

Belgium



Women in decision-making: **1.85/5**
Socio-economic position of women: **2.71/5**
Violence against women: **2.6/5**

UNDERSTANDING BELGIUM

Belgium has the most progressive legislation in the EU for parity in political decision-making: a “zipper” list system ensures an equal number of women/men candidates in equal positions. However, women are only 39% of members of parliament. Addressing entrenched stereotypes, including in political parties and the media, remains a challenge.

Legislation in the private sector also seeks to tackle the low representation (11% in 2010) of women on boards. The new requirement of 30% women on boards is the most stringent in the EU behind France’s 40% quota.

Belgium also scores comparatively well for women’s economic independence and the sharing of care responsibilities. The gender pay gap is almost half the EU average at 8.8%, despite a higher than average gap in full-time employment rates of women and men averaging 18.4%.

A relatively short maternity leave (15 weeks) and reasonable rates for public childcare encourages a rapid return to the labour-market for women with young children. However, while availability of childcare from 2.5 years is excellent, problems remain in availability for smaller infants, 35% of whom receive formal care. Maternity leave remuneration at 77% is one of the lowest in the EU.

In January 2007 Belgium adopted a very ambitious “gender mainstreaming law” for the structural integration of a gender perspective in all policies defined and conducted at Belgian federal level.

Belgium provides excellent access to sexual and reproductive rights, including to same sex couples. Sexuality education is also a best practice. However, there is a lack of support services for women victims of violence and the National Action Plan to combat violence has no gender analysis. Official police figures for reported cases count 21,579 victims of domestic violence in 2010, 15% of all women. In 2009, the police recorded 2885 rapes – 8 per day. Out of these declared rapes, only 6% of victims registered formal complaints.

TRENDS:



In 2012, Belgium transposed EU legislation on parental leave. For births from January 2013, parents will be entitled to the new EU minimum of 4 months parental leave, up from 3 months per child.

In June 2011, Belgium adopted a law imposing the presence of at least 1/3 of each gender in management boards of state and publicly-listed companies. State companies are granted 1 year to comply, listed companies 5 years and small to medium-sized (listed) firms 8 years. The sanction for non-compliance is the loss of benefits by board members.

In July 2011, a new law banned media advertisement of cosmetic surgery.



Flexibility in the labour market decreased with the limitation of “credit temps” leave in the private sector to 3 years. Previously, workers were entitled to reduce their working hours in case of justified need for a period of up to 5 years. Only the first year provides full pension entitlements.

In December 2011, a new law also moved to progressively reduce pre-pension entitlements. While the pension age remains 65 after 45 years of work, by 2016 the pre-pension age will increase from 60 to 62 and the necessary minimum number of years of work and tax contributions will increase from 35 to 40. Pension entitlements continue to be calculated on the basis of 45 years of work.

Highlights

Legal measure requiring 50% women/men on final party electoral lists with placement rules and rejection of the list as sanction for non-compliance

39%
women in parliaments

Legal measure requiring 30% women on corporate boards

 no women presidents of the largest companies

8.8%
gender pay gap

47.4%
of women in full-time employment

35% of infants under 3 and 99% of those between 3 and school-age in formal childcare

0,45
shelter places for women victims of violence per 10,000 inhabitants