

Online and offline banking through consumers' eyes



Online banking use is still on the rise. A fifth of Belgians (22%) say they did digital banking on their computer or through banking apps more often in 2023 than the year before, with the app, in particular, appearing to be overtaking PC use. For many, online banking has clearly become an indispensable part of their daily lives.

However, even if physical appointments or cash withdrawals are becoming increasingly rare, the idea of having a bank branch or ATM nearby remains important to a large proportion of Belgians.

Banks remain committed to offering multi-channel services to best address the expectations and needs of different groups in society. That's why several initiatives are being taken to make banking services – both online and offline – accessible to all. For example, slightly more than a third of Belgians indicate that they have heard of the Universal Banking Service (UBS), which allows manual transactions at a price of up to €60 per year. These are the findings from an online survey commissioned by Febelfin and conducted by the research agency iVOX¹.

Find out everything about it in this storytelling brochure.



¹ Online survey commissioned by Febelfin and conducted by research firm iVOX between 6 and 14 December 2023 among 1,000 Belgians representative of language, gender, age and education. The maximum margin of error for 1,000 Belgians is 3.02%.

ONLINE BANKING CONTINUES TO GROW

Online banking using your computer or banking apps on your smartphone has never been easier. Paying bills on your smartphone, checking your bank balance, repaying a friend after a night out... you can do everything in a few clicks from home or wherever you happen to be. The number of Belgians using the app and live chat continues to rise, with about a fifth saying that they bank digitally more often compared to last year.



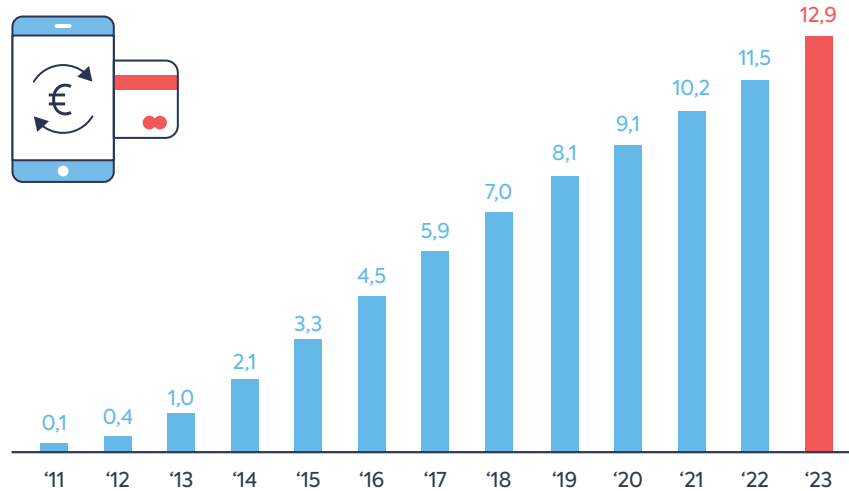
Online banking is a growing part of our daily lives

With digital channels, we can now transfer money or check our account balance in minutes, without having to travel. It should come as no surprise, then, that the vast majority of Belgians surveyed – as many as 96% – said they had used a PC or smartphone for digital banking in the past three months. About three in five say they have even done so in the last two days. Compared to the two previous years, the proportion of Belgians who banked online in the past month has thus continued to rise (2021: 86% and 2022: 88%).

Continued growth in the number of internet and mobile banking subscriptions

Increasing use of banking applications and the computer to conduct banking translates into a continued increase in the number of internet and mobile banking subscriptions. In 2023, for instance, **mobile banking** subscriptions increased by more than 1.4 million in one year (12.9 million subscriptions at the end of 2023). Together with 2021, this is the largest annual increase in absolute terms. Over the past five years, **the number of mobile banking subscriptions has increased by more than 12% year-on-year.**

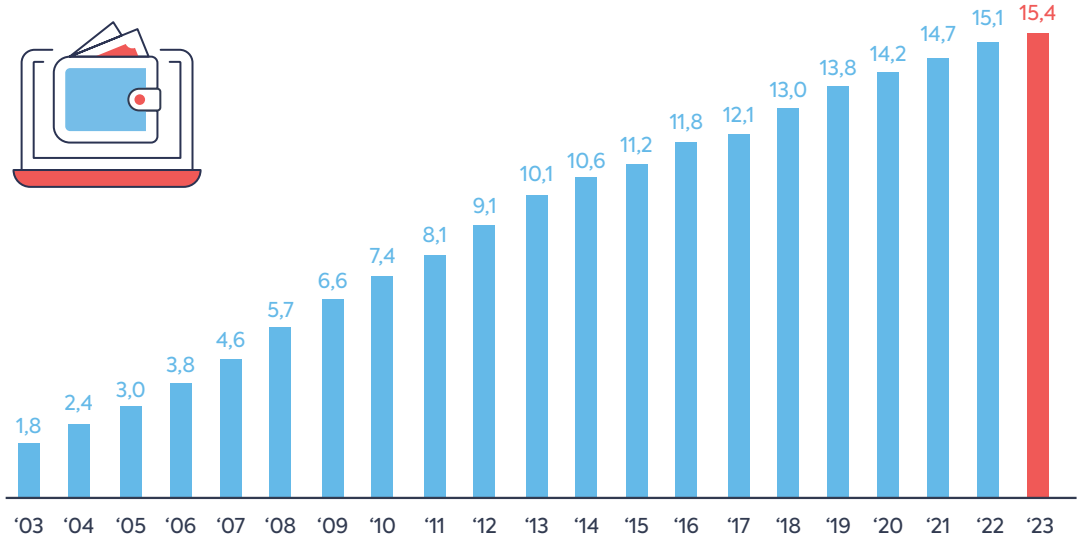
Number of mobile banking subscriptions (millions)



Source: Febelfin 2023 (preliminary figures)

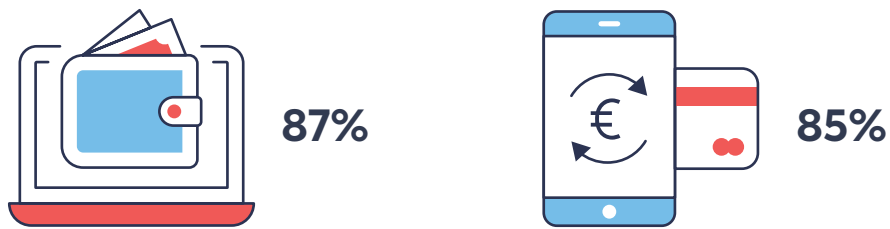
Although the growth of **traditional PC banking** is slowing down, the trend remains positive (more than 15 million subscriptions at the end of 2023, an increase of more than 300,000 compared to the previous year).

Number of internet banking subscriptions (millions)



Source: Febelfin 2023 (preliminary figures)

The app is becoming an increasingly popular channel for banking services



The most popular channels for using banking services are the PC (87%) and banking apps on a smartphone (85%).

Although PC banking was clearly preferred in the past, the app is now also gaining the same acceptance and more Belgians reported using it in 2023. We have seen an increase of 14 percent over three years (2020: 71%, 2021: 81%, 2022: 82%, 2023: 85%). The app is now almost equally popular.

For which services do we mainly use online banking?

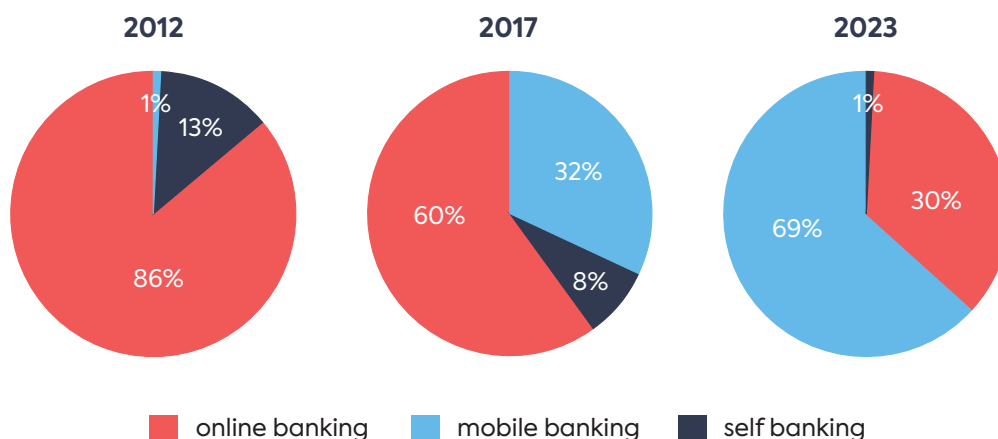


The top three most used online banking services are unchanged from the previous year. Making payments is by far the main reason Belgians use online banking (77%). Checking balances and transactions is the second most used service (68%), followed by transfers between own accounts (47%).

Using new features is also on the rise. Clearly, many Belgians are trying out new communication channels. For example, the proportion of respondents using live chat is increasing every year (2020: 33%; 2023: 42%). The number of users who use online banking to look up past transactions has also increased significantly (2022: 16%; 2023: 21%).

The growing popularity of the app can also be seen in its use for transfers. The app is by far the most frequently used to make transfers. 69% of all transfers are done via the app, and 30% via PC banking. In 2017, this was still the reverse, and a decade ago it was even non-existent.

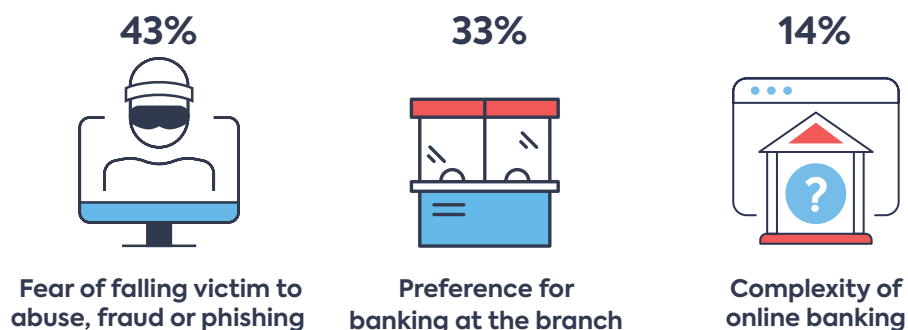
Number of European transfers by channel



Source: Febelfin 2023 (preliminary figures)

The group that has not yet made the move to online banking is shrinking

The above figures show that online banking is now the norm for many Belgians. More and more people are switching to online banking, even those who initially had doubts about its security. Yet there is still a group that is unconvinced about the possibilities of online banking or does not have the skills or knowledge to bank online. Fear of falling victim to abuse, fraud or phishing (43%) and a preference for banking at the branch (33%) are the main reasons given, while 14% of these respondents think online banking is too complicated.



The fear of being a victim of online fraud, in particular, is on the rise (2022: 18%; 2023: 43%). As a sector, we recognise more than ever that we need to continue to raise awareness of safe online banking and continue developing initiatives and measures, together with telecom providers, to get people on board of the digital train and to ensure that the payment traffic stays safe.

THE IDEA OF A BANK NEARBY REMAINS IMPORTANT

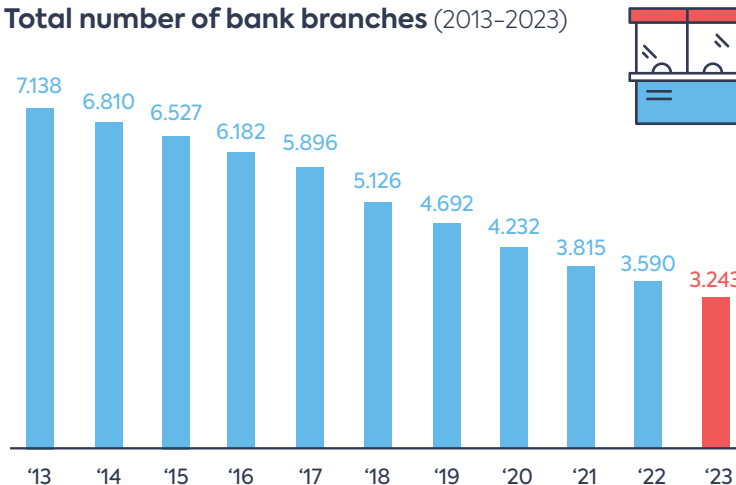
Although many services that used to be available only in bank branches are now also available online, 8 in 10 Belgians still indicate that they consider it important to have a physical bank branch nearby. Then again, we have increasingly less need to go to a bank branch. 61% of Belgians never make a physical appointment at the bank or do so less than annually.



What about availability?

The number of bank branches shows a downward trend, as in previous years. For example, the number of bank branches has fallen by almost 10% in one year to 3,243 by the end of 2023.

Total number of bank branches (2013–2023)



Source: Febelfin 2023 (preliminary figures)

Why do we still want to go to a physical bank branch?

As in previous surveys, the main services for which Belgians still go to a physical bank branch are advice on their personal financial situation (31%), monitoring investments (30%) and applying for and managing loans (19%).

A small minority also sometimes visit the bank for day-to-day banking, including making transfers and payments (6%), collecting account statements (5%) and creating a standing order (3%).

Around 7 out of 10 respondents believe that it is easy to arrange a physical meeting at their branch.



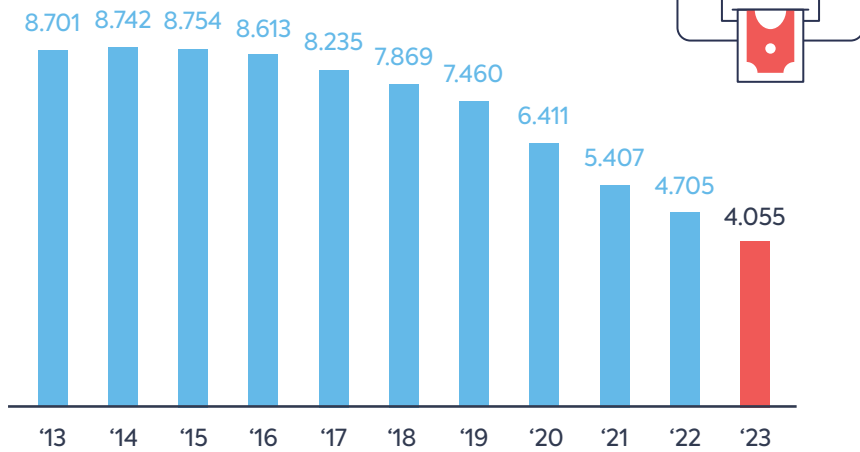
DEVELOPMENTS WITH ATMS AND WITHDRAWALS

Belgians are increasingly paying digitally and withdrawing less and less cash. The number of cash withdrawals fell by 10% year-on-year in 2023. There was still a slight increase in 2022, but in ten years' time the number of withdrawals has more than halved. So digitalisation continues. And it is clear that more and more people are turning to online payment instruments.

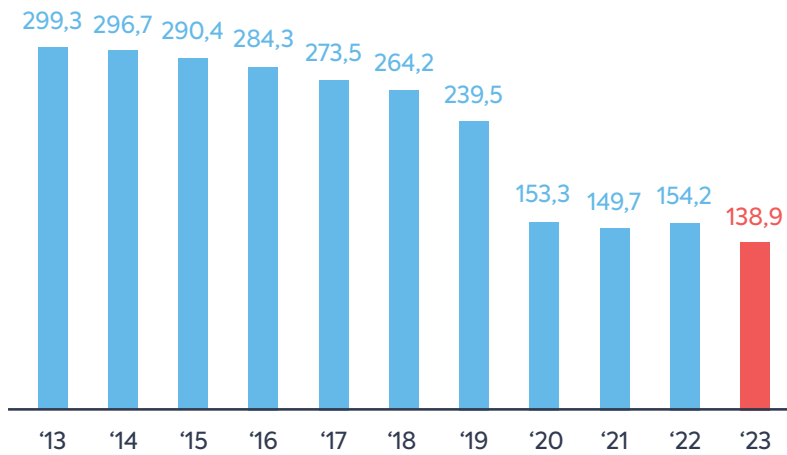


Compared with pre-COVID 2019, the number of ATMs and the number of cash withdrawals fell by roughly the same amount. Recognising that the use of cash is still a basic necessity, the sector is making every effort to guarantee access to cash for everyone, both now and in the future.

Total number of ATMS



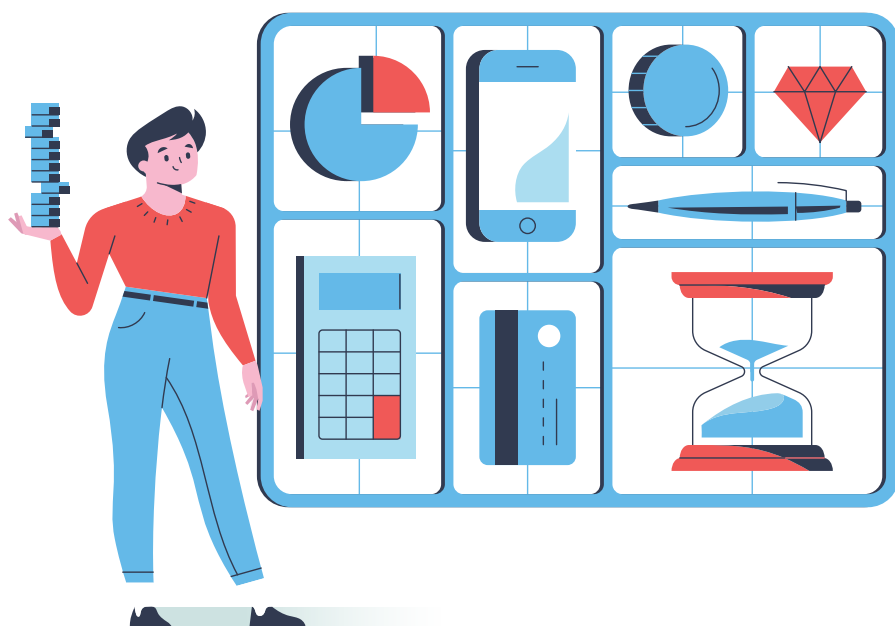
Total number of cash withdrawals (millions)



Source: Febelfin (figures exclusive of bpost, including Batopin) 2023 provisional figures

A COMPREHENSIVE OFFERING TO SUIT EVERYONE'S NEEDS AND GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY

By focusing on innovative online services, always designed with ease of use and security in mind, as well as offline services such as the **Universal Banking Service** for non-digital customers, the banking sector continues to adapt to changing customer behaviour.



What initiatives do we organize?

Febelfin and the individual banks organize information sessions, webinars and other initiatives with various partners to maximise digital inclusion. We recommend the **Febelfin brochure on digital inclusion**, which clearly summarises the free material available on safe digital banking and payments.

Febelfin organises information sessions on digital banking and the various forms of fraud across the country.

Febelfin has also launched the '**Digicoaches' e-learning course**'. This train-the-trainer course has all kinds of useful information on how to get started with online banking, how to bank safely online, and how to pay online. This e-learning course gives digicoaches the tools to support those less familiar with the digital world to safely bank online and make payments. Whether you are a professional or volunteer digicoach, you will get lots of tips and tricks, advice and tools. Over 330 volunteers or professionals received their certificates in 2023.

Universal banking service for non-digital customers

Despite the huge benefits of digitalisation, some people are finding it harder to make the transition to the digital world. Here too, the sector is doing all it can to develop tailored initiatives. The major retail banks therefore offer the **Universal Banking Service** (UBS) that allows non-digital or less digitally savvy customers to carry out manual banking transactions for a maximum flat fee of EUR 60 a year. This package includes at least 60 manual transactions per year (e.g. paper transfers). Banks can individually decide to add additional services. In this way, each customer can still take full control of their banking affairs.

Just over a third of Belgians (36%) seem to have heard of the concept of the Universal Banking Service. That's why Febelfin is doing its utmost to make this service even better known and more established.

Good value for money for all customers

When it comes to value for money, both digital and non-digital customers are well served in Belgium. Fees in neighbouring countries are generally much higher for a similar offer, and Belgian customers can even expect a more comprehensive digital service for this price. Only the Netherlands and Sweden offer a similar range, but at a much higher cost. As a result, digital consumers in Belgium have access to an affordable, high quality and complete range of services at the best value for money.

Belgium and Germany are also the only countries to offer a package for non-digital consumers, but the package is much more attractively priced in Belgium. Read our [storytelling brochure 'Payment transactions'](#) for more information.

The sector remains committed to doing more

The financial sector continues to optimise its services and is committed to ensuring that banking is accessible to all. For this reason, an accessible banking website will be launched in 2024. The website will mainly target stakeholders and showcase all the initiatives of the Belgian financial sector and Febelfin concerning digital inclusion. This will include testimonials, figures, a calendar of information sessions and existing and new initiatives.





Belgian Financial Sector Federation

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