



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

A peer learning project

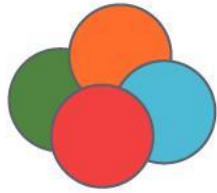
Country Report – Flanders



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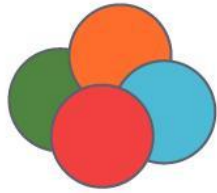
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Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. General Information on Belgium – Flanders	2
3. General information on ECEC in Flanders	3
3.1. A split- ECEC system in Flanders	3
3.2. Childcare in Flanders 0-3	4
3.3. Types of childcare services	5
3.3. Accessibility	5
3.4. Structural quality	6
3.5. Workforce	6
3.6. The pedagogical framework	8
3.7. Pedagogical quality	10
3.8. Quality assurance	10
4. Information on family day care in Flanders	11
5. Information on professionalisation & support systems of family day care in the country	12
6. Current challenges in ECEC in Flanders	14
7. Information on the Flemish QualFDC partners	15
7.1. Vlaams Welzijnsverbond	15
7.2. VBJK	15
Glossary	18
Appendix	19



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care



1. Introduction

This country report of Belgium documents relevant policy, research, and practice of the organisation of ECEC in Flanders (Belgium), with specific attention to family day care¹.

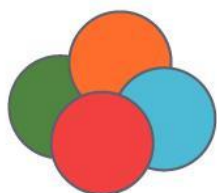
2. General Information on Belgium – Flanders

Belgium is a federal state with 3 communities (Flemish, French, German Community) and 3 regions (Flanders, Walloon, Brussels-Capital) next to the federal level. Policy areas such as family services, childcare services, education, youth work and welfare are regulated at the community level. Please see table below for some information relating to this.

	Belgium	Flanders
Population	11.59 milj inhabitants (2021)	6,589 milj (2019)
Surface area	30.528 km ²	13.624 km ²
Federal capital	Brussels	

Communities	Regions
	

¹ This country report is based on: https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/u794/InTrans%20Policy%20Baseline%20Report%20-%20BELGIUM_o.pdf; Hulpia, H., Peeters, J., & Van Landeghem, G. (2014). Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving. Case study report: Flanders. Brussels: European Commission DG E&C.



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In this country report we focus on the Flemish community of Belgium, as ECEC is a regional policy area.

In the table below we provide some general numbers on children in Flanders.

Flemish Community – 2017	
Number of new born children	65.992
Child Poverty Rate – new born in poverty	13,76 %
Children up to the age of 3 in single parent household	7,6 %
Number of new born children - mother non Belgian nationality	28,1 %
Use of formal childcare by children < 3 years	52,6 %
Number of children up to the age of 18	19,8 %

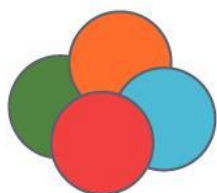
3. General information on ECEC in Flanders

3.1. A split- ECEC system in Flanders

Flanders is historically characterised by a double ECEC split system, where childcare services for children up to three years of age (*kinderopvang*) and out of school care services for children from two and a half to twelve years of age are (*buitenschoolse opvang*) under the auspices of the **Ministry for Welfare**². Preschool institutions (*kleuterschool*) for children from two and a half to compulsory school age are under the auspices of the Ministry for Education. Consequently, we are dealing with a vertical transition (from home/environment to preschool environment) and an extra horizontal transition (daily transition from preschool to out of school care). These three types of institutions have distinct curricula, professional profiles, child–staff ratio, ... (Peeters & Pirard, 2017)³

² The main Agency for childcare is Agency Upbringing (Agentschap Opgroeien).

³ In this country report we focus on childcare 0-3. For more information on the differences in the split ECEC system in Flanders - see the ppt



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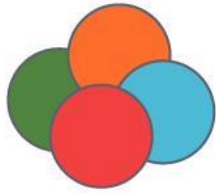
The main differences between childcare (0-3) and preschool (2.5-6) are summarised in the table below:

Competence	Ministry of welfare	Ministry of education
Viewed as	A basic provision, despite a persistent shortage of places and a tendency to prioritize working parents	Basic provision for 2,5 - 6 year olds, universally accessible
Professionalism	Low standards, approx. 80% without formal qualification requirements	All teachers have a bachelor degree
Inspection	Central quality monitoring, albeit mainly technical standards	Pedagogical standards
Finances	Parents pay according to their income level in approx 2/3 of provisions	Officially free of charge for all
Availability	Scarcity of places, not enough for all children	Every child is guaranteed a place in school
Goal	Threefold: an economic function (labour participation), an educational function and a social function (equity)	Clearly formulated pedagogical goals

3.2. Childcare in Flanders 0-3

With formal childcare the Flemish Government seeks to provide a service to families:

1. that has an economic, pedagogical, and social function:
 - **'Economical'** because childcare allows parents to go to work and earn an income. Formal childcare itself also employs a large number of people.
 - **'Pedagogical'** because a good childcare setting not only nurses young children and makes them feel safe, but also stimulates children in their physical and psychological development. Children meet other people there and learn to deal respectfully with each other from a young age onwards.
 - **'Social'** because childcare can counter the exclusion of disadvantaged groups and help promote their integration. The social function of childcare first and foremost implies fighting exclusion mechanisms and increasing accessibility for families which currently have difficulty in finding their way to childcare due to all kinds of thresholds. However, its social function encompasses more than just enhancing accessibility for disadvantaged groups and tackling obstacles. Accessible childcare allows parents to follow training, to apply for jobs to find work, etc.



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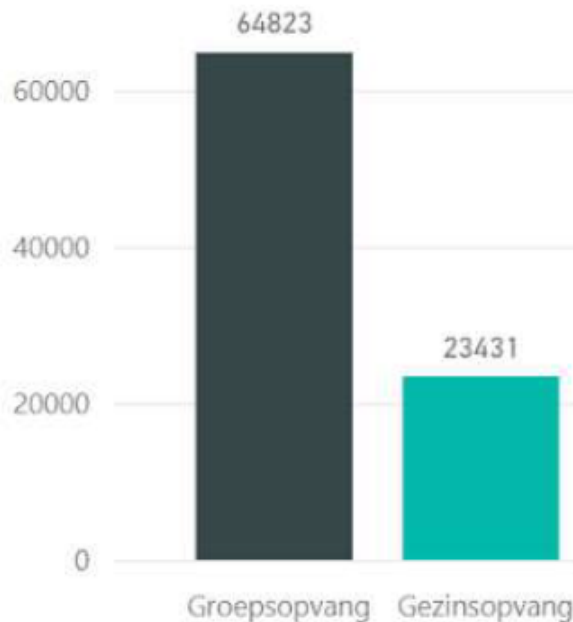
2. is qualitative, available, affordable, and directly accessible for every child without any distinctions, in addition to the upbringing of the child within his/her family, with respect for the child's capacities, his/her home environment and the family's freedom of choice;
3. which can be a meeting place for all parents, with respect for diversity between parents and between children. In a childcare setting parents can ask all kinds of questions and meet other parents as well.

3.3. Types of childcare services

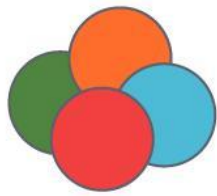
There are several types of childcare in Flanders:

- family day care (gezinsopvang)
- childcare services - group based (groepsopvang).

The figure below shows the number of places per type, revealing that more places are available in childcare.



3.3. Accessibility



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Childcare is often income related and tax deductible.

In general, the take up of children in childcare is around **50%**. Statistics demonstrate that childcare is more inaccessible for families living in poverty, families from ethnic cultural minorities and single parents (Van Lancker, 2013; Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2012; Vande Gaer, Gijssels, & Hedebouw, 2013; Vandenbroeck, Geens, & Berten, 2014). A recent report showed how affluent families use childcare twice as much as their poorer counterparts (46.7% versus 86.0%). Similarly, the unmet needs for childcare are twice as high in poor families and ethnic minority families, than average (Teppers, Schepers, & Van Regenmortel, 2019).

3.4. Structural quality

Adult child ratio: 1 staff member for 8/9 children.

In childcare centres for the under-threes there are usually at least nine and at most 18 children in a group at any one time. A qualified staff member is responsible for a maximum of eight children. If several staff members are present, each one may also be in charge of nine children.

3.5. Workforce

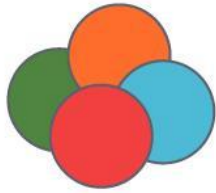
15 basic competencies of childcare workers⁴

There are 15 basic competencies defined for a childcare worker⁵



⁴ For more information we will refer to the SEEPRO₃ – forthcoming soon

⁵ <https://www.kindengezin.be/sites/default/files/2021-09/basiscompetenties-kinderbegeleider.pdf>



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These basic competencies are⁶:

Basic attitude:

- Positive and constructive attitude towards all children, parents, colleagues, and others.
- Observes the behaviour of children, individually and in group, reflects on it and adjusts its actions.
- Reflects on the practices and contributes to the improvement of the childcare service.

Collaboration:

- Collaborates with parents and see them as 1st educator.
- Collaborates with others for the care of the child.
- Collaborates, gives feedback, makes appointments.

The child:

Emotional support

- Stimulates positive contacts between babies and toddlers and defines boundaries.
- Recognizes social, emotional needs of children and responds to it.

Educational support

- Stimulates babies/toddlers in its development, starts from its talents.
- Supports the child in all its activities.
- Makes sure that there is a stimulating, safe, hygienic, and healthy play environment for children.

Daily routine

- Supports children at drop off and pick up moments.
- Prepares food for babies and toddlers, organises, and supports meals.
- Organises rest-moments and movement-moments.
- Cares for the needs of children.

⁶ Own translation; <https://www.kindengezin.be/sites/default/files/2021-09/basiscompetenties-kinderbegeleider.pdf>



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Initial education

In general childcare workers are **low qualified**. They have a vocational degree (ISCED 3B) or no degree. However, from 2014 onwards the aim was to have qualified staff by 2024. This has been prolonged to 2026. For childcare workers, the upper-secondary, vocational qualification route is situated within the secondary schools or adult education.

The last 10 years a new **bachelor's degree** in pedagogy of young children (PJK) has been organised to be able to work in childcare, mainly as coach or leader. This bachelor initial training takes place at higher education institutions – university colleges. There are 3 PJK's in Flanders (in Ghent, Antwerp, and Brussels).

Staff shortage: "We need more hands"

Currently the childcare sector suffers from a staff shortage (e.g., more than 6000 vacancies in 2021; currently around 700⁷).

3.6. The pedagogical framework



Since 2014 there is a pedagogical framework for childcare 0-3⁸. This pedagogical framework is a concise vision text on quality childcare. It clarifies what childcare means to children, families, and society. The framework offers direction, a firm basis to be committed to. The pedagogical framework does not prescribe what one 'should' do in everyday practice. It is not a manual. The dialogue about it with all parties involved, results each time in different practices, customised to the local context. This

cooperation ensures that all parties involved inspire each other in shaping pedagogical quality. The pedagogical framework contains a best-efforts obligation for childcare services, which is a commitment to work along the lines of the vision set out in the present framework. One is expected to make efforts to get going with the present framework. This does not imply an obligation to achieve results. Quality will not be judged by measuring children's development or by examining to what extent one works together with families and external parties.

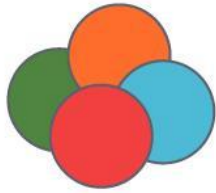
Actions mentioned in the pedagogical framework:

Actions with respect to children

- practitioners adopt a holistic approach
- practitioners make sure that children feel emotionally safe

⁷ <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2022/03/22/personeelstekort-kinderopvang/>

⁸ <https://www.kindengezin.be/sites/default/files/2021-05/pedagogical-framework-english.pdf>



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- practitioners are sensitive for children's needs
- practitioners fulfil an active and stimulating role
- practitioners offer opportunities for autonomy
- practitioners adapt their approach to each individual child
- practitioners learn children how to live together
- practitioners offer each child integrated development opportunities in the four areas of experience: me and the other, exploration of the world, communication and expression, body, and movement

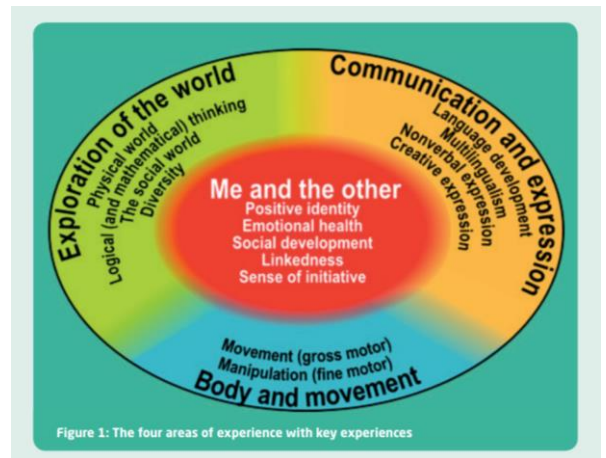


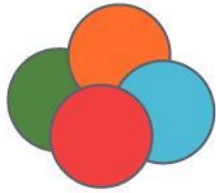
Figure 1: The four areas of experience with key experiences

Actions with respect to families

- practitioners and families get to know each other
- participation from and systematic consultation with families

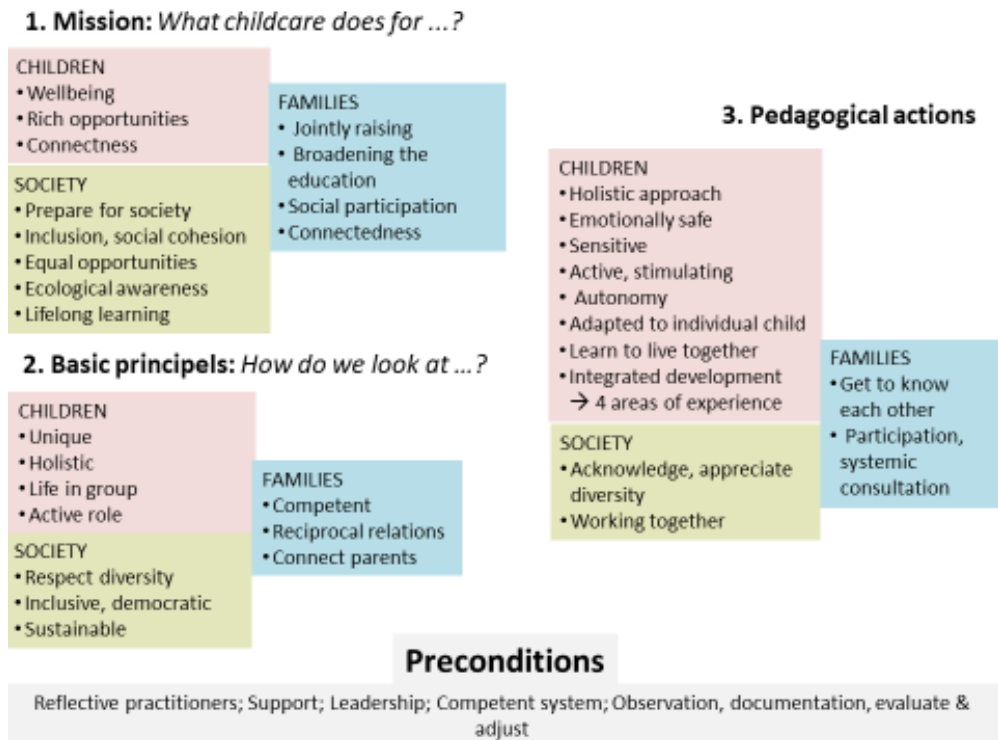
Actions with respect to society

- acknowledging and appreciating diversity
- working together with other facilities and services (e.g., schools)



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Summary of the pedagogical framework:



3.7. Pedagogical quality

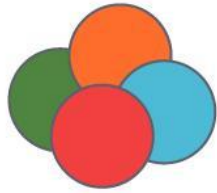
A baseline study (in the MEMOQ-project, 2016) demonstrated that childcare services are moderate to good in providing emotional and physical care and individual attention. But more attention should be paid to the educational support and the involvement of children. There are no significant differences in pedagogical quality between childcare services and family day care.

3.8. Quality assurance

Childcare centres are inspected by *Zorginspectie* (care inspection).

The *Zorginspectie* also evaluates the pedagogical quality. The instruments to assess the pedagogical quality used by the *Zorginspectie* are developed in the MeMoQ-project⁹. These are in line with the instruments that can be used for self-reflection, called 6-MeMoQdimensions.

⁹ As well as the pedagogical framework, the scientific baseline study, and the self-evaluation instrument.



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4. Information on family day care in Flanders

If you wish to find out more on family day care in Flanders, take a look at the following short movie: <https://vbjk.be/nl/projecten/onthaalouders-sterker-maken>

There are **different types** of family day care in Flanders:

- childminder up to a maximum of 8 children simultaneously
- childminders up to maximum of 18 children simultaneously – cooperating childminders

Organization of family day care

There are **3 types of statutes** for family day care in Flanders:

- - Independent statute
- - Sui Generis statute (since 2003)
- - Employee statute (since 2015, still a pilot project – approx. 700).

They are currently evaluating the sui generis statute and the employee statute to make new policy choices for the future. See the appendix for the differences between the 2 statutes.

Family day carers work under the guidance of a **family care organiser** (n =94). These organisers select, supervise, monitor, and educate the childminders. They have contacts with parents, take care of paying the childminders and collect invoices from parents. Parents pay a daily fee to the organiser based on their income.

Specific challenges in family day care

There is a high turnover among the childminders. In recent years we have seen a huge decrease in the number of childminders, but the demand for childcare remains high. Hence, the challenge for the next years is the retention of family day care childminders and deployment of lateral entrants.

Specific articles on family day care are

- Vandenbroeck, M. & Bauters, V. (2017). The professionalization of family day care in Flanders, France, and Germany. *European Early childhood Education research journal*, 25 (4).



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- Vandenbroeck, M., Slot, P. & Hulpia, H. (2021). Quality in home base childcare providers: variations in process quality? *European Early childhood Education research Journal*, 29 (2): 1-17.

5. Information on professionalisation & support systems of family day care in the country

Since 2022, Flanders has invested in on-the-job pedagogical bachelors for the entire childcare system. In total this concerns 264 FTE. Approximately an average of 1 FTE per 80 to 100 childminders.

The pedagogical coach works within the pedagogical framework and always at the request of the family care organiser and is deployed with starting childcare workers in the family day care, pedagogical situations and with the implementation of MeMoQ.

Starting childcare workers:

There are two types of supporters: the pedagogical coach and family care mentor¹⁰. The pedagogical coach will support at the start of the new child supervisor in:

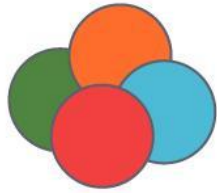
- Organization of the day
- Setting up the play area
- Pedagogical actions
- Contact with parents

They provide this support by working in the childcare site for the first few months.

Besides participating and coaching on the shop floor, the pedagogical coach, if there is a demand for it, also starts up a basic course with the starting child supervisors (both with qualified and nonqualified childcare workers). This course zooms in on the 15 basic competences. The course is organised across services and regionally. The frequency is 6 times a year. The family care organiser decides whether the child supervisor will sign up for this track.

Pedagogical counselling questions:

¹⁰ The family care mentor supports the childcare worker to get the accreditation. So, this is only for non-qualified childminders.



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

At the request of the family care organiser, the pedagogical coach initiates a counselling track with the childminder about a pedagogically difficult situation or when a more intensive form of counselling is needed. This request can come about in different ways:

- At the request of the childminder (through the person in charge).
- At the request of the person in charge
- After a score 1 or several scores 2 at MeMoQ (self-evaluation)
- After a deficit on pedagogical level after inspection visit

MeMoQ self-evaluation:

In some services there is a demand for implementation of the self-evaluation MeMoQ, both through training or intervention, and in the workplace. For starting FDC workers, this is included by the pedagogical coach and mentor in the 15 basic competencies. For FDC workers who have been working for some time, this will be implemented rather through training, learning networks or intervention.

Childminders working in FDC without qualification

Childminders who are working without a qualification have to options:

- They can follow a training at a centre of adult education (CVO – centrum voor volwassenenonderwijs).
- They can take an assessment – EVC-procedure.

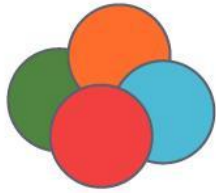
EVC-procedure

- Recognition of Acquired Skills (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties)
- To acknowledge existing experience in a specific context (the day care).

The EVC-assessment:

- Assessment of the 15 basic competencies
- Done by the CVO (centre for adult education)
- 2 (scheduled) days: These days follow each other as soon as possible, not always consecutively: Day 1: observation and oral examination in the day care; Day 2: oral examination in a test centre.
- Both days the same 2 assessors are present together.
- Takes place in the day care of the own choice (own daycare is possible)
- Price: €130 (967 DKK)

If a childminder does not pass the assessment, she has to follow specific modules of the CVO-training.



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The non-qualified childminder gets support from a **mentor**. These mentors support the childminders to get the qualification at the CVO or support the childminder in preparing for the EVC-assessment. This takes approximately 2 years (1 year at the initial training centre CVO - mostly followed by a year for other competencies and a 2nd the assessment).

6. Current challenges in ECEC in Flanders

- several bad news items in the press
- adult child ratio is too high
- no child free hours
- low wages
- low qualified staff
- job turnover, enormous amount of open vacancies



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7. Information on the Flemish QualFDC partners

7.1. Vlaams Welzijnsverbond



The Flemish Welfare Association today groups facilities from three sectors in welfare work: youth and family support, support of persons with disabilities and childcare.

The Flemish Welfare Association represents 750 organisations, together accounting for a capacity of about 27,000 places and an employment of 31,000 employees. In addition, we are recognized as an employers' organisation.

Within childcare, we see 3 major sub sectors:

- Group care – childcare centres
- Family care – childminders
- Extracurricular care

Childcare employs 3 staff members, 3 family care mentors and 6 pedagogical coaches. We support all our childcare members in the areas of advocacy, supporting policy-making capacity, qualitative strengthening on the shop floor and preparation for qualification through workplace learning and experiential competencies.

7.2. VBJK



VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) is an NGO and recognized as a research centre by the Federal Belgian Government. VBJK is an official partner of Agency Upbringing and works in close collaboration with the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy of Ghent University.

VBJK focuses on the basic provisions for young children (0-12) and their families, such as ECEC (childcare and preschool), out of school care and preventive family support. VBJK always combines theory, policy, and practice in its work. This means, in coaching, product



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development (such as books, a 2-monthly magazine, and movies) or research, VBJK always connects all involved parties: children, parents, practitioners, researchers, policymakers and all possible relevant organisations.

VBJK is specialised in national and international projects

Examples of national projects, relevant for QualFDC, are Strengthening childminders in family day care¹¹, or projects on professionalisation. VBJK is also specialised in European policy research. The centre was involved in the CoRE research (Competence Requirements in ECEC) commissioned by DG Education and Culture (2009-2011), the research on 'The role of ECEC in preventing early school leaving, also commissioned by DG Education and Culture (2013-2014) and the Eurofound systematic review on continuous professional development in ECEC (2013-2015).

VBJK is also part of the NESET II Network (Network of experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training), which provides reports for the European Commission on specific requested themes, such as professional learning communities, integrated working, multilingualism.

VBJK has worked for years on CPD (continuous professional development) of ECEC staff, with specific attention to the link between theory and practice, through group reflection. A specific method (WANDA) has been developed by VBJK and Artevelde University College to support and realise group reflection in groups and teams and encourage a high quality, inclusive child care for the diversity of children and families. Whilst the notion of reflexivity in professional practice is not new, finding ways to realise this reflexivity and concretely link it to transformation of practice is innovative.

How does VBJK work?

Innovation, in relation.

- VBJK works in a participative way, looking into the perspective of everyone involved, including children and families who participate directly or indirectly. We carefully search for ways to reach partners and target groups.
- We **cooperate** with partners in an open and respectful way and attentive to transparent dialogue. We always look for a common ground and equivalence.
- VBJK informs **policymakers**, on request as well as proactively, based on careful monitoring of evolutions in practices and research – including internationally – as well as our own projects and research.

¹¹ <https://vbjk.be/nl/projecten/onthaalouders-sterker-maken>



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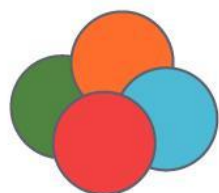
- **Nationally and internationally**, we keep track of relevant trends in practice, research, and policy. In every project we aim for **co-ownership** of stakeholders. By building solid support, we always try to go for change on a **structural level**.

Innovation by reflection.

- **Critical reflection** is the key to innovation and change. Professionals ask themselves: why do we do what we do in our work with children? VBJK often takes the position as a critical friend. As a supportive friend, we want to fully understand the work of practitioners, we want to value it and at the same time question it. Alongside the partners we analyse the practice, research, and policy (deconstruction) and then build new practices, policy, and research: reconstruction in co-construction.
- The work of VBJK is **methodically and scientifically** substantiated: we build our work on theories of change, work with models in which we approach actors of change, use validated techniques of group reflection (i.e., intervention and supervision). The same scientific basis is used in our own research, be it focus groups, literature reviews, action research, case studies or quantitative analysis.

Innovation in a structural way

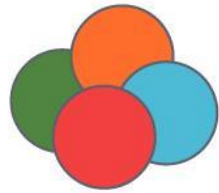
- VBJK works towards building and strengthening **competent systems**, in which not only the individual, but also the team, the organisation, the policy level and (international) networks have their role to play. Only through solid cooperation and quality requirements for all these actors, every level can continually develop and grow. The different roles and responsibilities of all actors are at the focus of all our guidance projects, policy work and research.
- At VBJK, we want to take the time needed to facilitate **innovation** and to give our partners tailored support, advice, or research. VBJK always aims at broad and **structural change** in the long term.



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Glossary

	What is meant by it?	Flemish word
ECEC - early childhood and care	Services for children 0-6	Voorschoolse voorzieningen
Childcare	ECEC services for 0-3 years old children	Kinderopvang
Preschool	ECEC for 2.5-6 years old children	Kleuterschool
Childcare services	Group care	Groepsopvang kinderdagverblijven Crèches
Family day care	Home based care	Gezinsopvang Onthaalouders
Child care worker	Child care worker In family day care also childminder	Kinderbegeleiders In family day care also: onthaalouder
Pedagogical coaches	Providing support to childcare services	Pedagogical coaches
Mentors	Providing support to non-qualified childminders	Mentoren
CPD – continuous professional development	Professional support (after initial training)	



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Appendix

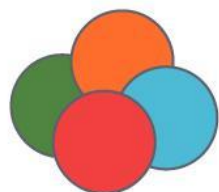
The difference between the sui generis statute and the employee statute:

Family day care	Employee	Sui Generis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is hired and receives an employment contract : all rules of labour law apply. • The childminder receives a salary and fixed and variable expenses. • The family care organizer must ensure that the reception parent is assigned enough children to meet the contractual number. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concludes a cooperation agreement with the service: labour law does not apply. • The "sui generis" reception parent receives an expense allowance based on the childcare days provided.
Children who do not attend	When children do not show up, wages and the fixed portion of the expense allowance continue to be paid.	When children do not show up, the childminder can claim a childcare allowance. The care allowance is regulated through the system of temporary unemployment and has strict regulations within the RVA.



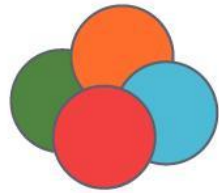
Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Income security	<p>The employee status provides income security :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A gross monthly salary of €2086.00 (at the current index). • A non-taxable expense allowance consisting of 2 parts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A flat rate of 20% on your monthly salary: 13.72 euros per day or 274.4 € per month of 20 working days ◦ 3.74 euros per child present per day of care, with a maximum of 8 children per day • Gross double vacation pay (92% of your gross monthly salary). 	<p>The "sui generis" status offers no income security. The reception parent receives only when the children are actually present :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €13.18/half day/child (half day < 5h care) • €21.98/day/child (5h care < 1 day < 11h care) • €8.79 (- 3h, only for after-school care)
Vacations and holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 days of vacation: net pay and double vacation pay • 10 days of additional vacation as compensation for the 50-hour week where the reception parent receives net pay • 10 paid legal holidays (with compensation when they fall on a Saturday or Sunday) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 unpaid days are assimilated for social security purposes • If the host parent takes more leave than the 20 days unpaid, it is not assimilated for social security purposes • A holiday is unpaid and is only assimilated for social security purposes if the host parent has a childcare plan for that day.



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed salary and flat-rate expense allowance of 20% on your monthly salary during the first month of illness • After that first month you are entitled to a sickness benefit, which is based on your salary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guaranteed salary • You are entitled to a sickness benefit but this is based on your performance in the previous quarter
Small Leave of Absence	As an employee, you are entitled to be absent from work with pay in a number of circumstances. These short periods of absence are called "minor leaves of absence." For example, a funeral, communion, marriage,.... For a complete overview, please visit here .	The small leave has been replaced by well-defined situations within the RVA regulations and can be compensated by a benefit if the conditions of the 4-week regulations are met. A complete list of situations that qualify as force majeure and therefore entitle you to benefits can be found here .
Time credit and thematic leave	As an employee, you are entitled to time credit in the form of care leave, training credit, parental leave, etc. More information can be found on the RVA website .	Time credit and thematic leave are not possible within "sui generis". However, a child minder in time credit with a regular employer may cumulate the expense allowance and the care allowance with the interruption allowance. See https://www.rva.be/nl/documentatie/infoblad/t21#h2_10
Educational leave	Entitlement to paid educational leave. From September 1, 2019, the regulations of Flemish educational leave (VOV) will apply: the reformed version of paid educational leave. Does your training start before September 1, 2019? Then the regulations of paid educational leave still apply. For more information on the conditions and the Flemish educational leave, please visit here .	No educational leave, but training vouchers. More info on training vouchers can be found on the VDAB website .



Enhancing Quality in Family Day Care

Pension	Pension is calculated at the minimum wage of the sector (€1,821.96 per month)	The calculation of your pension is linked to your occupation. If you care for an average of 4 children per day all days until retirement, the calculation base is €1,593.81 (minimum wage NAR) Career years prior to 2003 do not count in the calculation.
Unemployment	You are entitled to unemployment benefits in case of dismissal	A child carer does not accrue unemployment rights. However, you can work for 15 years while retaining your rights if you start from unemployment or quit your previous employer. If your cooperation agreement ends, you will not receive C4. If you stopped working at your previous employer, you re-enrol with your last employer. If it does not have a new job, it will write a certificate that you will use to go to the ACV service center to open your right to unemployment. If you have been a child carer sui generis for more than 15 years, you will have to work for 13 weeks before you can apply for unemployment again.