



Country Fact Sheet Belgium

Some Facts about the Gender Pay Gap in Belgium

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“Gender Pay Gap: New Solutions for an Old Problem. Developing Transnational Strategies Together with Trade Unions and Gender Equality Units to Tackle the Gender Pay Gap“

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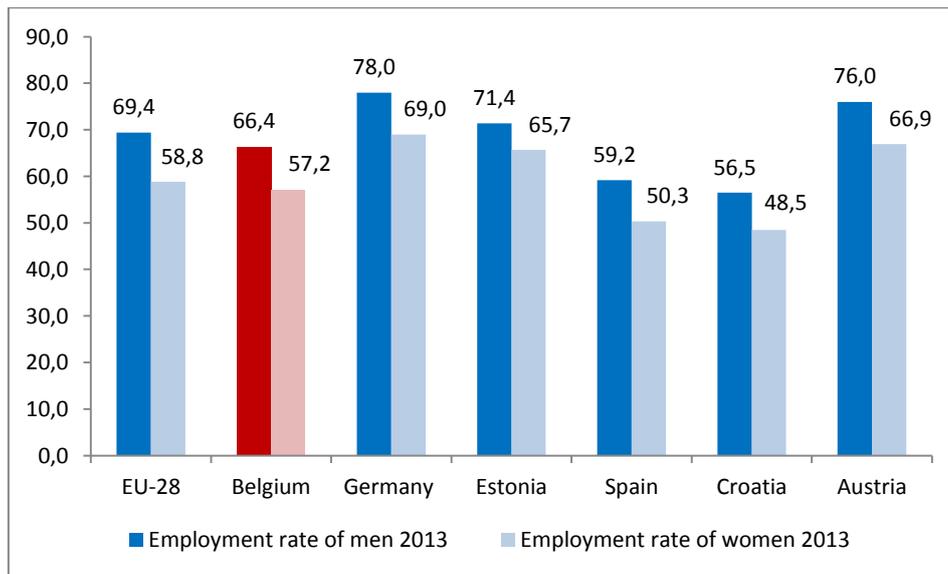
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GPG in Belgium: Brief Data Overview

The employment rate of women and men in Belgium is somewhat lower than the EU-28 average. For men it amounts to 66.4%, and for women to 57.2%. Compared to the countries in the study, Belgium is situated in the middle, with higher employment rates than Spain and Croatia, but markedly lower employment rates than Germany, Austria, and Estonia.

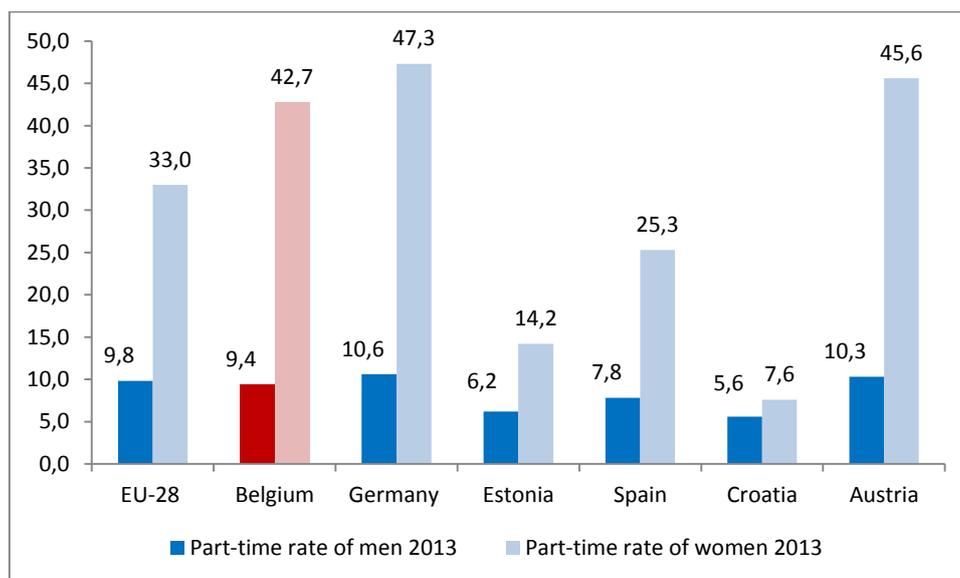
A fairly large proportion of female employment in Belgium is part time: 42.7%. For men, this is much lower; i.e. 9.4%. This is largely due to a stereotypical division of labour in the households, where women take up most of the care given to children and other relatives.

Figure 1: Women's and men's employment rate 2013



Source: Eurostat, LFS (online data code: lfsi_emp_a)

Figure 2: Women's and men's part-time rate 2013

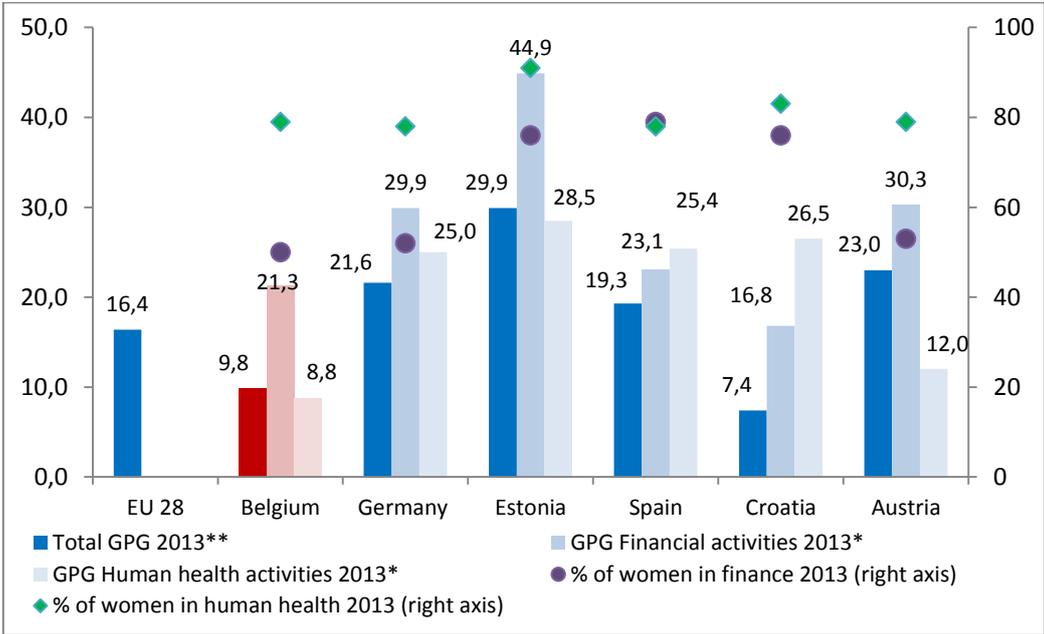


Source: Eurostat, LFS (online data code: lfsi_emp_a)

Compared to other EU-Countries, Belgium has a relatively low gender pay gap. It amounts to 9.8%. In the health sector it is somewhat lower (when social work activities with or without accommodation are included).¹ In the financial sector the gender pay gap is markedly higher, and amounts to 21.3%.

Almost 80% of the employees in the health sector in Belgium are women. In the financial sector the division is much more even: half of the employees are women. However, the pay levels of women and men are far more apart. Men earn on average 6.1 euro more per hour than women.

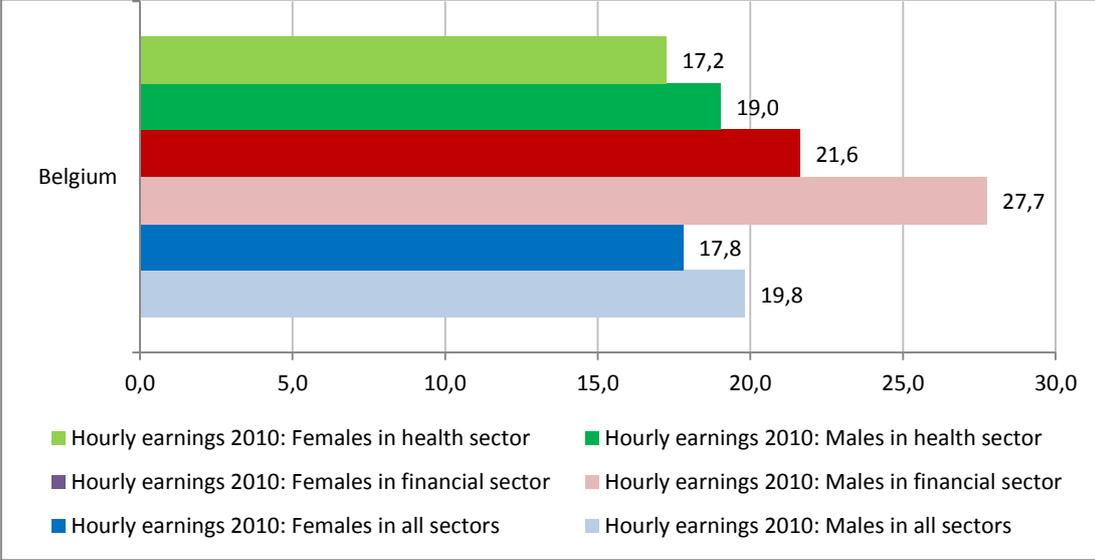
Figure 3: Total GPG, the GPG in the financial and health sectors and women’s share in these sectors 2013**



Source: Eurostat, LFS (online data code: earn_gr_gpgr2 and lfsa_egan2); ** total GPG except public administration, defence, compulsory social security; NACE Rev. 2 (structure of earnings survey methodology); 2015; * latest year available for Austria: 2010

¹ When these sectors are not included the gender pay gap in the health sector more than doubles, and amounts to 19,3%.

Figure 4: Mean hourly earnings by sex in Belgium 2010



Source: Eurostat, LFS, Structure of earnings survey (online data code: earn_ses10_13), hourly earnings include industry, construction and services (except public administration, defence, compulsory social security)

Facts and Findings about the GPG in Belgium

Wage-setting mechanisms in Belgium

Belgium has highly collectively regulated wage-setting mechanisms. Social partners set the general minimum wage, and often agree upon specific, higher minima for subsectors. Many subsectors also use collectively agreed upon classifications of functions.

Important characteristics of the GPG in Belgium

- Although Belgium has a relatively small gender pay gap in comparison to other EU-countries, this gap is very resilient, considering the many years equal pay has been at the heart of labour and equality policies.
- In 2012 an important law was passed in Belgium on tackling the gender pay gap. With some delay, the process of implementation is taking place as we speak (2015).
- There are many obstacles in removing the last gendered inequalities in the classifications of functions.

Specific initiatives to reduce the GPG in Belgium

□ Law on the Gender Pay Gap

In 2012 a law was voted on tackling the gender pay gap, that states that the gender pay gap should be discussed on all levels of collective labour negotiation (national, sector, subsector, company). All job classification systems have to be analysed on their gender neutrality by the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue. All enterprises with at least 50 employees must make up a gender pay gap report every two years. A mediator for claims of unequal pay can be appointed in companies.

□ Annual Gender Pay Gap Reports

In 2006 the federal government decided that there was a need for official gender pay gap data annually. Up till then, the media were full of contradictory figures, and studies. As from 2007 the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men in cooperation with the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, and the Directorate-general Statistics published an annual report, containing clear policy recommendations. In 2008 the Federal Planning Bureau joined in. These reports received a lot of media attention, and helped keeping the gender pay gap on the political agenda.

□ EVA project

From 2001 until 2006 an evaluation project as regards the gender neutrality of job classifications was organised: the EVA project. The project was an initiative of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men in cooperation with the Federal Public Service of Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, the trade unions and the employers' organisations. The project resulted in a manual on how to review a classification of functions, in order to make it 'analytical', i.e. to base it on qualities and competences needed for certain jobs.

□ Collective Labour Agreement 25, 25bis and 25ter

In the past classifications of functions sometimes explicitly mentioned different pay levels for women and men. In 1975 the principle of equal pay for equal work was adopted in CLA 25, 'concerning the equal compensation of male and female employees'. Differentiating pay on the basis of sex was explicitly forbidden. However, since this CLA did not result in the disappearance of the gender pay gap, the principle was completed with an additional agreement (CLA 25bis, 2001) as regards raising awareness on this subject, stating that joint committees 'should' review all classifications of functions on their gender neutrality. In 2008 this recommendation was strengthened to an obligation to do so (CLA 25ter, 2008).

□ Annual Equal Pay Day

In 2005 the socialist political women's movement Zij-kant, together with the socialist trade union, organized the first Gender Pay Gap in Belgium (www.equalpayday.be). They took a trade mark on the name, and have organized this day annually since then. Campaigns are very visible and often controversial. The 2011 campaign went viral (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_aubcM-vls). The Christian-democratic trade union organizes equal pay actions around the same period. These highly visible actions received a lot of media attention, and were one of the reasons the gender pay gap stayed on the political agenda for so many years.

□ Loonwijzer

The Christian-democratic trade union developed in the same period an interactive website www.loonwijzer.be that allows visitors to compare their own wage to people with similar professions. The underlying idea is to feed the discussion and to make people aware of (gender) pay differences. The website is still kept up to date by the research institute HIVA. It is linked to an international network, the WageIndicator Network (www.wageindicator.org).

GPG in the Financial and Insurance Sector in Belgium

Important characteristics of the financial and insurance sector in relation to its GPG

- Average wages are substantially higher in the financial and insurance sector than in the economy as a whole in Belgium.
- The gender pay gap in the financial sector is a lot higher than on average in Belgium.
- There is a considerable vertical segregation ('glass ceiling') in the financial and insurance sector in Belgium.

Initiatives (or lack of those) in the financial and insurance sector to reduce the GPG

- Development of a new classification of functions for the insurance sector

For the insurance sector a completely new classification of functions was developed by the joint committee. However, communication towards the employees was not optimal and as a consequence a lot of appeal procedures were filed by individual employees.

- Obstacles in the banking sector

The large banks use their own pay scales and resist the elaboration of an analytical classification of functions for the entire subsector. The small banks are not well represented in the joint committee, so there is little support from that site. The old classification of functions for the lower level of employees in the banking sector did not pass the evaluation of gender neutrality by the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, and will have to be adapted.

- Network initiative

In one of the large banks, KBC, a network was developed: the Gender Action Group. Its goal is to strengthen the organization by incorporating diversity and inclusion on all levels. It organizes network events, lectures and workshops. Although the gender pay gap and the glass ceiling inspired women to form the network, its scope is for the moment much broader.

GPG in the Human Health Sector in Belgium

Important characteristics of the human health sector in relation to its GPG

- The Belgian social profit sector is largely dominated by women: 78.7% of employees are women.
- The sector has a high degree of segregation. On a managerial level, the domination of women is much less apparent. Almost half of managers are men. Skilled workers are predominantly men, unskilled predominantly women.
- In the health sector in Belgium the share of part-time work is higher than the general part-time employment rates. 54.1% of women's paid work is part-time, for men this is 17.6%.

Initiatives (or lack of those) in the human health sector to reduce the GPG

- Development of a new, analytical classification of functions for the health sector

As a consequence of the EVA-project a new and analytical classification of functions was developed for the health sector. The development was very accurately. The gender dimension was taken in account in every step. The new classification was approved by the joint committee. However, since the sector is largely dependent on public funding, there is no money for the actual implementation of the classification. The old pay scales are still in use.