

ghent:

Ghent scanned



G H E N T _ B Y _ N U M B E R S

Ghent scanned 2018 – Abstract

Ghent is growing in numbers and becoming highly diverse

The people of Ghent

Approximately 260,000 people lived in Ghent in 2018, representing a growth of 16% since 2000. In those 18 years, the population has risen by a good 30,000 people. Ghent is still a young city, thanks to the sustained high birth rate in combination with a low, stable death rate. Furthermore, there is the influx of mainly young people, many of whom are graduates who settle here, and foreigners. The increase in the number of children first made itself felt in childcare, then in preschool and primary education. The wave is now moving towards secondary education. Over the coming years, the number of secondary school pupils is expected to increase by 2750, with a peak in 2025-2026.

The number of elderly people is also increasing, but not as fast as the number of people in younger age groups. Consequently and unlike the rest of Flanders, Ghent does not yet have an ageing population but ageing is expected to set in from 2020 onwards, with an increase in the proportion of people aged 65 and above.

Ghent residents are moving house more and more. There were a total of 54,000 moves in 2017: 21,000 within Ghent itself, 16,500 moves to the city from elsewhere and 16,500 moves out of the city. The latter group, people leaving the city, often move to places nearby.

Non-residents in Ghent

There are more than 75,000 students; those who have lodgings in Ghent form something of a city within the city. The number of students is increasing faster than the number of Ghent residents. That has practical repercussions for the housing market in Ghent: large-scale student facilities have been built but a considerable number of students still occupy part of the private housing market.

Half of the secondary school pupils in Ghent also come from outside the city. Every day a good 100,000 commuters travel to Ghent, a number that is increasing year by year.

Ghent is also increasingly popular with tourists: tourists spent 998,620 nights in Ghent in 2016.

Highly diverse

When people think about diversity, the first thing that comes to mind is the increase in the number of nationalities in the city. That is indeed happening: there are currently people from a good 150 different countries living in Ghent. The most prevalent nationalities of origin are Turkish people at the top of the list (this has been the case for decades), Bulgarians in second place (for the last ten years) and Moroccans in third place, followed by the Dutch and Russians. Ghent is evolving towards highly diverse diversity and becoming a 'majority-minority' city: a city where the majority is made up of a wide range of minorities. That is already the case in Brussels, Genk and Antwerp. In Ghent that is not yet true of the entire city, although certain neighbourhoods are experiencing the phenomenon.

Another telling figure is that half of all Ghent children between 0 and 9 years old have a background in migration. That has an effect on primary education, with diverse school populations and a wider range of languages spoken at home. A large proportion of young people indicate that the youth work available, including welfare work, is still oriented too much towards the white middle classes.

There are many other forms of diversity besides the differences in background, such as diversity of age groups, sexual preferences or whether or not one has a disability.

Happy in Ghent

Ghent residents are quite satisfied with their city:

- 80% are proud of the city,
- 77% are satisfied with their neighbourhood,
- 87% are satisfied with the cultural amenities on offer,
- there is a high degree of satisfaction with shopping facilities, restaurants and nightlife, sport and recreational facilities.

Thus it is no surprise that 87% of residents like living in Ghent. Add to that the fact that 73% of residents generally feel healthy, and it seems like nothing can go wrong. But not everything is hunky-dory. Although a majority believed the introduction of the traffic circulation plan was good for Ghent, there was a substantial group of 35% of Ghent residents who did not think so at all. The increase in tourists is experienced by 10% of Ghent residents as unpleasant. When it comes to nuisance factors in their own neighbourhoods, the people of Ghent are most annoyed by litter and traffic noise.

Space is scarce in Ghent

There needs to be space for all the functions of a (central) urban area one way or another - living, working, education, healthcare, sports, meeting people, parties, relaxing in green spaces etc. - without crowding each other out. Because more and more people live and work here, activity levels are increasing. The surface area of the city is not getting any bigger, however.

Housing

More people mean more homes. At first sight, there are enough homes available in Ghent (in terms of numbers) to accommodate everyone. However, several factors make living in Ghent difficult for many people.

To begin with, there is a discrepancy between home size and people's needs. It is no longer possible to base assumptions on the traditional family unit. There are stepfamilies and growing groups of students and people over the age of 65, all of whom have their own needs. We note a mismatch between the supply and demand. A typical example is families with three or more children: they have great difficulty finding a suitable place to live.

A second point is that housing has got more expensive in Ghent (as it has all over Flanders). The selling price of apartments and houses has increased by more than 70% since 2006. 40% of tenants spend more than 30% of their budget on housing costs.

If we look at new homes, we find that they are smaller in size. Since the aim is to make the city more compact, that is a logical development, but it is not becoming equally compact in all areas. Over the last decade, the ten most densely populated neighbourhoods in Ghent saw their populations increase by another 10%. Plans for the near future show the same trend: more homes in the city centre, far fewer on the outskirts.

The persistent need for additional homes on the private market can also be seen in the long waiting list for council housing.

Demographic pressure

There is a general increase in mobility relating to homes: people are moving house more often. People also stay living in the city for longer. The population growth since 2000 shows that the urban exodus of the 1980s and 1990s has stopped, thanks to positive migration

figures. There is now more of a 'selective' urban exodus underway, although it is still difficult to define it because migration databases do not contain socio-economic data. Neither is it possible to draw conclusions from fiscal data with any degree of certainty. It is true that people who move out of Ghent often stay nearby. People are highly oriented towards the city. Their reasons for moving are often linked to phases in their lives (living together, having children, getting divorced) and often to 'the need for more space (outdoors)'; affordable housing is not the primary reason for moving. Once people get onto the housing market, the cost of housing does play a role and they look for a home outside Ghent.

Working

Ghent's economy - certainly in comparison to that of most other Flemish cities - is relatively diverse: industry still plays a significant role and Ghent has a relatively low level of specialisation in its economic activities. The lower the level of specialisation, the less vulnerable the economy. There is an abundance of highly reputed knowledge and educational bodies, the labour pool is qualified, the local consumer market is attractive and demanding and there is a well-connected, high-performing port. In 2018, the fabric of our business sector can be described as resilient, but the growth in productivity is limited. Ghent creates jobs, but there is a mismatch in content between the many job vacancies and the many job seekers. The jobs in the lower and middle segments are disappearing, whereas the vacancies mainly require highly educated people, particularly in technical areas. Simultaneously, if Ghent continues to retain its role as a regional centre of growth, there will be a need for 30,000 extra jobs and 2,500 starters per year by 2030. However it is difficult to predict future demands for economic space.

Transportation

The fact that more people travel into and within Ghent is impacting quality of life in terms of traffic, safety and accessibility. The Mobility Plan has already changed many Ghent residents' transportation behaviour. A positive development is the reduction in the number of accidents and of victims of traffic accidents. The people of Ghent still suffer from traffic congestion, with significant differences from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the transport systems are insufficiently adapted to urban planning and vice versa. The scale of the city is also too small: there is a need for a regional perspective on mobility and other transport-related behaviour.

Leisure

Ghent's cultural landscape is broad, diverse and trendsetting. Ghent has a fine selection of museums and offers a greater range of cultural events than anywhere else in Flanders. 87% of people in Ghent are satisfied with what is on offer.

De Krook is a source of inspiration for international organisations to bring together technology, knowledge, science, culture and innovation. Library visits have not declined in Ghent, in contrast to the other central cities in the Flemish region.

Ghent has an extensive sports infrastructure with facilities for both top sports and sports-for-all, both indoors and outdoors. Eight out of ten Ghent residents are satisfied with the range of sports facilities available.

Open space is important for everyone in Ghent, especially in the more densely built-up neighbourhoods where people have insufficient private space outdoors or none at all. In general there is a need for more facilities and infrastructure for children and young people, (local) sports halls, space for specific sports, local greenery and woodland.

Living together

Although there are more of us, not much has changed in the last ten years in terms of how people experience a lack of safety in the city. It does appear that the incidence of violence against individuals has increased in the last five years: 'assault and battery' has gone up by as much as 12%. Litter continues to cause a great nuisance, both in terms of the tonnage collected and people's experiences. That is what annoys Ghent residents most: an average of 47% experience litter as a nuisance, but again there is great variation between the neighbourhoods. One in three Ghent residents suffers from noise pollution due to traffic in their own neighbourhood. Another disruptive sound is noise caused by neighbours, hotels-café-restaurants or businesses.

In cities, where people often move house and where there is a lot of diversity, there is a great need for bonding and social cohesion. An extremely positive sign is that 84% of people in Ghent trust other people, and this figure does not vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

- 73% are satisfied with the contact they have with people in their neighbourhood,
- 46% of Ghent residents state that they are in touch with their neighbours, friends or family at least once a week,
- 40% indicate that they have a positive attitude to other cultures,
- 35% have taken part in a local activity in the past year,
- 6% feel unsafe in their neighbourhood.

In comparison to the other central cities, Ghent has achieved average to good scores. There are large discrepancies between the neighbourhoods and also within individual neighbourhoods. Therefore a different approach is needed to promote social cohesion within densely built-up, diverse neighbourhoods with many people moving house and sometimes a high proportion of student residents. Cohesion between the neighbourhoods where that urban reality is more tangibly present and other neighbourhoods where that is not the case is an issue that deserves considerable attention.

Vulnerable people in Ghent

Socialisation of health care

Socialisation of health care is defined as a shift within care, away from institutionalisation: people with a disability or chronic illness, vulnerable elderly people, young people with behavioural and emotional problems, people living in poverty and many other people need to have a meaningful place in society. The strength of individual and the power of a network of helping family members, neighbours and acquaintances are the starting point. Mobilising social capital in this way is often a (more) humane solution that offers a better quality of life. The question is whether everybody has a network of this kind.

- 9% of people in Ghent are unsatisfied with their social relationships,
- 4% have contact with other people less than once a week,
- 17% of Belgians define the support they receive from those around them as weak.

Because personal networks (in big cities) are not present or strong enough as a matter of course, this far-reaching de-institutionalisation of care for groups of people is leading to increased vulnerability. After all, not everyone is equally self-reliant.

Poverty

An estimated (or underestimated) 55,000 people in Ghent are living in poverty and social exclusion. Approximately 40,000 Ghent residents are at risk of financial poverty.

Senior citizens scored better for poverty in 2016 than five years ago, but it is a cause for concern that the risk of poverty among young people in Belgium (16 to 24 year-olds) has risen by 6 percentage points. The number of young adults (18 to 25 year-olds) who are homeless or without shelter is increasing as well. One in five children in Ghent are born in a disadvantaged family. Growing up in poverty also influences a child's development and thus adversely affects their future. 28,000 people in Ghent have an active file at the Public Centre for Social Welfare; a quarter of these are receiving benefits. The risk of poverty among non-Belgians is three times higher than for Belgians. Single-parent families and people who live alone are at considerably higher risk. The risk of poverty is also unequally distributed over the neighbourhoods.

Inequality

Socio-economic differences in Flanders lead to inequality in terms of education, employment, health and housing.

Inequality in education

The most significant factor explaining the differences between the highest and lowest achieving pupils in Flanders is their socio-economic background. As a system, education does not succeed in levelling out existing inequalities. This makes it a source of concern that the risk of poverty in preschool and primary education is increasing. The same is true in full-time secondary education, particularly Vocational Secondary Education (including the part-time educational pathway). Truancy is increasing, not just among secondary school pupils but also at primary schools. Leaving school early has lessened in Ghent (and Flanders) over the years, but is still at 14%: one in seven school leavers in Ghent does not have any qualifications. Although school leavers from vocational secondary schools have better chances of finding employment in the short term, they score less highly for quality of employment and experience disadvantages later in their careers.

Inequality on the labour market

In comparison to other EU countries, Belgium has the largest employment gap. People with a migration background have a lower employment level than ethnic Belgians: in Ghent, 73% of ethnic Belgians are employed compared to 51% of people coming from the 13 new EU countries (in Central and Eastern Europe). The latter group are very heterogeneous, however, with high employment for Polish people and low employment for Slovaks. Five years ago, these employment levels were even lower. The group of people with ethnic origins in Turkey and North Africa, who have been in Ghent for much longer, still have a low employment level. The figures for the second generation are particularly worrying.

Inequality in health

The term 'health gap' has been replaced by 'social gradient': many factors are responsible for inequality in health. Flemish figures reveal that educational levels influence the subjective experience of health, life expectancy, chronic conditions, mental health and overweight. People don't just delay care for financial reasons: information and cultural factors also play a role. These differences in health are magnified in cities due to the greater socio-economic and cultural differences, which are expressed for example in neighbourhoods of Ghent where the chances of a long and healthy life are lower.

Inequality in housing

The growing costs of housing are putting pressure on affordability. As for the risk of poverty, there is a striking discrepancy in Belgium between tenants (32.6%) and home owners (7.6%).

According to the Flemish Government's standards, there is no longer any obligation for Ghent to expand its social housing market. Nonetheless, the need is great: 10,435 households were on the waiting list in 2017, but the supply of social housing is growing far less quickly. An estimated 28,000 rented homes are of insufficient quality. They are mainly inhabited by low-income groups, single people and single-parent families. 4%, or 5,600 of homes, have a serious damp problem. People stay in poor quality housing because they have no choice. The lowest levels of the private rental market are under excessive pressure, meaning that highly vulnerable people are pushed into the grey margins of the housing market, where they often encounter abusive and illegal practices. The Flemish Housing Council has said that it is at an impasse, and that the housing crisis is intensifying.

Detailed inspections of homes in Ghent have revealed that there is still an immense amount of work to be done on saving energy. 16.5%, or 21,000 homes, do not meet any of the stated basic criteria (an economical boiler, well-insulated roof and high-performance glass). Thus 'the climate' is also a factor in this form of inequality: a comfortable, energy-efficient home, solar panels, an electric car or organic / vegetarian food are not feasible for everyone's budget.

Global tendencies and their impact on Ghent

International migration has already been mentioned: global events cause migratory flows, whether they are due to war or accession to the EU. Moreover, climate change and the economic recovery after the global financial crisis are affecting the city of Ghent.

Climate

Higher CO₂ emissions from industry and transport are compensated for in the urban environment. We will need to make huge efforts to meet the proposed goals for CO₂ reduction in 2030 and 2050. The path to be taken for transport and industry is less clear. What is more, all scenarios point to increasing electricity consumption, which only emphasises the need for a lot of renewable energy - a huge amount, in fact.

Climate change is making itself felt in the form of heatwaves, extreme precipitation and flooding. These effects are exacerbated in urban environments by the high proportion of paved surfaces, accelerated run-off of precipitation and a lack of greenery and space for water.

However there is also positive news: the air quality has improved over the last twenty years, although concentrations of harmful substances can vary greatly from location to location; density of traffic, traffic jams and the way streets are built determine whether or not concentrations of these substances remain beneath the European annual threshold values or not.

Global economy

Since the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 and the government debt crisis in the eurozone in 2012-2013, there has been a gradual economic recovery at international level, including the eurozone and Belgium. In 2017 the global growth in GDP reached its highest level since 2011, at 3.7%. The growth in GDP was 2.3% for the group of advanced economies, 2.2% in the eurozone and 1.7% in Belgium. The Federal Planning Bureau expects that the strong investment dynamic and growth rate of the GDP will continue in 2018 and 2019. Profitability has also increased considerably in recent years, and, at the beginning of 2018, business confidence reached its highest level in seven years.

