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PRESS RELEASE

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2020: The pandemic had a significantly negative effect on international trade flows in all three regions, but proved a boon for net exports

- Drop in imports and exports largest in Brussels and smallest in Wallonia
- Travel restrictions significantly beneficial to net exports in Flanders and Wallonia
- Structure by industry of imports and exports virtually unchanged

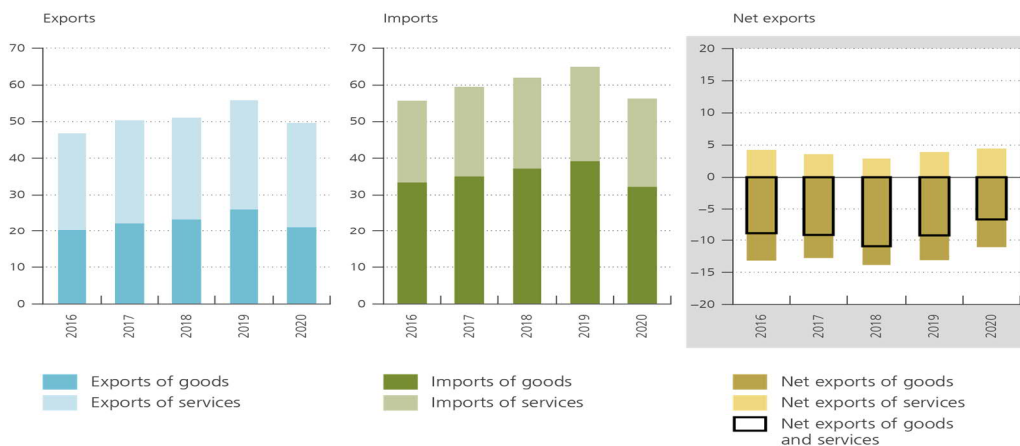
Brussels: pronounced fall in international trade, particularly in terms of goods

Total **exports** for Brussels shrank by -11.0 % in 2020. Similarly, total **imports** recorded a pronounced downward trajectory of -13.4 % – declines that followed three successive years of growth. Imports and exports fell much more sharply for goods (-17.8 % and -18.9 % respectively) than for services (-6.8 % and -4.0 % respectively).

In the goods trade, most of the drop was down to industry and trade. Among services, the branch ‘liberal professions, scientific and technical activities’ was the biggest contributor to the contraction, followed by the hospitality industry in exports and by final consumption expenditure of households for imports, mostly because of lower tourist spending abroad.

Net imports for Brussels thus fell to € 6.6 billion in 2020.

TOTAL EXPORTS, IMPORTS AND NET EXPORTS FOR THE BRUSSELS REGION, 2016-2020 (€ billion)



Source: INR

Flanders: imports and exports shrink, net exports edge up

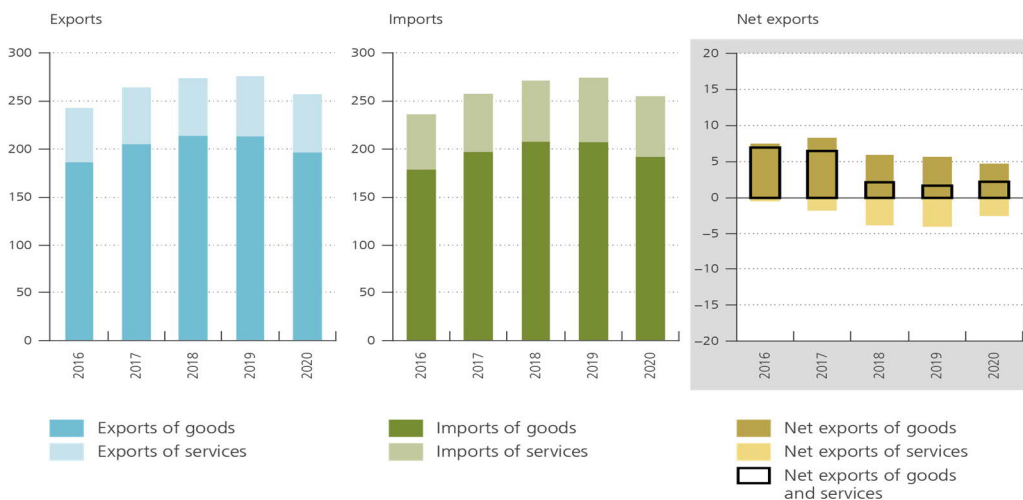
In 2020 total Flemish **exports** shrank by -6.9 % and **imports** by -7.1 %. This steep contraction in the first year of the pandemic followed nine successive years of growth in both imports and exports, aside from a very minor slide in 2013. The fall in both flows was a tad more pronounced for goods (exports: -7.7 %, imports: -7.4 %) than for services (exports: -4.0 %, imports: -6.0 %).

In goods, trade accounted for most of the fall, both in imports and in exports. For services, construction and trade were the biggest contributors to the exports decline, while the drop in imports was mainly attributable to final consumption expenditure of households (mostly tourism) and ‘transport and storage’.

In 2020 **net exports** improved slightly in Flanders, to € 2.2 billion.

TOTAL EXPORTS, IMPORTS AND NET EXPORTS FOR FLANDERS, 2016-2020

(€ billion)



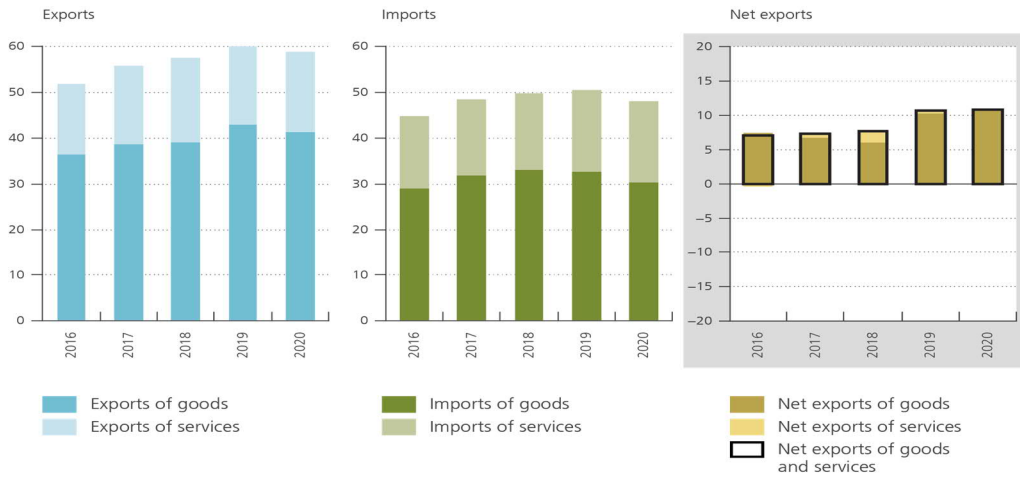
Source: INR

Wallonia: drop in imports and exports, net exports remain at high level

Walloon **exports** declined by -3.9 % in 2020. The intensity of the decline was similar for goods (-3.8 %) and services (-4.0 %). The fall in total **imports** (-5.0 %) was wholly attributable to goods (-7.3 %), as services imports were virtually stable (-0.7 %). In goods, the metalworking industry was the biggest contributor to the contraction in both imports and exports. Lower exports for services were mostly down to trade and financial services activities. In services imports, the negative contribution of final consumption expenditure by households – due to restrictions on tourism abroad – was offset by the financial services activities’ contribution, particularly because of the steep rise in ICT services imports.

Net exports remained more or less stable in 2020 (€ 10.8 billion), the highest level since the series started in 1995.

TOTAL EXPORTS, IMPORTS AND NET EXPORTS FOR WALLONIA, 2016-2020
(€ billion)



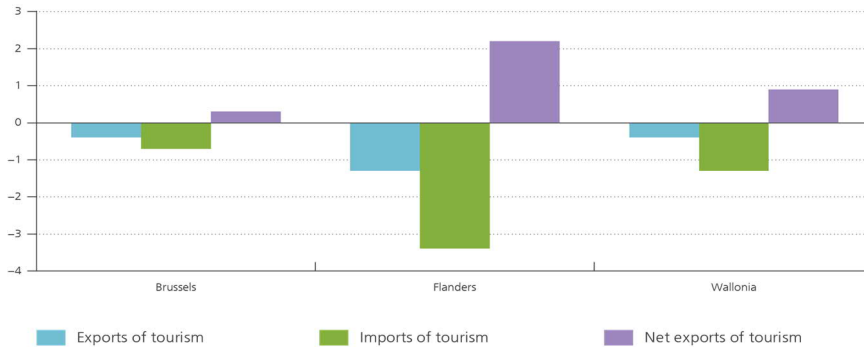
Source: INR

2020 travel restrictions had a major impact on net figures for Flanders and Wallonia

Tourism imports relate to tourist spending by Belgian residents abroad and amount generally twice as much as its counterpart, tourist spending by non residents in Belgium (= tourism exports). Every year, a significant net imports figure is recorded for tourism.

The general reduction in tourism in 2020 in the wake of international travel restrictions in both directions had a downward impact on net imports – or, in other words, an upward impact on net exports. This varied by region though: the effect was biggest in Flanders (+€2.2 billion), followed by Wallonia (+€0.9 billion). The impact in Brussels remained limited (+€0.3 billion).

2020 EVOLUTION IN EXPORTS, IMPORTS AND NET EXPORTS FOR TOURISM
(€ billion)

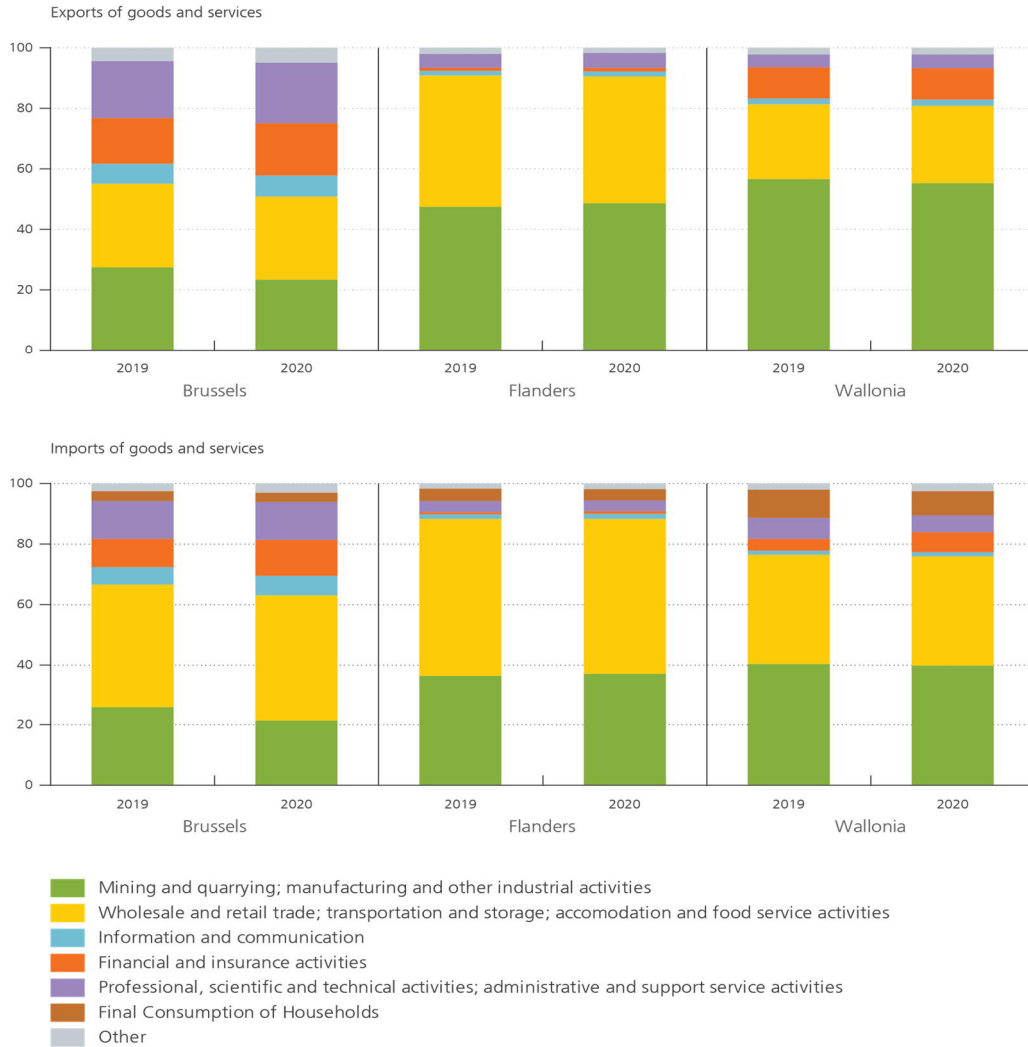


Source: INR

Structure of imports and exports virtually unchanged in 2020

The pandemic strongly affected economic activity in 2020, sometimes with big differences between industries. Yet this appears to have barely changed the structure by industry of international trade. The differences between 2019 and 2020 were minimal for the three regions.

STRUCTURE OF IMPORTS AND EXPORTS BY REGION – SHARES BY INDUSTRY IN 2019 AND 2020
(in %)



Source: INR

The table on the next page shows the key variables for the regional breakdown of Belgian imports and exports by working place for the past three years

KEY VARIABLES OF THE REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF THE BELGIAN IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF GOODS AND SERVICES

	In absolute numbers (in € million)	Share of each region in the total for the country (in %)	Share of goods and services (in %)	Percentage change compared to the previous year (in %)			Average annual growth rate (in %)
	2020	2020	2020	2018	2019	2020	2011-2020
Exports of goods and services							
Brussels	49 656.8	13.6	100.0	1.4	9.3	-11.0	2.1
Flanders	257 086.8	70.3	100.0	3.5	0.9	-6.9	3.4
Wallonia	58 833.6	16.1	100.0	3.1	6.6	-3.9	2.2
Belgium	365 577.2	100.0	100.0	3.2	2.9	-7.0	3.0
Exports of goods							
Brussels	21 178.9	8.2	42.7	4.8	11.8	-18.9	-0.1
Flanders	196 662.8	75.9	76.5	4.2	-0.3	-7.7	3.3
Wallonia	41 314.5	15.9	70.2	1.1	9.9	-3.8	1.2
Belgium	259 156.2	100.0	70.9	3.8	2.1	-8.1	2.6
Exports of services							
Brussels	28 477.9	26.8	57.3	-1.4	7.2	-4.0	4.5
Flanders	60 424.0	56.8	23.5	1.4	5.3	-4.0	3.9
Wallonia	17 519.1	16.5	29.8	7.6	-0.5	-4.0	5.5
Belgium	106 421.0	100.0	29.1	1.6	4.8	-4.0	4.3
Imports of goods and services							
Brussels	56 274.5	15.7	100.0	4.1	4.9	-13.4	0.9
Flanders	254 863.0	71.0	100.0	5.3	1.1	-7.1	3.9
Wallonia	48 015.2	13.4	100.0	2.8	1.5	-5.0	2.0
Belgium	359 152.7	100.0	100.0	4.8	1.8	-7.9	3.1
Imports of goods							
Brussels	32 266.6	12.7	57.3	6.2	5.5	-17.8	-0.8
Flanders	191 921.5	75.4	75.3	5.6	-0.2	-7.4	3.6
Wallonia	30 331.6	11.9	63.2	3.7	-1.1	-7.3	0.0
Belgium	254 519.7	100.0	70.9	5.4	0.4	-8.9	2.4
Imports of services							
Brussels	24 007.9	22.9	42.7	1.1	4.0	-6.8	4.0
Flanders	62 941.5	60.2	24.7	4.6	5.3	-6.0	5.3
Wallonia	17 683.6	16.9	36.8	0.9	6.8	-0.7	7.5
Belgium	104 633.0	100.0	29.1	3.1	5.3	-5.4	5.3
	In absolute numbers (in € million)						
	2018	2019	2020				
Net exports of goods and services							
Brussels	-10 932.4	-9 216.4	-6 617.7				
Flanders	2 133.2	1 656.1	2 223.8				
Wallonia	7 688.4	10 693.7	10 818.4				
Belgium	-1 110.8	3 133.4	6 424.5				
Net exports of goods							
Brussels	-13 832.5	-13 118.4	-11 087.7				
Flanders	5 915.3	5 663.4	4 741.3				
Wallonia	6 027.2	10 264.3	10 982.9				
Belgium	-1 890.0	2 809.3	4 636.5				
Net exports of services							
Brussels	2 900.1	3 902.0	4 470.0				
Flanders	-3 782.1	-4 007.3	-2 517.5				
Wallonia	1 661.2	429.4	-164.5				
Belgium	779.2	324.1	1 788.0				

Source: INR

Technical note

The regional breakdown of Belgian imports and exports of goods and services is jointly drawn up by NBB and the regional statistical authorities. This press release presents the first regional outcomes for 2020, as well as the revised figures for 2018 and 2019. The results are presented in current prices. These align with the October 2021 national accounts.

The statistics only include imports and exports from and into Belgium and do not include trade between the regions.

On its website, the National Bank of Belgium (NBB) publishes monthly import and export figures for goods by region for foreign trade, and has been doing so since data year 2002. These outcomes – both total figures for Belgium and shares by region – differ from the figures reported under the national and regional accounts in accordance with ESA 2010.

At the national level, the figure differs for conceptual reasons – e.g. different treatment of natural gas and electricity transit and of flows for contract work, repairs and triangular trade). The differences in the shares by region reflect different methodological principles used to arrive at the regional breakdown itself.

For a detailed description of the methods used, please refer to "[Regional distribution of Belgian imports and exports of goods and services, Methodological note](#)", which can be accessed via the NBB website (in French and Dutch).