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Belgium

Belgium,^[A] officially the **Kingdom of Belgium**,^[B] is a country in Western Europe. It is bordered by the Netherlands to the north, Germany to the east, Luxembourg to the southeast, France to the southwest, and the North Sea to the northwest. It covers an area of 30,689 km² (11,849 sq mi) and has a population of more than 11.5 million, making it the 22nd most densely populated country in the world and the 6th most densely populated country in Europe, with a density of 376 per square kilometre (970/sq mi). The capital and largest city is Brussels; other major cities are Antwerp, Ghent, Charleroi, Liège, Bruges, Namur, and Leuven.




Belgium is a sovereign state and a federal constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. Its institutional organization is complex and is structured on both regional and linguistic grounds. It is divided into three highly autonomous regions:^[10] the Flemish Region (Flanders) in the north, the Walloon Region (Wallonia) in the south, and the Brussels-Capital Region.^[11] Brussels is the smallest and most densely populated region, as well as the richest region in terms of GDP per capita.

Belgium is home to two main linguistic communities: the Dutch-speaking Flemish Community, which constitutes about 60 percent of the population, and the French-speaking Community, which constitutes about 40 percent of the population. A small German-speaking Community, numbering around one percent, exists in the East Cantons. The Brussels-Capital Region is officially bilingual in French and Dutch,^[12] although French is the dominant language.^[13] Belgium's linguistic diversity and related political conflicts are reflected in its complex system of governance, made up of six different governments.

The country as it exists today was established following the 1830 Belgian Revolution, when it seceded from the Netherlands, which had itself only existed since 1815. The name chosen for the new state is derived from the Latin word *Belgium*, used in Julius Caesar's "Gallic Wars", to describe a nearby region in the period around 55 BCE.^[14] Belgium is part of an area known as the Low Countries, historically a somewhat larger region than the Benelux group of states, as it also included parts of northern France. Since the Middle Ages, its central location near several major rivers has meant that the area has been relatively prosperous, connected commercially and politically to its bigger neighbours. Belgium has also been the battleground of European powers, earning the moniker the "Battlefield of Europe",^[15] a reputation strengthened in the 20th century by both world wars.

Belgium participated in the Industrial Revolution^{[16][17]} and, during the course of the 20th century, possessed a number of colonies in Africa.^[18] Between 1888 and 1908, Leopold II, king of Belgium, perpetrated one of the largest massacres in human history in Congo Free State, which was his private estate, and not yet a colony of Belgium. Estimates of the death toll are disputed but millions of people, a significant part of the population, died for the sake of rubber and ivory exports.^[19]

The second half of the 20th century was marked by rising tensions between the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking citizens fuelled by differences in language and culture and the unequal economic development of Flanders and Wallonia. This continuing antagonism has led to several far-reaching reforms, resulting in a transition from a unitary to a federal arrangement during the period from 1970 to 1993. Despite the reforms, tensions between the groups have remained, if not increased; there is significant separatism particularly among the Flemish; controversial language laws exist such as the municipalities with language facilities;^[20] and the formation of a coalition

<h1>Kingdom of Belgium</h1> <p><i>Koninkrijk België</i> (<u>Dutch</u>) <i>Royaume de Belgique</i> (<u>French</u>) <i>Königreich Belgien</i> (<u>German</u>)</p>	
	
<u>Flag</u>	<u>Coat of arms</u>
<p>Motto: "Eendracht maakt macht" (<u>Dutch</u>) "L'union fait la force" (<u>French</u>) "Einigkeit macht stark" (<u>German</u>) "Unity makes strength"</p>	
<p>Anthem: "La Brabançonne" (English: "The Brabantian")</p> <div><div>0:00</div><div>MENU</div></div>	
	
<p>Location of Belgium (dark green) – in <u>Europe</u> (green & dark grey) – in the <u>European Union</u> (green)</p>	
Capital and largest city	<u>Brussels</u> 50°51'N 4°21'E
Official languages	<u>Dutch</u> <u>French</u> <u>German</u>
Religion (2019 ^[1])	60% <u>Christianity</u> —54% <u>Roman Catholic</u> —6% <u>Other Christian</u> 31% <u>No religion</u> 7% <u>Islam</u> 2% <u>Others</u>
<u>Demonym(s)</u>	<u>Belgian</u>
<u>Government</u>	<u>Federal parliamentary</u>

government took 18 months following the June 2010 federal election, a world record.^[21] Unemployment in Wallonia is more than double that of Flanders, which boomed after the Second World War.^[22]

Belgium is one of the six founding countries of the European Union and its capital, Brussels, hosts the official seats of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Council, as well as one of two seats of the European Parliament (the other being Strasbourg). Belgium is also a founding member of the Eurozone, NATO, OECD, and WTO, and a part of the trilateral Benelux Union and the Schengen Area. Brussels hosts the headquarters of many major international organizations such as NATO.^[C]

Belgium is a developed country, with an advanced high-income economy. It has very high standards of living, quality of life,^[23] healthcare,^[24] education,^[25] and is categorized as "very high" in the Human Development Index.^[26] It also ranks as one of the safest or most peaceful countries in the world.^[27]

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Government

	constitutional monarchy ^[2]
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">MonarchPrime Minister</div>	<div>Philippe</div> <div>Alexander De Croo</div>
Legislature	Federal Parliament
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Upper houseLower house</div>	<div>Senate</div> <div>Chamber of Representatives</div>
Independence from the Netherlands	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">DeclaredRecognised</div>	<div>4 October 1830</div> <div>19 April 1839</div>
Area	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">TotalWater (%)</div>	<div>30,689^[3] km² (11,849 sq mi) (136th)</div> <div>0.71 (as of 2015)^[4]</div>
Population	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">2020 estimateDensity</div>	<div>▲ 11,492,641^[5] (82nd)</div> <div>376/km² (973.8/sq mi) (22nd)</div>
GDP (PPP)	2020 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">TotalPer capita</div>	<div>\$575.808 billion^[6] (36th)</div> <div>\$50,114^[6] (18th)</div>
GDP (nominal)	2020 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">TotalPer capita</div>	<div>\$503.416 billion^[6] (26th)</div> <div>\$43,814^[6] (16th)</div>
Gini (2020)	<div><div>▼ 25.4^[7]</div><div>low</div></div>
HDI (2019)	<div><div>▲ 0.919^[8]</div><div>very high · 17th</div></div>
Currency	Euro (€) (EUR)
Time zone	UTC+1 (CET)
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Summer (DST)</div>	UTC+2 (CEST)
Driving side	right
Calling code	+32
ISO 3166 code	BE
Internet TLD	.be
<div><div>a. The flag's official proportions of 13:15 are rarely seen; proportions of 2:3 or similar are more common.</div><div>b. The Brussels region is the <i>de facto</i> capital, but the City of Brussels municipality is the <i>de jure</i> capital.^[9]</div><div>c. The .eu domain is also used, as it is shared with other European Union member states.</div></div>	

History

Antiquity

Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, the Aquitani another, those who in their own language are called Celts, in ours Gauls, the third.

(...) Of all these, the Belgae are the strongest (...).

— Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, Book I, Ch. 1

The *Belgae* were the inhabitants of the northernmost part of Gaul, which was much bigger than modern Belgium. Caesar used the Latin word "*Belgium*", to refer to their country within northern Gaul, which was a region now in northern France.^[28] Modern Belgium corresponds to the lands of the Morini, Menapii, Nervii, Germani Cisrhenani, Aduatuci, and, around Arlon, a part of the country of the Treveri. All of these except the Treveri formed a less Celtic-influenced "transition zone", north of the area Caesar treated as "Belgium".



Gallia Belgica at the time of Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul in 54 BCE

After Caesar's conquests, *Gallia Belgica* came to be the Latin name of a large Roman province covering most of Northern Gaul, including the Treveri. Areas closer to the lower Rhine frontier, including the eastern part of modern Belgium, eventually became part of the frontier province of *Germania Inferior*, which interacted with Germanic tribes outside the empire. At the time when central government collapsed in the Western Roman Empire, the Roman provinces of Belgica and Germania were inhabited by a mix of a Romanized population and Germanic-speaking Franks who came to dominate the military and political class.

Middle Ages

During the 5th century, the area came under the rule of the Frankish Merovingian kings, who were probably first established in what is northern France. During the 8th century, the kingdom of the Franks came to be ruled by the Carolingian Dynasty, whose centre of power was around the area which is now eastern Belgium.^[29] The Frankish kingdom had been divided up in many ways, but the Treaty of Verdun in 843 divided the Carolingian Empire into three kingdoms, whose borders had a lasting impact on medieval political boundaries. Most of modern Belgium was in the Middle Kingdom, later known as Lotharingia, but the coastal county of Flanders, west of the Scheldt, became part of West Francia, the predecessor of France. In 870 in the Treaty of Meerssen, modern Belgium lands all became part of the western kingdom for a period, but in 880 in the Treaty of Ribemont, Lotharingia returned to the lasting control of the Holy Roman Emperor. The lordships and bishoprics along the "March" (frontier) between the two great kingdoms maintained important connections between each other. The county of Flanders expanded over the Scheldt into the empire, and during several periods was ruled by the same lords as the county of Hainaut.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the cloth industry and commerce boomed especially in the County of Flanders and it became one of the richest areas in Europe. This prosperity played a role in conflicts between Flanders and the king of France. Famously, Flemish militias scored a surprise victory at the Battle of the Golden Spurs against a strong force of mounted knights in 1302, but France soon regained control of the rebellious province.

Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands

In the 15th century, the Duke of Burgundy in France took control of Flanders, and from there they proceeded to unite much of what is now the Benelux, the so-called Burgundian Netherlands.^[30] "Belgium" and "Flanders" were the first two common names used for the Burgundian Netherlands which was the predecessor of the Austrian Netherlands, the predecessor of modern Belgium.^[31] The union, technically stretching between two kingdoms, gave the area economic and political stability which led to an even greater prosperity and artistic creation.

Born in Belgium, the Habsburg Emperor Charles V was heir of the Burgundians, but also of the royal families of Austria, Castile and Aragon. With the Pragmatic Sanction of 1549 he gave the Seventeen Provinces more legitimacy as a stable entity, rather than just a temporary personal union. He also increased the influence of these Netherlands over the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, which continued to exist as a large semi-independent enclave.^[32]

Spanish and Austrian Netherlands

The Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), was triggered by the Spanish government's policy towards protestantism, which was becoming popular in the Low Countries. The rebellious northern United Provinces (*Belgica Foederata* in Latin, the "Federated Netherlands") eventually separated from the Southern Netherlands (*Belgica Regia*, the "Royal Netherlands"). The latter were ruled successively by the Spanish (Spanish Netherlands) and the Austrian Habsburgs (Austrian Netherlands) and comprised most of modern Belgium. This was the theatre of several more protracted conflicts during much of the 17th and 18th centuries involving France, including the Franco-Dutch War (1672–1678), the Nine Years' War (1688–1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), and part of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748).

The French revolution and the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Following the campaigns of 1794 in the French Revolutionary Wars, the Low Countries – including territories that were never nominally under Habsburg rule, such as the Prince-Bishopric of Liège – were annexed by the French First Republic, ending Austrian rule in the region. A reunification of the Low Countries as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands occurred at the dissolution of the First French Empire in 1814, after the abdication of Napoleon.

Independent Belgium



Episode of the Belgian Revolution of 1830, Gustaf Wappers, 1834

In 1830, the Belgian Revolution led to the separation of the Southern Provinces from the Netherlands and to the establishment of a Catholic and bourgeois, officially French-speaking and neutral, independent Belgium under a provisional government and a national congress.^{[33][34]} Since the installation of Leopold I as king on 21 July 1831, now celebrated as Belgium's National Day, Belgium has been a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, with a laicist constitution based on the Napoleonic code.^[35] Although the franchise was initially restricted, universal suffrage for men was introduced after the general strike of 1893 (with plural voting until 1919) and for women in 1949.

The main political parties of the 19th century were the Catholic Party and the Liberal Party, with the Belgian Labour Party emerging towards the end of the 19th century. French was originally the single official language adopted by the nobility and the bourgeoisie. It progressively lost its overall importance as Dutch became recognized as well. This recognition became official in 1898, and in 1967, the parliament accepted a Dutch version of the Constitution.^[36]

The Berlin Conference of 1885 ceded control of the Congo Free State to King Leopold II as his private possession. From around 1900 there was growing international concern for the extreme and savage treatment of the Congolese population under Leopold II, for whom the Congo was primarily a source of revenue from ivory and rubber production.^[37] Many Congolese were killed by Leopold's agents for failing to meet production quotas for ivory and rubber.^[38] In 1908, this outcry led the Belgian state to assume responsibility for the government of the colony, henceforth called the Belgian Congo.^[39] A Belgian commission in 1919 estimated that Congo's population was half what it was in 1879.^[38]

Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914 as part of the Schlieffen Plan to attack France, and much of the Western Front fighting of World War I occurred in western parts of the country. The opening months of the war were known as the Rape of Belgium due to German excesses. Belgium assumed control of the German colonies of Ruanda-Urundi (modern-day Rwanda and Burundi) during the war, and in 1924 the League of Nations mandated them to Belgium. In the aftermath of the First World War, Belgium annexed the Prussian districts of Eupen and Malmedy in 1925, thereby causing the presence of a German-speaking minority.

German forces again invaded the country in May 1940, and 40,690 Belgians, over half of them Jews, were killed during the subsequent occupation and The Holocaust. From September 1944 to February 1945 the Allies liberated Belgium. After World War II, a general strike forced King Leopold III to abdicate in 1951 in favour of his son, Prince Baudouin, since many Belgians felt he had collaborated with Germany during the war.^[40] The Belgian Congo gained



The Burgundian State of Charles the Bold in the 15th century

independence in 1960 during the [Congo Crisis](#);^[41] Ruanda-Urundi followed with its independence two years later. Belgium joined NATO as a founding member and formed the Benelux group of nations with the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Belgium became one of the six founding members of the [European Coal and Steel Community](#) in 1951 and of the [European Atomic Energy Community](#) and [European Economic Community](#), established in 1957. The latter has now become the [European Union](#), for which Belgium hosts major administrations and institutions, including the [European Commission](#), the [Council of the European Union](#) and the extraordinary and committee sessions of the [European Parliament](#).

In the early 1990s, Belgium saw several large corruption scandals notably surrounding [Marc Dutroux](#), [Andre Cools](#), the [Dioxin Affair](#), [Agusta Scandal](#) and the murder of [Karel van Noppen](#).



Cheering crowds greet British troops entering [Brussels](#), 4 September 1944

Geography

Belgium shares borders with France (620 km), Germany (167 km), Luxembourg (148 km) and the Netherlands (450 km). Its total surface, including water area, is 30,689 km² (11,849 sq mi). Before 2018, its total area was believed to be 30,528 km² (11,787 sq mi). However, when the country's statistics were measured in 2018, a new calculation method was used. Unlike previous calculations, this one included the area from the coast to the low-water line, revealing the country to be 160 km² (62 sq mi) larger in surface area than previously thought.^{[42][43]} Its land area alone is 30,278 km².^[44] It lies between latitudes 49°30' and 51°30' N, and longitudes 2°33' and 6°24' E.^[45]

Belgium has three main geographical regions; the coastal plain in the northwest and the central plateau both belong to the Anglo-Belgian Basin, and the [Ardennes](#) uplands in the southeast to the [Hercynian orogenic belt](#). The [Paris Basin](#) reaches a small fourth area at Belgium's southernmost tip, [Belgian Lorraine](#).^[46]



Relief map of Belgium

The coastal plain consists mainly of sand dunes and [polders](#). Further inland lies a smooth, slowly rising landscape irrigated by numerous waterways, with fertile valleys and the northeastern sandy plain of the [Campine](#) (*Kempen*). The thickly forested hills and plateaus of the Ardennes are more rugged and rocky with caves and small gorges. Extending westward into France, this area is eastwardly connected to the [Eifel](#) in Germany by the [High Fens](#) plateau, on which the [Signal de Botrange](#) forms the country's highest point at 694 m (2,277 ft).^{[47][48]}



The [Meuse river](#) between [Dinant](#) and [Hastière](#)

The climate is [maritime temperate](#) with significant precipitation in all seasons ([Köppen climate classification](#): *Cfb*), like most of northwest Europe.^[49] The average temperature is lowest in January at 3 °C (37.4 °F) and highest in July at 18 °C (64.4 °F). The average precipitation per month varies between 54 mm (2.1 in) for February and April, to 78 mm (3.1 in) for July.^[50] Averages for the years 2000 to 2006 show daily temperature minimums of 7 °C (44.6 °F) and maximums of 14 °C (57.2 °F) and monthly rainfall of 74 mm (2.9 in); these are about 1 °C and nearly 10 millimetres above last century's normal values, respectively.^[51]

Phytogeographically, Belgium is shared between the Atlantic European and Central European provinces of the [Circumboreal Region](#) within the [Boreal Kingdom](#).^[52] According to the [World Wide Fund for Nature](#), the territory of



Belgium belongs to the [terrestrial ecoregions](#) of [Atlantic mixed forests](#) and [Western European broadleaf forests](#).^{[53][54]} Belgium had a 2018 [Forest Landscape Integrity Index](#) mean score of 1.36/10, ranking it 163rd globally out of 172 countries.^[55]

Provinces



High Fens landscape near the German border

The territory of Belgium is divided into three Regions, two of which, the Flemish Region and Walloon Region, are in turn subdivided into provinces; the third Region, the Brussels Capital Region, is neither a province nor a part of a province.

Province	Dutch name	French name	German name	Capital	Area ^[3]	Population (1 January 2019) ^[5]	Density	ISO 3166-2:BE
Flemish Region								
 <u>Antwerp</u>	Antwerpen	Anvers	Antwerpen	<u>Antwerp</u>	2,876 km ² (1,110 sq mi)	1,857,986	647/km ² (1,680/sq mi)	VAN
 <u>East Flanders</u>	Oost-Vlaanderen	Flandre orientale	Ostflandern	<u>Ghent</u>	3,007 km ² (1,161 sq mi)	1,515,064	504/km ² (1,310/sq mi)	VOV
 <u>Flemish Brabant</u>	Vlaams-Brabant	Brabant flamand	Flämisch-Brabant	<u>Leuven</u>	2,118 km ² (818 sq mi)	1,146,175	542/km ² (1,400/sq mi)	VBR
 <u>Limburg</u>	Limburg	Limbourg	Limburg	<u>Hasselt</u>	2,427 km ² (937 sq mi)	874,048	361/km ² (930/sq mi)	VLJ
 <u>West Flanders</u>	West-Vlaanderen	Flandre occidentale	Westflandern	<u>Bruges</u>	3,197 km ² (1,234 sq mi)	1,195,796	375/km ² (970/sq mi)	VWV
Walloon Region								
 <u>Hainaut</u>	Henegouwen	Hainaut	Hennegau	<u>Mons</u>	3,813 km ² (1,472 sq mi)	1,344,241	353/km ² (910/sq mi)	WHT
 <u>Liège</u>	Luik	Liège	Lüttich	<u>Liège</u>	3,857 km ² (1,489 sq mi)	1,106,992	288/km ² (750/sq mi)	WLG
 <u>Luxembourg</u>	Luxemburg	Luxembourg	Luxemburg	<u>Arlon</u>	4,459 km ² (1,722 sq mi)	284,638	64/km ² (170/sq mi)	WLX
 <u>Namur</u>	Namen	Namur	Namur (Namür)	<u>Namur</u>	3,675 km ² (1,419 sq mi)	494,325	135/km ² (350/sq mi)	WNA
 <u>Walloon Brabant</u>	Waals-Brabant	Brabant wallon	Wallonisch-Brabant	<u>Wavre</u>	1,097 km ² (424 sq mi)	403,599	368/km ² (950/sq mi)	WBR
Brussels Capital Region								
 <u>Brussels Capital Region</u>	Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest	Région de Bruxelles-Capitale	Region Brüssel-Hauptstadt	<u>Brussels City</u>	162.4 km ² (62.7 sq mi)	1,208,542	7,442/km ² (19,270/sq mi)	BBR
Total	België	Belgique	Belgien	<u>Brussels City</u>	30,689 km² (11,849 sq mi)	11,431,406	373/km² (970/sq mi)	

Politics

Belgium is a constitutional, popular monarchy and a federal parliamentary democracy. The bicameral federal parliament is composed of a Senate and a Chamber of Representatives. The former is made up of 50 senators appointed by the parliaments of the communities and regions and 10 co-opted senators. Prior to 2014, most of the Senate's members were directly elected. The Chamber's 150 representatives are elected under a proportional voting system from 11 electoral districts. Belgium has compulsory voting and thus maintains one of the highest rates of voter turnout in the world.^[56]

The King (currently Philippe) is the head of state, though with limited prerogatives. He appoints ministers, including a Prime Minister, that have the confidence of the Chamber of Representatives to form the federal government. The Council of Ministers is composed of no more than fifteen members. With the possible exception of the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers is composed of an equal number of Dutch-speaking members and French-speaking

members.^[57] The judicial system is based on civil law and originates from the Napoleonic code. The Court of Cassation is the court of last resort, with the courts of appeal one level below.^[58]

Political culture

Belgium's political institutions are complex; most political power is organized around the need to represent the main cultural communities.^[59] Since about 1970, the significant national Belgian political parties have split into distinct components that mainly represent the political and linguistic interests of these communities.^[60] The major parties in each community, though close to the political center, belong to three main groups: Christian Democrats, Liberals, and Social Democrats.^[61] Further notable parties came into being well after the middle of last century, mainly around linguistic, nationalist, or environmental themes and recently smaller ones of some specific liberal nature.^[60]

A string of Christian Democrat coalition governments from 1958 was broken in 1999 after the first dioxin crisis, a major food contamination scandal.^{[62][63][64]} A "rainbow coalition" emerged from six parties: the Flemish and the French-speaking Liberals, Social Democrats and Greens.^[65] Later, a "purple coalition" of Liberals and Social Democrats formed after the Greens lost most of their seats in the 2003 election.^[66]

The government led by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt from 1999 to 2007 achieved a balanced budget, some tax reforms, a labor-market reform, scheduled nuclear phase-out and instigated legislation allowing more stringent war crime and more lenient soft drug usage prosecution. Restrictions on withholding euthanasia were reduced and same-sex marriage legalized. The government promoted active diplomacy in Africa^[67] and opposed the invasion of Iraq.^[68] It is the only country that does not have age restrictions on euthanasia.^[69]

Verhofstadt's coalition fared badly in the June 2007 elections. For more than a year, the country experienced a political crisis.^[70] This crisis was such that many observers speculated on a possible partition of Belgium.^{[71][72][73]} From 21 December 2007 until 20 March 2008 the temporary Verhofstadt III Government was in office. This coalition of the Flemish and Francophone Christian Democrats, the Flemish and Francophone Liberals together with the Francophone Social Democrats was an interim government until 20 March 2008.^[74]

On that day a new government, led by Flemish Christian Democrat Yves Leterme, the actual winner of the federal elections of June 2007, was sworn in by the king. On 15 July 2008 Leterme announced the resignation of the cabinet to the king, as no progress in constitutional reforms had been made.^[74] In December 2008, he once more offered his resignation to the king after a crisis surrounding the sale of Fortis to BNP Paribas.^[75] At this juncture, his resignation was accepted and Christian Democratic and Flemish Herman Van Rompuy was sworn in as Prime Minister on 30 December 2008.^[76]

After Herman Van Rompuy was designated the first permanent President of the European Council on 19 November 2009, he offered the resignation of his government to King Albert II on 25 November 2009. A few hours later, the new government under Prime Minister Yves Leterme was sworn in. On 22 April 2010, Leterme again offered the resignation of his cabinet to the king^[77] after one of the coalition partners, the OpenVLD, withdrew from the government, and on 26 April 2010 King Albert officially accepted the resignation.^[78]

The Parliamentary elections in Belgium on 13 June 2010 saw the Flemish nationalist N-VA become the largest party in Flanders, and the Socialist Party PS the largest party in Wallonia.^[79] Until December 2011, Belgium was governed by Leterme's caretaker government awaiting the end of the deadlocked negotiations for formation of a new government. By 30 March 2011, this set a new world record for the elapsed time without an official government, previously held by war-torn Iraq.^[80] Finally, in December 2011 the Di Rupo Government led by Walloon socialist Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo was sworn in.^[81]



Philippe
King of the Belgians
since 2013

Alexander De Croo
Prime Minister since
2020

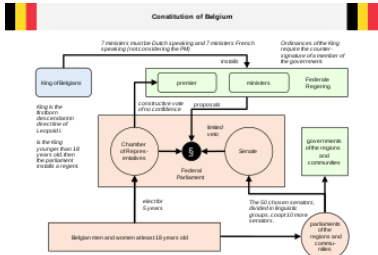


Chart illustrating the federal government construction of Belgium



The Belgian Federal Parliament in Brussels, one of six different governments of the country

The 2014 federal election (coinciding with the regional elections) resulted in a further electoral gain for the Flemish nationalist N-VA, although the incumbent coalition (composed of Flemish and French-speaking Social Democrats, Liberals, and Christian Democrats) maintains a solid majority in Parliament and in all electoral constituencies. On 22 July 2014, King Philippe nominated Charles Michel (MR) and Kris Peeters (CD&V) to lead the formation of a new federal cabinet composed of the Flemish parties N-VA, CD&V, Open Vld and the French-speaking MR, which resulted in the Michel Government. It was the first time N-VA was part of the federal cabinet, while the French-speaking side was represented only by the MR, which achieved a minority of the public votes in Wallonia.^[82]

In May 2019 federal elections in the Flemish-speaking northern region of Flanders far-right Vlaams Belang party made major gains. In the French-speaking southern area of Wallonia the Socialists were strong. The moderate Flemish nationalist party the N-VA remained the largest party in parliament.^[83] In July 2019 prime minister Charles Michel was selected to hold the post of President of the European Council.^[84] His successor Sophie Wilmès was Belgium's first female prime minister. She led the caretaker government since October 2019.^[85] The Flemish Liberal party politician Alexander De Croo became new prime minister in October 2020. The parties had agreed on federal government 16 months after the elections.^[86]

Communities and regions

Following a usage which can be traced back to the Burgundian and Habsburg courts,^[87] in the 19th century it was necessary to speak French to belong to the governing upper class, and those who could only speak Dutch were effectively second-class citizens.^[88] Late that century, and continuing into the 20th century, Flemish movements evolved to counter this situation.^[89]

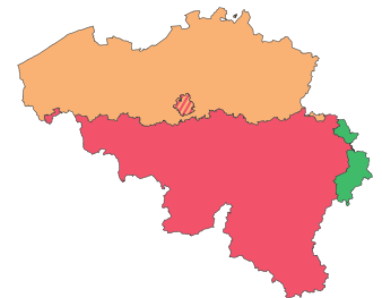
While the people in Southern Belgium spoke French or dialects of French, and most Brusselsers adopted French as their first language, the Flemings refused to do so and succeeded progressively in making Dutch an equal language in the education system.^[89] Following World War II, Belgian politics became increasingly dominated by the autonomy of its two main linguistic communities.^[90] Intercommunal tensions rose and the constitution was amended to minimize the potential for conflict.^[90]

Based on the four language areas defined in 1962–63 (the Dutch, bilingual, French and German language areas), consecutive revisions of the country's constitution in 1970, 1980, 1988 and 1993 established a unique form of a federal state with segregated political power into three levels:^{[91][92]}

1. The federal government, based in Brussels.
2. The three language communities:
 - the Flemish Community (Dutch-speaking);
 - the French Community (French-speaking);
 - the German-speaking Community.
3. The three regions:
 - the Flemish Region, subdivided into five provinces;
 - the Walloon Region, subdivided into five provinces;
 - the Brussels-Capital Region.

The constitutional language areas determine the official languages in their municipalities, as well as the geographical limits of the empowered institutions for specific matters.^[93] Although this would allow for seven parliaments and governments when the Communities and Regions were created in 1980, Flemish politicians decided to merge both.^[94] Thus the Flemings just have one single institutional body of parliament and government is empowered for all except federal and specific municipal matters.^[D]

The overlapping boundaries of the Regions and Communities have created two notable peculiarities: the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region (which came into existence nearly a decade after the other regions) is included in both the Flemish and French Communities, and the territory of the German-speaking Community lies wholly within the Walloon Region. Conflicts about jurisdiction between the bodies are resolved by the Constitutional Court of Belgium. The structure is intended as a compromise to allow different cultures to live together peacefully.^[16]



Communities:

- ☐ Flemish Community / Dutch language area
- ☒ Flemish & French Community / bilingual language area
- ☐ French Community / French language area
- ☐ German-speaking Community / German language area



Regions:

- ☐ Flemish Region / Dutch language area
- ☐ Brussels-Capital Region / bilingual area
- ☐ Walloon Region / French and German language areas

Locus of policy jurisdiction

The Federal State's authority includes justice, defense, federal police, social security, nuclear energy, monetary policy and public debt, and other aspects of public finances. State-owned companies include the Belgian Post Group and Belgian Railways. The Federal Government is responsible for the obligations of Belgium and its federalized institutions towards the European Union and NATO. It controls substantial parts of public health, home affairs and foreign affairs.^[95] The budget—without the debt—controlled by the federal government amounts to about 50% of the national fiscal income. The federal government employs around 12% of the civil servants.^[96]

Communities exercise their authority only within linguistically determined geographical boundaries, originally oriented towards the individuals of a Community's language: culture (including audiovisual media), education and the use of the relevant language. Extensions to personal matters less directly connected with language comprise health policy (curative and preventive medicine) and assistance to individuals (protection of youth, social welfare, aid to families, immigrant assistance services, and so on.).^[97]

Regions have authority in fields that can be broadly associated with their territory. These include economy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport, the environment, town and country planning, nature conservation, credit and foreign trade. They supervise the provinces, municipalities and intercommunal utility companies.^[98]

In several fields, the different levels each have their own say on specifics. With education, for instance, the autonomy of the Communities neither includes decisions about the compulsory aspect nor allows for setting minimum requirements for awarding qualifications, which remain federal matters.^[95] Each level of government can be involved in scientific research and international relations associated with its powers. The treaty-making power of the Regions' and Communities' Governments is the broadest of all the Federating units of all the Federations all over the world.^{[99][100][101]}

Foreign relations

Because of its location at the crossroads of Western Europe, Belgium has historically been the route of invading armies from its larger neighbors. With virtually defenseless borders, Belgium has traditionally sought to avoid domination by the more powerful nations which surround it through a policy of mediation. The Belgians have been strong advocates of European integration. Both the European Union and NATO are headquartered in Belgium.

Armed forces

The Belgian Armed Forces have about 47,000 active troops. In 2019, Belgium's defense budget totaled €4.303 billion (\$4.921 billion) representing .93% of its GDP.^[102] They are organized into one unified structure which consists of four main components: Land Component or the Army, Air Component or the Air Force, Marine Component or the Navy and the Medical Component. The operational commands of the four components are subordinate to the Staff Department for Operations and Training of the Ministry of Defense, which is headed by the Assistant Chief of Staff Operations and Training, and to the Chief of Defense.^[103]

The effects of the Second World War made collective security a priority for Belgian foreign policy. In March 1948 Belgium signed the Treaty of Brussels and then joined NATO in 1948. However, the integration of the armed forces into NATO did not begin until after the Korean War.^[104] The Belgians, along with the Luxembourg government, sent a detachment of battalion strength to fight in Korea known as the Belgian United Nations Command. This mission was the first in a long line of UN missions which the Belgians supported. Currently, the Belgian Marine Component is working closely together with the Dutch Navy under the command of the Admiral Benelux.

Economy

Belgium's strongly globalized economy^[105] and its transport infrastructure are integrated with the rest of Europe. Its location at the heart of a highly industrialized region helped make it the world's 15th largest trading nation in 2007.^{[106][107]} The economy is characterized by a highly productive work force, high GNP and high exports per capita.^[108] Belgium's main imports are raw materials, machinery and equipment, chemicals, raw diamonds, pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, transportation equipment, and oil products. Its main exports are machinery and equipment, chemicals, finished diamonds, metals and metal products, and foodstuffs.^[44]

The Belgian economy is heavily service-oriented and shows a dual nature: a dynamic Flemish economy and a Walloon economy that lags behind.^{[16][109][E]} One of the founding members of the European Union, Belgium strongly supports an open economy and the extension of the powers of EU institutions to integrate member economies. Since

1922, through the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union, Belgium and Luxembourg have been a single trade market with customs and currency union.^[110]

Belgium was the first continental European country to undergo the Industrial Revolution, in the early 19th century.^[111] Areas in Liège Province and around Charleroi rapidly developed mining and steelmaking, which flourished until the mid-20th century in the Sambre and Meuse valley and made Belgium one of the three most industrialized nations in the world from 1830 to 1910.^{[112][113]} However, by the 1840s the textile industry of Flanders was in severe crisis, and the region experienced famine from 1846 to 1850.^{[114][115]}

After World War II, Ghent and Antwerp experienced a rapid expansion of the chemical and petroleum industries. The 1973 and 1979 oil crises sent the economy into a recession; it was particularly prolonged in Wallonia, where the steel industry had become less competitive and experienced a serious decline.^[116] In the 1980s and 1990s, the economic center of the country continued to shift

northwards and is now concentrated in the populous Flemish Diamond area.^[117]



Steelmaking along the Meuse at Ougrée, near Liège

By the end of the 1980s, Belgian macroeconomic policies had resulted in a cumulative government debt of about 120% of GDP. As of 2006, the budget was balanced and public debt was equal to 90.30% of GDP.^[118] In 2005 and 2006, real GDP growth rates of 1.5% and 3.0%, respectively, were slightly above the average for the Euro area.

Unemployment rates of 8.4% in 2005 and 8.2% in 2006 were close to the area average. By October 2010, this had grown to 8.5% compared to an average rate of 9.6% for the European Union as a whole (EU 27).^{[119][120]} From 1832 until 2002, Belgium's currency was the Belgian franc. Belgium switched to the euro in 2002, with the first sets of euro coins being minted in 1999. The standard Belgian euro coins designated for circulation show the portrait of the monarch (first King Albert II, since 2013 King Philippe).

Despite an 18% decrease observed from 1970 to 1999, Belgium still had in 1999 the highest rail network density within the European Union with 113.8 km/1 000 km². On the other hand, the same period, 1970–1999, has seen a huge growth (+56%) of the motorway network. In 1999, the density of km motorways per 1000 km² and 1000 inhabitants amounted to 55.1 and 16.5 respectively and were significantly superior to the EU's means of 13.7 and 15.9.^[121]

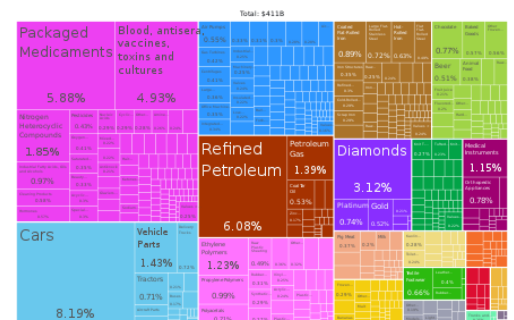
From a biological resource perspective, Belgium has a low endowment: Belgium's biocapacity adds up to only 0.8 global hectares in 2016,^[122] just about half of the 1.6 global hectares of biocapacity available per person worldwide.^[123] In contrast, in 2016, Belgians used on average 6.3 global hectares of biocapacity - their ecological footprint of consumption. This means they required about eight times as much biocapacity as Belgium contains. As a result, Belgium was running a biocapacity deficit of 5.5 global hectares per person in 2016.^[122]

Belgium experiences some of the most congested traffic in Europe. In 2010, commuters to the cities of Brussels and Antwerp spent respectively 65 and 64 hours a year in traffic jams.^[124] Like in most small European countries, more than 80% of the airways traffic is handled by a single airport, the Brussels Airport. The ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge (Bruges) share more than 80% of Belgian maritime traffic, Antwerp being the second European harbor with a gross weight of goods handled of 115 988 000 t in 2000 after a growth of 10.9% over the preceding five years.^{[121][125]} In 2016, the port of Antwerp handled 214 million tons after a year-on-year growth of 2.7%.^[126]

There is a large economic gap between Flanders and Wallonia. Wallonia was historically wealthy compared to Flanders, mostly due to its heavy industries, but the decline of the steel industry post-World War II led to the region's rapid decline, whereas Flanders rose swiftly. Since then, Flanders has been prosperous, among the wealthiest regions in Europe, whereas Wallonia has been languishing. As of 2007, the unemployment rate of Wallonia is over double



Belgium is part of a monetary union, the eurozone (dark blue), and of the EU single market.



A proportional representation of Belgium exports, 2019



Port of Zeebrugge

that of Flanders. The divide has played a key part in the tensions between the Flemish and Walloons in addition to the already-existing language divide. Pro-independence movements have gained high popularity in Flanders as a consequence. The separatist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) party, for instance, is the largest party in Belgium.^{[127][128][129]}

Science and technology

Contributions to the development of science and technology have appeared throughout the country's history. The 16th century Early Modern flourishing of Western Europe included cartographer Gerardus Mercator, anatomist Andreas Vesalius, herbalist Rembert Dodoens^{[130][131][132][133]} and mathematician Simon Stevin among the most influential scientists.^[134]

Chemist Ernest Solvay^[135] and engineer Zenobe Gramme (École industrielle de Liège)^[136] gave their names to the Solvay process and the Gramme dynamo, respectively, in the 1860s. Bakelite was developed in 1907–1909 by Leo Baekeland. Ernest Solvay also acted as a major philanthropist and gave its name to the Solvay Institute of Sociology, the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management and the International Solvay Institutes for Physics and Chemistry which are now part of the Université libre de Bruxelles. In 1911, he started a series of conferences, the Solvay Conferences on Physics and Chemistry, which have had a deep impact on the evolution of quantum physics and chemistry.^[137] A major contribution to fundamental science was also due to a Belgian, Monsignor Georges Lemaître (Catholic University of Louvain), who is credited with proposing the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe in 1927.^[138]



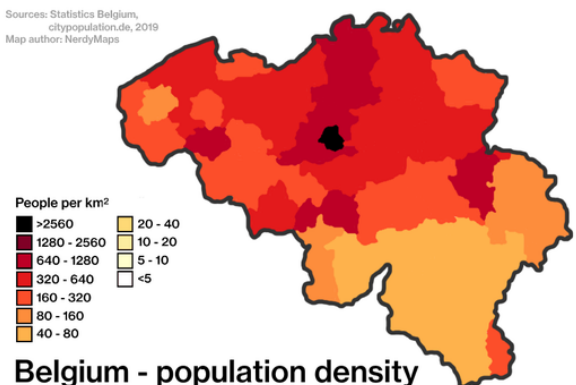
Gerardus Mercator

Three Nobel Prizes in Physiology or Medicine were awarded to Belgians: Jules Bordet (Université libre de Bruxelles) in 1919, Corneille Heymans (University of Ghent) in 1938 and Albert Claude (Université libre de Bruxelles) together with Christian de Duve (Université catholique de Louvain) in 1974. François Englert (Université libre de Bruxelles) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2013. Ilya Prigogine (Université libre de Bruxelles) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1977.^[139] Two Belgian mathematicians have been awarded the Fields Medal: Pierre Deligne in 1978 and Jean Bourgain in 1994.^{[140][141]} Belgium was ranked 22nd in the Global Innovation Index in 2020, up from 23rd in 2019.^{[142][143][144][145]}

Demographics

As of 1 January 2020, the total population of Belgium according to its population register was 11,492,641.^[5] The population density of Belgium is 376/km² (970/sq mi) as of January 2019, making it the 22nd most densely populated country in the world, and the 6th most densely populated country in Europe. The most densely populated province is Antwerp, the least densely populated province is Luxembourg. As of January 2019, the Flemish Region had a population of 6,589,069 (57.6% of Belgium), its most populous cities being Antwerp (523,248), Ghent (260,341) and Bruges (118,284). Wallonia had a population of 3,633,795 (31.8% of Belgium) with Charleroi (201,816), Liège (197,355) and Namur (110,939), its most populous cities. The Brussels-Capital Region has 1,208,542 inhabitants (10.6% of Belgium) in the 19 municipalities, three of which have over 100,000 residents.^[5]

Sources: Statistics Belgium, citypopulation.de, 2019
Map author: NerdyMaps



Belgium - population density

Population density in Belgium by arrondissement.

In 2017 the average total fertility rate (TFR) across Belgium was 1.64 children per woman, below the replacement rate of 2.1; it remains considerably below the high of 4.87 children born per woman in 1873.^[146] Belgium subsequently has one of the oldest populations in the world, with an average age of 41.6 years.^[147]

Migration

As of 2007, nearly 92% of the population had Belgian citizenship,^[148] and other European Union member citizens account for around 6%. The prevalent foreign nationals were Italian (171,918), French (125,061), Dutch (116,970), Moroccan



Brussels, the capital city and largest metropolitan area of Belgium



National Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Koekelberg, Brussels

Since the country's independence, Roman Catholicism has had an important role in Belgium's politics.^[167] However Belgium is largely a secular country as the constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. During the reigns of Albert I and Baudouin, the Belgian royal family had a reputation of deeply rooted Catholicism.^[168]

Roman Catholicism has traditionally been Belgium's majority religion; being especially strong in Flanders. However, by 2009 Sunday church attendance was 5% for Belgium in total; 3% in Brussels,^[169] and 5.4% in Flanders. Church attendance in 2009 in Belgium was roughly half of the Sunday church attendance in 1998 (11% for the total of Belgium in 1998).^[170] Despite the drop in church attendance, Catholic identity nevertheless remains an important part

of Belgium's culture.^[168]

According to the Eurobarometer 2010,^[171] 37% of Belgian citizens responded that they believe there is a God. 31% answered that they believe there is some sort of spirit or life-force. 27% answered that they do not believe there is any sort of spirit, God, or life-force. 5% did not respond. According to the Eurobarometer 2015, 60.7% of the total population of Belgium adhered to Christianity, with Roman Catholicism being the largest denomination with 52.9%. Protestants comprised 2.1% and Orthodox Christians were the 1.6% of the total. Non-religious people comprised 32.0% of the population and were divided between atheists (14.9%) and agnostics (17.1%). A further 5.2% of the population was Muslim and 2.1% were believers in other religions.^[172] The same survey held in 2012 found that Christianity was the largest religion in Belgium, accounting for 65% of Belgians.^[173]

Symbolically and materially, the Roman Catholic Church remains in a favorable position.^[168] Belgium officially recognizes three religions: Christianity (Catholic, Protestantism, Orthodox churches and Anglicanism), Islam and Judaism.^[174]

In the early 2000s, there were approximately 42,000 Jews in Belgium. The Jewish Community of Antwerp (numbering some 18,000) is one of the largest in Europe, and one of the last places in the world where Yiddish is the primary language of a large Jewish community (mirroring certain Orthodox and Hasidic communities in New York, New Jersey, and Israel). In addition, most Jewish children in Antwerp receive a Jewish education.^[175] There are several Jewish newspapers and more than 45 active synagogues (30 of which are in Antwerp) in the country. A 2006 inquiry in Flanders, considered to be a more religious region than Wallonia, showed that 55% considered themselves religious and that 36% believed that God created the universe.^[176] On the other hand, Wallonia has become one of Europe's most secular/least religious regions. Most of the French-speaking region's population does not consider religion an important part of their lives, and as much as 45% of the population identifies as irreligious. This is particularly the case in eastern Wallonia and areas along the French border.



Interior of the Great Synagogue of Brussels



The Great Mosque of Brussels

A 2008 estimate found that approximately 6% of the Belgian population (628,751 people) is Muslim. Muslims constitute 23.6% of the population of Brussels, 4.9% of Wallonia and 5.1% of Flanders. The majority of Belgian Muslims live in the major cities, such as Antwerp, Brussels and Charleroi. The largest group of immigrants in Belgium are Moroccans, with 400,000 people. The Turks are the third largest group, and the second largest Muslim ethnic group, numbering 220,000.^{[155][177]}

Health

The Belgians enjoy good health. According to 2012 estimates, the average life expectancy is 79.65 years.^[44] Since 1960, life expectancy has, in line with the European average, grown by two months per year. Death in Belgium is mainly due to heart and vascular disorders, neoplasms, disorders of the respiratory system and unnatural causes of death (accidents, suicide). Non-natural causes of death and cancer are the most common causes of death for females up to age 24 and males up to age 44.^[178]



University Hospital of Antwerp

Healthcare in Belgium is financed through both social security contributions and taxation. Health insurance is compulsory. Health care is delivered by a mixed public and private system of independent medical practitioners and public, university and semi-private hospitals. Health care service are payable by the patient and reimbursed later by

health insurance institutions, but for ineligible categories (of patients and services) so-called 3rd party payment systems exist.^[178] The Belgian health care system is supervised and financed by the federal government, the Flemish and Walloon Regional governments; and the German Community also has (indirect) oversight and responsibilities.^[178]

For the first time in Belgian history, the first child was euthanized following the 2-year mark of the removal of the euthanization age restrictions. The child had been euthanized due to an incurable disease that was inflicted upon the child. Although there may have been some support for the euthanization there is a possibility of controversy due to the issue revolving around the subject of assisted suicide.^{[179][180]} Excluding assisted suicide, Belgium has the highest suicide rate in Western Europe and one of the highest suicide rates in the developed world (exceeded only by Lithuania, South Korea, and Latvia).^[181]

Education

Education is compulsory from 6 to 18 years of age for Belgians.^[182] Among OECD countries in 2002, Belgium had the third highest proportion of 18- to 21-year-olds enrolled in postsecondary education, at 42%.^[183] Though an estimated 99% of the adult population is literate, concern is rising over functional illiteracy.^{[166][184]} The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), coordinated by the OECD, currently ranks Belgium's education as the 19th best in the world, being significantly higher than the OECD average.^[185] Education being organized separately by each, the Flemish Community scores noticeably above the French and German-speaking Communities.^[186]



The Central Library of the KU Leuven University

Mirroring the dual structure of the 19th-century Belgian political landscape, characterized by the Liberal and the Catholic parties, the educational system is segregated within a secular and a religious segment. The secular branch of schooling is controlled by the communities, the provinces, or the municipalities, while religious, mainly Catholic branch education, is organized by religious authorities, although subsidized and supervised by the communities.^[187]

Culture

Despite its political and linguistic divisions, the region corresponding to today's Belgium has seen the flourishing of major artistic movements that have had tremendous influence on European art and culture. Nowadays, to a certain extent, cultural life is concentrated within each language Community, and a variety of barriers have made a shared cultural sphere less pronounced.^{[16][188][189]} Since the 1970s, there are no bilingual universities or colleges in the country except the Royal Military Academy and the Antwerp Maritime Academy.^[190]

Fine arts



The Ghent Altarpiece: The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (interior view), painted 1432 by van Eyck

Contributions to painting and architecture have been especially rich. The Mosan art, the Early Netherlandish,^[191] the Flemish Renaissance and Baroque painting^[192] and major examples of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture^[193] are milestones in the history of art. While the 15th century's art in the Low Countries is dominated by the religious paintings of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, the 16th century is characterized by a broader panel of styles such as Peter Breughel's landscape paintings and Lambert Lombard's representation of the antique.^[194] Though the Baroque style of Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck flourished in the early 17th century in the Southern Netherlands,^[195] it gradually declined thereafter.^{[196][197]}

During the 19th and 20th centuries many original romantic, expressionist and surrealist Belgian painters emerged, including James Ensor and other artists belonging to the Les XX group, Constant Permeke, Paul Delvaux and René

Magritte. The avant-garde CoBrA movement appeared in the 1950s, while the sculptor Panamarenko remains a remarkable figure in contemporary art.^{[198][199]} Multidisciplinary artists Jan Fabre, Wim Delvoye and the painter Luc Tuymans are other internationally renowned figures on the contemporary art scene.

Belgian contributions to architecture also continued into the 19th and 20th centuries, including the work of Victor Horta and Henry van de Velde, who were major initiators of the Art Nouveau style.^{[200][201]}

The vocal music of the Franco-Flemish School developed in the southern part of the Low Countries and was an important contribution to Renaissance culture.^[202] In the 19th and 20th centuries, there was an emergence of major violinists, such as Henri Vieuxtemps, Eugène Ysaÿe and Arthur Grumiaux, while Adolphe Sax invented the saxophone in 1846. The composer César Franck was born in Liège in 1822. Contemporary popular music in Belgium is also of repute. Jazz musician Toots Thielemans and singer Jacques Brel have achieved global fame. Nowadays, singer Stromae has been a musical revelation in Europe and beyond, having great success. In rock/pop music, Telex, Front 242, K's Choice, Hooverphonic, Zap Mama, Soulwax and dEUS are well known. In the heavy metal scene, bands like Machiavel, Channel Zero and Enthroned have a worldwide fan-base.^[203]



Jacques Brel

Belgium has produced several well-known authors, including the poets Emile Verhaeren, Guido Gezelle, Robert Goffin and novelists Hendrik Conscience, Stijn Streuvels, Georges Simenon, Suzanne Lilar, Hugo Claus and Amélie Nothomb. The poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1911. *The Adventures of Tintin* by Hergé is the best known of Franco-Belgian comics, but many other major authors, including Peyo (*The Smurfs*), André Franquin (*Gaston Lagaffe*), Dupa (*Cubitus*), Morris (*Lucky Luke*), Greg (*Achille Talon*), Lambil (*Les Tuniques Bleues*), Edgar P. Jacobs and Willy Vandersteen brought the Belgian cartoon strip industry a worldwide fame.^[204] Additionally, famous crime author Agatha Christie created the character Hercule Poirot, a Belgian detective, who has served as a protagonist in a number of her acclaimed mystery novels.

Belgian cinema has brought a number of mainly Flemish novels to life on-screen.^[H] Other Belgian directors include André Delvaux, Stijn Coninx, Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne; well-known actors include Jean-Claude Van Damme, Jan Decleir and Marie Gillain; and successful films include *Bullhead*, *Man Bites Dog* and *The Alzheimer Affair*.^[205] Belgium is also home to a number of successful fashion designers Category:Belgian fashion designers. For instance, in the 1980s, Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts produced important fashion trendsetters, known as the Antwerp Six.^[206]

Folklore

Folklore plays a major role in Belgium's cultural life: the country has a comparatively high number of processions, cavalcades, parades, 'ommegangs' and 'ducasses',^[I] 'kermesse' and other local festivals, nearly always with an originally religious or mythological background. The Carnival of Binche with its famous Gilles and the 'Processional Giants and Dragons' of Ath, Brussels, Dendermonde, Mechelen and Mons are recognized by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.^[207]



The Gilles of Binche, in costume, wearing wax masks

Other examples are the Carnival of Aalst; the still very religious processions of the Holy Blood in Bruges, Virga Jesse Basilica in Hasselt and Basilica of Our Lady of Hanswijk in Mechelen; 15 August festival in Liège; and the Walloon festival in Namur. Originated in 1832 and revived in the 1960s, the Gentse Feesten have become a modern tradition. A major non-official holiday is the Saint Nicholas Day, a festivity for children and, in Liège, for students.^[208]

Cuisine



Moules-frites or mosselen met friet is a representative dish of Belgium.

Many highly ranked Belgian restaurants can be found in the most influential restaurant guides, such as the Michelin Guide.^[209] Belgium is famous for beer, chocolate, waffles and french fries with mayonnaise. Contrary to their name, french fries are claimed to have originated in Belgium, although their exact place of origin is uncertain. The national dishes are "steak and fries with salad", and "mussels with fries".^{[210][211][212][J]}

Brands of Belgian chocolate and pralines, like Côte d'Or, Neuhaus, Leonidas and Godiva are famous, as well as independent producers such as Burie and Del Rey in Antwerp and Mary's in Brussels.^[213] Belgium produces over 1100 varieties of beer.^{[214][215]} The Trappist beer of the Abbey of Westvleteren has repeatedly been rated the world's best beer.^{[216][217][218]} The biggest brewer in the world by

volume is Anheuser-Busch InBev, based in Leuven.^[219]

than 5% French-speakers) and an estimated 20,000–25,000 speakers of German in the Walloon Region outside the geographical boundaries of their official Community, or 0.9%; French: in the latter area as well as mainly in the rest of Wallonia (3.321 million) and 85% of the Brussels inhabitants (0.866 million) thus 4.187 million or 39.8%; together indeed 100%.

- G. Flemish Academic Eric Corijn (initiator of **Charta 91** (<http://www.charta91.be/>)), at a colloquium regarding Brussels, on 2001-12-05, states that in Brussels 91% of the population speaks French at home, either alone or with another language, and about 20% speaks Dutch at home, either alone (9%) or with French (11%)—After ponderation, the repartition can be estimated at between 85 and 90% French-speaking, and the remaining are Dutch-speaking, corresponding to the estimations based on languages chosen in Brussels by citizens for their official documents (ID, driving licenses, weddings, birth, sex, and so on); all these statistics on language are also available at Belgian Department of Justice (for weddings, birth, sex), Department of Transport (for Driving licenses), Department of Interior (for IDs), because there are no means to know *precisely* the proportions since Belgium has abolished 'official' linguistic censuses, thus official documents on language choices can only be estimations. For a web source on this topic, see e.g. **General online sources: Janssens, Rudi**
- H. Notable Belgian films based on works by Flemish authors include: *De Witte* (author **Ernest Claes**) movie by Jan Vanderheyden and Edith Kiel in 1934, remake as *De Witte van Sichem* directed by **Robbe De Hert** in 1980; *De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen* (Johan Daisne) **André Delvaux** 1965; *Mira* ('De teleurgang van de Waterhoek' by **Stijn Streuvels**) **Fons Rademakers** 1971; *Malpertuis* (aka *The Legend of Doom House*) (**Jean Ray** [pen name of Flemish author who mainly wrote in French, or as John Flanders in Dutch]) **Harry Kümel** 1971; *De loteling* (**Hendrik Conscience**) **Roland Verhavert** 1974; *Dood van een non* (**Maria Rosseels**) **Paul Collet** and **Pierre Drouot** 1975; *Pallierter* (**Felix Timmermans**) **Roland Verhavert** 1976; *De komst van Joachim Stiller* (**Hubert Lampo**) **Harry Kümel** 1976; *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (**Hendrik Conscience**) **Hugo Claus** (a famous author himself) 1985; *Daens* ('Pieter Daens' by **Louis Paul Boon**) **Stijn Coninx** 1992; see also **Filmarchief les DVD's de la cinémathèque** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070514023803/http://www.ledoux.be/nl/dvdmain.htm>) (in Dutch). Retrieved on 7 June 2007.
- I. The Dutch word 'omweggang' is here used in the sense of an entirely or mainly non-religious procession, or the non-religious part thereof—see also **its article on the Dutch-language Wikipedia**; the Processional Giants of Brussels, Dendermonde and Mechelen mentioned in this paragraph are part of each city's 'omweggang'. The French word 'ducasse' refers also to a procession; the mentioned Processional Giants of Ath and Mons are part of each city's 'ducasse'.
- J. Contrarily to what the text suggests, the season starts as early as July and lasts through April.

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