Belgian family policy from a comparative perspective: What works and what is missing.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe Belgian family policy in comparison with the policy of other countries in the so-called conservative welfare state regime group, namely, France, Germany and the Netherlands, and with the policy of one country with a social-democratic model, Sweden. On the basis of previous literature, we also aim to identify strengths and weaknesses according to two criteria: efficacy in promoting fertility and gender equity. Belgian family policy presents several strengths. Its family allowances and birth premiums are among the most generous. Enrolment rates for children under three years old are among the highest. Recent findings have shown a positive association between these features of Belgian policy and couples' fertility. However, other aspects of Belgian policy are more critical for gender equity. They regard the nature of public spending on families, the duration of maternity leave, the remuneration of parental leave, the lack of radical reforms to support fathers' involvement, and the sub-national disparities in some family policy measures.

Key words: family policies, fertility, gender equity, Belgium, conservative welfare state regime

Mots-clés: politiques familiales, fécondité, équité de genre, Belgique, régime d'état providence conservateur

Introduction

Belgium, like Germany, France and the Netherlands, is characterized as a welfare state of the type that Esping-Andersen called "corporatist-conservative" ("conservative" in this study; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Esping-Andersen and Palier, 2008). Esping-Andersen (1999) classified countries according to two features: (a) the level of decommodification, i.e., the degree to which social services are provided as a right and without reference to the market, and (b) the ability of the welfare state to build broad solidarities, i.e., the degree of universalism (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Arts and Gelissen, 2002). The conservative regime is characterized by modest decommodification, as the principal and original aim of social policies is the maintenance of income related to occupational status (corporatist solidarity) through partial compensation of the costs of having children, including for wealthier families (Thévenon, 2011). As a result, cash transfers and tax benefits play an important role in family policy. It has also been argued that in the past, this regime was under the influence of the Catholic Church, restraining women's labour market participation while preserving the traditional family, and that some of these traits may have endured into the present (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Morel, 2007).

In Esping-Andersen's classification (1999), the conservative welfare state is in an intermediate position relative to the liberal model and the social-democratic model. The former is followed in countries such as the U.S., Australia, and, to a lesser extent, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Here, private services are encouraged, and social coverage concerns only the most disadvantaged people. In the social-democratic model, typical in Nordic countries, the state carries out many functions of care traditionally performed by the family, with strong de-commodification of services and universal policies to favour equality among citizens (Esping-Andersen and Palier, 2008). Other welfare state models are those of the Southern and Eastern European countries; they are generally characterized by low public spending on the family, with the exception of Hungary.

In this study, we will focus on Belgium and its family policy following a descriptive approach. Our *first aim* is to identify the main characteristics of Belgian family policy from a comparative perspective. Belgian family policy is a special case and one that, to our knowledge, has not been given sufficient attention from a comparative perspective. For example, despite Belgium's similarities with the other countries in the conservative group, the mothers' rapid return to work after maternity leave is more clearly encouraged here. Another feature of Belgian family policy is the reduction of work time according to the formula of 1/5 or 1/10. Our *second aim* is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Belgian family policy according to two criteria: efficacy in supporting fertility and gender equity. We will compare Belgium to other conservative countries: Germany, France and the Netherlands. We will also take into account Sweden, whose welfare model is often cited as an example of policy that effectively supports fertility and gender equity (Andersson, 2020).

Before starting our analysis, some of the main criticisms of Esping-Andersen's classification have to be taken into consideration. A first criticism concerns the classification of the Netherlands (Arts and Gelissen, 2002). This country was originally assigned to the social-democratic regime by Esping-Andersen (1990), while other authors have classified it as liberal

(Korpi and Palme, 1998). However, most authors have classified the Netherlands in the conservative regime (for a review, see Arts and Gelissen, 2002). Esping-Andersen 1999's classification also moved the Netherlands from the social-democratic regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990) to the conservative regime. Esping-Andersen's typologies are ideal types, and the assignment of a country to a certain typology depends on its degree of similarity to the ideal type. The difficulty of classifying the Netherlands lies in its middle position. Because of the degree of universality of its policies – especially with reference to pensions – high replacement rates and high tax rates, the Netherlands might be classified as social-democratic (De Beer et al., 2001). Nevertheless, compared to those in other social-democratic countries, women's employment rates are lower (De Beer et al., 2001), especially their full-time employment rates.

A second criticism of Esping-Andersen's classification concerns the omission of the gender and family dimensions (Orloff, 1993; Saraceno and Kerck, 2011). In particular, the welfare state system can affect the allocation of paid and unpaid labour between partners. For a more accurate classification of countries, Orloff (1993) proposes two additional dimensions of the welfare state: (a) the extent to which a state promotes or discourages women's labour force participation and (b) the extent to which a state satisfies an individual's needs in its substitution of the family, i.e., the degree of "defamilization". Some family policies are characterized by a high degree of decommodification combined with a high degree of defamilization; for example, they provide public childcare services (Saraceno and Kerck, 2011). Other family policies combine decommodification with supported familism, such as by instituting parental leave that allows parents, particularly women, to stay home to care for children (Saraceno and Kerck, 2011). Additionally, Saraceno and Kerck (2011) identify a further dimension of welfare state regimes: (c) the extent to which a state enables men to take on care responsibilities, thereby combining decommodification and supported familism for men.

A third criticism of Esping-Andersen's typology is the need to account for the evolution of social policies. According to Neyer (2013), in France and Belgium, the good coverage of formal childcare reflects a high degree of defamilization and distinguishes these countries from other countries in the conservative group. In Germany, the 2007 family policy reform – which will be presented below – introduced a father's quota in parental leave and a relatively high remuneration rate, thus supporting familism for men, a singularity within the conservative group. Thus, one could object that, overall, conservative welfare states have become much more service-oriented, and country policies no longer necessarily cluster around the male breadwinner model.

In this study, we take Esping-Andersen's classification as the starting point but consider the three criticisms presented above. Regarding the first criticism about the hybrid welfare regime in the Netherlands, because of the moderate level of decommodification and women's position in the labour market in this country, it stands in an intermediate position between the social-democratic and liberal regimes, hewing closer to the conservative group. Moreover, accounting for the second criticism of Esping-Andersen's classification, our study aims to clarify the gender dimension of family policy within the conservative group and with particular reference to Belgium. Regarding the third criticism to Esping-Andersen's classification, about the evolution of family policy within the conservative group, we maintain that compared to other welfare regimes, the conservative group is still characterized by an intermediate degree of decommodification and defamilization. Thus, we join Neyer (2013) in stressing that differences between countries of the same typology may be due to a single policy measure or a limited set of features, with other basic characteristics being held in common.

With respect to the second aim of our study – to discuss the efficacy of family policy in promoting fertility and gender equity – we seek to explain the fertility level and the degree of gender equity in Belgium in light of the family policy measures and in light of previous literature on the efficacy of these measures. Regarding gender equity, we will examine women's employment and fathers' participation.

For clarification, at least three approaches have been applied in previous studies to measure the efficacy of a policy. The *first* approach consists in measuring the effect of a single policy measure or a limited set of policies on the outcome of interest. Several micro and macro studies adopt a quasi-experimental approach or account for unobserved heterogeneity to determine the causal relation between specific policy measures and fertility or gender equity. Previous studies following this approach will be presented below. A *second* approach consists in quantifying a welfare system, determining clusters and relating them to the outcome of interest (see, for example, Thévenon, 2008; Saraceno and Kerck, 2011; Lohmann and Zagel, 2016). Saraceno and Kerck (2011), for instance, conduct a systematic comparison of European countries to clarify the gender dimension of family policies. A similar approach is adopted by Lohmann and Zagel (2016), while Thévenon's (2008) clusters aim to determine the effect of a welfare system on fertility. However, according to Neyer (2013), "(m)erely quantifying welfare-state measures have proved to be of limited potential in capturing essential characteristics of the welfare state and in explaining current or long-term cross-national differences in fertility outcomes". Moreover, in this second approach, because of the large number of countries considered, the authors are able to build a general framework, but their studies are inevitably lacking in detail. Saraceno and Kerck (2011) state that their study is intended as a basis for future in-depth analyses on a smaller number of countries.

Following a *third* approach, we aim to provide a comparative analysis of family policies in a limited number of countries – those in the conservative group and Sweden. The limitation on the number of countries is appropriate for performing a detailed comparison of family policy measures together with recommendations at the national level – in our case, at the level of Belgium. Our descriptive and comparative analysis of policy measures will be complemented by findings from previous studies on policy measure efficacy in supporting fertility and gender equity (see the first approach presented above). By considering the Belgian family policy measures and by inferring their efficacy in promoting fertility and gender equity from previous studies, we will provide a useful background for interpreting fertility and gender equity level in Belgium.

Its descriptive, comparative, comprehensive, and detailed analysis is one of the unique contributions of this paper. Another unique feature is that, unlike most previous comparative studies, this study will take into account the role of time credit policies and work time reduction. Accounting for Belgian regional differences is another novelty of the paper. Indeed, recently, Belgian regions have acquired more autonomy with respect to family policies. In this study, we will mainly focus on Wallonia and Flanders, the two largest regions. We will speak of the French-speaking region when considering Wallonia together with the Brussels region, while we will refer to Flanders and the Dutch-speaking region interchangeably.

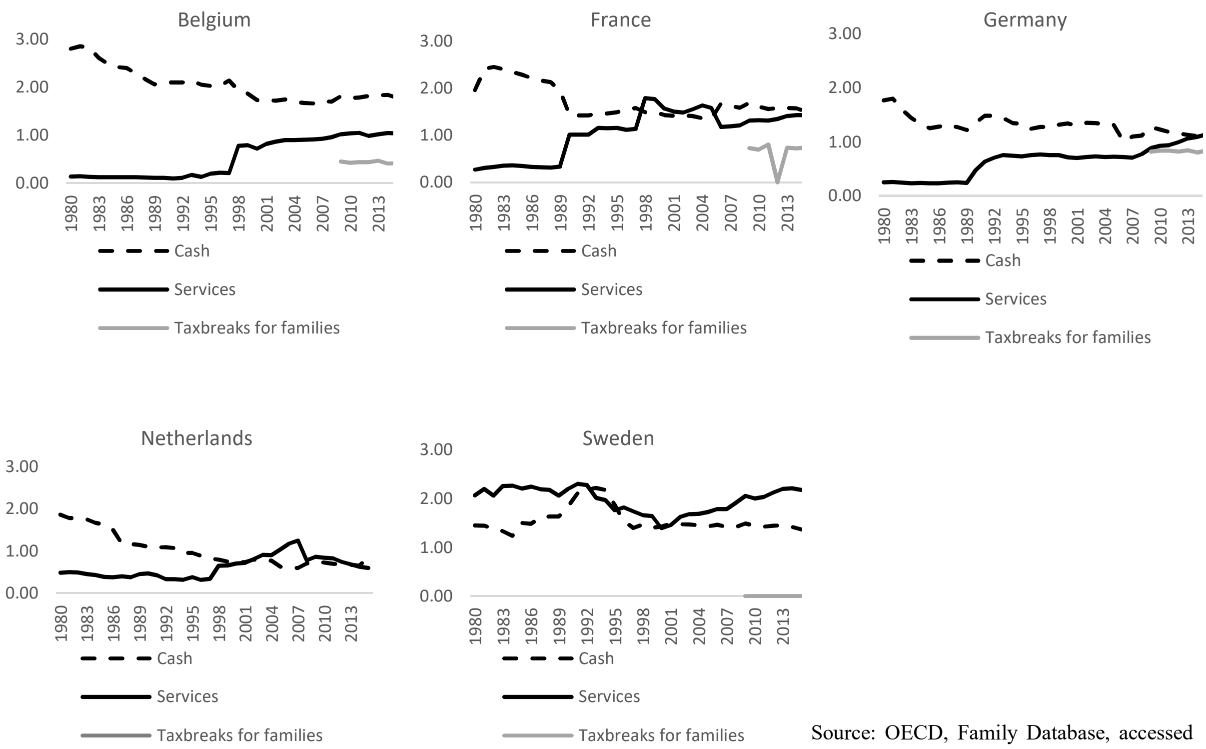
In the next paragraphs, after presenting trends in public spending in the five countries, we will briefly consider family allowances and birth premiums. Then, policy measures designed to balance work activity with family life, such as those related to childcare provision, leave, and work time reduction, will be discussed in greater detail. For each type of policy, we will present the countries' main characteristics. Finally, we will consider previous studies that evaluate the efficacy of family policies for promoting fertility and gender equity. In light of this literature, we will consider trends in fertility and female labour force participation in Belgium. We will conclude by summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of Belgian family policy in supporting fertility and gender equity.

2. Public spending on family benefits

We will start by comparing the selected countries in terms of public spending on family benefits. The OECD defines three types of public spending: cash transfers, mainly including family allowances and income support payments during periods of parental leave; childcare and preschool education facilities; and financial support for families provided through the tax system. In conservative countries, public spending on family benefits is above the 2015 OECD mean. It constituted 3.7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in France, 3.2 percent in Belgium, and 3.1 percent in Germany in 2015. In the same year, it was 3.5 in Sweden (OECD Family Database, accessed on 4th July 2019). The Netherlands represents an exception in the conservative group, as family benefits constituted 2 percent of the GDP there in 2011 (latest available year).

Figure 1 shows that a sizeable share of family support in Belgium, France and Germany takes the form of tax benefits and cash transfers. The share of cash transfers is especially high in Belgium, while in France, spending on services is higher than that in other conservative countries. During the 90s, public spending on services has begun to increase: first in France and Germany, and then in Belgium. The Netherlands is an exception in the conservative group: after the economic crisis of 2008, spending on services began to decline. Sweden presents several distinctive features: public spending on services is generally higher than spending on cash transfers and higher than that in conservative countries, reaching approximately 2 percent of the GDP. Interestingly, in the conservative group, the trends are towards the convergence of public spending on cash transfers and services, while in Sweden, spending on services has overtaken spending on cash transfers. Another distinctive feature of the conservative group is the use of tax breaks.

Figure 1 - Public spending on family benefits in the form of cash, services and tax measures, in percent of GDP, 1980-2015



Source: OECD, Family Database, accessed on 4 January 2021

3. Family allowances and horizontal equity

Family allowances are child-related cash transfers to families whose purpose is to offset the costs of raising children. In Belgium, the history of family allowances dates back to 1915, when allowances were spontaneously offered by some employers to their employees. The recent history of family allowances stems from the 6th state reform. On 11 October 2011, an important political agreement was reached to transfer new powers from the federal level to the federated entities. Family allowances represent the majority of the resources transferred to the federated entities (Bisciari and Van Meensel, 2012). In this respect, a law dated 4 April 2014 (*loi générale relative aux allocations familiales, LGAF*) modified the previous law from 19 December 1939 (Flohimont and Neven, 2015). As a consequence, since 1 January 2019, each region of Belgium has had its own system of family allowances (*Allocation familiales* in French or *Groeipakket* in Dutch), with its own disbursement amounts and rules (Parentia, accessed on 5 July 2019).

Table 1 presents, for 2010, the main features of the family benefits in the conservative countries and Sweden. These include family allowances and "refundable" or "non-wastable" tax credits. The latter are paid in cash when the tax to be paid is not large enough for a fiscal advantage to apply. This benefit is available in countries such as Germany. After Germany, Belgium and Sweden present the most generous universal family allowances.

In general, the conservative countries and Sweden exhibit the principle of horizontal equity (Chesnais, 1996), with family allowances paid for all children. In other words, the right to a family allowance generally does not depend on income. Note that horizontal equity implies a transfer from childless persons to families, while vertical equity focuses on redistribution from higher-income families to poorer households.

As stated above, since 2019, each Belgian region has had its own family allowance system. The following rules apply to children born after 2019 in Flanders and children born after 2020 in Wallonia. In Flanders, the basic family allowance is 163.2 euros per month. In Wallonia, it is 155 euros per month for children aged 0-17 and 165 euros for children aged 18-24 years. Supplements are available in both regions according to income and starting with the third child. Thus, the same principles apply in the two regions, where elements of horizontal and vertical equity are seen as well as more generous benefits starting with the third child. Allowances are slightly more generous in Flanders, although Wallonia accounts for the greater costs associated with the increasing age of the child (Parentia, accessed on 9th July 2019).

Table 1 - Family benefits in conservative countries and Sweden, 2010 (annualized)

	Maximum benefit for one child aged 3-12		**Benefit amount per additional child varies with**		**Upper age limit for children (student)**	**Means test**	**Observations**
	National currency	**Percent of average wage**	**Age of child**	**Number of children**			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
Belgium	1,266	3	+/-	+/-	17 (24)	No	For the unemployed, family benefits are increased in the 7th month of unemployment.
France	747	2	+	+	19	No	Family allowance: zero benefit for first child. For 2 children (under age 11), the amount per child is 747 euros (2 percent of AW).
Germany	2,208	5	0	+ from 3rd	18 (25)	No	*The kindergeld* is a non-wastable tax credit in the form of a monthly tax refund (*supplementary child allowance* if there is no tax liability).
	1,680	5	--	--	--	Yes	*The supplementary child allowance (kinderzuschlag)* is paid to parents to prevent them from having to apply for unemployment benefit II/social welfare benefits solely for the maintenance of their children.
Netherlands	1,114	2	+	-	17	No	Universal child benefit.

	1,242	3	+	-	17	Family taxable income.	The benefit is withdrawn at a rate of 7.6 percent when the family’s yearly taxable income exceeds 28,897 euros.
Sweden	12,600 (approximately 1,200 euro)	3	0	+	15 (19)	No	--

Source: OECD, Family Database, accessed on 4 July 2019

Notes: "+": increases, "-": decreases, "0": remains the same, "+/-": increases or decreases (some countries give higher rates to the youngest and oldest age groups).

4. The birth premium: a purely universal measure

The birth premium is another cash transfer to a family and takes the form of a one-time bonus that parents receive upon the birth of a child. The aim is to compensate parents for the costs incurred as a result of the birth. This is the only family policy that is purely universal, as all parents receive the same amount, without any evaluation of income. Since the amount does not vary with income, we could say that the aim is purely demographic (van Nimwegen, 2011). Other terms may be used to define birth premiums, such as baby bonuses, birth allowances or birth grants. This article mainly uses the terms birth premium (*prime à la naissance* in French) or baby bonus.

In Belgium, the history of birth premiums dates back to 1926, when the state offered allowances to its civil servants and a baby bonus was also granted (Jamin et al., 2005). Together with family allowances, the 6th state reform has redefined competences for the birth premium. Since 1 January 2019, each region has had its own scheme for birth premiums (amounts, rules, payment cycle, etc.; Parentia, accessed on 4 July 2019; FAMIFED Agence fédérale pour les allocations familiales, accessed on 4 July 2019).

In Flanders, parents receive an amount (*startbedrag* in Dutch) of 1,122 euros for each child born after 1 January 2019. There is no difference between the first child and the subsequent children. This system is new: previously, parents received an amount of 1,272.52 euros for each first child born before 31 December 2018 and received 957.42 euros for subsequent children. In Wallonia, for children born after 1 January 2020, parents receive a birth premium of 1,100 euros. Finally, in the Brussels-Capital Region, a new model came into force in 2020, under which the birth premium is 1,100 euros for the first child and 500 euros for subsequent children. There may be supplements depending on the family’s situation, such as difficult economic circumstances, or the child's situation, such as the presence of a disability. With the exception of these specific cases, the amount is not generally associated with income (Parentia, accessed on 4 July 2019).

The other countries considered for this study have different systems or no birth premium at all. In France, the 1939 family code abolished the allowance for the first child and replaced it with the birth premium (McCleary, 1941). Since 2004, the premium has been paid conditional on the amount of income. In the Netherlands, no birth premium is paid to parents. Similarly, no premium exists in Germany or Sweden (Mutual Information System Protection (MISSOC), 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019).

5. Childcare and preschools: catching up to Sweden

Other family policy measures support parents' work–family balance. Among these, formal childcare facilities (centre-based services or family-based services) generally serve children aged 0 to 2, while preschool or pre-primary education provides educational content and traditional care for children aged 3 to 5.

In 2002, the European Council, at the Barcelona summit, set the objective of providing high-quality and affordable childcare facilities for preschool children by 2010. Enrolment rates of at least 90 percent of children aged 3-5 years and at least 33 percent of children under 3 years old were fixed as targets (European Commission, 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019). The aim was to increase female employment, reduce the gender gap in the labour market, and improve countries' economic outcomes. As a result, in the OECD area, childcare coverage of 32.9 percent of children under the age of 3 was attained in 2018 (European Commission, 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019).

The Belgian enrolment rate of children under 3 years old is higher than the OECD average and equalled 56.1 percent in 2017 (OECD Family Database, accessed on 4 January 2021). These data are based on the OECD analysis of the EU-SILC survey and refer to children using centre-based services (crèches or nurseries or day care centres, both public and private) and family-based provisions (family day care and care services provided by professional childminders).

The Eurydice figures, also based on the Eurostat EU-SILC survey but considering only centre-based childcare, show an enrolment rate of 52.9 percent for Belgium (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019). The Eurydice data are particularly suitable for comparison because of the consistency in the definition of formal childcare across countries. Table 2 compares the enrolment rates and average weekly hours spent in centre-based childcare across our five countries.

Table 2 - Enrolment rates and average weekly hours in centre-based childcare among 0-3-year-olds (2017)

Country	enrolment rate 0-3 years old	average weekly hours
Belgium	52.9	31.1
France	50.5	31.1
Germany	30.3	32
Netherlands	61.6	16.7
Sweden	52.7	31.8

Source: Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019.

Belgium, Sweden and France present similar enrolment rates in centre-based childcare, approximately 50 percent. Also similar among these countries are the average weekly hours, approximately 31. In the Netherlands, the enrolment rate is much higher, 61.6 percent. However, the relatively high Dutch enrolment rate is associated with a low number of hours per week: on average, 16.7 hours in 2017. The other exception is Germany, where the enrolment rate for centre-based childcare among those 0-3 years old is relatively low and equal to 30.3 percent. The average weekly hours are similar to those in other countries, at 32.

Concerning regional disparities within countries, in Germany, significant differences exist between West and East Germany. In 2018, the percentage of children under 3 years old enrolled in childcare reached 29.4 percent in West Germany and 51.5 percent in East Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019, accessed on 4 July 2019). Differences between Belgian regions are smaller but still substantial. In 2019, the enrolment rate for children under three years old was 48 percent in the French-speaking region (ONE, 2019) and 55 percent in the Dutch-speaking region (Kind en Gezin, 2019). Heterogeneity between provinces is greater in the former region, with percentages fluctuating between 39.6 in Brussels, 46.3 in Hainaut, and 63.3 in Walloon Brabant. The gap between provinces is less pronounced in Flanders, with an enrolment rate for 0-3-year-olds ranging from 51.3 percent in Antwerp to 63.3 percent in West Flanders (Kind en Gezin, 2019; ONE, 2019).

Regarding the evolution of enrolment rates, a comparison of the OECD data for the years 2010 and 2017 indicates that Belgium shows the greatest increase, 17-percentage-points, followed by France and Germany, 8.4 and 10.4-percentage-points. Figures for Sweden appear high but stable (OECD Family Database, accessed on 4 January 2021; data are not available for the Netherlands before 2017). In other words, in the last decade, France and Belgium caught up to Sweden.

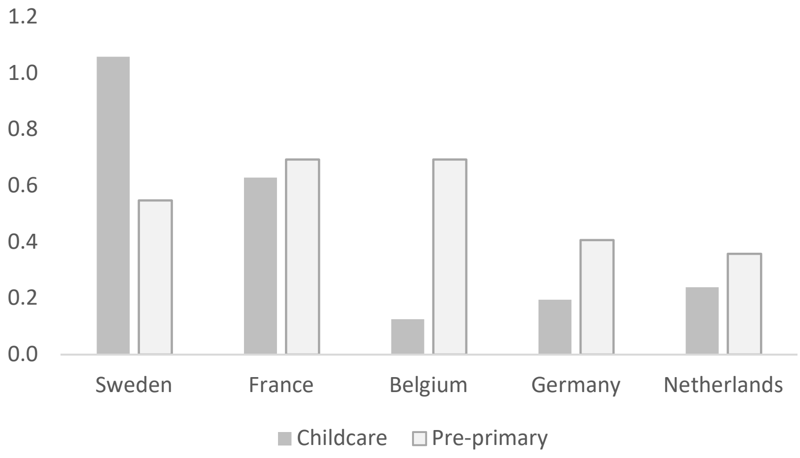
An interesting feature of childcare is the guarantee of a place. In Sweden, a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidized childcare starts when the child is 1 year old. Similarly, in Germany, legal entitlement also starts at 1 year old. In Belgium the legal entitlement begins at 2.5 years old. In France, the legal entitlement starts at 3 years old, while in the Netherlands, there is no legal entitlement (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019).

A further characteristic of childcare is free access. In Belgium, access to preschool for children aged 2.5 years old until 6 years old is free of charge during open hours and during the school day (Vandenbroeck, Urban and Peeters, 2016). In France and Sweden, childcare is free after the child turns 3 years old. In the Netherlands, preschool is free when the child turns 4 years old. In Germany, there is no regulation at the country level. For example, Berlin and Hamburg offer childcare free of charge for all children, while North Rhine-Westphalia and Thuringia offer free childcare for all children during the year preceding primary education (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019).

Concerning the average monthly fees (in purchasing parity standards, PPS) of childcare facilities for children under 3 years old, these are between 0 and 110 PPS in Sweden, between 121 and 274 PPS in France, 258 PPS in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, and 511 PPS in the Netherlands (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019).

Public expenditure on childcare and pre-primary schools totals on average over 0.7 percent of GDP in the OECD area. Sweden devotes the largest proportion of GDP to childcare, approximately 1 percent, compared to 0.6 percent in France, approximately 0.2 percent in Germany and the Netherlands, and 0.1 percent in Belgium (Figure 2). The public expenditure in Belgium is particularly low, and this does not seem to be justified by the enrolment, hours, legal entitlement, or monthly fee characteristics presented above. This could be related to significant proportion of the private self-financing sector for childcare provision for children under the age of 3 (more than 10 percent), both in the French and Dutch-speaking regions. This pattern is also observed in the Netherlands. In France and Germany, this share is of minor importance, while in Sweden childcare for those less than 3 years old is public or it is private but publicly subsidized (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019). Another difference that might affect public expenditure is the cost of the staff, as determined by their education level: in Belgium and in the Netherlands, early preschool teachers do not need a bachelor’s level of education, while in France and Germany, the bachelor’s level is required (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019). Moreover, in the Netherlands, in line with the fact that the majority of women work part time, childcare facilities have fewer open hours, which could affect public expenditure as well. In Germany, the lower public spending on childcare is likely correlated with the lower enrolment rate. The gap among countries is less marked for pre-primary schools, for which the expenditure ranges from 0.4 to 0.6 percent of GDP (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Public spending on childcare and pre-primary education as a percent of GDP, 2015



Source: OECD, Family Database.

6. Leave policies to improve gender equity

In this study, we maintain that leave policies, especially parental leave, are the weak link in Belgian family policy. This weakness is shared with France and the Netherlands, while Sweden and, more recently, Germany have implemented policies characterized by long leaves with good remuneration.

The right to reconcile professional and family life through leave policies is granted primarily by two European directives (Ramalho et al., 2015). The first, Directive 92/85/EEC, seeks to protect the health and safety of pregnant workers and of workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding and to support the reconciliation of work and family life at an early stage. This directive guarantees a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave. The second directive, 96/34/EC, from 3 June 1996, established reconciliation measures applicable to men and women, including the right to a non-transferable parental leave of a minimum of three months. The directive also granted the right to protection against dismissal during parental leave and the right to return to the same or an equivalent job at the end of the leave. This directive was replaced by Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 to further improve the reconciliation of work and family life. The two most important changes introduced by the 2010 amendment were the extension of the minimum period of parental leave from three to four months and, in order to encourage gender equity, the provision that at least one month should be non-transferable to the other parent (Ramalho et al., 2015).

In the following paragraphs, we will present in more detail each individual instrument and country.

Maternity leave

Maternity leave (*Congé de maternité* in French, *Mutterschaftsurlaub* in German, *Zwangerschapsverlof* in Dutch, *Mammaledighet* in Swedish) is defined by the OECD (2017) as an "employment-protected leave of absence for employed women at around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries." Maternity leave is an individual right and is generally well paid: most OECD countries pay more than 50 percent of previous wages (OECD, 2017).

In Belgium, as in other conservative countries, maternity leave is mandatory. Belgian maternity leave has a duration close to that in the other conservative countries, approximately 15 weeks on average. However, the remuneration is lower, corresponding to approximately 70 percent of the gross salary, whereas in the other countries, it is 100 percent or close to 100 percent. In France, the duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks for the first and second child and 24 weeks starting with the third child. In Germany, the duration is 14 weeks, but only eight postnatal weeks are mandatory. In the Netherlands, the duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks and it is compulsory to offer leave at least four weeks before and six weeks after birth (Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020). In Sweden, maternity leave lasts 14 weeks. The obligation includes two weeks before or after delivery (MISSOC, 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019) (see Appendix).

Paternity leave

According to the OECD (2017), paternity leave is an "employment-protected leave of absence for employed fathers at or in the first few months after childbirth." As with maternity leave, paternity leave is an individual right and cannot be transferred to the mother. In general, periods of paternity leave are much shorter than those for maternity leave. Workers on paternity leave often continue to receive full wage payments.

Paternity leave (*Congé de paternité* in French, *Vaderschapsverlof* in Dutch, *Vaterschaftsurlaub* in German) appeared in Belgium in 1961, well before it was instituted in France (2002) or the Netherlands (2001) (see Appendix). On 1 January 2021, Belgian paternity leave increased from

10 to 15 days, and on 1 January 2023, it will increase to 20 days. This measure follows policy in the Netherlands, where in 2020, paternity leave was extended from 5 days to a maximum of five weeks (five times the number of working hours per week). On 1 July 2021, paternity leave will increase from 14 to 28 days in France.

In Germany, there is no statutory entitlement (OECD, 2017). However, the 2007 reform allows fathers to take long and well-remunerated parental leave (see next paragraph). Similarly, in Sweden, parental leave is generous for fathers (see next paragraph).

In Belgium, paternity leave can be taken intermittently (over a period of 4 months after delivery) (ONEM, Employment National Office, accessed on 4 July 2019). Since 30 July 2011, fathers who take paternity leave have been protected against dismissal (Math and Meilland, 2004; ONEM, accessed on 4 July 2019). The introduction of job protection for fathers on paternity leave occurred later than in other countries: 2002 in France, 2001 in the Netherlands and 1980 in Sweden. For both paternity and maternal leave, Belgium was a forerunner in the introduction of a leave policy but a laggard in granting job protection (see Appendix).

Regarding remuneration for paternity leave in Belgium, the employer pays the first three days, and the remaining days are covered by insurance. The remuneration is equal to 100 percent of the father's salary for the first three days and 82 percent thereafter, up to a ceiling (OECD Family Database, accessed on 28 June 2019). We can see differences in leave remuneration between countries (Table 3). At present, paternity leave remuneration is 100 percent of earnings in France, up to a ceiling, and 70 percent in the Netherlands, also up to a ceiling (Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020; Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019).

Parental leave

Parental leave *(Congé parental* in French*, Elternzeit* in German*, Ouderschapsverlof* in Dutch and *Föräldraledighet* in Swedish*)* is defined by the OECD (2017) as a period of employment-protected leave for parents that is often supplementary to maternity and paternity leave. Entitlement to the parental leave period is generally an individual right and cannot be transferred to the other parent. This has been the case in Belgium since 1998 (OECD, 2017, see Appendix) and in France since 1995 (Falkner et al., 2002).

The duration of Belgian parental leave is four months per parent. The leave must begin before the child is 12 years old. In France, for parents with one child, parental leave is 12 months. Either parent can receive a payment for six months, and the remaining six months are reserved for the other parent. For parents with two or three children, parental leave is paid until the child is three years old. One parent can be paid for a maximum period of 24 months, and the remaining months are reserved for the other parent (Boyer and Fagnani, 2018; OECD, Family Database accessed on 28 June 2019). In Germany, for children born after 30 June 2015, a maximum of 12 months from the initiation of parental leave can be taken until the child reaches the age of eight. Normally, the duration is 10 months, but an extension to 12 months is possible if both parents take at least two months ("bonus" paid weeks mentioned above). In other words, equal arrangements are rewarded with extra months of paid parental leave (Axelsson, 2018). The duration of parental leave in the Netherlands is equal to 26 times the number of working hours per week per parent and per child for employed parents. The child must be under 8 years old (European Commission, 2018; accessed on 4 July 2019; MISSOC, 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019). In Sweden, parents have the right to 480 days of leave, with 90 days reserved for each parent. The remaining days can be transferred from one parent to another with informed consent (Ray et al., 2010). Parental leave must be used before the child turns 12 (see Table 3).

With respect to users of parental leave (or recipients of parental leave benefits), in Sweden, the share of fathers was approximately 45 percent in 2016 (OECD, Family Database, accessed on 27 June 2019). In Germany, the parental leave benefit was taken by 38.8 percent of fathers in 2016 (Schober et al., 2020). However, variation between German regions is substantial: from 28.5 in Saarland to 49.1 in Saxony (Schober et al., 2020). According to Boyer and Fagnani, (2020), for France, no information is available on the parental leave uptake, while the OECD indicates 4.4 of share of fathers recipients of CLCA (Complément de libre choix d'activité) or PreParE (Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant) in 2016.

The OECD has not published recent data for Belgium. However, OECD data from 2013 showed that the share of fathers taking parental leave was approximately 25 percent. The difference compared to Sweden and Germany is likely to be related to the remuneration rate of the leave, which approaches 80 percent of previous earnings in Sweden and 67 percent in Germany, while in Belgium, a flat rate is applied corresponding to less than 800 euros per month (Table 3).

Other data sources for Belgium show that of all users in 2012, 29 percent were men. This percentage increased to 30 percent in 2015 and to 32 percent in 2017 (Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes, 2018). Fathers in Flanders are more likely to use parental leave (approximately 30 percent of users) than those in Wallonia (approximately 25 percent) and Brussels (approximately 20 percent).

Belgian parental leave can be full time, with total cessation of activities; 1/2 time, corresponding to 50 percent of the number of hours of full-time employment; and 1/5 time, where the working parent continues to work 80 percent of the number of hours of full-time employment (see Table 3) (ONEM, accessed on 4 July 2019). Since 2019, parental leave of 1/10 time has also been possible (ONEM, accessed on 4 July 2019). In Germany, parental leave can be part time and spread over 20(+4) months (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2015, accessed on 4 July 2019; OECD, 2017). In Sweden, parents may take full-time, part-time, quarter-time or one-eighth-time paid leave, with the duration of the leave being extended accordingly. Parents can take leave in a single continuous period or in several blocks of time. Both parents can take up to 30 days of paid leave at the same time until the child reaches one year of age. These days are called "double days" (Duvander and Haas, 2018; OECD, 2017). Part-time parental leave is also an option in Germany and in the Netherlands (Den Dulk and Yerkes 2020; Schober et al., 2020)

In Belgium the most frequently chosen formula is the 1/5 reduction of working time (ONEM accessed on 1 March 2021). In 2020, the 1/5 formula was chosen by 70 percent of men, especially in Wallonia, where they were 76 percent compared to 69 percent in Flanders and 66 percent in Brussels region. In Brussels region, men were more likely to choose to full-time formula (13 percent) than in Flanders (8 percent) and Wallonia (4 percent; ONEM accessed on 1 March 2021). The 1/5 reduction of working time was chosen by 56 percent of Belgian women. As observed for men, women in Wallonia were more likely to take this formula: they were 63 percent compare to 56 in Flanders and 50 percent in Brussels region. Similarly to men, women living in Brussels were more likely to prefer the full-time parental leave (26 percent) compared to Flanders (14 percent) and Wallonia (8 percent; ONEM accessed on 1 March 2021). Only one percent of men and 4 percent of women mix full-time and part-time leave (Mortelmans and Fusulier, 2020).

Regarding the duration of the parental leave, at our knowledge, data are not available for Belgium. For Sweden, available data for 2016 show 131.1 days of parental leave for men compared to 333.9 for women (OECD, Family Database, accessed on 27 June 2019). In Germany, the 2016 average duration of parental leave is 3.4 months for men and 13.4 months for women (Schober et al., 2020). For 75 percent of German fathers, the maximum duration of parental leave is two months − corresponding to their individual entitlement − compared to 0.8 percent for mothers. A parental leave duration between 10 and 12 months concerned only 6.4 percent of men compared to 72 .7 percent of women (Schober et al., 2020). According to

Den Dulk and Yerkes (2020), in the Netherlands, the 2017 average duration of the parental leave was 19 months for men compared to 14 months for women. This long duration reflects the possibility to take a part-time parental leave. On average, the parental leave was 9 hours per week for women and 8 hours per week for men (Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020).

Table 3 - Leave policy characteristics

		Belgium	France	Germany	Netherlands	Sweden
Maternity leave	**Remuneration**	First month at 82 percent of daily wage (without ceiling). Remaining weeks: 75 percent of daily wage (maximum 135 euros/day).	100 percent of net earnings with a maximum daily benefit of 83.58 euros.	100 percent of daily wage (no ceiling), plus a maternity benefit: uninsured female employees and non-working uninsured spouses or daughters of insured individuals can receive maternity benefits equivalent to sickness benefits.	100 percent of daily wage (maximum 211.42 euros/day).	Maternity leave is not paid in Sweden, but mothers can benefit from a long and well-remunerated parental leave.
	Duration	15 weeks	First or second child: 16 weeks; third or higher: 24 weeks.	14 weeks	16 weeks	90 days
Paternity leave	**Remuneration**	3 days at 100 percent of earnings paid by the employer. The remaining days at 82 percent of earnings paid by insurance (with ceiling).	100 percent of net earnings (with ceiling).	No statutory entitlement (but parental leave policy encourages fathers' uptake)	70 percent	77.6 percent of earnings (with ceiling).
	Duration	15 days	28 days starting in July 2021	/	5 weeks	10 days
Parental leave	**Remuneration**	See box	See box	See box	No remuneration.	See box
	Duration	4 months for each parent.	Until the child is 3 years old. The duration of paid leave is shorter. For parents with only one child: any one parent can receive the payment for a maximum of 6 months only. For parents with two or more children: any one parent can receive the payment for a maximum of 24 months only.	The duration of the leave is up to 3 years and can be used until the child is 8 years old. However, the duration of paid leave is shorter: 10 months after maternity leave. If both parents request at least 2 months of benefits, the duration is extended by 2 months (10 +2 option)	Parental leave lasts 26 times the number of working hours per week per parent and per child.	480 days, with 90 days reserved for each parent

Source: Our elaboration from different sources: ONEM; MISSOC, OECD Family Data Base. Accessed on 4 July 2019. Den Dulk. and Yerkes. (2020); Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019; Schober et al., 2020.

Box -The remuneration of parental leave (see also Table 1)

The Belgian worker receives leave remuneration (*allocation d'interruption* in French) from the National Employment Office (ONEM, accessed on 4 July 2019). This is a low flat-rate replacement benefit. The remuneration corresponds to 750.33 euros per month net of taxes (834.90 euros before taxes, *ONEM*, accessed on 4 July 2019). Several options exist for remuneration: a total cessation of professional activities, a reduction to part-time work, and a reduction of working time by ⅕.

In France, the PreParE ("Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant") is paid to all parents by the local CAFs (Caisse des allocations familiales) and is income related. The basic benefit is 391 euros per month when work activities are interrupted; 253 euros per month if the parent works less than half of full-time hours; and 146 euros per month if the parent works from 50 to 80 percent of full-time hours (Boyer and Fagnani, 2018). A supplementary means-tested allowance, the "Allocation de base", is paid to lower-income parents, increasing the benefit to 576, 438 or 331 euros according to the time schedule already mentioned. Furthermore, for parents with a single child, the PreParE is paid for six months maximum per parent after the end of maternity leave.

In Germany, the remuneration is paid by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Reimer, Erler and Blum, 2018). For births since 1 July 2015, the parental allowance is available in two variants: a) as a basic parental allowance, which corresponds to the former parental allowance scheme, or b) as a "Plus" parental allowance ("ElterngeldPlus" in German) allowing parents to take part-time leave. The parental allowance is paid at a level of 67 percent of last year's net income, with a minimum of 300 euros/month and a maximum of 1800 euros/month (Reimer, Erler and Blum, 2018).

In Sweden, parental leave is paid by the Public Health Service (MISSOC, 2018, accessed on 4 July 2019). The first 195 days are paid at 77.6 percent of income (maximum SEK 967/day = 94.18 euros), and the remaining 45 days are paid as a flat rate of 180 SEK/day (= 17.53 euros).

To summarize, the German remuneration system is similar to the Swedish one, since it has an income quota. By contrast, the remuneration is a flat rate in Belgium and France.

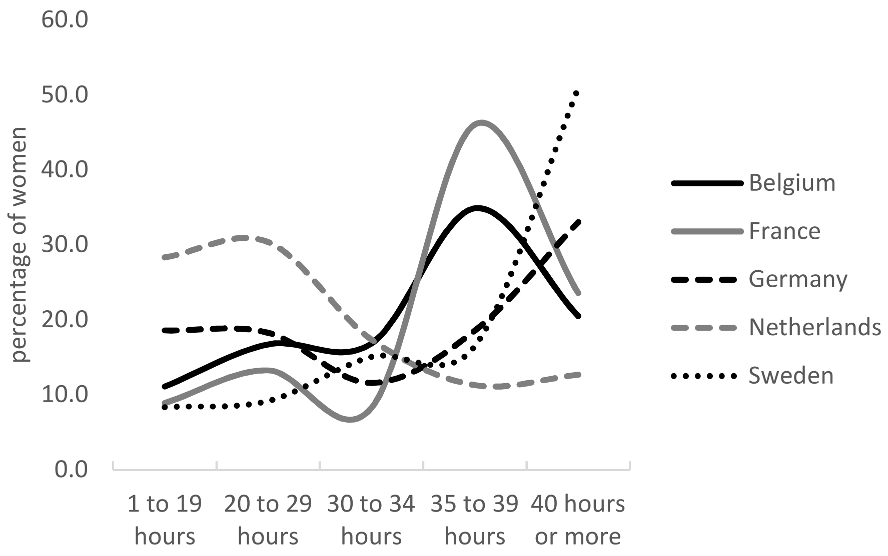
In the Netherlands, there is no remuneration when taking parental leave (Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020).

3. Work time reduction to balance work and family

Part-time work is an additional strategy to reconcile work and family that is especially used by women. Part-time work is defined by the OECD as working less than 30 hours per week (OECD, Family Database, accessed on 4 July 2019). If we apply this definition, the Netherlands has, in Europe, the highest percentage of women employed part time, 58.6 percent in 2017 (Figure 3). In Belgium, part-time work applies to 27.8 percent of women are engaged in part-time work, and in Germany, 36.8 percent. The lowest percentages of women employed part time are observed in Sweden, at 17.5 percent, and in France, at 22.1 percent (2017, Figure 3). The low level of part-time work in Sweden could be the effect of the long and well-remunerated parental leave offered there (see below), which, combined with good childcare enrolment, allows women to continue working full time after becoming mothers.

This definition of part-time may lead to underestimation of the percentage of women reducing their work time in Belgium, as the 20 percent work time reduction, which has been possible since 2002 within the framework of the leave policy and time credit (see below), is not included. Although part-time work is not a main strategy in Belgium, as it is in the Netherlands and Germany, the use of 1/5 time reduction appears to be a unique feature of Belgian family policy.

Figure 3 – Employed women grouped by their usual weekly work hours, 2017



Source: OECD, Family Database

The time credit policy

In Belgium, since 2002, time credit has allowed workers in the private sector to completely or partially interrupt their work while receiving a flat rate payment from the ONEM. This is a national policy applying to Brussels, Wallonia, and Flanders. A similar scheme, the "career break", applies in the public sector. There are specific reasons established in the policy for limiting or interrupting work: to care for a family member with a severe illness, to care for a child less than 21 years old with a handicap, to attend professional training, and end of career. Another reason is to care for a child under 8 years old, for which a maximum duration of time credit of 51 months (with variations according to the collective agreement of the sector of activity) is allowed. The duration of time credit is the same for the total, part-time or 1/5 formulas.

The Belgian time credit grants the right to a flat rate payment from the ONEM. For example, a worker in the private sector who stays with the same employer for at least five years and who completely interrupts his/her work will receive a net amount of 535.20 euros (indexed amount on 1 September 2018; ONEM, accessed on 4 July 2019). It has been observed that payments for time credit based on the part-time formula diminished between 2016 and 2017 (Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2018). In Flanders, in specific situations, an additional premium (*aanmoedigingspremie*) is paid.

The percentage of men among users of the time credit to care for a family member more than doubled between 2008 and 2017, from 6 percent to 15 percent (Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2018, on the basis of ONEM data). As we observed for parental leave, the 1/5 time reduction is the preferred formula of time credit (although in this specific case, the available statistics do not allow us to distinguish the type of time credit, such as care provision, end of career or another type).

In Germany, in January 2012, an instrument similar to time credit, Familienpflegezeit (family caring time) for employees, was introduced. But this is an optional provision that is available if covered by an individual contract or collective agreement. It allows employees who need to care for a dependent relative to reduce their working time to a minimum of 15 hours per week for up to two years. The reduction in income is less than the reduction in hours, but employees have to repay the difference by receiving the same amount of reduced earnings for an equivalent period after returning to full-time employment (Blum, Erler and Reimer 2016).

In the Netherlands short-term leave and unpaid long-term leave are available but only in case of illness of a family members or friend (Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2020).

The impact of time reduction on pension

In Belgium, the time credit period is taken into account when calculating the amount of future pension income (as with parental leave). The precondition is to receive an ONEM benefit for time credit. However, the impact on the pension amount differs with respect to whether there was a total interruption or partial reduction of work time (SFP, accessed on 4 July 2019). In the case of partial reduction, the pension amount is calculated on the basis of the *fictive mean yearly salary* of the previous year. With total interruption of work, the pension amount is calculated on the basis of the *fictive yearly limited salary.* On 1 September 2018, this fixed amount was 24,730.99 euros per year. Therefore, partial time reduction rather than full interruption is encouraged by the pension calculation. Before 1996, the approach was different, and a partial reduction of work time during the time credit period was not taken into account when calculating the pension if the worker was 50 years old or younger.

Similar rules apply in the case of work time reduction outside the time credit policy. If an employee works less than 1/3 of full time and receives the minimum income benefit, the pension is calculated on the basis of the *fictive normal salary*. If the worker works at least 1/3 of the full-time schedule without an income allowance, the pension income is calculated on the basis of the *fictive limited salary* (SFP, accessed on 4 July 2019). Note that in Belgium, a minimum income benefit (*allocation de garantie de revenus*) is paid to guarantee a total income at least equal to the unemployment benefit.

Regarding the impact on workers' pension, it is interesting to compare Belgium to the Netherlands, where time reduction is a main strategy to reconcile their career and family life (see above), and to Sweden. In these countries, basic pension requires a minimum number of years of residence. For older individuals, the Dutch policy compensates for work time reduction during one's earlier career by allowing a basic pension income corresponding to approximately 25 percent of average earnings. A basic pension system of more than 20 percent of average earnings is also applied in Sweden (Kim and Rizzi, 2019).

4. The efficacy of family policy: fertility and gender equity

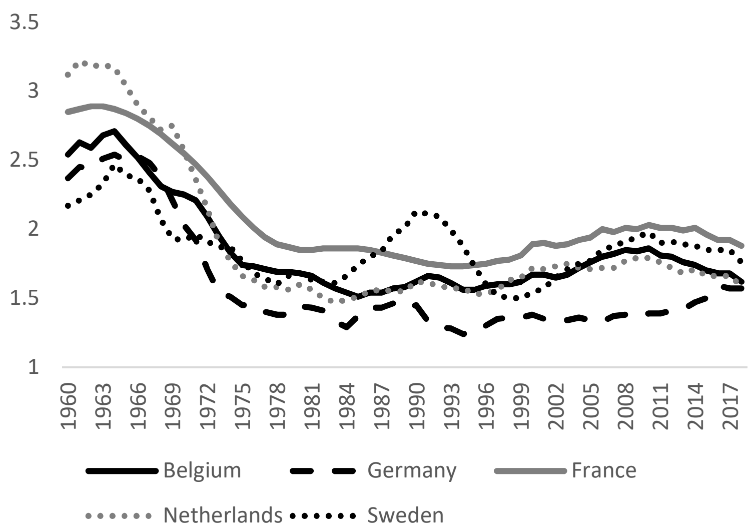
The objectives of family policies can be numerous: to offset childrearing costs, to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, to promote gender equity, and to support fertility (Thévenon, 2011). The aims of increasing fertility and encouraging gender equity are, for example, the origin of the recent reorientation of family policy in countries such as Germany (Letablier and Salles, 2013). Gender equity and fertility are also the main focuses of this study. In this section, we will review previous literature on the efficacy of family policies for promoting both fertility and gender equity, with a special emphasis on Belgium and the other countries considered in the study. In other words, addressing the second aim of our study, we will seek to explain the fertility level and the degree of gender equity in Belgium in light of the family policy measures and in light of previous literature on the efficacy of these measures. Regarding gender equity, we will examine women's employment and fathers' participation.

Family policies and fertility

Initial evidence of the effectiveness of family policies in terms of fertility support is found in the identification, among developed countries, of two groups of countries: countries characterized by an average number of children per woman equal to 1.5 or more and countries with lower fertility. The first group, comprising Sweden and most of the conservative countries, is characterized by stronger family policies that partially offset the costs of children and help families combine family care and professional activities (McDonald, 2006). These policies, as we saw in the previous sections, encompass cash benefits, kindergartens for children 0-2 years old, work flexibility, and leave. In contrast, the group of low-fertility countries, mainly in Southern and Eastern Europe, is characterized by a low level of services and/or cash transfers (McDonald, 2006).

Germany has long been in the second group of countries, exhibiting a level of fertility below 1.5 children per woman (Figure 4). However, the 2007 German family policy reform was inspired by the Swedish model and involved a drastic change in parental leave and childcare provisions. This seems to have positively affected fertility trends in this country. Notably, Germany was the only country in the group not registering a decline in fertility after the 2008 economic crisis (Figure 4). However, a causal relation can hardly be established with this descriptive macro approach.

Figure 4 - Fertility in conservative countries and in Sweden, 1960-2018



Source: World Development Indicators accessed on 4 January 2021

Other studies show more robust results on family policy efficacy by using longitudinal data. A study on Belgium applies a natural experimental design to show the effect of Belgian policy on fertility (Klüsener et al., 2013). In particular, the authors focus on the German-speaking region of Belgium. This region was German until 1918, when it was annexed to Belgium. Fertility in this region was close to that in Germany before 1918 but increased to the Belgian level some decades later, though the cultural identity of this German-speaking community remained unchanged. This supports the hypothesis that the rise in fertility is mainly due to Belgian family policy rather than cultural assimilation and changes in fertility preferences.

Other studies look at the effect of specific policy measures on fertility. Using macro-panel data, Luci and Thévenon (2011; 2013) show a positive effect of cash transfers and tax allowances on both the tempo and quantum of fertility. In particular, they show a 0.02 increase in the total fertility rate when family income increases by 10 percent (Luci and Thévenon, 2011). These results are in accordance with D'Addio and d'Ercole (2005) and with Gauthier and Hatzius (1997). The "timing effect" seems to be crucial, with cash transfers encouraging early motherhood but not necessarily larger family size (Ermisch, 1988; Barmby and Cigno, 1990; Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato, 2009; Thévenon and Gauthier, 2011). It has also been shown that transfers in the year of childbirth, such as birth premiums, have a strong impact on fertility (Luci and Thévenon, 2013). In contrast, Kalwij (2010) shows that an increase in cash transfers has no effect on the timing of births or on completed fertility (although tax allowances are not accounted for in his study).

With macro data, Luci and Thévenon (2013) also find a positive impact of the duration of maternity leave on fertility, in accordance with Adsera (2004). In their statistical analysis, they obtained this result while controlling for female employment at the country level, which might be negatively related to the duration of the leave. The authors also emphasize the importance of controlling for childcare services for children below three years of age, as long maternity leaves might be associated with a shortage of childcare services in some countries – although this is not the case for France and Sweden, which combine long leaves with good childcare provision coverage. Regarding the effect of maternity leave payments, it was assumed that an increase in available family income would increase fertility. However, empirical findings show that the effect on fertility is small and mainly concerns the timing of fertility (Kalwij, 2010; Luci and Thévenon, 2013).

Regarding parental leave duration, some studies have shown a positive effect on fertility in Sweden and Norway (Duvander and Andersson, 2006). In particular, fathers' uptake of moderately long leave positively affects couples' propensity for second and third births (Duvander and Andersson, 2006). Similarly, Duvander, Lappegård, and Andersson (2010) show that fathers' parental leave use is positively associated with the transition to the second and third birth in both Norway and Sweden. Duvander et al. (2019) obtain similar results for Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Concerning payment during leave, Kalwij (2010) shows that a 10 percent increase in remuneration during maternity leave and parental leave produces a 3.2 percent reduction in childlessness at ages 36–40, though there is no significant effect on completed fertility. Similar results are obtained by Raute (2018), showing that the German reform introducing more generous and universal coverage for parental leave positively affects fertility, particularly that of more highly educated women.

Regarding childcare services, macro-panel studies consistently find a positive effect on fertility (Hilgeman and Butts, 2009; Kalwij, 2010; Luci and Thévenon, 2011). For example, Kalwij (2010) finds that a 10 percent increase in childcare subsidies results in an approximately 0.4 percent increase in completed fertility. Most previous studies based on micro data also show a positive association between the local availability of childcare and fertility in Germany (Bauernschuster et al, 2016), in Norway (Rindfuss et al, 2007; Rindfuss et al., 2010), in Spain (Baizan, 2009), and in Italy (Del Boca, 2002). For Belgium, Wood (2019) finds that an increase over time in childcare coverage across and within municipalities positively affects the arrival of a first child for dual-earner couples. This result is confirmed by Wood and Neels (2019), who show a positive effect of childcare coverage on first- and higher-order births but particularly on the first birth. Interestingly, Wood (2019) shows for Belgium that the impact of childcare coverage on the first birth is particularly strong for highly educated dual-earner couples (Wood, 2019).

Comparing several policy measures, Kalwij (2010) finds that maternity leave, parental leave and childcare provisions are more effective in supporting fertility than other measures of cash transfer because they favour the combination of employment and parenthood. This conclusion is in partial agreement with Luci and Thévenon (2013), who show that childcare services and cash transfers in the first year of birth have the largest effect on fertility (however, Luci and Thévenon do not take into account parental leave remuneration in their analysis).

Finally, a positive effect on fertility has been observed for women working part time, although studies on this relation are still limited (D’Addio and d’Ercole 2005; Del Boca et al., 2009).

Family policies on gender equity

In this study, we are also interested in the impact of family policy measures on gender equity, such as the greater involvement of women in the labour market and the greater involvement of men in the family.

Leave policies generally have a positive effect on female employment by discouraging exit from the labour market after childbirth. Dearing (2016) identifies the ideal parental leave as being well-paid and lasting approximately 14 months. She shows an inverted U-shaped relation between women’s employment and leave policies, with moderate durations having a large positive effect on women’s employment and working hours and very short or long durations having a slightly positive effect.

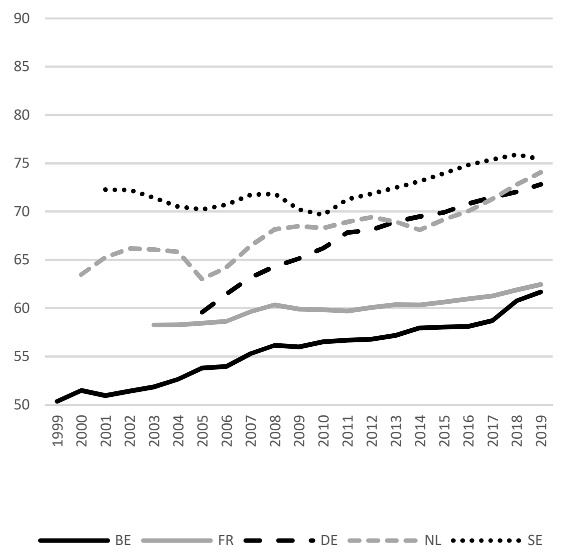
In her literature review, Rossin-Slater (2017) shows that maternity leave up to one year favours mothers’ return to previous employment and has a positive or no effect on employment probability. Some positive effects on the employment rate in the longer term are observed for the more educated (Bergemann and Riphahn, 2015). Consistently, the results for the German reform implementing one year of paid leave show a positive effect on female employment (Spiess and Wrohlich; 2008; Kluve and Tamm, 2013; Geyer et al., 2015). Only in some countries under the liberal regime, which is characterized by a lack of job protection during leave, do some negative employment or career effects appear, and the same is true for leaves shorter than one year (Das and Polachek, 2015; Stearns, 2016). Regarding wages, in Germany, long leaves of two or three years that are poorly or not remunerated negatively affect women’s wages up to eight years after returning to work (Schönberg and Ludsteck, 2014); in the case of France, the effect may last up to ten years (Lequien, 2012). In Austria, an increase in paid leave from one to two years affects wages in the short run but not in the long run (Lalive and Zweimüller, 2009). Overall, it appears that paid leave up to one year is beneficial or neutral for women’s employment. A more recent study based on 159 countries has identified a threshold of 30 weeks for a positive effect of maternity leave on female employment (Del Rey et al., 2020); however, the results might be biased by the fact that the predictor of female employment was maternity leave length, whether paid or unpaid.

The results presented above could be related to the levels of maternal employment shown in

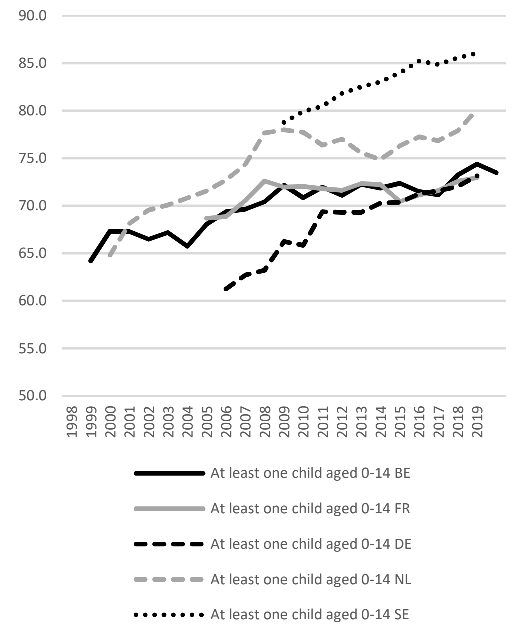
Figure 5. Sweden, which offers the longest paid leave among our five countries, exhibits the highest full-time maternal employment rate, more than 75 percent; by comparison, this rate is more than 55 percent in France, approximately 50 percent in Belgium, approximately 35 percent in Germany, and 30 percent in the Netherlands. Of course, these trends represent initial evidence and do not support a causal relation between paid leave and female employment.

Fig. 5 - Female and maternal employment rates, 1998-2019

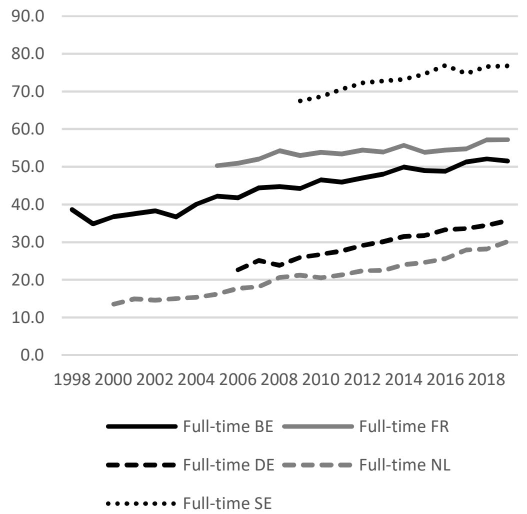
Female employment rate



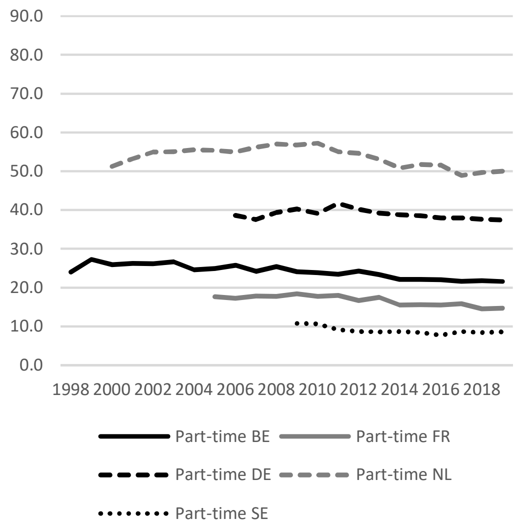
Maternal employment rate (at least one child 0-14)



Part-time maternal employment rate (at least one child 0-14)



Full-time maternal employment rate (at least one child 0-14)



Source: OECD (2021), Employment rate (indicator), accessed on 18 January 2021.

Note:

BE, no information on the type of work for 1% - 3% of women before 2005, 5.2% in 1999, 4.6% in 2000 and 3.4% in 2004.

FR, no information for 0.4% - 1.2% of women

SE, no information for 0.5% - 1.5% of women

Regarding formal childcare, Cascio et al.'s (2015) literature review shows that childcare facilities for children ages 0-3 benefit female and maternal employment. It has also been shown that full-time free childcare significantly increases mothers' labour force participation, while part-time free childcare has a marginal effect (Brewer and Gardiner , 2020). In contrast, cash transfers appear to have a negative effect on the female labour supply, especially in poor households (Laroque and Salanié, 2003; Buddelmeyer et al., 2004; Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato, 2009). Buddelmeyer et al. (2004) show via means-testing that cash benefits can cause an "unemployment trap" if the salary is close to the threshold. The authors also indicate that a high threshold might favour part-time work instead of full-time work. Comparing several policy measures, Gehringer and Klasen (2017) illustrate that public spending on cash benefits and spending on childcare provision promote part-time employment, whereas public expenditure on parental leave schemes positively affects women's full-time employment.

By encouraging female work, family policies help to increase or maintain the family income, thus favourably affecting fertility at the micro level. This can be observed in the relation between female labour force participation and fertility at the macro level. Whereas before the 1980s, macro-level cross-national studies revealed a strong negative correlation between female workforce participation and fertility rates (Ahn and Mira, 2002; Engelhardt and Prskawetz, 2004; Kögel, 2004), this relationship has weakened in recent years because of the reduction in the incompatibility between motherhood and a career (Kögel, 2004).

Family policies can also improve gender equity in terms of the greater involvement of fathers in the family. The OECD Family Database (accessed on 18 January 2021) shows that among men with children below school age, Swedish fathers devote more time to childcare: from 1.6 percent of their time if they have one child to 9 percent if they have two or more. These percentages are 1.2 and 8.4 for German fathers, 0.7 and 5.2 for French fathers, and 0.6 and 5.6 for Belgian fathers. Data for Sweden and Germany refer to the beginning of the 2000s and might underestimate the gap with other countries.

Based on micro data, Duvander and Johansson (2012) find that in Sweden, the introduction of a month reserved for fathers increased their leave by 10 days (from 25 to 35 days) while decreasing mothers' leave by 26 days (from 319.6 to 293.6). The second month reserved for fathers implemented in 2002 has increased the use of leave by fathers by almost seven days on average. Similar results are observed for Germany: before the 2007 reform, male benefit recipients consistently constituted less than 5 percent of all recipients: 3.5 percent in 2006 according to Schober et al. (2020). Geisler and Kreyenfeld (2018), on the basis of the German microcensus of 1999–2012, show that among children born in 2014, more than a third had a father receiving parental leave benefits. In 2016, the parental leave benefit was taken by 38.8

percent of fathers (Schober et al., 2020), showing an important increase as an effect of the 2007 reform.

Previous studies show that the education level of partners matters: when both partners have a high education level or when women have a higher education level, fathers' leave uptake is more likely (Reich, 2011; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2018; Reimer, 2020). Moreover, it has been shown that the following work arrangements and characteristics are positively associated with fathers' uptake of parental leave in Germany: men working part-time with partners working full-time, men whose partners have a higher income, and men with a permanent contract (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2018; Reich, 2011).

Marynissen et al. (2019) show that Belgian fathers belonging to low-income households (first tertile) or high-income households (third tertile) are less likely to take parental leave than fathers in middle-income households. In other words, the low flat-rate replacement benefit characterizing Belgian parental leave penalizes both low- and high-income fathers. Lower income is also penalized in Sweden in terms of fathers' uptake of parental leave (Marynissen et al. 2019). This may reflect, among other things, the higher proportion of people with a fixed-term contract in this group, as it is difficult for such workers to negotiate a right that is not an obligation. Note that the fact that high household income does not favour fathers' uptake is specific to the Belgian context.

Conclusions

In this study, we performed a descriptive and comparative study of Belgian family policy in light of the literature on policy efficacy and with a particular emphasis on fertility and gender equity. This study's unique contribution lies in its comprehensive approach to family policies in a limited number of countries and the focus on the Belgian case. Most comparative studies on a large number of countries inevitably lack details about policy features (Saraceno and Kerck, 2011), and they are less conducive to producing recommendations at the national level.

Belgian family policy presents several strengths in comparison to the other conservative countries. Its family allowances and birth premium are among the most generous. Enrolment rates for children under three years old are relatively high. Maternity and paternity leave policies, implemented to protect the maternity period and encourage fathers' involvement in the perinatal period, were instituted earlier than in other countries. In several developed countries, some of these policy measures – and, in particular, enrolment rates and leave – have proven to have a positive effect on fertility (Del Boca, 2002; Adsera, 2004; Duvander and Andersson, 2006; Rindfuss et al., 2007; Baizan, 2009; Hilgeman and Butts, 2009; Kalwij, 2010; Rindfuss et al., 2010; Luci and Thévenon, 2011; Luci and Thévenon, 2013; Bauernschuster et al., 2016; Raute, 2018). This positive effect has also been shown in the case of Belgium (Klüsener, et al., 2013; Wood, 2019; Wood and Neels, 2019).

However, some weaknesses in Belgian family policy are also apparent. These concern (1) the nature of public spending on families, (2) the duration of maternity leave, (3) the remuneration of parental leave, (4) the lack of radical reforms to support fathers' involvement, and (5) the sub-national disparities in some family policy measures.

First, in comparison to Sweden but also in comparison to the other conservative countries, Belgium presents the highest share of cash family benefits. It has been shown that cash benefits support fertility, but they could discourage maternal employment or encourage part-time versus full-time employment (Laroque and Salanié, 2003; Buddelmeyer et al., 2004; Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato, 2009).

Second, Belgian maternity leave is well remunerated, but it is relatively short. It might appear counterintuitive to point to the brevity of leave as a shortcoming. In fact, some previous research stressed that short leave periods prevent women's exit from the labour market (for a review, see Ciccia and Verloo, 2012). However, it has been shown that the relation between well-remunerated parental leave and female employment is an inverted U-shaped one, with moderate durations of parental leave having the greatest positive effect on women's employment (Dearing, 2016). Moreover, Gehringer and Klasen (2017) show that well-designed parental leave policies in terms of duration and remuneration favour full-time women's employment instead of part-time employment more than other family policy measures. Concerning fertility, recent studies also show a positive effect of leave duration on fertility with childcare provision controlled (Luci and Thévenon, 2013).

Third, a four-month parental leave in addition to maternity leave is available in Belgium, but leave remuneration takes the form of a flat rate and is likely to discourage parents' uptake. Consequently, work time reduction might become a preferable strategy to combine work and family after motherhood. Although the part-time option is not as popular in Belgium as in the Netherlands or Germany, work time reduction is an appreciated and common strategy. Parental leave and time credit allow parents to reduce their work time in a flexible manner. The formula of 1/5 parental leave is particularly appreciated by men. However, because of the flat rate remuneration, the main earner, usually the man, may be discouraged from uptake, and women remain the ones who reduce their work time more often. In other words, short maternity leaves associated with poorly remunerated parental leave make women's choice of part-time more likely during the parental leave period.

Because of the brevity of maternity leave, the flat rate remuneration accompanying parental leave, and because of the legal entitlement to childcare begins at 2.5 years old, we observe in Belgium a childcare gap of 2.2 years. This indicates the period of time a child is not covered by either adequately paid childcare leave or a guaranteed place in formal childcare (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019). In France, the childcare gap is almost three years (2.7), and it is even longer in the Netherlands (4.7 years). However, no childcare gap is observed in Germany or in Sweden, indicating that formal childcare provision measures dovetail with childcare leave (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019). The childcare gap overlap period is crucial for parents seeking a balance between care and work among the different options: working full-time, working part-time, or exiting the labour market.

When women are compelled to interrupt or reduce their work time, this has several consequences. Women's work time reduction may impair their employment prospects and earnings, increase occupational segregation, and decrease women's satisfaction (Connolly and Gregory, 2008; Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; Manning and Petrongolo, 2008; Berger, 2013; Joseph et al., 2013). Because of their lower earnings, women may be more vulnerable in the case of divorce. Moreover, in the long term, work time reduction may affect pension income (Kim and Rizzi, 2019). The Belgian family policy system takes women's work time reduction into account when calculating the pension amount in the case of leave and time credit use. However, within the time credit framework, when a parent has a full interruption of work, the fictive limited salary instead of the fictive normal salary is applied for the pension calculation. The same penalization occurs when a woman reduces her work time outside the time credit system.

Fourth, although conservative countries are no longer centred on the male breadwinner model, radical reform favouring fathers' involvement in the family is lacking in most countries in this group. This is in line with Morel's observation (2007) that the 1997 European Employment Strategy aimed to raise gender equality and support fertility, but a decade later, only the female employment aim has been pursued by conservative countries. Fertility under the replacement level and men's still-limited involvement in care require more focused policies in most conservative welfare states (and in several other countries in Europe). Interestingly, it has been observed that the two phenomena are related, with gender equity supporting fertility (Goldscheider et al., 2015). Thus, fathers' involvement should be considered a priority in the coming decades.

With the introduction in 2019 of the 1/10 parental leave, the share of Belgian men using this formula is likely to become notable. However, further policy measures are needed to substantially increase the care role of fathers, in particular, improvements in the remuneration of parental leave. Regarding the Belgian paternity leave, recently, its duration has increased: on 1 January 2021, it increased from 10 to 15 days, and on 1 January 2023, it will increase to 20 days. Similar measures have just been taken in the Netherlands and will be taken soon in France. These measures undoubtedly represent progress towards greater gender equity: since paternity leave is well remunerated, it represents a real opportunity for fathers to be involved in family care. Nevertheless, in Belgium, it can be taken only in the first four months after birth, when the mother is on maternity leave. In this sense, it is a less flexible measure than parental leave, which can be taken until the child's 12th birthday.

In our group of countries, only Sweden and, more recently, Germany have more consistently adopted policies with the aim of improving gender equity. In particular, in Sweden, relatively long and well-remunerated leaves favour women's full-time work (as they do not need to shift to part-time work to compensate for the childcare gap), encourage men's involvement, and support fertility (Spiess and Wrohlich 2008; Kalwij, 2010; Duvander et al. 2010; Duvander and Andersson, 2006; Raute, 2018; Duvander et al., 2019).

Finally, concerning regional disparities within Belgium, we showed that Belgian Dutch-speaking fathers are more egalitarian than Belgian French-speaking fathers, as reflected in their parental leave uptake. Moreover, the enrolment rate in formal childcare appears higher in Flanders than in the French-speaking region. The latter is especially characterised by high variability between provinces (ONE, 2019).

An agenda for Belgian policy makers seems to emerge from these observations. First, together with childcare facilities, relatively long and well-remunerated parental leave plays an essential role in supporting female employment, fathers' involvement, and fertility. Second, future research should more carefully evaluate policy measures that favour full-time work and compensate for future pension losses related to working part time. Alternatively, in line with the gender equity principle, part-time work should be encouraged for both fathers and mothers (Nedelsky, forthcoming). This would give everyone in society time to care for the most vulnerable members of the family. Finally, regarding the gap between the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Belgian regions in terms of the childcare enrolment rate and fathers' use of parental leave, this regional difference requires further investigation and indicates that improvements in family policies might be especially needed in the French-speaking region.

Additionally, future research might compare countries with respect to policy measures that focus on specific characteristics of the household: multiple births, adopted children, same-sex parents, and self-employed parents. In the coming years, researchers should also use micro data to clarify how recent changes in paternity leave impact fertility and gender equity. The impact of family policy measures according to the characteristics of households should be carefully considered. Finally, the present analysis could be extended to account for other criteria of efficacy, notably, the impact on families' poverty and on child development.

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Appendix

Maternity leave

Period and EU Directives	BE	FR	DE	NL	SE
1900-1930	**13/12/1889 (law):** Article 5 of the law on Women's and Children's Labour legislated four weeks leave for working mothers giving birth.	**1909**: Eight weeks of unpaid maternity leave (OECD, 2019). **1913**: First law on paid maternity leave (Henneck, 2003). **1928**: Payments were generalized for all civil servants. At 100 percent of earnings for two months. Leave still unpaid for women working in the private sector.	**1878:** Pregnant women cannot work during the 3 weeks before birth. **1903 and 1911:** Leave period to 6 weeks. Paid leave of 2 weeks before delivery. **1924:** Job protection during maternity leave.	**1889**: Four weeks for pregnant women. **1919**: Women cannot work for at least eight weeks after childbirth. Of these, two weeks can be used before birth.	**1901**: 4 weeks of unpaid maternity leave.
1930-1950					**1937**: 3 weeks of unpaid maternity leave (six weeks before, six weeks after birth. Job protection. **1939**: Maternity leave of 4,5 months. 12 weeks postnatal. **1945**: Unpaid maternity leave of 6 months.
1950-1990	**24/10/1967 (law):** Article 8 of the Royal Decree no. 40 on Women's labour introduced job protection during maternity leave. 8 postnatal weeks mandatary. **1969**: Total job-protected maternity leave was increased to 14 weeks. One month paid by the employer at 100 percent of earnings, followed	**1966**: Job-protection for the 12 weeks following childbirth **1969**: Maternity leave of 14 weeks (of which 6 were prenatal weeks). Payment at 50 percent of earnings **1/1/1971 (law 1970):** Maternity leave payments increased to 90 percent of earnings (OECD, 2019).	**1/1/1968:** 14 weeks of mandatory maternity leave (Mutterschutzgesetz), of which 6 weeks are prenatal. A sickness insurance benefit was paid by the social security system at a flat rate approximately equal to the average salary for female workers. Employers were required to supplement this	**1966**: 12 weeks of paid maternity leave. **1969**: Maternity leave paid at 100 percent of earnings. **1/8/1976** (Act of May 6th): Job protection. **2/3/1990** (Law 22/2/1990): 16 weeks of maternity leave at 100 percent replacement rate. Of these, 4 pre-	**1955**: 3-6 months paid, but only if nine months of employment before the birth. **1963**: Paid maternity leave of 6 months (180 days), paid at 80 percent of earnings. **1/1/1974**: Parental leave replaced maternity leave.

	by a social security allowance **22/12/1989 (law):** 30 days paid at 82 percent of the previous wage and from the 31st day at 75 percent. **29/12/1990 (law):** Maternity leave is extended by one week to be taken before birth (for a total of 7 prenatal and 8 postnatal weeks).	**1/10/1978** (law): Maternity leave was extended to 16 weeks, of which 6 weeks were prenatal. **26/07/1985:** From the third child, the entitlement became 26 weeks of leave (8 weeks prenatal).	benefit to reach the full salary. **1/1/1979:** Additional four months of extended leave. In this period, monthly payment depended on the average salary during the three months prior to the start of maternity leave.	natal weeks mandatory.	
1990-2010 **1992:** Pregnancy Directive 92/85/EEC	9/7/2004 (law): 6 weeks prenatal and 9 weeks postnatal.		**20/6/2002:** (Out of 14 weeks) only 8 postnatal weeks are mandatory.		**1994/1995**: 2 mandatory weeks of maternity leave.
2010 to the present					

Paternity leave

Period	BE	FR	DE	NL	SE
1950-1990	**23/11/1961 (**Royal Decree): two days of paternity leave paid by the employer. **28/8/1963** (Royal Decree): paternity leave increased by one day.				**1/1/1980**: 10 days paid at 90 percent of earlier income. The leave was called “Leave and benefit in relation to childbirth” and is gender neutral.
1990-2010	**1/7/2002**: Paternity leave was increased to ten days. Three days mandatory paid at 100 percent of earnings. Then, at 82 percent with a ceiling.	**1/1/2002** (law no. 2001-1246, 21st of December 2001): Maximum of 3 days of paternal birth leave and 11 consecutive days of paternity leave, for a total of 14 days. This leave was job-protected and fully paid.		**1/12/2001:** 2 days of paternity leave, fully paid and job-protected.	
2010 to the present	**1/1/2021:** Paternity leave was increased to 15	**2013**: Paternity leave) renamed ‘leave for looking		**1/2015**: Paternity leave extended to five days. The first	

	days. They will become 20 days in 2023.	after a child in order to adopt a gender-neutral perspective on family. **1.7.2020**: Paternity leave was increased to 28 days.		two days paid by the employer at 100 percent of earnings. In **2020**, paternity leave was extended to a maximum of five weeks (70 % pay).	

Parental leave

Period and EU Directives	BE	FR	DE	NL	SE
1950-1990 **1986:** Council directive 86/378/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes.		**13/7/1977**: Unpaid and job protected parental leave for a maximum of 2 years (one year of social security contributions). Fathers could use this leave only if the mother declined her right. **5/1/1984** (law on 4/1/1984): Fathers eligible for parental leave. **1/1/1985**: Parental leave payment (Allocation Parentale d'Education, APE) for parents with three or more children, with the youngest child under 3 years old. Flat rate. For both parents but family-based entitlement (one benefit per family only). Partial payment for part-time work. **30/12/1986** (law on 29/12/1986): Parental leave for a maximum of 3 years.	**1/1/1986**: 8 months of paid parental leave (Erziehungsgeld). Parents can work up to 15 hours per week. **1/1/1988**: Paid employment-protected parental leave extended up to 10 months. **1/7/1989**: Paid parental leave extended up to 13 months. Parents could now work up to 19 hours per week. **1/7/1990**: Paid parental leave extended up to 16 months.		**1/1/1974:** Maternity leave replaced by 6 months (180 days) of job-protected parental leave. Of these, up to 60 days prenatal. **1/1/1975**: 7 months (equal to 30 weeks or 210 days). **1/6/1978**: 9 months (equal to 39 weeks or 270 days) paid at 90 percent of the salary. Until child was 18 months old. **1/7/1980**: 12 months (or 360 days), of which 9 months were fully paid and 3 months were paid at a flat rate. **1989**: 15 months (or 450 days).

1990-2010 **1996:** Councile Directive 96/34/EC: minimum individual right for each parent.	**29/10/1997** (law): A three-month, job-protected parental leave scheme was introduced (NATLEX). The scheme applied to the private sector and it was paid at a flat rate. **2009:** Parents who work in the private sector could take parental leave until the child's 12th birthday. Public sector since 2010.	**1994**: The parental leave payment (APE) made available also to parents with a second child under 3 years old. Eligibility criteria for receiving a benefit payment were more restrictive for parents with only two children compared to parents with three or more children . **1/1/2004**: New payment system called Complément de libre choix d'activité (CLCA), paid also in the case of the first child for six months after maternity leave. Flat-rate payment (APE, EUR513 per month in 2005), paid to families whose income was below a threshold. **1/7/2006**: One year period of leave option for parents with a third chid (Complément optionel de libre choix d'activité, COLCA). Flat rate payment at higher rate than CLCA. **2014:** CLCA for first child extended to up to 12 months, with 6 months maximum for each parent. For second child, each parent can take 2 years and half maximum (= 6 months minimum for each parent). **1/1/2015**: CLCA	**1/1/1992**: Job-protected parental leave of 34 months. Payment still only for 16 months. **1/1/1993**: Paid parental leave extended from 16 to 22 months. **1/1/2001**: DM900 per month for 10 months or DM600 per month for 22 months. These benefits were income-tested. Parents could work up to 30 hours per week. Paid leave could be used until child's second birthday. The third year of leave may be used until the child was 8 years old. **1/1/2007**: New earnings-related parental leave benefit with floor and ceiling (Elterngeld, or "parental money"). The payment became at 67 percent of the parent's average earnings during the 12 months preceding childbirth. Duration 10 + 2 months to favour fathers' uptake. **2009**: Grandparents can take leave to care for their grandchildren if the child's parents are younger than 18 years or if they are still in school.	**1/1/1991**: 26 weeks part-time (50 percent) unpaid job-protected parental leave. Individual right. Up to child's 4th birthday. **1/7/1997**: Employees may request to spread leave over more than 26 weeks or take up more hours per week. Until the child's 8th birthday.	**1/1/1994:** Childcare allowance for parents who stop fully or partially to work to look after a child aged 0-3. Parental benefit reduced to 360 days. 90 days paid at flat rate are abolished. **1/1/1995**: Abolition of childcare allowance. Reintroduction of 90 days. Individualization of paternal leave. Each parent can benefit of half leave. Paid at 80 percent of earlier income. Months are transferable to the other parent, except one month (daddy or mummy month, paid at 90 percent). **1/1/1996**: Parental leave paid at 75 percent and mummy and daddy months at 85 percent. **1/1/1997**: Mother and father months at 75 percent. **1/1/1998**: Payment at 80 percent with ceiling for mother and father months and for 300 days of parental leave. The remaining 3 months at a flat rate. **1/1/2002**: 480 days of parental benefit and 90 days at a flat rate. 2 months reserved for each parents.

		and CLOCA replaced by PreParE (Prestastion partaée d'éducation de l'enfant). For second child, each parent can take 2 years maximum.			**2008**: Municipal child-raising allowance (vårdnadsbidrag) reintroduced. **7/2008**: Introduction of the "gender equality bonus" as a tax credit to parents that share the leave equally.
2010 to the present **2010**: Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU, aimed at better protection of the position of the employee taking parental leave and aimed at encouraging fathers' uptake of parental leave.	**2012**: Implementation of the European Directive 2010/18/EU with a fourth month of parental leave.		**2011**: Long-term unemployed no longer eligible for parental benefits, but social assistance payments. The replacement rate was reduced to 65 percent if the net monthly income exceeds €1200. **1/2012**: New optional Familienpflegezeit (family caring time): work time reduction to a minimum of 15 hours to care for a dependent relative up to 2 years. Reduction of income less than reduction of hours, but the difference is repaid after returning full time. **7/2015**: New ElterngeldPlus programme, which allows parents to spread their leave to 24 (+4) months but with the monthly leave benefit halved.	**8/2011**: Wetswourstel modernisering regelingen voor verlof en arbeidstijden (Law on modernizing leave arrangements and working times). More flexibility in the uptake and an extension of the entitlement to employees starting a job. **2012**: After parental leave, it is possible to ask the employer for a change in working hours for a maximum period of one year.	**1/1/2012**: Gender equality bonus now paid in the form of tax-free income. Introduction of "double-days": parents may be at home together on leave for up to 30 days during their child's first year. **1/1/2016**: Parent's quota extended to three months per parent. **1/2/2016**: Municipal child-raising allowance (vårdnadsbidrag) abolished.

Source: Main source OCDE Family Database, PF2_5_Trends_in_leave_entitlements_around_childbirth_annex.pdf, Last updated 26/10/2017. Motiejunaite-Schulmeister et al., 2019.