

# Country profile 2026: Belgium

## Introduction

As shown in the [Digital Decade 2025: Country reports](#), Belgium’s digital landscape in 2025 is characterised by strong technological adoption among businesses and advanced connectivity, though it faces some structural challenges in infrastructure and workforce diversity. Its small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector leads the EU, with 83.7% achieving basic digital intensity, supported by a sharp rise in AI adoption to 24.7% and high use of cloud and data analytics. 59.4% of adults possess basic digital skills, though large divides persist across education and age. Despite strong enterprise investment in training (36.8%), low female participation and ICT specialist shortages remain. According to the [State of the Digital Decade Eurobarometer 2025](#), public sentiment is largely positive, with 72% believing digitalisation simplifies daily life, although 92% favour urgent action against cyberbullying and child-related online harms.

## BIK policies

### Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks describe the overarching goals that shape policies for a better internet for kids.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Policy priority	X			
Integrated policy		X		
Influence of the BIK+ strategy		X		
Recognition of children's rights	X			

Table 1: Policy frameworks - Belgium

- ***This topic is comprehensively*** addressed in national/regional laws, regulations and policies.
- ***There are separate, dedicated policies*** which address the topic of children and the digital environment.
- ***The BIK+ strategy is an important influence*** on policy development on children and the digital environment.
- ***National/regional policies and policy documents*** explicitly recognise children's rights in the digital environment.

### **Key developments and policy frameworks**

- In December 2025, the Flemish Government approved the action plan "Veilig Online" (Safe Online). This plan explicitly adopts the BIK+ philosophy by moving beyond simple restrictions.
- In May 2025, Mediawijs (the Flemish knowledge centre) published a new **Vision Paper on Children and Social Media**, co-created with stakeholders. It focuses on strengthening the "digital triangle" (child-parent-teacher).
- In 2025, the Belgian Children's Rights Commissioner (Kinderrechtencommissariaat) published a landmark advice, "**Children have a right to a safe digital world**", developed through structured consultation with children and youth.
- The updated **National Cybersecurity Strategy** (October 2025) includes specific policy chapters dedicated to protecting vulnerable groups, including minors.
- In 2025, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media (Flanders), in collaboration with Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten (KeKi) and Mediawijs, launched a **child-friendly version of General Comment No. 25**.

### **Policy design**

Policy design asks whether evidence and research support BIK-related policies and whether systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating those policies.

High

Medium

Low

Not present

Regular data collection	X
Data on risks, harms, well-being	X
Information systems	X
National research fund	X
Monitoring and evaluation	X

Table 2: Policy design - Belgium

- **Quantitative data on some aspects** of children’s digital activity is collected regularly as part of broader surveys.
- **Some but not all aspects of children’s experiences** of risks, harms and digital well-being are included in regular surveys.
- **Systems are in place at the government level** to gather information on children and the digital environment.
- **There is a dedicated long-term research fund**/research programme on children and the digital environment.
- **Policies are regularly monitored and evaluated**, but not always systematically.

### Key national research studies:

- In May 2024, the 9th edition of the [Apestaartjaren](#) report was published. This is the most comprehensive survey in Belgium, reaching over 7,000 children (ages 6–18). It is conducted biennially by Mediawijs, Mediaraven, and Ghent University. The latest edition included specific focus areas on AI usage, digital well-being (digital stress), and the impact of algorithms, providing the evidence base for the new Flemish "Safe Online" action plan.
- In 2024-2025, the "[Baromètre de l'inclusion numérique](#)" (King Baudouin Foundation) provided significant data on digital inequalities affecting families and youth in Wallonia and Brussels.

- Research by the [Belgian Safer Internet Centre](#) (Child Focus) in early 2025, specifically via the [CyberSquad initiative](#), provided qualitative insights into how youth experience "algorithmic pressure" and the "fear of missing out" (FOMO). This data led to the launch of the "[What's in my algorithm](#)" campaign (December 2025).
- FWO (Research Foundation Flanders) launched a specific, dedicated fund in 2024-2025 called the [JEZ! Research Projects](#) which specifically support fundamental scientific research on youth development in the digital age, including psychosocial impacts and digital participation.
- Belgium has participated in the new wave of [EU Kids Online](#) with data collected in 2025.

## Policy governance

Policy governance examines how policies are coordinated at the governmental level, whether other implementation bodies are involved in their delivery and coordination.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Lead ministry for policy development		X		
National coordination body		X		
National action plan or strategy	X			

*Table 3: Policy governance – Belgium*

- **Policy development sits across different ministries** with leadership officially distributed according to the area of specialisation.
- **Coordination occurs across relevant departments** and stakeholders through more informal arrangements.
- **There is a defined national action plan** on children and the digital environment.

## Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement enquires how different stakeholders can participate in policy development.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Stakeholder forum		X		
Public consultation on BIK topics		X		
Youth involvement in policy		X		

*Table 4: Stakeholder involvement - Belgium*

- **Stakeholders are involved through various existing groups or platforms across different government branches.** While opportunities for engagement exist, they are not centrally coordinated, and stakeholder participation may vary in consistency or influence.
- **The public is consulted during the development of new BIK policies.** While engagement is structured and meaningful, it is event-driven and does not occur outside of major policy formulation efforts.
- **Children are listened to directly** in the policy development process but are not formally involved in decision-making.

## Stakeholder mechanisms

- The primary multi-stakeholder platform in Belgium remains the [Belgian Safer Internet Centre](#) (BetterNet), coordinated by Child Focus. It brings together government/public agencies [Mediawijs](#) (Flanders) and [Conseil Supérieur de L'éducation aux Médias \(CSEM\)](#) (Wallonia); civil society – Child Focus and [Média Animation](#). It remains the only platform where federal police/justice authorities, regional media centres, and civil society (like Child Focus and Mediawijs) meet regularly to align their BIK+ strategies. While highly effective, this hub operates as a partnership rather than a government-mandated "task force" with executive powers over all ministries.

- The most significant recent development in terms of governance is the full operationalisation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) Board in 2025. Under the [Cooperation Agreement of May 3, 2024](#), the [Belgian Institute for Postal Services and Telecommunications \(BIPT\)](#) (federal level) acts as the central coordinator (DSC) for a board that includes the regional media regulators (VRM, CSA, Medienrat). This board ensures a formal, systematic channel for enforcing minor protection rules on digital platforms. However, its mandate is primarily regulatory and legal, rather than a broad BIK+ steering committee for education and empowerment.

## BIK+ actions

### Pillar 1 – Safe digital experiences

Actions to promote a safe, age-appropriate digital environment that respects children’s best interests.

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Content rating systems for online/video games	X			
DSC measures protection of minors	X			
DSC-SIC working relationship	X			
Definition of harmful online content	X			
Complaints handling mechanism	X			
Intimate image abuse laws	X			
Cyberbullying laws	X			
Age verification requirements	X			
Digital wallet for minors		X		
EU harmonised age verification		X		

Laws on online marketing	X
Protecting mental health and well-being	X

*Table 5: Safe digital experiences - Belgium*

## Implementing EU laws

- Belgium uses the [Pan-European Game Information \(PEGI\)](#) system as its formal framework for the rating and classification of video games. Although there is no specific "Belgian Rating Act" that mandates PEGI for all software, its implementation is enforced through a combination of consumer protection laws, industry contracts, and gambling regulations. The [FPS Economy](#) (Federal Public Service Economy) oversees consumer protection and ensures that games sold on the Belgian market provide consumers with transparent information.
- The [BIPT](#), as the Belgian Digital Services Coordinator (DSC), has operationalised the national framework for minor protection under the Digital Services Act (DSA) through several concrete actions in late 2024 and throughout 2025. It is an active member of [Working Group 6](#) (Protection of Minors) within the [European Board for Digital Services](#) and contributed to the development of "common investigatory tools" to assess whether platforms are meeting the high standards of privacy, safety, and security required for minors. Child Focus and/Unia VMRI were designated as the first [Belgian Trusted Flaggers](#).
- In October 2025, the BIPT supported the Commission's formal requests to platforms like YouTube and Snapchat to assess their measures against addictive design and their age verification protocols.

## Addressing online harms

- The December 2025 action plan "[Veilig Online](#)" (Safe Online) introduced more granular classifications of harmful practices that platforms must mitigate. These include "infinite scroll", "autoplay", and "push notifications" as harmful mechanisms for minors. Deepnudes (AI-generated non-consensual imagery) and doxing are also formally

categorised as harmful online practices requiring specific prosecutorial and preventive focus.

- For sector-specific risks, the [Belgian Gaming Commission](#) maintains a strict classification of "harmful" [simulated gambling in video games](#) (loot boxes), which can result in such content being classified as illegal games of chance.
- In the French Community, the Conseil Supérieur de L'éducation aux Médias (CSEM) published an updated "[Media Literacy Framework](#)" in 2024-2025, which provides educators and parents with a classification of "risky" content types, including commercial manipulation and body-image-distorting algorithms.
- As the national Digital Services Coordinator (DSC), the BIPT has launched a [formal, accessible portal](#) for users to file complaints when an online platform fails to meet its DSA obligations. The BIPT portal is designed to be the "stop-gap" for when platforms ignore notices. In 2025, the BIPT established a dedicated email address ([complaintdsa@bipt.be](mailto:complaintdsa@bipt.be)) and an online form specifically categorised to handle minor protection issues.
- As a "trusted flagger", Child Focus not only helps children submit notices to platforms but also assists them in escalating persistent issues to the BIPT or regional regulators when platform responses are inadequate.

### ***Age assurance***

- The BIPT, as the national Digital Services Coordinator, is monitoring the implementation of the EC's [Article 28 guidelines](#) (supported by the Belgian BIPT), clarifying that age verification is "appropriate and proportionate" for services whose terms exclude minors or where high risks (such as adult content) exist.
- As of 1 September 2024, the legal age for all forms of gambling (online and offline) [was raised to 21](#). Operators must use the EPIS (Excluded Persons Information System), requiring a formal identity check.
- Belgium is currently in a transitional phase where it is evolving its national [MyGov.be](#) application (launched in May 2024) to meet the full

technical specifications of the EUDI Wallet by the late 2026 deadline. Children can receive an electronic identity card (eID) with digital certificates from the age of 12 (and a Kids-ID with basic electronic functionality from age 6). The EUDI Wallet will be available to Belgian minors aged 12 and older, as they possess the "High Level of Assurance" (LoA) credentials required by the eIDAS 2.0 regulation to onboard to the wallet.

- The Belgian Digital Services Coordinator (BIPT) and Flemish Media Minister, Cielkje Van Achter, have emphasised that while age verification is necessary for adult content (pornography/gambling), they prefer a system where minors are not required to use a "generalised identification tool" for all social platforms.

### ***Supporting digital well-being***

- As of February 2024, the Digital Services Act (directly applicable in Belgium) explicitly bans dark patterns on online interfaces (Article 25). In 2025, the Belgian Digital Services Coordinator (BIPT) began active monitoring of "deceptive design", such as making it unnecessarily difficult to cancel subscriptions or using confusing "consent" buttons that exploit children's lack of experience.
- The Flemish Media Regulator updated its [Content Creator Protocol](#) in 2025. It mandates that influencers (including those targeting children) must use clear, immediate labels such as "Advertentie" or "Publiciteit" at the beginning of descriptions. Terms like #collab or #gifted are no longer considered sufficient.
- Building on the 2020 law (the [Child Influencer Act](#)), Belgium maintains strict rules on the commercial exploitation of children under 16 on social media. This includes mandatory authorisation from the Social Inspection and the requirement that a portion of the child's income be placed in a protected bank account until they reach majority.
- The Flemish action plan "[Veilig Online](#)" (December 2025) contains a dedicated pillar for Digital Well-being. It mandates that schools integrate digital well-being into their student guidance systems (CLB - Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding), treating online-related stress (FOMO (fear

of missing out), body dysmorphia) with the same clinical seriousness as offline issues.

## Pillar 2 – Digital empowerment

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Teaching online safety	X			
Digital skills training	X			
Policies on digital use in schools	X			
Adequate teacher training	X			
Non-formal online safety education	X			
Critical media literacy	X			
Creative digital skills	X			
Supports for parents	X			

Table 6: Digital empowerment - Belgium

### Digital empowerment in formal education

- Primary education: In Flanders, online safety is part of the "ICT Attainment Targets" (Eindtermen), which are cross-curricular. In 2025, new minimum targets for primary education emphasise identifying online risks and understanding privacy. In the French Community, the **FMTTN (Formation Manuelle, Technique, Technologique et Numérique)** framework, part of the "Pact for Excellence," mandates media education from the start of primary school. As of 1 September 2025, a nationwide ban on smartphones in primary schools was enacted to minimise digital distractions and bullying, shifting the focus back to intentional, teacher-led digital education.
- Secondary education: Online safety is embedded in "Citizenship" and "ICT" subjects. In 2025, the curriculum explicitly includes modules on AI ethics, deepfakes, and algorithmic awareness. In the French Community

(FWB), the platform [Pix](#) became a central tool in 2025 for students to self-assess and certify their digital skills, including a specific domain for "Protection and Security." In Flanders, the "[Digisprong](#)" project continues to provide the hardware (laptops) and the pedagogical framework to ensure online safety is practiced daily. The [Knowledge Centre Digisprong](#) updated its guidance in late 2025 to include school-wide cybersecurity support programmes.

- Following the [Decree of 13 March 2025](#), the recreational use of smartphones and connected devices (including smartwatches) is strictly prohibited in the French-speaking community in all pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. This applies from the moment students enter the school gates, including during breaks and lunch. The Flemish government implemented a tiered ban starting 1 September 2025.

### ***Digital empowerment and lifelong learning***

- Within Flanders, the December 2025 action plan "[Veilig Online](#)" specifically allocates funding to youth work organisations (such as De Ambrassade) to integrate "digital first aid" into their local chapters. This ensures that youth leaders are trained to handle issues like cyberbullying or sexting that occur during extracurricular activities.
- In Wallonia, in 2024 and 2025, the CSEM (Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation aux Médias) launched specific calls for "[non-formal media education projects](#)". These funded initiatives in youth centres (Maisons de Jeunes) focus on critical AI literacy and online self-defence.
- The [CyberSquad initiative](#), run by the Belgian SIC (Child Focus), was expanded in 2025. It operates primarily in the non-formal space (Discord, Instagram, and TikTok), where trained peer-mentors provide immediate, low-threshold support to victims of online abuse. This "youth-for-youth" model is specifically designed for marginalised teens who may be hesitant to report issues to formal authorities or teachers.
- Regarding media literacy, the Safe Online Action Plan explicitly prioritises "algorithmic awareness" and AI literacy. It aims to make critical media literacy a "basic skill for every Flemish person", with specific funding for

projects that help children recognise deepfakes and AI-driven misinformation.

- The BELUX hub of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) has expanded [Idoubt.eu](https://www.idoubt.eu), a portal specifically designed to guide young users through the "flow of news" and provide verified fact-checks on viral trends.
- Regarding digital creativity, the [Kids AI Coding initiative](#) which took place across several Belgian cities in October 2025, specifically encourages children aged 9–13 to use AI tools - not just as passive consumers but as creators - to build their own apps, games, and digital art projects. During Digital Week 2025, locations like Cityfab and [SOMA](#) hosted workshops for children aged 4 to 12. These programmes merge digital arts with physical crafts through 3D design, robotics, and electronic prototyping.

### Pillar 3 – Active participation, respecting children’s rights

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Promoting civic engagement	X			
Promoting children's rights	X			
Child-friendly policy documents	X			
Addressing digital inequalities	X			
Positive digital content	X			

*Table 7: Active participation, respecting rights - Belgium*

#### Active participation

- Belgium has extended voting rights for European elections to 16- and 17-year-olds. Following a [2024 Constitutional Court ruling](#), participation for this age group is now compulsory, aligning their civic duties with adults.

- A mandatory impact assessment – the "Youth Test" (JKER) – for all new Belgian legislation (including digital and environmental laws) to ensure youth interests are protected.
- In September 2025, the [Youth Impact Forum](#) (Brussels) promoted institutionalised participation, specifically showcasing participatory budgeting models where young people directly decide on local government fund allocations.

### ***Promoting awareness of children's rights***

- In the [2024–2025 Annual Report](#), the Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner ([Kinderrechtencommissariaat](#)) explicitly addressed the "digital economy" as a rights issue. A key advisory published on 28 October 2025, called for a more robust legal framework to protect minor influencers, framing their activities not just as labour, but as a potential infringement on their rights to privacy and protection from commercial exploitation.
- In 2025, the [National Commission on the Rights of the Child](#) (NCRC) acted as a central hub for over 90 organisations to align national policy with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. It has focused on ensuring that the "digital by default" transition of public services (like the MyGov.be wallet) does not exclude vulnerable children, thereby upholding the right to non-discrimination.
- In November and December 2025, Belgium (alongside Poland and Slovenia) hosted [a series of child-led awareness sessions](#) in partnership with the Council of Europe. These sessions focused on children's rights when in contact with the law - including digital evidence and online privacy in judicial proceedings - ensuring that children's voices are central to the "digitalisation of justice."

### ***Addressing digital inequalities***

- The [Promoting Equality and Non-Discrimination in Youth Work](#) project held empowerment sessions in Brussels specifically for marginalised groups, including refugees and youth with disabilities, focusing on self-advocacy and direct political participation.

- The [Digital for Youth](#) non-profit continues to be a central pillar of the Belgian strategy. By late 2025, it successfully distributed over 23,000 refurbished laptops to schools and youth organisations. The programme specifically targets youth aged 6–25 in socially vulnerable backgrounds. In 2025, Digital for Youth partnered with the King Baudouin Foundation to focus on children in foster care and refugee centres, ensuring they have personal devices for homework and social participation.
- The federal government allocated approximately €5 million to 22 large-scale projects in 2025 via [the Digital Belgium Skills Fund \(DBSF\) 2025](#). These projects focus on the socio-economic integration of vulnerable youth through advanced digital literacy training, moving beyond basic office skills to cybersecurity and data science.

### **Positive digital content**

- [MediaNest](#) (ongoing) remains the primary Flemish portal for parents and professionals to find "positive" digital tools. In 2025, it underwent a major update to include an "AI-Toolbox for Kids", which highlights creative and safe AI applications (like Scratched or Curiosity Machine) over standard commercial bots.
- [WatWat.be](#), supported by the Flemish government, acts as a high-visibility hub for teenagers. In 2025, it launched the "Positive Vibes" campaign, which uses peer-created digital content (short-form videos and podcasts) to model constructive online behaviour and creative digital expression.
- In the [Mediamenu](#) (2025 Edition), Mediawijs provided a curated "menu" of vetted digital tools and games for schools. The 2025 selection includes a new category for "ethical Ggames," promoting developers who implement privacy by design and avoid dark patterns (such as loot boxes).

## Best practices

### Example 1

#### ***AI for Youth (Initiative: digital empowerment)***

Launched in late 2025, the **AI for Youth** initiative directly addresses the "AI Gap". It focuses on 10- to 15-year-olds, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, teaching them that AI is a tool for creation rather than just consumption. Workshops cover technical basics, ethical implications, and environmental impact. AI for Youth is a public-private partnership involving Digital for Youth, Digitale Wolven, and private innovation partners (iO, Brightlab).

### Example 2

#### ***Orange Belgium: Smartphone Pass (Initiative: parental support)***

The **Smartphone Pass** project facilitates the transition to a child's first smartphone. Instead of a technical "filter", it is an interactive web platform designed for parents and children to use together. It uses gamified modules to discuss topics like cyberbullying, privacy, and screen time, culminating in a "family contract". Funding is provided by (Orange Belgium) as part of the #ForGoodConnections strategy.

### Example 3

#### ***NieuwsWijsNeuzen: Disinformation Checkpoint (Initiative: resilience)***

A highly innovative "**Factcheck Checkpoint**" for children aged 8–12. Using platforms like TikTok and Instagram, children can submit news items they doubt. Journalism students then produce "child-sized" debunking videos. It uniquely bridges the gap between academic research, professional journalism, and child-led participation. Funding is provided via Mediawijs (Flemish Knowledge Centre for Media Literacy).

## BIK+ index 2026: Belgium

The BIK+ index has been developed to provide an aggregated at-a-glance overview of the levels of implementation across the two dimensions, BIK policies and BIK+ actions, in Belgium compared to the EU27+2 average. Values are shown in per cent.

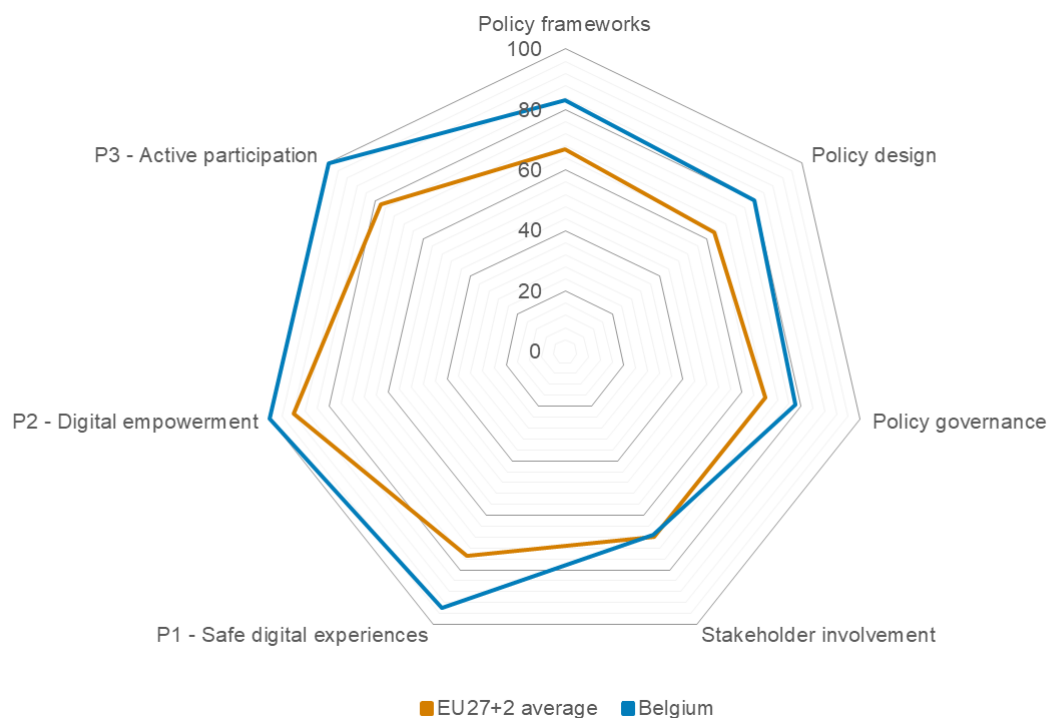


Figure 1: BIK+ index 2026: Belgium - EU27+2 average comparison