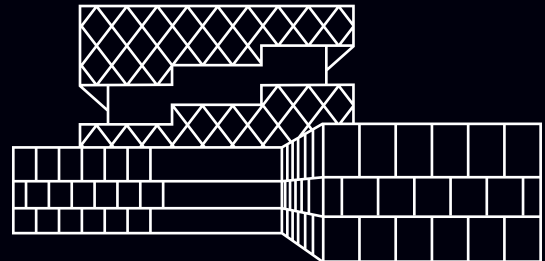




Opening the door to the future



An inclusive survey to help shape our common future



Opening the door to the future

An inclusive survey to help
shape our common future

01 — Key takeaways

Quality of healthcare and access to education make Belgium an attractive place to live and work.

Belgium's performance when it comes to the digitalisation of society is considered rather average, but the digitalisation of society is deemed to be the country's lowest priority for the general public, and rather average for Belgium's key leaders.

Only one third of the general public feels that the education system prepares younger generations for the job market. Both groups call for an overall increase in the quality of the education system.

The general public consider companies' biggest responsibility to be protecting jobs, whereas Belgium's key leaders see it as protecting employee safety and wellbeing.

Attention to climate change will be the main force of change shaping Belgium's future. Only a minority of people assume great personal responsibility to try and reduce climate change.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion is considered to be a high priority by all groups.

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02 About this report

The content for this report is based on extensive consultation with a wide cross section of people in Belgium, at all stages of their lives and careers, including one-to-one interviews with some of the country's leading business, academic and political profiles (details of the survey methodology can be found on page 26). The initial premise of the research was to understand what people in Belgium believe the biggest challenges facing the country are today and where they think priorities should be focused to place Belgium in a better competitive position as it reaches its bicentenary in 2030. Based on interview input and in response to wider geopolitical and other events unfolding during the course of the research process, we broadened some of our questions*.

Combining respondents' contributions with our many areas of expertise, our aim isn't to offer concrete

solutions, but present food for thought about the areas for which true collaboration, co-creation and creativity are required if we're to devise the novel solutions Belgium needs to become a fairer, more competitive and more prosperous environment for all. One that focuses on cultivating talent and creating a true haven for talent in Belgium, embraces inclusion and diversity, promotes a circular economy to help protect natural assets, fosters and supports entrepreneurship and implements a forward-looking, market-relevant education system.

The report forms the basis for discussion with a wide range of stakeholders, with the hope of addressing topics from diverse perspectives to help Belgium fulfil its immense potential for the future. It's just the first step on a journey to help prepare Belgium for the years to come.

*Note that the majority of the interviews took place before 24 February 2022 and therefore don't reflect the influence of the events in Ukraine.



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03 Foreword

Building a brighter, fairer, more inclusive environment for all

Human connection. Without it collaboration and co-creation cannot exist. As American author, speaker and pastor John C. Maxwell once said, “*The greatest innovative thinking doesn’t occur in a vacuum.*” It happens, I firmly believe, when people with diverse experiences from different backgrounds come together and combine their views and experiences to create fresh ideas. That way topics can be addressed from a variety of angles and solutions sought are better able to work for a broader audience. That’s what we at PwC Belgium strongly consider is required to help Belgium find sustainable answers to the questions the country currently faces or is likely to encounter in the coming years. And that’s the very *raison d’être* of this pivotal study.

2030 will be a landmark year for Belgium as the country marks 200 years of independence. This upcoming event offers an opportunity and provides an impetus for us, as a collective nation, to come together and address the good and the less good, and contemplate how we can build a brighter, fairer, more inclusive environment for us all.

The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled the shortcomings of a globalised world and the current war in Ukraine touches upon everything; geopolitics, inflation, renewable energies, digitisation, etc. Together, they form an ideal impetus for change.

We believe as a firm we’ve a responsibility to have a positive impact on the communities around us and society as a whole. We want to play an active role in a solution that supports a transparent business context and community.

Axel Smits
Chairman and
Territory Senior Partner (TSP)
PwC Belgium



It's our experience in building trust, providing comfort about the reality, sanity and sustainability of companies' operations, that we can bring to bear to play an active and responsible role in setting a more promising path to Belgium's future. We hope that not only will people acknowledge our role, but work with us and add in their own unique perspectives and skills to build and deliver sustainable solutions for the long term.

We see a specific role in the need to nurture tomorrow's talent. Not only is PwC often referred to as "one of the best business schools in the world", but we also work with external partners whose goal is to abolish the digital divide and make education available to everyone, especially to those for whom the traditional education system and path make no sense.

Indeed, we believe that Belgium has the potential to become the 'talent haven' of Europe. Many of the opinions expressed by survey respondents substantiate that belief. While there's work to be done to make our vision a reality, it's clear that Belgium has all the ingredients it needs to achieve this bold ambition. Our new Brussels premises - PwC Campus - is a symbol of that ambition. It also underscores our commitment to the country and the creation of a better future for all its citizens.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Axel". The signature is stylized with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

”

If you look at history, innovation doesn't come just from giving people incentives; it comes from creating environments where their ideas can connect.

Steven Johnson,
author of *The Seven Patterns of Innovation*

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04 — Belgium today

The so-called heart of Europe - geographically positioned as such and one of the six founding states of the European Union (EU) -, Belgium's home to different facets of the European institutions, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), as well as the European (or global) headquarters of many international firms. While they naturally play a key role in the country, especially in its ability to attract investment, there's much more to Belgium than that.

Belgium is truly international. Not only is it sought out as a base for many international organisations, but the many home-grown concerns also do business with countries all around the world: Belgian exports amount to more than 80% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), making it the 10th largest exporting country in the world, according to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Its open economy is just one selling point for those considering Belgium as a place to locate a business. Its geographical location makes it an ideal gateway to Europe and its dense interconnected transportation network - consisting of road, train, sea, waterways, air or multimodal solutions - assures efficient distribution.

The country boasts a multicultural and multilingual population - there are more than 180 nationalities and 100 languages spoken in Brussels alone - which assures diverse perspectives and ideas. People are generally well educated with good access to education (according to our survey results) and have a penchant for entrepreneurship. The country's already proven to be a world leader in a number of sectors ((bio)pharmaceuticals, chemistry, (nano)technology, etc.), with solutions devised here having a tangible positive impact in the world.

What our study found

The attractiveness of Belgium as a place to live and work was confirmed by our study, with the quality of health-care and access to education named as the top reasons for this by all respondents.

But there are many areas in which Belgium underperforms, according to the general public and key leaders who took part in our survey, which are preventing the country from being truly future ready, something the COVID-19 pandemic made clear was crucial if the country's to remain competitive.

Belgium's key leaders were more negative than the general public about the areas in which there's room for improvement. Indeed, all of the seven topics (with the exception of migration and asylum policy) listed as areas in which Belgium's performing badly were noted by more than twice the percentage of Belgium's key leaders than the general public, indicating that they perhaps think more broadly about crucial issues at stake and the country's overall readiness for the future.

DOING WELL (NET)

(Top2 'doing well' MINUS Btm2 'doing badly')

Quality of healthcare system



Access to education



DOING BADLY (NET)

Top2 (Btm2 'doing badly' MINUS Top2 'doing well')

Effective environmental policy



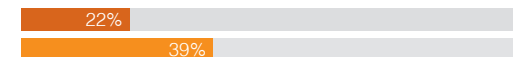
Cope with age / pensions system



Mobility



Effectiveness of fiscal system



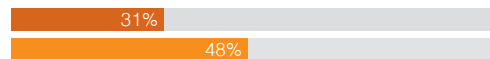
Migration / asylum policy



Efficiency of government



Repay government debt



■ General public ■ Belgium's key leaders

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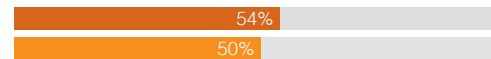
04

Looking at priorities for the future, the general public again place quality of healthcare at the top, with employment and job creation in second place and efficiency of government coming in third, underscoring people's tendency to focus on the here and now, rather than really looking forward.

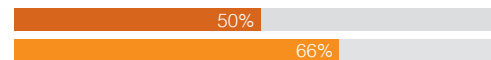
While efficiency of government is a priority for Belgium's key leaders, they also focus more on issues considered crucial for the future, such as quality of education, the environment and digitalisation.

TOP 2

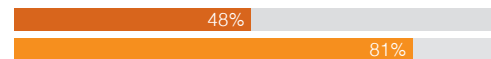
Quality of healthcare system



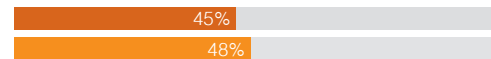
Efficiency of government



Quality of educational system



Ageing population / pensions



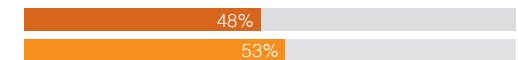
Policies to address environmental issues



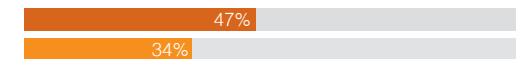
Employment & job creation



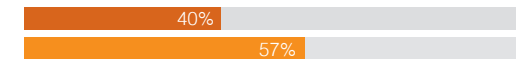
Fight against poverty & exclusion



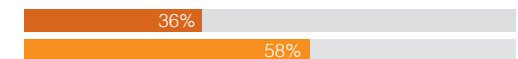
Fight against terrorism & crime



Sustainability of the economy



Solve mobility issues



■ General public ■ Belgium's key leaders

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The biggest challenge is the unpredictability of policy. Belgium has no vision, only short-term strategy – deadly for us as a company.

CEO, automotive services provider



Healthcare - Belgium's biggest asset

Belgium's healthcare system is considered to be the country's most important asset. Cancer, stress and mental health issues are seen as the main health problems. Already a big plus, healthcare remains a top priority in the minds of the general public. More positive about the future of healthcare, Belgium's key leaders rank it more as an average priority, placing education, employment, efficiency of government and effective environmental policies ahead of it. That may be because Belgium's key leaders perceive there to be many more initiatives being rolled out than the general public does.

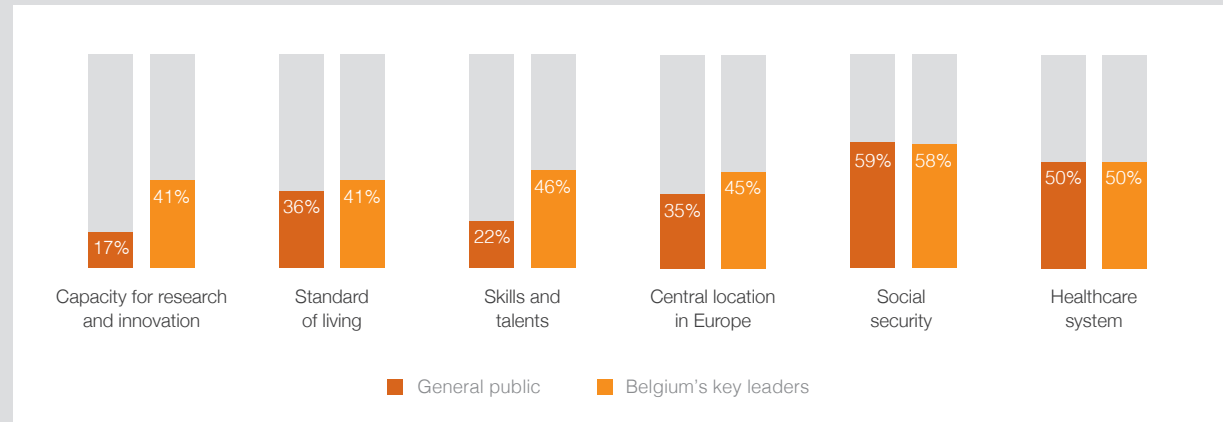
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05 Differing views

Belgium and its people have a reputation for being more pessimistic about their future than their average European counterparts. According to a poll by the King Baudouin Foundation on behalf of Bertelsmann Stiftung, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Belgians have a dark view of the future of the country and only half (50%) see a bright future for themselves.

Our study found that the general public fit that profile more aptly than the key leaders we spoke with. The latter being able to see many more assets in Belgium that can be leveraged beyond the healthcare system and social security mentioned by the general public.



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For historical reasons, Belgians generally tend to concern themselves more with the here and now, rather than looking ahead. They've a tendency to focus on the problems at hand, rather than considering and investing time in potential future assets. As our survey shows, there's no sense of urgency to adapt to the speed at which the world's changing.

One area where this is certainly true is digitalisation. Our results find that Belgium's performance when it comes to

the digitalisation of society is considered rather average with only a handful of people feeling that the country is ahead of other countries when it comes to digital transformation. The general public acknowledges the positive impact of digitalisation on their own career less than the key leaders in Belgium.

Despite its low performance, the digitalisation of society is deemed to be the country's lowest priority for the general public, and rather average for Belgium's key leaders.

PRIORITY

Digitalisation of society



■ General public ■ Belgium's key leaders

”

Belgium has a number of important assets: an open country, always focused on Europe (++), a well-educated population, good productivity, innovation and research have improved in recent years, the macroeconomic environment is good (no big fluctuations)... and Belgians are praised abroad.

CEO, IT services provider

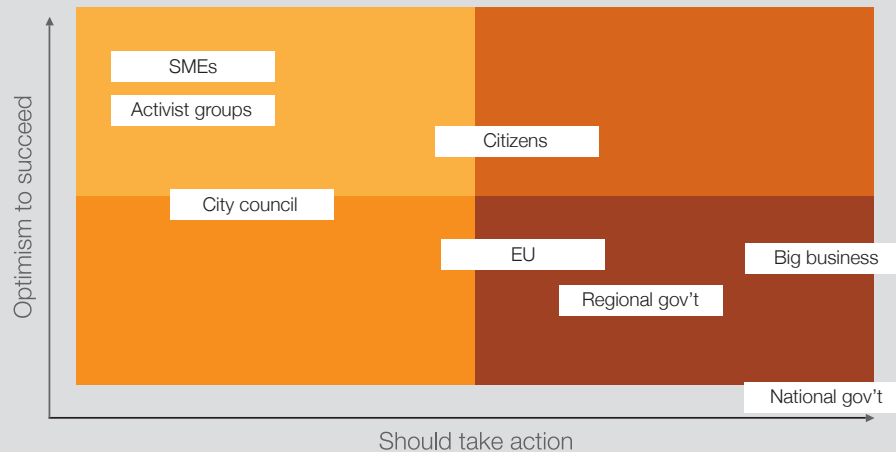
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06 — Fixing the future

According to a survey by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Belgium ranks third from the bottom on the table of nations expressing their level of trust in government.

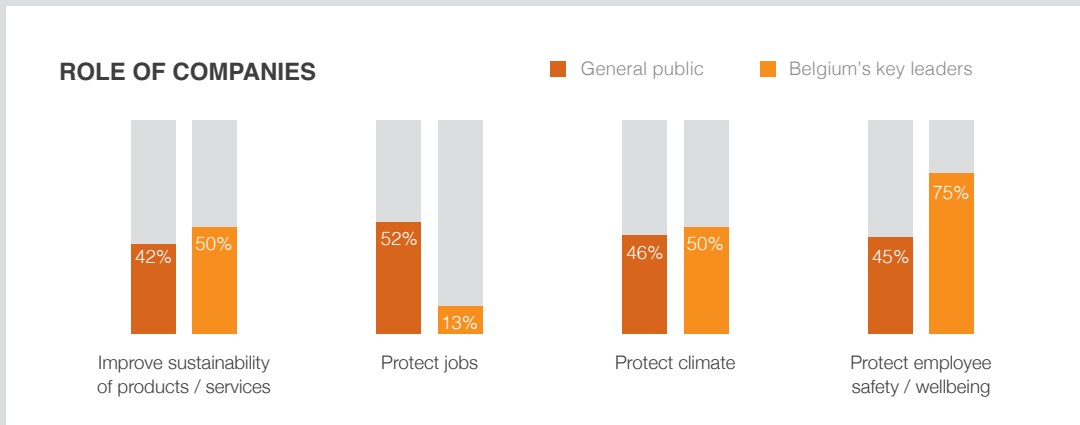
With confidence in government historically low based on a general dislike and distrust of politicians, it's unsurprising that respondents have little faith in governments to solve society's problems. Indeed, many see it as a role for larger companies.



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According to our findings, the general public consider companies' biggest responsibility (52%) to be protecting jobs, whereas Belgium's key leaders see it as protecting employee safety and wellbeing (75%).

Belgium's key leaders are also more convinced than the general public that companies have a role to play in abolishing discrimination, something that'll be crucial in making sure that no talent goes to waste (see page 16).



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06

Making sure no talent goes to waste - turning Belgium into a talent haven for Europe

Only by making sure that everyone who can work is gainfully employed will Belgium be able to solve its debt crisis and be able to make the necessary investments in the future. Indeed, to refinance the economy, we must encourage innovation, connect the newly unemployed with talent-starved industries and make use of European funding mechanisms and reskilling initiatives.

Already, access to the education system and the quality of the education system rank relatively high in our survey. However, both the general public and Belgium's key leaders see room for improvement in the quality of education on offer, with the latter group almost twice as convinced of the need.

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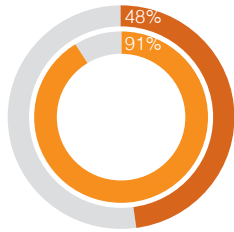
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PRIORITY

Improve quality of education



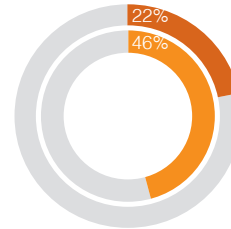
■ General public
■ Belgium's key leaders

Among the general public, however, only one third feels the education system prepares younger generations for the job market. More of Belgium's key leaders evaluate it as such, but only just over half (51%) of those polled. On the other hand, the general public's less convinced of citizens' skills and talents, compared to key leaders.

Whilst opinion leaders are confident about the future, the general public's worried and nervous about what the future holds. Employment and job creation are considered a top priority.

BELGIUM ASSETS

Skills

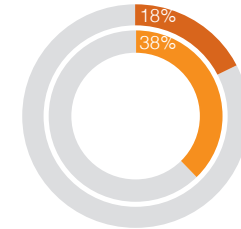


■ General public
■ Belgium's key leaders

Both groups call for an overall increase in the quality of the education system. Belgium's key leaders also see the need for more focus on life-long learning and employability and entrepreneurship, something largely ignored by the general public. To secure its future, our workforce needs skills that allow them to adapt to a fast-changing work environment, especially the ability to learn new skills quickly, especially digital skills, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, creativity and collaboration.

OPTIMISM

Future of work



■ General public
■ Belgium's key leaders

Key leaders believe that the responsibility to attain these skills lies most with individuals and employers, whereas the general public also sees a role for government.

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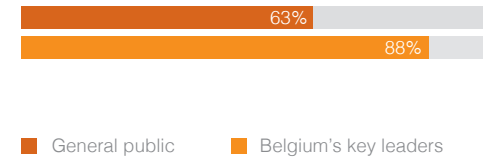
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Building a Belgian unicorn nation

One of the striking characteristics of Belgium is the acknowledged entrepreneurial spirit of its people. With a great sense for commercial opportunities, there's a tendency to prefer start-ups to big companies. This is acknowledged at least from outside the country. Belgium's capacity for research and innovation and its industry and trading power aren't particularly marked as assets by the general public. And there's a perceived need to remove the obstacles to entrepreneurship, for example by reducing the administrative burden for entrepreneurs and encouraging the government to act as facilitators by strengthening the entrepreneurial culture.

However, both groups recognise that Belgium performs well in certain sectors. The challenge for the future is to promote these industries further. This may be helped by improvements in the effectiveness of Belgium's fiscal system, which is only considered a medium priority. However, both the majority of

NEED TO REFORM THE FISCAL SYSTEM FOR COMPANIES



Belgium's key leaders and the general public feel that the tax system - for companies as well as individuals - could do with a major overhaul.

Supporting fledgling firms

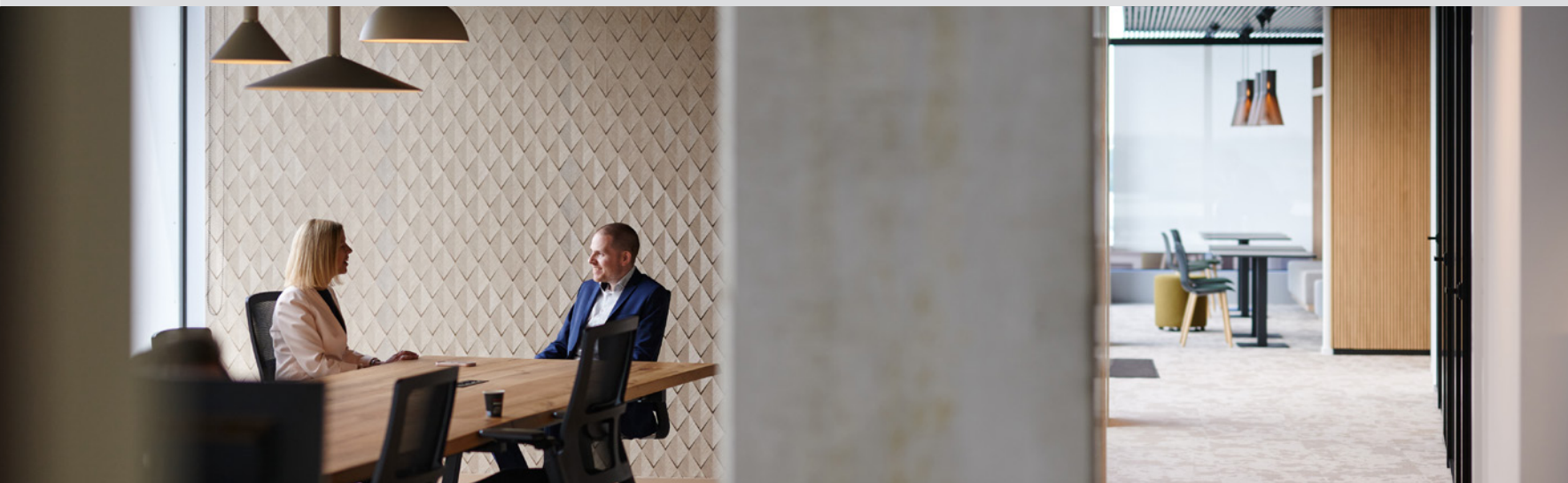
With its international population, Belgium represents an ideal testing ground for multilingual start-ups to test products and services effectively. While Belgium start-ups may not be as prolific as in other major European cities and may be valued slightly lower,

there's already a notable number of unicorns with new concerns being added to their ilk all the time. Although, boosting the global competitiveness of our country isn't deemed a major priority.

Our survey found that Belgium's key leaders see a need for greater focus on entrepreneurship, which the growing number of unicorns in the country provides one answer to.

At PwC, we firmly believe that start-ups have the agility and ability to change the future. They've the potential to be the future big players in Belgium, and likely further afield. To make a real positive contribution to the country, Europe, globally and importantly to society. They can play a role in helping increase the competitiveness of our country, create jobs, increase people's digital saviness and much more, thereby representing a real part of the future.

PwC Belgium's bespoke Scale programme is all about helping them on their journey. To date, PwC's helped many fledgling companies make connections that take them to the next level, helping them improve their pitching skills, devise a more compelling business case for investors, meet corporates who might be interested in partnering with them and much more.



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Championing a circular economy

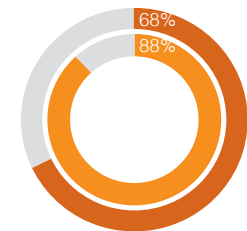
The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a real need to transform supply chains and become less reliant on far-off producers. Globalisation, it seems, is no longer the way to go, and countries like Belgium need to find ways to become self-sustaining with sustainable solutions.

The events in Ukraine have pinpointed a need to build our own energy capabilities, rather than relying on fossil fuels from third nations. And not just fossil fuels. The war in Ukraine's also impacting many key supply chains for materials that play a part in the transition to clean energy. Keeping green recovery on track will require action now to mitigate the effects of critical supply chain issues.

Attention to climate change will be the main force of change shaping Belgium's future. Indeed, a majority are worried about the consequences of climate change. The general public not only sees fewer shortcomings, but also finds it difficult to pinpoint a clear set of key challenges, whereas Belgium's key leaders see more challenges that need to be

addressed. However, many aren't convinced of the effectiveness of policy actions in this area and most see the responsibility for taking the lead in tackling climate change lies with the biggest countries in the world, business and industry and the European Union (EU). The role for citizens and consumers is considered smaller. Only a minority assumes great personal responsibility to try and reduce climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE



Worried about climate change

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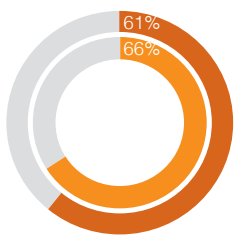
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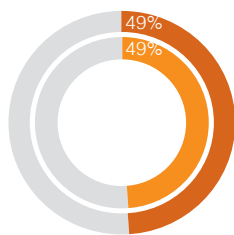
TAKE THE LEAD IN CLIMATE INITIATIVES

General public

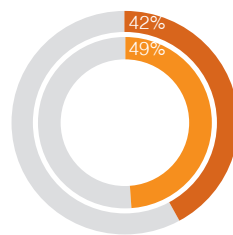
Belgium's key leaders



Biggest countries



Business & industry



European Union

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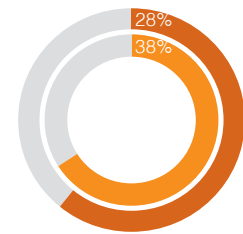
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A fairer world for all

Belgium's performance in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is evaluated higher by Belgium's key leaders than the public at large, but is considered to be a high priority by both groups. The fight against discrimination's ranked much lower in the list of Belgium's future priorities despite the fact that four in 10 respondents report having experienced discrimination in the past year - a lot more among younger generations. Again, nevertheless, Belgium's evaluated rather well by all groups in tackling discrimination, a task deemed to be for companies, potentially due to a lack of faith in governments and their policies. Yet, it falls far behind other seemingly corporate responsibilities such as protecting jobs and protecting the climate.

ROLE OF COMPANIES - DISCRIMINATION



Biggest countries

■ General public ■ Belgium's key leaders

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The gaps between groups in society are getting larger and larger and the fragmentation is making it harder for governments to develop policies.

Chief editor, online news publications

”

There are a lot of tensions in Belgium because everything's split up... young people don't even speak a second national language anymore, we don't read each other's newspapers,... even between poor Wallonia and capitalist Brussels there's strong antagonism.

CEO, investment company

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07 Conclusion

We believe that everyone has a role to play in shaping the future of our country to strengthen its economic engine, develop inclusive, skilled workforces and introduce sustainable value and supply chains. All societal stakeholders should see themselves reflected in plans to become a nation that cultivates talent, where there are few obstacles to entrepreneurship and start-ups are encouraged and supported, and a country that champions a truly circular economy.

The journey will be a long one, there are very few quick wins in such an enormous evolution. Identified priorities, climate change in particular, must remain so. We must be careful to avoid trade-offs to make things happen faster, for example, climate change shouldn't be pushed to the background while the focus turns to defence or inflation. By investing in a

longer-term vision, we can work on tackling challenges in a more holistic way, calling on Belgium's already numerous assets and building on them.

Our survey found that a majority of respondents have little faith in governments to solve society's problems, seeing it rather as a role for larger companies. For real change to happen, companies must acknowledge and act on this role. Rather than continuing to complain about issues and drawbacks, companies need to abandon their disappointment and cynicism of the government and act. They have the resources and responsibility to facilitate change, calling on governments as their allies. By 'rallying around the flag', as it were, and working together, they can help make Belgium a bigger power player not just in Europe, but the world.

The conflict in Ukraine has only served to hone in on the need to work together, to stop pointing fingers and work for the greater good. In wartime, like now, whether we're directly involved or not, we need to focus on self-reliance, creating our own sustainable solutions and our own wealth as a nation to ensure prosperity for all going forward.

While the general public currently tends to focus on the here and now, it's important that they learn to look further ahead, to see the value of investing over the longer term to find real solutions to challenges, even those they face today. For example, understanding the value of digitalisation and getting on board with becoming a more digital society will reap substantial benefits in the long run. Looking at different future scenarios and what could happen depending on the actions we take could help gain their buy-in to think more long term.

This survey is just one step in PwC Belgium's Imagine 2030 journey. It represents a means of discovering what people in Belgium deem important today and for the future, and where they believe priorities should be set. As such, it offers insight into how we can contribute to building a brighter tomorrow for Belgium. It also demonstrates our ambition to bring stakeholders together to combine their ideas and aspirations, build partnerships and ecosystems to make a positive impact and deliver sustainable change.

Do you want to be part of our journey? We're looking for visionaries who are unafraid to break through the barriers to change, who want to add their ideas and input to build a better Belgium for the future. Soon, we'll launch a dedicated website via which you can find out more about getting involved.

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shape our common future

08 — Survey methodology

The survey was run by the Belgian office of Kantar, the world's leading data, insights and consulting company, between 11 October 2021 and 31 January 2022, and consisted of a qualitative online questionnaire, answered by 1,998 members of the general public over the age

of 18. One hundred and twenty-five of Belgium's key leaders (politicians, business leaders, academics, union heads, media representatives, etc.) were interviewed in person via telephone or in face-to-face meetings to gain qualitative and semi-qualitative input.



Key takeaways **01**

About this report **02**

Foreword **03**

Belgium today **04**

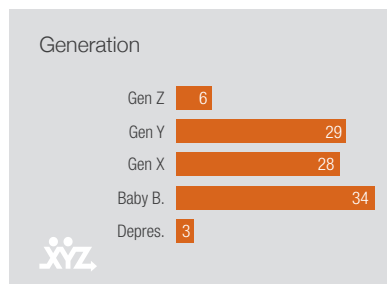
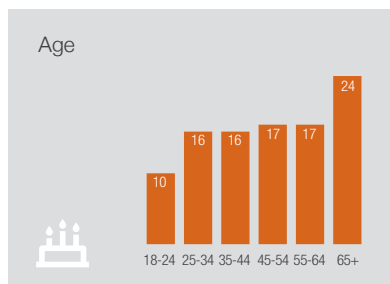
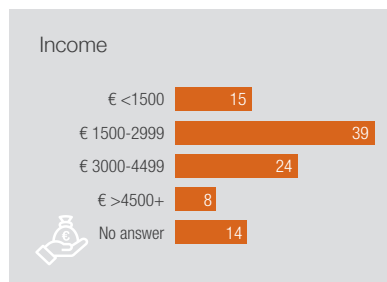
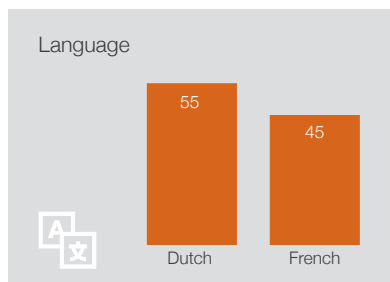
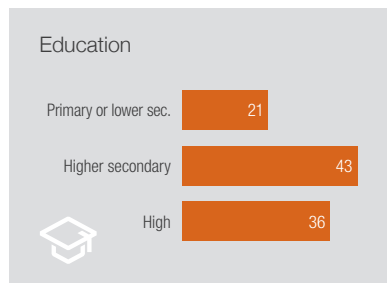
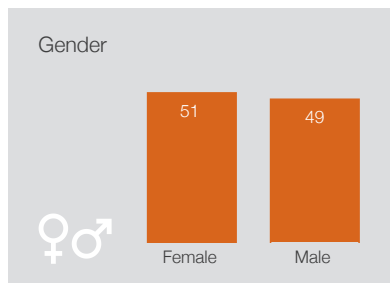
Differing views **05**

Fixing the future **06**

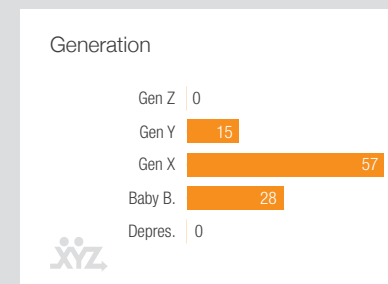
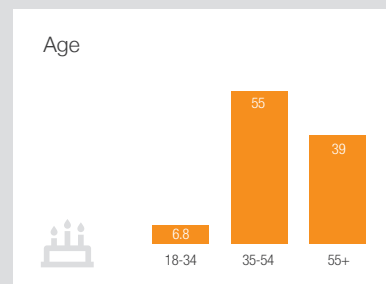
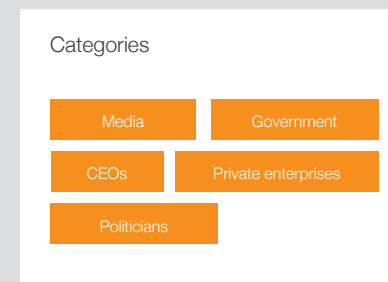
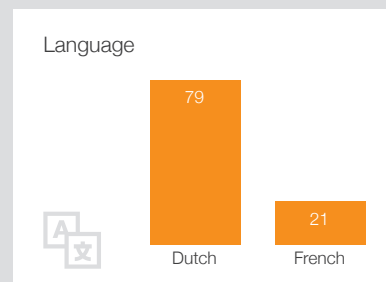
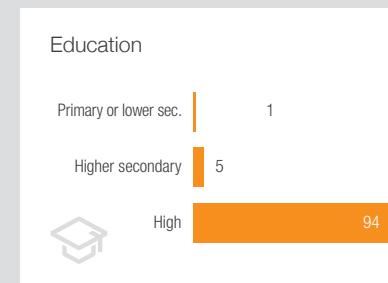
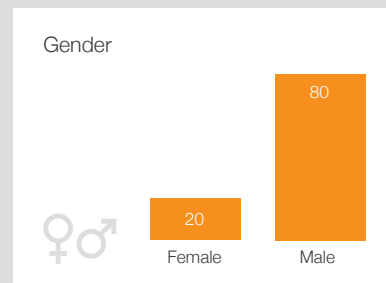
Conclusion **07**

Survey methodology **08**

GENERAL PUBLIC



BELGIUM'S KEY LEADERS





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