

# Labour market integration of the population of foreign origin

T. De Keyser  
Ph. Delhez  
H. Zimmer<sup>(\*)</sup>

## Introduction

The question of the labour market integration of the population of foreign origin is particularly important in Belgium. Immigrants make up 14 % of the resident population – one of the highest proportions for any EU country. While the employment rate of European immigrants is close to that of persons born in Belgium, the figure for non-European immigrants is much less and the lowest of all Member States.

In our analysis, a person's origin is determined by the country of birth, not nationality, owing to the large number of persons acquiring Belgian nationality each year, and a distinction is made between EU countries and others.

The article is in four parts. The first part details the definitions and sources used, and describes the immigrant population in Belgium. The second part considers the main employment findings according to origin and compares them with those of the other EU countries. Since the socio-demographic characteristics of the immigrant population differ from those of the population born in Belgium, that has to be taken into account in examining the labour market performance according to origin. The third part analyses individual and institutional factors influencing access to the labour market as well as those on the demand side, particularly discrimination. It therefore sheds light on miscellaneous obstacles encountered by foreigners. This part also focuses on the specific situation of direct descendants of immigrants. Finally, the fourth part covers the qualitative aspect of employment

and examines the specific characteristics of jobs held by people of foreign origin.

## 1. Characteristics of the immigrant population in Belgium

### 1.1 Definitions

According to the National Register, on 1 January 2010 Belgium had around 10 840 000 residents, of whom 9 780 000 were Belgian and 1 060 000 of a different nationality. Since a large number of foreigners have become Belgians, it is interesting to know that, at the same time, almost 1 500 000 foreign-born persons were living in Belgium.

In 2010, immigrants thus represented 13.9 % of the total population, a proportion similar to that seen in Spain, but lower than in Austria (15.2 %) and Sweden (14.3 %).

There was recently a big expansion in the large group of Belgians born in another country; this was due to the simplified procedure for obtaining Belgian nationality, i.e. on entry into force of the Law of 2000 amending the Belgian Nationality Code ("Snel-Belgwet"). Since 2000, around 400 000 people have become Belgian<sup>(1)</sup>; according to the latest figures available from the Directorate

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(1) Belgian nationality can be acquired by a statement of nationality, by "simple" option, by marriage with a Belgian or by naturalisation.

General of Statistics and Economic Information (DGSEI), the figure was just under 33 000 in 2009. However, in October 2012, the Chamber adopted a proposal for a law aimed at tightening up the procedure for acquiring nationality. Under the new rules, candidates seeking Belgian nationality must prove that they can speak one of the country's languages and that they are socio-economically integrated. After five years of legal residence, they can apply for Belgian nationality, although the law specifies a more flexible procedure for persons legally resident in Belgium for more than ten years. Nationality is not necessarily acquired by deliberate choice. Any child born in Belgium to non-Belgian parents who meet the stipulated conditions<sup>(1)</sup> is automatically Belgian. Similarly, children born abroad but having at least one Belgian parent are automatically Belgian.

Persons registered as "Belgian" may therefore have very diverse origins. If those varied origins affect labour market participation, an analysis based on nationality will not provide a complete picture of the labour market integration of migrants and their descendants. The definition of an "immigrant" used in this article is therefore not based on nationality but on the individual's actual migration history: people are regarded as immigrants if they are resident in Belgium but were born abroad<sup>(2)</sup>.

Once the definition of an immigrant has been decided, it is necessary for the purpose of analysis to differentiate between groups according to the origin of the individuals. The principle of the free movement of people in the EU (despite the temporary restrictions still imposed on Romanian and Bulgarian workers) facilitates migration flows and is likely to influence the reasons for immigration. It is therefore appropriate to distinguish between European migrants (i.e. those from the EU) and those from the rest of the world. This article therefore focuses on three clearly-defined groups: people born in Belgium, European immigrants and non-European immigrants (born within and outside the EU respectively).

There are essentially two types of data source for determining the immigrant population: administrative statistics and survey data. The advantage of using administrative data is that these are "genuine", but they nevertheless also have some drawbacks. For instance, they do not offer sufficient detail to provide more information on the characteristics and the socio-economic situation of those in question, and they are not directly comparable at international level. The data from the labour force survey (LFS), harmonised at European level, give a more detailed description of the personal context of the individuals polled. In this article, administrative data are used to indicate the absolute sizes of the populations, while the

survey data are used to analyse participation in the labour market and examine in greater depth some of the specific characteristics of these populations. The "ad hoc module"<sup>(3)</sup> of the 2008 survey, which investigated in particular the position of migrants on the labour market, is used in several sections.

## 1.2 Structure of the immigrant population

### 1.2.1 Immigration trends and the main countries of birth

Recent years have seen a steep rise in the number of new immigrants. Whereas in 2001 just over 10 % of registered residents had been born outside Belgium, that figure was almost 14 % in 2010, which corresponds to around one and a half million individuals. The percentage of foreign-born persons has been rising steadily for several decades, but this increase has clearly accelerated since 2000. In the 1930s, the proportion of immigrants was around 5 %, which means that it took almost 70 years for that figure to double.

In recent years, there has also been a change in the principal countries from which immigrants originate. Taking the immigrant population as a whole, France and Italy were the main countries of origin in 2001, at 14.2 and 12.8 % respectively. Together, the neighbouring countries and Italy accounted for around 44 % of the total. The dominant non-European immigration countries, namely Morocco and Turkey, represented 10.1 and 6.3 % respectively of the immigrant population. Owing to its colonial past, Belgium also had a significant proportion of people born in the Congo, namely 4.4 %. The "other countries" group accounted for just over one third of the total in 2001.

At the beginning of 2010, the proportion of persons born in Morocco (11.9 %) exceeded that of persons born in France (11.4 %), even though the latter had increased in number. The Netherlands and Italy respectively accounted for 8.3 and 8 % of Belgium's immigrant population. There has been clear diversification in the countries of origin, with the share of "other countries" rising to 37.2 %. But there was also a steep rise in immigration from the new EU Member States: between 2001 and 2010, the

(1) At least one of the parents must have been born in Belgium or have had their principal residence there for five of the ten years preceding the birth.

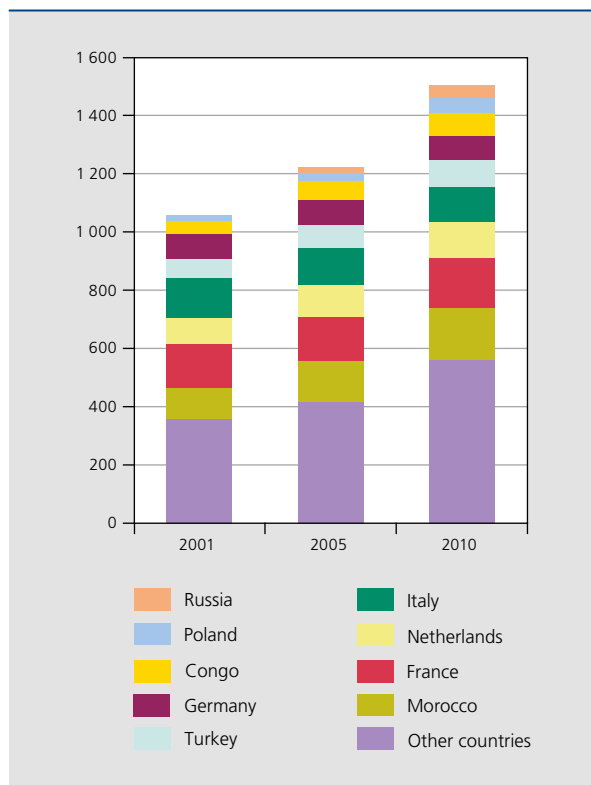
(2) Only 1.3 % of the population aged from 15-64 years have both parents born in Belgium and were born abroad (2008 data on the basis of the labour force survey ad hoc module), indicating that the influence of this group should not be particularly significant.

(3) Every second quarter, an "ad hoc module" consisting of supplementary questions is added to the individual questionnaire for a specific fraction of the population. In 2008, the topic was "the situation of migrants and their direct descendants on the labour market", so that these supplementary questions applied to the group of migrants in Belgium.

**CHART 1**

**BREAKDOWN OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH**

(in thousands of persons, data as at 1 January)



Source: DGSEI.

number of immigrants from Poland more than doubled. The number originating from Russia also increased steadily. However, these groups do not yet account for a large share of the total immigrant population. It was the surge in immigration from Morocco and "other countries" that, at the beginning of 2010, caused the percentage of European migrants in the total foreign-born population to fall to 49.6%, whereas the figure had stood at 52% before the accession of the new EU Member States in 2004.

However, this rate of increase is not unique in the history of Belgian immigration. In the 1920s, the percentage of the foreign-born population had risen even faster than now, owing to the recruitment of foreigners to work in the mines. But after the Second World War most of them were recalled to their country of origin to perform their military service, more or less ending that expansion. After the war, the migration tool was used again to provide the coal industry with cheap labour and thus to restrain commodity prices in a context of industrial recovery. In addition, as that recovery gained hold, other sectors experienced structural shortages of workers. After the Iron Curtain had descended, Belgium turned mainly to

southern Europe, and later North Africa and Turkey, to meet the post-war demand for labour.

The nature of migration changed after the Second World War: while, in the 1920s, foreign workers were sent back to their country of origin when the business cycle went into reverse, in the 1970s many immigrants settled in Belgium after the immigration stop in 1974. Moreover, many of them arranged for their families to join them, gradually increasing the proportion of immigrants in the Belgian population (by around one percentage point every ten years following the immigration stop).

### 1.2.2 Reasons for immigration

The ad hoc module of the 2008 survey enables us to break down the foreign-born population according to the main reason for immigration. In 2008, immigrants from the EU had entered Belgium for family reasons in 44% of cases. Work was cited as the main motive in 29.3% of cases, followed by "other reasons" (20.8%)<sup>(1)</sup>. Finally, 4.8% originally came to Belgium to study.

The profile of immigrants from outside the EU is more diverse. Almost half (47%) came to Belgium for family reasons. Only 18% of them cited work as the reason for migration, while just over 15% of immigrants in this group sought asylum. "Other reasons" and study were the main original reason for 10.2 and 9.6% respectively of non-EU immigrants.

The fact that a large proportion of migrants from both EU and non-EU countries cite family reasons as the main motive for immigration is due to the immigration stop introduced in 1974, which greatly hampered economic migration. The divergent findings for the two origin groups are attributable mainly to differences in the regulations. As stated earlier, the free movement of people within the EU means that it is now possible to look for a job in another EU country without prior authorisation<sup>(2)</sup>. Conversely, people who are not nationals of a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) wishing to come to Belgium to work have to obtain a work permit<sup>(3)</sup>. Belgium in fact applies separate sets of rules on work permits and residence permits.

(1) According to the Eurostat quality report (2010), this high percentage reflects a problem concerning the survey questions for this group, which were clearly not sufficiently detailed.  
 (2) Except Romania and Bulgaria.  
 (3) Switzerland is the only exception.

The type-B work permit is valid for only one employer and has a one-year time limit. The application must be made by the employer wishing to take on the worker. If an examination of the labour market proves that it is not possible to find locally a Belgian or European worker suitable for the job in question within a reasonable period, the employer is granted an employment authorisation and the worker concerned is automatically granted a type-B work permit<sup>(1)</sup>.

The type-A work permit is valid for all salaried occupations with all employers for an unlimited period. It is granted only after four years of work covered by a type-B work permit<sup>(2)</sup> during a maximum ten-year period of legal residence, which explains why it is granted far less commonly than the type-B work permit.

The type-C work permit introduced in 2003 is valid for all salaried occupations and for a limited period. It is granted to certain categories of foreign nationals who have only a limited or precarious right of residence in Belgium (e.g. students, asylum-seekers, etc.).

In principle, nationals of non-EU countries who hold a permanent right of residence do not need a work permit. Therefore, all people coming to Belgium to join their family and who have obtained a permanent residence permit (the length of the procedure increased from 15 months to three years in 2007<sup>(3)</sup>) have full access to the labour market without prior authorisation. The obligation to hold a work permit could impede access to employment for immigrants in only a very specific number of cases.

Data from the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue (FPS ELSD) on the number of work permits issued each year since 2005 show that the number of type-A and B work permits – grouped together in view of the small number of type-A permits – increased sharply up to and including 2008, a year in which more than 50 000 work permits of this type were granted, then fell substantially in 2009 to around 30 000, following the economic crisis and the abolition of the transitional regime<sup>(4)</sup> for the ten countries which joined the EU in 2004. The number of type-A and B work permits declined in 2010 as well, dropping to 26 500. The composition is

dominated by the new EU Member States and changed over the period under review, with a large number of Polish recipients from 2005 to 2008 joined by a rising number of Bulgarians and Romanians from 2007 onwards: the latter are the two groups which currently account for the bulk of the type-A and B work permits. Type-C work permits are much less affected by the economic situation, since they do not primarily concern migration for occupational reasons; the number of these permits has hovered around 25 000 for some years.

### 1.2.3 Regional breakdown of the immigrant population

Immigrants do not settle uniformly throughout Belgium, the reasons being not only variations in the availability of work but also language, cultural affinities, and relatives or groups already present, etc.

At the beginning of 2011, 39.8% of all immigrants lived in Flanders, compared to 29.4% in Brussels and 30.8% in Wallonia. Owing to differences in the size of the regional populations, the proportion of foreign-born persons among residents of the Region is 10% in Flanders and 13.8% in Wallonia, whereas it reaches 41.5% in Brussels. This high proportion in the capital is due partly to the presence of major international institutions and businesses. However, it is so substantial that the existence of an established population is an attraction in itself.

Over 8% of the population of Brussels was born in Morocco; persons from that country are therefore almost twice as numerous as those from France (4.3%). Similarly, immigrants from the Congo (2.4%), Poland (2.1%) and Turkey (2.1%) are relatively more numerous in the capital than elsewhere. In Wallonia, the main groups are people born in France (2.8%) and Italy (2.4%). Finally, Flanders mainly has immigrants from the Netherlands (1.8%) and Morocco (1%).

### 1.2.4 Age pyramid

The age pyramid for native Belgians has a fairly flat profile, with a rise in the 40 to 59 age group. This means that the baby boomers are approaching retirement age and will tend to become inactive. The spike at the extremity of the age pyramid, indicating that there is a relatively large proportion of people aged 70 and over, reflects the increased life expectancy of the population. However, the size of the youngest age bands shows that demographic trends have been fairly stable since the baby boom generation.

The immigrant populations have a different demographic profile. Owing to the large historical immigration waves,

(1) The rules are less strict for workers applying for a job on the regional lists of critical jobs compiled for this purpose, and there is no examination of the labour market.

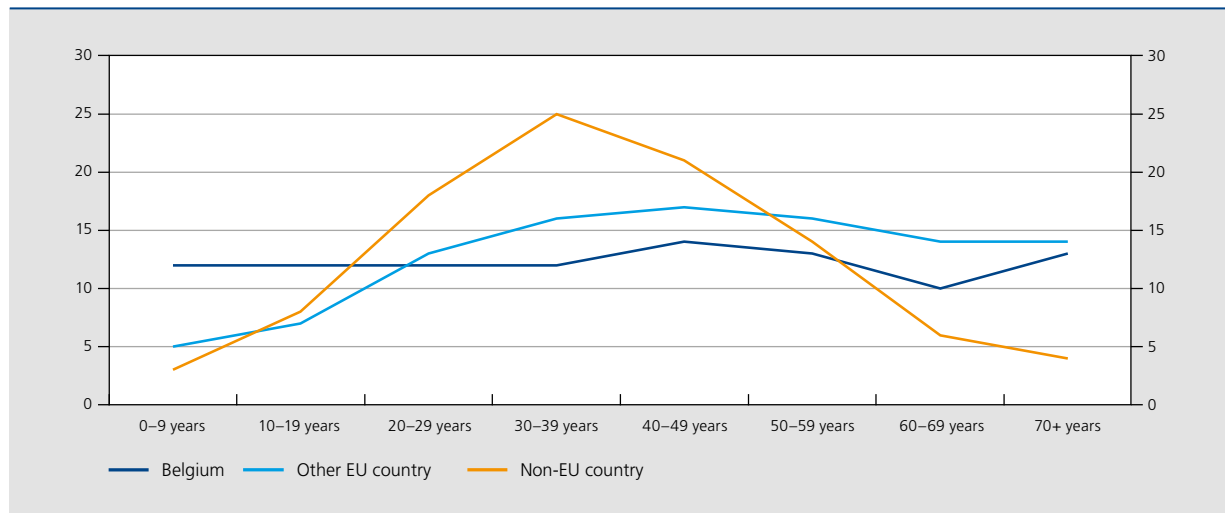
(2) In certain cases, that period may be reduced to two or three years.

(3) During this three-year period a work permit is necessary.

(4) A limit on the number of workers from most of the new EU Member States was introduced as a transitional measure, to avoid labour market shocks in Belgium. That obligation ended on 1 May 2009 for most of the countries, though it was extended until 31 December 2013 for the most recent Member States, namely Romania and Bulgaria.

## CHART 2 AGE PYRAMID BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH

(in % of the corresponding total population, data as at 1 January 2010)



Source: DGSEI.

elderly persons are fairly well represented among immigrants from the EU countries, but the corresponding population of working age is also relatively larger than among people born in Belgium. The youngest age bands are relatively less numerous in the total population concerned.

Non-EU immigrants often come from farther away, and have to follow a stricter immigration procedure, which may explain why the proportion of children among them remains even lower. The great majority of people arriving in Belgium from non-EU countries are relatively young and of working age. Almost two-thirds of the population are aged between 20 and 49 years, while that applies to barely four out of ten people born in Belgium. The contrast is equally striking in regard to the over-50s: while they represent a quarter of non-EU immigrants, they account for around 37 % of people born in Belgium.

## 2. Labour market status

### 2.1 Main findings

The integration of these various groups into the labour market is examined via the objective status categories as defined by the International Labour Office (ILO) and used in the labour force surveys harmonised at European level. Persons in employment are those who have performed at least one hour of paid work during the reference week <sup>(1)</sup>

– which therefore does not exclude undeclared employment. Unemployed persons had no work during the reference week, were available for work and had actively looked for a job during the last four weeks, or had already found a job due to start in the coming three months. Registration with a public employment service and the receipt of unemployment benefits are therefore not relevant criteria for the survey. Inactive persons are those who do not work and are not looking for a job. They are therefore not part of the labour supply.

Most results were calculated on Labour Force Survey microdata, for which 2010 is the last year at our disposal.

In all, persons born in Belgium and those coming from other EU countries have similar activity rates, at around 68 %. However, the breakdown between people in work and the unemployed is slightly different; while 63.6 % of the native population were in work in 2010, the figure was 61.2 % for persons born in another EU country. Their respective unemployment ratios thus stood at 4.7 and 6.7 %. The position of the population born outside the EU presents greater differences; almost four in ten persons were inactive, while only 46.5 % were in work and 14.3 % were unemployed.

The gender breakdown reveals very clear-cut findings. While the activity rate for men is fairly similar for the

(1) Or have not worked but normally have a job from which they were temporarily absent on account of illness, holiday, labour dispute or training.

**CHART 3** BREAKDOWN OF THE POPULATION BY GENDER AND ORIGIN ACCORDING TO LABOUR MARKET STATUS  
(in % of the population aged from 15 to 64 in 2010)



Source : EC (LFS, microdata).

various countries of origin of the residents, the employment rate of those born outside the EU, at 56.6 %, is more than ten percentage points below the figure for the other comparison groups. Among the men, 16.6 % are looking for work, i.e. between two and three and a half times more than the proportion for other residents. Among the women, only half of immigrants from outside the EU are active : 37 % have a job while 12 % are unemployed. The activity rates for the other two categories of residents are similar, at over 60 %, and the gaps between the employment rates of European immigrants and women born in Belgium are relatively small, since 55.2 and 58.7 % respectively are working.

The high unemployment ratios among immigrants from outside Europe and the particularly high inactivity rate among women in this group justify maintaining, in the rest of the article, the distinction between persons born in an EU country (other than Belgium) and those born outside the EU.

In the analysis from here on, the employment rate (as a percentage of the total population of working age, i.e.

active and inactive) is the preferred indicator of labour market integration, rather than the unemployment rate (as a percentage of the active population only), owing to the major differences in participation rates according to origin and gender.

## 2.2 International comparison

The existence of significant gaps between the employment rates of immigrants and persons born in Belgium is not a recent phenomenon. The disparities in the employment rates of native-born as opposed to those from outside the EU already stood at 15 percentage points in the 1990s, and reached around 20 points in the early 2000s<sup>(1)</sup>. However, the gap narrowed during the decade that followed. The differential between native-born and persons born in other European countries has always been smaller.

There are therefore likely to be specific barriers to the integration of immigrants into the labour market. Before considering certain exclusion factors, it is worth looking at Belgium in a European perspective. In 2011<sup>(2)</sup>, Belgium had the lowest employment rate of any European country for people born outside the EU, at 45.8 %. The European average stood at 58.1 %<sup>(3)</sup>. Belgium's ranking in that respect has hardly changed for some years. Among the old EU members, Belgium has been in last place since 1995<sup>(4)</sup>. In terms of the percentage point gap between the

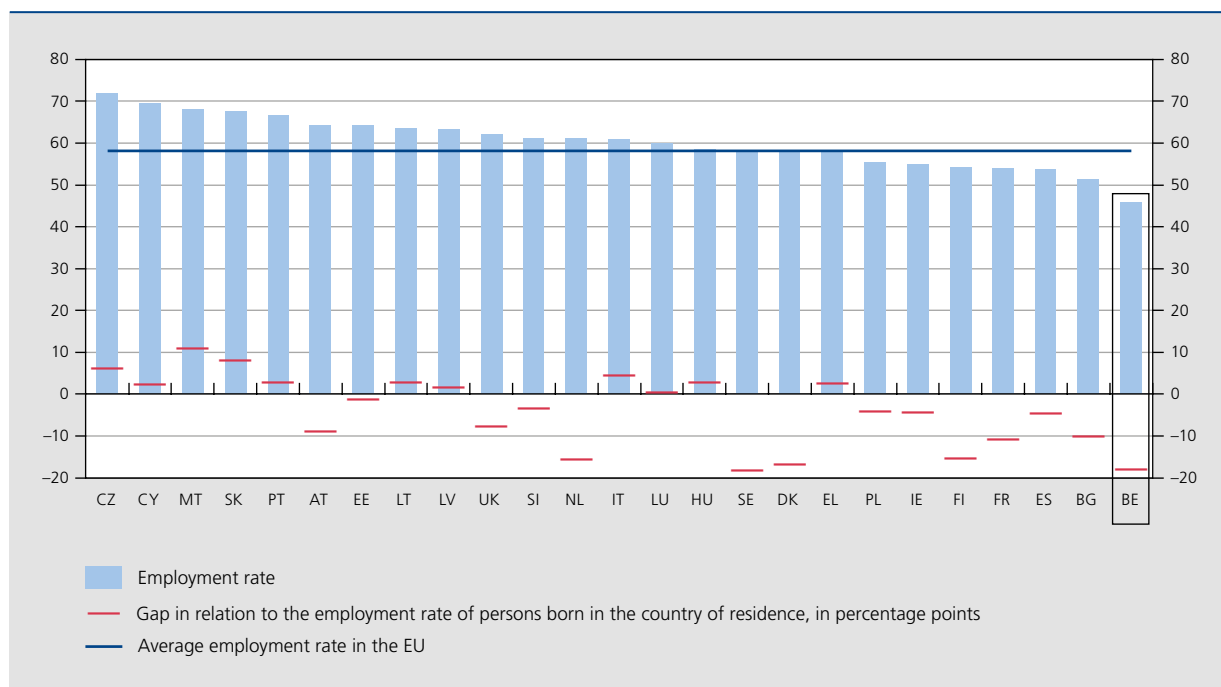
(1) The group considered for this period comprises persons born outside the EU-15, i.e. a larger group of migrants, in the absence of data on people born outside the current EU which has 27 members.

(2) Microdata are not necessary for the purpose of this European comparison based on the employment rate; the year 2011 can thus be presented.

(3) Excluding Germany, which does not report data on the country of birth in the labour force survey, and Romania.

(4) Start of the published series of employment rate by country of birth.

**CHART 4** EMPLOYMENT RATE OF PERSONS BORN OUTSIDE THE EU<sup>(1)</sup>  
(in % of the population aged from 15 to 64 years in 2011, unless otherwise stated)



Source: EC (LFS, Eurostat).

(1) The respondents' country of birth is not available for Germany. The data on Romania are not available for 2011.

employment rate of native-born and that of non-European immigrants, Sweden and Belgium perform the worst, at around 18 percentage points.

Under the EU2020 strategy, Belgium adopted secondary targets concerning the employment of certain risk groups which had an employment rate well below the average. The improvement in the employment figures for non-European nationals (in this connection, nationality is the criterion used) was formulated in terms of a reduction in the differential between the employment rate of this group and that of Belgian nationals. In the strategy, the group considered comprises people between the ages of 20 and 64 years. In 2011, the gap came to 29.1 percentage points; it is to be cut below 16.5 points within ten years.

### 3. Factors influencing access to employment

#### 3.1 Individual characteristics

The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Belgium's resident population may vary according to the person's origin. In this section, we look at the observable

parameters which could typically influence the chance of being in work.

It is possible to formalise the link between the probability of being employed and miscellaneous explanatory variables using a simple econometric estimate, namely a logistic regression. The dependent variable is binary and takes the value 1 if the person is in work and 0 if that is not the case. The – qualitative – explanatory variables are also dichotomic: for example, the fact of being a woman, resident in Wallonia, with a given level of education, etc. This multivariate analysis can be used to measure the influence of a single characteristic by controlling all the others. Thus, the effect of being born in a non-European country is not connected with the different average level of education of immigrants, because the model takes account of these specific effects.

For this estimate, the reference group comprises men aged between 25 and 54 years, medium-skilled<sup>(1)</sup>, born in Belgium and resident in Flanders. The coefficients

(1) The levels of education correspond to the ISCED 1997 international classification. The three main groups are: low-skilled, having completed no more than pre-primary, or primary education or the first stage of secondary education (levels 0-2), medium-skilled, having completed second stage secondary or post-secondary but not higher education (levels 3-4), and highly-skilled, holding higher education qualifications (levels 5-6).

obtained all have the expected sign and are statistically significant at the 1 % threshold. As expected, the probability of being in work is very high for the reference group, at 90 %. All other things being equal, and changing only one characteristic at a time in relation to the reference group, the likelihood of having a job is lower for a woman, a young person, or an older person, and for someone not completing secondary education, not born in Belgium, and resident in a Region other than Flanders. Conversely, it is greater for those with higher education qualifications.

Age has by far the greatest impact: the probability of being in work for a medium-skilled native-born, resident in Flanders and aged between 15 and 24 years is only half that of an adult aged between 25 and 54, and drops by 33 percentage points for persons aged between 55 and 64 years compared to that same reference group. The reason is that the majority of young people and the older age group are inactive, respectively because they are still in education or have permanently retired from the labour market. The chance of labour market integration is 12 points below the figure for the reference group for those not completing secondary education. The fact of being born in a non-EU country is just as significant a factor as the level of education. While persons born in Belgium have a 90 % chance of being in work, that figure falls to 77 % for persons with the same characteristics but born outside the EU. Women are at a disadvantage

compared to their male counterparts, and the fact of being resident in Wallonia or Brussels also reduces the chances of being in work. However, it should be borne in mind that we are dealing with a simplified model which only neutralises the effect of certain variables. Fluency in the language of the country of residence, marital status, nationality, household composition, place of obtaining the highest qualifications, and the size of the social network are just a few examples of other factors which are not all covered by the labour force surveys and which may have a varying degree of influence on access to the labour market. Obviously, discrimination by employers cannot be ruled out as a factor limiting access to employment for certain population groups (see below).

The acquisition of nationality may be seen as a means of integration. However, if it is subject to compliance with certain conditions, the findings relating to labour market integration may be biased; both positive and negative selection criteria may then play an invisible role and cause endogeneity<sup>(1)</sup>.

(1) Thus, it is possible that persons meeting the set conditions for acquiring nationality may also have characteristics enabling them to find a job more quickly. For example, they may be more highly skilled, more motivated, with a better support network, etc. But it is also possible that migrants attracted by citizenship specifically form a more vulnerable group on the labour market and essentially wish to enjoy the benefits of that citizenship. It is more than just the effect of nationality that is measured, be it in a positive or a negative case (Corluy et al., 2011).

**TABLE 1** PROBABILITY OF BEING IN EMPLOYMENT IN BELGIUM: ECONOMETRIC RESULTS  
(logit model based on 2010 data)

	Parameter coefficient	Standard deviation	Significance <sup>(1)</sup>	Calculated probability <sup>(2)</sup>
Reference <sup>(3)</sup> .....	2.197	0.0237	***	90.0
Woman .....	-0.714	0.0191	***	81.5
Aged 15-24 .....	-2.468	0.0253	***	43.3
Aged 55-64 .....	-1.928	0.0231	***	56.7
Low-skilled .....	-0.944	0.0217	***	77.8
Highly-skilled .....	0.703	0.0247	***	94.8
Born in another EU country .....	-0.140	0.0361	***	88.7
Born in a non-EU country .....	-0.979	0.0337	***	77.2
Resident in Brussels .....	-0.483	0.0318	***	84.7
Resident in Wallonia .....	-0.340	0.0202	***	86.5

Sources: EC (LFS, microdata), NBB calculations with unweighted data.

(1) \*\*\*: significant at 1 %.

(2) The probabilities shown in the table are not additive. The presentation is of the *ceteris paribus* type: one characteristic at a time is changed in relation to the reference group.

(3) The reference is a man aged between 25 and 54 years, medium-skilled, born in Belgium and resident in Flanders.



If the effect of nationality is estimated on the basis of Belgian data, the selection effect should have less influence in that, until recently, the acquisition of nationality was conditional solely on a certain period of residence (Corluy *et al.*, 2011)<sup>(1)</sup>. The results of a regression applied solely to persons born outside the EU confirm the importance of Belgian nationality. The significant coefficient indicates that the probability of getting a job increases considerably – by 11 percentage points – if, *ceteris paribus*, the person can claim Belgian nationality. Various factors, such as less discrimination, access to employment in public administration, exemption from a work permit, etc., could perhaps play a role in this “nationality premium”.

### 3.2 Structure of the population and employment rate

The population structure by gender, age and level of education and the employment rates corresponding to each of these categories differ according to origin: the immigrant groups have a relatively greater concentration of people aged from 30 to 49 years and fewer people in the 50-64 age group than the native population. In the case of non-European immigrants in particular, over half are in the intermediate age group. It is necessary to distinguish between European and non-European immigrants in regard to the level of education. While European immigrants are fairly evenly distributed across the three

levels of education – and actually comprise a larger proportion of highly-skilled persons than the native population – around 47 % of non-European immigrants have not completed secondary education, and only a quarter of them have higher education qualifications.

The lower average employment rate of immigrants could be due to the different structure of their population, with characteristics which are perhaps more unfavourable to employment than for the Belgian-born population. To identify the “structure” effect, it is possible to calculate an immigrant employment rate adjusted for the population structure and cross-analysing gender, age and level of education. The reference group is the population born in Belgium. If this adjustment is made, the employment rate of non-European immigrants increases by only 1.8 percentage points to 48.3 % in 2010. Conversely, the employment rate of European immigrants falls by 1.1 points to 60.1 %. Thus, the real population structure of these two groups has a negative and positive effect respectively on their chance of having a job. But the main factor accounting for their overall employment rate is their low employment rate in each category considered.

Confirming the results of the above regression, it appears that, whatever the socio-demographic characteristics of

(1) In October 2012, the Chamber passed a new proposal for a law amending the Belgian Nationality Code.

**TABLE 2** BREAKDOWN OF THE POPULATION BY ORIGIN ACCORDING TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CORRESPONDING EMPLOYMENT RATES  
(respectively in % of the total population aged from 15 to 64 years and in % of the corresponding population aged from 15 to 64 years in 2010)

	Share in the total population				Employment rate			
	Belgium	Other EU country	Non-EU country	Total	Belgium	Other EU country	Non-EU country	Total
<b>Gender</b>								
Men .....	50.5	48.7	48.7	50.3	68.5	67.6	56.6	67.4
Women .....	49.5	51.3	51.3	49.7	58.7	55.2	37.0	56.5
<b>Age</b>								
15 to 29 years .....	28.9	19.7	24.9	28.0	44.0	47.0	31.8	43.2
30 to 49 years .....	41.2	47.1	53.1	42.6	85.7	77.6	56.5	82.0
50 to 64 years .....	29.9	32.2	22.0	29.4	52.2	46.5	39.1	50.9
<b>Level of education</b>								
Low-skilled .....	30.9	35.0	46.9	32.6	39.6	43.7	33.2	39.1
Medium-skilled .....	37.9	31.3	28.8	36.7	66.9	63.1	51.8	65.7
Highly-skilled .....	31.1	33.6	24.2	30.7	83.5	77.8	66.1	81.9

Source: EC (LFS, microdata).

people born outside the EU, their employment rate is systematically lower than that of people born in Belgium or in another EU country.

As far as age is concerned, the intermediate group has the highest employment rate, taking all origins together. Thus, 56.5% of non-European immigrants and 77.6% of European immigrants in this category have a job. However, the maximum employment rate is 85.7% for the population born in Belgium, which considerably widens the gap between origins compared to what is seen for young people and the older age group.

The relatively low employment rate of young people is influenced by the fact that some of them have not yet completed their education. However, the NEET<sup>(1)</sup> indicator, which measures the percentage of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not working or pursuing any training, reveals a worrying situation which implies a risk of losing competence and becoming bogged down in unemployment or inactivity. In 2010, 20.8% of young non-European immigrants – or about one in five – were in that situation, compared to 18% of young immigrants of European origin and 9.9% of Belgian-born.

### 3.2.1 Level of education and its recognition

The highest level of education attained is a decisive factor for employability and career development. However, persons with low skills make up the largest group among the foreign-born population.

Regardless of origin, there is a positive correlation between the employment rate and the level of education. Yet even though the employment rate of foreigners improves in the event of more advanced study, since two-thirds of highly-skilled persons originating from a non-EU country are working, there is still a gap of around 17 points in relation to the natives of Belgium.

Issues concerning the recognition and the values of diplomas or levels of education probably help to explain these divergent employment rates and occupational over-qualification (see section 4.2.), particularly in the case of people from non-European countries. They relate to the problems of information asymmetry (employers may

wonder about the content of a degree gained abroad), the conditions for the transfer of knowledge (insufficient fluency in the language of the host country which may make it hard to make full use of skills acquired in the country of origin), the complexity of the certification process and the relevance of the application of this knowledge in a different society (law, customs, etc.) (OECD, 2007).

The labour force surveys do not identify the place where the highest qualifications were obtained. On the basis of information obtained from the 2001 Belgian socio-economic census, the OECD (2008) compared the divergences in employment rates between natives and non-European immigrants gaining their qualifications in Belgium, and those gaining their qualifications abroad: the gap diminishes – but persists – at the level of secondary and higher education if the courses were attended in Belgium.

In Belgium, the three language communities all have their own procedures for recognising foreign qualifications. They check whether the diploma corresponds to a Belgian educational diploma. That equivalence is essential for the pursuit of regulated occupations<sup>(2)</sup> and in the case of a public service employer. In the case of unregulated occupations, private employers are free to take on staff on the basis of a foreign diploma without any decision on equivalence, although they may nevertheless request such a decision.

On the basis of the Belgian labour force survey ad hoc module 2008, the DGSEI<sup>(3)</sup> found that 83.7% of immigrants aged 15 and over have not ascertained the Belgian qualifications corresponding to the highest diploma which they have obtained (one-third of them have not done so because they gained their highest diploma in Belgium), while 11% have applied for, and obtained, equivalence, and the remaining 5.3% have been refused equivalence or are waiting for a response.

Moreover, the agencies responsible for skill validation were only set up recently<sup>(4)</sup>. Their purpose is to grant official recognition of professional knowledge and expertise acquired outside the traditional (Belgian and foreign) training routes. The three French-speaking governments initiated a system for the validation of professional skills. It involves the social partners, public employment services and educational and vocational training providers. Validation centres arrange tests; candidates who pass are issued with certificates of competence covering a set of skills associated with a particular occupation. A similar system exists in Flanders. Specific certificates (*ervaringsbewijs*) are determined by the social partners in the Flanders Socio-Economic Council (SERV). The certificate concerns the occupation as a whole. At the end of 2012, there

(1) "Not in education, employment or training".

(2) Typically medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, pharmacy, law, architecture, nursing, psychology, etc.

(3) <http://statbel.fgov.be/fr/statistiques/chiffres/travailvie/emploi/migrants>.

(4) Flanders passed the Decree of 30 April 2004 "betreffende het verwerven van een titel van beroepsbekwaamheid" (on the acquisition of a certificate of professional competence), while a cooperation agreement was signed on 24 July 2003 between the Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission on the validation of skills in continuing vocational training. Three decrees on approval of the cooperation agreement were then adopted by the levels of power concerned.

was a validation process for around fifty occupations in Flanders and in the French Community.

### 3.2.2 Specific situation of women

The employment rate of female non-European immigrants is particularly low in Belgium. Only 37% of them are in work, while the majority are inactive. The inequality between men and women from the same origin is most marked in the case of immigrants from a non-European country: here, the gender gap in the employment rate is almost 20 percentage points, compared to around 10 points for natives of Belgium.

The labour force surveys shed light on the reasons put forward to explain this inactivity, or more precisely the failure to look for work. The motives cited may be family or personal responsibilities, illness or disability, training, belief that no work is available, retirement and "other reasons" (unspecified). In order to reduce the effect of the 15-24 age group, who are quite likely to be still studying, and the 55-64 age group who may have retired from the labour market and do not usually still have dependent children, we analyse the distribution of the reasons for inactivity among women in the 25 to 54 age group.

Family and personal responsibilities are the main reason for inactivity, regardless of the migration background of the women, but the proportions of the diverse reasons vary according to the origin of the women questioned. In 2010, around 39% of those born in Belgium cited family responsibilities as the main impediment to seeking work. Next came medical reasons for 28% of them. Among inactive women originating from another EU country, 47% of respondents cited family responsibilities and 15% mentioned illness and disability, a proportion similar to that comprising "other reasons". Over half of the inactive women born in a non-EU country were not seeking work on account of their family responsibilities. Around one in ten could not find an appropriate category of reasons in the survey, and a total of 18% were undergoing training or were ill.

Certain factors may explain this uneven distribution according to origin and the greater inequality between men and women from outside the EU in regard to labour market access. For example, on average these women have more children under the age of 15 living in their household than is true of women born in Belgium. In 2010, a quarter of non-European adult immigrants were living with one child, 19% with two children, and 13% with three or more children. The corresponding proportions for natives of Belgium are 17, 14 and 4% respectively. It is known that, in large families, it is usually the women who leave the labour market to look after the children

(CSE<sup>(1)</sup>, 2007). Moreover, we cannot rule out cultural differences which maintain a family and economic model centred more on the man as the family's main means of support ("male breadwinner"). Other factors – which are not necessarily spelt out in the survey – may be involved and could encourage women to remain at home, such as low pay prospects or insecure working conditions, especially in the case of low-skilled women.

### 3.3 Parental origin

The difficulties facing first-generation immigrants could be passed on to their children, the "second generation"<sup>(2)</sup>: these are people born in their country of residence to parents born abroad, regardless of their own and their parents' nationality<sup>(3)</sup>.

The second generation is identified by objective criteria, using the labour force survey ad hoc module 2008. Apart from the respondent's country of birth (available in the regular surveys), one of the variables concerns the country or countries of birth of the respondent's father and mother. This identifies first-generation immigrants (13.6% of the population aged between 15 and 64 years, according to the survey), persons born in Belgium having two foreign-born parents (4.1%), persons born in Belgium having only one foreign-born parent (4.3%) and persons born in Belgium both of whose parents are natives of Belgium (78%). It is interesting to compare the results for these various groups on the labour market because, normally, children born in Belgium to immigrant parents have been integrated into the Belgian education system, learnt the language and culture of the country from a very early age, are covered by the Belgian social security system, etc. Theoretically, they should therefore have easier access to the labour market than first-generation immigrants. Yet according to the figures, this early integration is not enough to guarantee them the same opportunities for employment as children whose parents are not immigrants, or to improve their results compared to first-generation immigrants, unless one of the parents was born in Belgium, as we shall see below.

The age group considered is limited to persons aged from 20 to 54 years. It covers three-quarters of the population

(1) High Council for Employment.

(2) They are commonly known as "second-generation immigrants". However, this term has certain connotations, since they are still referred to as "immigrants" whereas they have not necessarily experienced any migration. Moreover, this categorisation does not necessarily correspond to the subjective identity of the persons concerned.

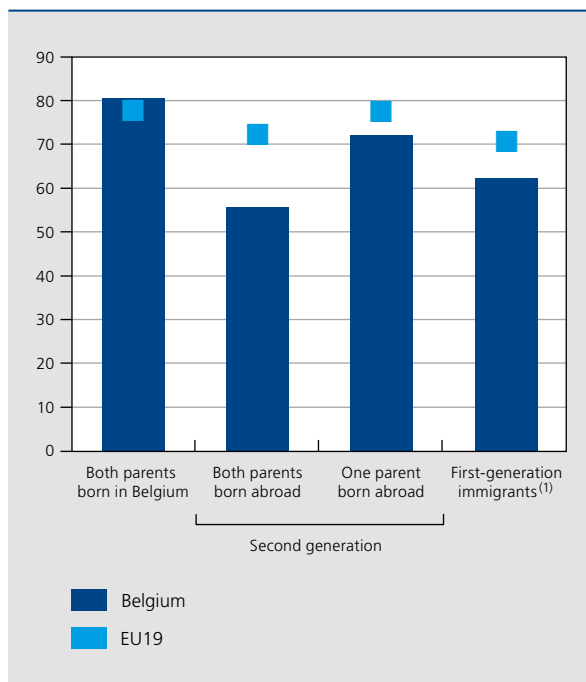
(3) Immigrants arriving at a very early age may in certain respects be regarded in the same way as immigrants' children born in Belgium. However, no-one has clearly defined the age of arrival in the host country beyond which the comparison no longer applies (OECD, 2007).

of working age among both the first and the second generation, and excludes some of the inactive persons at the two extremities of the distribution (15 to 19 year-olds, who are in school – proportionately more numerous in the second generation – and 55 to 64 year-olds, some of whom have retired from the labour market – proportionately more numerous in the other comparison groups) while retaining young people aged from 20 to 24 years whose participation in higher education appears to vary according to origin<sup>(1)</sup>.

In Belgium, the employment rate of native-born whose parents are not immigrants stood at 80.6% in 2008; they represent the most successful group in terms of labour market access. Next come persons born in Belgium having only one foreign-born parent: 72% of them were working. Among first-generation immigrants aged from 20 to 54, only 62.3% had a job in 2008. Finally, children having two immigrant parents (taking EU and non-EU together)<sup>(2)</sup> had the lowest employment rate of the four population groups considered, namely 55.6%. The fact of having at least one parent born in the country of residence may therefore have a positive influence on the “integration” process, or at least on the chances of entering employment. Be that as it may, it seems that the problems encountered by immigrants to find a job also apply to their children. Moreover, the addition of a binary variable representing parental origin (at least one foreign-born parent) in a regression similar to that presented above<sup>(3)</sup> confirms that, *ceteris paribus*, the probability of employment declines (–3 percentage points) if both parents were not born in Belgium.

The European average used for comparison covers only 19 countries, namely those for which the ad hoc module microdata are available and for which the parental origin of the respondents could be determined with a sufficiently high response rate. On average in the EU, all groups of foreign origin (immigrants or persons born in the country of residence but having at least one immigrant parent) have a higher employment rate than the same groups resident in Belgium. Descendants of two immigrant

**CHART 5** EMPLOYMENT RATE OF IMMIGRANTS AND PERSONS BORN IN BELGIUM ACCORDING TO PARENTAL ORIGIN  
(in % of the population aged from 20 to 54 years in 2008)



Source: EC (LFS, microdata, ad hoc module 2008).  
(1) Regardless of the parents' country of birth.

parents have a slightly higher employment rate than first-generation immigrants. If only one parent was born abroad, the employment rate is similar to that of natives whose parents were not immigrants, at around 78%.

However, the average conceals significant divergences between countries. A different immigration history and different integration procedures for new immigrants may influence the outcomes for their children in society. The employment rate gap between residents whose parents were not immigrants and those with two foreign-born parents is highest in Belgium, at 25 percentage points, and in Spain (16.9 percentage points). In France and the Netherlands, Belgium's neighbouring countries<sup>(4)</sup>, the gap to the detriment of this second generation is much smaller, at 10.1 and 6.7 percentage points respectively in 2008.

This issue needs to be considered in the light of, among other things, the inequality of opportunities which already applies at school: the OECD's PISA surveys reveal the persistence of a substantial divergence in pupils' results according to whether or not they have a history of migration; that applies in both Flanders and the French Community<sup>(5)</sup>. The main explanatory factor is the socio-economic status of the parents (level of education and

(1) For example, in 2008, 35% of young people aged from 20 to 29 years, born in Belgium to native-born parents, had completed higher education, against 12% of children of immigrant parents.  
(2) For simplicity (some couples are of mixed European and non-European origin) and to ensure that the data are representative.  
(3) The reference is a man aged between 25 and 54 years, medium-skilled, resident in Flanders and born in Belgium with two native-born parents. The regression concerns data from 2008, the year of the labour force survey ad hoc module concerning migrants.  
(4) The country of birth identifying first- and second-generation immigrants is not available for Germany.  
(5) The main recent study on the subject, conducted by Jacobs *et al.* (2011), identifies three categories of pupils according to their migratory status. The first comprises “native pupils”: these are pupils born in Belgium or abroad with at least one parent born in Belgium. The second category covers pupils born in Belgium both of whose parents were foreign-born. The study calls them “second-generation pupils”. The third category comprises “immigrant pupils”, namely foreign-born pupils whose parents were themselves born in another country.

occupation), as pupils with an immigrant background often come from families in a less favourable socio-economic situation than that of the others (Jacobs *et al.*, 2011). But this parameter does not explain everything: the language spoken at home is a decisive factor<sup>(1)</sup>, as is the type of course pursued. Children of low-skilled parents and immigrants are over-represented in technical and vocational education and under-represented in general education. Pupils on technical and vocational courses achieve poorer academic results. All the same, in both types of education there is a marked difference between the results of “native” children and those with an immigrant background.

In 2008, the proportions of young people aged between 15 and 24 who are not in employment or training (NEET) among descendants of immigrants (two foreign-born parents) and first-generation immigrants were two to three times higher than for children born in Belgium with native-born parents, at 11.4 and 20.4% respectively. Without a diploma, the chances of getting a job are seriously compromised. Moreover, when the sons and daughters of immigrants leave education, they have to compete with the children of native families who have more national cultural capital and more effective social networks. On top of that are possible problems of discrimination based on (supposed) origin.

### 3.4 Discrimination in recruitment

It is hard to assess the impact of discrimination on the labour market. Even for persons with the same socio-demographic characteristics, existing differences in job opportunities and remuneration may be due to characteristics which cannot be easily measured, such as social networks or knowledge of how the labour market operates.

The legislation forming the legal basis of the fight against discrimination<sup>(2)</sup> applies among other things to employment relationships, be it access to a job, working conditions or the termination of an employment relationship in both the public and the private sector.

Discrimination means any difference of treatment based on age, sexual orientation, marital status, wealth, belief or ideology, political convictions, language, current or future state of health, disability, physical or genetic characteristics, social origin, gender, nationality, supposed race, skin colour, ancestry, nationality or ethnicity<sup>(3)</sup>.

A study conducted in Belgium in 1996 at the instigation of the ILO (Arriijn *et al.*, 1998) played a key role in putting the issue on the political agenda. It was based on

the situation test method. Pairs of researchers with the same characteristics (qualifications, gender, age, nationality, attitude) apply for a medium-skilled vacancy by the same method. The only difference between them is their “ethnic” origin – native Belgian or Moroccan Belgian – according to the sound of their name or the physical identity attributed. If only one of the two is called in, interviewed or taken on<sup>(4)</sup>, the difference can, in principle, be attributed solely to ethnic origin. This argument presupposes that ethnic origin should never be a staff selection criterion. The divergences between the number of discriminatory actions against people of Moroccan origin and those of Belgian origin are added together for the various recruitment phases and expressed as a percentage of the number of case files opened. Discrimination rates concerning persons of foreign origin came to 34.1% in Brussels, 39.2% in Flanders and 27% in Wallonia<sup>(5)</sup>. Situation tests do not permit direct comparison of results between countries or between Regions or any ranking of Regions according to their degree of discrimination. However, the rates calculated using the ILO method in other countries in the mid-1990s make it possible to assess the results obtained in Belgium. The Netherlands and Spain respectively recorded rates of discrimination against candidates of Moroccan origin equal to 36.6 and 35.6%, Germany's rate of discrimination against people of Turkish origin was 19%, and the results obtained in the United States were broken down by origin: 19.4% for Afro-Americans and 33.2% for Hispanics.

Since then, extensive literature has been devoted to this matter and the issue has been closely monitored by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism.

In 2005, a joint ULB/KUL study (Martens *et al.*, 2005) was based on the ILO method and applied it in a non-experimental context. Two groups of job applicants were selected from the Actiris database: a population comprising young people of foreign nationality<sup>(6)</sup> and a control population comprising young people with a profile which was as similar as possible, but of Belgian nationality. Among the pairs of job applicants, almost half of the foreigners would have received unequal treatment.

(1) Pupils speaking the language of education at home often achieve better results.

(2) The legal basis consists of three laws:

- the general Law of 10 May 2007 to combat certain forms of discrimination, replacing the Law of 25 February 2003;
- the Law of 10 May 2007 to combat discrimination between men and women, replacing the Law of 7 May 1999 on equality of treatment between men and women;
- the Law of 30 July 1981 against certain acts motivated by racism and xenophobia.

(3) Source: FPS ELSD.

(4) Thus, if both candidates progress to the next recruitment phase or if both are rejected, there is no question of discrimination.

(5) 87/255, 71/181 and 54/201 respectively.

(6) Moroccan, Turkish, sub-Saharan and east European nationalities.

The EC's Eurobarometer survey of discrimination conducted in 2012 (EC, 2012) reveals that, in Belgium, if a firm wants to recruit someone and has a choice between two candidates with the same skills and qualifications, the main criterion against a candidate, according to the responses<sup>(1)</sup>, is skin colour or ethnic origin: this factor is cited by 60 % of respondents, compared to an average of 39 % in the EU. The findings are much the same as in previous editions of the survey.

More recently, in 2012, the diversity barometer initiated by the Centre for Equal Opportunities<sup>(2)</sup> looked at access to employment according to various criteria, such as age, gender, disability and origin, on the basis of three scientific studies<sup>(3)</sup> each adopting a different method: behaviour tests which can be used to examine any differences in the chance of selection of certain population groups, interviews with human resources officers, and presentation of a series of indicators aimed at identifying inequalities in relation to the criteria mentioned above. Persons of foreign origin are obviously treated differently when it comes to inviting candidates to attend a job interview: the probability that a person of foreign origin will not be invited to that interview, in contrast to his Belgian counterpart, is 6.6 percentage points greater than the probability that neither candidate will be invited (Capéau *et al.*, 2011). Of the human resources officers questioned, 10 % state that the candidate's origin influences the ultimate selection, and 5 % state that skin colour is also a factor (Lamberts and Eeman, 2011). Nonetheless, in such a survey, the question on the influence of origin will presumably elicit more socially acceptable responses<sup>(4)</sup>.

## 4. Employment characteristics

This section focuses on the qualitative aspect of occupations. When persons of foreign origin find a job, its characteristics are not – on average – the same as those of jobs held by natives.

### 4.1 Branches of activity

The analysis of employment by branch of activity distinguishes between men and women, because of their relative specialisations. Generally speaking, regardless of origin, the main branches employing men are different from those employing women: male workers are over-represented in industry, construction and transport, while a proportionately larger number of women are employed in certain services such as health and social work, education, or real estate and business services.

Male and female immigrants are systematically under-represented in public administration and in education. The reasons are many, and may concern both legal barriers – for persons not of Belgian or European nationality – and specific requirements relating to qualifications. In the first case, the OECD (2008) showed that naturalised immigrants were almost as likely to work in the public sector as native Belgians<sup>(5)</sup>.

Among the other salient points is the fact that male workers born outside the EU are more likely than Belgian-born to be employed in the hotels and restaurants branch (9.8 %, compared to 2.2 %) and in the "other branches"<sup>(6)</sup> (6.7 %, compared to 4.9 %). On the other hand, in the case of workers originating from another EU country, it is mainly in construction (19 %) and in the "other branches" (12.4 %) that they will be proportionately more numerous than native-born. In the first case that is due to the large influx of construction workers from one of the "new" Member States (over half of them work in this branch), and in the second case it is due to the presence of persons from the "old" Member States working in extra-territorial organisations and bodies.

In the case of women, there are again differences according to origin. Women from a non-EU country are three times more likely to work in the hotels and restaurants branch than women born in Belgium (8 %, compared to 2.8 %). They are also much more likely to have a job in real estate and business services (14.2 %, compared to 8.7 %) and in the other branches (12.6 %, compared to 7 %), which may be due in the first case to such factors as their employment in cleaning firms or their registration with temporary employment agencies, and in the second case to working as domestic cleaners for households. However, like native-born, the majority of female immigrants from outside Europe are employed in health and social work. Women born in a European country most frequently work in the "other branches" – mainly service branches – (18.5 %), but this time the key reason is the presence of international institutions in Belgium. They are also over-represented in real estate and business services (14.4 %) compared to natives.

(1) Out of a total of 1 059 interviews in Belgium.

(2) The diversity barometer concerns three aspects of life in society: employment, housing and education.

(3) Capéau *et al.* (2011), Lamberts and Eeman (2011) and Desmarez *et al.* (2011).

(4) This assumption is borne out by the results for similar questions on the wearing of headscarves. Evidently, it is not so much religious belief as the wearing of these external symbols that influences the ultimate decision. Almost half (45 %) of human resources officers state that certain religious symbols, such as the headscarf, influence the ultimate selection. The question is of course to what extent this distinction is based on religion or on ethnic origin.

(5) On the basis of the 2001 socio-economic census.

(6) The "other branches" are: agriculture, arts and entertainment, other service activities, activities of households as employers, and activities of extra-territorial organisations.

**TABLE 3** BREAKDOWN OF EMPLOYMENT BY BRANCH OF ACTIVITY ACCORDING TO GENDER AND ORIGIN

(in % of the corresponding population in work aged from 15 to 64 years, in 2010)

	Men				Women			
	Belgium	Other EU country	Non-EU country	Total	Belgium	Other EU country	Non-EU country	Total
Industry .....	22.8	20.0	20.0	22.4	9.1	7.9	6.6	8.9
Construction .....	11.7	19.0	11.1	12.2	1.2	n.r.	n.r.	1.2
Trade and repairs .....	13.0	10.6	14.5	13.0	13.4	12.0	11.1	13.2
Hotels and restaurants .....	2.2	5.8	9.8	3.0	2.8	5.4	8.0	3.3
Transportation and communication .....	13.2	10.4	14.2	13.1	5.0	5.0	4.2	4.9
Financial services .....	3.8	2.6	1.8	3.6	3.6	2.5	2.5	3.5
Real estate and business services .....	8.2	7.4	8.5	8.2	8.7	14.4	14.2	9.4
Public administration .....	9.4	4.6	4.3	8.7	10.1	7.1	6.4	9.7
Education .....	5.4	3.7	3.6	5.2	15.0	7.9	8.8	14.2
Health and social work .....	5.5	3.4	5.5	5.3	23.9	17.6	24.8	23.5
Other branches <sup>(1)</sup> .....	4.9	12.4	6.7	5.5	7.0	18.5	12.6	8.1
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source : EC (LFS, microdata).

(1) Agriculture, arts and entertainment, other service activities, activities of households as employers, activities of extra-territorial organisations.

## 4.2 Over-qualification in employment

Over-qualification means the situation in which people have more skills or formal qualifications than their job requires. There are various ways of measuring that. In this article, the rate of over-qualification measures the proportion of highly-skilled individuals in employment (graduates of higher education) pursuing a low or medium-skilled occupation<sup>(1)</sup>.

In Belgium, workers born in Belgium and those born in another EU country have similar rates of over-qualification, at 21.6 and 20.3 % respectively in 2010. With more than a third of people (35.1 %) pursuing an occupation which does not correspond to their level of education, workers born outside the EU have an over-qualification rate 1.6 times higher than that of native-born. Those rates have been relatively stable since 2004<sup>(2)</sup>. The rate of over-qualification of persons born outside the EU is the same as for the EU, on average<sup>(3)</sup>. This inequality may be due to problems concerning the recognition of training and skills acquired abroad, but also to a weak network of contacts, limited access to certain information, or discrimination by employers.

One might expect that the chances of the recognition of qualifications or fluency in the national language would

improve over time, reducing the likelihood of being over-qualified. Yet in Belgium the rate of over-qualification of non-European migrants hardly changes with their period of residence: it stays at the same level, whether the person has lived in the country for more than or less than six years.

## 4.3 Types of employment contract and professional status

The qualitative aspect of employment may also be approached according to the type of employment contract: temporary contracts apply to 7.3 % of employees born in Belgium, 10.7 % of those born in another EU country, and 16 % of those born outside the EU. Regardless of the worker's origin, temporary contracts are involuntary in about three-quarters of cases (the person states in the survey that the reason for the temporary contract is failure to find a job offering a permanent contract). That similarity

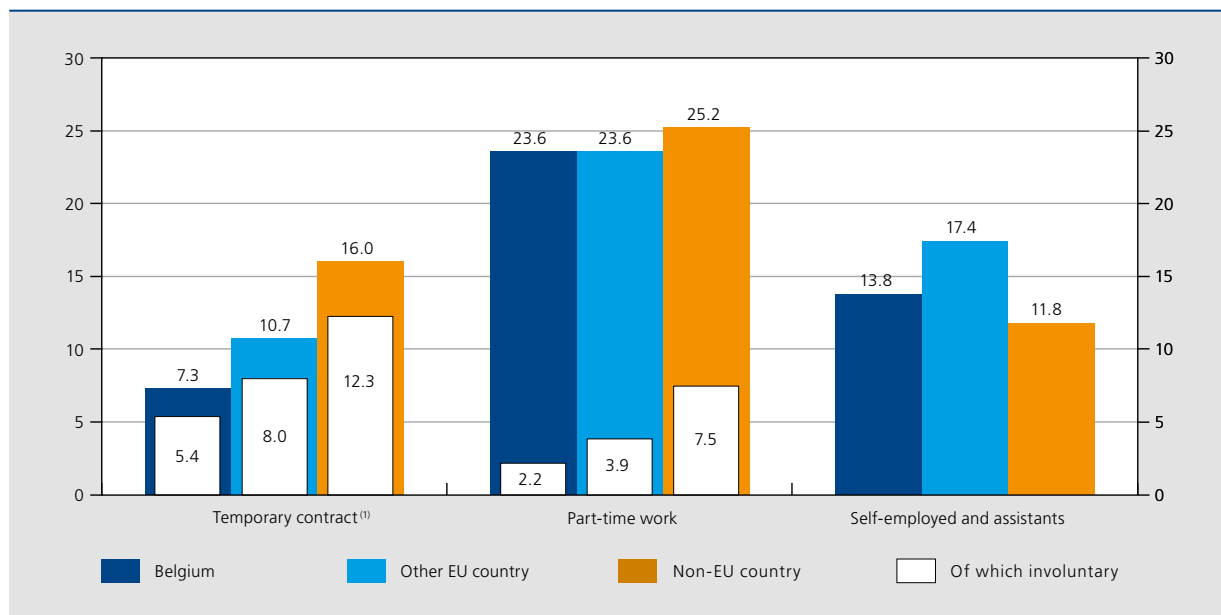
(1) Corresponding, according to Eurostat, to ISCO classification 4 to 9: clerical support workers; service and sales workers; craft and related trades workers; plant and machinery operators and assemblers; elementary occupations.

(2) Year from which it is possible to define three groups of countries of birth: Belgium, other EU countries, non-EU countries.

(3) Average excluding Germany.

**CHART 6** TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS BY ORIGIN

(in % of the corresponding total employment of the population aged from 15 to 64 years in 2010)



Source: EC (LFS, microdata).

(1) In % of salaried employment only.

may be surprising, taking account of the high proportion of temporary contracts among workers coming from outside the EU. It is therefore possible that this risk group accepts less secure jobs in view of the various obstacles encountered in the search for work. In some other European countries, work under temporary contract, which is already more common among immigrants, is also more often involuntary than in the case of natives (that is true in France, Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden).

Part-time work concerns around a quarter of people in work, regardless of their origin. However, the detailed breakdown of employment by gender shows that, in the case of men, 12.2 % of non-European immigrants work part-time, compared to just 8.2 % of native-born. For women, the differences are smaller. However, whether part-time working is a deliberate choice or not varies considerably according to the respondent's origin: among non-European immigrants, part-time work was not chosen in 29.9 % of cases (the respondent states that it was not possible to find full-time work) compared to just 9.5 % of workers originating from Belgium.

Entrepreneurial activity could be a way of overcoming some obstacles to the pursuit of salaried employment, or a strategy for avoiding overly low wages – owing

to occupational over-qualification, for example – or discrimination. In 2010, proportionately more migrants from other EU countries were self-employed, namely 17.4 %. A more detailed breakdown by country of origin indicates that a quarter of workers from the “new” Member States were self-employed. That is due partly to the transitional arrangements concerning the free movement of workers; for nationals of the countries which joined the EU in 2004 (except Cyprus and Malta), a work permit was still required until May 2009 in order to pursue salaried employment. Self-employed status was a way of circumventing the barriers hampering access to the Belgian labour market. In the case of nationals of Bulgaria and Romania, countries which joined the EU in 2007, the transitional arrangements will be retained until the end of 2013, and registration as a self-employed worker therefore still represents an alternative way for them to gain employment in Belgium (in 2010 one-third of Bulgarian and Romanian workers had self-employed status). Conversely, only 11.8 % of immigrant workers from non-EU countries pursue a self-employed activity, i.e. two percentage points below the figure for workers born in Belgium. Immigrants wishing to set up in business may again face barriers, notably in terms of difficulty in getting credit to finance their activity (OECD, 2011a).



## Conclusions

The position of foreign-born persons on the labour market is problematic in Belgium. The employment rate of non-European immigrants is the lowest for all Member States, namely 45.8% in 2011. There is a difference of almost 20 percentage points compared to persons born in the country of residence.

Immigrants represent 14% of Belgium's total resident population. The countries of origin have become more diverse, but the main ones are still Morocco, France, the Netherlands and Italy.

The structure of the immigrant population differs from that of the population born in Belgium. Almost two-thirds of persons born outside the EU are in the 20-49 age group, and a quarter of them are aged 50 and over. Conversely, the corresponding proportions in each of these two groups are around 40% for persons born in Belgium. Immigrants are also distributed differently across the various levels of education, compared to natives of Belgium. In particular, the distribution among non-European immigrants is very uneven since almost half are low-skilled and barely a quarter hold a higher education diploma.

However, age, gender and level of education may influence the likelihood of having a job. But it has been calculated that, given the same population structure as native-born, the average employment rate of immigrants would be almost unchanged. A simple logistic regression also shows that, *ceteris paribus*, the effect of being "foreign-born" has a negative impact on the probability of getting a job. Nonetheless, certain parameters such as the place where a person's qualifications were obtained, fluency in the language of the country of residence, and social networks are not included in the analysis, whereas they could also be explanatory factors here.

The level of education and professional experience are decisive factors for finding a job and career development. Around one in five young immigrants are not pursuing training and are not working; that means a high risk of becoming bogged down in unemployment and social exclusion. Even if foreign-born persons have completed higher education (not necessarily in Belgium), they are considerably less likely to be in work than natives. Problems concerning the recognition of foreign diplomas and the weak development of skill validation are probably additional obstacles.

Fewer than four out of ten female immigrants from outside Europe are in work. Their participation in the labour market is below that of Belgian-born, but it is also very unequal compared to that of men of the same origin. In both cases, the gap between their respective employment rates is 20 percentage points. Different family responsibilities, the prospect of an insecure job and the social model are some of the reasons which may explain their failure to seek employment.

The employment rate of the children of immigrants, a population which is still relatively young, is below that of children of parents born in Belgium. However, the fact of having a parent born in Belgium increases the chances of finding work, which tends to confirm the importance of language and social aspects. The inequalities begin before the person looks for work. According to the PISA studies, the academic results of pupils from immigrant families are inferior to those of pupils of Belgian origin, a phenomenon which is due largely to the parents' socio-economic circumstances.

Apart from individual characteristics, discrimination in recruitment cannot be ruled out according to an ILO study. The existence of discrimination in recruitment is borne out by other more recent studies, such as the barometer of diversity in employment.

Foreign-born persons who have a job are proportionately more often employed than native-born in certain branches regarded as less secure, such as the hotel and catering trade or cleaning services, whereas they are under-represented in public administration and education. Over a third of persons from outside the EU have a job which does not match their level of education. Moreover, taking account of the greater prevalence of temporary contracts and involuntary part-time work in their case, compared to native-born and "Europeans", it is possible that this risk group of non-European origin is obliged to accept less secure jobs or reduced working hours in order to gain employment.

The analysis of access to the labour market according to a person's origin showed that the inequalities persist year after year and from one generation to the next, whereas employment is the most powerful instrument of social integration and of combating poverty.

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