

Social and economic environment

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The European coastal areas are characterised by their increasing number of inhabitants and a population density that is on average 10% higher compared to the hinterland. Moreover, these regions are also subject to an expansion of infrastructure and economic activities (*The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas*, EEA 2006, *Balancing the future of Europe's coasts*, EEA 2013). Hence, the coastal zones are regions with a unique identity and specific challenges. The Belgian coastal area is characterised by a typical social environment, with a higher population density, a large ageing population, a high amount of second homes and high real estate prices. Furthermore, the coast constitutes a specific region from an economic perspective. On the one hand, large economic gateways (sea ports and airports) are present, but the region is also characterised by a higher unemployment rate, seasonal employment and a limited number of high-quality jobs for the highly educated (*Breyne et al. 2007*, *Maelfait et al. 2012*). In the current text, the Belgian coastal area is mainly compared to the province of West Flanders. In the publications mentioned below, the figures are also benchmarked within larger geographical areas, such as the Flemish region.

10.1 Policy context

Both federal and Flemish actors are involved in the Belgian policy concerning the economic environment. On the federal level, the following Federal Public Services (FPS) exist: *FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue* and *FPS Economy, SMEs, Self-Employed and Energy* (see the federal policy statements *Werk 2014* and *Economie en consumenten 2014*). Furthermore, there are the following Flemish policy domains: *Work and Social Economy* and *Economy, Science and Innovation* (see the Flemish policy notes *Sociale economie 2014-2019* and *Werk, Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie 2014-2019*).

The housing policy and spatial planning belong to the Flemish policy domain of Spatial Planning, Housing Policy and Immovable Heritage (*RWO*) (see the *Omgeving 2014-2019* and the *Wonen 2014-2019*). Furthermore, the Flemish policy domains of *Wellbeing, Public Health and Family*, *Education* and *Culture, Youth, Sports and Media* are important as well with regard to the social environment.

The Province of West Flanders (see *streekhuis Kust*, *De Provincie aan de Kust. Beleidsbrief Kust 2011*) and the municipalities are involved in the translation of the economic policy, the housing policy and spatial planning (see below). The legal framework concerning spatial planning can be found in the *coastal codex, theme Spatial Planning*. The local legislation for inhabitants of the coast is listed as well (*coastal codex, theme Local Legislation*).

10.2 Spatial use

The actual spatial use has been determined by the regional spatial plans, drafted by the federal government. A regional spatial plan covers one or several districts, in which the space has been divided into areas dedicated to housing and services, industry, recreation, nature reserves as well as agriculture. A destination in a regional spatial plan is further refined by the municipality in urban plans (BPA). These plans have been created particularly in buildable areas. Therefore, differences exist today between several coastal municipalities concerning the specific interpretation, such as the heights and density of the apartment blocks.

The new Flemish decree on spatial planning (decree of 18 May 1999) has changed the planning system. The destinations on the regional spatial plan still remain valid until they are replaced by a new destination, through a spatial implementation plan (RUP). These RUPs can be elaborated by the municipalities, the provinces as well as by the Flemish Region. The drafting of a RUP is the implementation of a spatial vision described in a spatial structure plan. Three spatial structure plans exist: the Flemish spatial structure plan (*RSV*) (Flemish Region), the spatial structure plan of the province of West Flanders (*PRS-WV*) (Province of West Flanders) and the municipal spatial structure plans. These spatial visions determine the future spatial use. The regional spatial plans, RUPs and BPAs can be consulted on the following website: <http://www.giswest.be/gewestplan-rups-internet>.

In the *RSV*, the coast is regarded as an urban network and a tourist-recreational network. This means that a coherent urban policy for the coast should be in place, with opportunities for further tourist and recreational activities. In this context, the regional urban area of Ostend (consisting of parts of Middelkerke, Ostend and Bredene) serves to meet new needs with regard to housing and industry. Furthermore, Ostend and Zeebrugge are designated as economic gateways, which means that the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge as well as Ostend Airport can benefit from opportunities for further development. This development is elaborated in regional spatial implementation plans

(GRUPs). The large connected nature areas such as Zwin, the beaches between coastal towns on the West Coast, etc. are also demarcated by the Flemish Region in GRUPs. The *RSV* and the GRUPs can be consulted on the following website: www.ruimtelijkeordening.be. Besides the further implementation of the Flemish spatial structure plan, the government of Flanders is preparing a new spatial policy plan (*Beleidsplan Ruimte*) (see *Groenboek. Vlaanderen in 2050: mensenmaat in een metropool? Beleidsplan ruimte Vlaanderen (2012)*).

The *PRS-WV* refines the spatial planning in the coastal zone. Every coastal municipality benefits from opportunities for further development. This needs to be concretised by the municipalities in municipal spatial structure plans and is concluded in the municipal spatial implementation plans. The province determines the possibilities for constructions on the beach and seawall in provincial spatial implementation plans. The PRS and RUPs can be found on the following website: www.west-vlaanderen.be/ruimtelijkeordening.

10.3 Current state

10.3.1 Social environment

THE COAST AND ITS INHABITANTS (more information: [demografische fiche Kust 2012](#))

On 1 January 2014, the coastal area¹ numbered 418,558 inhabitants. This constitutes 35.6% of the total population of the province of West Flanders. In the period 2002-2014, the population in the coastal area increased by 4% (figure 1), a growth rate comparable to the surrounding coastal areas around the North Sea (*The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas*, EEA 2006, *Balancing the future of Europe's coasts*, EEA 2013). A detailed comparison of the population growth of the Belgian coast and the Côte d'Opale in Northern France is discussed in the following publication: *Grensoverschrijdende atlas: Van Berck tot Brugge, één grens, twee gebieden, één gezamenlijke horizon (2006)*.

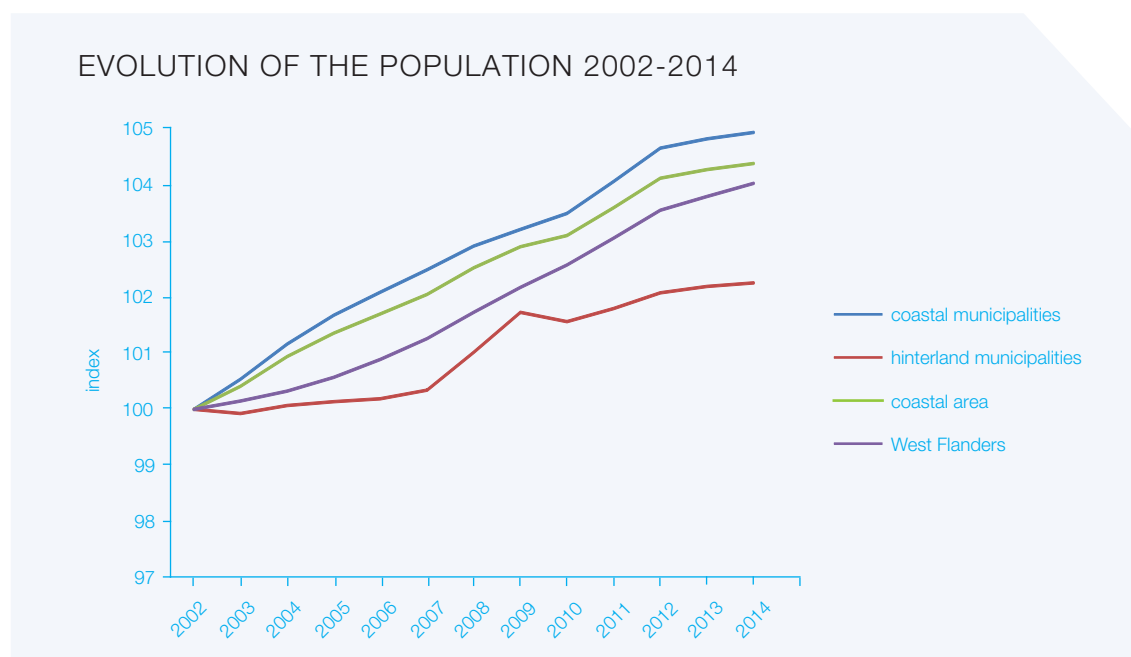


Figure 1. Evolution of the population in the coastal area (coastal municipalities + hinterland municipalities) and the province of West Flanders between 2002-2014 (Source: 'rijksregister', population on 01.01 of each year, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

¹ The coastal area includes the 10 coastal municipalities (Blankenberge, Bruges, Knokke-Heist, Bredene, De Haan, Middelkerke, Ostend, De Panne, Koksijde and Nieuwpoort) and the 9 hinterland municipalities (Damme, Jabbeke, Zuienkerke, Diksmuide, Lo-Reninge, Gistel, Oudenburg, Alveringem and Veurne).

The coastal municipalities as well as the hinterland municipalities are characterised by population growth, although the increase is more evident at the coast than in the hinterland. The population growth in the coastal zone is stronger than the average in the province of West Flanders (Source: 'rijksregister' population on 01.01 of each year, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

Recently, the research department of the government of Flanders have presented their new population forecasts (see figure 2). (<http://www4.vlaanderen.be/sites/svr/Pages/2015-01-29-projecties.aspx>). The projections show a further increase of the number of inhabitants in the coastal municipalities, although the population growth will be less pronounced (+2%) than the past 10 years. The population growth in the hinterland municipalities will stagnate between now and 2024.

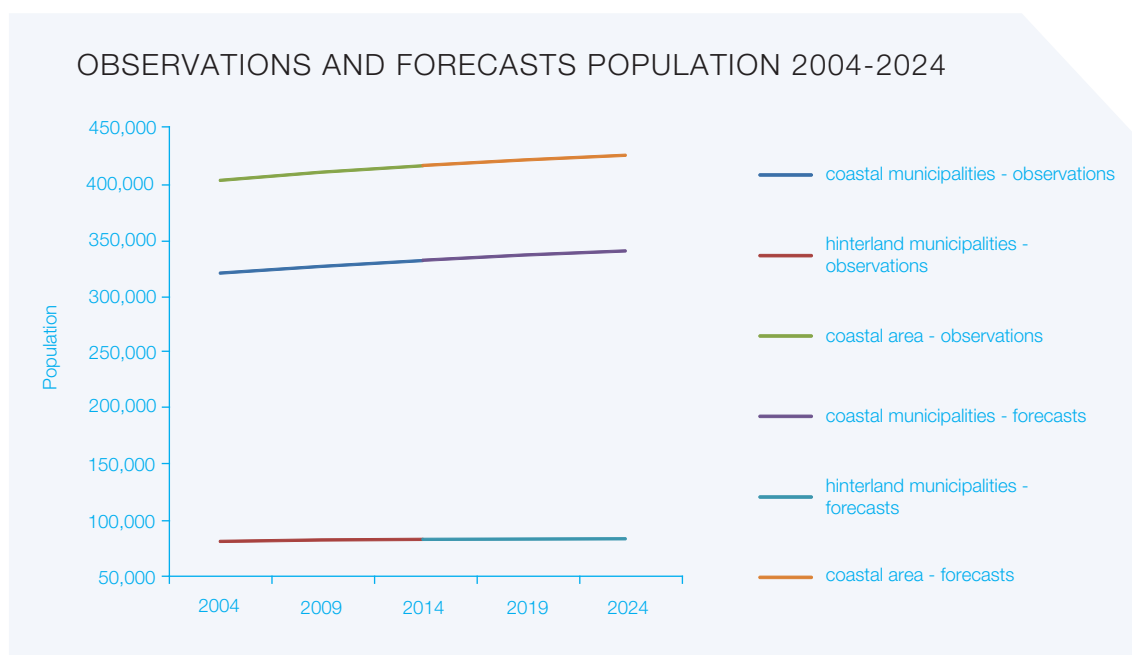


Figure 2. Observations and forecasts of the population in the coastal municipalities, hinterland municipalities and coastal areas (Source: research department of the government of Flanders).

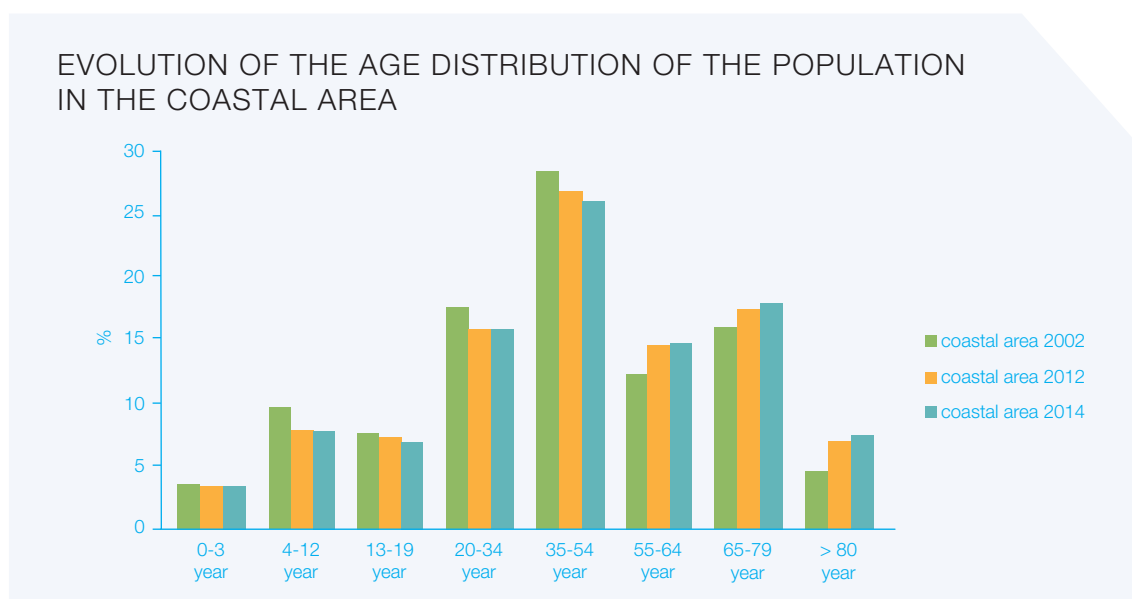


Figure 3. The evolution of the age distribution of the population in the coastal area, between 2002 and 2014 (Source: 'rijksregister' on 01.01.2014, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

The Belgian coast as well as the Dutch coast and parts of the Northern French coast constitute the coastal area around the North Sea with the highest population density (*The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas*, EEA 2006, *Balancing the future of Europe's coasts*, EEA 2013). The average population density in the Belgian coastal area amounts to 368 inhabitants per km². This average masks certain differences: the population density of the coastal municipalities amounts to 696 inhabitants per km², while the population density of the hinterland municipalities is 129 inhabitants per km². 80% of the inhabitants of the coastal area live in a coastal town (Source: 'rijksregister' on 01.01.2014, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

The coastal population has a few typical characteristics. According to the publication *Grensoverschrijdende atlas: Van Berck tot Brugge, één grens, twee gebieden, één gezamenlijke horizon* (2006), the profile of the inhabitants of the Belgian coast strongly resembles the profile of the French Côte d'Azur. The dejuvenation and ageing processes are more pronounced in the Belgian coastal area than in the other parts of Flanders and West Flanders (Coudenys 2012 in *Maelfait et al. 2012*, *De Klerck 2011*). The age groups under 55 years decrease proportionally while the age groups above 55 years increase proportionally (see figure 3). Furthermore, the structural coefficients tell us something about the demographics (see table 1).

In West Flanders, for every 100 persons between 0 and 19 years old, there are 138 people aged 60+. In the coastal municipalities, this proportion increases to 199: for every 100 persons aged under 20, there are 199 people aged 60+, so the population aged 60+ is twice the population aged under 20. The so-called 'grey pressure' is 70 in the coastal municipalities: for every 100 persons in the professionally active age range (20-59 years) there are 70 people aged 60+. The internal ageing (the share of people aged 80+ within the group of 60+) amounts to 22 in the coastal municipalities. This figure is slightly lower than in the hinterland municipalities and West Flanders.

On 1 January 2014, 136,366 persons aged 60+ lived in the coastal area (Source: 'rijksregister' on 01.01.2014, processed by the Province of West Flanders). The increase between 2002 and 2014 amounts to 28%, which means that the population of persons aged 60+ in the coastal area has increased with more than a quarter compared to 12 years ago. In the same period, the number of persons under 20 in the coastal area has decreased by 10% (from 84,219 in 2002 to 75,389 in 2014).

On 1 January 2014, 195,396 households were living in the coastal area. In the time range 2002-2014, the amount of households increased by 11%. The increase in the amount of households is stronger than the increase in the number of inhabitants. Hence, the coast was characterised by a continuing reduction in family size within the past 11 years.

When the features of the households are observed in detail, a distinction can be made with regard to the composition of the household: a household consisting of a single adult or of several adults living together, a household without children aged under 20 (family without children) or a household with one or more adults living together with one or more children aged under 20 (family with children). This last category also includes single-parent families.

The households in the coastal area comprise 37% singles, 41% families without children and 21% families with children (figure 4). The coastal municipalities are characterised by more singles and fewer families with children compared to the hinterland municipalities and less than the average of West Flanders. (Source: 'rijksregister' on 01.01.2014, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

Table 1. The structural coefficients in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and the province of West Flanders on 1 January 2014 (Source: 'rijksregister').

	STRUCTURAL COEFFICIENTS			
	coastal municipalities	hinterland	coastal zone	West Flanders
Ageing degree (60+/0-19 year)	199.44	122.36	180.88	138.19
Grey pressure (60+/ 20-59 year)	70.25	50.13	65.94	54.86
Internal ageing (80+/60+)	22.39	23.99	22.65	23.29
Family care index (80+/50-59 year)	50.72	41.99	48.96	45.66
Juvenile pressure (0-19 year/20-59 year)	35.22	40.97	36.45	39.70

OVERVIEW OF FAMILIES WITHOUT CHILDREN, WITH CHILDREN, AND SINGLES IN THE COASTAL AREA (2014)

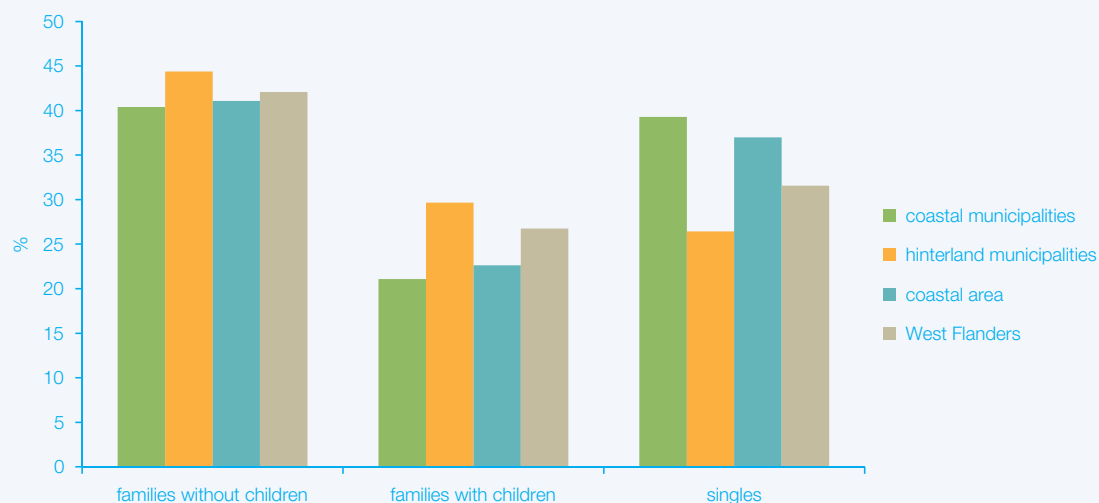


Figure 4. Overview of families without children, with children, and singles in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and the province of West Flanders on 1 January 2014 (Source: 'rijksregister').

EVOLUTION OF SINGLES IN THE COASTAL AREA AND IN THE PROVINCE WEST-FLANDERS BETWEEN 2002 AND 2014

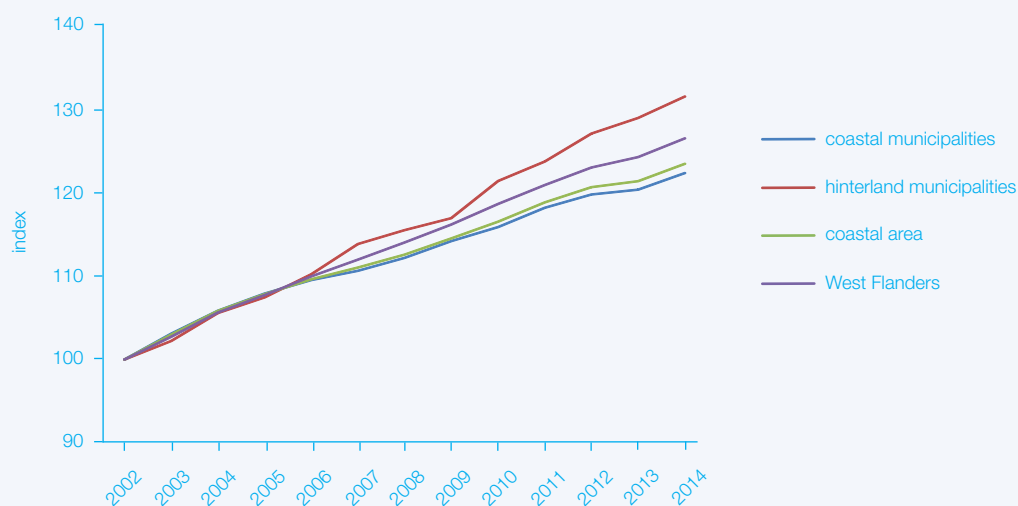


Figure 5. The evolution of singles in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and in the province of West Flanders between 2002 and 2014 (Source: 'rijksregister', population on 1 January of each year, processed by the Province of West Flanders)

A distinctive feature of the coastal municipalities is the large number of singles. This group has grown a lot over the past 12 years (+23% in the coastal area, +26% in West Flanders) (see above: reduction in family size) (figure 5). The highest increase is observed in the hinterland municipalities.

When we observe the features of the population, a few indicators reveal the urban character of the coastal municipalities: an older population, a lot of singles and a higher population density. This urban profile first appeared

in the deprivation atlases ([Kesteloot et al. 1996](#), [Kesteloot & Meys \(2008\)](#)) that contain an analysis on neighbourhood level. The neighbourhoods along the coast show a completely different profile than the neighbourhoods behind the coastal zone. The line of demarcation between more deprived quarters and less deprived neighbourhoods does not correspond to the borders of the municipalities. To determine the urban profile of the coastal zone and the related problems, an analysis on neighbourhood level is required.

The deprivation atlas of the province of West Flanders (*provinciebestuur West-Vlaanderen, Steunpunt Sociale Planning, [Kansarmoede-atlas West-Vlaanderen 2014](#)*) confirms the urban nature of the coastal municipalities and reveals that coastal towns are faced with deprivation more than average ([Kansarmoede-atlas West-Vlaanderen 2014](#)). In the coastal area, 19.7% of all families live in a deprived neighbourhood. The share of families living in a deprived neighbourhood is 8% higher than the average in West Flanders (12%). In the coastal municipalities, an average of 23% of families live in a deprived neighbourhood. For the hinterland municipalities, this share amounts to 4% of families ([Kansarmoede-atlas West-Vlaanderen 2014](#), see also [kansarmoede-steekkaarten per gemeente](#)).

THE COAST AND ITS HOUSING (more information: [woonfiche kustzone 2012](#))

The total surface of the coastal area is 1,183 km². The coastal municipalities account for 42% of this area, the hinterland municipalities for the other 58% (Source: FPS Economy - *Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie*, based on the land register).

The Belgian coastal zone has the highest share of built-up area compared to the other European coastal zones ([The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas, EEA 2006](#), [Balancing the future of Europe's coasts, EEA 2013](#)). In the publication: *Grensoverschrijdende atlas: Van Berck tot Brugge, één grens, twee gebieden, één gezamenlijke horizon (2006)* a detailed comparison between the habitation of the Belgian Coast and the Côte d'Opale (Northern France) is made. The built-up area in the Belgian coastal area amounts to 239 km². 7% of this built-up area in the coastal area serves housing. For the coastal municipalities, the area for housing constitutes 35% of the built-up area whereas in the hinterland municipalities this is only 4% (Source: FPS Economy - *Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie*, based on the land register).

In 2014, 309,806 housing facilities were present in the coastal area (table 2). However, there is a significant difference in the types of housing. In the coastal municipalities, 54% of the housing facilities are situated in an apartment (block) compared to 8% in the hinterland municipalities. In the hinterland municipalities, 87% of the housing facilities are ordinary houses (*Kadasterkubus* of Province West Flanders).

The total amount of housing facilities in the coastal municipalities is slightly higher than the amount of homes needed for housing its inhabitants. An average of 38% of the housing facilities in the coastal area is not used as a permanent home (figure 6). In other words, housing facilities often serve other functions: second homes, some sort of industry, or sometimes they remain tenantless houses (Coudenys 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)).

The use of the housing facilities for other functions than permanent habitation might have negative consequences for the community, such as an increased feeling of insecurity and a lack of social cohesion. On the other hand, a large amount of second homes is one of the preconditions for the tourism industry (see theme **Tourism and recreation**). Figure 6 clearly shows a large housing surplus. This phenomenon is typical for the coast given that the hinterland municipalities only have 10% housing facilities which are used for other purposes than permanent habitation.

Table 2. An overview of the housing facilities in the coastal area, divided into hinterland municipalities and coastal municipalities (Source: Province of West Flanders, *kadasterkubus*, situation on 01.01.2014).

Housing facilities	COASTAL ZONE		HINTERLAND MUNICIPALITIES		COASTAL MUNICIPALITIES	
	Total		Total		Total	
Total number housing facilities	309,806	100%	38,125	100%	271,681	100%
• Residential houses	149,182	48%	33,256	87%	115,926	43%
• Commercial premises	9,919	3%	1,693	4%	8,226	3%
• Apartments and buildings	150,705	48%	3,176	8%	147,529	54%

THE SHARE OF THE HOUSING FACILITIES WITHOUT DOMICILE IN THE COASTAL AREA IN 2014

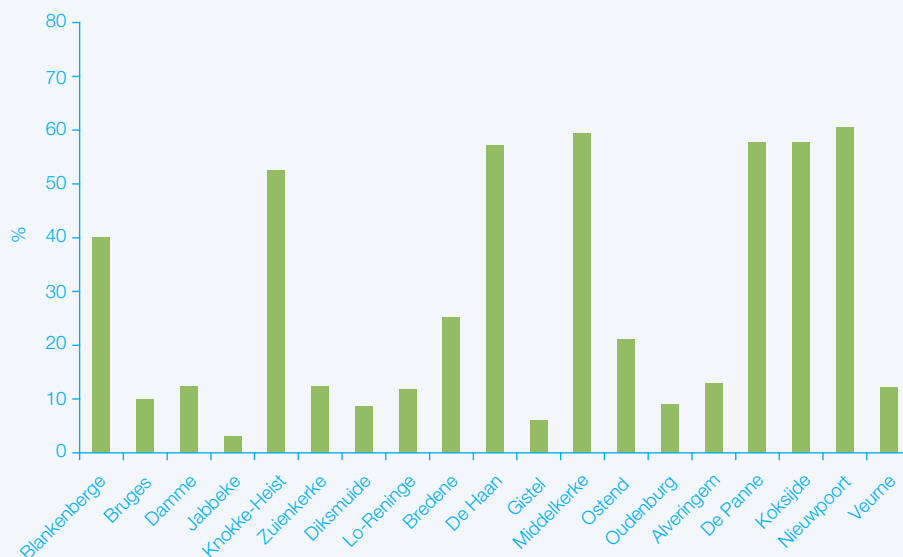


Figure 6. The share of the housing facilities without domicile in the coastal area, during the past 5 years (Source: Kadasterkubus province of West Flanders, situation on 01.01.2014; methodology: Coudenys 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)).

10.3.2 Economic environment

THE COAST AND ITS LABOUR MARKET

In 2012, there were 169,121 professionally active persons in the coastal area (employees, self-employed and helpers) aged between 18 and 64 years. Hence, the coastal area constitutes 33.5% of the total number of working persons in West Flanders. There were 142,170 employees in the coastal area at the end of 2012, which represents 34.8% of the total of West Flanders. Moreover, 36,928 self-employed and helpers (excluding the self-employed as a secondary activity) were active in the coastal area, which equals 35.1% of the total number in West Flanders (Source: [RESOC-dataset 2014](#) on www.pomwvl.be).

The coastal area is characterised by a very weak industrial basis. The share of the industry within salaried employment was only 9.4% at the end of 2014, compared to 20.7% in West Flanders. In the coastal area, 85.5% of salaried employment is situated in trade and services, of which tourism and the hotel and catering industry constitute a major part. In the latter sector, a large number of the jobs are seasonal employment. In West Flanders, 71.8% of all employees are active in trade and services (Source: [RESOC-dataset 2014](#) on www.pomwvl.be).

In 2012, 181,306 inhabitants of the coastal area belonged to the professionally active population (working people and non-working jobseekers) aged between 18 and 64 years. This is 33.9% of the total number in West Flanders. The degree of activity – the proportion of the professionally active population compared to the total population aged between 18 and 64 – in the coastal area equalled 73.1% (2012), which is less than in West Flanders (75.7%). The employment rate – the proportion of the number of working people compared to the total population aged between 18 and 64 – is lower as well in the coastal area (68.1%) than in West Flanders (71.3%) (figure 7). The unemployment rate – the number of non-working jobseekers compared to the professionally active population aged between 18 and 64 – in the coastal area amounts to 6.7%, which is higher than the average of West Flanders (5.5%) (Source: [RESOC-dataset 2014](#) on www.pomwvl.be).

In 2013, 13,430 non-working jobseekers were present in the coastal area, which represents 41.1% of the total in West Flanders. Furthermore, the older jobseekers amount to 3,051 or 44.5% of the total in West Flanders. The unemployment pressure – the proportion of the number of non-working jobseekers and the older jobseekers compared to the potential professionally active population (18-64 years) – is higher in the coastal area (6.7%) than

EVOLUTION IN THE ACTIVITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN THE COASTAL AREA AND IN WEST-FLANDERS

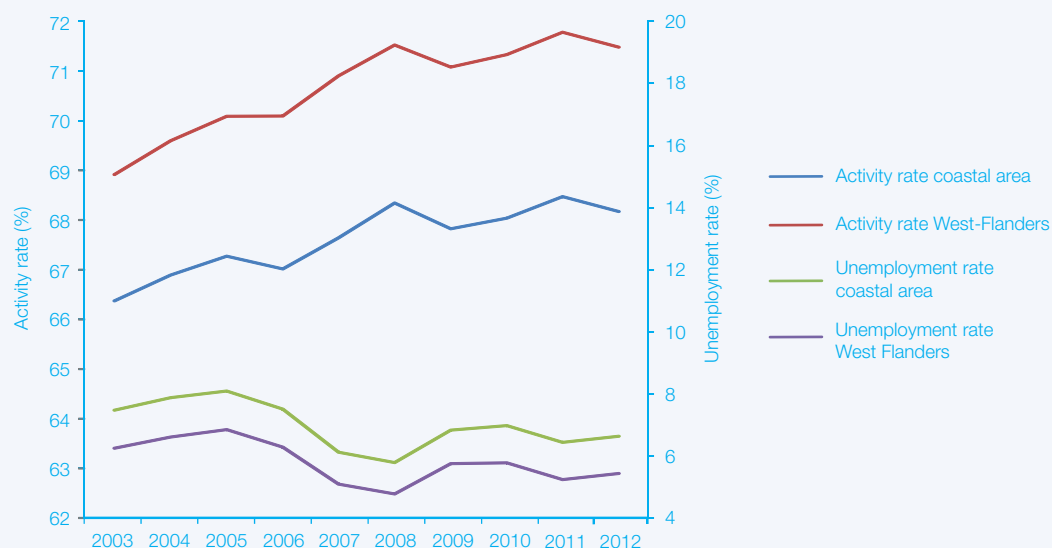


Figure 7. The evolution of the activity and unemployment rates in the coastal area and in West Flanders, 2003-2012 (Source: Steunpunt WSE, Processing: Afdeling DSA, West Flanders Development agency).

UNEMPLOYMENT PRESSURE IN THE COASTAL AREA, 2013

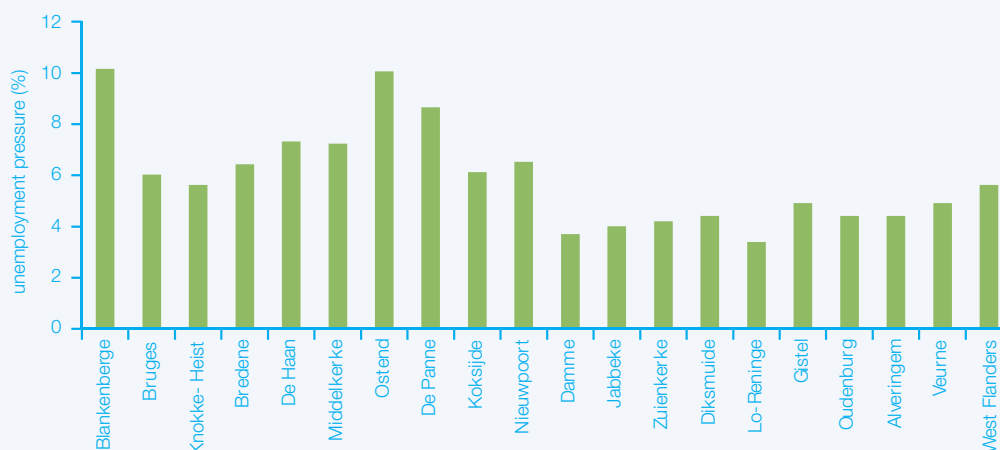


Figure 8. Unemployment pressure in the coastal zone, 2013 (Source: *West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014*, processing: Afdeling DSA, West Flanders Development agency).

in West Flanders (5.6%). In the coastal municipalities, the unemployment pressure is considerably higher than in the hinterland municipalities (figure 8) (Source: VDAB and RVA in *West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014*).

In 2012, only four coastal municipalities (Bruges, Knokke-Heist, Ostend and Nieuwpoort) had a positive commuting balance for employees. In these municipalities, the number of employees who work in the cities but live elsewhere exceeds the number of inhabitants working outside of the municipality (Source: *West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014*).

In the following information sources: [West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014](#), [Gemeentelijke Steekkaarten](#) and the [RESOC-dataset](#), statistics about the labour market are available on the level of municipalities, districts and the province of West Flanders.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT THE COAST

In 2012, the produced wealth measured on the basis of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP²) per capita, was lower in West Flanders than in the Flemish region or in Belgium. The district of Bruges (also including municipalities that are not part of the coastal area) is the only coastal district where the GDP per capita is higher than the average of West Flanders. During the 2003-2012 period, the GDP per capita in the district of Bruges grew by an average of 3.5% per year; in West Flanders, the average increase of the GDP per capita was limited to 3.0% per year. Hence, the district of Bruges widened the gap with the province of West Flanders. In the other coastal districts of Ostend and Veurne (also including municipalities that do not belong to the coastal zone), the GDP per capita grew by an average of 2.7% and 2.4% respectively. The latter increase did not allow to close the gap with West Flanders (Source: NBB in [West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014](#)).

With regard to the realised gross value added³, the district of Bruges ranks second after Kortrijk, with a share of 25.6% of the gross value added that was realised in West Flanders in 2012. In the other coastal districts of Ostend and Veurne the gross value added amounted to 10.4% and 4.9% respectively. In 2012, the gross value added per employee in West Flanders was 82,915 euros. This means that the province remains well below the Flemish average (88,636 euros). The coastal districts of Veurne and Ostend, as well as the district of Diksmuide and Tielt, have a gross value added per employee that exceeds the Flemish average (Source: INR in [RESOC-dataset 2014](#)).

In 2013, 35,706 active enterprises were present in the coastal area, which equals 33.8% of the total in West Flanders. 26,719 of the active enterprises are situated in the coastal municipalities, 8,987 in the hinterland municipalities. In the coastal areas, 69.3% of the active enterprises belong to the tertiary sector of the economy⁴, and 6.9% to the quaternary sector⁵. In West Flanders, the share of active enterprises in these sectors is lower (62.9% in the tertiary sector and 5.4% in the quaternary sector). Also, the number of founded and disappeared enterprises in the tertiary and quaternary sector is notably higher in the coastal area compared to West Flanders. The economic dynamics in the coastal zone are relatively high. In 2014, both the foundation ratio (proportion of the number of foundations in comparison to the number of active enterprises) (coastal zone: 6.9%, coastal municipalities: 7.2%, hinterland municipalities: 6.0%) and the retirement ratio (proportion of the number of shutdowns and bankruptcies compared to the number of active enterprises) (coastal area: 6.8%, coastal municipalities: 7.1%, hinterland municipalities: 5.7%) were higher in the coastal area than in the province of West Flanders as a whole in 2013. The turbulence ratio (sum of the foundation and retirement ratios) is therefore considerably higher (coastal area: 13.7%, coastal municipalities: 14.3%, hinterland municipalities: 11.7%) than the figure for West Flanders (12.8%). These observations can be entirely attributed to the coastal municipalities, as the ratios of the hinterland municipalities are always below the ratio for West Flanders. Urban centres usually have more foundations and shutdowns. This is inherent to the opportunities these centres offer. The higher turbulence at the coast can also be partly explained by the nature of the activities. The hotel and catering sector, which is abundantly present in the coastal area, is characterised by a large number of foundations and shutdowns. In 2013, 4,022 active enterprises were present in the hotel and catering sector in the coastal area (coastal municipalities: 3,432 active enterprises, hinterland municipalities: 590 active enterprises), equalling 50.5% of the province of West Flanders. The coastal area alone accounts for 43.1% of the total number of catering businesses in West Flanders. (Source: FPS Economy (ADSEI), processing: *Afdeling DSA*, West Flanders Development agency).

The coastal area covers 36.2% of the total surface of West Flanders. With regard to the surface used for economic activity, the coastal area only constituted 22.5% of the total in West Flanders on 1 January 2013. In West Flanders, 17.8% of the built-up area is used for economic activity whereas this figure is 14.4% in the coastal area. In the coastal municipalities, the share of the built-up area that is used for economic activity is larger than in the hinterland municipalities (16.0% and 11.7% respectively) (Source: [RESOC-dataset 2014](#) on www.pomwvl.be).

² The GDP is the market value of all officially recognised final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. The GDP per capita is often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living.

³ The difference between the marketable value of production and the purchased primary resources.

⁴ Service sector: the economic sector in which enterprises want to make profit by selling their goods or services.

⁵ The non-commercial services: e.g. governmental services and services with government funding.

In 2012, the spatial productivity in the coastal area equalled 45.1. This means that in the coastal area, there were 45.1 persons working per hectare of economically occupied surface. In the coastal municipalities, this number amounted to 56.1 compared to 23.2 in the hinterland and 32.6 in the entire province. These differences are caused by the different morphology and the economic structure of these regions. In urbanised regions, the economic use of space is totally different as a result of a different sectoral structure: on the one hand relatively little industry and fewer users of large spaces, and on the other more trade and services with offices and high-rises and more employees per surface unit. Until 2008, the spatial productivity of West Flanders remained at the same level. After 2008 the indicator revealed a decreasing evolution. In the other regions, the spatial productivity already started to decrease in 2006. These decreases are the result of a growing spatial dispersion of living and working. In this regard, the commercial suburbanisation or the migration from municipalities towards the surrounding countryside has strongly increased over the past five years. Up till now, the Flemish spatial structure plan ([RSV](#)) could not reverse this trend (Source: [RESOC-dataset 2014](#) on www.pomwvl.be).

In the following information sources: [West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2014](#), [Gemeentelijke Steekkaarten](#) and the [RESOC-dataset](#) statistics about entrepreneurship are available on the level of municipalities, districts and the province of West Flanders.

10.4 Sustainable use

10.4.1 Sustainable living at the coast

In the coastal zone, few ingredients for a balanced, sociologically healthy social environment are present. The continued ageing, the high amount of singles, the numerous relocations and the strong pressure caused by tourists and second homes cause an unbalanced social and demographic situation. This disrupted social climate appears mostly in the neighbourhoods close to the coast ([Meire & Bracke, 2005](#), Coudenys 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)).

The ageing of the coastal population results in an unbalanced demographic mix, which causes a different model of society. On the coast, there are proportionally much more elderly people compared to the rest of West Flanders. This feature is amplified by the second home owners, who are nearly always older than 45 years and do not have children under 18 living at home. 75% of second home owners are at least 55 years old and live together with their partner. More than half of them are retired. Hence, the ageing process is amplified by the nearly 124,500 second home owners aged 50+, who reside on average 82 nights a year in their second home (WES 2008, second homes at the coast, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)).

The Province of West Flanders is investing in a programme where the coast is considered to be a test case for the future ageing of the population in Flanders ([Programma Vergrijzing aan de kust](#)). Hence, in the note [Vergrijzing aan de Kust: Lust of last \(2012\)](#) (Province of West Flanders), the situation of the ageing population at the coast is described and a number of barriers and challenges are listed. Furthermore, in [Vandekerckhove et al. \(2015\)](#), a study commissioned by the Province of West Flanders, the relocation movements of people aged 80+ has been analysed. The research includes the consequences for the housing market and health care in the coastal region. The analysis has revealed a number of trends: the retired migrant is insufficiently prepared for growing older, a personal social network is important and the housing accommodations at the coast are not adapted. Furthermore, a number of challenges and recommendations have been formulated: consider the situation as an asset (e.g. voluntary work opportunities, economical opportunities, etc.), go for adapted and self-reliant living and raise awareness (see [De Klerck 2011](#)).

The importance of a personal social network is also addressed in [Meire & Bracke \(2005\)](#). For the many singles and retired migrants at the coast who left their social environment, social isolation is a realistic problem. It is therefore essential to repair and strengthen this social network as much as possible. A study about the liveability at the coast ([Meire & Bracke, 2005](#)) has revealed that the mutual involvement of inhabitants is indeed weak along the coast, especially in neighbourhoods close to the sea.

A good physical environment and good living conditions are also essential for a sustainable living environment and the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the coast. The urban profile and the high deprivation rate indicate the many challenges of the coastal area ([Maelfait et al. 2012](#)).

10.4.2 Economic development at the coast

In '*West Deal*' the strategic lines for the economic policy of West Flanders are outlined for the next five years (2013-2018). Some of the policy lines are specifically relevant for the coastal area such as cooperation concerning Blue Energy (*Fabriek voor de Toekomst*), the possibilities for Ostend as an industrial port for offshore developments, the expansion of the harbour of Zeebrugge, tourism-related opportunities for Bruges-Ostend airport, etc. In the study *West-Vlaanderen Groeit – Ambitie 2030*, an investigation has been conducted into the status of the West-Flemish economy as well as its prospects. In this context, five visions for the future and five specific construction sites for West Flanders have been addressed, including certain aspects of the economy in the coastal area (blue energy, ports, healthcare economy at the coast, etc.).

Legislation reference list

Table with Belgian and Flemish legislation. The consolidated version of this legislation is available on [Belgisch staatsblad](#) and the [Justel-databases](#).

BELGIAN AND FLEMISH LEGISLATION		
Date	Title	File number
Decrees		
Decreet van 18 mei 1999	Decreet houdende de organisatie van ruimtelijke ordening	1999-05-18/33

