

## Health Expectancy in Belgium

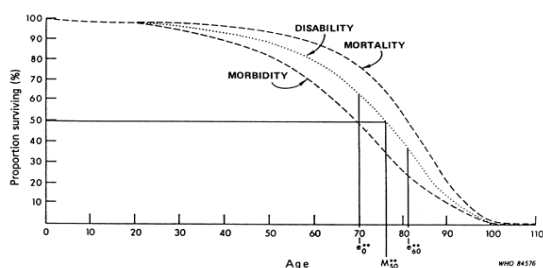
### What is health expectancy?

Health expectancies were first developed to address whether or not longer life is being accompanied by an increase in the time lived in good health (the compression of morbidity scenario) or in bad health (expansion of morbidity). So health expectancies divide life expectancy into life spent in different states of health, from say good to bad health. In this way they add a dimension of quality to the quantity of life lived.

### How is the effect of longer life measured?

The general model of health transitions (WHO, 1984) shows the differences between life spent in different states: total survival, disability-free survival and survival without chronic disease. This leads naturally to life expectancy (the area under the 'mortality' curve), disability-free life expectancy (the area under the 'disability' curve) and life expectancy without chronic disease (the area under the 'morbidity' curve).

The general model of health transition (WHO, 1984): observed mortality and hypothetical morbidity and disability survival curves for females, USA, 1980



$e_0^{**}$  and  $e_{60}^{**}$  are the number of years of autonomous life expected at birth and at age 60, respectively.  $M_{50}^{**}$  is the age to which 50% of females could expect to survive without loss of autonomy.

There are in fact as many health expectancies as concepts of health. The commonest health expectancies are those based on self-perceived health, activities of daily living and on chronic morbidity.

### How do we compare health expectancies?

Health expectancies are independent of the size of populations and of their age structure and so they allow direct comparison of different population sub-groups: e.g. sexes, socio-professional categories, as well as countries within Europe (Robine et al., 2003).

Health expectancies are most often calculated by the Sullivan method (Sullivan, 1971). However to make valid comparisons, the underlying health measure should be truly comparable.

To address this, the European Union has decided to include a small set of health expectancies among its European Core Health Indicators (ECHI) to provide summary measures of disability (i.e., activity limitation), chronic morbidity and perceived health. Therefore the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), composed of 3 general questions covering these dimensions, has been introduced into the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) to improve the comparability of health expectancies between countries.\* In addition life expectancy without long term activity limitation, based on the disability question, was selected in 2004 to be one of the structural indicators for assessing the EU strategic goals (Lisbon strategy) under the name of “Healthy Life Years” (HLY).

Further details on the MEHM, the European surveys and health expectancy calculation and interpretation can be found on [www.eurohex.eu](http://www.eurohex.eu).

### What is in this report?

This report is produced by the European Health and Life Expectancy Information System (EHLEIS) as part of a country series. In each report we present:

- Life expectancies and Healthy Life Years (HLY) at age 65 for the country of interest and for the overall 28 European Union member states (EU28), using the SILC question on long term health related disability, known as the GALI (Global Activity Limitation Indicator), from 2004 to 2013. The wording of the question has been revised in 2008.
- Prevalence of activity limitation in the country of interest and in the European Union based on the GALI question by sex and age group;
- Health expectancies based on the two additional dimensions of health (chronic morbidity and self-perceived health) for the country of interest, based on SILC 2013;
- Life expectancy and HLY at age 65 in the member states of European Union in 2008 and 2013, by gender.

#### References

Jagger C., Gillies C., Moscone F., Cambois E., Van Oyen H., Nusselder W., Robine J.-M., EHLEIS Team. Inequalities in healthy life years in the 25 countries of the European Union in 2005: a cross-national meta-regression analysis. *The Lancet*. 2008;372(9656) 2124-2131  
Robine J.-M., Jagger C., Mathers C.D., Crimmins E.M., Suzman R.M., Eds. *Determining health expectancies*. Chichester UK: Wiley, 2003.  
Sullivan D.F. *A single index of mortality and morbidity*. HSMHA Health Reports 1971;86:347-354.  
World Health Organization. *The uses of epidemiology in the study of the elderly: Report of a WHO Scientific Group on the Epidemiology of Aging*. Geneva: WHO, 1984 (Technical Report Series 706).

\* Before the revision of 2008, the translations of the module used in some countries were not optimum (See Eurostat-EU Task Force on Health Expectancies common statement about the SILC data quality). This revision is being evaluated.

## Life expectancy (LE) and Healthy Life Years (HLY) at age 65 for Belgium and the European Union (EU28) based on SILC (2004-2013)

### Key points:

Belgian life expectancy (LE) at age 65 has increased by 1.2 years for women and 1.3 years for men over the period 2004-2013. By 2013 LE was almost similar to the EU28 average for women (21.3) and for men (17.9).

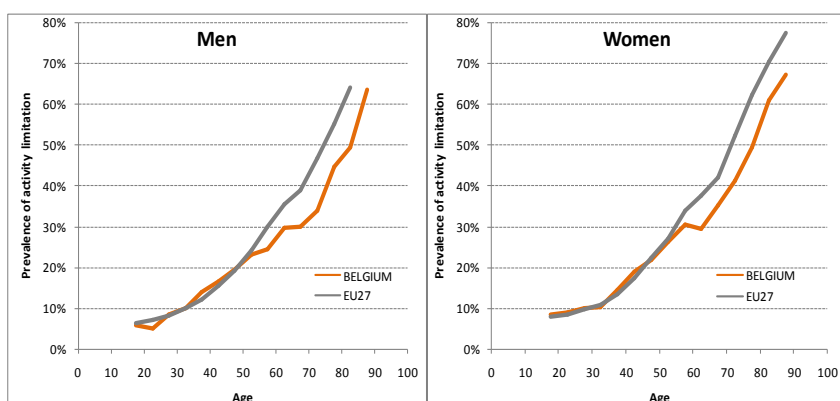
The new HLY series, initiated in 2004 with the SILC data, shows values for Belgium being in 2013 above the EU28 average (8.6 for women and 8.5 for men) by 2.3 years for women and men.

In 2013 women and men at age 65 can expect to spend 51% and 61% of their life without *self-reported long-term activity limitations* respectively. HLY decreased slightly for women and increased slightly for men between 2012 and 2013.

Note that the wording of the GALI question was slightly changed in Belgium in 2005 to better reflect the EU standard.



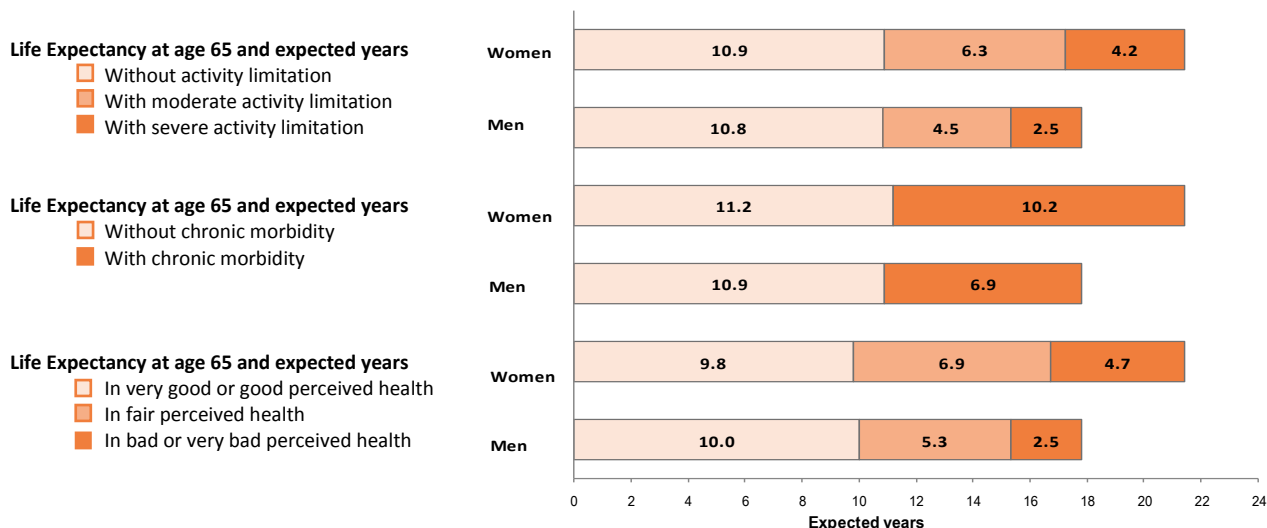
## Prevalence of activity limitation in Belgium and in the European Union (EU27) based on the GALI question, by sex and age group (SILC, Mean 2011-2013)



Reports of limitation in usual activities strongly increase with age in the European Union and women systematically report slightly more activity limitation than men. Compared to the mean trajectory by age, observed in the European Union in the 3 years (2011-2013), Belgium tends to display same prevalence rates of activity limitation before the age of 50 years for men and 45 years for women and lower prevalence rates after this age for both sexes.

These results should be interpreted with caution as sample sizes in the SILC survey vary remarkably; for instance in 2013 they ranged from 5429 in Denmark to 38,039 in Italy. In 2013, the sample size for Belgium comprised 6025 women and 5686 men aged 16 years and over.

## Life and health expectancies at age 65 based on activity limitation (Healthy Life Years), chronic morbidity and perceived health for Belgium (Health data from SILC 2013)



### Key points:

In 2013, LE at age 65 in Belgium was 21.4 years for women and 17.8 years for men.

Based on the SILC 2013, at age 65, women spent 10.9 years (51% of their remaining life) without activity limitation (corresponding to Healthy Life Years (HLY)), 6.3 years (29%) with moderate activity limitation and 4.2 years (20%) with severe activity limitation.\*

Men of the same age spent 10.8 years (61% of their remaining life) without activity limitation compared to 4.5 years (25%) with moderate activity limitation and 2.5 years (14%) with severe activity limitation.\*

Although the total number of years lived by men were less than those for women, for all health expectancies, the years of life spent in positive health were similar for men and women. Therefore, compared to men, women spent a larger proportion of their life in ill health and these years of ill health were more likely to be years with severe health problems.

These results should be interpreted cautiously given the lack of the institutional population, such as people living in nursing homes.

\* These may not sum to Life Expectancy due to rounding

## Publications and reports on health expectancies for Belgium

● Berger N., Charafeddine R., Tafforeau J., Van Oyen H. Espérances de vie en bonne santé par région et par niveau socio-économique en Belgique. WIV-ISP, Direction Opérationnelle Santé Publique et Surveillance, 2012: Bruxelles, N° de dépôt légal/2012/2505/44.

● Van Oyen H., Charafeddine R., Deboosere P., Cox B., Lorant V., Nusselder W., & Demarest S. Contribution of mortality and disability to the secular trend in health inequality at the turn of century in Belgium. *Eur J of Public Health*. 2011, 21(6):781-787.

● Charafeddine R., Gadeyne S., Deboosere P., Berger N., Demarest S., Van Oyen H. Social inequalities in Healthy Life Expectancy. Alternative methods of estimation in the absence of the national census. WIV-ISP, Direction Opérationnelle Santé Publique et Surveillance, 2011: Bruxelles, N° de dépôt légal/2011/2505/41.

● Van Oyen H., Charafeddine R., Deboosere P., Cox B., Lorant V., Demarest S. The evolution of social inequality in health

expectancy. In: Van Oyen H., Deboosere P., Lorant V., Charafeddine R (Eds). *Social inequality in health in Belgium*. Series Society and Future (In Dutch: Reeks: Samenleving en Toekomst). Federaal Wetenschapsbeleid. Academia Press, Chapter 3: 27-43, Gent, 2011.

● Van Oyen H., Cox B., Demarest S., Deboosere P., Lorant V. Trends in health expectancy indicators in the older adult population in Belgium between 1997 and 2004. *Eur J Ageing*. 2008 Jun;5(2):137-146.

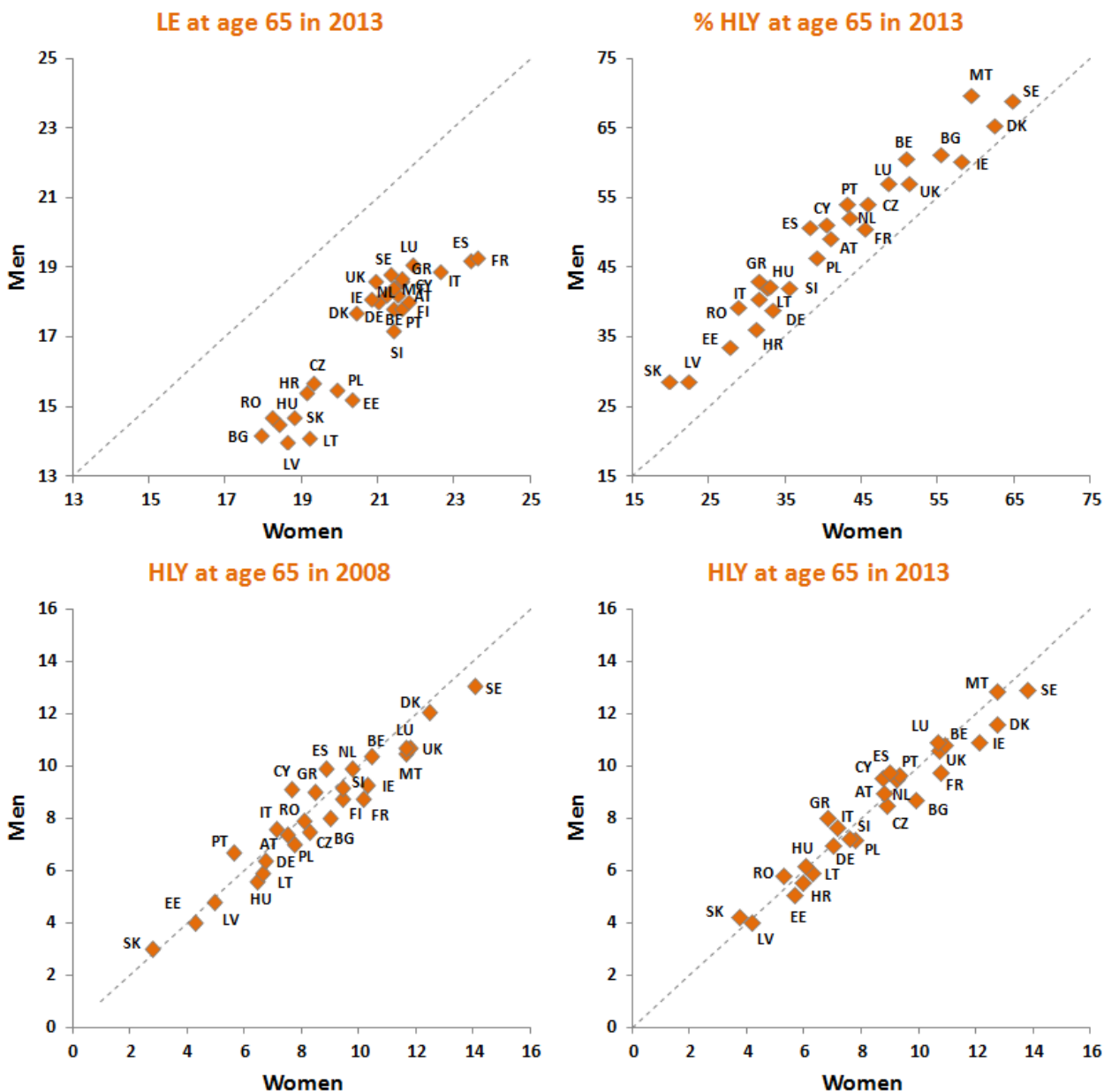
● Cox B., Van Oyen H., Cambois E., Jagger C., Le Roy S., Robine JM, Romieu I. The reliability of the Minimal European Health Module. *Int J Public Health*. 2009 (54): 55-60.

**Life expectancy (LE) and healthy life years (HLY) at age 65 in the member states (MS) of the European Union (EU) in 2008 and 2013: Correlation between genders** (Health data from SILC 2008 and 2013)

In 2013, LE at age 65 varies by 9,7years in the EU from 13.9 years for men in Latvia to 23.6 years for women in France. In each MS, LE for women is always higher than for men – around 3.4 years on average.

The proportion of LE free of activity limitation (corresponding to HLY) varies by country from 19.8% to 68.9%. Even ignoring potential outliers there still appears to be considerable cross-national variation.

Men and women live about the same amount of time without activity limitations. Next to the 7 MS where the number of HLY was already slightly larger for men than for women in 2008, a slightly larger HLY in men is observed in an additional 5 MS in 2013.



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