

Childcare staff shortage reaches levels never seen before ^[1]

Last year, childcare providers in Brussels and Flanders sought new employees 6,267 times, a 54% increase over previous years, according to figures requested by Flemish Parliament member Celia Groothedde Ledoux (Groen).

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EXCERPTS

The sector has already been struggling for some time, De Standaard reports. In 2020, there were 4,068 vacancies in childcare in Flanders and Brussels– nowhere else in the care and welfare sector was there such an acute shortage of employees.

New figures show that in 2021, the figure rose by 54% to a dramatic record of 6,267 vacancies. At the end of 2021, 915 of those were still open. Currently, 770 remain.

Vacancies take a long time to fill

Helan Kinderopvang, a union of 51 daycare centres, recently pointed out that it takes an average of 42.5 days for a vacancy to be filled due to a Flemish decree in 2014 that the childcare sector says increased their workload tremendously.

“This is untenable,” Groothedde Ledoux stressed.

The 2014 decree increased the sector standard to eight to nine children per supervisor with the intention of reducing waiting lists, about which parents had complained for many years.

But the vacancies in child care increased rapidly after the decree: while there were 1,756 vacancies in 2013, that figure has since tripled.

“Flanders, as one of the richest regions in Europe, invests much less in childcare than our neighbouring countries,” said Groothedde Ledoux.

“But cheap childcare does not exist. If investments are not made properly, the children, the parents or the supervisors pay the price. In this model of the Flemish government, all three pay.”

Demand for reform

Groothedde has been pressing for a thorough reform for some time now.

“For more than two years now Wouter Beke (Note: Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health, Family and Poverty Reduction) has been shifting the problems in the sector away and the crisis is snowballing ever harder,” Groothedde Ledoux said.

“Either the Flemish government now seriously invests in childcare, or it will be his legacy that he let the strong Flemish childcare go to pieces.”

Two recent government initiatives in Flanders are making it extra difficult for childcare: Minister of Education Ben Weyts (N-VA) decided to hire 550 child supervisors for nursery education. As a result, people are leaving child care because, according to Groothedde Ledoux, “otherwise they have to do the same thing for 40 years, their careers are now very flat.”

Employment Minister Hilde Crevits (CD&V) decided to train 1,300 people ‘on the job,’ meaning they learn the profession while already active in child care. The intention was to get more people into centres quickly, “but these lateral entrants must be trained by supervisors who are already under high work pressure,” said Groothedde Ledoux.

The sector has planned a demonstration for 1 April in Brussels, and 25 March in Ghent.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: child care shortage ^[4]

child care workforce ^[5]

care economy ^[6]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/03/childcare-staff-shortage-reaches-levels-never-seen> [2] <https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium-news/212220/childcare-staff-shortage-reaches-levels-never-seen-before> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-shortage> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-workforce> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/care-economy>