Did you know?

**Within the OECD, Belgium has the 11th highest regional disparities in GDP per capita across small regions.**

**Metropolitan areas in Belgium with more than 500,000 inhabitants contributed 55% to national GDP growth in 2000-16 but only account for 45% of national population.**

**The share of public investment carried out by subnational governments in Belgium is the highest among OECD countries.**

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**Economic trends in regions**

The gap in GDP per capita between Belgian regions has narrowed moderately over the last sixteen years. The narrowing disparities have been driven by the relatively faster economic growth in the region with the lowest GDP per capita, Wallonia (Région wallonne), which grew by 13% between 2000 and 2016, and a stagnation in the Brussels region. However, regional economic disparities in Belgium remain higher than the OECD median.

With a productivity growth of 0.7% per year over the period 2003-16, the Flemish region has slightly reduced the gap with the region of Brussels. The youth unemployment rate in Brussels region reached 36% in 2016, more than twice the level observed in the Flemish region.

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**Source:** OECD Regional Database.

Notes: (1) Figure on regional gap in GDP per capita: OECD regions refer to the administrative tier of subnational government (large regions, Territorial Level 2); Belgium is composed of 3 large regions. (2) Figure on index of regional disparity: top (bottom) 20% regions are defined as those with the highest (lowest) GDP per capita until the equivalent of 20% of national population is reached, this indicator provides a harmonised measure to rank OECD countries, using data for small regions (Territorial Level 3) when available. (3) Productivity is measured as GDP per employee at place of work in constant prices, constant Purchasing Power Parities (reference year 2010).
Relative ranking of the regions with the best and worst outcomes in the 11 well-being dimensions, with respect to all 402 OECD regions. The eleven dimensions are ordered by decreasing regional disparities in the country. Each well-being dimension is measured by the indicators in the table below.

The top performing region in Belgium fares better than the OECD median for all 13 well-being indicators, with the exception of air pollution and employment rate. The latter is lower than the OECD median in all regions. On the other hand, the regions with the poorest performance in the country still fare better than the median OECD region in six well-being indicators, such as income, civic engagement, safety, access to services, housing and health (mortality rate).

Belgium has the fourth largest regional disparities in health among OECD countries. Large disparities are also found in jobs and community. All Belgian regions rank among the top 20% of OECD regions in terms of voter turnout, also due to the compulsory voting system.

Notes: (1) OECD regions refer to the first administrative tier of subnational government (large regions, Territorial Level 2); Belgium is composed of 3 large regions. (2) Household income per capita data are based on USD constant PPP, constant prices (year 2010).

Updated the 5th of March 2019
In Belgium, 59% of the population lives in cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants. The share of population in cities with more than 500,000 people is 45% compared to 55% in the OECD area.

Metropolitan areas (cities above 500,000 people) in Belgium account for 54% of national GDP and 49% of employment. Between 2000 and 2016 they generated 55% of national GDP growth.

In terms of GDP per capita, Brussels ranks among the 327 OECD metropolitan areas. Belgian metropolitan areas have levels of air pollution – as measured by people’s exposure to PM 2.5 – above the OECD median, with the population of Liège having a better air quality compared to Gent, Antwerp and Brussels.
Subnational government expenditure by function
As a share of total subnational government expenditure, 2016

**Belgium**

- Education: 27%
- Social protection: 25%
- General public services: 17%
- Economic affairs: 16%
- Other: 12%
- Health: 3%

**OECD average**

- Education: 25%
- Social protection: 14%
- General public services: 14%
- Economic affairs: 14%
- Other: 15%
- Health: 18%

Subnational expenditure per capita: **USD 12 344**

OECD average: **USD 6 817**

Subnational government expenditure amounts to **USD 12 344 per capita** in Belgium compared to an OECD average of USD 6 817. In Belgium, this is equivalent to **49.8% of total public expenditure** and to **26.5% of GDP**. In comparison, across the OECD, subnational government expenditure accounts for 40.4% of total public expenditure and for 16.2% of GDP. Education and social protection are the two largest spending items for subnational governments in Belgium: together they represent **52%** of subnational expenditure compared to 39% in the OECD area.

In Belgium, **88.7% of total public investment** was carried out by subnational governments, compared to an OECD average of 56.9%. The proportion of public investment carried out by subnational governments in Belgium is the highest among OECD countries.

### Role of subnational governments in public investment

**Subnational government public investment per capita, 2016**

- **Belgium**
  - Total public investment: USD 1 034 per capita
  - Subnational government investment: USD 916 per capita
  - 88.7% of public invest.

- **OECD average**
  - Total public investment: USD 1 278 per capita
  - Subnational government investment: USD 727 per capita
  - 56.9% of public invest.

Source: OECD Subnational Government Structure and Finance Database.
Note: The function ‘Other’ includes housing and community amenities, recreation, culture and religion; environment; public order and safety.

### OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018

The 2018 edition of OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance shows how regions and cities contribute to national growth and the well-being of societies. It updates its regular set of region-by-region indicators, examining a wide range of policies and trends and identifying those regions that are outperforming or lagging behind in their country.

Consult this publication on line: [https://oe.cd/pub/2n9](https://oe.cd/pub/2n9)