

Families under increasing pressure in Flanders: lack of time around childbirth

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Work-Life balance

How do mothers and fathers experience the leave system around childbirth?

→ survey with parents of young children on maternity leave and paternity leave

→ **6.000 respondents: 5.399 mothers and 654 partners**



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Maternity leave in Belgium

Duration:

➤ **employees, civil servants, unemployed:**

- 15 weeks (17 weeks for twins)
- Maximum 6, minimum 1 week before birth
- Rest: after birth
- 1 week before birth and 9 weeks after birth are mandatory

➤ **Self-employed persons:**

- Recently increased up to 12 weeks
- 1 week before birth and 2 weeks after birth are mandatory
- Maximum 9 weeks flexible after birth (or 18 weeks part-time)
- 105 hours of free household help in period after birth

Financial benefits: depending on the social statute



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Satisfaction with the duration of the maternity leave

	Employees, civil servants, unemployed		Self-employed persons
	Mothers	Partners	
Too long	1	1	1
Just right	8	22	6
Too short	49	56	26
Much too short	42	21	67
Total	100	100	100



Reasons for dissatisfaction

- Breastfeeding
- Building a close bond
- Wellbeing of the baby
- Medical reasons (caesarian section, premature birth, complications during pregnancy...)
- Lack of childcare or not wanting to entrust a young baby to professional care
- Fatigue, night feeding
- Twins



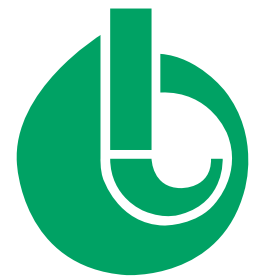
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“After 3 months, I was total loss. I didn't have the chance to build a close bond with my baby. Going back to work was impossible. It would have been inhumane, both for myself and my baby. It's a pity that so little value is attached to the human aspect of childbirth. The economy seems to be one hundred times more important”



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"It is unfortunate that mothers are being punished when they are no longer able to go to work a few weeks before childbirth. After the birth of my son, I could stay at home for only 9 weeks because from 6 weeks before the birth on, I was not allowed to work anymore ... "



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Satisfaction with financial benefits during maternity leave

	Employees, civil servants, unemployed		Self-employed persons (mothers and partners with a self employed wife)
	Mothers	Partners	
Good	50	40	26
Too low	50	60	74
Total	100	100	100



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Self-employed persons: satisfaction with household help (105 hours for free)

I did not know this system	10
It's a benefit, and it's enough	28
It's a benefit, but it's not enough	35
It's ok, but not very useful	23
It's useless	4,5
Totaal	100



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“It’s a great initiative, but I only got them three months after the birth. It would have been more useful if I got them earlier. There was too much bureaucracy to get the cheques”

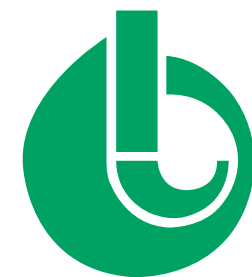


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What do mothers do after their maternity leave?

(employees and civil servants)

1 form of extra leave	%
• Parental leave	29
• Vacation days	11
• Breastfeeding leave	13
• Other leave system	2
Combination of different leave systems	
• Parental leave and vacation days	7
• Other combinations	18
Back to work	20
Total	100



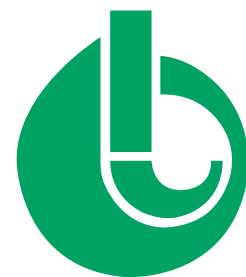
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"I took an extra leave to be able to breastfeed longer, but it was without financial benefits. Young parents want the best for their baby, but you also need an income."



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“We have to choose between either losing a lot of income in one of the most expensive periods of your life, or either missing a lot in the development of your child. Not everyone can make that choice.”



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Paternity leave in Belgium (for fathers and partners in LGTB relationship)

Employees, civil servants

- 10 days, to be taken in the months after the birth
- optional

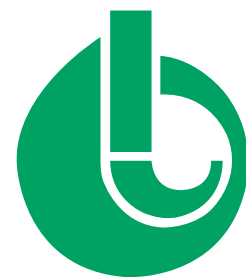
Self-employed and unemployed persons: no paternity leave



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Satisfaction with the duration of the leave

	Mothers	Partners
Just right	7	15
Too short	41	51
Much too short	52	33
Total	100	100



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Mother: "10 days for my partner was really too short. I had a caesarian and was not allowed to lift things for a month, but I had to bring our eldest child to school myself. That was really difficult."



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Satisfaction with financial benefits during paternity leave

	Mothers	Partners
Good	48	57
Too low	52	42
Total	100	100



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Mandatory or not?

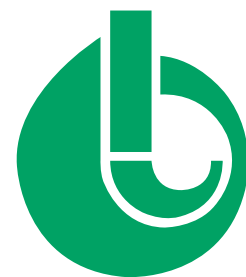
	Mothers	Partners
Yes, all the days	44	41
Yes, some of the days	33	31
No	23	28
Total	100	100



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What do partners do after their paternity leave?

Vacation days	30%
Parental leave	15%
Combination of different systems	6%
Back to work	49%



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Mother: "After his paternity leave, my partner wanted to take some extra vacation. But he was not allowed to because there was too much work. He also does not dare to ask for parental leave because he is afraid of being dismissed."



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Conclusions

Current maternity and paternity leave system

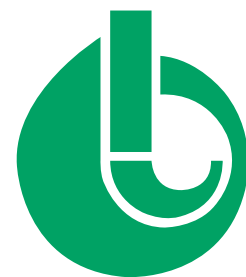
- Current system = no satisfaction.
- Main complaint: not long enough. Results show a cry for help for more time around birth.
- Alternative “solutions” are not available for everybody (financial constraints, employers...)
- Benefits : self-employed persons are most dissatisfied



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Our proposition

- 26 weeks of maternity leave for all mothers
- Obligation of 15 weeks (3 weeks before birth)
- Flexible system for self-employed mothers
- Improve the benefits for self-employed mothers
- 20 days of paternity leave for all partners



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