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Introduction

1. Background and demographic data¹

In 2004, taking into account all ages, demographic figures showed there were 5,309,245 women and 5,087,176 men.

There are slightly more women than men, as women represent 51 % of the total population. The distribution of women, according to regions, is as follows: 10 % in the Brussels capital region, 57 % in the Flemish region and 33% in the Walloon region.

As for the population of foreign origin, in 2004 there were 442,693 men and 417,648 women, that is, 48 % women and 51 % men. The distribution of women of foreign origin according to regions is as follows: 31 % in the Brussels-capital region, 33 % in the Flemish region and 36% in the Walloon region.

In terms of the different family configurations, which can be considered family units, in Belgium in 2004 there were 15.6 % single mothers and 5.8 % single fathers. In 2003, the mother was the head of the family in three out of every four single parent families, whereas the father was only head of the family in one out of every four. Proportionally, the number of single parent families is higher in Brussels (29.3 %) than in the Walloon region (25.9 %) and in Flanders (16.4 %).

2. Female employment in Belgium²

Since the seventies, Belgium has experienced a **greater participation of women** in its labour market, which has evolved favorably. In Belgium, female employment as a proportion of total employment reached almost 44% in the year 2000, as opposed to 40 % in the year 1990, 35 % in 1980 and 30 % in 1960.

In 2002, there were as many men as women in **higher education** (27 % and 28 %). Men and women's qualifications were quite similar.

The **employment rate** shows the relationship between the sector of the population that has a job and the population which is in the age to work. Despite the positive evolution of the situation of women in the labour market, we can see that the employment rate of women is lower than that of men: in Belgium, it was 67.9 % for men as opposed to 52.7 % for women in 2004. Also, the employment rate does not imply quality work or good work conditions.

How many workers are employed **part time** in relation to the total number of employed workers? It is mainly women that have part-time jobs. Amongst working women, 42.4 % work part time, as opposed to 6.9 % men. The main reason for having a part-time job varies according to gender. In 2001, the main reason for a man to have a part-time job was not being able to find a full-time job (31 %), whereas the main reason for a woman to have a part-time job was taking care of her children (29 %). Therefore, when a woman chooses to have a part-

¹These figures are extracted from the following Web site, <http://www.statbel.fgov.be>

² These figures are extracted from the following Web site, <http://www.statbel.fgov.be> and were compiled in report made by the Belgium Trade Union FGTB in 2005 and titled "elimination of gender stereotypes in the labour sphere and in the trade Union organizations".

time job, she does so in order to take care of her children whereas when men have part-time jobs it is generally against their will.

Unemployment rate according to gender: the proportion of unemployed people in relation to the active population between 15 and 64 years old is 8.5 %. This proportion is 7.6 % for men and 9.6 % for women.

Pay differences between men and women: in 1999 the average gross salary per hour for women was 89% that of men. On the basis of the yearly average gross salary, this represents a 25 % difference.

Nowadays, women have managed to find employment in fields and activities that used to be mainly male such as post delivery, bus driver, police agent and intellectual professions. However, there are still sectors in which their presence is minimal, as can be seen in the following table. The jobs mainly carried out by women are: cleaner, teacher, child care and domestic help

Table: Distribution of male or female dominated professions in 2003

<i>Predominantly female professions</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Predominantly male professions</i>	<i>%</i>
Cleaner	99,8 %	Excavator and construction machine driver	100 %
School teacher	99 %	Woodcutter, forester	100 %
Child care and domestic help	98,3 %	Electrician	99,6 %
Secretary	94,7 %	Vehicle mechanic	99,2 %
Chemist's assistant	92 %	Plumber	99 %

However, an article pointed out: « *The presence of women is growing in some sectors: notary (from 1.1% to 34.9%), architect and urban planner (from 1 % to 25.9 %), court secretary, justice usher and legal advisor (from 2.1% to 52.5%), judge and magistrate (from 1.6 % to 39.9 %), lawyer and legal advisor (from 8 % to 42.2 %), specialist doctor and surgeon (from 6.3 % to 32.2 %); female presence is also increasing in other professions such as: auditor, tourist guide, translator, interpreter, chemist's apprentice and secondary school teacher. In the following professions there has been a very large increase in female presence: police agent (from 0.1 % to 12.1 %), post delivery (from 0.2 % to 23.3 %) and bus driver (from 0.7 % to 11 %)*³. »⁴

³ Institut National de Statistique, Info. flash n 17, the 19th of March 2002. Data compare the 1990 and the 2000 figures.

3. The issue of Gender Stereotypes⁴

In 2005, the Belgium trade Union FGTB did a research on the elimination of gender stereotypes in the labour sphere. For that purpose, three sectors of activity were chosen: a predominantly female sector, teaching; a predominantly male sector, construction; and a more neutral sector, banking and insurance. Interviews were done to men and women about several questions.

One of the questions was **the reason why men and women have difficulties to find a job**. The answers were the following:

Difficulties encountered in general by women when trying to get a job

Question 7	Education		Construction		Banking	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Lack of training	6 %	0 %	4 %	3 %	5 %	0 %
Lack of professional experience	0 %	0 %	8 %	9 %	7 %	7 %
Lack of self-confidence	18 %	15 %	25 %	15 %	9 %	24 %
Lack of time	32 %	39 %	33 %	41 %	36 %	36 %
Stereotypes	32 %	39 %	25 %	32 %	34 %	31 %
None	12 %	7 %	4 %	0 %	9 %	2 %
Others	0 %	0 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Generally, when women try to get a job, they encounter the following difficulties, expressed in decreasing order of importance:

- lack of time,
- unequal distribution of family duties (70 % of the interviewees answered this)
- persistence of preconceived ideas and stereotypes on the role of women (64 %)
- women's lack of confidence in their capacity (34 %).

There are slightly more women than men in the education and construction sectors who consider lack of time and stereotypes as obstacles. More men in the education and construction sectors mention lack of self-confidence as a difficulty. This does not apply to the banking sector, in which 24 % of women think this is a difficulty as opposed to 9 % men.

Another question asked refers to **behaviour, abilities and preferences of women** while exercising their professional activity so as to analyze existing stereotypes in the labour sphere. Interviewees were asked whether or not they agreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Interviewees had to express their opinion according to a scale that went from “completely agree” to “completely disagree”. The answers were the following:

⁴ Source: report by the Belgium Trade Union FGTB in 2005 : “elimination of gender stereotypes in the labour sphere and in the trade Union organizations”

Stereotypes

Question 9	Education				Construction				Banking			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
Stereotypes	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False
Taking care of others	60 %	40 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	73 %	27 %	36 %	6 %	63 %	37 %
Household chores	15 %	85 %	13 %	87 %	25 %	75 %	27 %	73 %	21 %	79 %	35 %	65 %
More honest	6 %	94 %	14 %	86 %	17 %	83 %	7 %	93 %	9 %	91 %	26 %	74 %
Physically attractive	60 %	40 %	45 %	55 %	45 %	55 %	26 %	74 %	50 %	50 %	46 %	54 %
No supervising	5 %	95 %	4 %	96 %	23 %	77 %	0 %	100 %	0 %	100 %	4 %	96 %
Less physical strength	95 %	5 %	75 %	25 %	58 %	42 %	94 %	6 %	87 %	13 %	83 %	71 %
Less ability for science	15 %	85 %	8 %	82 %	8 %	92 %	0 %	100 %	0 %	100 %	8 %	92 %
Receiving orders	10 %	90 %	8 %	82 %	7 %	93 %	7 %	93 %	0 %	100 %	8 %	92 %
More docile	25 %	75 %	13 %	87 %	16 %	84 %	13 %	87 %	13 %	87 %	29 %	71 %
Accept a lower salary	25 %	75 %	48 %	52 %	69 %	31 %	40 %	60 %	33 %	67 %	56 %	44 %

The global results show great disagreement for the following statements: women do not want to supervise other people's work (96 % of the interviewees disagreed), women are more prepared to receive orders (94 %), women are not as good at science and mathematics (93 %), women are more honest (86 %).

However, the following statements were agreed: women have less physical strength, (81 % agree), women are more willing to take care of others (54 %). Also, 44 % of the interviewees think women are more prepared to accept a lower salary and 46 % think women are more physically attractive.

In the banking and education sectors, more women than men say that women would accept a lower salary (48 % of women in the education sector as opposed to 25 % of men and 56 % of women in banking as opposed to 33 % of men). However, this does not apply to the construction sector, in which a majority of men agree.

The statement « women have less physical strength » was much more accepted by women than men in the construction sector: 94 % of women agree with this statement as opposed to 58 % of men. In the education sector the situation is the opposite: 95 % of men agree with this statement as opposed to 75 % of women.

In the banking and construction sectors there were systematically more women than men who agree with the following statement: «women are, by nature, more willing to take care of others». This does not apply to the education sector.

The statement: « women are more physically attractive » is more accepted by men than women. It is men in the education sector that agree most with this statement: 60 % of them.

A last question showing the importance of both stereotypes and work life balance was asked. The interviewees had to choose **the main difficulties found by women to hold management positions**. The answers are the following:

Question 19.	Education		Construction		Banking	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Lack of training	0 %	0 %	7 %	3 %	2 %	0 %
Lack of experience	19 %	0 %	15 %	13 %	0 %	0 %
Lack of self-confidence	19 %	19 %	22 %	9 %	13 %	15 %
Precarious work	0 %	0 %	0 %	3 %	2 %	4 %
Inequality regarding family duties	19 %	32 %	15 %	22 %	32 %	33 %
Male domination	19 %	12 %	19 %	25 %	25 %	35 %
Stereotypes	14 %	17 %	15 %	16 %	11 %	11 %
Discouragement from spouse and family	6 %	8 %	4 %	9 %	7 %	2 %
Others	4 %	2 %	3 %	0 %	8 %	0 %

Globally, the most mentioned difficulties are:

- inequality in the share of family duties (27 %),
- male domination in company management (23 %),
- women's lack of self-confidence in their own abilities (16 %),
- stereotypes (15 %).

In particular, inequality in the distribution of family duties represents 32 % of the difficulties mentioned both by women in the education sector and by men in the banking sector. Male domination in company management represents 35% of the difficulties mentioned by women in the banking sector and 25 % of difficulties mentioned by women in the construction sector.

I. National policies

1. Welfare state and family policies

This is interesting to note that although most of the Belgian policies are decentralized, family policies have remained partly in the competence of the national Belgian state.

Family measures in Belgium are recent and first measures are to be found at the beginning of the 20th century. Until recently there was no family policy as such and family measures were embedded in the social policy as such⁵.

The different measures concerning families have been really conservative until the late 1990s and are in the last decade far more progressive. In 1962, the first familial planning is created to fight against illegal abortion. In 1974 for the first time, the rights of mothers to educate and manage children's goods together with the fathers is recognized and this is only in 1973 that the advertisement for contraceptives is no more forbidden, abortion being decriminalized only in 1990. In the Esping-Andersen typology of welfare state, Belgium is indeed categorised together with France as a conservatism state where gender differentiation still plays a large role⁶.

⁵ « La politique familiale, un domaine difficile à isoler » in P. Cattoir et D. Jacobs, Politique familiale, étude de la littérature, revue belge de sécurité sociale, 2002, p 8.

⁶ Esping-Andersen et alii, « A new welfare architecture for Europe » report submitted to the EU Belgian Presidency in 2001. <http://socialeurope.com/pdfs/Gosta-Esping.pdf>

In the 2000 family measures have changed radically: in February 2003 a law is adopted allowing persons from the same sex to marry, in 2005 a law grants shared custody for divorced parents, and in June 2006 right of adoption for homosexuals is recognized⁷.

There is a secretary of state for families since 2004: Mrs Mandaila-Malamba, MR liberal party, from Congolese origins. Although her program focuses more on links with the Congolese community than on families themselves⁸, her role in the recent actuality has emerged with new family measures like a law allowing adoption for homosexual couples (law of the 18 May 2006), although progressive family measures are rather attributed to the popular minister of Justice: Mrs Laurette Onkelynx, from the socialist party.

The role of political parties: in family policies is binary when it comes to the realm of the definition of families. The right wing parties' proposals for family target possibilities for mothers to stay at home⁹. The CD and V (right wing party), together with the extreme right and one part of the MR party, voted massively against the laws for adoption of children by homosexuals, against the 2003 law allowing the marriage of persons from the same sex, and in 1990 against the right of abortion for the mother. On the other side, the socialist party has appeared more progressive, but the real program proposed by the socialist party targets in priority poor families and especially housing. The progressive movement in relation with families in Belgium is represented by the ecological parties (*Ecolo* for the French speaking part and *Agalev* for the Flemish part): one of their priorities was to defend right of adoption of homosexuals, but they also refused to stigmatize parents from delinquent youngsters. When it came to the parental and paternity leaves, most opposed party was the liberal (centre) MR party emphasizing the costs of such a measure.

The Impact of Church and free masonry : traditionally played a large role in Belgium when it comes to society such as education (there is a traditional competition in Belgium between the UCL, Catholic University, and the ULB/VUB University founded by the free masons). The church traditionally opposes non traditional forms of families, adopting a stance in favour of the right to life against abortion and not sensible to sexual orientation or free reproductive rights. The free masons, place moral values and support to family as an important point, and indirectly supported more progressive social and family measures. Actions in society and for "*the good of mankind*" are important for masons but they exclude political involvement and gather participants from left and right wing parties. The Belgian free masonry is also traditionally less involved in politics than their French counterparts¹⁰. Nevertheless, and as the feminists pointed out, the exclusion of women from the majority and regular lodges, is still based on the assumption that "men know better"¹¹.

The role of civil society movements: There are civil society groups that have been really active in Belgium: women's groups, feminist associations, but also conservatism movements such as the church influenced group "*la famille c'est vraiment important*" fighting against

⁷ See website www.droitbelge.be. More in detail, [http://www.juridat.be/cgi_loi/loi_al.pl?cn=1804032130&language=fr&caller=list&la=F&fromtab=loi&tri=dd+AS+RANK&rech=1&numero=1&sql=\(text+contains+\(""\)\)#LNKR0057](http://www.juridat.be/cgi_loi/loi_al.pl?cn=1804032130&language=fr&caller=list&la=F&fromtab=loi&tri=dd+AS+RANK&rech=1&numero=1&sql=(text+contains+() (livre I – Des personnes ; titre VIII – De l'adoption).

⁸ See her website <http://www.giselemandaila.be> and <http://users.skynet.be/suffrage-universel/be/mandaila-malamba.htm>.

⁹ CDF (Chrétiens Démocrates Fédéraux) document « personne et famille » ; see the website <http://www.cdf-info.be/action/opinions/famille.html>.

¹⁰ « Les franc maçons et la politique » in *Précis de franc maçonnerie*, éditions Bayard Dervy, 2000

¹¹ « L'initiation des femmes » in *Précis de franc maçonnerie*, éditions Bayard Dervy, 2000

abortion, and marriage or adoption for the people from the same sex¹². The feminist movement has mainly followed the other European movements and some associations have been created such as the women university in 1979. Finally active NGOs have as well promoted the rights of children and of women to be placed higher on the political agenda.

The most important civil society organisations involved in families and women issues are:

- Families associations
 1. La ligue des familles (www.liguedesfamilles.be)
 2. GezinsBond (www.gezinsbond.be)
- Women associations
 1. Amazone (www.amazone.be)
 2. Les femmes prévoyantes socialistes (<http://www.femmesprevoyantes.be>)
 3. Les femmes et société (www.lecdh.be/animation/femmes.htm)
 4. Flora (www.florainfo.be)
 5. Le réseau femmes Belgique (www.reseaufemmesbelgique.be)
 6. Vrouwenraad (www.vrouwenraad.be)
- Men associations
 1. Le Réseau Hommes Belgique (www.rhb.be)
 2. Relais-hommes (www.relais-hommes.org)

Not all those associations are recognized by the Political institutions. Due to the specificity of the Belgian institutional system, some associations are more active at the regional level and others at the national level. Some associations, such as la Ligue des familles or GezinsBond are important associations and are always consulted by the policy makers, others associations have less influence towards the policy makers. Nevertheless most of them have participated to the Etats Généraux de la Famille organized by the Secretary of State for Families and disabilities between 2004 and 2007.

2. Conservatism trends and stereotypes

1. Lack of childcare facilities

The first childcare facilities were created at the end of the 19th century for charity purpose¹³. It has not been easy in Belgium to evolve from this first idea that childcare facilities were reserved for the socially poor. Opinions have long followed the line of liberals/Christian democrats, for which the extension of childcare is too costly, and of greens/socialists, for which there should be an equal access to childcare facilities. There is however a recent consensus that more places should be created for daily childcare. In the report “can parents afford to work” Belgium system of childcare still appears to be amongst the most protective as the costs of childcare are reasonable (in average 400 Euros per month per child), indexed on revenue, and deductible from taxes¹⁴.

2. Conservatism in law measures

This is also interesting to quote that the housing leases, still include a sentence “Le preneur doit occuper l’endroit en bon père de famille” (the renter should occupy the apartment/house,

¹² <http://www.actionfamille.be>

¹³ Humblet Perrine, «Les crèches à l’œuvre du temps de l’œuvre nationale de l’enfance», ULB, <http://www.one.be/docs/DOSSIERS/creches.htm>

¹⁴ Herving Immervoll and David Barber, «Can parents afford to work? Childcare costs, tax benefit policies and work incentives” Institute for the study of labour, January 2006

as good family father) even if the renter is a woman, what sends back to a more conservative vision of family.

3. Tax systems and indemnities discouraging women's work life balance

The tax system has been recently criticized by the media and parties, because families with 2 salaries pay more taxes, and can have a lower netto salary than families with only a bread winner.

It had also been noticed, that married people pay more taxes than unmarried people, what had led to some recent tax changes. The tax system can however been considered as discouraging both parents to work when they have a family.

Maternal leave indemnities are really poor in Belgium (a working woman will receive less maternity leave indemnities per not worked month than most of unemployed women)¹⁵. One of the parents only receives children indemnities.¹⁶

The above mentioned measures are not in accordance with recent speeches and trends to facilitate work life balance for women and men.

Most of the associations described previously, together with the trade unions, such as the FGTB, and political parties that were in the opposition, such as the Green or the CDH (Former Social Christian party), have been asking for real measures facilitating work life balance for women and men pointing out that the actual regulations are not sufficient. Sweden and France have often been taken as a model: Sweden for the regulations on maternity, paternity and parental leaves and France for the kindergarten facilities and financial helps for parents¹⁷.

During the Federal elections most of the political parties have been proposing measure to facilitate work life balance for families but also fostering the Equality between men and women in terms of right and obligations towards children. For some political parties these measures are taken more as measures fostering equality and well-being but for others those measures will help to increase the birth rate of the country.

We can therefore draw 2 hypotheses:

- i. These measures can be considered as left over from the past, which have not evolved because they have not been on the political agenda, or/and because there were civil society movements to protest against them,
- ii. Or the measures can be viewed as the general belief that the male should be the main breadwinner as opposed to the female caretaker.

¹⁵ These assumptions are based on interviews.

¹⁶ More details on indemnities can be found at the website of the ONAFTS (National office of indemnities for employees <http://www.rkw.be/Fr/Birth/who.php> . An overview of benefits for parents can be found at the ONE (French speaking National Office for Childhood) website:

<http://www.one.be/PDF/BROCHURES/carnetparents.pdf> .

¹⁷ Le Soir, 19th July 2007 *Les partis stériles face à la dénatalité*

3. Maternity, parental and paternity leave

Every woman who is entitled to benefit insurance and meets the required conditions of insurance (waiting period, maintained rights, and payment of contributions) is entitled to maternity leave for the birth of her child. During this period, she receives a maternity fee.¹⁸

The maternity fee attributed to salaried employees and self-employed persons is managed and paid out by the bodies and institutions responsible for incapacity for work (Management Committee, Technical Health Service Council, Welfare Benefit Service, etc.).

Female civil servants are not entitled to the maternity fee, as they are not subject to the benefit sector. They fall under a specific regulation, pursuant to which they are given fifteen weeks of paid leave (100% of their normal salary).

Salaried employees are entitled to a 15 weeks leave (17 weeks in case of multiple birth), to be split in two periods: prenatal rest (up to 7 weeks, 1 is mandatory); postnatal rest (8 weeks starting from the day of birth).

Pregnant women are entitled to a maternity benefit, via a doctor declaration, according to the status (worker or unemployed).

Self-employed workers who meet the required conditions of insurance are entitled to a 3 weeks maternity leave starting from the day of birth and to a lump-sum maternity benefit.

The Belgian law distinguishes the paternity leave (adopted the 29th April 1997 what proposed 10 days of leave for the father after the birth of a child) and the parental leave (adopted in October the same year) which proposes, depending of the worker's statutes, an interruption of career of 3 months, or the possibility to work part time for the father or the mother during the 1st 6 months. The non worked months, are remunerated 457 Euros/month for full time leave, and the half for part time leave. The parental leave is more used by mothers than by fathers.

There is no large scale evaluation of these measures. The parental leave is open to gay and lesbian couples (who have been recognized the right of adoption in 2006).

4. Childcare facilities

There is a shortage of childcare facilities at the national level. The ONE (national office of childhood) is in charge of childcare facilities together with the communities. This part will be described in the regional/local level, as there are some huge regional disparities, the shortage of childcare facilities in Brussels being the most accurate.

5. Possibility of part time work¹⁹

There are several possibilities of working part time in Belgium (3/4, 4/5). There is for instance a possibility of "career break" of 1 year after several years of services in the same company. However, the Belgian work regulations are not protective enough towards the employee to allow them freely to take a career break, or a parental leave (work contracts are flexible).

Moreover, the low remuneration of parental leave and the fee for the career break, do not allow middle class people to use these facilities. They can rather be considered as facilities for high class people, with flexible hours.

¹⁸ Information on maternity leave is taken from www.socialsecurity.be

¹⁹ Source : Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique www.vbo-feb.be

Two other facilities can have better impacts: the medical leave and the palliative leave which open the possibility for a leave of 2 month for the palliative and 12 months for the medical (assistance to a sick relative).

Finally, the system of pre pension from 50 years old opens possibilities to reduce work time both for men and women.

6. The Federal Institute for Gender Equality and the new antidiscrimination law

The “Institut pour l’égalité des femmes et des hommes”²⁰ has been set in 2002 and is fully operative since 2004. It resumes the work, the projects and the staff of the Gender equality direction of the Federal Ministry of Employment, created in 1974.

It has been established as independent body, entitled to take legal action, register complains and help citizens. Other reasons of discriminations fall within the competence of the “Centre de l’égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme”²¹.

Institute’s recommendations were not so binding, as it did not have the power of inflicting fines, until the approval of the new antidiscrimination law²², published on the official gazette on the 31/05/07. Actually, three laws have been approved to address three forms of discriminations: on gender, racism and other reasons of discriminations.

II. Local/regional policies

1. Childcare facilities

There is a shortage of daily nursery at the national and regional level. The most critical situation is Brussels, where parents would need to register their child 18 months in advance to grant them a place in a public crèche²³. In Wallonia, in 1990, there were 2018 demands of places in a crèche that could not be satisfied²⁴. The budget of the national office of childhood represents 1,7% of the French community budget and the allocation for parents 0,9% of this same budget. An analysis then concludes that there is no global policy of childcare facilities in the French speaking part of Belgium.

2. Local workshops

The Municipality of Brussels has developed workshops for parents and future parents to prepare women and couples at the birth²⁵, including prenatal and postnatal period. Local hospitals have also developed days of information for future fathers. There is no study yet to show the results of these local initiatives.

3. Coherence of national, regional and local level

²⁰ <http://www.iefh.fgov.be>

²¹ <http://www.diversite.be>

²² http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/summary_body.pl?language=fr&pub_date=2007-05-30#EDITION2

²³ <http://www.forummagicmaman.com>

²⁴ Source : article of Gisèle Caprasse, from

http://www.wallonie-en-ligne.net/Wallonie-Futur-2_1991/WF2-53_Caprasse-G.htm

²⁵ Workshops take places at the “Maison des Familles” of the Echevinat à la famille de Brussels. <http://www.brucity.be/artdet.cfm?id=3083&nLanguage=1>

In a context of extreme decentralization, the coherence of policies between national, communities, regional and local levels for family policies is quite good in comparison with other Belgian policies such as education.

The national level is still responsible for family policy in general, and this is together with social security and care facilities, one of the few competences of the national level. The childcare facilities are the responsibility of the Community level (Communauté Française, and Vlaamse Gemeenschap). The regional level is not competent, and the local level can only take small scale initiatives especially in the area of fight against discriminations.

Some of those examples will be more detailed in the III part of this inventory about good and bad practices. Nevertheless as regional and local initiatives in the field of work life balance, we can point out the following example:

1. In the Region of Brussels-Capital:

- a. Creation of a department in charge of Equality between men and women
- b. The department is in charge of providing information and training to the civil servants and politician concerning gender equality approaches and policies to develop
- c. The department has also done a deep research in the 19 Municipalities belonging to the Region Of Brussels to check if the municipalities are implementing the different regulation on gender equality and work life balance
- d. The Region of Brussels Capital promotes time flexibility for parents and gives better conditions to their employees in terms of paternity, maternity and parental leaves. For instance the paternity leave is of 1 month whereas the official regulation only provides 10 days.

2. The city of Brussels

- a. The department in charge of family affairs offers a lot of services to parents and future parents, such as :
 1. **Baby kot:** locations open to all the parents of babies between 0 and 3 years. Parents can meet, have a coffee and discuss with other parents while special professional are taking care of the children.
 2. **Les midis des parents:** every third Thursday of each month parents can come to the city hall between 12h and 14h to discuss about a special topic of interest for children
 3. **Baby sitter for sick children:** the parents have access to a babysitter for 15€ per day for one child or 22€ for two children
 4. **A House of family:** parents can find in this house several services such as babykot but also a service of family mediation where parents and couple with problem can come to get support.
 5. **Sessions for future parents:**
 6. **Consultative body for Family:** Gathering 20 associations representing the families, it gives its opinion to the Municipality on the different policies having an impact on Families.
- b. The Department of Equal Opportunities
 - This department is in charge of **promoting the policies of gender equality inside the administration of the city of Brussels**. For instance, measures have been taken to have gender equality in juries in charge of recruiting new employees, vocational training not only during evening but also during the day, training of the human resource department on gender issues etc...

- The department gives **subsidies** to association promoting projects of gender equality
- The department organizes every year **a week about women and city**

3. The City of Schaerbeek

In this city, civil servants come to visit new parents in order to inform them about the services that can help them, the possibilities of kindergartens, the right they have as parents etc.... This personalized service is very appreciated from the parents.

III. Private sector initiatives

Policies aiming at work life balance or a better participation of women in their working life place women mainly as target. The Belgian national businesses federation states: “a *better work life balance is an important objective of the economical sector. This cannot however lead to the subjection of business organization to individual familial wishes of employees*²⁶” what is to say that the private sector is open to the theme, but does not wish to extend employees rights in a more general way.

The study day of the Belgian network of childcare facilities, that took place on the 14th of March 1990, emphasizes that employers should carry of part of the costs of childcare facilities for parents workers, but only as complementary part of the municipal and regional services.

Company daily nursery exist in Belgium, but here again, their extension cannot be generalized to small and medium sized businesses.

Each company has to submit to the Institute of Gender Equality a gender Equality report on yearly basis explaining the action taken within the company to promote Equality between women and men. Nevertheless this legal obligation is not known and only few companies are in compliance with the law²⁷.

IV. NGO and civil society initiatives and proposals

Belgium has a history of powerful NGOs and associations in the realm of family policies, both religious and secular. The most institutionalised of these NGOs are sometimes associated to the production of policy recommendations in the amount of grey literature on the subject. The more global approach associations (like for the promotion of equal rights) ask for more childcare facilities, and more social benefits, no matter the gender. They also campaign for more flexibility of the parents at the workplace and for a local approach to family policies.

There are as well associations for migrants and for the socially excluded, who propose services to parents (time for discussion for mothers, assistance to fathers, family mediation²⁸...).

²⁶ FEB « Congé parental : point de vue de la FEB » 2004

²⁷ This information was given by a representative of the Belgium Insitute of Equality between women and men, during the Focus groups we organised in the framework of this project. Most of the Associations attending to this focus group didn't know about this legal obligation, even if there were association working on gender issues.

²⁸ For instance social services of the town of Ixelles

We can point out however that the most visible associations are associations promoting the rights of women (the Women University, Amazone association) and the rights of children (CODE NGO) but also UNICEF and the Red Cross. These associations lobby for women and children's rights to be taken care of at different political levels.

The Trade Unions are also very active in the promotion of better work life balance policies. The FGTB trade Union has a special women branch very active in the promotion of equality between women and men. The FGTB Women organises every year the 30th of March the Equality Pay Day²⁹ event in order to promote equality of salaries between women and men as a first step to Gender Equality in General in the labour sphere. On the other hand the Belgium Employers Association (FEB) seems to be less interested by the topics of conciliation and promotion of women.

V. Concrete examples: Best and worst practices

1 At the National Level

The “Valuing diversity plan” in the Federal administration (14th February 2005)³⁰

The « valuing diversity » action plan includes the adoption of 80 measures. The objectives of this plan are as follows:

- promotion of equality between women and men;
- participation of people with disabilities in public employment;
- integration of foreign people in the public administration;

As an employer, the federal administration wants to guarantee equal opportunities for men and women. As for contracting, it is important to pay attention to success opportunities for both men and women. In this sense, selection tests have to be as neutral and as objective as possible. Also, the objective is to encourage women to present their candidatures, as much as possible, to management posts.

In particular, the campaign « a future woman on top » wants to encourage women to take up management posts within the Federal Administration. Such functions are within the reach of both internal Administration candidates and external candidates. A recent study has shown that only 15.5 % of women run as candidates for elections to mandate functions and that they represent 11 % of the designated agents.

The 2005-2007 action plan « Valuing Diversity » of the Federal Administration foresees an objective with figures: a third of future mandate functions must be carried out by women. The campaign is an initiative of the Diversity cell within the Staff and Organisation Federal Public Service which wants to encourage women to participate in elections by means of this initiative.

Promoting the integration of women in predominantly male professions

During the 1999 to 2001 period, the Federal Ministry for Employment and Labour has carried out a project called “Quo Vadis” which was co-financed by the European Social Fund. This large scale project aimed at putting an end to stereotyped ideas regarding the roles of women and men at work, as well as improving knowledge on demand and supply in the labour market.

²⁹ For more information visit the websites : www.equalpayday.be or www.monsalaire.be

³⁰ For more information you can visit the website of the Belgium Federal Government: www.pourladiversite.be

Over 150 women, mainly in long-term unemployment and poorly qualified, have been trained and accompanied so as to allow them to carry out predominantly male functions with a view to their integration in the labour market. This project has been a success, particularly thanks to the cooperation of the federal sector institutes for training. 82 % of women have found a job and 72 % of them have done so in a predominantly male sector. Companies and sectors also found rewards for their efforts: thanks to this project, they found the necessary workforce with technical training and the employed women have contributed to increasing performance and to qualitative improvement of the final product. Finally, the rise in the number of women at the work places has improved the work environment.

Quo Vadis has allowed for the identification of certain critical success factors, elaborated from practical experiences. Recommendations that could be useful for similar projects were also produced. The final result of the project consists of a manual that will serve as a practical instrument and inspirations for social interlocutors and advisory, training and employment bodies and for professionals in the management of human resources who wish to apply measures aiming at the training and integration of women in male functions and professions.

It is necessary to put the success of this project into perspective. In the case of restructuring processes, it is mainly women that tend to leave the company. Also, Quo Vadis focused mainly on individual workers and not really on the environment, which meant that employed women had to leave the company due to lack of support, follow up, etc. This criticism, which was made by the Flora network and SOFFT³¹ association, has brought about the birth of a new approach: jobcoaching.

A second project coordinated by the association Flora was conducted between 2001 and 2003 and allowed this association to develop further the concept of jobcoaching³²

Initiatives to fight against employment traps

For several years, the Belgian federal authorities have been implementing a structural reduction policy in the fiscal and parafiscal aspects of the indirect cost of labour. Several measures have been adopted in order to reduce the risks of employment traps. The measures adopted in this sense are part of a strategy for the promotion of employment amongst the most fragile groups, that is, people with very low salaries and elderly people. Taking into account the persistence of an important pay difference between men and women, this policy also favours women. From this point of view, several measures have been adopted so as to increase the employability of women. Therefore, the benefit of 743,70€ granted to single parents in long term unemployment is aimed mainly at women. The same applies in the case of the 22 preservation of increased family subsidies for the resumption of work. The reduction of personal contributions to the social security for low salaries and the creation of the reimbursable tax credit for low salaries (the creation of a tax credit involves paying low-paid workers a complement for their income in order to improve their purchasing power) have had positive effects in the employment rate for women.

³¹ SOFFT: Service d'Orientation pour Femmes à la recherche d'une Formation et d'un Travail. For more information please visit : <http://www.cvfe.be/sofft.htm>

³² For more information on the project jobcoaching: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/docs/be1_en.pdf or visit the website of the NGO Flora: www.florainfo.be/fr/florafr.php?tri=proj1

2. At the Regional level

Integrating women in the construction sector³³:

The INSERECO project aims to promote the insertion of new workers, amongst which women are particularly important, in the construction sector and, to this effect, it intends to improve the brand image of this sector of activity. This project is alternatively carried out in partnership with the Walloon Construction Confederation, the Walloon Training Institute, self employed workers and SME's, the Interdisciplinary Centre for the Training of Trainers of the University of Lieges, the Walloon Ministry for Transport Equipment and, finally, the Walloon region.

3. Private initiatives

Companies receiving the Label Equality Diversity³⁴

In 2006 the Belgium Government has launched a pilot action with 30 private and public companies in order to:

- Analyse the diversity within each organisation
- Define and implement actions to promote equality and diversity within their company
- Involve the employees in the analysis and the implementation of those policy
- Receive institutional support to conceive and advertise this diversity and equality policy

The companies willing to receive a Label had to fulfil 4 conditions:

- Respect the Law on Equality of Opportunities and non discrimination
- Develop an internal policy promoting diversity, especially in the human resource department
- Analyse, define and implement actions involving the employees
- Have a real impact in the organisation of the company

On the 22 March 2007, 10 public and private organisations received the Label Equality diversity:

- Sodhexho
- Randstad Group Belgium,
- Groupe-SNCB³⁵,
- The City of Leuven,
- Ethias Assurance,
- The Federal Police,
- Boulot
- Age d'Or Services (Liège et Verviers),
- Crioc
- Centens Parcs Belgique

³³ For more information visit the website :

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/equal/jsp/dpComplete.jsp?cip=BEfr&national=18#objective_fr

³⁴ For more information visit the website <http://www.emploi.belgique.be/defaultTab.aspx?id=8138>

³⁵ For an example of action carried out by the SNCB, please visit :
<http://jobs.b-rail.be/main/F/hr/careers/careers/index.php>

4. NGOs and Trade Unions

In favour of a non-sexist education: initial training of the teaching staff³⁶.

In Belgium, this project has been launched by the Women Solidarity association and Refuge for Women Victims of Violence thanks to the support of the Daphné European programme. It represents a great step forward towards non-sexist education, towards an education that fights against gender stereotypes. This pilot project tries to integrate the problems of inequality between men and women within the sphere of basic training for teachers and has been carried out from January 2003 to June 2005.

Promoting women entrepreneurship

The Organisation representing the self employees in Belgium (UCM: Union des Classes Moyennes) has coordinated several Equal projects³⁷ with the following aims:

- promote female entrepreneurship and raise the number of female entrepreneurs
- support female entrepreneurs to help them become better entrepreneurs with enterprises that grow and have more chances to survive and make more profit
- give more social recognition to female entrepreneurs, by emphasising that entrepreneurship is not totally male dominated and by doing so bring in gender issues in the entrepreneurial world

The main actions have been:

- Creation of a positive image for female entrepreneurs.
- Teach women to network
- Motivate women to follow further education and ameliorate the choice in formation programmes, in order to make them more appropriate to the wishes and needs of the women.
- Motivate women to use the services and chances offered to develop their enterprises.

The results of those projects has been the creation of a sustainable network of Belgian women entrepreneurs (www.reseaudiane.com)

³⁶ For more information about this project, please visit the website: <http://www.educ-egal.org/>

³⁷ For more information about those projects, please visit the website :
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/equal/jsp/dpComplete.jsp?cip=BEfr&national=56>

Conclusion

Regarding the situation of women in the labour market in Belgium, there is greater participation of women in the labour market. Despite the fact that both men and women are present in higher education, they do not keep up the same relationship with employment. The rate of employment for women is lower than that of men. Women are more likely to have part time contracts: 42.4 % of women as opposed 6.9 % of men. Women are more likely to interrupt their careers and there is a greater concentration of them in non management jobs and in predominantly female sectors and professions, which are less valued and not as well paid. There are more unemployed women than men: 9.6 % of women as opposed 7.6 % of men and women earn 15% less than men.

Regarding legislation, Belgium can be proud of having important anti-discrimination legislation that seeks to promote equality between men and women in the labour sphere. Both in the private and the public sector, the legislation attempts to ensure equality in three fundamental areas: access to employment, professional training and work conditions and forbidding anything that is opposed to equality. The law forbids discrimination in employment and pay inequality. Belgium has been implementing a positive actions policy since the 90s which aims to eliminate obstacles found by women in their professional life and to promote a mixed work environment. Subsequently, the positive action plans have been integrated into gender mainstreaming policy. More recently a new trend has emerged regarding equal opportunities: a policy of diversity as can be seen in the recent action plan « valuing diversity », run by the Federal Administration. Despite this important corpus of anti-discrimination legislation, equality is not always a reality in the labour market

Work life balance policies have not yet been perceived as tools to promote equality between men and women. There is a range of policies and initiatives targeting parents (parental leave, work time flexibility, childcare facilities). However some of these measures are not compulsory and when there are compulsory there are not properly implemented. Some studies³⁸ explain why these measures are under used:

- **Economical:** the labour force of men is better valorised on the labour market. The business culture does not recognize the category of “fathers”. On the contrary women have claimed that they were also mothers and have claimed for particular rights at work. The external side effect has been a minor professional valorisation of women and their higher investment in the familial area.
- **Cultural:** men are among all breadwinner and the homemakers are rather identified as women.
- **Political:** as work life balance measures are not compulsory, it does not give to employees a good force of negotiation with the employers. Most of the work life balance policies are targeting women through part time job and have the side effect to minor the professional involvement of women.

This brings us to the importance of gender stereotypes. In the research done by the FGTB, we have seen that interviewees have expressed strong disagreement with the following statements: (1) women do not want to supervise other people’s work (96 %), (2) women are more willing to receive orders (94 %), (3) women are not as good at science and mathematics (93 %). However, interviewees agree with the following statements: (1) women have less

³⁸ B. Fuselier, L. Merla « articuler vie professionnelle et vie familiale : enjeu de société, enjeu pour l’égalité » in Les cahiers de l’éducation permanente, n° 19, Editions Luc Pire, premier trimestre 2003

physical strength (81%), (2) women are more willing to take care of others (54 %). Also, 44% of interviewees thought that women would accept a lower salary. The difficulties encountered by women in getting into management posts that are mentioned most are: unequal share of family duties, male domination in the company management, women's lack of self-confidence in their own abilities and gender stereotypes. Finally, the following measures to fight efficiently against gender stereotypes in the labour sphere were mentioned most: share of family duties (62 %), awareness since childhood regarding equality issues (61 %) and more crèche services and services for dependents (58 %). The responses given by men and women are generally similar, except those that refer to a better distribution of family duties, which is something that more women than men want.

The answers given by interviewees show that a better involvement of men in family duties and better work life balance policies for both parents could be useful tools to succeed in the Equality between women and men and in the promotion of women at the local level.