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French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region: access and users

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Toegangsmodaliteiten en publiek van de Franstalige kinderopvang in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest

Perrine Humblet, Emmanuelle Robert, Philippe Huynen, Gaëlle Amerijckx, Stéphane Aujean and Benjamin Wayens

Translator: Jane Corrigan



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French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region: access and users

*Modalités d'accès et public des milieux d'accueil francophones de la petite
enfance en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*

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Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest*

**Perrine Humblet, Emmanuelle Robert, Philippe Huynen, Gaëlle Amerijckx,
Stéphane Aujean and Benjamin Wayens**

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The survey which this fact sheet is based on was financed and directed by the Observatoire de l'enfant of the Commission communautaire française. Complementary results are available in the 39th issue of the magazine published by the Observatoire, *Grandir à Bruxelles* (<https://www.grandirabruxelles.be/>).

- ¹ With a high number of births each year (16 635 in 2019) and a wide variety of socio-economic situations and career paths, the demography and sociology of the Brussels population are putting the early childhood care systems under strain. Accessibility is a basic principle in the organisation of a quality childcare system¹ for young children. There is a lack of capacity in the Brussels region (room for four out of ten children on regional average) associated with a very unequal distribution of the available space [Humblet *et al.*, 2015]. However, accessibility also depends on the diversity of services, their access criteria, registration procedures, how the initial contact takes place and even on how the services are adapted to the needs of the population.

- 2 A survey² was conducted in the French-speaking childcare centres in Brussels at the request of the Observatoire de l'enfant to identify the registration procedures for children under age three and to describe the social and demographic characteristics of user families.
- 3 The survey took place between the months of July and October 2018, with the support of ONE.
- 4 The questionnaire consisted of two sections, one of which dealt with the characteristics of the services, in particular the registration, and the other, the socio-demographic characteristics of each child registered in June 2018. The questionnaire was sent to all of the centres authorised by ONE.
- 5 A total of 152 of the 377 centres which were contacted participated in the survey (response rate = 40,6 %), and 116 of them completed the two sections simultaneously, allowing the collection of socio-demographic data regarding 4 233 children. The data regarding the services were weighted according to the distribution of the centres in the Region (according to the type of service, subsidised nature and municipality). The weighting was also applied to the sample of children registered at the centres.
- 6 At the time of the survey, there were different types of service which were subsidised and non-subsidised by ONE (table1). A reform which was passed in 2019 is currently being implemented.

Table 1. Typology of French-speaking centres used in the survey

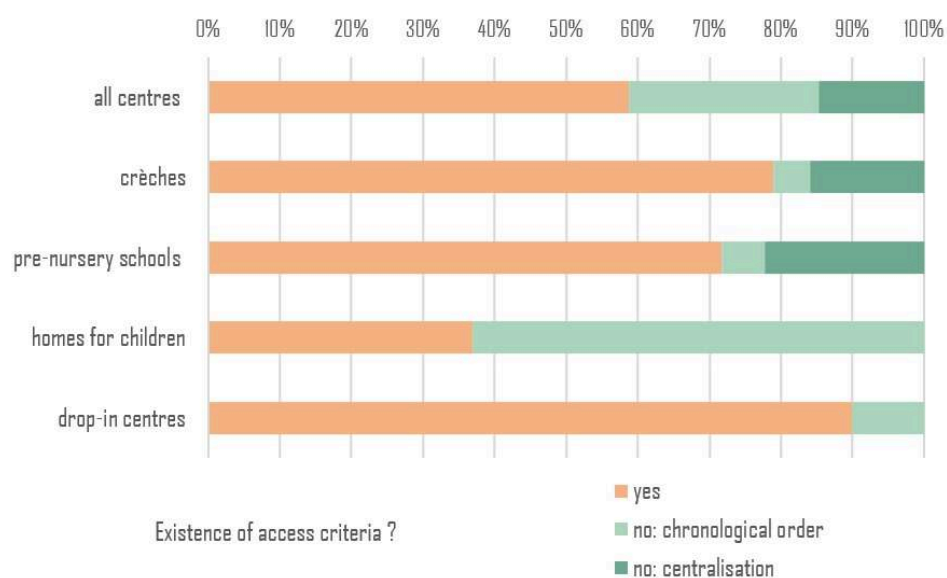
	Subsidised by ONE	Non-subsidised by ONE
Community-type	Crèche Pre-nursery school (<i>Prégardiennat</i>) Maison Communale d'Accueil de l'Enfance	Home for children (<i>Maison d'enfant</i>) Drop-in (<i>Halte-accueil</i>)
Family-type	Service registered caregiver	Independent caregiver

- 7 This fact sheet includes the main results of the survey of French-speaking childcare centres in Brussels and deals with the registration procedures and criteria, the organisation of the first days of childcare, the characteristics of users and the financial contribution of parents.

1. Registration procedures and criteria

- 8 The majority of French-speaking childcare centres are involved in the selection of applications addressed to them. However, for a number of crèches and pre-nursery schools, registration is totally centralised, often at municipal level.

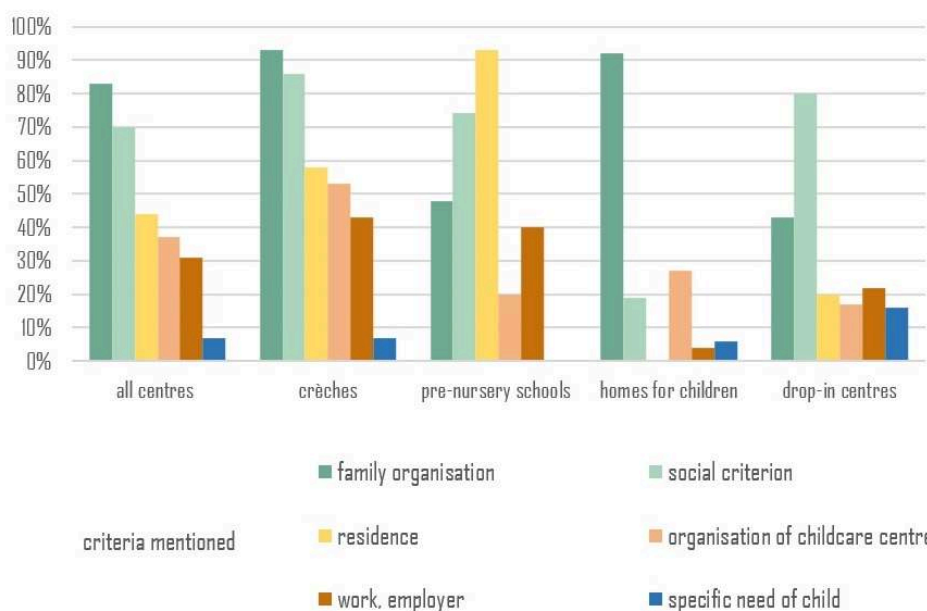
Figure 1. Registration procedures for French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region



Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

- 9 In 63 % of homes for children (figure 1), the chronological order of registration is taken into account exclusively.
- 10 In centres which do not depend on a centralised management and do not take into account the chronological order exclusively, five criteria are mentioned on average among the twenty or so proposed in the questionnaire (without prioritisation). The criteria mentioned are more limited for homes for children (average of 2,2 criteria).
- 11 The criteria are related to family organisation (siblings, school affiliation), social reasons (disadvantaged situation, unemployment, single parent, emergency or one-off service), place of residence, service organisation (grouped entry, minimum duration of care), parents' work (parents' work, company staff) and finally to specific needs.³

Figure 2. Registration criteria mentioned for the French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region



Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

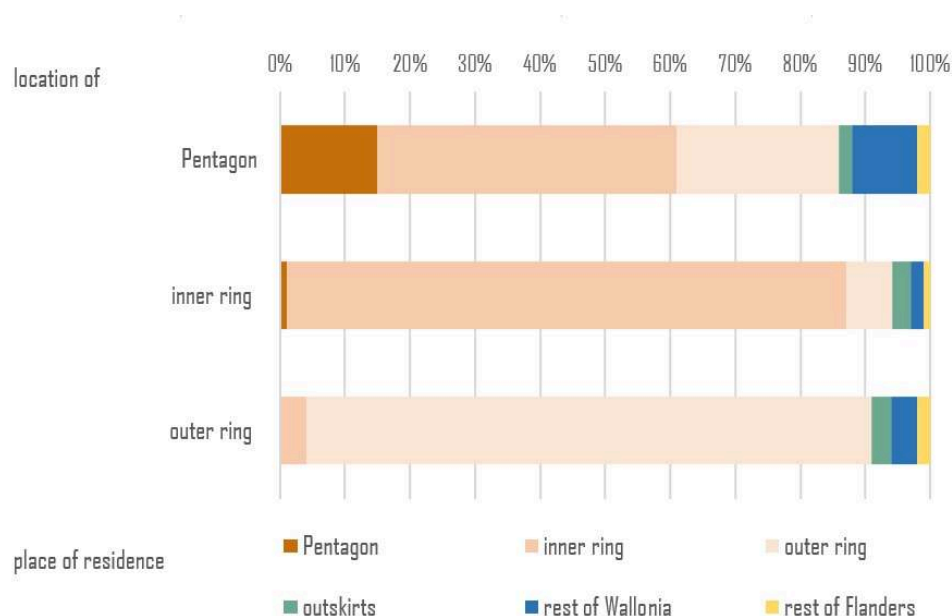
2. The organisation of the and first days at a centre

- 12 Generally, the arrival of children takes place individually (79 %) and not in groups of children. Individual arrival takes place in 98 % of homes for children and 95 % of drop-in centres, but only 55 % of crèches, which more often have groups of children of the same age.
- 13 Arrival at a childcare centre is preceded by a period of familiarisation,⁴ which varies on average from just under four days for drop-in centres to one to two weeks for crèches. However, a third of respondents mentioned spontaneously that this period could be managed flexibly by adapting to the child, especially in homes for children and drop-in centres.
- 14 Arrival in a childcare centre takes place at any time of year in four out of five centres. The crèches are distinguished by a higher rate (37 %) of arrivals at specific times after school holidays. This practice is linked to grouped entries and can have the effect of determining access to the crèche according to the date of birth of a child, who must be the right age at the right time, otherwise he or she may not be accepted. This probably has an impact on the composition of crèches.
- 15 The average age of arrival for crèches and homes for children is 6,6 months and 7,9 months respectively, but 20 % and 23 % of children arrive before the age of 4 months. The arrival takes place at a later age in drop-in centres (average age 11,9 months), which are characterised by an increasing number of arrivals according to the age of children, with a peak between 13 to 24 months (38 % of entries). The age of children on arrival at pre-nursery schools differs for regulatory reasons (minimum 18 months).

3. The users of childcare centres

- 16 Whenever possible, childcare centres are often chosen within the parents' residential environment. This may be reinforced by access criteria integrating the notion of proximity. A strong correspondence is therefore observed between the area where a child lives (according to post code) and that of the location of services situated in the inner and outer ring. However, in the Pentagon (the medieval core of the city), where the logic of childcare is more closely linked to the workplace, infrastructures have a wider reach, with almost 40 % of children coming from the outer ring of Brussels, and even from the outskirts⁵ or further away in Wallonia or Flanders.

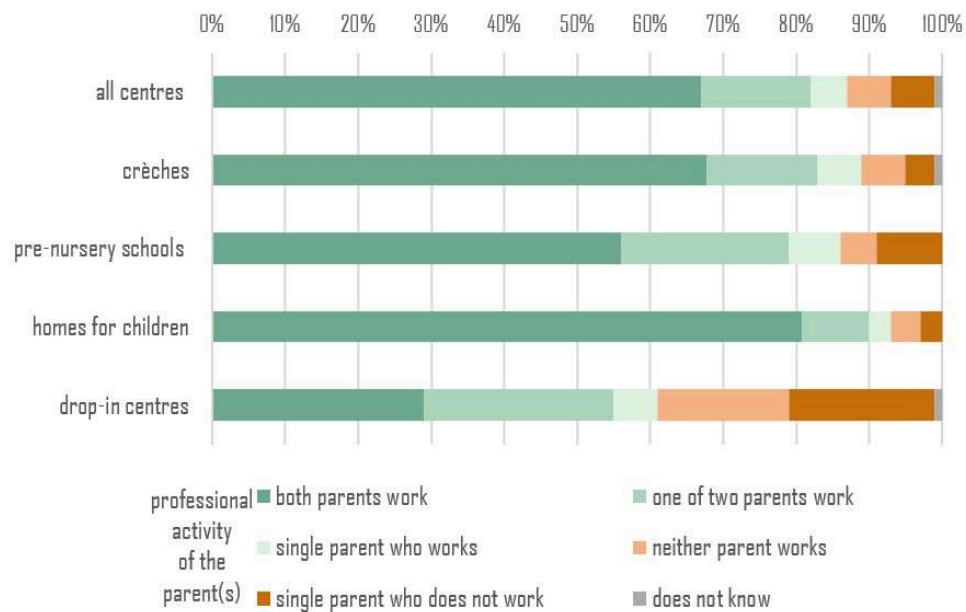
Figure 3. Area of residence of children according to location of French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region



Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

- 17 The majority of children who are registered in French-speaking childcare centres in Brussels live with two parents (86 %). But in the drop-in centres, this proportion is much lower (69 %).
- 18 Most of the children (87 %) in French-speaking childcare centres in Brussels live in a household which is professionally active: 67 % with both parents working, 15 % with one of the two parents working, and 5 % with a single parent who is working. It is not specified whether it is full-time or part-time work.
- 19 These proportions differ according to the type of service. The drop-in centres have a specific profile (figure 4).

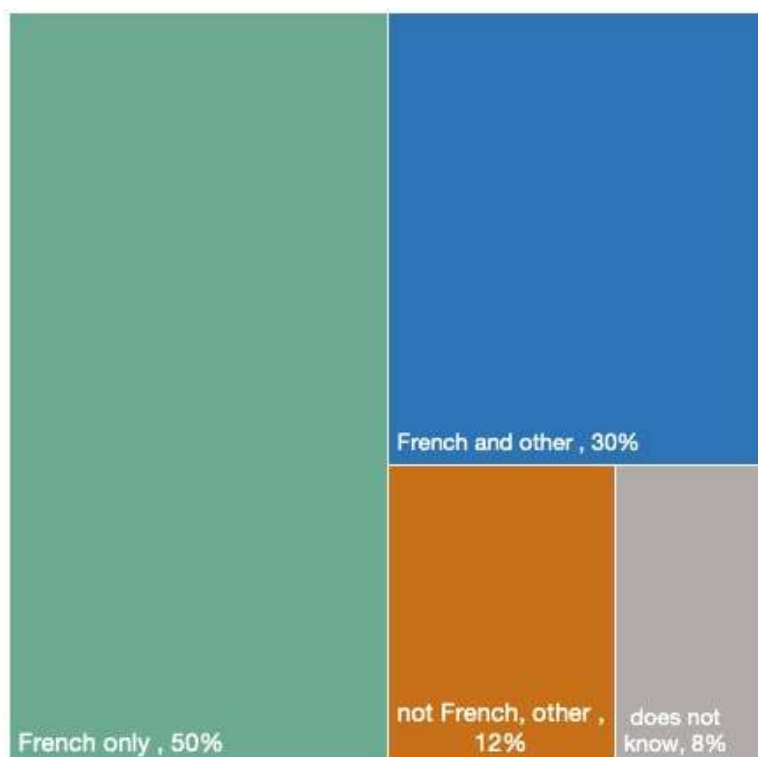
Figure 4. Professional activity in the households of children in French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region



Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

- 20 For the vast majority of children (88 %) the childcare centre does not consider there to be a “specific need”⁶ for the service. This proportion varies little between the different types of structure.
- 21 The language used in the family context of children may indicate specific needs. The family context is French unilingual for 50 % of children and multilingual for 42 % (8 % remain unanswered). The results from the drop-in centres differ, with only one out of four children who speak only French at home (27 %).

Figure 5. Languages used in the family context of children in French-speaking childcare centres in the Brussels-Capital Region

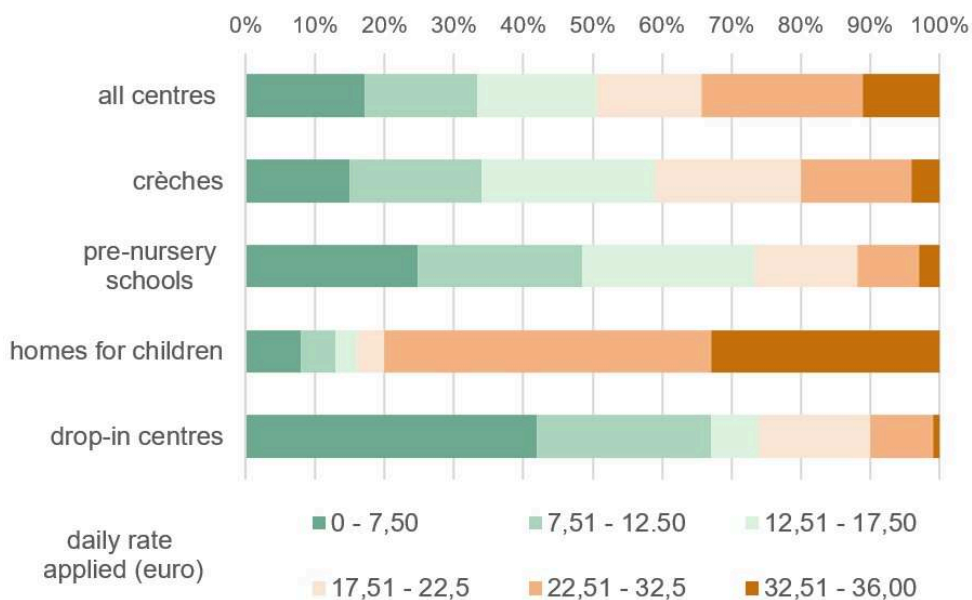


Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

4. The financial contribution of parents

- 22 All categories of service, subsidised and non-subsidised, receive funding from public authorities, private bodies, municipalities, Actiris, the European Social Fund, companies and non-profit associations. This is supplemented by parental contributions.
- 23 The scales applied for parental contributions vary, and are based on the characteristics of the childcare centre as well as those of the parents. The scale which is applied in the crèches and pre-nursery schools which are subsidised mainly by ONE takes into account the net income of the household. On the other hand, in homes for children and drop-in centres, the scales are fixed and vary according to establishment.
- 24 The average daily cost of childcare in all of the French-speaking centres in the Region is € 18,7 (the median cost being € 17,6). The lowest amounts are seen in drop-in centres (average cost € 11,4 and median cost € 9) and the highest amounts are seen in homes for children (average of € 27,8 and median of € 30). For the latter, the average is influenced downwards by a few homes for children which are part of a social project.
- 25 Figure 6 highlights the high level of specificity of drop-in centres with their social project.

Figure 6. Cost per day according to the type of French-speaking childcare centre in the Brussels Region



Source: Robert and Godin [2019], Huynen [2020]

* The maximum amount of € 36 per day corresponds to the last bracket of the ONE scale, but in homes for children, the last bracket is actually € 32.51 - € 75.

Conclusion

- 26 As the early childhood care sector does not provide as many places as needed by the population, registration criteria are necessary and are diversified and sometimes complex, influencing the level of primary accessibility of the service. In the “classic” childcare centres, i.e. crèches, pre-nursery schools and homes for children, families with two parents who are professionally active are most common, and the “municipality of residence” criterion seems to have an impact in geographical terms on the selection of children. However, crèches and pre-nursery schools differ from homes for children in terms of the cost per day, and therefore in terms of the socio-economic status of families. Drop-in centres stand out in terms of financial contribution as well as other indicators, highlighting their specific users who are families with more pronounced social needs.
- 27 A reform is under way at ONE, targeting both the quality and accessibility of early childhood care. There is still a long way to go, but a first series of milestones has been established with a view to reducing educational inequalities. The elements gathered in this fact sheet will make it possible to take into account the realities of Brussels and underline the benefit of complementing the efforts to improve the rate of coverage (the creation of places) by considering other factors which influence the accessibility of childcare centres and the diversity of their users.

The authors would like to express their warm thanks to the childcare centres which took the time to answer the survey whose results are presented in this fact sheet.

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NOTES

1. Recommandation du Conseil concernant la garde des enfants 31/03/1992 (92/241/CEE).

See also: <https://www.grandirabruxelles.be/index.php/77-2/>

2. ROBERT E. and GODIN I., 2019.

HUYNEN, P., 2020.

3. In the questionnaire for the childcare centres, there was no definition of the notion of "specific need".

4. "Familiarisation is a series of encounters between a child, his/her family and professionals ready to welcome them in a new environment" (ONE, La familiarisation). It takes place in the presence of the parent, before the actual first day of care.

5. The outskirts include: Asse, Beersel, Dilbeek, Drogenbos, Grimbergen, Hoeilart, Kraainem, Linkebeek, Machelen, Meise, Merchtem, Overijse, St-Pieters-Leeuw, St-Genesius-Rode, Tervuren, Vilvoorde, Wemmel, Wezembeek-Oppem and Zaventem.

6. The "child" questionnaire proposed the following: "no specific need", "social need", "medical need", "youth support" and "other".

ABSTRACTS

This fact sheet includes the main results of a survey of French-speaking childcare centres in Brussels between the months of July and October 2018. It deals with the registration procedures and criteria, the organisation of the first days of childcare, the characteristics of users and the financial

Cette *fact sheet* reprends les principaux résultats d'une enquête réalisée, entre les mois de juillet et d'octobre 2018, auprès de milieux d'accueil de la petite enfance francophones à Bruxelles. Elle aborde successivement les modalités et critères d'inscription, l'organisation de

l'entrée et des premiers jours d'accueil, les caractéristiques du public et la contribution financière des parents.

Deze *factsheet* stelt de belangrijkste resultaten voor van een enquête die tussen juli en oktober 2018 werd afgenomen bij Franstalige kinderopvang in Brussel. De auteurs bespreken achtereenvolgens de inschrijvingsmodaliteiten en -criteria, de organisatie van de instap en van de eerste opvangdagen, de kenmerken van het publiek en de financiële bijdrage van de ouders.

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Mots-clés: institutions, enseignement, jeunesse, inégalités sociales, santé, politiques sociales

Trefwoorden: instellingen, onderwijs, jongeren, sociale ongelijkheden, gezondheid, sociaal beleid

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AUTHORS

PERRINE HUMBLET

Perrine Humblet has a doctorate in public health sciences and is an honorary professor at École de Santé publique at Université libre de Bruxelles. She conducts research and assessments on early childhood policies and programmes, as well as on the social determinants of health. She is currently an expert for the Observatoire de l'enfant of the Commission communautaire française in Brussels and previously for international organisations (European Commission, OECD, UNESCO).

phumblet[at]ulb.ac.be

EMMANUELLE ROBERT

Emmanuelle Robert has a doctorate in public health sciences and is a researcher at École de Santé publique at Université libre de Bruxelles. Her main fields of investigation concern epidemiology in the area of mother/child health (breastfeeding, infant immunisation, etc.).

emrobert[at]ulb.ac.be

PHILIPPE HUYNEN

Philippe Huynen is a sociologist with a solid background in computer science. He has been working for more than 35 years in the research sector, in a university environment (UCLouvain, Université Saint-Louis) as well as in the private sector (with his company, Spirit of Data). His skills in methodology and quantitative analysis have led him to work in fields as diverse as health, social housing, the automotive and banking sectors, justice, mobility in Brussels, etc.

p.huynen[at]spirit-of-data.be

GAËLLE AMERIJCKX

Gaëlle Amerijckx is a sociologist with a doctorate in public health sciences. She is a research associate at Observatoire de la Santé et du Social de Bruxelles, and works in particular on the evaluation of Brussels public policies in relation to social and health issues. Her previous research, carried out at university, focused on an analysis of policies regarding 0-12 year olds (at Brussels, Belgian and European levels) and on welfare factors for young people in Brussels (under age 8) in relation to socio-educational institutions. She is also an expert for Observatoire de

l'enfant of the Commission communautaire française.
gamerijckx[at]ccc.brussels

STÉPHANE AUJEAN

Stéphane Aujean is a sociologist. As a senior attaché at the Commission communautaire française of the Brussels-Capital Region, he coordinates the Observatoire de l'enfant, a research and action programme on childhood policies in Brussels, and in particular on childcare policies. The Observatoire is intended mainly for professionals and public authorities, providing them with knowledge, services, information, the results of its research and recommendations for reflection and debate. To this end, the Observatoire publishes the magazine *Grandir à Bruxelles* (<http://www.grandirabruxelles.be>).
saujean[at]cocof.irisnet.be

BENJAMIN WAYENS

Benjamin Wayens is a geographer and coordinates the interdisciplinary network of studies on Brussels (EBxl) at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He is also the deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Brussels Studies*. Although his research on Brussels is very eclectic, he has nonetheless developed in-depth expertise in quantitative urban observation and analysis of the logic which guides the location of activities. He teaches Applied Geography and Geomarketing and has been conducting research in this field for 20 years, with the retail trade and school systems in Brussels and Belgium as his preferred fields of study.
bwayens[at]ulb.ac.be