

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT _____	3	SDG 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES _____	65
02. HIGHLIGHTS _____	5	SDG 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES _____	69
03. INTRODUCTION _____	8	SDG 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION _____	73
04. METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS FOR PREPARING THE REPORT _____	10	SDG 13 CLIMATE ACTION _____	77
05. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT _____	13	SDG 14 LIFE BELOW WATER _____	81
06. PROGRESS ON GOALS AND TARGETS AND EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND MEASURES TAKEN SO FAR _____	25	SDG 15 LIFE ON LAND _____	84
SDG 1 NO POVERTY _____	27	SDG 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS _____	88
SDG 2 ZERO HUNGER _____	31	SDG 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS _____	92
SDG 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING _____	35	07. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION TO THE VNR 2023 _____	96
SDG 4 QUALITY EDUCATION _____	39	08. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDGS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL _____	107
SDG 5 GENDER EQUALITY _____	44	09. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES _____	118
SDG 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION _____	49	10. IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES _____	121
SDG 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY _____	53	11. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS _____	128
SDG 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH _____	58	ANNEX 1 STATISTICAL ANNEX _____	131
SDG 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE _____	62		

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01

INTRODUCTORY
STATEMENT

FOREWORD

BELGIUM'S VNR 2023

In 2017, two years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, Belgium presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR). Six years ago however, the context for the 2030 Agenda was significantly different.



Since 2021 the High-Level Political Fora have all focused on the Recovery and “building back better” after the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the report of the Secretary-General for this year’s HLPF “the high costs of COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and climate change, demonstrate the importance of countries shifting to a structural transformation pathway that promotes the goal of sustainable development.”

At the halfway point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, at the final HLPF before the second SDG-Summit, I am honoured to introduce Belgium’s second VNR. Having a robust institutional framework for sustainable development and a staunch advocate for multilateralism, Belgium takes the VNR’s reporting mechanism, despite its voluntary nature, very seriously.

Before presenting a thorough overview of the major policy initiatives and challenges of the different federated entities per Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), this VNR begins with a concise overview of the process that led to its development and provides additional context regarding our federal state.

Given the importance of the multistakeholder approach, the various governments have decided to include both a chapter written by the Major Groups and other Stakeholders and one written by the associations of the local authorities in Belgium. This reflects the conviction that everyone must be on board in order to attain the SDGs by 2030 in the spirit of a whole of society approach. Additionally, new and emerging challenges are examined. Last but not least, the Annex of this VNR contains a list of 82 indicators, organized by SDG, providing an overview of the current state of Belgium’s SDG-implementation, at the national and regional levels.

Considering the SDG-indicators and the countless reports on the status of the 2030 Agenda’s implementation worldwide, I can only conclude that the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development needs a boost. This requires the commitment of all stakeholders. The various governments in Belgium remain committed to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

On the eve of the third four-year-cycle of the HLPF, I am hopeful that this VNR can contribute to a solid SDG-boost in Belgium. Moreover I hope that the hard work and energy that have been put into this VNR can also be useful for the international community, including the United Nations, other member states as well as other local authorities around the world and civil society, serving as a basis for further dialogue and exchange among all actors involved.

I wish you an interesting read of Belgium’s second VNR and hope that it can contribute to a shared vision of a prosperous and sustainable future for all.

Zakia Khattabi,
Minister of Climate, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zakia Khattabi', with a stylized flourish at the end.



02

HIGHLIGHTS

02

HIGHLIGHTS

BELGIUM'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW – A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The decision to present a second VNR is part of a long-standing commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development of the federal state of Belgium. Since 2007, sustainable development has been enshrined in the Belgian Constitution, ensuring that all policy levels pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental aspects in their respective competences.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs requires a whole of society approach and besides governments, other important stakeholders including civil society and the private sector have mobilised around the Global 2030 Agenda.

The process of the Second Review was established taking into account this whole of society approach. This joint report is the result of a collaborative effort of various policy levels and stakeholders and summarizes how these various policy levels in the federal state of Belgium contribute to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Since the last VNR in 2017, the Court of Auditors has also conducted an analysis of the implementation, monitoring and reporting by public authorities in Belgium (Preparedness Review) in 2020.

In order to make the process as inclusive as possible, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (CFDD-FRDO) was tasked to serve as the focal point for engaging various social groups: worker and employer non-governmental organisations, science and research, youth and «Leave No-One Behind». These were involved in two phases. In the first phase a summarized overview of the SDG implementation of these groups was compiled after which a significant space was devoted to it in the VNR itself. In a second stage, a joint opinion by several advisory councils was requested on the preliminary draft version of the VNR.

The full contributions from all actors who have participated (governments & stakeholders) can be found at sdgs.be.

STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES AND POLICIES

Governments in Belgium start from a privileged position given, among other things, the strong institutional framework regarding sustainable development. With a strong economy, high-quality education and relatively low income inequality, governments have the opportunity to pursue sustainability initiatives, both internally and externally. Through international actions, governments in Belgium are contributing to achieving the SDGs abroad. Global sustainable development has long been a shared commitment: promotion and protection of human rights, effective and inclusive multilateralism, international solidarity, eradicating poverty, combating climate change and reducing inequalities. This commitment was reflected, for example, in the Belgian response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the sixth Belgian mandate in the UN Security Council in 2019-2020 and the focus on climate security and children in armed conflict. Queen Mathilde's role as an SDG Advocate also illustrates this commitment.

This second VNR illustrates that governments in Belgium have adopted many policy initiatives that contribute positively to the SDGs, yet many challenges also lie ahead of us.

National statistics show that time is running out. In 2022, Belgium was on track to meet the targets for only 20 of the 51 indicators examined. An annex to this VNR shows the evolution since 2000 for a comprehensive list of indicators in more detail, at the national and regional levels.

Key challenges for implementing the 2030 Agenda include, of course, the consequences of the

COVID-19 pandemic, the theme of this year's HLPF, as well as increasing geopolitical uncertainty, the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, social inequalities, the link between digitalisation and sustainable development, and the central role of education. These challenges can also present opportunities that must be seized.

In their contributions, civil society groups ask for, among other things, greater coherence in the way that different policy levels monitor the implementation of the SDGs and their targets. This means not only regard for internal Belgian policy coherence, but also coherence with the European and international context, given the economic, ecological and social impact across borders.

This VNR shows that the various governments in Belgium and actors involved remain committed to the SDGs by continuing and strengthening existing efforts to live up to the Decade of Action of Sustainable Development as called for by the Secretary-General of the UN.





03

INTRODUCTION

03

INTRODUCTION

The decision to submit a second Voluntary National Review (VNR) is part of a long-standing commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the various governments in Belgium (see 5.1.) have taken ownership of the issues and translated them into their own policies. Many civil society and private organisations have also mobilised around this new global Agenda.

In the first Voluntary National Review (2017), we presented these mechanisms of ownership and engagement in detail. With this second Voluntary National Review, we will show how the efforts have evolved since 2017, and the new initiatives, progress and challenges halfway through the Agenda's implementation period. This process also serves to mobilise all public and private stakeholders to accelerate implementation, fill gaps and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Governments in Belgium have long been involved in implementing international sustainable development commitments, either directly from the Rio Conference (Agenda 21, conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification) or from complementary processes.

As a federal state, Belgium enshrined the pursuit of sustainable development in its constitution to give it a broad basis and the highest degree of commitment. Article 7bis states (freely translated):
 "In the exercise of their respective competences, the federal State, communities and regions pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, taking into account intergenerational solidarity."

It is therefore up to each federal and federated entity to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Each started with specific sustainable development strategies or plans at their entity level, followed by a national sustainable development strategy in 2017. Since then, each entity has main-

tained a dynamic implementation process. Local governments (provinces, cities and municipalities) also implemented these efforts. In addition, many actors from civil society, the private sector and the education and research field contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The various governments in Belgium also contribute to achieving the SDGs through international actions. Global sustainable development has long been a shared commitment: promotion and protection of human rights, effective and inclusive multilateralism, international solidarity, eradicating poverty, combating climate change and reducing inequalities. This commitment was reflected, for example, in the Belgian response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the sixth Belgian mandate in the UN Security Council in 2019-2020 and the focus on climate security and children in armed conflict. Moreover, all governments in Belgium are involved in the European sustainable development policies of the European institutions on the continent and beyond.

This second report presents the richness and diversity of these contributions. That is why we involved a wide range of stakeholders from the outset, to give them a place in this Voluntary National Review.



04

METHODOLOGY
AND PROCESS FOR
PREPARING THE REPORT

04 METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS FOR PREPARING THE REPORT

The preparation of the Voluntary National Review is coordinated within the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD), which was reactivated for this reason after several years of inactivity. A technical working group made up of experts from the administrations of the different entities coordinates the contributions of the entities under the chairmanship of the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (FISD).

The members of the IMCSD agreed on the following guidelines:

- **Content:** a balance between the various dimensions of sustainable development, its internal and external components, a fair and critical assessment of the achievements, attention to the universal, transformative and holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda, a presentation of the indicators for monitoring the SDGs and a presentation of the evolution and new ambitions since 2017;
- **Structure:** a table of contents based on the guidelines proposed by the United Nations; a **synthetic approach** has been opted for, in which the VNR presents the essential elements of the contributions of the governments to the SDGs, and refers to an appendix that includes the detailed contribution of the various entities.
- **Process:** involve the various government agencies and organised civil society groups from the outset, to feed the report.

From July 2022, the various governments and civil society actors received a request for contribution. In this regard so, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development sought input from members of the main advisory councils. It also took into account the 'No One Left Behind' principle and contacted a specific list of organisations representing the most vulnerable social groups.

During the SDG Forum¹, which took place on 4 October 2022, these contributions were finalised. As the first multi-stakeholder forum on the SDGs in the Benelux, the SDG Forum gets as many sectors as possible involved and offers a wide range of workshops, plenary sessions and panel debates.

These contributions have since been published on the website www.sdgs.be and summarised in a draft report. The contributions of the organised civil society groups are an integral part of the Voluntary National Review, in addition to the contributions of the governments, and a clear distinction is made in the text in this regard.

In early 2023, we submitted the draft report to the main advisory councils of civil society. At the request of the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development drafted a joint opinion with other advisory councils. In May 2023, the conference considered the final approval of the VNR.

¹The SDG Forum is organised by 20 partner organisations from all areas of the sustainable development sector. Together, they connect unusual suspects. The SDG Forum offers policymakers, companies, NGOs and academics the chance to meet and exchange SDG-ideas and solutions.

05.05.2022
LAUNCH

01



The ministers responsible for sustainable development in the Belgian governments set the coordination modalities, activate the technical group and send the application for the Voluntary National Review to the UN.

The technical group draws up a plan of approach (process, timetable, stakeholder involvement) and the template for contribution of the various governments and civil society groups.



02

05 > 07/2022

DRAWING UP A PLAN OF APPROACH

07.2022
APPROVAL OF THE PLAN OF APPROACH AND COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

03



The ministers approve the action plan and send requests for contributions from societal groups via the Federal Council for Sustainable Development.

The technical group compiles contributions by authorities, including local authorities. Discussion of contributions by societal groups at the SDG Forum (04.10.2023).



04

07 > 10/2022

CONTRIBUTIONS BY GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIETAL GROUPS

10.2022 > 01.2023
COMPILATION AND SYNTHESIS PHASE

05



The technical group compiles and summarises the contributions into a summary report.

The ministers validate the draft report and submit it to the advisory councils for a joint opinion.



06

13.02.2023

APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT REPORT

02 > 04.2023
DEVELOPMENT OF MAIN MESSAGES AND COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

07



The technical group prepares the main messages, completes the texts, and prepares a brochure and video.

The technical group adjusts the draft report following the opinion issued by the Federal Council for Sustainable Development on 14/04/2023.



08

04.2023

PROCESSING THE JOINT OPINION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

05.2023
APPROVAL OF MAIN MESSAGES AND THE DRAFT REPORT

09



The Ministers approve the draft report, key messages and communication materials.

Finalisation of documents, submission to the UN, publication on sdgs.be.



10

06.2023

FINALISATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE REPORT

07.2023
PRESENTATION AT THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

11



PREPARATION PROCESS



05

POLICY AND
ENABLING
ENVIRONMENT

05

POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

On 5 May 2022, the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) decided to submit a second Voluntary National Review. In July 2022, the IMCSD approved a 'plan of action' for the drafting of the present VNR.

5.1.

Division of powers

Belgium is a federal state composed of the communities and the regions. The governance of the country is in the hands of different partners, who independently exercise their powers in their domains.

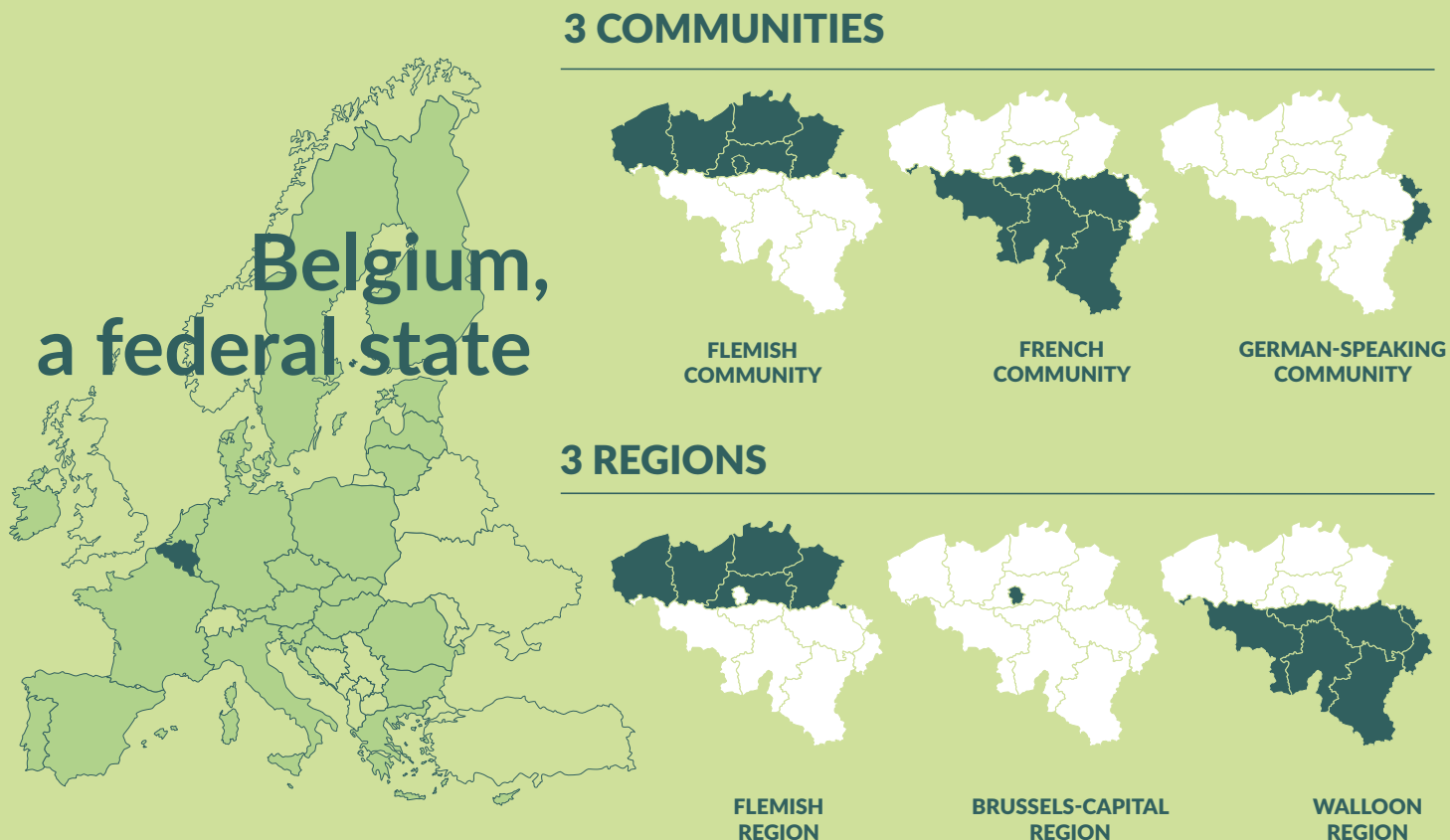
Following the various state reforms (1970, 1980, 1988-89, 1993, 2001 and 2014), the pyramid of the unitary state has given way to a more complex three-tiered system.

At the highest level are now the federal state, communities and regions, all three of which are equal

in legal terms. They are on equal footing, but are competent for different domains.

The level immediately below this one is still that of the provinces. Prior to the state reform of 1993, the provinces were only under the supervision of the central state. Now they need to work under the supervision of all higher governments, under federal, community or regional competences.

At the bottom of the pyramid are the municipalities, the level of government closest to the public. Like the provinces, they are under the supervision of the higher governments depending on the competence exercised, i.e., either federal, community or regional. In general, they are funded and controlled by the regions.



5.2.

Context

A. INTEGRATION OF THE SDGs

All governments in Belgium have committed to the UN 2030 Agenda from their own competencies.

Since assuming power in 2020, the current *federal coalition government* decided to use the SDGs as a compass. This approach is coherent with the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs launched by the UN Secretary-General and with the European Commission's strategy for the spreading and mainstreaming of the SDGs. As such, the federal government pledged to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular by devising new policies to fill previously identified gaps.

In addition, a year into its mandate, the current federal government approved a new Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. The plan contains around 240 measures to be implemented by the federal government, across all federal departments. The plan came about in a participatory approach, and has a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Implementation is monitored annually by the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development and evaluated by the Task Force on Sustainable Development of the Federal Planning Bureau. The same team is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the sustainable development indicators.

Moreover, thanks to the law of 5 May 1997, for more than 25 years the federal government has had an institutional framework that provides the tools and resources to deliver the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In order to mobilise all federal government members, since 2021 they are all required to indicate every year in their policy notes that they have to submit to parliament for the preparation of the annual budget, how they will contribute to the SDGs. This exercise is repeated and evaluated every year. At the same time, the federal government departments are working together to draft a Sustainable

Development Charter, to be published in 2023. Given the proliferation of tools to help implement the SDGs, an inventory is also taken to assess the extent of current and future needs. The results of this evaluation will be known in 2023 and published on sdgs.be.

The need to develop an integrated or cross-cutting public policy at the federal level has for several years led to the creation or formalisation of various platforms for interdepartmental exchanges, on an ad hoc or structural basis. Similar structures currently exist for sustainable development policies (since 1997), but also for foreign policy, gender, poverty, disability, etc. These bodies prepare integrated policies for sustainable public procurement, including a recent focus on ICT equipment, but also policies that apply due diligence (for example, the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and the federal Due Diligence tool for SMEs). A new federal policy on food supply chains or critical commodities is also being prepared.

The Interfederal Statistical Institute (ISI), in collaboration with the departments of the federated entities, has drawn up a proposal for a list of indicators for monitoring the SDGs for 2022. This list can be accessed at indicators.be.

The *Flemish government* is committed to achieving the sustainable development goals contained in the 2030 Agenda. In 2021, the Flemish government approved the fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development. With this strategy, the Flemish Government is intensifying its efforts to achieve a sustainable society, with Vision 2050 as its long-term compass and Vizier 2030 as its focus. Vizier 2030 is the Flemish objectives framework for 2030, and translates the SDGs into its own objectives. With 53 objectives, Vizier 2030 helps orient Flemish policy. All Flemish ministers are pursuing policies that contribute to achieving these objectives. The long-term Vision 2050 strategy contains the future vision of how we want Flanders to be in 2050: a strong, social, open, resilient and international Flanders that creates prosperity and well-being in a smart, innovative and sustainable way, and where no-one is left behind. The Flemish government is committed to an approach based on transition management. For example, the implementation of the fourth Flemish

Strategy for Sustainable Development focuses on 7 transition priorities: (i) Circular Economy, (ii) Living, Learning and Working in 2050, (iii) Living Together in 2050, (iv) Industry 4.0, (v) Mobility, (vi): Energy and Climate and (vii) Environment for the Future. (see c). The VSDO4 is followed up via the transition platform monitored by the Flemish Department of Chancellery and Foreign Affairs. The SDGs act as a coordinating framework for Flanders' sustainability ambitions. Many Flemish policy plans have come about in this context, through a multi-stakeholder approach. Examples include the Flemish Resilience recovery plan, the Mobility Vision 2040, the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan, the Flemish Poverty Reduction Plan 2020-2024 and the Blue Deal. The Flemish development cooperation towards 2030, "Towards a new identity for Flanders as a partner in development" is the strategic translation of the SDGs into Flemish development policy.

In its policy statement, the **French Community** has committed to making a substantial contribution, through a comprehensive and coordinated strategy, to efforts to reshape our lifestyles and consumption patterns, and make the climate emergency the key focus of all actions. To this end, a decree was adopted on 1 July 2021 establishing the coordination and strengthening of the actions of the French Community for an ecological transition with the following demarcated and ambitious objectives:

- Carbon neutrality at the latest by 2050;
- A reduction of at least 55% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990;
- Implementation of sustainable adaptation measures necessary to minimise the risks of climate change to humans and biodiversity.

The Ecological Transition Plan (ETP) of the French community includes the concrete measures needed to achieve these global objectives. Developing these objectives was intended to be largely participatory, involving boards, sectors and civil society through representative associations. This plan also commits to analyse the application of the recommendations of the "Mayors' covenant" in the global real estate strategy.

The action plan includes several pillars: mobility, real estate infrastructure, public procurement, changes to habits, training and awareness, and cross-cutting measures. The actions within each pillar focus on specific sectors, organisations and target groups.

In addition to the Ecological Transition Plan of the French Community, there are 5 other strategic cross-cutting plans that overarch and guide the actions of the French Community in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: the Media Education Plan of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB), the Action Plan for the Rights of the Child (PADE) 2020-2024, the Plan to Tackle Poverty 2020-2025, the Intra-Francophone Plan to tackle violence against women 2020-2024 and the Women's Rights Plan 2020-2024.

In the **Brussels-Capital Region**, sustainable development projects are integrated into the operational objectives of the administration. Moreover, sustainable development actions and projects relating to the SDGs are followed up and monitored two to three times a year.

The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development sets the development priorities of the Brussels Region, based on economic, social, environmental and mobility needs. Various regional sectoral plans are linked to the SDGs, including: The Nature Plan, the Water Management Plan, the Air-Climate-Energy Plan, the Regional Program for the Circular Economy, the Good Food Strategy, the Brussels Plan to Tackle Violence against Women, the Brussels Plan to Support Single-Parent Families, the Brussels Plan for the Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals, the regional policies on gender mainstreaming and handstreaming or the Shifting Economy. Complementing the social lower bound and ecological upper bound concepts of Doughnut Theory, the SDGs serve as a general and unifying framework for the Shifting Economy strategy. The Go4Brussels 2030 Strategy is targeting the transition for Brussels in terms of economy, society and environment.

European regulations corresponding to several SDGs provide the basis for the programmes of the Brussels-Capital Region. With this, the Brussels administrations integrate the SDGs and monitor them through specific indicators.

In 2013, the *Walloon government* adopted a decree incorporating sustainable development at the institutional level. Each Walloon strategy for sustainable development, and in particular the action plan, has the same duration as the legislature, with a progress report at least every two years.

The Second Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development (SWDD) from 2016 already aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and included the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets as medium-term objectives. It also included a long-term vision for a Wallonia in which the 17 SDGs are achieved.

The Third SWDD (2022) bolsters the implementation of the SDGs in Wallonia and makes the sustainable development policies more coherent, by linking sectoral policies. In particular, this is by giving Wallonia measurable targets for 2030 that are linked to the SDGs and provide a clear trajectory. This is significant progress compared to the previous strategy.

Specifically, the strategy involves the following:

- A mapping of the most structural Walloon strategies and plans to demonstrate their respective contribution to the SDGs;
- 89 quantified objectives related to the targets of the SDGs which are regarded as priorities for Wallonia, translated to the Walloon context;
- 91 monitoring indicators to evaluate Wallonia's progress toward the SDGs;
- 16 cross-cutting actions to enhance Wallonia's capacity to implement the SDGs, divided into six categories: anticipating, ensuring coherence, participating, educating and raising awareness, finance and measuring.

Alongside the more sectoral approach of other Walloon strategies and plans, the Third Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development therefore promotes a systemic approach at different scales and with multiple stakeholders. It also falls within a long-term vision, with specific attention to proactivity and the narrative aspect, with a view to a sustainable and resilient Wallonia.

Wallonia has had a department working specifically on sustainable development since 2012: the Directorate for Sustainable Development, which in 2022 had around 30 employees. The missions of this service are the following:

- Promoting sustainable development at the strategic level and ensuring Wallonia's representation in that area;
- Empowering public and private actors to integrate sustainable development into their activities and operations;
- Facilitating the transition of systems (food, housing, circular economy, etc.) to sustainable development;
- Managing subsidies to organisations to promote sustainable development.

The Regional Development Concept (REK) Ostbelgien Leben 2025 serves as a common thread for sustainable development and the implementation of the SDGs in the *German-speaking Community*, across different administrations and implementation phases. This concept sets out a vision for the future of the German-speaking Community as an economic, border, educational, solidarity and living region. In this framework, various projects are being implemented, spread over three implementation phases (REK I, REK II and REK III).

The Third Regional Development Concept (REK III) includes 32 future-oriented projects up to 2024. Every six months, the Government of the German-speaking Community submits a report to the Parliament of the German-speaking Community on the state of affairs. Any citizen can consult this report. For the first time, REK III links the topic of sustainability to an internationally recognised system using the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, you can read in the plan which SDGs each project contributes to in a separate chapter.

REK III has cross-links with other REK projects and initiatives in East Belgium. In order to be successfully implemented, a network of partners is required. The project descriptions show the overlapping areas for collaborations or project-related partnerships.

Promoting cooperation, innovation and sustainable development have been central elements of the regional development strategy from the outset. Where it is useful and possible, the REK includes regional, national, European or global developments and strategic plans in its projects.

As the vision Ostbelgien Leben 2025 was nearing its expiration date, the German-speaking Community started drafting a new, integrated vision Ostbelgien Leben 2040 in 2021. This includes two interlocking strategies: a development strategy to implement the development programs and projects, and a spatial planning strategy to develop the new spatial planning legislation and related steering tools. The SDGs will once again play an important role in the drafting of these strategies.

B. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

As early as 2016, the *federal government* identified five priority strands to guarantee the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Belgium.

1. The first strand is raising awareness and educating of stakeholders, in particular through the SDG Forum. This event brings together more than 600 participants from all backgrounds, the private sector, academia and government, every year. A website has been launched (sdgs.be) that brings together the main SDG initiatives. Various leaflets have been developed, presenting the SDGs in an accessible way. In parallel, in 2016, the UN Secretary-General asked Queen Mathilde of Belgium to become one of the SDG Advocates. The Queen's focus is on the emancipatory power of education, especially for girls and women. Her main focus is on SDG 4. In this context, she has also worked with the Flemish and French communities (and the federal government). In this capacity, Queen Mathilde has taken an active role, hosting the 2018 UN Global Education Meeting in Brussels and serving as Belgium's high-level representative at the 2020 Global Education Meeting. She was keynote speaker on advancing gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in and through education, at the Transforming Education Summit on 19 September 2022. This group
2. The second strand was intended to integrate the 2030 Agenda into the federal strategy for sustainable development as defined by the law of 5 May 1997, specifically through a new Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. This plan, adopted in 2021, is a crucial element of the federal government's sustainable development during this administration. The SDGs are also integrated into the draft framework of annual sustainability action plans.
3. The third strand focused on integrating the 2030 Agenda into federal policy. After reviewing the existing policies, a group of independent researchers conducted two gap analyses in 2017 and 2019. This ultimately led to a proposal for quantified objectives for better implementation of the SDGs, in the federal context. To fill the identified gaps and start up new actions, four federal government departments were invited to conduct a materiality analysis relating to the SDGs. Finally, all federal departments integrated the SDGs into their annual strategic plans.
4. Coherence with other political authorities was the goal of the fourth strand. Following the presentation of the first Belgian review in July 2017, the federal and federated entities organised a national conference to draw lessons from this initial assessment and accelerate the joint implementation of the SDGs. Upon starting its mandate, the current federal government also reiterated its commitment to a development policy.
5. The last strand was to establish partnerships with civil society and the private sector. The first steps have been taken to raise awareness among a wide audience, through the SDG Voices. In addition, the federal government allocated funding for the development of specific projects or structural support to two civil society consultation platforms (Associations21 and Reset.Vlaanderen). In October 2017, more than 80 companies, civil society organisations and public sector representatives signed the Belgian SDG Charter for International Development.

As outlined in the 2020 federal coalition agreement, the 2030 Agenda takes an important position in terms of the federal government's internal and external policies: "In the international arena, the government will be a strong advocate of multilateral cooperation. The Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations 2030 Agenda are central to this." There is also a focus on just transition and the most vulnerable groups.

Flanders has strong governance with the participatory and holistic approach of Vision 2050 and Vizio 2030, working with the relevant stakeholders. As stipulated in SDG 17, partnership is crucial to achieving the objectives. As such, Flanders supports local governments in activities that give substance to the Flemish policy on sustainable development, including the organisation of the Week of the Sustainable Municipality. The fact that the SDGs are well anchored among local governments is also evidenced by the commitment of the umbrella organisations Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP) to produce a Voluntary Subnational Review. Flanders also supports CIFAL Flanders in drawing up an SDG Roadmap with practical information, tools, critical reflections, best practices and practical tips on how to get started with the SDGs.

To increase stakeholder involvement in sustainable development, **Wallonia** set up the Walloon Partnership for Sustainable Development in 2021. This new dialogue body brings together 25 representatives of organisations inspired by the Major Groups of Agenda 21 (1992 Rio Summit).

The Walloon Partnership for Sustainable Development refers to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) and is involved in various missions:

- Contributing to the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the action plan of the Third Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development (SWDD);
- Communicating the objectives and actions of this strategy to the identified groups of actors to mobilise them;
- Contributing to and responding to Wallonia's progress on the 17 SDGs (regular regional

reports measuring Wallonia's position using indicators);

- Preparing the joint drafting of the long-term vision.

The organisations which are members of the Walloon partnership also contributed to this Voluntary National Review.

The Third Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development bolsters the implementation of the SDGs in Wallonia and strengthens the coherence of development policies by linking to them the sectoral policies achieved.

The **German-speaking Community** used a broad participatory process with civil society and the population to draft its third Regional Development Concept (REK III, implementation 2019-2024). Around 170 civil society stakeholders gave their views in a written consultation. In addition, a citizen discussion, an online survey and interviews with student council representatives from various schools highlighted risks and suggestions for the future. This made it possible to update the SWOT analysis from 2008. A new development strategy for after 2025 is currently under preparation.

The municipalities, social partners, LEADER action groups and public service providers are essential partners to achieve the future objectives of the Regional Development Concept (REK) and thus the implementation of the SDGs. They were involved in the drafting of the REK in the form of their own projects or advice and guide its implementation through a working group and existing consultation structures with the government. In addition to projects overseen by the ministry, the REK III includes projects by these stakeholders. The individual REK projects involve a large number of institutions, stakeholders and citizens, for example in the form of information events or workshops. They work together to further develop and position East Belgium as an attractive place to live and work.

The **Brussels-Capital Region** has incorporated the European recommendations for a sustainable city (Urban Agenda, Leipzig Charter) in its Regional Strategic Plan for 2040, making explicit reference to the SDGs. These are de facto incorporated into the

Regional Strategic Plan, and embedded in day-to-day management.

The Brussels Region organises awareness campaigns at the level of governing bodies (executive committee, cabinet). Through the various strategic plans (Shifting Economy, Good Move, etc.), awareness campaigns related to the SDGs are ongoing for municipalities, the general public or specific target groups (youth, women, LGBTQIA+, etc.).

C. POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs holistically and coherently constitutes a challenge. Addressing the interactions between economic, social and environmental goals in a balanced way and avoiding adverse impacts for the well-being of current and future generations is important for the implementation of the SDGs.

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is a tool for integrating the economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development at all stages of internal and international policy-making, and is therefore a valuable element for achieving the SDGs. In this context, it is important to identify spill-over effects and trade-offs and set out policy responses. Some policies may conflict with each other or have unintended negative effects. Production and consumption patterns (SDG 12), climate policies (SDG 13), environmental protection (SDGs 14 and 15) or trade policies (SDG 17) are just a few examples that can have far-reaching transnational effects, both positive and negative, on other countries, including developing countries.

PCSD seeks to ensure that the policies implemented do not counteract each other or have unexpected negative consequences. Given Belgium's federal structure, with different levels of government responsible for different policy areas, policy coherence for sustainable development is relevant.

As such, sustainable development requires a cross-cutting approach, involving all levels of government, and a long-term vision to avoid these possible negative impacts.

In the third federal plan sustainable development, the federal government engages to pay more attention to PCSD. In order to enhance the knowledge and exchange of practices and instruments between government services, the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development will establish a new working group for policy coherence and it will be considered how PCSD can be taken into account more on the inter-federal level.

D. LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Leaving no one behind and reaching out to the most vulnerable is central to the policies of the various governments in Belgium. Examples of how this translates in concrete terms are explained under SDGs 1, 5 and 10.

In this transition to sustainable development, the **federal government** is applying the principle of Leaving No One Behind across a range of policy areas. For example, Hence it a major theme in the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. But the government has also decided to adopt specific policies toward the most vulnerable groups, to achieve a just transition. This is evident in particular in the adoption of the federal plan to tackle poverty and inequality mentioned in SDG 1.

This principle is also one of the cornerstones of Belgian foreign policy, as evidenced by Belgium's commitment to minority rights, the development of the least developed countries, conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, among other areas.

The federal coalition agreement provides for the organisation of a "National Conference on a just transition to address the employment, social policy, reskilling and economic challenges of an inclusive climate transition." In 2022, the Estates General of the Just Transition were announced at the federal level. The objective of the States General is to gather input from various perspectives to prepare a Conference, and to this end the federal government set up 4 projects:

- A High Committee for the Just Transition was established that will produce a report from the academic world aiming to explore how to

institutionalise and organise a just transition in Belgium.

- Through the Agora for the Just Transition, a diverse group of selected citizens will consider the question: what conditions do transition policies need so that no one is left behind?
- Via the ICSD, the federal government departments will reflect based on their expertise on the priority challenges in their fields and prepare an input report related to these.
- Finally, the Forum for a Just Transition has also been launched, to collect input from organised civil society.

In the **Walloon Region**, consideration for the most vulnerable citizens is at the heart of any regional policy. Although this is a cross-sector challenge, Wallonia has also developed a specific plan, namely the “Plan Wallon de sortie de la pauvreté”. This is designed to provide all Walloons with the progressive means to escape poverty, through access to basic comforts and access to work. The focus is therefore on access to social-professional integration, housing and welfare for all. The plan is one of the pillars of Walloon political action. Other examples can be found in the next chapter.

Reaching the most vulnerable is central to the **Flemish** policy on equal opportunities, inclusion and integration. Reducing inequalities is a shared responsibility of all policy areas and requires an inclusive, cross-cutting approach. This means that actions are implemented from the various domains and there is a structural focus on creating the best possible conditions to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. The Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunity Policy Plan 2020 - 2024 was approved on 23 October 2020.

Full participation in society is a key concern in Flanders. Education and work are the main levers in this regard. Proficiency in Dutch is given an important role as a connecting factor. Building a strong network for newcomers is also a key focus. With the Living Together Plan, the Flemish government supports local governments to promote living together in diversity. The policy is scientifically based. The Living Together in Diversity survey and the Living

Together barometer collect data, including in the areas of proportional participation, active and shared citizenship and social cohesion. This maps different aspects of living together in diversity, and it means that the progression in Flanders can be monitored. The Municipal and Urban Monitor provides a wealth of information from the local level.

The Leaving No One Behind principle is also evident in the approach to tackling poverty. Since the Decree of Tackling Poverty (2003), Flanders has developed various policy instruments. These include both the Permanent Poverty Consultation and the Poverty Test from 2019, which tests new policies for their inclusiveness. The Department of Finance and Budget also endeavours to collect financial data, to better simulate the impact of policies on vulnerable groups. The Leaving No One Behind principle also serves as a guiding principle at the international level. For example, reaching the most vulnerable is one of the conditions in the Country Strategy Papers, and subsequent project proposals for Flemish development cooperation.

The third Regional Development Concept (REK III) of the **German-speaking Community** takes into account vulnerable or disadvantaged groups through a range of projects. Securing and further developing hospital sites is an ongoing task, as is improving the health of the population. The Healthy Living in East Belgium project is also pursuing this goal, with a larger scope thanks to new competences, providing new opportunities for the implementation phase up to 2025. The Together Against Poverty project takes targeted measures to reduce the risk of poverty, especially for people who did not complete their education. Guidance into professional life ensures financial independence.

The further expansion of family friendliness is also among the objectives of the solidarity region. The Unburdening Parents, Strengthening Parents project plans measures to improve child care and strengthen the family as the foundation of society. The Supporting Seniors Close to Home project aims to make the best use of the available opportunities of the overall concept for seniors policy. Demographic changes emphasize the need to further develop services for those in need of care.

Moreover, it is important to design assisted living regions close to the place of residence with active participation of the older generation. To enable or facilitate the participation of older people in professional life and voluntary activities, we need to adapt infrastructure and working conditions. To further support people with support needs and their caring family members, it is important to promote empowerment among both seniors and people with disabilities. This is the crux of the German-speaking Community's future Independent Living project.

The **Brussels-Capital Region** integrated the Leaving No One Behind principle into its strategic frameworks (Regional Policy Statement 2019-2024, strategy Go4Brussels 2030). The Region trains and finances the relevant municipal departments so that they can undertake their own support initiatives in line with the reality on the ground. In general, the Region gets civil society representatives involved in the development of action plans. The subsidy policy supports the actions of civil society. Contacts with experts in the field provide input into the daily work of the Regional departments. The Region also considers vulnerable groups in territorial development projects.

In the area of family allowance, the Brussels-Capital Region introduced support measures for certain Brussels families and tackled the phenomenon of non-take-up of family allowances.

In the context of projects to support and guide certain target groups, social companies are given a mission: the beneficiaries must acquire skills and follow-up with a view to their inclusion in the labour market. Specific methods should promote access to work.

An ordinance on combating homelessness links agencies that address acute (high urgency) situations of homelessness with structures for more sustainable re-housing, in the search for stability and long-term solutions.

As regards mobility, there are specific projects for disadvantaged groups to promote the use of public transport and bikes. In terms of spatial planning, the Brussels Region invests in the areas with the most precariousness, in order to develop public spaces and a quality living environment.

E. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS (Coordination between different administrations and/or levels of authority)

As laid down in art. 7bis of the Constitution (freely translated): *"In the exercise of their respective competences, the federal State, communities and regions pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, taking into account intergenerational solidarity."* Hence, each level of administration, should be contributing towards sustainable development. The consultation and collaboration between the federated entities around sustainable development takes place at the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD), which was established by the Consultative Committee on 6 June 2012. The IMCSD brings together the members of the governments responsible for sustainable development at the federal, regional and community levels. It is the most important body for dialogue and cooperation between federal and federated entities regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The IMCSD did not meet between 2017 and spring 2022, and the national sustainable development strategy developed in 2017 was not fully implemented.

With a view to the drafting of the VNR, the activities of the IMCSD were revived, and since May 2022 it has been meeting regularly again in a new dynamic, among other things through a rotating chairmanship, partly for the purposes of drafting this VNR. The smooth functioning of the IMCSD is important for the collaboration between the governments for sustainable development.

F. PREPAREDNESS REVIEW BY THE COURT OF AUDIT

Globally, the Courts of Audit are in a unique position as external auditors of governments to contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan of INTOSAI, the global association of courts of auditors, the SDGs are a priority focus. The courts of audit committed to assess the preparedness of their

national governments to achieve the SDGs. To this end, they conduct a so-called Preparedness Review.

In 2020, the Court of Audit also examined how all levels of government in Belgium are committed and organised with regard to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the report, the Court of Audit sets out recommendations regarding the various governments.

For example, it was assessed whether the various governments in Belgium have set up an adequate system for realising, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. In particular, the Court of Audit focused on the coordination within and between levels of government. The actual results of the policies for sustainable development were beyond the scope of this review. A seven-step model by INTOSAI was used as the standards framework for the review. Specifically, the Court of Audit examined whether the governments:

1. have a strong commitment to achieving the SDGs;
2. engage the public and relevant stakeholders in this regard;
3. have clearly assigned the various responsibilities and corresponding resources;
4. ensure sufficient mutual coordination;
5. have specific policies with clear objectives;
6. have adequately prepared their policies;
7. have set up a system to monitor and report on the achievement of the goals.

A selection of the report's findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented below:

Owing to their autonomy, the levels of government can interpret their commitment for the 2030 Agenda differently, but the Court of Audit recommends that they fit their plans and commitments into the national strategy, set quantified targets linked to these policy measures. The indicators to monitor the achievement of the SDGs should be consistent

with those used nationally, and levels of government should design their reporting on SDG policies in such a way that results can be coordinated at the national level.

The different levels of government in Belgium (federal state, communities and regions) are required to make a political commitment towards the SDGs. They can set out their own policies autonomously, but since 133 of the 169 targets fall under the powers of the different levels of government, consultation and coordination are essential. Each level of government should also check the extent to which it has already developed policies for achieving these targets and goals, and whether further policy actions are necessary.

For national coordination, on the basis of which Belgium must fulfil its international commitments to the 2030 Agenda, the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) serves as a coordinating body. For example in 2017 it drafted the National Strategy on Sustainable Development, which aims to provide a basis for a coherent approach to policies on sustainable development in Belgium, and collaborated on the VNR which was presented to the UN in 2017.

The National Strategy it drafted in 2017 does not include specific objectives, the collaborative projects it includes are mostly process-based and do not include targets. The second evaluation report of the National Strategy, which was scheduled for March 2019, has not yet been produced.

The SDG policies are monitored using indicators. For 34 indicators, an initial assessment of the implemented policies has been made. In 2018, the Interfederal Statistical Institute further expanded this set of indicators and collected measurement data for 82 indicators, available in the Annex of this VNR. Since February 2020, 32 indicators have been broken down by region.

Given their autonomy, the levels of government have taken a different approach to their political commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Most have developed strategic plans regarding sustainable development and actions to engage citizens and stakeholders. Coordination within the same level of government is also set up differently, both in terms

of policy direction and coordination by the administrative departments. Government budgets contain funds which have an overlap with the SDGs in terms of content, but an explicit link to the 2030 Agenda is more the exception rather than the rule. There are also diverse approaches to policy preparation: most governments evaluated the existing policies relating to sustainable development in preparation for their strategic plans, but only the federal and Flemish levels did this using a comparison with the 17 SDGs.

The indicators to monitor the SDGs within a level of government have also been developed differently. For example, targets and baseline measurements are often missing, and there are no clear links between indicators and government programmes and actions from the strategic plans relating to the SDGs. The reporting on the SDGs is often limited to an indication of the realised actions, without evaluating them against the SDGs.

In addition, the Court of Audit has made recommendations to the various governments collectively. They should use the updated National Strategy as a shared vision to coordinate their strategic plans and further political commitments around sustainable development. Within the National Strategy, they also need to translate the global SDGs into concrete, quantified targets, tailored to their own level of government, and then link the necessary policy measures to them. For the indicators, governments should set targets.

The Court of Audit also recommends a more planned approach to policy preparation and the involvement of citizens and stakeholders, as well as a clearer coordination and follow-up of strategic plans and policies to ensure periodic reporting to the parliaments. The governments must clearly define the responsibilities of all government actors and estimate the resources needed to achieve the objectives.

The report was discussed in the various parliaments, in Flanders in the Commission for General Policy, Finance, Budget and Justice on 16 October 2020.

Governments have drawn inspiration from the recommendations of this report to take new initiatives, such as setting quantified targets in sustainable development strategies (e.g. Wallonia), reactivating the IMCSD or the integration of the SDGs in the policy notes of the federal government and the adoption of a new federal plan on sustainable development. Other recommendations are still relevant, such as more reference to the national sustainable development strategy of 2017.

In Flanders, a response to the Court of Audit's recommendations is given every year in the Policy and Budget Explanation (BBT in Dutch) following the implementation of the budget.



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06

PROGRESS ON
OBJECTIVES AND
TARGETS

06

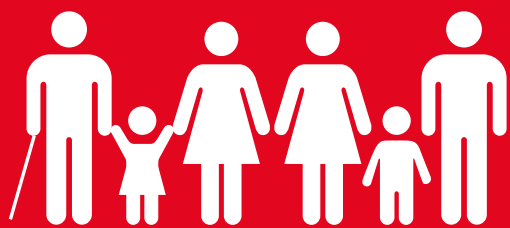
PROGRESS ON GOALS AND TARGETS AND EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND MEASURES TAKEN SO FAR

This chapter examines all SDGs. The evolution of key indicators are presented, highlighting Belgium's strengths and weaknesses per SDG. The overview per SDG is supplemented by a selection of good practices under different sub-themes.

This selection of good practices shows how the governments in Belgium are taking action at different levels to make a positive contribution to the SDGs. However, this should not conceal Belgium's challenges regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely those highlighted in the indicators and described in the last section for each SDG.

Note that not all policy actions are included from each entity, these can be found in each entity's detailed contribution for each SDGs. These contributions are available as annexes to the extended VNR and can also be accessed at www.sdgs.be.





SDG 1/
NO POVERTY



SDG1 NO POVERTY

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i01. Risk of poverty or social exclusion	%	10.8	⊖
i02. Very low work intensity	%	↘	⊕
i05. Over-indebtedness of households	%	↘	⊙

Since the Voluntary National Review in 2017, the various governments in Belgium have made new action plans to tackle poverty, with various emphases, such as child poverty, education and employment. The energy crisis and COVID-19 have also prompted specific actions.

The various political levels have revived the Inter-ministerial Conference on Social Integration, Housing and Urban Policy. The work continues within this context, namely to identify synergies in the fight against poverty and to update methods of cooperation in tackling homelessness.

NON-TAKE-UP AND VULNERABILITY

Potential beneficiaries of social services or benefits are not always aware of their rights, sometimes do not have the reflex to claim them, or do not know how to. This is the challenge of Non-Take-Up. The Fourth *Federal* Plan for Tackling Poverty and Inequality was adopted in 2022. It provides actions around four themes: early detection of poverty, access to sustainable work as a lever in tackling poverty, empowerment and inclusion of all, and a campaign on the European social agenda. Under this plan, specific measures will be taken to strengthen access to social rights, tackle non-take-up and foster the automation of rights.

Flanders continues to fight various forms of poverty and actively pursues poverty reduction and the prevention of social exclusion. Poverty reduction has been a cross-cutting policy theme in Flanders since 2003. All policy areas take structural measures to prevent and tackle poverty. For example, efforts are made on various poverty factors such as access to the labour market, emancipation and employment of women with a migration background and education, among others. In addition, e-inclusive digitalisation, inclusive entrepreneurship, social protection, better public services, energy and water, and mobility have also become increasingly important in countering poverty risk. Furthermore, the Flemish government is committed to helping people become self-reliant and addressing the structural causes of poverty. Since 2019, Flemish policy domains have been required to apply the Poverty Test when drafting policy, in order to evaluate the potential impact of the policies on vulnerable groups. The Flemish Action Plan for Tackling Poverty 2020-2024 came about during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the directing role of local governments, participatory power-oriented policies, result-oriented monitoring and civic solidarity as guiding principles.

The *Walloon* Plan to End Poverty (Plan Wallon de Sortie de la Pauvreté), adopted in 2021, is based on 3 strands: social and labour inclusion, access to well-being and access to housing, in particular

through a coordinated Walloon strategy to get people out of homelessness.

The government of the **French Community** adopted a plan to tackle poverty and reduce social inequalities 2020-2025. The emphasis is on enhancing the expertise in the fight against poverty and reducing social inequality, accessibility of services and preventing vulnerability.

The REK-III project Together Against Poverty, of the **German-speaking Community**, focuses on the goal of ending all forms of poverty (2020-2025).

In 2022, the Government of the **Brussels-Capital Region** approved the first integrated Brussels social health plan: Brussels Takes Care. The adoption of a new Brussels Poverty Plan within Brussels Takes Care will set policies to prevent poverty and homelessness.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In early May 2022, Belgium submitted its national action plan relating to the EU Child Guarantee to the European Commission. With the European Child Guarantee, EU member states, including Belgium, want more equal opportunities for vulnerable children. In 2019, just before the corona crisis, more than 22% (18 million) of children in Europe were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This Belgian national action plan is the result of a coordinated collaboration between all responsible policy levels around children's rights and the fight against poverty, as well as civil society organisations familiar with this issue.

As such, **Flanders** has also joined the European Child Guarantee, in which children up to age 18 in vulnerable situations receive a number of minimum guarantees, such as free access to education, care, housing, health care and at least one meal per school day (SDG 1.3). With various actions, Flanders contributed to the Interfederal Action Plan for the Child Guarantee (2022-2030). In addition, Flanders also offers support through the Growth Package, the Flemish child allowance. There is also the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024.

The French Community has its Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2020-2024, which gives concrete form to the rights recognised in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through various measures. The plan is based on 9 strategic objectives.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

The innovative Housing First projects have been strengthened at the **federal** level. These are projects aimed at increasing the number of support routes for homeless people into housing. This project has also received support from the European Recovery Plan to launch a call for projects more focused on young people.

The Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Homelessness 2020-2024 is a complement to the **Flemish** Action Plan to Tackle Poverty. It is an integrated policy plan that starts from the competences Housing and Welfare. To this end, there is collaboration with the Platform on Homelessness, which consists of civil society, agencies and supporting Flemish policy bodies.

To increase the supply of public housing, the **Brussels-Capital Region** is rolling out a sustainable renovation of the housing stock and is aiming for 6,400 additional homes. An emergency plan for social housing policy offers a concrete solution for 15,000 households on the waiting list for social housing. A homelessness ordinance structurally links the agencies for acute (emergency) homelessness and rehousing services, and strengthens night shelter capacity. In addition, a substantial budget has been set aside in the context of the recovery and redevelopment plan to implement structural rehousing solutions for homeless individuals and families temporarily housed in emergency arrangements in the wake of COVID-19. Finally, in terms of individualised support for each person and every family, psychosocial operators (especially Housing First and assisted living services) have been strengthened.

CULTURE

The cultural policy of the **French Community** has a special focus for vulnerable groups. A series of (support) measures encourages their cultural expression, participation in civic and cultural life and exercising cultural rights. The **Flemish Community** is also committed to the cultural participation of disadvantaged groups through a range of measures.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The various governments actively participate in the achievement of SDG 1 through special support for the construction and development of universal social protection systems, which are one of the priorities of its development cooperation policy.

Some examples:

- Set up in 2018, the Belgian Dialogue Universal Social Protection 2030 network offers a space for permanent dialogue for all Belgian actors involved in social protection and development cooperation. The network has organised two major conferences (2020 and 2022);
- Enabel, the Belgian development cooperation agency, has developed a thematic portfolio on social protection. Enabel supports the introduction of universal health insurance in several African countries;
- The International Labour Organization remains an important strategic partner through non-earmarked multi-year funding. In addition, since 2020, Belgium has been providing financial support to the Flagship Programme Social Protection Floors, which focuses on several sub-Saharan African countries;
- For the Flemish Strategy Papers on Development Cooperation with Mozambique and Malawi, Flanders has budgeted €25 million for each of the two countries, for each implementation period of 5 years.

CHALLENGES

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the various governments set up working groups with different topics within their competencies, for example, the federal government set up a working group in 2020 to regularly monitor and report on the socio-economic impact. This working group organised a seminar in October 2022 to take stock of the energy crisis. In Flanders, a Task Force on Vulnerable Families was set up during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other things. Specifically for children and young people, Flanders rolled out the Action Plan for Generation Resilience in 2020.

Despite the existing support schemes, the risk of poverty or social exclusion looms over a large number of households (almost one person in five in Belgium). 2,144,000 Belgians, or 18.7% of the population, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). This is what emerged from the poverty figures for 2022 based on surveys of income and living conditions (EU-SILC).

13.2% of Belgians live in a household with a total disposable income lower than the poverty line, which is 1,366 euros per month for a single person. They are considered at risk of monetary poverty (AROP). Furthermore, 11.5% of the population live in a household with low work intensity (LWI). 5.8% of the Belgian population was facing severe material and social deprivation (SMSD) in 2022.

Behind the national figures lie regional differences. For each of the key indicators, the situation is most precarious in the Brussels-Capital Region and least so in Flanders. The Walloon Region lies between the two, but has higher levels of poverty than the national level. More details are available in the statistical annex.

In a context of rising prices for basic goods, such as energy and food, poverty reduction and inequality must remain a priority.



SDG 2/
ZERO HUNGER



SDG2 ZERO HUNGER

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i07. Adult obesity	%	↘	⊖
i08. Meat consumption	g/inhabitant/day	↘	+
i09. Organic agriculture area	%	↗	+

The various policy levels have drafted new action plans since the previous review in 2017.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

The Made in Ostbelgien project of the *German-speaking Community* focuses on regional short-chain products. The label aims to promote the sustainable development of the region, with closer links between producers and consumers that help strengthen the economy, secure jobs in the region, strengthen regional identity and preserve the cultural landscape for future generations.

In *Wallonia*, the Walloon College for Sustainable Food developed Food Wallonia with a participatory approach towards the end of 2022, an alliance between employment and environment in the area of food. To facilitate the transition to a sustainable food system, Food Wallonia works around six objectives:

- Ensuring access to sustainable food;
- Contributing to the good health of citizens;
- Generating socio-economic wealth;

- Protecting the environment;
- Obtaining a high level of expertise and skills in sustainable food systems;
- Applying responsible and effective governance mechanisms.

This action plan comprehensively contributes to the EU Farm To Fork and Biodiversity strategies for 2030.

In the *French Community*, a budget has been set aside to develop the provision of free meals in elementary schools where the pupils are generally the most socio-economically disadvantaged.

The *Flemish* programme Flanders’ FOOD brings start-ups with protein innovations in contact with established players in the food industry, to foster exchange and collaboration.

PESTICIDES

With the National Action Plan for Pesticide Reduction 2023-2027, adopted in late 2022, the government is stepping up its ambitions to reduce the impact of pesticide use on human health and the

environment. *Flanders* is also committed to reducing agricultural pesticides, with the preparation of a Flemish Action Plan on Sustainable Pesticide Use 2023-2027, and it also supports the EU ambition to use 50% less pesticides by 2030.

AGRICULTURE/PRODUCTION

The *Flemish* objectives framework Vizier 2030 focuses on agricultural productivity in the short term, with a long-term focus on securing food resources. Nevertheless, the Flemish ambitions are more far-reaching. For example, agriculture is an important link in the transition priority of the Circular economy. With the Flemish food strategy 'Vlaamse Kost' (Flemish cuisine), in addition to healthy food, the Flemish government is committed to a resilient, sustainable circular food economy that brings farmers and citizens closer together, making a fair food price possible for both. This strategy should boost the agricultural sector to achieve both an equitable income for each link in the food chain (SDG 2.3) and sustainability (SDG 2.4).

The *Flemish* Protein Strategy 2021-2030 ensures the sustainability and diversification of protein production. It involves a shift from animal to plant protein, as well as alternative sources of protein. With the Strategic Plan for Organic Agriculture 2018-2022, Flanders was one step ahead of the EU organic regulation in 2021. The plan reflects rapidly growing consumer demand for more home-grown organic products, and aims to allow Flemish organic agriculture to continue its growth.

In 2021, the *Walloon* government launched 'Plan Bio 2030', a new development plan for organic production in Wallonia. The goal is to increase regional supply and demand for organic products, balancing the two to maximize the positive impact for the region.

The strategic part of the plan sets ambitious development targets for the organic sector by 2030, including: 30% of agricultural land cultivated under organic rules, 4,720 farms under organic control, 1,490 processing plants for agricultural products under organic control, and a 14.9% share of organic products in the total share of food bought. The

operational part of the plan contains the actions for an initial five-year period (2021-2025). Both the development and implementation of the plan are through a participatory approach with the governments, associations and representatives of the organic sector in Wallonia.

FOOD AID

The *federal* government has substantially increased the offering of food aid. In 2020, €13 million was earmarked for the purchase of perishable foods. In 2023, €25 million has now been earmarked for purchases of these products. Government action has also put together an offering of material aid (shampoo, toothpaste, nappies, tampons, sanitary towels) with a budget of €8 million over three years. Although the link with food aid may not seem obvious, purchasing these essentials does weigh on a household's budget. Thanks to the government organising the distribution of these products, many households have been able to spend part of their budget to buy new food products.

In order to reduce the pernicious socio-economic and environmental impact of the use of biofuels, not to compromise food safety and limit the impact on food prices, the federal government decided to phase out the share of biofuels produced from food and feed crops.

In *Brussels*, the Region and Communities have joined forces to provide structural resources to support coordination and consultation on food aid, grocery stores and social restaurants. The Brussels Region is also bolstering the finances of the European Social Fund for the Most Deprived, implemented by the federal state, with an additional budget of €17 million for the period 2021-2027. This support was strengthened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely through a specific call for projects on the right to food and food aid.

The Good Food 2 strategy of the Brussels-Capital Region aims to give every Brussels citizen access to good food, adapted to their needs, while respecting a fair price for producers. The strategy supports projects that encourage the accessibility of good nutrition for all, provides for the training of social

and health professionals in the principles of good nutrition and aims to act at the neighbourhood level with actions that meet the specific needs of neighbourhoods where there is little or no supply of good nutrition.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

As the food crises are on the rise, the *federal government* is focusing both on short-term solutions, through humanitarian contributions to the World Food Program (WFP), among other things, and long-term structural solutions by supporting the transition to more sustainable food systems. There is specific focus on:

- Supporting agro-ecological methods;
- Promoting a more inclusive approach (especially women and small-scale farmers);
- Fostering access to safe, high-quality and affordable food;
- Investment in research and access to innovations.

The federal government approaches this via the various channels of Belgian International Solidarity: support for a resilient and climate-friendly agricultural sector is one of the priorities within the governmental cooperation, but also through multi-lateral partners (contributions to the Flexible Fund of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)) and through non-governmental partners and university cooperation.

The *Flemish Government* has signed a new agreement with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization for the Flemish contribution 2022-2025 to the Flexible Voluntary Contribution (FVC) to the so-called Four Betters (better production, nutrition, environment and life), including innovations to make agri-food systems in Africa more resilient to climate change. The Flemish development cooperation in Malawi focuses entirely on the agricultural sector. Various grants have been made available to support both government and non-governmental

projects to make the agricultural sector more resilient to the effects of climate change and promote gender equality in the sector.

The Brussels-Capital Region participates in a project in Kinshasa to address food insecurity. Thanks to this project, food products can be directly processed in rural areas into flour, to create a value chain and reduce the number of middlemen, while developing the chain for selling and marketing products in cities.

CHALLENGES

There is a need for a transition of the entire food system, with a comprehensive approach in all links of the chain. This needs to take socio-economic aspects into account, including the viability of farms and access to sustainable food for all.

Climate mitigation and climate adaptation represent challenges for the agriculture and food sectors. The effects of climate change are complicating the cultivation of various crops. At the same time, the agricultural sector also plays a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Yet there are also opportunities for the sector as a linchpin in the transition priorities of the circular economy, energy, climate and environment.



SDG 3/
GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



SDG3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i12. Healthy life years	Years at birth	↗	⊖
i15. Premature deaths due to chronic diseases	Rate/100,000<65	70.1	⊕
i22. Daily smokers	%	13.2	⊕

The various governments in Belgium have been active for many years in the areas of disease prevention, the promotion of health and well-being, research and road safety.

DISEASE PREVENTION AND PROMOTING HEALTH

Wallonia unveiled its Walloon Prevention and Health Promotion Plan for 2030 in 2018. In the context of the plan to end poverty, the 'Impulseo' scheme of the **Walloon** Region offers financial support for helping family doctors set up in areas with a shortage of doctors. Based on an evaluation, the criteria for granting the Impulseo support will be redefined to prioritise areas with particularly acute shortages.

The **Brussels Region** has a new Health Promotion Plan 2023-2027. This plan sets out a common roadmap and specific health promotion actions to improve the well-being of Brussels residents and tackle social inequalities in health.

The **German-speaking Community** is strengthening its health network with its Guaranteeing Health Care project. One of the objectives is to improve

front-line support, including the development of a front-line concept and a register of health professions.

Belgium has launched NAPED, a national plan to counter endocrine disruptors based on prevention, regulation and scientific research. These three strands complement each other and follow a One World One Health approach, that takes into account the connection between human, animal and environmental health.

Flanders continues to invest in mental health care and specifically in the residential and quality of life of the elderly in residential care centres. It also strives to promote healthier lifestyles, protect people from infectious diseases and envisage the detection of diseases in time. Within the Flemish Action Plan for Suicide Prevention, there is a focus on the specific needs and target groups. For example, there is an ongoing campaign to make mental health problems less taboo, specifically targeting men (komuitjekop.be). Over 4.5 million people pay the health care premium each year for Flemish social protection. Flemish Social Protection uses these funds to strengthen more than 300,000 people in need of care each month, with a care budget.

RESEARCH

Belgium is very active in the fight against musculoskeletal disorders, which are among the most common occupational diseases, including RSI.

The MEMO+ project, launched in 2021 as part of the National Action Plan on Environment and Health, monitors exotic tiger mosquitoes in Belgium.

The *Flemish* Impulse Programme Care strengthens cooperation in innovation, aspires to better care for everyone in Flanders, and has consciously opted for personalised and digital medicine and care technology. Through innovation, the Flanders' Care program aims to improve the supply of quality care and encourage responsible entrepreneurship in the healthcare economy. Through cross-cutting collaboration between care and industry, Flanders' Care 4.0 facilitates the development of collaboration and business models to forge more efficient collaboration between the care sector and the business world.

FIRST-LINE CARE AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL

The 'Care in the City' partnership in the *Brussels-Capital Region* brings together actors from the health, social and spatial planning sectors to identify their needs and see how they can further improve the customer experience.

Projects for the reform of mental health for children and youth, adults and the elderly are ongoing, and are optimised where possible. During the COVID-19 crisis, first-line care psychologists became more accessible for vulnerable groups. Evaluation and optimisation also enhance this operation.

Flanders has been investing in a partner organisation for promoting mental health since 2020 and, via geluksdriehoek.be, among others, brings existing knowledge and practical tools on resilience and mental well-being to the general population. With the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, Flanders is targeting the well-being and positive identity development of children and young people, the development of pleasant and healthy neighbourhoods with quality housing, adequate social meeting space, and access to recreation. In addition, the

plan also focuses on an integrated leisure policy and media literacy.

Following COVID-19, in the context of the *Walloon* Resilience recovery plan, the Region initiated a project to facilitate the further development of a continuum of care, by promoting mental health services in the city within all age groups and living environments.

In REK III, the *German-speaking Community* launched the Guaranteeing Health Care project, and is drafting a decree and implementing decrees that will help bolster the mental health of the public.

ROAD SAFETY

The *federal government* has taken the necessary measures to prevent dangerous conduct by road users (tackling recidivism, automatic detection of violations, optimising cross-border enforcement, studying the introduction of a points-based driving licence, revising traffic regulations, etc.). The federal government drafted a federal road safety plan for 2021, with specific, quantified goals, including reducing annual traffic fatalities from 650 today, to zero by 2050.

The *Flanders* Road Safety Plan 2021-2025 makes cyclists and pedestrians the priority. The main objective of the plan is to reduce traffic fatalities. There is also a focus on driving under the influence, excessive and/or inappropriate speed and distractions.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

As part of short-term emergency solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, Belgium supported COVAX, for equitable access to vaccines for low- and middle-income countries. The Belgian government decided to forward vaccine doses to countries with vaccine shortages, and supported efforts in logistics and medical facilities. *Flanders* is a partner for vaccine donations to Mozambique: the donation of Astra Zeneca vaccines to this country is part of the commitment agreed between Belgium and its federated entities to redistribute at least 4 million vaccines

to middle- and low-income countries through the multilateral distribution mechanism COVAX by the end of 2021.

In addition, our country contributes to the response of the international financial institutions to COVID-19, and is a key player in various Team Europe Initiatives of the EU in the health sector. To this end, *Belgium*, together with its European partners (Germany, France and the European Union), is strengthening the institutional capacity of African countries for local production by improving the regional regulatory framework via the World Health Organization, and by developing the expertise of relevant national (public health institutes, ministries of health) and regional actors.

The *federal government* is putting universal access to basic health care at the heart of its cooperation with partner countries in this regard, the 'She Decides' movement remains an important partner for exchange. Furthermore, the right to health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the strengthening of health systems remain a priority for our non-governmental partners, civil society and academic actors. The federal government supports humanitarian partners in strengthening protection mechanisms to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health care for population groups in vulnerable situations.

An important goal of *Flemish* Development Cooperation is to further strengthen the health system in Mozambique and expand basic health care in this country. Moreover, Flanders aims to help realise the right to (sexual) health and healthy, self-chosen pregnancies of women, adolescents and other vulnerable groups such as sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+), displaced persons and persons with disabilities, both in Mozambique and around the world.

CHALLENGES

In general, Belgium can present good figures for SDG 3, but as is the case in other sectors, the search for sufficient workers and strong profiles in the healthcare sector remains a challenge.

Other risk factors for health also remain a major concern. About 74 000 new cases of cancer and about 30 000 deaths from cancer were expected in Belgium in 2020. Cancer incidence in Belgium is greater than the EU average both for men and women. Preventing and detecting chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes or cerebrovascular diseases early therefore remains a challenge.

In 2019, among the under 65s in Belgium, there were 87.7 deaths from chronic conditions per 100,000 inhabitants of that age group. To achieve SDG3 by 2030, this figure must fall to 69.5. There has been a decline, but this target will not be achieved if the trend since 2003 continues (data available November 2022). The number of premature deaths from chronic conditions is therefore evolving unfavourably.

Overweight and obesity rates have increased, driven by poor nutrition and low physical activity. The number of avoidable hospitalisations also needs to fall, in particular for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Finally, as in other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health of Belgians and has caused more mental health problems. For example, the prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms among adults more than doubled during the first wave. When lockdown measures were subsequently relaxed during the summer of 2020, prevalence fell again (but not to pre-COVID-19 levels), only to rise again to similar levels during the second wave. By March 2021, the prevalence had declined slightly but still remained nearly twice as high as in 2018. Specific focus on mental resilience among the younger generation is essential. The pandemic highlighted the need for investment in health care (infrastructure and human resources).



SDG 4/
QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i23. Early school leavers	%	0% (18-24)	—
i24. Lifelong learning	%	15	—
i26. Underachievement in reading	%	15	—

The **Flemish** and **French Communities** have been working together since 2015 in the context of global decision-making and monitoring of the implementation of SDG 4. In 2022, they jointly led the Financing strand of the United Nations Transforming Education Summit. In education policy, communities place emphasis on counselling and inclusion of children with delayed language proficiency, lifelong learning, adult literacy and digitisation, among other things.

From a development cooperation perspective, the **federal** government is also committed to making education accessible to girls.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION

The **Flemish and French Communities** have several initiatives and instruments at their disposal for education in sustainable development, both in schools and in vocational training.

In the **French Community**, the compulsory school curriculum includes environmental education, in the discipline of “scientific education.” The curricula also include cross-cutting skills, including civic education and media literacy (its media literacy plan was approved in 2021). In addition, the French Community awards an annual subsidy to the Academy for Research and Higher Education (ARES) for the

purpose of organising a call for projects targeting higher education institutions, aimed at promoting sustainable development within the latter.

Wallonia provides financial support for projects, especially in schools. This is the case, for example, for the Sustainable School label, an initiative of the Coordination Environnement non-profit association, which relies on a structured methodology that draws on the 17 SDGs.

As regards vocational training, all training courses for crafts at the Walloon Institute for Employment and the Middle Class feature a module on sustainable development.

The action program of the cooperation agreement Éducation Relative à l’Environnement et au Développement Durable between the **French Community**, the **Walloon** Region and the **Brussels-Capital Region** (2021-2024) also falls within the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development.

The curricula for the **German-speaking Community** include cross-curricular competencies in civic education and media literacy. Starting in the academic year 2022-2023, there will be additional part-time positions (middle management) in secondary schools to support this project. These positions will be for interdisciplinary coordinators with tasks in

civic education, media education and vocational orientation. Furthermore, an advisory body on political education was set up at the Autonomous College of East Belgium.

Flanders is committed to raising the quality of education through measures such as ambitious minimum targets imposed by the Flemish government.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND INCLUSION

Flanders pursues a policy of equal educational opportunities with a system of school funding based on the socio-economic characteristics of students. Flemish schools can count on additional resources and possibilities to accommodate newcomers who do not yet speak Dutch, and have them learn the language. The right to education and language inclusion (NT2) is also guaranteed for refugee students in higher education and adults. Through the horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunities Policy Plan, **Flanders** is making every effort to ensure that newcomers acquire proficiency in Dutch, thereby enhancing their inclusion and access to training and work, including through language stimulation in summer schools for non-native children and a language app that allows non-native Brussels residents to practice speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Compulsory education was lowered from 6 years to 5 years, and each child's language level is verified at the start of compulsory education through the KOALA test. Children with delayed language proficiency are required to follow a language pathway in order to reduce learning shortfalls and school dropout, and promote equal opportunities. In 10 years' time, Flanders aims to be in the top 5 countries with the best reading skills. The Flemish Government wants to ensure this catch-up with a large-scale Reading Campaign, which is primarily aimed at people who currently do not read much, or even not at all.

Furthermore, in the context of the corona crisis, recovery funds have been set aside for the "from vulnerable to resilient" recovery plan. Through this plan, initiatives will be rolled out to make education more future-proof, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable.

In 2019, the **French Community** launched a new decree for the reception, education and guidance of students who are not proficient in the teaching language.

LIFELONG LEARNING

The rapid technological evolutions require the continual upskilling of workers, but also of citizens in general, which further increases the need for lifelong learning.

Through the projects Learning Within Business, Guidance and Mediation as from one hand and Integration and Diversity, the **German-speaking Community** is improving access to affordable, quality education. These projects facilitate access to education and training for unemployed low-skilled individuals, those re-entering the labour market, side-entrants, migrants and target groups far removed from the labour market.

In 2021, the **Flemish** Ministers of Work and Education launched the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning, Setting the Course for a Learning Flanders, a coherent and cross-policy set of 7 flagships with 47 priority actions. On 25 March 2022, the Flemish government approved the vision paper 'Towards a learning and career account' in Flanders. This vision paper sets out a growth path for the incremental development of the learning and career account. With 'Edusprong': from being behind to leaping ahead - Plan for high-quality, strengthened Adult education, Flanders is giving adult education a boost. The plan addresses structural challenges: (1) enhancing digital skills, (2) tackling people leaving without qualifications, and (3) strengthening labour market opportunities.

In 2021, the **French Community Government** adopted a Joint Action Plan for 2021-2024 to address illiteracy. This plan aims to (1) enhance our understanding of illiteracy and low literacy among the adult population (2) align policies and develop/optimize literacy pathways and (3) further train and retrain staff, especially educators.

DIGITALISATION

The **German-speaking Community** is using the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility to further develop the digitisation of its education system from 2022 to 2024, with a focus on standardising and sustainably supporting the IT environment of the school system.

Via the Pact for Excellence in Education, the **French Community** has devised its digital strategy, which is planned over several years and based on 5 priority areas aimed at promoting the digital transition: training support for teaching teams, school equipment, the provision of digital resources, media and media education, and finally digital and secure school management.

The **Flemish** programme Digisprong stands for quality digitisation in education: a future-oriented and secure ICT infrastructure for all schools in compulsory education, a strong supportive and effective ICT school policy, ICT-competent teachers and adapted digital learning tools, and a knowledge and advice centre, Digisprong, at the service of the education field.

The **Brussels-Capital Region** is investing in the digital equipment of schools, both in terms of connectivity (Fiber to School) and strengthening mobile digital equipment and internal connectivity in Brussels schools with vulnerable audiences. Other supported pilot projects are also contributing to this challenge of digitalisation within schools. Examples include projects to prevent (cyber)bullying at school or work relating to the protection of personal data and privacy on the Internet. It also includes digital resources for vocational language classes in qualifying education.

SCHOOL DROPOUT

The **Brussels-Capital Region** appointed a school facilitator to lead the fight against school dropout. Various measures and plans contribute in this regard, including the School Acceleration and Support Program, which supports children and young people in school and citizenship activities. The resources are mainly available for students in difficulties, often from the most disadvantaged areas. The Region is

also helping municipalities implement their local plans to keep schools.

With its comprehensive plan to tackle school dropout, the **French Community** aims to reduce dropout by 50%. It involves setting up three strands of student support: a prevention strand, an intervention strand and a compensation strand.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Belgium was an elected member of the SDG Education 2030 Steering Committee from 2016 to 2021 and host country of the UN Global Education Meeting in Brussels, from 3-5 December 2018. In 2022, the Flemish and French communities jointly led action track 5 - financing education for the Transforming Education Summit.

Belgium signed the Paris Declaration: A call for investing in the future of education (2021) and enrolled in the benchmarking process for SDG 4, led by UNESCO, in 2022.

Education is a priority strand of the Belgian law on development cooperation, including vocational training. At the government cooperation level, this translates into actions to improve access to quality education for girls, support for primary education, projects that guide young people through vocational and technical education to jobs and entrepreneurship, teacher training, and the sustainable renovation of schools. In addition, many non-governmental actors funded by Belgian development cooperation also focus on education, training and university cooperation.

The **federal government** will continue to implement participatory actions in the field of education and children's rights, particularly through the Educaid platform, which brings together educational actors from all walks of life. Funding from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Partnership for Education promotes education, learning, protection and respect for children's rights. Belgium supports the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in educating Palestinian refugee children in humanitarian crisis situations. Within SDG 4, the federal government is also committed to global

citizenship, namely, raising awareness and educating citizens and communities about the SDGs and global challenges. This encourages citizens and communities to make a personal or collective commitment to benefit a more sustainable and just world.

Flanders has awarded a subsidy to the Workplace Learning for Lifelong Learning (2020-2022) project of the International Labor Organization (ILO). The aim of this project is to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of ILO member states, employers and workers to modernize workplace learning and move toward a global strategy. At the international level, Flanders participates in various OECD programmes which contribute to SDG 4, and supports UNESCO projects to strengthen educational capacities abroad.

CHALLENGES

Although most indicators place Belgium above the European average, several studies show that the quality of education is declining. There are differences by community within Belgium but all three communities are making efforts to strengthen the quality of their education. For instance, Flanders has a better score than the average of neighbouring countries and the OECD average in all three domains (reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy) of the PISA ranking, and the results of the German-speaking community are comparable to the averages of neighbouring countries. The French community is below the OECD average in all three domains. The three communities are stepping up their efforts to make education a real lever for a more sustainable society. Education for sustainable development is a key lever that needs to be used more in the wider society. This holistic approach goes beyond the approach currently used in environmental education or citizenship education.

Like the rest of the labour market, education seeks strong profiles. This makes it difficult to find replacements. Targeted measures are therefore being taken so that new staff are attracted to the teaching profession and remain in it. School drop-out is another problem that requires a thorough approach, following the principle of “Leave no one behind”.





SDG 5/
GENDER EQUALITY



SDG5 GENDER EQUALITY

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

ODD Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i27. Gender pay gap	%	0	⊖
i28. Inactive population due to caring responsibilities	%	↘	⊙
i29. Female members of parliament	%	50	⊖

The various governments in Belgium are making efforts to achieve gender equality and tackle gender-related discrimination. Thanks to mechanisms embedded in laws and regulations, the fight against discrimination and for gender equality is in place across the board and provides a basis for policies in all areas. Intersectionality, though still a challenge, is at the heart of the processes. Specific attention is given to more vulnerable women including women with disabilities, women in poverty, women of foreign origin, LBTQIA+, refugees and asylum seekers.

Belgium scores well in terms of LBTQIA+ rights, ranking second on the Rainbow Europe Index 2023 by ILGA, the European umbrella for LBTQIA+ organisations.

RESEARCH

Belgium continues to invest into research into gender equality and support for civil society organisations. Since 2022, the **federal government** has provided an additional budget of around €5 million to this end. This allows the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IGVM) to continue and strengthen its actions. In addition, Belgium publishes an annual report on the wage gap.

PRACTICE TESTS

On 31 March 2022, the **federal government** passed a law making discrimination tests more enforceable. These tests aim to identify discrimination during recruitment.

MAINSTREAMING NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Belgian governments continue to focus on gender equality. Specific action plans help mainstream non-discrimination:

- In Implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Act, the **federal government** adopted a Federal Plan on Gender Mainstreaming (2020-2024);
- **Wallonia** has adopted the Gender Plan 2020-2024, which aims to integrate gender into all public policies through the concept of gender mainstreaming.
- In the ESF+ Programme of the **German-speaking Community** (2021-2027), gender equality is an assessment criterion for awarding project support;
- Since 2016, the **Brussels-Capital Region** has included the concept of gender budgeting in the

budget circular it sends to municipalities each year to encourage them to analyse their budgets from a gender perspective. In December 2022, the Brussels Capital Region approved its Brussels plan for gender mainstreaming and gender equality. Supported by the voluntary sector, which was largely involved in its drafting, this plan proposes highly specific cross-cutting actions to ensure better gender equality in regional public policy. Within each administration, an equal opportunity focal point monitors the implementation of regional mainstreaming policies; The prison population reflects society and also includes LGBTQIA+ persons. As such, recommendations and a toolbox specifically for transgender inmates were produced;

- **Flanders** issues a periodic summary report on gender that maps the social position and participation of men and women in Flanders;
- The Flemish Living Together Plan is the translation of the Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunities Policy 2020-2024 to the context of Flemish local governments, and supports the latter in promoting living together in diversity. Local governments can receive support for actions such as enhancing safety and liveability, reinforcing proficiency in Dutch, and tackling discrimination and exclusion;
- The project Safe(r) and Trusted Environments (2022 - 2024), supported by **Flanders**, is all about creating and facilitating safe environments for the LGBTQIA+ community in Flanders;
- In September 2020, the **French Community** adopted a Women's Rights Plan 2020-2024 which helps tackle violence against women, facilitating the reconciliation of private and professional life, breaking down stereotypes, and ensuring better representation of women in all professional sectors and positions of responsibility.
- In January 2016, the **French Community** adopted a decree on gender mainstreaming in all French Community policies. It has also incorporated the gender budgeting method into its budget cycle and submits an annual "Gender Paper" report to parliament.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Various policy initiatives place the emphasis on preventing and combating gender-based violence:

- In 2021, at the initiative of the **federal government, all Belgian governments** adopted the National Action Plan to Combat Gender-based Violence 2021-2025 (NAP). This plan is structured around seven strategic pillars and broken down into 201 key measures. A national civil society platform was established to ensure independent monitoring of the NAP 2021-2025, provide advice following the mid-term and final evaluations, and provide advice upon request or of its own accord to the Inter-Service Group in the context of NAP implementation;
- The 2021 Act Against Violence federal campaign, set up with €1 million in funding, saw a sharp increase in calls to helplines for victims or witnesses of partner violence;
- In 2017, the federal government launched a pilot Care Centre after Sexual Violence project, a previously unseen multidisciplinary partnership between a hospital, the police and the public prosecutor's office. Belgium currently has 9 Care Centres, in Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Ghent, Genk, Liège, Roeselare, Leuven, Namur and the aim is to have 10 centres in Belgium by 2024;
- **Wallonia** adopted an action plan and supports 'No Means No', a two-year project (2020-2021) funded by the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme (2014-2020). The project combats violence against women with disabilities, via female self-defence. The project brought together seven partner organisations in Belgium, France, Germany and Poland;
- The **Flemish** action plan to tackle sexual violence focuses on prevention and on appropriate measures when sexual violence actually occurs, investing in both victims and perpetrators, and on strengthening the qualities of professionals and sectors involved in the fight against sexual violence. In the short term, Flanders will make additional efforts to expand and roll out Family Justice Centers. The police, judiciary and social

workers work together in these centres to stop domestic violence. This is also in line with the coordinated approach to domestic violence envisioned in the Istanbul Convention.

- The Gender Chamber of the **Flemish** Ombuds Service handles questions and complaints regarding gender discrimination and transgressive behaviour. The Gender Chamber is specifically part of an action plan against transgressive behaviour in the culture and media sector.
- Since 2020, the **French Community** has launched an annual call for projects to combat homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination and violence.
- In July 2020, the **Brussels government** approved its first action plan against violence against women. The 56 actions in this plan apply to prevention and safety, housing, employment and public services, mobility, training, statistics, urban planning, spatial planning and, of course, equal opportunities.
- The **Brussels government** has adopted an action plan to make nightlife more inclusive, safe and welcoming for all. In addition, a campaign to raise awareness among witnesses to street harassment and sexual assault in nightlife was launched in late 2022.

COMMUNICATION

A working group, commissioned by CommNetKern, drafts practical recommendations for federal communicators to make the **federal government's** communication strategy more inclusive, including from a gender perspective.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Within the **federal government**, gender equality is central to all new instructions for bilateral cooperation, with the federal government explicitly stating SDG 5 as a priority. In the partner countries of the federal development cooperation, projects have been launched around transformative masculinity, the fight against gender-based violence, and the participation of girls and women in all sectors of society, including digitisation. In addition, Belgium helps realise this SDG through funding to multilateral partner organisations such as UN Women, with in particular its African Girls Can Code Initiative, and to international NGOs and funds.

The federal development cooperation is looking for concrete and realistic ways to fund women's organisations on the ground more directly. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are priorities in various government cooperation portfolios. This commitment is reflected in the Belgian partnership with, among others, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). It also plays a role in funding within governmental and non-governmental cooperation programmes, as well as Belgium's active involvement in the 'She Decides' movement and Belgian positions in European and international negotiations and forums. Belgium also supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict and the team of experts on the rule of law and sexual violence in conflict.

Flanders has also supported a number of projects including Nadia's Initiative (which, among others, helps the Yazidi people persecuted by IS), Mozaika (co-organiser of Baltic Pride), the Bedayaa Organisation in Egypt (to build a network for LBQ women) and the Polish organisation Love Does Not Exclude (to provide legal support for people from the LGBTQIA+ community).

CHALLENGES

The gender pay gap remains a concern. On average, women earn 5.3% less per hour than men (2020), with the situation worsening with age. There is an emerging conservatism regarding gender equality, the rights of girls and women as well as more specifically progressive policies on sexual and reproductive health and rights in an increasing number of UN member states influential their region (see also SDG 5). Belgium counters this by taking a stand within relevant UN institutions and organisations (UNAIDS, HRP/WHO, UNWOMEN, UNWOMEN CSW, ICPD...) and by supporting concrete actions in partner countries.

The fight against femicide, the most extreme form of gender violence, should be a priority for Belgium. Our country does not currently have official statistics. There is a need for efficient tools to better assess the problem and protect victims, a draft law on femicide is currently under discussion.





SDG 6/
CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



SDG6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i30. Nitrates in river water	mg NO ₃ -N/l	↘	+
i31. Nitrates in groundwater	mg NO ₃ -N/l	↘	0
i323. Water consumption	%	20	+

INTEGRATED ACTION PLANS FOR DROUGHT/WATER

Over the past five years, *Wallonia* has experienced four summer droughts and one summer of floods, which took a heavy toll in terms of human lives (39 deaths) and property damage (estimated at nearly €5.7 billion).

The integral drought strategy of the Walloon governments (2021) should prevent or at least mitigate the effects of these events, focusing on:

- Retaining and conserving water in urban and rural areas and in agriculture for as long as possible;
- Managing water demand and reducing waste;
- Better distribution of water resources and use of new supplies.

Numerous ongoing management plans, for each flood-prone area, at the level of flood risk or related to nitrogen, include actions for adaptation to the effects of drought.

In response to the drought, the *Flemish Government* set up the Blue Deal in 2020, an integrated and broad program that includes both regulations and realisations on the ground to structurally address the drought issue. It is a partnership between governments, agricultural companies, knowledge institutions, citizens, local governments and (nature) associations. The Blue Deal reverses the effects of water scarcity and drought through, among other things, more efficient water use, (re)use of alternative water sources, restoration and expansion of wetlands and increasing space for water (both in open space and in the urban environment), reducing paving and expanding green-blue networks. These actions also generate positive effects on biodiversity and reduce the risk of flooding. The European Recovery and Resilience Facility provides partial funding. The Drought Commission, part of the Coordinating Commission on Integrated Water Policy, has been responsible for Flanders' reactive drought management during long periods of drought since May 2021. In response to the water issue, the Blueprint for rainwater and drought plans was created as a guide for local governments to contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. The agricultural sector is also encouraged to contribute with the Action Plan Water for Agriculture and Horticulture 2019 - 2023.

Flanders is committed to circular water use through cross-cutting cooperation. This working agenda is part of the Flemish ambitions for a circular economy, of which Flanders Circular is the project initiator.

Flanders has also chosen to give water more space once again. Re-watering streams and rivers create wetter soil and more oxygen in the water. Riparian zones provide an important buffer between land and water and prevent sediment, pesticides and fertilizers from entering the water.

The LEADER project in the **German-speaking community** Our Waters and their Wastewater Situation (2017-2020) in the municipalities of Eupen, Lontzen and Raeren came about under the impetus of the local action group Between Weser and Göhl. The aim of the project was to make citizens, farmers and other stakeholders aware of the problems, show alternatives and support residents. Nature Centre Haus Ternell coordinated the project.

In its development projects, the **Brussels-Capital Region** applies and specifically implements its environmental ambitions: zero discharge of rainwater into sewers, maximum infiltration, reuse of grey water, etc. The government companies systematically work with the water facilitator of Brussels Environment to this end. In the area of managing available water resources in the Brussels Region, new regulations on groundwater extraction came into force on 1 April 2019. A Water quantity plan has also been drawn up for the short and medium term (up to 2040), to optimise our infrastructure to meet drinking water needs by 2020, without seeking new water sources.

WATER SUPPLY

In Flanders, everyone has the right to be connected to the public water network and therefore have access to sufficient, quality and safe drinking water. Public drinking water supply is a competence of the Flemish municipalities - which organise this responsibility via drinking water companies. From

the Integral Water Policy, the Flemish Government started a cross-cutting action programme of water scarcity and drought: the Blue Deal (see above). With this programme, Flanders is not only guaranteeing quality drinking water for all, but at the same time ensuring better protection of our strategic water resources.

With the introduction of the **Brussels-Capital Region's** disconnection ban, it is now illegal to deny access to drinking water to users who do not pay. On 1 January 2022, another set of social measures went into effect to improve access to drinking water for all and combat the problem of water insecurity: social intervention in the payment of water bills, strengthening the social water fund, the possibility of reasonable payment plans, etc.

The tasks of the water authority also include the production and distribution of drinking water and the management of the sewage network.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Flanders contributes to the international policy dialogue with public and private stakeholders and civil society on future-proof water management, for example in Cape Town (South Africa). This is part of the OECD's Economics and Governance of Water Security in Africa project supported by Flanders.

The Flemish water sector joined forces in the Fluid Crew project in order to promote the various Flemish (technological) water solutions more widely, tackle the drought problem across borders, and optimise Flemish technology and put it further on the map internationally.

The **Brussels-Capital Region** has an International Solidarity Fund at its disposal. For every cubic meter of water billed by the water operator, 0.005 euros goes to projects on access to drinking water and adequate sanitation in developing countries. This fund was set up in 2015 and has already supported 35 projects, totalling nearly €2.5 million.

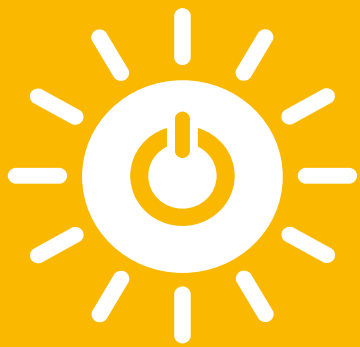
CHALLENGES

The increasing prevalence of droughts has increased the challenges of sustainable management of water resources. Water quality also remains a challenge. The availability and quality of safe (drinking) water is closely linked to the effects of climate change. Longer periods of drought and higher temperatures reduce water availability and increase (peak) demand. This requires a long-term strategy that addresses both future and current needs. The governments in Belgium are aware of these challenges and are addressing them (see above).

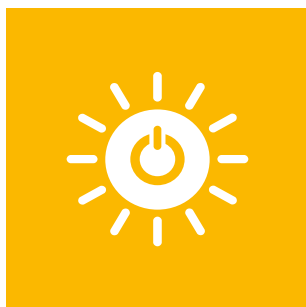
Groundwater levels continue to decline. In the 2017 Voluntary National Review, we reported that maintaining sufficient and quality groundwater is a challenge (SDG 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6).

Currently, almost no watercourse can determine its own course. Due to private and commercial land use, streams or rivers are forced into largely straightened beds, reinforced by walls. As a result, there is more water volume, which flows faster. In the event of heavy rain, this inevitably means that rivers burst their banks, flooding farmland or buildings. Such structural changes to the streambed lead to a loss of microhabitats, reducing the ecological value of the watercourse and its resilience. According to water status reports in recent years, untreated domestic and agricultural wastewater cause additional pollution.





SDG 7/
AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



SDG7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i34. Dwellings without adequate heating	%	0	–
i35. Renewable energy	%	17.5	+
i37. Energy productivity	€ ₂₀₁₀ /kg oil eq.	11.4	–

CROSS-CUTTING PLANS

The Climate Employment Renovation Alliance (ACER, 2021) is part of the **Walloon** recovery plan and aims to accelerate building insulation to achieve a zero-carbon building stock by 2050. This complements other alliances between employment and the environment: partnerships that aim to make environmental improvements a source of economic opportunity and employment. ACER has a participatory administration and aims to stimulate demand for sustainable renovation of both public and private buildings and strengthen the supply quantitatively and qualitatively.

The **Flemish** Energy and Climate Plan (2021-2030) includes more than 300 measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency and increase the share of renewable energy, with annual reporting.

In the context of the **Walloon** Region's POLLEC3 support program, in 2017 all German-speaking municipalities in Belgium decided to join the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. The government

of the **German-speaking Community** joined the Covenant of Mayors as territorial coordinator in 2018, and submitted an action plan for renewable energy and climate adaptation in 2019.

The policy statement of the **Brussels-Capital Region** includes a plan dedicated to renewable energy, thereby aligning its economic and social development with the transition to environmentally friendly technologies. In addition, since June 2021, there has also been a Climate Ordinance that includes the main climate commitments.

The **Brussels-Capital Region's** new Air-Climate-Energy Plan, which will be submitted for approval in 2023, raises the target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from 40% to 47% by 2030, compared to 2005, in line with the European Fit for 55 package. With this plan, the Regional Government aims to end Brussels' dependence on fossil fuels, prepare the city for the effects of climate change and make it a greener, more pleasant and resilient city by 2030. The European Union selected Brussels as one of the participants in the mission 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030.

In its cross-cutting plan for the ecological transition (PTE), the **French Community** aims to improve the energy performance of its buildings (public, school, university, cultural, sports and youth infrastructure). Various reforms have been implemented to ensure that the infrastructure is more sustainable. Among other things, a 10-year strategic renovation plan for school infrastructure was approved, for a total budget of €1 billion.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the **federal government** decided to expand the target group for the social tariff. These measures include a favourable rate for electricity, natural gas or heat to help individuals or families falling under certain categories of entitlement pay their energy bills. By expanding the target group, 2 million Belgians benefit from this measure, which has also provided protection against high energy prices.

In addition, the **federal** government took various measures since the start of the energy crisis, including the basic electricity and gas package and a VAT reduction on energy bills to help keep energy bills affordable.

THEMATIC PLANS

Within the limits of its competencies, the federal government is taking measures (taxation, product standards, offshore energy, mobility, hydrogen, public buildings) to help reduce dependence on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. The federal government has also launched two communication campaigns in response to the energy price crisis.

Within its competences, the **federal** government is taking a whole series of measures (taxation, product standards, offshore energy, mobility, hydrogen, government buildings) that contribute to reducing dependence on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the federal government launched 2 communication campaigns following the energy price crisis. EnergyWatchers, an initiative of the **federal government**, is a website that provides citizens/consumers with a wealth of information through practical tips and calculation modules to reduce their energy consumption and carbon

emissions. The site covers various topics: green energy, housing, electricity, travel and consumption in general.

To increase the share of renewable energy within the **Flemish Region**, several thematic action plans have been set up, with various prescriptive, incentivising and supporting actions.

The Heat Plan 2025 contains 26 measures to make the switch to sustainable heating and the greening of energy carriers. The plan implements the objectives relating to green heat and waste heat from the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan (VEKP). The Solar Plan 2025 includes various actions to source more green power from solar energy. In order to support this, a solar panel obligation on rooftops of large electricity consumers was introduced. The Wind Plan 2025 should ensure the realisation of the Flemish objectives for wind energy. The Flexibility Plan 2025 includes 20 specific actions to unlock the potential of flexibility. Efforts are also being made to realise hydrogen projects in Flanders.

The Flemish Region has taken several additional measures to increase building renovation rates, such as bundling the renovation premium and most energy premiums into an integrated premium, the My Renovation Premium (MVP). In addition, the energy loan was transformed into the My Renovation Loan (MVL). The MVL amounts to a maximum of EUR 60,000, is repayable over a maximum of 25 years and is aligned with the My Renovation Premium in terms of target groups and activities. From 2023, new owners of a residential building with EPC label E or higher will be obliged to renovate the house to at least label D within five years of the notarial transfer of ownership. This minimum EPC label after transfer will be tightened to label C from 2028, to label B from 2035 and to label A from 2040. The Flemish Rent Decree 2022 prohibits indexing of the rent of non-energy-efficient dwellings. This is part of the reforms to promote energy efficiency in the existing housing stock.

The legislative framework and voluntary Energy Policy Agreements to promote energy efficiency in energy-intensive enterprises was expanded and

tightened. A new legislative framework was introduced for non-energy-intensive enterprises. In the context of the new Energy Poverty Plan 2025, Flanders is working hard in the structural fight against energy poverty.

The 'Renolution' strategy includes important measures to reduce building-related greenhouse gas emissions in the **Brussels-Capital Region**, including mandatory renovation of all non-energy-efficient housing by 2033. The strategy also targets an average energy performance level for Brussels residential buildings of C+, corresponding to a consumption of 100 kWh/m²/year, by 2050. Accompanying and financial support measures should ensure that the energy transition is fair and inclusive, leaving no one behind.

FUNDING TRANSITION

The resources of the **Flemish** Climate Fund used to help realise the greenhouse gas reduction objectives from the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan were optimised according to the principles of co-financing and government cost efficiency. This means that greenhouse gas reduction measures cannot be financed entirely from the Flemish Climate Fund, but are also co-financed from other government resources. The contribution from the Climate Fund is proportionally higher with higher cost efficiency of the financed measure. The premium after audit, ecology premium+ and the strategic innovation support provide financial assistance to companies making investments to organise their production process in an environmentally friendly and energy-efficient way.

In 2021, the **German-speaking Community** introduced a simplified energy premium system with higher subsidies for private households. The German-speaking Community is now also responsible for renewable heat and can therefore subsidise private renovations in this domain.

Within the **Brussels-Capital Region's** Air-Climate-Energy Plan, there is significant focus on measures to accompany the energy transition and to combat

fuel poverty. This roadmap should lead to carbon neutrality in all areas of competence of the Brussels Region: from the economy to spatial planning, including mobility, housing, food, digital technology, waste management, and so on.

The **federal government** is encouraging greening and an acceleration of the transition, through various tax measures. For example, a greening of the taxation on company cars was implemented in 2021 and a greening of the investment deduction for companies is currently underway.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Belgium contributes to energy security in Belgium and Europe. The European policy on TEN-E contributes to the realisation of European energy infrastructure, which is also necessary for the energy transition toward which the European Green Deal is working. Belgium is also a member of the International Energy Agency (IEA). The Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) and the multilateral funds we support, including the Green Climate Fund, launch sustainable energy projects.

The **federal government** works within various energy partnerships, including the Benelux, the Pentatlantal Forum, the North Sea Energy Cooperation and most recently with the Esbjerg Declaration countries to expand offshore wind production capacity in the North Sea and additional interconnection capacity.

CHALLENGES

The energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has generated new challenges. In the first instance, energy policy should focus on phasing out our dependence of fossil fuels and ensuring security of supply, energy efficiency, affordable energy that is sustainable and for which supply and security is guaranteed. Decarbonising our energy supply, pushing through electrification, unlocking demand and supply flexibility, keeping energy costs affordable, an equitable

and inclusive energy transition, further expanding the share of renewable energy, switching to a hydrogen economy, and achieving better energy efficiency within all sectors of society are the main challenges in this regard. The measures also need to be targeted to reach vulnerable target groups. Not only do these challenges have a national scope, they also need to be considered in a European and global context.

Belgium faces significant challenges as it pursues its energy transition. In 2020, fossil fuels (primarily oil and natural gas) accounted for 71% of energy supply. Most of the demand for fossil fuels comes from industry, transport and buildings. Between 2011 and 2019, energy-related greenhouse gas emissions fell by only 3.5 million tons of carbon dioxide (Mt CO₂) to 90 Mt CO₂. Belgium's dependence on fossil fuels and stagnating emissions and emission reductions are challenges, especially in non-ETS sectors such as buildings and transport. To ensure security of supply, given the decommissioning of several nuclear reactors, the consumption of natural gas and the carbon intensity of electricity generation will temporarily increase, but these emissions are covered by the emissions cap of the ETS. At the same time, the energy crisis presents opportunities to accelerate the energy transition and the transition to low-carbon technologies and electrification.





SDG 8/
DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i40. Unemployment rate	%	↘	⊙
i42. Youth not in employment, education or training	%	9	+
i43. Fatal accidents at work	Rate / 100,000	↘	+

The various governments have developed a range of initiatives relating to decent work and young NEETs, among others, to raise the employment rate to 80%. The employment rate has evolved favourably since 2017, but shows regional variations.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND REACTIVATION

With the plan All hands on deck, *Flanders*, together with the social partners, wants to ensure a sustainable revival and transformation of the Flemish labour market that focuses on three priorities: lifelong learning, digitalisation and sustainable employment for all. With the employment agreement 'Everyone Needed, Everyone on Board': 40 Measures for the Flemish Labour Market, the Flemish government and social partners are addressing a number of crucial challenges in the labour market. The agreement is based around four main strands: (1) a results-oriented activation policy, (2) a comprehensive training policy, (3) a focus on workable work and (4) exploiting the opportunities of interregional mobility and economic migration.

In order to raise the employment rate on the one hand, and to motivate low-income workers to find a job and stay in work on the other, Flanders launched a job bonus, targeting low-wage workers.

In order for Flanders to provide better access to employment opportunities, a Lifelong Learning Partnership was set up with a wide variety of actors from both the employment and education fields. Together with the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning, this should turn Flanders into a learning society.

Community service has been introduced in Flanders for people who are unemployed for more than two years. This means that long-term job seekers carry out small-scale tasks at local governments, educational institutions and non-profit organisations, to develop generic skills and build a work rhythm.

In *Wallonia*, the 'Coup de Boost' project aims to reactivate, accompany and offer a future to young people aged 18 to 25 who are very far removed from the labour market. The project is producing positive results: after six months, almost one in two young people (47.5%) are back on the job market

(work, training leading to a qualification or resuming studies). After one year, this percentage rises to nearly 3 in 4 young people involved (71%).

In the context of the Youth Guarantee, the **Brussels-Capital Region** sets up actions for the young people of Brussels who do not finish school and/or do not work, to give confidence in their abilities and in the public institutions. Since 2019, the activities of Actiris, the official body responsible for training and guiding unemployed people, have fallen within the general framework of the SDGs. The 'Solution Guarantee for All' is a pact to find a solution for every job seeker within 12 months of registration. The solution may be a job, a training course or an internship. There are various support measures through internships, such as Stage First, CPE, Eurodyssey, ReActivate, Contrat d'insertion, etc.

The **federal government** reformed the right to training for workers in 2017. This was based on a report by the Belgian Group of Experts on Competitiveness and Employment. This reform provided for:

- A collective right to training of 5 days per year for each full-time equivalent;
- Setting up an individual training account that allows the worker to follow the evolution of the training taken;
- An additional right to training averaging 2 days per worker (FTE) per year, when the right to training is not regulated at the sector level or the employee does not have an individual training budget;
- Assessment criteria: the employer reports on the efforts made in its annual accounts submitted to the National Bank of Belgium.

There is also more focus on well-being at work, mental health and work-life balance. To meet future challenges, for example, the Ministry of Defence has a strong focus on The New Way of Working project. Human resources are the priority in this regard, which in the future will combine enhanced employability with greater mental well-being. At the federal level, a project has been underway at the Ministry of Defence since 2022 to enhance employment opportunities for young NEETs.

CRISIS MEASURES FOR COMPANIES

The COVID-19 pandemic affected a range of business sectors. The various governments in Belgium took measures to help companies through the crisis. One of the most important measures taken by the **federal government** was the corporate tax reform, including the reduction of nominal corporate tax rates, the reduction and subsequent elimination of the additional crisis contribution and the introduction of several additional tax incentives. To support SMEs, the federal government raised the rate of the ordinary investment deduction for SMEs in 2022.

The project 'Wirtschaftsstandort Ostbelgien Vermarkten' supports and strengthens the competitiveness and innovation capacity of East Belgium and its companies.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The **federal government** funds the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to make the mining sector more sustainable and ensure that mining revenues contribute to the local community.

In regard to decent work, the federal development cooperation produced a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) Decent Work (2021) with non-governmental partners and an innovative thematic portfolio for Social Protection, with a focus on decent work in Central Africa, implemented by Enabel. The Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) devised a new Decent Work Strategy in 2022 that aims to further ensure that investments in companies in developing countries have a positive impact on the people working there.

In the context of the **Flemish** cooperation with the ILO, projects supported over the past few years have included a focus on inclusive trade and decent work. One example is the promotion of decent work on tea plantations in Malawi, aimed at promoting sustainable, rural livelihoods and decent work. There is also a focus on job creation in the green economy in Morocco.

CHALLENGES

Labour market tightness: falling unemployment and a rise in employment and vacancies that are more difficult to fill. A quantitative and qualitative mismatch, an ageing population, technology and digitalisation that will change the nature of jobs are just some of the challenges. Fostering the inclusion of the long-term sick and persons with disabilities is crucial.

In the context of a transition to a green and digital economy, constant upskilling and retraining are crucial to responding flexibly to changes in the labour market. A culture of continuous learning, combined with individual upskilling, should provide better protection against qualifications becoming obsolete. This demands sustained policy efforts.

The Ukraine crisis has brought new challenges to the labour market, such as absorbing and assisting lower-skilled war refugees and companies shutting down production.





SDG 9/
INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



SDG9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i44. Passenger transport by car	Modal share	67.4	—
i45. Road freight transport	Modal share	63.7	—
i48. Research and development	% GDP	3	+

INNOVATION

In the area of innovation, the various governments in Belgium are working with strategic frameworks to address the domains in which they wish to invest as a priority, each contributing to different SDGs.

The Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) provides the strategic framework for **Walloon** research, innovation and industrial policy. This approach allows each European region to identify and develop its own competitive advantages based on its strengths and potential.

With Flanders Technology & Innovation, **Flanders** is demonstrating that it is a world technology laboratory, and it plans to tackle five major societal challenges: climate and energy (energy tech), health (health tech), education and labour market (Flanders Next Academy), data and digitization (data tech) and entertainment and media (entertainment tech). Five thematic conferences will be organised around these themes. Major public events are subsequently planned for March 2024, spread across the five Flemish provinces. Flanders also has extensive Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cybersecurity (CS) policy programs. The Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) facilitates training

and investment support for internationally oriented companies undergoing transformation with a strong innovative character.

In the **Brussels-Capital Region**, the call for digital and economic transition projects acts as a flagship action of the Shifting Economy, which promotes the digitisation of businesses by supporting digital projects with a positive social and environmental impact. Similarly, the Crea.Brussels call for projects is open to Brussels-based companies, entrepreneurs and artists active in the cultural and creative industries.

DIGITAL TRANSITION WITHIN GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Digitalisation continues apace within government services.

The **federal government's** Just-on-web programme, which still needs to be developed, should meet the need for faster, more modern and digital Justice. This unique portal should offer citizens and businesses a single, clear point of contact for all interactions with the Judiciary, along the lines of Tax-on-web.

Another planned project is the construction of a fibre optic network in the **German-speaking Community** and the realisation of a sustainable digital infrastructure that meets the expectations and needs of our current and future (digital) society. The EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility will provide funding from 2022 to 2026. The main goal is to make the region more attractive to both citizens and businesses, especially SMEs. Only a robust digital infrastructure, such as fibre optic cable, provides the necessary foundation to fully exploit the potential of digitisation in all sectors, including private households, businesses, schools, agriculture and hospitals. The project also aims to strengthen equal opportunities for all citizens to access a high-quality Internet connection.

In **Flanders**, the Flemish Data Utility was set up to stimulate economic and social prosperity with innovative initiatives in the field of data use. As an independent broker, this institution should both strengthen citizens' confidence in data sharing and simplify finding and exchanging data for businesses. The Flemish Data Strategy 2022, which was created in collaboration between the Flemish government, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities and the Association of Flemish Provinces, focuses on data literacy and broadening skills, engaging all stakeholders inside and outside government, and data quality and use of data.

INCLUSION IN DIGITALISATION

The Belgian governments are also working on inclusion in the area of Digitalisation.

One example is the creation of a Digilab within the **federal government** to manage annual calls for projects addressed to Public Centers for Social Welfare and other social actors. These projects aim to promote the digital inclusion of vulnerable people and remove inequalities in digital skills or the use of essential digital services. The federal government is investing €30 million from its incubation fund to finance these calls for projects.

Digital Wallonia is the digital strategy of Wallonia, led by the **Walloon government**. This was officially launched in December 2015 and updated in 2018 and 2022, in particular through the integration of the EU's digital priorities and the resources made

available under Wallonia's Recovery Plan. It acts as a structuring regional framework and ensures the coherence and sustainability of digital policies. It is making a major contribution to innovation in the Walloon Region.

The **Flemish** action plan 'Everyone Digital' supports local governments in developing a digital, low-barrier inclusion operation. The Digibanks call closes the digital divide through three objectives:

- Equal access to digital technology through the conditional provision of laptops, screens and other hardware, and support in a specific context;
- Strengthening training and knowledge sharing around digital skills, both in terms of personal and technical skills (e.g., repair of IT equipment);
- Guidance for improved digital access to essential services through physical nodes.

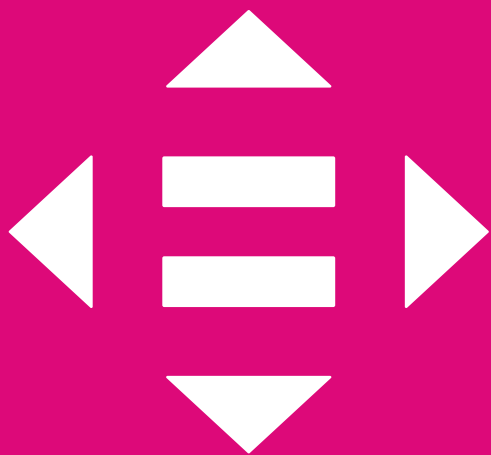
INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The **federal** development agency Enabel plays a pioneering role in terms of Digitalisation for development (D4D) through its D4D-Hub, a multi-stakeholder platform for exchange, cooperation and partnership building between European and global partners to jointly support a 'human-centric' digital transformation, and through Wehubit, a project dedicated to social innovation through digital solutions.

The **Flemish** strategic research centre Flemish Institution for Technological Research (VITO) is a driving force behind the international program The Global Sustainable Technology & Innovation Community. This programme focuses on accelerating the development and adoption of integrated technology solutions for the SDGs.

CHALLENGES

The 2030 Agenda calls for additional measures, including the implementation of new business models, not hesitating to call into question existing practices, and the evolution of an approach where the focus is not on merely reducing negative impacts but on realising a positive impact. Circularity is an important lever to bring this about.



SDG 10/
REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



SDG10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Reduce inequality within and among countries

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i50. Risk of poverty	%	↘	○
i51. Depth of risk of poverty	%	↘	○
i52. Income inequality: Gini index	Index 0-100	→ ↘	+

Income inequality in Belgium is relatively low compared to other EU member states. All governments in Belgium are addressing inequality within all domains.

INCLUSION

Flanders takes an inclusive approach in equal opportunities, inclusion and integration policies. An approach addressing the target group is only possible when this becomes truly necessary. In this regard, Flanders pursues a robust policy that strives for a society where opportunities are central, where everyone contributes to our society and shapes Flemish citizenship.

DISCRIMINATION ON THE LABOUR MARKET

In the area of employment, the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience provides for scientific monitoring of diversity and discrimination in the

labour market at the sectoral level. A *federal* draft law provides for close involvement of the sectors in this monitoring, through joint committees and sub-committees. The draft law includes the creation of a Diversity Service of the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, which will draw up sectoral data sheets for the sectors in question.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The federal government, the Communities and Regions have launched various structural plans to promote equal opportunities, cross-cutting or in a specific area.

The Federal government adopted a series of action plans on various related themes: on Anti-Racism, for LGBTQI+ friendly Belgium, for the rights for persons with a handicap and for the Roma community. Additionally, the Federal government revised its already robust anti-discrimination laws to include among others a definition of intersectional discrimination.

Flanders translates SDG 10 in Vizier 2030 in terms of the proportional participation of disadvantaged groups, reducing social inequalities in health and well-being and striving for a Flanders where every long-term resident has a sufficient proficiency in Dutch. At the same time, employment rates, and cultural, sports and political participation are also examined. For Flanders, the Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunities Policy Plan 2020-2024 puts the focus on participation in society from the perspective of broadening horizons, but also as a civic duty. Participating in society gives citizens a better understanding of labour market opportunities, reduces segregation and enhances understanding of the multi-layered identities in a diverse society.

In **Wallonia**, a plan to tackle discrimination in access to housing was launched in 2020. The key measures are:

- Drafting a new decree that makes mystery checks possible, i.e., situational testing in a fair, legal and non-provocative manner;
- Drawing up a brochure similar to a practical guide for the general public to answer the questions that any landlord, tenant, real estate agent, etc. may have and what to do in the event of discrimination;
- Training real estate agents, municipalities and public housing agencies through a module on discrimination laws.

SOCIAL SECURITY

The right to social security for all is a fundamental principle of the 2030 Agenda. In 2021, the **federal government** set up an action plan for accessible Social Security. It contains various measures, some of which aim to evaluate and improve certain statuses, to improve access to (formal, effective, adequate and transparent) social security:

- Reform of the status of artists: this reform aims to modernise the status in line with contemporary professional artistic practice and targets participation to a significant extent. It came about following a participatory process.

- Improving the living and working conditions of sex workers;
- Ensuring good working conditions and better social protection for people who are structurally active in the platform economy.

Employers in the **German-speaking Community** who employ people at a disadvantage on the labour market receive an AktiF or AktiF PLUS subsidy to this end. The target group includes young people up to 25 years old, and with no more than a high school diploma, long-term job seekers, job seekers over 50 years old, etc.

INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

Within the **Flemish** integration policy, the Dutch language plays an important role as a connecting element in society. Building a strong network for newcomers is a key focus. The new inclusion policy emphasizes more economic and social self-reliance, thorough proficiency in Dutch, and knowledge of Flemish society, values and norms.

The inclusion pathway in **German-speaking Community** is an education and support programme tailored to the migrant's circumstances and needs that helps the migrant take their first steps into the host society. The pathway consists of an initial reception, a social assessment, a language course, an integration course, individual guidance during the course and info sessions on socio-professional inclusion.

Following the war in Ukraine, a separate website has been set up with information for newcomers from Ukraine. The website provides information on the governments, health, finance, work, housing, mobility, education and leisure. Sports and recreation centre Worriken became a reception centre with 200 beds for refugees from Ukraine.

The REK Integration and Diversity Project is all about equal access to education. A tailored educational offering should help people from immigrant backgrounds in East Belgium participate more easily in society.

OTHER GOOD PRACTICES INCLUDE:

- The setting up of a **Flemish** Human Rights Institute, with a broad and independent mandate to protect all human rights and to handle complaints of discrimination within the Flemish competences;
- The call for projects of Women in Business of the **Brussels-Capital Region**, includes a criterion relating to intersectionality;
- Calls for projects promoting equal opportunities in general and calls for projects promoting the rights of a specific target group in the area of combating discrimination and violence against women at the **federal** level;
- The call for projects Crea.**Brussels** integrates UNIA (an independent public service for tackling discrimination and promoting equal opportunities) into the jury, with a focus on equal opportunities.
- The reform of penitentiary health care contributes to more accessible, quality care for individuals in detention. The goal is a comprehensive and integrated care offering, embedded in broader health policy and a policy for meaningful detention.
- JustFromCell is a digital platform where inmates have access to a number of applications. This **federal government** project also helps to foster the inclusion of inmates in society. Such a platform provides an interface that offers secure and limited access to the prison's services and to the Internet, for example, to look for work, apply for jobs and take online classes.

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

The action plan DG Inklusiv 2025 contains specific measures and principles that should lead to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the **German-speaking Community**. The plan sets out a vision for the year 2025 and goals within 10 action areas. These goals are the result of extensive consultations with persons with disabilities, thereby meeting their needs.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

In the context of the Addis Tax Initiative, the **federal government** has committed itself to Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM). In addition to DRM as a focus in several bilateral cooperation portfolios or projects on improved fiscal governance, Belgium's efforts have led to increased cooperation with the International Monetary Fund to strengthen tax policies in partner countries. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Belgian government supported the Debt Service Suspension Initiative.

The **federal government** deferred bilateral debt repayments from 16 of the most affected countries to our country between May 2020 and the end of 2021. In this way, Belgium offered €38 million in debt relief. Moreover, the government fully supports the implementation of the common framework for debt treatment outside the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative.

A broad consultation process with all actors resulted in the federal Migration and Development Strategy in 2021. This strategy sets out how Belgium can address the opportunities and challenges relating to migration, mobility and forced displacement within development cooperation and endorses SDG 10.7: facilitating orderly, safe and responsible migration and mobility of people.

The development policy of the **German-speaking Community** supports organisations from the German-speaking Community in sustainable projects in structurally weak regions.

Flanders also contributes to the socio-economic development of partner countries through the Flemish development cooperation, which will lead to prosperity, self-reliance and future prospects.

CHALLENGES

In a context of rising energy and food prices, a focus on social cohesion remains important for policies, to make progress toward sustainable development, with the equitable transition in mind.



SDG 11/
SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



SDG11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i54. Inadequate dwelling	%	0	–
i55. Exposure to particulate matter	µg PM _{2,5} /m ³	10	+
i57. Noise pollution	%	↘	+

All governments in Belgium are committed to inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities including sustainable mobility and infrastructure, by taking action in different areas. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at local implementation of the SDGs.

SUPPORTING URBAN POLICIES

Various policy initiatives contribute to a more sustainable infrastructure in cities, towns and regions.

Quartiersapaisés *brussels* aims to create the conditions for truly peaceful neighbourhoods and significantly enhances the quality of life, the quality of public spaces and urban resilience. The plan gives priority to residential functions, universal accessibility, traffic safety, air quality and health.

The *Flemish* objectives framework Vizier 2030 puts the focus for SDG 11 on housing quality standards (including environmental standards) and sustainable and resilient infrastructure. The Flemish cities policy is an important driver in promoting the SDGs and

realizing the European and international ambitions. The policy focuses on urban renewal (including densification) and Flanders as a smart region. The transition to a smart region therefore continues in the Smart Flanders programme, with the ambition of being European leader by 2030.

The Flemish Air Policy Plan 2030 includes 93 actions to improve air quality through a sectoral approach (transport, industry, agriculture, households and the tertiary sector). In 2021, of these 93 actions, 83 had already been started and 7 completed.

Brussels-Capital Region is reforming its ordinances in the area of spatial planning, towards Good Living, a more flexible instrument that encourages quality architecture while respecting heritage, better quality housing while preserving open spaces and sustainable, multifunctional buildings.

The Emergency Housing Plan for the Brussels-Capital Region 2020-2024 is structured around five major projects: increase the supply and quality of social housing, improve public action on housing, support tenants, guarantee right to housing and access to property.

Be Sustainable, the reference framework for sustainable neighbourhoods in Brussels since 2019, boosts the sustainability ambitions of major urban projects and neighbourhood renewal.

Since January 2020, the **German-speaking Community** has had competences for spatial planning, housing and certain areas of energy. The community started a comprehensive reform process for spatial planning.

Social housing in the German-speaking Community includes around 1,500 rental units, most of which are more than 30 years old. A planned investment project through the European Union Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will make these dwellings more energy efficient between 2023 and 2025.

In addition to the Climate Employment Renovation Alliance, **Wallonia** approved a plan to renovate 55,000 social housing units in 2022.

MOBILITY

Sustainable mobility is an important infrastructure aspect for all governments in Belgium. The various policy levels have devised different objectives in this regard.

In 2017, the **Walloon** government adopted the FAST 2030 vision, with ambitious and recognised goals for the necessary transformation of mobility in Wallonia by 2030. Through the Modal Shift, the Walloon government is implementing a mobility system that guarantees flow, accessibility, health and safety for all. The regional mobility strategy consists of two components, one relating to the mobility of individuals and the other on the transport of goods.

The Green Deal Sustainable Urban Logistics (2019) aims to reduce the number of kilometres travelled within urban transport and unavoidable kilometres travelled in a sustainable, low-carbon manner (SDG 11.2, 11.6).

With the **Flemish** Mobility Vision 2040, the Road Safety Plan 2021-2025, the policy vision Clean Power for Transport 2030 and the Space Flanders policy plan, Flanders is moving towards safe and zero-emission transport, thereby contributing to SDG 11.2 regarding sustainable and urban mobility.

Flanders is also committed to low-carbon multi-modality, with good connections for commuting as well as for social activities and household tasks. To help facilitate the modal shift and make Flanders a cycling region, investments are partly financed from the Flanders Resilience recovery plan.

Beliris is contributing to the realisation of various infrastructure projects in **Brussels** that improve mobility. These include projects such as the pedestrian avenue, the new Metro North line, the vélo-plus network and the Promenade Verte: a walk of more than 60 km that will allow pedestrians and cyclists to easily traverse the Brussels-Capital Region. The Good Move plan is the Brussels Region's mobility strategy launched in 2020. It has decisively opted for a pleasant and safe city, consisting of calm neighbourhoods, connected by intermodal structuring routes, focused on efficient public transport and more fluid traffic. It places the user at the centre of the reflections on daily travel.

The Railway Vision 2040 was born from a collaboration between the **federal government** and the railway companies and civil society. The Vision is preparing for the future and provides a framework for railway policy over the next 20 years, with significantly reduced carbon emissions, in line with international, national and regional targets.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The **federal government** contributes indirectly to achieving this SDG through its policy of non-affected funding to the multilateral system, the funding of non-governmental actors in Belgian development cooperation policy and the co-benefits of interventions on priority strands. For example, in Rwanda, urbanisation dynamics are being supported bilaterally, with a focus on sustainable urbanisation.

With the **Flemish** UNESCO Trust Funds (FUT), Flanders has been supporting heritage projects (cultural, natural, intangible and underwater heritage) with a geographical focus on Africa for more than 10 years. As regards preserving heritage in all its aspects, Flanders has made contributions in Syria (war), Nepal (earthquake) and Ukraine (war).

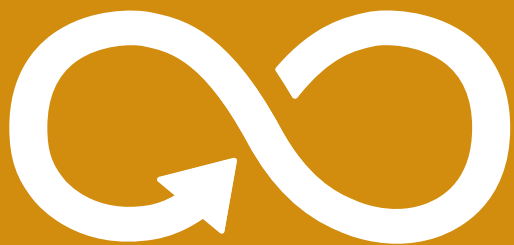
Through this cooperation with UNESCO, Flanders is committed to the protection and preservation of heritage as an engine for cultural diversity, development and peace-building. Flanders offers financial support to projects that protect natural and cultural heritage such as the cultural heritage in Southern Africa and national park Jardines de la Reina in Cuba.

CHALLENGES

In a small country like Belgium with a high population density, spatial planning is an economic, social and environmental challenge. Making better use of land-take is therefore essential, rather than allowing further spatial expansion, which is at the expense of our environment. The question of access to quality housing for all must also remain a central issue, in a context where property and energy prices hit the most vulnerable hardest.

Climate change and a concentration of activities in dense space present cities with stressors, including heat stress and exposure to particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, high concentrations of ozone and odour, light and noise pollution. The challenge here is to counteract the adverse health effects within the existing boundaries of the city. Mobility is also an important sector to overcome the climate challenges and achieve sustainability.





SDG 12/
RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION AND
PRODUCTION



SDG12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i58. Domestic material consumption	t / inhabitant	↘	+
i59. Hazardous waste	kg / inhabitant	↘	○
i60. Waste recycling	%	↗	○

Unsustainable production and consumption patterns around the world affect the climate crisis, natural disasters, biodiversity loss, pollution, hunger and poverty. The way in which we handle our natural resources, raw materials and materials plays a key role in this regard. The various governments in Belgium are working at different levels towards responsible consumption and production patterns to ensure, inter alia, that their environmental and social impact decreases, and there is more independence. This includes, on the one hand, a large focus on the role that governments can play in their internal operations or in cooperation with other (international) partners. The various governments in Belgium are also committed to circular economy as a strategy for a sustainable change in production and consumption patterns.

GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT POLICY

The governments have taken various initiatives to make their procurement policies more sustainable.

The annual **Federal** Action Plan for Sustainable Development includes a number of actions relating to sustainable procurement and awareness-raising of staff. The procurement procedures

systematically include sustainability clauses, in particular regarding waste treatment, catering, aspects related to mobility and accessibility for persons with reduced mobility. There is also a specific focus on communication with the deaf and hard of hearing.

The **Flemish government** also has consideration for SDG 12 in its internal operations. The Support Services Agency, which supports the entities within the policy domains of the Flemish government and local administrations with facility services, implements sustainability in a cross-cutting manner in its activities, thereby playing an exemplary role within the Flemish government.

Since 2022, the Flemish government and the Dutch government have been working together to develop, update and publish criteria for sustainable public procurement, the so-called MVI Criteria Tool. This cooperation should lead to largely common criteria for socially responsible public procurement (SDG 12.7).

The integration of environmental clauses in public procurement is one of the priorities of the **French Community's** Transversal Plan for Ecological Transition (PTE) for 2021.

SUPPORTING RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION

The *Flemish* government maintains partnerships with the private sector. The Flemish agencies VLAIO and Flanders Circular are an important pivot in the establishment and development of these partnerships and encourage further research into circular business models and technologies. There are also special tools to help Flemish companies become more sustainable. Examples include SustaTool, a roadmap for integrating sustainability considerations into the day-to-day operations of companies, and SustaTrade, a tool that helps international entrepreneurs identify potential sustainability risks such as human rights and climate.

With the Action Plan to Eliminate Asbestos towards an Asbestos-safe Flanders 2040, Flanders is committed to accelerating the asbestos removal policy. The Flemish recovery plan 'Flemish Resilience' has set aside €40 million for asbestos removal.

The Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft *East-Belgium* offers free innovation advice to small and medium-sized companies, the self-employed and large companies. The project Qubus (2020) is a local business incubator with co-working space that offers project managers, young entrepreneurs, start-ups and existing companies individual customised support for the further development of their projects.

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

The *Brussels* Good Food 2 strategy works toward a structurally more sustainable food system by 2030. The goal is to transform our food system, from production to consumption, into a model that respects humans and other species, respects biodiversity and creates quality jobs, as outlined in the Strategy for a Shifting Economy.

With the *Flemish* Action Plan against Food Loss and Biomass (residual) Flows Circular 2021-2025, Flanders is taking a new step, following the Chain Roadmap Food Loss 2015-2020, to further reduce food loss and create more sustainable (re)use opportunities for biomass and biomass residual flows.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A participatory process by the *Walloon government*, with private and public stakeholders, academia, the research field and the voluntary sector led to the first strategy for a circular economy in Wallonia in 2021: Circular Wallonia. The five main strands are:

- Strengthen the production and supply of circular goods and services;
- Stimulating demand for and consumption of circular goods and services;
- Enhancing the mobilisation of Walloon actors for a circular transition;
- Optimising the management of waste considered as a resource;
- Bringing the development of the circular economy within value chains identified as priorities.

Building on the various actions of Flanders Circular, the new policy program Circular Construction 2022-2030 continues the transition to circular construction and contributes to the *Flemish* government's goal of drastically reducing the carbon footprint, in collaboration with actors in the construction sector. The Flemish recovery programme Flemish Resilience has made €30 million available to support innovative recycling processes and €25 million to support innovation & living labs for circular building and the circular manufacturing industry.

Under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Belgium Builds Back Circular program was initiated. This programme primarily focuses on financial support for applied research, industrial development and SME projects in the areas of product and service design and chemical substitution, to promote product circularity in both cases. The *Federal* Action Plan on the Circular Economy (2021-2024), adopted in 2021, also contains 31 measures that will boost the circular economy. Furthermore, an intra-Belgian Circular Economy Platform should strengthen cooperation between the regions and the federal government in the area of circular economy. Finally, the federal government's expertise centre on critical raw materials will make Belgian

society more resilient in the face of raw materials scarcity and shortages, thereby contributing to SDG 12.2.

In the *Brussels-Capital Region*, the regional strategy Shifting Economy includes in its priorities the necessary support to create inclusive, quality and non-outsourcable jobs and to participate in the climate goals. The support to businesses provided by the Region also includes more support for the circular economy and the reorientation of support to businesses towards exemplary economic models. The Region also supports companies, associations and social action centres that work towards the socio-professional integration of job seekers who are particularly removed from the labour market. It encourages Brussels residents who are building a business with a social purpose.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Together with *federal* development cooperation, Beyond Chocolate was set up in 2018 to make chocolate production more sustainable, with a focus on countering deforestation, child labour and ensuring a viable income for producers. This collaboration involves both the Belgian chocolate sector and retail, as well as civil society, investors, trade unions and universities. This initiative was extended in 2022.

The development agency Enabel's Trade for Development Center (TDC) emphasises supporting producer organisations and multi-stakeholder initiatives focused on the sustainability of value chains, and encouraging citizens and policy makers to develop sustainable consumption patterns.

The TruStone initiative is an international CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) covenant for the natural stone sector that runs until the end of 2024. The covenant brings together Dutch and *Flemish* companies, industry associations, the Dutch and Flemish governments, trade unions and NGOs to promote international corporate social responsibility in the sector.

CHALLENGES

The transition to more frugal models of production and consumption that consume fewer natural resources is challenging, given that this requires a transformation of our economies and lifestyles. Addressing this requires complex systemic changes. Another challenge stems from the inherent contradiction in the climate transition, where there is an increasing demand for resources e.g. for making transport electric, which risks causing negative environmental and social impacts.

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine have also showed how vulnerable and dependent Belgium and Europe are in terms of resources and raw materials needed to meet our needs.

The challenge is to see the climate and energy transition also as a materials transition, toward production and consumption models that commit to less, more efficient and more circular use of materials.



SDG 13/
CLIMATE ACTION



SDG13 CLIMATE ACTION

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i63. Greenhouse gas emissions non-ETS	Mt CO ₂ eq.	41.8	—
i64. Natural disaster victims	Rate / 100,000	1.97	—
i65. Contribution to international climate finance	M€	↗	+

Climate policy in Belgium is increasingly taking shape. Both in depth, with new emission reduction measures, and more broadly,, with more of a focus on adaptation policies and climate finance. The floods in July 2021 were a painful wake-up call that kick-started adaptation policy. At the same time, the already approved components of the European #fitfor55 package are proving to be an inspiration for national and regional climate policies.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Climate change is resulting in extreme weather and natural disasters more often, and Belgium is no exception. In July 2021, floods claimed 41 lives in our country. The Ministry of Defence played an important role in the rescue and clean-up operation that followed. The government learned the necessary lessons from this which, combined with an analysis of the security environment, has prompted the Belgian government to invest heavily in the disaster and crisis management capabilities of the Ministry of Defence in the coming years.

PUBLIC HEALTH

In response to the rising impact of climate change on human health, a group of countries, including Belgium, pledged at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26, November 2021) to build climate-resilient, low-carbon and sustainable health systems. The federal government is meeting these obligations through the third National Action Plan for Environment and Health.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

A new governance framework should ensure the implementation and evaluation of the *federal* climate policy 2021-2030. This framework mobilises all branches of the government and relevant departments to pursue ambitious climate policies and fully meet the commitments of the federal state. The first annual evaluation cycle of the roadmaps of the relevant ministers was completed with the publication of a summary report on the implementation of federal climate policy 2021-2030. This showed that the policies and related measures are on track and are producing results, even if there were some delays or obstacles to implementation. These roadmaps are the core of the government's climate policy and the basis for new initiatives.

Although we are making progress in implementing measures at all levels of government, it is still crucial to further develop public support for the climate transition in our country. MY 2050 is a tool to promote awareness about climate neutrality.

With the approval of the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan in 2019, and the additional measures from November 2021, the **Flemish government** is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 compared to 2005, as stipulated in the effort-sharing regulation. An agreement framework includes the various procedures and timing of the successive steps of the energy and climate policy cycle on the Flemish Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, and the role of all stakeholders in this regard.

With the adoption of the Energy and Climate Plan in 2019, the **German-speaking Community** and municipalities committed to a 40% reduction in CO₂ by 2030. Furthermore, the government of the German-speaking Community is aiming to reduce CO₂ emissions by 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050.

The new Climate and Energy Plan should prepare the **Brussels-Capital Region** for the consequences of climate change and address the "inevitable." In synergy with the Water Management Plan 2022-2027, Brussels is making its territory more resilient through various actions, including better soil permeability, integrated rainwater management, more vegetation, especially in densely populated neighbourhoods and the creation of cool zones to counteract heat islands.

The European Union selected the **Brussels-Capital Region** as one of the cities which will participate in the mission 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030.

In February 2023, the Brussels-Capital Region launched the first cycle of its Citizens' Assembly on Climate. This is a permanent assembly of 100 citizens appointed by lot to make recommendations on regional climate policy, to help achieve the goals for greenhouse gas reduction and resilience.

As part of the development of the Air-Climate Energy Plan 2030, a Citizens' Panel on Climate was set up in **Wallonia**, a randomly selected citizens' panel (50 panel members and 25 deputies) that

formulates proposals for action. This citizen consultation was part of the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% from 1990 levels by 2030. After 13 meetings, the panel formulated 168 recommendations for reducing greenhouse gases.

TECHNOLOGY

Flanders plans to focus on CCUS (Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage). To accelerate the rollout of CCUS, the Flemish government is developing a regulatory framework for the transport of CO₂, among other things. In addition, Flanders is expanding cooperation with CCUS-pioneering countries such as Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Within the Moonshot program Flemish Industries Carbon Circular and Low in CO₂ by 2050, Flemish universities, research institutions and industry, under the coordination of the spearhead cluster CATALISTI are working together to develop breakthrough technology for new climate-friendly processes and products by 2040.

CLIMATE FINANCE

In regard to sustainable finance and its connection to human rights, the **federal government** is following the efforts of the European Platform for Sustainable Finance on minimum guarantees, which published its report in July 2022. In February 2022, the European Commission published a proposal for the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). At the time of writing this VNR, the European Parliament has adopted its position regarding the proposal. The trilogues will likely begin in the spring of 2023. In January 2023, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) came into force.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The federal government is working to incorporate ecocide into the new criminal code. In this regard, we are leading the way in Europe in providing for strong punishments for inflicting serious, large-scale or permanent damage to the environment. In particular, criminalising ecocide falls within the context of combating environmental crime with an international scope.

In addition, an expertise network of environmental magistrates meets every 6 months with representatives of the police to further define the lines around environmental enforcement and harmonise their approach.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Belgium is committed to increasing its contribution to international climate finance for the period 2021 to 2024, to a minimum of €531.5 million. As part of this commitment, the **federal government** has already increased its annual contribution from €70 million per year to €100 million per year. This financing focuses on cross-cutting strengthening of the climate policy in partner countries, and climate adaptation. Within this broader scope, the government chose three priority themes: (1) focusing on climate action in the service of biodiversity and ecosystem protection, (2) sustainable agriculture, and (3) sustainable urban development. To bolster these efforts on the ground, Belgium launched a climate partnership in the Sahel. The Belgian development agency Enabel and the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) are actively pursuing this objective, for example by contributing to the Great Green Wall and investing in renewable energy around the world. BIO drew up an ambitious climate strategy in 2022.

The **federal government** created a thematic Common Strategic Framework for climate and environment with non-governmental partners in federal development cooperation. Belgium also makes efforts with multilateral partners and contributes to three of the main multilateral climate funds: the Global Environment Fund, the Green Climate Fund (including Flemish contributions) and the Fund for the Least Developed Countries. Experience on the ground in our partner countries (including Mozambique) shows that there are still major challenges in terms of data collection (financial data related to loss & damage) and strengthening local governments to access climate finance.

Belgium is actively involved at the international level in various initiatives, including the Champions Group on Adaptation Finance, the Feminist Action for Climate Justice, the Generation Equality, and the

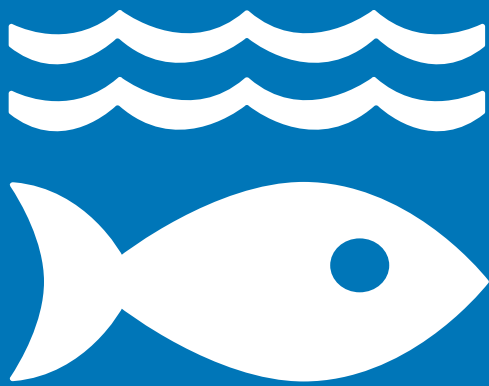
work of the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health established by the UN's World Health Organization, to work in a coordinated and collaborative manner with all signatory countries.

Flanders funded a World Health Organization study to make Mozambique's health system more resilient in the face of climate change.

In the new Air-Climate-Energy Plan, final approval of which is scheduled for May 2023, the **Brussels-Capital Region** is raising its contribution to international climate financing for the period 2021-2030, €2.75 million euros per year (a 22% rise). The Brussels Region continues to prioritise multilateral projects through the funds of the United Nations or the World Bank (Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund), but also works through an agreement with the Belgian cooperation agency Enabel to implement projects in Belgium's partner countries (Uganda, Rwanda, Mozambique, etc.).

CHALLENGES

Belgium is not yet on track to reduce emissions from buildings, vehicles and agriculture rapidly enough to meet the more stringent European targets. Road traffic emissions have long been a contentious issue. The rapid electrification of (company) cars offers some solace, but this requires the large-scale expansion of charging infrastructure. The aging building stock also awaits a renovation wave. This needs to be accompanied by specific incentives to accelerate energy performance improvements at the lower end of the housing market. For its part, the energy-intensive industry faces a major challenge: it will replace its use of fossil fuels for renewable electricity and gases. Belgium has started building the infrastructure to supply this energy to industry and potentially remove excess CO₂. The acceleration of climate policies will be further inspired by the already approved parts of the European directives from #Fitfor55.



SDG 14/
LIFE BELOW WATER



SDG14 LIFE BELOW WATER

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i66. Oil pollution	Number cases	0	+
i67. Sustainable fisheries	%	100	-
i68. Natura 2000 protected marine area	%	30	+

WATER QUALITY

The quality of water and consequently of the oceans and aquatic life depends on upstream activities, including agricultural practices.

FISHERIES

To bring this about with inclusive participation from the Small Island Developing States, many of which are hardest hit by the climate crisis, the *Federal* Directorate General for Maritime Affairs helped set up an international fund. In recent years, Belgium has also actively participated in the Clyde Bank Declaration, an international coalition. The first project we participated in was the realization of Green Shipping Corridors: using zero-emission ships on maritime routes between two or more ports.

In 2020, the requirements for sulphur content in marine fuels became more stringent. Administrative fines and SO_x measurements in the North Sea with a sniffer aircraft help monitor compliance. One alternative way to run on high-sulphur fuel, while still meeting the stricter sulphur standard, is to install a so-called scrubber, which 'scrubs' the exhaust gases.

However, these wash waters mostly end up in the sea and lead to more water pollution. To address this at the international level, a *study* was conducted on the adverse impact of scrubber wash water on water acidification in the southern North Sea.

The new Belgian Shipping Code (2021) reflects the modernisation of shipping. A regulatory framework for registering unmanned vessels responds to the innovative technologies that will eventually lead to the introduction of autonomous shipping. Digitisation also continues to gain ground, including for merchant vessel certificates and seafarers' certificates of competency and medical certificates aboard Belgian ships.

The third Social Covenant 2021 - 2025, for a sustainable Flemish fisheries sector, has been concluded. The aim of the covenant is to make *Flemish* fisheries more sustainable and to give substance to the European Green Deal. GEOFISH is an online tool of the Flemish Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Research and provides the fisheries sector with a spatial visualisation of fisheries-related data and marine spatial planning, such as the status of fish stocks or possible restrictions (marine nature reserves, wind farms, Brexit) that have an economic impact on the fisheries sector.

The Flemish policy area of Agriculture and Fisheries is continuing its efforts around the possibilities of aquaculture. Some examples of projects that make a contribution in this regard are the feasibility study Landbased Aquaculture in Flanders and Value@Sea, a study on the cultivation of extractive aquaculture species in the Belgian part of the North Sea. This is in collaboration with universities and social actors from the business community.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Belgium is one of the driving forces behind the Blue Leaders Initiative, which unites countries in a call for urgent action to protect the ocean from the climate crisis, overfishing, pollution, and other threats. The Blue Leaders are committed to establishing the protection of at least 30% of the global ocean as a new international goal, as well as supporting the recently adopted High Seas Treaty that provides for the establishment of well-protected marine areas.

The Flemish Institute for the Sea (VLIZ), together with researchers and multilateral and international partners, is working on the World Ocean Assessment, the scientific basis and source for national and international policy recommendations in the context of the UN Ocean Decade (2021-2030).

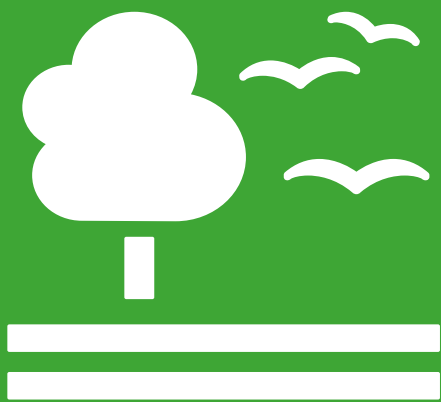
The **Flemish government** is funding the fourth phase (2021-2022) of the Ocean Economy Project, in which Flanders has been involved since the first phase. This project of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) complements the Blue Cluster in the context of the Flemish cluster policy.

CHALLENGES

The limited flow of workers into the fishing industry, due to the economic uncertainty, the risk of occupational accidents and the shift of maritime jobs to other sub-areas within the sector, are all challenges.

Climate change and pollution in the North Sea (SDG 14.1) have a negative impact on fish stocks and the fishing industry. At the same time, the sector suffers from complex market access and difficulties in obtaining fair prices.





SDG 15/
LIFE ON LAND



SDG15 LIFE ON LAND

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i69. Natura 2000 protected land area	%	30	⊖
i70. Forests with FSC or PEFC label	%	↗	⊕
i71. Farmland bird population	Index	↗	⊖

In Belgium, the first National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) was drafted in 2006 and has since been revised in function of the Aichi Targets adopted by CBD COP10 in 2010. The NBS formulates a set of priority targets to prevent and reduce biodiversity loss in Belgium. It is the only national document on biodiversity applicable at both federal and regional levels to meet Belgium's European and international commitments. It provides a framework for the policies to be followed and the actions to implement them. Taking into account the autonomy and distribution of competences related to the environment between the four levels of power, as well as regional characteristics, the responsibility has been given to each policy level to define its own priorities for implementation. In 2022, the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the CBD adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This agreement sets the framework for all national, regional and global efforts around biodiversity until 2030. For national implementation of

the GBF targets, it is crucial that countries translate those agreements into national plans and policies as soon as possible. Parties are therefore expected to update their national biodiversity strategies and action plans by COP16 (2024) to align them with the new global targets and support their timely implementation. Belgium started developing an NBS for the period to 2030 immediately after CBD COP15. This NBS should clearly outline how Belgium will halt and reverse biodiversity loss at home and in its supply areas by 2030. Moreover, for the implementation of an action-oriented and comprehensive NBS to succeed, sufficient financial and human resources are needed. The COP15 decisions therefore also emphasise the development of a national financing plan for the NBS based on the methodology used by BIOFIN or similar. The preparation of such a national financing plan will therefore be part of the review of the NBS.

BIODIVERSITY PLANS

The various governments in Belgium have adopted several action plans in recent years that protect, support, restore and/or counteract invasive species.

To highlight all existing and future initiatives and commitments, **Belgium** set up the Belgian Biodiversity Alliance (BBA). This inclusive public-private partnership provides a common platform for all private and public actors in Belgium. The online tool BiodiversiTree from the federal government and the three regions helps companies with specific actions to protect biodiversity through four areas of action: land, infrastructure, procurement and processes. The FPS Public Health acts as a pilot, being responsible for the process and procurement policy of the initiative, and it monitors developments.

The federal coalition agreement stipulates that the **federal government** must set an example on biodiversity in managing federal domains owned by the Belgian Building Agency, the Railways and the Ministry of Defence. The BiodiversiScape approach, launched in 2022, gives substance to this provision. The Belgian Buildings Agency is one of five companies pioneering the #BeBiodiversity strategy.

The **Brussels-Capital Region** is focusing on forestry policy and expanding cooperation with farmers to reduce pesticide use.

In late 2022, the **German-speaking Community** launched a project to prepare the implementation of a sustainability fund that quantifies the loss of biodiversity when non-buildable land is converted to buildable land. Various measures should compensate for this loss and minimize the impact on biodiversity.

In the area of ecosystems and biodiversity, **Flanders** wants to achieve healthy ecosystems and put in place a conservation policy. This has a direct positive impact on climate change. This is reflected in the continuation or strengthening of various Flemish policies and programmes, including Natura 2000, the Sigmaphan, which aims to better protect Flanders from flooding, and the AGNAS area-based program (demarcation of areas of natural and agricultural structure). In addition to the SDGs, the policy is also influenced by EU developments,

such as the European Biodiversity Strategy 2030, as part of the European Green Deal. With regard to agricultural biodiversity, farmers make a voluntary commitment to make additional efforts through management agreements and, from 2023, through eco-regulations.

NATURE AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

In the area of nature management, several policy initiatives emphasise planting new forests and hedgerows.

Launched in 2019, the 'Yes We Plant' project encourages tree and hedge planting in **Wallonia** through subsidies for citizens, municipalities, farmers, businesses and schools. Hedges provide ecological connectivity and foster the dispersal and migration of species, including the recolonisation of disrupted environments. Moreover, they provide structure and variety to our landscapes. In October 2022, more than 1,400 kilometres of hedgerows and 1,364,000 trees had already been planted in Wallonia.

The calls for projects of Forêt Résiliente, and the associated subsidies (2021 and 2022) have encouraged forest owners to opt for forest management which is more resilient to climate change. The goal was to make populations with low resilience, the same age, monospecific or extinct, more diverse and irregular, and align regeneration with the creation of a more biodiverse forest made up of a combination of species which are adapted to the changes happening around the world.

Flanders has clear nature expansion objectives in mind: bring 20,000 hectares of additional nature under effective management before the end of the legislature in 2024 and 10,000 hectares of new forest by 2030, of which 4,000 hectares by 2024. Through activation programs and communication campaigns, the Forest Alliance, a partnership of governments and nature organisations, businesses, associations and individuals, is raising awareness of the need to create more forest. Furthermore, the Forest Alliance is a convenient partner for all those who want to contribute to forest expansion but do not have the expertise.

INVASIVE SPECIES

The National Action Plan to Tackle the Unintentional Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species prevents the unintentional introduction and spread of 53 invasive alien species considered as a priority by the European Economic Area (EEA). It is focused on three themes:

- Possession for public and private purposes;
- Recreational and professional activities in freshwater environments;
- Transport of habitat materials (such as ground cover), culture substrate and machinery.

Flanders is committed to countering the impact of invasive alien species with a coordinated approach involving private owners, land users and land management organisations.

SOIL MANAGEMENT

Soil restoration and soil care, including soil remediation, are key to achieving SDG 15.3. *Flanders* is putting this vision into practice through agencies such as the Public Waste Agency of Flanders (OVAM).

In 2016, the *Brussels-Capital Region* adopted a nature plan proposing a vision to develop nature and biodiversity in the Brussels Region by 2050. The strategic objectives for 2020 have been extended to 2025. The plan contains conservation actions, through the active protection of 16 nature reserves, two forest reserves and three Natura 2000 sites. In this way, 14.5% of the regional territory has at least one of these active protection statuses.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

Belgium actively participates in European and international processes to halt desertification, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. In this regard, Belgium recognises the importance of sustainable forest management. The Belgian Development Cooperation therefore endorsed the Global Forest Pledge (EUR 200M 2021-2025) and the Congo Basin Forest Pledge (EUR 26M 2021-2025). Among other things, Belgium contributes to the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI). In addition, our country is

active in protecting ecosystems and biodiversity through funding to multilateral funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), through partner organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and through non-governmental actors.

CEBIOS, the programme of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences is also worth mentioning. Through this programme, scientists from North and South work together to enhance the expertise and experience in the area of biodiversity, thereby also improving the living conditions of the populations in the partner countries involved.

CHALLENGES

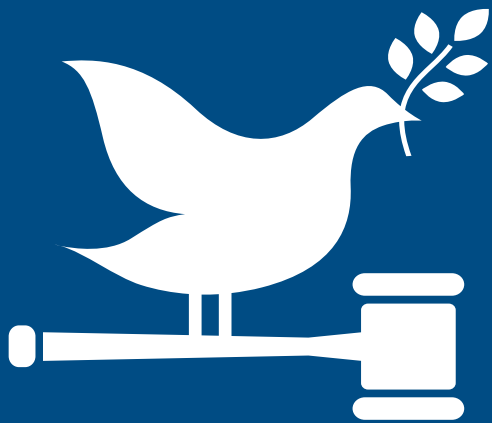
The fight against the erosion of biodiversity requires structural measures to conserve, protect and restore ecosystems. It requires rethinking our relationship with nature and invites us to implement "nature-based solutions" (UNEA 5.2 resolution 5) at all possible levels and in all sectors. It also requires a commitment to open space.

Belgium is fully engaged at all different policy levels to implement the new international commitments and obligations (Kunming-Montreal global Biodiversity Framework 2022) and the European objectives on biodiversity (European Green Deal including the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Farm-2-Fork Strategy 2030). This both in terms of biodiversity conservation and protection at home and in terms of our ecological footprint elsewhere in the world.

With regard to biodiversity financing ("resource mobilisation"), both nationally and internationally, major steps forward can still be taken.

Sometimes policy choices are made within Belgium that yield short-term gains, but do not consider the long-term impact and the impact on certain ecosystem services, such as resilient soil.

Due to the specificity of our country, with a dense population density and many human and economic activities in a limited area, it requires political courage within Belgium to quickly take the necessary and structural steps to combat the further erosion of biodiversity.



SDG 16/
PEACE, JUSTICE AND
STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i76. Security feeling in public spaces	%	↗	+
i77. Corruption perceptions index	Index 0-100	↗	○
i78. Trust in institutions	%	↗	○

All governments are committed to peaceful and inclusive societies. Government agencies at all levels of government are accessible to the public.

DEFENCE

During the period of this Voluntary National Review, the Belgian security environment was in constant evolution, becoming more complex and uncertain, and less predictable. To make an adequate response in this regard, following a period of austerity, Belgium made the turnaround. This culminated in the publication of the STAR plan (Security & Service - Technology - Ambition - Resilience) by the Minister of Defence in 2022. Together with the revised military program law, this plan will give the Ministry of Defence the long-term capabilities it needs to respond to today's challenges.

CORRUPTION

Implementation of the recommendations of Belgium's evaluation report is currently underway in the context of the fifth evaluation round of the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption. This deals with the prevention of corruption and the promotion of integrity in the senior executive positions of central governments.

When requested by customs, individuals have to declare both accompanied and unaccompanied liquid assets starting from a value of €10,000 when entering or leaving Belgium from or to another EU member state. In accordance with the new provisions, customs may also act on amounts of less than €10,000 if there are indications that the liquid assets are related to criminal activity.

STRONG PUBLIC SERVICES

The Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) knowledge centre supports those responsible for Recovery and Investment Plan measures in complying with this European principle of not causing significant harm to six specific environmental objectives. The **federal government** also plans to participate in a European Technical Support Instrument project in 2023, focusing on integrating the 'do no harm' principle and environmental dimension into public funding programs.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

These initiatives help draw lessons from the COVID-19 crisis and better prepare our country for future crises:

- Structural development of the crisis management service within the federal government, based on a network structure that forms the basis for a flexible and optimised service;
- Redesign of the Generic Preparedness Plan (GPP), which provides a holistic framework for managing health crises, whether they have occurred before or, more likely, are still completely unknown or even unsuspected;
- Participation in the development of the Pandemic Preparedness partnership in the context of the EU's Horizon Europe research programme. This should make it possible to build a consolidated European research and innovation space that enhances the EU's ability to respond and anticipate emerging health threats, including through better coordination of research and innovation funding at European, national and regional levels;
- Integration of a pandemic chapter within hospital emergency plans so that hospitals can also integrate Pandemic Preparedness within their emergency plans at the operational level.

DIGITALISATION

Flanders is working on transparent and digital decision-making. Digital Flanders is the strategic partner for realising and guiding digital transformation projects for Flemish and local administrations. With the creation of the Flemish Data Utility, Flanders is aiming to become a leader in the European data economy. Within the Flemish Data Strategy 2022, the Flemish Government is accelerating its evolution to a data-driven government with 202 actions.

COACHING TOWARD SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONS

The **Walloon Region** has developed a tool to support the selected organisations in their transition to sustainability for one year free of charge. Upon completion of the coaching, the organisation will have an SDG plan ready that guides strategic actions for the coming years. The organisation has committed to opting for sustainable development at the most relevant points, in accordance with the challenges and levers.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The **federal government** is focusing on tackling the root causes of vulnerability, building resilience in vulnerable contexts, and strengthening governance aspects in line with SDG 16. In this regard, we are realising projects in each of our partner countries, with objectives linked to SDG 16, including human rights, democracy, transitional justice, the fight against corruption, good governance, inclusive society building, women's rights and youth.

Belgium believes that a critical civil society plays a crucial role in this regard. That is why the federal government has issued calls for projects to strengthen human rights and democracy in four partner countries where the challenges in this area are particularly acute. Human rights and the voice of civil society will also have their place in bilateral

programmes of the federal government, in particular with Palestine, Uganda and the DR Congo. Through a new cycle of five-year programmes (2022-2026) for non-governmental cooperation partners, a quarter of the international solidarity budget is channelled via civil society partners (see SDG 17). Moreover, our country has strengthened cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), both with more financial resources and through support for specific national offices.

In terms of accessibility, keeping digitalisation inclusive deserves particular attention. Governments must become more resilient and agile in a rapidly developing society that is becoming increasingly digital, and ensure that everyone can keep up with that change. An inclusive data economy seeks to increase citizens' trust in sharing data, by focusing on security, control and privacy. At the same time, it should also improve the economy, by making data more findable, usable and exchangeable.

JUSTICE

Our country is part of the Coalition in the Fight against Organized Crime along with the Netherlands, France, Spain, Germany and Italy. On 7 October 2022, the six countries approved the Joint Action Plan in Amsterdam. The main strands include the security of port facilities, information exchange, confiscation of criminal assets abroad and joining forces. The Benelux Treaty on Police Cooperation from 2018 will enter into force in 2023.

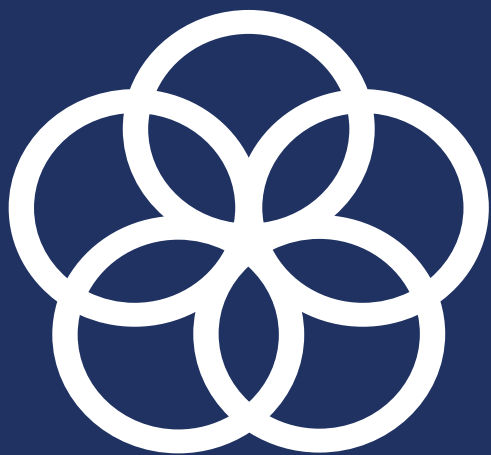
The Justice at stake workshop, which is organised in various courthouses, is an awareness-raising workshop on the workings of the courts for third grade students in vocational, technical and general secondary education.

CHALLENGES

Belgians' trust in their government fell more sharply between 2007 and 2020 than in comparable OECD countries. Maximising citizens' trust in institutions is undeniably a challenge for democracy and important for social cohesion.

Shaping effective and transparent institutions that are mindful of participatory and representative decision-making is an ongoing task for the various public authorities in Belgium.





SDG 17/
PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



SDG17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

SDG Indicator	Unit	Objective	Assessment
i79. Official development assistance (ODA)	% GNI	0.7	—
i80. Official development assistance to least developed countries	% ODA	50	—
i82. Public debt	% GDP	↘	—

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Belgium is working to strengthen cooperation and coordination for universal social protection. A major obstacle to the development of social protection is the lack of technical expertise, both in partner countries and within development agencies. To remove this obstacle, the **federal government** has set up the BELINCOSOC service centre. The European project SOCIEUX+ takes a similar approach.

The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board on Social Protection and the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection 2030 were set up under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Labour Organization to improve coordination at the global level. Belgium is a founding member of both.

The Belgian Dialogue on Universal Social Protection saw the light of day in 2018, and brings together various social protection actors, both public authorities and NGOs, trade unions, Belgian health insurance fund, etc.

PARALLEL COMPETENCES AND TRADE

The Wallonia International Business Awards 2022, organised by the **Walloon** Agency for Export and Foreign Investment, launched a sustainable development award in addition to the standard prizes. This is an affirmation of the 2020 Grand Prize, which for the first time rewards a Walloon company that has successfully developed internationally thanks to the sustainable transition of its products/services.

The Walloon guide 'Entreprendre Durable à l'International' is an informative and illustrated tool on the importance of SDGs as an international development strategy.

Flanders Accelerates is the internationalisation strategy for the Flemish economy. With it, Flanders is aiming to strengthen its international position in five areas, namely Life Sciences & Health, Food, Solution Driven Engineering & Technology, Smart Logistics and Sustainable resources, Materials & Chemistry. Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT)

currently has a diversified network in around 100 locations around the world. The ambition is to also extend the Flemish Science & Technology offices abroad. Moreover, FIT, along with other relevant agencies and departments, will encourage companies to respect human rights and educate them on the importance of sustainability at the international level. FIT's work in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility aims, among other things, to encourage Flemish entrepreneurs working at the international level to integrate the SDGs into their business strategies.

The **German-speaking Community** maintains permanent contacts with foreign - mainly German-speaking - states, as well as with partner regions abroad, often in the form of an official cooperation agreement.

Some international partnerships function without agreements because they are set up due to urgent events. For example, in 2020 and of 2021, the cross-border Corona Task Force met almost weekly to jointly combat the effects of the pandemic across borders.

PARTNER COUNTRIES AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES

In 2021, preparation of the new portfolios for government cooperation with Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Benin, Guinea, Morocco, Niger, Burkina Faso, Palestine and the DR Congo started at the **federal** level. In 2021, the Belgian governments approved two thematic portfolios relating to climate in the Sahel and social protection in Central Africa. In the same year, the Belgian authorities concluded 26 geographical, and 4 thematic common strategic frameworks with the non-governmental partners of Belgian development cooperation.

At the multilateral level, the **federal government** has since 2009 mainly opted for non-earmarked financing. As such, 15 international partner organisations receive more than one-third of federal multilateral development assistance. The European Union is another important partner: more than a quarter of Belgium's official development assistance goes to the EU, and Belgium is closely involved in the Team Europe initiatives that bring together

interventions by member states and the European Commission to make a greater impact. Over the past three years (2020-2022), our country has invested an average of more than €200 million per year in the World Bank Group and other regional development banks such as the African Development Bank.

From a trade perspective, Belgium advocates for the effective implementation of the commitments contained in the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters of EU trade agreements, subject to an appropriate dispute settlement mechanism. These chapters contain the commitments related to the right to work, social rights, gender and environment.

Since the adaptation of the Framework Decree on **Flemish** Development Cooperation in 2018, the SDGs have been applied more prominently in promoting Development Cooperation in Flanders. Most of Flemish official development assistance concentrates on a limited number of sectors. In 2021, health, population and reproductive health was the most important sector within Flemish official development aid, at 40%. Environmental protection and energy received 15%. Around 12% of Flemish official development aid was directed to education. Flanders has a tradition of cooperating with multilateral organisations.

Brussels International organises a call for projects for the South in collaboration with Brussels Environment and/or hub.brussels. Since 2019, the theme of this call has been sustainable and inclusive economic development. This call for projects aims to eradicate poverty and strengthen sustainable urbanisation (Objective 11.3) in the partner regions of the Brussels-Capital Region.

The development policy of the **German-speaking Community** wants to support organisations in the German-speaking community in sustainable projects in structurally weak regions. Direct financial assistance is only provided in exceptional and unexpected crisis situations, such as after the floods in Pakistan, the drought in East Africa, the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the famine in the Sahel, the earthquakes and tsunamis in Indonesia, the response to the Corona crisis in developing countries, or the war in Ukraine.

POLICY COHERENCE

Belgium has several institutional mechanisms in place to improve policy coherence. As regards sustainable development, there is the Inter-Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development where, among other things, the national sustainable development strategy was adopted, and the VNRs are drafted. In addition, the federated states are represented on the Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development, for example.

CHALLENGES

The total external debt of low- and middle-income countries reached \$9 trillion by the end of 2021. This figure has more than doubled in the last 10 years. This debt burden, coupled with rising interest rates and slowing growth, threatens to push many countries into a debt crisis. It also means that there is pressure on the resources available to achieve the SDGs.

The share of foreign debt owed to private creditors (namely, banks and bondholders) has risen sharply over the past decade. The share of debt owed to government creditors not belonging to the Paris Club has risen sharply. These developments make restructuring significantly more difficult. By the end of 2021, low- and middle-income countries had 61% of their public and government-guaranteed debt with private creditors, up 15 percentage points from 2010.

The various governments in Belgium are advocates of the principles of multilateralism. In a world where countries are increasingly interdependent and societies are more interconnected than ever, international cooperation is vital. Multilateralism is the key to international stability, stronger democracy and more well-being for all. Within multilateral institutions, differences of opinion between member states can sometimes be a problem, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is also important to cooperate and seek policy coherence at the multilateral level. It is important that the rules of the game are the same for everyone.

Belgium is a founding member of the World Trade Organization. The decisions on the so-called Geneva Package were a positive element in 2022 (decisions on fisheries subsidies, WTO response to emergencies, including a waiver of certain requirements relating to licences for COVID-19 vaccines, food safety and agriculture, and WTO reform). The Doha Round negotiations and the lack of activity within the Appellate Body are major challenges to multilateralism.

Different indicators are sometimes used depending on the policy level (global, European, Belgian, federated state level). More coherence in the way that different policy levels monitor the implementation of the SDGs and their targets is desirable. When indicators are used, there needs to be consideration for (international) comparability.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda, all countries must be on board. The authorities in Belgium must continue focusing on ensuring an international level playing field for companies, so they do not find themselves at a competitive disadvantage.

It is essential to keep an adequate focus on the long-term perspective of the SDGs even in the current times of crisis. Decisions made now must be compatible with the SDGs. It is crucial for Belgium to achieve the 0.7% of GDP for international cooperation.



07

CIVIL SOCIETY
CONTRIBUTION

07

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION
TO THE VNR 2023

GENERAL

At the request of the Inter-Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCSD), a broad participatory process was launched in the autumn of 2022, whereby civil society organisations were given the opportunity to provide input into the process of drafting the Voluntary National Review (VNR). In this process, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD)⁶ played a coordinating role.

An extensive list of organisations were invited to transmit their vision in response to a questionnaire. More than 30 responses were collected. Synthesis texts of all these responses were produced for each social group.⁷ Interactive sessions were organized during the SDG Forum, which took place on 4 October 2022 in Brussels.⁸ Organisations and citizens could enter into dialogue with each other regarding the VNR, based in part on the previously submitted responses. The results of the synthesis texts and discussions were then submitted to the IMCSD.

Civil society organisations appreciated the fact that - compared to the VNR process in 2017 - more space was given for participation during the preparatory phase of the drafting of the VNR.⁹

A joint opinion was issued by several advisory councils in early 2023 on the then available draft of the VNR. Among other things, the opinion assessed whether there was clear progress in the quality of the VNR report compared to the 2017 report. The first VNR in 2017 was described as a 'baseline measurement'. The understanding was that the second

VNR would be much more an assessment of the implementation of policy rather than a list of intentions. The assessment of the report can be found in the above-mentioned opinion.¹⁰

This section summarises civil society's own contribution, and expectations with regard to the VNR, as expressed during the participatory process in the autumn of 2022. The contributions are grouped together by societal group, based on the contributions from the organisations and therefore does not necessarily give a full picture of that social group as a whole.

CIVIL SOCIETY'S CONTRIBUTION
TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE 2030 AGENDA¹¹

EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS

The various organisations representing the companies support or promote actions relating to all the SDGs, with certain emphases.

The Flemish farmers' union *Boerenbond* has a range of specific projects aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector in view of the major environmental, social and economic challenges. There is a need for solutions to climate, energy and nature issues, while ensuring viable incomes.

⁶ FRDO: <https://frdo-cfdd.be/>

⁷ All contributions and synthesis texts are compiled on the FRDO website: <https://frdo-cfdd.be/en/news/civil-society-contribution-to-voluntary-national-review-2023/>

⁸ SDG Forum 2022: <https://sdgforum.be/>

⁹ Several advisory councils made an opinion on the draft VNR in 2017: <https://frdo-cfdd.be/en/opinions/opinion-on-the-belgian-report-for-the-voluntary-national-review-2017/>

¹⁰ <https://frdo-cfdd.be/en/opinions/05-opinion-on-the-draft-voluntary-national-review-2023/>

¹¹ The individual contributions of the various organisations, which can be found on the FRDO website, each contain links to the specific initiatives highlighted. This section contains only a limited selection of all initiatives.

The Walloon business organisation **Union Wallone des Entreprises (UWE)** has focused on raising awareness and training businesses on the SDGs as a whole. For example, a dedicated website has been set up for UWE members, together with the Walloon government. The site lists a range of Walloon companies active in 63 of the 169 targets of the SDGs. Companies wishing to commit to specific SDGs are given guidance in this regard, through a number of thematic units.

In its own contribution, the Belgian business association **Federation of Enterprises in Belgium (VBO-FEB)** refers to their renewed mission statement 'Creating Value for Society'. The organisation aims to be the guide for businesses through the major societal and socio-economic challenges of the future. For example, long-term visions are set out in various cross-cutting domains in the field of mobility (mobility, circular economy, taxation, energy, labour market, digitalisation, etc.). This is via studies, reports and participation in public debates. Together with all sectoral federations, an overarching future vision for Belgium was also set out, called Horizon 2030. This vision explicitly refers to the SDGs as a framework and to the intention to make our country 'SDG-Proof'. The organisation has also opted to raise awareness of new trends, and highlights good practices. The sectors which are members of the organisation have also produced sustainability reports and roadmaps.

The **Flemish business organisation Voka** is endeavouring to embed the SDGs in its own operations in various ways. The main focus is the "Growing Together Plan", with a major focus on health, innovation and sustainability. Through the Voka Sustainable Business Charter, more than 300 companies are actively supported in their plans to implement the 17 SDGs. Companies can receive certification for their efforts, and Voka collaborates with Cifal Flanders and UNITAR to this end. In addition, for specific SDGs there are e.g. learning networks for energy and sustainable business, digitalisation projects, a healthcare platform, etc.

The **employer umbrella organisation Verso** represents social enterprises. Verso has been embedding the SDGs in its day-to-day operations for years.

Through awareness-raising and information on best practices, it promotes sustainable business and innovation, including within social dialogue. Verso is overseeing the 'Hand on inclusion' project for Flanders. The organisation organises cross-sectoral actions and training and education initiatives relating to the SDGs. Through the ECOSWITCH project, the aim is to ensure action by, and the transition of sectors, relating to the SDGs.

The discussions at the SDG Forum showed that many companies, including small businesses, are helping to achieve the SDGs, even if they do not always communicate or certify it. It was also highlighted that partnerships with NGOs can enhance corporate engagement.

EMPLOYEE ORGANISATIONS

The various trade union organisations have a strong focus on the SDGs within their operations.

For the **General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB)**, the emphasis is on the P of People. Specifically, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 16, and SDG 17. The organisation makes every effort to train and raise awareness of union representatives, through the 'Sustatool'. With this tool, they can bring the SDGs to the workplace through social dialogue. The methodology used by the organisation to bring the SDGs to the workplace has been selected by the EU as a good practice. The ACLVB has proposed working with the Sustatool to other European trade unions, in the context of SDG 17 (partnerships). Through its own NGO for development cooperation (BIS-MSI), it has been working with partners in Africa on the SDGs. To promote SDG 8, the three Belgian trade unions supported the 'Timefor8' campaign of the ITUC/ETUC.

And the actions of the **Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV)** also focus on the P of People, namely SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 16, and SDG 17. As regards the P of Partnership, the organisation has drawn up a roadmap on sustainable development at the Walloon level. The ACV also supported and promoted the 'Timefor8' campaign.

AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Various organisations working toward a more inclusive society have a strong focus on the SDGs.

For example, the *Belgian Disability Forum (BDF)* works according to the principles of 'leave no one behind', 'connectedness and indivisibility' and 'inclusiveness'. The main focus is on SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 11. Through various communication channels, the BDF provides information on how the SDGs are important for persons with disabilities.

In 2019, the *Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service* drafted an important report on sustainability and poverty. The SDGs provide the framework for this report. The Service has been recognised as an SDG Voice. Important priority SDGs for its internal operations include SDG 1 and SDG 10. The SDGs as a whole play a role in the various activities of the Service.

For *ATD Fourth World - Belgium*, SDG 1 is central to its operations. The organisation cites a participatory study, in partnership with Oxford University. In this project, people in poverty, professionals and university graduates can work together. The goal of the project is to achieve better poverty reduction policies at the national and international levels.

The discussion at the SDG Forum highlighted the fact that transition processes in general are often not very inclusive. Not all societal groups can participate to the full. It is often the most vulnerable who are more seriously affected, among other things by climate change, but who have the least resources to protect themselves.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

It is clear that the various NGOs have a strong focus on the various SDGs in all their activities. Just about all the SDGs are mentioned in the contributions of the NGOs which participated in the survey. SDG 14 was the only one not mentioned. The SDG most often highlighted by the various NGOs is SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), followed by SDG 5 (gender equality). Reducing forms of inequality therefore appears to be crucial for the various NGOs. Furthermore, some NGOs specifically target given SDGs.

For example, the *Dutch-speaking Women's Council* has a strong focus on poverty and gender equality and women's empowerment, among other issues. The *Flemish Youth Council* issues opinions on all topics that concern children, youth and youth organisations, which is related to various SDGs. The institution also gave a contribution during the Belgian UPR (Universal Periodic Review, a five-year analysis of the human rights situation in a country).

The French-speaking sustainable development organisation *Associations 21* has a specific focus on SDG 4. The organisation developed a special tool, Cap 2030, which gives opportunities to a wide audience to have an active discussion on the SDGs.

The organisation *Habitat et Participation* works primarily around the issue of housing (SDG 11). The work of *Luttes-Solidarités-Travail* (LST) focuses on poverty and reducing inequality (SDGs 1 and 10).

The activities of the youth council of the French community, *Forum des Jeunes*, are primarily related to quality education (SDG 4). Programs in schools, and schools themselves, need to be better adapted to the challenges of tomorrow.

The Dutch-speaking umbrella for development organisations *11.11.11* raises awareness and influences policy, urging the governments in Belgium to step up their efforts to achieve all the SDGs. It primarily focuses on SDG 17 and the cross-cutting theme of PCSD (Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development). From a thematic perspective, the focus is on: climate change and combating the related impacts, the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, making trade and investment policies more sustainable, equal access to the legal system for all and corporate duty of care, fiscal policy and debt relief for lower-income countries, the obligation to set aside 0.7% of GDP for international cooperation by 2030, equitable migration policies, defence of the 'civil space', strengthening civil society participation and political inclusion, partnerships for sustainable development, global citizenship education. The French-speaking umbrella for development organisations *CNCD*, like 11.11.11, has a central focus on the SDGs and PCSD. Their joint actions have a strong focus on Central Africa, and providing solutions to the climate crisis.

Sensoa, the centre of expertise for sexual health, focus in particular on SDG 3, SDG 4 and SDG 5.

The French-speaking environmental umbrella association *Canopea* is primarily involved with the 'green SDGs' 7, 11, 12, 13 and 15. The Dutch-speaking organisation for sustainable development *Reset Flanders* has activities in just about all the SDGs. *Trias*, which focuses on strengthening entrepreneurship in the South, has integrated the People, Planet and Profit components into its core strategies. *BOS+* is committed to forest conservation and expansion and better forest management. The organisation works in Belgium, Africa and Latin America.

The development organisation *WSM* focuses its own activities primarily on the SDGs related to decent work and social protection. The network *Be-cause Health* primarily focuses on actions related to health, inequality, and sexual and reproductive rights.

SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

This category includes several organisations involved in promoting scientific research, as well as several advisory boards. In this sense, they likely give a limited picture of the full field of science and research.

The *Belgian Fund for Scientific Research* (FWO) has indicated that in principle, by giving support to scientific knowledge building, there can be a contribution to all the SDGs. It is up to the researchers requesting support to work out what their research pertains to (and therefore to which SDG that research is connected).

On its own initiative, the *Flemish Advisory Council for Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (VARIO) has issued a number of opinions related to the SDGs. These include: the SDGs as a compass for science, innovation and entrepreneurship policy, opportunities for Flemish companies through the SDGs, and a draft of the fourth Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development. One concrete proposal in these opinions is to make all government support to companies conditional on a positive impact on the SDGs.

The *Flemish Strategic Advisory Council on Agriculture and Fisheries* (SALV) has issued several opinions on the various key Flemish strategies linked to sustainability issues. These include the implementation

of the SDGs. The SALV monitors the implementation of the SDGs at the various policy levels.

The French-speaking *Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur* (ARES) is both a federation and an administration. As a federation of educational institutions, ARES works in various ways to promote quality education (SDG 4). The organisation participates in the activities of various international organisations involved in sustainable development. In its administration role, ARES takes initiatives to reduce its own footprint (SDG 13), strive for sustainable consumption (SDG 12) and integrate sustainability clauses in a number of public procurement contracts (SDG 12). Inclusive writing is also encouraged (SDG 5).

PRIORITY THEMES AND SDGS FOR BELGIUM IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

- Striving for a systemic change in the prevailing economic model. This requires an integral holistic approach to the SDGs, through the 'Doughnut Model', to arrive at a model within the limits of the planet. (Dutch-speaking Women's Council, Associations 21, LST, Reset.Flanders, BOS+)
- A priority focus on the climate and biodiversity crisis. (Dutch-speaking Women's Council, Flemish Youth Council, Associations 21, BOS+, CNCD and 11.11.11)
- Tackling poverty and inequality in all its forms. (Dutch-speaking Women's Council, Flemish Youth Council, Habitat et Participation, LST, Reset Flanders)
- An ambitious and just energy transition. A clear choice for renewable energy and policies that make the transition accessible to all social groups. (Associations 21, Habitat et Participation, LST, Canopea, Reset.Flanders)
- Guaranteeing the right to housing for all. (Associations 21, Habitat et Participation, Reset.Flanders)

- Strong social protection at home and internationally. (LST, Reset.Flanders, WSM)
- A structural focus on policy coherence for sustainable development. (11.11.11, CNCD, Advisory Council on Policy Coherence for Development, Associations 21, Trias)
- Quality education. (Forum des Jeunes)
- Equitable access to responsive health services and promoting SRHR. (Be-cause Health)
- Better services for people living with HIV and addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination, better policies around physical and sexual integrity for the asylum and migration sector, education policies around relationships and sexuality. (Sensoa)
- Making the Decent Work Agenda of the ILO central to international policy. (WSM)
- A structural focus on the (international) externalities of domestic policies. (11.11.11, Trias, BOS+)

AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

- Guaranteeing the right to housing. Among other things, by substantially increasing the number of affordable and quality housing units. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service, SDG Forum)
- An just energy transition. Among other things, a specific focus on the energy renovation of homes rented by individuals on a low-income. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service, ATD Quart Monde, SDG Forum)
- A larger supply of quality jobs for the low-skilled. Inclusive employment BDF,(Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- Equal educational opportunities. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- For every policy decision, ask whether persons with disabilities have access to that policy or measure. More generally, a much broader focus on 'leave no one behind'. (BDF)

- Seeing poverty as a violation of human rights and not just the result of individual responsibility of people in poverty. (ATD Fourth World)
- The participatory process for the Voluntary National Review is not fully inclusive. Many organisations or citizens are unable to participate. (SDG Forum)

EMPLOYEE ORGANISATIONS

- Priority focus on decent work. More focus on the quality of work and occupational health and safety. (ACV, ACLVB)
- Meet the 0.7% of GDP for international cooperation. (ACV, ACLVB)
- Ratify ILO Convention C.190 and eliminate the gender wage gap. (ACV, ACLVB)
- Importance of social protection. Funding social protection in bilateral programmes with international partners. Funding the Global Fund for Social Protection and the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection (ILO). (ACV)
- The transition must be just. It must be possible for climate shocks to be absorbed by proper social protection. (SDG Forum)
- The need for a policy with a long-term perspective. Decisions made now (as a solution to the crisis) must be compatible with the SDGs. (SDG Forum)

EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS

- Belgium's policy must focus on the SDGs and targets for which the score is currently not good. These include: the share of renewable energy in total energy supply, the share of female graduates in STEM fields at tertiary level, satisfaction with public transport, development cooperation. (UWE)
- More of a focus is needed on the effects associated with imports and exports. It is important to be aware of environmental and social impacts beyond our borders (e.g., electronic waste,

pollution, risk of human rights violations). It is essential to have a good overview of the entire supply chain and customers. Good data is needed to this end. (UWE)

- In the transition to a sustainable economy, the focus needs to be on: CO₂ reduction, green innovation, green mobility and applying ESG principles. For these issues, it is important to look at EU reference countries. The goal must be to do at least as well as those reference countries for those issues. (VOKA)
- Our country faces four major challenges: the trend of slowing economic growth and productivity growth, the ageing of our population, (global) climate change, the international trend of deglobalisation. Tackling these challenges requires a major shift in four major areas: digitalisation, greening, the labour market, and governments. (VBO)
- A special focus is necessary for the agricultural sector. To incorporate the expectations in the area of sustainability, decent incomes for farmers are a necessary condition. It is crucial that the challenges are tackled together and throughout the chain. It is also essential that healthy and sustainably produced food is consumed as part of a healthy diet and lifestyle. (Boerenbond)
- Social enterprises play an important role in this regard. It is necessary to get an overview of the contribution and positive impact of different sectors, through simple and transparent sustainability indicators, which can be easily monitored by any company. (Verso)
- There is also a need for initiatives to further inform and raise awareness among small businesses regarding the SDGs. (SDG Forum)
- A key challenge is in the area of the circular economy, including a focus on ecodesign and life-cycle analysis. (SDG Forum)
- Different legislation at different policy levels is a challenge for businesses. (SDG Forum)

- The energy crisis is having a severe impact on businesses. At the same time, there may also be opportunities to accelerate the energy transition, including by consuming less energy. (SDG Forum)

SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

- Climate action. Climate change mitigation. Environment-related SDGs. (ARES, FWO)
- Socially responsible production and consumption. (ARES, FWO)
- Access to quality education. (ARES)
- Biodiversity. (ARES)
- Protection of marine life and life on land. Reducing pollution. (ARES)
- Consideration for the social and environmental impact of in-house activities. (ARES)
- Addressing the export of plastic waste and pesticides. (ARES)
- Sustained research efforts in prosperous countries for all SDGs. This is essential for achieving the SDGs at the global level. (FWO)
- Focus on a sustainable agriculture, horticulture and agri-food sector. A vision for a robust and sustainable food system. (SALV)
- There is a need for other indicators to support and monitor a more sustainable economic model. Scientists can play an important role in developing this. (SDG Forum)
- Scientists can help make choices and evaluations, in a transparent manner. (SDG Forum)
- It is important that university courses be adequately adapted to the need for a cross-cutting approach to societal challenges. (SDG Forum)

NEED FOR CHANGE AT THE EUROPEAN OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

- There is a need for scientific breakthroughs in the socio-economic value chain. The conditions in this regard are: (1) intensifying international research and development investments in both human and institutional resources, (2) developing initiatives (globally) for the widest possible free access to information (open science) and for promoting the exchange of open data, (3) stimulating inter- and trans-disciplinary research, (4) improving and intensifying the dialogue between researchers, policy makers and the general public, (5) continuing to invest in the training of the next generation of creative scientists and technically qualified workers. (FWO)
- Some key challenges: (1) developing sustainable economic models that help reduce the profits of large multinationals, (2) access to high-quality, lifelong education for all, (3) a greater commitment to reducing the carbon footprint. (ARES)
- There is a need for more coherence in monitoring the SDGs by the different policy levels. Different indicators are used depending on the level (global, European, Belgian, Flemish). (VARIO)
- There is a need for a better system for internalising external costs. If this is not well organised, companies may be at a competitive disadvantage, e.g. in the case of a carbon tax. An arrangement at the supra-national level is preferable. (VARIO)
- There must be a sufficient focus on the level playing field in the international market. This focus is already taking concrete form in the Commission's proposal for a CBAM in the context of the ETS system. (VARIO)
- There is a need for more policy coherence in the EU's Common Agricultural and Food Policies. (SALV)

EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS

- There is a need for proper follow-up within the EU, so that all countries are judged at the same level and the bar is set equally high. (VOKA)
- At the international level, all countries must be on board. In this way, we can ensure the continent's competitiveness and prevent carbon leakage. (VOKA)
- There is a need for a different food policy. Agreements on price within the chain are needed. To this end, competition law needs to be amended. There is a need for a genuine level playing field. In this regard, a form of border tax (analogous to CBAM) which is WTO-compliant, could be considered. (Boerenbond)
- There is a need for measures that can normalise the current situation as regards energy prices. It must be possible for climate investments to take place in a favourable investment climate. (VOKA)
- The 2030 Agenda represents a new policy vision which EU countries can unite around, and for which citizens can be mobilised. (UWE)

AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

- The priority issues include: (1) developing measures, instruments and funds for the just financing of climate policy, (2) stronger focus on inequality and how it can be reduced, (3) strengthening rights with respect to energy, water, mobility and internet. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- European legislators must have more of a systematic focus on inclusiveness. These include the "e-society" and digitalisation in general (BDF)
- The Social Climate Fund must reach people on low incomes, who live in poorly insulated housing and in regions where there is little public transport. (ATD Fourth World)
- It is necessary to step up the fight against discrimination based on socio-economic status. (ATD Fourth World)

EMPLOYEE ORGANISATIONS

- More focus on decent work, focusing on the quality of work. (ACLVB and ACV)
- Binding legislation on Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD). (ACLVB and ACV)
- Universal Social Protection (USP). (ACLVB)
- Climate and just transition. (ACLVB and ACV)

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

- A structural focus on policy coherence for sustainable development. (11.11.11, CNCN, Advisory Council on Policy Coherence for Development, Trias, BOS+, Be-cause Health)
- Strong international climate and biodiversity policies. (Flemish Youth Council, BOS+, CNCN, 11.11.11)
- Further develop the social dimension of the EU. (Dutch-speaking Women's Council)
- International support for social protection programs. (WSM)
- The EU must propose credible projects for the exit from nuclear and fossil energy while supporting the large-scale development of renewable energy. (Canopea)
- Strong international policy against deforestation. (BOS+)
- A comprehensive approach to the SDGs and a framework for monitoring them which makes any greenwashing impossible. (Reset Flanders)
- Restricting lobbyists which block structural policies, phase out measures or (budget) norms that prevent sustainable investments. (Associations 21, Habitat et Participation)
- Better structural policies for Central Africa. (CNCN and 11.11.11)
- More focus on health and gender equality within European development cooperation. (Sensoa)
- Belgium must continue to actively pursue SRHR together with other countries. (Be-cause Health SRHR)

WHAT SHOULD THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE VNR 2023 BE**AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY**

- A strong focus on 'leave no one behind'. (BDF)
- The importance of an just transition, with a focus on just financing of climate policy. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- The importance of better monitoring inequalities and Matthew effects in our society. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- A choice of ex ante and ex post analysis of policy measures, with the participation of people in poverty. (Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service)
- The urgency of reflecting and taking action in a long-term perspective. Measures for people in poverty are too often temporary. (ATD Fourth World)
- More attention and recognition for the contributions of all - including those often overlooked - to the SDGs. (ATD Fourth World)
- Better use of the tools that already exist, to act in a more participatory and coherent way. (ATD Fourth World)

SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

- Underscoring the importance of scientific research as a mediator for global prosperity and well-being. (FWO)
- The SDGs offer many opportunities for businesses. SDG 8 and SDG 9 can be strengthened by focusing on the other SDGs. Profit and purpose can reinforce each other. (VARIO)
- The current growth model is not sustainable. There is a need for a 'new economy': climate-neutral, circular, inclusive, with fair chains. There is a need for a 'transformative

innovation model'. The EU has already taken initiatives in this direction via the Green Deal and NextGenerationEU. (VARIO)

- Two things are crucial here: (1) access to high-quality, lifelong education for all, (2) sustainable consumption. (ARES)

EMPLOYEE ORGANISATIONS

- An emphasis on the importance of decent work (SDG 8) as a transformative SDG. (ACLVB and ACV)

EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATIONS

- The business world is already strongly committed to achieving the SDGs, and will continue these efforts. The programme of the VOKA Sustainable Business Charter is innovative and unique. Thanks to this programme, our country is a front-runner. (VOKA)
- It is vital to ensure the coherence of public policy, at the national and European level. This is important for accelerating the ecological transition and ensuring more social justice. (UWE)
- It is vital overall to further ensure the coherence of public policy, at the national, federal and European level. The structure of our Belgian economy is very open, and means that any 'gold plating' is not possible. (VBO-FEB)
- The VNR should make clear that sustainable food production in Belgium is a positive development, and recognise that the sustainability of food production is a work in progress. There is a need for a system adjustment in terms of a fair price for the producer, as a condition for further sustainability. (Boerenbond)
- From their core business, social enterprises automatically contribute to the achievement of various SDGs. The way this civil society is organised in Belgium is unique and can be an example for other countries. (Verso)

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

- There is a need for concrete commitments to the identified challenges. (Dutch-speaking Women's Council)
- It is important to recognise that different forms of struggles and challenges are connected to each other. The climate struggle must also be a struggle for social justice. (Flemish Youth Council)
- Large-scale investments are needed for mental well-being. (Flemish Youth Council)
- It is crucial to ensure that education for sustainable development is more structural. (Associations 21)
- There is a need for stronger policies that can provide structural answers to the housing crisis. (Habitat et Participation)
- It should be apparent from the text that Belgium aims to fulfil the international solidarity pledge in concrete terms, and that Belgium is an active partner in realising health and gender equality. (Sensoa)
- There is a need for a different vision of how we use energy. By 2030, we must reduce energy consumption on a large scale, for a credible transition to renewable energy. Energy sufficiency must be central to the debate on SDG 7. (Canopea)
- Key messages: (1) focus on international solidarity, (2) a more holistic approach, especially for housing policy, (3) combine the processes for the VNR and for the National Conference on the just transition, (4) focus on strengthening the societal support and democracy. (Reset.Flanders)
- There is a need for a concrete interpretation of the progress made in Belgium. (Triad)
- For the policy for Central Africa: (1) strengthening civil society in partner countries, (2) decolonisation and equal partnership, (3) policy coherence, (4) improved financing of international cooperation. (CNCD and 11.11.11)

- For climate policy: (1) draw up an evaluation for SDG 13 and SDG 12 (12.2), (2) clarify the links between SDG 12 (12.2) and SDG 13, through circular strategies, (3) formulate recommendations to make progress. (CNCD and 11.11.11)
- Need for explicit support for the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection. (WSM)
- There is a need for a "health in all policies strategy." (Be-cause health)
- Continued support for SRHR. (Be-cause Health SRHR)





08

IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE SDGS AT
THE LOCAL LEVEL

08

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDGS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

At the request of the IMCSD, this section was prepared by local governments and their umbrella organisations.

Policy environment

Belgium is a federal state with 581 cities and municipalities (300 in Flanders, 262 in Wallonia and 19 in the Brussels-Capital Region) and 10 provinces (5 in Flanders and 5 in Wallonia). The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), the Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (UVCW) and Brulocalis in Brussels-Capital represent the municipalities. The Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP) and the Association of Walloon Provinces (APW) represent the provinces. The aim of these organisations is to represent the interests of their members, share knowledge and network. When we refer to local governments in this chapter, we mean municipal and provincial governments.

Local governments have a wide range of responsibilities closely related to sustainable development goals. Sustainable development is one of the basic responsibilities of local governments. The law imposes these responsibilities on them, a higher level of government delegates them, or local governments carry them out as part of their constitutionally recognised autonomy. The local governments are the country's major investors, have a large amount of real estate and land to carry out their functions, and are among the largest employers.

The municipalities and provinces have organised themselves into supralocal structures that are crucial for the implementation of specific tasks (management of water or sewage networks, gas, electricity, telecommunications, waste, regional development, first-line, fire and police zones, etc.) These inter-municipal collaborations are crucial in the drafting and implementation of local policies

and, consequently, in achieving the SDGs.

The local governments in Belgium pursue ambitious policies in different areas to achieve the SDGs, taking into account the complexity of the Belgian state structure and the holistic approach to the SDGs.

To achieve the planet-related goals, this includes:

- City planning permits and approvals;
- Commercial establishment and environment (SDGs 8, 11, 13, 14, 15);
- Public cleanliness management and household waste collection and management (SDGs 11, 12, 14, 15);
- Protection of biodiversity, adaptation of territory to climate change and policies to reduce greenhouse gases (SDGs 7, 13, 14, 15);
- Sustainable mobility policies and incentives for active mobility (SDGs 11, 13);
- Management of water supply and sewage, management of watercourses, municipal nature reserves and municipal public forests (SDGs 6, 14, 15);
- Support for sustainable local or urban agriculture (SDG 2).

To achieve the people-related goals, this includes:

- Social assistance via the Public Center for Social Welfare (SDGs 1, 2, 10);
- Organisation of municipal and provincial education (SDG 4);
- Management of public hospitals, residential care centres and community crèches (SDGs 3, 4, 10);
- Construction and management of low-cost housing through social housing agencies or public housing corporations (SDGs 1, 11).

To achieve the prosperity-related goals, this includes:

- Actions for urban and rural renewal (SDGs 8, 11);
- Support for economic development and management of business parks (SDG 8);
- Management of local economic, social, recreational, sports and tourism infrastructure (SDG 9)
- Encouragement of the circular economy (SDG 12).

Finally, to achieve the goals related to peace and partnership, the local governments are implementing an ambitious programme of international cooperation with the countries of the South. In terms of governance, local government procurement helps achieve SDG 12 and local government personnel management helps achieve SDGs 5 and 10. Local governments are also committed to efficient and transparent service delivery and innovations in the area of citizen participation (SDG 16).

To implement their many tasks, local governments have a number of resources, the most important of which are taxes (property tax, personal income tax, various local taxes), regional financing funds (municipal and provincial funds), as well as regional, federal or European subsidies and their own income related to activities or investments.

The SDGs at the local level - the 2030 Agenda as a strategic framework

Various studies show that the active involvement of the local level is essential for achieving fully 65% of the SDGs¹⁴. What is more, this important role is embedded in a specific objective tailored to local governments: SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

The Belgian municipalities and provincial governments are also contributing to the 2030 Agenda,

both internally through their own organisation (HR, purchasing policy, public buildings, etc.) and externally through local services and international cooperation. In this regard, they are not only focusing on the 17 thematic areas, but are also using the SDGs as a framework for coherent sustainable local policies. The interconnectedness of the SDGs fosters cross-cutting collaboration and challenges local governments to contribute to sustainable development from all disciplines.

Various local governments in Belgium use the 2030 Agenda as a structural framework for planning, implementing and monitoring their policies. As such, we see a difference in the tempo between the regions. Wallonia took the first important institutional steps, with the appointment of SDG officers or sustainable development coordination units, the drafting of an SDG roadmap, linking strategic goals to the SDGs, and raising awareness among staff, citizens and local partners.

The local governments in Flanders are already a step further on the road to structurally embedding the SDGs in the various phases of the local policy cycle: context analysis, coalition agreement and multi-year plan based on the SDGs, translation of the SDGs into individual strategic objectives, monitoring and reporting on progress on the SDGs. The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP), as umbrella organisations, are taking on a strong supporting and facilitating role in this regard, thanks in part to Flemish resources. Flemish local governments and their umbrellas are seen around the world as pioneers in the local translation of the SDGs and are regularly asked to explain their SDG operations at international forums.

In Brussels, the Municipal Climate Action Plan currently takes precedence over the 2030 Agenda as the explicit framework for sustainable local policy planning. This strategy is in line with the strategy of the Brussels-Capital Region, which has made climate change one of its main priorities.

The umbrellas of local governments defend the interests of local governments in both thematic

¹⁴ Cities Alliance Discussion Paper — N° 3, Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a successful New Urban Agenda, <https://www.citiesalliance.org>

dossiers (17 SDGs) and regarding their needs to work more structurally with the SDG framework, including more alignment between SDG indicators at different policy levels. The umbrellas also direct their members to regional, federal and European resources for developing sustainable local policies.

For example, the Brussels-Capital Region has already launched various action plans to support the Brussels municipalities in meeting the challenges contained in the 2030 Agenda. Examples include Good Move, Good Food, Good Soil, Plan Régional Déchet, Plan Climat Air Energie or Quartiers Durables. In this context, Brulocalis acts as an intermediary to the municipalities and supports them in managing calls for projects.

In 2022, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP) undertook to jointly prepare a first Flemish Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR). This document provides an overview of the realisation of the SDGs at the local level and includes a data analysis based on SDG indicators as well as several examples of local actions for each SDG. VVSG and VVP want to highlight the important role of local governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda, and at the same time offer their members tools and best practices to (further) focus on the Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition to defending interests, the umbrellas also have an important knowledge-sharing and networking role: they organise SDG training and campaigns (including Sustainable Municipality Week), collect and share innovative practices, provide awareness materials and policy tools, set up SDG working groups, pathways and partnerships with their members and other partners, and facilitate exchanges between local officials and politicians on all policy topics pertaining to the 2030 Agenda.

THE 2030 AGENDA AS THE FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL POLICY IN MOUSCRON

The city of Mouscron is the first Walloon city to voluntarily integrate the SDGs into its cross-cutting municipal strategic plan (PST in French). The city is focusing on the SDGs in all its areas of competence and in partnership with its citizens: participation

projects, citizen ambassadors for the SDGs, a local radio programme dedicated to the SDGs, raising awareness among students in municipal schools, etc. In addition, the City of Mouscron has developed a project sustainability barometer, a tool that allows it to evaluate how each of the projects it develops helps achieve the SDGs and thus improve its projects to better meet the 2030 goals.

CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAMMES IN THE BRUSSELS MUNICIPALITIES

The City of Ixelles committed to a "Climate Action Plan" in 2017, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030. This new action plan was drawn up together with the residents of the municipality and the administration to ensure a good understanding of the approach and the steady implementation of the plan's actions.

The municipality of Auderghem voted for the "Local Agenda 21 Action Plan" in 2018, and has been committed to tackling global warming since 2019. In accordance with federal guidelines, a zero plastics motion was passed in the services of the Municipal Council of Auderghem. Since 2020, the municipality has also declared a climate emergency to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The municipality of Jette is particularly proactive in terms of integrating the SDGs into its municipal policies. For example, various action plans have been launched, each aimed at achieving specific SDGs. We can therefore highlight the social action plan which includes SDGs 1, 2 and 3. This was drawn up based on 9 strands for the period 2022-2027. For the period 2020-2024, an action plan on equal opportunities was drawn up, consisting of working groups preparing findings, the evaluation of already implemented or ongoing measures and the specific actions to be taken to make Jette an exemplary and inclusive place that can welcome every person with the same respect and dignity, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion or disability. There was a specific focus on SDG 11 and 13, where the Municipal College actually identified 6 priorities to combat climate change. This new plan "Jette towards a sustainable and inclusive transition" replaces the old Agenda 21 action plan.

THE 2030 AGENDA AS STRATEGIC COMPASS IN PROVINCE OF ANTWERP

The 2019-2024 administrative agreement of the Province of Antwerp highlights sustainability as a core value for their organisational culture and daily operations. Specifically, the province considers which SDGs each policy decision contributes to. All action plans from the policy cycle and all actions from the management cycle are linked to SDGs. The University of Antwerp has guided the provincial staff through this process. In doing so, the provincial services came up with output and impact indicators in order to assess the extent to which the provincial policies contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. A website reporting on the progress publishes both figures and good examples. Currently, the provincial government is looking into whether the SDGs could be the starting point for provincial policy planning in the 2025-2030 legislature. In this regard, they would start from the SDGs and describe how and to what extent the province of Antwerp can realise them, within its remit and powers.

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW CITY OF GHENT

The City of Ghent was the first Belgian municipality to draw up an SDG report, which fell within a broader SDG pathway. In 2020, the city drafted a start-up report with environmental data for all SDGs. This report discusses the available indicators and describes a baseline measurement. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, the city produced high-quality reports for each pillar of sustainable development - People in 2021, Prosperity in 2022 and Planet in 2023. The pillars Peace (SDG 16) and Partnership (SDG 17) are addressed in each report.

The Ghent City Council consults with platforms and consultative bodies in the city. What do the SDGs mean for your sector and organisations? What are you already doing in terms of sustainability? Together, how can we enhance our contribution to the SDGs? The pillar reports highlight best practices from Ghent, selected by Ghent stakeholders. At the end of the current legislature (2024), the city is updating the 2020 start-up report to identify changes and evolutions in the area. In the context of inter-

national exchange and learning, Ghent translates its sustainability reports and offers them as Voluntary Local Reviews to the United Nations. In July 2022, the mayor of Ghent represented Europe and North America as a region at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, with his testimony on the City of Ghent's Voluntary Local Review.

SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY WEEK: GLOBAL GOALS GET A LOCAL FACE

Since 2018, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has organised the [Sustainable Municipality Week](#) campaign, always during the third week of September. Participating municipalities hang out an SDG flag at city hall and spotlight local sustainable heroes. These heroes are citizens, associations, schools or businesses that contribute to the SDGs. Around 100 Flemish cities and municipalities participate each year. The Flemish government, Belgian NGOs, provinces and other governments also fly the flag. Since 2020, the Association of Dutch Municipalities has taken part, with an annual SDG Flag Day on 25 September. In 2022, partner cities of Flemish municipalities in Bolivia and Senegal also participated for the first time.

Progress on the SDGs - trends and good examples

Global and national challenges are also felt locally. Digitalisation continues to grow, and data and technology is becoming more important. Belgian local governments encounter problems with discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, among other things. There is not much progress as regards litter, and the scarce space is under pressure. In this regard, we also see the struggle for green space, coupled with the negative correlation between SDG 15 on the one hand and SDGs 2 and 8 on the other. Climate change has tragic consequences, such as the floods in July 2021 that struck the province of Liège the hardest. The floods caused huge material and human damage with long-term consequences in terms of waste disposal, reconstruction, finan-

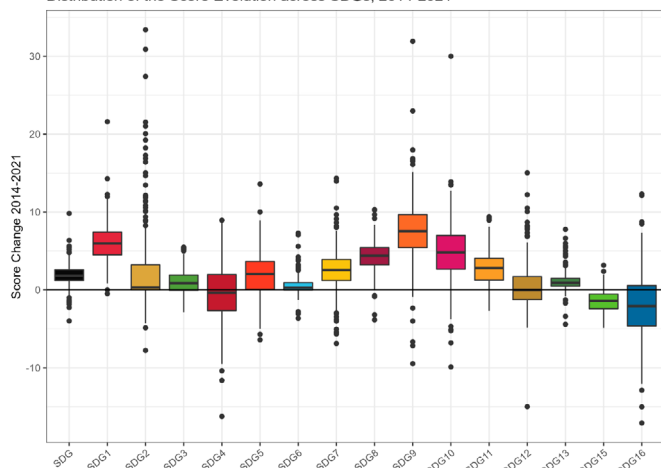
cial expenditure and mental resilience. Recent crises such as COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and the unprecedented rise in energy costs reinforce these trends, and have additional side effects such as spending on international cooperation being called into question in times of financial austerity.

Specifically for the Flemish region, a comprehensive indicator study (values from 2010 to 2021) suggests that municipalities are doing fairly well in terms of poverty reduction (SDG 1) with a systematic improvement over time. We also see a collective improvement in employment rates (SDG 8), a narrowing in the origin gap in employment and declining income inequality (SDG 10).

However, the study also highlights the bottlenecks in achieving the SDGs. Early school leaving and delayed progress in schools hinder the achievement of SDG 4, something we especially see among boys and students from migrant backgrounds. Despite good recycling figures, there is overall a slight increase in waste generation (SDG 12). The share of undeveloped land area is decreasing almost everywhere in Flanders (SDG 15). Moreover, the majority of Flemish municipalities are still a long way from the target of 51% renewable energy in the total primary energy supply (SDG 7). Municipalities are also growing further apart in this regard: those who previously invested in green energy are still making the most progress in renewable energy generation.

More information can be found in the Flemish Voluntary Subnational Review.

Distribution of the Score Evolution across SDGs, 2014-2021



In Wallonia, the third Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development revealed the evolution of indicators for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs, with weaker trends regarding the beneficiaries of social assistance and income inequality (SDGs 1 and 10) in particular, but promising developments in the areas of health (SDG 3) and housing renovation (SDG 11), and even very positive developments in the areas of water quality (SDG 6) and the development of renewable energy (SDG 7), thanks in particular to the investments of local authorities.

Data sources

Local governments can use publicly available data sources in addition to their own data. The indicators are selected and monitored at the regional or provincial level, providing local governments with valuable insights into social, economic, environmental and governance issues for each individual municipality or at the supra-municipal level. In Wallonia, WalStat and WalOnMap are the main datasets. Brussels municipalities can rely on statistics from the Institut Bruxellois de Statistique et d'Analyse. For Flemish municipalities, there is the 'Municipality and City monitor', including data from a triennial population survey, 'Province in Figures' (which includes a separate indicator set on climate) and, specifically for the SDGs, the SDG Monitor from Idea Consult.

Best practices

Local governments are not standing still. In fact, they are taking important steps towards climate action. 98% of Flemish, 68% of Walloon and 32% of Brussels municipal councils have signed the Mayors' Covenant 2030 for Climate and Energy. Flemish municipalities and the Flemish government joined forces in 2021 with the Energy and Climate Pact. Brussels followed suit in 2017 with the development of local climate action plans. Municipalities can also count on support from the provinces in pursuing global climate and energy goals.

Local governments are also taking action on other SDGs. Flemish provincial governments are creating cycle highways. Municipal governments are focusing on Smart Cities. In November 2022, Bruges, Leuven and Roeselare won the World Smart City Award for their Smart City Data Platform. Municipal governments are also investing in buddies for newcomers, organising repair cafes where broken items are given a second life, looking for innovative ways to organise civic participation, committing to cooperation and exchanging with municipal governments abroad, etc.

Local governments and their umbrella associations have proved to be reliable and flexible partners in times of crisis, having made every effort to ensure optimal service to citizens, providing them with information. Leaving No One Behind is high on the agenda in this regard. Municipal governments supported local catering establishments and markets in implementing the strict corona measures and initiated digital platforms to support the local economy. They took additional measures to tackle loneliness and to organize COVID-19 proof activities for children and young people. They created additional care capacity, for example in hotels, to relieve hospitals, and coordinated the organisation of vaccination centres in local infrastructure. Provincial governments manage green areas, and kept these as accessible as possible to the general public during the crisis. Local administrations also play a key role in housing Ukrainian refugees, including arranging the screening of and contacting (prospective) host families.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Belgium scores well on SDG 1 according to the SDSN index. Levers for structural poverty reduction are employment, education, housing, health and social security. These largely lie with the federal and regional governments, but municipalities and indirectly the provinces can also do their part here. Their contribution is crucial for the flanking poverty policy.

Larger municipalities tend to have higher poverty rates and therefore undertake various initiatives, including in the context of free time. For example,

the city of Genk (more than 67,000 inhabitants) organises volunteer talent coaches who explore various leisure activities with preschoolers from vulnerable families (e.g., newcomers). The coach tailors their approach to the family and makes every decision in consultation with the parents according to the self-reliance of the child after the course. The city government provides training for the coaches and works with various partners to direct families toward the project. In the City of Beringen (population over 47,000), one in seven children grows up in a disadvantaged family. The city administration, together with service clubs and Rap op Stap (a low-threshold travel agency for people on a limited budget), manages a fund to convince underprivileged residents to take part in leisure activities, for example by purchasing sports equipment.

MOBILITY

Cities and municipalities have important responsibilities in the area of mobility, as managers of roads and public spaces and as partners of transport companies. Cities and municipalities create peaceful neighbourhoods and promote sustainable, fuel-efficient and inclusive mobility. This is by working on infrastructure and services for active modes (cycling, walking) and policies to promote a modal shift, prioritising public transport, LEZ, parking policies, etc.

In this context, 116 Walloon cities, spread throughout the territory, are actively participating in the 'Wallonie Cyclable' initiative. They receive regional subsidies to devise a strategy for everyday bike use through construction or rehabilitation of a structuring cycle network that connects local amenities (stations, stores, administration, schools, etc.). The municipalities have the ambition of increasing the modal share of cycling in Wallonia to 5% by 2030.

Municipalities receive large subsidies for the construction of infrastructure such as bike lanes, dedicated paths, speed limiters and bike parking. The Flemish provinces are committed to expanding the network of cycle highways through subsidies, but also, for example, by transforming built heritage into innovative mobility networks, such as the former coal routes in Limburg.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

Local governments are working with other governments and stakeholders on measures to reduce the impacts of climate change. To promote energy efficiency and sustainable energy use, they are building heat grids, developing thermoscans, organising group purchasing, supporting citizen cooperatives and appointing energy and renovation coaches for citizens. As the largest owner and manager of forests in Wallonia, Walloon municipalities promote resilient forests, including by reforestation with tree species which are more resistant to drought and flooding.

All Flemish municipalities are working on a rain-water and drought plan that focuses on pavement removal, building permeable pavements, public awareness, water reuse and water buffers for dry periods. The new circulation plans also include similar measures. Climate actions transcend the individual municipal level. For example, the province of Limburg is a partner in a recent programme to make the 'Voerstreek' more climate-robust, which includes water buffering to protect downstream areas, encouraging rainwater infiltration and improving the water quality of streams. The actions link different sectors including agriculture, heritage and nature management.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The circular economy is an important lever for the government to address environmental issues while supporting the economic structure of its region and creating local jobs. Local governments can play a role in prevention, communication and awareness raising regarding the circular economy and energy for sustainable development.

The Walloon provinces have joined the Walloon government's Green Deal for Circular Procurement. The provinces' purchases must now meet social objectives, such as the implementation of a social policy, inclusion, integrating job seekers, learners or the disabled. The Walloon provinces are also participating in the Sustainable Canteens project, with a focus on short-chains, they have opted for an environmentally conscious rental policy for work clothes, and are working on charging stations and electric bikes.

CITIZEN-CENTRED SERVICES

There are some great examples in Belgium where civic proximity and inclusive local services are crucial. For example, mobile recycling parks allow less mobile residents to properly dispose of specific waste streams such as mattresses, electric appliances, metals and wood in their neighbourhoods. The 'Neighbourhood Cart' is a mobile community store and service centre that travels around the municipality of Bornem on a set route. Residents can buy fresh, local produce there and ask questions about municipal services. The neighbourhood cart enhances the self-reliance of residents, especially the elderly and less mobile, and provides employment for people who have difficulty accessing the regular labour market.

Another example is the 'Caring Neighbourhoods', in which 133 Flemish and Brussels municipalities participate. The programme focuses on strengthening the social fabric and solidarity, connecting informal and formal care and intersectoral cooperation (e.g., welfare partners, housing, youth, spatial planning).

During the corona pandemic, municipal governments took additional measures to ensure much-needed civic services. Volunteers or municipal staff called elderly residents, and municipalities set up emergency hotlines for residents in need of a chat. In this way, municipalities tackled loneliness and identified care needs.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Almost all provinces, the municipalities in the Brussels-Capital Region and one in ten municipalities in Flanders and Wallonia are involved in development cooperation in Africa, Asia or Latin America. They work in a range of areas related to municipal competences, including environment, waste management, social action, youth assistance, education, civic and local development. The partnerships often focus on capacity building from municipality to municipality, based on three pillars: good political governance, efficient governance and citizen participation in the decision-making process.

For example, in the programme for Morocco managed by Brulocalis, the partnership between

Etterbeek and Ait Baha focuses on setting up a mixed participatory council, while the partnership between Jette and Belfaa revolves around the creation of a joint reporting centre for female victims of violence. Each partnership of the Brussels programme in Senegal plans to organise at least one economic forum per year in each partner municipality in Senegal. The Brulocalis program in DR Congo envisages setting up and filling a community library in Kintambo, with support from the municipality of Uccle.

Emerging challenges

For several of the SDGs, where Belgium as a country scores lower according to the international SDSN index and the Federal Planning Bureau, including SDGs 4, 5, 7, 12, 13 and 17, we also see challenges and limited positive evolutions at the local level.

Climate change and continued densification, especially in Flanders, present local governments with challenges in terms of compact, sustainable and affordable housing, to accelerate the modal shift and ensure the greening and quality of public spaces. We need to take more rapid action in the area of renewable energy generation and consumption and building insulation, being careful not to exclude vulnerable groups.

Other priorities include water storage to see us through drought periods, and increasing soil permeability to reduce flooding during heavy rainfall, thereby building on the initiatives already undertaken. There is a need for extended producer responsibility for polluting products, especially in the area of water pollution. The regional policies in these areas are often still insufficient, for example as regards nature conservation and biodiversity protection and housing renovation in Wallonia.

Local governments are not yet adequately playing their leverage role on sustainable procurement. This is related both to market constraints and the lack of necessary resources in shifting responsibilities to the local level. The Walloon provinces, among others, are looking to the regional government to work out solutions, for example, to involve local producers more effectively.

There are also continuing challenges in the areas of care, equity and inclusion. The pressure on the care sector is also being felt locally, as demonstrated, e.g. in the serious shortage of childcare workers and social workers. Significant investment is needed to promote accessibility in rural areas, such as accessible basic public services, public transport and local mobility initiatives. Increasing diversity is leading to tension in some cases. Local governments have not yet realised gender equality. For example, less than one in five Belgian mayors is a woman. International solidarity and spending on international cooperation are being called into question, especially in times of budget constraints and pressing local needs. Local governments can take an even stronger exemplary role here.

Belgium and its local governments score well in the area of poverty reduction. Nevertheless, we see that poverty remains a major societal challenge. This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and the rise in energy prices. This situation is not expected to improve any time soon. Poverty reduction in all its facets (energy, transport, housing, digital poverty, etc.) must remain high on the agenda, in close consultation and cooperation with local governments.

We cannot ignore the growing distrust in politics and loss of confidence in government, especially in Flanders. The 2020 Citizen Survey in the Municipality and City Monitor showed that 34% of Flemish people have a lot of confidence in the municipal government (in addition to 11% in the federal government and 16% in the Flemish government). In Wallonia, according to the latest social barometer of IWEPS, 54% of individuals have confidence in their local government. Continuing innovation in civic participation is an important step to improve this relationship.

Despite the reduction of debt, local governments are up to their necks financially due to the succession of crises in recent years, including COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and the sharp rise in inflation and energy prices. The pressure on financial and human resources makes achieving the SDGs harder.

Key messages and recommendations

Since 2017, Belgium took important steps towards strategically anchoring the 2030 Agenda at different policy levels and with their stakeholders. Examples include the new National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development, the drafting and updating of the Flemish Vizier 2030, the Third Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development, the integration of the 2030 Agenda in the policy of universities and colleges, the rollout of the Voka Charter Sustainable Entrepreneurship and the increasing number of municipal and provincial councils that incorporate the 2030 Agenda in the policy cycle.

Nevertheless, we need to work towards even more effective data collection and disclosure. For example, we have little or no data on hunger, mental health, circular economy and innovation. This is where regional governments can play a role in filling the gaps. Local governments also need more data that provide insight into the outcomes of their own policies, in addition to outcome indicators such as poverty figures that enhance understanding of the local context.

Furthermore, disaggregation is limited in existing data, for example, by age, gender or neighbourhood. However, this is necessary to effectively meet the principle of Leaving No One Behind. Better coordination is also needed between the different sources, such as the Municipality and City Monitor, Provinces In Figures, IWEPS, etc. Working towards the harmonisation of local data can enrich the national indicators (e.g., for SDG 11). Initiatives to deal with spillover effects should also be more data-driven.

The complexity of societal challenges requires innovative forms of cooperation and full partnership, both between the different policy levels in our country and with partners in Europe and worldwide. We need to recognise the key role of local govern-

ments in achieving the SDGs, and work towards stronger and more transparent coordination between governments, for example by involving local governments in intergovernmental consultations. In this regard, we need to give local governments the space, flexibility and resources to flesh out the policies.

To boost trust in government, we need to accelerate the transition from consultation to co-creation with stakeholders and citizens, especially the most vulnerable. Given the integrated and interdisciplinary nature of the SDGs, all levels of policy need to place cross-cutting and cross-service work higher on the agenda. In addition, European and international partnerships are necessary to promote equity and reduce negative spillovers.

Without pressure from the regions, incorporating the SDGs as a strategic policy framework remains too voluntary for local administrations. Especially in Brussels and Wallonia, the potential of the 2030 Agenda as a strategic reference framework is still underused. The umbrella associations are calling for the SDG support, which the regions already currently provide, to be continued, both directly to local governments and through their umbrellas, but are also in favour of specific incentives from the regional governments for municipal governments that use the SDGs as a framework for their strategic policy plans.

These incentives can be strategic tools (methodological tools, support for participatory initiatives, etc.), communicating sustainable development ambitions (communication tools, awareness campaign aimed at citizens) or support in the implementation of local action plans (higher subsidies, financial support in the context of innovative projects, etc.).

The recent major crises in Belgium have underscored the importance of robust, resilient and well-funded local authorities. They were the ones who, as local citizen interlocutors, primarily managed the crises. In this context, strengthening the partnership of local governments with the federal and regional levels of government on certain key issues (pensions, police, firefighting, energy) is

essential to enable cities, municipalities and provinces to continue their actions to eliminate poverty, enhance resilience within their territory, and pursue responsible economic development.

To confront the financial challenges, regional and federal governments can provide support to local governments, for example by (temporarily) raising the fixed growth rate of the municipal fund to the level of inflation and guaranteeing the normal indexation of other funding streams, and by co-financing in statutory pension costs.

Local governments, given their responsibilities, civic proximity and experience with the 2030 Agenda, are essential partners in the ambition to make progress on the SDGs. The umbrella associations of municipal and provincial governments play a crucial role in capacity building of their members on the 2030 Agenda as a policy framework and the realisation of the 17 SDGs. The regional and federal governments must continue engaging and supporting the umbrellas, among other things in the run up to the 2024 local elections and subsequent development of multi-year policy plans.

The ambitions of the 2030 Agenda won't stop in 2030. Even after that, we need to continue striving for a more sustainable world, with every level of policy and all actors making efforts. The strong involvement of local governments around the world in incorporating and achieving the SDGs, as well as in addressing crises, highlights the key role of the local level. Local administrations and their umbrella associations are essential in the international development and national implementation of the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and deserve a seat at the decision table.





09

NEW AND EMERGING
CHALLENGES

09

NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

Halfway through the implementation period of the 2030 Agenda, this second VNR serves not only to map out our inspiring policy initiatives, but also to highlight the challenges. These challenges may also present opportunities, which needs to be seized. Since 2017, new challenges have emerged for achieving the 2030 Agenda. The world is confronted with a succession of global crises that are slowing, sometimes reversing, the progress toward a more sustainable world. Our resilience in the face of these various crises will be crucial for achieving the SDGs.

COVID-19

COVID-19 had a substantial impact on the society, economy, and health of the Belgian people, including mental health, inter alia as a result of the various measures taken to contain the pandemic. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the vulnerability of health care systems around the world and significant differences in the ability to respond to this type of crisis. Global inequalities grew, both within and between countries. More in general, the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on many SDGs and delayed work to implement the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, this is why the governments in Belgium took a range of measures to prevent the spread of the virus, reduce its impact on health care and also provide support to affected citizens and businesses. For example, an effective vaccination campaign was rolled out which resulted in a high rate of vaccination. To strengthen prosperity and well-being after corona, Belgium launched a National Recovery & Resilience Plan, Flanders the relaunch plan "Flemish Resilience" and the Walloon government "Get Up Wallonia".

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY

Anthropogenic climate change, including increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, has led to widespread adverse effects and associated loss and damage to nature and people beyond the natural climate variability. The reports of the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the visible manifestations of these events, both in Belgium and elsewhere, confirm this evolution¹⁵. The IPCC reports that vulnerable communities that have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected¹⁶. The most vulnerable people and systems are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change.

Rising land use, pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, climate change and invasive alien species are the main interconnected challenges in the area of biodiversity in Belgium.

Despite international treaties and protocols signed in the past, the state of biodiversity and ecosystems continues to deteriorate; the direct and indirect effects of current production and consumption patterns are of such a nature as to threaten the survival of our planet. Biodiversity is essential to our well-being and health.

GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

Peace and security are a prerequisite for sustainable development. The world is experiencing the largest number of conflicts since the founding of the United Nations. As the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022¹⁷ indicates, around 2 billion people live in conflict-stricken countries.

¹⁵ IPCC report, AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

¹⁶ IPCC report, p. 6. https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf

¹⁷ Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has prompted a global rise in geopolitical tensions, and has raised questions about the framework for international co-operation. Combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, this war has had major implications for supply chains, the price of goods, energy supply and food security of millions of people. These elements may exacerbate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Despite some positive signs, the global macroeconomic outlook remains highly uncertain and particularly bleak for many countries, raising fears of a lost decade for development, according to the 2023 Financing for Sustainable Development Report¹⁸.

INEQUALITIES

The just transition to sustainable development is a challenge for Belgium. The various governments have a duty to leave no one behind. The social consequences of transitions need to be taken into account. To this end, citizens, businesses, trade unions, NGOs and governments all have a role to play. Especially in Belgium, the social dialogue model should make such arbitration possible.

DIGITALISATION

Technology played a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital revolution is gaining momentum, bringing about changes in the labour market in particular, with consequences for the nature of jobs and the skills required. A strong focus on continuous education, including in the workplace, will be essential in the coming years.

Closing the digital divide to avoid vulnerable groups being further excluded is critical to achieving fundamental social rights and creating stronger and more inclusive public services. In this regard, digitalisation is not an end in itself, but must clearly benefit the quality of education and access to rights, so that no one is left behind.

Moreover, according to the UN, the growing use of digital technologies raises the question of their environmental and energy impact.¹⁹

EDUCATION

Education is an essential factor in making progress toward achieving all the SDGs. It applies to all ages, in schools and training centres, in the professional and private context, and it demands resources to pursue ambitious policies in this area.

Although most indicators put Belgium above the European average, several studies show that the quality of education here is declining. There are differences at the community level in Belgium, but all three communities are making efforts to enhance the quality of their education. For example, Flanders scores higher than the average of neighbouring countries and the OECD average in all three domains (reading, mathematics and science) of the PISA ranking, the German-speaking community has comparable results to the neighbouring countries and the French community is below the OECD average in all three domains.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed various vulnerabilities. Many schools switched to (partial) remote teaching. This was not always self-evident for the most vulnerable students. The COVID-19 crisis did not help pupils with learning deficits and learning disadvantages either. Through a range of initiatives, the communities are catching up and further efforts are being made to digitalise education, among other things.

¹⁸ Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2023; <https://desapublications.un.org/file/1137/download>

¹⁹ The growing footprint of digitalisation <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/37439/FB027.pdf>

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10

IMPLEMENTATION
RESOURCES

10

IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

This chapter provides an overview of the financial resources available to implement the SDGs, with a specific focus on development cooperation. The first part explains the evolution of aid from Belgian development actors in recent years. Statistical data provide clarification on the contributions of different actors, as well as the destination of this funding. The second part focuses on qualitative data, good practices and studies within Belgium.

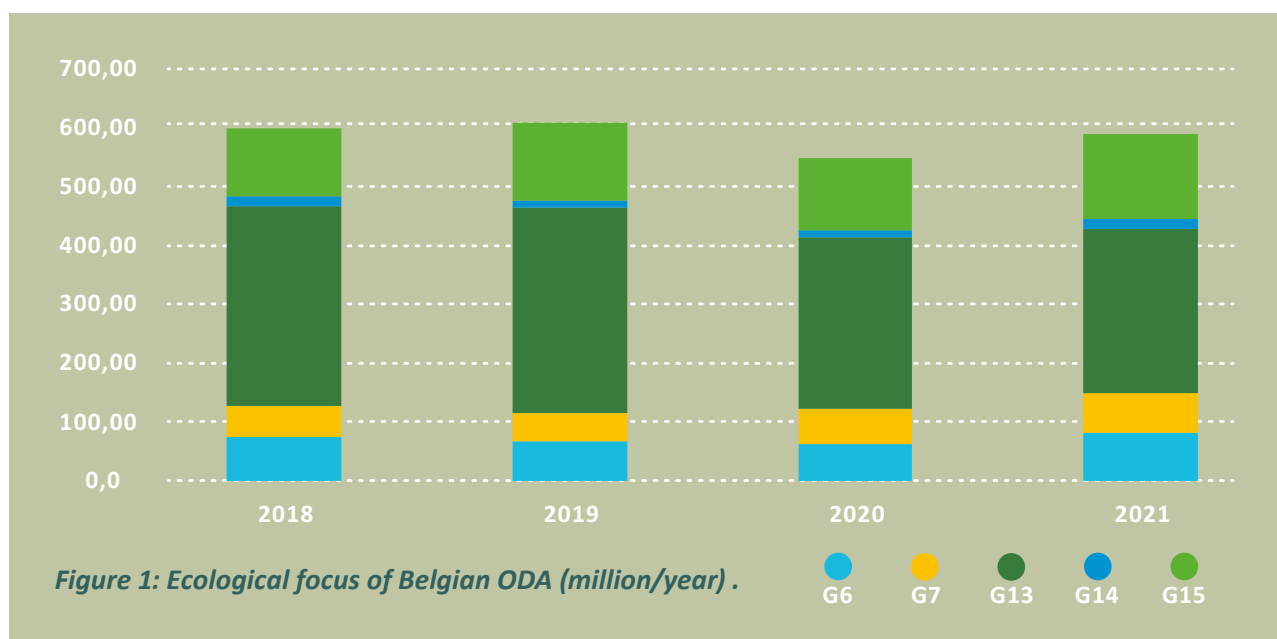
EVOLUTION OF BELGIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION EXPENDITURE (ODA)

Between 2017 and 2021, Belgian spending on development cooperation (ODA) increased in absolute terms from €1.94 billion to €2.21 billion. As a proportion of Belgium's gross national income, the percentage of ODA fluctuated between 0.41% and 0.48% during this period. Although the percentage remains relatively stable, it is still far from the official target of 0.7% ODA/GNI.

The federal government's annual General Policy note on International Solidarity lays out the main strands of federal policy on development cooperation and humanitarian aid. An appendix to this

paper contains the SDGs to which the federal government intends to contribute with these policy decisions, to ensure coherence with the 2030 Agenda.

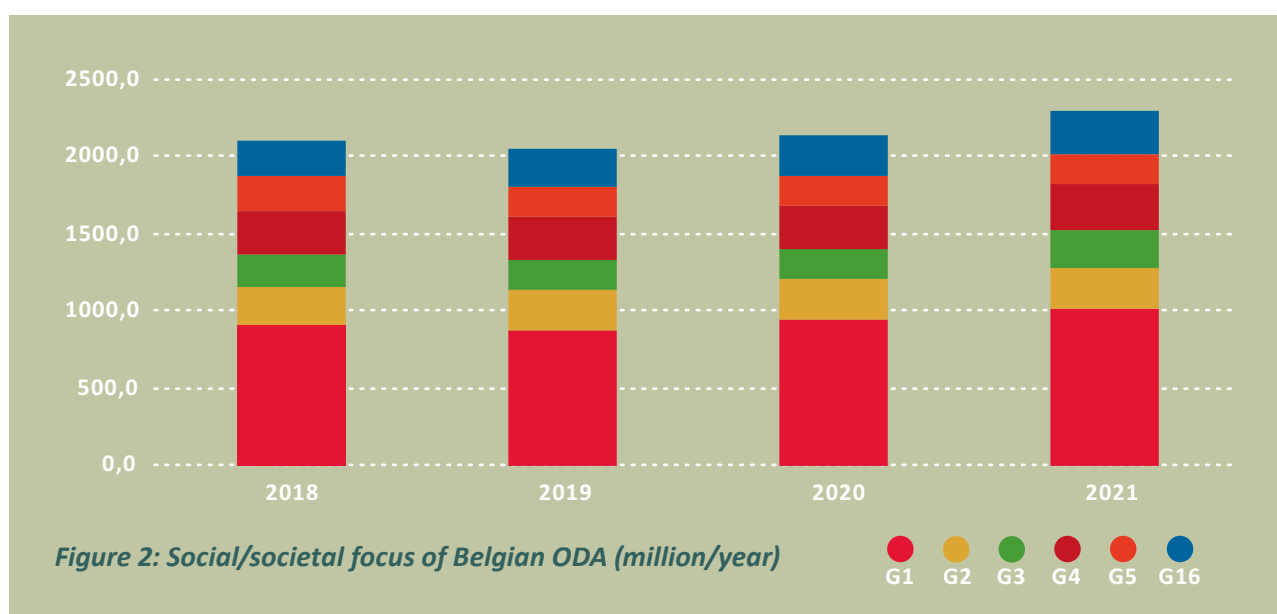
If we break down these figures for 2021 (base year), we see that around half of the total ODA (56%) is managed by the Directorate General for Development cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the federal government. Part of this budget (11%) goes to governmental cooperation with 14 partner countries, mainly implemented by Enabel. To enhance its impact on the ground to achieve the 2030 Agenda, Enabel offers its expertise, promotes interaction among all actors and develops the best possible partnerships. The agency also runs programmes for third parties.



²⁰ Disclaimer: Belgian development aid funding typically supports highly integrated activities relevant to various SDGs, in line with the complex and cross-cutting realities in this area. To make the financial efforts visible in terms of the SDGs, a simple distribution cannot therefore be assumed, where one euro would be allocated to only one SDG. A representation in terms of SDGs therefore highlights the thematic emphases in relative terms.

Another part of the budget (11%) managed by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid is used to finance the programmes of Belgian non-governmental actors (NGOs and institutional actors such as interuniversity cooperation actors) whose programmes are mostly aligned with the SDGs. The diversity of these actors allows Belgian cooperation to take advantage of their complementarity and ability to act in diverse and complex contexts. The accredited organisations draw up a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) for each country or transnational theme. These are used as a reference for devising the organisations' programmes, including the identification and implementation of synergies and complementarities between them.

A significant portion of the budget (18%) goes to funding a number of international organisations. Belgian cooperation with United Nations organisations and bodies is primarily through a voluntary, multi-year contribution to the general resources of a limited number of recognised multilateral partner organisations (core funding), whose objectives correspond to Belgian priorities and the SDGs. In addition, Belgium contributes to the general resources of the World Bank and the (sub)regional development banks. As a development finance institution, the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) is the privileged actor for private sector investments in intervention countries. It manages a portfolio of €1.1 billion of investments in 52 intervention countries.



€881.74 million falls under the administration of the regions and other federal government departments such as the FPS Finance. This figure also includes the Belgian contribution to the European Commission's development cooperation spending: €477 million (for the same year). The federal agency Fedasil's reception of asylum seekers falls only partially under official development assistance.

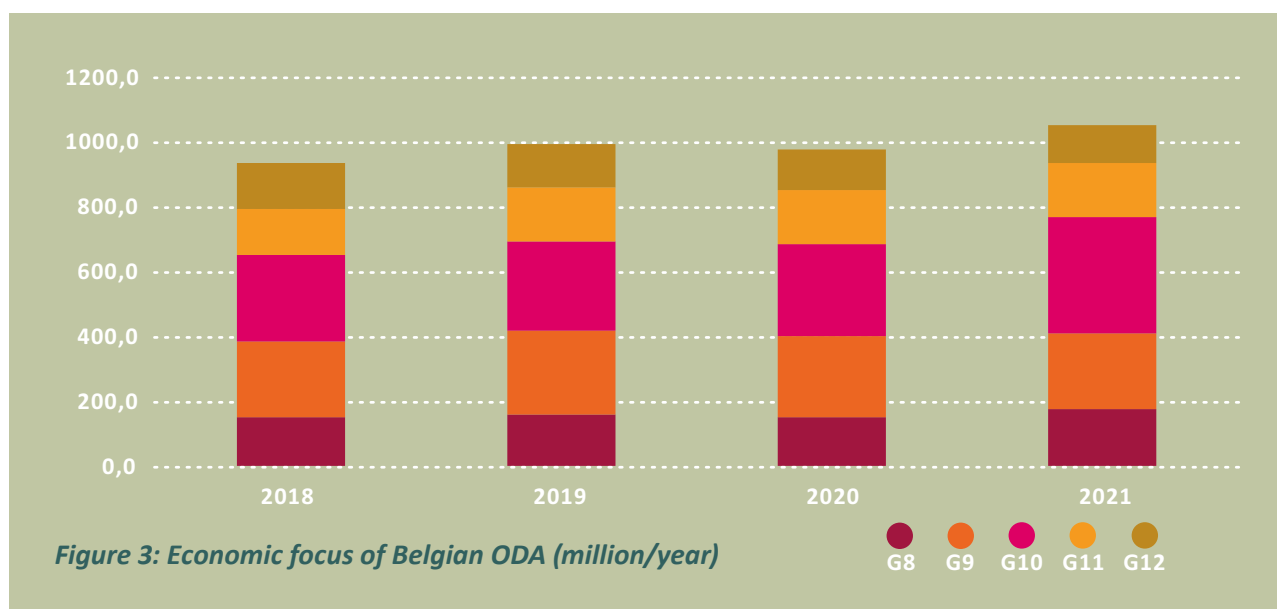
The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation (OECD) reviewed Belgian development cooperation in 2019²¹. The report commends Belgium for its international commitment to the least developed countries and countries in fragile or conflict situations. The report also highlights Belgium's commitment to gender equality, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Furthermore,

²¹ OECD, Development Cooperation Peer Reviews: Belgium 2020 <https://read.oecd.org/10.1787/026f1aad-en?format=pdf>

the report notes that Belgium is a strong supporter of multilateralism and actively advocates UN reform to strengthen its legitimacy, representativeness and effectiveness. In 2021, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) also spent €186.14 million on humanitarian programs, €95.31 million on climate policy, €51.81 million on local entrepreneurship and fair trade, and smaller amounts on advocacy and evaluations. In addition, other departments of FPS Foreign Affairs allocated €87.43 million to development cooperation, including for conflict prevention. In total, FPS

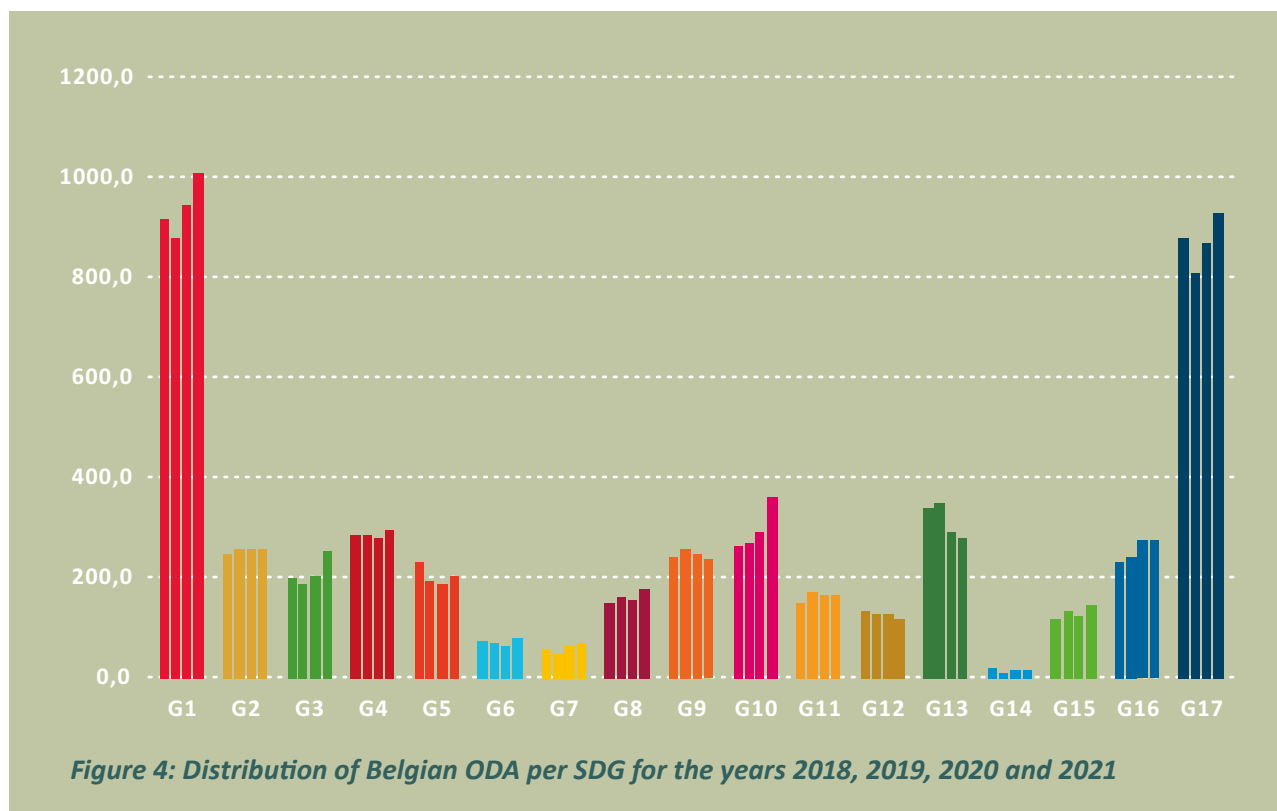
Foreign Affairs provided around €1.31 billion in 2021, or 60% of Belgian spending on development cooperation.

The report also calls on the Directorate General for Development and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) to develop clear country strategies, and within these strategies to clarify the order of thematic priorities and to further develop thematic expertise within the DGD. It also draws attention to the international commitment to devote 0.7% of GNI to development assistance and the need for a pragmatic roadmap to achieve this goal.



Unfortunately, spending on development cooperation alone cannot reduce inequality or improve respect for human rights around the world. Diplomacy, trade, agriculture, migration, environment and security are all areas that have a major impact on development. It is essential for Belgian federal development cooperation to ensure more coherence among the various Belgian federal policies, so that they also contribute to the SDGs. This is also why the federal government has been developing partnerships with the private sector and academia in recent years.

As an advocate for transparency regarding the contributions to the SDGs (and to common global goods) by various actors, the federal government supports an expansion of statistical accounting for the benefit of development through Total Official Support for Sustainable Development to include other sources of financing for sustainable development, including non-traditional donor funding, private sector investment and South-South cooperation.



BEST PRACTICES

• LINEAR BONDS (GREEN OLO)

In February 2018, the Belgian federal state issued a first 15-year green OLO in euro (OLO86). The Debt Agency has since prepared an update to this framework, to be more in line with current market practices. Since July 2022, all future issues of green OLOs, both OLO86 and future green OLOs, will be conducted under this new framework.

• EURONEXT

ESG bonds must meet recognised standards, such as the ICMA Principles, and have external verification. Green bonds still make up the largest share of sustainable products, although their share in terms of amounts issued is declining. Green bond issues exceeded \$2 billion in 2022.

• NATIONAL BANK OF BELGIUM

The National Bank of Belgium has been investing part of its own foreign reserves in dollar-denominated corporate bonds since 2004. For the sustainable investment strategy, they initially applied the methodology of negative screening, in which the National Bank did not invest in companies that did not take into account the sustainability and social responsibility of their activities.

A few years later, they also switched to positive screening, with the National Bank of Belgium only considering bonds from companies that score high enough on ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) criteria, or their commitment to the environment, society and good governance. A specialised external rating agency assigns this score.

In order to strengthen the sustainable nature of its own portfolios and as the number of issuers continues to grow, the National Bank decided in 2019 to increase the proportion of sustainable assets in them.

The National Bank of Belgium is also a member of the Network for Greening the Financial System. This is a voluntary collaboration between more than 50 central banks and regulators to help manage climate and environmental risks to financial stability and green the financial system.

• **FSMA (FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS AUTHORITY).**

> **Non-financial reporting directive (NFI directive)**

The FSMA has recently conducted two qualitative studies on non-financial reporting at large listed companies in Belgium (fiscal years 2017-19).

The main **focal points** are as follows:

- First, a number of companies lack (i) the risk description, (ii) the links between those risks and the policy pursued, (iii) the due diligence procedures and the results obtained, as well as (iv) the KPIs used, in whole or in part.
- Second, there is room for improvement in providing relevant and sufficiently specific information on environmental issues, including climate change. This is the case in particular for the description of key environmental risks. Companies must have an additional focus on (i) their own impact on the environment and climate change, on the one hand, and (ii) the impact of these issues on corporate activities, on the other.
- Third, nearly 10% of companies do not base their NFI statement on a recognised European or international reference model.
- Fourth, progress must be made to ensure the accuracy, completeness and reliability of the processes for collecting, processing and reporting the non-financial data.

Important steps have been taken in the right direction, both in terms of content and form. Research has highlighted the **following key improvements**:

- First, the majority of NFI statements for each of the required topics contains an explanation of the policies pursued.

- Second, more companies have included information on non-financial matters in a sufficiently specific way. In many cases, the non-financial information is sufficiently complete and focused on the issues essential to issuers. This is partly because many issuers have conducted a materiality analysis.
- Third, companies prioritise numerical objectives, more than was previously the case. They provide KPIs that are specific to company activities and related to the objectives.
- Fourth, a large majority of companies have drawn up an internal code of conduct or ethical code. They implement due diligence procedures to this end. In addition, more and more companies are applying a code of conduct for their suppliers. They are also increasingly taking steps to verify compliance with their code.
- Fifth, a growing number of companies base their NFI statement on a recognised European or international reference model. The most commonly used reference models are the SDGs and the GRI Standards. Many companies combine these two reference models.
- Sixth, the presentation and quality of NFI statements in the last two years has improved, even if there is still room for improvement in the way they are structured.

> **Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR)**

Among other things, the SFDR imposes pre-contractual disclosure to end investors regarding SRI objectives and about promoting social and/or environmental attributes. This allows funds to be classified according to their sustainability-related disclosures:

- funds that aim for a sustainable investment.
- funds that promote social and/or environmental characteristics.
- other funds do not comply with Article 8 or 9 of the SFDR. They do not have sustainable investment objective(s) nor do they promote social and/or environmental characteristics.

These *statistics* are updated every quarter and provide an overview of the Belgian Public Institutions for Collective Investment, the most common investment funds.

FLANDERS

Flanders also has a tradition of cooperating with multilateral organisations, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Bank, UNESCO, UN World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labor Organization (ILO, Flemish Trust Fund), Multilateral institutions received €75 million of Flemish support/contributions over the period 2018 - 2021.

As regards climate finance, Flanders subscribes to the goals of the 2015 UNFCCC Paris Agreement. Over the period 2016-2021, more than €85 million from Flanders was spent on climate financing, through projects of the FAO, WFP, African Development Bank (African Climate Change Fund), UNESCO, WHO, UNDP, World Bank, and UNEP, among others.

BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION

The Brussels administrations can create their own partnerships for improving actions. As such, specific

collaborations with Eurocities, Metropolis, the City of Rabat, Smart Tourism Destination, NECSTouR, City Destinations Alliance, Global Sustainabilities, Time for DMOcracy, etc., among others, have been set up.

THE WALLOON REGION

With the Third Strategy for Sustainable Development, the decision was taken to develop a methodological proposal for analysing regional budgets in the context of the SDGs. The objective is to then take things a step further by drafting budgets using the SDGs.





11

CONCLUSION AND
NEXT STEPS

The High Level Political Forum at which this VNR is presented comes mid-way through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The global efforts have so far proven insufficient. The world was already on the wrong path to achieving the SDGs, when multiple crises made the situation even more difficult: the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, increasing inequalities, the climate and biodiversity crisis and ongoing environmental degradation.

Although Belgium as a federal state starts from a privileged position, thanks in part to its strong institutional framework on sustainable development, it also needs to put forward solutions in response.

Peace and security are a necessary pre-condition for sustainable development, in line with the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, as enshrined in SDG 16. There can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development. The political and economic upheaval caused by the war in Ukraine threaten the global recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising food and energy prices and other consequences of Russia's aggression in Ukraine have jeopardised the implementation of the SDGs at the global level. More than ever, conflict prevention, the link between humanitarian aid, development and peace, and inclusive approaches to resilience, are essential.

Anthropogenic climate change, including the higher frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, has led to widespread negative effects and associated loss and damage to nature and people beyond the natural climate variability. The IPCC reports and the occurrence of these weather phenomena, in Belgium and elsewhere, confirm this trend.

We are halfway through the 2030 Agenda and the clock is ticking. This VNR demonstrates the commitment of all governments in Belgium to the full and timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Belgian local and provincial governments are also contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda, both internally through their own organisation (staff policy, procurement policy, public buildings, etc.)

and externally through local services and international cooperation. In this regard, they are not only focusing on the 17 thematic areas, but are also using the SDGs as a framework for coherent sustainable local policies, and use the 2030 Agenda as a structural framework for policy planning. Active involvement of the local level is essential for achieving 65% of the SDGs.

Belgium reaffirms its determination to pursue the 17 SDGs with a long-term, holistic approach. The governments in Belgium recognise at the same time that achieving these goals requires the active participation of all actors in society: governments and administrations, citizens and civil society, knowledge institutions and the private sector. The importance of partnerships is also underscored. Mindful of the principle of leaving no one behind, the governments in Belgium have a specific focus on vulnerable groups. The different governments commit to gender equality and to combat gender-related discrimination. They also pay attention to the integration of the gender dimension in the SDGs. It is clear that Belgium will remain committed to achieving the SDGs in cooperation with others domestically and abroad.

Since the SDGs were adopted, the different governments in Belgium have taken policies that positively contribute to attaining the goals. This VNR illustrates that despite the positive contribution, many indicators show that much remains to be done.

The contributions of civil society, the opinions of the advisory councils and the preparedness review of the Court of Audit highlight various cross-cutting levers which will accelerate the realisation of the SDGs. The different governments commit to continuing and strengthening their action towards this goal, within their respective powers.

This time of converging crises underscores the need for a systemic approach. Sustainable development requires a transversal approach and long term vision. Policy coherence for sustainable development in the spirit of SDG 17 serves as a valuable tool to

prevent that policies contradict or have unexpected negative effects, and can thus contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

The use of inclusive participative processes brings citizens closer to democratic decision making processes. The governments will continue to innovate in this area.

The governments in Belgium recognise the importance of cooperation, as shown in this VNR. Dialogue among policy levels and with civil society groups is essential and will be continued. The IMCSD is the coordinating body regarding sustainable development, in which this VNR was conceived as well as the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. After the official presentation of the VNR, the intention is to continue the dialogue, especially with the stakeholders who have made a contribution to it, in order to sustain the momentum and strong commitment at all levels.

It is clear that all governments in Belgium, together with the other Member States of the European Union, are committed to the full and timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and reiterate that it forms a coherent and mutually reinforcing framework with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (FfD), the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework.






























As such, Belgium remains resolutely convinced of multilateralism, and an international order based on the rule of law, the founding principle of the United Nations. Only through multilateralism will we find long-term solutions to today's complex crises.





Statistical annex

This annex presents a set of 82 indicators to monitor Belgium's progress toward the SDGs. These indicators were selected for this report by the Interfederal Statistical Institute (ISI). The indicators were collected by the Federal Planning Bureau. More information and details are available at www.indicators.be.

GEOGRAPHICAL CODES, COLOURS, LINES AND MARKERS USED			
	BE	Belgium	  
	BR	Brussels -Capital Region	 
	DAC	Development Assistance Committee	
	DE	Germany	 
	EU	European Union, 27 countries	 
	FED	Federal BE	
	FR	France	 
	NL	Netherlands	 
	VL	Flemish Region	 
	WA	Walloon Region	 

indicators.be > For all information on all indicators: figures since 1990, targets, link to the SDGs, international comparisons, breakdowns for population groups, definitions, sources, etc.

1.1. ASSESSMENT OF TRENDS

Belgium's progress towards the SDGs is measured by assessing 51 indicators, three per SDG. These are listed at the beginning of each section in Chapter 6. The assessment shows that if current trends are pursued, few of the SDGs will be met by 2030.

Out of the 26 indicators with a quantified objective, 9 are expected to be met following current trends, while 17 are not likely to be met.

Among the 25 indicators without a quantified objective, 11 have made progress towards their objective between 2000 and 2022, while 2 have moved in the opposite direction. For the remaining 12 indicators, the trend is stable or undetermined.

The gender breakdown (21 indicators) shows that the situation in Belgium is relatively favourable, although significant disparities remain. The breakdowns according to income (8 indicators) and education (5 indicators) levels reveal, unsurprisingly, a more favourable situation for the categories with

the highest income or education level. People with at best a lower secondary education are particularly disadvantaged.

1.2. SELECTION OF INDICATORS

These 51 assessment indicators - three per SDG - are drawn from a larger set of 82 SDG monitoring indicators, all of which are presented graphically in the statistical annex. These 51 indicators include the 34 indicators from the 2017 Voluntary National Assessment (Belgium, 2017), to which one indicator per SDG has been added to give a broader picture of the situation.

The set of 82 indicators was selected by the Inter-federal Statistics Institute from the list of 231 global indicators proposed by the UN for monitoring the SDGs and using the work of Eurostat and the Federal Planning Bureau. The availability of data in Belgium was also taken into account. Comparability at European level and the availability of regional data as well as of a quantified objective were also considered in the selection of indicators.

1.3. EVOLUTION OF THE LIST OF INDICATORS

These indicators and their assessment are updated at least once a year in February for the Report on Sustainable Development Indicators (ICN/BFP, 2023). The information contained in the report is complemented by the website www.indicators.be.

The list of indicators is subject to changes in the light of developments at UN and Eurostat level and according to data availability. In Belgium, a public debate on this list of indicators took place in the first half of 2023. The results of this debate will be progressively integrated into the work done on indicators as from the Report on Sustainable Development Indicators of February 2024.

1.4. IMPACT ON THE REST OF THE WORLD: FOOTPRINT INDICATORS

Belgium's development has a negative impact on the rest of the world. Indeed, Belgium is a net importer of CO₂ and raw materials. This result reflects the fact that Belgium is a small, open economy and dependent on resources from elsewhere in the world.

In 2015, Belgium's carbon footprint reached 116.8 Mt of CO₂, while its production-related emissions amounted to 100.8 Mt of CO₂. Belgium's material footprint was 137.2 million tonnes of material in 2019, while material extraction in Belgium reached 95.6 million tonnes the same year. Between 2008 and 2019, our material footprint has decreased by approximately 24.7%.

1.5. GUIDE TO READING TABLES AND GRAPHS

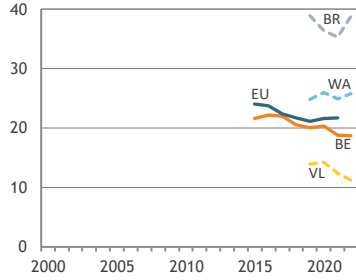
The tables presenting the assessment of three indicators by SDG at the beginning of each section of Chapter 6 contain the following information for each indicator:

- the name of the indicator and its number,
- the unit of measurement of the indicator,
- the objective set for the indicator; this is either a figure, if a quantified objective is defined, or an arrow, indicating the direction of the desired change,
- the assessment of the indicator's progress towards the objective, by means of three icons:
+ favourable - unfavourable ○ undetermined

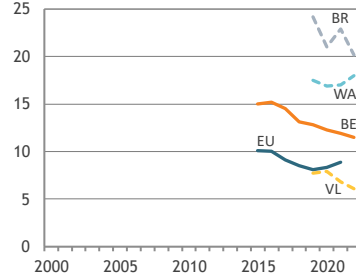
The graphs of the complete set of 82 SDG monitoring indicators show, depending on data availability, the evolution between 2000 and 2022 of the indicator at the Belgian level, at the level of the European Union or three neighbouring countries (Germany, France and the Netherlands) and in the three Belgian regions. For these 82 indicators, further information, in particular the assessment of the indicator and its objective, can be found on the website www.indicators.be which provides further information to the statistical annex. The method of assessing the progress of the indicators towards their objective is described in detail in Annex 6 of the Report on Sustainable Development Indicators of February 2023 (ICN/BFP, 2023).

SDG 1
No poverty

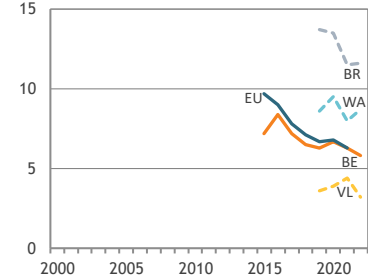
01 Risk of poverty or social exclusion
percentage of population



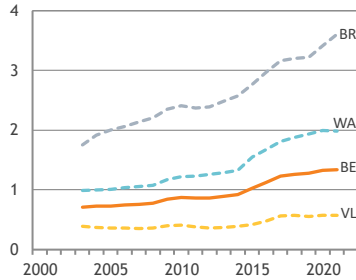
02 Very low work intensity
percentage of population aged less than 65



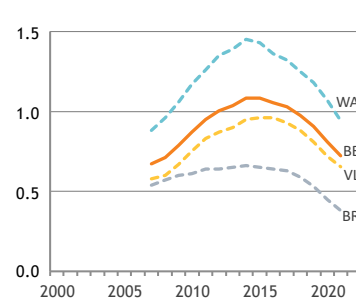
03 Severe material and social deprivation
percentage of population



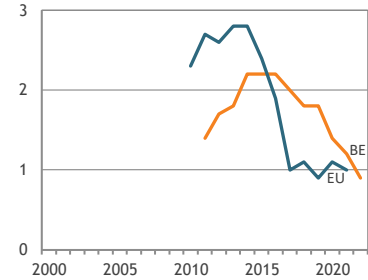
04 Guaranteed minimum income
beneficiaries
percentage of population



05 Over-indebtedness of households
percentage of population aged 18 and over

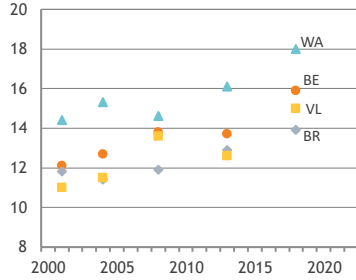


06 Postponement or cancellation of health
care for financial reasons
percentage of population aged 16 and over

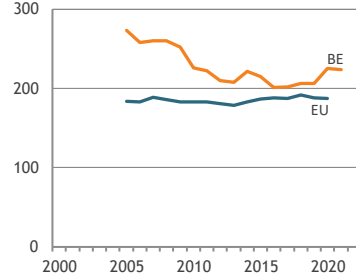


SDG 2
Zero hunger

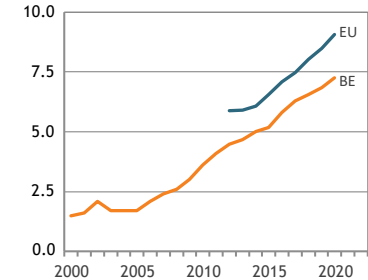
07 Adult obesity
percentage of population aged 18 and over



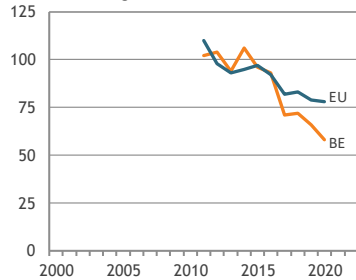
08 Meat consumption
grams per person per day



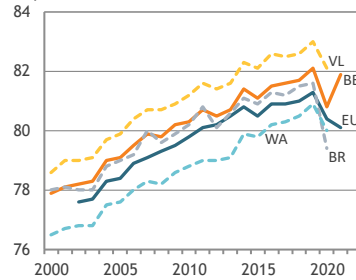
09 Organic agriculture area
percentage of agricultural area



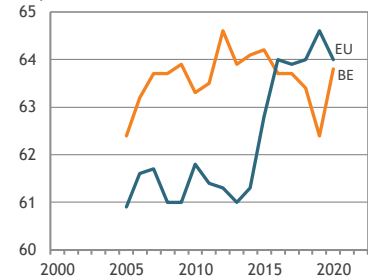
10 Agricultural pesticides
index, average 2011-2013 = 100



11 Life expectancy
years at birth

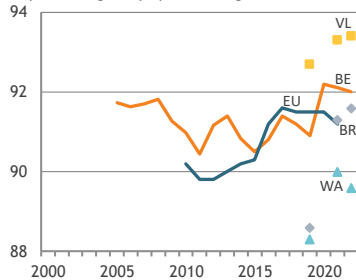


12 Healthy life years
years at birth

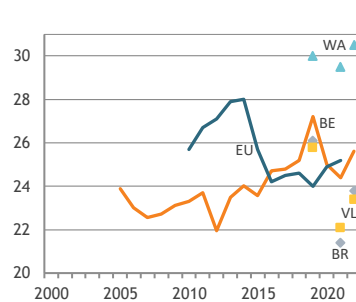


SDG 3
Good health and well-being

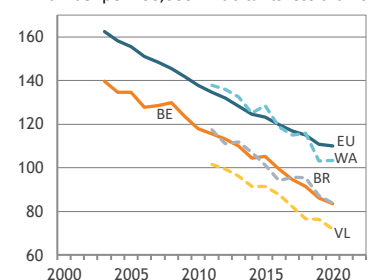
13 Self-perceived health
very good, good or fair
percentage of population aged 16 and over



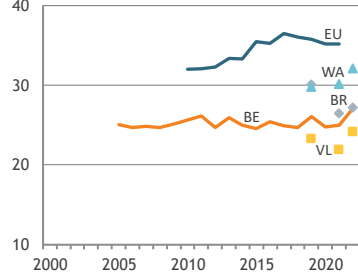
14 Limitations in usual activities
percentage of population aged 16 and over



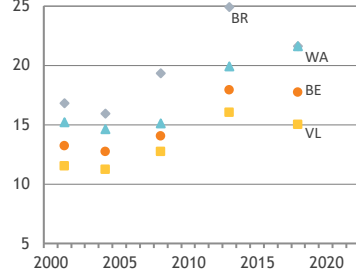
15 Premature deaths due to chronic
diseases
number per 100,000 inhabitants less than 65



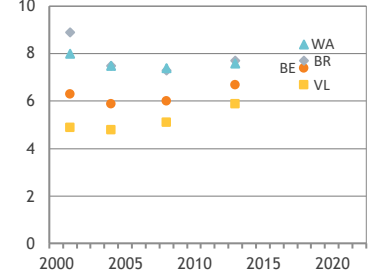
16 Long-standing illness or health problem
percentage of population aged 16 and over



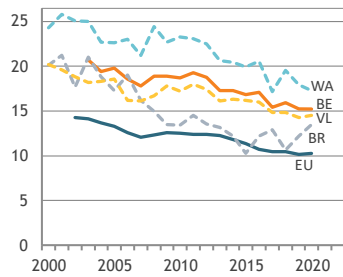
17 Psychological distress
percentage of population aged 15 and over



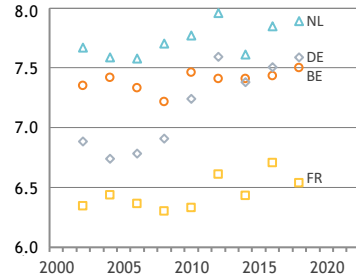
18 Depression
percentage of population aged 15 and over



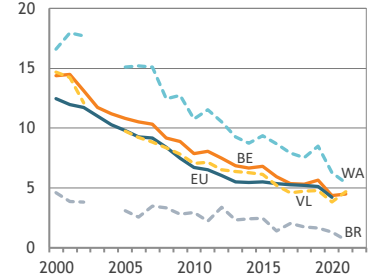
19 Suicide
number per 100,000 inhabitants



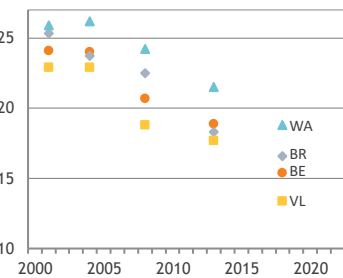
20 Life satisfaction
score 0-10 | population aged 15 and over



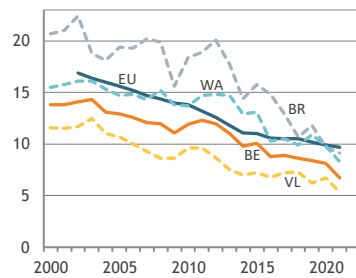
21 Traffic fatalities
number within 30 days per 100,000 inhab.



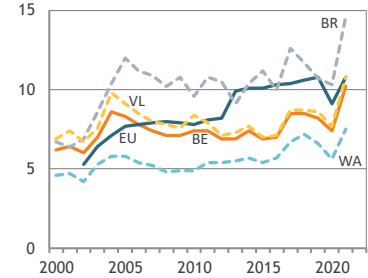
22 Daily smokers
percentage of population aged 15 and over



23 Early school leavers
percentage of population aged 18-24

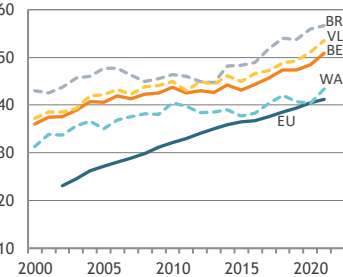


24 Lifelong learning
percentage of population aged 25-64

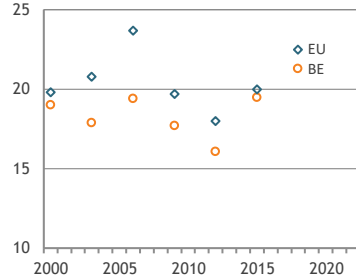


SDG 4
Quality education

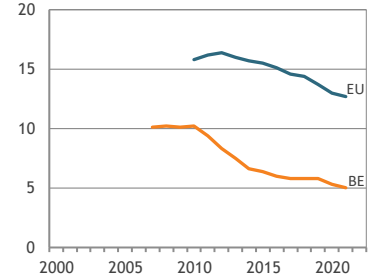
25 Higher education graduates
percentage of population aged 25-34



26 Underachievement in reading
percentage of 15-year-old students

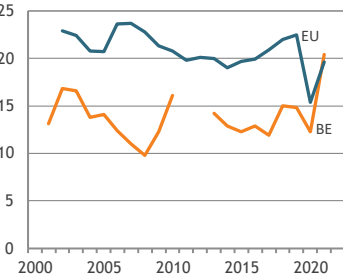


27 Gender pay gap
hourly wages, percentage difference

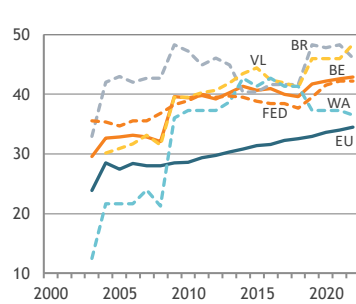


SDG 5
Gender equality

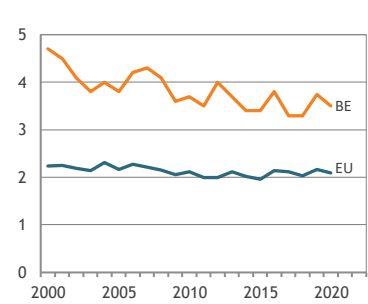
28 Inactive population due to caring responsibilities
percentage of aged 15-64 outside labour force



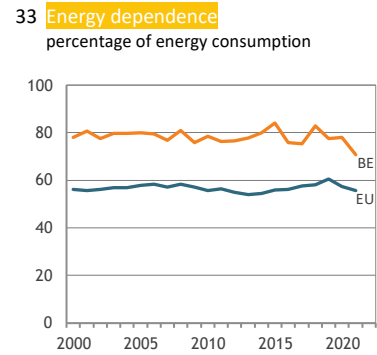
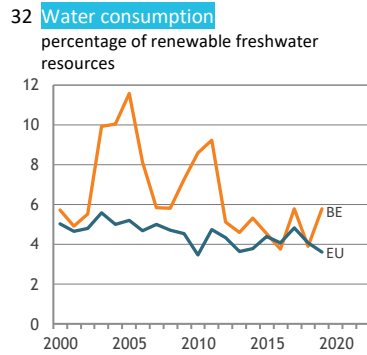
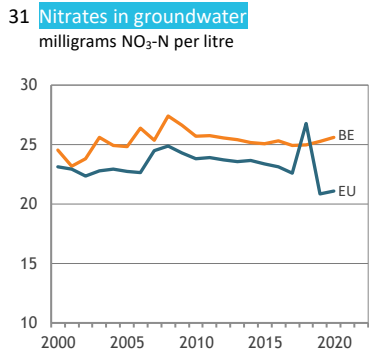
29 Female members of parliament
percentage



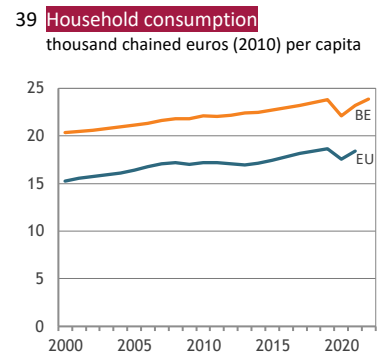
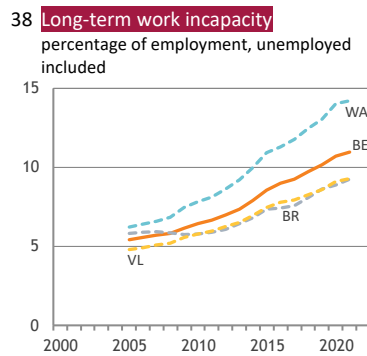
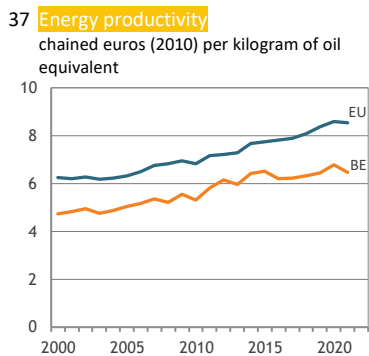
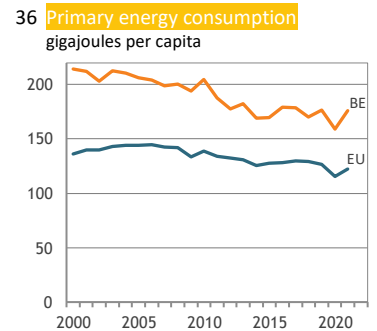
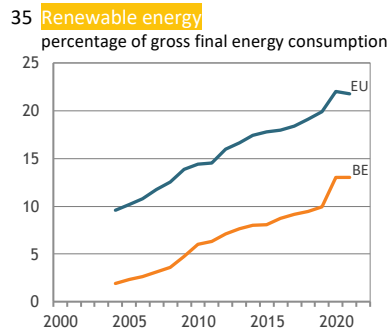
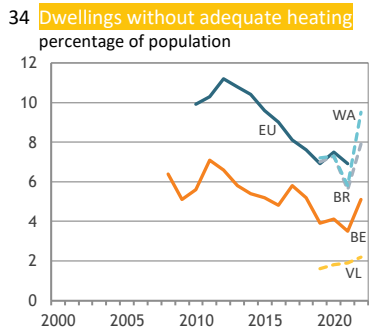
30 Nitrates in river water
milligrams NO₃-N per litre



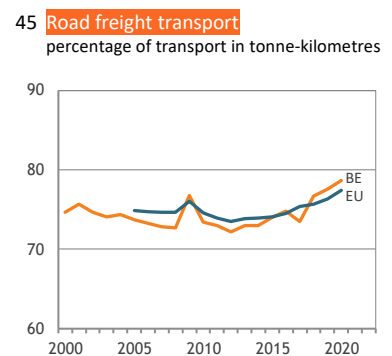
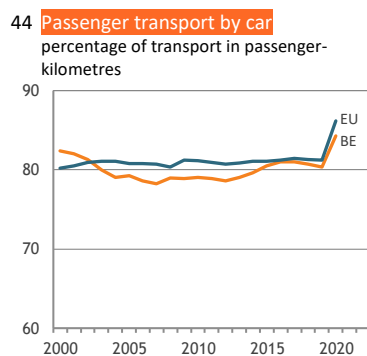
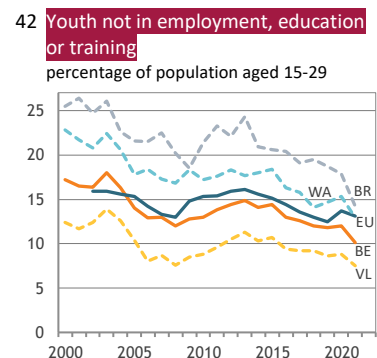
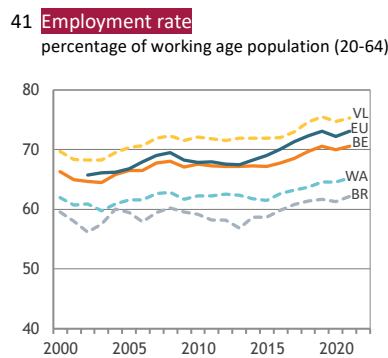
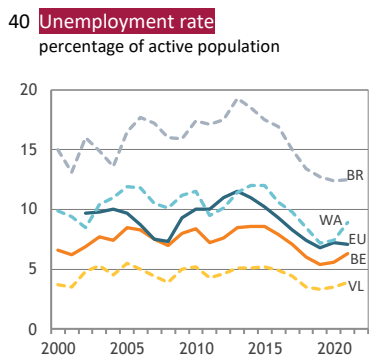
SDG 6
Clean water and sanitation



SDG 7
Affordable and clean energy

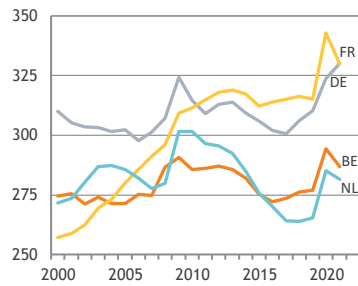


SDG 8
Decent work and economic growth

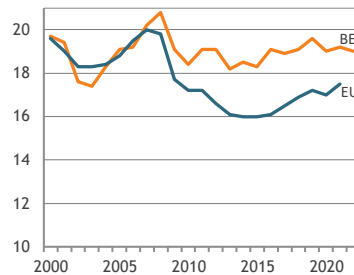


SDG 9
Industry, innovation and infrastructure

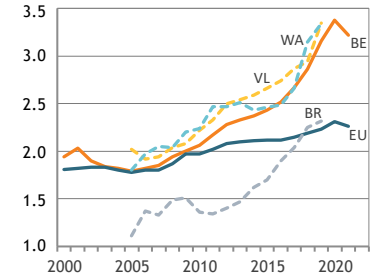
46 **Physical capital stock**
percentage of gross domestic product



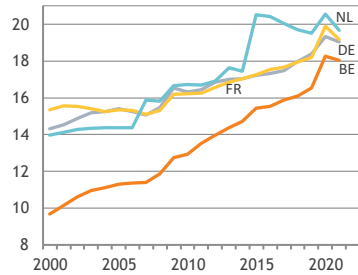
47 **Gross investment in the physical capital stock**
percentage of gross domestic product



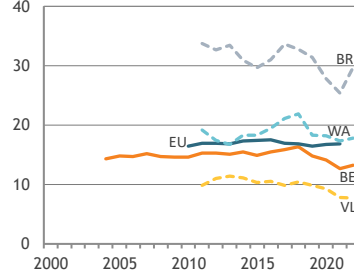
48 **Research and development**
percentage of gross domestic product



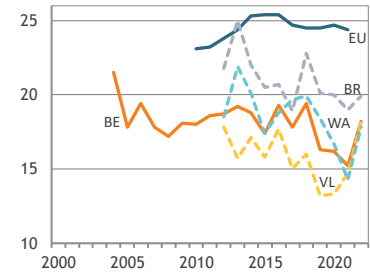
49 **Knowledge capital stock**
percentage of gross domestic product



50 **Risk of poverty**
percentage of population

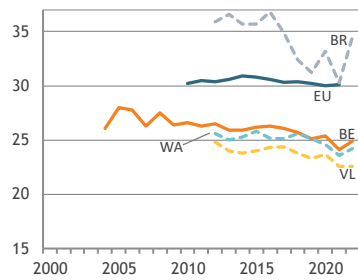


51 **Depth of risk of poverty**
percentage distance to poverty threshold

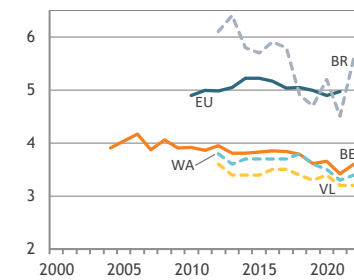


SDG 10
Reduced inequalities

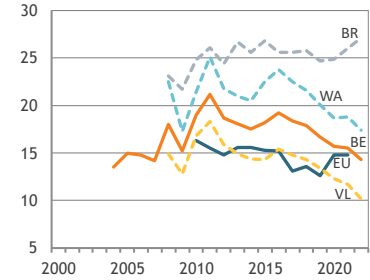
52 **Income inequality: Gini index**
scale 0-100



53 **Income inequality: S80/S20**
quintile share ratio

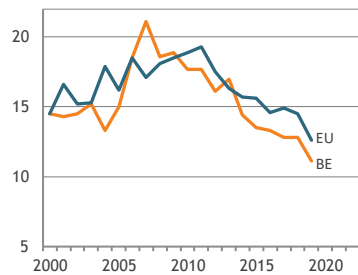


54 **Inadequate dwelling**
percentage of population

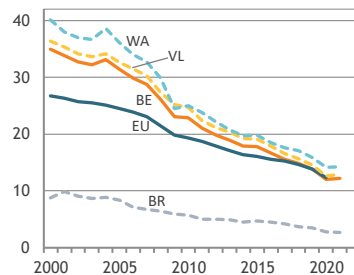


SDG 11
Sustainable cities and communities

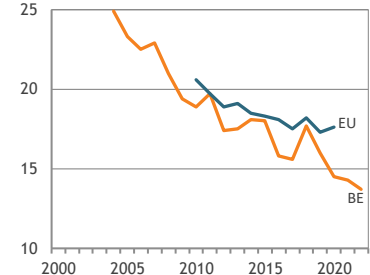
55 **Exposure to particulate matter**
micrograms PM_{2.5} per cubic metre



56 **Nitrogen oxide emissions**
kilograms NO₂ per capita

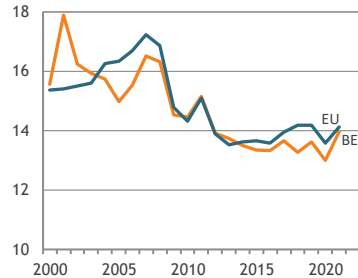


57 **Noise pollution**
percentage of population

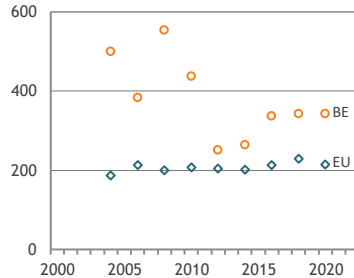


SDG 12
Responsible consumption and production

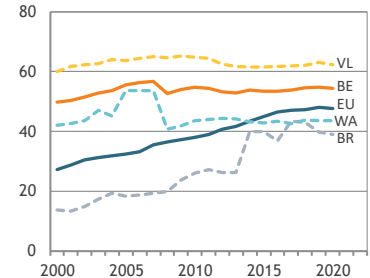
58 **Domestic material consumption**
tonnes per capita

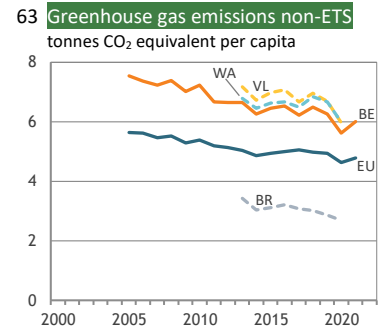
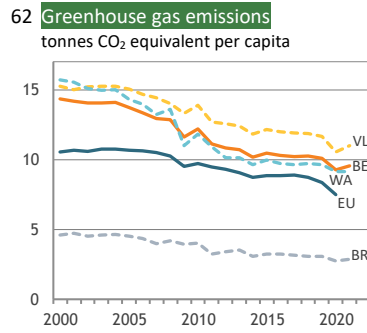
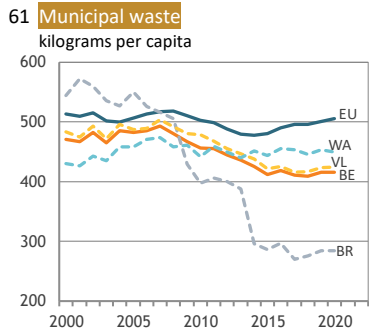


59 **Hazardous waste**
kilograms per capita

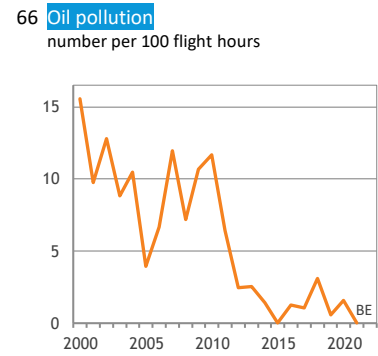
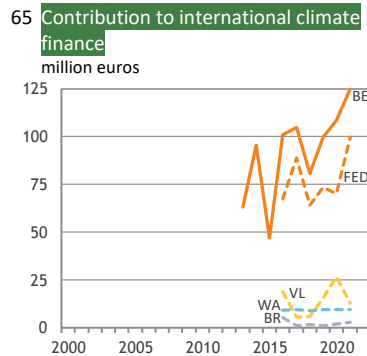
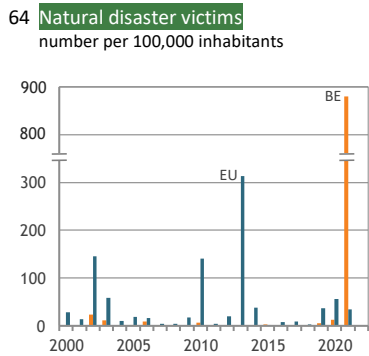


60 **Waste recycling**
percentage of municipal waste

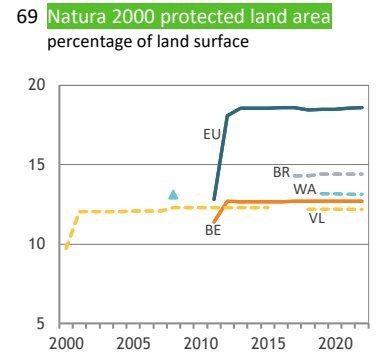
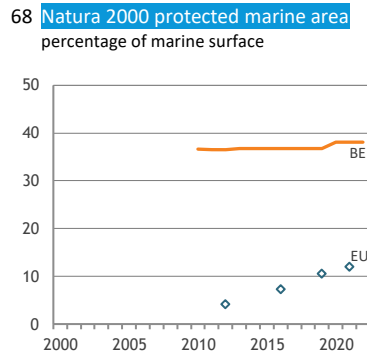
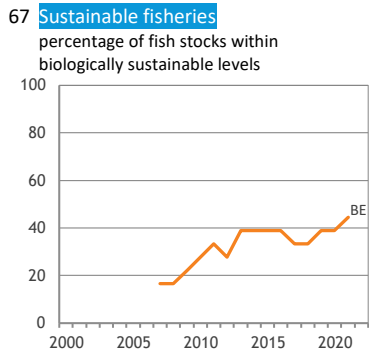




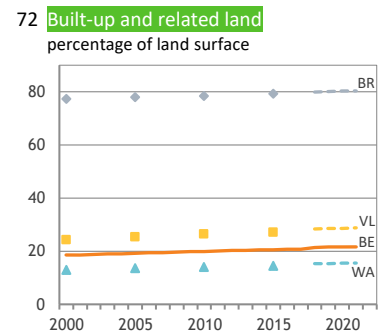
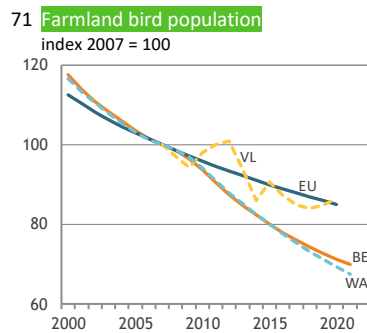
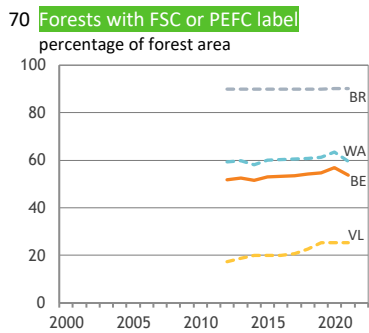
SDG 13
Climate action



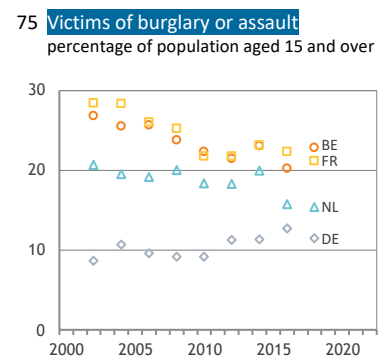
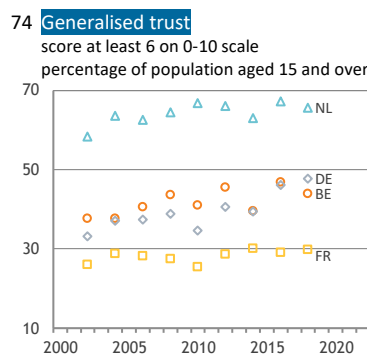
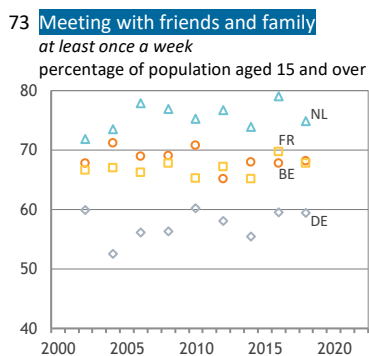
SDG 14
Life below water



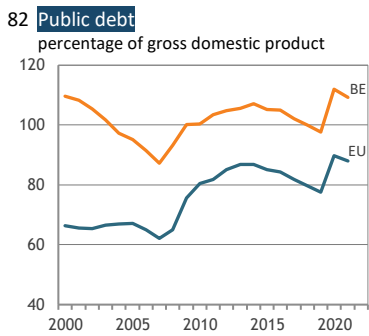
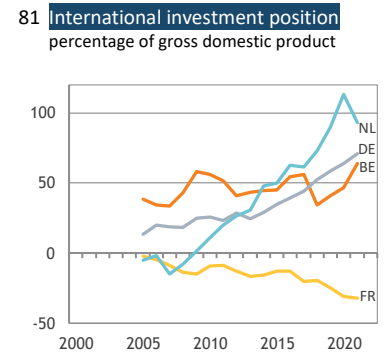
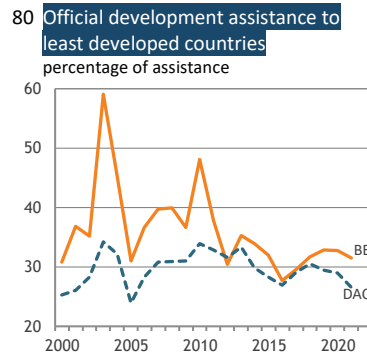
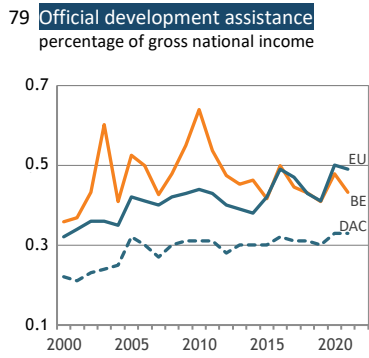
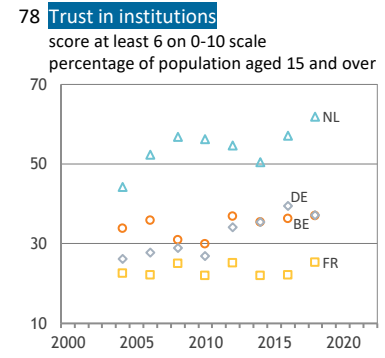
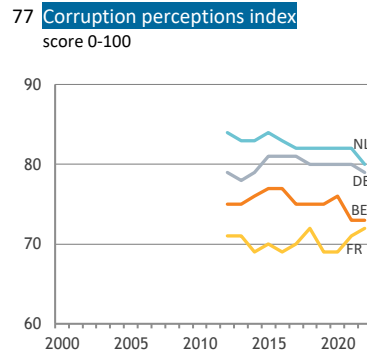
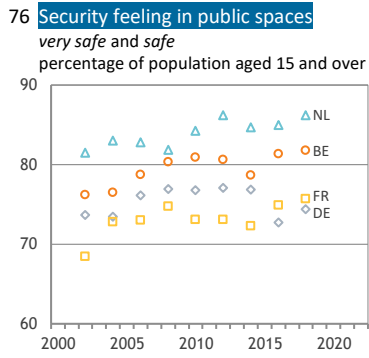
SDG 15
Life on land



SDG 16
Peace, justice and strong institutions



SDG 17
Partnerships for the goals



BACK TO THE TOP