



Family support for young families in Brussels

Brochure for Parents

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1 Introduction

A wide range of support services and organisations are available for (future) parents in Brussels. Are parents aware of the range of family support services and do they use them?

The Flemish Community Commission (VGC) therefore funded research into the accessibility of family support in Brussels.

The research was carried out by the Centre for Family Studies (Odisee). At the end of 2018, we questioned **277 future parents and parents with children aged between 0 and 6 years in Brussels**. We also interviewed **31 staff at 20 Brussels-based initiatives**.

This brochure provides an overview of the experiences and expectations of (future) parents.



(Source: BISA.brussels)

2 Which parents participated in the study?

Mainly '**mothers** with a child aged between 0 and 6 years' shared their experiences and expectations. The group of (future) fathers was small (7%). One quarter of all the respondents were expecting a child.

Most of the parents are part of a two-parent family with their partner, are well educated and are in work.



Over half of the parents were born in Belgium (63.7%) and have lived in Brussels for more than five years (73.3%).

Almost half the parents (48.5%) have a father or mother with a **migration background** and almost half (45.5%) of the parents speak **several languages** in their family.

There are a great many low-skilled parents, jobseekers and parents experiencing financial difficulties. They are less strongly represented in the group of parents that participated in the study. The conversations with professionals in the field who work with vulnerable (future) parents on a daily basis confirmed and supplemented the experiences and expectations of this group of parents.

3 Are parents aware of the range of support services?

Most parents (77.4%) receive support from family, friends or other people in their immediate circle. They often talk with these people about the arrival of their child, parenthood and parenting of their children.

Three-quarters of the parents (75.7%) say that these people from their immediate circle are suited to tell them about help and support initiatives. Over half of the parents consider written and electronic channels (e.g. brochure, website) (63.9%) or services and professionals (52.1%) to be suitable channels to inform them about the range available.

Around half of the (future) parents (53.8%) say that they were **not informed** about help and support initiatives. Awareness and use of the family support services varies greatly from service to service.



The following pages contain information about the awareness and use of the services available in Brussels in various areas, such as healthcare, education and childcare, etc.

The boxes marked ‘[Where can you go?](#)’ give a few examples of Brussels services and organisations that can support you.

3.1 Healthcare

Three quarters or more parents are aware of and have already used a: GP, gynaecologist, midwife, maternity department, paediatrician, health insurance provider.



Other professionals who offer support during pregnancy, at or shortly after the birth, such as maternity assistance, are less well known to parents and used less frequently.

[Where can you go?](#)

A dashed blue box containing the text "Where can you go?" with a magnifying glass icon. Below the text are two logos: "vollemaan" (expertisecentrum kraamsorg) and "AWARELLE" (VZW JAAR). Three dots are visible to the right of the logos.

3.2 Education and childcare

One-third to around half of the parents know someone from school, the CLB (Centre for Student Guidance) or PMS (Centre for Psycho-Medical-Social Assistance). Two-thirds (66.5%) know of a childcare professional (e.g. a child-minder or a childcare worker) but only one-third (37.8%) of the parents has actually used their services.

[Where can you go?](#)

A dashed blue box containing the text "Where can you go?" with a magnifying glass icon. Below the text are three logos: "kinderopvang in Brussel", "CLB", and "CENTRES PMS PSYCHO-MÉDICO-SOCIAUX". Three dots are visible to the right of the logos.

3.3 Social services and assistance

Most services offering financial, material, social, practical or other support (social services), the services responsible for youth support or psychological assistance are often not well known. These include the services for family care and additional home care, Wijkgezondheidscentra (WGC - community health centres), Centrum voor Kinderzorg en Gezinsondersteuning (CKG - childcare and family support centre), Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk (CAW - general welfare centre), Centrum Integrale Gezinszorg (CIG - integral family care centre), Centrum Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg (CGG - mental healthcare centre). A minority of parents have called upon these services.

The public social welfare centres (OCMW/CPAS) and psychologists are better known: over half of the parents said they were familiar with them (67.2% and 77.3%). Over a quarter of the parents have already called upon a psychologist (27.1%). The use of the OCMW/CPAS is far lower (4.8%).



3.4 Preventive family support

Various initiatives are available in Brussels that support parents with their (future) parenthood or parenting children. These initiatives are known to less than half of the parents and a small group of parents have called upon their services. Around a quarter of the parents have visited Baboes, the only initiative with four locations in Brussels.



3.5 The Brussels clinics

In Brussels, you can visit a clinic of Kind & Gezin (K&G) or a clinic of the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE). They monitor the physical and psychosocial health of young children, they provide information and support to parents, etc.

The majority of parents are familiar with a clinic run by Kind & Gezin (K&G) or ONE (83.3%) and have used one or both (80.4%).



There are various reasons why parents use or do not use a clinic. First we describe the reasons why parents use a clinic. Then we describe the reasons why parents do not use a clinic.

Why do parents go to a clinic?

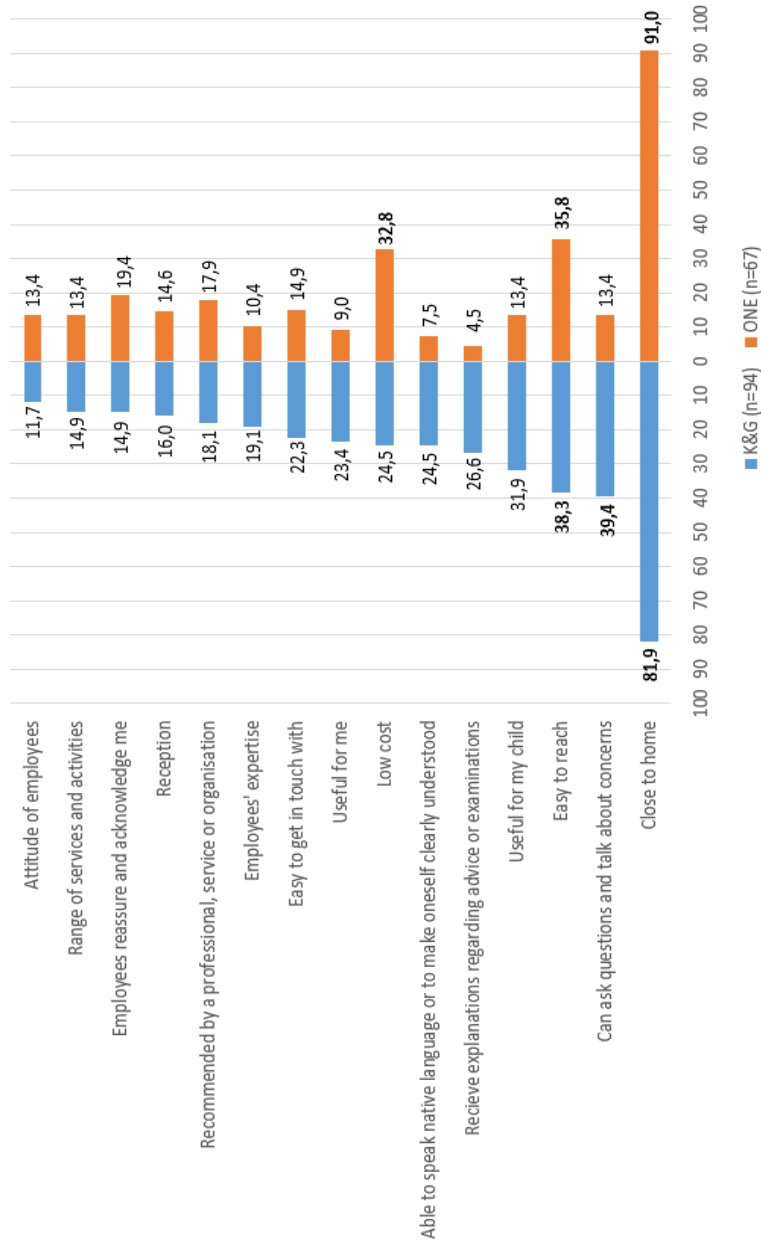
This time it was via the website, but I saw that there was a centre in my neighbourhood that I'll go to in the future. (a parent)

The main reason why parents use a certain clinic is **physical accessibility**. Parents go to the clinic that is nearest or is easily accessible (e.g. on foot). Both parents who use the services of K&G and those who go to ONE give these two reasons in the top 3 (see Graph 1 on the next page).

One-quarter to over one-third of K&G users give **substantive reasons**: 'being able to ask questions and talk about concerns', 'useful for my child', 'receive explanations regarding advice or examinations', 'able to speak native language or able to make oneself clearly understood'. ONE users give these substantive reasons far less often.

It also appears that the **low cost** or free services convince a quarter of K&G users and a third of ONE users to visit these clinics.

Graph 1: Most frequently reported reasons for using a clinic (%)



Why don't parents go to a clinic or to another clinic?

If parents already use a K&G clinic, this is the main reason why they don't use a ONE clinic. The reverse also applies for ONE users. Other reasons for **not using another clinic** (whether K&G or ONE) are: not aware of the services offered by the clinic, concern about language issues and no clinic in the neighbourhood.

It's easier to speak Dutch, so we prefer to go to K&G (and they also know English). (a parent)

For the parents who **do not use a K&G clinic or a ONE clinic**, the most frequent reason is that they are **expecting their first child** (37.8%). Other reasons for not using a clinic are: they do not need one (17.8%), they already use another professional such as a paediatrician (13.3%) or they are unaware of the offer available (13.3%).

I prefer the paediatrician. My children have a lot of health problems that require specific, sustained and regular monitoring and trust. (a parent)

Among the parents who do not use a clinic, one-fifth say that they can rely sufficiently on other sources of support. These include another professional, the informal network, books, magazines, folders, websites, etc.

3.6 Improved awareness

Parents would clearly like the range of support services available to be made better known:

A summary of all local initiatives would be handy. (a parent)

All the possibilities of help could be explained in the maternity department or better still at the first pregnancy appointment ... for example a booklet from the commune that lists all the assistance, associations, groups, activities, etc. that could help parents. Coming from abroad, I found it very hard to find what I was looking for. (a parent)

It would be useful to have a website or a brochure that lists the various places and the initiatives providing help that exist in the Brussels region (I am not aware of many related to the question asked), to be able to find them, and for these initiatives to be spread around Brussels. (a parent)

Improved awareness of the range of support services available:

- various channels: flyers, posters, websites, newsletters, talking to (future) parents in person, etc.
- (more) cooperation with services that parents are aware of and visit: doctors, OCMW/CPAS, hospitals, etc.

4 Is the support accessible?

4.1 Physically easy to reach?

We said earlier that ‘near home’ and ‘easy to reach’ are the most frequent reasons why parents use a particular **clinic**.

Parents who use a ONE clinic usually go to their clinic **on foot** (87.1%). Fewer than half of the K&G users go to their clinic on foot (47.8%).



Within 15 minutes to ONE clinic: 80.7%

Within 15 minutes to K&G clinic: 61%

Parents who go to a K&G clinic in particular think their journey to the clinic is too long (11.4%). Among parents who go to a ONE clinic, this is far less the case (1.7%).

Note: There are far more ONE clinics (80) than K&G clinics (20) in Brussels. The ONE clinics are more widely spread, making them easier to reach.

If we ask parents more generally about what constitutes ‘good help and support’, many of them give ‘**easy to reach**’ as a factor (87.1%). More than two-thirds of the parents (69.9%) said that it is important for the support to be **close to other locations or services** that the family already uses.

Further development and alignment of initiatives at neighbourhood or district level

- accessible services at neighbourhood or district level
- align the range available with initiatives that families already use (e.g. childcare, leisure activities) on physically accessible locations
- experiment with mobile support initiatives (e.g. consultations, meetings)

4.2 Good opening times and consultation schedules?

Half of the K&G users (52.3%) think the **consultation schedules** 'were sometimes easy to get to, but often require adjustments'. Of the K&G users, 11.4% think the consultation schedules 'are often difficult to almost impossible'. In short, two-thirds of the K&G users (63.7%) said they have to make a special effort to get to the appointment.

This applies for three-quarters of parents (75%) who use the ONE clinics: 45% think the consultation schedules were 'sometimes easy to get to, but often require adjustments' while 30% said the consultation times are 'often difficult to almost impossible'.

There is also a difference between K&G and ONE users in terms of the **actual and desired contact times**. For the K&G users 'the time that they go to the clinic' and 'the time they would like to go' often correspond well.

That is less common among ONE users. In addition, there is a great demand for evening and Saturday appointments at ONE clinics.

Improve contact times at the clinics

- keep or extend the current opening times or contact times, especially for evening appointments
- make the assets (e.g. evening appointments at K&G) more clearly known to parents and professionals

Parents ask opening hours tailored to families. They think it would be ideal if the opening times were **geared to working parents** or times when children are collected from **crèche** or **school**. There is also a need to **extend** opening times of family support initiatives, playgrounds, etc.

Other parents would like more **flexibility**. One-third of the parents (36%) think it is important 'that you can walk in and out freely, without having to make an appointment, without having to register' for a service.

Somewhere you can go for instance every two or three months to talk about how things are going. (a parent)

It would be good for GPs to have appointment-free visiting times again. Our eight-month-old daughter was very ill [...]. We called our regular paediatrician and GP: not before seven days. Luckily the GP was willing to see us in the meanwhile. [...] You can't predict when you're going to be ill, can you? Getting access to a GP or a paediatrician is a real problem in Brussels. (a parent)

4.3 Demand for good infrastructure

As well as 'easy to reach' and 'contact times geared to families', parents would like support structures to have good infrastructure:

- ✓ furnishings and equipment suited to children (79.4%)
- ✓ possibility to care for children (77.1%)
- ✓ pleasant place (74.8%)
- ✓ comfortably furnished for (future) parents (58.5%)

A comfortable and pleasant location obviously encourages people to (continue to) go the support service.

Comfortable and pleasant locations

- expansion of available space and/or improvement of the infrastructure
- services, organisation and authorities provide sufficient resources for the infrastructure

5 Is the range of support services easy to reach?

The location has already been mentioned in one of the previous points. In addition, parents also consider various other elements of availability to be important. We list them here:

- ✓ 69.9% of the parents think it is important for the support initiatives to be near other locations or services that they already use
- ✓ 69% of the parents think it is important to be able to go to one location with various questions

Such as De Brug: many services in one building. (a parent)

Overall support (home help, psychological support, health advice, etc.). (a parent)

- ✓ 62.1% think it is important that they can contact the same staff member for various questions, help or support.

It's good to have one identifiable person who you can contact and who follows your 'dossier' so that you don't have to tell the same story four times to explain your questions/concern. So continuity in personal support is important. (a parent)

Long-term follow-up by the same person (a single point of contact to promote continuity/quality of follow-up and establish trust). (a parent)

Starting from pregnancy to build a relationship with a professional team that can follow the child and the family throughout. (a parent)

- ✓ 55.6% of the parents think it is important that they can contact staff easily

Various parents put forward concrete proposals to be able to contact staff (more) easily: permanently manned telephone service, electronic channels such as e-mail, WhatsApp and chat.

Combining range and continuity in the support

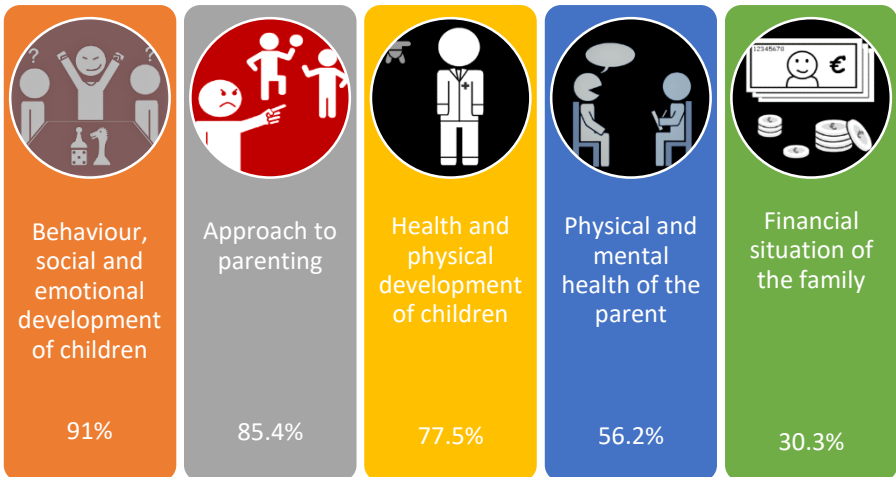
- (further) development of initiatives at neighbourhood or district level: combining the range available benefits all parents and in particular vulnerable parents
- provide various channels to contact staff

6 Useful and reliable support

A useful and reliable range of support services responds to the requests and needs of parents and deals respectfully with parents, their children and their context.

6.1 Which topics and areas require support?

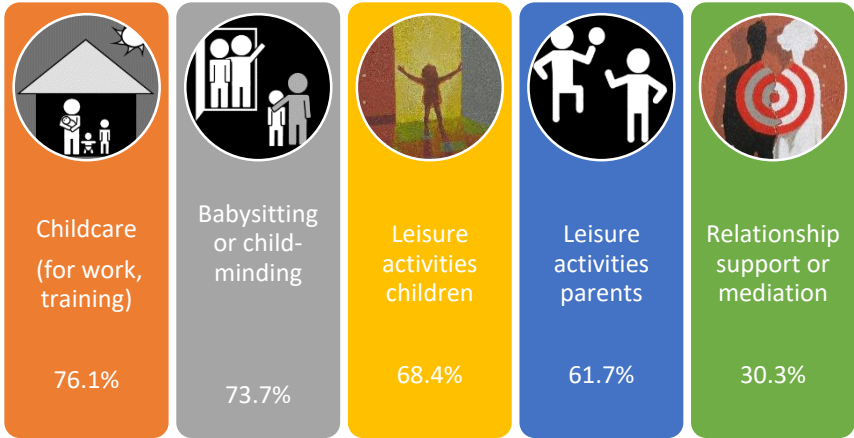
If we ask parents about the **topics** on which they would like information, support or guidance, the following are most frequently mentioned:



Parents would also like information, support or guidance on other topics such as the material living situation of the family (29.2%), the work situation (25.8%), their relationship with their partner (25.8%) and their relationship with their ex-partner (11.2%).

There are two **areas** in which the majority of parents would like support:

- (1) childcare facilities (childcare and child-minding or babysitting for the children)
- (2) leisure activities (range for children and for parents)



Early information (just after the birth) about outcome, deadlines and working of the school registration procedure and childcare options. (a parent)

More assistance initiatives and information about services after birth (in particular possible childcare options) owing to the lack of places in this sector. Impossible for parents to prepare their return to work as well as possible owing to a lack of response from the early-years childcare service. (a parent)

Range tailored to the needs of (future) parents

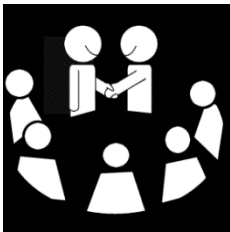
- focus on various **topics** and **areas**: parenting, physical and mental health, financial and material situation, partner relationship, childcare, leisure time
- expansion of the 'childcare' and 'leisure time' range

6.2 How do families want to be supported?

Various people or activities can offer parents support. It was said earlier that parents often see people in their immediate circle as supportive (e.g. family, friends) (see point 3, p.5). Other support figures and activities include:

- ✓ websites (70.4%)
- ✓ individual (consultation) discussions with a professional (68.1%)
- ✓ exchanges in a group of parents (57.7%)

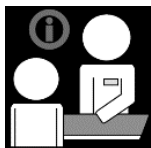
With my first child in particular, I think I would have been pleased to talk to other parents and people with experience, with the children present. My uncertainty lasted over four months, until I went back to work and my daughter started going to crèche. I soon got to know other parents there who had the same questions as I did. (a parent)



Somewhere that would be a place for meeting others, leisure and consultation, too. (a parent)

A place where non-binding contacts can be made with professionals and with other parents, but where specific questions can also be dealt with by appointment. (a parent)

Some parents indicate that they mainly want **information**. Other parents mostly need **guidance** or they want both **information and guidance**.



Parents mainly need information on the topics of ‘the health and physical development of the children’, ‘the behaviour, social and emotional development of the children’ and ‘the approach to parenting’.

But parents ask more guidance on the topic ‘relationship with the partner’.



Generally speaking, taking all the topics together, parents need:

- ✓ information (72.7%)
- ✓ tips, advice or guidance (70.2%)
- ✓ a listening ear (65.7%)
- ✓ a referral (47.3%)

Range tailored to the needs of (future) parents

- informal contacts (e.g. with other parents)
 - o meeting places: parents can get to know one another
 - o groups or workshops that meet for exchanges, information or advice
- range at district level:
 - o easy to reach
 - o chance to (continue to) have physical contact with one another, to support one another (e.g. to exchange baby or other equipment, go to other support services together)
- widely spread, varied, free or affordable range:
 - o printed or online
 - o personal contact with a professional (e.g. explanation, consultation)

6.3 Attitude and expertise of staff

Whether a support initiative is useful and reliable for parents is related to 'the way staff act' or the 'expert knowledge' of staff. These two elements can determine whether or not a parent uses (or continues to use) a support initiative.

The following factors are most important for parents:



Staff listen to you (93.3%)



Staff treat information as confidential
(91.5%)



Staff provide clear, understandable information
(91.1%)



Staff devote sufficient time to you (89.4%)



Parents can ask questions and talk about concerns
(86.2%)



Staff respect your privacy (82.2%)



Staff take your family situation into account
(81.9%)



Staff reassure parents if they are concerned
(79.7%)

People with expert knowledge who follow the most recent developments in raising children and do not stick rigidly to old-fashioned methods. (a parent)

'One size fits all' does not help at all and does more harm than good. (a parent)

Services that are not medically and socially intrusive, and the right to self-determination, and no need to justify yourself if you don't agree with a proposal. (a parent)

Profile of a supporter:

- staff who can gear their work to parents, their children and their context in terms of attitude and expertise
- staff who are mindful of the informal support network for parents and their children (e.g. their family, friends, neighbours) and who strengthen that network

7 Is the range of support services understandable?

It is not enough for parents to be aware of the range available. They must also have a clear picture or **understand ‘what the range and the staff stand for’**. What does the initiative have to offer them? How is the support offered? etc.

Brussels is characterised by great linguistic diversity, often even within one family. Dutch or French are far from the only languages spoken in Brussels families and knowledge of Dutch and French is declining. Parents may drop out if information or advice is not understandable.

The vast majority of parents (91.1%) think it is important for staff to be able to convey the (often linguistic) information and support **intelligibly**.

Slightly more than half of the parents (52.1%) think it is important for staff to speak their **mother tongue**. Almost one-third do not think this is important.

For one-fourth of K&G users (24.5%), the language used is a reason to use the K&G clinic (see Graph 1, p.10). This is far less the case among ONE users (7.5%).

They provide a clear explanation, recognise us and follow our progress by asking specific questions the next time about what was discussed the previous time. (a parent)

Towards a broader linguistic view and approach

- a functional use of language, seeking a common language, using (more) visual language, deploying social interpreters or multilingual staff, etc.

8 An affordable range of support services

The range of support services available in Brussels is largely free of charge. Some services and organisations work with a payment plan tailored to suit the family.

That is a strength because two thirds of the (future) parents consider **'a low cost'** important for help and support (65.9%).

It emerged earlier that for around one-third of ONE users (32.8%), the low cost is a reason to call upon the ONE clinic. For ONE, this is in third place in the ranking of reasons for use (see Graph 1, p.10). Among the K&G users, one-fourth of the parents (24.5%) mention the low cost, which shares sixth place for K&G.

Free or affordable services

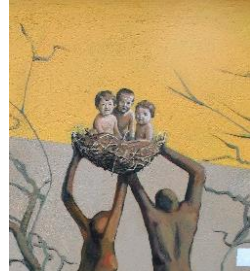
- keep and expand the efforts made to ensure that use of the range of services available remains affordable or free of charge
- support from authorities: e.g. regulations, funding and family-specific reimbursement frameworks

9 Transfer between services?

9.1 Transfer between clinics

Most parents visited one clinic in Brussels. Parents who visited two or more different clinics are mainly K&G users. ONE has far fewer parents who visited several ONE clinics.

We also note that somewhat more K&G users switched to a ONE clinic (47%) than the reverse (23.5%).



9.2 Referral to other professionals and services

The help or guidance of a service is not always sufficient for the requests and needs of the family. In that case, parents need to be referred to other professionals and services in an 'appropriate' manner.

Almost half the parents (47.3%) think the 'referral' is a desirable form of support.

Both K&G users (28.7%) and ONE users (23.2%) have already been referred by their clinic to another service or professional.

K&G users were referred to professionals or services in various areas: healthcare, parenting support, services that provide information, etc. All the referrals of ONE users bar one were referrals to healthcare workers.



The experiences of referrals from the clinics vary widely. Some parents thought a referral was necessary, but were not given one. This meant, for example, that they did not feel they were taken seriously.

Other parents were referred, but felt that was not necessary. It led to unnecessary examinations or unnecessary anxiety, for example. Whereas the majority of K&G users were satisfied with their referral, this was only the case for half of the ONE users.

Several parents put forward concrete proposals for a better referral.

Importance of smoother referral to or information about other family support organisations. (a parent)

They ought to refer people more to other activities in the neighbourhood for children and give out information. (a parent)

I would like them to offer parent - children activities. (a parent)

A tailored transfer

- professionals focus on adequate and sensitive referral
- referral follow-up: professionals promote the continuity of care and support for parents and children

10 Getting down to work with the findings

The (future) parents and professionals in the field gave us a great deal of information on the family support offer in Brussels and how the range of family support services in Brussels can be improved and in line with the needs of (future) parents.

With the support of the VGC, in January 2020 the Centre for Family Studies (Odisee) will continue to work to enhance the range of family support services in Brussels. We are doing this in various districts in Brussels and together with professionals in the field. The findings from this research and the strengths of the existing services and organisations form the basis to improve the range of family support.

11 To find out more?

Would you like more information about the research?

Various documents are available for consultation on <https://www.kcgezinswetenschappen.be/nl/gezinsbegeleiding-in-brussel>:

- the research report in Dutch
- the presentation of the research findings and recommendations in Dutch
- the summary of the research in Dutch, French and English
- the brochure for parents in Dutch, French and English

Would you like more information about what will happen next?

More information about the cooperation between professionals and the Centre for Family Studies (Odisee) to enhance the range of services available for young families is available on <https://www.kcgezinswetenschappen.be/nl/ondersteuning-voor-jonge-gezinnen-in-brussel>

Would you like to find out more about the VGC and its commitment to families?

To support families, the VGC works with various Dutch-language organisations in Brussels. They help families with questions about childcare, parenting support, opportunities to meet and working in the family sector. Information about the range on offer can be found on <https://www.vgc.be/wat-biedt-n-brussel/gezin>.

Would you like to find out more about Huis van het Kind in Brussels?

In the Huis van het Kind (House of the Child), various services and organisations work together to offer support for families. More information is available on: <https://www.ketinbrussel.be/>

A word of thanks

- To all future parents and parents with young children as well as professionals who cooperated on this research into accessible family support in Brussels. We are grateful to them for sharing their experiences and expectations.
- To the people who took care of the follow-up and feedback in this research project: Luc Dekeyser, Sara Mouton, Evelyne Dirix and Daisy Flossy from the VGC, Wouter Boeckmans, adviser to former VGC board member Bianca Debaets, and Pepijn Hanssens, adviser to the chair of the board Elke Van den Brandt.
- To the students and volunteers who helped to recruit (future) parents, translate the research instruments and transcribe the interviews.

Photos

Nora Theys and Gal (2008). *Mural entitled 'Zin in gezin?'*. Brussels: Schaerbeek campus (Family Studies, Odisee).

Pictograms

www.sclera.be

Reference

Vandewaerde, S., Fagardo, B., Nys, K., & Emmerly, K. (2020). *Family support for young families in Brussels. Brochure for Parents. Research funded by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC)*. Schaerbeek: Centre for Family Studies (Odisee).

