



European Commission

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Community
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities

**Inventory of policies and best practices
Project: Work Life Balance**

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I. Updates from the previous inventory

Since the first inventory was completed, have any changes taken place in this policy area? Is it currently debated?

Since the first inventory was completed in spring 2006, the topic is more debated at the political and social level. You can find regularly on the newspapers article related to the topic of conciliation, new family models, changes in fatherhood etc... Several seminars, conferences were organised on the issue especially by the Belgium Federal Institute for Equality between Women and men (Institut pour l'Egalité des Femmes et des Hommes¹).

The main changes in the policy area since 2006 have been:

- In 2004, the newly created federal secretariat of States on Family affairs and disabilities launched a broad debate on Families called “Les Etat-Generaux de la famille”. After 3 years of consultations, the final report called “plural Families – tailored made family policies- has been published in 2007². The report recognizes the diversities. An important chapter is dedicated to the conciliation family and work with a special attention to the “new men”.
- The new law on divorce adopted in 2007. This new law open the possibility to divorce faster and without a need of a fault and favours the “garde alterné” between the two parents.
- A debate during the Forum with experts, in the framework of “PROM” project³, highlighted that the law of 1997 giving the right to the father to have 10 days of paternity leave was mandatory for the private sector but not for the public sector. Each local authority or regional government needed to transpose this Law and nowadays 50% of the Belgian municipalities have not yet transposed the Law.
- The Federal Institute for equality between women and men will have the legal tools to investigate in the Private companies and give fines to the companies not implementing the regulation related to work life balance and especially the paternity leave.

During the legislative elections of June 2007 the question of work life balance appeared as a priority for the two liberal parties (MR and VLD) and for the former Christian social party (CDH). For instance the CDH would like to increase the maternity leave of 15 days, to double for the paternity leave (from 10 days to 4 weeks) and the parental leave (from 3 months to 6 months). They also would like to create a “time saving account” allowing workers to take 5 years during its professional life to take care of children, parents etc...

What is the current situation on the labour market, and how does it affect work-life balance practices and policies?

You can find below the most recent figures (2005) concerning the situation on labour market⁴.

¹ www.iefh.fgov.be

² Familles plurielles – politique familiale sur mesure, Edition Luc Pire, 2007 (you can download the document on www.lesfamilles.be)

³ <http://prom.newtowns.net>

⁴ These figures are extracted from the report “reconciliation of private and professional life in Belgium” written at the end of 2006 by the Flemish association Vrouwenraad (<http://www.vrouwenraad.be/>).

Population 2005

Age	Women	Men	Total
	5.334.527	5.111.325	10.445.852
0-19	1.180.353	1.233.688	2.414.041
20-64	3.100.921	3.131.390	6.232.311
65+	1.053.253	746.247	1.799.500

Labour market situation in Belgium 2005

Employees, public servants and self-employed

	Men and women (x 1.000)		men		women	
	10.477,0	100%	5.127,3	100	5.349,7	100
Employed	4.235,4	40,4	2.386,9	46,6	1.848,5	34,6
unemployed	391,0	3,7	196,4	3,8	194,6	3,6
children -15	1.795,6	17,1	917,9	17,9	877,7	16,4
out of work 15-64	2.286,5	21,8	902,2	17,6	1.384,3	25,9
out of work 65+	1.768,5	16,9	724,0	14,1	1.044,5	19,5

Number of employees, percentage women, and percentage part-time work per sex, per sector in the private sector 2004

sector	Total employees	% women	% part-time work		
			total	women	men
Total private sector	2.460.500	41,3	25,8	48,6	9,7
Social sector	352.400	76,7	53,7	62,8	23,5
Distribution	228.400	66,6	49,7	64,8	19,7
Horeca, sports and recreation	110.100	52,4	53,8	62,4	44,4
Clothing and textile industry	63.500	51,2	17,9	29,8	5,4
(other) workers	34.800	50,9	44,8	68,3	20,4
Financial sector	118.500	49,6	24,0	39,6	8,5
Services for companies and individuals	167.200	47,1	22,8	38,3	9,0
Employees	437.500	45,3	19,6	34,3	7,3
Food industry	86.400	29,5	15,6	33,9	7,9
Chemical sector	125.700	29,4	12,3	29,2	5,2
Environment	23.000	28,0	18,2	34,9	11,8
Media	17.500	27,8	14,2	31,4	7,6
Paper and cardboard	15.800	20,9	8,3	24,6	4,1
Gas and electricity	14.700	20,3	6,4	22,5	2,4

Transport and logistics	149.100	17,7	12,8	28,6	9,4
Woodworking	24.000	10,0	9,1	38,5	5,8
Stone and glass industry	23.400	7,1	6,0	27,4	4,4
Construction	148.200	0,7	3,2	51,1	2,9

Sectors as the construction, stone and glass, woodworking and metal industries employ mainly men. Women are overrepresented in the social services sector (family and geriatric assistance, health services) and in the distribution sector.

Most part-timers in all sectors are women. The number of part-timers compared to the total number of employees:

- both male and female employees: 23,4%
- men: 7,8%
- women: 42,6 %

In 2004 the Belgian private sector employed nearly 2,5 million persons among which 634 300 worked part-time, i.e. one fourth of the working population (25,8%). Though part-time work is mostly (and only) seen in response to the offer of a large group of women wanting to work part-time it is clear that the demand of employers largely affects the number of employees that may or must work part-time.

Employment rate, activity rate, unemployment rate of the population aged 15 - 64

Employment rate 2005

Proportion between the working population and the total population aged 15-64:

	Belgium	EU-25
Women	53,8%	56,3
Men	68,3	71,3
Total	61,1	56,3

Employment broken down to sex and training 2005

	Men and women		women		men	
Primary education	341.690	8,1%	127.169	6,9	241.521	9,0
Lower secondary	684.720	16,2	244.129	13,2	440.591	18,5
Higher secondary	1.649.150	38,9	695.848	37,6	953.302	39,9
Higher education – short cycle (non-university)	864.017	20,4	502.683	27,2	361.334	15,1
Higher education – long type (non-university)	173.222	4,1	66.348	3,6	106.874	4,5
University	522.116	12,3	212.196	11,5	309.920	13,0
Total	4.234.916	100	1.848.374	100	2.386.542	100

Unemployment rate 2005

Proportion of unemployed persons aged 15-64 compared to the active population aged 15-64:

- Both men and women: 8,5%
- men: 7,7
- women: 9,6

Gender pay gap

Average gross monthly earnings October 2004:

- Both men and women: 2.662 Euro
- men: 2.757 Euro
- women: 2.343 Euro

The difference between male and female wages amounts to the average of 24% of the gross yearly earnings and to 12% of the gross hourly earnings.

Wage differences between men and women; wage surveys in 2002 and 2004

Full-time working employees, executive staff and public servants

	Gross monthly wages (Euro)			Net monthly wages			Gross yearly earnings		
	m	W	m/w %	m	w	m/w %	m	w	m/w %
Average	3.236	2.401	34,8	1.948	1.503	29,6	47.143	33.896	39,1
10%	1.859	1.569	18,5	1.240	1.085	14,3	24.490	19.467	25,8
25	2.278	1.822	25,0	1.433	1.207	18,7	31.163	24.119	29,2
50	2.924	2.182	34,0	1.750	1.372	27,6	41.690	30.080	38,6
75	3.804	2.749	38,4	2.175	1.640	32,6	56.321	39.526	42,5
90	4.970	3.465	43,4	2.692	1.955	37,7	74.897	52.293	43,2

Comments: the upper limit for the 10% men earning the lowest wages is 14.3% higher than the net monthly wages of women in the same category. Women earning more than 1.955 Euro are in the top 10 whereas men earning the same wages have a lower percentile score.

Allocation of extralegal advantages

	Men %	Women %
Company car	37,	13,4
Petrol voucher	37,6	15,1
Per diem	10,1	4,1
GSM	43,6	18,3
PC for personal use	24,7	10,6
Fixed allowance for expenses	25,1	12,5
Childbirth or marriage bonus	37,5	25,8
Price reduction	33,0	23,1
Pension scheme or group insurance	61,8	44,4
Hospitalisation insurance	66,4	51,9
Culture or sports vouchers	3,7	3,0
Fitness, massage	4,5	3,7
(contribution) childcare	4,4	3,8
Meal vouchers	56,7	52,2

Laundry and ironing services	2,9	2,8
Travel allowances	52,1	63,1

Time use per week

Time budget in one week (in hours) in Flanders: time spent by persons aged 18-75

	1999			2004		
	m	w	t	m	w	t
job	26:10	15:22	20:49	25:11	16:12	20:43
Domestic work	13:27	25:44	19:32	13:56	23:53	18:52
Education and care	1:17	3:39	2:27	1:26	3:39	2:32
Personal care, meals	15:20	15:58	15:39	14:53	16:13	15:33
Sleep and rest	60:21	62:11	61:15	60:21	61:56	61:08
Training	2:30	2:48	2:39	2:39	2:27	2:33
Social activities	8:32	9:40	9:05	10:12	10:21	10:16
Free time	30:17	23:24	26:53	30:11	24:34	27:24
Waiting	0:11	0:11	0:11	0:11	0:11	0:11
On the road	7:37	6:28	7:03	7:33	7:06	7:19
Other	2:12	2:31	2:21	1:23	1:22	1:23

On the average women spent 24 hours a week on domestic work, men only 14 hours. Compared to 1999 men worked less hours in 2004 and spent more time on personal care and meals, they did more chores and social activities. Women worked more and participated more in social activities; they also spent more time on travelling, personal care and meals.

Introduction

In Belgium, there has been a renewal of grey literature on family policies in 1994, with changes in labour regulations to allow part time work⁵ and the adoption of parental leave in 1995⁶, and in 2004 with debates related to the possible extension of the parental leave⁷. Like all policies in Belgium, the level of competences are split between the federal level (ministry of family) and National office of childhood (ONE), the regional and community level, and the local level. There have been recent initiatives developed at the local level to support/assist future parents⁸.

Could you please specify under which circumstances this renewal has taken place? Have there been any prominent “whistleblowers” with regards to the hardships experienced by fathers or the necessity to involve fathers more?

There are two main whistleblowers of this renewal.

The first one is the pressure of the European Union with the Treaty of Maastricht first and then the Lisbon strategy:

- Equality between men and women is a transversal policy of the EU and Belgium added that in its Constitution in 2001
- More work flexibility
- Increase the employment rate of women
- Develop strategies for work Life Balance (European Council of 2000)
- The Directives on parental leave and paternity leave

The second one has been internal to Belgium. Until 1999 the Belgian government were led by the Flemish and French-speaking Christian Democrat parties. Those parties had a conservative approach towards families and society. In 1999, for the first time the Christian-democrat parties are not part of the federal government. The new government composed of socialist, greens and liberal wants to modernise the Belgian society. News regulations are adopted promoting new models of families.

The period of the moderate combination model (1990-2005)⁹

Since the beginning of the nineties one can speak of a moderate combination model in most Western countries, be it with some variants, since the combination families with a more equal division of professional and family labour become the majority. Among others, the model has been stimulated by the emancipation movement for a more equal division of time and means among men and women, both on the micro and macro level. This movement went together with the increasing awareness of the importance of a high (er) professional participation to achieve a sufficiently high family income, a strong collective financial basis (solidarity system) and a more efficient use of women’s resources in business life. In the period 1990-

⁵ Réseau de la Commission européenne des modes de garde d’enfants, « les hommes, les médias et la garde d’enfant » 1994

⁶ Accord cadre sur le congé parental, 14 décembre 1995

⁷ Congé parental : point de vue de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique, Janvier 2004

⁸ For instance activities proposed by the Municipality of Brussels’ échevinat à la famille

⁹ This analysis has been done by the Flemish association Vrouwenraad and it can be found in the report on “reconciliation of private and professional life in Belgium” written by them at the end of 2006

2005, the total activity rate of women (share of professionally active women in the whole female population) increased permanently.

The Belgian policy now provides a whole range of measures for all combination models:

- for professionally active women and men and for their families, both for full-time and part-time workers (see above: entitlements for employees)
- for non-active persons (mostly women): they have derived rights for social security and through the 'conjugal quotient' foreseen in the income tax system. This tax measure allows splitting up the taxable income of the husband into two parts: the husband is taxed on 70% of his earnings and his wife on the remaining 30%. This gives them a financial benefit compared to a tax on 100% of the family income.

At first sight everyone can find among these measures something to suit him/her: single earners, one-and-a-half earners, dual earners.

However, women's organisations have pointed out a whole range of governmental measures leading to unequal treatment, in particular regarding social security, income tax and employment policy (pay gap).

The social security system based on the traditional male breadwinner model is no longer adapted to the new trends in family models (more divorces, more singles, more single parents with children, more restructured families...). This results in de facto discriminations due to unequal treatment of women and men, of women in different situations, of married and cohabiting couples, dual-earners and single-earner households.

A concrete example of such a different treatment of women and men is the fact that unemployment benefits are paid according to three possible family situations, i.e. unemployed persons can be heads of the family, singles and cohabiting persons (married or unmarried). Cohabiting or married partners (mainly women) living together with a professionally active partner are paid less than heads of family although they contributed to social security and thus built up their own social rights.

Unequal treatment of women in different situations: married women who have never been professionally active are entitled to a widow's pension. The amounts of widows' benefits are mostly higher than the pension benefits of women who have always been professionally active. This is because the widows' benefits are based on the earnings of the deceased husband whereas the pension of the retired employee is based on her own earnings which is generally still lower than that of a man (= gender pay gap). Cohabiting women are not entitled to.

Targets

It should be noticed, that only a small minority of policies and media articles are directed towards fathers¹⁰. However, the same European report, shows that mothers are not mentioned neither as a specific target group, and that policies rather emphasize the target group of parents in general without gender approach, or and even more often policies are targeted as "child policies". This reference of parents if most of the time used in a negative way (parents in crisis, problems of aids, drugs etc.) and policies directed at children are described in the positive way (childcare facilities, *office national de l'enfance*, guard of children, protection of childhood)¹¹. There is no specific policy directed at deviant fathers, as the protection of

¹⁰ Réseau de la Commission européenne des modes de garde d'enfants, « les hommes, les médias et la garde d'enfant » 1994

¹¹ Ibidem

children is done in a more general way by “protection of childhood policies” at the national level¹².

The context in which policies were elaborated

As in France, men and women do not appear as a policy category in Belgium. The aim of equality between the sexes is translated into policies to promote equal rights, but without specification to know if these policies target inequalities for women, or for migrants, socially excluded people....The role of men is not analysed and the grey literature of policy proposals and evaluation remains a whole focused on an abstract, universal definition of citizens.

Good AND bad practices (policy failures) Intentions and results

The try of having a gendered approach in 1994, to promote part time work, failed because of sex stereotypes. The marketing posters indeed used to promote part time work showed a busy women carrying a child mentioning “and what if you would be paid to work less...” although the poster targeting men or fathers showed a man in an office and in front a computer and titling “and if you would be paid to follow a training...” Following this campaign, the Flemish media have reacted to emphasize that this campaign was based on sex stereotypes, although the French speaking media have not reacted. The Flemish minister of equality of chances then recognized that the material used in this campaign had not been perfect!

I. National policies

1.1. Policies targeting fathers

- Welfare state and family policies

Most of the welfare policies targeting fathers are policies targeting families. Belgium followed the development of the welfare state and developed family policies which target men only indirectly: housing policies, policies fighting poverty, education, have all one way or another touched the subject of family. These families are characterized by the fact that they address “parents as a whole” and rarely fathers. They have served the purpose if helping families to support the costs of children, of economic redistribution between households and if disparate incomes. They include tax policies as social 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 such¹³.

The different measures concerning families have been really conservative until the late 1990ies 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

¹² Rapport Office National de l'Enfance 2004

¹³ « 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.

educate and manage children's goods together with the fathers in 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 role¹⁴.

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 recognized¹⁵.

There is a secretary of state for families since 2004: Mrs Mandaila-Malamba, MR liberal party, from Congolese origins. Although her program more focus on links with the Congolese community than on families themselves¹⁶, her role in the recent actuality has emerged with new family measures such the adoption of 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 Onkelyn 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 parties proposals for family targets possibilities for mothers to stay at home¹⁷. The CD and V (right party) voted together with the extreme right and one part of the MR party, 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, the party which was the main opposed 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 between the UCL: catholic university in Belgium and the ULB/VUB university founded by the free masons). The church traditionally opposed non traditional forms of families, but rather focused on sexuality orientation and right to life against abortion than to issues such as paternity¹⁸. The free masons, place moral values and support to family as an important point,

¹⁴ ESPING-ANDERSEND etc. « A new welfare architecture for Europe » report submitted to the EU Belgian Presidency in 2001. <http://socialeurope.com/pdfs/Gosta-Esping.pdf>

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ See her website <http://www.giselemandaila.be> and <http://users.skynet.be/suffrage-universel/be/mandaila-malamba.htm>.

¹⁷ CDF (Chrétien Démocrates Fédéraux) document « personne et famille » ; see the website <http://www.cdf-info.be/action/opinions/famille.html>.

¹⁸ Conseil pontifical pour la famille « Famille et procréation humaine », 13 mai 2006, published in French by Fraternité Saint Pie X, Belgique. The document signed by the Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, president of the

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 counterparts¹⁹. 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”²⁰.

The role of civil society movements: There are civil society groups that have been really active in Belgium: associations of fathers²¹, but also conservatism movements such as the church influenced group “*la famille c’est vraiment important*” fighting against abortion, and marriage or adoption for the people from the same sex²². 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.

“There are civil society groups that have been really active in Belgium: associations of fathers, but also conservatism movements such as the church influenced group “la famille c’est vraiment important” fighting against abortion, and marriage or adoption for the people from the same sex.” (p.3): could you map out the field of civil society organisations specifically mobilised around fatherhood issues? What have been their relationships with policymakers?

The most important civil society organisations involved in fatherhood issues have been:

- General associations
 1. La ligue des familles (www.liguedesfamilles.be)
 2. GezinsBond (www.gezinsbond.be)
- Men associations
 1. Le Réseau Hommes Belgique (www.rhb.be)
 2. Relais-hommes (www.relais-hommes.org)
- Associations defending the rights of fathers
 1. Le Mouvement pour l’Egalité Parentale (www.egaliteparentale.be)
 2. Goudi (Service d’information pour les parents divorcés (www.goudi.be))
 3. BGMK (www.bgmk.orgg)
 4. Papa Pro (<http://users.skynet.be/papapro>)
- 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)

Pontifical Council for the Family, is not available on-line and it has been widely criticized also within the Catholic world.

¹⁹ «Les franc maçons et la politique » in *Précis de franc maçonnerie*, éditions Bayard Dervy, 2000

²⁰ « L’initiation des femmes » in *Précis de franc maçonnerie*, éditions Bayard Dervy, 2000

²¹ <http://www.lespapas.com>

²² <http://www.actionfamille.be>

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.

- Conservatism trends

1/ Lack of childcare facilities

The first childcare facilities were created at the end of the 19th century for charity purpose²³. 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 follow the line, of liberals/Christian democrats for which the extension of childcare is too costly, and 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 taxes²⁴.

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, 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)²⁵. One of the parents only receives children indemnities.²⁶.

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

²³ 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>

²⁴ 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

²⁵ These assumption are based on interviews.

²⁶ 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> .

“The above mentioned measures are not in accordance with recent speeches and trends to facilitate work life balance for women and men.” (p.4): Have there been actors or mobilisations focused on this discrepancy? Are there trends asking that policies become more congruent with each other?

Most of the associations described previously but also 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 parents²⁷.

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:

- 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,
 - Or the measures can be viewed as the general belief that the male should be the main breadwinner as opposed to the female caretaker.
- Parental and paternity leave

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)

- 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.

²⁷ Le Soir, 19th July 2007 *Les partis stériles face à la dénatalité*

1.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

- Possibility of part time work²⁸

There are possibilities of working part time for fathers in Belgium. 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.

2 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.

II. Local/regional policies

II.1. Policies targeting fathers

- 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 18months in advance to grant them a place in a public crèche²⁹. In Wallonia, in 1990, there were 2018 demands of places in a crèche that could not be satisfied³⁰. 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. Gisèle Cararasse then concludes that there is no global policy of childcare facilities in the French speaking part of Belgium³¹.

- Local workshops

The municipalities like the municipality of Brussels have developed workshops for parents and future parents to discuss about the link and the birth³². Local hospitals have also developed days of information for future fathers. There is no study yet to show the results of these local initiatives.

II.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

No local policies target men as a whole. We did not take into account policies addressing gender violence, for they do not take into account work-life balance per se.

²⁸ report fédération des entreprises de Belgique

²⁹ <http://www.forummagicmaman.com>

³⁰ <http://www.wallonie-en-ligne.net> Gisèle Caprasse

³¹ idem page 3

³² Echevinat à la famille Brussels

- **Coherence of national, regional and local level**

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 persons care, 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.

“The regional level is not competent, and the local level can only take small scale initiatives especially in the area of fight against discriminations.”(p.6): Could you give examples of such policies in the field of work-life balance or gender in general?

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 :
 - **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.
 - **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
 - **Baby sitter for sick children:** the parents have access to a babysitter for 15€ per day for one child or 22€ for two children
 - **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.
 - **Sessions for future parents:**

- **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

III.1. Policies targeting fathers

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.

III.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

There are no private sector policies targeting men as a whole. 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*³³” 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.

IV. NGO and civil society initiatives and proposals

IV.1. Policies targeting fathers

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 like the centre for equality of rights, are sometimes associated to the production of policy recommendations in

³³ FEB « Congé parental : point de vue de la FEB » 2004

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 mediation³⁴...).

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.

IV.2. Policies targeting men as a whole

There are rare initiatives targeting men as a whole. There is a strong father's lobby "les papas.com" which aim is to fight against fathers' discrimination in the cases of divorce (extend shared custody to low income families) but also recognition of fathers in public organizations (public hospitals when a child is sick, social security). Their speech is rather moderate "to fight for the rights of democratic fathers and democratic mothers" in comparison with the fathers interviews that we have made with divorced fathers..

Conclusion

There is a range of policies and initiatives targeting fathers, or parents in general (parental leave, work time flexibility, childcare facilities)...However these measures are not compulsory and rather open for fathers a range of opportunities that they are free to take or not. This is then necessary to study how these measures are used or not by fathers. Some studies emphasize that fathers under use these opportunities³⁵. The authors of this report 3 factors explaining 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 they higher investment in the familial area, being as such an obstacle for more fathers implication in the familial life
- **Cultural:** men are among all breadwinner and the homemakers are rather identified as women. Demand to reduce work time is considered by employers as a minor involvement at work or by the colleagues as a lack of virility.
- **Political:** as work life balance measures are not compulsory, it does not give to employees a good force of negotiation with the employers. Few men are even aware of these measures.

³⁴ For instance social services of the town of Ixelles

³⁵ 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

II. Best and worst practices

I. Best practice:

We have chosen to describe the Belgian regulation about careers break

1. Introduction

In 1985, the Belgian government introduced a law allowing the employees to have careers breaks. The worker can stop working partly or totally during a certain period and he/she receives a state allocation covering partly the losses of salary. At the beginning this measure was created in order to facilitate work time reduction and sharing of work but the measure is more and more used by workers as a way to conciliate work, family and leisure times.

In the nineties, 3 new careers breaks were created: parental leave, medical care leave and palliative leave. In 2002, in the private sector the new law on “credit-time” reformed the whole system.

It was a demand from several Trade Unions to have a law allowing workers to take more easily careers break in order to have a better articulation between work and family. In 2000, the influent trade union FGTB sent an official request to the government asking for a time-credit law and a paternity leave of 2 weeks for fathers. In 2002, two law were approved by the Belgian Parliament.

2. Implementation³⁶

- **Total career break for public sector employees**
 - For full-time and part-time employees
 - Period of minimum 3 months and maximum 12 months
 - Maximum duration: 72 months during the whole career
 - Flat-rate payments (index-linked amounts dd. 01.10.2006)

Total career break of a full-time employee – gross monthly amounts		
Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
350,48 Euro	383,83 Euro	417,20 Euro

Total career break of a full-time employee – net monthly amounts		
Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
314,98 Euro	344,95 Euro	374,94 Euro

Total career break of a part-time employee – gross monthly amounts (in Euro)
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³⁶ The Following figures and text have been extracted from the report “reconciliation of private and professional life in Belgium” written at the end of 2006 by the Flemish association Vrouwenraad (<http://www.vrouwenraad.be/>).

Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
350,48 x Q/S	383,83 x Q/S	417,20 x Q/S

Q: average of working hours a week

S: average of working hours a week of a full-time employee

Total career break of a part-time employee – net monthly amounts (in Euro)		
Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
314,98 x Q/S	344,95 x Q/S	374,94 x Q/S

- **Part-time career reduction for employees younger than 50**

- Full-time employees can reduce their working time to 4/5, 3/4, 2/3 or half-time
- Part-time workers employed on a 3/4 basis can reduce their working time to half-time
- Period of minimum 3 months to maximum 72 months
- Maximum duration: 72 months
- Flat-rate payments:

Full-time employee – gross monthly amounts (in Euro)			
	Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
Reduction to 4/5	70,08	76,77	83,43
3/4	87,62	95,96	104,30
2/3	116,81	127,94	139,07
1/2	175,23	191,92	208,58

Full-time employee – net monthly amounts (in Euro)			
	Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
Reduction to 4/5	58,07	63,61	69,13
3/4	72,60	79,51	86,42
2/3	96,78	106,00	115,22
1/2	145,18	159,01	172,81

Allowances for employees working on a 3/4 basis are calculated pro rata the number of hours covered by the reduction.

- **Part-time career reduction for employees aged 50 and over**

Full-time working employee – gross monthly allowance (in Euro)			
	Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
Reduction to 4/5	140,19	146,87	153,54
3/4	175,23	183,59	191,92
2/3	233,61	244,78	255,88

1/2	350,48	367,14	383,83
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Full-time working employee – gross net amounts (in Euro)			
	Regular allowance	Increased allowance 2nd child	Increased allowance 3rd or following children
Reduction to 4/5	116,15	121,69	127,21
3/4	145,18	152,11	159,01
2/3	193,55	202,81	212,00
1/2	290,38	304,18	318,01

The allowances are reduced with 5% after 12 months career break.

• **Time credit, career reduction and half-time working system**

Time credit: 1 year half-time or full-time (extension possible to maximum 5 years by a collective labour agreement (CLA))

Private sector employees are entitled to time credit, career reduction and a half-time working system. However, in companies employing 10 or less employees the consent of the employer is required.

Time credit

This system allows the following possibilities:

- a complete career suspension both for full-time and part-time employees;
- a half-time career reduction for employees who have been working on at least a 3/4 basis during the preceding 12 months.
- duration: 1 year half-time or full-time, extension is possible by a CLA.

Career reduction

The 1/5 working time career reduction allows the full-timer working 5 or more days to reduce his/her working time with one day or two half-days a week. Maximum duration: 5 years.

Working time reduction

Employees aged 50 and over are entitled to:

- a career reduction of one day or two half-days a week if they have been working full-time 5 or more days a week or on a 4/5 basis as a result of a career reduction during the 12 preceding months;
- a half-time reduction if they have been working at least on a 3/4 basis during the preceding 12 months.

Flat-rate payments:

Gross amounts (in Euro)			
	Less than 5 years seniority in the company	5 years seniority in the company	
		Less than 20 years experience	20 years experience or more
Complete suspension	418,76	558,35	

<i>1/5 reduction</i>			
Younger than 50		137,88 / 177,93*	
Aged 50 or over		137,88 / 177,93*	193,72 / 233,77*
<i>1/2 reduction</i>			
Younger than 50	209,37	279,17	
Aged 50 or over	209,37	279,17	417,05

* for singles or for persons living with at least one dependent child

Net amounts (in Euro)			
	Less than 5 years seniority in the company	5 years seniority in the company	
		Less than 20 years experience	20 years experience or more
Complete suspension	376,34	501,79	
<i>1/5 reduction</i>			
Younger than 50		114,24 / 147,42*	
Aged 50 or over		114,24 / 147,42*	160,50 / 193,68*
<i>1/2 reduction</i>			
Younger than 50	173,47	231,30	
Aged 50 or over	173,47	231,30	345,53

- **Medical care leave**

- To take care of a seriously ill family member (relatives in the first and second remove). In this case a medical certificate is requested stating that the employee has declared that he/she will take care of this patient.
- Complete career suspension for full-timers and part-timers
- Half-time reduction for employees working on a 3/4 basis
- 1/5 reduction for full-timers
- Duration of total career break: periods of minimum 1 month to maximum 3 months. Extension is possible up to 12 months, not necessarily taken in consecutive periods. Part-time reductions can be extended to 24 months, not necessarily taken consecutively in the same period.
- Flat-rate payments :

Total career break – gross amounts (in Euro)	
Full-time employment	Part-time employment
684,56	684,56 x (number of working hours reduced/ number of hours in full-time work)

Total career break – net amounts (in Euro)	
Full-time employment	Part-time employment
615,56	615,56 x (number of working hours reduced/ number of hours in full-time work)

Reduction to 1/2 – gross amounts (in Euro)	Reduction to 1/5
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Younger than 50	Aged 50 and over	Younger than 50	Aged 50 and over
342,46	580,90	116,18 or 156,23*	232,36

*for singles with at least one dependent child

Reduction to 1/2 – net amounts (in Euro)		Reduction to 1/5	
Younger than 50	Aged 50 and over	Younger than 50	Aged 50 and over
283,73	481,28	96,26 or 129,44*	192,52

- **Palliative care leave**

- For any form of assistance – medical, social, administrative and psychological –and of care of a terminally ill person.
- Full-timers or part-timers can reduce their working time during one month, extension with one month is possible.
- Flat-rate payments: the same allowances as for medical care leave (see above).

- **Parental leave**

- Total career break for full-time and part-time workers: maximum 3 months, with a possibility to split into months
- Half-time for full-timers: maximum 6 months, can be split into periods of two months
- 1/5 reduction for full-timers during 15 months at the most, can be split in periods of 3 months
- conditions for employees
 - in the private sector, local and provincial administration: during the 15 months preceding his/her application he/she had an employment contract for at least 12 months (not necessarily without any interruption)
 - public and educational sectors: only for those in active service
 - age conditions for the child concerned:
 - the child is less than 4 years old
 - for employees in the private sector, local or provincial administration their children may be less than 6 years old
 - in case of adoption: during a period of 4 years after the registration of the adopted child as long as the child is younger than 8
 - in case of disabled children (physical or mental incapacity of at least 66%) as long as the child is younger than 8
- flat-rate payments (in Euro):

Total career break Gross amounts	Part-time reduction		Reduction to 1/5	
	- 50 years	+50 years	- 50 years	+50 years
684,94	342,46	580,90	116,18 or 156,23*	232,36

Total career break Net amounts	Part-time reduction		Reduction to 1/5	
	- 50 years	+50 years	- 50 years	+50 years
615,56	283,73	481,28	96,26 or 129,44	192,52

Parental leave is an individual entitlement, non-transferable between parents. There are no policy measures targeted specifically at encouraging fathers' take-up.

As the father's right to parental leave cannot be transferred to the mother it prevents mothers from leaving the labour market for extended periods. Moreover, as parental leave is an individual right it is also an incentive for fathers to take this leave because if they do not their families cannot benefit from it.

This creates an incentive for women to resume employment because if the right to parental leave were transferable between partners it is highly probable that women would take up both their own and their partners' leaves.

Furthermore, as it is possible to take parental leave on a part-time basis, women's careers need not be completely disrupted. So this measure too creates an incentive for women to remain in the labour market.

The gross monthly benefit is quite generous when total career break is taken. However, this system is not systematically applied in the whole public sector despite its high share of female employment. As a result, in 2003 80% of the 16.720 women taking parental leave were private sector employees. In 2004 still only about 6.7% of parents took up their right to parental leave. 43% of women in Flanders interrupt their career opposed to 17% of Flemish men. The one-fifth reduction is most popular amongst both men and women.

During the career breaks, one's job is guaranteed and one's social rights are maintained.

3. Evaluation

In Belgium in 2004, 9% of female employees (89.000 women) use the system of careers breaks/credit time whereas only 2.9% of male employees (35.000 men) did it. There were only few men using those possibilities even though their number is constantly increasing.

In 2004, the University of Antwerp and the Free University of Brussels did a survey about the Flemish men using the careers break and time-credit possibilities. About 607 men were interviewed³⁷. The main conclusions are the following.

Why the men decided to take a career break?

- First: try another work
- Second: spend more time at home and take care of children and house works
- Third: Start studies, trainings

How do they use the free time during the week?

It depends if they decide to only reduce the working time or if they decide to stop completely to work for a period of time

For men in part time career break:

- House work: + 7 hours and 16 minutes
- Children: + 2hours and 28 minutes
- Transports: + 1 hour and 2 minutes
- Training and studies: + 49 minutes
- Personal care: + 39 minutes
- Free time and social activities: + 17 minutes

³⁷ Project FWO 'Loopbaanonderbrekers onder de loep. Een onderzoek naar de leefsituatie en tijdsbesteding van gebruikers van het tijdskrediet in vlaanderen' (convention G.0515.04)

Around 80% of the free time is used by those men for house and children related tasks. These men use this system for a better work life balance conciliation.

For men not working during the career break:

- House work: +14 hours and 29 minutes
- Free time and social activities: + 8 hours and 50 minutes
- Training, studies: + 6hours and 38 minutes
- Personal care: + 5 hours and 22 minutes
- Children: + 2 hours and 38 minutes
- Transports: + 50 minutes

Only 44% of the free time is use by those men for house and children related tasks. 36% is used for leisure, personal care and social activities and 22% for training and studies.

Conclusion: This study shows that when you give to men the possibility of working less by promoting an alternative role thanks to the measures on credit time/careers break, they take this extra time to stay more at home and take care of family and home.

Nevertheless this is truer for men taking a part time career break than for men on full career break.

II. Worst practice

1. Introduction

In 1997, the Belgian law introduced a 10 days paternity leave for full-time or part-time employees. The main elements being the following:

- 10-day paternity leave for full-time or part-time employees. The fathers have to take these days within the thirty days following the birth of their children but they are free to take them whenever they want within this period and not necessarily all at once. Even in case of twins or multiple births fathers are entitled to just one period of 10 days leave.
- 3 days are paid at 100% of the earnings in the private sector, 7 days are paid at 82% of the salary (but limited at 88.08 Euro per day).
- In some public institutions fathers are entitled to 4 days paid leave at 100% of their earnings and the remaining 6 days at 82%.

If the father does not take this leave it cannot be taken by other persons as paternity leave is an individual and non-transferable entitlement

2. Implementation

This regulation is mandatory for the private sector. In the public sector each local or regional institution has to take a transposition regulation of this federal law.

The result is that in 2007 more than half of the Belgian municipalities have not yet transposed in their internal regulation the paternity leave. On another hand 10 Walloon municipalities, the Walloon region and the Region of Brussels-Capital have adopted a 15 days paternity leave for their employees.

3. Reasons of failure

In 2001, the Belgium Institute For Equality of Women and Men coordinated a research asking to the Belgian Municipalities to make a selection of the measures they have chosen to implement or they would like to implement for a better equality between men and women. The measures targeting men were the less successful. On the opposite the measure related to part time job or change of working hours for women where the more successful.

In 2004 a second study was realized in the Region of Brussels-Capital. The target audience was a number of male policy makers in charge of Equality matters or working in relation with equality matters. The main conclusions were that those men didn't realize the segregation between men and women in their own organisation; they didn't perceive that the gender discrimination is deeply included in the system. All few of them perceived this segregation as a result of the inequality of role in the couple concerning family tasks and professional ones. For those men, there was already a formal equality and the rest is just a question of individual choices made by women and not a social construction.

In conclusion, at the local political level, it seems that the questions of gender equality are only a woman issue and in that sense increasing the day of paternity leave is not perceived by local politicians and local administration as a priority.

III. Case study

We have decided to focus for this case study on the Belgium Network of Men (Le RHB-Réseau Hommes Belgique)³⁸. The Network was created in Belgium in 1995. The aim of the network is to create and support links and places where men can blossom out and develop their masculine consciousness through discussion groups and common activities.

The network is dedicated to issues related to the role of men in society, in the couple, to new masculinities and also to work life balance issues.

This network is promoting the equality between men and women but it seems not to be supported by the Belgian authorities, neither by the feminist organisations. During a meeting we organised in June 2007 with several feminist NGOs and Institutions, two men of the network were participating and we noticed that there was a kind of misunderstanding between them and the women organisation.

The first sentence of their brochures says: *“The borders of masculinities are changing. Roles and men stereotypes are now evolving, the same way it happened last century for women. The man is not anymore the patriarch, the macho, or the violent warrior of the ancient times. Men will not express themselves only in accordance with the role women would like to leave them. Men of today are searching for their own true identity”*.

I. Genesis

In 1992, Guy Corneau, a Quebecois psychologist, inspired by an experience from Vancouver, decided to create a network of Men in Quebec. Later on it was a source of inspiration for several French speaking countries. In February 1995 he came to Belgium to give several conferences and he met Mr Pol Marchandise that decided to create a Belgium network of men. In spring 2005 100 men met for the first time, the Belgium Network of Men was born

II. Beneficiaries

The RHB is more a place where men can share and help each other while having fun. The network is open to men that have internal questions about masculinity, relationship, fatherhood etc...and need to break the silence and discuss with other men. The network is not open to men that are in crisis and need an individual psychotherapy. The network is not a substitute to a personal therapy but it can be a complementary action. Each discussion group can decide to exclude a member if they notice that the expectations of the participant go beyond their competences.

The RHB is also supporting the network of Women Belgium and work together with them

III. Implementation

The aim of the network is to facilitate the relationships between men and women; it is not a network of men against women. A lot of men feel a deep loneliness because they are not use to express their sensibility and problems and they don't find the right words to do so.

³⁸ www.rhb.be

The RHB encourages men to express their emotions and to listen to the others without any prejudices or judgments. Men feel more free and at ease if they talk and express their emotion only with other men. Also excluding women also prevent from any game of seduction and power between the different genders.

To achieve that, the network proposes to any member to join a *small group*. Each group is self-managed by the members, i.e. without any professional or psychotherapist in charge of the animation. In order to organize the work of each group, the members have to follow the rules and procedures described in an **exercise book**. Those group are a kind of experimental laboratory where each one learn autonomy and each group develop its own way just with the help of a small kit “do it yourself”.

The process is not an easy one. At the beginning the group works very well but quite soon difficulties arise due to the different opinions of the members, conflict between members or question of power. It is the time where each group needs to have a lot of creativity to find its own way to explore the masculine identity. Each association reproduced unconsciously gender stereotypes.

When a man decides to join the RHB he doesn't have to expect fast answers to its question. Each discussion group will find its own way to answer the questions of the members, with the help of other discussion group that are existing now for more than 15 years.

IV. Evaluation

After 10 years of existence, the Network is divided in 35 groups. Some have been crated at the beginning others later:

- Brussels: 16 groups with 114 men
- Province of Hainaut: 2 groups with 16 men
- Province of Liege: 9 groups with 56 men
- Province of Luxembourg: 3 groups with 21 men
- Province of Namur: 5 groups with 36 men

In total there around 250 men that meets regularly in Walonia.

For its 10 years anniversary, the network have asks to some of the men to make an evaluation of the benefits of the network. Please find some of the comments given by the men themselves:

- René Beguin (64years): “I am conscious now that in my couple there are 3 ways: there is my way, the way of my wife and our common way. Each way goes to the same point but using different routes. About my children, I still have a lot to do. I have learned to leave away my convictions about education and also the society norms and that the most important is to do what it is good for my children
- Christian Leurquin (55 years): “I have build a relation with my wife a relation based on dialogue....I become a dad and an actor of my professional life. Today I am happy to be a man facing the world and my own fears; fear to be judged, fear to lose support from the others, fear to be abandoned”.
- Anonymous: “As father, I am more watchful and more listening. As a human being I am more open and tolerant. As a worker, I am more focused on the

pleasure to work than on profitability. As a partner, I am less focused on myself and more respectful of the life of my girlfriend”.

We have interviewed some of the coordinators and some of the men participating in the network and what we can say is that they are much more aware about the problematic links to work life issues, the changes of roles of father the new masculinity paradigms than the other men we interviewed.

In that sense this network can play an important role to help men to find solution and also get information on how to conciliate work life and family life in the framework with the impact on the equality of role and task at the family level.