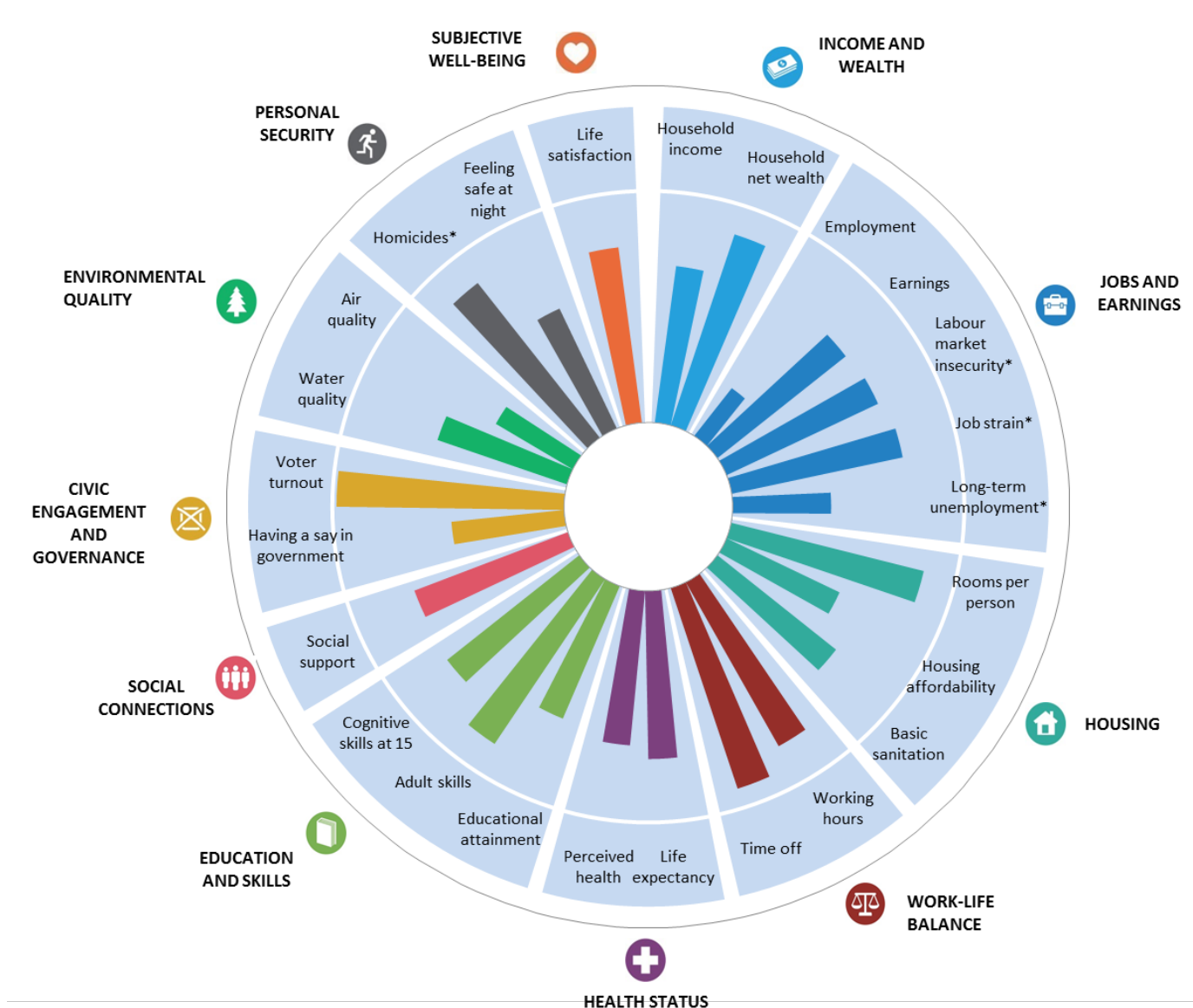


How's Life in Belgium?

Relative to other countries, Belgium performs above or close to the OECD average across the different well-being dimensions. **Household net adjusted disposable income** and **household net wealth** were among the top third in the OECD in 2015 and 2014 respectively. While both job strain and labour market insecurity are comparatively low in Belgium, in 2016 the **employment rate** stood at 62%, 5 percentage points lower than the OECD average, and the **long-term unemployment rate** was 4%, double the OECD average rate. In terms of work-life balance, the **time off** (i.e. time spent on leisure and personal care) of full-time employees is among the top tier in the OECD area, and only 4% of employees regularly **worked 50 hours or more per week** in 2016, less than one-third of the OECD average. While **air quality** in Belgium is close to the OECD average level, 84% of Belgians reported feeling satisfied with the **quality of the water** in the period 2014-16, slightly higher than the OECD average (79%). Belgium's personal security, **social support** and **life satisfaction** also stand slightly above the OECD average.

Belgium's average level of current well-being: Comparative strengths and weaknesses














Note: This chart shows Belgium's relative strengths and weaknesses in well-being when compared with other OECD countries. For both positive and negative indicators (such as homicides, marked with an "**"), longer bars always indicate better outcomes (i.e. higher well-being), whereas shorter bars always indicate worse outcomes (i.e. lower well-being). If data are missing for any given indicator, the relevant segment of the circle is shaded in white.

Additional information, including the data used in this country note, can be found at:


www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-2017-country-notes-data.xlsx


Change in Belgium's well-being over the past 10 years

Dimension	Description	Change
 Income and wealth	Household net adjusted disposable income increased steadily, by 5%, from 2005 to 2009, in line with the OECD average cumulative gain over the same period. Since then it has gradually decreased, to a level just 2% higher (in real terms) than in 2005. Household net wealth was 7% higher in 2014 than in 2010, in real terms.	↔ ↗
 Jobs and earnings	The employment rate is 1.2 percentage points higher than in 2005, just below its 2008 peak. Despite an overall increase of 2% (in real terms) in the past ten years, average earnings fell slightly between 2015 and 2016. Labour market insecurity in 2015 was higher than in 2007, yet below its 2009 level. At 28%, the share of employees experiencing job strain is similar to the level in 2005 (having peaked at 36% in 2010). By contrast, long-term unemployment has improved from 4.4% to 4% over the decade.	↗ ↗ ↘ ↔ ↗
 Housing conditions	In Belgium, the proportion of rooms per person has remained stable over the past decade, slightly above the OECD average. However, housing has become less affordable, with the proportion of disposable income spent on it rising from 19.7% in 2005 to 20.5% in 2015. Belgium is one of few OECD countries where the percentage of people living in dwellings without basic sanitary facilities has increased since 2005.	↔ ↘ ↘
 Work-life balance	At 4.3%, the share of employees working 50 hours or more per week in 2016 was very similar to the level reported in 2005.	↔
 Health status	The 10-year change in life expectancy at birth in Belgium cannot be assessed, due to a recent break in the data. However, between 2011 and 2015, it remained relatively stable (having risen slightly up to 2014, then fallen in 2015). The percentage of adults reporting to be in “good” or “very good” health also remained relatively stable between 2005 and 2015.	↔ ↔
 Education and skills	The 10-year change in upper secondary educational attainment cannot be assessed, due to a recent break in the data. However, between 2014 and 2016, attainment rates in Belgium increased by 1.5 percentage points.	↗
 Social connections	In Belgium, there has been very little change over the last decade in the percentage of people with relatives or friends whom they can count on to help in case of need. This is contrary to the OECD average trend, which has decreased slightly (by 3.1 percentage points) over the same period.	↔
 Civic engagement	At 89%, voter turnout in the 2014 federal elections increased very slightly compared to 2010, but was still marginally below the 91% turnout in 2007. This is in line with the OECD average trend, which has seen voter turnout decrease by 2.4 percentage points over the past decade.	↘
 Environmental quality	Satisfaction with local water quality in Belgium in recent years is very similar to the levels seen 10 years earlier. Exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution has improved by 7% overall since 2005, despite a sharp increase from 2008 to 2009.	↔ ↗
 Personal security	Although the number of deaths due to assault has gradually decreased over the last 10 years, feelings of safety when walking alone at night have remained relatively stable in Belgium.	↗ ↔
 Subjective well-being	In Belgium, there is tentative evidence of a slight fall in life satisfaction since 2005, but current levels are still above the OECD average.	↘


Note: For each indicator in every dimension: ↗ refers to an improvement; ↔ indicates little or no change; and ↘ signals deterioration. This is based on a comparison of the starting year (2005 in most cases) and the latest available year (usually 2015 or 2016). The order of the arrows shown in column three corresponds to that of the indicators mentioned in column two.


Belgium's resources and risks for future well-being: Illustrative indicators

 Natural capital			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Greenhouse gas emissions from domestic production	2	↗	2005-2015
CO ₂ emissions from domestic consumption	3	↘	2001-2011
Exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution	2	↗	2005-2013
Forest area	3	↔	2005-2014
Renewable freshwater resources	3	..	Long-term annual avg
Freshwater abstractions	2	..	2013
Threatened birds	2	..	Latest available
Threatened mammals	2	..	Latest available
Threatened plants	3	..	Latest available

 Economic capital			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Produced fixed assets	2	↗	2005-2014
Gross fixed capital formation	2	↘	2005-2016
Financial net worth of total economy	1	↗	2005-2016
Intellectual property assets	2	↗	2005-2014
Investment in R&D	1	↗	2005-2015
Household debt	2	↘	2005-2015
Household net wealth	1	↗	2010-2014
Financial net worth of government	3	↘	2005-2016
Banking sector leverage	2	↔	2005-2016

1	Top-performing OECD tier, latest available year
2	Middle-performing OECD tier, latest available year
3	Bottom-performing OECD tier, latest available year

 Human capital			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Young adult educational attainment	3	↗	2014-2016
Educational expectancy	1	..	2015
Cognitive skills at age 15	2	..	2015
Adult skills	1	..	2011/2012
Long-term unemployment	3	↗	2005-2016
Life expectancy at birth	2	↔	2011-2015
Smoking prevalence	2	↗	2008-2014
Obesity prevalence	1	↔	2008-2014

 Social capital			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Trust in others	3	..	2013
Trust in the police	2	..	2013
Trust in the national government	2	↘	2005-2016
Voter turnout	1	↘	2007-2014
Government stakeholder engagement	2	..	2014
Volunteering through organisations	2	..	2011/2012

↗	Improving over time
↘	Worsening over time
↔	No change
..	No data available

HOW LARGE ARE WELL-BEING INEQUALITIES IN BELGIUM?

What is inequality and how is it measured? Measuring inequality means trying to describe **how unevenly distributed** outcomes are in society. *How's Life? 2017* adopts several different approaches:

- Measures of “**vertical**” inequalities address how unequally outcomes are spread across all people in society – for example, by looking at the size of the gap between people at the bottom of the distribution and people at the top.
- Measures of “**horizontal**” inequalities focus on the gap between population groups defined by specific characteristics (such as men and women, young and old, people with higher and lower levels of education).
- Measures of “**deprivation**” report the share of people who live below a certain level of well-being (such as those who face income poverty or live in an overcrowded household).

Compared to most OECD countries, Belgium has low levels of **vertical inequality** in terms of income, wealth and earnings. It also fares well in life satisfaction, but the gaps become a lot larger for both working hours and cognitive skills.

Across almost all OECD countries, **women** typically fare worse than **men** on earnings, low pay and employment. In Belgium, women earn 7% less than men, a gap much narrower than the OECD average (13%), and they are 7% less likely than men to be unemployed. However, the Belgian gender divide is larger than in the OECD on average for outcomes such as having a say in government and feelings of safety.

Belgium shows mixed outcomes regarding the divide between **young** and **middle-aged** adults. For instance, in all OECD countries, younger adults have lower levels of income and wealth – but in Belgium these gaps are narrower than for the OECD on average. By contrast, younger adults in Belgium face comparatively large disadvantages in terms of employment and unemployment.

In all OECD countries, adults with only a secondary level of **education** have lower household net wealth and lower earnings compared to tertiary-educated adults – although in Belgium these gaps are narrower than for the OECD on average. By contrast, Belgium has a comparatively large education-related divides in outcomes such as cognitive skills at 15 (i.e. for the children of adults with different education levels), adult skills, having a say in government, and feelings of safety – all of which are all higher among those with a tertiary level of education.

Regarding **deprivations**, the country is classified in the top third of the OECD (i.e. least deprived) in 7 out of 20 indicators. However, Belgium has a comparatively high unemployment rate (7.9%) and a high share of people with less than a secondary level of educational attainment (25.3%).

Well-being inequalities in Belgium

	Vertical inequality	Horizontal inequality by			Deprivation
		Gender	Age	Education	
		Women relative to men	Young relative to middle-aged	Secondary relative to tertiary	
Household income	Green		Green		Yellow
Household net wealth	Green		Green	Green	Green
Earnings	Green	Green	Green	Green	
Low pay		Yellow			Green
Employment		Yellow	Red	Red	
Unemployment		Green	Red	Red	Red
Housing affordability					Yellow
Rooms per person					Green
Life expectancy	Yellow				
Perceived health		Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green
Working hours	Red	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow
Time off		Yellow	Red		
Educational attainment		Green	Yellow		Red
Cognitive skills at 15	Red	Green		Red	Yellow
Adult skills	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Green
Time spent socialising		Yellow	Yellow		
Social support		Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Voter turnout		White	White	White	Green
Having a say in government	Yellow	Red	Green	Red	Yellow
Air quality					Yellow
Water quality		Red	Green	Red	Yellow
Homicides		Red			Yellow
Feeling safe at night		Red	Green	Red	Yellow
Life satisfaction	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green
Negative affect balance					Yellow

Legend:
● top third of OECD countries
● middle third of OECD countries
● bottom third of OECD countries
● data gaps
 no measures

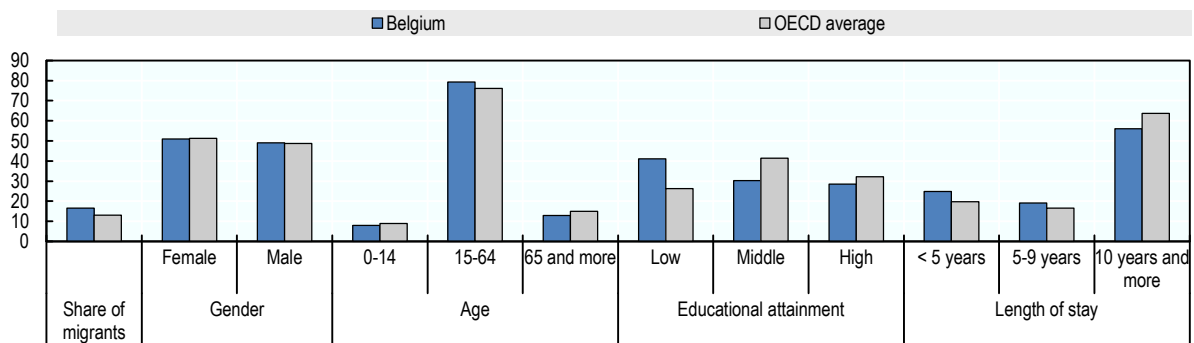
HOW'S LIFE FOR MIGRANTS IN BELGIUM?

Migrants (defined as people living in a different country from the one in which they were born) represent an important share of the population in most OECD countries. Capturing information about their well-being is critical for gaining a fuller picture of how life is going, and whether it is going equally well for all members of society.

Who are the migrants in Belgium and OECD?

Less than one in five people living in Belgium were born elsewhere (17%), slightly above the OECD average (13%), and 51% of them are women (the same as the OECD average). Migrants in Belgium are slightly more likely to be of working age than in the OECD on average (79% of them are aged 15 to 64, as compared to 76% across the OECD), and they are more likely to have a low educational attainment than a middle or a high level. More than one in two migrants arrived in Belgium ten years ago or more.

Share of migrants in the total population and selected characteristics

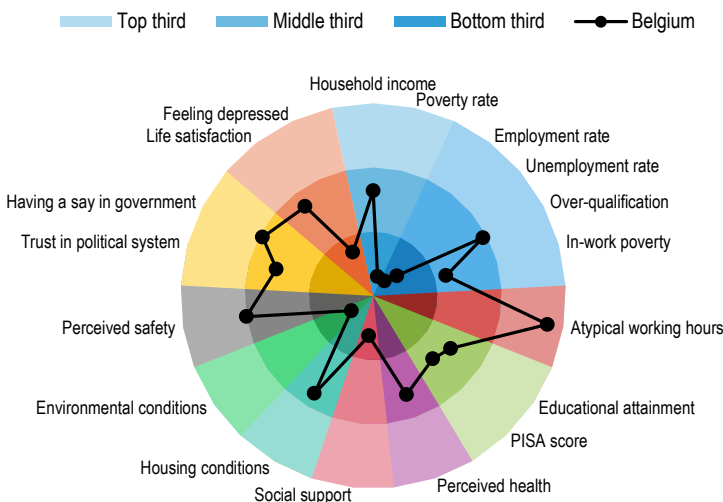


How is migrants' well-being in Belgium?

Compared with the migrant populations of other OECD countries, migrants living in Belgium have a relatively good situation regarding atypical working hours. Migrants settled in Belgium rank in the middle third of OECD-country migrants for 11 out of 18 selected well-being indicators. They rank in the bottom third for environmental conditions, feeling depressed, poverty, employment, unemployment and social support.

As in many other OECD countries, migrants in Belgium tend to experience lower well-being outcomes than the native-born population: in Belgium, this is the case for 11 out of 15 selected well-being indicators. Migrants in Belgium experience similar situations as the native-born regarding perceived safety and atypical working hours, but report higher levels of trust in the political system and having a say in what the government does.

Comparing well-being outcomes for migrants in Belgium with the migrant populations of other OECD countries



Comparison of migrants' and native-born well-being in Belgium

	Migrants have a worse situation	Same situation	Migrants have a better situation
Household income	▲		
Wealth	▲		
Physical health risks at work	▲		
Atypical working hours		▲	
Literacy scores	▲		
PISA score	▲		
Perceived health	▲		
Social support	▲		
Housing conditions	▲		
Environmental conditions	▲		
Perceived safety		▲	
Trust in political system			▲
Having a say in government			▲
Life satisfaction	▲		
Feeling depressed	▲		

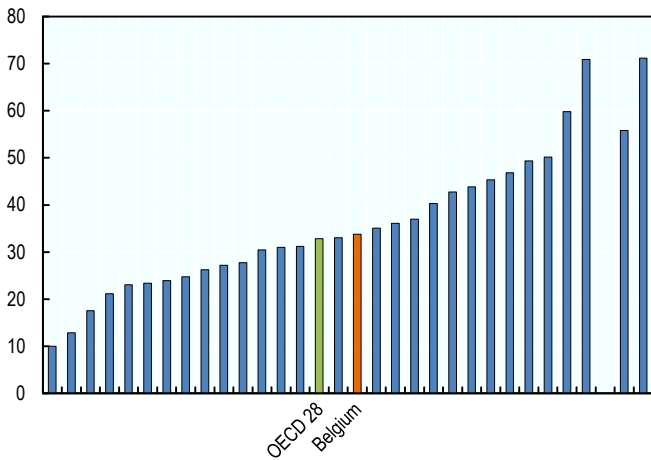
GOVERNANCE AND WELL-BEING IN BELGIUM

Public institutions play an important role in well-being, both by guaranteeing that people’s fundamental rights are protected, and by ensuring the provision of goods and services necessary for people to thrive and prosper. How people experience and engage with public institutions also matters: people’s political voice, agency and representation are outcomes of value in their own right.

In Belgium, 34% of the population feel that they have a say in what the government does, similar to the OECD average of 33%. Although Belgium is one of few OECD countries to enforce compulsory voting, turnout has fallen slightly in recent years, from 91% in 2007, to nearly 89% in 2014. When asked about whether or not corruption is widespread across government, 49% of Belgians answered "yes", as compared to an OECD average of 56%. Since around 2006, the share of people in the OECD who report that they have confidence in their national government has fallen from 42% to 38%.

Having a say in what the government does

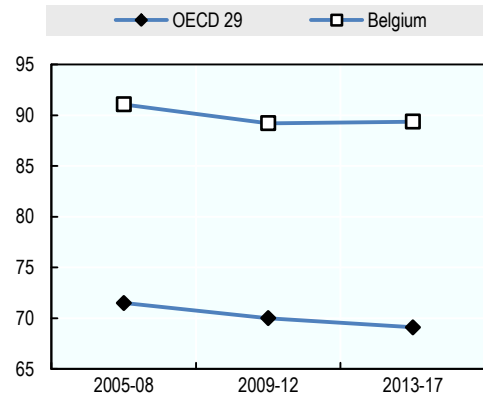
Percentage of people aged 16-65 who feel that they have a say in what the government does, around 2012



Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC database)

Voter turnout

Percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote



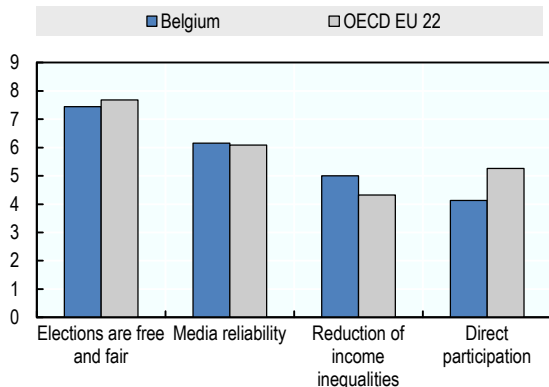
Note: Data refers to parliamentary elections. If more than one election took place over the time period indicated, the simple average voter turnout from all elections is shown. The OECD average sums elections that occurred over the time periods shown in 29 OECD countries.

Source: IDEA dataset

Overall, Belgians’ satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country is fairly similar to the European OECD average level. People in Belgium tend to be relatively satisfied with the freedom and fairness of elections (7.4 on a 0-10 scale), while they are less satisfied when it comes to the reduction of income inequality (5.0) and direct participation mechanisms at the local level (4.1). Meanwhile, satisfaction with public services varies according to whether people have used those services in the last year: people with direct recent experience of using health and education services tend to be more satisfied than those without. In Belgium, satisfaction with both health and education services is above the OECD European average level.

Satisfaction with different elements of democracy

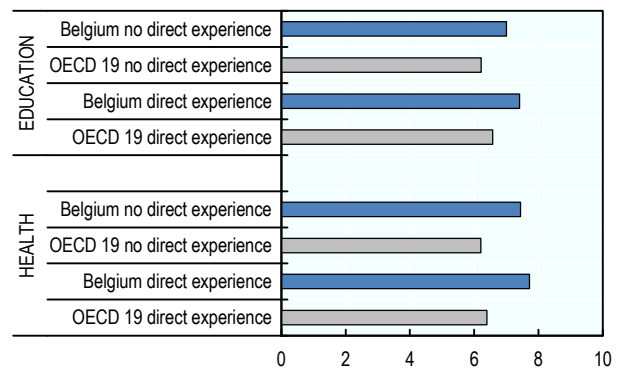
Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with elements of democracy, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on wave 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS), special rotating module on citizens’ valuations of different elements of democracy

Satisfaction with public services by direct experience

Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction, 2013



Source: OECD calculations based on the EU Quality of Government (QoG) for 19 European OECD countries.

BETTER LIFE INDEX

The **Better Life Index** is an interactive web application that invites citizens to compare well-being across OECD countries and beyond on the basis of the set of well-being indicators explored in *How's Life?*. Users chose what weight to give to each of the eleven dimensions shown below and then see how countries perform, based on their own personal priorities in life.

11 topics to define well-being

Housing	Community	Health
Income	Education	Life Satisfaction
Jobs	Environment	Safety
	Civic Engagement	Work-Life Balance

Each flower represents a country and each petal represents a topic

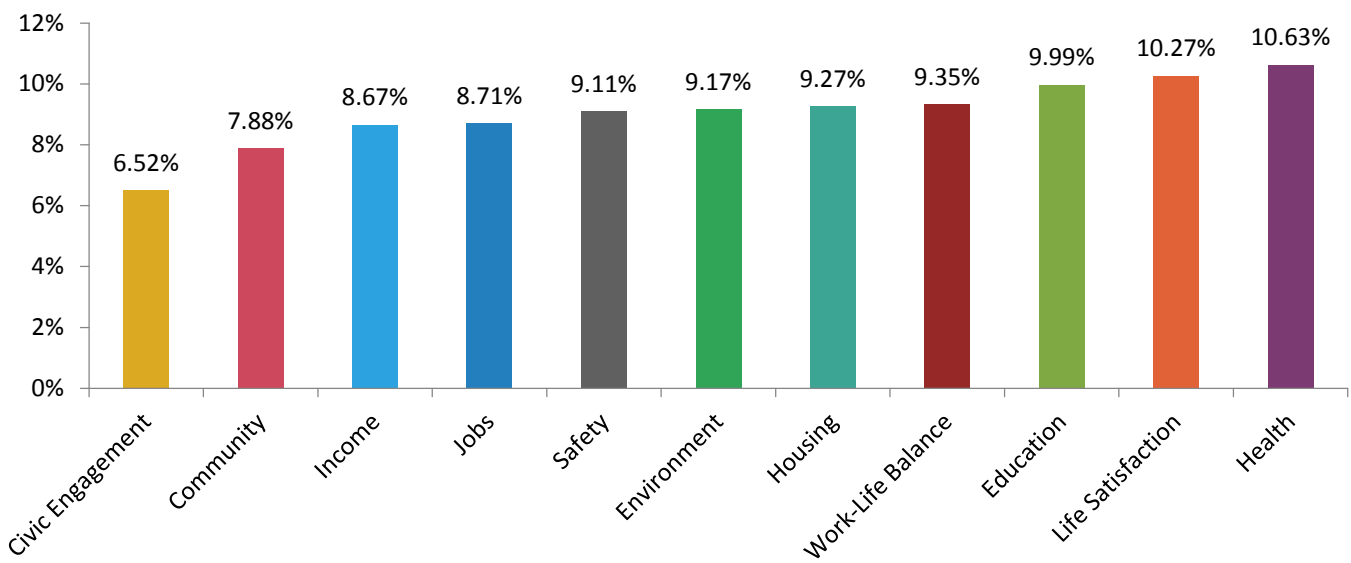
Rate the topics according to their importance to you

Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, on how these preferences differ across countries, and on the demographic characteristics of users.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN BELGIUM?

Since its launch in May 2011, the Better Life Index has attracted **over ten million visits from just about every country on the planet** and has received over **22 million page views**. To date, over 115,000 people in Belgium have visited the website making Belgium the 21st country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are Brussels (34% of visits), Ghent, Antwerp, and Liege.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared by 1,800 website visitors in Belgium. Findings are only indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For Belgian users of the Better Life Index, health, life satisfaction and education are the three most important topics** (shown below).¹ Up to date information, including a breakdown of participants in each country by gender and age can be found here: www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#BEL.



¹ User information for Belgium is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and September 2017.

The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's Life?* report. It also includes an interactive web application, the *Better Life Index*, and a number of *methodological and research projects* to improve the information base available to understand well-being levels, trends and their drivers.

The OECD Better Life Initiative:

- Helps to inform policy making to improve quality of life.
- Connects policies to people's lives.
- Generates support for needed policy measures.
- Improves civic engagement by encouraging the public to create their own *Better Life Index* and share their preferences about what matters most for well-being
- Empowers the public by improving their understanding of policy-making.

This note presents **selected findings for Belgium from the *How's Life? 2017* report** (pages 1-6) and shows what **Belgian users of the Better Life Index** are telling us about their **well-being priorities** (page 7).

HOW'S LIFE?



How's Life?, published every two years, provides a comprehensive picture of well-being in OECD and selected partner countries by bringing together an internationally comparable set of well-being indicators. It considers eleven dimensions of current well-being including: income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing; health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security; and subjective well-being. It also looks at four types of resources that help to sustain well-being over time: natural, human, economic and social capital.

The *How's Life? 2017* report presents the latest data on well-being in OECD and partner countries, including how lives have changed since 2005. It includes a special focus on inequalities, the well-being of migrants in OECD countries, and the issue of governance – particularly how people experience and engage with public institutions. To read more, visit: www.oecd.org/howslife.

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