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## **Women's health report for Belgium: addressing the information gap**

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### **Issue:**

In the last years, Belgian policy makers have become increasingly concerned about health problems affecting only women (e.g. endometriosis) or affecting women in different ways than men (e.g. cardiovascular diseases). The current monitoring tools on the health status in Belgium routinely present information disaggregated by sex. Nevertheless, there is a need to go further than a mere comparison of men and women and strive for gender-sensitive health reporting.

### **Description of the problem:**

To address the information gap pertaining to the health of girls and women, a women's health report for Belgium was developed. The goal of this report is to identify and highlight health issues specific to women or affecting them differently and possible knowledge and data gaps.

### **Results:**

The report highlighted several data gaps, e.g. prevalence of endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome, and several opportunities to fill them. The process also uncovered available but underused data on women-specific issues, including fertility treatments, abortions, and contraception. Among the main results, an analysis on girls (11-18 years old) showed an alarming difference in health status compared to boys, starting from a young age and increasing throughout adolescence. For example, girls reported experiencing more psychosomatic symptoms more often than boys with the difference increasing with age. Girls reported more often a negative perception of their health (22%) compared to boys (15%) and more often depressive symptoms (47%) than boys (31%). Conversely, boys were twice as likely to meet WHO recommendations on physical activity.

### **Lessons:**

This first report on women's health in Belgium highlighted the need to collect better information on women-specific issues and the need to promote the use of existing data. Results showed that gender differences in health emerge and increase during adolescence. We strived to put results into context to produce knowledge and recommendations for policymakers.

**Key messages:**

- Developing a women's health report allowed to highlight data gaps and underuse of existing data.
- Specific interventions should target teenage girls.