



2026

Gap analysis of Belgian *equality* *data* related to age

Improving Equality Data Collection
in Belgium III

Synopsis

This analysis of Belgian *equality data* related to age highlights structural gaps and leads to a set of recommendations to improve the collection and use of age-related data. The analysis first emphasises the need to **collect data that is representative of the whole country** in order to address current regional imbalances. We then recommend **diversifying data collection methods**, in particular by increasing the use of correspondence experiments, which are better suited to measuring actual discrimination. The analysis also emphasises the importance of **covering all areas of life and all age groups**, particularly older people, whose experiences have been little studied. We recommend **systematically including older people** in samples and conducting **specific research** on their experiences, including those of LGBTQI+ and racialised older people, who are currently largely invisible. At the same time, we call for **greater visibility of the discrimination experienced by young people**, whose experiences are often studied through analyses focused on their rights rather than on inequalities. Finally, the analysis emphasises the need for a rigorous **intersectional approach** and a **precise operationalisation of age**, avoiding the use of vague categories such as "young people" and "older people".

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is equality data?

The term ‘equality data’ is an umbrella term that refers to all data that can be used to describe and analyse the state of equality or inequality in society. This data therefore relates to inequalities, but also to discrimination and human rights. It can be quantitative (e.g. survey data) or qualitative (e.g. in-depth interviews). In some cases, this data is collected specifically to measure inequality or discrimination. In other cases, the data is collected for other purposes but can still be used to measure these phenomena.

1.2 Context and objectives of the report

This report is part of the third phase of the Equality Data project, carried out between November 2023 and December 2025 with the financial support of the Justice Federal Public Service – Equal Opportunities Service. This phase of the project focuses on the criterion of age¹.

The aim of this report is to analyse the existing gaps in Belgian equality data related to the criterion of age. We wish to analyse all Belgian data on discrimination, inequalities and human rights in relation to age in order to identify needs and gaps in data collection on this criterion.

To this end, an inventory of equality data related to age has been compiled. The sources of data identified during this inventory can also be consulted on [the Equality Data Hub](#), a platform that provides an overview of existing equality data for various protected characteristics: so-called "racial" criteria, philosophical and religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sexual characteristics, disability, health status, physical characteristics and, following this phase of the project, age. This report focuses solely on data sources related to the criterion of age.

1.3 Selection and definition of the age criterion

In the third phase of the Equality Data project, we are focusing on the criterion of age.

Age is a protected criterion, which means that discrimination on the basis of age is prohibited by law², whether it takes the form of direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, incitement to discriminate, or

¹ As part of this project, we also conducted [research](#) on age discrimination in Belgium and made [recommendations](#).

² [Act of 10 May 2007 on combating certain forms of discrimination](#).

cumulative and intersectional discrimination. However, in 2024, nearly 10% of the cases opened by Unia concerned age discrimination³. This type of discrimination is therefore common.

We already know that research exists on the experiences of older people, but that there is a lack of data on the experiences of age discrimination experienced by young people⁴. Similarly, age discrimination and inequality are well documented in certain areas such as employment⁵, but there is little data on other areas of life.

However, in order to achieve age equality in Europe, AGE Platform Europe⁶ recommends the collection of reliable data, covering all ages and addressing age-related issues for which information is currently lacking. That is why we would like to answer the following question:

- What are the gaps in equality data related to age in Belgium?

To answer this question, we have compiled an inventory of sources presenting data on age. We then analysed these sources and how age is operationalised in them. Based on this analysis, we have identified gaps and needs in terms of age data collection in Belgium and we make recommendations to address these gaps.

2 Methodology

2.1 Search and selection of sources

We collected sources that seemed potentially relevant to the inventory in several ways. On the one hand, we identified potential sources by surveying stakeholders and, on the other hand, by conducting proactive and systematic search on relevant websites. Once these steps were completed, we identified a few additional sources, but in a less systematic manner. After collecting the sources, we then analysed them more closely to see if they met our selection criteria. Finally, the selected sources were included in the inventory.

³ Unia (2025). [Rapport annuel 2024 : ensemble !](#)

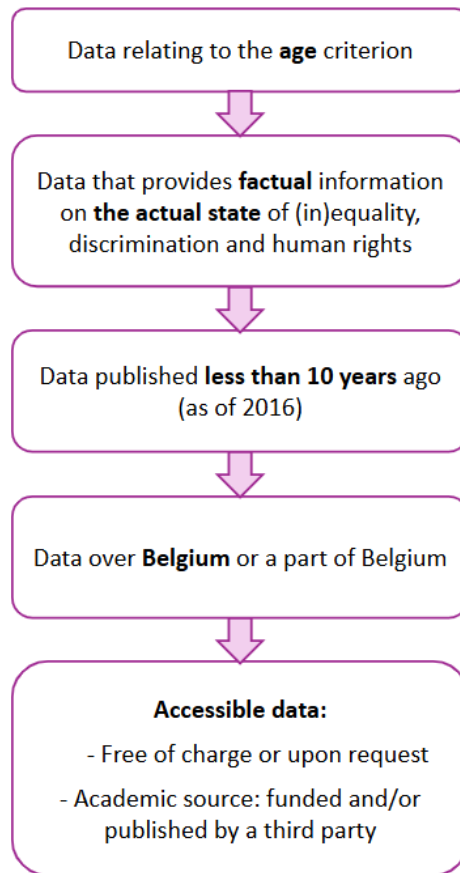
⁴ De la Fuente-Núñez et al. (2021). [Scoping Review on Ageism against Younger Populations.](#)

WHO (2021). [Global report on ageism.](#)

⁵ Lippens et al. (2023). [The state of hiring discrimination: A meta-analysis of \(almost\) all recent correspondence experiments.](#)

⁶ AGE Platform Europe (2025). [Proposal for EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism.](#)

Figure 1. Decision tree leading to the selection of sources



In order to determine whether or not to include a source in the inventory, we followed the decision tree above, which was established during the first phase of the project⁷ and then refined during the subsequent phases.

During our literature review, it became apparent that age is very often used to describe a sample in sources dealing with inequality and discrimination. Indeed, age is often taken into account as a control variable, which in most cases allows information about equality or inequality to be deduced from the available data, but it would not be possible to list all these sources. In order to remain within the realm of feasibility and to identify only sources containing the most relevant information, we defined as an additional criterion that the source must offer an analysis of one or more of the following topics:

- Ageism.
- Inequality related to age, year of birth, generation and/or cohort.
- Discrimination related to age, year of birth, generation and/or cohort.
- Age-related human rights violations.

In these analyses, age must be considered a central factor in the phenomenon described.

⁷ Unia (2021). [Improving equality data collection in Belgium - phase I](#).

2.2 Update of sources already included in the inventory

Sources already included in the inventory were examined to verify whether they contained information on age.

2.3 How the inventory works

Once the sources had been selected, we classified them using the *mapping tool*, an instrument created by the *Subgroup on Equality Data*⁸ that enables an inventory of equality data to be compiled. This tool was adapted during the various phases of the Equality Data project.

In practical terms, this tool takes the form of an Excel spreadsheet in which the following information is entered:

- source characteristics: name, language(s), author, year of publication.
- data characteristics: types of data, geographical coverage, areas of life and discrimination criteria the data covers, intersectionality and keywords.
- the operationalisation of age.

2.4 Analysis of sources

We analysed the sources in the inventory to identify gaps in the collection of age-related equality data in Belgium. To do this, we analysed the language and year of publication of the sources, the type of data presented, the geographical coverage, the age groups studied, the areas of life studied, and the intersectionality of the data. To analyse the age groups, we classified the sources into four categories:

- The source covers people of all ages.
- The source focuses on 'young people'.
- The source focuses on 'middle-aged people'.
- The source focuses on 'older people'.

It is important to note that there are no fixed definitions of the terms "young people" or "older people"; these definitions are socially and culturally constructed. In this report, we refer to "young people" as those aged 30 or under. This age limit is generally used in Belgium for youth policies. We refer to "older people" when referring to people over the age of 60. Policies aimed at older people use different age limits, but 60 seems to be the most common limit in Belgium.

Finally, we analysed how age data is operationalised.

⁸ Subgroup on Equality Data (2019). [Compendium of Practices on Equality Data: Equality Data Diagnostic Mapping Tool](#).

3 Gaps in equality data in Belgium

At the time of writing, the equality data inventory includes **391 sources related to the criterion of age**. The gap analysis covers these 391 sources.

It is important to note that some of these sources also cover other discrimination criteria studied alongside age.

3.1 Language of publication

293 sources are available in Dutch, 174 in French, 72 in English and 26 in German. It is important to note that many sources are available in several languages, but there are still significant differences in language accessibility in Belgian equality data related to age.

3.2 Year of publication

As explained in the section on source selection, we selected sources published from 2016 onwards. A significant proportion of the sources (198, or 50.6%) were published recently: from 2023 onwards.

3.3 Type of data

A single source may contain different types of data, which explains why the sum of the following percentages is greater than 100%.

Of the 391 sources related to age, 222 (56.8%) present data from surveys, 131 (33.5%) present administrative data and 126 (32.2%) present data from qualitative research. Thirty-three (8.4%) present data relating to complaints and 20 (5.1%) present data from diversity monitoring. Given the number of institutions mandated to receive complaints of discrimination and to carry out diversity monitoring, these types of data are well represented in Belgian equality data related to age. Only 8 (2%) sources present data from correspondence experiments. With the exception of one correspondence experiment conducted on the Brussels labour market, all correspondence experiments took place in Flanders. 29 (7.4%) sources present other types of quantitative data.

Finally, 83 sources present data on experiences of discrimination and 17 present data on hate crimes and hate speech. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that the experiences of discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech addressed in these sources are necessarily based on age. As mentioned above, some sources also contain data on other criteria, so it is possible that these phenomena relate to other discrimination criteria studied alongside age.

3.4 Geographical coverage

A data source may contain information on different regions of Belgium and/or on the whole of Belgium (which explains why the sum of the following percentages is greater than 100%).

The majority of sources contain data on the Flemish Region (211 sources, 54.0%). 106 (27.1%) sources contain data on the Brussels region, 70 (17.9%) on the Walloon region, 23 (5.9%) on the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and 17 (4.3%) on the German-speaking community. Finally, 155 sources (40.0%) contain data on Belgium as a whole.

There is therefore an imbalance between the Belgian regions in terms of the collection of equality data on age.

3.5 Age groups

169 sources (43.2%) cover a sample of various ages, 151 (38.6%) specifically cover “young” people (under 30), 2 (0.5%) specifically on “middle-aged” persons (between 31 and 59 years old), and 50 (12.8%) specifically on “older” people (aged 60 and over). 19 (4.9%) sources do not provide information on the age of the people covered by the data.

However, these figures should be interpreted with caution. Firstly, a significant proportion of the sources about young people deal with children's rights rather than the inequalities or discrimination experienced by adolescents and young adults. Secondly, the two sources about “middle-aged” persons actually deal with the experiences of “older workers” (workers aged 45 and over).

3.6 Areas of life covered by the data

The table below shows the areas of life covered by the sources. It is important to note that a source may cover different areas of life, which explains why the total number of sources is greater than 391 (and why the total percentage is greater than 100%).

Discrimination and inequalities based on age are most frequently studied in the areas of health and well-being, employment and housing. The areas of media and mobility and transport receive the least attention.

The most frequently studied areas in the 'Other area' category are leisure (53 sources, 13.6%), violence (47 sources, 12.0%) and public space (40 sources, 10.2%).

Young people are overrepresented in the area of justice and police (33 sources), while there is a lack of data on older people in this area (2 sources). Similarly, only 3 sources specifically focus on older people in the media area, compared to 16 sources on young people in this area.

Table 1. Number of sources covering each area of life.

Area of life	Number of sources covering this area
Employment	180 (46.0%)
Education	115 (29.4%)
Health and wellbeing	183 (46.8%)
Poverty and standard of living	112 (28.6%)
Housing	132 (33.8%)
Mobility and transport	38 (9.7%)
Justice and police	59 (15.1%)
Media	34 (8.7%)
Digitalisation	50 (12.8%)
Other area	220 (56.3%)

3.7 Intersectional data

269 sources, or about two-thirds of the sources on age, present intersectional data between age and one or more other criteria.

For the sake of clarity, we have grouped the criteria with which age is studied in an intersectional manner into five broad categories: so-called "racial" criteria, gender, sexual orientation, risk of poverty, and disability and health status. It is important to note that, in the sources included in the inventory, age was also studied in an intersectional manner with criteria not included in these five broad categories: level of education (40 sources), philosophical and religious beliefs (22 sources), and household type (19 sources).

The following table shows that age was most frequently studied in an intersectional manner with gender (130 sources), so-called "racial" criteria (117 sources) and disability and health status (109 sources). Eighty sources study age in an intersectional manner with risk of poverty, and 20 with sexual orientation. There are therefore few intersectional analyses between age and sexual orientation.

Despite the large number of sources presenting intersectional analyses, certain groups are invisible. Only 7.3% of sources on young people include intersectional analyses with sexual orientation, and the experiences of LGBTQI+ older people are not studied in any source. Furthermore, few sources focus on racialised older people (only 14.0% of sources on older people present intersectional analyses between age and so-called "racial" criteria).

Table 2. Number of sources containing intersectional data between age and another criterion by age group^{9,10}.

	So-called "racial" criteria	Gender	Sexual orientation	Risk of poverty	Disability and health status
Young people	77 (51.0%)	63 (41.7%)	11 (7.3%)	42 (27.8%)	50 (33.1%)
Middle-aged individuals	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Elderly people	7 (14.0%)	17 (34.0%)	0	13 (26.0%)	17 (34.0%)
All ages	29 (17.2%)	43 (25.4%)	7 (4.1%)	24 (14.2%)	40 (23.7%)
Age unknown	4 (21.0%)	6 (31.6%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.2%)	2 (10.5%)
Total	117	130	20	80	109

4 Operationalisation of the age criterion in equality data

Age is operationalised in various ways in the sources included in the inventory.

281 sources use cohorts, i.e. they divide the people studied into different age groups. More specifically, 87 study 'young' people using only cohorts between 0 and 30 years of age, 2 study 'middle-aged' people using only cohorts between 30 and 65 years of age, and 23 study 'older' people using only cohorts aged 65 and over. It is interesting to note that the theme of the two sources that study "middle-aged" people is the experience of "older workers" (between 45 and 55 years old and between 55 and 64 years old). 169 sources use cohorts of all ages.

⁹ The percentages in brackets should be read line by line. They reflect the number of sources containing intersectional data between age and another criterion for a certain age group, relative to the total number of sources containing data for that age group. For example, 51% of sources about young people present intersectional analyses between age and so-called 'racial' criteria.

¹⁰ A single source may contain intersectional analyses between age and several other criteria, which is why the sum per line is greater than the total number of sources for that age group and the sum of the percentages is greater than 100%.

Two limitations concerning the use of cohorts should be highlighted. The first is that 47 sources using cohorts and supposedly covering all ages exclude older people by limiting data collection to a certain age (e.g. no one over 70). This decision can of course be justified based on data availability and the theme of the source. However, excluding older people from age-related data collection risks making their experiences invisible. The second limitation is that the size of these cohorts varies according to age group, sometimes even within the same source. For example, among the sources covering all ages, 27 use relatively small cohorts (5 or 10 years) for young and middle-aged people, but only one very large cohort covering all people aged 60 or 65 and over. This does not allow for the complexity and nuance of older people's experiences to be captured, nor does it always allow for adequate comparison between groups.

64 sources mention 'young people' and 27 mention 'older people' without defining these categories. In fact, the categories 'young people' and 'older people' are socially and culturally defined. However, we can expect variations in the conceptualisation of these categories, even within Belgian society, hence the importance of specifying and justifying how these categories are constructed in the context of data collection.

Nineteen sources mention 'age discrimination' without specifying the age of the people who experience this discrimination. These sources provide information on the number of people who report having been victims of discrimination on the basis of various criteria such as age, but also skin colour, sexual orientation, disability, etc. However, these sources do not allow us to deduce the age of the people to whom the data refer.

5 Recommendations for improving the collection and use of age-related data

5.1 Collecting equality data on the criterion of age: yes, but across the whole of Belgium

The analysis of gaps in Belgian equality data related to age shows that this data does not cover all Belgian regions in a representative manner. For example, there is three times more data on Flanders than on Wallonia. This imbalance between regions prevents us from gaining a comprehensive and coordinated overview of age-related discrimination and inequalities in Belgium. We therefore recommend that sufficient data on age be published for the whole of Belgium (ideally broken down by region) and that there be sufficient consultation and coordination between the different regions and levels so that meaningful data can be collected in more than one region.

5.2 Increasing the methods of equality data collection on the criterion of age

The gap analysis highlights the prevalence of administrative data, data from surveys and qualitative research, and the lack of data on correspondence experiments, a method that allows to compare the

treatment received (e.g. during a job interview) by two people with similar profiles except for one characteristic (e.g. age)¹¹. Although controversial, this method has many methodological advantages over surveys and most qualitative research methods. As correspondence experiments measure the perpetrator's "real" discrimination, they avoid certain biases related to the accuracy of memories, social desirability or self-selection. Finally, correspondence experiments offer very high ecological validity because they are conducted directly in the field and are integrated into real-life processes (such as recruitment). This is why we recommend using a variety of methods to collect equality data on the criterion of age, which would allow us to benefit from the advantages and strengths of each method.

5.3 Collecting data on all areas of life for all age groups

Our analysis reveals a lack of age-related data in the areas of media, mobility and transport. The lack of data in the media sector particularly affects older people, while the lack of data on mobility and transport affects all age groups. In addition, young people are overrepresented in the area of justice and police, while there is a lack of data on older people in this area. However, the literature highlights that older people need tailored approaches in their interactions with the police¹². We therefore recommend collecting more data on these areas of life, with a focus on data related to the experiences of older people.

5.4 Including "older" people in studies on discrimination and inequality

Our analysis of Belgian equality data on the criterion of age highlights that the experiences of "older" people are frequently invisible. In some cases, people over the age of 75 or 85 are explicitly excluded from the samples on which the studies are based. In other cases, very large cohorts are used (e.g. a group comprising people aged '65 and over'), which does not allow for the nuances of the experiences of older people to be highlighted. However, our study conducted as part of this project on age discrimination¹³ shows that 65-year-olds do not experience the same discrimination as 85-year-olds. That is why we recommend both including older people in studies on discrimination and inequality, and conducting specific analyses of their experiences and lived realities.

¹¹ Verhaeghe & Van der Bracht (2017). [Praktijktesten: van onderzoeksmethode naar beleidsinstrument tegen discriminatie?](#)

¹² Kokorelias et al. (2025). [To protect and serve: a review of initiatives to support police officers in better meeting the needs of older adults.](#)

¹³ Unia (2025). [Age discrimination in Belgium.](#)

5.5 Conducting specific research on the experiences of 'older' people

Contrary to popular belief when it comes to ageism, our analysis reveals that in Belgium, few sources related to age focus specifically on older people. Moreover, older LGBTQI+ people and racialised older people are particularly invisible. This lack of data slows down the detection of certain problematic situations faced by these people. For example, the lack of data on elder abuse hinders the detection and tackling of this phenomenon¹⁴. We therefore recommend conducting specific research on the experiences of older people and, where necessary, identifying potential obstacles to collecting data on this age group.

5.6 Raising awareness of discrimination experienced by 'young' people

Our analysis of Belgian equality data on the criterion of age reveals a significant proportion of sources about young people. However, a large part of this data is not presented from the perspective of discrimination and inequality, but specifically concerns the rights of children and young people. The large amount of equality data on young people does not necessarily mean that the discrimination experienced by this age group receives as much attention as it appears to. Indeed, the scientific literature reveals that discrimination experienced by young people is invisible and that there is a lack of data on the subject¹⁵. We therefore recommend that data collectors make discrimination experienced by young people visible by adopting a more societal (and not solely legal) perspective, rooted in people's experiences and the challenges posed by ageism.

5.7 Ensuring an intersectional approach to age data collection

Our analysis reveals the existence of numerous sources incorporating intersectional analyses between age and other discrimination criteria. However, sexual orientation is rarely included in these analyses. Furthermore, certain groups remain invisible: LGBTQI+ people (particularly older people) and racialised older people. Given that our study conducted as part of this project¹⁶ reveals that LGBTQI+ older people and racialised older people face specific experiences of discrimination, and that some researchers are calling for an intersectional study of the experiences of older people¹⁷, we recommend that data collectors ensure an intersectional approach that makes the experiences of groups that receive less attention visible.

¹⁴ Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre (2020). [How to better tackle elder abuse in Belgium?](#)

¹⁵ Bratt et al. (2018). [Perceived Age Discrimination Across Age in Europe: From an Ageing Society to a Society for All Ages.](#)

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¹⁶ Unia (2025). [Age discrimination in Belgium.](#)

¹⁷ Gutterman (2021). [Ageism and Intersectionality: Older Persons as Members of Other Vulnerable Groups.](#)

5.8 Operationalising the age criterion in a clear and defined manner

Our analysis reveals that in about a quarter of the sources relating to the age criterion, age is operationalised by reference to 'young people' or 'older people' without specifying the age of the people in question. On average, Belgians estimate that 44 is the age at which youth ends and 64 is the age at which old age begins¹⁸. These estimates are subject to individual, cultural and temporal variations, which is why data collectors cannot rely on the socially constructed categories of "young people" and "older people" to operationalise age. We therefore recommend clearly defining the age of the groups covered by age equality data.

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¹⁸ Abrams et al. (2011). [Ageism in Europe: Findings from the European Social Survey](#).

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