

Belgium

Geography

Location: Western Europe, bordering the North Sea, between France and the Netherlands.

Map references: Europe.

Area:

total area: 30,510 sq km.

land area: 30,230 sq km.

Land boundaries: total 1,385 km, France 620 km, Germany 167 km, Luxembourg 148 km, Netherlands 450 km.

Coastline: 64 km.

Maritime claims:

continental shelf: median line with neighbors.

exclusive fishing zone: median line with neighbors (extends about 68 km from coast).

territorial sea: 12 nm.

Climate: temperate; mild winters, cool summers; rainy, humid, cloudy.

Terrain: flat coastal plains in northwest, central rolling hills, rugged mountains of Ardennes Forest in southeast.

Natural resources: coal, natural gas.

Land use:

arable land: 24%.

permanent crops: 1%.

meadows and pastures: 20%.

forest and woodland: 21%.

other: 34%.

Irrigated land: 10 sq km (1989 est.)

Environment:

current issues: Meuse River, a major source of drinking water, polluted from steel production wastes; other rivers polluted by animal wastes and fertilizers; industrial air pollution contributes to acid rain in neighboring countries.

natural hazards: flooding is a threat in areas of reclaimed coastal land, protected from the sea by concrete dikes.

Note: crossroads of Western Europe; majority of West European capitals within 1,000 km of Brussels which is the seat of the EU.

People

Population: 10,081,880 (July 1995).

Age structure:

0-14 years: 18% (female 875,079; male 919,939).

15-64 years: 66% (female 3,303,219; male 3,363,250).

65 years and over: 16% (female 969,966; male 650,427) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 0.17% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 11.46 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 10.22 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: 0.5 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 7 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:
total population: 77.21 years.
male: 73.94 years.
female: 80.67 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 1.62 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:
noun: Belgian(s).
adjective: Belgian.

Ethnic divisions: Fleming 55%, Walloon 33%, mixed or other 12%.

Religions: Roman Catholic 75%, Protestant or other 25%.

Languages: Dutch 56%, French 32%, German 1%, legally bilingual
11% divided along ethnic lines.

Literacy: age 15 and over can read and write (1980 est.)
total population: 99%.

Labor force: 4.126 million
by occupation: services 63.6%, industry 28%, construction 6.1%,
agriculture 2.3% (1988).

Government

Names:

conventional long form: Kingdom of Belgium.

conventional short form: Belgium.

local long form: Royaume de Belgique.

local short form: Belgique.

Type: constitutional monarchy.

Capital: Brussels.

Administrative divisions: 9 provinces (French: provinces, singular - province; Flemish: provincien, singular - provincie); Antwerpen, Brabant, Hainaut, Liege, Limburg, Luxembourg, Namur, Oost-Vlaanderen, West-Vlaanderen.

Independence: 4 October 1830 (from the Netherlands).

National holiday: National Day, 21 July (ascension of King Leopold to the throne in 1831).

Legal system: civil law system influenced by English constitutional theory; judicial review of legislative acts; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction, with reservations.

Suffrage: 18 years of age, universal and compulsory.

Flag: three equal vertical bands of black (hoist side), yellow, and red; the design was based on the flag of France.

Economy

Overview: This small private enterprise economy has capitalized on its central geographic location, highly developed transport network, and diversified industrial and commercial base. Industry is concentrated mainly in the populous Flemish area in the north, although the government is encouraging reinvestment in the southern region of Walloon. With few natural resources Belgium must import substantial quantities of raw materials and export a large volume of manufactures, making its economy unusually dependent on the state of world markets. Three-fourths of its trade is with other EU countries. The economy grew at a strong 4% pace during the period 1988-90, slowed to 1% in 1991-92, dropped by 1.5% in 1993, and recovered with 2.3% growth in 1994. Belgium's public debt has risen to 140% of GDP, and the government is trying

to control its expenditures to bring the figure more into line with other industrialized countries.

Transportation

Railroads:

total: 3,410 km (2,362 km electrified; 2,563 km double track).

Highways:

total: 137,912 km.

Inland waterways: 2,043 km (1,528 km in regular commercial use).

Pipelines: crude oil 161 km; petroleum products 1,167 km; natural gas 3,300 km.

Ports: Antwerp, Brugge, Gent, Hasselt, Liege, Mons, Namur, Oostende, Zeebrugge.

Airports:

total: 43.

Defence Forces

Branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, National Gendarmerie.