

Belgium – ANED Country profile

The information contained in this summary was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) in April 2009.

Academic networks and resources

Culture and Disability International Network (CADIN)

Policy and enforcement bodies

The key national bodies with responsibility for disability law and policy implementation include:

There is a Secretary of State for People with Disabilities but most disability policy falls within the separate jurisdictions of the Flemish Community, the Walloon Region, the French Community, Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region and the German-speaking Community. The main bodies with responsibility for disability policy in each jurisdiction are:

[Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap](#) (VAPH)

[Agence Wallonne pour l'Intégration des Personnes Handicapées](#) (AWIPH) covers some aspects of employment, technical aids, buildings accessibility, transport, and tax exemptions.

[Service Bruxellois Francophone des Personnes Handicapées](#) (SBFPH) covers aspects of education.

[Dienststelle der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft für Personen mit Behinderung](#) covers some aspects of work and education.

The Direction générale Personnes handicapées is responsible for drafting, interpreting and applying regulations relating to benefits for disabled people. It issues certificates for rights to social and tax concessions, parking cards and public transport discount cards. It arranges medical expertise for the determination of disability in relation to family allowance.

The [Higher National Council for Persons with Disabilities](#) (CSNPH) is an advisory body responsible for examining all relevant issues within federal jurisdiction of the federal government and can make proposals (e.g. in relation to allowances, social security and some legal protection). It publishes an annual Activity Report.

Organisations of disabled people

The national organisation representing disabled people at the European level (European Disability Forum) is:

Belgian Disability Forum asbl (BDF)
 Finance Tower
 Bd. du Jardin Botanique 50, bte 150
 1000 Bruxelles
bdf@minsoc.fed.be
 Tél.:+32 (0)2 509 83 58

Other significant national organisations of disabled people include:

Blind and partially sighted people are represented in the European Blind Union by the Confédération Belge pour la Promotion des Aveugles et Malvoyants, including 20 French and 20 Flemish associations. The [Oeuvre Nationale des Aveugles](#) (ONA) performs social, educational and cultural functions and has more than 5,000 members in the French speaking communities. [Ligue Braille Liga](#) supports autonomy and integration for blind or partially sighted people and provides social services, rehabilitation, training and leisure opportunities. [Blindenzorg Licht en Liefde](#) provides services in Brussels and Flanders.

The [Federation of Flemish Deaf Organizations](#) (Fevaldo) represents Deaf people from the Flemish community in six regions. The [Fédération Francophone des Sourds de Belgique](#) (FFSB) represents Deaf people from the Francophone community.

[Association Chrétienne des Invalides et Handicapés](#) (ACIH/AAM)

[Katholieke Vereniging voor Gehandicapten](#) (KVG) is an association of people with physical, mental or sensory impairments, and their families. It provides mutual support, social, employment and information functions.

[Handisport](#) promotes sport for disabled people.

National law and strategy

Belgium has ratified the [United Nations Convention](#) and the [Optional Protocol](#).

Important national laws, policies and strategies concerning disabled people include: Legislative arrangements are complex, operating at the federal, regional and community levels.

Anti-Discrimination Law of May 10, 2007 (replacing earlier law of 2003) is the primary federal legislation covering discrimination, racism and xenophobia. This includes both direct and indirect discrimination in access to employment, health care, public life and access to goods and services. It does not explicitly cover education.

The Social Rehabilitation Act 1963 established the main federal provisions on disability and employment, supplemented by decrees in the three Communities and three Regions. This includes provisions on sheltered employment and vocational rehabilitation. Implementation resides with the four regional agencies.

There has been little specific legislation to regulate accessibility and inclusive design (e.g. in broadcasting, telecoms or e-accessibility) although the concept of reasonable accommodation is included in the 2007 Law.



Facts and figures

Data on population indicate that:

The population of Belgium is 10.666.866 (January 1, 2008). The age structure is 22,99% between 0-19 years, 59,95% between 20-64 years, and 17,06% 65 years and older. The average age is 39,8 years. The increase of the population is 0,77% (2008). The birth rate is 10,45 births/1000 (2003) and the death rate is 10,07 deaths/1000 (2003). The net migration outcome is 0,97 migrating people/1000 (2003). The life expectancy is 78,67 years (75,58 years for men; 81,69 years for women). Ethnically, the population consists of 57,8% Flemish, 32,4% Walloon, and 9,8% other. The used languages are Dutch (60%), French (40%) and German (<1%). The legal languages are Dutch and French. The number of people with functional limitations is much larger than usually estimated, somewhere between 12 and 16% of the working population (between 15-64 years).

Data on employment indicate that:

Approximately 60% of people with disabilities do not work. Those who do, namely 40%, means that there is about 1 in every 14 employees who is disabled. Of those disabled people that work, there is some information available in two groups, namely those who work in sheltered workshops (about 15000 in Flanders) and those who work in the regular employment market who receive a wage subsidy (CAO-26 or VIP, about 5000). Both of these groups represent only 10% of people who work with functional limitations.

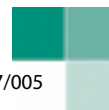
Data on education indicate that:

Mardulier (2001) reported that there has been a continuous growth of the number of pupils in special education [buitengewoon onderwijs], which points to more exclusion than inclusion over the period 1991-2001. In secondary education, the growth of special education is 15%. Whereas in regular elementary education, there has been a negative growth due to lower birth rates, the participation in special education grew with 42,23% over a 10 year period. During the same period, the number of children who followed integrated education also grew to the double compared with the schoolyear 1990-1991.

Data on accessibility indicate that:

A research on accessibility of websites in 2007 revealed that 96% of Belgian websites did not pass the basic criteria of AnySurfer and thus constitute a barrier for visitors with a functional limitation (Toegankelijkheidsmonitor 2007)

[Data from the MeAC accessibility survey](#) (2007) showed that None of the selected public or commercial websites, passed both automatic and manual accessibility evaluation.



The main emergency number was not accessible by text phone (a text relay service was available in Flanders).

Both public television channels provided national language TV programs with subtitling, amounting to approximately 50%, but no signing or audio description was available.

The main commercial TV channels provided much less subtitling in national language programs (e.g. 5%) and no signing or description.

Neither of the two main banks had installed talking ATMs.

Data on poverty and incomes indicate that:

No national data were provided on poverty and incomes.

Data on attitudes indicate that:

The [2007 Special Eurobarometer on Discrimination in Europe](#) showed that 62% of people knew someone who was disabled (compared to 55% EU average) and 87% acknowledged that being disabled tended to be disadvantage in society (EU average 79%).

Disability discrimination was viewed as widespread by 53% (EU average 53%); 26% thought that disability discrimination was more widespread than five years ago. 48% thought that not enough was being done to combat discrimination in general (EU average 51%).

700% thought that more disabled people should be in the workplace (EU average 74%) and 86% thought specific measures on equal opportunities were needed in this field.

Data on public spending indicate that:

In 2006 Belgium spent 6.4% of total social benefit expenditure on disability benefits compared to the EU27 average of 7.5% (European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics)

Social protection

Key features of the national system include (including adapted items from the [MISSOC](#) database December 2008):

Disability benefits



Disability benefits fall under the responsibility of the Federal Service for Social Security. The objective of Social Assistance is to ensure that everyone has the right to a basic level of income. The right is extended to all legal residents in Belgium. It is based on an assessment (mostly medical). Assistance in finding appropriate employment can also be extended to persons with disabilities. There are possibilities of assistance to employers who need to make modifications to the workplace in order to accommodate disabled staff as well as compensations to loss in productivity. Other benefits such as parking permits, exemptions or reductions in taxes and utilities can also be obtained.

Rehabilitation and re-training

In Flanders, all (re-)orientation regarding work by disabled people is arranged by VDAB (Flemish Service for Guidance in Employment). In Wallonia, this (re-)orientation is under the responsibility of AWIPH.

Preferential employment and quotas

There are several preferential employment systems in Belgium that provide incentives to employers when employing a person with a disability. A quota system of 2.5% persons with disabilities in Belgium is applicable only to the public sector. However, this percentage is not being achieved and also not enforced. There are many calls however to increase the percentage.

Long-term support and care

There is no single system of long term support and care. More detailed description of policies and practices is described in the ANED country reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2008) and on Support for Independent Living (2009).

Additional information

Useful sources of more detailed information about the situation of disabled people, and the policies and support available, include:

R. Kennes, ed. (2001). *Inclusief beleid voor personen met een handicap. Voorbeelden uit de beleidspraktijk*. Leuven: Acco.