

## 1.1 Patients who experienced a waiting time of more than two weeks to get an appointment with a medical specialist (% of respondents asking an appointment in past year, HIS) (A-15)

### 1.1.1 Documentation sheet

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|--------------------|--|
| <b>Description</b> | <p><b>Primary indicator</b><br/>Patients who experienced a waiting time of more than two weeks to get an appointment with a medical specialist (% of respondents who consulted a medical specialist in past year)</p> <p><b>Secondary indicator</b><br/>Patients who experienced the waiting time to get an appointment with a specialist as a problem (% of respondents who consulted a medical specialist in past year)</p>  |
| <b>Calculation</b> | <p><b>Numerator</b><br/>Primary indicator: Number of patients, aged 15 years and over, who consulted a medical specialist in past year and experienced a waiting time of more than two weeks to get an appointment<br/>Secondary indicator: Number of patients, aged 15 years and over, who consulted a medical specialist in past year and experienced the waiting time for a specialist as a problem</p> <p><b>Denominator</b><br/>Number of patients aged 15 years and over who consulted a medical specialist in past year</p>   |
| <b>Rationale</b>   | <p>Assessing waiting times is one way to evaluate whether health services distribution is adequate. Waiting times for healthcare are not systematically registered in Belgium, so analysis of the data from the HIS provide a rare but valuable opportunity to get a view on the situation in Belgium, although the data are very general and not differentiated according to specialism. The HIS is repeated every 4-5 years. Waiting times for an appointment with a medical specialist may have further increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however the latest data available from the HIS date from 2018, so there is currently no view yet on the impact of COVID-19 on the basis of this survey.</p> |
| <b>Data source</b> | <p>Health Interview Survey (HIS) conducted by Sciensano: <a href="https://www.sciensano.be/en/projects/health-interview-survey/hisia">https://www.sciensano.be/en/projects/health-interview-survey/hisia</a></p> <p><b>Primary indicator</b><br/>Indicator PE02_3, part of 'Patient experiences'. PE02_3 is an indicator showing the distribution of medical specialist patients according to the delay to get an appointment. One of the categories is more than 2 weeks.</p> <p><b>Secondary indicator</b></p>   |

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Indicator PE03\_3, part of 'Patient experiences'.

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**Technical definitions**

The concerned questions in HIS are part of the individual questionnaire. The indicators on waiting time only concern consultations at the cabinet of the specialist. Home visits are not in scope. The indicators on waiting time are furthermore 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 specialist. I will now ask some questions about your patient experiences during the last consultation with a specialist in Belgium. Beware, contacts during a hospitalisation are not considered. Can you describe your last type of consultation?"

1. Consultation with specialist at an outpatient department of a hospital
2. Consultation with a specialist at a doctor's office
3. Telephone consultation by a specialist
4. In the past year I have not consulted a specialist in Belgium.
9. Don't know
- 1. No answer

If answer is 3. (telephone consultation) or 4. (no consultation), then the question on waiting time is not posed.

In other cases, the following question on waiting time is 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
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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 residential care or nursing home.<sup>1</sup>

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|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>International comparability</b> | Waiting times are registered in several European countries, however, there is no direct comparison to the Belgian data from HIS as methodologies differ. |
| <b>Limitations</b>                 |  |
| <b>Dimension</b>                   | Accessibility – Health services distribution   |
| <b>Related indicators</b>          | Waiting time for face to face contact with mental health center  |
| <b>Reviewers</b>                   | Rana Charafeddine (Sciensano)  |

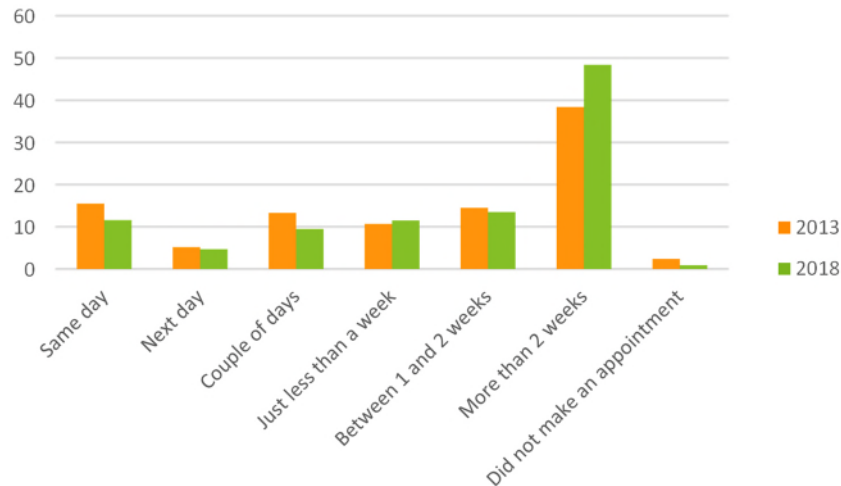
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### 1.1.2 Results

#### Belgium

According to the last data from the HIS, 48% of the patients who consulted a medical specialist in 2018 had to wait more than two weeks to get an appointment with a specialist (see Figure 1). Compared to 2013 there was an increase of 10 percentage points (38% in 2013).

**Figure 1: Waiting time to get an appointment with the specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) (2013/2018)**



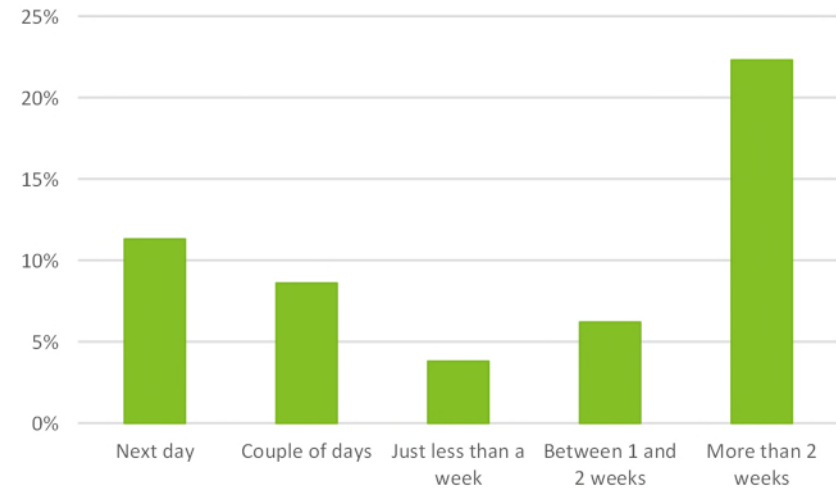
Source: Based on HIS

In 2018, 13.5% of the Belgian patients who asked an appointment with a specialist (aged 15 years and over) had a problem with the waiting time to get this appointment. In 2013, this percentage was lower: 10.2%.

The percentage patients that had a problem with the waiting time for making an appointment with a specialist correlates with the waiting time. In case the

waiting time is more than 2 weeks, 22% of the patients perceives this as problematic (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 specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment 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 more than 2 weeks to see a specialist as reported in 2018. These data are displayed in Table 1. We see that the people in the age category 75+ are the least affected by long waiting times (31.8%), compared to the other age groups. There is no clear relationship with income level.

**Table 1: Patients who experienced a waiting time of more than two weeks to get an appointment with a medical specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) – analysis by gender, age category and income quintile (2018) – HIS**

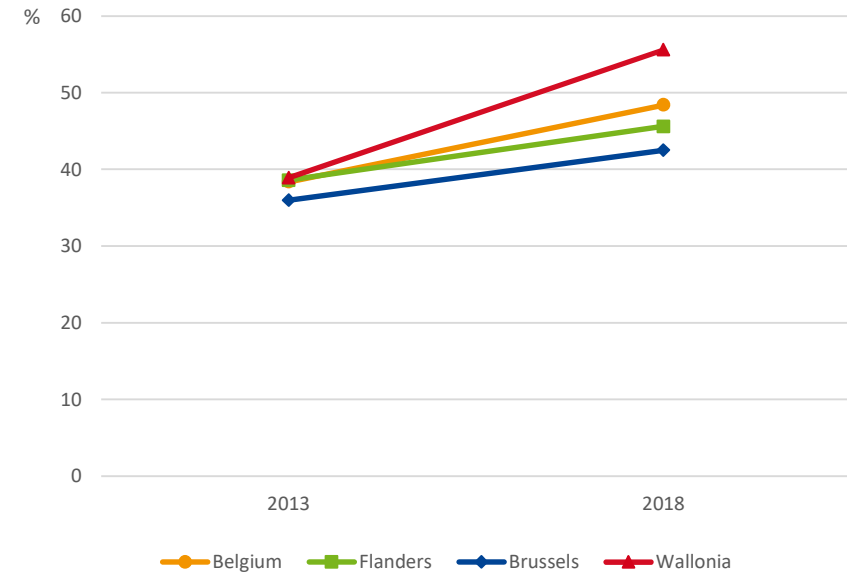
|               |                 | % of respondents |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Belgium       |                 |                  |
| Gender        | Males           | 49.6             |
|               | Females         | 47.7             |
| Age category  | 15-24           | 45               |
|               | 25-34           | 48.7             |
|               | 35-44           | 53               |
|               | 45-54           | 49.7             |
|               | 55-64           | 54.4             |
|               | 65-74           | 45.8             |
|               | 75 or over      | 31.8             |
| Income levels | First quintile  | 53               |
|               | Second quintile | 39.9             |
|               | Third quintile  | 56.4             |
|               | Fourth quintile | 47               |
|               | Fifth quintile  | 47.1             |

Source: Based on HIS

### Regional comparison

In 2018, the percentage of patients who had to wait more than two weeks to get an appointment with a medical specialist was highest in Wallonia (56%). In Brussels the percentage was lowest (43%). Flanders scores in between (46%). Confidence intervals are not available for these data.

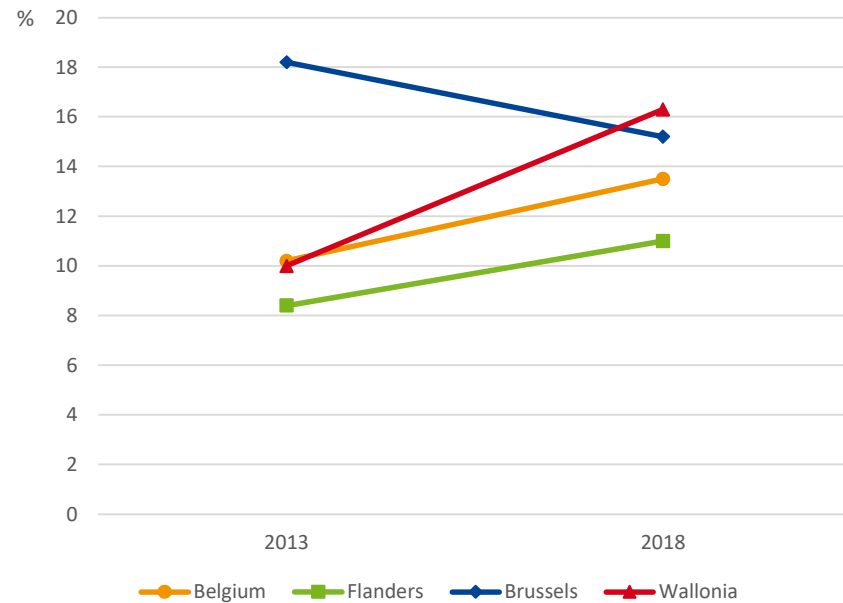
**Figure 3: Patients who experienced a waiting time of more than two weeks to get an appointment with a medical specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) (2013/2018)**



Source: Based on HIS

Compared to 2013, the percentage of patients who had a problem with the waiting time for an appointment with a medical specialist increased in all regions except for Brussels (see Figure 4).

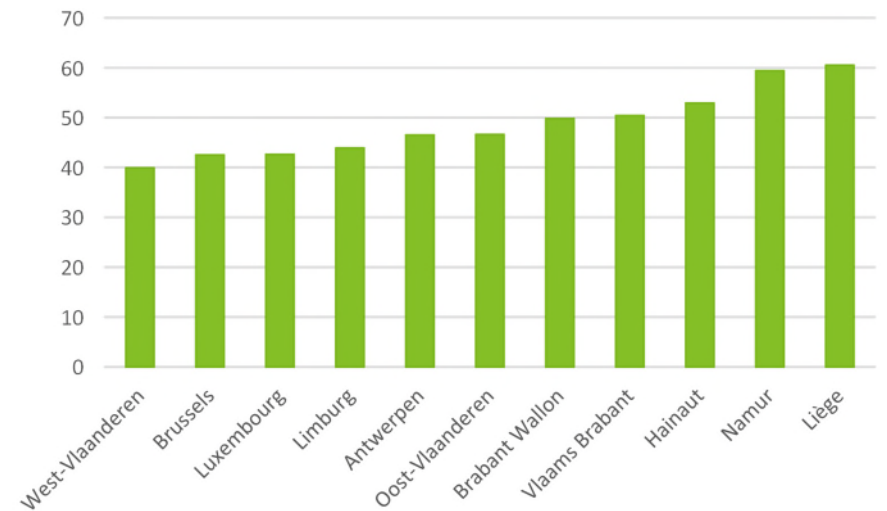
**Figure 4: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who had a problem with the waiting time to get an appointment to see the specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) (2013/2018)**



Source: Based on HIS

The percentage of patients that had a waiting time of more than 2 weeks to see a specialist is highest in the provinces of Liège and Namur and lowest in the province of West-Vlaanderen (see Figure 5). No confidence intervals are available for these data.

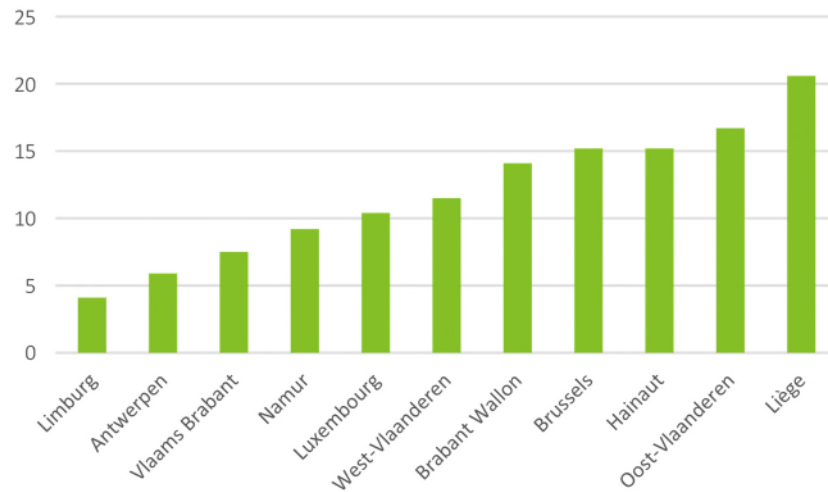
**Figure 5: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who had a waiting time of more than two weeks to see the specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) (2018) – analysis by province**



Source: Based on HIS (2018)

The percentage of patients who had a waiting time for a specialist is significantly higher in Liège than in Limburg and Antwerp (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Patients (aged 15 years and over) who had a problem with the waiting time to get an appointment to see a specialist (% of respondents aged 15 years and older asking an appointment in past year) (2018) – analysis by province**



Source: Based on HIS (2018)

### Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

As the most recent data for these indicators date from 2018, no data are available to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Key points

- Within the patients who asked for a consultation with a medical specialist, 48% reported that they had to wait more than 15 days to meet the specialist (data from 2018).
- Waiting time for a specialist consultation was considered to be a problem by 13.5% of the patients asking an appointment in 2018.

### References

1. 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](https://www.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/method_nl_2018.pdf)