



Social and economic environment

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Citation:

Coudenys, H., Barbey, S., Depestel, N., Traen, S., Vandermeulen, A., Pirlet, H., 2013. Social and economic environment. In: Lescrauwaet, A.K., Pirlet, H., Verleye, T., Mees, J., Herman, R. (Eds.), Compendium for Coast and Sea 2013: integrating knowledge on the socio-economic, environmental and institutional aspects of the Coast and Sea in Flanders and Belgium. Oostende, Belgium, p. 197-208.

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 2006¹⁰⁰²⁸¹). Hence, the coastal zones are regions with a unique identity and specific challenges. The Belgian coastal area is characterised by its typical social environment, with a higher population density, a large ageing population, a high amount of second homes and high house 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. 2007¹¹⁴⁹⁵⁷, Maelfait et al. 2012²²¹⁰¹⁶). 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*. Furthermore, there are the following Flemish policy domains: *Work and Social Economy* and *Economy, Science and Innovation*.

The housing policy and spatial planning belong to the Flemish policy domain of Spatial Planning, Housing Policy and Immovable Heritage (*RWO*) (see the *Flemish Policy Note Spatial Planning 2009-2014*²²⁵³⁶³ and the *Flemish Policy Note Housing 2009-2014*²²⁷⁵⁰⁷). 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 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, to industry, to recreation areas, to nature reserves, as well as agriculture. A destination in a regional spatial plan has been further refined by the municipality in urban plans (BPA). These plans have been particularly created 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 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 an 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 touristic, recreational network. This means that a coherent urban policy for the coast should be in place, with opportunities for further touristic 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. Besides, Ostend and Zeebrugge are designated as economic gateways, which means that the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge, as well as the 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 het Zwin, the beaches between coast 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.

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. 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 The social environment

THE COAST AND ITS INHABITANTS (more information: *demografische fiche Kust 2012* ²²¹³⁸⁴)

On 1 January 2012, the coastal area¹ numbered 417,570 inhabitants. This constitutes 35.7% of the total population of the province of West Flanders. In the period 2002-2012, the population in the coastal area increased by 4% (figure 1), a growth comparable to the surrounding coastal areas around the North Sea. (*The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas*, EEA 2006 ¹⁰⁰²⁸¹). 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)* ¹⁰⁷⁷¹⁵.

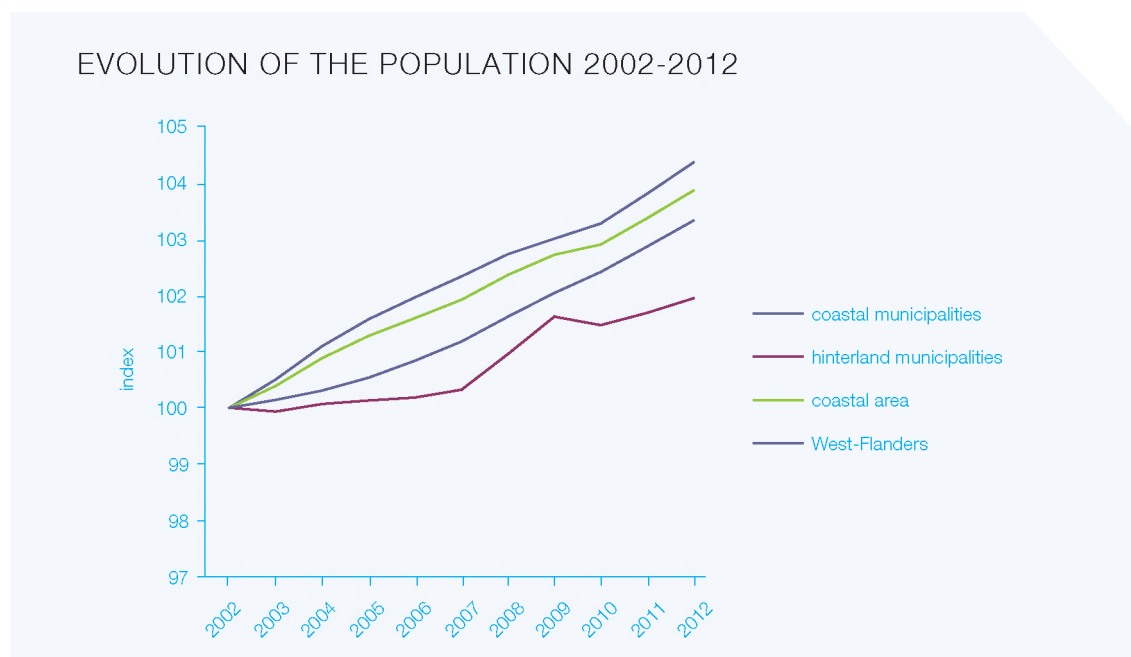


Figure 1. Evolution of the population in the coastal area (coastal municipalities + hinterland municipalities) and the province of West Flanders between 2002-2012 (Source: 'rijksregister', population on 01.01 of each year, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

The coastal municipalities as well as the hinterland municipalities are characterised by a population growth, although the increase is more evident on 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' on 01.01.2012, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

The increase in population will continue in the future. In the context of the European DC Noise project (<http://www.dcnnoise.eu/>), researchers (VUB) have worked out population forecasts. The Province of West Flanders uses these forecasts for the development of its policy. The forecasts that are made on a regional level predict a further population increase in the coastal municipalities (*Denorme & Verhaeghe 2011* ²²⁵³⁶²).

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 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 2006¹⁰⁰²⁸¹). The average population density in our coastal area amounts to 367 inhabitants per km². This average masks certain differences: the population density of the coastal municipalities amounts to 694 inhabitants per km², while the population density of the hinterland municipalities is 128 inhabitants per km². 80% of the inhabitants of the coastal area live in a coastal town (Source: 'rijksregister' on 01.01.2012, 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)¹⁰⁷⁷¹⁵, 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*²²¹⁰¹⁶). The age groups under 55 years decrease proportionally, the age groups above 55 years increase proportionally (figure 2). Furthermore, the structural coefficients tell us something about the demographics (table 1).

Table 1. The structural coefficients in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and the province of West Flanders on 1 January 2012 (Source: 'rijksregister').

	STRUCTURAL COEFFICIENTS			
	coastal municipalities	hinterland	coastal zone	West Flanders
Ageing degree (60+/0-19 year)	187.49	114.63	169.85	131.65
Grey pressure (60+/ 20-59 year)	66.78	48.51	62.91	53.02
Internal ageing (80+/60+)	21.83	22.90	22.00	22.60
Family care index (80+/50-59 year)	48.33	40.83	46.86	44.29
Juvenile pressure (0-19 year/20-59 year)	35.62	42.32	37.04	40.27

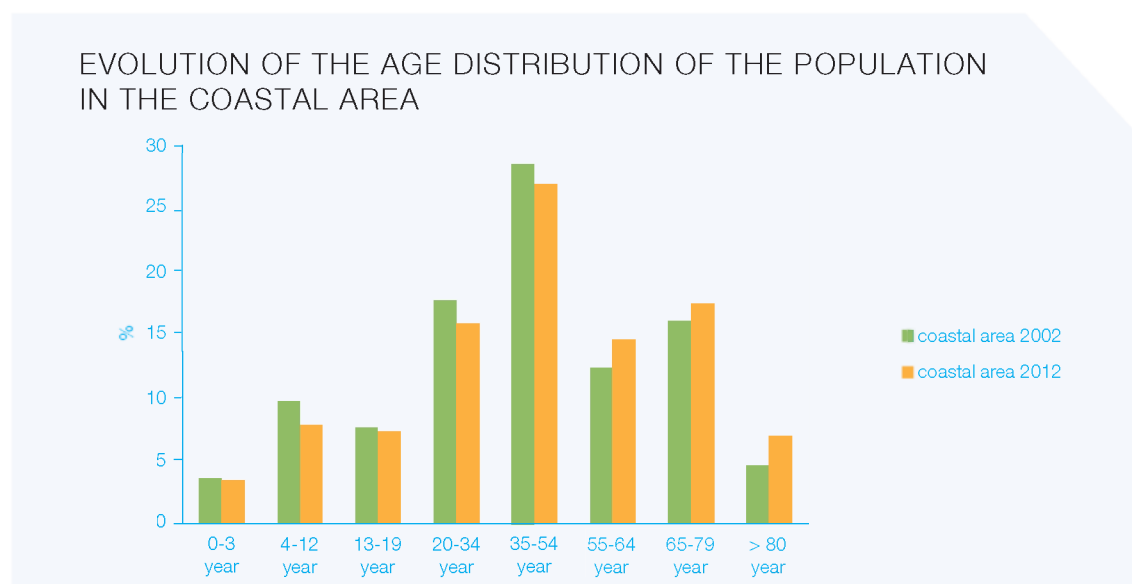


Figure 2. The evolution of the age distribution of the population in the coastal area, between 2002 and 2012.

In West Flanders, for every 100 persons between 0 and 19 years old, there are 132 people aged 60+. In the coastal municipalities, this proportion increases to 187: for every 100 persons aged under 20, there are 187 people aged 60+. The so-called 'grey pressure' is 67 in the coastal municipalities: for every 100 persons in the professionally active age range (20-59 years) there are 67 people aged 60+. The internal ageing (the share of 80+ people 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 2012, 121,749 persons aged 60+ lived in the coastal area (Source: *rijksregister* on 01.01.2012, processed by the Province of West Flanders). The increase between 2002 and 2012 amounts to 25%, which means that there are now 25% more persons aged 60+ in the coastal area compared to 10 years ago. In the same period, the number of persons under 20 years in the coastal area decreased by 8% (from 84,219 in 2002 to 77,275 in 2012).

On 1 January 2012, 193,287 households were living in the coastal area. In the time range 2002-2012, the amount of households increased by 10%. 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 10 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 36% singles, 40% families without children and 22% families with children (figure 3). 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 01.01.2012, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

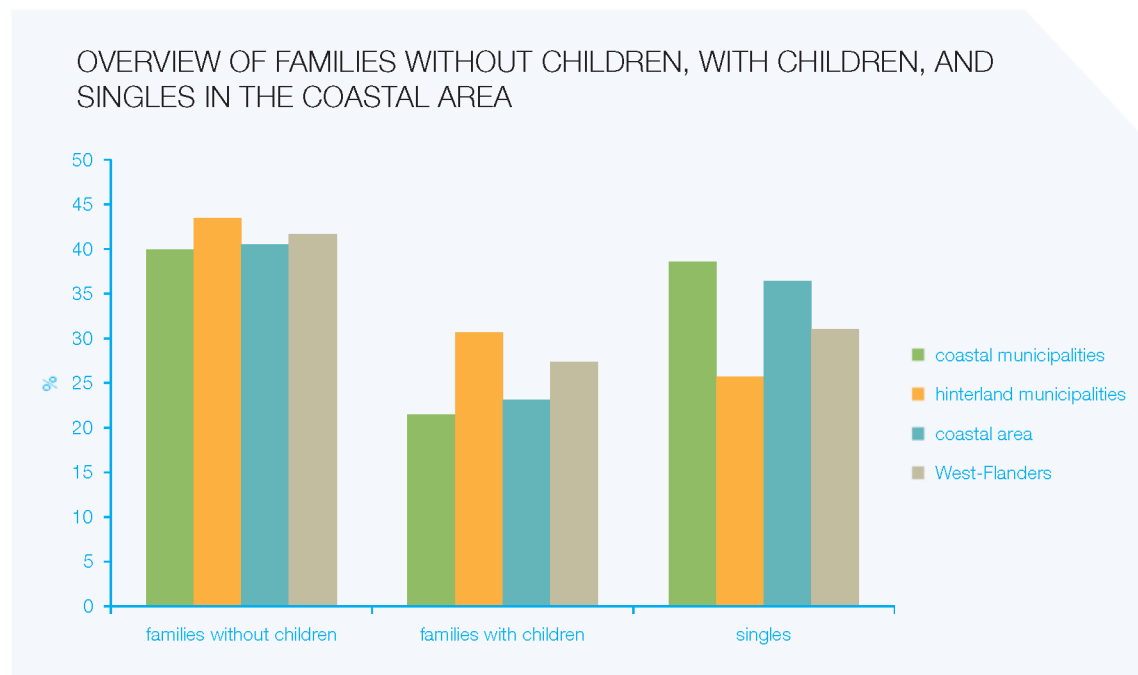


Figure 3. Overview of families without children, with children, and singles in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and the Province of West Flanders on 1 January 2012 (Source: *rijksregister*).

A distinctive feature of the coastal municipalities is the large number of singles. This group has grown a lot over the past 10 years (+20% in the coastal area, +23% in West Flanders) (see above: reducing family size) (figure 4). 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* ²²¹³⁹³, *Kesteloot & Meys S. (2008)* ²²⁵³⁶¹) 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 with 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 2011* ²¹⁴⁵⁶¹) confirms the urban nature of the coastal municipalities

EVOLUTION OF SINGLES IN THE COASTAL AREA AND IN THE PROVINCE WEST-FLANDERS BETWEEN 2002 AND 2012

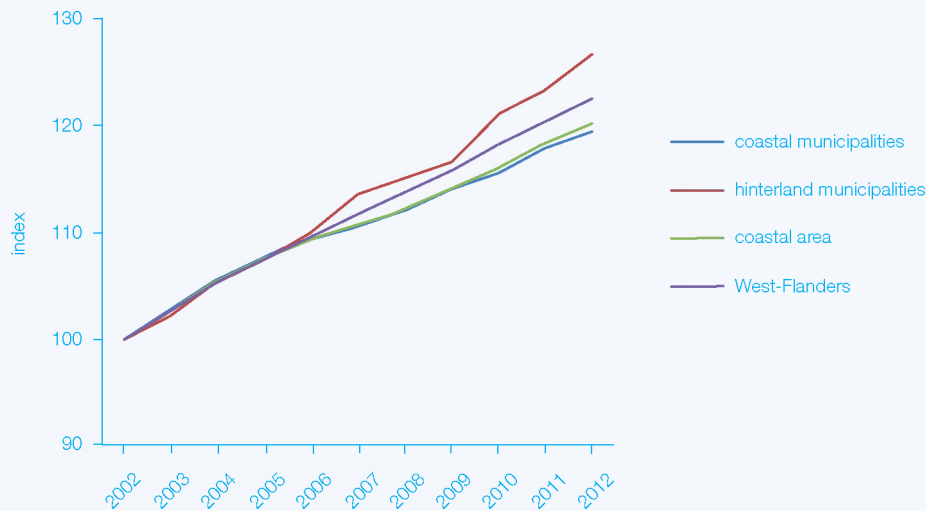


Figure 4. The evolution of singles in the coastal area (coastal municipalities and hinterland municipalities) and in the province of West Flanders between 2002 and 2012 (Source: 'rijksregister', population on 1 January of each year, processed by the Province of West Flanders).

and determines that coastal towns are more often confronted with deprivation than the average (Rammelaere 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#) ²²¹⁰¹⁶). In the coastal area, 22.2% of all families live in a deprived neighbourhood. The share of families living in a deprived neighbourhood is nearly twice as high as the average in West Flanders (11.7%). In the coastal municipalities, an average of 22.6% of families live in a deprived neighbourhood. For the hinterland municipalities, this share amounts to 14.5% of families (Rammelaere 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#) ²²¹⁰¹⁶).

THE COAST AND ITS INHABITANTS (more information: [woonfiche kustzone 2012](#) ²²¹³⁸⁵)

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 ¹⁰⁰²⁸¹). In the publication: *Grensoverschrijdende atlas: Van Berck tot Brugge, één grens, twee gebieden, één gezamenlijke horizon (2006)* ¹⁰⁷⁷¹⁵ 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, in the hinterland municipalities this is only 4% (Source: *FPS Economy Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie*, based on the land register).

In 2010, 289,558 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 7% in the hinterland municipalities. In the hinterland municipalities, 88% of the housing facilities are ordinary houses (Source: *Land register 'kadastrale statistiek van de West-Vlaamse gemeenten'*, 2010).

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 39% of the housing facilities in the coastal area is not used as a permanent home (figure 5). 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](#) ²²¹⁰¹⁶).

Table 2. An overview of the housing facilities in the coastal area, as well as in the hinterland and coastal municipalities (Source: Land register 'kadastrale statistiek van de West-Vlaamse gemeenten', 2010).

Housing facilities	COASTAL ZONE		HINTERLAND MUNICIPALITIES		COASTAL MUNICIPALITIES	
	Total		Total		Total	
Total number housing facilities	289,558	100%	35,937	100%	253,621	100%
• Residential houses	139,696	48%	31,787	88%	107,909	43%
• Commercial premises	9,732	3%	1,608	4%	8,124	3%
• Apartments and buildings	140,130	48%	2,542	7%	137,588	54%

The use of the housing facilities for other functions than permanent housing 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 5 clearly shows a large housing surplus. This phenomenon is typical of the coast given that the hinterland municipalities only have 10% housing facilities which are used for other purposes than permanent housing.

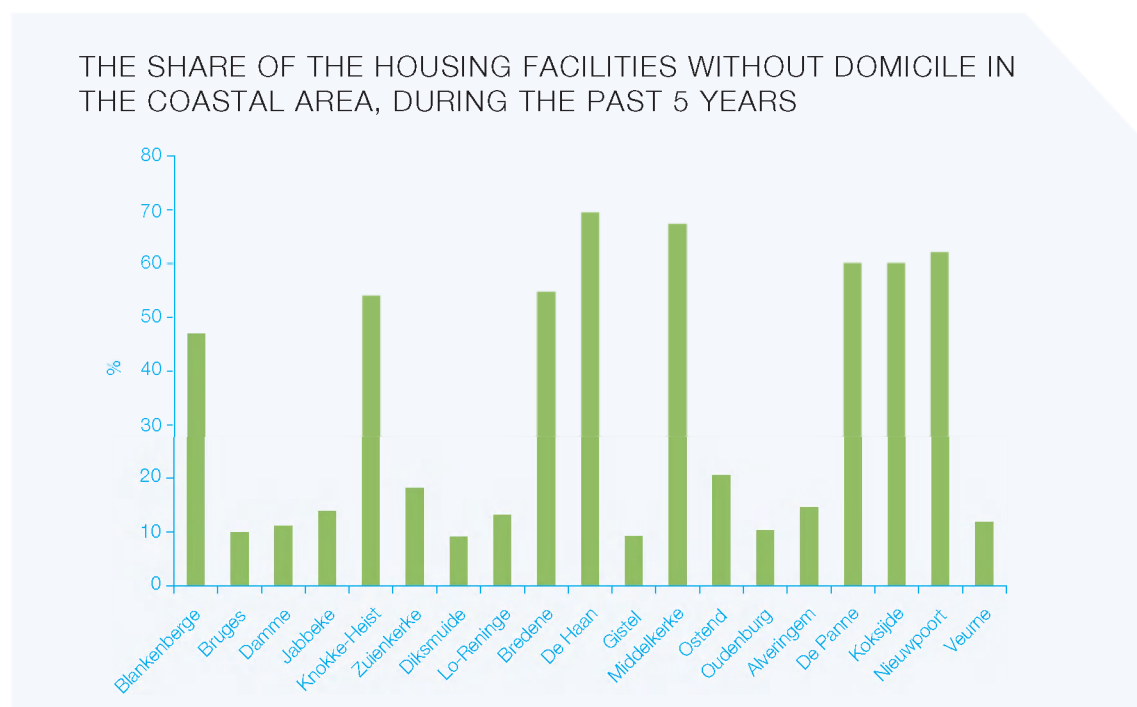


Figure 5. The share of the housing facilities without domicile in the coastal area, during the past 5 years (Source: Coudenys 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶).

10.3.2 The economic environment

THE COAST AND ITS LABOUR MARKET

In 2010, there were 168,809 professionally active persons in the coastal area (employees, self-employed and helpers) aged between 18 and 64 years. Hence, the coastal area constitutes 33.6% of the total number of working persons in West Flanders. (Source: *Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie*, www.lokalestatistieken.be). There were 141,312 employees in the coastal area at the end of 2010 (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶) which represents 34.8% of the total amount of West Flanders. Moreover, 36,586 self-employed and helpers (excluding the self-employed as a secondary activity) were active in the coastal area, which equals 35.0% of the total number in West Flanders (source: RSZV, www.lokalestatistieken.be).

The coastal area is characterised by a very weak industrial basis. The share of the industry within salaried employment was only 9.8% in 2010, compared to 21.4% in West Flanders (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶). In the coastal area, 85.3% 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, 71.2% of all employees are active in trade and services (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶).

In 2010, 181,587 inhabitants of the coastal area belonged to the professionally active population (working people and not-working jobseekers) aged between 18 and 64 years. This is 34.0% of the total number in West Flanders (source: *Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie*, www.lokalestatistieken.be). 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 73.2% (2010), which is less than in West Flanders (75.8%). 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 6). The unemployment rate – the number of not-working jobseekers compared to the professionally active population aged between 18 and 64 – in the coastal area amounts to 7.0%, which is higher than the average of West Flanders (5.8%) (Source: *Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie*, www.lokalestatistieken.be).

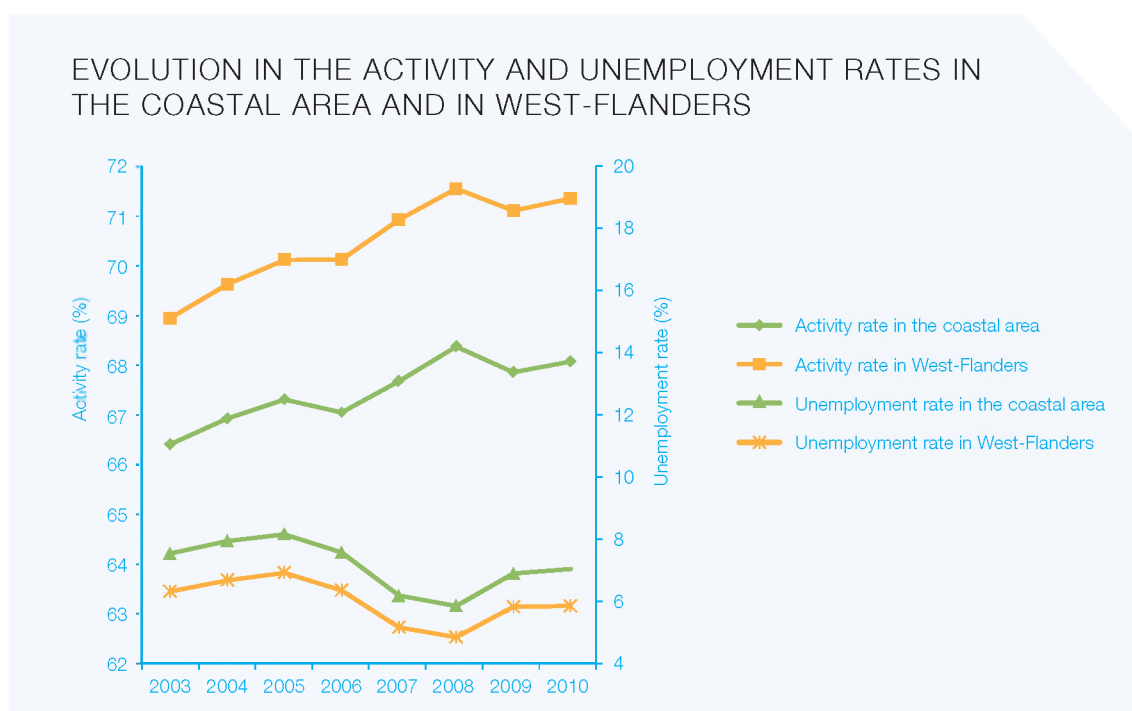


Figure 6. Evolution in the activity and unemployment rates in the coastal area and in West Flanders, 2003-2010 (Source: *Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie*, www.lokalestatistieken.be).

In 2011, 12,090 not-working jobseekers were present in the coastal area, which represents 42.1% of the total in West Flanders (source: *VDAB*). Furthermore, the older jobseekers amount to 3,547 or 43.9% of the total in West Flanders. The unemployment pressure – the proportion of the number of not-working jobseekers and the older jobseekers compared to the potential professionally active population (18-64 years) – is higher in the coastal area (6.3%) than in West Flanders (5.2%). In the coastal municipalities, the unemployment pressure is considerably higher than in the hinterland municipalities (figure 7) (Source: *VDAB* and *RVA in West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2012*²²⁶⁵⁰⁴).

In 2010, only four of all coastal municipalities (Bruges, Ostend, Veurne and Nieuwpoort) had a positive commuting balance for employees. In these municipalities, the number of employees that work in the cities, but live elsewhere is bigger than the amount of inhabitants working outside of the municipality. (Source: *Steunpunt Werk en Sociale Economie*).

In the following information sources: *West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2012*²²⁶⁵⁰⁴ and the *Gemeentelijke Steekkaarten* statistics about the labour market are provided on the level of municipalities, districts and the province of West Flanders.

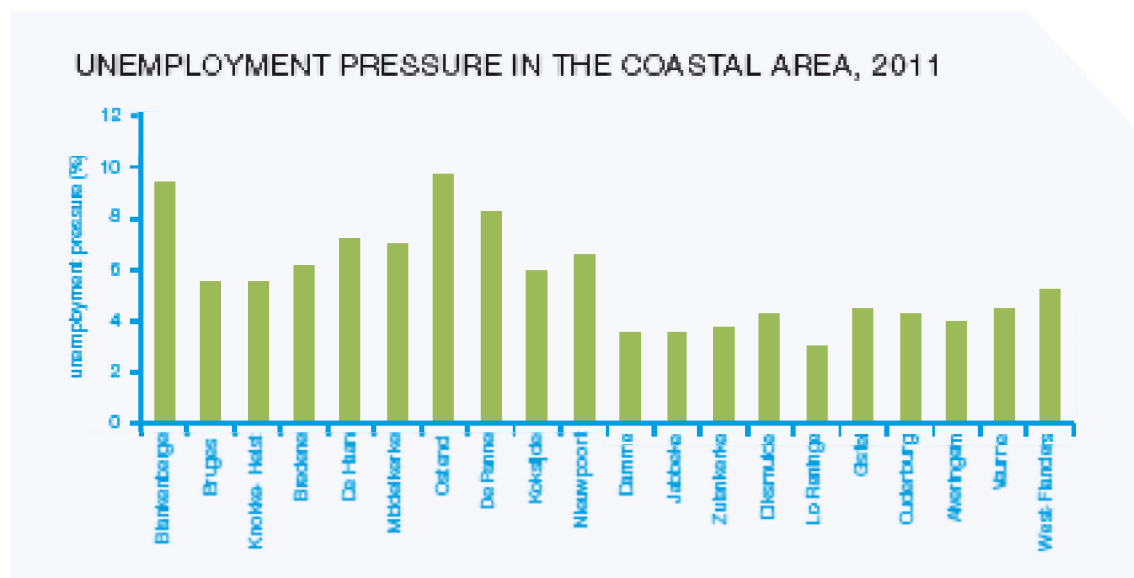


Figure 7. Unemployment pressure in the coastal area, 2011 (Source: based on VDAB and RVA in [West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2012](#) ²²⁶⁵⁰⁴).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON THE COAST

In 2010, 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 period 2003-2010 the GDP per capita in the district of Bruges grew with an average of 3.6% 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 with an average of 2.9% and 3.0% respectively. The latter increase did not allow to close the gap with West Flanders (Source: NBB in [West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2012](#) ²²⁶⁵⁰⁴).

With regard to the realised gross value added³, the district of Bruges ranks second after Kortrijk, with a share of 25.4% of the gross value added that was realised in West Flanders in 2010. In the other coastal districts of Ostend and Veurne the gross value added amounted to 10.5% and 5.1% respectively. In 2010, the gross value added per employee in West Flanders was 78,650 euros. This means that the province remains far below the Flemish average (83,921 euros). The coastal districts of Veurne and Ostend, as well as the district of Tielt, have a gross value added per employee that is higher than the Flemish average (source: INR in [RESOC-dataset 2012](#)).

On 1 January 2011, 35,284 active enterprises were present in the coastal area, which equals 34.0% of the total in West Flanders (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#) ²²¹⁰¹⁶). 26,545 of the active enterprises are situated in the coastal municipalities, 8,739 in the hinterland municipalities. In the coastal areas 69.9% of the active enterprises can be situated in the tertiary sector of the economy⁴, and 6.2% in the quaternary sector⁵. In West Flanders the share of the active enterprises in these sectors is lower (63.0% in the tertiary sector and 4.9% in the quaternary sector). Also, the number of founded and disappeared enterprises is notably higher in the coastal area compared to West Flanders. The economic dynamics in the coastal zone are relatively high. In 2011, both the foundation ratio (proportion of the number of foundations in comparison to the number of active enterprises) (coastal zone: 8.0%, coastal municipalities: 8.3%, hinterland municipalities: 7.1%) and the retirement ratio (proportion of the number of shutdowns and bankruptcies compared to the number of active enterprises) (coastal area: 6.5%, coastal municipalities: 6.9%, hinterland municipalities: 5.4%) were higher in the coastal area than in the entire province of West Flanders. The

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.

turbulence ratio (sum of the foundation and retirement ratios) is therefore considerably higher (coastal area: 14.5%, coastal municipalities: 15.2%, hinterland municipalities: 12.5%) than the figure for West Flanders (13.3%). These observations can be entirely attributed to the coastal municipalities, as the ratios of the hinterland municipalities are always below the number for West Flanders (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶). Urban centres usually mark 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 2011, 4,150 active enterprises were present in the hotel and catering sector in the coastal area (coastal municipalities: 3,547 active enterprises, hinterland municipalities: 603 active enterprises), equalling 43.6% of the Province of West Flanders (Source: *FPS Economy (ADSEI)*, processing: *Afdeling DSA*, the 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 2011. In West Flanders 18.0% of the built-up area is used for economic activity whereas this number equals 14.5% 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 (16.2% and 11.8% respectively) (Source: *FPS Economy (ADSEI)*, www.lokalestatistieken.be).

In 2010, the spatial productivity in the coastal area equalled 45.7. This means that in the coastal area, there were 45.7 persons working per hectare of economically occupied surface. In the coastal municipalities this number amounted to 56.1 compared to 24.1 in the hinterland and 32.9 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 less industry and fewer users of large spaces and on the other hand more trade and services with offices and high-rises and more employees per surface unit. Until 2008, the spatial productivity of West Flanders remained on the same level. After 2008 the indicator revealed a decreasing course. In the other regions, the spatial productivity already started to decrease from 2006 onwards. 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 country-side has strongly increased over the past five years. Up till now, the Flemish spatial structure plan (*RSV*) could not reverse this trend (Depestel 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶).

In the following information sources: *West-Vlaanderen Ontcijferd editie 2012*²²⁶⁵⁰⁴ and the *Gemeentelijke Steekkaarten* statistics about entrepreneurship are provided 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 many 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](#)⁷⁰⁹²⁹, Coudenys 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶).

Population ageing 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](#)²¹⁴⁶⁶⁹ and [part 2](#)²¹⁴⁶⁷²).

The latter situation can be seen as a threat, but also as an opportunity. The population forecast for Flanders reveals that the coastal situation is offering a predictive image of the situation in Flanders within the next 30 years. This situation might therefore serve as a test case for policy initiatives, to see what the societal model in Flanders will look like in a couple of years, and which measures can or should be taken.

A personal social network is important and gains importance with age. Hence, social isolation is a realistic problem for the many singles and retired migrants who left their social environment. It is therefore essential to repair and strengthen their social network as much as possible. A study about the liveability on the coast ([Meire & Bracke, 2005](#)⁷⁰⁹²⁹) 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 to a sustainable living environment and the wellbeing of the inhabitants. The urban profile and the high deprivation rate indicate the many challenges of the coastal area ([Maelfait et al. 2012](#)²²¹⁰¹⁶).

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
Decrees	
Decreet van 18 mei 1999	Decreet houdende de organisatie van ruimtelijke ordening