



Sustainability@Leave

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Parenting Leave Policies in Belgium and Inequalities

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Parenting leaves in Belgium: Types of leave and design elements



Parenting leave policy in Belgium

- Maternity Leave
- Birth Leave
- Parental Leave
- Time credit system and career breaks

Presentation based on Fusulier, B. and Mortelmans, D. (2025). 'Belgium country note', Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M. (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2025*.

Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium

Maternity Leave (*Moederschapsverlof/Congé de maternité*)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Employees (and unemployed): **15 weeks**: can start from six weeks before her baby is due

Obligatory to take leave **from one week before** the due date to **nine weeks after** delivery.

- Self-employed: **12 weeks**

Obligatory to take leave **from one week before** the due date to **two weeks after** delivery.

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Maternity leave

Payment and funding

- Employees in the **private sector**: the first month at 82% of earnings, plus 75% for the remaining weeks with an upper limit of €183.13 per day.
- **Statutory civil servants** receive their full salary, and contractual civil servants are paid as per the private sector.
- **Self-employed mothers** receive €890.31 per week (full time) (or €445.16 per week when taken half time) during the first 4 weeks and from week 5 onwards (€814.32 per week full time and €407.16 per week half time).
- **Unemployed mothers**: in the first month they receive unemployment benefits + 19.5 per cent of the gross salary limited to the salary ceiling taken into consideration by the unemployment sector, after which they receive unemployment benefits + 15 per cent of previous earnings with an upper limit (as for the first month).
- Funded through **Federal Health Insurance**, financed by employer and employee contributions and general taxation.

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Maternity leave

Eligibility

- **All female employees or women on unemployment benefits** are entitled to leave with an earnings-related benefit payment.
- **Self-employed workers** can take maternity leave but have a separate system, which is less advantageous than the system for employees. They have 12 weeks (instead of 15) and only 3 of those are compulsory.
- **No differences apply to same-sex couples.** Only their labour market position determines their benefit access, not the gender composition of their couple, nor its institutional bond (married or unmarried).
- **For non-citizens/immigrant workers,** their labour market status determines their benefit eligibility. An individual must have been working as an employee for a minimum of 120 days, plus paying social security contributions. For temporary workers, the minimum is 400 hours of work across 6 months.

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium

Birth leave (*Geboorteverlof / Congé de naissance*)

Length of leave: 20 working days

Payment: 100% of earnings for the first 3 days paid by the employer, then 82% of earnings for the remaining period with an upper limit of €183.13 per day

Funding: through **Federal Health Insurance**, financed by employer and employee contributions and general taxation

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Birth leave

Flexibility in use

- Can be taken during the first **4 months after the birth** of the child
- Can be taken in one term or as spread leave
- Self-employed workers may take leave in whole days or half days

Eligibility

- **All employees and self-employed** workers are eligible, but unemployed are not
- Persons in same-sex relationships are eligible (co-parent)

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium

Parental leave (*Ouderschapsverlof/Congé parental*)

Length of leave

- **4 months** per parent. Leave is an individual, non-transferable entitlement.
- Self-employed: 12 weeks

Payment: €1 038.11 per month (€1 768.56 per month for single parent) in the case of full-time leave. The benefit is higher for single parents: it is increased with €55.11 per day

Funding: through **Federal Health Insurance**, financed by employer and employee contributions and general taxation

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Parental leave

Flexibility in use

- Leave may be taken **full-time**, part-time (**50%**) over eight months, one day per week (**20%**) over 20 months, or a half day a week (**10%**) over 40 months
- For part-time leave, the total duration of eight months can be split into blocks of time (with a minimum of 2 months). For one-fifth of the leave, the total duration of 20 months can also be split into blocks (with a minimum of five months)
- Leave may be taken up until **the child's 12th birthday**
- Both parents can take leave **at the same time**



Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Parental leave

Eligibility

- All employees who have completed **one year's employment with their present employer** (during the last 15 months) and who have parental responsibility for a child. All employees in the public sector are eligible, regardless of the length of their service
- Self-employed workers are **not eligible**
- **No differences** exist for same-sex couples or adoption parents
- **For non-citizens/immigrant workers**, their labour market status is what determines their eligibility – they need to be working as a Belgian employee
- Taking the 10% parental leave is only possible with the **agreement of the employer**

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium – Parental leave

Specificities

- **The Flemish community** (i.e., the government in Flanders) pays an **additional benefit bonus** (encouragement benefit / *aanmoedigingspremie*) for a maximum of one year for Flemish care leave or Time Credit. The amount of this additional payment depends on the sector of employment (e.g., private, social profit or public) and the reduction of employment while taking leave.
- Employers may **postpone granting leave** for up to 6 months ‘where business cannot cope’. In addition, the request for leave must be addressed to the employer a minimum of 2 months and a maximum of 3 months in advance.

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium

Time Credit system (*Tijdskrediet met motief/Crédit-temps avec motif*) / Career breaks (public sector)

Length of leave: 1 paid year (full-time) of this type of leave over their working lives

Aim: only be taken in order to care for a **child younger than eight years** (or for a disabled child up to the age of 21 years), to provide palliative care, and/or to care for a severely ill relative

Payment: varies according to age, civil status, and years of employment (e.g., it is higher for those employed for five years or more). The maximum for a full-time break is **€634.68** per month before taxation

Flexibility: 1 paid year (full-time), or 24 months taken part-time or 60 months taken at one-fifth time

Parenting Leave Policy in Belgium - Time Credit and Career breaks

Eligibility:

- Employees need **2 years of previous employment with the same employer** in order to be granted payment.
- For each company, there is a **5% threshold** of employees who can use the Time Credit with motive system at any one time: priorities are settled within the company according to certain rules

Funding: funded by the **federal social security system**, which is financed by contributions from employers and employees, and by the federal government.

-> All employees can trace their personal account of Time Credit/career break in an online e-government tool: Break@Work (www.breakatwork.be).

Parenting leave policy in Belgium: recent changes

- Reform existing leave systems by introducing a **family credit**. Each child generates at birth a **backpack of leave entitlements** that can be taken up by parents/grandparents.
- This system would bring together different types of leave: maternity, paternity, co-parenting, parental leave and time credit. A new form of leave could also be introduced: **grandparental leave** → proposal and have not yet been formalized



Inequality-reducing and inequality-generating elements of parental leave design in Belgium



Who is eligible, who not?

- Parental leave: self-employed are not eligible
- Birth leave: unemployed are not eligible
- Belgium restricts access to employees with short working duration before birth
- Belgium limits access, with conditions, for asylum seekers in Belgium
- Based on 2017 data, **7 % of women and 23 % of men** are not eligible in Belgium (self-employed + employment conditions)

Source: EIGE note “Who is eligible for parental leave in Belgium?”, 2021

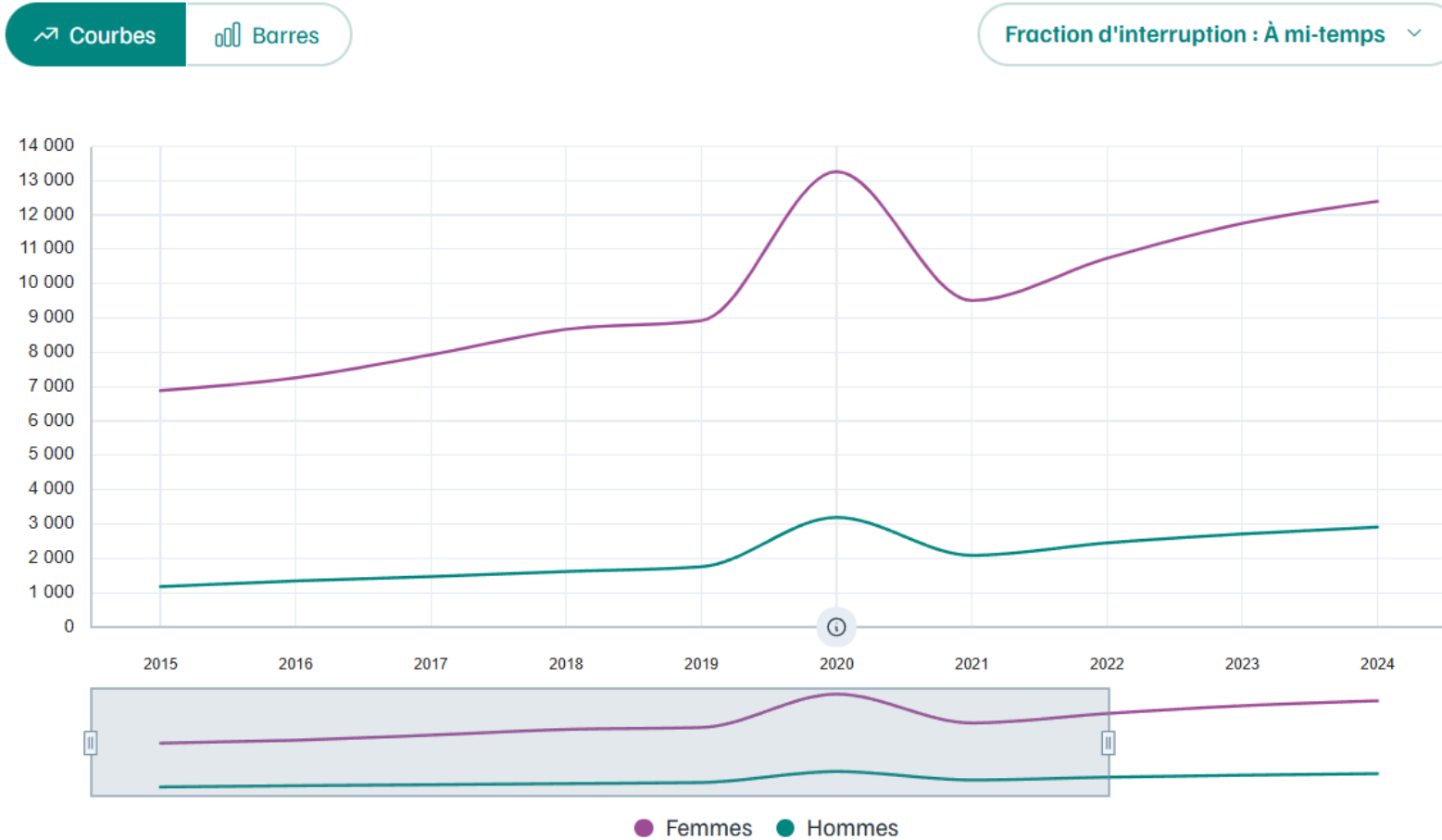
What do we know about take-up rates?

- Viewing the ongoing increasing flexibility of numerous types of leave, with all the variation in remuneration and duration across different sectors (private, public, education, etc.), it becomes **increasingly difficult to provide accurate data on leave uptake rates** in Belgium.
- Available statistics are mostly administrative and developed to fit the monthly payments of the users.
- **Maternity leave:** no systematic information on what proportion of women do *not* take the full amount of Maternity leave, an issue which is especially relevant among the self-employed.

What do we know about take-up rates?

- **Birth leave:** In 2023 in the private sector, 53 993 fathers or co-parents used the Birth leave for four or more days. There is no information about fathers using three – or fewer – days of paid leave paid by the employer + no info for civil servants. On average in 2023, they took **18.11 days** of paid leave
- **Parental leave:** There is no information on what proportion of employees are *not* eligible for parental leave. The proportion of fathers among all leave-takers is growing during this period 2010-2024 (from 27 to 38%). Part-time leave options are the most popular, especially among men
- Data show that the total number of people taking parental leave in Belgium **is increasing**, and the gap between men and women is narrowing because **relatively more fathers** are taking parental leave.





Source : [Office national de l'emploi \(ONEM\)](#)

Note : Les chiffres représentent le nombre moyen annuel de personnes concernées (unités physiques).





Final Discussion



Parenting Leave Policies in Belgium and Inequalities

- There is variation in how parental leave is taken (full, partial, flexible), but **the impact of that variation** (financial, career, health, well-being) has not always been thoroughly investigated.
- Younger, lower educated and mothers, and mothers with migration background have less access to parental leave due to the criteria/structural arrangements
- **Less quantitative research on fathers** with existing work focusing especially on experiences, barriers and on the influence of work environment.



Parenting Leave Policies in Belgium and Inequalities

- More research is needed on **the barriers that prevent fathers and those in vulnerable situations** (lower educated, migration background, part-time work etc.) taking up paternity or parental leave.
- Important areas for investigation include **social norms at work and in the larger society, plus the organization of work cultures** to enable and support men and others in this take-up
- There is a need for raising awareness of birth leave among (future) parents and employers and research to promote a broader understanding of the needs of working parents and supportive work environments

Other

Useful sources:

- <https://www.genderstat.be/fr>
- <https://www.onem.be/statistiques/chiffres-mensuels/interruption-de-carriere-credit-temps-et-conges-thematiques/conges-thematiques-y-compris-conge-parental-corona>
- [https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2025/Dobrotic et al LPRN 2025.pdf](https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2025/Dobrotic_et_al_LPRN_2025.pdf)