

**THE PROVISION OF  
CHILDCARE SERVICES IN FRANCE**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the number of births remained at a high level in France, reaching **830 900**, i.e. a 2,9% increase in a year. The number of births is greater than the 2000 highpoint and has reached a level that has not been observed in the last 25 years. France is in fact – along with Ireland - the country with the highest fertility rate in EU 25. On 1 January 2007, France had 4.8 million children under 6 and 2,4 million children under 3. Since 2000, the number of young children has continued to increase.

Childcare services are at the heart of discussions on work-life balance. Indeed, such services constitute one of the most important solutions enabling parents - both men and women - to pursue their careers. The Lisbon Summit included the objective of childcare provision for 30% of children between 0 and 3 years and 90% of those between 3 and compulsory school-age (6 years in France). France is in a rather favourable situation from this point of view, even though it is very difficult to have a very precise picture of the distribution of the various forms of childcare, as the systems are becoming complex. According to statistical sources used (which we will come back to below), it can be estimated that about 42% of children under 3 have a (formal) childcare solution besides parents and almost 100% of children over 3 are in nursery school. However, the quality, cost, flexibility and ability to adapt to demand – all of which are more qualitative dimensions – are yet to be proved in France.

There are many long-standing and complicated childcare policies in France. Various issues are at stake ranging from policies designed to increase the birth rate (successfully promoting the return to and maintenance of a high birth rate (1.98)) and employment policies (promoting the employment of mothers) to also sometimes combating inequality (support for disadvantaged families, in particular lone parent families). However, besides these largely positive dimensions, policy regarding childcare has sometimes been ambiguous, leading indirectly to the opposite, namely women, who are in insecure labour market situations, leaving the labour market via the ex-APE<sup>1</sup> and parental leave; strong individualisation of childcare arrangements (childminders, own-home carers and so forth) to the detriment of collective childcare, which is largely favoured by families; in the end, there is a two-tier system, where reductions and tax credits are awarded to better-off families.

## 2. CHILDCARE SERVICES: FACTS AND FIGURES (8 PAGES)

### 2.1 Introduction

The State has already played a central role in these services for a very long time. Throughout Europe, the French pre-school system of nursery schools<sup>2</sup> is well-known - free schooling for all children from 3 years old, without it being compulsory. As for younger children (0-3 years), the system is less developed and does not cover all needs. In fact, there is a sharing of responsibilities between the State (which offers collective childcare services or funds some individual services) and households, who take on the search for it (either by looking after their children themselves or by paying for someone to come into their home or for a registered childminder...). At the beginning, companies were generally absent from these debates. This issue was thought not to concern them, as they concentrate on economic, rather than social, objectives. However, the situation has moved on significantly and some companies have introduced measures for helping to find childcare and, in some cases, have even set up their own childcare structures.

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<sup>1</sup> APE: Allocation parentale d'éducation – Parental childcare allowance

<sup>2</sup> 'Ecoles maternelles' are part of the national education ministry, are staffed by fully qualified teachers and have a national curriculum. (They officially take children from the age of 3, but if they have space and there is a need for it, they also accept children between 2.5 and 3 years).

## 2.2 Availability

### A. Analysis of SILC data

2005

Children cared for, by type of care, as a proportion of all children of the same age group

Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)

Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)

Only cared b

Number of hours				Number of hours				
0-2 years	0	1-29	>=30	0-2 years	0	1-29	>=30	0-2 years
FR	68%	16%	16%	FR	69%	15%	15%	FR

2006

Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)

Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)

Only cared b  
reply cat = 0

Number of hours				Number of hours				
0-2 years	0	1-29	>=30	0-2 years	0	1-29	>=30	0-2 years
FR	69%	14%	17%	FR	72%	15%	14%	FR

The 2005 SILC data do not totally correspond to French data (see below), regarding the use of formal types of childcare. Our own data estimate that formal arrangements cover **42% of children under 3 years – not 32%** (including 16% from 1 to 29 hours). This discrepancy can be explained by the note presented in the SILC survey concerning France, namely that childminders, who are paid directly by parents are not included. However, in France, the great majority of childminders must be registered and therefore represent a form of formal care. This is, in fact, the main form of childcare of very young children. As for informal childcare arrangements, our national data for 2002 estimated that they represented about 15%, but the most recent data (see Table 1) estimate them at 10% (which is very different from the 30% provided by SILC). A surprising fact is that 48% of children under 3 are looked after by one of their parents – and both French and SILC data converge on this point. SILC data for 2006 are very much the same, but reflect a small drop in the use of childcare (the proportion of children looked after by their parents increases by 2 points, although this cannot be confirmed by French data).

The second divergence between European and French data concerns the number of hours of childcare. According to national data (see table 4), the number of hours of childcare is significantly higher than those declared in the SILC survey: nursery school has the youngest children for on average 29.5 hours per week and crèches and childminders look after children for 37 hours per week! Whereas SILC data refer to significantly shorter times.

2005

**Children cared for, by type of care, as a proportion of all children of the same age group**

**Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)**

**Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)**

Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)				Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)		
Number of hours				Number of hours		
<b>3 to compuls. school</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1-29</b>	<b>&gt;=30</b>	<b>3 to compuls. school</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1-29</b>
FR	5%	56%	39%	FR	72%	25%

2006

**Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)**

**Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)**

Formal arrangements (reply categories 1-4)				Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)		
Number of hours				Number of hours		
<b>3 to compuls. school</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1-29</b>	<b>&gt;=30</b>	<b>3 to compuls. school</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1-29</b>
FR	6%	52%	42%	FR	72%	24%

We also disagree with the data concerning children from 3 to 6 years regarding both 2005 and 2006. In France, 100% of children over 3 are in nursery school for an average of 33 hours per week (see table 5). The only explanation for this discrepancy can be that on Wednesdays and at the end of the day, children are looked after in a different way (by play centres, informal forms of care or 'parents' themselves). But the main form is nursery school. Moreover, as for the under 3s, it seems that in 2006, SILC data show a slight reduction in collective care, which we cannot confirm on the basis of French data.

The first distinction which must be made concerns the age of children. Most difficulties concern 0 to 3 year olds (there is systematic provision for 3 to 6 year olds, although there are problems regarding flexibility of opening hours and Wednesdays, when there is no school (and pre-school) in France). On the one hand, there are collective childcare services (collective crèches, family crèches<sup>3</sup>, parental crèches<sup>4</sup> and play groups<sup>5</sup>, etc.) and, on the other, individual forms (registered childminders<sup>6</sup> and own-home childcare<sup>7</sup>). Moreover, some individual childcare arrangements are not declared.

In France, childcare arrangements are complex and varied, depending on whether they are of an individual nature (looked after in the parents' home or that of a childminder) or a collective nature; mixed (family crèches); jointly financed and managed by the State, local authorities, associations and parents... The following are the main forms of childcare for the 0-3 year age group:

**Childminders** – who are not taken into account by the EU-SILC data – are the most widespread form of childcare. In 2005, there were 399,000 registered childminders, theoretically offering 1,041,000 places (including childminders employed by family childcare services). However, not all registered childminders actually work. On 31 December 2005, there were, in fact, an estimated **473,600** places available with 263,000 registered childminders employed by individuals. It should not be forgotten that these childminders are very different from informal arrangements, as they must be registered by the département council after the mother and child protection services have checked on their conditions for looking after children (medical check-up, family environment, size and healthy nature of their accommodation, etc.). Thanks to reforms improving their occupational status, as well as benefits helping families to access this form of childcare, their numbers are on the increase (they increased 3.5 times between 1990 and 2001).

**Collective childcare:** collective crèches (2,000 establishments), which are generally managed by town councils; parental crèches (200), which are managed by parents; workplace crèches (240) which are partly managed by companies; play groups (2,700), which look after children from time to time and are managed by associations and town councils; and finally about 1,160 family crèches (which make it possible to bring together children who are looked after by childminders). In 2005, **319,000** places were available in collective childcare establishments and family childcare services for children under 6, distributed as follows: 256,800 places in the former, i.e. 4% more than in 2004, which was a bigger increase than that observed during the period 2001-2004; and 62,100 places in the latter.

Thus, overall, **42% of children between 0 and 3 years are looked after in formal collective or individual childcare.** About 10% are looked after informally, mainly free-of-charge or paid for in an undeclared way. **Thus, there is a total of about 52% of children, who are not looked after directly by their 'parents'.**

**These data should be treated carefully:** they are approximations because they are not all available at the same time; they do not represent a division – a child can both be at nursery school

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<sup>3</sup> Structures which bring together on a regular basis (for a few hours per week) registered childminders and the children they look after.

<sup>4</sup> Structures funded and run by parents with some qualified staff as well as regular participation of parents of the children concerned (a rota of a certain number of hours per week).

<sup>5</sup> “halte-garderies”: structures in which parents, who look after their children themselves, can leave them for a few hours per week.

<sup>6</sup> “Assistantes maternelles”, who are qualified, registered childminders, who look after a regulated number of children in the childminder’s home.

<sup>7</sup> Carers, who are often not registered childminders (no specific qualifications are required) and who look after child(ren) in the child(ren)’s home.

and looked after by a childminder – some studies have shown that about a third of all children have two or three different forms of childcare each week.

**Table 1. Estimation of the distribution of children under 3, by type of childcare 2005-2006**

	Number	%
Crèche (and collective care)	319,000	13,2
Pre- school ( 2 to 3 years)	183,000	7,6
CMG <sup>8</sup> -Registered childminder *	473,600	19,7
Own-home childcare - AGED**	34,500	1.4
Other (informal care arrangements or other family members, besides parents)	237,100	10
Parents with ex-APE- CLCA***	587,600	24,5
Economically inactive parents	278,400	11.6
Maternity leave	287,800	12
Total (children from 3 months to 3 years)	2,4 millions	100

Source: CNAF, Delphine Chauffaut

\*AFEAMA: *Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle agréée* – family subsidy for employing a registered childminder

\*\*AGED: *Allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile* – allowance for own-home childcare

\*\*\*APE: *Allocation parentale d'éducation* – parental childcare allowance; CLCA : complément de libre choix d'activité – Supplement for freedom of choice concerning economic activity

There are other ways of calculating childcare arrangements. The CNAF<sup>9</sup>, for example, observes from parents' point of view the **main form of care** between 8a.m. and 7p.m. of children under 3. In this case, the role of parents increases greatly in that, for example, the youngest children in nursery schools do not go for the whole day. Accordingly, 70% of parents are the main carers of their children between 8a.m. and 7p.m.; 13% of children are looked after mainly by a childminder and 9% by a crèche.

An INSEE<sup>10</sup> study shows that these data change if both parents work full-time: between 8a.m. and 7p.m., 72% of the children are looked after by some one else; in other words, 28% nevertheless are looked after by one of the parents, 20% are in a crèche, 33% are with a childminder and others are looked after informally. The fact that 28% of children are looked after by their parents means that the parents' working hours are different, in order for each of them to be able to look after the children at different times.

The data of INSEE's 2005 employment survey can be used to study the situation of employed parents

<sup>8</sup> CMG: *Complément mode de garde* - childcare supplement

<sup>9</sup> CNAF: Caisse nationale des allocations familiales – National Family Allowance Fund

<sup>10</sup> INSEE: Institut national des statistiques et des études économiques – National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies

**Table 2. Main form of childcare of young children during their parents' working hours %**

Main form of childcare	Lone mothers in employment	Couple where only the father has a job	Couple where both parents have a job	All those with a job		
				Men	Women	Total
<b>Paid childcare services</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>48</b>
Collective (crèche, play groups and centres, etc.)	31	2	20	13	20	16
Individual (childminder, own-home care, etc.)	19	4	41	26	39	32
<b>Other forms of care</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>52</b>
Family, neighbours, friends	44	4	21	15	22	18
Father	-	1	6	2	8	4
Mother	6	89	12	44	11	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: some situations that are less frequent (lone fathers, couples where only the woman has a job, etc.) are not presented in a detailed way, but are included in the total. Those who say they do not use any form of childcare have not been taken into account in the calculations, as there were too few of them. As for couples, where both work, the table only includes the replies given by the mothers. In these situations, the replies of the father and mother are very close, except where only one of the parents has custody of the children (these data are commented in the text).

**Interpretation: 50% of lone mothers in employment mainly use paid childcare for their child(ren) while they are working.**

Field: people between 15 and 64 years with a job and at least one child under 6 in the household.

Source: enquête Emploi et module ad hoc sur la conciliation entre vie familiale et vie professionnelle, 2005, Insee.

Thus, it can be observed that when mothers work (whether they are in a couple or not), half of all children are looked after by someone else, whether paid or not (crèche, nursery school, childminder and so forth). The use of informal arrangements that are more or less free-of-charge (grandparents, neighbours, etc.) is far from negligible, especially when mothers bring up their children alone (44% use an informal network). However, if mothers do not work, the great majority look after their children themselves.

In terms of regional disparity resulting from local authority funding (which covers 30% of expenditure), big cities have much greater coverage. The national average is 6.3 crèche places per hundred children under 3, whereas in Paris it is 23.9 (18.9 in the Paris region - Ile de France) and less than 2 in the Charente-Maritime *département*. 7 *départements* offer more than 10 places per hundred children, while 12 offer less than 2 (Périvier, 2003).

Since the mid-90s, the increase in crèche places has slowed down greatly - 5,000 extra places per annum were created between 1985 and 1996, compared with 1,500 between 1996 and 1999. This drop has been compensated by incentives given to individual solutions (AFEAMA). But in the framework of European objectives, it was announced in 2002 that the plan was to create **20,000 new crèche places** by 2007.

### **The role of companies**

Major companies offer (or participate in providing) services, which make it possible to develop improved work-life balance. The range of proposed services is vast, including crèches (company crèches funded by works councils, as is the case with the Feydau crèche at Credit Lyonnais, hospital crèches such as at Paul Brousse hospital in Villejuif) or crèches, which are co-funded by the family

allowances agency (CAF – *caisse d’allocations familiales*) and open to local children, such as “*Les petits canards*” crèche at the daily newspaper, “*Liberation*” in Paris, “*La Trottinette*” crèche at the Atomic energy commissariat in Grenoble and “*Les Diablottins*” at the Bank of France – and other company crèches at, for example, Michelin, the Post Office, University hospitals and even a crèche for the Elysée’s staff.

Company-provided services also include sports halls, housework, dry cleaning (provided by companies such as IBM, Bull and the Accor group) and help with childcare and housework (the “Pimprenelle office” at the RATP provides information about childcare facilities and has reserved places in crèches, which are open long hours; an association recruits home helps (for ironing and cleaning) for employees at Sainte Camille hospital; Sofinco gives a bonus to “parent employees” for childcare up to the age of six; Sodexo offers “vouchers for household services” and the Accor Service group “home-help tickets”). These examples show that companies, which develop such services, are often companies which practice atypical working hours and / or have difficulty in recruiting staff. In some cases, companies’ initiatives are part of local ones, which bring together a variety of partners – this is the case of the initiative called “*Les Petits Avions*” in the Roissy airport area and that of the Société Nationale des Poudres et Explosifs concerning an “Inter-local authority childcare contract”, which is co-funded by CAF and several companies of varying sizes and sectors.

**There are now 224 company crèches (many of which are in hospitals), providing 15,000 of the 200,000 crèche places in France** (Emergences, 2004). Since 2003, State support for company crèches has been introduced in the form of tax credit corresponding to 60% of the operating costs of new structures.

However, according to a study carried out by Emergences (2004), these crèches are contested:

- the cost of such structures and unequal provision, given companies’ differing ability to invest; and even the long-term nature of the structure if the company concerned has difficulties;
- compartmentalisation of children of staff in the same company, which inter-company crèches can avoid;
- trivialisation of threats to the emotional and mental equilibrium of children and families;
- the risk of worsening the phenomenon of flexible working hours. If the crèche, which has long opening hours, is also close to one’s workplace, parent employees can put off going home because of management pressures;
- the risk of management interfering in employees’ private life and family.

Another problem, which is identified, is that the crèches are far from employees’ home, thus imposing long travelling time on children, which may be early in the morning or late at night, depending on the parent’s hours. Analysis of trends in employees’ time cannot be separated from the general phenomenon of longer commuting distances, which prevails for all employees.

### **Children over 3**

When children are 3, childcare is provided both by school and others. Overall, more than 2.6 million children attended pre-primary education (nursery schools) in 2006-2007 – in fact, **all 3 to 6 year olds attend school**. The numbers in pre-primary education practically doubled between the 1960s and the middle of the 1980s, because of the increase in the number of three year olds – and to a lesser extent two year olds – attending school. From 1986 onwards, demographic changes constitute the main factor influencing the number of children in pre-primary school. The survey on childcare shows that after school (between 4.30. and 7.30.p.m.) and on Wednesdays during the day, children between 3 and 6 years old are looked after by their parents during more than three-quarters of the time. However, on Wednesdays, parents use outside care most frequently. Informal (unpaid) carers are mobilised for shorter periods of time than paid ones. When both parents work full-time,

they continue to provide this care during, on average, 65% of the time in the evening after school and half of the time on Wednesdays. Between 4.30. and 7.30.p.m., during the week, they use informal carers for relatively short periods of time (less than 10% of the time under consideration) and they use a system of paid care for about a quarter of the time. On Wednesdays, however, children are looked after, on average, during almost 20% of the time by informal arrangements and almost 30% of the time by paid ones.

### **2.3 Quality**

The system of training and monitoring, as well as quality, varies depending on the kind of care:

- **in crèches**, staff have training as paediatric nursing assistants (baccalaureate +2 years of studies) or youth worker for young children, thus guaranteeing real basic training, to which is added the actual functioning of crèches (regular meetings, group work, meetings with psychologists and so forth). The team is led by a paediatric nurse and, on a non-permanent basis, a doctor and psychologist. Service staff do the cleaning and maintenance and help with meals. The children are well looked after with one assistant for 5 children, who do not walk yet, and one for 8 who walk. They are accepted from the age of 10 weeks until 3 years in groups (of on average ten children) according to age. They are structures which are specially adapted to the needs of very small children; they have both space and pedagogical equipment and encourage creative activities. It is a stimulating environment for children and an opportunity for learning to live in society.
- **Childminders** have experienced many changes regarding their occupational status: registration means controls, training, recognition via validation of their experience... and now there is a diploma. The training, which was introduced in 2006 by the Ministry of health, is organised and financed by the *départements* and lasts 120 hours. The initial 60 hours are provided within 6 months of the request to register as a childminder and before looking after children. The remaining 60 hours are provided within two years of beginning to look after the first child. There is not an official rate for childminding, but a minimum one. The number of children that the childminder can look after is written in their registration document and can be 1, 2 or 3 children – and relatively rarely an exemption is given authorising 4 children. The registration document also indicates the type of care allowed (all-day, before and after school, permanent, and so forth).
- **Nursery school from 2,5 to 6 years:** the French nursery school system has worldwide recognition. It has several advantages in terms of quality – the staff are teachers recruited by the National Education Ministry. They also usually have local authority support staff (with a CAP<sup>11</sup> qualification in caring for young children) The groups of children are sometimes big (between 28 and 30 children), but many of the younger ones only attend school in the morning. Educationally, nursery schools are recognised as being very important for language development via games.

### **2.4 Flexibility**

The French school system (nursery and primary schools) are known for their long hours each day. Typical days are from 8.30.a.m. to 4.30.p.m., generally with leisure centres attached for the period between 4.30. and 6 p.m. (and sometimes also between 7 and 8.30.a.m., but not very often as they are provided by local authorities). There is no school on Wednesdays, but the leisure centres are open then as well (generally in schools). Throughout the year, there are 36 weeks of school and leisure centres are available for the other weeks. However, the time covered should be differentiated according to types of care and children's age:

### **Under threes**

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<sup>11</sup> CAP: certificat d'aptitude professionnel – certificate of vocational aptitude

The following table shows that parents and own-home childcarers are able to cover the longest periods. However, nursery schools do not cover such long periods, thus encouraging parents to reduce their working time or to use other forms of childcare.

**Table 4. Average weekly time of the main forms of childcare for children under 3 – from Monday to Friday (including Wednesdays)**

	Average time
Parents	44hours 27minutes
Childminders	36hours 42minutes
Crèches	37hours 25minutes
Grandparents	34hours 08minutes
Individual care	36hours 45minutes
Own-home childcare	40hours 31minutes
School	29hours 33minutes

Source: DREES, 2003

### *Three to six year-olds*

**Tableau 5. Time spent at school**

Time spent at school (hours per week)	Number of school weeks per annum
33	36

Source: according to Barrère-Maurisson M. et al., 2000

#### **Experiences of crèches with atypical hours**

As already mentioned, increased use of atypical working hours has led to more adapted and flexible solutions being introduced.

#### **- “Non-stop” collective crèches:**

There are two such crèches in Paris. Given operating difficulties, “24 hours per day” provision was stopped and extended opening hours introduced (compared with traditional childcare provision). Parents have to bring their children at the same time every day, which does not suit employees, whose working hours vary each day or on a weekly basis. Other such “non-stop” crèches have since opened elsewhere in the Paris region.

#### **Operating principles of “non-stop” crèches**

Open 24 hours per day – the first of this type was opened in 1991 in the 13<sup>th</sup> Paris arrondissement.

Maximum presence per month: 14 nights or 22 days

Possible periods:

- 5.30.a.m. to 4.30.p.m.
- 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- 9 p.m. to 9 a.m.

Children have the same carer every day or night.

Target population: children between 3 months and 3 years, whose parents work in catering, health or social services, show business and sorting offices, etc.

Funding:

- Paris council – 40%
- CAF – 40%
- Post office and telecommunications – 20%

Number of places:

- Night – maximum of 20
- Morning - maximum of 21
- Afternoon - maximum of 21

“Non-stop” opening hours were jeopardised by financial considerations; today it takes children between 5.30.a.m. and 10 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and between 7.30.a.m. and 6.30.p.m. on Saturdays.

Source: Le Monde, N° 13067, 8 July 1993 (quoted in Emergences, 2004)

Another example is the town of Rennes’ Equal project, called “Rennes, time equality”, which studied needs in terms of services (childcare, neighbourhood services, mobility, services for the elderly, etc.) for women cleaning staff and executives in Rennes. This study highlighted the need for crèches with opening hours which are adapted to atypical working hours. Cleaning staff are those who are most concerned by this and they constitute the largest number of women working in the Rennes employment area. In order to diversify types of childcare, a community, inter-company and

inter-town crèche (called “Calais”) was opened with longer opening hours on 15 April 2004 in the Atalante Beaulieu industrial zone in Rennes. Children can be looked after for 10 hours in a row between 6 a.m. and 9.30.p.m. This crèche has 25 regular places, 1 “emergency” place and some “occasional” places (according to Silvera et al., 2004).

**- Specialised family crèches with long opening hours**

There are five such structures in Paris and the Essonne and Val d’Oise *départements* and more are planned for the other *départements* of the Paris region. They are open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. and they also provide childminders at night and on weekends.

**Other experiences and innovative forms of childcare**

The aim of the Equal project, “G.E.P.E.T.T.O”, is to experiment in 8 areas a high-quality response to childcare problems at atypical times and also for emergencies. It involves a structure, which employs childcare professionals, who go to parents’ homes on a 24-hour a day and a 7-day week basis, in order to supplement existing childcare arrangements. The project is particularly concerned about the needs of siblings and individualising responses to family needs. The child stays at home. One of the main principles is to render existing local childcare services reactive.

*Pimprenelle office at RATP (Paris region urban transport) – an innovative measure*

The Pimprenelle office was opened in 1998, following an agreement signed by the social partners, in order to help staff arrange childcare during atypical working hours. It provides services (financial help towards childcare and individualised help for finding a solution). 15,000 children are concerned and almost 11,000 of them have at least one parent who is working for RATP with atypical working hours (a third of whom are under 3). Depending on the type of childcare (crèche or childminder, etc.), pay and the timing and days of required care, financial help ranges from 3 to 9 Euros per hour – the average is generally about 5 Euros. Financial help is of a redistributive nature, as there is an income ceiling. In terms of direct childcare, the initial project, which was supported by the unions, included a company crèche, but a survey of staff showed that this solution was not desired (notably because of long commuting distances). The Pimprenelle office has reserved places in existing crèches, which practice atypical opening hours (“Boutchou” and “Maison enchantée”, etc.) and has also set up an information network on available types of childcare (crèches and registered childminders, etc.). There are other ongoing projects: a crèche at Thiais, which will be open from 5.30.a.m. to 10.30.p.m. (39 places); partnership with companies with the same problems (SNCF railway board, the Post Office and Air France, etc.); development of childcare “relays” making it possible to find a carer, who will come to parents’ homes in order to cover atypical hours by supplementing other forms of childcare (follow-up to the Gepetto experience in Brittany).

**2. Affordability**

Expenditure on childcare amounts to almost 13 million Euros. It is important to note that 40% of the total is devoted to the withdrawal of “parents” from economic activity. Individualised childcare services account for about half of total expenditure.

**Table 6. Expenditure related to childcare for the under three in 2005 (in €millions)**

<b>Monetary allowances for individual childcare</b>	<b>2 701</b>
Help with employing a registered childminder (AFEAMA, CMG childminder)	2 548.
Help with employing own-home care (AGED, CMG own-home)	153.
<b>Childcare establishments</b>	<b>3 610</b>
Expenditure on functioning of CNAF (Caisse	1 752

nationale d'allocations familiales): National family allowance fund.	
Expenditure on functioning of MSA (Mutuelle sociale de l'Agriculture): Social agricultural mutual insurance)	14
Expenditure on functioning of town councils (2004)	1 432
FIPE (Fond d'Investissement petite enfance): young children's services investment fund	27
AEI (Aide Exceptionnelle à l'Investissement): exceptional help for investment	51
DAIPE (Dispositif d'Aide à l'Investissement Petite enfance): help system for investing in young children's services	20
DIPE (Dispositif d'Investissement Petite enfance): System for investing in young children's services	0
Investment expenditure of town councils (2004)	280
Investment in equity capital for EAJE (Etablissement d'accueil du jeune enfant): childcare establishments	34
<b>Others</b>	<b>791</b>
Pre-school establishments (nursery schools)	791
<b>Tax expenditure</b>	<b>566</b>
Tax reductions for childcare	240
Tax reductions for family employees	220
Tax exemptions for registered childminders	140
Tax credit for companies	35
<b>Total childcare services for the under threes</b>	<b>7668</b>
<b>Help for reducing or withdrawing from economic activity</b>	<b>5 163</b>
Parental leave allowances (APE, CLCA)	2 738
Expenditure on AVPF (Assurance vieillesse des parents au foyer- old-age pension for parents at home) related to the above services	2 425
<b>Total</b>	<b>12 811</b>

**Source:** CNAF, DREES<sup>12</sup>, Direction du Budget, Direction générale du Trésor et de la politique économique, Education nationale.

### **The cost of childcare from the point of view of parents on the basis of a full-time equivalent**

The amounts paid for by families, the CNAF, local authorities, as well as the State, in the form of tax deductions, vary depending on the kind of childcare used. The CNAF has developed a technique using “typical cases“, i.e. theoretical situations that make it possible to estimate – for four types of childcare and different levels of family resources – monthly costs of full-time childcare (9 hours per day, 18 days per month) of a child under 3 of a couple, who are both working and without other children. The legislation referred to is that which was applicable on 1 July 2007.

#### *a. Total costs of different kinds of childcare*

- **Childcare establishments:** the indicator of overall costs of functioning used is the real cost price. It relates the total of charges resulting from the profit and loss account of the structure to

<sup>12</sup> DREES: Direction de la Recherche et des Etudes de l'Evaluation et des Statistiques – Directorate of Research and Studies, Evaluation and Statistics.

the number of actions accomplished, i.e. hours of childcare. Calculations have been made on the basis of a sample of almost 400 childcare establishments in 2004 and then updated. The real cost price in collective childcare establishments is on average **€8.47 per hour**. Distribution of costs is relatively concentrated. **On the basis of 9 hours per day, 18 days per month, the total cost of a place in such establishments is €1,372 per month.**

- **Childminders:** the hypothesis used is €3 for maintenance costs and €3 for meals per day of childcare. Hourly remuneration is the equivalent of 3,5 SMIC hours per day of childcare (although payment of childminders varies greatly). **On the basis of the same length of childcare, the total cost of a childminder is €862 per month.**
- **Own-home childcare:** two scenarios are presented depending on whether the child is looked after alone or whether the family shares the care with another one. In both cases, pay is considered to be 1.2 times hourly SMIC. **The total cost for own-home childcare is €2,258 per month for one child and €1,129 when the care is shared by two families.**

*b. Financial participation in the cost of childcare*

If a family has an income above the equivalent of two SMICs, the least onerous childcare solution is a registered childminder. The allowances awarded to families for compensating the cost of using a childminder – the CMG part of PAJE (prestation d'accueil de jeune enfant – integrated childcare allowance) and tax credit, which has been increased to 50% of the rest of the costs since the 2007 budget - provide considerable help that make it financially possible. However, when the household's income is equal to, or less than, two SMICs, collective childcare establishments cost less. This is explained by the use of a national sliding scale related to income. Own-home childcare is systematically significantly more expensive for families, however much they earn. For families with income above 5 times the level of the SMIC, the difference between the cost of shared own-home care, collective childcare establishments and registered childminders is minimal.

It should be remembered that couples with one child represent 60% of families with at least one child under 3; couples with two children – 21%; and those with three or more children – 9%. As far as income from work is concerned of couples where both parents work and have at least one young child, 53.2% have less than 2 SMICs; 36.5% of them have between 2 and 4 SMICs; and 10.5% have more than 4 SMICs (including 5% who have more than 5 SMICs). Finally, we insist on the fact that nursery school is free-of-charge for children from 2 to 6 years old (except for lunch, which is paid for on a sliding scale related to income).

**Table 7. Cost of childcare for families depending on the type of care and the level of income of the household (estimation of expenditure per month, €)**

Types of childcare	1 Smic (€1,034)	2 Smic (€2,068)	3 Smic (€3,102)	4 Smic (€4,136)	5 Smic (€5,171)
Childminder	100€	150€	150€	260€	260€
Own-home care		800€	800€	900€	900€
Shared Own-home care		270€	270€	320€	320€
Collective childcare establishment (besides nursery school)	50€	100€	200€	300€	310€

**Source: d'après l'observatoire national de la petite enfance 2006**

**2. Attitudes**

Firstly, it should be noted that access to crèches and childminders takes place at the end of maternity

leave. Only women taking the CLCA for between 6 months and 3 years prolong their maternity leave. The others (more than half) use childcare facilities when their baby is from 3 to 4 months old. This is “normal” in France and until now women have not been “made to feel guilty” about going back to work at the end of maternity leave. Although specialists of young children emphasise the risks of too early socialisation of children, but they are not (yet?) in a majority in our country.

For the 0-3 year age group, childcare arrangements are generally more flexible than for 3 to 6 year olds. For example, childminders sometimes accept keeping a child until 7p.m.; and sometimes even on Saturdays. Own-home care (which is not used much) is the most flexible system. However, crèches and nursery schools have fixed hours. For nursery schools (2.5 to 6 years), there is the problem of Wednesdays, when schools are closed, but leisure centres can take over. Moreover, school holidays in France are long (for nursery schools), but not for the other systems; crèches are sometimes open all year round.

### ***2.7 Related issues***

The absence of a sufficient number of collective childcare facilities means that one has to look for other individual solutions. It is clear that the CLCA (ex-APE) has had a major impact. The success of the CLCA cannot be directly attributed to a lack of adapted childcare, but it is an essential dimension – the majority of women who opt for this allowance, which involves withdrawing from economic activity, often refer to this reason, as well as to the cost of childcare and also previous working conditions. Only a minority emphasise a “deliberate” choice of wanting to stop working, in order to look after their children; and in all cases, this reason is only a temporary one.

### ***2.8 Summary and conclusion***

The French childcare system does not cover all the needs of families, who often have to look for individual solutions and sometimes even use undeclared work. The State nevertheless plays a major role, which has increased over time, by financing already for a very long time free provision, which is linked to the educational system, for three year-olds. For the under threes, efforts have been made, but most effort has been put into developing individual forms of childcare. As far as companies are concerned, until recently – and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century – it was considered a private affair (of families and the State). Fear of a return of paternalism is perhaps one of the explanations for this. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, companies began to invest in this area in various ways – via direct childcare facilities, especially to compensate for atypical working hours by offering supplementary solutions for their employees. However, this issue is far from really being taken on board by French companies.

## **3. CHILDCARE SERVICES: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

The French childcare system unquestionably has positive macro-economic, macro-social and demographic effects. It should be recalled once again that the French fertility rate is the highest in Europe; that women's employment rate has not ceased to increase – except for a negative element for mothers of two children as a result of the CLCA - and, finally, that these childcare facilities offer possibilities for the most disadvantaged families, especially lone parent families.

### ***3. Labour market achievements***

The number of dual earning couples has not ceased to increase in France and accounts for about 60% of families. It can also be said that childcare provision is necessary for this dual earning model.

In January 2006, France had 4,8 million children under 6, i.e. 300,000 more over ten years. More than 9 out of 10 children under 6 live with both of their parents. In the majority of cases (59%), their mother works and for 90% of them, their father works. 34% have a mother who is

“economically inactive” and only 4% have a father in this situation.

**Table 8. Type of family according to parents' economic activity (%)**

	0-3 years old	3-6 years old
Economically active lone parent families	3	5
Non-economically active lone parent families	3	2
Couples with one economically active parent	37	32
<b>Dual earning couples</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>59</b>
Couples with one non-economically active parent	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: enquête emploi 2005

39% of children under 6, both of whose parents work, have a mother working part-time (31% of all economically active women work part-time). Amongst these children, 19% have a mother who would like to work more; 10% have a mother who works part-time because of a lack of childcare provision or it is too expensive.

The occupational category of mothers influences their choice of childcare. The majority of women in professional and managerial positions use paid – and above all individualised – childcare (because it is more flexible and even less expensive when in one's own home). This is much less the case for women manual workers and the self-employed – the former use informal networks more and 26% of the latter look after their child themselves, given their type of work.

**Table 9. Main form of childcare used during working time by mothers depending on their socio-occupational category**

%

	Employees					
	Self-employed	Profession al and managerial staffs	Intermediate occupations	Clerical workers	Manual workers	Total employees
<b>Paid childcare</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>
Collective care (crèche, play group and centres, etc.)	13	29	25	17	9	21
Individualised care (childminder, own-home care, etc.)	25	51	44	34	31	39
<b>Other forms of care</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>
Family, neighbours, friends	24	9	19	27	34	22
Father	12	7	6	8	16	8
Mother	26	4	6	14	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: the number of those using no care is so small that it is not taken into account.

Interpretation: 38% of self-employed women mainly used paid childcare for looking after their child(ren) during their working hours.

Field: mothers of between 15 and 64 years old with a job and at least one child under 6 in the household.

### 3.3 Social inclusion

The consequence of these partly contradictory policies is, above all, a process of **polarisation of the situations of households (and women)**: on the one hand, those who benefit from the “family social ladder” (less broken careers, childcare facilities that are compatible with their career, as well as tax deductions, such as for the ex-AGED (which is now incorporated in the PAJE) and the others, who accumulate unemployment, insecure jobs, (imposed) part-time work, difficulties in finding childcare, partial or total withdrawal from the labour market (ex-APE), and sometimes a lone parent situation (it should be remembered that women constitute 80% of lone parents and that the risk of poverty is greater). Thus work-life balance is significantly more difficult – or even impossible – for disadvantaged parents and mothers – the lower the standard of living of households, the fewer the choices they have. Mothers with low or very low pay (less than €600) will have to “choose” to withdraw from the labour market until childcare is free-of-charge (i.e. nursery school at 2 years). Thus, hardly 20% of poorest mothers with a child, who is not at school, work, whereas 70% of well-off mothers do so! However, the great majority of poor women worked before having children. It is a choice related to economic calculations made by the household (DREES 2006). Moreover, there are more big families (with 3 or more children) amongst poor families and this makes their situation more complicated. Poor households, where both parents continue to work, generally have more constraints regarding their work schedules (work on weekends, at the end of the day, in shifts). These families use paid childcare less (56% of poor families, compared with 91% of well-off families) and have to use informal networks (family and neighbours, etc.). Finally, the choice of part-time work in order, for example, to look after one's children on Wednesday (when nursery schools are closed) occurs more amongst the well-off than the poor, because of the cost involved.

### 3.4. Increasing the fertility rate and/or any other relevant topic

France is now quoted for achieving what seemed unthinkable, namely maintaining and increasing the economic activity rate of women (about 80% for women between 25 and 49) with stabilisation at “only” a third of women in part-time work) and... a fertility rate amongst the highest in Europe (1.98). The link is established (and reversed compared with the debates in the 1960s and 1970s) – there seems to be recognition of the fact that women's economic activity is not only compatible with, but even favourable, to the presence of children! This is the opposite of the situation in the Southern countries, where both rates are particularly low (except in Portugal).

The following table shows the highest employment rate of women between 20 and 49 years old corresponds to the presence of a child (then it drops after the second child and, above all, after the third). Women's overall employment rate is 71.8% for the 25 to 49 age group, but only 56% for the 15 to 64 age group.

**Table 10. Women's employment rate in France for the 20 to 49 age group, depending on the number of children, 2002 (%)**

<b>Proportion of women with:</b>	
0 children	48,2
1 child of 0-14 years	24,2
2 children of 0-14 years	18,7
3 and more children of 0-14 years	7,2
<b>Employment rate of women with:</b>	
0 children	71,3
1 child of 0-14 years	74,8
2 children of 0-14 years	65,2
3 and more children of 0-14 years	41

Source: Milewski, 2004, données Eurostat

The reason given for this good French result is family policy promoting mothers' work. Is this really so? One can partly challenge this point of view and speak rather of ambivalence – on the one hand, the education system has, via the issue of equal opportunities, developed a policy aiming at bringing children into school and socialising them early (and thereby developing mothers' access to work); but, on the other hand, other measures have had the opposite direct or indirect effects. We will come back to the tax system and in particular the dependants' tax allowances, which can be seen as being a disincentive to work for some women, and also the APE, which is now called “Supplement for *freedom of choice* concerning economic activity”.

### **3.5 Summary and conclusion**

The socio-economic impact of the level of childcare provision is considerable, but ambiguous – a link can be made between unmet childcare needs (in terms of number of places, quality and cost) and mothers' employment rates. It is certain that insufficient places do not impact on the fertility rate, but it is possible to consider that some women withdraw from the labour market – temporarily, although sometimes definitively – because of a lack of accessible childcare.

## **4. CHILDCARE SERVICES: POLICY ISSUES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Childcare services are part of family policy and also educational policy (as 2 to 3 year olds are already covered by the national education ministry). In France, family policy and childcare facilities are an integral part of social, tax and employment policies – indeed, funding childcare depends on social policy and also tax policy (via dependants' tax allowances (see below) and tax reductions related to care – it is also part of employment policy, in that measures have an impact that either promote, or not, women's employment.

### **4.2 Policies with regard to availability**

Overview of changes in policy with regard to availability, including developments in ways of financing, like supply subsidies (such as operating grants or capital equipment grants) or demand subsidies, focussing for example on low-income families. This section should also provide information on the cost for public expenses, the division of the (macro-economic) childcare bill between the state, the employer and the parent. In addition, the question whether the Structural Funds are used for developing childcare facilities should be covered.

### **Measures of the Family Conferences, 2003-2005:**

From 2003 onwards, the system of financial help towards childcare was totally reformed and turned into a single allowance. The **PAJE** (prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant – integrated childcare allowance) and is made up of various parts:

- **Birth bonus (€800)** and means-tested **basic allowance (€160)**, which is awarded until the child's third birthday. The income ceiling was raised, thus enabling 15% more families to receive it. The typical profile of those receiving it is dual-earning couples with income close to average pay.
- **Supplement for freedom of choice concerning economic activity (CLCA)** is available for the first child for the “parent”, who stops working for 6 months, or for the second child with the same conditions as for the previously existing APE (during a period of 3 years) (an allowance of €513).
- **New optional supplement for freedom of choice concerning economic activity:** for a year and for a bigger allowance (€750) for a third child (in 2005).
- **Supplement for freedom of choice concerning childcare:** for up to the age of 6 years for the low and average paid (2 SMICs), the cost of care in a crèche, by a childminder or own-

home care will be reduced.

One can see that with PAJE, financial help for own-home childcare has been increased and encouraged more than registered childminders.

In the Hirsch report (2005), a new estimation concerning the PAJE shows that the cost of childminders is going down for poor households, but their effort rate remains high: **“A couple where both people work half-time have to devote 15% of their income to paying for a childminder** earning average pay, i.e. €157 per month (in Paris this effort rate is as high as 33%). Whereas **a couple where both people earn three times the SMIC per month only devote 5.6% of their income to paying for the same childminder** (€311 per month)”.

### Dependants' tax allowance and family allowances

An initial topic for debate: for or against separate taxation?

France is the only country in Europe to have a tax system with a marital and dependants' tax allowance.

It involves joint taxation of couples, thus benefiting couples where only one person works with a high income, and also being a disincentive for dual earning couples on low and similar pay. This family-based tax system is considered by some people to penalise women's employment or transition from part-time to full-time employment, as new income from economic employment in a household (especially if it is so-called “secondary income”) can lead to increased taxation in a higher tax bracket (Lanquetin, Letablier, 2005). This approach has been under debate for a long time already (Glaude, 1991).

More recently, Sterdyniak (2004), who is strongly opposed to individualising social rights, also supports joint taxation: “joint taxation is in the interests of married couples, **except in the very special case of women on low pay** (thus entitled to a reduction) **living with a man whose pay is not too high**”. Is this really a very special case? Given that joint taxation is advantageous for a woman earning the SMIC and... a partner earning more than €2,000. Should not one be seeking to protect the less well-off and in particular dual-earning couples on low income and couples earning the SMIC?

**Table 11. Joint taxation versus separate taxation when the wife earns the SMIC**

Husband's taxable income	8 355€ (i.e. net monthly SMIC)	11 000€	15 000€	18 000€
Separate taxation	0+0	780+0	1571+0	2478+0
Joint taxation	446	1 059	1 821	2400

Source Sterdyniak, 2004.

The dependants' tax allowance introduces a half-allowance for each of the first 2 children and a whole allowance for the third and following children - the reduction of taxation increasing with income. The implementation of these dependants' allowances reduces the progressive nature of taxation for big families. But given the same number of children, the dependants' allowances benefit higher income families more. Since 1981, in order to introduce a certain degree of “vertical equity”, a ceiling was put on the dependants' allowance at €2,086 per half-deduction for income in 2003.

However, some studies show the limits of the impact of dependants' tax allowances on fertility – a variation of 1% of financial incentives for families with 3 children is said to produce a relative increase in their proportion of less than 0.05%! In fact, the link between “desire to have children” and “financial incentives” is far from being evident (what about living conditions, available childcare facilities, parents' qualifications, occupational integration and feeling of “social insecurity”, unemployment, job insecurity, housing problems and so forth?). In fact, sensitivity to tax incentives increases with income!

Benefits linked to families represent almost €44 billion, i.e. 2.8% of GDP (including maternity benefit and family allowances), of which €38 billion are devoted to directly family benefits. Family allowances (which are not means-tested) constitute the biggest item. Attempts by the left-wing government in 1998 to means-test family allowances, which are available for the second child and especially from the 3<sup>rd</sup> child onwards, failed following a general outcry from family-centred organisations (UNAF<sup>13</sup>) and some trade unions, such as the CFTC<sup>14</sup> in the lead).

Compared with other European countries regarding efforts in relation to family benefits, France is 7<sup>th</sup> - behind the Nordic countries (3.8% of GDP in Denmark) and also Germany and Austria. This is partly explained by the nature of these benefits – in the Nordic countries, they are mainly in kind (collective services), whereas in Germany, Austria, and above all in France, they are monetary benefits and less than 1 GDP percentage point in the form of collective services. This is why France is included amongst the “corporatist – conservative” systems, according to Espin-Andersen, because of an absence of universal rights in all areas, and in particular the right of children to childcare provision (as is the case in the Nordic countries), even if the situation is hybrid, given that, as we have already said, nursery schools offer rights from the age of 3 onwards (and they are not included in calculating the cost of family benefits).

According to the conclusions of the DREES report, family and social benefits, minimum social benefits and taxation represent **€2,400 per child per annum** (€5,000 for the under threes). Depending on households' primary income, the distribution of the average amount of social transfers follows a U curve – taking children into account in minimum social benefits and housing benefits helps low income families relatively more, while dependants' tax allowances benefit better-off families. **But if one concentrates on help directly related to children (benefits, dependants' allowances and help with care), the highest incomes benefit most, and even more so with more children.**

The Godet report emphasises the fact that the standard of living drops with the number of children (independently of income). It is true that families with children represent 54% of the population, but only receive 43% of available income, whereas households without children account for only a quarter of the population, but receive more than 33% of available income. However, it cannot be said that this concerns the different socio-occupational categories in the same way.

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<sup>13</sup> UNAF: Union nationale des associations familiales – National Union of Family Associations

<sup>14</sup> CFTC: Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens - The French Christian Workers' Confederation

**Table 12. Gap in the standard of living, depending on family size and socio-occupational category after transfers and taxation**

	Manual workers	Clerical workers	Professional and managerial staff
Couples			
• Without children	163	187	333
• 1 child	149	166	291
• 2 children	135	151	267
• 3 children	117	140	254
• 4 or more children	100	111	244

Source: Insee in Godet, 2005

Purchasing power per unit of consumption (1 (1<sup>st</sup> adult), 0,5 (second), 0,3 per child under 14, 0,5 for children over 14)

Base 100: manual worker couple with 4 or more children in 2000

Impoverishment is thus observed to be greater amongst manual worker families with many children (63% more for manual workers without children) than within other socio-occupational categories, but **the gap is 1 to 2 between manual worker couples and professional and managerial couples without children and 1 to 2.5 between the same categories when it comes to families with many children...**

#### ***4.3 Policies with regard to quality***

The situation of registered childminders has been really improved, as they now have a proper status, namely a collective agreement, recognised training, monitoring by the health services and so forth. They have better recognition, even though their pay is still low. However, some childminders are in the informal sector and do not have social protection cover; they are not monitored, and are not encouraged to give up their undeclared situation.

#### ***4.4 Policies with regard to related issues***

The French childcare system is increasingly of a twofold nature. In some ways it is unquestionably advanced (nursery school from 2.5 years onwards with staff trained by the National Education ministry; flexible timing of childcare which is better adapted to parents' needs, etc.), but, on the other hand, some families do not find a solution and “choose” provisional withdrawal from economic activity or informal childcare, which is not without consequences for the children concerned. The idea announced by the President of the Republic during the electoral campaign, namely “the legal right to demand childcare” (droit d'accueil opposable) for each parent, could partly deal with these problems. But, there would need to be solutions adapted to needs and part of the budget used for the CLCA would have to be transferred to collective childcare, which is widely acclaimed by families.

#### ***4.5 The response of the recommendations given at the EU level***

No recommendation was made by the 2007 Spring Council concerning France. It as if childcare

provision is sufficient and leads to no inequalities. However, in our view, there are grounds for criticising the indirect effects - which have very often been denounced in our reports - of the development of the ex-APE on the employment of those women who are most fragile in relation to the labour market. This solution, which is mainly “chosen” by women (and only 2% of fathers), is justified given the following factors: lack of childcare facilities in certain employment areas; the cost of care for the lowest paid; and difficult working and travelling conditions, encouraging these mothers to choose an allowance that is at the same level as minimum social benefits. The difficulties of returning to employment lead one to think that this measure is contrary to the objective of improving women's employment.

Finally, it should be recalled that the present President of the Republic announced in his election campaign that he would offer a “legal right to demand childcare”, but this measure has already been postponed until 2009... and will be introduced in 2012. This reform will involve local authorities very much - all parents, who do not receive a solution regarding childcare, will be able to go to court, however, the concrete resources have not yet been defined. Introducing such a legal right means that many, often complex, issues have to be resolved. The main one will involve fixing the limits of the right. Given that childcare facilities are a mixture of public collective solutions, as well both private collective and individual ones, who will be responsible for meeting the demands of parents without a childcare solution? Moreover, the introduction of a legal right implies that the current lack of childcare places must be dealt with - and this is why its implementation has been postponed until 2012. Given that we know that there are 1.44 million children under 3, both of whose parents work, the government has estimated that the 350 to 400 thousand additional places need to be created in order for such a right to be effective. This is an objective which seems rather incompatible with the austerity cure imposed on the CNAF's national social action fund in the framework of the 2005-2008 COG<sup>15</sup> that was signed between the family department and the State. Following the budgetary escalation in recent years, the CNAF has had to reduce by €200 million its subsidies for the creation and functioning of childcare facilities (out of a total social action budget of about €3.5 billion). The new agreement should, therefore, logically lead to an increase in this allocation, which seems hardly compatible with the necessary return to a balanced social accounts.

#### **4.6 Summary and conclusions**

In France one cannot deny the desire to provide childcare is in line with families' needs. But we are far from meeting all the demand, both in terms of means and quality. It is considered to be the responsibility of the State, but in fact childcare solutions are often found individually and in modest families, arbitration, which is to the detriment of mothers' work, is often the only solution. Will a real legal right to demand childcare be the solution? We will observe, in our conclusion, the initial effects of such a measure.

### **5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

It is difficult to assess whether childcare needs are met or not. We can use the CNAF's indicator (Paris, Chauffaut, 2007), which takes into account potential childcare needs: **potential childcare needs can be estimated by relating the number of children under three, both of whose parents are economically active or students (or the parent in lone parent families) along with the children whose parent is economically inactive because of a lack of childcare to the total number of children under 3.** Thus, 60% of children under 3, i.e. **1,440,000** children potentially need individual or collective childcare. According to this study, it is estimated that about 1 million of childcare places are available for these children (from 4 months to 3 years). **This means that**

<sup>15</sup>

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**400,000 additional childcare places are needed.** This figure can provide an indicator of potential needs regarding individual and collective childcare, but it does not take into account the interaction of the decision to embark on economic activity and the choice of childcare. Thus, some dual earning couples look after their child who is under 3 themselves, either by working at home or because they have atypical working hours, which enable them to take it in turns to look after their child. Other parents withdraw from the labour market, because they do not have a suitable childcare arrangement. Surveys estimate that amongst those women who look after their child themselves, 40% do so, because they do not have access to childcare.

**Table 13. Estimation of potential needs regarding childcare for the under 3s and effective supply (Metropolitan France)**

Needs	Number	Source
number of children between 3 months and 3 years (*)	2,112,167	CNAF calculation based on INSEE figures, beginning 2007
Number of children, whose lone parent or both parents are economically active (whether occupied or not)	1,246,179	INSEE, enquête emploi 2005
Number of children, one of whose parents is economically inactive because of difficulties related to childcare	155,244	INSEE, enquête emploi 2005 Enquête Méda & Wierinck 2003
<b>Total potential needs</b>	<b>1,401,423</b>	
Effective supply for the 0-3 year olds Places in childcare establishments (EAJE)	319,000	DREES enquête PMI (2005)
PAJE CMG beneficiaries - own home (- 3 years)	32,215	CNAF Fileas (2006)
PAJE CMG beneficiaries - childminder (- 3 years)	473,601	CNAF Fileas (2006)
PAJE CMG beneficiaries - structure (- 3 years)	1,326	CNAF Fileas (2006)
Nursery school	182,000	Education nationale (2006)
<b>Total childcare places</b>	<b>1,009,142</b>	

(\*) For third children and others, children are included from 4 months.

Source: Paris, Chauffaut, 2007

The same study makes a concrete assessment of what could be a legal right to childcare. Two hypotheses are envisaged:

- The principle of a single monetary allowance (possibly on a sliding-scale basis) given to all parents of young children, who decide to look after their children themselves (or withdraw from economic activity).
- The principle of free generalised supply in kind (in fact the left wing's programme), which involves generalising the nursery school type of system (i.e. free childcare provision) from the end of maternity leave.

These principles are totally different and, in the view of the CNAF's specialists, it would not be possible to implement either of them: the first solution would remove the diversity of the French system of childcare and would, in our view, be an even greater incentive to withdraw from economic activity, which is not our objective. The second solution is significantly more interesting,

but obviously very expensive - “overall, totally collective, childcare provision for all families, would lead to additional costs of about €10 billion” (Paris, Chauffaut, 2007) (including maintaining parental participation and using all expenditure devoted to the ex-APE and the CLCA!). That seems very unlikely to be possible in the present period!

The CNAF's proposal would thus be a mixture – on the one hand, avoiding the “traps”, which would lead to women withdrawing from economic activity (but they do not indicate whether they would completely abolish the CLCA), and, on the other, applying the principle of a legal right to demand childcare to target populations, namely the unemployed and those who find a job quickly would have priority; families with income below a threshold for which childcare is essential in order to stay in an occupation. Proposals put forward by the Strategic analysis centre (Centre d'analyse stratégique) (2007) are taken on board in order to promote equal access to childcare (harmonising families' effort rates between individual and collective care – reinforcing help to modest families regarding using childminders); ensuring better geographical organisation of supply; improving information, in particular via an individualised information service, and so forth.

Qualitatively, the choice of childcare is not always satisfactory. From the point of view of parents' demand, there are still many families who are dissatisfied with the type of childcare they have, even though the proportion dropped between 1997 and 2003 (according to a Credoc survey). Now, 63% of parents use a form of childcare, which they consider to be the most satisfactory one (compared with 57% in 1997). However, when one breaks down the different kinds of childcare, it becomes clear that demand both for crèche places and for people to come into the home to look after children is far from being met.

**Tableau 14. Parents'\* preferences and practices regarding childcare (%)**

	Type of childcare considered to be most satisfactory when both parents work	Type of childcare adopted for the youngest child
Registered childminder	35	35
Collective crèche	25	19
Grandparents	20	23
Own-home childcare	9	5
Unregistered childminder	4	11
Family crèche	3	2
Playgroup	2	3

\* Parents whose youngest child is not looked after by its mother

Source: Credoc, 2003

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