

The Evolution of the Social Situation and Social Protection in Belgium: **Increasing divergences**

Monitoring the social situation in Belgium and the progress towards the social objectives and the priorities of the National Reform Programme



June 2016

The evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium 2016 : Increasing divergences

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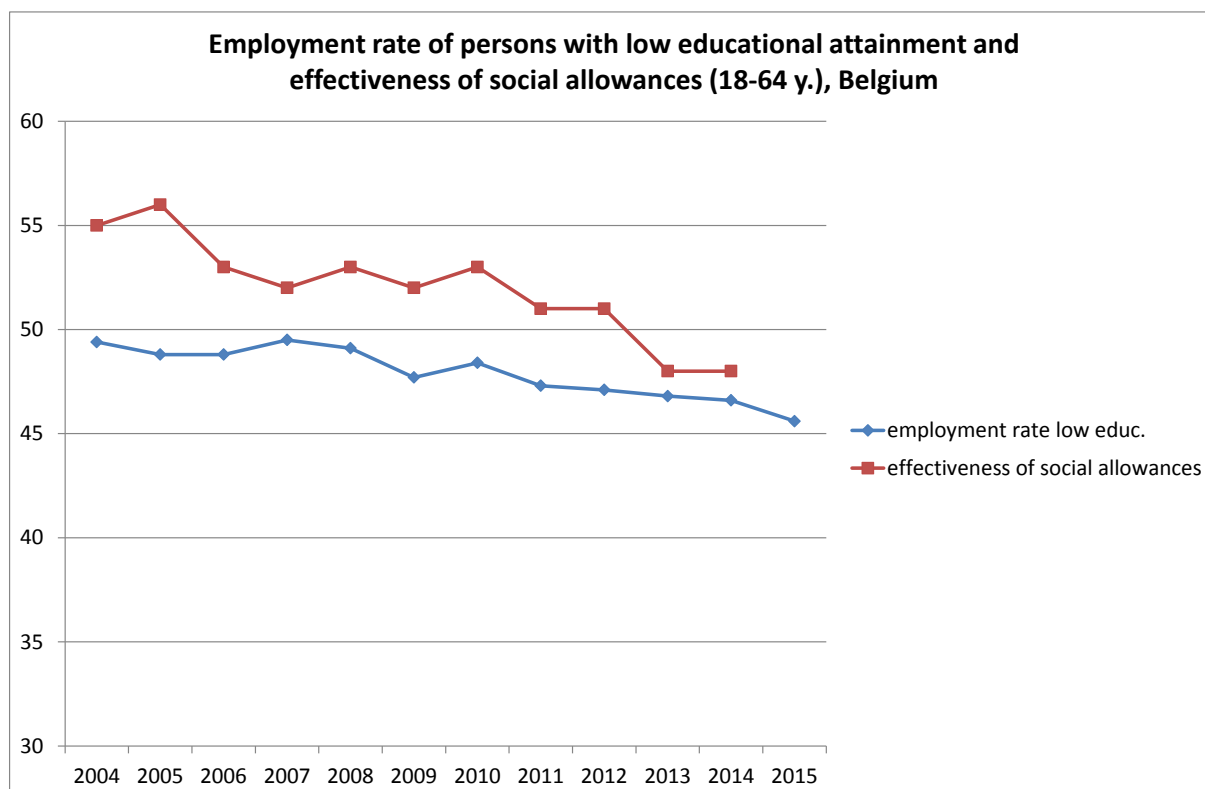
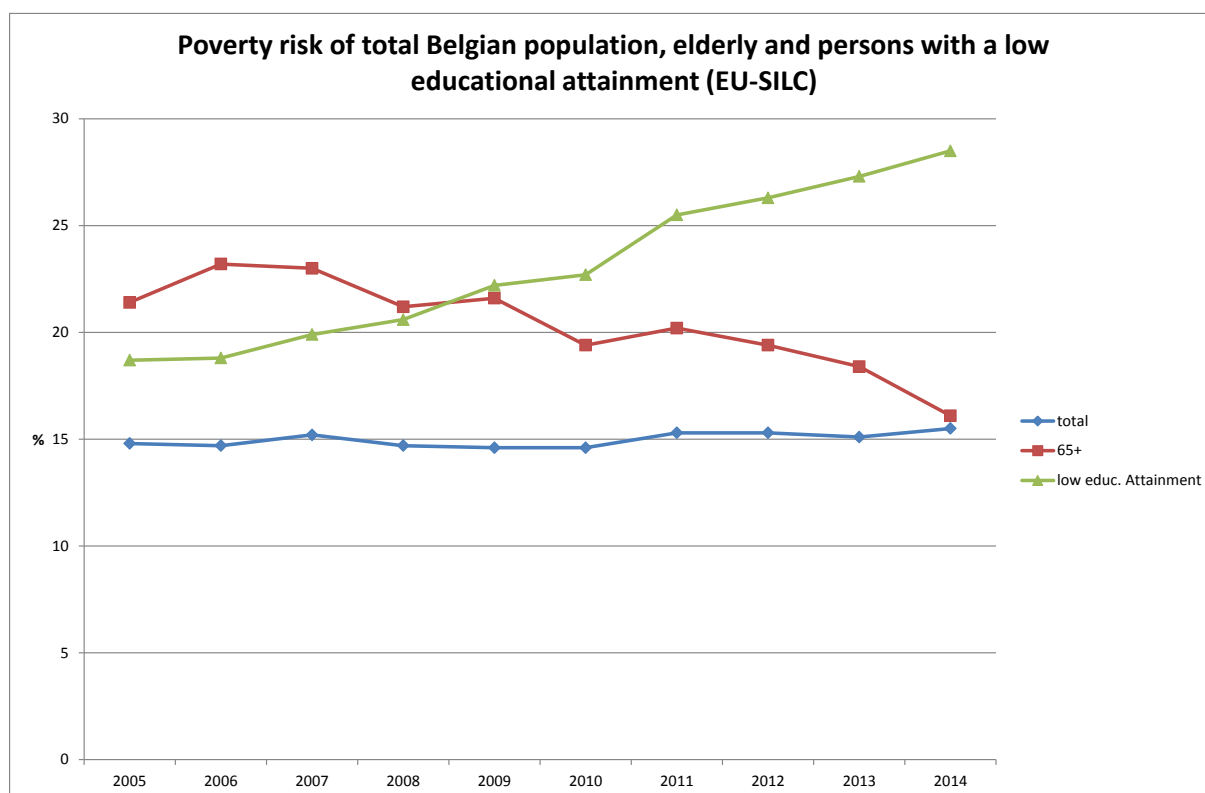
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Key Messages of the analysis of the EU social indicators

- This study builds on the earlier analysis showing that, below stable social indicators for the population at large, there are diverging trends for different population categories. The poverty risk for elderly has decreased , while the poverty risk for the low skilled at working age has sharply increased.
- The decrease of the poverty risk has been stronger for elderly woman than for elderly man. The decrease can be attributed to an improvement of the lowest pensions. The average level of pensions and income of elderly relative to younger age cohorts has remained stable.
- The increase in the poverty risk among the working age population is situated exclusively among weaker social categories: the low skilled, quasi-jobless households, tenants.
- The employment rate of the low skilled has further decreased according to the latest LFS annual figures. This gradual decrease over the last years is now becoming substantial and has occurred simultaneously with a decreasing effectiveness of social transfers for the working age population. This finding points to deeply structural causes of decreasing labour market access for the low-skilled labour . A decreased earnings capacity, polarization of (un)employment over households and decreased adequacy of social protection for the non-elderly population are the main causes for the increased poverty risk for the low-skilled population.
- There is an increase in unmet need for both medical and dental care in the lowest income quintile over the last 3 years, pointing to possible increasing health accessibility issues. Although some caution is needed due to relatively low sample sizes, this needs to be monitored closely.
- Child poverty has remained relatively stable, but consistently above the overall population poverty rate. On other dimensions of child well-being, Belgium scores moderately or unfavourably according to OECD and UNICEF studies.
- In general, the analysis of the EU social indicators jointly with other recent studies for Belgium seem to point to increasing or above EU-average inequalities on a number of domains: poverty, employment, health care accessibility, education, child health and well-being, the position of people with a migrant background, together with steep socio-spatial cleavages between regions and between city neighbourhoods. These findings justify concern about the social situation and social cohesion, despite the apparent overall stability in the social indicators and the positive evolution among the elderly.



Note : effectiveness of social allowances: reduction of pre-transfer poverty due to social allowances in % of pre-transfer poverty

Introduction

This report summarizes the evolution of the social situation, in view of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy¹. It builds on the autumn update on the evolution of poverty risks on the basis of EU-SILC 2014 data². While no new EU-SILC 2015 data were available yet, this report extends the analysis, adds findings based on the recent labour force survey 2015 data and complements the analysis of the EU social indicators with findings from other recent studies. The main aim of this study is to support and contextualize the monitoring of the Europe 2020 target on the reduction of poverty and social inclusion in the context of the National Reform Programme.

The social indicators are mainly based on data derived from surveys of a population sample. The EU-SILC survey is one of the main data sources for all the indicators on income, poverty and deprivation. When interpreting these data, a statistical error rate should be taken into account. This means that when the value of an indicator is interpreted for a specific moment in time, an error rate should be considered and it should also be considered that the variations in time and space that are found in the sample cannot always be extrapolated to the entire population. For indicators calculated on the basis of smaller subpopulations, the error rate is higher.

Some population groups are not included in the sampling frame. Hence, the situation of these groups is not reflected in the indicators. These groups mainly include persons in collective households, homeless people and people who do not have a valid residence permit. In the SILC-CUT survey (Schockaert et al., 2012), the combined size of these groups is estimated at 2% to 3% of the population. Some of these groups live in extreme poverty. The authors therefore estimate that the EU-SILC poverty rate (AROP) may understate the true rate by 0.6 pp. to 1.7pp.³

The analysis is based on the indicators that are available on the Eurostat website and on complementary national data, such as the detailed indicators and the breakdowns on the basis of the EU-SILC and the Labour Force Survey, made available by the Directorate General Statistics of the Federal Public Service Economy.

1 The monitoring of the social situation in the context of the aforementioned European reports is coordinated by the Federal Public Service (FPS) Social Security, with the support of the NRP/NSR Social Indicator working group, which consists of experts in the field of social indicators from the federal and regional administrations, universities, research centres and stakeholder organisations (cf. annex 4 for an overview of the persons who contributed to this note). However, the responsibility for the content of this note lies with the FPS Social Security. This note further builds on preparatory work of OSE and HIV. For contact : rudi.vandam@minsoc.fed.be or sebastien.bastaits@minsoc.fed.be

2 Federal Public Service Social Security (2015), Evolution de la situation sociale en Belgique. Actualisation sur base des données de l'enquête EU-SILC 2014, Octobre 2015

3 Schockaert, I., Morissens, A., Cincinnato, S., Nicaise, I., *Armoede tussen de plooiën. Aanvullingen en correcties op de EU-SILC voor verborgen groepen armen*, Leuven: HIVA, 2012, 225p

1 | The Economic and European context

1.1 Economic context

The 2015 analysis⁴ indicated that, for the period 2007-2012, the economic impact of the crisis in Belgium had been less than on average in the EU, but also that from 2014 on, economic evolution is projected to be somewhat below EU28 figures. This picture is confirmed by the Spring 2016 forecasts from the European Commission. (see table 1.1). For 2015 and 2016 GDP growth rate is expected to remain 0,6% below EU28 level, while for 2017 this would be 0,3%. Budget deficits are expected to be larger than EU averages from 2014 to 2017 and inflation rate is expected to be higher than EU28 figures.

Table 1.1 : Evolution of some economic indicators and forecasts 2014- 2016

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
GDP growth rate											
BE	3.4	0.7	-2.3	2.7	1.8	0.2	0.0	1.3	1,4	1,2	1,6
EU28	3.1	0.5	-4.4	2.1	1.8	-0.5	0.2	1.4	2.0	1,8	1.9
Budget balance											
BE	0.1	-1.1	-5.4	-4.0	-4.1	-4.1	-2.9	-3,1	-2,6	-2,8	-2,3
EU28	-0.9	-2.5	-6.7	-6.4	-4.5	-4.3	-3.3	-3,0	-2,4	-2,1	-1,8
Gross debt (% of GDP)											
BE	86.9	92.4	99.5	99.6	102.2	104.1	105.1	106,7	106	106,4	105,6
EU28	57.8	61.0	73.0	78.4	81.0	85.2	87.2	88,6	87,2	86,9	85,7
Inflation rate (yearly change percentage)											
BE	1.8	4.5	0.0	2.3	3.4	2.6	1.2	0,5	0,6	1,7	1,6
EU28	2.4	3.7	1.0	2.1	3.1	2.6	1.5	0,6	0,0	0,3	1,5

Source: 2007-2014 EUROSTAT; 2015-2017 forecasts : European Economic Forecast Spring 2016, European Commission

⁴ <http://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/analyse-situation-et-protection-sociale-belgique-2015-fr.pdf>

1.2 Social developments

Different tools have been developed during the previous years to monitor the social situation in the EU :

- a “*social scoreboard*” was developed by the European commission with the primary objective of identifying major employment and social problems at an early stage. The social scoreboard is based on five employment and social indicators : the unemployment rate, the Youth unemployment rate together with the NEETs rate, the change in the gross household disposable income, the at-risk-of-poverty rate of the working age population and the S80/S20 ratio. The social scoreboard is reported annually in the “*Joint Employment Report*” (JER) that is included in the “semester package” with the “Annual Growth Survey” and the “Alert Mechanisme Report”.
- a ‘Social Protection Performance Monitor’ (SPPM) was developed by the Social Protection Committee to complete the monitoring of the social situation in Europe. This tool consists of three elements: (1) a graph of the evolution towards the EU headline target of the Eu Strategy 2020 on poverty or social exclusion (2) a dashboard of key social indicators covering the domains 'inclusion', 'pensions' and 'health and long-term care' that should lead to identifying 'key social trends', (3) country profiles. The SPPM constitutes the backbone of the annual report of the SPC on the social situation in the EU.

The Joint Employment Report (JER), accompanying the 2016 Annual Growth Survey, concludes that the social situation in the EU slowly improves, but that signs of divergence among and within Member States persist and are cause for concern. As a consequence of this divergence, progress against the Europe 2020 headline target has been mixed (JER 2016).

This deterioration of the social situation in many member states is illustrated in more detail by the SPPM. For the EU as a whole the following main negative trends, or “trends to watch” (i.e. where around a third or more of all Member States show a significant deterioration in the given indicator), are identified **for the most recent period 2013-2014** (see [Figure 1.1.](#)):

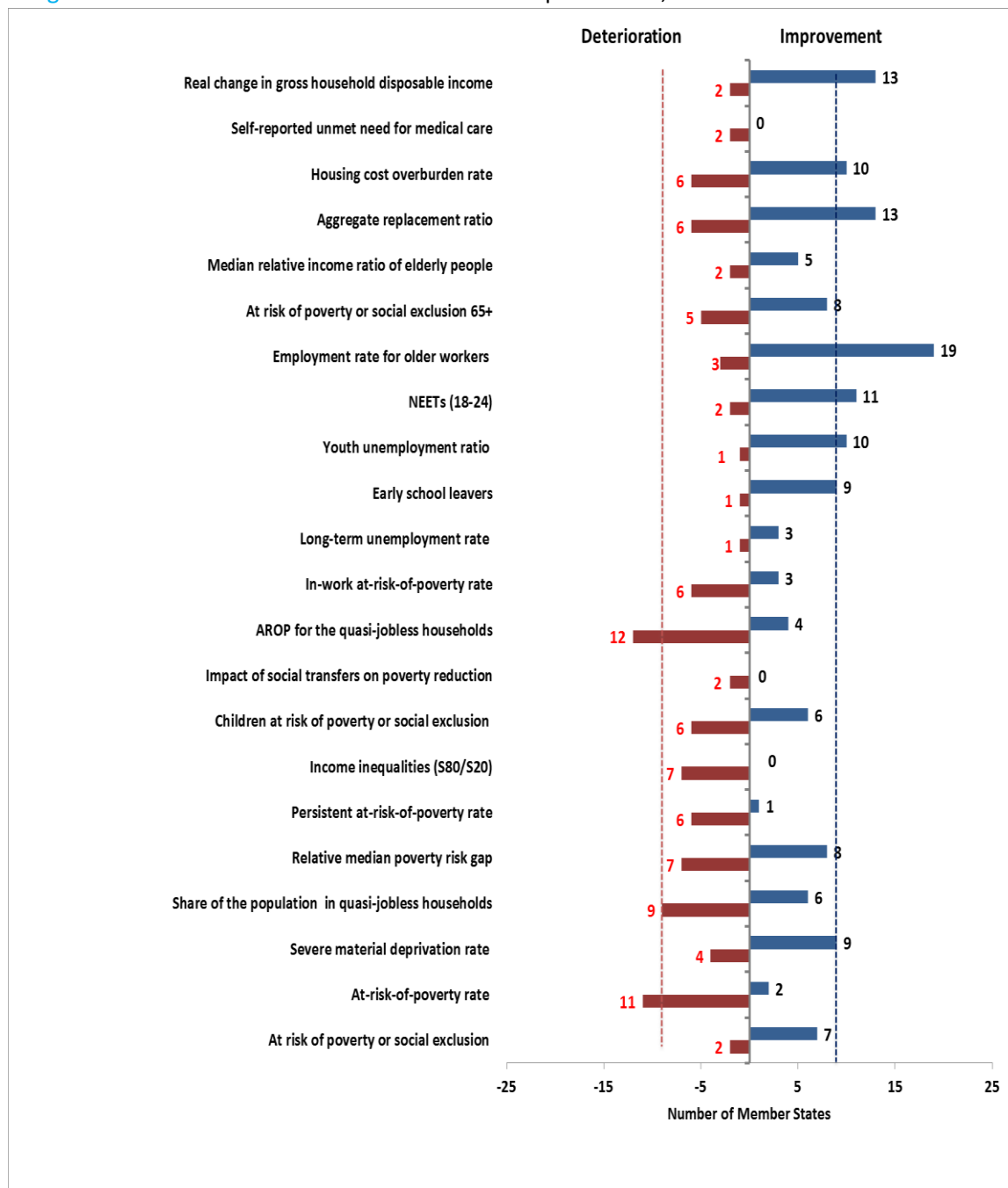
- A general continued deterioration in the (relative) poverty situation, with rises in the poverty risk for the population as a whole in many Member States (11 MS), and in the share of working poor (6 MS) and the poverty gap in several countries (7 MS)
- increases in the share of the population living in (quasi-)jobless households (registered in 9 MS), together with rises in the at-risk-of-poverty rates for people residing in such households (registered in 12 MS). The latter points to a reduction in the adequacy of social benefits in many countries.

In contrast, the SPPM observes following positive evolutions between EU-SILC 2013-2014 :

- rises in **real gross household disposable income** (in 13 MS) along with reductions in the **housing cost overburden rate** in 10 MS and in the **severe material deprivation rate** (in 9 MS). This reflects that household incomes and financial conditions of EU households have improved in the most recent period, benefitting from stronger economic activity and improved labour markets.

- finally, visible signs of **reductions in youth exclusion**, with falls in the NEET rate (in 11 MS) and the youth unemployment ratio (in 10 MS) , reflecting improvements in the labour market and further reductions in the rate of **early school leavers** (in 9 MS).
- continued improvements in the **labour market participation of older workers** (as evidenced by increases in the employment rate for 55-64 year olds in 19 MS)

Figure 1.1. Social trends to watch and areas of improvement, 2013-2014



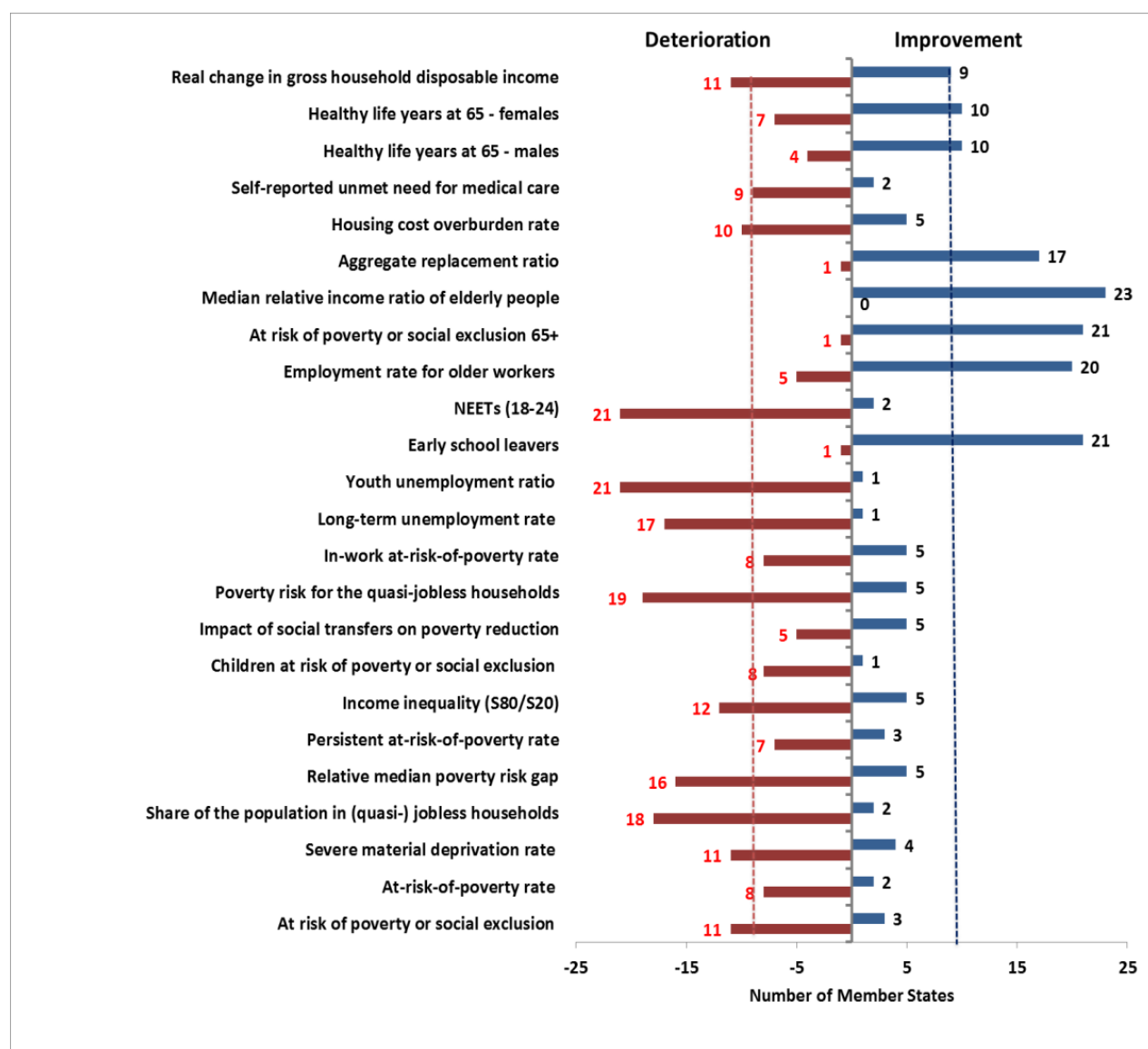
Source: Social Protection Committee

Looking at the longer-term developments since 2008 and the beginning of the Europe 2020 strategy, for most social areas the situation has worsened considerably as a result of the economic crisis,

despite signs of recent improvement (Figure 1.2.). The areas with the most substantial deterioration compared to 2008 are:

- **Increased risk of poverty or social exclusion** (in 11 MS), reflecting mainly rises in the **share of the population living in (quasi-)jobless households** (in 18 MS) and **falls in living standards** (as evidenced by rises in **severe material deprivation** in 11 MS, against a background of declines in **real gross household disposable income** in 11 MS)
- **increased income inequality** (in 12 MS) and a rise in the **depth of poverty** (with the poverty gap up in 16 MS)
- still strong signs of **youth exclusion** (with significant increases in the NEET rate and the youth unemployment ratio in around three-quarters of MS)
- **increased (long-term) exclusion from the labour market** in general (with rises in the long-term unemployment rate and in the share of the population in (quasi-) jobless households in around two-thirds of MS), together with rises in the **poverty risk for people living in (quasi-) jobless households** in 19 MS
- increases in the share of **children at risk of poverty or social exclusion** (with 8 MS registering increases with reference to 2008)
- rises in the **housing cost overburden rate for households** (in 10 MS)
- increases in **self-reported unmet need for medical care** (9 MS)

Figure 1.2. Social trends to watch and areas of improvement, 2008-2014



Source: Social Protection Committee

2 | The Europe 2020 poverty or social exclusion target

The EU-target on the reduction of poverty or social exclusion is based on the combination of three indicators: the number of persons that is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold⁵ or in a situation of severe material deprivation⁶ or in a situation of very low work intensity⁷. Belgium set its Europe2020 target on the same basis as the EU-wide target. It aims at reducing the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 380.000 compared to the situation at the start of the strategy (2.194.000 persons based on EU-SILC 2008).

After a slight increase for 3 consecutive years (period 2009-2012), the evolution of the combined indicator 'poverty or social exclusion' (AROPE), based on the EU-SILC survey, showed a slight decrease in 2013 (figure 2.1) but sets out again slightly upward in 2014. Based on the assessment in the Social Protection Performance Monitor⁸, the 2008-2013 change is not statistically significant. Thus, the real trend remains off-track compared with the anticipated decrease. On the basis of EU-SILC 2014 (about halfway the decade), the number of persons living in situation of poverty or social exclusion is estimated at 2,339,000 compared to 2,194,000 on the basis of EU-SILC 2008: a decrease by 525,000 persons is therefore necessary in the next four years to reach the target by 2020 (EU-SILC 2018). The at-risk of poverty rate or social exclusion indicator remains stable, indicating that it becomes unlikely that the EU-target on the reduction of the number of persons being in such a situation will be met.

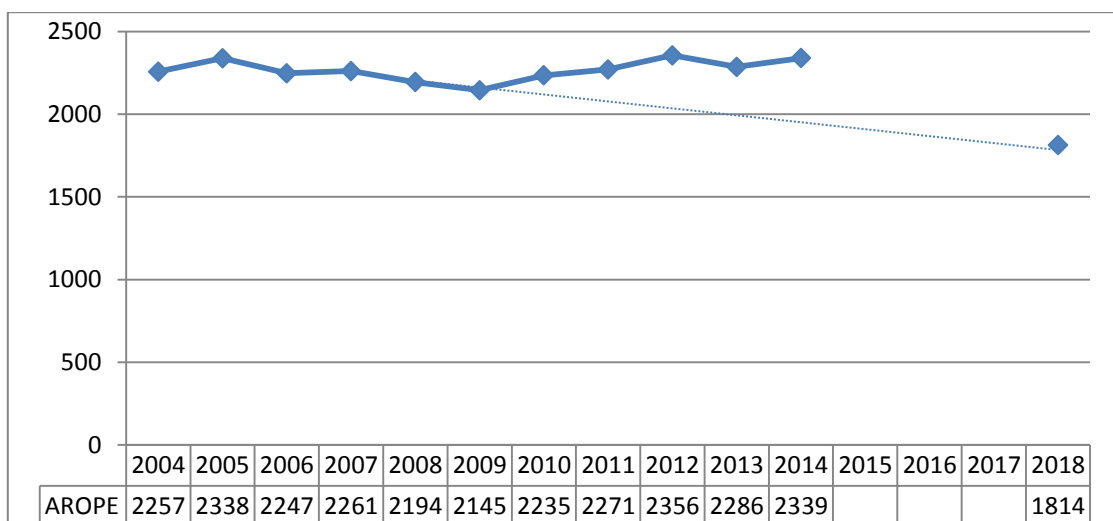
5 60% of the median disposable income

6 A person is considered to be in a situation of severe material deprivation if this person lives in a household that is confronted with at least 4 out of 9 problems: being confronted with arrears, not being able to afford 1 week annual holiday away from home, not being able to afford a meal with meat/fish/chicken every other day, not being able to make an unexpected expense with a value equal to the poverty threshold (1000 € in 2011), not being able to heat the dwelling adequately, not being able to afford a washing machine, a tv, a telephone, a car.

7 A person is living in a household with a very low work intensity if the actual number of months worked in the household is less than 20% of the possible maximum number of months that could be worked by all adult household members (excluding students).

8 Social Protection Committee: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=758>

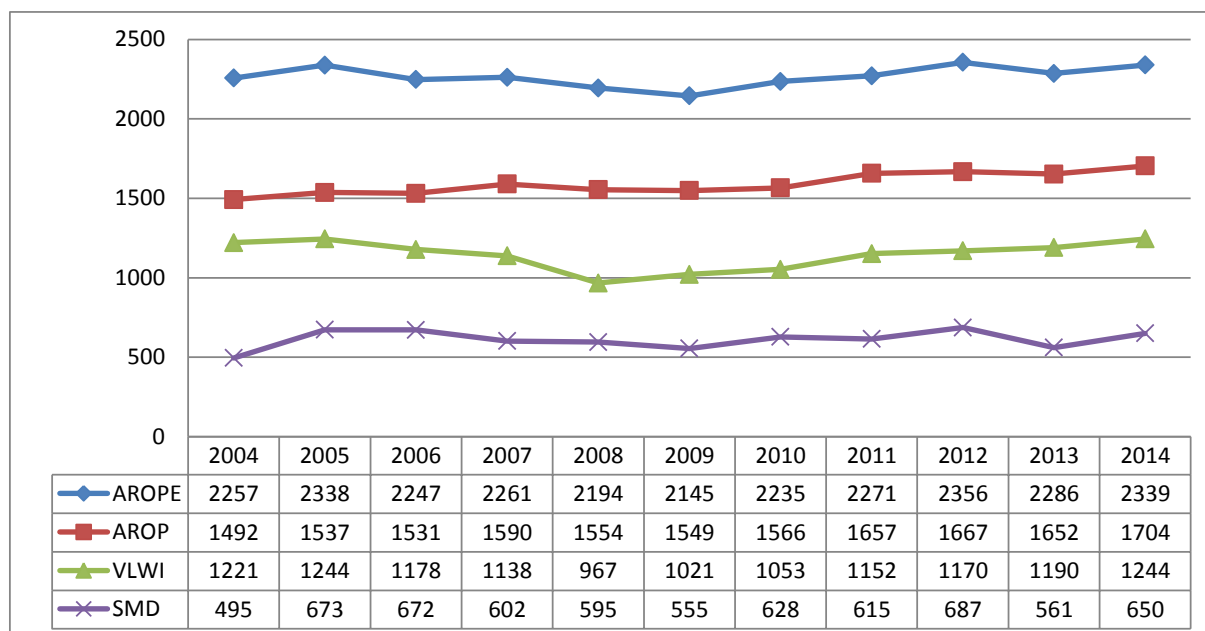
Figure 2.1. Evolution of poverty or social exclusion in relation to the national Europe2020 target, Belgium (absolute number x1000)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Looking at the three different sub-indicators (figure 2.2), it can be observed that after a decrease during the period 2005-2008, the number of people in a very low work intensity household increased gradually during the subsequent crisis period 2008-2011 and continued to rise since then. At-risk of poverty (AROP) shows slight increases and material deprivation (SMD) indicators remains stable.

Figure 2.2. At-risk of poverty or social exclusion, at-risk-of poverty, severe material deprivation and very low work intensity, Belgium (absolute number x1000)

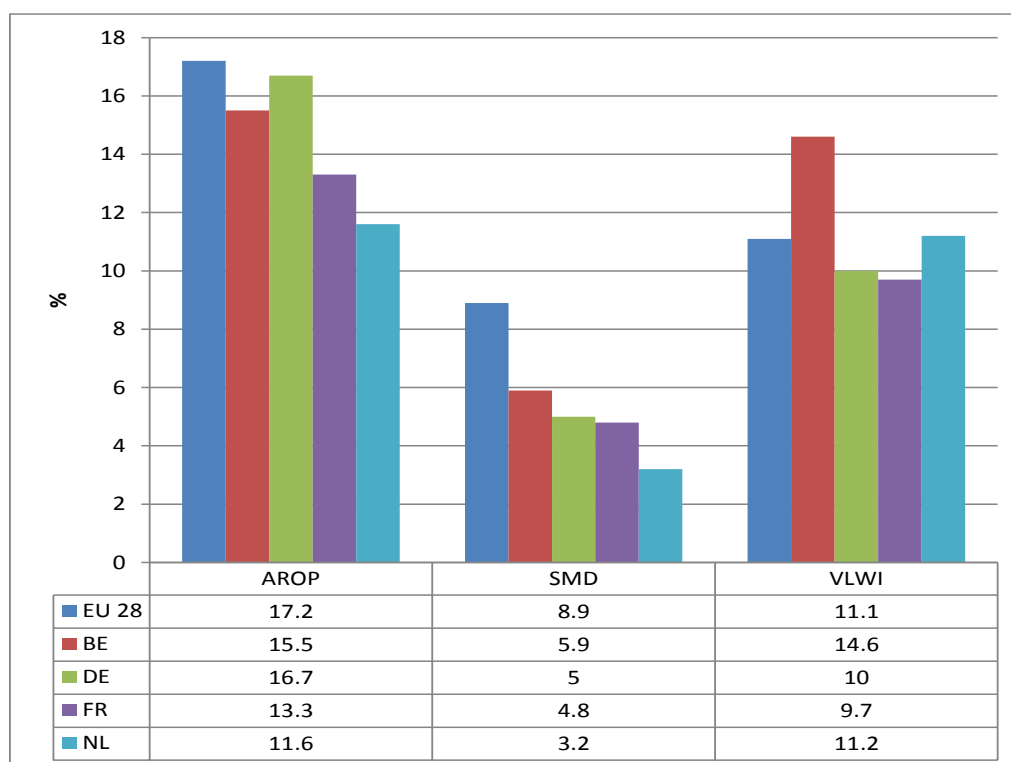


Note: AROPE: at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion; AROP: at-risk-of-poverty; SMD: severe material deprivation; VLWI: very low work intensity

Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

At the [figure 2.3](#), it can be observed that Belgium performs significantly better on the severe material deprivation indicator than the EU-average. In 2014⁹ the level is slightly higher than in the neighboring countries though. The at-risk-of poverty indicator is somewhat below the EU28-average. The situation is different for the very low work intensity indicator with a significant higher Belgian proportion compared to the European average.

Figure 2.3. Target indicators in Belgium, neighboring countries and EU28, 2014



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

⁹ It is to be noted that Eurostat has just communicate (in april) new provisional figures for 2015 for this SMD indicator. These newest data's seems to show an amelioration for the EU28 in general (8,2% vs 8,9% in 2014). For Belgium, the decrease is lower (5,8% vs 5,9% in 2014) with a divergent trends under age classes (see figure 3.1.3).

3 | Poverty and social exclusion : overall stability... result of divergent evolutions

The most recent trends show an overall stability for the total population in terms of the evolution of some key social indicators. However, the observable stability for the population as a whole masks significant divergences between its different subgroups. This paragraph first illustrates this overall stability and then points to the differing evolutions in various population groups.

3.1 Overall stability...

3.1.1 The evolution of the overall social situation in Belgium : Labour market participation and income distribution

Although poverty and social exclusion are key aspects of the social situation, the living standards of large parts of the population can be or are affected by both the crisis and structural labour market and demographic evolutions. Therefore, before analysing more in depth the evolution of poverty, some indicators on the overall social situation are presented.

a) Labour market participation

As for most people, the most important pathway for an adequate living standard is work, employment is of key importance for the social situation. The labour market in Belgium is stable on population level. The employment rate is below the European average (67.2 % against 70.0 % for the EU-28) and remained nearly constant ([table 3.1.](#)). The rate is about 0,5-0,8 pp. below its pre-crisis level, with almost no changes in the most recent years. The EU employment rate increased between 2013 and 2015. The unemployment rate increased in Belgium, but remains significantly beneath the EU-level. Forecasts indicate a slight decrease in the unemployment rate for Belgium in 2016 (0,3 pp.) and a somewhat larger decrease in 2017 (0,5 pp). This decrease would be more or less in line with the decrease in the unemployment rate at EU28 level.

Table 3.1. Employment rate and unemployment rate

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Employment rate (20-64)											
BE	67.7	68.0	67.1	67.6	67.3	67.2	67.2	67.3	67.2		
EU28	69.8	70.3	69.0	68.6	68.6	68.4	68.4	69.2	70.0		
Unemployment rate											
BE	7.5	7.0	7.9	8.3	7.2	7.6	8.4	8.5	8.5	8.2	7.7
EU28	7.2	7.0	8.9	9.6	9.6	10.5	10.8	10.2	9.4	8.9	8.5

Source: Eurostat (LFS); European Economic Forecast Spring 2016, European Commission

b) Income distribution

One way to look at distributional aspects of income is to look at Gross Household Disposable Income (GHD). GHD is based on the National Accounts and can roughly be described as the share of the economy-wide income that goes to the household sector¹⁰. National Accounts provide a very valuable source of much timelier information on the evolution of aggregate household disposable income. The evolution of its components, which can illustrate the role of social transfers in the overall income, is an important complement to the GDP indicator, giving insight to the extent to which GDP growth benefits households. It's also an important aspect of the inclusive growth agenda which is at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The GHD decreased slightly for Belgium since 2009 (in real terms) , but remained rather stable during the most recent years. France shows the same evolution, while the decrease is somewhat more pronounced in The Netherlands. In Germany GHD clearly increased since 2010. In Greece GHD dropped dramatically (as in Cyprus-not shown in [figure 3.1a](#)), while it is also substantially under its pre-crisis level in Spain, and Portugal. Since 2012/2013 there is a slight increase of GHD in many Member States

Changing the perspective from distribution between economic sectors to the distribution of income between households, the S80/S20 indicator compares the aggregate income of the 20% households with the highest incomes to the 20% households with the lowest incomes. The more the ratio is different from 1, the more the distribution of income among these two groups is unequal. In Belgium, it remains relatively stable and at a low level.

The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 100 that reflects the overall inequality of the income distribution within a country. Like the S80/S20 ratio, this coefficient is relatively stable. Compared to the years 2005-2006, we even notice some decrease in income inequality according to the GINI index.

¹⁰ Includes also non-profit household serving institutions. The definition of this indicator is as follows: GHD= D1 Compensation of employees (received) + B2G-B3G Gross operating surplus and gross mixed income (received) + D4 Property income (received) - D4 Property income (paid) + D7 Other current transfers (received) - D7 Other current transfers (paid) + D62 Social benefits other than social transfers in kind (received) - D62 Social benefits other than social transfers in kind (paid) + D61 Social contributions (received) - D61 Social contributions (paid) - D5 Current taxes on income, wealth, etc. (paid)

Both measures indicate that income inequality is rather low in Belgium compared to other EU-countries and both measures of income inequality also indicate a stable level in Belgium (See [Table 3.1.](#), [Figure 3.1b](#) and [Figure A2.10](#) in [annex 2](#)).

Table 3.1. Income inequality in Belgium

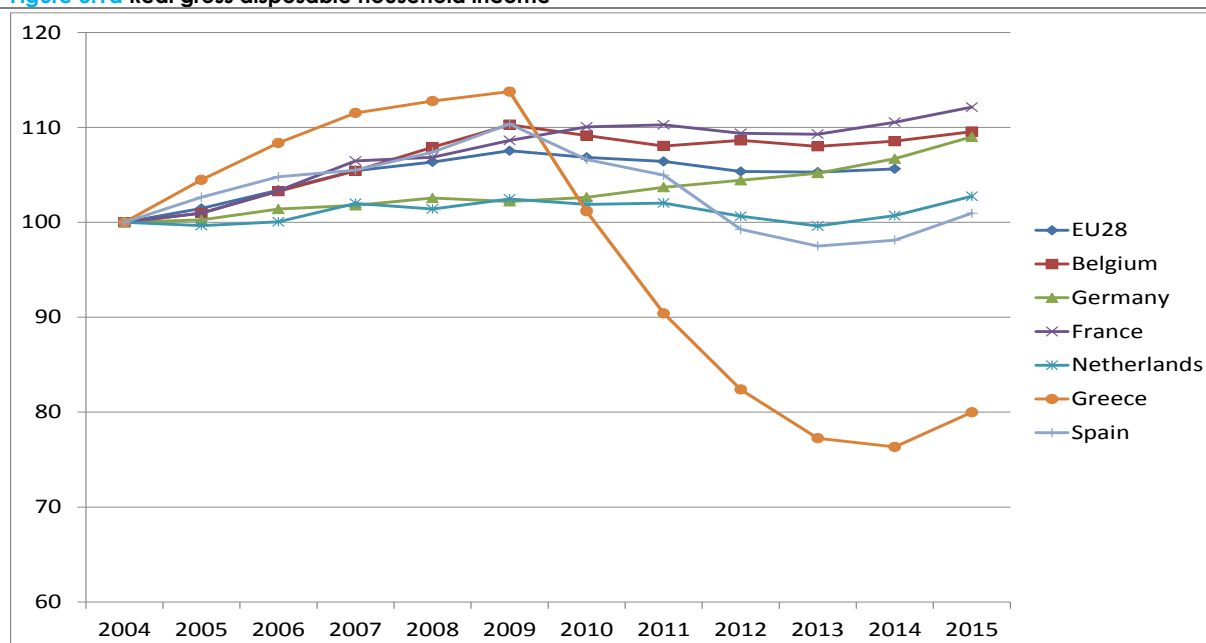
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
S80/S20	3.9	4	4.2	3.9	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.9	4	3.8	3.8
Gini	26.1	28	27.8	26.3	27.5	26.4	26.6	26.3	26.5	25.9	25.9

Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Still another perspective on the evolution of household incomes is offered by the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The at-risk-of poverty threshold is defined as a percentage of the median equivalent household disposable income in a country. As such it shows how incomes in the middle of the income distribution evolve over time, which is both important from the perspective of average living standards, but also from the economic perspective of the evolution of internal demand. [Figure 3.1b](#) shows that median income, in real terms remained rather stable in Belgium throughout the crisis period. This is also the case in the neighboring countries, although The Netherlands show a slight drop in median incomes. In countries like Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain¹¹ median incomes appear to have been seriously affected by the crisis.

Figure 3.1. Indicators of the evolution of household income, Belgium and selection of countries

Figure 3.1a Real gross disposable household income



11 For Spain there is a break in the series between 2012 and 2013

Figure 3.1b: Median equivalent household income

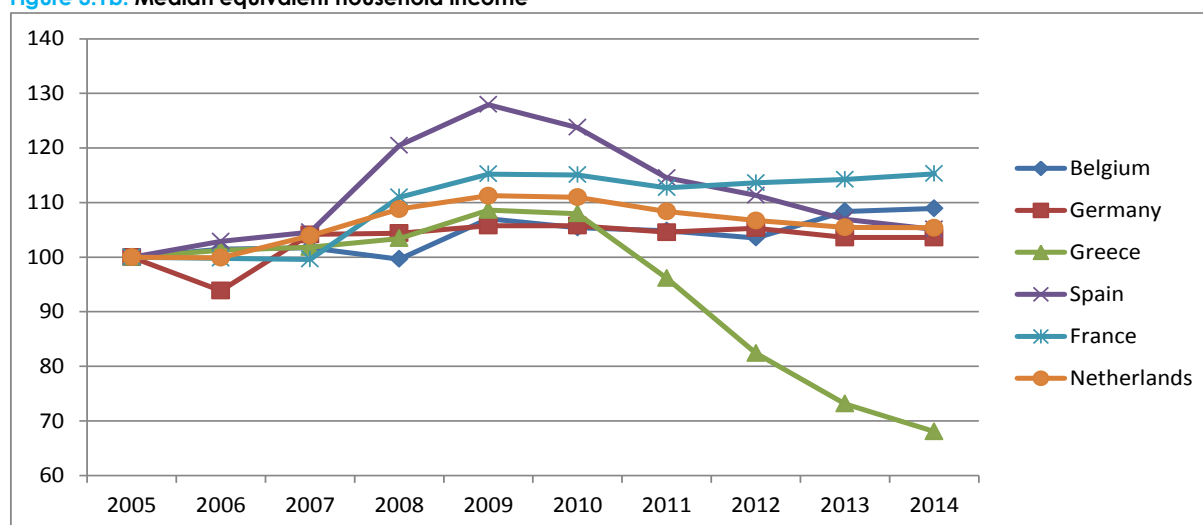
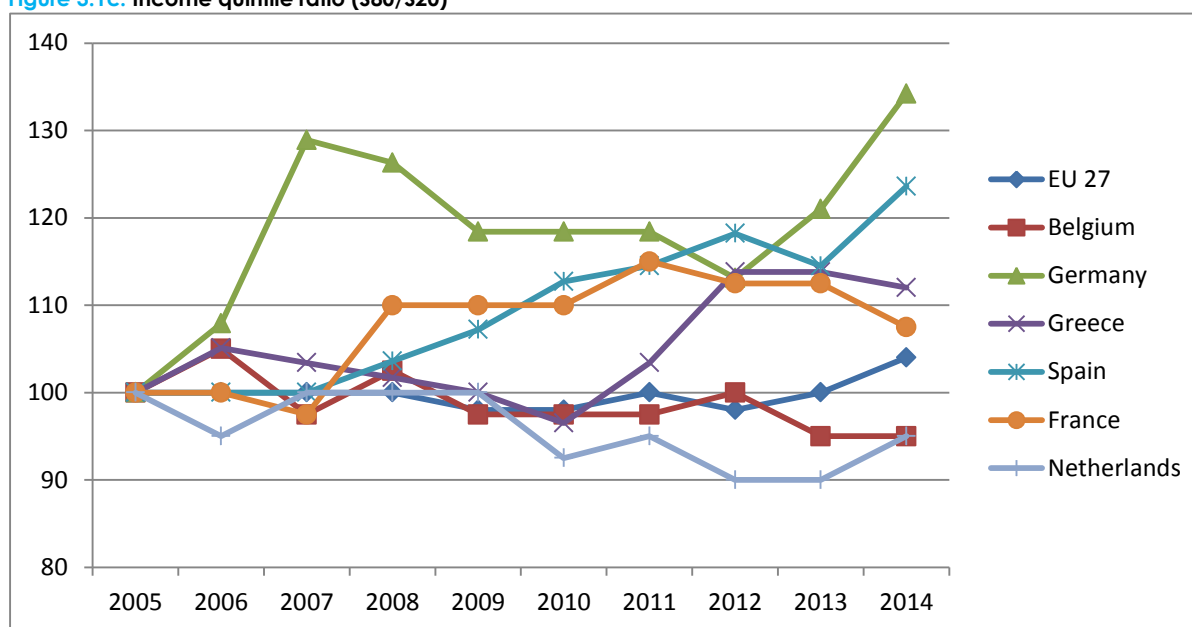


Figure 3.1c: Income quintile ratio (\$80/\$20)



Note figure 3.1b,c: break in series for Spain between 2011-2012. Data refer to income years Source: Eurostat, AMECO (own calculations)

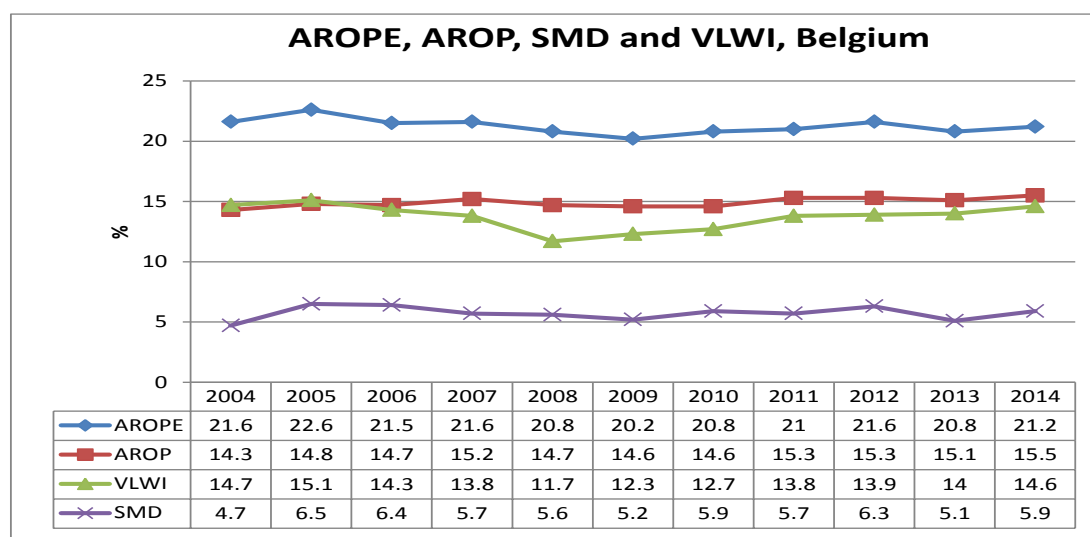
3.1.2 Indicators on poverty and social exclusion

The EU-SILC 2014 (income 2013) survey shows for Belgium that 15.5% of the population (EU28: 17.2%) is at-risk-of poverty, 14.6% lives in a household with very low work intensity (EU28: 11.1%) and 5.9% is severely materially deprived (EU28: 8.9%). On the basis of the 'standard'¹² material deprivation indicator 11.8% is materially deprived (EU28:18.5%). In Point 2 on the follow-up of the

¹² Contrary to the "Severe" material deprivation indicator that imposes that the person is to be confronted with a least 4 out of 9 problems, this "standard" indicator imposes only 3 out of 9 problems...

Europe 2020 target it was already pointed out that the number of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion didn't change significantly over the past decade (see [figure 2.2.](#)). From the three constituent indicators the LWI shows the most marked evolution. This can also be found when the evolution is expressed in percentages instead of absolute numbers. In relative terms the slight increase in the AROP, noted in absolute terms, becomes even less marked and the SMD remains stable in relative terms as well.

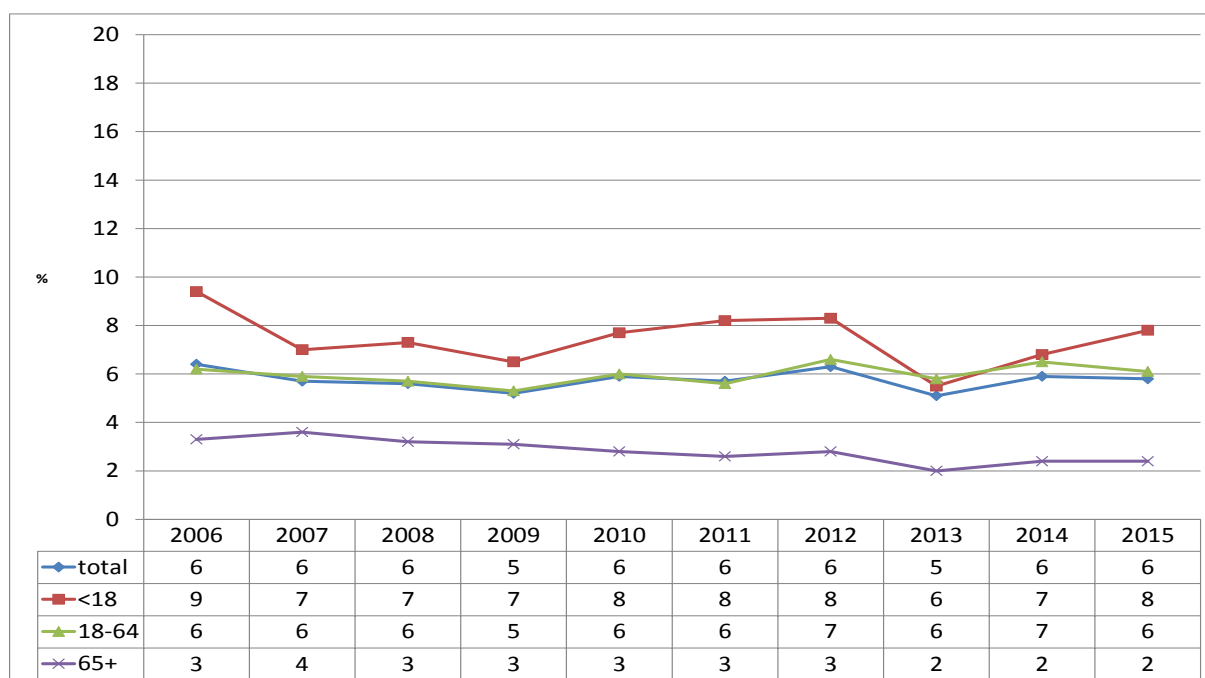
figure 3.1.2. Evolution AROPE, AROP, SMD and VLWI in percentage



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

In the context of a joint effort by Eurostat and the National Statistical Institutes to enhance the timeliness of the social indicators, Eurostat released an early estimate of the severe material deprivation indicator for EU-SILC 2015. This early estimate shows that SMD for the whole population remained on the same level in 2015 as well. For children it increased by about 1 pp. for the second successive year, while for the other age categories it remained rather stable ([Figure 3.1.3](#))

figure 3.1.3. Evolution SMD with early estimates EU-SILC 2015



Source: EU-SILC, Eurostat, Statistics Belgium

Concluding on this overview of labour market, household income, distribution and poverty indicators for the population as a whole, one can say that the social situation remained rather stable.

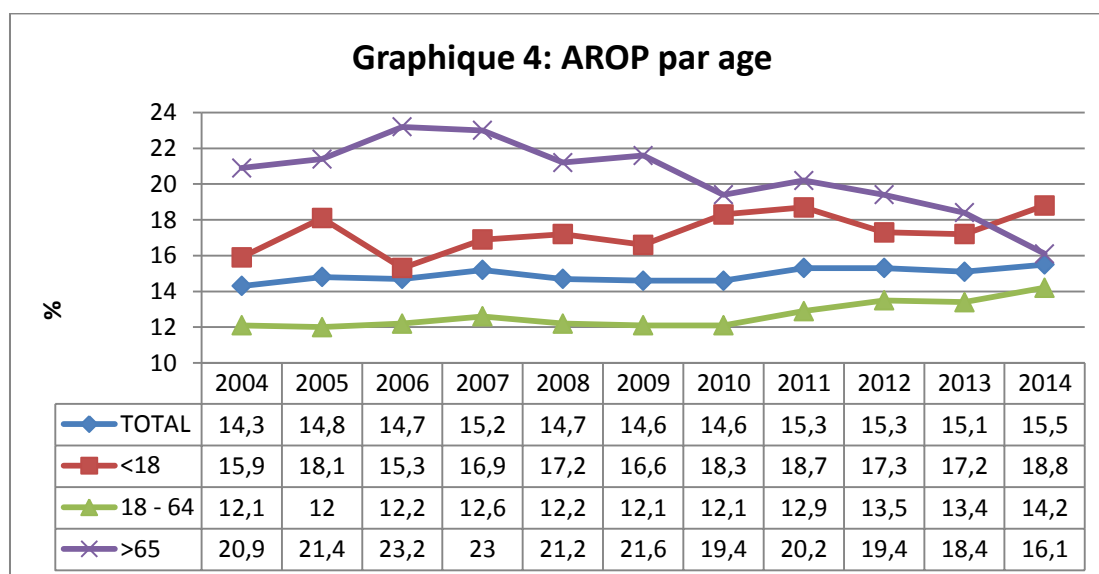
3.2 ... divergent trends

Turning from analyzing the evolution of the social indicators on a population level, we now analyze them for some major subgroups. First, by age groups, then by groups within the population at active age.

3.2.1 Decline in the poverty risk of the elderly

When the evolution of poverty is broken down in three age groups - children, persons at working age and persons from 65 and over divergent trends become apparent. Most striking is the significant and continuing decline of the AROP for the elderly since 2006. Between 2006 and 2014, the risk of poverty among older people dropped from 23% to 16%.

Figure 3.2.1. Evolution AROPE, AROP, SMD and VLW in percentage



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

This decrease has almost reduced the risk of poverty among the elderly to the observable levels for the general population (about 15%)¹³. Although the problem of poverty among older people is not solved yet, this evolution nevertheless represents a major upheaval. Historically, the risk of poverty for older people was significantly higher than for the overall population. With this drop, Belgium follows the trend observed in other European countries.

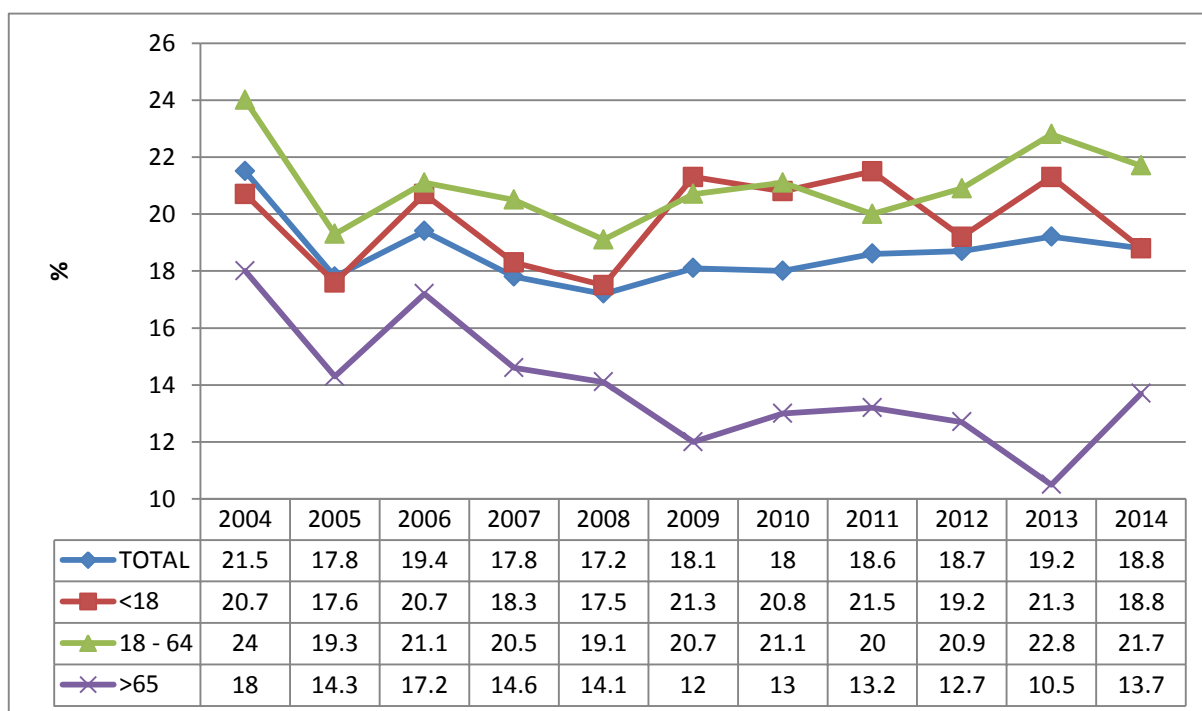
However, the decrease in the risk of poverty among older people does not mean that the entire sub-group "older people" has seen an improvement of its living conditions relative to other age groups. Other indicators (which compare the median income of the elderly with the median income of younger people or which compare the median income of pensioners with the median income of workers) remain fairly stable and show a slight increase in recent years.

Firstly, the median at-risk-of-poverty gap¹⁴, which indicates how far people at-risk-of-poverty are below the poverty line, has grown very slightly between 2008 and 2013 (17.2% in 2008 and 19.2% in 2013) but has decreased in the most recent 2013-2014 among children and the population in the active age whereas the gap increased significantly in 2014 among the elderly to reach a maximum over the period 2008-2014 (Figure 3.2.1.bis.) Although this should be subject to further analysis (see also the section 5 "pensions"), these results suggest that improvements in the poverty indicators for the elderly have been mainly situated among the lowest incomes.

¹³ Although this trend can be observed in the three Regions, the level of poverty for the elderly compared to the level of poverty for the active population is different for in the different Regions (see section 3.2.2. c.)

¹⁴ The difference between the median income of persons having an income that is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, as a percentage of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

Figure 3.2.1.bis Relative median poverty risk gap, total and by age, Belgium (in %)

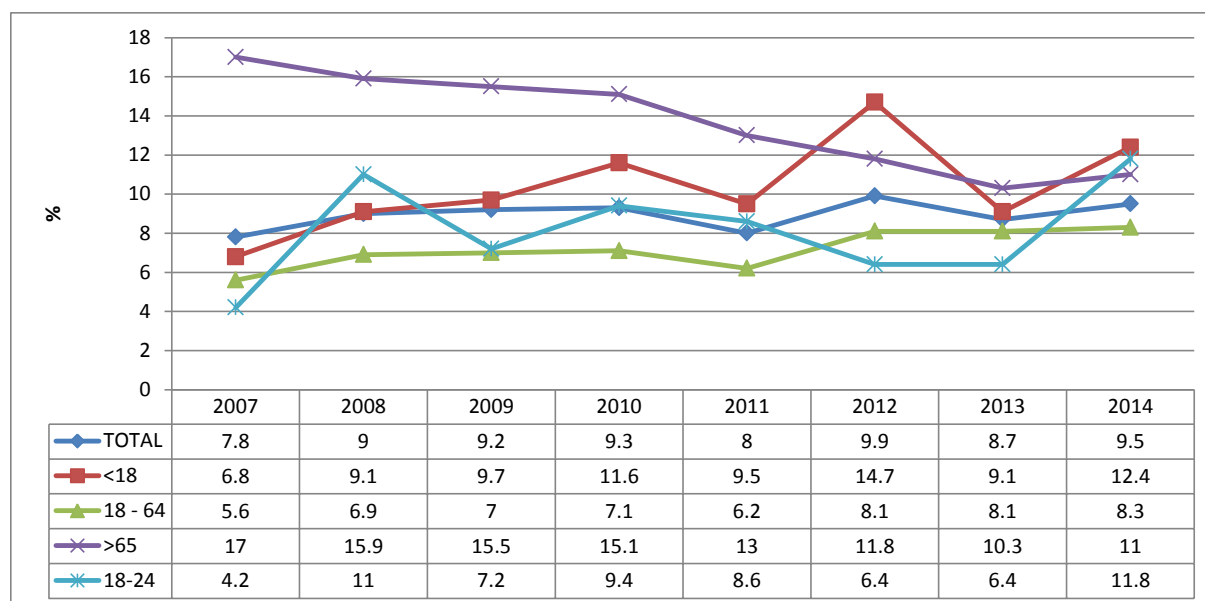


Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Secondly, the percentage of persons with a persistent poverty risk¹⁵ was 9.5% in 2014 (figure 3.2.1.ter). For the total population, this percentage has been more or less on the same level since 2007, slightly increasing from 7.8% in 2007 to 9.9% in 2012, with an exceptional decrease of the rate in 2011. The decrease in 2011 can be observed for the three broad age groups. The persistent poverty rate among the population in the active age followed a similar trend as the rate for the total population. However, behind the rates for the total population, a noticeable evolution is hidden: the risk of persistent poverty among the elderly was progressively decreasing since 2007 (from 17% to 10.3%) but increased in 2014 (11%).

¹⁵ Persistent poverty rate: the percentage of persons that is at-risk-of-poverty in the most recent year for which data are available (currently 2011) and in at least 2 of the 3 preceding years

Figure 3.2.1.ter. Persistent poverty rate, total and by age, Belgium (in %)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Clearly, the changed poverty risks among the different age categories also results in a changed age composition of the population at-risk-of-poverty. The share of people aged 65 and over among the poor decreased from 23% in 2004 to 17,5% in 2014, notwithstanding the increased share in the total population. The share of people at active age increased from 53% to 57%. (see more details in [Annex A2.11.](#)).

3.2.2 Differences between some sub-groups of the active population

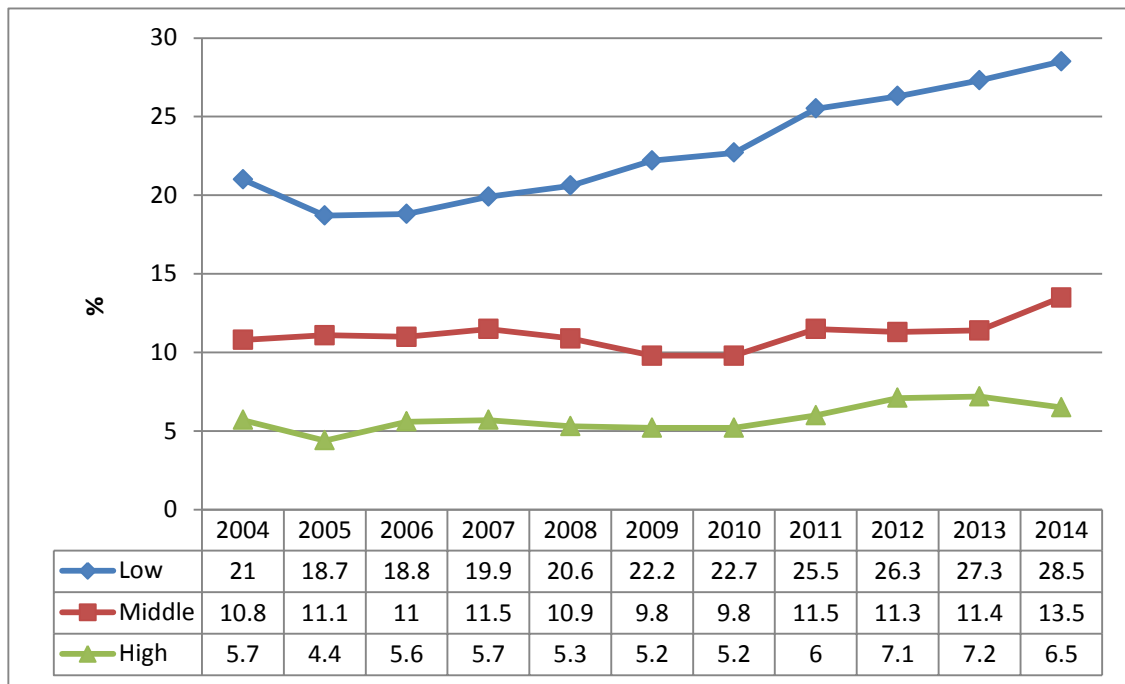
After a stable period around 12% (until 2010), the risk of poverty rose to 14% for the working age population in 2014. This increase affects a specific segment of the active population, namely categories which already have a low social status.

The indicators above point to divergent poverty trends between the elderly population and younger age categories. However, divergent trends can also be found within the working age category. It is particularly worrying that poverty rates have increased specifically in categories that were already at higher risk of poverty.

a) Poverty risk by educational level

This is clearly illustrated by the evolution of the poverty risk by educational level ([figure 3.2.2.](#)). Differences in poverty risk between the educational level have increase sharply between 2005 and 2014. Poverty rates for persons with a low educational attainment increased from 18.7% in 2005 to 28.5% in 2014. For other levels of education, the risk of poverty has remained more or less stable (note that the latest developments between 2013 and 2014 also shows an increase for people with an average level of education). The difference in poverty rates between persons with a low and a high educational attainment increased from 14 pp. to 22 pp., pointing to a growing divide within the population at active age. Further in this note additional trends confirming this finding are presented.

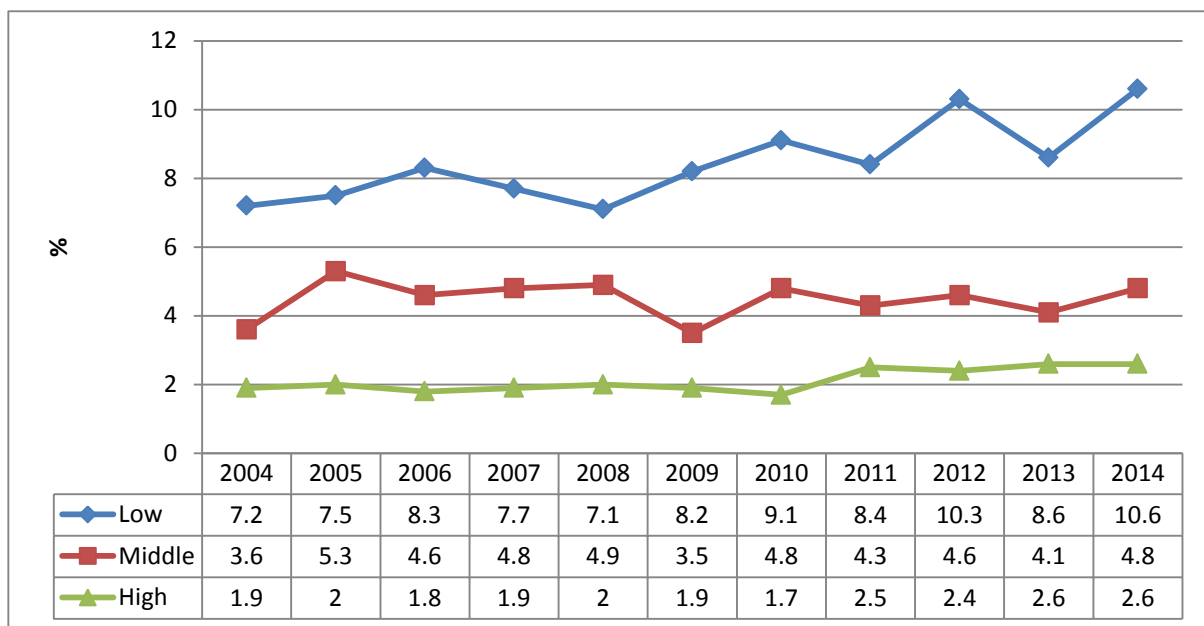
Figure 3.2.2. At-risk-of-poverty rate by level of education, (18-64) Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The same observations can be made when studying the material deprivation indicator ([figure 3.2.2.bis.](#)). The number of people in severe material deprivation situation is increasing among less educated people, from 7.2% in 2004 to 10.6% in 2014, while the level of severe material deprivation for higher levels of education remains roughly constant.

Figure 3.2.2.bis. SMD by level of education, (18-64) Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

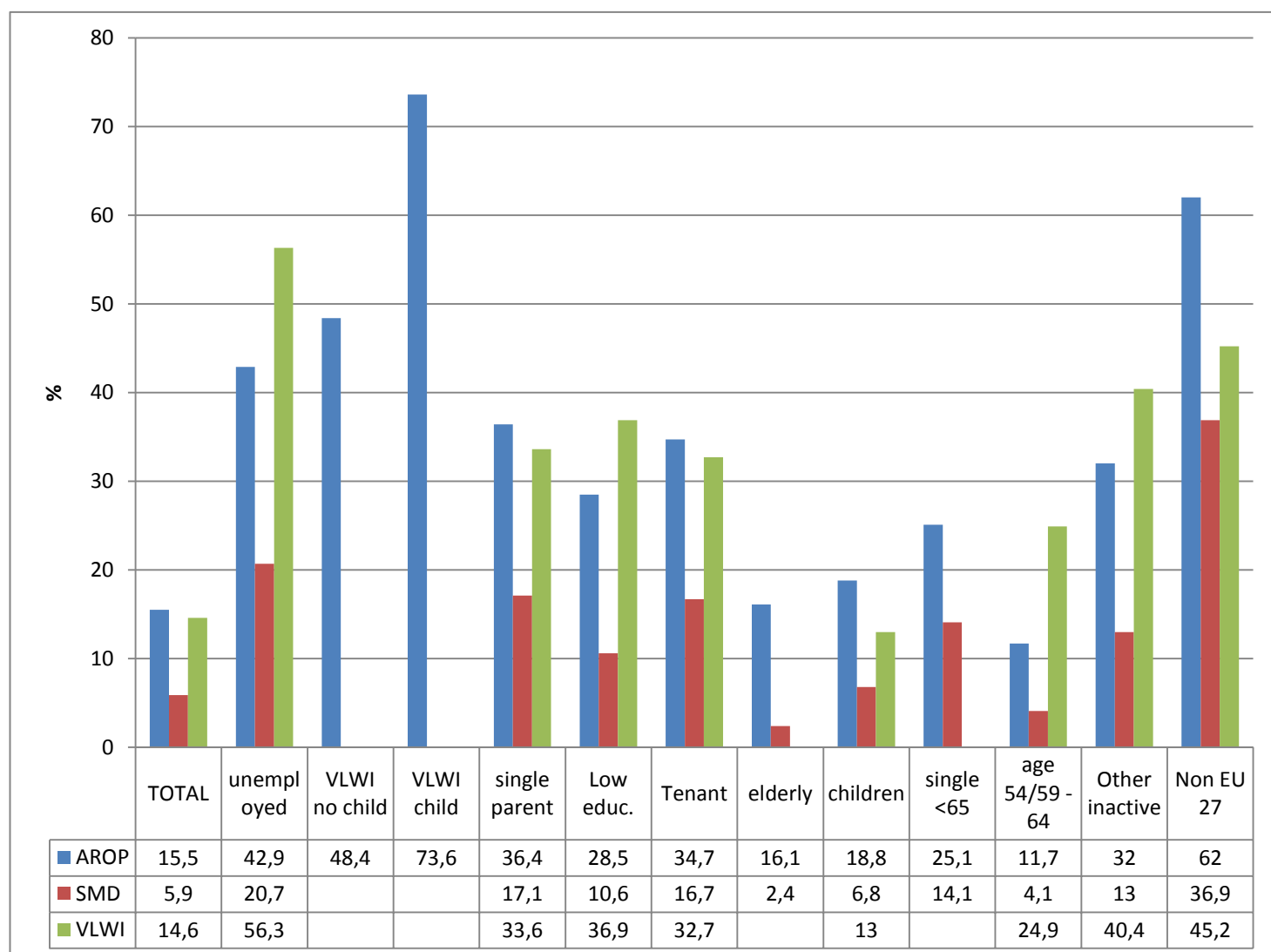
b) Poverty risk by some others categories

[Figure 3.2.2.ter.](#) shows the risk of poverty or social exclusion for a number of other population categories, on the basis of the three indicators of the Europe 2020 target.

Most of these categories have high scores for the three indicators. However, certain categories do not score consistently high. The elderly have a relatively high poverty risk, but a low risk of severe material deprivation. Persons with a low education level have a high risk of poverty and very low work intensity. Persons in the active age but close to the retirement age have a high risk of very low work intensity, but they score better than average for the two other indicators. Children score worse than average for the three indicators to a limited extent. The categories with the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion are: persons living in households with very low work intensity, especially those with children, and persons with nationalities from outside the EU27. A Eurostat analysis finds that Belgium is among the EU Member states with the largest difference in poverty risk between non-EU citizens and nationals (Eurostat, 2014). Unemployed persons, single parent families and tenants also have a very high risk (for this see also section 4.3. on “housing”). All these categories score consistently high for the different indicators.

As said for elderly, looking at gender differences in poverty or social exclusion risks remains difficult because all three main indicators are defined as household, and not person, characteristics. So no intra-household differences are observed, the only gender differences in poverty levels are due to differences between single man and single woman. Looking at the latter, no clear and systematic gender differences can be observed on the three indicators. On the at-risk-of-poverty rate, woman had a higher risk in 2008, but the difference decreased over the following years, and even inversed in the most recent data. Single man have higher risks to be severely materially deprived than single woman and the risk to live in a very low work intensity household has been at about the same level for man and woman over the last years ([see annex A2.9](#)). It should however be noted that this partial analysis may give a biased view on gender differences in risks of poverty or social exclusion.

Figure 3.2.2.ter. Incidence of poverty or social exclusion by high risk and policy relevant social categories, Belgium, 2014



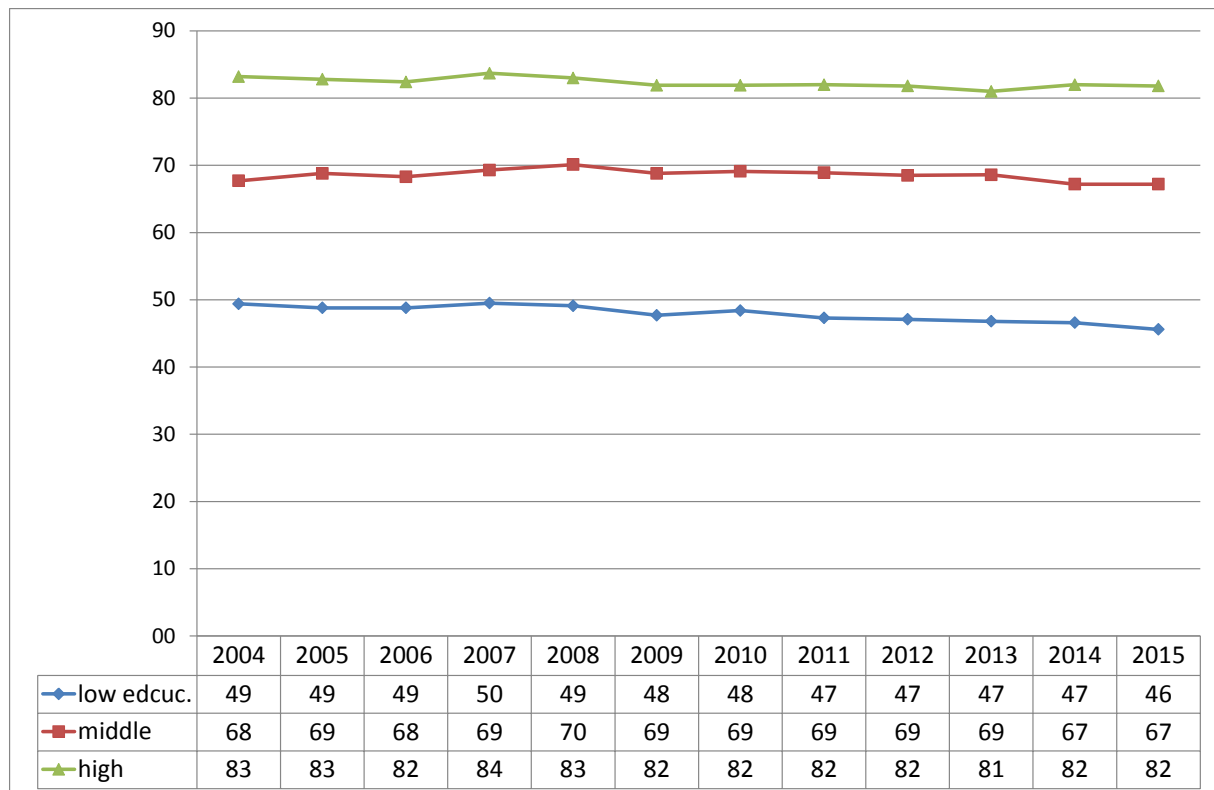
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

c) Labour market access and adequacy of social protection

The access to the labor market is obviously important for the acquisition of an adequate income. [Figure 3.2.2. quater](#) represents the evolution of employment rates by education level in Belgium for the period 2004-2015. The decrease from 50% to 46% between 2008-2015 for low skilled workers should be considered as significant because (1) the decrease contrasts with the evolution of other educational levels and (2) regarding the low-skilled workers' employment rate, Belgian performances are below those of other European countries¹⁶.

¹⁶ The series contains breaks in 2011 and 2014, so some care is needed in the interpretation of the evolution. However, it is safe to conclude that a decrease has occurred.

Figure 3.2.2. quater. Employment rate by level of education, (20-64) Belgium

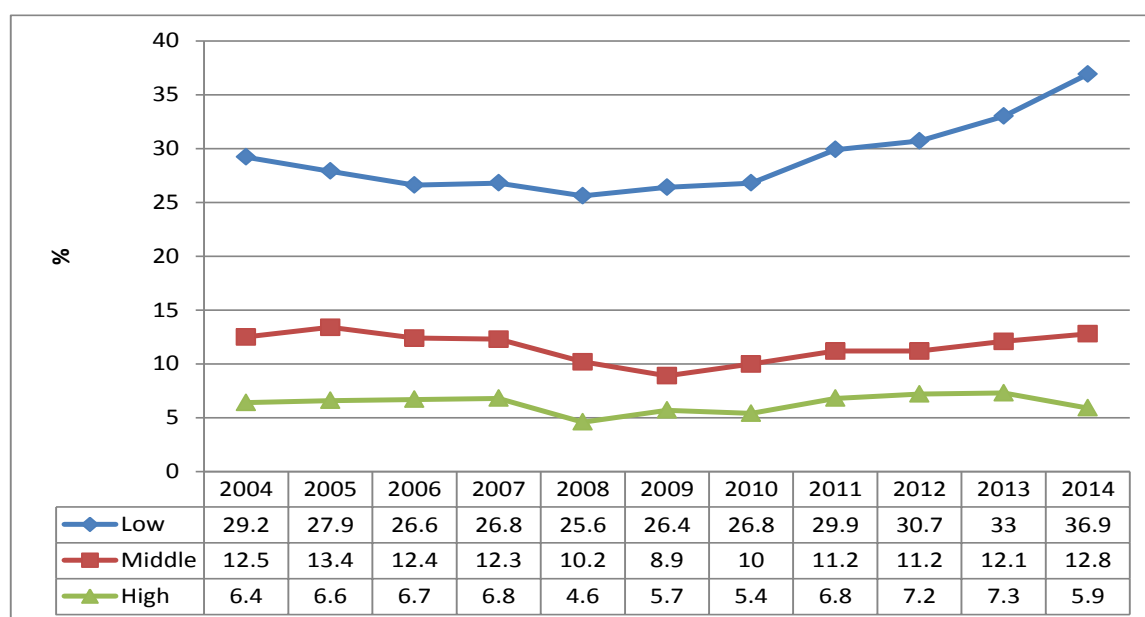


Source : Labour Force Survey (LFS), EUROSTAT

Note : breaks in series in 2011 and 2014

Figure 3.2.2..quinquies shows the evolution of the percentage of people living in households with low work intensity by level of education. The distribution of the percentage of people living in households with very low work intensity by education level shows a sharp increase in people with low education. Between 2008 and 2014, the percentage of low-skilled workers with very low work intensity has increased by 10 points.

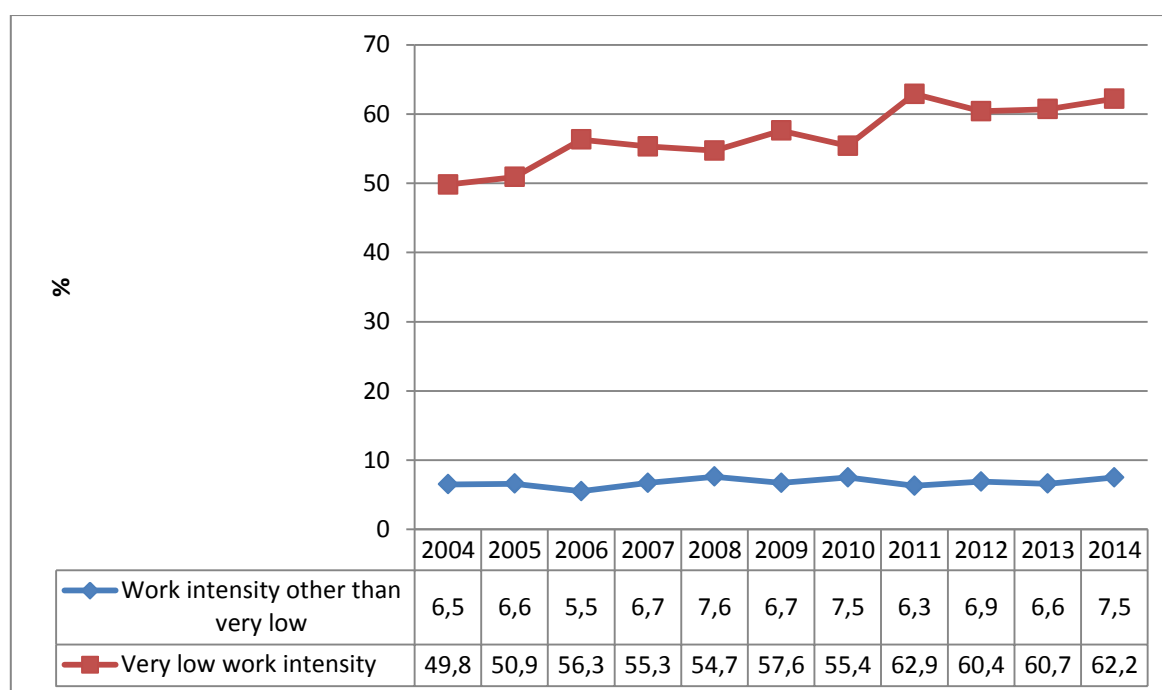
Figure 3.2.2.quinquies. VLWI by level of education, (18-64) Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The risk of poverty is influenced by primary income, usually the salary earned, but also by the level of benefits received by those who do not have access to the labor market. We can judge the adequacy of social benefits by observing the risk of poverty among people from households with very low work intensity because one can assume that the main income of people living in such households comes from Social Security. [Figure 3.2.2.sexies](#) shows the evolution of the poverty risk by work intensity. The main finding here is that the poverty risk has only increased among persons with very low work intensity, increasing from 50% to 62% between 2004 and 2014. For people with a work intensity of more than 20%, the risk remains nearly constant.

Figure 3.2.2.sexies. At-risk-of-poverty rate by work intensity of the household



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

3.3 Regional and socio-geographical aspects

Extensive analysis and monitoring on the evolution of the social situation is undertaken by Regional Authorities¹⁷. Here we briefly highlight regional differences on some key-indicators and check if similar trends as on the federal level can be found on the regional level (see annex 3).

As is the case on the federal level, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate remains constant over the period 2008-2014 at the regional level. Although in Wallonia there is some decrease between 2008 and 2012, the 2014 figures are again at 2008-level. There is however an important difference in the level of poverty or social exclusion between Flanders and Wallonia. In Flanders the rate is around 15%, in Wallonia it is much higher at around 25%. In Brussels the rate is even higher, at around 40%. The at-risk-of-poverty rate shows a very similar picture. It remains constant in both Flanders and Wallonia during the observation period with large differences in level between both regions. The very low work intensity rate shows a continuing increase in both Flanders and Wallonia as from 2008 (From 7.7% to 9.7% in Flanders and 15.7% to 19.6% in 2014 in Wallonia).

Also labour market indicators show very different levels for both regions. Here some differences in the trend can be observed. While the employment rate in Flanders remained stable at about 66% in the period 2010-2014, Wallonia shows a small increase from 2010 to 2012 (56,7% to 57,3%) followed by a small decrease between 2012-2014 (back to 56.5%). Quarterly results for 2015 show small increases in the employment rate in Wallonia (55,8% to 56.5%) and Brussels (53.4% to 54.9%) between the first and the last quarter, but some decrease in Flanders (67% to 66.1%). Severe material deprivation is very low in Flanders at 2.5% in 2014, while it was 9% in Wallonia. This indicator remained rather stable overall in both regions.

The reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the elderly can be observed in all regions (see figure A3.3. in annex 3).

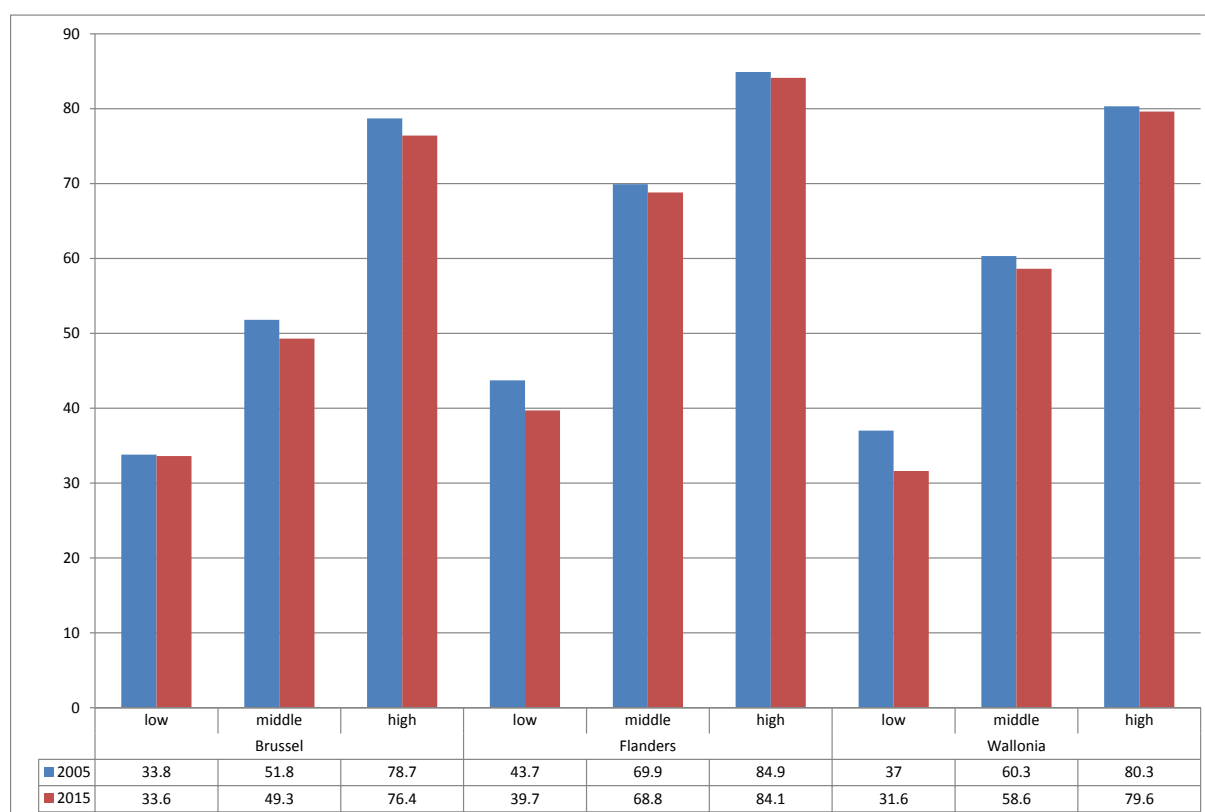
Information on the evolution of the poverty risk by educational level was unfortunately not available when drafting this report. However, the employment rate of persons with a low educational attainment shows a stronger decrease in both Flanders and Wallonia compared to other educational groups, over the period 2005-2015 (see figure 3.3. and A3.3.2 in annex 3).

Although there are important differences in levels between these two regions, these findings point to similar challenges.

¹⁷ Cf.

- Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering, Vlaamse Armoedemonitor 2015 (<http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/vlaamse-armoedemonitor-2015>)
- Observatoire de la santé et du sociale Bruxelles, Baromètre social. Rapport Bruxellois sur l'état de la pauvreté, 2015 (<http://www.observatbru.be/documents/publications/publications-pauvrete/barometre-social/2015-barometre-social.xml?lang=fr>)
- Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation de la Prospective et de la Statistique (IWEPS), chiffres non publiés (à paraître) communiqué par IWEPS (f.ghesquiere@iweeps.be)

Figure 3.3.: Employment rate in Regions by educational level, 2005-2015



Source: Statistics Belgium

Turning to a focus on urban aspects of poverty and social exclusion, a study by Grippa et. al. (2015) points to socio-spatial inequalities, with an accumulation of negative socio-economic characteristics in some neighbourhoods, especially in city centres. In Brussels and Flanders urban areas, the most affluent neighbourhoods (often suburbs) seem to be isolated from socio-demographic dynamics and pressures in the less affluent neighbourhoods. In Walloon cities some improvement in disadvantaged peripheral areas is observed (see box 1).

Box 1 : Dynamics of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions (2015)¹⁸

In the 'Dynamics of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions' report, researchers of the Free University of Brussels (ULB), in collaboration with the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), focused on the most deprived urban areas in Belgium (corresponding with 30% of the population or 2 million inhabitants).¹⁹

The analyses are based on 23 indicators covering the different dimensions of precariousness: labour market, region of origin, income and social transfers. A synthesis measure was created based on these variables. This analysis was applied to all statistical neighbourhoods with more than 50 inhabitants in the 22 Belgian urban districts. The available statistics cover the period between 2003 and 2010 which makes it possible to describe the dynamics within the urban areas.

18 Grippa, T., Marissal, P., May, X., Wertz, I., & Loopmans, M. (2015), *Dynamiek van de buurten in moeilijkheden in de Belgische stadsgewesten*, Brussel: POD Maatschappelijke Integratie, 87p.

19 The analyses were conducted at the 'statistical sector' level, since this happens to be the only category that corresponds more or less with the concept of neighbourhoods within municipalities, and for which homogenous and coherent statistical data are available for all of the 22 major Belgian urban districts.

Differential dynamics among the Regions

Belgian cities are confronted with major social and socio-spatial inequalities. Most of these inequalities are characterized by a concentration of social difficulties in a specific part of their territory. In those neighbourhoods, with low average incomes, high unemployment rates, low education levels and often a poor living environment, negative future prospects of the inhabitants accumulate and interact. Despite the large diversity among Belgian urban regions, some important similarities could be observed: In all Belgian urban regions, a strong contrast was found between impoverished city centres on the one hand and affluent suburbs on the other hand.

The observed dynamics on the neighbourhood level in the urban regions are quite complex. In Brussels and the major Flemish cities, a further dispersion of the disadvantaged population from the poor central neighbourhoods to adjacent middle-class districts could be observed. Meanwhile, new migrating population groups tend to settle in the most underprivileged neighbourhoods. The most affluent neighbourhoods seem to be isolated from both families that are moving out of the most impoverished areas and the new migrants. Consequently, the increasing demographic pressure seems to concentrate in the poorest neighbourhoods and adjacent areas in the big cities, especially in Brussels. The dynamics of the major Walloon urban regions are slightly different. Although the new migrants similarly settle in the impoverished city centres, they are less numerous. In contrast to the Brussels' and Flemish urban areas, several relatively disadvantaged peripheral neighbourhoods seem to improve as a result of the settlement of middle class families due to the lower real estate prices.

One of the most remarkable observations is the significant gap between Walloon and Brussels' cities on the one hand and Flemish cities on the other hand. The major Walloon cities, which are confronted with a structural crisis since the 70s, are mostly affected by poverty. In the urban regions of Liège and Charleroi, respectively 283,000 individuals (43%) and 230,000 individuals (56%) live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In the Flemish urban regions of Antwerp and Ghent, the number of individuals living in impoverished neighbourhoods amounts 'only' to respectively 200,000 individuals (20%) and 78,000 individuals (18%).

Increased pressure on PCSWs

The statistics also show an important shift from unemployment to the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) in most urban regions. The following table shows the evolution of the unemployment level and the entitlement to GMI benefits between 2005 and 2010.

Evolution of unemployment level and entitlement to GMI between 2005 and 2010 (in %)

Urban region	Unemployment insurance beneficiaries	GMI beneficiaries
Liège	-12%	+26%
Charleroi	-13.5%	+86%
Ghent	-24%	+42.5%
Antwerp	-13%	+20.5%
Brussels	-1.2%	+31%

The significant transfer from unemployment to the GMI inevitably leads to an increased (financial) pressure on the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSWs).

4 | Follow-up of the policy priorities in the context of the National Reform Programme and the National Social Report

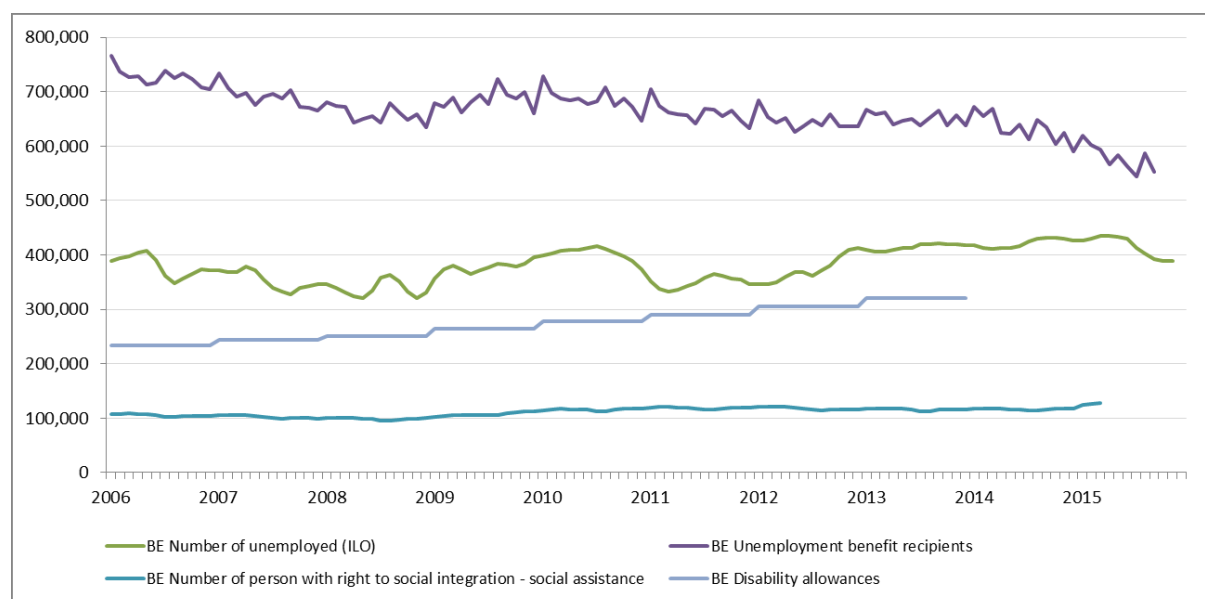
4.1 Social Protection

The number of people with an unemployment allowance decreased during the previous years. The number of full time unemployed with an unemployment allowance dropped significantly during 2015. Two policy measures influenced this drop: the limitation of the right to an integration allowance to 3 years had a decreasing effect, while the increase from 58 to 60 in the age from which an exemption to look for work could be asked had an upward effect on the number of full time unemployed with allowance. The unemployment benefit administration points to the fact that the decrease of the number of full time unemployed with allowance is stronger among the groups involved in the measures and while some kept their job or changed job, while others went to other benefit systems or withdrew from the labour market (RVP-ONE, 2016)

The number of persons with an invalidity allowance on the other hand increased steadily during the last decade. This increase can be partially explained by demographic and labour market evolutions: an ageing population and the increased female labour market participation in combination with the increased pensionable age for woman. Furthermore there are increases in specific diseases that play a role, in particular mental disorders.

The number of social assistance beneficiaries also increased steadily over the last decade, with relatively strong increases in 2009 and 2010 and again in 2014 (see [figure 4.1.1.](#)). The number of social assistance beneficiaries increased stronger among young people (SPP Intégration Sociale, 2015).

Figure 4.1.1. Trends in take up of selected benefits (number of persons)



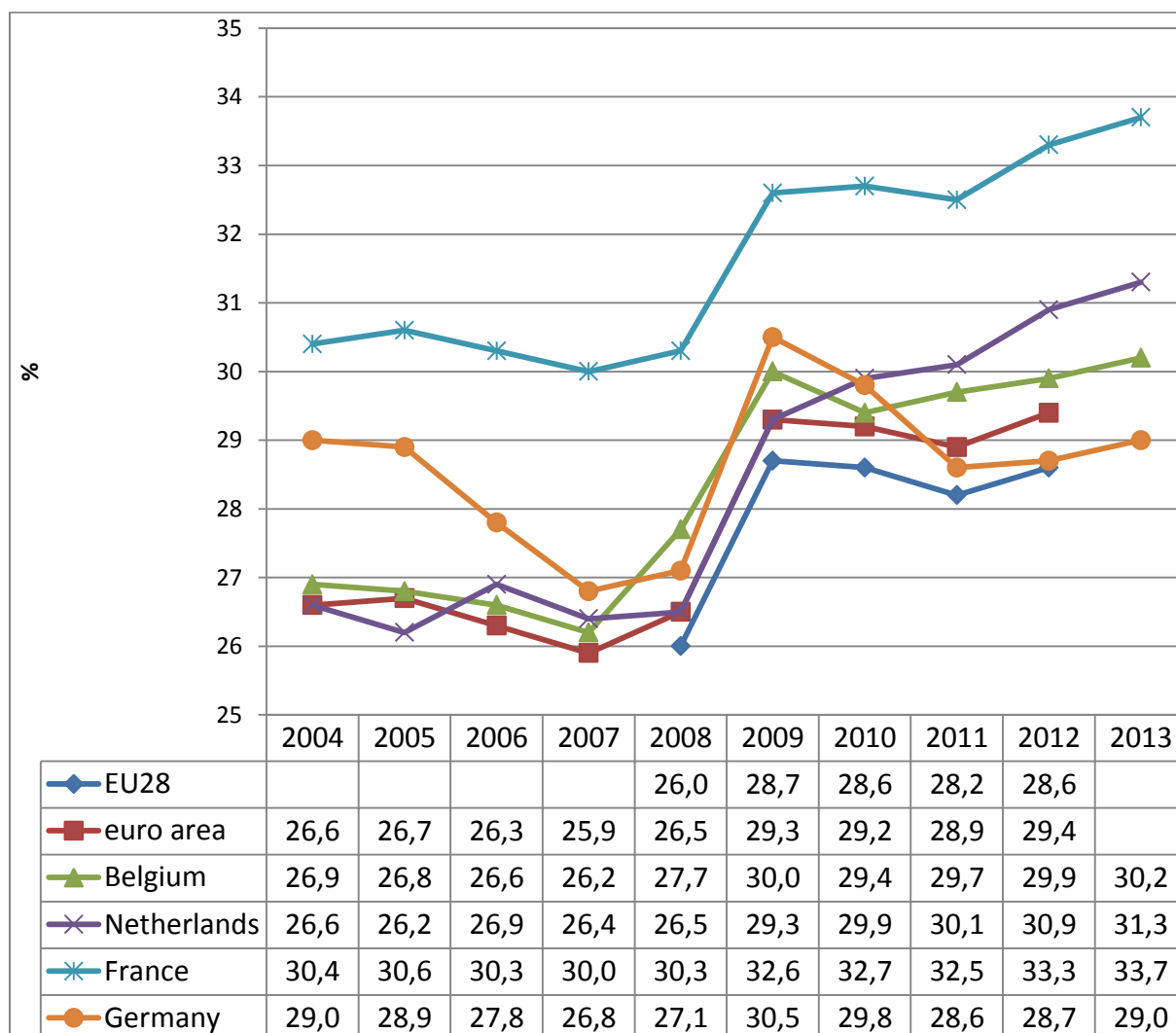
Source: Social Protection Committee (SPPM Country Profile Belgium 2015)

In 2013, social protection expenditure amounted in Belgium to 30.2% of GDP, which is about 1 percent above the EU28-average (28.6% in 2012, for 29,9% in Belgium in 2012) and slightly higher than the average for the Euro area.

The evolution of social benefits expenditure²⁰ kept in line with the European evolution, with a steep increase of the expenditure level in percentage of GDP as from 2007, due to the increase of the volume of benefits and the lesser or negative growth of GDP. Over the period 2008-2012, the expenditure level in percentage of GDP remained above the EU28 average and was very similar to the expenditure rate of the Euro area (figure 4.1.2.).

Concerning the comparison with the neighboured countries, Belgium is situated between Germany and Netherlands, well below France. All countries show an increase of social expenditures since 2011.

Figure 4.1.2. Social benefits expenditure as % of GDP

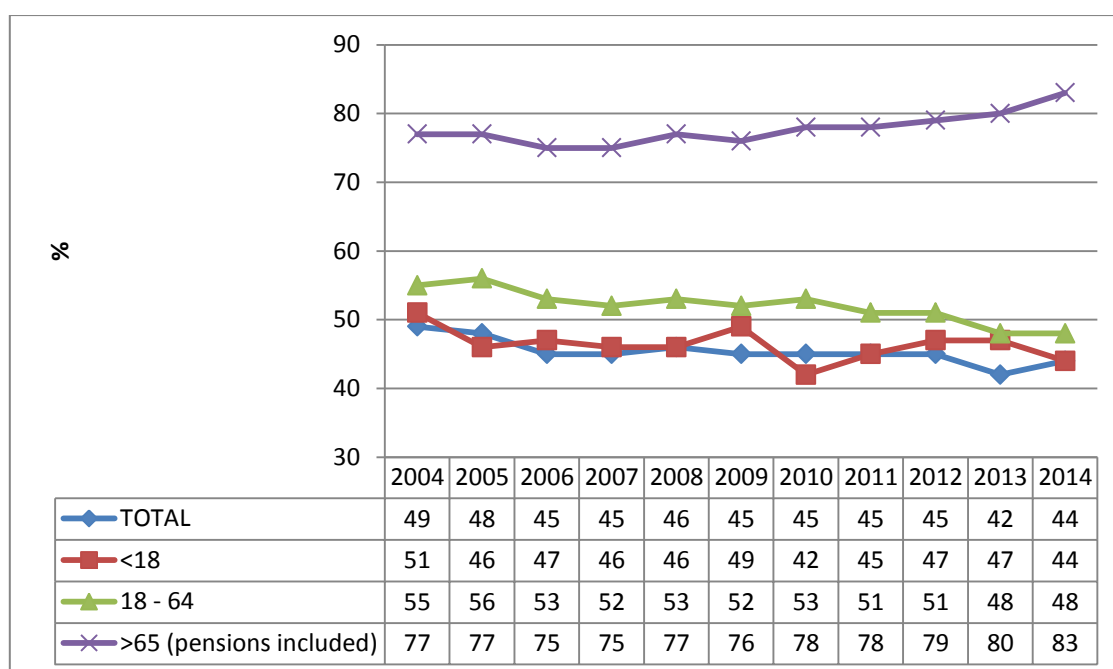


Source : ESSPROS, EUROSTAT

²⁰ Including administration costs

The effectiveness of social transfers can be measured by analyzing their impact on the poverty risk²¹. In 2014, the social benefits reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 27.5.3% to 15.5%, i.e. a reduction by 44% (EU28: 34%). Between 2004 and 2014 the effectiveness of the social transfers for the total population shows a slightly decreasing trend from 49% to 44%. Whereas the effectiveness of social protection decreased for the population in the active age and for children in the same period, it increased slightly for the elderly (figure 4.1.3.).

Figure 4.1.3. Effectiveness of social protection by age: % reduction of pre-transfer poverty rate due to social transfers, Belgium



Note: social transfers without pensions for age categories '<18' and '18-64' and 'TOTAL', pensions inclusive for age category '>64'*
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The effectiveness of social protection can also be measured by means of the poverty risk of persons in households with very low work intensity. Most of these persons indeed do have to rely on social protection in order to be able to maintain a minimum standard of living. The poverty risk of this group is very high: 48.4 % for persons in households with no children and 73.6% for persons in households with children in 2014 (figures 4.1.3.). While the poverty risk for the category with children in Belgium is higher than the EU28 average (estimated 66.3%), it is lower than the EU28 rate (50.2%) for the category without children. Together with the finding that the very low work intensity rate is high in EU-context, this finding, which is rather constant over different EU-SILC waves, is crucial in the assessment of the social situation and the adequacy of social protection in Belgium. It shows that, in general, social protection is too low to supply people who have to rely solely on it with an adequate income, and that the adequacy has rather decreased than increased²². As this analysis is

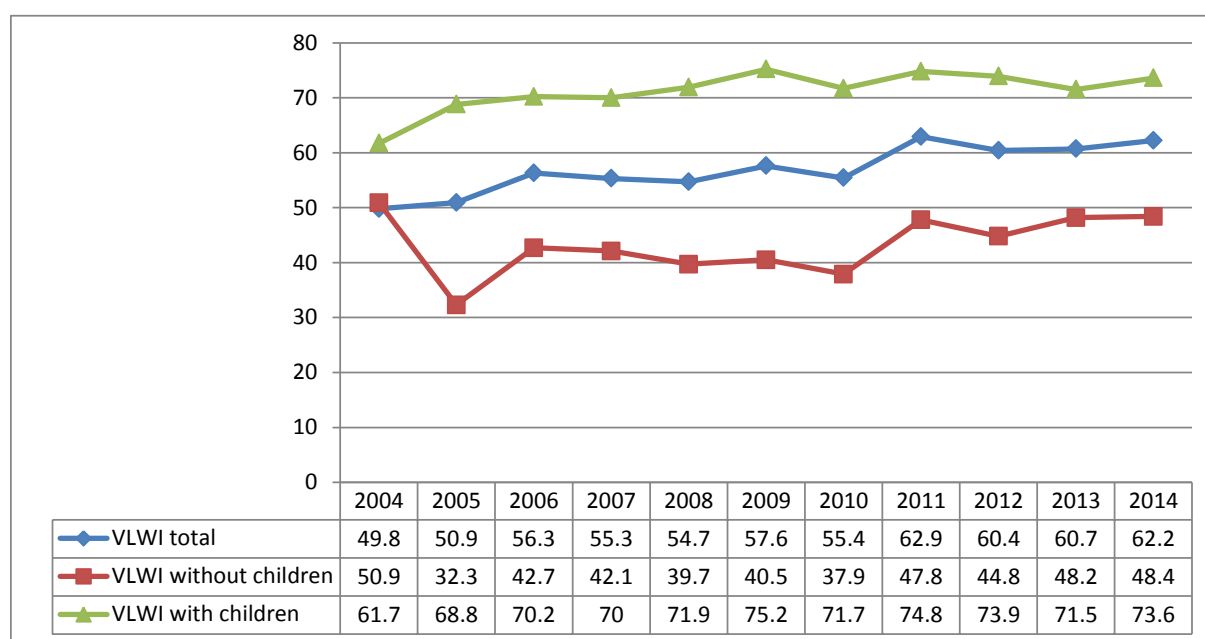
21 Of course, apart from securing a minimum income level, social benefits should also be evaluated on the extend they secure the living standard. However, the latter is more complex to measure. For pensions this aspect is covered via the 'theoretical replacement rates' (see section 5).

22 It is interesting to note that Decoster et. al. (2015) find that changes in the tax-benefit system have overall been poor during the period 1992-2012. These findings depend however (1) on the necessary ceteris paribus assumption (so holding eg. household structures and market incomes constant) and (2) on the crucial assumption about what constitutes a 'no policy change' counterfactual: indexation with inflation or indexation with wage growth. In the latter case redistributive effects of past policy changes are much lower.

based on rather small subgroups of the EU-SILC survey these conclusions would require some caution. However, the findings are consistent with the results of other types of analysis.

An analysis of the level of the minima (social security and social integration income) shows that, especially for couples with children, the minimum benefits are below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (table 1 in [annex 1](#)). Invalidity benefits and full pensions for single persons are above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Some minima, such as the minimum pensions for self-employed persons and the income guarantee for the elderly have been increased significantly during the last years.

Figure 4.1.2. At-risk-of-poverty rate for population in very low work intensity households, total, with and without children, Belgium (in %)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The finding of decreasing adequacy of social benefits based on the EU-social indicators is further confirmed in different studies (see box 2). Van Lancker et. al. point to the increased degressivity in unemployment benefits, while Storms et. al. point to the fact that prices of basic necessities increased more than allowances and minimum wages.

Box 2

1. The impact of unemployment on household income in Belgium (2015)²³

Van Lancker et al. (2015) compared the unemployment schemes in four countries (Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden) at three different points in time (1995, 2007 and

²³ Van Lancker, W., Marchal, S., Schuerman, N., Van Mechelen, N., & Van Kerm, P. (2015), *Leven aan de dop. De impact van werkloosheid op het inkomen in België in vergelijkend perspectief*, Antwerpen: Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, 24p.

2012). They used data from statistical bureaus and administrations (including Eurostat, the national employment offices and the OECD).

Generally, reforms in the unemployment schemes in European countries are characterized by a tightening of the policies, with a stronger focus on activation and more conditionality of the entitlement to unemployment benefits. The recent reforms of the unemployment scheme in Belgium seem to follow that trend. However, the Belgian situation remains exceptional compared to the other European countries: the benefits are in principle unlimited in time, whereas long-term unemployed in other countries are transferred to social assistance schemes. Compared to the other countries, the replacement rates (i.e. the proportion of net income in work that is maintained after job loss) in Belgium are very low: The replacement rates of the Belgian unemployment benefits are even lower than the replacement rates in the (means-tested) social assistance schemes in the other countries.

In Belgium, the unemployment benefits have become even more degressive in recent years. Whereas in 1995 only unemployed cohabitants were confronted with declining benefits after being long-term unemployed (more than 1 year), this was the case for all categories in 2013. The strengthened degressivity also included an increase of the benefit level during the first six months of unemployment. However, this did not result in an adequate level of income protection for the 'average' beneficiaries:

- Single-earner families that become unemployed are confronted with a net disposable income far below the poverty threshold. For couples with children, who are unemployed for more than six months, the low benefits and degressivity are compensated by social allowances in child benefits to a certain extent. However, their net disposable income continues to decrease and drop below the poverty line if they remain unemployed for a longer period.
- Most dual-earner families are better off: the combination of unemployment benefits and a labour income is sufficient to stay above the poverty line.

The strengthened degressivity has a particularly detrimental impact on singles: The net disposable income amounts to respectively 117% and 132% of the poverty line for singles with children and without children during the first three months of unemployment. This decreases to respectively 104% and 92% of the poverty line after 2 years of being unemployed. Taking into account that the calculations were based on the *maximum* unemployment benefits, most households even have a lower net disposable income.

In addition, the infinite character of the unemployment benefits in time is not absolute. In the frame of the strengthened activation procedure, the number of sanctions (which can lead to a temporary or permanent suspension) increased to approximately 8% of the eligible unemployed. The sanctioned unemployed who recur to social assistance by the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs) to compensate for their income loss receive a benefit which is below the poverty line for all household types. The same applies to school leavers who have to rely on the PCSWs during their waiting period (before being entitled to unemployment benefits).

2. The effectiveness of the minimum income between 2008 and 2013 (2015)²⁴

Storms et al. (2015) analysed the effectiveness of the minimum income schemes between 2008 and 2013 by making use of reference budgets. Reference budgets are priced baskets of goods and services that are needed for households to achieve a given standard of living. They can be an important reference toolkit for measures to improve the adequateness of the minimum income protection schemes. Reference budgets always correspond with a lower limit: They display the budget needed for people who are in good health, sufficiently informed and possessing the necessary skills to manage their own budget. This implies that the financial deficits can add up if one of these conditions are not fulfilled. This is often the case for low-income households.

Belgium is among the EU-countries that are most actively involved in the design of reference budgets. Storms et al. (2015) calculated updated reference budgets for 21 different household types (based on household composition and education level). Between 2008 and 2013, the reference budgets increased on average by 15%, exceeding the general price increase of 9%. The 15% average increase hides substantial differences between household types: a sharp rise of the reference budgets could be observed in particular among singles and couples with no children. Housing costs are an important explanatory factor in this respect. The rental prices for (decent) residences on the private housing market have risen sharply between 2008 and 2013, in particular for single-bedroom accommodation. Other significant price increases were observed in the field of mobility, recreation, maintaining social relations, a safe childhood and healthy food.

By comparing the reference budgets with the level of minimum incomes, the researchers were able to assess the adequacy of the minimum income protection. They found that the level of most minimum incomes is insufficient to participate normally in society. A guaranteed minimum income (leefloon / RMI) or minimum unemployment benefit is inadequate for nearly all household types. The guaranteed minimum income and the unemployment benefit suffice only for single-parent families with young children who are entitled to social housing, if supplemented with child allowances and education allowances. For singles and couples without children who rent a residence on the private housing market, the minimum *wage* is sufficient to cover the necessary costs. For single-parent families and couples with children, one minimum wage usually does not suffice. However, the situation significantly improves if households with low wages only have limited housing costs.

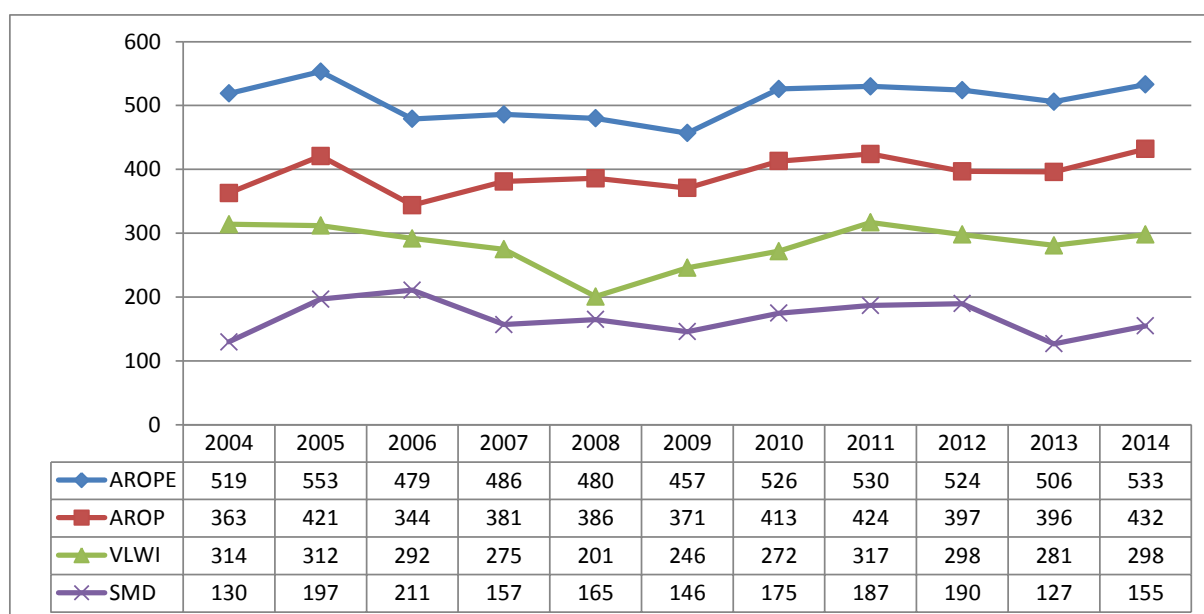
Using reference budgets as a benchmark, Storms et al. (2015) conclude that minimum wages in Belgium are generally too low for single-earner families to participate normally in society, especially when they have to pay rents at market rates. A similar comparison with the median income using reference budgets shows that the minimum income protection is more adequate for single persons than for couples with children. Moreover, the adequacy of the guaranteed minimum income seems to deteriorate as the children are getting older. Based on the evolution of the reference budgets between 2008 and 2013, Storms et al. conclude that the minimum income protection of households of working age has not become more adequate for most household types and deteriorated for some households. The most important reason for this negative evolution is that the prices of basic necessities increased more than allowances and minimum wages.

²⁴ Reference: Storms, B., Penne, T., Vandelannoote, D., & Van Thielen, L. (2015), *Is de minimuminkomensbescherming in ons land doeltreffender geworden sinds 2008? Wat leren we uit de geüpdatete referentiebudgetten?*, Antwerpen: Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck, 67p.

4.2 Child poverty

We already pointed out that the number of children living in situations of poverty or social exclusion seemed to have stabilized but the 2014 results show an increase. [Figure 4.2.1.](#) shows that this increase occurred on all three dimensions of the Europe 2020 target: poverty risk, severe material deprivation and very low work intensity. The increase of the number of children in households with low work intensity is most noticeable, given that the indicator already increased by more than half between 2008 and 2011. Another remarkable evolution is the significant increase (+28%) of the children living in households facing severe material deprivation between 2013 and 2014. As pointed out in [Figure 3.1.3.](#), early estimates for EU-SILC indicate that this increase continued in 2015.

Figure 4.2.1. Poverty or social exclusion among children (0-17), Belgium (absolute number x 1000)

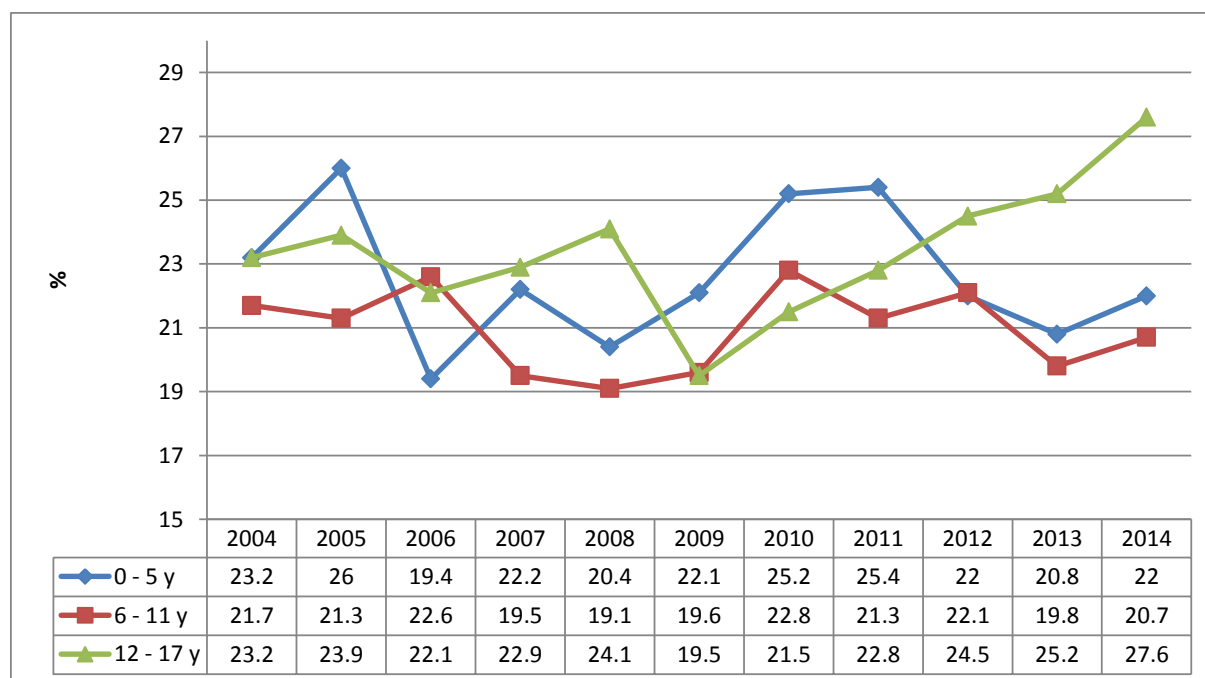


Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Depending on the age category, about 20-25% of all children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion²⁵. The risk of poverty or social exclusion is the highest in the age category 12-17 (27.6%). This is remarkable given the fact that in 2009 this age category still had the lowest risk of poverty or social exclusion. Every age group experienced an increase of the risk of poverty or social exclusion during the last year. In the youngest age category (0-5), the risk in 2014 was 22% compared to 20.7% for the age category 6-11 ([figure 4.2.2.](#)). The risk for all three age categories is below the EU28 level (0-5y: 25.8% / 6-11y: 27.1% / 12-17y: 30.3% in 2014).

²⁵ Due to relatively small sample sizes for breakdowns by child age groups, some caution is needed in the interpretation of the relative levels and the evolution.

Figure 4.2.2. Poverty or social exclusion of children by age, Belgium (in %)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

In figures 3.2.1.bis and 3.2.1.ter, it was shown that the median poverty gap decreased while the risk of persistent poverty has increased for children between 2013 and 2014. The poverty gap for children in 2014 (18.8%) was wider than the poverty gap for the elderly (13.7%) but slightly smaller than the poverty gap for the population in the active age (21.7%). The persistent poverty rate among children increased significantly between 2011 (9.5%) and 2012 (15.5%) and, after a small decrease, increased again in 2014.

The percentage of early school leavers²⁶ slightly decreased from 12.3% in 2011 over 12% in 2012 to 11% in 2013. This indicator depicts the number of young people (age 18-24) with a weak labour market position, but is also informative for the performance of the education system. Belgium scores somewhat better than the EU28 average (11,9%), but 17 countries do better. The percentage of young people (18-24) not in employment or education (NEET) was 16,0% in 2013, which is also somewhat below the EU28 number (17,0%). The figures increased however by 1 pp. compared to 2012 and by 2,7 pp. compared to 2008. The different evolution of both indicators can be explained by the increased youth unemployment rate.

The PISA 2012 results (with a focus on mathematical literacy) confirm earlier results on the educational performance of Belgium and the different Regions (De Meyer et. al., 2014) . Like in the previous studies, Belgium is one of the few countries that combine a high general performance level of fifteen-year olds with high coherence between the performance and the social-economic status of the pupils, and consequently with a high degree of social inequality. The study further again confirms that Belgium is one of the weakest performers regarding pupils with a migrant background. Even after controlling for differences in the socio-economic profile of the population of migrant pupils, Belgium, and a fortiori Flanders, remains among the worst performers. In our 2015 analysis²⁷ it was

²⁶ There is a break in time series for the indicator “early school leavers” for every country in 2014

²⁷ FPS Social Security (2015)

mentioned (cf. box 4, p27) that the OECD in its 2015 Economic Survey for Belgium, also puts a focus on the Belgian education system's performance regarding children of a migrant background.

Finally, we recall that, after a gradual decrease of the infant mortality rate over the period 2001-2011 (from 4.6% to 3.4%), the rate increased to 3.5% in 2013, remaining slightly beneath the EU28 level (3.7% in 2013).

Recently Unicef published its Report Card 'Fairness for Children' (Unicef, 2016). This Report Card contains league tables on child inequality on four domains: income, education, health and life satisfaction. The league tables are for EU Member States based on EU-SILC, PISA, and HBSC. These tables show that the position of Belgium in these league tables is average (income, self-reported health) to unfavourable (education, life satisfaction). See details in the Box 3 below.

Box 3 : Fairness for children and inequalities in child well-being in Belgium according to UNICEF

The UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti published in April 2016²⁸ its 13th report on child well-being in rich countries (OECD + EU). With particular emphasis on the issue of fairness for children, the study examines inequalities between children across 4 dimensions : inequality in income, inequality in educational achievement, inequality in health and inequality in life satisfaction.

The main observations are the following ones :

- As regards the 1st dimension, inequalities in income (EU-SILC), Belgium ranks 22th (out of 41 EU and OECD countries) with a relative income gap of 48,41, which means that the income of a household with a child at the 10th percentile is 48,41% lower than that of a household with a child at the middle of the income distribution. By way of comparison, this gap ranges from 37 to 40 in the least unequal countries (Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands ...) but is higher than 55 in the most unequal countries (United States, Japan, Greece, Italy ...). A positive point is that this gap remained unchanged in Belgium between 2008 and 2013, while, during the same period, it increased by at least one point in 19 countries.

- As regards the 2nd dimension, inequalities in education achievement (measured as the PISA test-score point difference between students at the median and the 10th percentile), the situation is particularly worrying. While the general level of education is good in Belgium (11,5% of the children aged 15 perform at below PISA's proficiency level 2 in reading, maths and science literacy), educational inequalities are particularly high, since Belgium has the second lowest place in the ranking (36th out of 37 EU/OECD countries) in terms of educational inequality. Moreover, the report shows that inequalities have risen in recent years (whereas inequalities have decreased in many other countries).

- As regards the 3rd dimension, inequalities in health (calculated by means of the HBSC questionnaire), Belgium ranks 15th (among 35 EU or OECD countries) with a relative health gap of 28,14, which means that the health score for a child in the 1st decile of the distribution is 28,14% lower than for a child at the middle of the distribution. By way of comparison, this gap ranges from 23 and 25 in the least unequal countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) but is close to 35 in the most unequal countries (Turkey, Poland ...). As in most countries, this gap has increased in Belgium from 2002 to 2014.

²⁸ The complete report can be downloaded at : <https://www.unicef.be/fr/augmentation-alarmante-des-inegalites-en-europe-les-recommandations-de-unicef/>

- As regards the 4th dimension, inequalities in life satisfaction (also calculated by means of the HBSC questionnaire), Belgium only ranks 30th (out of 35) with a relative gap of 29,9, which means that the satisfaction score for a child in the 1st decile of the distribution is 29,9% lower than that for a child at the middle of the distribution. By way of comparison, this gap ranges from 24 and 26 in the least unequal countries (the Netherlands, Denmark ...). Belgium is the country where life satisfaction of the children at the bottom end of the distribution has decreased the most (- 3,7 percentage points) between 2002 and 2014, so that in 2014, 10% of the children attending school aged 11, 13 and 15 have assigned a score less than 4/10 in terms of life satisfaction.

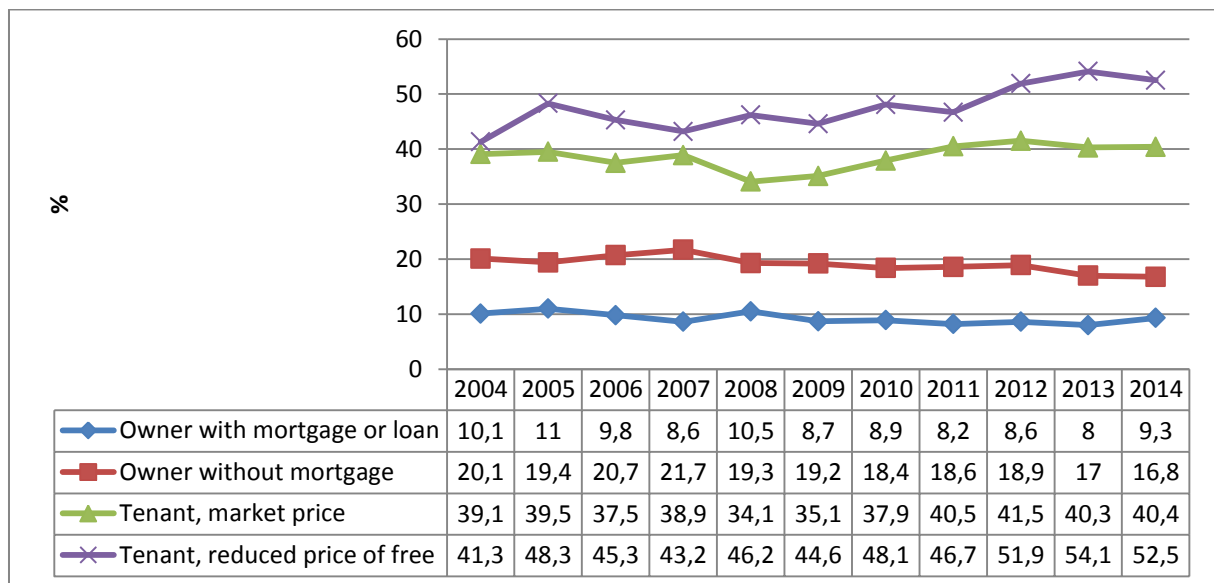
- At global level (for all 4 dimensions), Belgium ranks among the less good countries (exactly 29th out of 35 countries analysed for all dimensions) in terms of inequalities in child well-being.

In conclusion, the report shows that inequalities between children tend to grow faster in Belgium than in many other countries and reach very worrying levels. The extent of the phenomenon makes UNICEF say that the increase of the number of children who, therefore, do not enjoy a good start in life, is a real time-bomb for the Belgian social system.

4.3 Housing

Earlier it was indicated that the-slight- increase in the AROPE rate was mainly situated among the active population. A breakdown of the evolution of the number of persons living in situations of poverty or social exclusion according to the housing situation shows that the increase occurred only among persons renting their home, in the age category 18-64. Especially among the tenants who rent at reduced prices, the number of persons living in situations of poverty or social exclusion has recently increased from 46.7% in 2011 to 54.1% in 2013. The 2014 figures show a slight decrease. Among owners, with or without mortgage, the number of persons living in poverty or social exclusion remains stable (or even decreases slightly for the owners without mortgage)²⁹ (figure 4.3.1). As it is known that tenants have a weaker social profile than owners³⁰, the indicators point to the fact that poverty risks appeared to have increased in very specific population categories, already confronted with higher poverty risks.

Figure 4.3.1. Risk of poverty or social exclusion by housing tenure, Belgium (in %)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Furthermore, it is relevant to monitor the evolution of the share of the housing costs in the household budget (figure 4.3.2) by poverty status. For persons below the poverty threshold, this share remains relatively constant around 35% (36% in 2014), while it is close to 15% for persons above the poverty threshold (14.2% in 2014).

On the basis of EU-SILC 2014, it appears that 10.4% of the population is confronted with potentially problematic housing costs³¹. Broken down by age category (figure 4.3.3.), it seems that this

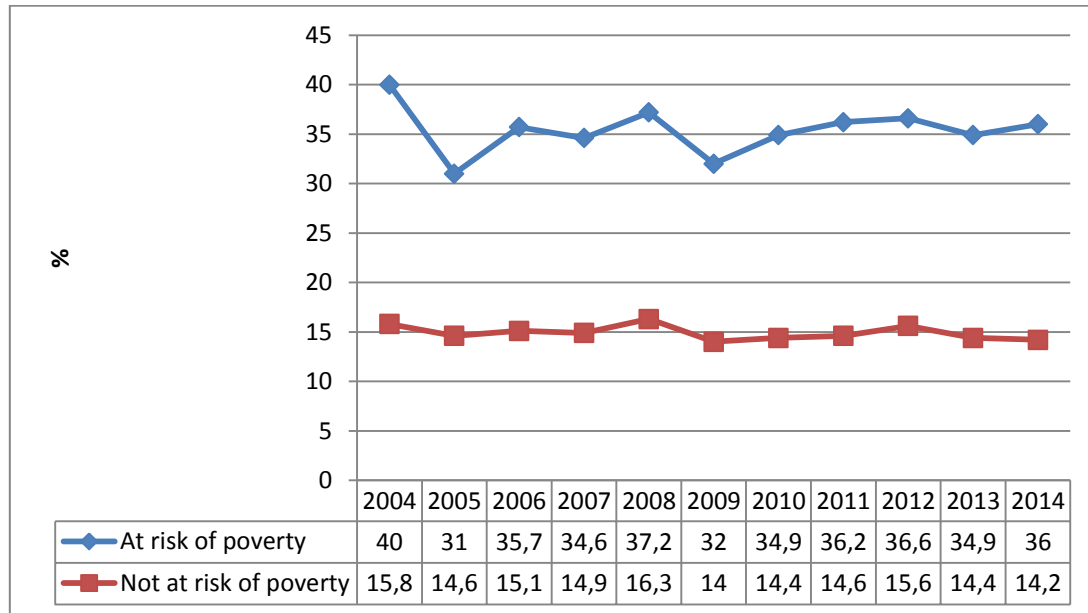
²⁹ The higher risk of poverty or social exclusion for owners without mortgages compared to owners with mortgages is probably linked with the profile of these categories. Owners without mortgages are mostly elderly people with lower (pension) incomes.

³⁰ Dit wordt voor Vlaanderen bevestigd in de recente resultaten van het Grote Woononderzoek, cf. Winters et. al. (2015), Wonen in Vlaanderen anno 2013. De bevindingen uit het grote woononderzoek 2013 gebundeld, Steunpunt Wonen, Leuven, 97 p.

³¹ "Problematic housing costs": a situation in which the total housing costs (minus housing benefits) amount to 40% or more of the total disposable household income (minus housing benefits).

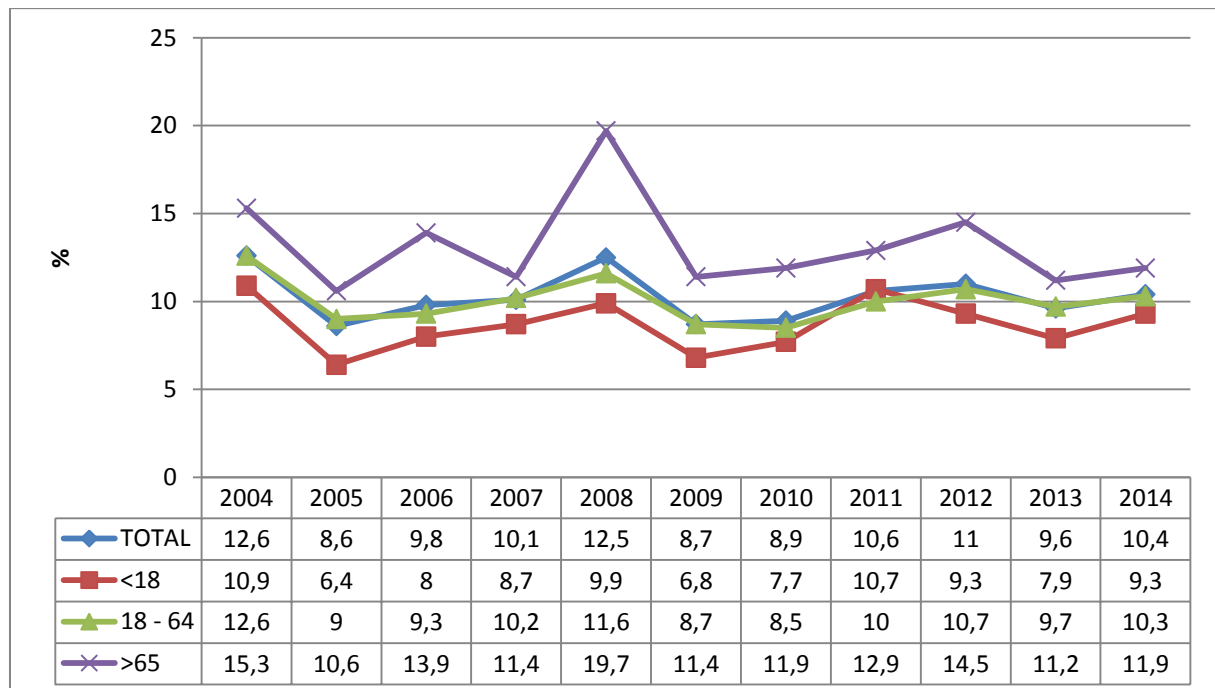
percentage is higher for the elderly (11.9%) than for children (9.3%) and persons in the active age (10.3%). Between 2013 and 2014 the housing cost overburden rate appears to have increased for all age categories.

Figure 4.3.2. Median housing cost burden by poverty status (in % of household disposable income), Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Figure 4.3.3. Housing cost overburden rate by age: % of persons with housing cost > 40% of disposable household income, Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The number of social housing units for tenants slightly but steadily increased over the years. However, the population and certainly the number of private households grew faster. The number of social housing units as a percentage of the total private households thus decreased slightly from about 6,3% during the mid-00s to 6% since 2011³². The number of persons on a waiting list for renting a dwelling at social rate has increased over the recent years³³.

There is no systematic data-collection on the number of homeless people. An organisation of the Brussels Authorities counted in November 2014 2603 persons as homeless. In January-February 2014 in Flanders, 711 adults and 53 children were counted in winter accommodation while 3019 adults and 1675 children were counted in other accommodations for the homeless and 599 were under the threat of eviction.

4.4 Active inclusion

The active inclusion strategy has three components: an adequate minimum income, inclusion into the labour market and access to high-quality services.

The best indicator for the extent to which a country succeeds in guaranteeing a minimum income is indeed the poverty risk. Offering (minimal) income protection in case a household has no primary income (due to social risks), is a key function of social protection systems and of an active inclusion policy. In that respect, it is relevant to examine the poverty risk in households with very low work intensity, as was done in [section 4.1](#). It can be assumed that these households depend on benefits to a large extent. As already mentioned, households with very low work intensity are confronted with a very high poverty risk, especially when children are involved. It is important to note that the performance of Belgium on this indicator is worse than the EU-average.

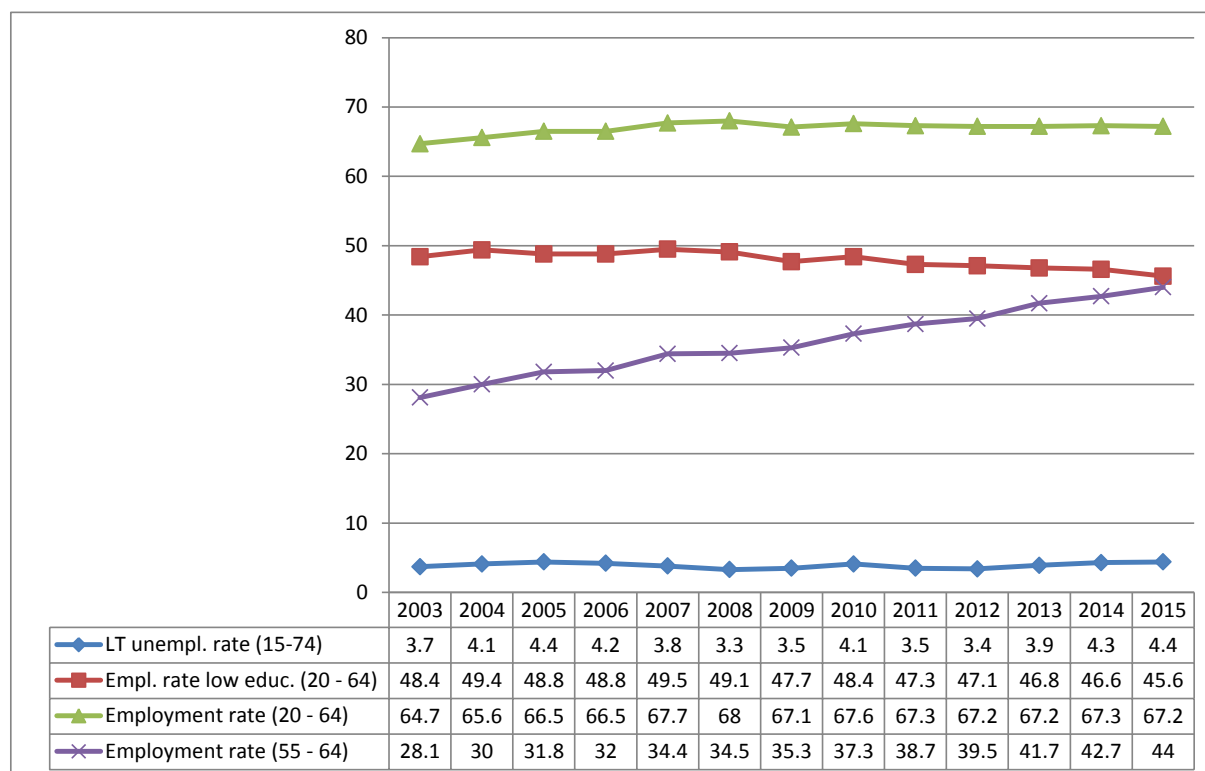
Together with benefit adequacy, inclusion in the labour market is a key challenge. Belgium's relatively weak labour market performance is mainly situated among the category with a low educational attainment. As already pointed out before, this is again illustrated by the recently published LFS data for 2015 ([see figure 4.4.1.](#)). While the total employment rate remained constant in 2015 compared to 2014 at 67%, the employment rate for persons with a low educational attainment further decreased starting from 2010 from 48.4% to 45.6%, thus further increasing the employment gap by educational level. This widening gap in the employment rate between persons with low education level and the total population can be observed for both Flanders and Wallonia, but not in Brussels ([see annex 2](#)). The employment rate of older workers (55-64 years) moves in the opposite direction: their employment rate gradually increases from 28.1% in 2003 to 44.7% in 2015. The long-term unemployment rate decreased slightly just before the crisis impacted and increased again slightly since then (4.4% in 2015). Overall, it is noticeable that long-term unemployment, like very low work intensity, reacts only in a limited way on differing socio-economic conditions.

32 Apart from social housing units for rent operated by social housing societies, municipalities and municipal welfare services can have housing can supply housing units at reduced prices. Furthermore, Flanders has a system of housing subsidies for households that have been on a waiting list for a certain time span. However, these additional housing support pathways are overall relatively marginal.

33 Due to differences in methods of collecting and updating lists, it remains difficult to give an exact figure of the number of persons on a waiting list over the regions. There could also be double counts of people registered in different regions. Furthermore, like the social housing society does, one could make a difference between people who are on a list but who live already in social housing and people who don't. With all these remarks in mind, about 195.000 people were registered in 2014 as candidate for a social dwelling.

However, looking at the evolution at the regional level shows that in Brussels and Wallonia there seems to be a stronger link to the economic cycle (see figure A2.9 in annex 2).

Figure 4.4.1. Employment rate (20-64), total and specific categories (low education, older workers) and long-term unemployment rate (15-74), Belgium (in %)



Source : Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Studies published in the course of 2015 tackle different aspects of this key challenge (see box 4). **Vandenbroucke and Colruy** find a strong polarization of work between households, with many people living in jobless households compared to other countries. The researchers point to the importance of individual characteristics for the finding that the cleavage between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is, relatively, very large in Belgium. The fact that many single persons households have the labour market profile of an ‘outsider’ and because both ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ tend to form couples among the same category (homogamy), explains the high household joblessness in Belgium. The **Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities** published an update of the ‘Socio-economic monitoring – Labour market and Origin’ report. Similar to the results of the first monitoring report (2013), the 2015 report shows that the employment gap between people of foreign origin and the rest of the population in Belgium is the highest among all EU-countries: 73,3% of the people of the Belgian origin were employed in 2012, compared to 42.7% of people of Maghreb origin and 45.0% of people originating from one of the EU candidate countries (especially Turkey). A study by the **Federal Planning Bureau** investigated exit rates from unemployment of school leavers by educational attainment. The study confirms that the chances of leaving unemployment are strongly associated with the level of education of school leavers without work experience. In particular, the probability of leaving unemployment is substantially higher for young graduates who have completed post-secondary education. Moreover, the results show that this effect has strengthened over time,

Box 4

1. The polarization of employment over households³⁴

Over the last 30 years the share of individuals in the Belgian working-age population without employment ('individual joblessness') has fallen continuously, while the share of households with no working-age member in employment ('household joblessness') remained fairly stable. The researchers examine why individual joblessness and household joblessness diverge. The growing gap between both measures of joblessness reflects changes in household composition and changes in the distribution of individual employment over households. The latter phenomenon is described by constructing a measure of 'polarisation of employment over households', which is based on the difference between observed and 'expected' household joblessness. On the basis of changes in household formation and changes in individual joblessness one would have expected household joblessness in Belgium to decrease. However, increasing polarisation, i.e. an increasingly unequal distribution of jobs over households, has counteracted this 'expected' evolution. Singles constitute households that are most vulnerable to the polarisation we describe, but a shift towards such more vulnerable households offers only a small share of the explanation of the evolution over time. We observe rising levels of polarisation, both in single adult households and couples. Within these household groups, changes in polarisation are similar, but increasing polarisation among couples is the most important factor in the overall increase in polarisation. The personal characteristics associated with individual joblessness (gender, education, age, region, origin) explain a significant part of this polarisation on the level of households. In 2012, almost half of polarisation in single adult households can be explained through typical individual characteristics of singles. In couples almost one third of polarisation is related to individual characteristics and marital selection. However, this also means that a substantial part of household joblessness cannot be explained by these individual characteristics. A comparison of Belgium with three low-polarisation countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands) and two high-polarisation countries (Ireland and the United Kingdom) suggests that polarisation is high in Belgium, when compared to Germany, France and the Netherlands, for the following reason. First, more than in those countries, Belgian singles have a weak socio-economic profile in terms of age, skills and origin: compared with the total population, they are more often low-skilled, older, and born outside the European Union. Second, the difference in individual joblessness between individuals with strong profiles and individuals with weak profiles is larger in Belgium than in those countries (whether it concerns singles or not). The latter factor is reinforced by regional differences within Belgium. Third, educational homogamy in couples is larger in Belgium than in Germany, France and the Netherlands.

³⁴ Corluy, Vincent and Vandenbroucke, Frank, Polarisation of Employment Over Households Revisited: The Belgian Case (May 2015). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2606599> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2606599> ; Vandenbroucke, F., Corluy, V., Huishoudens zonder werk in België, Leuvense Economische Standpunten, 2015/149

2. Socio-economic monitoring: labour market & origin³⁵

In the 'Socio-economic monitoring – Labour market and Origin' report, the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities give an overview of the labour market position of people with a migrant background for the period 2008-2012. The report is based on statistics from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security which allows to map the entire population according to origin and migrant background (duration of stay, acquisition of nationality, etc.).

Similar to the results of the first monitoring report (2013), the 2015 report shows that the employment gap between people of foreign origin and the rest of the population in Belgium is the highest among all EU-countries: 73,3% of the people of the Belgian origin were employed in 2012, compared to 42.7% of people of Maghreb origin and 45.0% of people originating from one of the EU candidate countries (especially Turkey). The employment rates for people of Sub-Saharan African origin (39.6%) or in non-EU-Europe countries (39.0%) were even lower. The disadvantageous position for people of foreign origin is not only situated on the employment level: the lower employment rate hides greater underlying differences regarding their labour market position. People of foreign origin are concentrated in specific sectors and statutes.

Construction and service vouchers attract Eastern European employees

Remarkably, the employment rate of people of Belgian origin declined between 2008 and 2012 (-0.5 percentage points), whereas the employment rate of nearly all categories of foreign origin increased. This is largely due to the fact that many people of foreign origin found jobs in the more dynamic (and often more insecure) segments of the labour market: Part-time employment became more popular and increasingly more people of foreign origin became self-employed. The segments of the labour market with a higher representation of people of Belgian origin (such as better paid white-collar workers) suffered more as a consequence of the crisis. Moreover, the job loss in the industrial sector affected relatively more people of Belgian origin.

A striking observation was the sharp rise in the employment rate among people originating from (mainly Eastern-European) countries that joined the EU in 2004: Their employment rate increased by 5 percentage points (for women even up to 8.6 pp). An important explanation for this sharp increase is the migration of people who started working in the construction sector or the cleaning industry (service vouchers).

The results also show a general decline of the gender gap with respect to the employment rate: the disadvantage of women from EU candidate countries even declined with 3.1 percent points.

Support measures contribute to closing the gap

The report shows that policy support measures contribute to the labour market integration of people of foreign origin. Measures such as the reduced social security contributions for long-term unemployed, and especially for first employees in SMEs, benefit this group disproportionately.

Regarding the inactive population, the statistics show that the youngsters of foreign origin tend to study longer (and are entitled to child benefits longer). A more detailed analysis of the other inactivity states shows that the strong overrepresentation of people of Belgian origin drawing 'unemployment allowances with company supplement' grew further. The number of people entitled to a guaranteed minimum income remained relatively stable among most groups of foreign origin despite the crisis.

³⁵ FPS Employment, Labour & Social Dialogue & Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (2015), Socio-economische monitoring 2015: Arbeidsmarkt en Origine, Brussel: FPS Labour, 264p.

3. The relationship between unemployment duration and education³⁶

In a recent study, the Federal Planning Bureau (2015) investigated the exit rates from unemployment associated with different levels of education in Belgium during two periods characterized respectively by high (2002-2007) and low economic growth (2009-2014). The study confirms that the chances of leaving unemployment are strongly associated with the level of education of school leavers without work experience. In particular, the probability of leaving unemployment is substantially higher for young graduates who have completed post-secondary education. Moreover, the results show that this effect has strengthened over time, in two ways. Whereas the odds of leaving unemployment for school leavers holding a primary and a high school degree versus a Bachelor's degree decreased between the two periods, those of school leavers holding a Master's degree increased. A regional distribution shows that Flemish school leavers have a higher probability of leaving unemployment than in the two other regions whatever their diploma. This advantage is relatively higher for low and medium skill degrees. This ability to integrate low-skilled school leavers in the labour market has nevertheless weakened after the economic crisis of 2008. Inversely, the chances of leaving unemployment associated with a Master's compared to a Bachelor's degree are higher both in Wallonia and Brussels than in Flanders during the period 2009-2014. This feature likely results from crowding-out with higher skilled young people taking up jobs below their level of qualification.

In Belgium, 12% of the young persons were not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in 2014. Again, the Flemish proportion (9.8%) is below the national figure, whereas the Walloon and Brussels rates (respectively 14.7% and 15.8%) exceed the Belgian percentage. The national proportion of NEETs is very close to the European average of 12.4% (in 2014). In 2015 the NEET rate remained stable (12.2%).

A breakdown by country of origin furthermore reveals a significant gap between youngsters of Belgian origin on the one hand and people of foreign origin on the other hand. In Belgium, the unemployment rate of youngsters born outside the EU28 amounted to 43.6% in 2014, compared to only 21.6% for youngsters of Belgian origin.

Having a job is unfortunately not always sufficient to avoid poverty. The percentage of working persons at risk of poverty remained relatively stable at around 4.5% during the period 2004-2011. In 2014, the rate amounted to 4.8% compared to an average of 9.6% in the EU28. Notwithstanding the relatively low in-work poverty rate, in absolute terms this groups makes up a sizable share of the total number of persons at-risk-of-poverty.

Participation in life-long learning - by initial educational attainment - is one indicator for the accessibility of (high quality) services as a component of active inclusion (figure 4.4.2). The indicator for participation in education or training among the population aged 25 to 64 decreased significantly between 2005 (8.3%) and 2008 (7.1%), especially among persons with a high initial education level. Between 2008 and 2011, the participation remained relatively stable. From 2011 the gap with the EU28 average increased again, mainly due to a rather steep increase in the EU28 figure in 2013. The

³⁶ Novella, M.L., & Duvivier, M. (2015), The relationship between unemployment duration and education, Brussels: Federal Planning Bureau, 32p.

difference in participation rate between persons with a high and a low educational level remained at about 8 to 9 pp. during the last years (about 3% for low skilled and about 11.5% for high skilled).

The interfederal service for the fight against poverty points in its most recent bi-annual report to a number of trends in the take up of a number of services and identifies a number of evolutions that may hinder the take up of public services (box 5).

Box 5 : Biennial report Rapport of the Service for the Struggle against Poverty

In addition to the issue of the “level” of social benefits/measures, there is another important consideration at stake when looking at the effectiveness of social benefits/measures : the notion of “non take-up”.

On the basis of “qualitative” information, which is the result of a broad and thorough consultation exercise on the subject, the recent biennial report (2014-2015) “Public Services and Poverty”, published by the Service for the Struggle against Poverty, Precariousness and Social Exclusion³⁷, highlights several worrying developments that are weakening more and more fundamental social rights in Belgium, whether in terms of justice, culture, early childhood services, health, employment, energy or water. This report points out, among others :

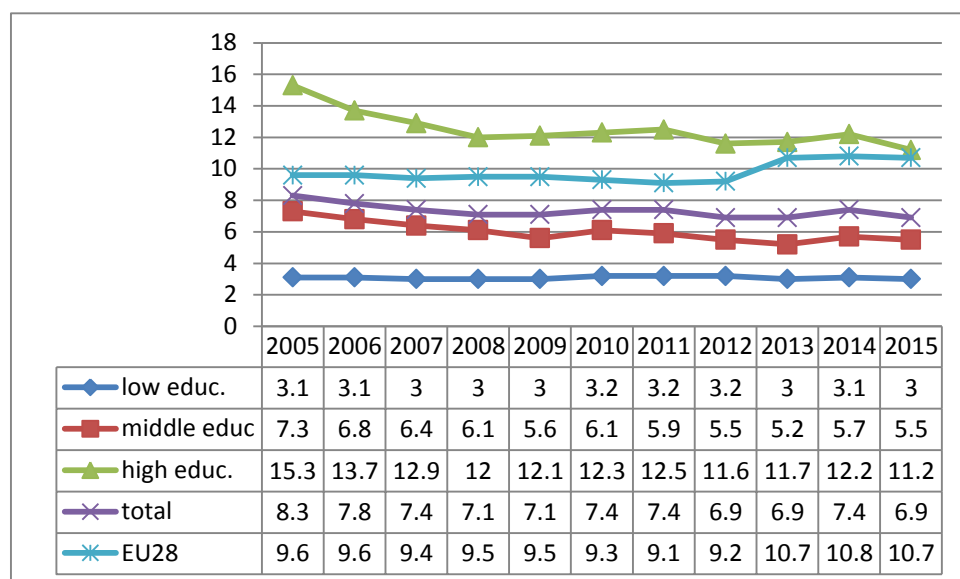
The fact that several social rights are more and more subject to conditions and controls. This development makes that these rights are sometimes considered as a “luxury”, leading to some people thinking that they are not entitled to them. For example, the tightening of the legislation on the integration allowances has led to the exclusion of a large number of jobseekers, a substantial part of which does not find the way to the CPAS (Public Social Assistance Centre).

The fact that the responsibility for the effectiveness of the rights is increasingly transferred either to a more local power (without sufficient means and with an increased risk of legal uncertainty and of inequality of rights), or to the individual person, as is the case for example with the minimum supply of gas and electricity, or to the “market”, which creates more risks (knowledge break, less experience) in terms of support of people in a situation of poverty.

The fact that people living in poverty are faced with many inequalities as regards access social rights. They are more subject to controls, less at ease with digital technologies, they have less access to information, etc.

³⁷ The Service for the Struggle against Poverty, Precariousness and Social Exclusion assesses the effectiveness of the fundamental rights of persons living in unfavourable socio-economic conditions. As an interfederal organ (created on the basis of a cooperation agreement between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions), the Service for the Struggle against Poverty is supported by has a Management Committee and a Monitoring Commission. With the participation of the associations in which the poorest people express themselves, it produces a biennial report including proposals and recommendations to the governments. For this recent report, the Service organised 38 meetings involving more than 300 persons.

Figure 4.4.2. Participation in life-long learning by educational attainment, Belgium, EU28 (population 25-64) (in %)



Source : Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium.

Note: Breaks in series in 2006 and 2013.

4.5 Overindebtedness

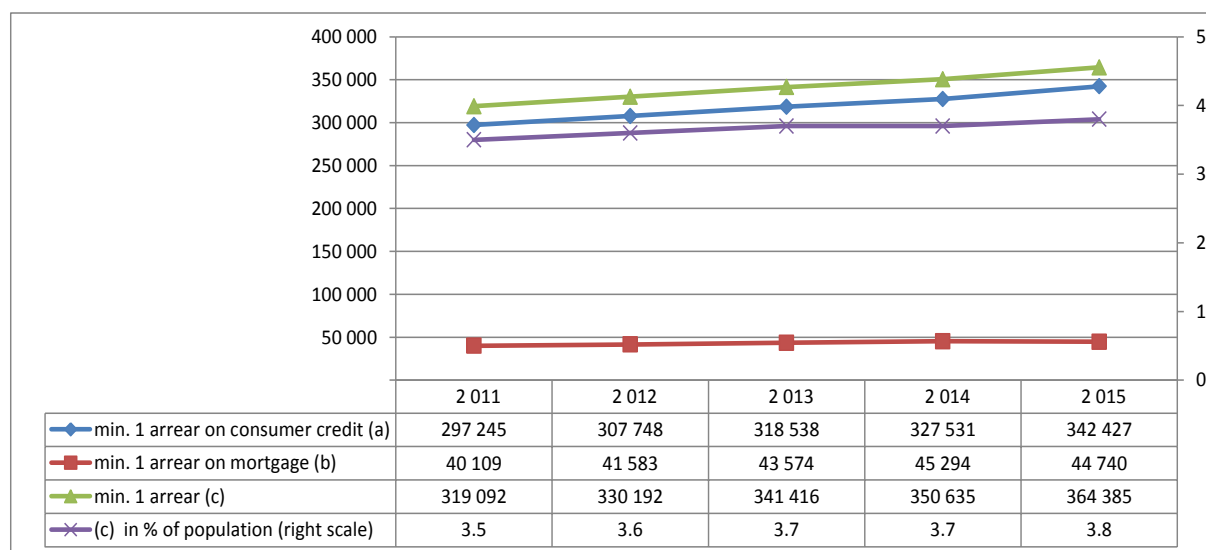
The number of persons with arrears at the end of the year increased from 350,635 at the end of 2014 to 364,385 at the end of 2015. In relative terms the increase is more limited. From 2011 to 2015 the population percentage increased from 3.5% to 3.8%. Most of these persons have one or two arrears, but 40% has also one or more other credits without default payments. The increase is mainly due to the increase in the number of defaults on payments in the context credit openings. The other types of credit show no major increase since 2010.

There are clear differences in the number of person with arrears. In Wallonia and Brussels about 5.5% of the population is in this situation, while in Flanders this is 2.6%. Within each region there are marked differences between sub-regions.

In 62% of the cases the amount of the arrears is below 5000 euro. The average amounts to 12.799 euro per person.

The Central Individual Credit Register does not collect any further details regarding the persons with arrears. Hence, it is not clear which social reality is hidden behind this increasing number of arrears. Regarding indicators around the problematic debts based on EU-SILC, the percentage of persons, whose disposable income falls (further) below the poverty threshold because they have to pay back consumer credits, remains stable around 5%. The percentage of persons who live in a household with at least two arrears for basic necessities (water, gas, electricity, rent and mortgage) is also relatively stable 2007 (6.1% in 2007, 7.8% in 2011, 6% in 2014)

Figure 4.5.1. Number of borrowers with at least one overdue debt repayment, absolute numbers (left) and in % of population (right), Belgium



Source : National Bank of Belgium

The Observatoire du Crédit et de l'Endettement (OCE) has made a study in 2015 on the link between overindebtedness and poverty. This study confirms (on the basis of data from the 'Credit Central of the National Bank) that vulnerable geographic areas are also characterised by a higher participation in loans and by a higher average amount of consumer credit and by a higher number of overdue debt repayments. Moreover the study shows a strong correlation between poverty and financial difficulties and a clear link between 'financial culture' and poverty.

On the one hand, overindebtedness and the deprivations resulting from it are most likely to generate situations of poverty or to worsen them. On the other hand, poverty may lead to overindebtedness, because the persons concerned put strategies in place (deferral of the payment of some bills or the rent, recourse to credit to finance necessities of daily life, etc.) in order to make up for a lack of income.

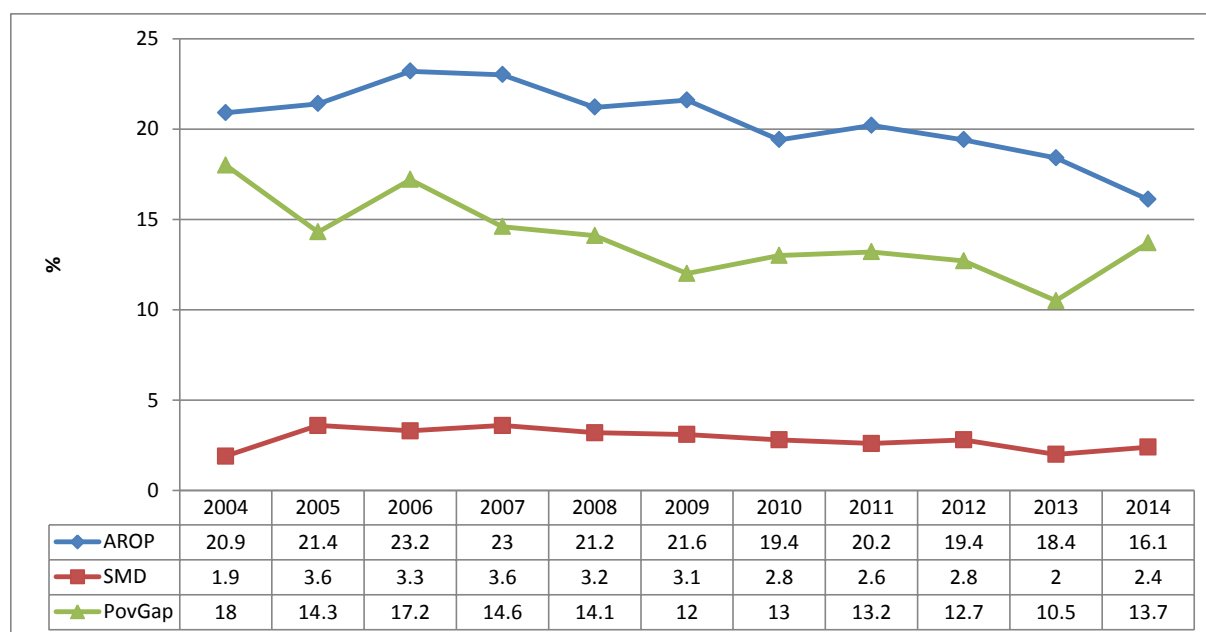
5 | Pensions

As mentioned in the section 3.1., the poverty risk of the elderly (65+) decreased by 7.1%-points from 23.2% in 2006 to 16.1% in 2014.

When other thresholds (based on 40%, 50% or 70% of median equivalent income) are used, the rate decreases over the observation period, except at the 40%-level, where a decrease happened only during the most recent years (see [figure A2.3 in annex 2](#)).

Over the past years, the poverty gap also decreased but the latest 2014 data show a marked increase. The severe material deprivation indicator remained stable.

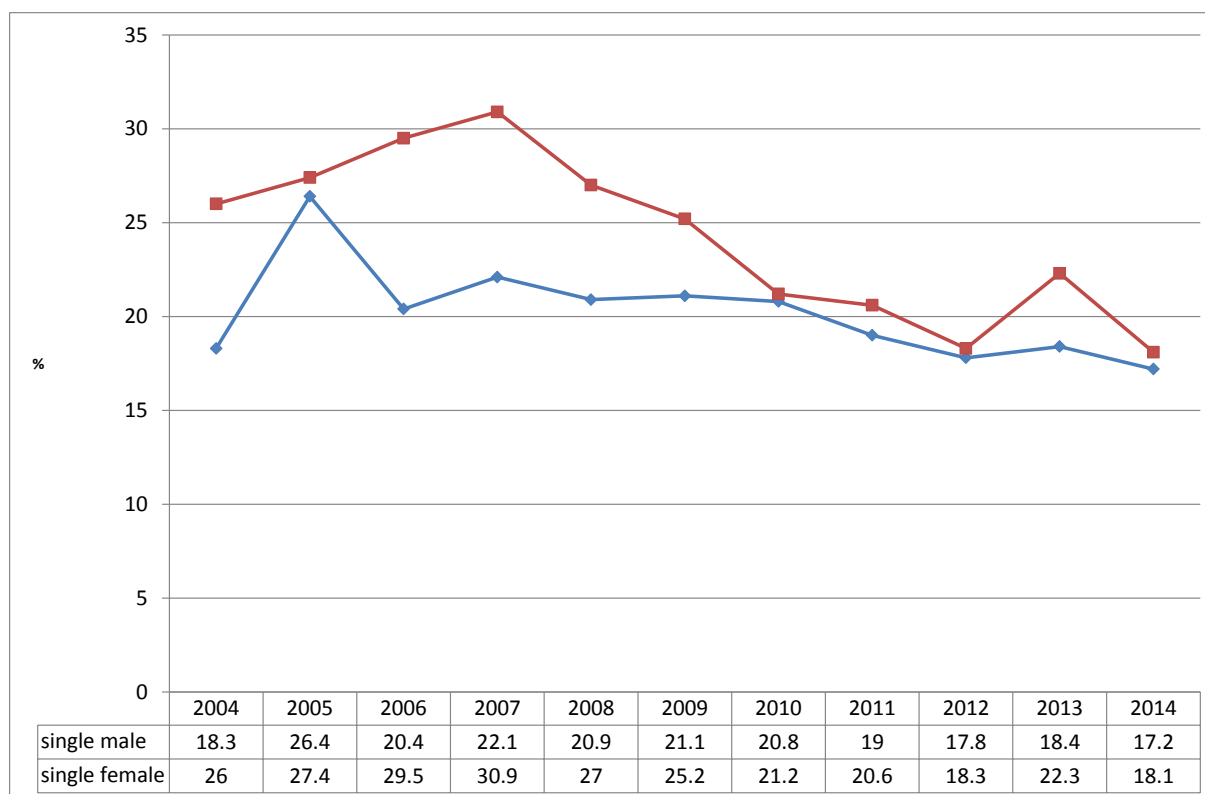
Figure 5.1. Poverty risk, poverty gap and severe material deprivation among the elderly population (65+), Belgium



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

It is interesting to note that the improvement of the AROP indicators for the elderly is essentially situated among women. In fact, the AROP rate for single man of 65 years or over stay relatively stable the last 10 years (from 18,3% in 2004 to 17,2% in 2014) but the AROP rate for single woman of 65 years or over drop considerably (from 26% in 2004 to 18,1% in 2014). It seems safe to assume that cohorts effects, woman with better pension rights entering pension, are the main explanation for this finding, although, also the improvement of minimum pensions over the last years could also have had an impact on this positive evolution.

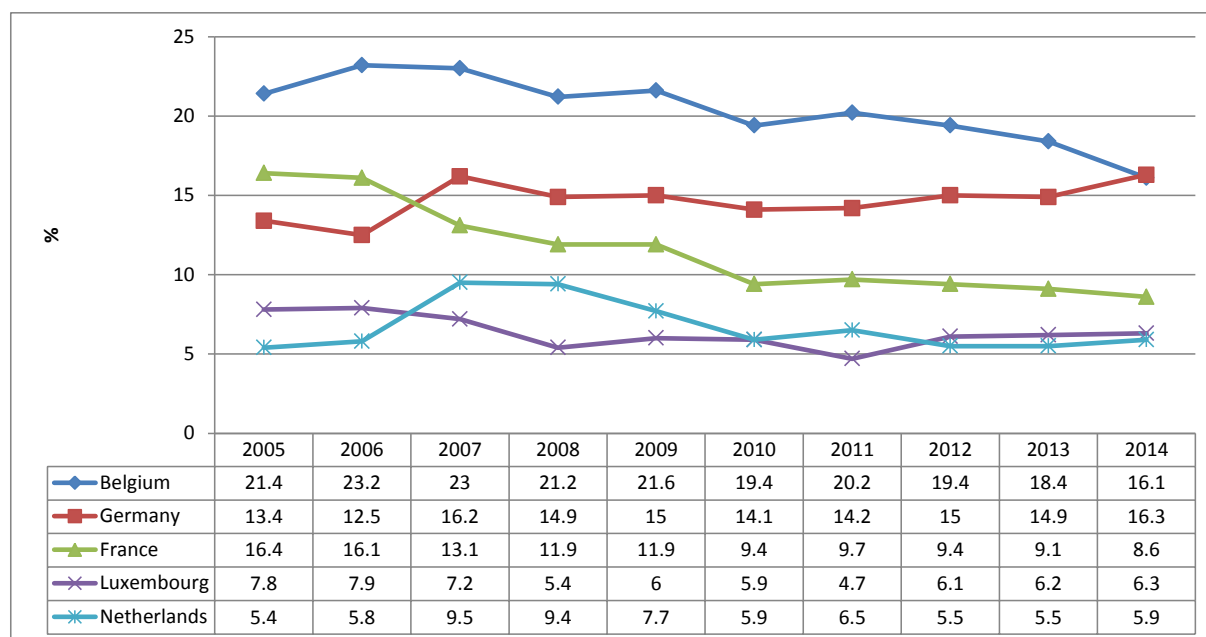
Figure 5.2. Poverty risk of single elderly (65+) man and woman, Belgium



Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Despite the decline, the poverty risk among the elderly population remains at a high level in Belgium compared to the EU28 (13.8%) and the neighboring countries (FR: 8.6%, DE: 16.3%, NL: 5.9% and LU: 6.3% in 2014). The poverty rate in the Netherlands and Luxemburg remains constant. France shows a very similar trend as Belgium, while there seems to be some increase over the last years in Germany.

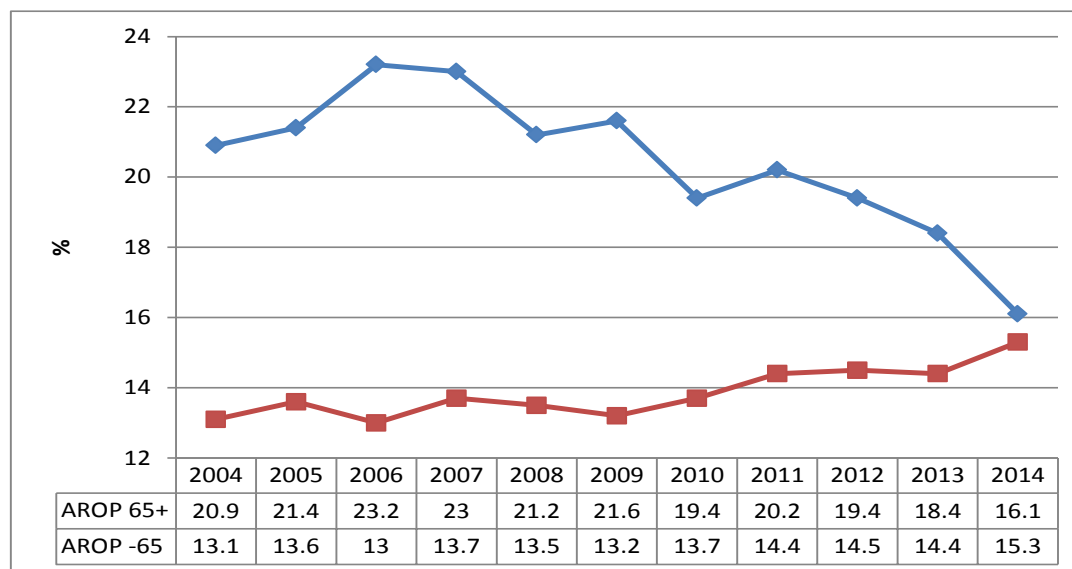
Figure 5.2. AROP of older people - Belgium and neighbouring countries



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Even though the poverty risk of the elderly is decreasing, it remains slightly above the poverty risk of the population aged below 65, which is increasing since 2009.

Figure 5.3. AROP for the population aged above and below 65



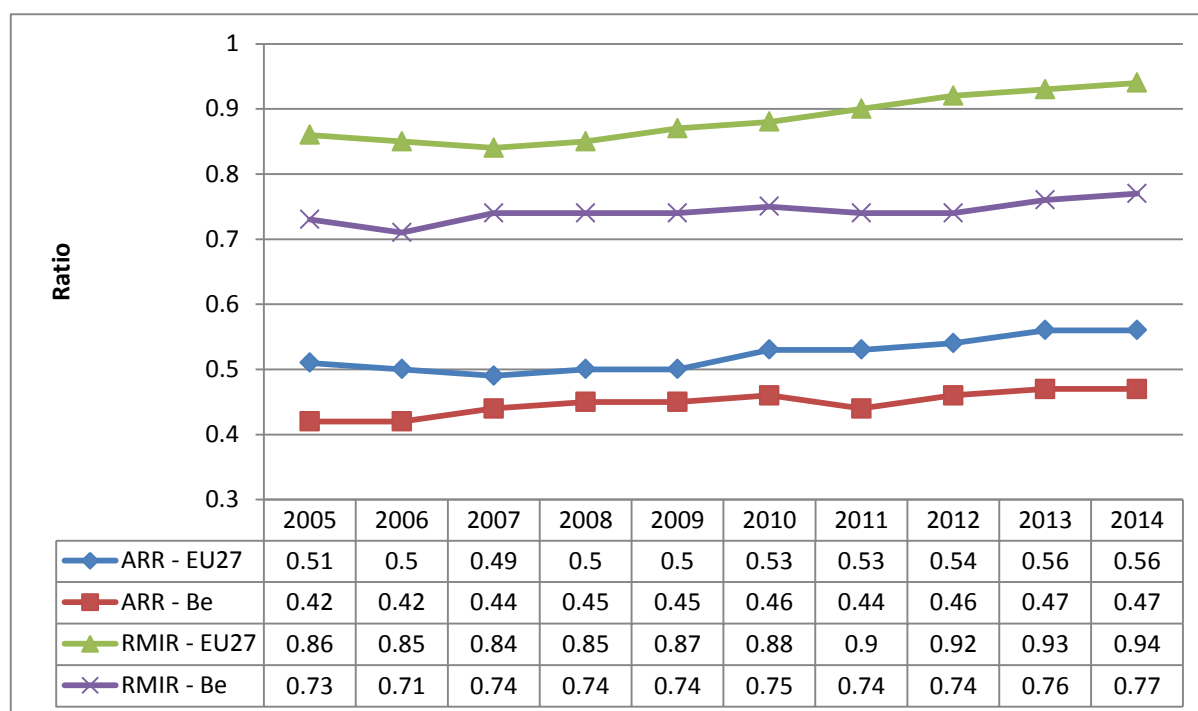
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The aggregate replacement ratio (= ratio of income from pensions of persons aged from 65 to 74 years and income from work of persons aged from 50 to 59 years) in 2014 remains at 0.47 in Belgium (after an increase from 0.41 in 2004 to 0.47 in 2013, the ratio stabilized and remains at the same level in 2014 than in 2013), compared to an average level for the EU28 of 0.56 (same level as in

2013). Germany (0.45) and the Netherlands (0.50) show a comparable ratio while France (0.68) and LU (0.85) show a much higher ratio.

The relative median income ratio (= ratio of median income of persons 65+ and median income of persons below 65) remains more or less stable (it only shows a very slight increase) over the whole period, while the EU average continues to increase steadily since 2007, remaining at a much higher level than the Belgian average.

Figure 5.4. Aggregate Replacement Ratio (ARR) and Relative Median Income Ratio (RMIR), Belgium and EU-27, 2004-2013



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

The prospective theoretical replacement rate for Belgium³⁸ shows that, with the current policy (situation January 2013) and taking into account a number of assumptions, the replacement rate for a person who retires in 2053 would change to a limited extent (Table 5.1.). For the basic type case (career of 40 years, average income) the net replacement rate (1st and 2nd pillar) in 2013 amounted to 78.6%. In 2053, it would amount to 74.7%. It would thus imply a small diminution, which is somewhat in contrast with a previous exercise which estimated the change in TRR between 2010 and 2050 to increase from 74 to 76%. This difference in outcomes between the current and the previous TRR exercise is essentially due to the abandoning of the “bonus pension”. Table 5.1. shows the results for a number of variants of this basic type case. The table shows e.g. that the current and the future replacement rate varies widely according to the income level during the professional career. For low incomes, the replacement rate amounts to 84.3% in 2053, for high incomes it amounts to

³⁸ The theoretical replacement rate is an indicator for the level of the pension compared to the wage earned before retiring. The calculation is based on a number of type cases. These type cases draw a picture of the functioning of the pension system, but they are not (necessarily) representative of the actual pensions the pensioners receive. For more information: SPC, European Commission Pension Adequacy Report 2015 (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7828&visible=0&>)

*No figures for 2013

54.9% in 2053. The replacement rate after 10 years of retirement amounts to 66.7%. The effect of a career interruption in the context of child care does not influence the replacement rate. Career interruptions in other contexts have a slightly more significant influence.

Table 5.1. Current and prospective theoretical replacement rate: base case and variants

	Base-case: 40 year career, average income level	Low income level	High Income level	10 years after retirement	Female employee with 3 years career interruption for care of children	3 year career interruption due to unemployment	10 year absence of labour market
2013	78.6	*	—*	*	*	*	*
2053	74.7	84.3	54.9	66.7	72.7	72.8	62.3

Source: Social protection Committee, European Commission, FPS Social Security

For a correct assessment of the relative prosperity of the elderly, it is also important to take home ownership into account. However, a concerted European methodology for taking into account the impact of the so-called imputed rent (fictitious income of owners-occupiers) is not yet available. The 2015 annual report of the Study Committee on Ageing however presented the result of a calculation made by ADS (Statistical Institute) in the context of EU-SILC. The conclusion is that if account is taken of the imputed rent, the poverty risk for the elderly (10% in 2012) is at a lower level than the poverty risk for the population in the active age. However, these interpretations should be approached with caution. [Figure 4.3.3](#) (cf. above) shows that the percentage of persons who are confronted with problematic housing costs remains higher among the elderly than among other age groups. The median total housing costs as a percentage of the household income is also higher for the elderly (17.5%) than for the total population (16.2%). Moreover, the extent to which the own home can be used for fulfilling other needs is a complicated issue. The severe housing deprivation rate of the elderly is 0.2% while it is 0.9% for the total population.

According to the 2015 Pensions Adequacy Report, 77.6% of the elderly are owners (2013). If you look in relation to gender, it is observed that only 74.8% of the elderly women are owners while 81.2% of the elderly men owns a house.

BOX 6

The **2015 Pensions Adequacy Report**³⁹ states that *pension adequacy varies considerably by gender*. To capture this, the report uses the **gender pension gap indicator**, which registers *the difference in average pension income for men and women as the percentage by which women's annual pension is lower than men's*⁴⁰.

In the Country Profiles of the 2015 Pension Adequacy Report (Volume II), it is question of the **gender pension gap**. The report exposes that, In Belgium, the gender pension gap 2012 was 27 percent,

³⁹<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=758> (see 'related links')

⁴⁰ Pension adequacy report 2015, volume 1 (page 54)

which was 14 p.p. lower than the EU-27 average and in decreasing trend since 2009 (31%). Two reasons for further reduction of this gap are identified : on one hand, the fact that future cohorts of female retirees will have a much higher activity rates which will help reduce the coverage and general gaps. On the other hand, if the steady improvement of minimum benefits continues, it will also contribute to shrink the gap.

when looking at tendencies and the situation in details, the report explains that *the gender gap in the employment rate of older workers (age 55-64) has decreased by 6.7 p.p. over the period of 2004-2014 (EU-28: -5 p.p.) and amounted to 11.4 p.p. in 2014 (EU-28: 13.7 p.p.). The gender gap in the duration of working life, which in 2013 came to 4.6 years (EU-28: 5.2 years) has decreased by 1.9 years since 2004 (EU-28: -1.2 years). The gender gap in part-time employment⁴¹ (for people aged 20-64), which reached 32.9 p.p. in 2014 (EU-28: 23.5 p.p.), has increased slightly by 2 p.p. since 2004. The gender pay gap⁴², which in 2013 at 9.8 percent was substantially lower than the EU-28 average (16.4 percent), has, however, only decreased by 0.3 p.p. since 2007 (EU-28: increase by 0.3 p.p. over the period of 2010-2013)⁴³.*

Finally, **concerning the budgetary sustainability of the pensions**, the Study Committee on Ageing (2015) estimates the additional pension costs at 0.6% of GDP for the period 2014-2020 and at 2.2% of GDP for the period 2014-2060, while it was estimated at 4.1% of GDP for the period 2013-2060. The general additional costs of ageing are estimated at 2.1% of GDP for the period 2014-2060. Compared with the previous estimates of the budgetary cost of ageing (2014), the current estimates are 2.1% of GDP lower. This is due to different factors. The budgetary cost of aging between 2014 and 2060 represents the variation in overall social spending, expressed as a percentage of GDP between these two years. Compared with the results of the 2014 annual report of the SCA, the total budgetary cost of aging decreases by 2.1% of GDP between 2014 and 2060. Lower productivity gains on average between 2014 and 2060 than in the 2014 annual report increases the fiscal costs but this increase was more than offset by a smaller increase than expected in the dependency ratio of the elderly (which results in a lower weight of social spending in percent of GDP), by the upward revision of GDP under SEC2010 and especially by the reforms (especially pension reform and unemployment with company supplement).

BOX 7 : governmental reforms in pensions : SCA report / The future of pensions in Belgium

In its 2015 annual report, the Study Committee on Ageing studies the impacts of the Pension reform of December 2014⁴⁴, arguing that, next to methodological changes, the reform will reduce the

⁴¹ The gender gap in the employment rate of older workers and the gender gap in part-time employment is calculated from the differences between values for women and men.

⁴² The 2015 Pension adequacy Report specifies that *The unadjusted Gender Pay Gap (GPG) represents the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees.*

⁴³ 2015 pension Adequacy Report (Country Profiles - Volume II)

⁴⁴ The measures taken into account for pension reform are the increase in the statutory retirement age to 67 by 2030, the rise of the minimum age and career conditions for access to early retirement, the removal of the *pension bonus* and the

budgetary cost of aging from 2.1% of GDP. Pension expenditures are eased 1.5% of GDP. According to the Study Committee on Ageing (2015), three factors are responsible for the reduction in pension expenditure as % of GDP: the decrease in the number of pensioners⁴⁵, the suppression of the *pension bonus* and the increase of the economic growth⁴⁶ that lightens the weight of each social spending as% of GDP⁴⁷. On the other hand, the average pension is raised compared to a scenario without reform because of the extension of careers -generated by measures concerning the conditions for access to early retirement and the age of retirement- which burdens the budgetary cost of aging⁴⁸.

In older forecasts, socio-economic dependency ratio⁴⁹ increased by 53% between 2014 and 2060, a smaller increase than the demographic dependency ratio⁵⁰ (69%), due to a higher average growth of employment than the growth of the population aged 18-66 years. In the new baseline projection that take the Pension reform into account, the demographic dependency ratio increases by 59% to 2060 while the socio-economic dependency ratio increases by only 25%⁵¹.

By comparing the baseline scenario to a scenario without reform, the SCA observes that pension reform reduces the poverty risk rates of the pensioners. Indeed, the extension of the activity generated by the recoil of the legal age of retirement results in higher average pensions. Pension reform will reduce inequality among pensioners in the long run. The lowest pensions increase more than the highest pensions, reducing inequality among pensioners.⁵²

Finally, let us notice that, between 2014 and 2060, the gain in life expectancy are expected to be of 7.9 years for men and 5.2 years for women and between 2014 and 2060, the total population is thought to increase by 17% from 11200000 to 13100000 inhabitants. This increase varies by age group: the group of 0-17 years increases by 17%, the population of 18-66 years by 5% and the population of 67 years and more by 68%⁵³. In Belgium, in 2013, the life expectancy at 65 years old is 17.8 years for men and 21.4 for women⁵⁴. According to the projections of the 2015 Pension Adequacy Report based on the 2015 ageing report, women and men aged 65 will have a life expectancy of respectively 25 years and 21.7 years. This is to be related to the concepts of dependency ratio.

abolition of subsidies for degree in assessing the career condition for early departure from the system of the public service. In the unemployment scheme with corporate supplement, the age for the plan is raised and the obligation is imposed on the recipients to be registered as job seekers and available in the labor market.

45 Under their assumptions, the number of retirement pensioners is reduced by 10% by 2060 compared to a scenario without reform or 315,000 persons

46 In this context, at unchanged productivity, employment and GDP are raised by 5.6% in 2060

47 CEV rapport annuel synthèse pages 7, 8 et 67

48 CEV rapport annuel synthèse pages 7, 8 et 67

49 the socio-economic dependency ratio is the number of pensioners relative to the number of workers

50 demographic dependency ratio is the ratio of the population of 67 years and older and the population of 18-66 years

51 CEV rapport annuel synthèse page 28

52 CEV rapport annuel synthèse pages 11 et 12

53 CEV rapport annuel synthèse page 25 et 27

54 Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT

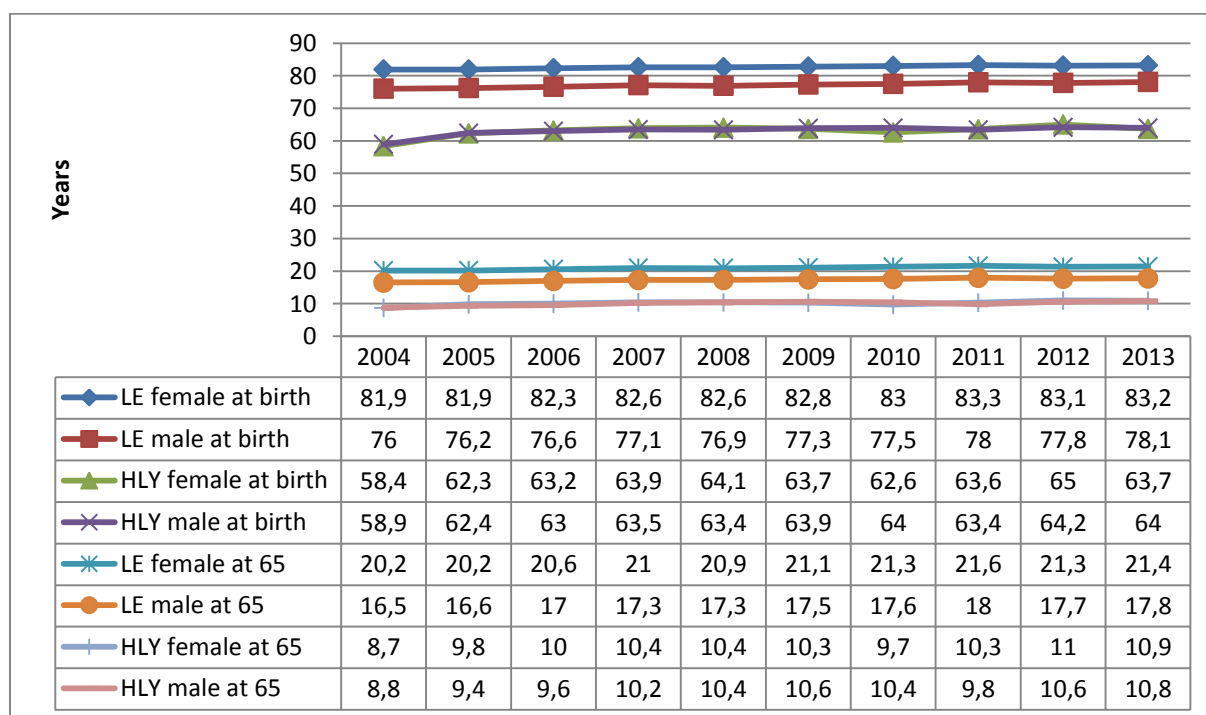
6| Health care and long-term care

6.1. key EU Health indicators

a) life expectancy and healthy life years

Between 2004 and 2013, **life expectancy** (LE) at birth for women has increased from 81.9 to 83.2 years, for men it has increased from 76 to 78.1 years. For both, a small decrease has been observed in 2012 compared to 2011. Especially the number of **healthy life years** (HLY) at birth show a decrease between 2012 and 2013. Also the difference between men and women in number of healthy life years is much smaller compared to the difference in life expectancy. Between 2004 and 2013, life expectancy at age 65 increased from 20.2 to 21.4 years for women and from 16.5 to 17.8 years for men. Life expectancy in good health at age 65 is 10.9 years for women and 10.8 years for men in 2013. Again the difference between men and women in number of healthy life years at age 65 is much smaller compared the difference in life expectancy at age 65.

Figure 6.1. Life expectancy (LE) and Healthy Life Years (HLY) in years, Belgium, 2004-2013



Source : EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Life expectancy (in good health) varies strongly according to social-economic status,. A number of figures are shown in table 6.1. These figures show significant differences for both sexes. For men, the difference between the extremes is 7.5 years, for woman it is 5.9 years. Regarding life expectancy in good health, the differences are even considerably bigger. Here, the difference between the extremes 18.6 years for men and 18.2 years for woman.

Table 6.1: Life expectancy (2001) and healthy life expectancy (2004) at age 25, by sex and level of education, Belgium

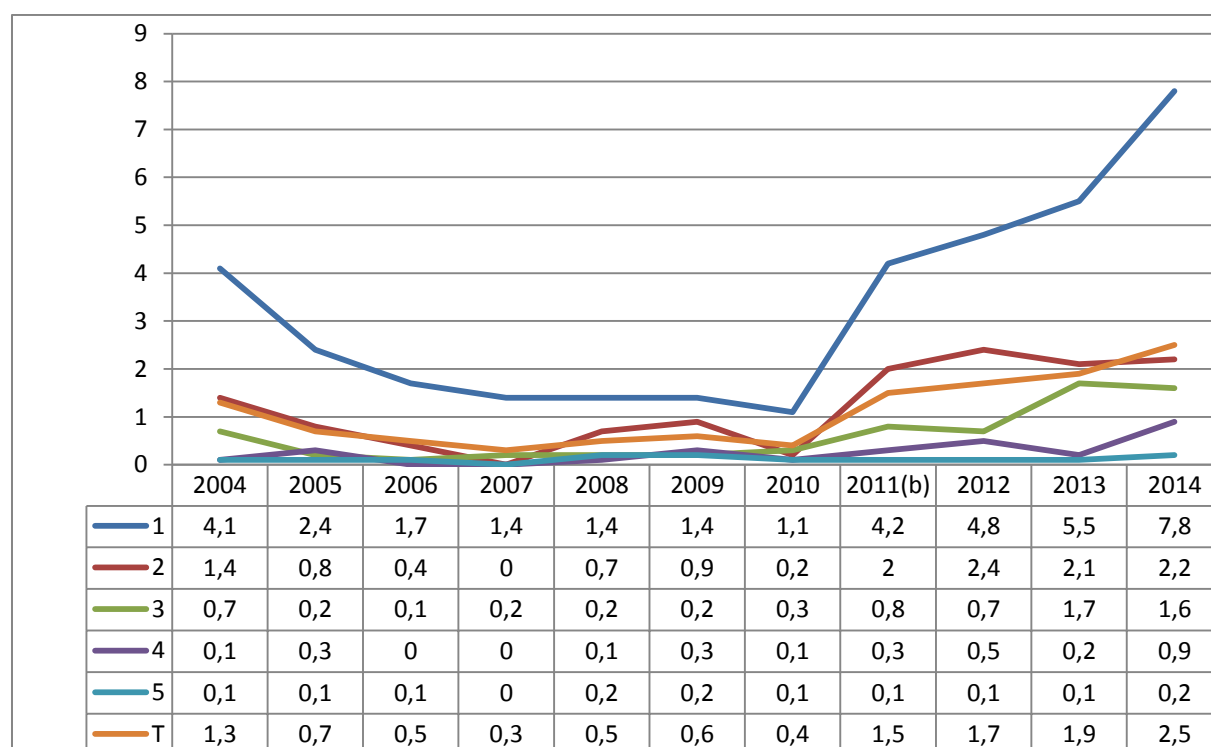
	Life expectancy		Healthy life expectancy	
	male	female	male	female
Higher education	55	59.9	46.33	47.1
Higher secondary education	52.5	58.8	41.54	41.27
Lower secondary education	51.3	58.0	39.71	42.01
Primary education	49.3	56.2	36.65	36.27
No diploma	47.6	54.0	27.75	28.92

Source: Deboosere et. al., Van Oyen et. al. in de Performantie van het Belgische gezondheidssysteem (2012).

b) accessibility of the health care

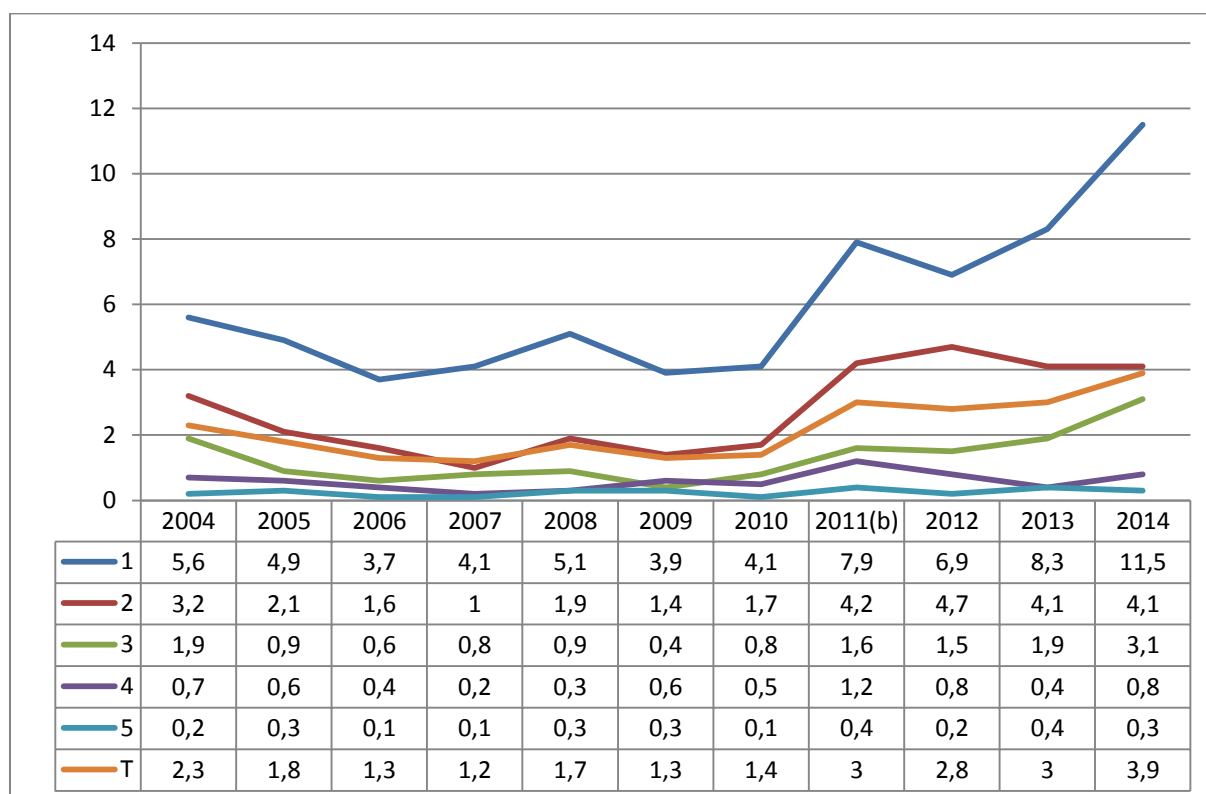
Information on the accessibility of the health care system is scarce, as it is not easy to measure. The indicator that is mostly used is **the unmet need for medical care and the unmet need for dental care**. These indicators reflect the percentage of persons who had to postpone healthcare because of financial reasons, distance or waiting lists. Belgium traditionally performs well on these indicators, but it can be observed that these indicators show an upward trend during the last years. It is very noteworthy that this increase is mainly situated in the lowest income quintile. Although at this stage some care in drawing conclusions on this evolution is required because of relatively small sample sizes, this trend requires due attention.

Figure 6.2 : Unmet need for medical examination by quintile of equivalent disposable household income



Source: EU-SILC, Eurostat (2004-2013), Statistics Belgium (2014)

Figure 6.3 : Unmet need for dental examination by quintile of equivalent disposable household income, Belgium

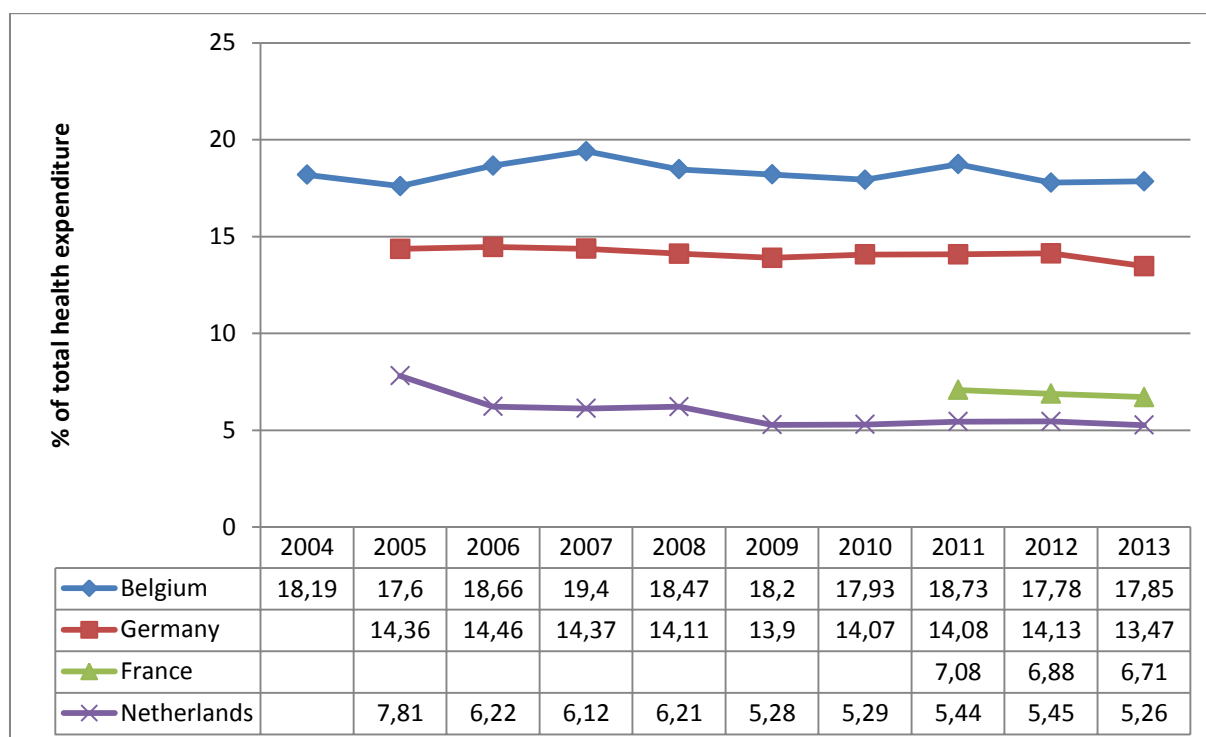


Source: EU-SILC, Eurostat (2004-2013), Statistics Belgium (2014)

Improving the measurement of the financial accessibility of health care is a major challenge. Very little information is available however. In addition to the above-mentioned 'unmet need' indicator and on the basis of the System of Health Accounts, it can be examined at an aggregate level what patient themselves spend on health care. The absolute '**out-of-pocket payments**' increased from € 4.9 billion to 7.2 billion between 2004 and 2013. It implies an average expenditure per inhabitant of € 646 in 2013. However, the share of the 'out-of-pocket payments' in total health expenditure has remained stable during the same period. Nevertheless, this share of 'out-of-pocket payments' in Belgium (17.8% in 2013) is high compared to the neighbouring countries Germany (13.8%), France (6.7%) and the Netherlands (5.3%). Overall, due to comparability problems these macro results concerning accessibility remain rather inconclusive⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ It is also to be noted that the figures have been reviewed since last year for all the series (2003-2013). This revision led to a lower level (around – 2%) due to correct for non-medical/pharmaceutical spending in pharmacies. This modification pursues a better measurement in terms of health out of pocket expenditures.

Figure 6.2. Out-of-pocket expenditures as share in total health expenditure, Belgium and neighbouring countries, 2004-2013



Source : EUROSTAT

c) Sustainability of the health care

Regarding the budgetary sustainability of the health care and long-term care systems, the Study Committee on Ageing (2015) estimates the budgetary costs of ageing as regards health care and long-term care at 0,4% of GDP for the period 2014-2020. For the period 2014-2060, the costs are estimated at 1,9% of GDP, while it was estimated at 2,1% for the period 2013-2060 in the previous aging report.

The age structure of Belgium is set to change: there will be an increase in the share of the persons aged 67 and older. One should understand that, to this increased number of elderly will correspond an increase in the need for long-term care service⁵⁶. In 2013, 8.4% of the population aged 65+ received long-term care in home for the elderly or in nursing home. The percentage is higher in Brussels (10.1%) and Wallonia (9.1%) than in Flanders (7.8%). The percentage of the population aged 65 and more that received long-term nursing care at home is smaller (4.9% for Belgium) and in this case, the percentage is somewhat higher in Flanders (5.2%) than in Wallonia (4.7%) or Brussels (3.2).

6.2. Health System Performance Assessment

In the following of the Tallinn Chart signed in 2008 that foreseen that the European countries have to evaluate on a regularly base the performance of their health system, the KCE (in partnership with the INAMI and the ISP) publish each 3 years, a report on this topic for Belgium⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ KCE, *Synthesis performance of the Belgian Health system report 2015* (draft version), page 31

⁵⁷ KCE (2015)

This Health System Performance Assessment is considered as a very good tool for identifying the priorities for the next years in the field of health.

The last health system performance report, finalised in the beginning of 2016, contains 106 indicators, calculated for the period 2008-2013, which cover 6 fields : health promotion, preventive care, curative care, mental health care, long term care, and care around the end of the life. Each of these fields is evaluated on 5 dimensions : quality, accessibility, efficiency, sustainability and equity.

In general, the summary of the report is quite positive : 78% of the Belgian considered themselves in good health. However, some aspect of the system are not so good assessed in the sense that 34 of the 106 indicators of the report are presenting an “alarm sign”.

Per theme, the main results of this report are the following :

- **Total health care expenditures represent 10,2 % of our gross domestic product** and are funded primarily by the public sector (78%). These figures are slightly above the EU-average. Compared to the year 2011, these expenditures remained unchanged in 2012 and 2013.
- **However**, on the basis of the indicators for the current availability of human resources in the fields of general medicine and nursing care, **the system’s capacity to meet future healthcare needs relating to population ageing is being questioned**. The proportion of new graduated general practitioners in the whole spectrum of medical specialities does not reach the quotas set by the Planning Commission, even if the situation has improved in recent years. In addition, although the number of nursing graduates increased the last few years, the number of hard-to-fill job vacancies for nurses remains high and the number of nurses per patient in our hospitals remains lower than abroad. It is also worrying to notice that the average age of general practitioners keeps on increasing. If this situation lasts, it could cause problems in the functioning of front-line care.
- **The efficiency of our healthcare system is improving**, as suggested by the increase in the use of generic and cheaper medications, the decrease in standard hospitalizations (at least one night) in favour of day surgery and the reduction in length of hospital stays after a normal childbirth. **However, there is a persistent lack of efficiency in several areas**. Unfortunately there are for example significant geographic variations between hospitals for certain surgical procedures (caesarean sections for instance) or costs, an overuse of certain examinations or equipment (in radiology for instance) or even inappropriate treatments (see also the point about the quality of care – cf. below).
- **Our healthcare system can be considered as accessible**, thanks to our sickness insurance, coupled with social safety nets for the lowest incomes (maximum health bill, increased reimbursement of healthcare expenditures). **Nevertheless, there often remains a significant amount payable by the patients** (18 % of total healthcare spending, which is a large share in comparison with the other European countries) **and the number of households that say they postpone contacts with the health services for financial reasons remains substantial**, especially for the lowest income group.
- **Most results relating to the quality of care are within the average of the other European countries, with some more positive points** (for example a lower mortality avoidable thanks to the healthcare system) **but also with some negative points**, such as, for example, the too frequent prescriptions of antibiotics and medical imagery examinations or the nosocomial infections.

There are also improvements in terms of coordinated care for cancer and diabetic patients and of survival after colorectal cancer.

In rest homes or in nursing homes, results are mixed : while it is to be welcomed for example that bed sores are relatively few in number, it remains difficult for the elderly persons who reside in such homes to have access to specialised medicine. The number of elderly persons who receive more than 5 medications a day is high.

- **The prevention targets** (which are set at international level) **are not always met** : for example, the vaccination coverage among young people remains sometimes below the recommended immunisation thresholds (for example measles among adolescents) and the vaccination against influenza is even declining among elderly persons (rates are below the objectives set by the WHO). As regards screening for breast and cervical cancers, it is not sufficient, in particular in the target groups. Finally, only half of the population consults a dentist on a regular basis.
- **In terms of health and lifestyle promotion, the results are rather poor** : stagnation of adult obesity, continued high smoking rates, low physical activity levels, risky alcohol consumption (binge drinking) among young men. Moreover, in general, many socio-economic inequalities remain in this area, including in particular a lack of understanding of the health messages (health literacy) in the population.
- **Some indicators relating to mental health and psychiatric care are worrying** : the suicide rate remains high (especially amongst the male population, where it is the 1st cause of premature mortality in terms of potential years of life lost), psychiatric hospitalizations continue to increase, and the use of antidepressants grows (antidepressants are prescribed at least once a year to 13,4% of the population). For the latter, the duration of treatment is lower than the recommendations in half the cases and, among elderly persons (over 65 years), too many patients (15,4%) taking antidepressants receive products with an anticholinergic effect, that are known to cause potentially serious side effects (for example falls) amongst this population.

In addition to that, there are long waiting periods for the 1st contact with a mental health centre, which raises the question of whether these services are accessible.

- It should also be noted that with regard to the access and the quality of end-of-life care, **the use of palliative care is growing and the use of aggressive treatments is relatively low. However, the hospital remains the most common place of death, whereas this is not what most people wish.**
- **Finally, and this is crucial within the framework of our analysis, the performance report shows that, for most of the health aspects addressed (accessibility, lifestyle, prevention, ...), important (regional) geographic variations are observable as well as socio-economic inequalities.** For example, in comparison with the most favoured social group, persons having a more disadvantaged socio-economic level (measured on the basis of the education level or the entitlement to the increased intervention) are less healthy (lower life expectancy (with and without incapacity), higher child mortality, higher obesity rate), exhibit less healthy behaviours (in terms of diet, smoking addiction, physical activity), have a less good health-related knowledge, participate to a lesser extent in the screening for cancer, are less medically monitored when they suffer from diabetes and have to differ more often care for financial reasons.

6.3. Focus on the « socio-economics inequality in the field of health on the basis of the 2013 Belgian Health Interview Survey

The results of the *2013 Belgian Health Interview Survey* show divergences between given populations subgroups. Health does not rely solely on policies, as it also depends on individuals' health behavior and life-styles, in which differences between socio economic positions remain important.

82% of Belgium's population aged fifteen or more consumes alcohol – and this number appears to be quite stable since the first Health Survey conducted in 1997. Alcohol-consuming profiles differ across social strata and age, but risky behaviors (such as overconsumption and binge drinking) exist at every level. Both global consumption and daily consumption rises with educational level. Nevertheless, it appears that larger amounts of alcohol are consumed and a greater number of excessive consumers are observed among the less educated class. The education level also has an impact on smoking behavior as the smokers rate are much lower among circles with access to higher education (16% against 23% for the Belgian population).

In Belgium, the average body mass index (BMI) value for adults is of 25,4, which is above the threshold for overweight (25). The highest average BMI is discernable among individuals with no diploma or who only graduated from their primary school (27,3) while the lowest average BMI is observed among higher education graduates (24,5). Besides, persons with low education levels tend to exercise less.

Four persons out of five consult at general practitioner at least once a year. People with a low educational level tend to consult their general practitioner more often and this is because they face more health issues. Differences in general health apart, analyses show no more socio-economical distinction in the amount of consultations. In the other hand, the results show that the chance to consult a specialist increases with educational level but it is not the case of the number or consultations with said specialist.

Regarding medication consumption, one can notice a rise - from 41% in 1997 to 51% in 2013 - in the number of individuals taking prescription drugs (during the two weeks preceding the interview) and a halving - from 33% in 1997 to 17% in 2013 - of the number of people taking non-prescription drugs. We observe an increase in the prescribed medication as the educational level diminishes.

In the matter of preventive care, social inequalities linked to the education level persist; notably regarding the screening for some cancers (breast cancer, cervical cancer) or the immunization coverage against the human papillomavirus. One can also notice that young people aged from 15 to 24 and individuals with a low educational level have a weaker knowledge about HIV/aids and tend to get tested less often. This lack of information and prevention is really worrying as the Health Survey 2013 "sexual health" module results indicate that high-risk sexual behavior are more frequent among these populations.

Finally, financial access to healthcare remains a problem for a part of the population. The Health Interview Survey contains an 'unmet need' indicator which is broader than, the more widely used EU-

SILC based indicator. On the basis of the broader indicator, healthcare spending represents a heavier burden for households with limited income and the fact that households perceive healthcare expenses as “high” is closely related to income level: 53% of households with lower income report that they experience trouble in meeting healthcare spending, as only 7% of households with higher income.

7 | Summary and concluding remarks

While no new EU-SILC 2015 data were available yet for this report, since the autumn update on the evolution of poverty risks, based on EU-SILC 2014 data⁵⁸, this report extends the analysis, adds findings based on the recent labour force survey 2015 data and complements the analysis of the EU social indicators with findings from other recent studies. The main aim of this study is to support and contextualize the monitoring of the Europe 2020 target on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion in the context of the National Reform Programme.

Overall the social indicators show a rather stable social situation in Belgium over the last years. The employment rate remains quasi constant at 67,2%. Also the unemployment rate remained constant at 8.5%. Both Gross Household disposable income and median equivalent household income remained stable. Income inequality remained stable as well..

As regards the Europe 2020 target on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion there is a standstill since the start of the strategy. The small fluctuations over the years are not statistically significant. This implies that the trend of the Europe 2020 social target remains off-track compared with the targeted objective.

The overall stability hides divergent trends for different population categories. The poverty risk of the elderly has decreased, but this positive evolution is offset by substantially increased poverty risks for the low skilled at active age.

The poverty risk of the **elderly population** decreased from 23% in 2006 to 16% in 2014. This is only just above the overall population level which implies an historic low for this age category. As the median income level of the elderly compared to the median income level of the younger cohort and average pensions relative to average labour incomes remained stable, the reduction of the poverty risk can be assumed to be due to an increase in the low(est) pensions. The increasing adequacy of social protection among the elderly and the finding that the poverty risk decreased considerably more among single elderly woman compared to man seem to confirm this. Notwithstanding the positive trend it should be noted that there remains a sizable poverty level among elderly. The Ageing Committee's study shows that the sustainability outlook of pensions has improved compared to earlier figures, both due to government measures and changes in the methodology of the forecasts.

Trends among the **active age population** are more alarming. The central finding here is the significant divergences that occurred between weaker categories and the rest of the active population. The increase in the poverty risk among the low skilled (from 19% in 2005 to 28% in 2014) captures the essence of the problem. Key drivers of this evolution are (1) decreasing accessibility (or segmentation) of the labour market, and , (2) decreasing adequacy of social allowances. These findings based on the EU social indicators are confirmed by national studies. These studies point to:

⁵⁸ Federal Public Service Social Security (2015), Evolution de la situation sociale en Belgique. Actualisation sur base des données de l'enquête EU-SILC 2014

- Decreasing adequacy of social allowances for the active population due to increased degressivity in unemployment allowances (Van Lancker et. al., 2015) and allowances not keeping up with price evolutions of basic necessities (Storms et.al. 2015).
- (increasing) inequality in access to the labour market:
 - Polarization of work between insiders (work rich) and outsiders (work poor) households (Vandenbroucke and Colruy, 2015)
 - Big gaps (relative to EU) according to migration status (FPS Employment and Centre for Equal opportunities, 2015)
 - Increasing difference in exit rates from unemployment for school leavers by educational level (Federal Planning Bureau, 2015)

Labour Force Survey data point to a gradual decrease in the employment rate of the low skilled. This trend continued in 2015 according to the recently released Labour Force Survey 2015 data. While the overall employment rate remained stable at around 67,5%, the employment rate of the low skilled decrease from 49% in 2007 to 45% in 2015. This trend is specifically worrying as the gap with EU-employment rates was already the largest for this category. It is noteworthy that this trend occurred together with the trend of decreasing adequacy of social allowances for the working age population. Although other factors can interfere in this relation, the simultaneous occurrence of both trends can be considered to point to the challenging, structural, nature of the issue at hand, which can be assumed to be related to the productivity/earnings capacity of the low skilled.

As social policy levers are dispersed among **different policy levels** in Belgium, it is relevant to note that the basic trends, observed at the Belgian level, can also be observed on the level of Flanders and Wallonia, even if large differences exist between the regions in terms of poverty and employment levels. Looking at the urban level, a recent study points to strong socio-spatial segregations in Belgian cities with a strong accumulation of negative characteristics in deprived neighbourhoods and, on the other hand, more affluent neighbourhoods (mostly suburbs) which are isolated from socio-demographic dynamics.

As noted in earlier studies, when looking at poverty trends by **housing** tenure, it can be observed that the increase in poverty risk is exclusively situated among tenants.

The Belgian **Health system Performance** Report 2015 presents a mixed picture. A relatively high share of the population is in good health and there is a relatively high satisfaction in contacts with the health system. The 'quality of health' indicators are mostly situated around EU15 averages with some indicators scoring better and others worse. Preventive care does not always meets international targets and some indicators of health promotion and life-style show poor results. Some mental health (care) indicators are alarming (e.g. suicide rates remain high). EU-SILC 2014 show a marked increase in the percentage of people in the first income quintile who indicate an unmet need for medical care and dental care. This could point to increased accessibility problems and necessitates a close observation when new figures become available.

While EU-SILC figures show no clear up- or downward trend over the observation period 2004-2014, the **child-poverty** rate remains consistently above the overall population rate. Studies point to relatively large inequalities among Belgian children in different domains. The PISA studies show consistently that Belgium combines a high general performance with a relatively high degree of social inequality in educational outcomes (eg. PISA 2012). Recently, UNICEF confirmed this finding, pointing to the fact that, notwithstanding a decreasing trend over the different PISA rounds, 'for Belgium (...) the achievement gap between the median and the 10th percentile is significantly higher than the OECD average' (UNICEF, 2016).

Furthermore, the same UNICEF report on 'Fairness for Children', shows:

- A stable moderate position for Belgium on bottom-end income inequality for children (measured as the distance between the 10th and 50th percentiles);
- A moderate, but increased bottom-end inequality in self-reported health among Belgian children
- An unfavourable and increased bottom-end inequality in life satisfaction among Belgian children

In **conclusion**, this elaboration of the analysis offers additional insights in the evolution of the social situation in Belgium.

Firstly, the continuation of the declining trend in the employment rate of the low skilled, as shown by the new Labour Force Survey 2015 data, is important. This decline in the rate is now becoming sizable and, although further EU-SILC data should be awaited, one can expect that this will negatively impact on other, income related, indicators and on the divergence between different social categories among the active population. The fact that the decline in the employment rate of the low skilled can be observed at the national level but also in Flanders and Wallonia, and the fact that this decline is happening simultaneously with a slightly decreasing adequacy of social protection allowances for the population at active age, point to the deeply structural character of the problem.

Secondly, the further analysis of EU social indicators and the addition of other recent studies broadly supports the earlier findings on the diverging trends among the active population, but it also seems to point to more wide ranging social issues. Taking a broad view on both the EU-indicators and the additional national studies, seems to point to a conclusion that there are increasing indications of growing inequalities or above EU-average inequalities among the active population and children, while overall income inequality remains low. Poverty, employment, health care accessibility, education, child health, the position of people with a migrant background are domains on which such observations can be made. Furthermore, there appear to be steep socio-spatial divergences, both between Regions and between city neighbourhoods⁵⁹. The fact that a number of negative developments are concentrated among groups with an already weaker social profile, together with these socio-spatial divergences can entail significant challenges for the social cohesion in Belgium.

Under these conditions, bringing about an evolution in the direction of the Europe 2020 target on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion can be expected to become increasingly difficult, even with the positive evolution of decreasing poverty rates among elderly.

⁵⁹ It is useful to note that this conclusion is in line with the assessment of the evolution of the social situation as 'aworrying' by the Federal Planning Bureau in the context of an analysis of additional indicators to complement GDP (Federal Planning Bureau, 2016).

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: SPPM SCOREBOARD FOR BELGIUM / SUMMARY TABLE OF MAIN SOCIAL TRENDS

Group	Indicator	BE									EU27		
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	change 2013-2014	change 2008-2014	2014	change 2013-2014	change 2008-2014
Europe 2020	At risk of poverty or social exclusion (in %)	20.8	20.2	20.8	21.0	21.6	20.8	21.2	~	~	24.4	~	~
	At-risk-of-poverty rate (in %)	14.7	14.6	14.6	15.3	15.3	15.1	15.5	~	~	17.2	0.6 pp	~
	At-risk-of-poverty threshold for a single person household (in pps)	10046	10501	10399	10899	11038	11738	11755	~	9.3 %	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Severe material deprivation rate (in %)	5.6	5.2	5.9	5.7	6.3	5.1	5.9	0.8 pp	~	8.9	-0.7 pp	~
	Population living in (quasi-) jobless households (in %)	11.7	12.3	12.7	13.8	13.9	14.0	14.6	0.6 pp	2.9 pp	11.1	~	2.0 pp
Intensity of poverty risk	Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap (in %)	17.2	18.1	18.0	18.6	18.7	19.2	18.8	~	1.6 pp	24.6	~	2.8 pp
Persistence of poverty risk	Persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate (in %)	9.0	9.2	9.3	8.0	9.9	8.7	9.5	~	~	n.a.	n.a.	1.1 pp
Income inequalities	Income quintile ratio (S80/S20)	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.8	~	-7.3 %	5.2	~	~
Child poverty and social exclusion	Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion of children (% of people aged 0-17)	21.3	20.5	23.2	23.3	22.8	21.9	23.2	1.3 pp	~	27.8	~	1.2 pp
Effectiveness of social protection system	Impact of social transfers (excl. pensions) on poverty reduction (%)	45.6	45.3	45.3	45.0	44.8	42.6	43.6	~	~	33.85	~	~
	Impact of social transfers (incl. pensions) on poverty reduction (%)	64.8	64.1	64.7	63.6	64.0	64.0	64.0	~	~	61.44	~	~
	At-risk-of-poverty rate for the population living in (quasi-) jobless households	54.7	57.6	55.4	62.9	60.4	60.7	62.2	~	7.5 pp	58.1	1.9 pp	2.3 pp
Social consequences of labour market	In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate (in %)	4.7	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.5	4.4	4.8	~	~	9.6	0.7 pp	1.1 pp
	Long-term unemployment rate (in %)	3.3	3.5	4.1	3.5	3.4	3.9	4.3	~	~	5	~	2.4 pp
Youth exclusion	Early school leavers (in %)	12.0	11.1	11.9	12.3	12.0	11.0	9.8	-1.2 pp	-2.2 pp	11.3	~	-3.4 pp
	Youth unemployment ratio (15-24)	6.0	7.1	7.3	6.0	6.2	7.3	7.0	~	~	9.2	~	2.3 pp
	NEETs (18-24)	13.3	14.5	14.3	14.8	15.0	16.0	15.0	~	1.7 pp	16.4	~	2.5 pp
Active ageing	Employment rate of older workers (55-64) in %	34.5	35.3	37.3	38.7	39.5	41.7	42.7	~	8.2 pp	51.5	1.7 pp	6.4 pp
Pension adequacy	At risk of poverty or social exclusion for the elderly (65+) in %	22.9	23.1	21.0	21.6	21.2	19.5	17.3	-2.2 pp	-5.6 pp	17.7	~	-5.7 pp
	Median relative income of elderly people	0.74	0.70	0.75	0.74	0.74	0.76	0.77	~	~	0.94	~	10.6 %
	Aggregate replacement ratio	0.45	0.45	0.46	0.44	0.46	0.47	0.47	~	~	0.56	~	12.0 %
Health	Self reported unmet need for medical care	0.5	0.6	0.4	1.5	1.7	1.9	n.a.	~	n.a.	n.a.	~	~
	Healthy life years at 65 - males	10.4	10.6	10.4	9.8	10.6	10.8	n.a.	~	~	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Healthy life years at 65 - females	10.4	10.3	9.7	10.3	11.0	10.9	n.a.	~	~	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Access to decent housing	Housing cost overburden rate	12.5	8.7	8.9	10.6	11.0	9.6	10.4	0.8 pp	-2.1 pp	11.4	~	~
Evolution in real household disposable income	Real change in gross household disposable income (in %)	2.4	2.2	-1.0	-1.0	0.6	-0.6	0.5	~	~	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: When no values for 2014 changes are 2012-2013 and 2008-2013. Break in series for "self reported unmet need for medical care" in 2011 ("n.a." shown for changes compared to 2008). For the poverty threshold values, levels are shown in PPS but changes are shown as changes in national currency terms and accounting for inflation.

ANNEX 2 : TABLES AND FIGURES

Annex 2 contains, from p. 49 to 56, the following tables and figures :

- **Table A2.1** : Minimum social protection allowances in % of at-risk-of-poverty threshold
- **Table A2.2** : Time series of some indicators not included in figures

- **Figure A2.1** : At-risk-of-poverty rate for children by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels (40%, 50%, 60%, 70% of median equivalent household income)
- **Figure A2.2** : At-risk-of-poverty rate for working age population by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels
- **Figure A2.3** : At-risk-of-poverty rate for elderly population by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels
- **Figure A2.4** : AROPE by age in percentage, Belgium
- **Figure A2.5** : Infant mortality rate, EU28, Belgium and neighbouring countries
- **Figure A2.6** : Long term unemployment rate, Belgium and Regions
- **Figure A2.7** : Trends in material deprivation items, Belgium
- **Figure A2.8** : Intersections between three basic indicators
- **Figure A2.9** : Gender differences in poverty risk
- **Figure A2.10**. Evolution of income dispersion measures (S80/S20 and GINI), Belgium and neighboring countries, 2014
- **Figure A2.11**. Repartition of poverty by age categories

Table A2.1. minimum social protection allowances in % of at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% of median)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Sep-11	Nov-12	Oct-13	Oct-14
social assistance for the elderly											
single person	76	79	79	91	92	92	92	95	93	93	92
couple	68	70	71	81	82	82	82	84	83	82	82
allowance replacing income for persons with a disability											
single person	72	73	72	73	76	74	75	77	75	75	75
couple with two children	66	67	66	67	68	66	67	68	67	66	66
social assistance											
single person	72	74	72	73	76	74	75	77	75	75	75
couple with two children	63	64	63	64	66	64	64	66	64	64	63
single parent with two children	83	85	83	84	86	83	84	86	85	83	83
old age pension (full career)											
single person	106	107	105	106	107	106	108	106	104	103	103
couple	88	90	88	88	88	87	88	88	87	86	85
unemployment allowance (after 6 months)											
single person	88	89	87	87	89	86	87	90	88	87	87
couple with two children	70	71	70	70	71	69	69	71	70	69	69
single parent with two children	88	89	88	88	89	86	87	89	87	86	86
invalidity allowance											
single person	96	98	96	101	102	101	103	106	104	103	103
couple with two children	80	81	80	82	83	82	83	84	83	81	81
minimum wage											
single person	130	127	125	128	130	130	128	127	125	122	122
couple with two children	90	88	87	88	89	88	88	88	87	84	85

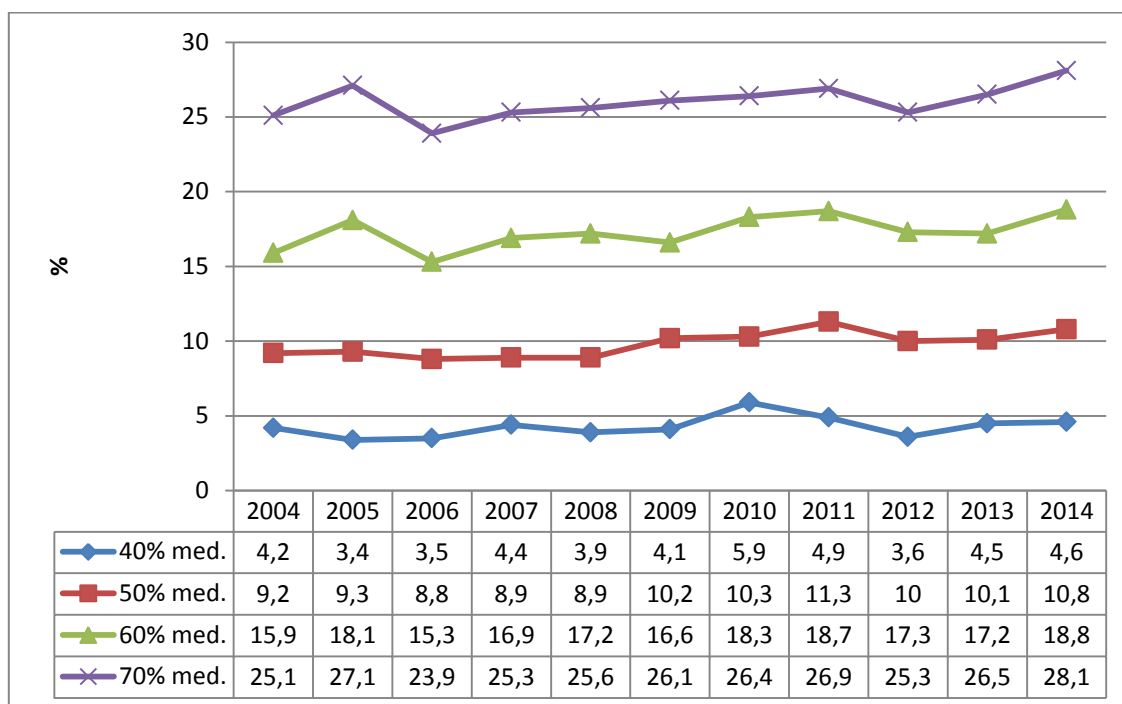
Source : SPF Social Security

Table A2.2. Time series of some indicators not included in figures

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
S80/S20	3.9	4	4.2	3.9	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.9	4	3.8	3.8
ini (after social transfer	26.1	28	27.8	26.3	27.5	26.4	26.6	26.3	26.5	25.9	25.9
Gini (before social transfers pension		37.7	36	34.6	35.6	34.3	34.8	34.8	35.1	34	34.5
Gini (before social transfers pension		50.6	48.7	46.7	48	46.6	46.5	47.1	47.7	47.1	47.6
Poverty threshold (60%) (nominal annual amounts in €)		9947	10328	10540	10791	11588	11678	12005	12168	12890	13023
AROP 40% threshold (%)	4.3	2.7	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.5	4.1	3.6	3.8	3.9	3.8
AROP 50% threshold (%)	8.5	7.7	8.2	8	7.5	7.9	7.9	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.6
AROP 60% threshold (%)	14.3	14.8	14.7	15.2	14.7	14.6	14.6	15.3	15.3	15.1	15.5
AROP 70% threshold (%)	23	24.1	23.5	23.4	23.8	23.5	23.8	24.1	24.3	24.3	24.9

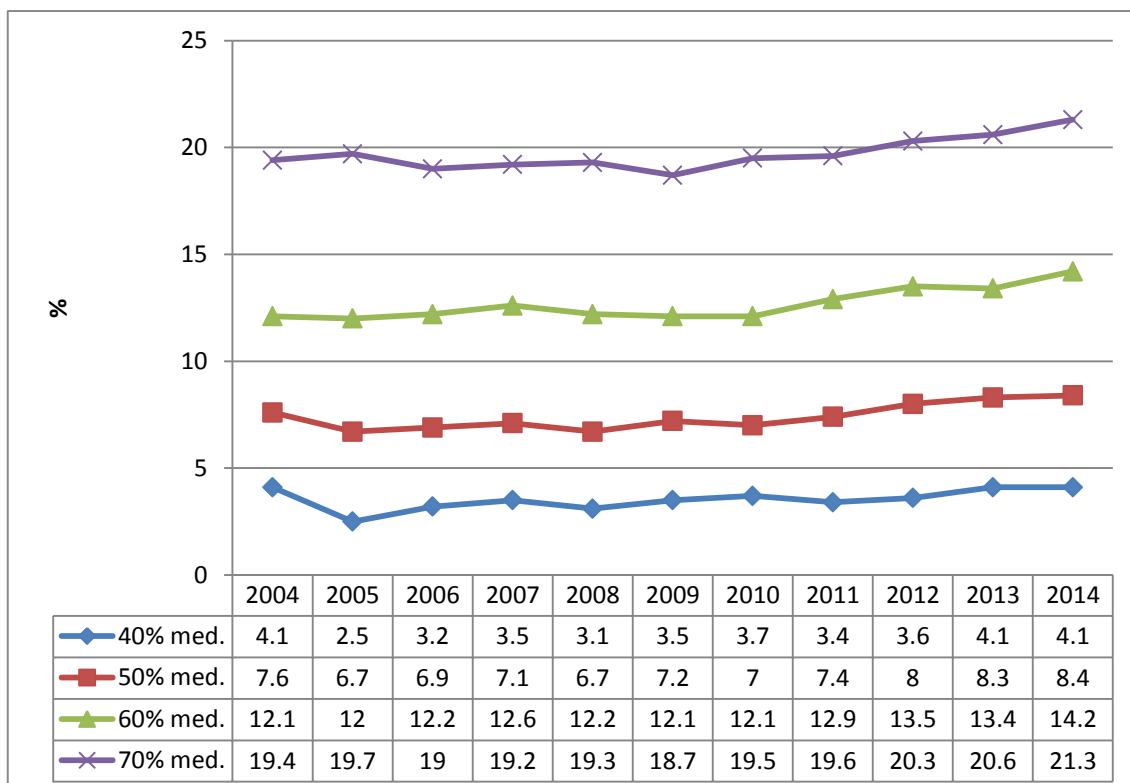
Source : EU-SILC, ADSEI EUROSTAT

Figure A2.1. At-risk-of-poverty rate for children (-18) by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels (40%, 50%, 60%, 70% of median equivalent household income)



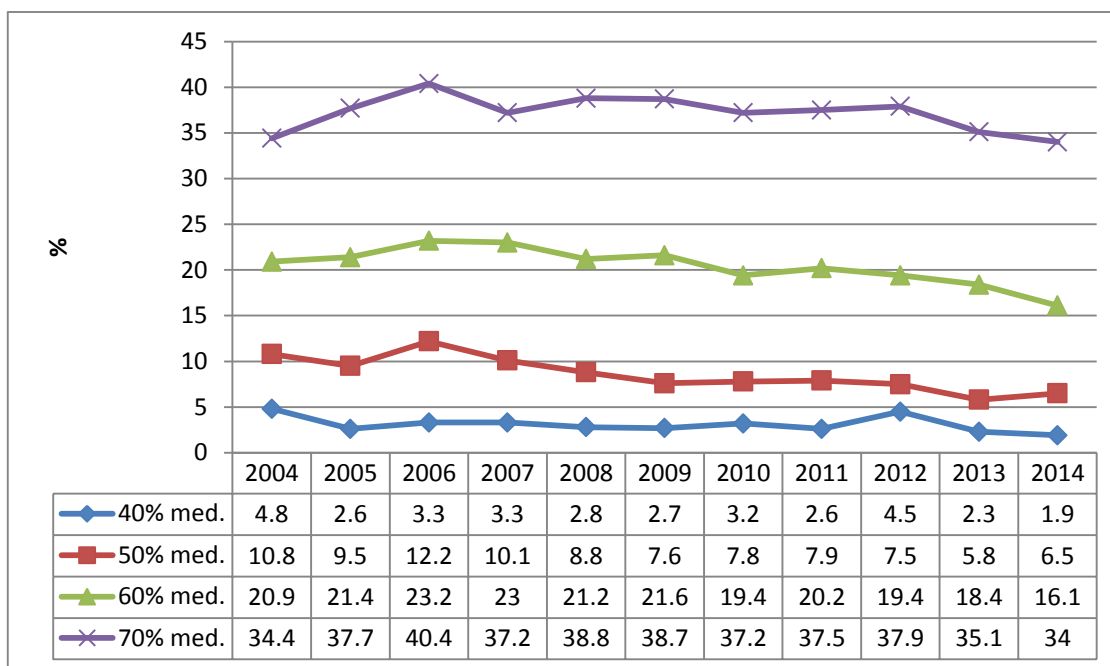
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Figure A2.2. At-risk-of-poverty rate for working age population (18-64) by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels (40%, 50%, 60%, 70% of median equivalent household income)



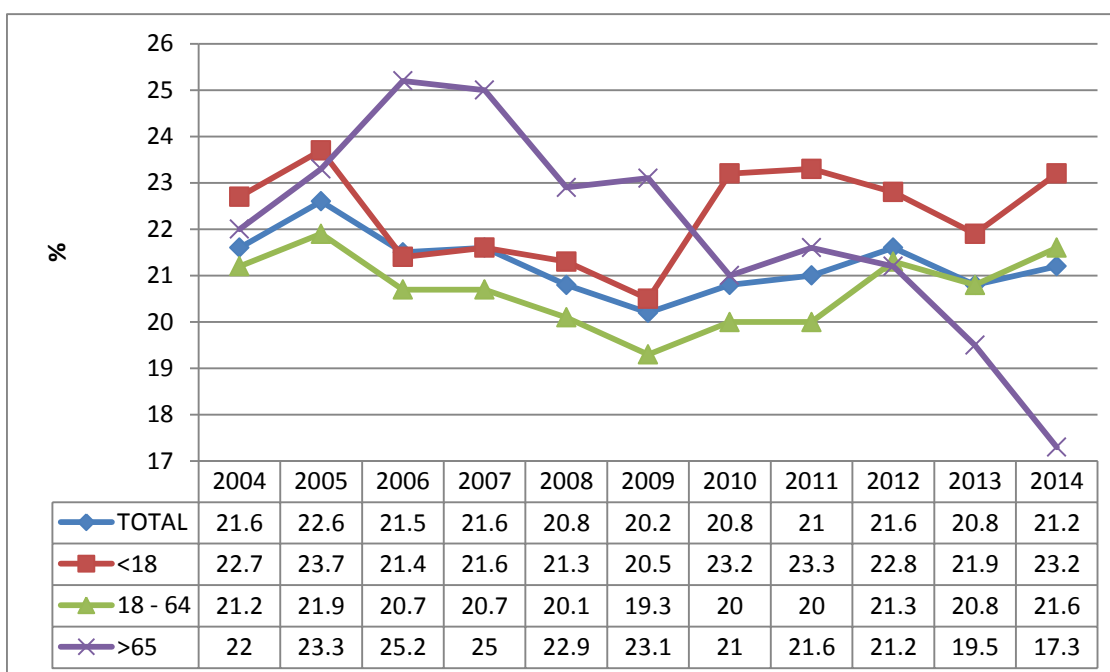
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

Figure A2.3. At-risk-of-poverty rate for elderly population (65+) by different at-risk-of-poverty threshold levels (40%, 50%, 60%, 70% of median equivalent household income)



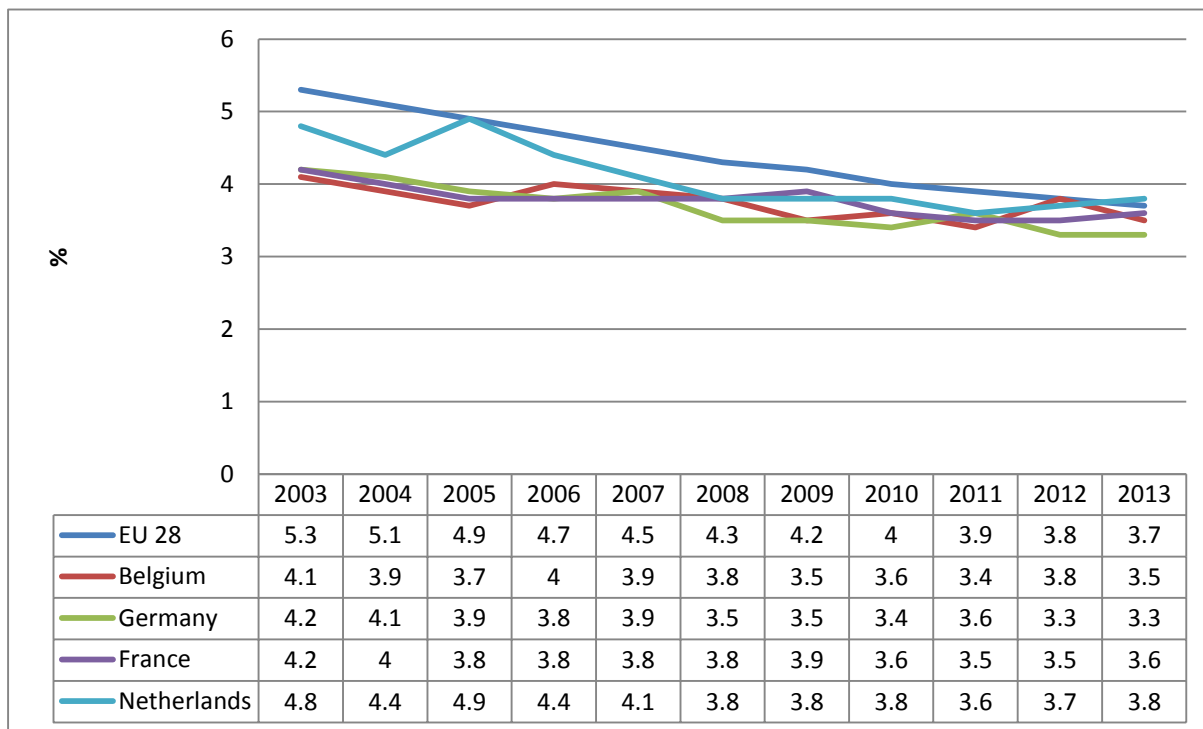
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Figure A2.4. AROPE by age in percentage, Belgium



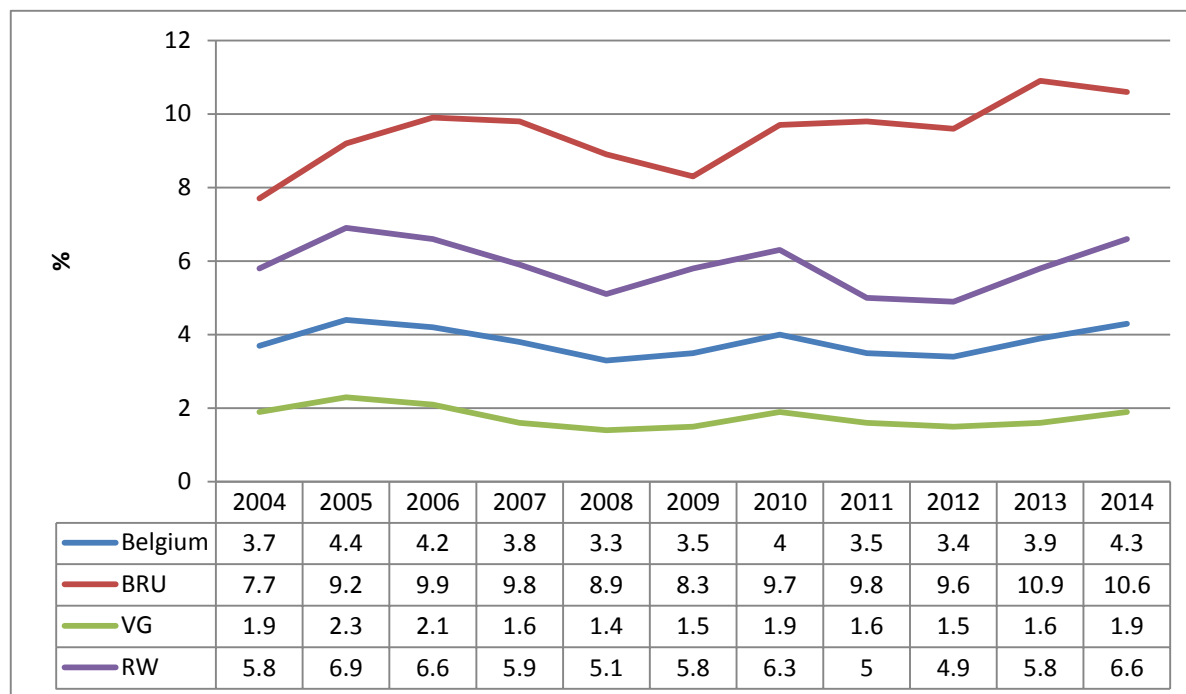
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Figure A2.5. Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births), EU28, Belgium and neighbouring countries



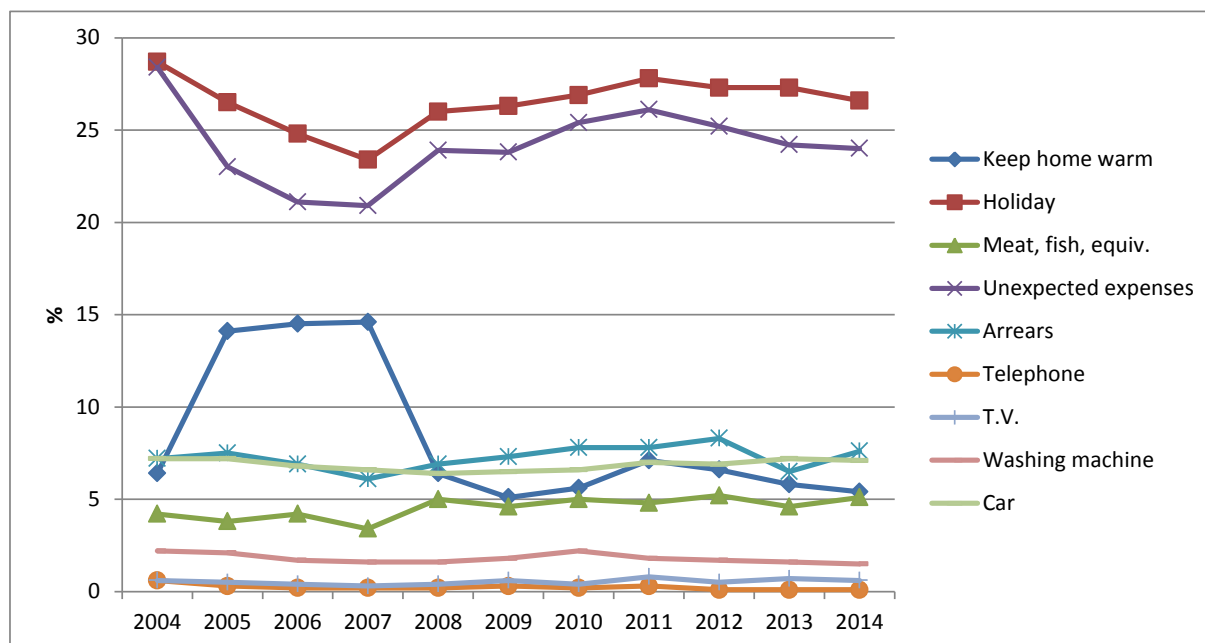
Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT

Figure A2.6. Long term unemployment rate, Belgium and Regions



Source : Labour Force Survey, Statistics Belgium

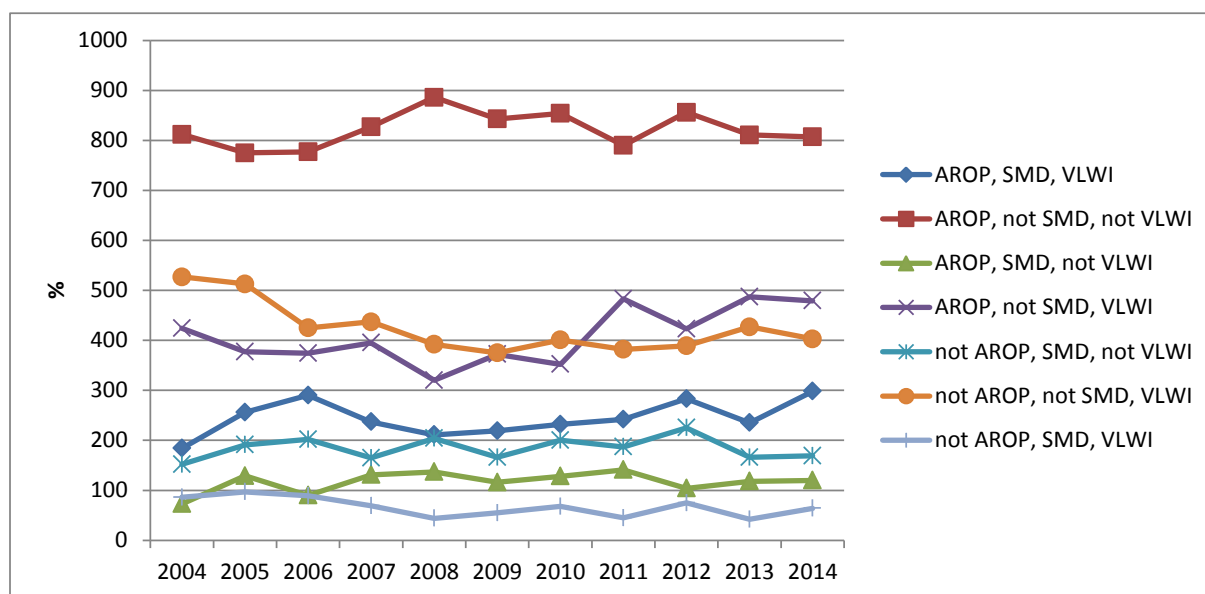
Figure A2.7. Trends in material deprivation items, Belgium (in %)



* Drop for the item "keep home warm" between 2007 en 2008 is due to modification in the survey's question.

Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT

Figure A2.8. Intersections between three basic indicators (in 1000 of persons)



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT

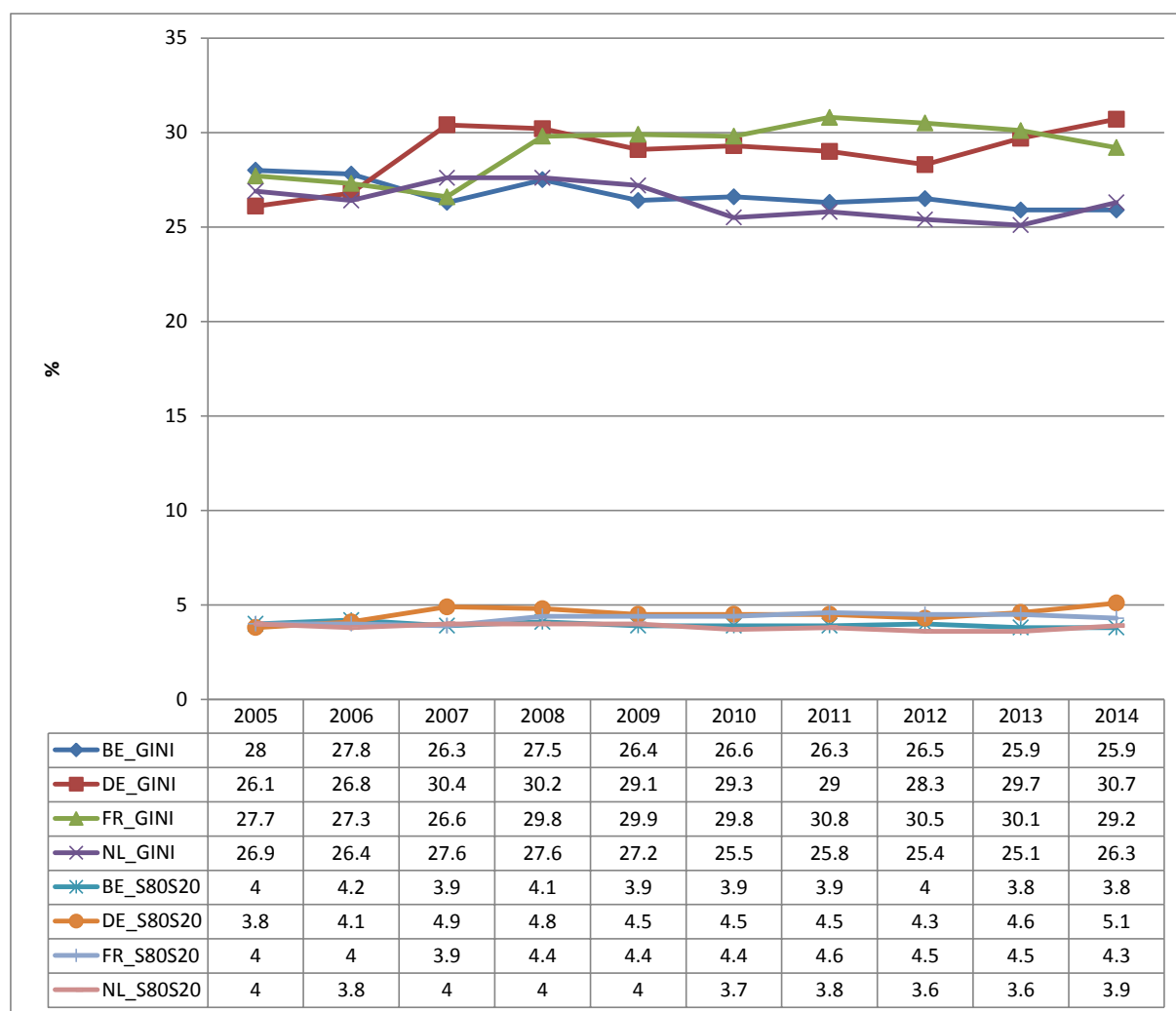
Figure A2.9. Gender differences in poverty risk (in %)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
AROP											
single M	18.6	19.9	18.3	22.5	19.2	18.8	18.1	20.4	19.7	25.2	21.9
single F	23.4	23.8	28.1	28.3	25.4	24.6	19.4	22.3	20.7	23.9	22.9
AROP 65+											
single M	18.3	26.4	20.4	22.1	20.9	21.1	20.8	19.0	17.8	18.4	17.2
single F	26	27.4	29.5	30.9	27.0	25.2	21.2	20.6	18.3	22.3	18.1
SMD											
single M	12.1	12.8	11.2	12.0	9.3	10.5	12.6	11.8	12.2	15.5	12.2
single F	9.8	11.1	10.5	11.1	10.1	9.2	9.5	9.0	8.4	8.0	8.7
VLWI											
Male	13.3	13.7	12.8	12.6	10.3	11.1	11.9	13.2	13.4	14.0	14.2
Female	16.1	16.5	15.9	15.0	13.2	13.6	13.5	14.4	14.3	14.0	14.9

*all M/F, ESTAT website does not allow distinction between single Male, Single Female

Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT

Figure A2.10. Evolution of income dispersion measures (S80/S20 and GINI), Belgium and neighboring countries, 2014



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT ; Statistics Belgium

Figure A2.11. Repartition of poverty by age categories (draft)

	2004			2014		
	Population		Poor (AROP) Population % by age	Population		Poor (AROP) Population % by age
	Nombre	%		Nombre	%	
Age 0-17	2.169.933	20,77%	24,3%	2.277.158	20,32%	25,4%
Age 18-64	6.476.419	62,00%	52,7%	6.901.298	61,57%	57,1%
Age 65+	1.799.500	17,23%	23,0%	2.030.588	18,12%	17,5%
Totaal	10.445.852	100,00%	100,0%	11.209.044	100,00%	100,0%

Source – site INS et EUROSTAT (calcul FPS)

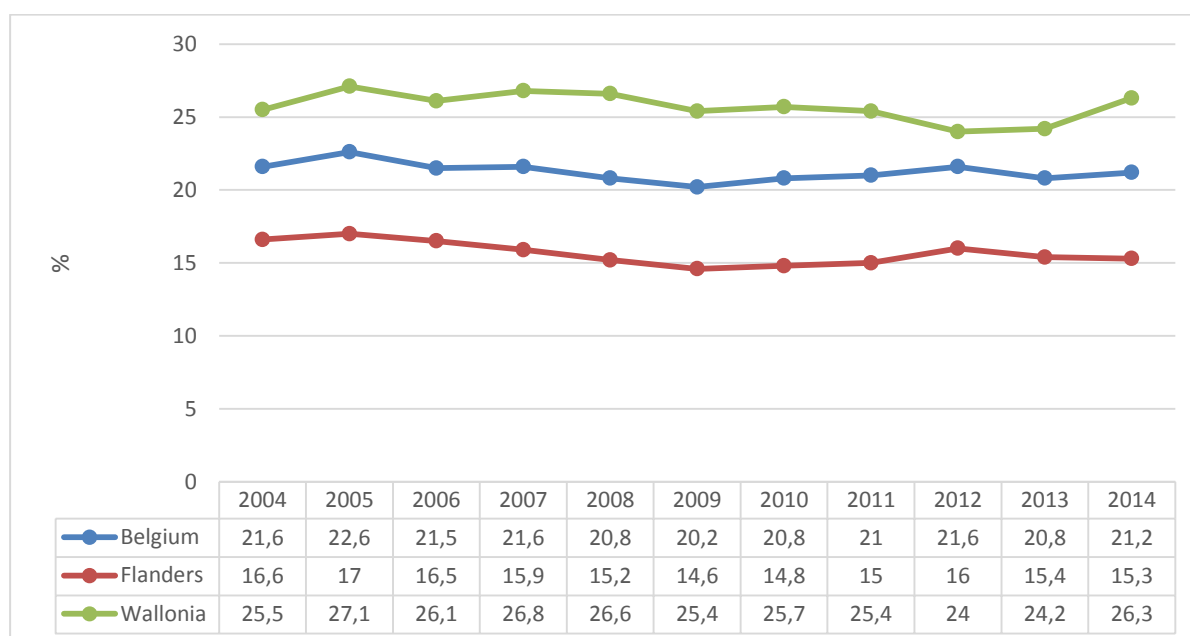
ANNEX 3 : TRENDS IN REGIONS

In this section, the evolution of the social situation in the Belgian regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region) will be discussed. The analysis will mainly focus on the basic indicators relating to poverty and social exclusion. In addition, some key shifts regarding labour market integration will be discussed. The social indicators are mainly based on data derived from the EU-SILC survey combined with regional data from IWEPS (Institut wallon de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la statistique) and SVR (Studiedienst Vlaamse Regering). Taking into account the lacking data for the most recent years and small sample sizes for available data, the statistics relating to the Brussels Capital Region will be discussed only briefly (and not integrated into the tables).

A 3.1. Indicators on poverty and social exclusion

The regional distribution of the evolution of the combined indicator 'poverty and social exclusion', based on the EU-SILC survey, shows significant disparities between the Regions (Figure A3.1.1.) : Whereas the Flemish AROPE rate stagnates around 15% over the period 2004-2014, the indicator fluctuates around 25% in the Walloon region. The situation in the Brussels Capital Region is even more precarious with an average rate around 39%. In the most recent period (2012-2014), the AROPE rate seems to decrease in Flanders (from 16% in 2012 to 15.3% in 2014). The Walloon AROPE rate seems to follow the opposite trend (from 24% in 2012 to 26.3% in 2014).

Figure A3.1.1. : At-risk-of poverty or social exclusion per Region (2004-2014, in %)



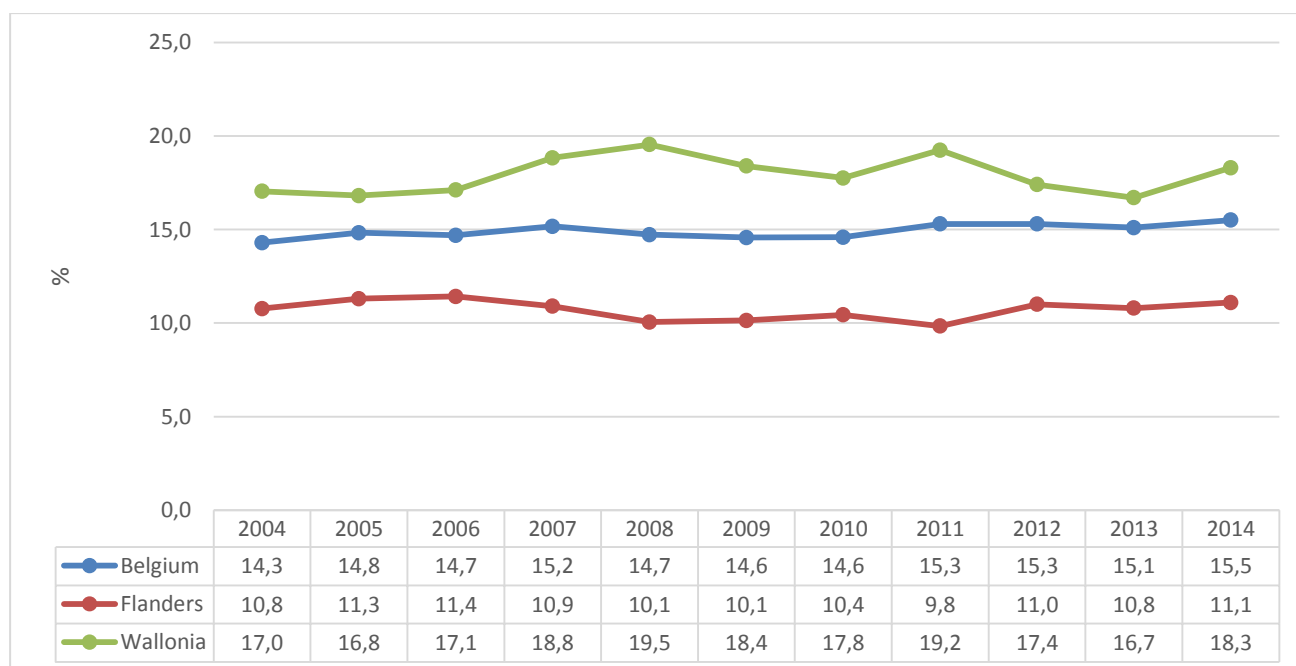
Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

A closer look at the regional AROPE rates by housing tenure status shows a precarious situation of tenants compared to owners in all Regions. However, significant differences can be observed between tenants in the different regions: Whereas the risk of poverty or social exclusion for tenants amounts to 53.3% in Wallonia, the Flemish rate reaches 'only' 31.6% in 2014.

In what follows, the combined AROPE indicator will be broken down into the at-risk-of poverty rate, the severe material deprivation indicator and the very low work intensity rate. For each indicator, the regional disparities will be discussed:

Figure A3.1.2. shows the regional evolution of the at-risk-of-poverty rate. Again, the Flemish rate is far below the Walloon level for the period 2004-2014: Whereas in Flanders approximately 11% of the population is at-risk-of-poverty, the Walloon average fluctuates around 18%. In the Brussels Capital Region, about 30% of the population is at-risk-of-poverty. Whereas the Flemish rate remains relatively stable between 2013 and 2014 (from 10.8% to 11.1%), the Walloon rate seems to increase again over the same period (from 16.7% to 18.3%).

Figure A3.1.2. : At-risk-of-poverty rate per Region (2004-2014, in %)



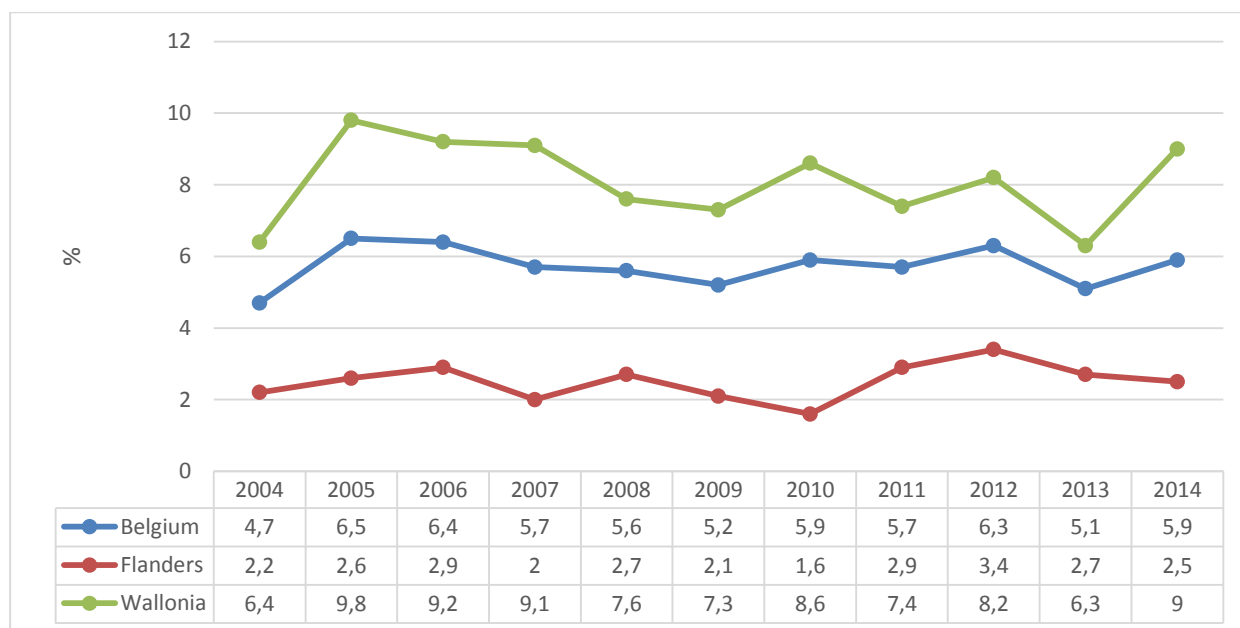
Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

A breakdown of the at-risk-of-poverty rate by age (0-15/16-64/65+) shows an important regional variation: Whereas the poverty rate among elderly is higher than the corresponding rate for the population in the active age in Flanders (15.1% vs. 9.4%) in 2014, the situation is the opposite in Wallonia (18.1% vs 18.3%) and the Brussels Capital Region (15.2% vs. 31.2%).

As regards household composition, the situation of single parent households with one or more children remains precarious in all Regions.

The regional evolution of the severe material deprivation indicator follows an irregular trend in the period 2012-14, though with similar regional disparities, as can be seen in [Figure A3.1.3](#). the Walloon severe material deprivation rate lands at 9% in 2014, whereas the Flemish rate declines to 2.5%. Again, the level in the Brussels Capital Region (around 17%) is far above the Belgian average (around 6%).

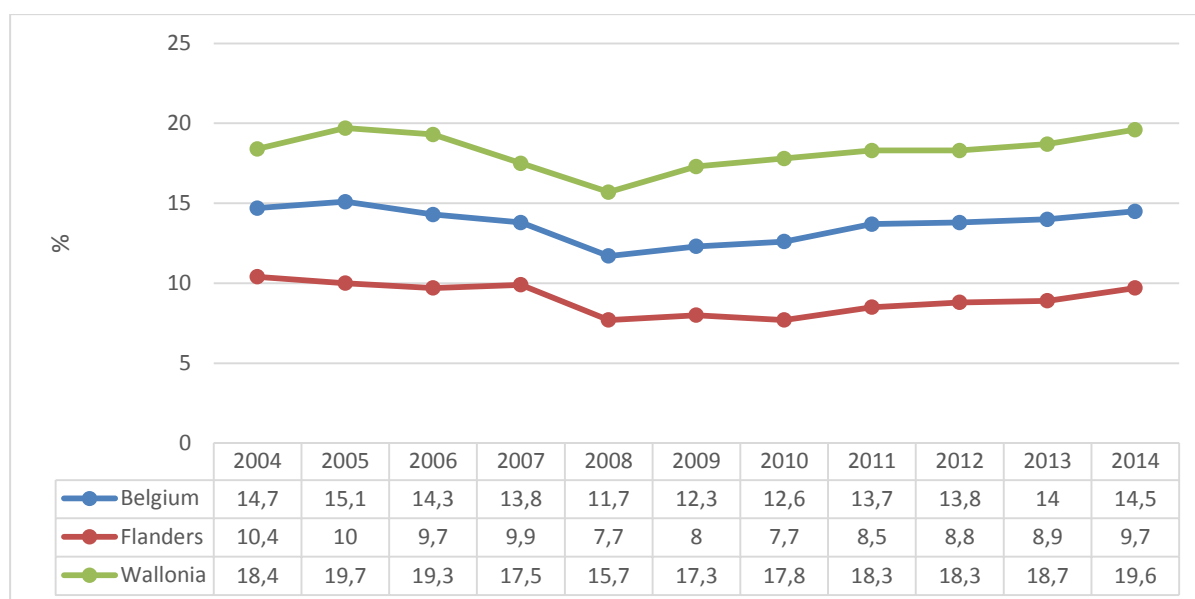
Figure A3.1.3. : Severe material deprivation per Region (2004-2014, in %)



Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

Figure [A3.1.4](#) gives an overview of the proportion of people living in a very low work intensity household. Again, it can be observed that the very low work intensity indicator is significantly higher in Wallonia (around 18%) compared to the Flemish rate (around 9%) over the period 2004-2014. For both regions, the proportion of people living in a very low work intensity household has been gradually increasing since 2008: In Flanders, the VLWI indicator increased from 7.7% in 2008 to 9.7% in 2014, while the Walloon rate increased from 15.7% in 2008 to 19.6% in 2014. In the Brussels Capital Region, the VLWI indicator fluctuated around 25% over the period 2004-2014.

Figure A3.1.4. : Very low work intensity per Region (2004-2014, in %)

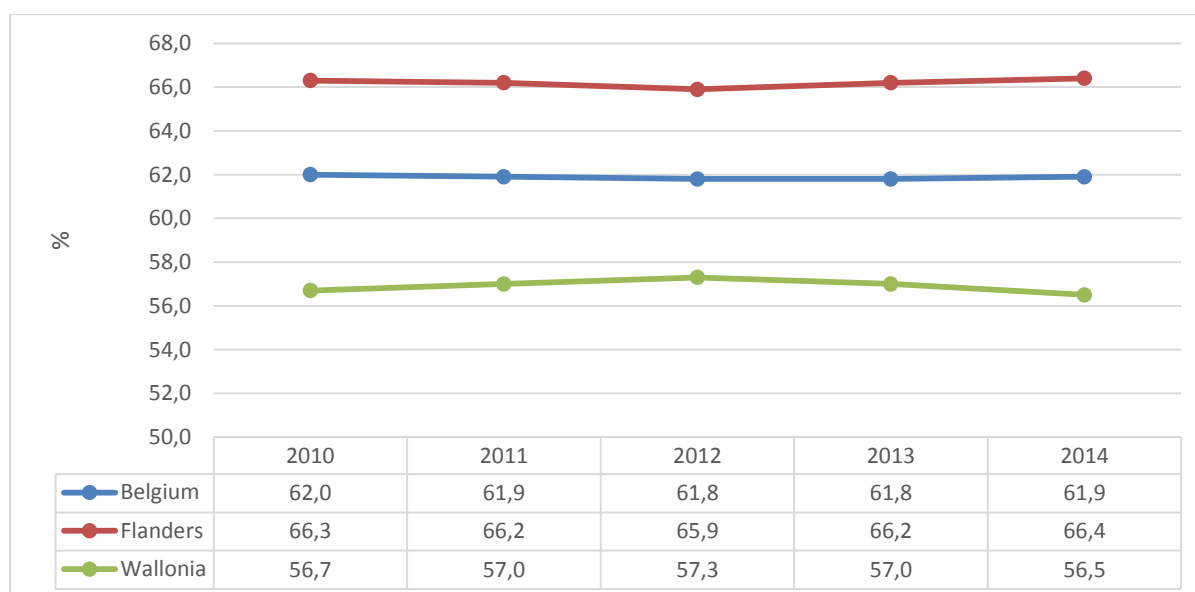


Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium ?

A 3.2. Labour market performance

The Labour Force Survey is an important tool to monitor the labour market situation in the different Regions. [Figure A3.2.1.](#) shows the employment rate of the population in the active age (15-64) among the Belgian regions for the period 2010-2014. The breakdown by region shows that the observed stability of the Belgian employment rate hides important regional disparities: Whereas the Belgian employment rate hardly changes between 2010 and 2014 (from 62% to 61.9%), the regional rates appear to fluctuate more: In Flanders, the employment rate decreases over the period 2010-2012 (from 66.3% to 65.9%) but increases again in the most recent years to reach 66.4% in 2014. In Wallonia, the opposite trend can be observed, with an initial increase (from 56.7% in 2010 to 57.3% Souin 2012) being followed by a decline to 56.5% in 2014.

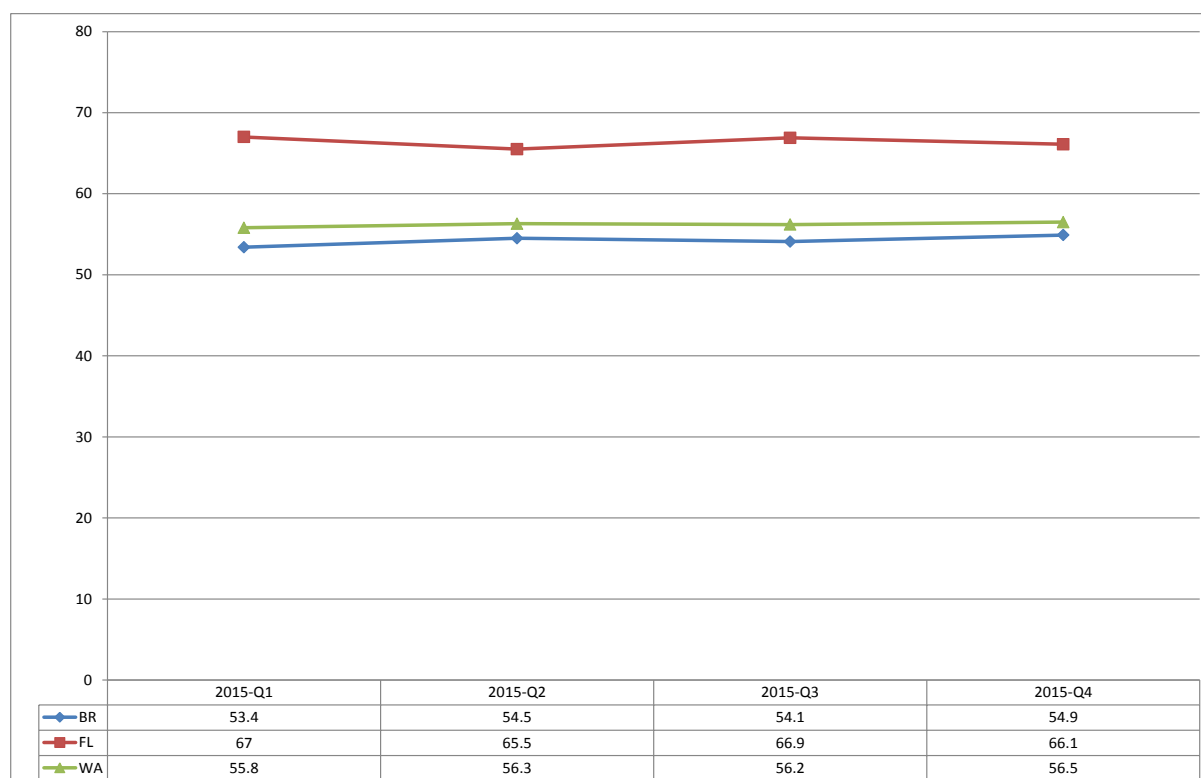
Figure A3.2.1. : Employment rate of the age group 15-64 per Region (2010-2014, in %)



Source: Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

To have a better view on the most recent evolution, [figure A3.2.2.](#) shows the 2015 quarterly employment rates. These Quarterly results show small increases in the employment rate in Wallonia (55,8% to 56,5%) and Brussels (53,4% to 54,9%) between the first and the last quarter, but some decrease in Flanders (67% to 66,1%).

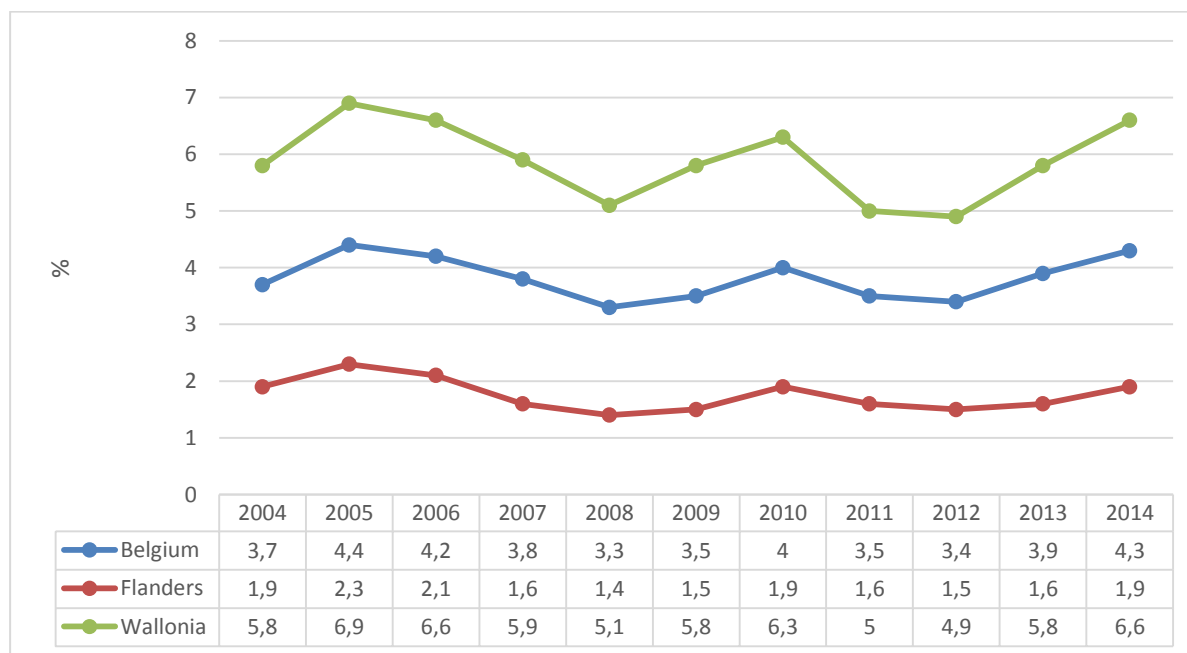
Figure A3.2.2. : Quarterly employment rates 2015



Source: Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

Another important labour market indicator is the long-term unemployment rate. Figure 6 depicts the long-term unemployment rate as the share of persons unemployed for 12 months or more in the total active population for the Regions. Whereas the Flemish long-term unemployment rate is relatively stable between 2004 and 2014 (around 1,8%), the Walloon rate seems to fluctuate more (f.i. from 6.9% in 2005 to 5.1% in 2008). In the most recent period (2012-2014), both regional rates seem to be gradually increasing. In the Brussels Capital Region, the long-term unemployment rate was 10.6% in 2014.

Figure A3.2.3. : Long-term unemployment rate (12 months and more) per Region (2004-2014, in %)

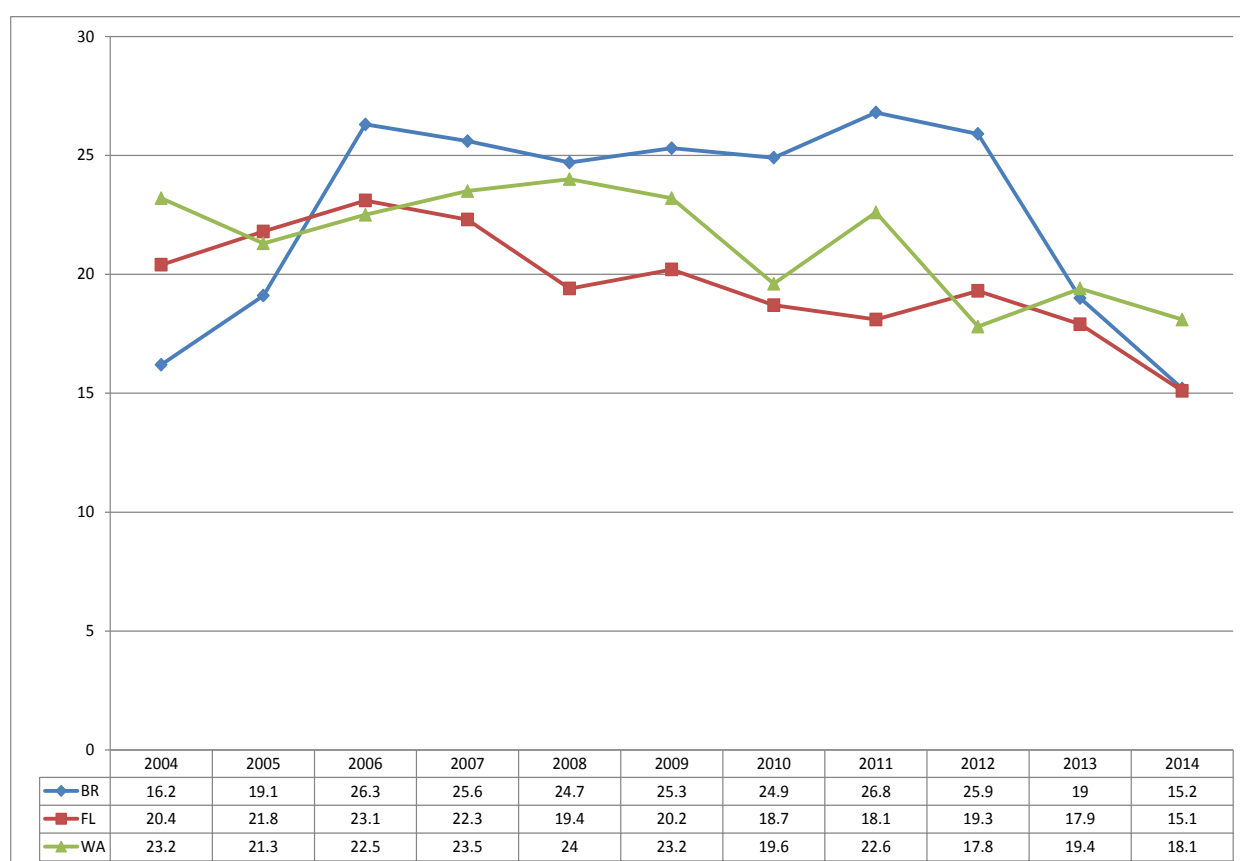


Source: Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT

A 3.3. Differences in trends between subgroups

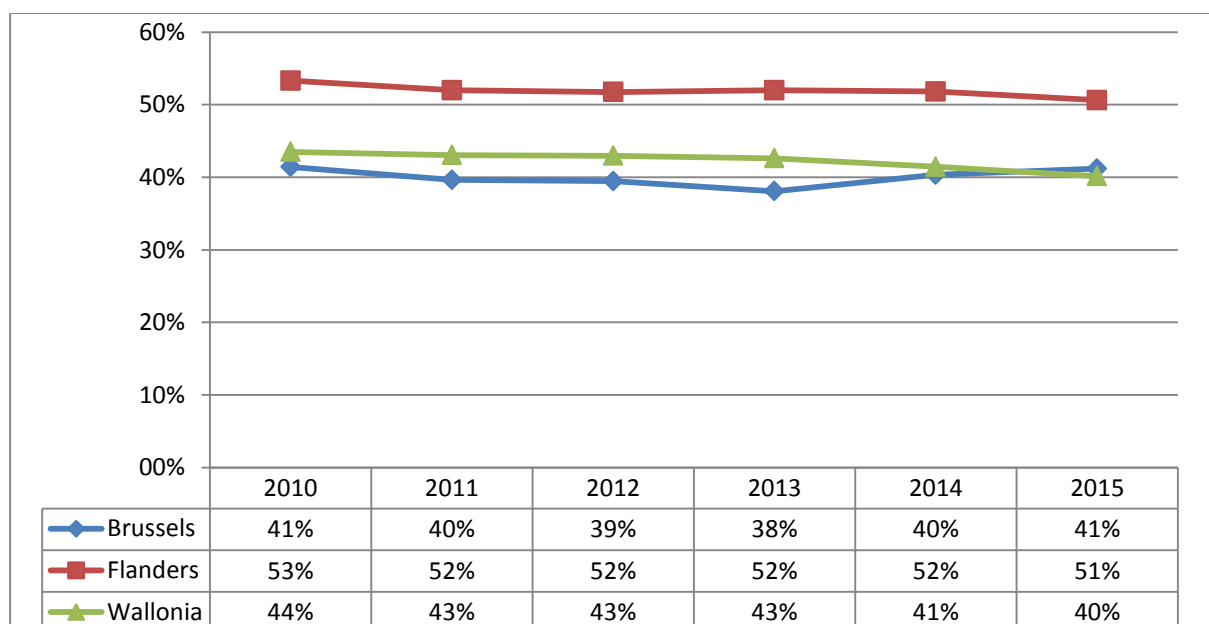
On the basis of the available data for drafting this analysis, a reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the elderly can be observed in all regions. Although the pattern differs somewhat between the regions ([figureA3.3.](#)).

Figure A3.3.1: At-risk-of-poverty rate for the elderly population (65+) by Region



Source: EU-SILC- SVR, IWEPs

Figure A3.3.2.: Employment rate of low-skilled persons by Region



Source: Labour Force Survey, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

ANNEX 4 : PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL INDICATORS (MEETINGS DECEMBER 2015 AND APRIL 2016)

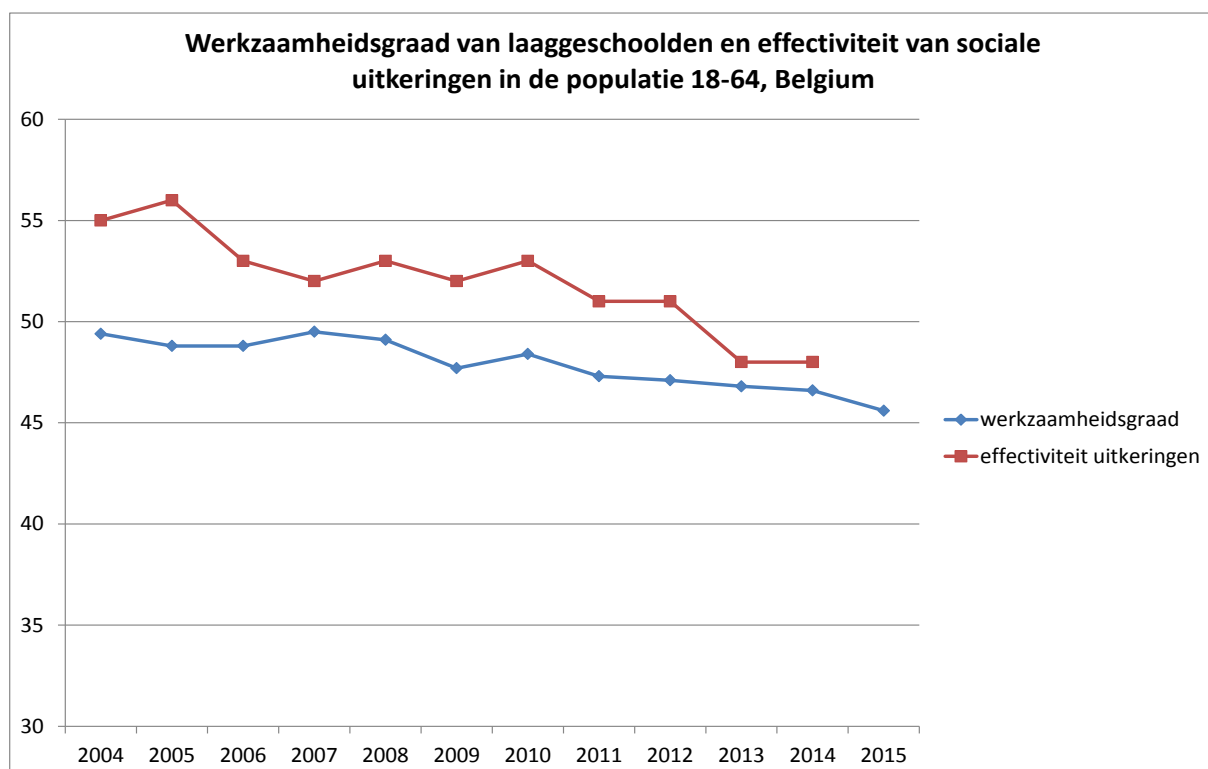
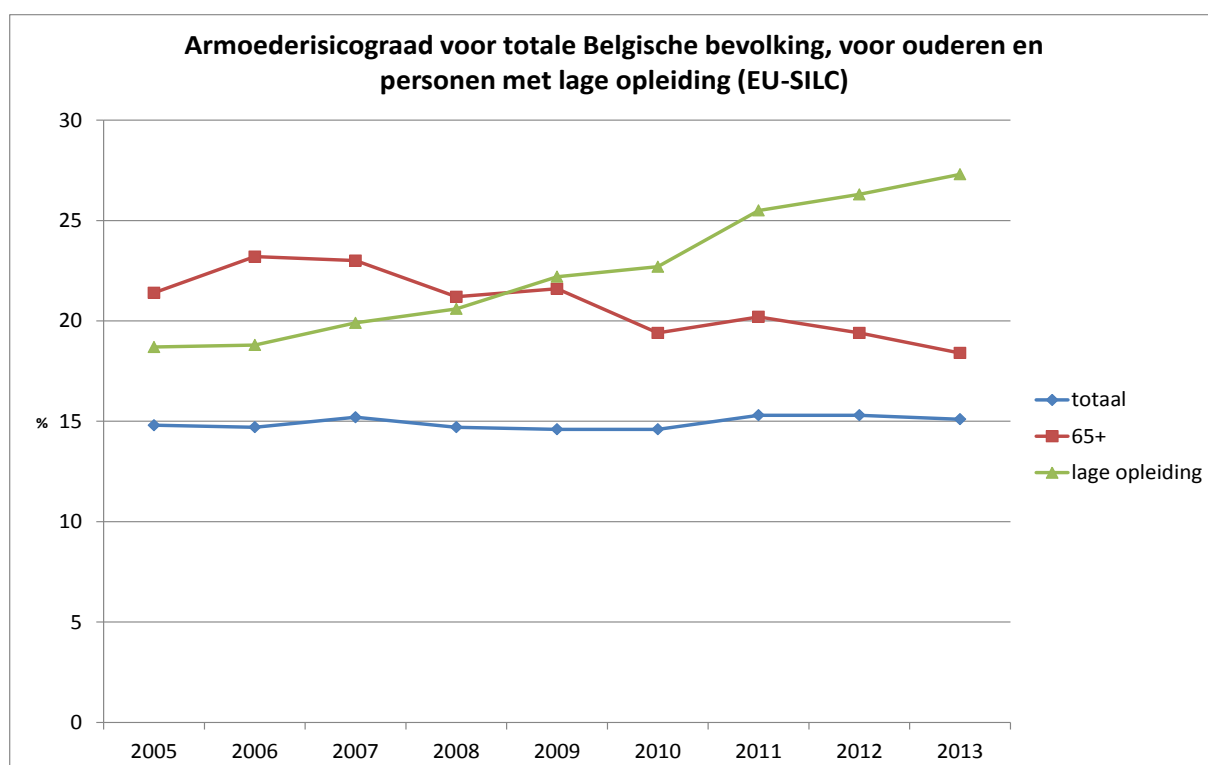
Jean-Maurice Frère (FPB), Sarah Luyten (Observatoire de la santé et du sociale Bruxelles), Essin Fehmieva, Marie Castaigne, Genneviève Geenens (Statistics Belgium), Didier Noël (Observatoire du Crédit et de l'endettement), Ides Nicaise, Wouter Schepers (HIVA-KULeuven), Henk Van Hootegem (Steunpunt armoedebestrijding), Sebastien Bastais, Peter Lelie, Dirk Moens, Rudi Van Dam (FOD SZ), Tim Goedemé (CSB-UA), François Ghesquire (IWEPS), Jo Locquet (POD MI), Jo Noppe (Studiedienst Vlaamse Regering), Ramon Peña-Casas (Observatoire Sociale Européen), Hildegard Van Hove (Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen), Chris Brijs (KSZ)

ANNEX 5 : NEDERLANDSTALIGE KERNBODSCHAPPEN, SAMENVATTING EN CONCLUSIES

Kernboodschappen van de analyse van de EU sociale indicatoren

- Deze studie bouwt verder op de eerdere analyse die aantoonde dat onder stabiele sociale indicatoren voor de totale bevolking divergerende trends zich aftekenen voor subgroepen uit de bevolking. Het armoederisico onder ouderen is gedaald, terwijl het voor laaggeschoolden onder de actieve bevolking sterk is toegenomen.
- De daling van het armoederisico onder ouderen was sterker voor oudere vrouwen dan voor oudere mannen. Deze daling kan worden toegeschreven aan een verbetering van de laagste pensioenen. Het algemene niveau van pensioenen en het inkomen van ouderen ten opzichte van jongere leeftijdscohortes bleef ongeveer stabiel.
- Op basis van de meest recente gegevens blijkt dat de werkzaamheidsgraad van laaggeschoolden verder gedaald is in 2015. De gestage daling over de laatste jaren wordt nu significant en is samengegaan met een dalende effectiviteit van de sociale uitkeringen. Deze bevinding wijst op het diepe structurele karakter van de dalende toegankelijkheid van de arbeidsmarkt voor laaggeschoolden en het stijgende armoederisico voor deze groep. Deze structurele oorzaken zijn gelinkt aan de verminderde verdien capaciteit, polarisatie van werk(loosheid) onder huishoudens en de gedaalde toereikendheid van de sociale uitkeringen voor de bevolking op actieve leeftijd.
- Er heeft zich de afgelopen drie jaar een toename van de on vervulde behoefte aan medische- en tandzorg (unmet need) afgetekend, dit voornamelijk in het laagste inkomenskwintiel. Dit wijst op een toename van problemen inzake toegankelijkheid van de gezondheidszorg, alhoewel er nog enige voorzichtigheid geboden is voor deze conclusie ten gevolge van beperkte steekproefgrootte. Deze bevinding dient in elk geval van nabij te worden opgevolgd.
- De kinderarmoedegraad is stabiel gebleven, maar bevindt zich consistent boven de armoederisicograad voor de totale bevolking. Op andere dimensies van kindermilieu scoort België op basis van OESO en UNICEF studies gemengd tot zwak.
- Over het algemeen wijst de analyse van de Europese sociale indicatoren, samen met andere recente studies voor België, op een groeiend aantal indicaties van toenemende ongelijkheden en punten waar België minder goed scoort dan internationale gemiddelden op een aantal domeinen zoals: . het armoederisico voor laaggeschoolden, het armoederisico van huishoudens zonder betaald werk, de toegang tot de arbeidsmarkt voor laaggeschoolden, de financiële toegang tot gezondheidszorgen, sociale ongelijkheden in onderwijsresultaten, gezondheid en tevredenheid met het leven van kinderen, en de sociaal-economische positie van migranten zijn domeinen waarop dergelijke vaststellingen kunnen worden gemaakt. Verder is het ook van belang te wijzen op de grote sociaal-ruimtelijke verschillen tussen Regio's en tussen stedelijke wijken. Deze bevindingen rechtvaardigen een bezorgdheid over

de sociale situatie en de sociale cohesie, niettegenstaande de algemene stabiliteit in de sociale indicatoren voor de bevolking als geheel en de positieve evolutie onder ouderen.



Note : effectiviteit van sociale uitkeringen: procentpunt reductie van pre-transfer armoedegraad door sociale uitkeringen in % van pre-transfer armoedegraad

SAMEVATTING EN CONCLUSIES

Aangezien er nog geen nieuwe EU-SILC 2015 gegevens met een aantal belangrijke sociale indicatoren beschikbaar waren voor dit rapport sinds de update van oktober 2015⁶⁰, wordt de analyse in dit rapport verder uitgediept, aangevuld met recente 2015 gegevens van de Enquête naar de Arbeidskrachten en aangevuld met bevindingen uit andere studies.

Over het algemeen wijzen de sociale indicatoren op een eerder stabiele sociale situatie in België over de voorbije jaren. De werkzaamheidsgraad blijft quasi constant op 67%. Ook de werkloosheidsgraad bleef stabiel rond 8,5%. Zowel het op de nationale rekeningen gebaseerde bruto beschikbaar gezinsinkomen en het mediaan equivalent gezinsinkomen bleven eerder stabiel en ook de inkomensongelijkheid bleef op hetzelfde niveau.

Voor de EU als geheel tonen de cijfers voor de meest recente jaren beperkte verbeteringen op sommige sociale en tewerkstellingsindicatoren, zij het met verschillen tussen lidstaten en voor sommige lidstaten nog grote verschillen met de pre-crisis situatie.

Wat de Europa2020 doelstelling inzake de reductie van armoede en sociale uitsluiting betreft kan er geen evolutie in de richting van de doelstelling worden vastgesteld. De beperkte fluctuaties van de indicator waarop de doelstelling gebaseerd is zijn niet statistisch significant. Globaal is het risico op armoede en sociale uitsluiting dan ook stabiel gebleven.

De stabiliteit die de sociale indicatoren vertonen voor de bevolking als geheel, verbergt echter sterk divergerende trends voor diverse subcategorieën. Het armoederisico voor ouderen (65+) is sterk afgenomen, maar deze positieve evolutie werd echter geneutraliseerd door een substantiële stijging van het armoederisico onder de laaggeschoolden op actieve leeftijd.

Het armoederisico onder ouderen daalde van 23% in 2006 tot 16% in 2014. Hiermee komt het armoederisico voor ouderen bijna op hetzelfde niveau te liggen als het cijfer voor de bevolking als geheel, wat een historisch laag niveau is voor deze categorie. De daling van het armoederisico is aanzienlijk sterker onder alleenstaande oudere vrouwen dan onder oudere mannen. De verhouding van het mediaan inkomen van ouderen tot het mediaan inkomen van de jongere leeftijdsgroep evenals de verhouding van het gemiddeld pensioen ten opzichte van het gemiddeld arbeidsinkomen bleven min of meer stabiel of stegen slechts in zeer beperkte mate. Er kan bijgevolg verondersteld worden dat de reductie van het armoederisico onder ouderen vooral te wijten is aan een verbetering van de lage/laagste pensioenen. De toename van de effectiviteit van de pensioenen wijst in dezelfde richting. Niettegenstaande deze positieve trend moet er ook op gewezen worden dat een armoederisico voor ouderen van 16% nog steeds een significante omvang betreft.

De trend onder de bevolking op actieve leeftijd is echter meer verontrustend. De centrale bevinding is hier de divergerende trend tussen enerzijds zwakkere categorieën en de rest van de actieve bevolking. De toename van het armoederisico onder laaggeschoolden (van 19% in 2005 tot 28% in 2014) vat de essentie van de problematiek. De belangrijkste determinanten van deze evolutie zijn (1) een dalende toegankelijkheid van de arbeidsmarkt en (2) een dalende toereikendheid van sociale uitkeringen voor de actieve bevolking. Deze bevindingen zijn gebaseerd op de Europese sociale

60 FOD Sociale Zekerheid (2015), Evolutie van de sociale situatie in België. Actualisatie op basis van de enquête EU-SILC 2014: Stabiliteit en Divergentie.

indicatoren en worden bevestigd en verder geduid door recente studies op nationaal vlak. Deze studies wijzen op:

- De dalende toereikendheid van uitkeringen voor de actieve bevolking ten gevolge van de toegenomen degressiviteit in werkloosheidsuitkeringen (Van Lancker et. al., 2015) en ten gevolge van het feit dat uitkeringen achter bleven op de prijsevolutie van basis behoeften (Storms et. al., 2015).
- (toenemende) ongelijkheid in toegang tot de arbeidsmarkt:
 - Polarisatie van werk tussen 'insiders' (werk-rijke) en outsiders ('werk-arme') huishoudens (Vandenbroucke en Colruy, 2015)
 - De, in vergelijking met EU niveau's, zeer grote kloof naar migratiestatus (FOD WASO en Interfederaal Gelijkekansencentrum, 2015)
 - Toegenomen verschillen in kansen om uit werkloosheid te ontsnappen voor schoolverlaters naar opleidingsniveau (Federaal Planbureau, 2015)

In vorige analyses werd reeds vastgesteld dat de Enquête naar de arbeidskrachten wees op een gestage daling van de werkzaamheidsgraad van laaggeschoolden sinds 2010. De recente gegevens van deze Enquête tonen aan dat deze trend zich verder heeft doorgezet in 2015. Terwijl de totale werkzaamheidsgraad stabiel bleef rond 67,5%, daalde deze voor laaggeschoolden van 49% in 2007 tot 45% in 2015. Deze trend is in het bijzonder verontrustend omdat de kloof in werkzaamheidsgraad tussen België en de EU-werkzaamheidsgraden voor deze categorie reeds het grootst was. Er kan vastgesteld worden dat deze dalende werkzaamheidsgraad zich samen heeft voorgedaan met een dalende effectiviteit van de sociale uitkeringen voor deze categorie. Alhoewel andere factoren kunnen interveniëren in de relatie tussen deze twee indicatoren, geeft hun gelijktijdig optreden toch een aanwijzing van het hardnekkig, diep structureel, karakter van deze problematiek die gerelateerd is aan productiviteit/verdien capaciteit van laaggeschoolden in België.

Aangezien de hefboomen voor het sociaaleconomisch beleid in België verspreid zijn over diverse beleidsniveaus is het relevant om vast te stellen dat deze basistrends die voor het Belgische niveau gelden, ook worden vastgesteld voor Vlaanderen en Wallonië apart, ook al bestaan er grote verschillen in de niveaus tussen deze regio's. Wat het stedelijke niveau betreft wijst een recente studie op een sterke sociaal-ruimtelijke segregatie in Belgische steden, met een sterke cumulatie van negatieve kenmerken in achtergestelde buurten en, anderzijds, meer begoede buurten (veelal buitenwijken) die geïsoleerd lijken van de socio-demografische dynamieken van de eerst vermelde buurten.

Zoals reeds werd vastgesteld in eerdere rapporteringen, blijkt de toename van het armoederisico onder de actieve bevolking zich uitsluitend te situeren onder huurders.

Het Rapport over de performantie van het Belgische gezondheidssysteem 2015 presenteert een gemengd beeld. Een relatief groot deel van de populatie is in goede gezondheid en er is een relatief hoge tevredenheid inzake de contacten met het gezondheidssysteem. De indicatoren inzake de kwaliteit van de gezondheidszorg situeren zich doorgaans rond het Europees gemiddelde met

sommige indicatoren die beter scoren en andere slechter. De preventieve zorg beantwoordt niet altijd aan de internationale doelstellingen en sommige indicatoren inzake gezondheidspromotie en levensstijl vertonen een zwak resultaat. Sommige indicatoren inzake geestelijke gezondheid (szorg) zijn ook verontrustend. Zo blijft de zelfmoordgraad hoog. EU-SILC 2014 gegevens vertonen een duidelijke stijging sinds 2013 van het percentage personen dat gezondheids- of tandzorg heeft moeten uitstellen (unmet need). Deze toename situeert zich voornamelijk in het eerste inkomensquintiel. Dit kan wijzen op een toenemend probleem van (financiële) toegankelijkheid van de gezondheidszorg en vereist een opvolging van nabij wanneer nieuwe gegevens beschikbaar komen.

Alhoewel de EU-SILC cijfers geen duidelijke op- of neerwaartse trend vertonen inzake kinderarmoede in de periode 2004-2014 moet wel worden vastgesteld dat de kinderarmoedegraad zich consistent boven de algemene armoedegraad voor de bevolking situeert. De PISA studies van de OESO, die de onderwijsprestaties meten, tonen steeds aan dat België een hoge algemene performantie combineert met een hoge graad van sociale ongelijkheid in de onderwijsresultaten. Deze bevinding werd onlangs door UNICEF bevestigd. Niettegenstaande een dalende evolutie over de verschillende PISA rondes stipt UNICEF aan dat het verschil in onderwijsresultaten tussen de mediaan en het 10^{de} percentiel significant hoger is dan het OESO gemiddelde (UNICEF, 2016). Verder kunnen op basis van het 'Fairness for Children' rapport volgende bevindingen voor kinderen worden aangestipt:

- Een stabiel gemiddelde performantie van België inzake 'bottom-end' inkomensongelijkheid (gemeten als de afstand tussen het 10^{de} en 50^{ste} percentiel)
- Een gemiddelde maar toegenomen 'bottom-end inequality' in zelf gerapporteerde gezondheidstoestand.
- Een ongunstige en toegenomen 'bottom-end inequality' inzake tevredenheid met het leven

Concluderend, leert deze verdere uitwerking van de analyse van de evolutie van de sociale situatie volgende algemene bijkomende inzichten:

- Ten eerste is de verdere daling in 2015 van de werkzaamheidsgraad van laaggeschoolden belangrijk. Deze daling die zich sinds enkele jaren aftekent wordt hiermee stilaan significant, en , alhoewel verdere EU-SILC gegevens moeten afgewacht worden, kan verwacht worden dat dit een negatieve impact zal hebben op andere inkomensgerelateerde indicatoren en op de divergentie tussen sociale categorieën onder de actieve bevolking. Deze daling in de werkzaamheidsgraad tekent zich af op federaal niveau, maar ook in Vlaanderen en Wallonië apart. Verder is het relevant om vast te stellen dat de daling van de werkzaamheidsgraad voor laaggeschoolden samengaat met een dalende effectiviteit van de sociale uitkeringen. Deze diverse vaststellingen wijzen op het diepe structurele karakter van dit probleem.

Ten tweede ondersteunen de verdere analyse van de sociale indicatoren en resultaten van andere studies de eerdere bevindingen inzake divergerende trends onder de actieve bevolking, maar deze analyse lijkt ook te wijzen op ruimere sociale kwesties. Op basis van een breed perspectief op de

beschikbare analyses lijkt het gewettigd om te wijzen op een toenemende aantal aanwijzingen van groeiende ongelijkheden en indicatoren waarop België minder goed scoort dan internationale gemiddelden. Het armoederisico voor laaggeschoolden, het armoederisico van huishoudens zonder betaald werk, de toegang tot de arbeidsmarkt voor laaggeschoolden, de financiële toegang tot gezondheidszorgen, sociale ongelijkheden in onderwijsresultaten, gezondheid en tevredenheid met het leven van kinderen, en de sociaal-economische positie van migranten zijn domeinen waarop dergelijke vaststellingen kunnen worden gemaakt. Verder is het ook van belang te wijzen op de grote sociaal-ruimtelijke verschillen tussen Regio's en tussen stedelijke wijken. Het feit dat een aantal negatieve ontwikkelingen zich concentreren binnen reeds zwakkere sociale categorieën zoals laaggeschoolden, huurders, ..., samen met soms scherpe sociaal ruimtelijke verschillen binnen steden, kan een ernstige uitdaging inhouden voor de sociale cohesie in België⁶¹.

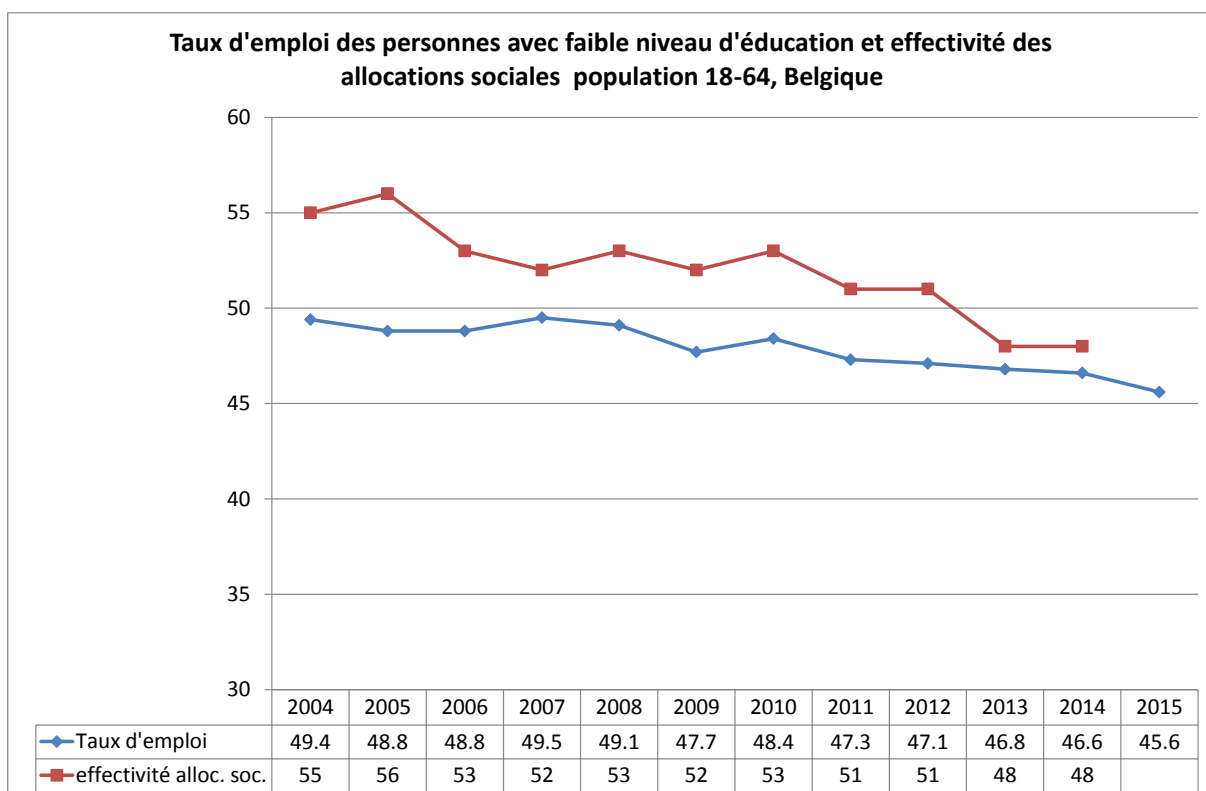
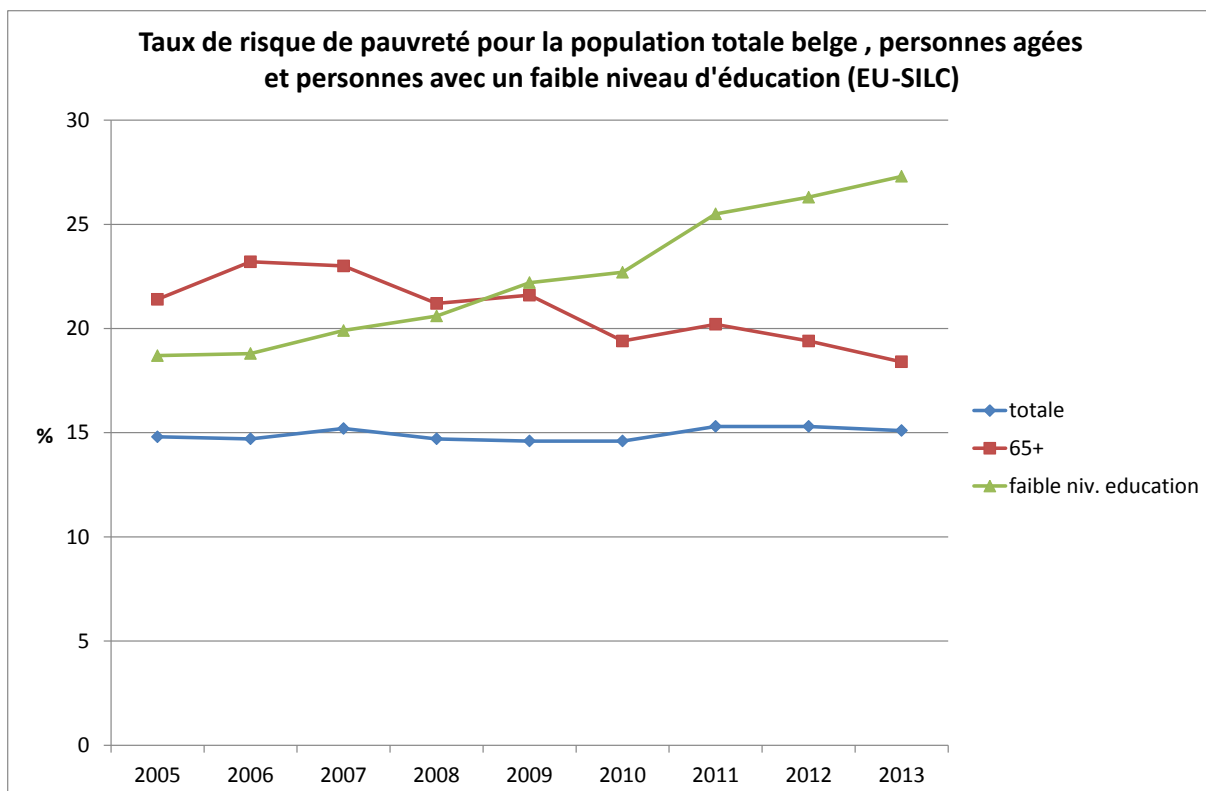
Het is duidelijk dat het onder deze sociaal-economische omstandigheden het bijzonder moeilijk is om een trend in de richting van de Europa2020 doelstelling inzake de reductie van armoede en sociale uitsluiting te bewerkstelligen, niettegenstaande de positieve evolutie onder ouderen. De vaststellingen in deze analyse wettigen een bezorgdheid over de sociale situatie en de sociale cohesie.

⁶¹ Deze analyse ligt in de lijn van de conclusie van het Federaal Planbureau in zijn analyse van aanvullende indicatoren bij het BBP, waar de evolutie van de sociale situatie als 'verontrustend' wordt gemarkeerd (Federaal Planbureau, 2016)

ANNEX 6 : MESSAGES CLÉS, RÉSUMÉ ET CONCLUSION EN FRANÇAIS

Messages clés de l'analyse des indicateurs sociaux européens :

- Cette analyse confirme nos analyses précédentes qui mettaient en avant une grande stabilité en Belgique des indicateurs sociaux pour l'ensemble de la population, mais des tendances divergentes pour différentes catégories de celle-ci. En particulier, l'analyse confirme le contraste, d'une part entre la baisse du risque de pauvreté pour les personnes âgées (+ de 65 ans) et, d'autre part, la forte hausse du risque de pauvreté pour les personnes d'âge actif avec un faible niveau d'éducation.
- La baisse du risque de pauvreté parmi les personnes âgées est plus prononcée chez les femmes que chez les hommes. Cette plus forte baisse peut être attribuée aux (récentes) augmentations des pensions les plus basses. Cependant, le niveau des pensions, et des revenus en général, des personnes âgées est resté relativement stable, comparativement aux classes d'âge plus jeunes.
- La hausse du risque de pauvreté au sein de la population active est située exclusivement parmi les catégories sociales déjà plus faibles : les personnes peu qualifiées, les personnes vivant dans un ménage avec une intensité de travail très faible et les locataires.
- Le taux d'emploi pour les personnes à faible niveau d'éducation continue à diminuer selon les chiffres de la dernière enquête LFS annuelle. Simultanément à cette baisse substantielle, constante au cours des dernières années, l'adéquation des transferts sociaux diminue également pour la population d'âge actif. Il s'agit là de 2 causes structurelles profondes expliquant l'augmentation de la pauvreté au sein de la population active. Ces deux causes sont liées à une polarisation croissante du marché de l'emploi (rendant l'accès de plus en plus difficile pour les groupes les plus faibles).
- Notre analyse montre également une hausse au cours des 3 dernières années des reports de soins de santé (mesurés par l'indicateur "unmet need"), tant au niveau des soins médicaux que dentaires, parmi les ménages avec les revenus les plus bas (le 1^{er} quintile). Bien qu'en raison d'une taille d'échantillon assez petite, cette observation doit être interprétée avec prudence (et méritera d'être monitorée durant les prochaines années), cela semble indiquer une possible hausse des problèmes liés à l'accessibilité des soins de santé en Belgique.
- Il est également à remarquer que si la pauvreté infantile est restée relativement stable en Belgique ces dernières années, elle reste supérieure à celle calculée sur l'ensemble de la population. Par ailleurs, la Belgique obtient des scores inférieurs à la moyenne sur plusieurs dimensions liées au bien-être des enfants selon des études de l'OCDE et de l'UNICEF.
- Enfin, de façon générale, l'analyse des indicateurs sociaux européens couplée avec les constats de récentes études, semble indiquer une croissance des inégalités (en moyenne plus forte que dans les autres pays européens) en Belgique dans un certain nombre de domaines (pauvreté, emploi, accès aux soins de santé, éducation, bien-être et santé des enfants, position des personnes d'origine étrangère), de même qu'un clivage sociogéographique croissant entre les différentes Régions du pays (voire entre quartiers au sein des villes). Ces constats justifient une attention particulière à la situation sociale et à la cohésion sociale, malgré l'apparente stabilité globale des indicateurs sociaux et l'évolution positive pour les personnes âgées.



Note : efficience des prestations sociales = réduction de la pauvreté grâce aux transferts de prestations sociale (en % de la pauvreté « avant transfert »)

RÉSUMÉ ET CONCLUSIONS

Ce rapport complète notre mise à jour de l'analyse de l'évolution du risque de pauvreté basée sur les données de l'enquête EUSILC 2014 (vu que les données de l'enquête 2015 ne sont pas encore disponibles à ce jour) réalisée l'automne dernier⁶². Les ajouts de cette étude se basent, d'une part, sur les nouveaux chiffres de l'enquête « Force de travail » (LFS) 2015 et d'autre part, sur une série de récentes études venant compléter notre analyse des indicateurs sociaux européens. Le but principal de ce rapport est de contextualiser et soutenir le monitoring de l'objectif de réduction de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale inscrit dans la stratégie européenne 2020, notamment dans le cadre du Programme National de Réformes (PNR)

Dans l'ensemble, les indicateurs sociaux montrent une situation sociale globale plutôt stable ces dernières années en Belgique. Le taux d'emploi reste quasi constant à 67,2%. De même, le chômage reste stable autour des 8,5%. Tant le revenu disponible brut des ménages que le revenu médian équivalent des ménages sont restés également stables et il en va de même pour les inégalités de revenus.

En ce qui concerne la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, il y a un quasi statut quo depuis le lancement de la stratégie européenne 2020, les petites fluctuations observées d'années en années n'étant pas statistiquement significatives. Cela signifie que la tendance ne va pas vers une réalisation de l'objectif de réduction de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale telle qu'inscrit dans la stratégie européenne 2020.

Derrière cette stabilité générale, se cachent des tendances divergentes pour différentes catégories de la population. Le risque de pauvreté a diminué pour les personnes âgées mais cette évolution positive est contrebalancée au sein de la population active par une augmentation substantielle du risque de pauvreté pour les personnes à faible niveau d'éducation.

Le risque de pauvreté pour les personnes âgées (+ de 65 ans) est passé de 23% en 2006 à 16% en 2014, ce qui représente un niveau historiquement bas pour cette catégorie (le taux étant désormais seulement juste au-dessus du taux pour l'ensemble de la population). Du fait que le revenu médian des personnes âgées soit resté stable en comparaison avec le revenu médian de la population active, et que les pensions moyennes soient également restées stables en comparaison avec le revenu moyen sur le marché du travail, on peut déduire que la baisse de la pauvreté parmi les personnes âgées est principalement due à l'augmentation des pensions les plus basses. Ce constat semble se confirmer par l'adéquation croissante de la protection sociale des personnes âgées et le fait que la baisse du taux de pauvreté soit plus prononcée chez les femmes âgées (que chez les hommes). Nonobstant cette évolution positive, il y a lieu de rappeler qu'il reste néanmoins une importante pauvreté au sein de la population âgée.

Par ailleurs, le Comité d'étude sur le vieillissement montre que la soutenabilité des pensions s'est améliorée (comparativement aux chiffres précédents) grâce à la fois aux mesures gouvernementales et à des changements méthodologiques dans le calcul des projections.

62 Federal Public Service Social Security (2015), Evolution de la situation sociale en Belgique. Actualisation sur base des données de l'enquête EU-SILC 2014

Les tendances au sein de la population active sont plus préoccupantes. Le constat majeur est la croissance des divergences significatives entre les catégories les plus faibles et le reste de la population active. L'augmentation du risque de pauvreté parmi les personnes avec un faible niveau d'éducation (passant de 19% en 2005 à 28% en 2014) est un élément clé de ce problème. Les causes principales de cette évolution sont (1) la détérioration de l'accès sur le marché du travail (segmentation du marché) et (2) la diminution de l'adéquation des prestations sociales. Ce constat, basé sur les indicateurs sociaux européens, est confirmé par des études nationales. Celles-ci indiquent :

- Une diminution de l'adéquation des prestations sociales due à l'augmentation de la dégressivité des indemnités de chômage (Van Lancker et. Al. 2015) et au fait que certaines prestations sociales ne sont plus adaptées à l'évolution des prix des biens de première nécessité.
- Une inégalité (croissante) de l'accès au marché du travail :
 - o Polarisation du travail entre les ménages "insiders" et « outsiders » (Vandenbroucke and Colruy, 2015)
 - o Un important écart (en comparaison avec la moyenne européenne) entre les personnes issues de l'immigration et le reste de la population active (SPF Emploi et Centre pour l'égalité des chances, 2015)
 - o Des différences croissantes selon le niveau d'éducation dans les taux de sortie du chômage des personnes ayant quitté l'enseignement (Bureau fédéral du plan, 2015)

Les données de l'enquête "Force de Travail" (LFS) indiquent une baisse constante des taux d'emploi pour les personnes à faible niveau d'éducation. Cette tendance continue en 2015 selon les dernières données de la LFS. Alors que le taux d'emploi pour l'ensemble de la population s'élève à 67,5% le taux d'emploi des personnes à faible niveau d'éducation n'est que de 45% en 2015 (contre 49% en 2007). Cette tendance est particulièrement préoccupante dans la mesure où c'est pour cette catégorie que l'écart par rapport à la moyenne européenne était déjà le plus important. Il est en outre important de remarquer que cette tendance se produit simultanément avec la baisse de l'adéquation des allocations sociales pour la population active. Bien que d'autres facteurs puissent intervenir dans cette relation, on peut considérer que ces 2 tendances simultanées sont un problème structurel lié à la productivité des travailleurs faiblement éduqués.

Bien que les compétences en matière de politiques sociales soient dispersées entre différents niveaux de pouvoir en Belgique, il est intéressant de noter que ces tendances sont observées tant en Flandre qu'en Wallonie même si de grandes différences existent entre les Régions en matière de pauvreté et d'emploi. Par ailleurs, une récente étude indique également qu'il existe de grandes différences géo-spatiales au sein des grandes villes entre les quartiers, avec notamment une forme de ségrégation se traduisant d'un côté par une accumulation de caractéristiques négatives dans les quartiers défavorisés et d'un autre côté par une évolution « normale » dans d'autres quartiers qui ne sont pas affectés par une telle dynamique sociodémographique.

Comme mentionné dans nos précédentes analyses, on observe aussi de grandes différences dans l'évolution de la pauvreté entre "propriétaires" et "locataires", avec une hausse du risque de pauvreté exclusivement située parmi les locataires.

Le rapport belge de performance du système de santé 2015 présente un bilan mitigé. Une part relativement importante de la population est en bonne santé et le niveau de satisfaction à l'égard du système est assez élevé. Les indicateurs de « qualité » en matière de santé sont pour la plupart situés autour de la moyenne européenne (EU15) avec quelques indicateurs atteignant de meilleurs scores et d'autres de moins bons. Les soins préventifs n'atteignent pas toujours les objectifs internationaux et certains indicateurs en matière de promotion de la santé et de style de vie présentent des résultats décevants. Certains indicateurs en matière de santé mentale sont même assez alarmants (les taux de suicides restent par exemple élevés). L'enquête EU-SILC 2014 montre en outre une hausse marquée du nombre de personnes dans le 1^{er} quintile de revenu reportant des soins médicaux ou dentaires (indicateur « unmet need »). Cela pourrait indiquer des problèmes croissants en matière d'accessibilité des soins de santé. Ce constat méritera assurément d'être suivi de près lorsque les nouvelles données seront disponibles.

Même si les données EU-SILC ne montrent pas de tendance claire sur la période 2004-2014 en la matière, le risque de pauvreté pour les enfants reste clairement supérieur au risque de pauvreté de l'ensemble de la population. Des études témoignent d'inégalités relativement grandes entre enfants en Belgique dans divers domaines. Les études PISA montrent que les hautes performances générales en Belgique en matière d'éducation n'empêchent pas de grandes inégalités dans les résultats scolaires (cfr. PISA 2012). Une étude récente de l'UNICEF confirme cela en insistant sur le fait que la différence entre les scores obtenus au test PISA par les élèves de la médiane et les élèves du 10^e percentile est significativement plus grande que dans la moyenne des pays de l'OCDE (UNICEF 2016).

De plus, ce même rapport de l'UNICEF sur "l'équité des enfants" montre :

- Une position à mi classement de la Belgique en terme d'inégalité de revenu des enfants (mesuré comme l'écart de revenu relatif entre le revenu d'un ménage avec enfant au 10^e percentile et celui à la médiane de distribution de revenus)
- Des inégalités de santé dans la moyenne européenne (mais croissantes) en Belgique
- Des inégalités supérieures à la moyenne européenne (et croissantes) en Belgique en matière de satisfaction dans la vie.

En conclusion, cette analyse offre des enseignements additionnels sur l'évolution de la situation sociale en Belgique.

Premièrement, la poursuite de la tendance à la baisse du taux d'emploi parmi les personnes à faible niveau d'éducation, confirmée par les nouvelles données de l'enquête « Force de travail » 2015, est un enseignement important. Cette diminution dans le taux d'emploi est désormais d'ampleur et, bien que les prochaines données de l'enquête EU-SILC devront le confirmer, on peut s'attendre à ce que cela impacte négativement, entre autre, les indicateurs de divergences (notamment liés aux revenus) entre les différentes catégories sociales de la population active. Le fait que cette baisse du taux d'emploi des personnes à faible niveau d'éducation s'observe tant au niveau national qu'en Flandre et en Wallonie, et le fait que cette diminution se produit simultanément avec une baisse de

l'adéquation des allocations de protection sociale pour la population d'âge active, démontre le caractère profondément structurel du problème.

Deuxièmement, les examens complémentaires des indicateurs sociaux européens, ainsi que les autres études référencées dans notre analyse, soutiennent les constats précédents sur les divergences croissantes au sein de la population active et semblent même indiquer des problèmes sociaux plus larges. En prenant cette vue plus complète (les indicateurs sociaux européens + des analyses nationales), on a davantage l'impression qu'il y a des inégalités croissantes au sein de la population active et chez les enfants (alors que les inégalités de revenus sur l'ensemble de la population restent relativement faibles). Par ailleurs, que ce soit en termes de pauvreté, d'emploi, d'accès aux soins de santé, d'éducation ou de santé des enfants, on observe des positions clairement plus faibles pour les personnes issues de l'immigration. De plus, il apparaît qu'il y a de fortes divergences socio-spatiales entre régions ainsi qu'entre quartiers dans les grandes villes. L'accumulation de ces évolutions négatives pour certaines catégories sociales déjà fragilisées (comme les personnes à faibles niveaux d'éducation et les locataires), combinée aux fortes divergences socio-spatiales dans les grandes villes, représente un défi majeur pour le maintien à l'avenir de la cohésion sociale en Belgique ⁶³.

Au vu de tous ces constats, il devient de plus en plus difficile de s'attendre à une évolution permettant d'atteindre l'objectif européen 2020 de réduction de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale, et ce malgré l'évolution positive liée à la baisse du risque de pauvreté parmi les personnes âgées.

63 Ces constats ont également été mis en avant par le Bureau fédéral du Plan (BFP) dans le cadre de ses travaux sur les indicateurs complémentaires du PIB, le BFP qualifiant d'« inquiétante » l'évolution de la situation sociale ? 5 Bureau fédéral du Plan, 2016)



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