

The Walloon region & Liège

The Walloon region is the southern, French & German-speaking part of Belgium. It has 4.3 million inhabitants over a surface area of 17,005 km², 14,847 km² of which agricultural land and forests. The population density of 253 inhabitants per km² is relatively high when compared to the European average.

The employment rate is 59.6 % for Belgium, with 62.9 for Flanders, 53.2 for Brussels and 55.4 for Wallonia, which is below the European average (64.2%). The difference in the employment rate between Belgium and better-placed countries is especially in the 15-24 group and in the 55+ group. Creating a faster operating labour market, with higher geographical and occupational mobility should help increase the employment rate in Belgium. (1)

There are major differences between regions. The Walloon region is characterised by an average unemployment rate of 18,1%, ranging from 10,9% (province of Luxemburg) to 21,4% for the province of Hainaut. In this project, we concentrate on the Liège area, which has the second highest unemployment rates in Wallonia (18,9%). (2)

Liège has known some main structural changes over the last years: the high unemployment rates they provoked are a priority on the political agenda in Liège. For the last 20 years, the province of Liège has been undergoing a slow deterioration of its social and economic situation. The decline of heavy industry (steel), and big international groups that decide to move out of the province has forced the province of Liège to reflect on its future. New economic activities are emerging, such as biotechnology, aerospace, micro-mechanics and also the logistics sector, but in terms of employment, they do not make up for the job losses suffered elsewhere.

The regional development agency of Liège, SPI+, set up a think tank for the future of Liège. For 2 years, a group of 50 people from all layers of society has reflected on the future of their province, with scientific advice from the foresight association 'Futuribles'. The results of this initiative, called "**Liège 2020**" can be found on the internet: in order to animate the debate of the redeployment of the region, 4 possible futures have been worked out. The 4 possible scenarios "Stone Statues", "At each other's throats", "The Swallow" and "The Phoenix", should encourage regional actors to reflect on how to build a better future. There also is a communication forum, where each citizen can post his ideas for economic redeployment. (4)

The **Group for Economic Redeployment (GRE)**, a not-for-profit organisation, was set up in order to coordinate the process of economic redeployment of the region.

(1) <http://meta.fgov.be/pdf/pd/endf37.pdf> (national action plan - English)

(2) http://www.leforem.be/informer/info/pdf/MarcheChiffres/marche_emploi_052005.pdf (AMEF – Le Forem)

(3) <http://www.leforem.be/informer/info/pdf/MarcheAnalyse/Liege.pdf> (Etats des lieux socio-économiques de Liège – Département Analysis of the Labour and Training Market – Le Forem - Fench)

(4) www.liege2020.be