

# Belgium<sup>1</sup>

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N.B. Belgium is a federal state.

For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the Leave Network website). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members](#) page on the Leave Network website.

## **1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents**

### **a. Maternity leave (*Moederschapsverlof/Congé de maternité*) (responsibility of the Federal Department of Employment)**

*Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- 15 weeks for employees – a woman can start to take her leave six weeks before her baby is due; one week before the due date and nine weeks after delivery are obligatory.
- 12 weeks for self-employed mothers; one week before the due date and two weeks after delivery are obligatory.
- Unemployed mothers have the same rights as employees.

*Payment and funding*

- Employees in the private sector: the first month at 82 per cent of earnings, plus 75 per cent for the remaining weeks with an upper limit of €142.5 per day. Statutory civil servants receive their full salary, and contractual civil servants are paid as per the private sector.

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- Self-employed mothers receive €499.54 per week (or €249.77 per week when taken part-time).
- Unemployed mothers: in the first month they receive unemployment benefits + 19.5 per cent of previous earnings with an upper limit of €142.5 per day, after which they receive unemployment benefits + 15 per cent of previous earnings with an upper limit of €142.5 per day.
- Funded through Federal Health Insurance, financed by employer and employee contributions and general taxation.

#### *Flexibility in use*

- The start of Maternity leave can be delayed until one week before the birth.
- Up to two weeks of post-natal leave can be taken as 'free days,' thereby spreading Maternity leave over a longer period and facilitating a more gradual re-entry into paid employment.
- Self-employed mothers are entitled to nine weeks of optional leave to be taken in blocks of seven days during the 36 weeks following birth. Each week of optional leave can be converted into two weeks of part-time leave, where women want or need to go back to work on a part-time basis (for up to 18 weeks).

#### *Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)*

- 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 three of those are compulsory. The allowance is also limited to a fixed amount (€485/week) which is lower than the upper limit set for employees (€715/week).
- 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.

*Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother*

- Mothers who need the full six weeks of pre-natal leave for health reasons can take an extra week of post-natal leave, i.e. their Maternity leave is extended to 16 weeks. However, the remainder of their pre-natal leave is not added onto their post-natal leave if they fall sick.
- In the case of multiple births, the length of leave increases by two weeks. Maternity leave can also be extended if the baby is hospitalised following birth.
- 'Social' Parental leave is provided in the case of the death of the mother, or if the mother remains in hospital (for longer than a week after delivery) and if the baby is at home. Then the father or co-parent is granted the remaining weeks of the Maternity leave, and paid 60 per cent of his earnings in addition to the payment of the mother's Maternity leave benefit.

**b. Paternity / co-parental leave (*Vaderschapsverlof/Congé de paternité*) (responsibility of the Federal Department of Employment)**

*Length of leave*

- Ten working days.<sup>2</sup>

*Payment and funding*

- 100 per cent of earnings for the first three days paid by the employer, then 82 per cent of earnings for the remaining period paid by Health Insurance – there is an upper limit of €120.52 per day as of March 2020.
- Funded in the same way as Maternity leave.

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<sup>2</sup> Belgium was one of the first OECD countries to introduce Paternity leave (two days in 1961, with guaranteed pay by the employers – extended to three days in 1963).

### *Flexibility in use*

- Fathers and co-parents (i.e. same-sex partners) can take these two weeks during the first four months following the birth of their child.

### *Regional or local variations in leave policy*

- Civil servants in the Walloon region receive 15 days, based on their Collective Agreement.

### *Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)*

- All male employees are eligible, but unemployed and self-employed fathers are not.
- No differences exist for same-sex couples. Their labour market position determines their eligibility, as opposed to the gender composition of the couple, or their marital status.
- For non-citizens/immigrant workers, their labour market status is what determines their eligibility. One needs to be working as a Belgian employee when the child is born.

### *Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent) or delegation of leave to person other than the mother*

- None.

## **c. Parental leave (*Ouderschapsverlof/Congé parental*) (responsibility of the Federal Department of Employment and Social Affairs)**

### *Length of leave (before and after birth)*

- Four months per parent. Leave is an individual entitlement.

### *Payment and funding*

- €750.33 per month after taxation (€834.90 before taxation).
- Funded in the same way as Maternity leave.

### *Flexibility in use*

- Leave may be taken full-time, part-time (50 per cent) over eight months, one day per week (20 per cent) over 20 months, or a half day a week (10 per cent).

- For part-time leave, the total duration of eight months can be split into blocks of time (with a minimum of two 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 can also be combined as follows: one month at full-time + two months at part-time + five months at one-fifth.
- Leave may be taken up until the child's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Both parents can take leave at the same time.

*Regional or local variations in leave policy*

- 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 (see section 1d). 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. This additional benefit payment is highest for employees in the social profit sector, namely an additional €504.29 net per month for employees taking a full-time break (for Flemish care leave or, in the case of Time Credit, for care reasons); while for employees in the private sector it is €183.27 net per month (for Parental leave or, in the case of Time Credit, for the reason the leave was taken). The encouragement benefit is not foreseen in case of a 10% parental leave.

*Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)*

- All employees who have completed one year's employment with their present employer (during the last 15 months) and who have, or expect to have, parental responsibility for a child (in practice, this can refer to: the child's biological mother and/or biological father; the person with whom the child has paternal filiation; the wife or partner of the biological mother of the child; the adoptive parents). Otherwise, the employer can grant this benefit by agreement with the employee. 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. Their labour market position determines their eligibility, not the gender composition of the couple, or their marital status.
- 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 per cent leave is only possible with the agreement of the employer.

*Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents*

- As the leave is allocated per child, the length of leave is increased for multiple births (e.g. each parent of twins gets eight months of leave).
- Parents of disabled children can take leave until their child's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.
- The benefit is higher for single parents: €1,233.52 per month after taxation (€1,372.56 before taxation).

*Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)*

- Employers may postpone granting leave for up to six months 'where business cannot cope.' In addition, the request for leave must be addressed to the employer a minimum of two months and a maximum of three months in advance.

#### **d. Childcare leave or career breaks**

- There is a Time Credit system (*Tijdskrediet/Crédit temps*), which applies to employees in the private sector; and a rather similar scheme – 'career breaks' – applies in the public sector. All eligible workers have a basic right to one paid year of this type of leave over their working lives, taken full-time, or 24 months taken part-time or 60 months taken at one-fifth time.
- Leave taken under the Time Credit/career break system can 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 approximately €500 per month after taxation. The bonus for residents of the Flemish community taking Parental leave also applies to this type of leave.
- Employees need two years of previous employment with the same employer in order to be granted payment. There is a guarantee in principle to return to the workplace following a career break or Time Credit period.
- For each company, there is a five per cent threshold of employees who can use the Time Credit system at any one time: priorities are settled within the company according to certain rules (e.g. priority in the case of care for a severely ill family member). There is a relative increase of this threshold, corresponding to the number of employees (one more unit per 10 employees in a business with more than 50 employees).

- Payments to Time Credit users are funded by the federal social security system, which is financed by contributions from employers and employees, and by the federal government.
- Collective agreements negotiated at sectoral or company level are permitted to extend the Time Credit period up to 51 months for care purposes. This maximum length of leave is applicable regardless of whether the leave is being taken full- or part-time.
- All employees can trace their personal account of Time Credit/career break in an online e-government tool: Break@Work ([www.breakatwork.be](http://www.breakatwork.be)).

## **e. Other employment-related measures**

### *Adoption leave and pay*

- The same regulations apply as those for parents having biological children, except that the Parental leave may be taken up until a child's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### *Time off for the care of dependants*

- Employees may take up to ten days of leave per year for 'urgent reasons' (*force majeure*) in order to deal with unexpected or sudden circumstances. The legislation defines 'urgent' as making it 'obligatory and necessary' to be present at home instead of being at work (e.g. such as an illness, accident or the hospitalisation of a member of the household). There is no entitlement to payment.
- For a severely ill family member (medical care leave), an employee can take full-time leave ranging from one to 12 months (and up to 24 months in the case of part-time leave). It must, however, be taken in blocks of one to three months. Benefits paid are under the same conditions as for Parental leave.
- Employees may also take up to two months of leave, full-time or part-time, for palliative care (to be taken in blocks of one month). Benefits paid are the same as for Parental leave.
- Foster parents may take six days of leave to allow them to fulfil administrative and legal requirements, and this is also paid as per Parental leave.

### *Flexible working*

- No statutory regulation. In Flanders, however, some firms experiment with flexible contracts adapted to the living conditions of parents with joint physical custody. These parents have one week with more working hours and one week with fewer working hours, depending on whether the children reside with them or

not. The system is not used in all economic sectors and receiving such a contract depends on the goodwill of the employer.

#### *Career savings account*

- Each employee can voluntarily save 'time rights' for use later in the career (time for time principle). 'Time rights' that can be saved are (1) voluntary overtime (up to 100 hours) and (2) conventional days off (not official days off). Time saved in the system can be taken later in the career. The system is dependent of the sector in which the employee works.

#### *Specific provision for (breast)feeding*

- None.

## **2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy**

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Belgium is 51 months (including full use of the basic entitlement to Time Credit), but most of this is low paid; leave paid at a high rate ends after Maternity and Paternity leave at around four months after birth. There is an entitlement to ECEC from 2.5 years of age: from this age, children can attend nursery school for 31.5 hours per week during term time. So, there is technically no gap between the end of Parental leave/Time Credit and an ECEC entitlement, but a substantial gap of more than two years between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement. Levels of attendance at formal services are above EU and OECD averages, with universal coverage for children over three years of age.

## **3. Changes in policy since April 2019 (including proposals currently under discussion)**

The federal government introduced a 'career-savings account' (5 March 2017) which became fully operational in 2019. This measure allows workers to accumulate 'vacation time' and/or 'remuneration' and use them for a temporary career break, to facilitate the transition between two jobs, or to top-up pension benefits. The system came into force on 1 February 2018, but in order to be activated and implemented, this measure must be translated into sectoral collective agreements by the social partners.

In 2019, an increased flexibility of Parental leave was introduced with the new option of taking it on a 1/10 basis, allowing parents to take a half-day off work every second week (for instance, to care for their

children on Wednesday afternoons, when there is no school). This option concerns full-time employees only.

From 1 May 2019, self-employed people are entitled to ten days' Paternity leave within four months of their child's birth. Self-employed people may take this leave in whole days or half days. The allowance amounts to a total of €816.30. Those who choose to take eight days (or fewer) will receive 15 free service vouchers.

## **Policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic up to end June 2020**

### *Childcare and schools*

- March 14: For daycare (until 2,5 years), all day-care facilities closed. There was an exception for children of parents in care professions (key workers) and children with a difficult situation at home. Keyworkers are defined using a list of sectors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This list contains the following sectors: Legislative and executive powers, medical facilities, including preventive health services, institutions for care, reception and assistance for the elderly, for minors, for the disabled and for the vulnerable, asylum and migration services, including asylum reception and detention in the context of forced return, integration and integration services, telecom infrastructure and services and digital infrastructure, the media, journalists and communication services, waste collection and treatment services, emergency zones, services of private and special security, police services, services of medical assistance and emergency medical assistance, defense, civil Protection, intelligence and security services, judiciary and the professions associated with it: courthouses, magistracy and correctional institutions, youth institutions, electronic supervision, court experts, bailiffs, court staff, translator-interpreters, lawyers, the Council of State and administrative courts, international institutions and diplomatic missions, emergency planning and crisis management services, the General Administration of Customs and Excise, crèches and schools, with a view to organizing childcare, universities and colleges, taxi services, public transport services, airports and essential services supporting air transport, air traffic control and planning, rail transport, passenger transport and logistics, suppliers and carriers of fuels, and suppliers of firewood, businesses and companies involved in the food chain, the food industry, agriculture and horticulture, fertilizer production and fishing, production chains that cannot be shut down for technical reasons, packaging industry associated with the authorized activities, pharmacies and pharmaceutical industry, hotels, urgent vehicle breakdown and repair services, services essential for urgent repairs that present a safety or hygiene risk, postal services, funeral parlors and crematoriums, public services and infrastructure that play a role in the essential services of the authorized categories, water management, inspection and control services, social secretariats, emergency centers, weather and weather services, social

- March 12: For toddler schools (from 2,5 years onwards), all toddler schools closed. Lessons (activities) were given online. On June 2, toddler schools reopened. There is no limit on the class sizes.
- March 12: All primary and secondary schools closed. Lessons were given online.
- March 20: All universities closed. Lessons were given online until the end of the academic year.
- May 18: Schools reopened partially. Primary schools reopened for years 1, 2 and 6 (children of 6, 7 and 12 years). Secondary schools reopened for years 1 and 6 (teenagers of 12/13 and 17/18 years). Only classes of 10 pupils were allowed (4 m<sup>2</sup> per pupil, 8 m<sup>2</sup> for teachers).
- June 8: Primary schools go to 50 per cent capacity (for all classes). Pupils alternate in school attendance and combine this with 50 per cent online teaching. The requirement of 4m<sup>2</sup> per pupil is abandoned. Secondary schools: Attendance for years 2 and 4 (14 and 16 years) for 2 to 4 days. Attendance for years 3 and 5 (15 and 17 years) for (at least) 1 day per week. Special education: possibility to reopen according to the needs of the pupils.

#### *Parental leave*

- Parents in a regular system of leave (Parental leave or Time Credit) can suspend their leave until August 31<sup>st</sup> with the purpose of being employed as a key worker in a vital sector. The suspension is voluntary and cannot be obliged by the employer. The suspension is a temporary suspension. The leave continues after the parent stops their employment in a vital sector.
- A special system of 'Corona Parental leave' was established May 14. The system is in place until September 30. It concerns a new and additional system that does not breach the existing rights of parents. The age limit for children is 12 years or 21 years in case of children with a handicap. Entitlement starts when a parent is at least 1 month employed. Leave can be taken for 1/2 and 1/5 of the time. Full time leave and 1/10 leave are not foreseen in the Corona Parental leave system. In order to be entitled to the 1/2 leave, full time employment

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security payouts, energy sector (gas, electricity and oil): production, transmission, distribution, market, water sector: drinking water, purification, extraction, distribution, chemical industry, production of medical instruments, financial sector: banks, electronic payment systems and all services useful for this purpose, trading in securities, financial market infrastructure, foreign trade, services responsible for the supply of cash, money transport, cash handlers and financial reporting between banks, ground stations of space systems, production of radioisotopes, scientific research vital, international transport, ports, nuclear and radiological sector.

is required. For the 1/5 leave, a minimum employment of  $\frac{3}{4}$  is required. Biological parents, foster parents and adoption parents are all entitled to take the leave. Both parents can take the leave. Employers need to agree with the leave. They can refuse the leave. Benefit levels differ according to the sector one is employed in. Since May 16 the corona parental leave has been extended to self-employed workers in order to take care of a child under the age of 12 or a disabled child. This parental leave can be taken until the end of August for the time being. The corona parental leave for self-employed workers cannot be combined with the replacement income 'bridging benefit' (a monthly financial benefit).

#### *Other measures for parents and other carers*

- From 1 July 2020, private sector employers will be able to obtain a 'Corona Time Credit' for a period of 1 to 6 months. This is a new time credit that will coexist with the regular time credit that already exists. In the context of the economic difficulties which may result from the coronavirus crisis, the corona time credit will enable employers of companies which are recognized as undergoing restructuring or in difficulty to offer workers a partial half-time or one-fifth break in order to temporarily reduce their working time. The periods of interruption taken under the Corona Time Credit will not be deducted from the maximum duration of the regular time credit. During the period of the corona-time credit, when all the conditions are met, the worker will be entitled to an allowance (same amount as the regular time credit).
- In addition to this new measure, there will also be the end-of-career Corona Time Credit. It will allow workers who are at least 55 years old and who have at least 25 years of paid employment to obtain the break benefits if the starting date of their reduced working time is during a period of recognition of the company as a company undergoing restructuring or in difficulty.
- Between March 16<sup>th</sup> and June 2<sup>nd</sup> 'telework' or 'work at home' was the norm for all employees from non-vital sectors. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the obligation to work at home was changed to advise to continue telework if possible.
- If 'telework' was not possible, employees can be put on 'technical unemployment' which is a special unemployment measure limited in time. Employees receive 70 per cent of their last wage (with a maximum of €2754.76, gross monthly salary = maximum €1928.33 net benefit).
- When a worker needs to stay at home to take care of children or sick family members, technical unemployment cannot be granted. In that case, yearly holiday needs to be used, or Corona Parental leave or

unpaid leave. One can also use the system of 'family leave' which gives (yearly) 10 days paid leave to take care of children or sick dependents.

- Periods of leave due to 'technical unemployment' (see above) or disability are considered as days worked in order to calculate the period of maternity leave after childbirth and the yearly holiday.
- COVID-19 is recognized as an occupational disease. Employees from the health sector are entitled to a compensation in case they become ill from COVID-19.
- A volunteer fund pays a compensation for the volunteers who worked outside home during the lockdown and that died between March 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup>.
- All hours worked during quarter 2 by students are not taken into account in their yearly credit of student hours (475 hours per year). Potentially, this can have an effect on the child benefits of their parents and the taxes paid by their parents next year.
- Some financial institutions allowed home loan payments to be suspended. In the Flemish community, people who received 'technical unemployment' (see above) are entitled to a special water and energy benefit of €202.68.
- Since March 17<sup>th</sup>, self-employed workers who have to interrupt their activity because of COVID-19 can benefit from the financial benefit. This is done within the framework of the 'bridging law'. The monthly financial benefit for the month of March and/or April 2020 were €1,614.10 (with dependents) or €1,291.69 (without dependents).
- A new 'consumption cheque' was created that can be issued voluntarily by companies to their employees. The consumption cheque (called 'horeca cheque' in the media) resembles the existing 'meal checks' and 'eco cheques' and represented a tax-free benefit for employees. The cheque cannot be an income replacement (it needs to be a bonus) and is limited to €300 maximum. The cheques can be issued until December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.
- An additional surplus of 120 voluntary overtime hours is made available for employees in vital sectors (see definition above). The total credit of voluntary overtime is therefore raised from 100 hours to 220 hours. Employees in vital sectors pay less taxes on these hours. The period in which the extra hours are worked is limited from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 to June 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.
- Between May 30<sup>th</sup> and June 17<sup>th</sup>, *new* wage garnishments were suspended. Potentially this measure will be extended to July 17<sup>th</sup> 2020. Exceptions were wage garnishments for failure to pay child support, criminal cases, tax or social debts due to fraud.
- In sum, the main measures taken are: Confinement at home and Physical distancing, Telework, Temporary unemployment benefit, Monthly financial benefit for self-employed workers, Day-care for

children from key-workers, On-line education from home, Corona Parental leave (since May 14<sup>th</sup>), Corona Time Credit (since July 1<sup>st</sup>).

## 4. Uptake of leave

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. The main source of information is the federal agency in charge (RVA/ONEM<sup>4</sup>), but for a more detailed account, see 'Documentation/Statistics.' The actual number of users according to the type of leave is especially blurred by the variations in the duration of leave. An increasing number of employees opt for one day per week leave, especially among those older workers taking a Time Credit/career break to facilitate the final years of their formal career. This also holds, to a lesser extent, for the uptake of Parental leave, especially among fathers who continue to work but who 'soften' their involvement via this one day per week leave. Such fathers are registered as leave-takers for 20 months (instead of four). The drawback of this flexibility is that it keeps users much longer in the annual statistics. We therefore invite readers to be very careful in their interpretation of the statistics we provide in this country note.

### a. Maternity leave

A period of Maternity leave is obligatory for employees. There is 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.

### b. Paternity leave

In the private sector, 55,314 (2017) and 54,422 (2018)<sup>5</sup> fathers used the Paternity leave for four or more days (there is no information about fathers using three – or fewer – days of paid leave). On average in 2018, they took 9.82 days of paid leave for the birth of their child (up to a maximum of 10 days). There is no information for civil servants. For several years, the number of users and the duration of their Paternity leave have remained relatively stable.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: [www.rva.be](http://www.rva.be) / [www.onem.be](http://www.onem.be)

<sup>5</sup> RIZIV/INAMI data, not yet available for 2019.

### **c. Parental leave**

There is no information on what proportion of employees are *not* eligible for Parental leave. In 2019, 68,688 employees used Parental leave, an increase of 32 per cent compared to 2010 (51,944). Obviously, most people taking Parental leave are women, although the proportion of fathers among all leave-takers is growing. The number of men taking Parental leave increased from 13,891 in 2010 to 22,211 in 2019.

In 2010, 38,053 women used Parental leave and in 2019, that number rose to 46,447. The proportion of men taking Parental leave also increased during this period (from 27 to 32 per cent). Part-time leave options are the most popular, especially among men. More than three-quarters (78 per cent) of male leave-takers use the one-fifth time option, suggesting that it is predominantly used as a flexible measure. In 2019, the 1/10 parental leave option was taken by 589 men and 858 women. The possibility of combining two or more types of leave (e.g. mixing some full-time with some part-time leave) is rarely used: it is taken on average by about one per cent of men and four per cent of women.<sup>6</sup>

### **d. Other employment-related measures**

In 2019, 117,271 employees in the private sector made use of the Time Credit system, mostly via the part-time formula; in comparison, only 4,204 individuals took a full-time break (507 men versus 3,698 women). Part-time use of Time Credit is predominantly used as an end-of-career measure (around 54 per cent). Men predominantly take Time Credit as end-of-career leave (N = 34,056), while women are more equally divided between end-of-career leave (N = 29,135) and part-time general leave (N = 32,431). Overall, with the new legislation reducing the appeal of the Time Credit scheme, the number of users has decreased by 28 per cent since 2015 (when N = 149,268). In 2019, 54,701 civil servants used the career break system (38,820 of them being women). If men are using the career break system, they generally use more of the end-of-career measure (78.5 per cent, compared to 63.5 per cent for women). Compared to 2018 (when N = 60,246), the number of users has decreased by 5,545 units. The most significant reason for this decrease is the tightening of the rules around the factors permitting an individual to take leave. A second reason is that Flemish civil servants and teachers can only use the Flemish care credit system (and no longer have access to the federal career break system). The decrease on the federal level is compensated at the Flemish level, so

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<sup>6</sup> See:  
<https://www.rva.be/nl/documentatie/statistieken/cijfers/loopbaanonderbreking-tijdscrediet-en-thematische-verloven/thematische-verloven>

that there is no decrease in total in the public sector, aside from the decrease caused by the more stringent regulations around an individual's eligibility for taking leave.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.tijd.be/politiek-economie/belgie/algemeen/belg-neemt-fors-minder-tijds krediet/10098519.html>