

# Foster care in Belgium

Structure, politics & research

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  - a small, but densely populated, and
  - federalised state
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- Foster care in Wallonia
- Research on foster care

# Small but densely populated

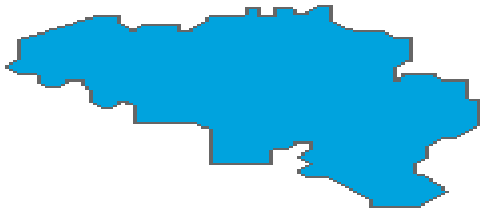
- 32.545 square kilometres
- Densely populated
  - Belgium:
    - 10.511.382
    - 2.248.706 below 20yrs.
  - Flanders:
    - 6.078.600
    - 1.348.899 below 20yrs.
  - Wallonia:
    - 3.413.978
    - 835.018 below 20yrs.
  - Brussels Capital region:
    - 1.018.804
    - 244.789 below 20yrs.



# A federalised state

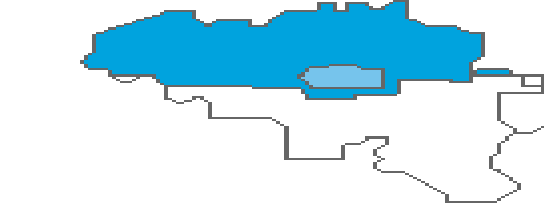
**BELGIE**

**DE FEDERALE STAAT**

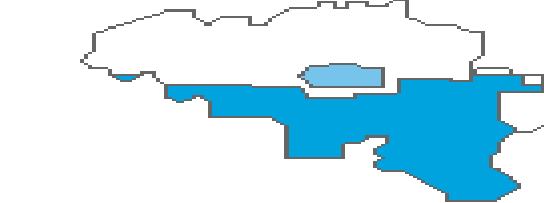


**DE GEMEENSCHAPPEN**

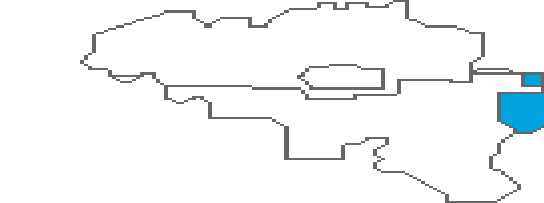
**DE VLAAMSE GEMEENSCHAP**



**DE FRANSE GEMEENSCHAP**

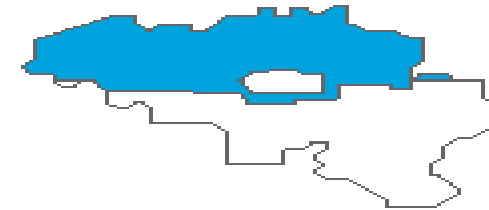


**DE DUITSTALIGE GEMEENSCHAP**

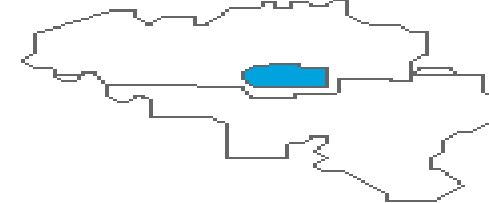


**DE GEWESTEN**

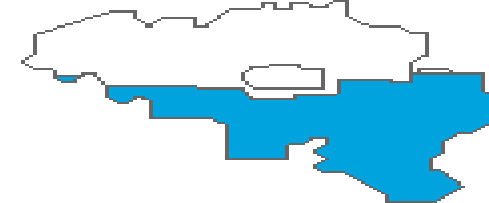
**HET VLAAMSE GEWEST**



**HET BRUSSELS HOOFDSTEDELIJKE GEWEST**



**HET WAAELSE GEWEST**



# Implications for the (foster) care system

- Welfare is Flemish Community matter
- Legislation is federal matter, e.g.
  - Child Protection Laws
  - Juvenile Justice
- Implementation of legislation co-ordinated by the Communities
- Complex realities

# **Foster care in Flanders**



# History and structure

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- Long tradition
- In various fields of care
- In a professional way

# Long tradition

- Before 18<sup>th</sup> century: foster care for orphans, abandoned children,...
- Foster care institutionalised by Child Protection Laws (1912, 1965, 1980), under the patronage of committees
  - protection and child-rearing
  - financial contribution
- Increase of children in foster care after the Second World War
- Since 1950
  - foster care further institutionalised
    - 1953: first family foster care service ('Brussel Accueil Familial – Open Haard')
    - 1973: services subsidized
  - focus on the 'pedagogical project' of foster families
  - professionalisation of foster care



# In various fields of care

- Preventive care system
- Child welfare system
- Care system for people with disabilities
- Mental health care system

# Preventive care system

- Co-ordinated by Child & Family
- Children under 12
- Short-term or long-term
- Always preventive-based
- Various objectives, e.g.
  - crisis situation
  - support families

# Child welfare system

- Measure
  - Committee for Special Youth Care
  - Juvenile court
- Protection (and prevention)
- 0-to-18-years
- Short-term or long-term perspective
- An alternative for residential care
  - not always the first option
  - number of children in foster families equals number of children in residential care

# Care system for people with disabilities

- Co-ordinated by the Agency for the Integration of People with a Disability
- All ages and disabilities
- Short-term or long-term
- Various objectives
  - crisis situation
  - weekend or holiday
  - support families

# Mental health care system



- The case of 'Geel'
  - Saint Dimpna (7<sup>th</sup> century)
  - foster families and community-based care for people with psychiatric problems
  - 360 families, 450 patients
  - pilot projects for children and adolescents
  
- Book: Geel revisited. After centuries of mental rehabilitation. E. Roosens & L. Van de Walle. Preface by Oliver Sacks (Garant, 2007).

# In a professional way

- 25 foster care services across Flanders
- Tasks
  - selection of foster parents
  - matching
  - administration
  - co-ordination and follow-up of the placement
  - coaching and training of foster parents
  - maintaining and optimising contacts with biological parents and family of origin
- Foster Care Federation
  - co-ordinating the services
  - recruiting new foster families
  - legal and political issues
  - bringing foster care into the attention of politicians, professionals and public opinion
  - stimulating research on foster care



# Figures and trends

- Number of people in family foster care
- Type of family foster care placement
- Financial contributions
- Costs

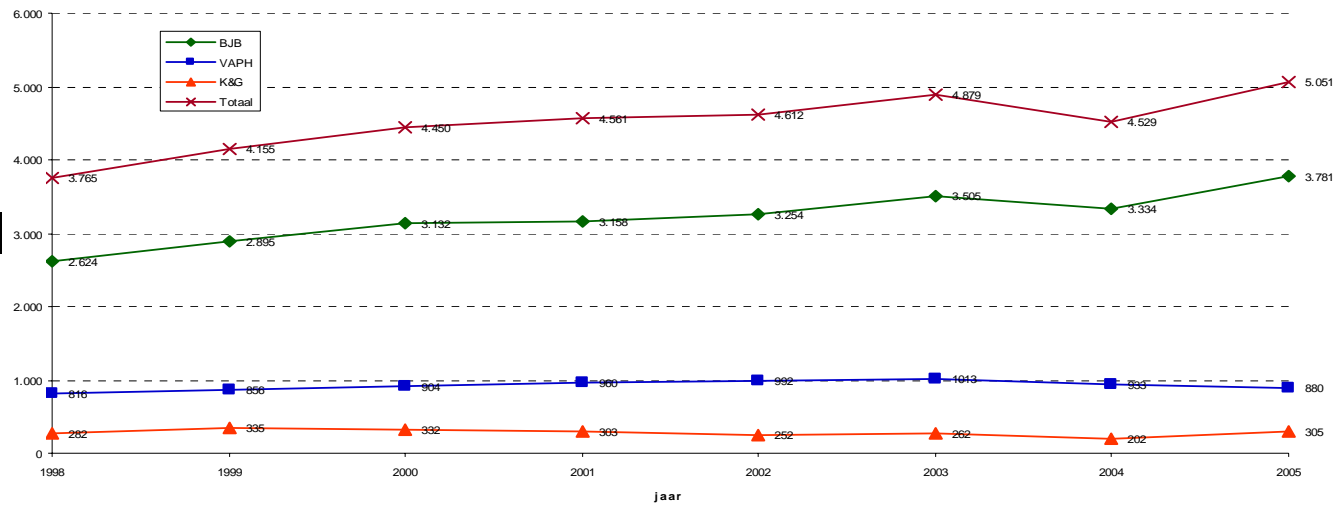


# Number of people in family foster care

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Child welfare	3.781	3.334	3.505	3.254	3.158	3.132	2.895	2.624
People disabilities	880	933	1013	992	960	904	856	816
Child & Family	305	202	262	252	303	332	335	282

# Evolution

Evolutie van het aantal pleegkinderen en pleeggasten in de erkende pleegzorg van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap

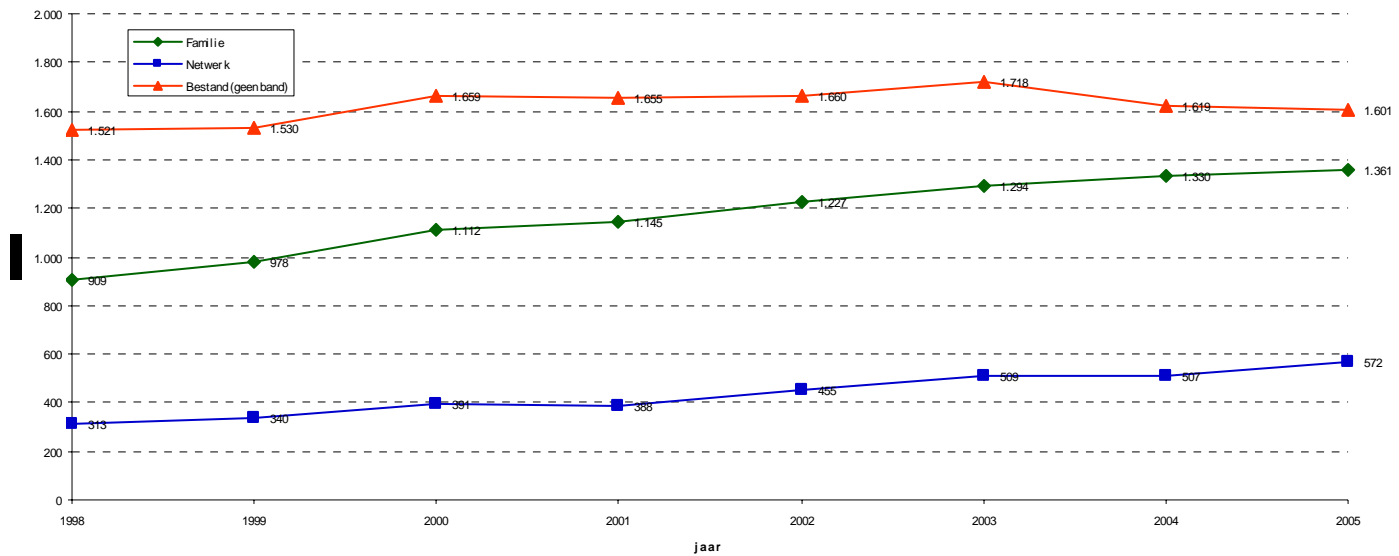


# Type of foster family placement

	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>1998</i>
Family	1.361	1.330	1.294	1.227	1.145	1.112	978	909
Network	572	507	509	455	388	391	340	313
Other	1.601	1.619	1.718	1.660	1.655	1.659	1.530	1.521

# Evolution

Evolutie van het aantal gezinnen in de pleegzorg via erkende plaatsingsdiensten naar de band met de opgenomen kinderen en/of gasten, Vlaamse Gemeenschap



# Financial contribution

- Child welfare:
  - - 12 year: € 15,34 (per day; daily allowance)
  - + 12 year: € 16,70
- People disabilities:
  - 0-3 year
    - mild: € 16,30
    - moderate: € 17,31
    - severe: € 18,31
  - 3-12 year
    - mild: € 17,21
    - moderate: € 18,22
    - severe: € 19,22
  - + 12 year
    - mild: € 18,22
    - moderate: € 19,22
    - severe: € 20,23
  - contribution 100% when person -21 year
- Child & Family:
  - 0-3 year: € 14,13
  - 3-12 year: € 15,06

# Costs (in child welfare system)

- Family foster care services (in 2003)
  - number of cases supported: 2.809
  - total cost: 20.585.742 €
  - one case: 7.328 €
- Residential care (in 2003)
  - number of cases supported: 2.836
  - total cost: 115.724.956 €
  - one case: 40.806 €

# Evolutions in policy

- The stepchild of the child & family welfare system?
  - Global Youth Care Plan (2006): only 2/38 objectives concern family foster care
  - still underestimated by professionals
  - change will come?
  - towards integrative care systems, including family foster care?
- Current problems and issues
  - finding new foster families
  - protecting the rights of foster parents
  - making family foster care more visible
- Initiative
  - European Congress on Foster Care Leuven, September 17-19, 2009

# Evolutions in practice

- Towards different forms of foster care
  - ‘orthopedagogical’ foster care (child welfare)
  - crisis foster care
  - support families
- New target groups
  - unaccompanied young minors
- Current problems (related to breakdowns)
  - criteria for placement
  - matching issue



# Foster care in Wallonia



# About the systems

- Analogous to systems in Flanders (one system until 1980)
- Foster care
  - child welfare system
  - care system for people with disabilities
  - (preventive care system)
  - mental health care system

# Mental health care system



- Centre Hospitalier Spécialisé à Lierneux
  - Service Hospitalier de Soins en Famille d'Accueil ~ Geel
  - since 1884 family foster care and community-based care for people with psychiatric problems and mental disabilities
  - > 80 foster families, about 130 people (all ages)

# Foster care

- 'Services de Placement Familial' (15)
- Foster Care Federation
- 1924 people in foster care
  - welfare system
  - people with disabilities
- number of minors in residential care higher than number of minors in foster care

# Overview of research



# Some remarks before

- There is not so much research on family foster care
  - poor input from government
  - neglected by the academic world?
  - notwithstanding many efforts by the Foster Care Federation and some services
- Most studies are based on small groups
- No well-elaborated research lines

# Grouping the studies

- Characteristics of foster families
- Characteristics of foster children
  - emotional and behavioural problems
  - foster-parent and foster-child interactions
- Perspectives on foster care
  - children
  - foster parents
- Outcomes
  - foster care in the preventive care system
  - factors predicting breakdown
  - the case of 'Geel'
- Specific issues
  - kinship foster care in ethnic minority groups
  - unaccompanied young minors


# Conclusion

- “However, as yet **no large scale, systematic,** scientific research has been undertaken in this field in Flanders. There is also a striking lack of **long-term outcome** studies on foster care.” ([www.federatiepleegzorg.be](http://www.federatiepleegzorg.be))



# **Towards a research agenda**



- 
- Matching issue
  - Long-term follow-up of placements
  - Outcomes of foster care in child welfare
  - Implementation of ‘orthopedagogical’ foster care project
  - Implementation of integrative care systems in child welfare