



1.1 Informal carers (% of population aged 50 years and over) (OLD-3)

1.1.1 Documentation sheet

Description	Percentage of the population aged 50 years and over reporting to be informal carer
Calculation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerator: population aged 50 and over reporting to be informal carer • Denominator: population aged 50 and over (included in the survey)
Rationale	<p>Informal carers are defined as people providing help to family members, friends and people in their social network, living in or outside of their household, who require help for Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL).</p> <p>Due to the ageing population the need for long-term care services, both formal and informal, is expected to further increase over the coming decades. However, due to declining family size, increased geographical mobility and rising participation rates of women in the labour market, the availability of informal carers is expected to decline in the coming decades.</p> <p>Informal care is often regarded as a cost-effective way to avoid or delay the need for institutionalisation.¹ However, it should not be overlooked that there are indirect costs linked to informal care, both for individuals as for the state, in terms of forgone employment and possible negative impact on the informal carers' health.²</p> <p>Enabling informal care and supporting informal carers should be seen as a key policy goal in relation to long-term care in the coming decades. Policies that formalise informal care through cash payments, legal rights, social security, and training opportunities can have substantial positive effects on informal caregivers and the receivers of care and can work to incentivise informal caregiving overall.¹</p>
Data source	<p>Data for Belgium: HIS data 2018: Health and society > Informal care: IC_1 Provides informal help or care ³</p> <p>International data: Health at a Glance 2021 from OECD,⁴ which is mostly based on SHARE wave 8</p>
Technical definition	<p>HIS (2018): Percentage of the population aged 50 years and over that provides at least once a week non-professional help or care. The question in the survey is posed as follows: "Do you provide care on non-professional basis for one or more persons with age-related conditions, long term illnesses, chronic diseases or handicaps at least once a week?" (Yes/No)</p> <p>The guidelines for this question make it clear that it should concern 1) regular help or care and not occasional help; 2) help with personal care or household activities and 3) help that does not belong to the profession of the person providing the help.</p> <p>SHARE wave 8: Percentage of the population aged 50 years and over reporting to provide informal care at least weekly.</p>
International comparability	<p>Comparison between European countries is possible on the basis of data collected by OECD. However, it must be noted that because of the informal nature of care provided, it is not easy to get comparable data on the number of people caring for family and friends across countries, nor on the frequency of their caregiving.⁵</p>
Limitations	
Dimension	Care for older persons; Accessibility; Sustainability
Related indicators	
Reviewers	Rana Charafeddine (Sciensano)



1.1.2 Results

Belgium

According to data from the Health Interview Survey (HIS) of 2018, 16.6% of the Belgian population aged 50 and over reports to be informal carer.

Data from HIS are also available for the year 2013 but not presented here as they are not completely comparable. In 2013 the question notably referred only to care provided to persons suffering from long term diseases, chronic diseases or handicaps (and not to persons with age-related conditions more in general).

Analysis by demographic characteristics and socio-economic status

We analysed whether there are differences according to gender, age category or income quintile for the population aged 50+ reporting to be informal carer. These data are displayed in Table 3. We see that women more frequently report to be informal carer (18.5%) compared to men (14.4%). However, the confidence intervals slightly overlap and there is thus no statistically significant difference.

People in the age category 55-64 years most frequently provide informal care (21.9%), followed by the category 65-74 (16.3%) and 45-54 (14.6%) (see Table 4). We also see that the people in the fifth income quintile most frequently provide informal care (26.0%), followed by the fourth income quintile (17.5%). The differences between the fifth quintile and the first-second-third quintile are statistically significant. The difference between the fourth and the first quintile is also statistically significant.

Table 1 – Informal carers (% of population aged 50+) - analysis by gender and income quintile (2018) – HIS

		% of population 50+
Belgium		
Gender	Males	14.4
	Females	18.5
Income levels	First quintile	10.4
	Second quintile	14.7
	Third quintile	15.7
	Fourth quintile	17.5
	Fifth quintile	26.0

Source: Based on HIS (2018)

Table 2 – Informal carers (% of population) - analysis by age category (2018) – HIS

		% of population
Age category	15-24	6.8
	25-34	6.5
	35-44	9.8
	45-54	14.6
	55-64	21.9
	65-74	16.3
	75 or over	8.1
	All age groups	12.2

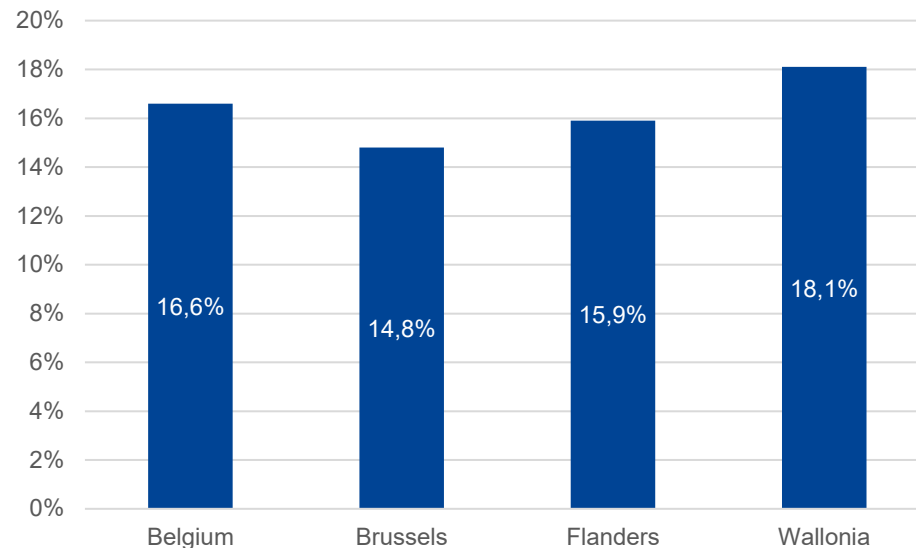
Source: Based on HIS (2018)



Regional comparison

The percentage of the population aged 50+ reporting to be informal carer is highest in the Walloon region (18%), lowest in Brussels-Capital region (15%) and in between in the Flemish region (16%) (see Figure 5). The differences however are not statistically significant.

Figure 1 – Informal carers (% of population aged 50+) (2018) - by region



Source: Based on HIS (2018)

International comparison

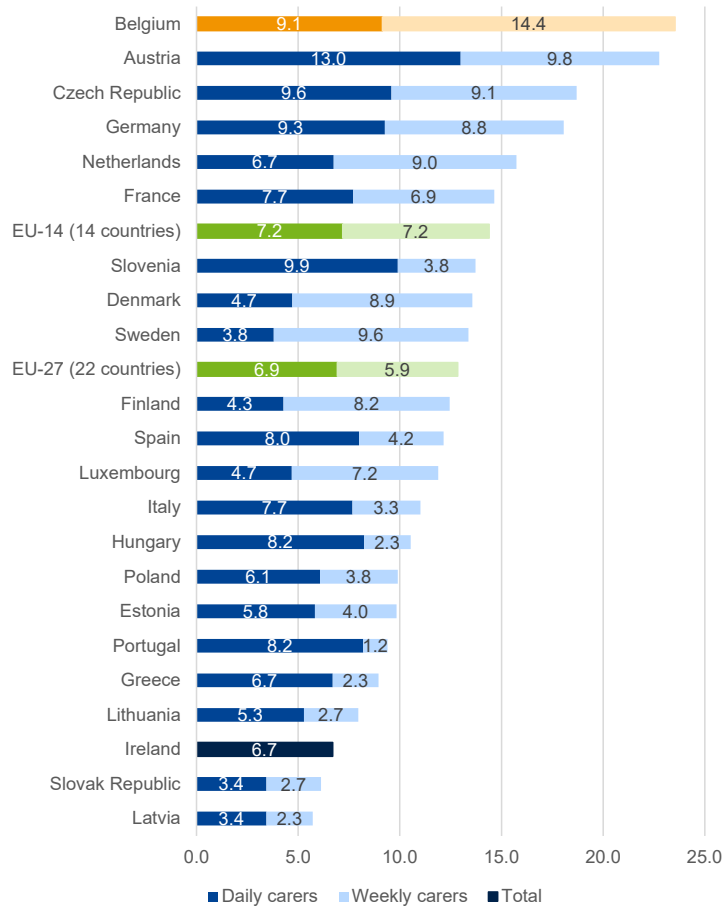
The Health at a Glance 2021 report from OECD combines data from different sources. For most of the European countries the data are based on SHARE wave 8. Data for Ireland however were taken from its 2016 census. In the SHARE survey, carers are asked about how often they provided care in the last year; this includes people who provided care either on daily or weekly basis. People caring for disabled children are excluded in SHARE. In the Ireland census all informal carers together are considered.⁴

According to this dataset assembled by OECD 24% of the Belgian population aged 50 years and over reports to provide informal care, either on daily (9%) or weekly (14%) basis (see Figure 6). For comparison, in 2015 this proportion was 20%. With a rate of 24%, Belgium ranks highest across the European countries. Besides Belgium, the highest rates of around or nearby 20% are found in Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany. The average EU-27 (calculated on the basis of 22 countries for which data were available) amounts to 13% (7% daily carers and 6% weekly carers). The lowest rates (less than 10%) are found in Portugal, Greece, Lithuania, Ireland, the Slovak Republic and Latvia. The average EU-14 reaches 14.4%.

The high share of informal carers in Belgium can be considered a strength for the Belgian health system. However this kind of caregiving has also been associated with a reduction in labour force attachment for caregivers of working age, higher poverty rates and a higher prevalence of mental health problems in caregivers.⁶ One of the support measures in Belgium to prevent these problems is the paid care leave. More information on the support measures for informal caregivers in Belgium can be found in the KCE report n° 223 on the support for informal caregivers.⁷



Figure 2 – Informal carers (% of population aged 50+), either on daily or weekly basis (2019 or nearest year) – international comparison



Source: based on OECD (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0ebfc7c0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/0ebfc7c0-en>); SHARE, Wave 8 (2019-20); Census 2016 for Ireland. Note: The definition of informal carers differs for Ireland

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Since the most recent data are from 2018 (HIS) and 2019-20 (SHARE) it is not clear what could have been the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on this indicator.

Key points

- According to data from HIS, 17% of the Belgian population aged 50 years and over reports to be informal carer, providing help at least once a week.
- The higher the income quintile, the more people aged 50 years and over report to be informal carer. The age group of 55-64 years is the most frequently providing informal care (21.9%).
- According to data from SHARE, 24% of the Belgian population aged 50 years and over reports to provide informal care on daily or weekly basis. This rate is higher than in many other European countries.
- In the future, due to a potentially decreasing number of informal carers and an increasing number of dependents, a shift towards more formal care can be expected.
- Several policy initiatives are needed to temper this shift and to facilitate informal care, taking into account the opportunity cost of informal care concerning labour market participation and health status of the informal caregiver.



References

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