1.1 Patients who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to get an appointment with a GP (% of respondents asking an appointment in past year, HIS) (A-16)

1.1.1 Documentation sheet

Description	**Primary indicator** Patients who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to get an appointment with a GP (% of respondents aged 15 years and older having consulted a GP in the past year) **Secondary indicators** (1) Patients who experienced the waiting time to get an appointment with GP as a problem (% of respondents aged 15 years and older having consulted a GP in the past year) (2) GPs who refuse new patients (%)
Calculation	**Primary indicator** Numerator: Number of patients, aged 15 years and over, having consulted a GP in the past year and answering to have a waiting time of one day or more to get an appointment with a GP (= sum of individuals answering "Next day" + "Couple of days" + "Just less than a week" + "Between 1 week and 2 weeks" + "More than 2 weeks") Denominator: Number of patients aged 15 years and over having consulted a GP in the past year **Secondary indicator (1)** Numerator: Number of patients, aged 15 years and over, having consulted a GP in the past year and answering to have experienced the waiting time for a GP as a problem Denominator: Number of patients aged 15 years and over having consulted a GP in the past year **Secondary indicator (2)** Numerator: GPs who refuse new patients Denominator: Number of GPs
Rationale	Assessing waiting times is one way to evaluate whether health services distribution is adequate. More and more GPs in Belgium do not accept new patients as they reached the maximum number of patients they can treat. Accessibility of GPs has become an area of concern.
Data source	**Primary indicator** Health Interview Survey (HIS) conducted by Sciensano: Indicator PE02_2, part of 'Patient experiences'.

Secondary indicator (1)

Health Interview Survey (HIS) conducted by Sciensano: Indicator PE03_2, part of 'Patient experiences'

Secondary indicator (2)

Rapport: analyse tijdsbesteding huisartsen. IM Associates. Study commissioned by FPS Public Health (2023) [1]

Technical definitions	**Primary indicator and secondary indicator (1)** The concerned questions in HIS are part of the individual questionnaire. The indicators on waiting time only concern consultations at the cabinet of the GP. Home visits are not in scope. The indicators on waiting time are not relevant for telephonic consultations. The questions were posed to persons aged 15 years or older: "Earlier during this interview you have indicated that during the past 12 months you have consulted a GP. I will now ask some questions about your patient experiences during the last consultation with a GP. Beware, we only consider consultations in the GP's office and consultations by telephone in Belgium. Home visits are not considered. Can you describe your last type of consultation?" 1. Consultation with general practitioner/family physician at a GP's office 2. Telephone consultation by a GP 3. During the past 12 months I had no consultation with a GP at his office and no telephone consultation (in Belgium). 9. Don't know -1. No answer In case the answer is 2. (telephone consultation) or 3. (no consultation) then the following question on waiting time is not posed. "How quickly did you get an appointment to see this doctor?" (Open question with immediate (re)coding by interviewer into days) 1. 0 days (= same day) 2. 1 day (= next day) 3. 2 to 5 days (= couple of days) 4. 6 to 7 days (= just less than a week) 5. 8 to 14 days (= more than 1 week) 6. 15 to 30 days (= more than 2 weeks) 7. 31 to 60 days (= more than 1 month) 8. 61 to 90 days (= more than 2 months) 9. 91 days or longer (= more than 3 months)

10. I did not make an appointment, I went directly to the doctor

11. The appointment was already made during the previous consultation

99. Don't know

-1. No answer

"Was the time you waited for the appointment a problem for you?"

1. Yes

2. No

9. Don't know

-1. No answer

Sampling frame: The HIS is addressed to all persons residing in the country, without restrictions as to their nationality, age or legal status. The most complete sampling frame to reach this target population is the National Register. People who are not registered in the National Register, such as the homeless or illegal immigrants, can therefore not be selected for participation in the survey. For pragmatic reasons, a number of categories of persons were excluded from the sample: persons residing (and registered) in a prison or religious community with more than 8 persons and residents of an institution with the exception of residents of a rest home or a rest and care home. [2]

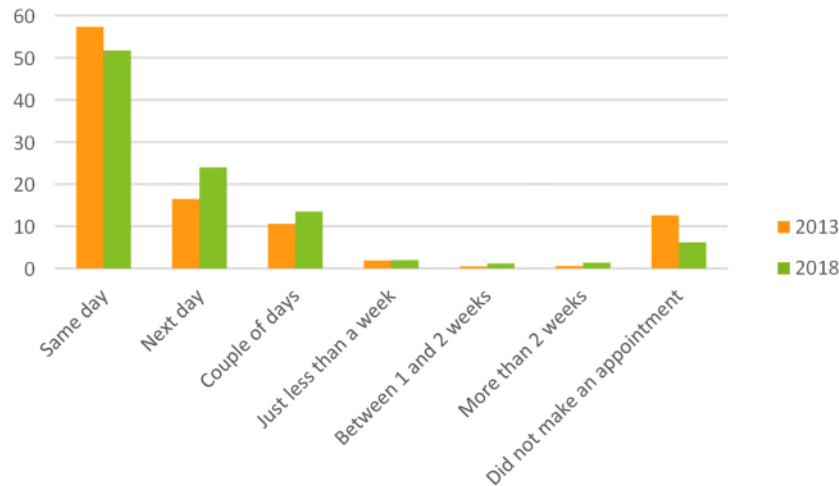|	
International comparability	
Limitations	
Dimension	Accessibility – Health services distribution
Related indicators	
Reviewers	Rana Charafeddine (Sciensano)

Patients who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to get an appointment with a GP / Patients who experienced the waiting time to get an appointment with GP as a problem

Belgium

Figure 1 shows the percentage of patients (aged 15 years and over) according to waiting time to see a GP (in 2013 and 2018) in Belgium. 42% of patients had a waiting time of one day or more in 2018, compared to 30% in 2013.

Figure 1: Waiting time to see the GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP in past year) (2013/2018)
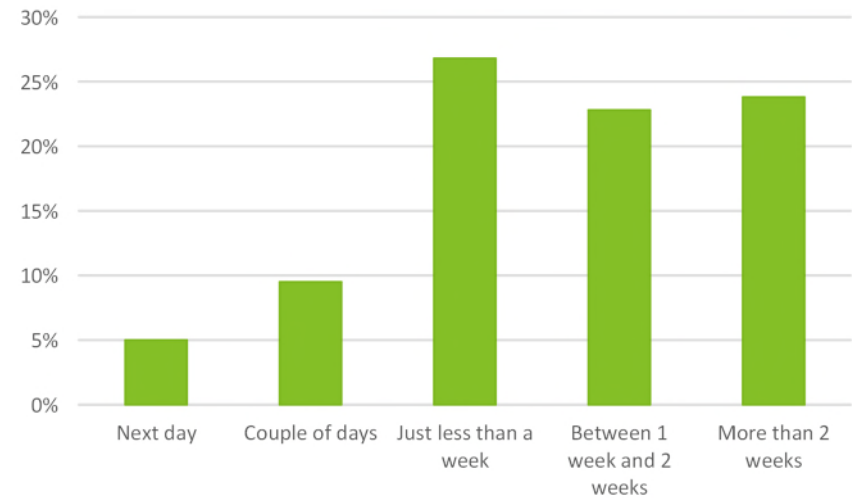

Source: Based on HIS (2013-2018)

In 2018 3.9% of the patients in Belgium had a problem with the waiting time for making an appointment with the GP.

The percentage patients that had a problem with the waiting time for making an appointment with a GP correlates with the waiting time. In case the waiting time is only one or a couple of days, less than 10% of the patients perceives the waiting time as problematic. In case the waiting time reaches just less than a week or more, 25% of patients perceives this as problematic (weighted average calculated over the population in 'just less than a week', '1-2 weeks', and '>2 weeks') (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who had a problem with the waiting time to get an appointment to see the GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP in past year) – analysis by waiting time (2018)

Source: based on HIS (2018)

Analysis by demographic characteristics and socio-economic status

We analysed whether there are differences according to gender, age category or income quintile for the percentage of patients who had a waiting time of one day or more to see a GP as reported in 2018. These data are displayed in Table 1. We see that the people in the age categories 55-64 and 75+ are slightly more affected by long waiting times (48%), compared to the other age groups. There is no clear relationship with income level.

Table 1: Patients who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to get an appointment with a GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP in past year) – analysis by gender, age category and income quintile (2018) – HIS
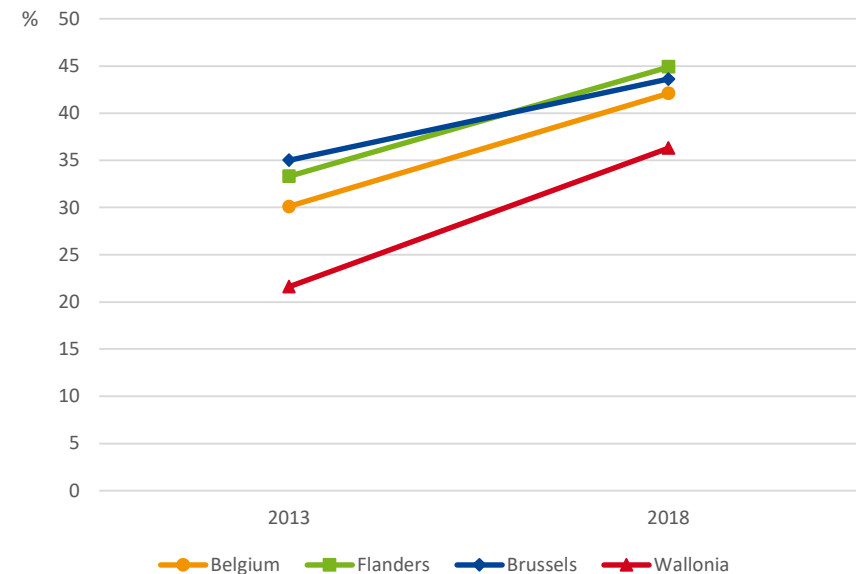
		% of respondents
Belgium		
Gender	Males	42.6
	Females	41.7
Age category	15-24	37.9
	25-34	36.3
	35-44	37.9
	45-54	42.8
	55-64	48.4
	65-74	43.7
	75 or over	48.0
Income levels	First quintile	39.5
	Second quintile	44.2
	Third quintile	46.2
	Fourth quintile	39.0
	Fifth quintile	42.0

Source: Based on HIS (2018)

Regional comparison

In all regions, the percentage of patients who had a waiting time of one day or more to see a GP is slightly higher in 2018 than in 2013. In Flanders, the percentage is highest (45% in 2018). In Brussels it reaches 44% in 2018. In Wallonia the percentage is lowest (36% in 2018).
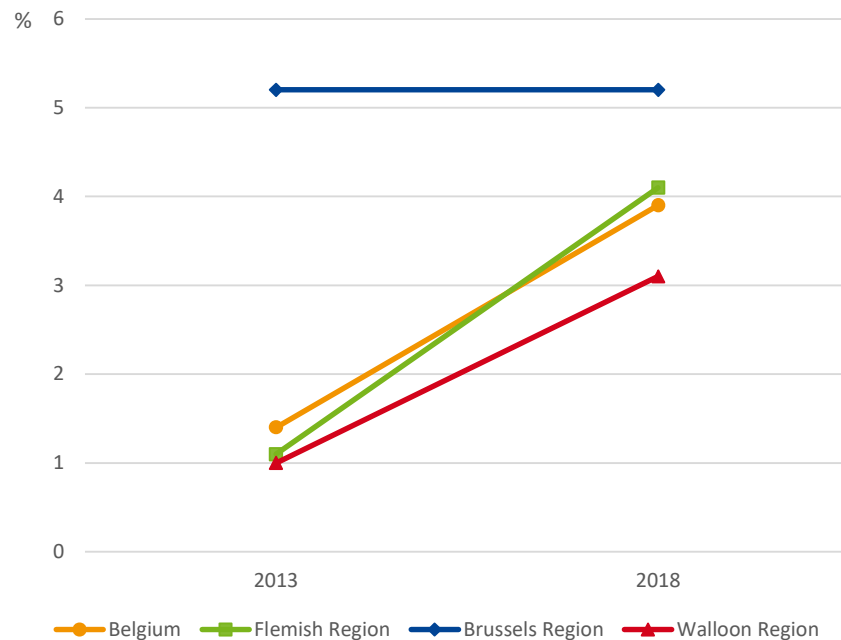
Figure 3: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to see a GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP) (2013/2018)

Source: HIS (2013-2018)

In Brussels the percentage of patients who had a problem with the waiting time to get an appointment with the GP is highest with 5.2% in 2018. In Wallonia, the percentage is lowest with 3.1%. Compared to 2013, the percentage has increased in Flanders and Wallonia but remained stable in Brussels.
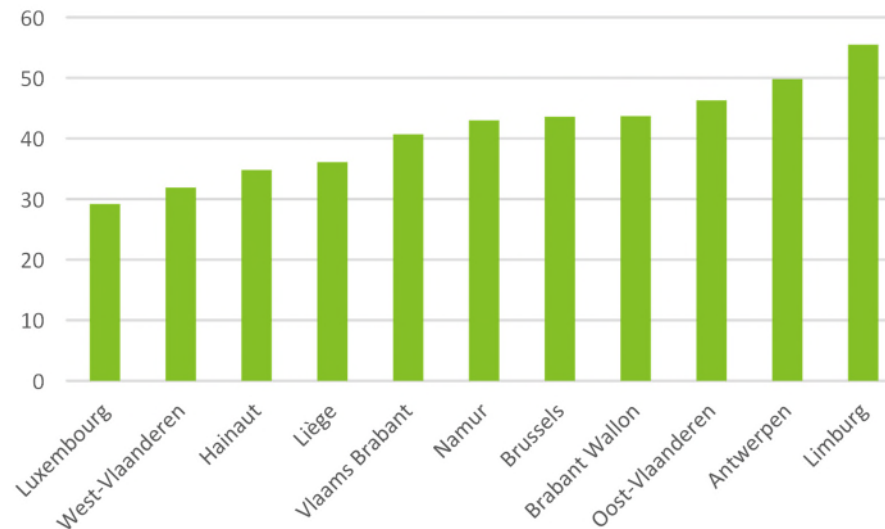
Figure 4: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who had a problem with the waiting time to get an appointment to see the GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP) (2013/2018)

Source: Based on HIS (2013-2018)

The percentage of patients that had a waiting time of one day or more to see a GP is highest in the provinces of Limburg and Antwerpen and lowest in the province of Luxembourg and West-Vlaanderen (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who experienced a waiting time of one day or more to see a GP (% of respondents who consulted a GP) (2018) – analysis by province

Source: Based on HIS (2018)

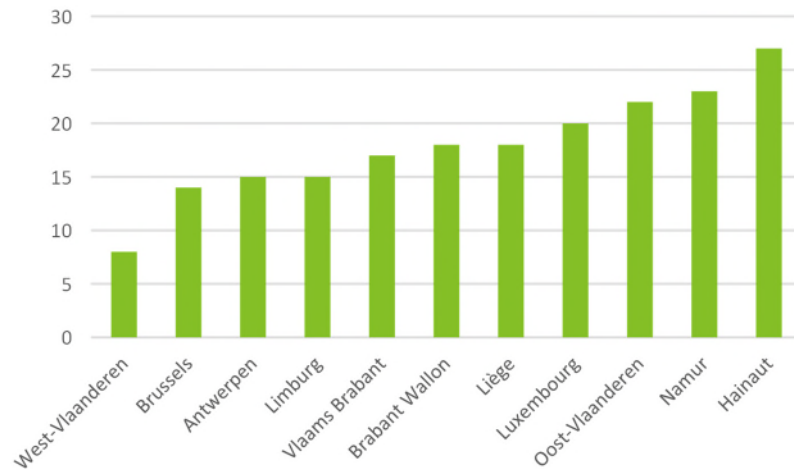GPs who refuse new patients

Belgium

According to a survey of 2023, 17% of GPs refuses new patients.[1] The majority of GPs (58%) accepts new patients only under certain conditions. Only 25% of GPs accepts new patients voluntarily and without conditions.

Regional comparison

Figure 6 shows the percentage GPs who refuse new patients by province in 2023. The problem is smallest in West-Vlaanderen (8%) and largest in Hainaut (27%).

Source: IM Associates, study commissioned by FPS Public Health (2023) [1]

Key points

- **In 2018 42% of the patients asking for an appointment with a GP reported to have a waiting time of one day or more to see the GP, compared to 30% in 2013.**

- **In case the waiting time reaches just less than a week or more, 25% of patients perceived this as problematic in 2018.**

- **In 2023 17% of GPs refuses new patients. The refusal of new patients is largest in the provinces Hainaut and Namur and lowest in West-Vlaanderen.**

References

1. IM Associates. Rapport: analyse tijdsbesteding huisartsen. In opdracht van de Minister van Volksgezondheid en de Federale Overheidsdienst Volksgezondheid, Veiligheid van de Voedselketen en Leefmilieu [Web page].2023. Available from: https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpsheal th_theme_file/20230417_nl_im_associates_- _rapport_tijdsindeling_huisartsen.pdf

2. Demarest S., Berete F., Charafeddine R., J. VdH. Methodologie. Gezondheidsenquête 2018 [Web page].2019. Available from: https://www.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/method_nl_2018.pdf