



# How's Life? 2013

MEASURING WELL-BEING

## Country Snapshot Belgium



OECD  
**Better Life**  
Initiative

For more information and questions:

[www.oecd.org/howslife](http://www.oecd.org/howslife)

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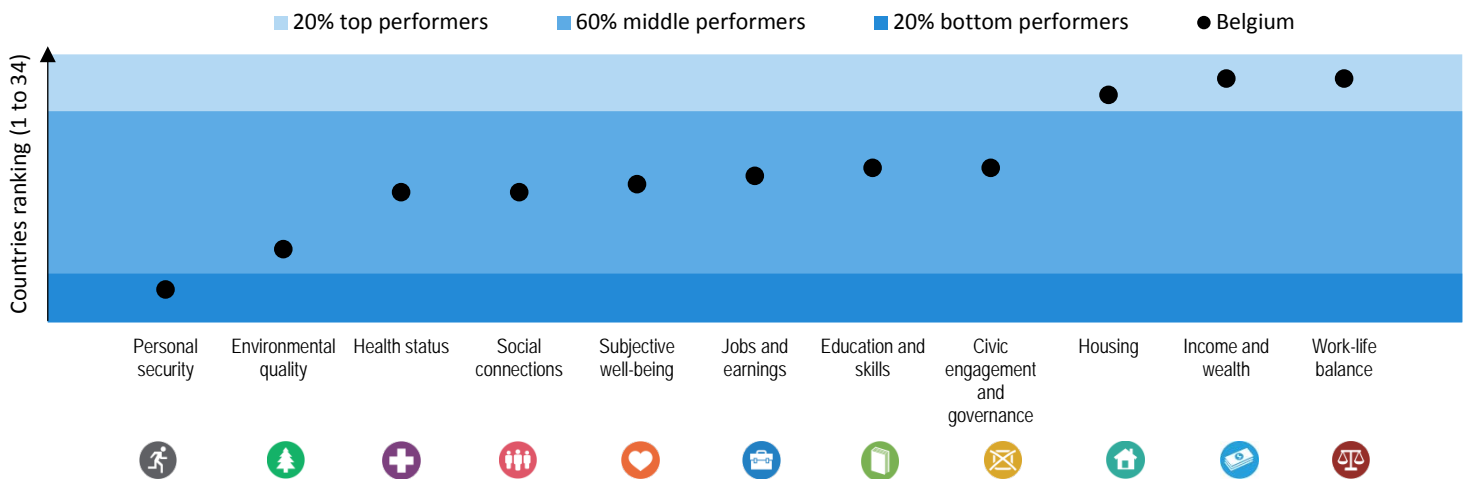
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## HOW'S LIFE IN BELGIUM IN 2013?

Compared with other OECD countries, **Belgium** performs well in many of the 11 dimensions that the OECD considers as essential to a good life (income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing conditions; health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security and subjective well-being – See back page for more details). **Belgium** ranks above the OECD average in the dimensions of work-life balance, income and wealth, housing, civic engagement, education and skills, jobs and earnings, subjective well-being, social connections and health status, but below average in environmental quality and personal security.

**Figure 1 - How does Belgium compare?**  
Belgium's well-being compared with other OECD countries, 2013



## WELL-BEING DURING THE CRISIS

Against this relatively good performance, *How's Life?* shows that the **average Belgian household** has been modestly affected by the crisis, with impacts that are particularly visible when looking at household income, life satisfaction and civic engagement.

Since the start of the crisis, real **household disposable income** remained stable in Belgium from 2007 to 2011 while in the Euro area, income dropped by 2% over the same period, with the largest decline occurring in 2011. However, market income inequality (before taxes and transfers) increased by 1% between 2007 and 2010, in line with the OECD average of 1.2%.

In OECD countries severely hit by the crisis, the largest impact of the crisis on people's well-being have come through lower employment and deteriorating labour market conditions. In contrast to this general trend, the **employment rate** and the long-term unemployment rate remained stable in **Belgium** between 2007 and 2012.

The poor employment situation had a major impact on **life satisfaction** in countries most affected by the crisis. However, in Belgium, the percentage of people declaring being very satisfied with their lives fell from 78% to 70% from 2007 to 2012 despite sustained employment conditions.

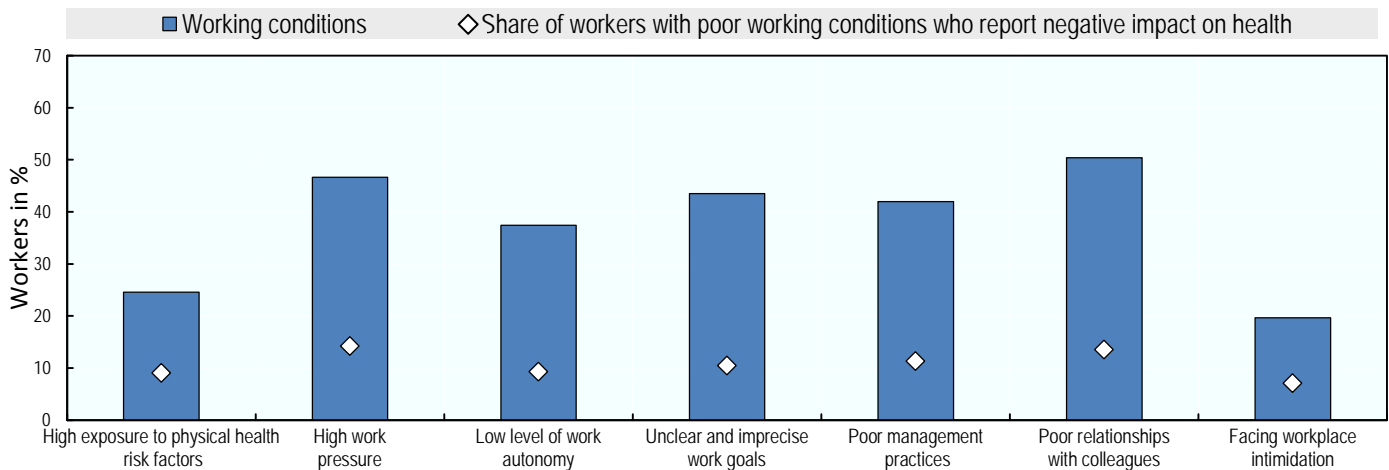
People's **trust in institutions** and in the way democracy works has also declined during the crisis. The percentage of **Belgian** people reporting that they trust the government decreased from 60% to 44% between 2007 and 2012.

Over the same period, however, **new forms of solidarity and engagement** have emerged in the countries the most impacted by the crisis. However, this trend is less clear cut in Belgium. The percentage of people reporting having helped someone increased by 1 percentage point while the share of people reporting having volunteered their time decreased by 4 percentage points between 2007 and 2012.

## WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE

People spend most of their daily life at work and work for a significant part of their life. Hence, the kind of jobs they have matters a great deal for their well-being. Job quality covers many different aspects, from work content to control over decisions, to interactions with colleagues, support from managers, as well as more traditional aspects such as earnings and job security. In 2010, **21% of Belgian workers reported being in a poor working environment**, a share slightly above the average in European countries. Low job quality impairs the physical and mental health of workers.

Figure 2 - Working conditions and impact on Belgian workers' health , 2010



Source: OECD calculations on the European Working Conditions Survey

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WELL-BEING

Gender gaps in well-being, typically in favour of men, have declined in most OECD countries including in **Belgium**. Compared to men, **Belgian women** are less likely to have a paid job or be elected in Parliament, and more likely to spend many hours performing household tasks or to feel insecure when walking alone at night.

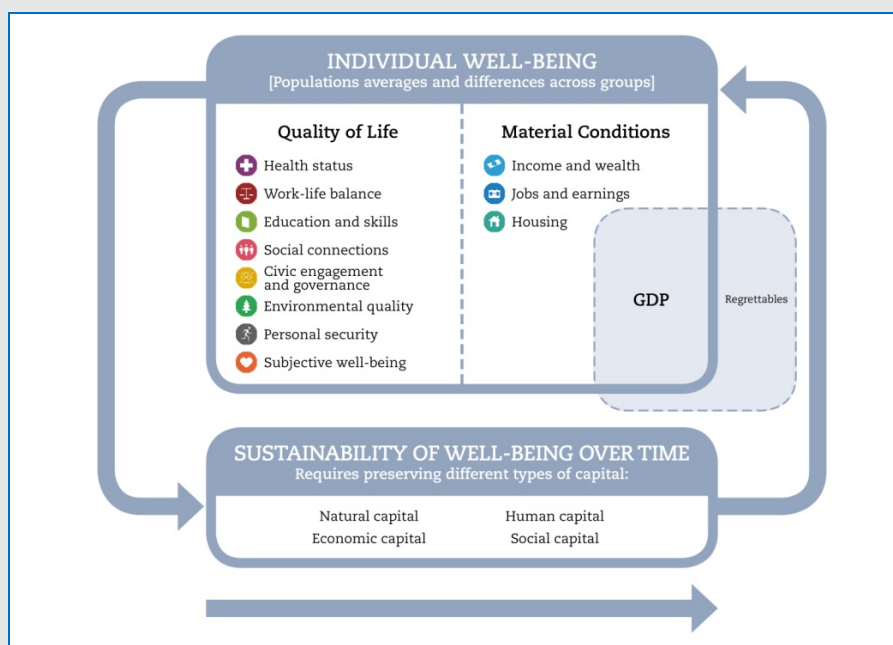
	HOW DO MEN AND WOMEN PERFORM IN BELGIUM?		AND IN THE OECD?	
	♀	♂	♀	♂
<b>Women and men throughout their lifetime</b>				
<b>Health status</b>				
Life expectancy at birth (years)	83	78	83	77
Share of people in good/very good health conditions	74%	80%	67%	72%
<b>Education and skills</b>				
Tertiary degrees awarded (all fields)	55%	45%	58%	42%
<b>Women and men in paid and unpaid work</b>				
<b>Jobs and earnings</b>				
Employment rates (tertiary educated individuals)	82%	87%	79%	88%
Wage gap between men and women	-	9%	-	+16%
Share of poor single-adult households	44%	31%	37%	30%
<b>Work-Life balance</b>				
Number of hours dedicated to household tasks (per week)	29	23	32	21
<b>Women and men in society</b>				
<b>Civic Engagement and governance</b>				
Share of seats in national parliament	38%	62%	27%	73%
<b>Personal security</b>				
Share of people feeling safe when walking alone at night	58%	75%	61%	79%
<b>Subjective well-being</b>				
Levels of life satisfaction on a 0 to 10 scale	7	6.8	6.7	6.6

## HOW TO MEASURE BETTER LIVES?

What matters most when it comes to people's well-being? The OECD *Better Life Initiative* assesses individual and societal progress by looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people. The OECD conceptual framework for defining and measuring well-being distinguishes between current and future well-being. Current well-being is measured in terms of outcomes and their distribution across the population achieved in the two broad domains: material living conditions (i.e. income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing conditions) and quality of life (i.e. health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security; and subjective well-being).

## SUSTAINING WELL-BEING OVER-TIME

How can we be sure that steps taken to improve well-being today do not undermine the well-being of people in the future? To assess the sustainability of well-being over time, the OECD focuses on four different types of resources (or "capitals") that can be measured today, and that matter for the well-being of future generations: economic, natural, human and social capital.



## THE BETTER LIFE INDEX

What matters to you in life? Create and share your *Better Life Index*. The *Better Life Index* is an **interactive tool** that uses the information from *How's Life?* and allows you to measure and compare well-being across countries according to **your own priorities**. Go to [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org)



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November 2013

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