

BELGIUM

PREVALENCE OF ADULTS THAT ARE PHYSICALLY
ACTIVE (MVPA FOR AT LEAST 30 MINUTES PER DAY), 2013

%	ADULTS (15+ YEARS)	
BELGIUM	BOTH SEXES	36
FLEMISH REGION		40
WALLOON REGION		31
BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION		29

Total population: 11 258 434

Median age: 41.2 years

Life expectancy at birth males: 78.1 years

Life expectancy at birth females: 83.2 years

GDP per capita: €34 500

GDP spent on health: 10.9% (1)



Monitoring and surveillance

Physical activity in adults

Belgium's health monitoring and surveillance system, which includes population-based measures of physical activity, was established in 1997 and is coordinated by the Scientific Institute of Public Health (WIV-ISP). The latest available data are reported in the Health Interview Survey (HIS) from 2013 (*Enquête de santé/Gezondheidsenquête*) (2, 3).

Aspects of physical activity measured in the HIS include frequency, duration and intensity of physical activity, across different socioeconomic groups and addressing young people, adults and older adults. Disaggregated data for younger adults, adults and older adults are available for the following years: 1997, 2004, 2008 and 2013.

According to the latest available data from the 2013 HIS (2, 3), 36% of the Belgian population (aged 15+ years) reported being physically active, carrying out moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA) for at least 30 minutes per day. This figure is twice as high among males (48%) as among females (24%) (see Table 1).

The country recommendations and cut-off points for adults meeting recommended physical activity levels differ by region/community in Belgium, as explained in the subsections that follow (4, 5, 6). Table 1 presents relevant data for the country as a whole and by region.

Flanders

According to the 2013 HIS results, in Flanders, 40% of the population (aged 15+ years) reported engaging in at least 30 minutes of MVPA on a daily basis. The distribution by age and gender is similar here to that observed for Belgium as a whole, with the figure for men (52%) being almost twice as high as that for women (28%).

Wallonia

The 2013 HIS data show that, in Wallonia, the proportion of the Walloon population (aged 15+ years) that is physically active (engaging in MVPA for at least 30 minutes per day) is relatively low (31%). Again, males are much more active (44%) than females (19%).

Brussels-Capital Region

Data from the 2013 HIS for the Brussels-Capital Region show that the percentage of the population (aged 15+ years) that is physically active (carrying out MVPA for at least 30 minutes per day) is lower (29%) compared with the 2 other regions. The gender difference is less evident than that observed for Belgium as a whole, but the figure is still higher among males (36%) than females (22%).

Table 1. Prevalence (%) of adults that are physically active (MVPA for at least 30 minutes per day), Belgium and its regions, 2013

% ADULTS	BELGIUM	FLEMISH REGION	WALLOON REGION	BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION
MALES	48	52	44	36
FEMALES	24	28	19	22
BOTH SEXES	36	40	31	29

Source: HIS 2013 (2, 3).

The WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) 2010 estimates for Belgian adults (aged 18+ years) (7) show that 62.6% meet the WHO recommended physical activity levels as defined in the *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (8), and that males (68.5%) are more active than females (57.1%).

Physical activity in children and adolescents

Physical activity levels in Belgian children and adolescents are assessed through the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (9). Different cut-off points for children and adolescents reaching the physical activity recommendations are used in the different regions/communities, as described in the subsections that follow.

Flanders

In Flanders the cut-off point used for children and adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels for health is based on the recommendations by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

According to the HBSC survey results from 2009/2010 (9), adolescent boys are significantly more active than adolescent girls, across all age groups (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds). Girls are also less likely than boys to participate in physical activity as they grow older. Among both male and female adolescents, the highest levels of physical activity are among those aged 11 years (25% and 15%) (see Table 2).

Wallonia and Brussels-Capital region

The cut-off point used for children and adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels is at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

According to the results from a study of the health and well-being of students in secondary education in the Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Region (which is a component of the overall Belgian HBSC study from 2009/2010 (9)), about 1 in 10 (11.9%) adolescents (aged 12–22 years for this particular study) were found to be physically active for at least 60 minutes per day, with boys twice as likely (15.5%) to be physically active compared with girls (8.5%) (10).

Moreover, according to the 2009/2010 HBSC study, boys are again significantly more active than girls, across all age groups. For boys and girls the highest levels of physical activity are among those aged 11 years (30% and 18%

respectively). The physical activity levels for both sexes drop significantly as adolescents grow older, with a 50% drop in physical activity observed from the age of 11 to the age of 15 years (see Table 2).

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of adolescents reaching the recommended physical activity levels, 2009/2010

	%	ADOLESCENTS		
		11 YEARS	13 YEARS	15 YEARS
WALLONIA AND BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION	MALES	30	20	15
	FEMALES	18	12	9
FLEMISH REGION	MALES	25	18	17
	FEMALES	15	11	10

Source: Currie et al., 2012 (9).

The WHO GHO 2010 estimates for Belgian adolescents (defined as aged 11–17 years in relation to WHO data) show that 17.5% meet the recommended WHO physical activity levels for health. The proportion of boys being physically active at the recommended level (22.5%) is almost twice as high as that for girls (12.5%) (7).

Policy response

Major policy documents adopted by government bodies

German-speaking community

A Sports Decree was passed by the Government of the German-speaking community in 2004 (11). This sets out the details of the dedicated national Sports for All policy and addresses Sports for All promotion. It covers the financing of amateur sports in the German-speaking community, among other issues, and addresses target groups such as sports associations, sports federations, community sports councils and various sports commissions. Another policy by the German-speaking community is entitled "The German-speaking community is healthy: I'm in!" (*Die DG wird fit, ich mache mit!*) – this is an activity programme for amateur sports for all citizens in the German-speaking community, including older adults, people with low physical activity levels or ethnic minorities (12). The Government of the German-speaking community also passed a Decree on Health Promotion in 2004, which generally highlights the importance of a healthy lifestyle (13).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The Parliament of the French-speaking community in Belgium passed the Political Declaration of the French-speaking community for 2014–2019. This is a dedicated Sports for All policy, specifically addressing Sports for All promotion, and the final version of the policy is expected to be approved at the end of 2015. The Government aims to use this policy to further the sporting culture within Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital Region, especially increasing access to physical activity within disabled and elderly populations. The overarching aims of this policy are to use government

strategy to encourage uptake of physical activity for all, which may include coupling sports, health, education and social integration (14). The Parliament of the French-speaking community has passed a Sporting Decree, targeting issues such as using physical activity as a route to physical, mental and social well-being; improving physical activity uptake outside of school; and stimulating regular uptake of physical activity (15). The Ministry of Education also issued a decree focusing on particular objectives for primary and secondary education and suggesting ways to achieve these aims, including collaborating with external partners to enhance sporting well-being and improving access to recreational sporting sites (16). Physical activity programmes have also been created using a network of collaborating bodies, including the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and bodies representing catholic schools, for example. These programmes emphasize the importance of strengthening motor skills and having a fair yet competitive spirit (17).

Flanders

The Flemish Action Plan on Sports for All was introduced by the Flemish Sports Agency (Blosa) in 2012. This serves as a dedicated Sports for All strategy and specifically addresses Sports for All promotion. Several core objectives make up this action plan: professional development and employment in the sporting profession; creating sports framework programmes to ensure greater cooperation between universities and colleges, making sports more accessible; and investing further in sports infrastructures (18). The Flemish Action Plan on Diet and Physical Activity (2009–2015), created by the Flemish Ministry for Welfare, Public Health and Family in 2008, focuses on healthy nutrition and physical activity. Activities focus on 6 priority areas for implementation: in the local community, in the environment of infants and young children, at school, in the workplace, incorporating a range of support for health care providers, and through information and communication (19). The Flemish School Sports Foundation (*Stichting Vlaamse Schoolsport* (SVS)) is finalizing a report on the organization of school sports for the years 2014–2017, with areas of focus including engaging students in both physical education (PE) and local extracurricular activities outside school, and encouraging students to participate in sports throughout the life-course.

A policy manual for integrating environmental considerations into local mobility policy plans was created by the Flemish Ministry for Environment, Nature and Culture in 2012. Encouraging physical activity by promoting active transport is one of the recommended strategies (20).

Box 1 details progress in the Flemish community on implementing the Sports Clubs for Health (SCforH) guidelines.

Box 1. SCforH guidelines

The Flemish community is involved in the Erasmus+ project entitled “Promoting National Implementation for Sports Club for Health Programmes in EU Member States” (21). The project is following up and monitoring the implementation of the SCforH guidelines and other SCforH activities across European Union (EU) Member States. Expected outcomes of the project are twofold, encompassing both scientific, evidence-based reports, and practical guidelines offering best practice examples. The SCforH project will run for 2.5 years and will be finalized by the end of June 2017. It boasts a comprehensive partner network involving both scientists in health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) and sports club research, as well as practitioners working with various sports clubs at the grassroots level in Flanders. The first results are expected during 2016.

Guidelines and goals

German-speaking community

The German-speaking community has a recommendation on physical activity for young people and adults. This is based on WHO's *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* (2010) (8) and the EU physical activity guidelines entitled *Recommended policy actions in support of health-enhancing physical activity* (2008) (22).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The French-speaking Region of Belgium has recommendations for adults as well as children and young adults. Some of these recommendations suggest 30 minutes of physical activity to be conducted regularly by the population, as part of the "0 – 5 – 30" plan by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (23)¹. There is emphasis on engaging in activities at a variety of levels, including moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA).

Flemish Region

The Flemish Region of Belgium has recommendations for children, young people, adults and older adults (24). The Flemish Government communicates its recommendations in terms of hours and minutes or number of steps per day. These recommendations are in line with those of the CDC and the ACSM.

Table 3 summarizes key physical activity initiatives in place in Belgium.

Table 3. Summary of key physical activity initiatives in Belgium

HEALTH	SPORTS	EDUCATION	TRANSPORT	MONITORING	GUIDELINES
Counselling on physical activity as part of primary health care services	Existence of a national Sports for All policy(ies)	Mandatory physical activity in primary and secondary schools	National or subnational schemes promoting active travel to school and/or workplace	Physical activity included in the national health monitoring system or separate routine survey	Existence of a national recommendation on physical activity
YES [*]	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

* French-speaking and Flemish regions = yes; German-speaking region = no.

Additional information on action in key areas

Physical activity among older adults

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The Community Policy Statement by the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in 2014 included provisions for improving access to physical activity for older adults as part of the commitment to the Sports for All policy (14). ÉnéoSport, a sports association covering the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, was established to promote and organize sports activities for the elderly (25).

¹ No (0) tobacco, 5 servings of fruit or vegetables and 30 minutes of physical activity, every day.

Flemish Region

The Flemish Action Plan on Policy for Older Adults created by the Flemish Ministry for Welfare, Public Health and Family was implemented in 2010. Under the health, sports and wellness section, the policy stresses the importance for independent ageing and maintaining as strong a physical health as possible, and engaging in physical activity being a good way to do this (26).

Furthermore, schemes such as “10 000 Steps” (27) and “Stand on your own two feet (BOEBS)” (28), created by the Flemish Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (*Vlaams Instituut voor Gezondheidspromotie en Ziektepreventie* (ViGeZ)), and “Sportelen (Move the way you are)” (*Beweeg zoals je bent*) (29) created by the Flemish Agency for Sports, are all schemes which promote physical activity in older adults. The 10 000 steps and BOEBS projects aim to prevent falls and limit sedentary behaviour, while “Doing fun sports, move as you are” and *Sportelen* are largely focused on making physical activity enjoyable and fun. While the overarching “Doing fun sports, move as you are” campaign was stopped in 2013, several of the activities within this campaign continue to be supported.

Physical activity in the workplace

Wallonia

The Wallonia Bicycle Plan (*Plan Wallonie Cyclable* (PWC)) was established in 2010 by the *Service Public de Wallonie* (SPW) and the Directorate-General for Mobility and Waterways (*Direction générale de la mobilité et des voies hydrauliques*). Through this plan, the Government proposes various measures, including the establishment of a comprehensive regional cycling plan, to increase the number of daily trips taken by bicycle (30). The PWC includes the strategic objective to promote cycling in the professional environment, with a focus on improving accessibility and facilities for cyclists wishing to travel to work by bicycle (31).

Brussels-Capital Region

The Corporate Travel Plan (*Plan de déplacements entreprise* (PDE)) was adopted in 2014 by Bruxelles Environnement, the Brussels-Capital Region authority responsible for the environment and energy. If a company employs more than 100 workers on the same site in the Brussels-Capital Region, it is obliged to prepare a corporate travel plan every 3 years. The primary objectives of this plan are to reduce the environmental impact of traffic generated by companies and to reduce congestion on roads; however, this scheme may also contribute to promoting active transport methods in Brussels (32).

To promote physical activity in the workplace, the Belgian External Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (IDEWE) has created several strategies to encourage companies to promote exercise, including suggestions such as a day of sports and physical exercise, and the provision of opportunities for fitness free of charge at work (such as an onsite fitness centre) (33).

Flemish Region

In Flanders, Bike to Work and Mobility Management are schemes used to promote active travel to work. Bike to Work was established in 2013 by the Cyclists' Union (*Fietersbond*). It provides suggestions for employers to promote active transport to work by bike, including: promotional materials; a guideline on how to install a pro-bike policy at work; and information on using professional education and networking systems to create mobility coordinators and foster a sense of competition to increase uptake rates, as well as use of ambassadors and/or a support/helpdesk (34). The

Mobility Management scheme was established in 2000 by the Flemish Foundation for Traffic Engineering (*Vlaamse Stichting Verkeerskunde* (VSV)). This provides a mobility management tool for employers, with information on tax matters, best practices (such a cycling and using carpools during commuter/business traffic hours) and a toolbox that helps companies and their employees to orient and develop their own transport plan (35).

In Flanders, 2 main schemes exist, which include sections on promotion of physical activity in the workplace: Healthy Work (*Gezond Werken*), and Jobfit, established in 2009 by the VIGeZ. These schemes involve using health policy and intervention strategies with instruments for active transport to and from work, along with ideas to create active workplaces and encourage active leisure time (36, 37).

Box 2 gives details of a Belgian pilot project for sports provision on prescription.

Box 2. Sports on prescription

A pilot project, *Sport sur ordonnance*, is being coordinated in the town of Frasnes-Lez-Anvaing by the national Ministry of Health to promote health professional counselling. Three fitness sessions are prescribed by local general practitioners, completely free of charge for 1 year. The aim is to increase engagement in physical activity, especially in populations in which uptake is low and may be leading to negative health consequences (38). The results of the pilot project are being evaluated for consideration for application on a larger scale.

Physical education in schools

Table 4 provides an overview of time allocated to physical education (PE) in Belgian schools and Box 3 gives details of schemes to encourage active breaks in schools.

Table 4. Overview of compulsory hours of physical education in Belgian schools

REGION	PRIMARY SCHOOLS	SECONDARY SCHOOLS
FLANDERS	2	2
WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION	2 LESSONS OF 50 MINUTES EACH (MINIMUM)	2 LESSONS OF 50 MINUTES EACH (MINIMUM)
GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY	2 HOURS PER WEEK	2 HOURS PER WEEK

Box 3. Promoting active breaks in schools

In Flanders, active school breaks are implemented through various schemes, such as “Sports moves your school” (*Sport beweegt je school*) (39) and Healthy School (*Gezonde School*) (40). “Sports moves your school” (*Sport beweegt je school*) is a tool which supports schools in achieving realistic goals for implementing high-quality, integrated motion and sports policy within classroom settings, promoting physical activity both within and between lessons. In addition, a scheme entitled Community School with Sports (*Brede School met Sportaanbod*) incorporates after-school HEPA promotion programmes, aiming to create community sports schools and increase the participation of children and young people in sports (41). These schemes are also used to promote active transport to school.

Physical activity among marginalized groups

German-speaking community

The German-speaking community of Belgium encourages communities to make sporting holiday camps free of charge for children and teenagers of families that receive welfare payments through an agreement between ministers and heads of local authorities.

Wallonia

The SPW has implemented a framework in Wallonia entitled “Infrasports” to support recreational sports among socially disadvantaged populations. This service coordinates “street sports” initiatives, encouraging local sporting enthusiasm and intergenerational relations by providing funding for sporting facilities. To date, over 150 municipalities are involved and 250 street sports facilities have been created (42).

Flemish Region

The Flemish Institute for Sports Policy and Recreation Management (*Vlaams Instituut voor Sportbeheer en Recreatiebeleid* (ISB)) created the Knowledge Centre for Neighbourhood Sports (*Expertisecentrum Buurtsport*) in 2014. This programme has created easily accessible sports, movement and health activities for vulnerable youth aged 12–18 years from disadvantaged backgrounds in 23 municipalities. One element of the programme is the facilitation by a local sports worker of a variety of activities, as well as the creation of a social network for these young people to engage in, encouraging further opportunities both within and outside of sports (43).

Financial support and incentives

Tax incentives are used in Belgium. The bicycle allowance is a mileage-based allowance given by the employer to employees who cycle to work. In some areas (primarily in public services) the bicycle allowance can also be given for work-related trips by bicycle. However, provision of this bicycle allowance is at the discretion of the employer. The bicycle allowance is tax free up to €0.22 per kilometre (44)².

Wallonia

Wallonia has started a scheme to subsidize communal sports facilities, entitled *Infrastructures sportives communales*. The scheme has 2 main parts: the first is a 50% grant to cover small communal sports facilities' projects requiring

² Value for the 2015 tax declaration (2014 income).

less than €159 000 in terms of start-up costs, and the second is a 60% grant to cover larger projects, for which the investment amount exceeds €159 000 (45).

Flemish Region

Financial incentives are also used in Flanders. Cyclists are reimbursed per kilometre cycled, up to a rate of €0.21/km for active travel to and from work. Many of the Flemish municipalities have also increased parking fees for cars, and several of them provide discounts for residents for renting a bicycle through the Blue Bike bicycle-sharing system, whereby the standard rate reaches €3 per day, per bike (46).

Box 4 discusses Belgium's use of media to raise awareness of physical activity for health.

Box 4. Cardiac health in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

This is a campaign for PE and public awareness, based in the French-speaking community of Belgium. It was created in 2011 and focuses on using physical activity as a means to prevent cardiovascular disease. The objective of this awareness campaign is to motivate people to change their behaviours, adopting healthier behaviours and attitudes that are beneficial to their health. The advertising is not funded by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation but free slots on French radio and TV channels are used, in accordance with Belgian legislation (47).

Successful approaches

The Bicycle and Walking Days (Rad- & Wandertag) initiative in the German-speaking community

Since 2005 this initiative involves the organization and implementation at local levels of physical activity, with several partners – specifically, encouraging walking and cycling for the entire population. The sports department of the Ministry of the German-speaking community conducted this 8-month campaign on physical activity for children and adolescents in 2015 (from March to November). The target groups are families, including parents of children of all ages. The campaign comprised advertisements in selected magazines and newspapers, materials for sports clubs, as well as banner advertisements on the internet and a dedicated website. It also included cooperation with local partners. The goals of this community activity are to raise awareness and inform the citizens of the German-speaking Region of Belgium about the positive aspects of physical activity, as well as offering regular and accessible opportunities to walk or cycle in the region (48).

My Club, My School (Mon Club, Mon Ecole) initiative in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Since 2011 the My Club, My School scheme has been facilitating the linkage between schools and sports clubs. Through this initiative the Administration for Physical Education and Sports (*Administration de l'Education Physique et des Sports* (ADEPS)) of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation encourages sports clubs to promote the discovery of their different sports modalities among students, to stimulate new passions, and (who knows?) to welcome new talents. Since the very beginning, this initiative has aimed to transform school sports infrastructures so that physical activities can also be offered outside school periods (e.g. during weekend/holidays or after school). The targeted population groups are children and adolescents aged 8–18 years, through all sports clubs affiliated to a federation and all schools in the network. The idea is to create a privileged relationship between the partners and to allow students to discover sports that interest them in a fun and educational way, outside of school PE, thus increasing youth participation in sports. As part of the initiative, grants are provided to schools (49).

Sports after School (Sport Na School (SNS)) project in Flanders

Since 2014, 32 PE teachers throughout Flanders are granted half-hour exemption from their teaching assignment in order to develop, together with the municipal sports services and local sports providers, sports provision for young people aged between 12 and 18 years. This project is mostly aimed at young people who are not yet members of any sports club and who do not want to commit themselves to a sporting activity on a regular basis. For a fixed (low) amount, the SNS pass allows these young people to practise organized sports immediately after school, free of obligation, throughout the school year. This initiative is being rolled out across Flanders during 2015. Practical coordination is ensured at the level of each province, while central management and general promotion of the initiative are organized at Flemish level, by means of a partnership between Bloso and the SVS. The fitness activities and new, fashionable sports that are offered appeal to young people, and experience so far has shown that (only) 34% of the users of the scheme are already members of a sports club. Girls in particular (60%) appear to appreciate this approach to sports(50).

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