



Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
52nd Session (2026)

Joint Stakeholders' submission on:
Human Rights in Belgium

Submitted by:

Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)

NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC
Piazzale M. Champagnat, 2 - 00144 Roma, Italia
<https://fmsi.ngo/en/> - fmsi@fmsi.it

The Marist Brothers – District of West-Central Europe
Schools of the Marist tradition in Saint-Hubert and Arlon

Geneva, October 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to **children's and young people's rights** in Belgium, particularly **education; public transportation; security; and quality of life and social services**. Each section conveys recommendations to the Belgium Government.

2. **Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international organization promoted by the Marist Brothers, present in 80 countries. FMSI has more than 15 years of experience working in the field of international solidarity, advocating for children's rights especially in the field of education. It works at the international level, participating in the UN human rights mechanisms in collaboration with other organizations with similar interests. It has been accredited by ECOSOC since 2011.

3. **The Marist Brothers – District of West-Central Europe:** The Marist Brothers is a religious congregation of consecrated men in the Catholic Church.¹ They are involved in the education of children and young people in schools and other educational settings. The District of West-Central Europe is an Administrative Unit within the Marist Institute, composed of several locations and personnel living and working in Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands.² The Marist Brothers currently ensure that the Marcellin Champagnat's charism remains present in the educational projects of some establishments that share the Marist tradition, and offer a welcome and listening project in Habay-la-Vieille. Their internal regulations stipulate compliance with the rules established by the Congregation and in line with those established by the Church and parliamentary commissions.

4. **Schools of the Marist tradition in Saint-Hubert and Arlon** are formal educational establishments administered by independent entities called Organizing Authority ("Pouvoir Organisateur"). Each school has its own internal regulations that explicitly mention the policy for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable persons.

5. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from youth, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Belgium. All information concerned the period from May 2021 to September 2025.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

6. Belgium was reviewed in May 2021 at the 38th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Belgium in the UPR. On that occasion, Belgium received 308 recommendations, supported 232 while noting 76.³ The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by the State in 2021.

¹ <https://champagnat.org/en/>

² <https://www.maristbrotherswce.com/>

³ Cf. "Matrix Recommendations Belgium" available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/UPR38-Belgium-Thematic-List-of-Recommendations.docx>

7. The implementation of recommendations is critical to ensure the true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, Belgium must pay particular attention to effectively follow-up those recommendations in consultation with Civil Society, both those that were accepted and those of which they took note.

8. We thank the government of Belgium for the opportunity to submit this report, as well as for its adherence to the measures proposed by the United Nations for the participation of civil society. We welcome the recommendations adopted in the last UPR, as well as the country's efforts to implement these measures. At the same time, we are also aware of the need to further elaborate on the previous recommendations, as well as to address new ones that may arise at the next session.

9. As a coalition, we would like to thank the Belgium government for its efforts to take measures to safeguard human rights, particularly of children and young people, as can be seen in the adoption of multiple recommendations.⁴ It is important to provide the necessary funding for institutions and to take effective measures that ensure the fulfilment and improvement of rights across the population, particularly among the most vulnerable.

10. We also welcome the adoption of many recommendations that are connected to the Sustainable Development Goals⁵ such as: 4 - Quality Education (5%); 5 - Gender equality (9%); 8 - Decent work and economic growth (9%); 10 - Reduced inequalities (25%); 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions (37%).

III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPICS

Methodology:

11. This report is based on the direct experiences of children, adolescents and young people, and involved several groups aged between 10 and 18. A total of 83 children and young people participated in the study (48% identified as male and 52% as female). There was a high degree of consistency in the opinions expressed by them on many of the themes. This report reflects the main issues raised by them during the fieldwork, although there were other concerns beyond those mentioned here.

Overview:

12. **Education and School System:** Belgian youth want a less stressful and more flexible learning environment. Students desire greater freedom and more hands-on, practical learning in subjects like cooking and technology, making education more relevant to real life. They also call

⁴ 35.136 (United Kingdom); 35.150 (Timor-Leste); 35.151 (Botswana); 35.152 (Bulgaria); 35.153 (Angola); 35.154 (Mozambique); 35.155 (Slovenia); 35.157 (Sudan); 35.158 (Peru); 35.177 (Mauritius); 35.179 (Belarus); 35.182 (Venezuela); 35.186 (Burkina Faso); 35.190 (Bulgaria); 35.191 (Malaysia); 35.194 (Georgia); 35.195 (Bahamas); 35.196 (Uzbekistan); 35.197 (Japan); 35.198 (Sri Lanka); 35.200 (Serbia); 35.209 (Togo); 35.211 (Argentina); 35.212 (Indonesia); 35.214 (Ireland); 35.215 (Nicaragua); 36.31 (Fiji); 36.58 (Paraguay); 36.60 (Ghana); 36.64 (Zambia)

⁵ Cf. "Infographic" available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/UPR38-Belgium-Infographic.pdf>

for improved school infrastructure and a fully free education system (including manuals and activities) to ensure equal access for all.

13. Mobility and Public Transport: Belgian youth demand a public transport system that is reliable, accessible, and affordable. They frequently complain about delays and insufficient bus frequency, especially during peak hours. A central demand is for increased bus frequency and services that run later. Critically, they advocate for free public transport—proposing it for all students or people under 18/26—to reduce financial burden, promote equity, and decrease road traffic and pollution.

14. Security and Personal Well-being: A significant concern for Belgian youth is safety in major cities and public spaces, with many feeling unsafe, particularly at night. They propose increasing the presence of well-trained police officers and installing more surveillance cameras. Beyond physical safety, they stress the need for greater psychological and emotional support within institutions like schools, advocating for more staff and dedicated psychological services. They also call for public awareness campaigns about child abuse, starting in primary schools.

15. Quality of Life and Social Services: Belgian youth are calling for a more equitable and inclusive society. They advocate for a better quality of life by demanding more and better-maintained parks and sports facilities. They also want government action to reduce the high cost of living (e.g., food and clothing) and increase financial support for families in need and the homeless. Ultimately, they seek greater freedom, equity (equal rights for all backgrounds), and a stronger voice in societal and educational decision-making.

16. Belgium protects with laws and public policies the human rights. We are aware that some of the challenges facing the government are not easy to work on, so we appreciate the efforts to improve them, now and in the future.

IV. EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SYSTEM

17. Our coalition welcomes the positive response of the Belgian government to a wide set of recommendations made by different nations during the last UPR session. These recommendations call for increased quality education, encouragement of access and reduction of inequalities, especially among vulnerable children such as migrants, refugees or children with disabilities.⁶ The recommendations also call for addressing school dropout rates.⁷ Tackling these issues effectively is a way of responding to the needs of children and young people in the country.

18. The Belgian education system, defined by its highly decentralized governance structure, where the authority for most educational policy and management rests with its linguistic communities, the Flemish Community and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB), has undergone significant structural reforms since 2019. This reform aims to reinforce and provide better support to the system.

19. The Belgian education system had to face the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative effect on academic proficiency. However, evidence suggests that Belgium's education system was disproportionately affected. According to a study cited by *The Brussels*

⁶ For example: 35.153 Angola; 35.154 Mozambique; 35.155 Slovenia; 35.157 Sudan; 35.158 Peru; 35.164 Qatar; 35.165 Sri Lanka; 35.196 Uzbekistan; 35.199 Uruguay; 35.208 Thailand; 35.209 Togo; and 35.203 Sudan.

⁷ 35.150 Timor-Leste; 35.151 Botswana; and 35.152 Bulgaria.

Times,⁸ the learning delay in Belgium was higher than in most other countries, with pupils losing about one-third of a school year, equivalent to three to four months of learning. The negative consequences of the school closures and the continuous switching between in-person and distance learning models are still noticeable in student wellbeing and academic performance today.

20. The pandemic not only disrupted student learning but also placed immense strain on the well-being of the education workforce leading to significant increases in the risk of burnout syndrome, emotional exhaustion, and a high need for recovery. Children's well-being was also negatively impacted. The UNICEF report notes that across OECD/EU countries, children are becoming less happy with their lives. This indicates a critical link between academic and mental health outcomes, reinforcing the need for policy responses that address both areas simultaneously.⁹

21. A core theme emerging from international reports is the inefficiency of public education spending in Belgium. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) analysis states that Belgium's educational outcomes are "comparable to peers but achieved at a higher cost" and identifies this "gap between spending and outcomes" as a significant source of potential efficiency gains that could be achieved through organizational reforms.¹⁰

22. A long-standing and critical challenge facing the Belgian education system is the significant gap in educational outcomes based on a student's socio-economic and migrant background. A Eurochild report identifies this as a primary concern, directly linking the problem to the "complexity of the education system, which consists of a mixture of private, public, and subsidised schools".¹¹

23. Data from PISA 2022 shows Belgium has one of the strongest associations globally between student performance (in mathematics) and Socio-Economic Status (ESCS). The difference in performance between students in the top and bottom quarters of the ESCS index is significantly large (117 PISA Score difference). This high stratification, alongside large achievement gaps for immigrant students, exacerbated by the pandemic's uneven impact, indicates that educational equity remains a stubborn, systemic issue, and represents a significant barrier to social mobility.¹²

24. **To improve the educational situation among children and young people, our coalition suggests the following recommendations:**

- a. Enhance fiscal efficiency and equity re-evaluating the use of resources to directly address the needs of at-risk students and to reduce the reliance on a complex, fragmented system that has been shown to perpetuate inequity.**

⁸ Cf. "Education delay due to Covid-19 higher in Belgium than in most other countries", published on February 3, 2023, available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/363907/education-delay-due-to-covid-19-higher-in-belgium-than-in-most-other-countries>

⁹ Cf. UNICEF "Child Well-Being in an Unpredictable World" accessed September 20, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/child-well-being-unpredictable-world>

¹⁰ Cf. International Monetary Fund (IMF) "Public Education in Belgium – Improving Outcome While Reducing Cost", accessed September 20, 2025, <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/Selected-Issues-Papers/2025/English/SIPEA2025021.ashx>

¹¹ Eurochild, "(In)visible children: Belgium - Country profile", accessed September 20, 2025, https://eurochild.org/uploads/2023/01/Belgium_Invisible-children-Eurochild-2022-report-on-children-in-need-across-Europe.pdf

¹² OECD "Education at a Glance 2025: Belgium", accessed September 20, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2025_1a3543e2-en/belgium_0fbd3865-en.html

- b. Strengthening the teaching profession providing robust professional development, effective tools that genuinely support pedagogical practice, and addressing the root causes of burnout to ensure the long-term sustainability of the profession.**
- c. Enact a Core Practical Skills Curriculum Reform to integrate a mandatory, “two-hour weekly module (e.g., first aid, cooking)” by replacing a low-efficiency course. This will increase graduate preparedness by 20% and simultaneously demonstrate a 2% reduction in administrative costs per student.**
- d. Implement a National Equity Funding Program to cover all costs (books, trips) for students in the lowest two socio-economic quintiles across all school types, aiming to decrease the PISA performance gap by 10% attributable to socio-economic background.**

V. MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

25. Belgium's mobility sector has undergone a profound transformation since 2020, driven by the federal government's commitment to the Avoid-Shift-Improve (A-S-I) strategy.¹³ Key national levers include the EUR 10 billion investment plan for rail infrastructure and service expansion, aiming to increase national train ridership by 30% by 2032.¹⁴ Concurrently, the Federal Mobility Budget (FMB) is slated to become mandatory for employers by 2026, using fiscal pressure to eliminate tax breaks for polluting company cars and steer commuters toward sustainable alternatives.¹⁵

26. However, the success of this shift in demonstrably improving the quality of life (QoL) for children and young people is hampered by three persistent challenges that the Belgian government should prioritize:

27. Air Quality and Safety Beyond City Centers: Local initiatives, such as Brussels' Good Move plan,¹⁶ have delivered quantifiable QoL improvements, reducing car traffic by 20%, lowering collision rates by a fifth, and significantly improving air quality in core areas, particularly in the central 'pentagon' district.¹⁷ Yet, the OECD highlights that high reliance on individual cars and traffic congestion persist across the wider metropolitan area.¹⁸ This enduring congestion subjects children and youth to higher levels of noise and air pollution during daily commutes, directly

¹³ Cf. Belgium - Mobility and Transport “ITS Progress Report 2020”, accessed September 30, 2025, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-06/2021_be_its_progress_report_2020.pdf

¹⁴ Cf. SNCB EMTN “Update 2023 - Base Information Memorandum”, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://www.belgiantrain.be/-/media/corporate/pdfs/sncb-emtn-update-2023-base-information-emorandum-04072023-signed.ashx?v=3b749c8571414c9d82172252f7c2097d>

¹⁵ Cf. 2. EY - Belgium “Mandatory implementation of the Federal Mobility Budget – Are you prepared?”, accessed September 30, 2025, https://www.ey.com/en_be/technical/tax/tax-alerts/2025/mandatory-implementation-of-the-federal-mobility-budget-are-you-prepared

¹⁶ Cf. Brussels Mobilty “The Good Move derivatives”, accessed October 3, 2025, <https://old-bm.irisnet.be/en/good-move/les-declinaisons-good-move>

¹⁷ Cf. ETSC “Brussels city centre reports big cuts in crashes and pollution from low traffic plan”, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://etsc.eu/brussels-city-centre-reports-big-cuts-in-crashes-and-pollution-from-low-traffic-plan/>

¹⁸ Cf. OECD “Territorial Reviews: Brussels-Capital Region, Belgium”, accessed September 30, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-territorial-reviews-brussels-capital-region-belgium_0552847b-en.html

impacting their health and limiting the availability of safe public spaces for active mobility like walking and cycling.

28. Reliability and Independence of Public Transport: The fragmentation of metropolitan governance, also known as the “Brussels paradox,” hinders effective policy coordination between regions.¹⁹ This structural challenge undermines the reliability of public transportation systems that young people depend on for independence and accessibility.²⁰ Reduced national rail punctuality (87.5% in 2023)²¹ and staff shortages²² weaken the incentive for modal shift, making public transportation less dependable for school and leisure.

29. Linking Mobility to Social Equity: The policy must fully leverage mechanisms that address the high cost of living. The Federal Mobility Budget’s Pillar 2 offers full tax exemption not only for public transport but also for housing costs (rent or mortgage payments).²³ High housing costs often force families into long, detrimental commutes. By promoting and maximizing this specific tax-exempt benefit, the government can effectively reduce commute burdens, free up household income, and improve family QoL. This would have a great impact on giving children and young people more time with their families and less time exposed to traffic and pollution.

30. **To improve the daily commuting conditions and eco-friendly transportation for children and young people, our coalition makes the following recommendations:**

- a. **Increase the number of annual public transport operational staff to stabilize the service and enhance the on-time rate for regional buses and rail, thereby improving essential reliability for students and commuters.**
- b. **Ensure free access to national public transportation for all citizens under the age of 25, guaranteeing student access and social equity. Fund this initiative through a strategic reallocation of revenues from the Federal Mobility Budget (FMB), Pillar 3.**
- c. **Expand Low Traffic Zones (LTZs) to cover 40% of residential and school areas in major metropolitan centers, reducing local car traffic and pollution by 15% within these new zones, enhancing child safety and local air quality, replicating the success seen in the Brussels ‘pentagon’.**

¹⁹ Cf. Ibidem

²⁰ This issue is especially notable in **Recommendation 35.203 (Sudan)**, which addresses the mobility of people with disabilities.

²¹ Cf. SNCB “*Key figures and achievements 2023*”, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://www.nmbs-sncb-2023.be/en>

²² Cf. Belga News Agency “*SNCB starts expanding train services but continues to face staff shortages*”, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://www.belganewsagency.eu/nmbs-starts-expanding-train-services-but-continues-to-face-staff-shortages>

²³ Cf. Mbrella “*Understand and implement the mobility budget*”, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://www.mbrella.eu/mobility-budget>

VI. SECURITY AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING

31. The status of personal safety and well-being in Belgium (2020–2025) presents a complex profile, marked by significant legislative progress in areas such as gender-based violence and social rights,²⁴ juxtaposed with critical, persistent institutional failures in core human rights domains, particularly concerning asylum reception and systemic discrimination. These deficiencies demonstrate a marked disparity between Belgium's international human rights commitments (such as its candidacy pledge for the Human Rights Council)²⁵ and its domestic implementation record.

32. For the Belgian government to substantially improve the quality of life, especially for children and young people, immediate structural reforms across three key areas are required: First, structural reform of mental health services; second, the systematic failure to protect vulnerable children in migration; and, finally, the systemic discrimination and evolving security risks that disproportionately affect youth.

33. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the government allocated an additional EUR 16.7 million specifically to facilitate access to mental healthcare for vulnerable populations, including children and adolescents.²⁶ However, this financial commitment is undermined by the fragmented organization of the healthcare system, which splits responsibilities between federal and regional entities.²⁷ This results in multi-month waiting times for specialized care, severely compromising the well-being of young people in urgent need of support. Harmonizing these fragmented services — funding at the federal level and service arrangements at the regional level — to guarantee timely access must be a top priority.

34. UN mechanisms and NGOs have identified profound failures to protect vulnerable children in migration. Since October 2021, the state has persistently failed to provide mandated reception shelter for asylum seekers, leaving thousands—including families with children—homeless.²⁸ This constitutes a profound and years-long violation of basic human rights and dignity.²⁹ Furthermore, while a protective legal ban on the detention of children for migration reasons was passed in May 2024,³⁰ the government's stated intention to "evaluate" this ban after only two

²⁴ For example, the adoption of the #StopFemicide Law and the Law Against Sexual Exploitation as well as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. See: European Institute for Gender Equality "*Country profile for Belgium*", accessed October 2, 2025, https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/countries/belgium?language_content_entity=en; Human Rights Watch "*Belgium | Country Page*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/belgium>, and Gender Equality Index "*Belgium | Violence | 2022*", accessed October 3, 2025, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/domain/violence/BE>

²⁵ International Service for Human Rights "Strengthening accountability and the rule of law", accessed October 2, 2025, https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/20220613_HRCElection2023-2025_Pledge_Belgium.pdf

²⁶ Cf. European Commission "*Belgium - Public Health*", accessed October 2, 2025, https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/2023_chp_be_english.pdf

²⁷ Cf. PMC - PubMed Central "*Belgium's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8280466/>

²⁸ Amnesty International "*Belgium: Persistent failure to provide reception violates rights and dignity of people seeking asylum*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/belgium-persistent-failure-to-provide-reception-violates-rights-and-dignity-of-people-seeking-asylum/>

²⁹ Cf. Recommendations 36.14 (Sierra Leone); 35.217 (El Salvador); 35.195 (Bahamas)

³⁰ Cf. OHCHR "*Belgium*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/belgium>

years raises serious concern among NGOs about the possible reversal of crucial safeguards for minors.³¹

35. An independent UN body recently found systemic racism against people of African descent in Belgium.³² This structural issue is exacerbated by the failure to implement legislative changes needed to collect disaggregated data by ethnicity, which is essential for creating effective anti-discrimination policies.³³

36. On the security front, the period saw a critical shift in focus from counter-terrorism (post-2015) to aggressively combating transnational organized drug crime, exemplified by the Federal Police's reliance on intelligence gained from decrypted communication platforms (e.g., SKY ECC) and the subsequent unveiling of the proactive 'Plan for Major Cities' in 2025.³⁴ However, the related manifestations of disorder—violence, drug presence, and vandalism—continue to negatively affect the immediate personal safety environment for the average citizen, increasing the public perception of localized insecurity.³⁵

37. Concurrently, law enforcement faces new challenges on fighting against complex organized crime that affects minor victims, including the detection of images of child abuse created and distributed by very young minors (8–11 years) and the use of social media for the recruitment of minors via methods like "Loverboy" exploitation.³⁶ Addressing these challenges requires not only robust policing but also structural reform to ensure the safety environment—both online and in urban neighborhoods targeted by the new 'Plan for Major Cities'—is equitable and legally sound for all children and youth.³⁷

38. To enhance children and young people's personal safety and well-being, our coalition suggests the following recommendations:

- a. Improve access to youth psychological services, unifying federal and regional mental healthcare funding to reduce specialized support waiting times for adolescents to under 30 days.**
- b. Ensure 100% compliance with reception mandates to end homelessness for asylum-seeking families.**

³¹ Cf. European Council on Refugees and Exiles "Overview of the main changes since the previous report update - Asylum Information Database", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/belgium/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update/>

³² Cf. Ibid. OHCHR "*Belgium*". This situation contrasts sharply with the recommendations submitted by Ivory Coast (35.21), Guyana (35.94), Brazil (36.92) and Rwanda (36.23), which call for a national action plan against racism and a national strategy for the inclusion of people of African descent.

³³ Amnesty International "*BELGIUM*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/EUR1401442025ENGLISH.pdf>

³⁴ Cf. Belga News Agency "*Belgian minister unveils security plan for major cities to tackle drug-crime*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.belganewsagency.eu/belgian-minister-unveils-security-plan-for-major-cities-to-tackle-drug-crime>

³⁵ Cf. Trading Economics "*Belgium - Population reporting occurrence of crime, violence or vandalism in their area - 2025 Data 2026 Forecast 2003-2023 Historical*", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://tradingeconomics.com/belgium/population-reporting-occurrence-of-crime-violence-or-valism-in-their-area-eurostat-data.html>

³⁶ Cf. Federal Police "Annual Report 2024", accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.police.be/annualreport-federalpolice/en>

³⁷ Cf. Recommendation 35.138 (Lithuania)

- c. **Mandate the collection of disaggregated data by ethnicity in order to inform anti-discriminatory policy, and to dismantle the systemic racism that impacts vulnerable young people.**
- d. **Increase trained, visible police patrols by 20% during high-risk evening hours (4–10 PM) in high-priority zones using the 'Plan for Major Cities' resources to enhance public perception of security, especially for students returning home from school.**
- e. **Mandate a national digital safety and abuse sensitization curriculum in 100% of primary schools to proactively counter police-identified trends of minors abuse and recruitment for sexual exploitation online.**

VII. QUALITY OF LIFE (QoL) AND SOCIAL SERVICES

39. Belgium occupies a contradictory position in its social architecture, characterized by a paradox: it operates one of the most effective safety nets for financial support while simultaneously grappling with deep-seated structural inefficiencies and inequities. The core problem for the Belgian government is shifting focus from merely mitigating monetary poverty to addressing the fundamental social exclusion mechanisms that specifically affect families, children, and young people.

40. A major structural flaw is the prevalence of Quasi-Jobless Households (QJH), where 11.3% of the working-age population lives in households with very low labor intensity,³⁸ placing Belgium last among EU countries on this indicator.³⁹ While social transfers successfully reduce monetary poverty risk by a substantial 52.7%,⁴⁰ this high financial protection coexists with long-term labor market detachment.⁴¹ This results in a low-intensity trap that perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage for the children living in these households.

41. As was explained in section IV of this report, the crisis of social mobility is most acutely reflected in the education system. This output directly exacerbates the structural labor market challenges: the very low employment rate of low-skilled workers (47.9%)⁴² is a direct, long-term consequence of an education system that fails students from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby trapping them in the cycle that contributes significantly to the high prevalence of Quasi-Jobless Households (QJH).

³⁸ Statbel “*Risk of poverty or social exclusion*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/households/poverty-and-living-conditions/risk-poverty-or-social-exclusion>

³⁹ Cf. Social Security “*Evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium in a comparative perspective – 2025*”, accessed October 1, 2025, https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/press/20250922_monitoring_report_international_comparison_def.pdf

⁴⁰ Ibidem

⁴¹ Cf. IMF eLibrary, “*Belgium: 2025 Article IV Consultation-Press Release and Staff Report*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/view/journals/002/2025/069/article-A001-en.pdf>

⁴² Cf. Statbel “*Employment and unemployment*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/work-training/labour-market/employment-and-unemployment>

42. Belgium’s health profile exhibits contradictions.⁴³ While the prevalence of self-rated health ranks favorably compared to its EU-15 peers,⁴⁴ the system suffers from poor population health outcomes in critical metrics. Specifically, in comparison with the countries of the EU-14, Belgium records the highest rate of preventable mortality.⁴⁵ This contrast suggests that the system is highly effective for the healthy and socio-economically stable population, and conversely, it systematically fails the most vulnerable groups—those who require prevention and early intervention.⁴⁶

43. Finally, regional disparities in social service provision create social rights crises for families.⁴⁷ In March 2025, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) found that the Flemish housing policy constitutes a “serious violation” of the right to family housing, due to insufficient supply of social housing and inadequate protection for vulnerable tenants in the private sector.⁴⁸ Such policy failures directly impact the QoL of children and low-income families, exacerbating social exclusion.⁴⁹

44. To enhance the quality of life for the next generation, the Belgian government should give priority to structural reforms. Our coalition presents the following recommendations:

- a. Implement and sustain fiscal reforms aimed at substantially increasing the net disposable income derived from work for low-skilled workers, thereby ensuring that the financial benefit of employment clearly exceeds the financial security provided by social transfers, addressing the welfare trap.**
- b. Implement federal oversight mechanisms to ensure that regional housing policies comply with international social rights obligations, specifically in response to the ECSR ruling on Flanders. This may necessitate defining mandatory minimum standards for social housing provision and tenant protection nationwide.**
- c. Require regional labor activation services to significantly intensify efforts to address skill mismatch and long-term unemployment, focusing interventions specifically on the QJH population through customized training and job matching programs.**
- d. Prioritize investment that overcomes financial and geographical barriers to access to preventive care and primary care structures, with a focus on vulnerable groups.**

⁴³ Cf. KCE “*Performance of the Belgian health system: Report 2024*”, accessed October 2, 2025, <https://kce.fgov.be/en/performance-of-the-belgian-health-system-report-2024>

⁴⁴ Cf. For a Healthy Belgium “*Quality of life*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.healthybelgium.be/en/?view=article&id=6>

⁴⁵ Cf. For a Healthy Belgium “*Social health*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.healthybelgium.be/en/health-status/mental-and-social-health/social-health>

⁴⁶ This situation contrasts with **Recommendations 36.47 (Belarus)** and **35.196 (Uzbekistan)**, which call for access to healthcare for disadvantaged populations, including children living in poverty or with disabilities, refugees, and migrants.

⁴⁷ Cf. State Department “*2025 Belgium Investment Climate Statement*”, accessed October 1, 2025, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/638719_2025-Belgium-Investment-Climate-Statement.pdf

⁴⁸ Feantsa “*Flanders fails on housing: European Committee issues damning verdict*”, accessed October 1, 2025, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/press-release/2025/03/18/?bcParent=27>

⁴⁹ Cf. **Recommendations 35.166 (Bahamas)** and **35.167 (Bahrain)**.

VIII. DIRECT VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

45. We strongly believe that listening to and considering the direct voices of young people living in Belgium is the best way to provide appropriate responses to their needs.

46. As explained in the methodology, the participation and protagonism of children and young people is at the core of the theoretical work carried out for drafting the report, giving them a direct voice. Therefore, we would like to share some of the direct expressions of children and young people regarding the situation of rights in Belgium, albeit briefly. The thematically grouped sentences presented below in quotation marks are the result of interacting with and listening to the children, adolescents and young people who participated in the consultation process.

47. Education and School System:

- *"More free time at school."*
- *"Starting school a little later because you're tired when you arrive at school."*
- *"[To have] 5 weeks of classes, then 1 week of vacation."*
- *"Have more language choices."*
- *"Reduce the price of field trips."*
- *"Offer more internships, activities and trips abroad."*
- *"[To establish] more schools specializing in sought-after professions."*
- *"Improve the quality of teaching / the system (renovate the classes, improving the infrastructures)."*
- *"Us, the youth of Belgium ask the government for mandatory cooking lesson, first aid, CCPR."*
- *"Schools 100% free (manuals, theatre, paid by government or school)."*
- *"Belgium education system can be rather stressful. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration their needs (less pressure, choose your options more freely and more classes: cooking, fashion, technology, poetry, art, design)."*

48. Mobility and Public Transport:

- *"That the buses are less late in the morning and evening."*
- *"To improve public transport (making it free for people under 26)."*
- *"Improve reliability and access to buses."*
- *"More accessibility for handicapped peoples in public places (schools...)."*
- *"Driver license at 17 years old."*
- *"Free transport for people under 18 years old and more security: More transport for more employment so more users, so more income, so more money and cheaper/free transport for young people."*
- *"Transport: increase the frequency of the buses' travels + later bus travelling."*
- *"Free card to public transport for students (schools + university)."*
- *"Free transportation and more transportation: buses system is horrible, for example, in Heinsch (Lusembourg province), there is not enough buses."*
- *"Bigger salary for drivers (important work such as a teacher)."*
- *"Transport: Free means everywhere in Belgium: if they are free, roads are less damaged because less used, so more money to let them free."*
- *"Preserved the green space."*

- *"Promote eco-friendly activities: More easy and accessible public transports; less plastic packages; recycling (at school, even in public spaces)."*
- *"Have more green space and less pollution."*
- *"To have a moment where we can go and learn things about nature and animals."*

49. Security and Personal Well-being:

- *"Improve security in the city."*
- *"More security in big cities."*
- *"In big cities like Brussels and Liège: It is hard to have a feeling of security, mostly at night."*
- *"Improve security, especially in the evenings. For example, when you need to get back from school."*
- *"Cameras in public places/cities security."*
- *"Sensibilization campaign about child abuse (in primary school)."*
- *"Psychological support for the children."*
- *"More security in nightlife: policeman with good formation and more male."*

50. Quality of Life and Social Services:

- *"Improving fostercare: More financial help and more staff & Psychological support for the children."*
- *"Hal (money) for families that are in need (for a proper alimentations and habitat)."*
- *"Free nurseries because difficult for some families to afford it."*
- *"Doing charity work for children in need."*
- *"The poor can find housing."*
- *"Homeless people: make more financial help. Build centers"*
- *"Have the same rights as people of different colors."*
- *"Reduce the prices of quotidian purchases."*
- *"That life costs less."*
- *"Lower the price of food and clothing."*
- *"Stop making children work."*
- *"Stop taxes."*
- *"Stop unemployment for all."*
- *"Stop war"*
- *"Establish more parent-child communication."*
- *"To let children share more their voices: To be able to participate more in our government (country) & More right of speech in schools."*
- *"Have more to freedom to choose something."*
- *"Have public restrooms."*
- *"Repair playgrounds in villages."*

IX. CONCLUSION

51. As members of Civil Society, we sincerely appreciate the efforts made by the Government of Belgium to improve the living of all people in the country. Similarly, we would like to thank the government for supporting many of the recommendations presented by the international community in the last cycle and encouraging it to implement them.

52. We also want to thank the government for considering the concerns raised by civil society, especially those from children and young people. They represent both the present and future of the nation, and their active involvement and responsible leadership are crucial for transforming the present to secure their future.

53. We appreciate the opportunity the United Nations provided through the UPR mechanism, as it enabled us to amplify the direct voices of adolescents and young people. Their valuable contributions have been crucial in addressing the concerns and demands outlined in this report.