

ITUC Global Poll 2014 Belgium Report

People across the world want an activist approach by their governments to secure jobs, workers' rights, tame corporate power and address climate change.

The ITUC Global Poll 2014 shows that people are facing serious financial pressure with falling or stagnating wages.

Globally, more than one in two working families in fourteen countries that constitute half the world's population cannot keep up with the rising cost of living. [Chart 1, 2]

In Belgium, 87 percent of respondents say their wages have fallen behind or stagnated compared with a global mean of 82 percent.

More than half of the people from 14 countries in the ITUC Global Poll cannot afford to save any money. [Chart 3, 4] Sixty percent of women are not able to save any money, among men this is 54 percent.

In Belgium, 58 percent of people cannot afford to save any money.

Trend data from three years of ITUC polling in 2012, 2013 and 2014 shows that in the past three years over half the world's population has not been able to save any money. [Chart 5]

One in ten families lack the money for essentials like housing, food and electricity. [Chart 6]

In Belgium, 9 percent of people lack the money for essentials like housing, food and electricity, compared with a global mean of 10 percent.

An overwhelming majority (79 percent) do not believe the minimum wage in their country is sufficient for leading a decent life. [Chart 7, 8]

In Belgium, 70 percent of people do not believe the minimum wage is sufficient for a decent life.

The spectre of unemployment remains for millions of people. 41 percent of people are directly impacted by the loss of jobs or reduction in working hours. [Chart 9,10]

In Belgium, 66 percent of people are directly impacted by the loss of jobs or a reduction in working hours.

Only one out of two people believe the next generation will find a decent job. [Chart 11, 12]

Belgium respondents fear the next generation will fail to find a decent job, with 56 percent of people thinking it unlikely the next generation will find a decent job.

Global citizens feel confronted with an economic system that favours the wealthy – and is not fair to most people. Almost four out of five people (78 percent) believe the economic system favours the wealthy, rather than being fair to most people. [Chart 13]

In Belgium, 77 percent of people think the economic system favours the wealthy, compared with a global mean of 78 percent.

The ITUC Global Poll 2014 covers the adult populations of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. The findings represent the opinions of more than 3.7 billion people, or according to UN estimates about half of the world population.

Read the ITUC Global Poll 2014 at www.ituc-csi.org

Key findings in Belgium:

Belgium sits alongside France with 42 percent of people unable to save any money.

There has been some improvement in views of the economy – in 2013 only 22 percent of people thought the economy was good – in 2014, 39 percent of people rate the economy as good.

Belgium is not doing as well as Germany or the UK with 34 percent of people with direct experience of unemployment or reduced working hours.

Belgium's are among the most pessimistic in Europe about the hope of the next generation finding a decent job.

Belgium is similar to France with 53 percent of people thinking corporate interests have too much power over economic decisions.

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Trust in government is broken

People want to be able to trust the economic system.

Over three years the ITUC Global Poll 2012, 2013 and 2014 shows unequivocally that this trust does not exist.

The ITUC Global Poll 2012 found only 13 percent thought voters had any influence on economic decisions.

The ITUC Global Poll 2013 found just 13 percent of people believe their government is focused on the interests of working families.

There is not a single country in the 2014 Global Poll where a majority believes the economic system is fair to most people. [Chart 14] Four out of five people (78 percent) believe the economic system favours the wealthy.

In Belgium, 77 percent believe the economic system favours the wealthy, rather than being fair to most people.

Economic and social outlook

The world needs a pay rise

Global workers are facing serious financial pressure with wages falling behind the cost of living.

More than half of the respondents (53 percent) say their family income has fallen behind the cost of living in the past two years. [Chart 1] An additional one-third of the respondents (29 percent) say their family income has stayed even with the cost of living in the past two years.

In Belgium, 65 percent say income fallen behind the cost of living. Belgium ranks alongside Italy, France and Germany where wages have fallen. 22 percent say income has stayed even with the cost of living.

Ten percent of global respondents now lack the money for basic essentials like housing, food and electricity. [Chart 6]

9 percent of Belgium citizens lack the money for basic essentials like housing, food and electricity.

The five European countries including Germany have the bleakest experiences of incomes and cost of living, closely followed by the Canada and the USA.

Two risks groups emerge in the ITUC Global Poll 2014, when those with lower education and age groups above forty are combined almost two out of three respondents (64 percent) experience incomes falling behind the cost of living.

Minimum wage is insufficient

An overwhelming majority (79 percent) of the global respondents from 11 countries with a minimum wage say the (national) minimum wage is insufficient to enable workers to lead a decent life. [Chart 7] 82 percent of women say the minimum wage in their country is not enough for a decent life compared with 76 percent of men.

In Belgium, 70 percent of respondents believe the minimum wage is insufficient for a decent life.

Overall evaluations of the economy continue to be negative: more than half of the respondents in the ITUC global poll (56 percent) rate the current economic situation in their country as bad. [Chart 15, 16] Just 1 out of 3 respondents in Europe rate their economy as good. 60 percent of women rate their economies as bad.

In Belgium, 61 percent of respondents rate the current economic situation as bad.

Spectre of unemployment

Over the past two years, more than 4 in 10 respondents have directly experienced unemployment or the reduction of working hours – either in their own job or that of a family member. [Chart 9, 10]

Respondents from BRICS countries have on average a greater chance of directly experiencing (partial) unemployment.

34 percent of respondents in Belgium have experienced (partial) unemployment in the last two years.

Young women under the age of forty in the 14 countries surveyed have most experience of (partial) unemployment.

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More than one in two working families in fourteen countries that constitute half the world's population cannot keep up with the rising cost of living.

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53 percent of this group say they have experience of unemployment.

Close to half (41 percent) of current workers expect their job to be less secure in the next two years. [Chart 17] Just one out of four European respondents (26 percent) expect their job to be more secure over the next two years.

Future prospects are dim

Previous ITUC polls have shown great concern about the next generation with more than 66 percent of people saying future generations “would be worse off than my own generation” in 2012.

The ITUC Global Poll 2014 finds just 1 in 2 respondents expect the next generation to find a decent job. Just 39 percent of European respondents believe the next generation will be able to find a decent job. [Chart 11, 12]

Belgium respondents fear the next generation will fail to find a decent job, with 56 percent of people thinking it unlikely the next generation will find a decent job.

Power dynamics favouring the wealthy

The current economic system favours the wealthy, rather than being fair to most people – no country has a majority saying it is fair to most people.

That is the opinion of 78 percent of all respondents in the 2014 Global Poll. [Chart 13] One in five European respondents believes the economic system is fair to most. 80 percent say it favours the wealthy.

77 percent of respondents in Belgium think the economic system favours the wealthy.

A striking 84 percent of global respondents say that ‘ordinary citizens’ do not have enough influence on economic decision-making. 60 percent think corporate interests have too much influence. [Chart 18] There is not a single country in the ITUC Global Poll 2014 that does not support giving ordinary citizens more influence in the process of economic decision making.

[Chart 19] There is a consensus among countries that corporate interests have too much power. [Chart 20, 21]

88 percent of Belgium’s agree that ‘ordinary citizens’ do not have enough influence on economic decision-making.

53 percent of Belgium’s think that corporate interests have too much influence on setting the rules for the economy.

Global citizens want corporate power to be tamed

First and foremost, global citizens want ordinary citizens to be brought back in the picture of the economic decision-making process. 62 percent say they want the power of corporations to be tamed. [Chart 22, 23]

In Belgium, 60 percent of people want the government to do more to tame corporate power.

Frustration with poor performance in tackling unemployment

Citizens across the globe are frustrated with their government’s poor performance in tackling unemployment. 68 percent of respondents say their government is bad at tackling unemployment. [Chart 24, 25] 69 percent of women say their government is doing a bad job at tackling unemployment compared with 65 percent of men.

71 percent of Belgium respondents said their government is bad at tackling unemployment.

Strong labour laws

Global citizens continue to express exceptionally strong support for a wide range of labour laws, including the right to strike. [Chart 26] The strongest call exists for laws that:

‘Protect workers’ health and safety.’ (97 percent favour, of which 71 percent strongly favour). In Belgium 97 percent favour, 69 percent strongly favour.

‘Establish and protect a decent minimum wage for workers also enjoy overwhelming support.’ (94 percent favour, 63 percent strongly). In Belgium 94 percent favour, 60 percent strongly favour.

A sense of disempowerment: The Global and Belgium snapshot

Majority say their income cannot keep up with the rising cost of living [Chart 1]

87 percent of Belgium respondents say their wages are falling behind the cost of living or stagnating

10 percent of people lack the money for essentials like housing, food and electricity [Chart 6]

9 percent of Belgium’s lack the money for essentials like housing, food and electricity

More than half respondents can’t save any money [Chart 3]

58 percent of Belgium respondents can’t save any money

An overwhelming majority believe the minimum wage is insufficient for leading a decent life [Chart 7]

70 percent of respondents from Belgium’s believe the minimum wage is insufficient for leading a decent life

Large numbers of people hold negative views of the economy [Chart 15]

61 percent of Belgium respondents hold negative views of the economy

The spectre of unemployment is alive 41% have experienced (partial) unemployment [Chart 9]

34 percent of Belgium respondents have experienced (partial) unemployment

Just one in two believe the next generation will find a decent job [Chart 11]

Only 44 percent of Belgium respondents believe the next generation will find a decent job

78 percent of people think the economic system favours the wealthy [Chart 13]

77 percent of Belgium respondents think the economic system favours the wealthy

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'Give workers the right to collective bargaining.' (89 percent favour, 45 percent strongly). In Belgium 90 percent favour, 41 percent strongly favour.

'Help to cement the right to join a union.' (89 percent favour, 43 percent strongly). In Belgium 88 percent favour, 42 percent strongly favour.

'Protect the right to strike.' (75 percent favour, 28 percent strongly). In Belgium 69 percent favour, 23 percent strongly favour.

A social protection floor

Global citizens overwhelmingly want their government to be working on a social protection floor. [Chart 27] Trend data from three years of polling shows consistent high levels of support for these policies. [Chart 28]

'Affordable access to health care.' (95 percent favour, of which 72 percent strongly). In Belgium 98 percent favour, 79 percent strongly favour.

'Decent retirement incomes.' (94 percent favour, 71 percent strongly). In Belgium 97 percent favour, 80 percent strongly favour.

'Providing affordable access to education.' (95 percent favour, 69 percent strongly). In Belgium 97 percent favour, 73 percent strongly favour.

'Support for paid maternity leave.' (89 percent favour, 55 percent strongly). In Belgium 88 percent strongly favour, 44 percent strongly favour.

'Unemployment benefits.' (87 percent, 47 percent strongly). In Belgium 81 percent favour, 50 percent favour.

True respect for workers' rights throughout entire production chain

The idea of corporations respecting workers' rights throughout the entire production chain is well received,

but citizens are sceptical on whether companies will deliver even if they were to make such a promise. A minority of just 39 percent of the respondents believe that they will. [Chart 29, 30]

Just 34 percent of Belgium respondents think that companies will respect workers' rights throughout their entire supply chain.

Worker responses: organise true power of workers

More than two out of three respondents (63 percent) agree with the statement 'workplaces that have a union representing workers provide better wages, conditions and health and safety for workers'. [Chart 31, 32]

In Belgium 54 percent of respondents agree 'workplaces that have a union representing workers provide better wages, conditions and health and safety for workers'.

More than three in four global respondents (76 percent) find it important that unions play an active role in society. [Chart 33, 34] 84 percent of global respondents younger than 25 say an active role by unions is important.

In Belgium, 73 percent of people find it important that unions play an active role in society.

If governments are concerned to tackle unemployment and inequality, ensure rights and fair wages for their citizens and tackle climate change, they will draw confidence from these views that their own people want more activist governments and they want corporate power tamed.

**Sharan Burrow, General Secretary
International Trade Union Confederation**

A roadmap for government action

Vacancy: activist national governments in the international arena

People are not satisfied with their government performance. Governments across the world and in Belgium are admonished 'to do more' when it comes to:

1 Taming corporate power [Chart 35]

Taming corporate power (62 percent 'do more'). Belgium 60 percent 'do more'.

Keeping more of the spoils from national natural resources (73 percent 'do more'). Belgium 76 percent 'do more'.

2 Jobs, wages and working conditions [Chart 36]

Reducing the gap between rich and poor (79 percent 'do more'). Belgium 83 percent 'do more'.

Ensuring fair wages (82 percent 'do more'). Belgium 79 percent 'do more'.

Increasing job security (81 percent 'do more'). Belgium 88 percent 'do more'.

Establishing reasonable working hours (60 percent 'do more'). Belgium 49 percent 'do more'.

3 International action [chart 37]

Intervening more actively in the economy to share wealth more equally (86 percent 'favour'). Belgium 90 percent 'favour'.

Ensure workers' rights are an essential part of global trade agreements (94 percent 'favour'). Belgium 96 percent 'favour'.

Strengthening international rules to make companies provide better wages and conditions (94 percent 'favour'). Belgium 95 percent 'favour'

Promote lifting the minimum wage in every country around the world (88 percent 'favour'). Belgium 94 percent 'favour'.

4 Dealing with climate change [Chart 38]

Limiting pollution that causes climate change (73 percent 'do more'). Belgium 68 percent 'do more'.