LANCET COUNTDOWN: TRACKING PROGRESS ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
In collaboration with Wellcome

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

BELGIUM

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in Belgium

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the connections between health and climate change. In its tenth iteration, the 2026 Global Report shows that the health impacts of climate change have escalated and frequently accelerated in the decade since the Paris Agreement came into force.

This document presents key country-level findings from the 2026 Lancet Countdown report for Belgium.

Climate change is driving the vast majority of heatwave days now experienced in Belgium. Heatwave exposure among infants and older adults has risen sharply, and more working hours are being lost to heat, particularly in construction.

Belgium is expanding renewable electricity, but households and road transport remain heavily reliant on fossil fuels, household biomass use is rising, and preparedness for the low-carbon transition has weakened.

Warming coastal waters are expanding the stretch of Belgium's coastline suitable for *Vibrio* bacteria, and estimated vibriosis cases reached a record high in 2025. This underlines the need for integrated environmental and health surveillance.

Heat and Health

Exposure to high temperatures increases the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and those with pre-existing conditions, face the greatest risks.

90.4% of the heatwave days that people in Belgium were, on average, exposed to between 2021 and 2025 would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (Indicator 1.1.1)

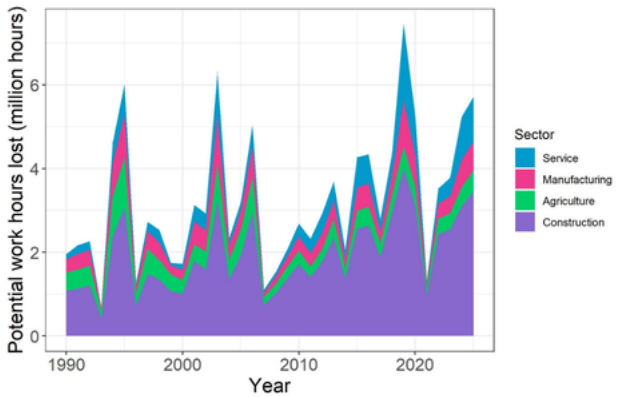
Children under one year of age and adults over 65 experienced an additional 4.5 heatwave days per year on average between 2016 and 2025 - this was an increase of 90% compared to 1986-2005. (Indicator 1.1.1)

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HEAT

Heat stress reduces labour productivity, undermining livelihoods and the social determinants of health, while heat-related deaths impose a growing cost on society.

- The average annual economic value of heat-related mortality losses in those over age 65 was US$1.7 billion between 2021 and 2025, which is equivalent to 98,000 average incomes of Belgium. This is a 118% increase since 2000 to 2004. (Indicator 4.1.2)
- The potential income lost from reduced labour capacity due to heat was nearly US$ 220 million in 2025. Workers in the construction sector were the most severely affected, incurring 57% of the losses. (Indicator 4.1.3)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector. Belgium, 1990 to 2025.



Heat exposure caused an annual loss of 4.4 million potential labour hours on average, between 2016 and 2025 - 68% higher than the average year in the 1990s. The construction sector was most affected, accounting for 62% of losses. (Indicator 1.1.3)

People were exposed to 26 more hours of moderate or higher risk of heat stress if undertaking moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) per year in 2016-2025 compared with the 1990s. (Indicator 1.1.2)

Air Pollution, Energy Transition and Health Co-Benefits

Fossil fuel combustion contributes to harmful air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Belgium's annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) was 11 µg/m^3, more than twice the WHO's recommended annual guideline of 5 µg/m^3. Reducing dependence on polluting fuels can improve air quality and protect health, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

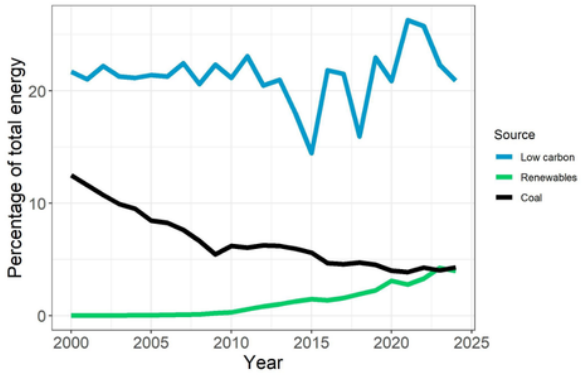
IIn 2023, the carbon intensity of Belgium's energy system decreased to 38.5 tCO_2/TJ, which is 2.4% lower than in 2016. As of 2023, coal made up 4% of Belgium's total energy supply and less than 0.1% of electricity generation. Renewables accounted for 4.3% of total energy supply and 28% of electricity, an increase of 212% and 180% respectively since 2016. (Indicator 3.1.1)

In 2023, 69% of household energy was still coming from fossil fuels. A further 9.3% came from harmful biomass, a 21% increase from 2016. (Indicator 3.1.2)

In 2023, fossil fuels still accounted for 89% of all road transport energy, and electricity accounted for only 1%. (Indicator 3.1.3)

In 2024, fossil fuel subsidies in Belgium exceeded carbon-pricing revenues, resulting in a net subsidy of US$1.1 billion, equivalent to 1.5% of the national health budget. (Indicator 4.3.2)

Year-wise share of total energy by source. Each line shows how one energy source's share changes over time.



Vulnerability to Infectious Diseases

Climate change is increasing the suitability for transmission of many vector-, food- and water-borne diseases. In Belgium, warming coastal waters are creating more favourable conditions for Vibrio bacteria, which can cause infections through contact with seawater or eating contaminated seafood, making environmental and health surveillance increasingly important.

The number of months that were suitable for malaria transmission in Belgium from 2016 to 2025 was 1.2 months per year for *P. vivax*, 160% higher compared to 1981 to1990. (Indicator 1.3.2)

The length of coast suitable for *Vibrio* transmission was 233% greater in 2025 than in the 1982 to 1991 baseline, reaching 34.3 km. (Indicator 1.3.6)

Estimated vibriosis cases have increased 56% since 1982 to 1991, reaching an annual average of 3100 cases in 2016 to 2025. Estimated vibriosis cases reached an all-time high in 2025 (3200 cases). (Indicator 1.3.6)

Romanello M, Walawender M, Israelsson J et al. The 2026 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: A decade of escalating health harms and a decisive moment for all. The Lancet 2026; published online October 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)01779-4
World Health Organization (2023). Health and environment scorecard: Belgium