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The population of Brussels: a demographic overview

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La population bruxelloise : un éclairage démographique De Brusselse bevolking: een demografische doorlichting

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Translator: Mike Bramley



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The population of Brussels: a demographic overview

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The Brussels-Capital Region is comprised of 19 municipalities and has a surface area of 161.4 km2. The region is the core of a much broader morphological agglomeration made up of 36 municipalities with a total population of more than one and a half million inhabitants. The official population of the Brussels-Capital Region totalled 1,048,491 inhabitants on 1st January 2008 and is the youngest in the country with an average age of 37.8 years recorded in 2006. The demographic development of Brussels has always been strongly dominated by migration over the past one and half centuries and this is not different today. The capital city has experienced a rise in population over the past few years and, just like all large European cities, the population composition is highly influenced by internationalisation. The last census (socio-economic survey of 2001) enabled the nationality of origin to be taken into account. According to this criterion, Brussels had 45 different nationalities with at least 1,000 inhabitants. The composition has diversified further since then and there has been an increase in inhabitants from European Union countries. The region is characterised by a clear spatial differentiation between the poorer districts, mixed neighbourhoods and the affluent areas of the city. The underlying structure of this spatial segregation according to socio-economic status has deep-seated historical roots and a high level of inertia. However, the arrival of new inhabitants, large construction sites within a number of districts, speculation and increasing property prices are slowly changing the composition of the population within some districts. A short description of the most important demographic trends that will affect the composition of the city in the coming decades is given below.

I. Observations

1. Brussels: a city of immigrants

Brussels is a typical city of immigrants; people who were born outside Brussels and who, at a certain time in their lives, came to live in Brussels. In 1991, 50.8% of Brussels inhabitants were born in Brussels. Restricting ourselves to Brussels inhabitants aged 18 and over, this figure becomes 42.5%. In 2001, the share of Brussels inhabitants actually born in Brussels decreased slightly to 49.8% and 40.3% respectively, under the influence of recent higher immigration figures. The majority of Brussels inhabitants who were born outside the region come from abroad. In 2001, 31.7% of Brussels inhabitants were born abroad, 8.4% in Flanders and 10.1% in Wallonia.

2. Brussels: the most important gateway for international migration

Migration constitutes the most important demographic factor in the population composition of the Brussels region. Although a natural increase in the population has been the most important factor in population growth since 2003, migration flows continue to be the largest influence on the region's composition. Each year, the region loses part of its population through internal migration, but experiences population growth due to international migration. Approximately one third of the population exchange between Belgium and other countries occurs through Brussels. The balance of international migration (the difference between inflow and outflow from and to other countries) was distributed across the regions in 2006 as follows: 17,588 people for Brussels, 21,546 for Flanders and 10,402 for Wallonia.

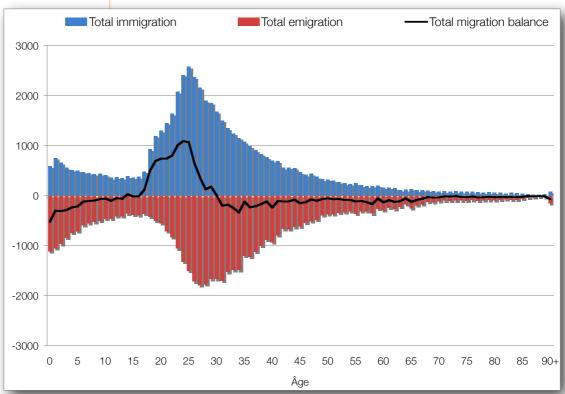
3. Brussels: an important factor in the internal migration flows within Belgium

Due to continuous international inflow, Brussels makes an important contribution to the dynamic of internal migrations within Belgium. For decades, Brussels has experienced a negative net domestic migration balance. More inhabitants leave the capital city for the rest of the country than the number moving to Brussels from Flanders and Wallonia. As this mainly involves families with young children, this outflow contributes to the population growth and rejuvenation of the population in Flanders and Wallonia. Having remained relatively low from the middle of the 1990s onwards, this negative balance has once again risen above 10,000 people for a number of years.

4. The migration flows lead to a permanent rejuvenation of the adult population within the city

Net migration only provides the balance of very extensive annual movements. For example, the negative domestic migration balance is the final result of nearly 60,000 annual movements between Brussels and the rest of Belgium. In 2005, no less than 21,351 people settled in Brussels from Flanders and Wallonia. The outflow for the same year amounted to 33,798 people, resulting in a negative domestic migration balance of 12,447 people. It is important to note that this exchange with Flanders and Wallonia is not neutral in terms of age and household status. ¹

¹ The data in this paragraph were corrected on 17 March 2009.

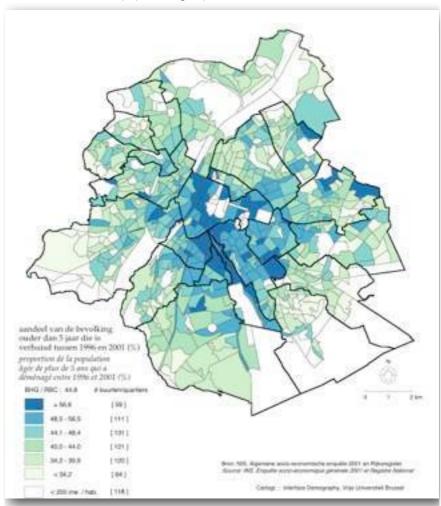


Graph 1. Migration according to age: Brussels-Capital Region 2005 Source: National Register, ADSEI, courtesy of Interface Demography

The inflow predominantly consists of young people who are often single and who will mostly rent accommodation. The outflow is dominated by slightly older age groups (see graph 1). More often than not, this involves households with children; which is shown on the graph in negative migration balances above 30 years and under 15 years. The limited availability of affordable (and relatively comfortable) private housing is the most important motivation for moving out of the capital city. Within the Brussels-Capital Region, the relocation intensity also differs substantially according to the district (see map 1).

The areas with the highest levels of residential mobility fall within the pentagon and the adjacent districts in the south-eastern quadrant, in the European district and in the direction of the university campuses. The important migration flows between Brussels and the outside world do not impede the fact that more than half the population remain living relatively stable in the Brussels region. Geographical patterns show that this is partly the population that has sufficient purchasing power to buy a decent home in a pleasant residential area. However, there is also relatively low relocation intensity in Molenbeek, Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek and Sint-Joost-ten-

Node/Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, possibly as a result of the relative immobility within which the less affluent population groups find themselves.



Map 1. Geographical mobility indicator 1/10/1996 - 1/10/2001

5. Brussels: a centre of attraction for young adults

The age structure of the immigration shows that mainly young people come to live in the capital city. The educational position of Brussels obviously plays an important role in this as many stay living in Brussels after graduating. Young employees, especially at an age when they do not yet have children, constitute another important group who come to live in the capital city in close proximity to their work. The international migration is also mainly young. Both the migration of EU citizens as well as non-EU citizens has a predominantly young age structure. The result is an overrepresentation of young adults in Brussels compared to the rest of the country.

The age structure of the (internal and international) migrants has an important impact on the age structure of the Brussels population. Brussels is the only region in which a relative rejuvenation of the population (slight increase in the share of those younger than 20 years and decrease in the share of those aged 60 and above) has been established. In 1991, the Brussels region was still the oldest region, whilst today it is the youngest, having therefore undergone a radical reversal over the course of the past 15 years. Large differences have been established between the various municipalities or districts within the region, such that the Brussels region today encompasses both the youngest municipality (Sint-Joost-ten-Node/Saint-Josse-ten-Noode) as well as one of the oldest municipalities (Ganshoren) in Belgium.

6. Suburbanisation: 50 years of migration across and beyond the region's borders

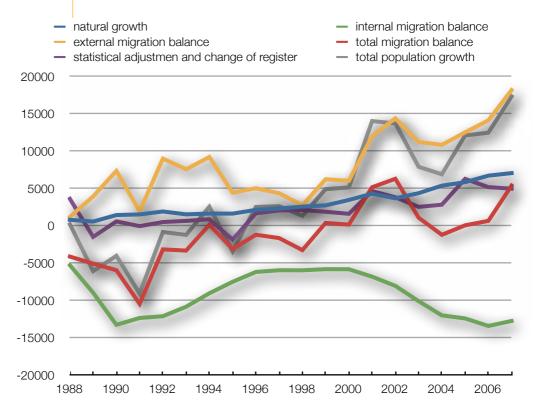
Just as in all large urban agglomerations, the 1950s saw the start of suburbanisation in Brussels. This outflow soon extended increasingly beyond the 19 Brussels municipalities and population growth in Brussels came to an end in the middle of the 1960s. The population in the urban agglomeration continued to grow, but from 1965 onwards, this growth took place outside the Brussels region. The international migration was not able to compensate for the internal emigration. As the death rate was also higher than the birth rate, the Brussels region experienced a slow yet persistent population decline. Until 1998, the registered outflow surpassed the total inflow. The region's borders, which were established along linguistic lines, took no account of the demographic and economic reality. The establishment of the region's borders automatically turned the urban exodus into relocation away from Brussels. Such residential relocation increasingly took place further from the capital city, with the price of living (affordable rent or affordable private housing) forcing many young families beyond the region's borders. For those working in Brussels, the daily commute was the trade-off that they had to accept for affordable housing.

7. Strong population growth

Population decline came to an end in the Brussels-Capital Region from 1995 on-wards. International immigration kept pace with the internal outflow and has even surpassed this on several occasions. However, there is also an important new phenomenon that has emerged in that Brussels has been experiencing natural growth since 1985 (see graph 2).

The absolute number of deaths has been falling for a number of years because of the declining share of elderly people within the population. Today's oldest generations were the pioneers of suburbanisation. A smaller share of elderly people together with a slightly increased life expectancy has led to a declining number of deaths. The population's young age structure also ensures an increasing number of births. The combination of a slightly higher fertility rate among international migrants and a young age structure generates an increasing number of births, year after year. In 1995, the size of the Brussels population reached its lowest level since the Second World War. Since then, the steady progression of natural growth combined with a positive migration balance has ensured strong population growth. According to the population register, the population exceeded the one million mark in 2005. On 1st January 2008, the population stood at 1,048,491 inhabitants. By adding the population that is not officially calculated in the population figure (such as asylum





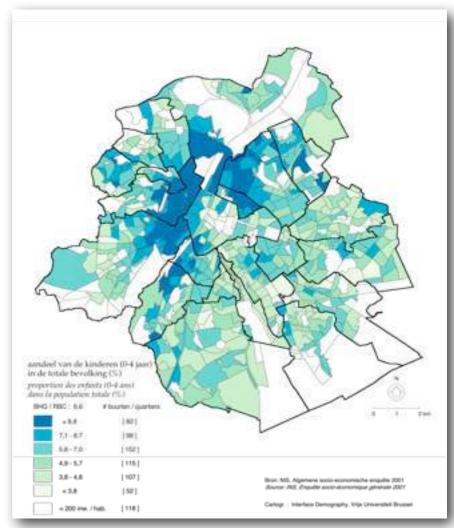
Graph 2. Factors in the recent evolution within the population of Brussels Source: National Register, ADSEI, courtesy of Interface Demography

seekers awaiting a judgement who are included in the waiting register), the population of Brussels would undoubtedly exceed the historical maximum of 1968 (1,079,181).

8. A large number of children grow up in poverty

An important change in recent population growth rests in the fact that parents with young children tend to remain living in the city.

Nevertheless, this is not because the city has become more child-friendly. For some households, city life is probably a conscious choice. However, the most important reason is that an increasing number of children are being born to less affluent families for whom suburbanisation to better and more affordable housing is not always possible. This is why the bases of recent Brussels population pyramids are becoming increasingly wider. When the births are broken down per municipality, the strongest growth occurs in the poorer municipalities within the first crown (see table 1). Today, the region's youngest population lives in these districts with the largest proportion of young children (see map 2). Analysis of birth certificates shows that



Map 2. Share of children (0-4 years) within the total population: Brussels-Capital Region (2001)

Cartography: VUB - Interface Demography.

approximately 28% of children are born into households where parents do not have income from employment, in the Brussels-Capital Region.



9. Growing diversity

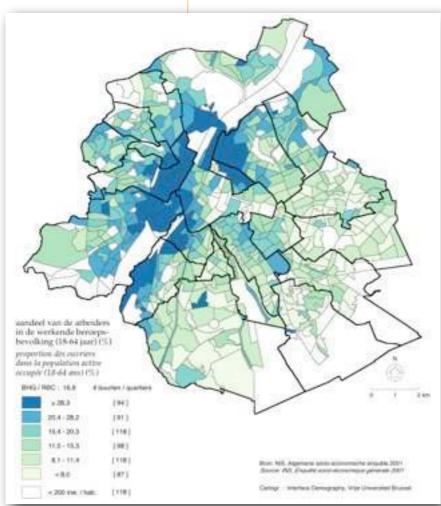
The composition of the Brussels population is becoming increasingly diverse, but the share of inhabitants that have the Belgian nationality has remained relatively constant over the past few years due to the numerous changes in nationality (see table 2). Since 1st January 1989, there have been more than 200,000 changes in nationality in Brussels, leading to more children being born as Belgians. The share of the Belgian population below the age of 18 is larger than the age groups that belong to the active population. Therefore, nationality is no longer a reliable indicator of the extensive diversity in origin and cultural background of the Brussels population. Taking nationality at birth into account, 46% of the Brussels population is not of Belgian origin. Adding the children that are born as Belgians to parents who migrated, means that more than 50% of the Brussels population comes from abroad or is born to parents who migrated. The population with Moroccan origin forms the most important group in this respect, amounting to almost 13% of the Brussels population in 2001. Over the past few years, the diversity of the country of origin has increased (see table 4), with migrants increasingly coming from East European countries (with Poland and Bulgaria leading) or Sub-Saharan Africa.



II. Questions - issues

1. Erosion of incomes

The migration patterns and especially suburbanisation have led to the more affluent double income families leaving the city, which in itself has caused a constant decrease in the average income per inhabitant of Brussels compared with the average income in Belgium (see table 5). Many companies have also established themselves in new industrial estates outside the Brussels-Capital Region, resulting in a sustained (relative) decrease in the incomes of the municipalities and the Brussels-Capital Region. This goes against the requirement to meet the increasingly greater needs of the urban population and the necessity to pursue an investment policy that makes living in the city appealing once again. The erosion of incomes makes it more



Map 3. Proportion of workmen (included comparable statutes)) – 1/10/2001.

difficult to pursue an active policy that meets housing needs. Nevertheless, an investment policy that ensures an appealing living environment whilst at the same time also guaranteeing the right to housing for the less affluent population is essential for a policy in which sustainable development is a priority

2. Socio-economic spatial residential pattern

The Brussels-Capital Region displays a clearly defined socioeconomic spatial residential pattern (see map 3). This pattern has barely evolved over the course of time and has determined the settlement patterns of newcomers to the capital city for a number of decades. As well as the traditional working-class districts along the canal, a poorer population of immigrants has concentrated in the 19th century belt of municipalities in the first crown. The classical effect of chain migration has led to the development of relatively concentrated cores of immigrant communities. The socioeconomic and cultural geographical patterns have produced invisible boundaries between communities living next to each other with little interaction. In day-to-day life, certain sections of the Brussels popu-

lation barely come in contact with each other. This de facto segregation is a challenge for the city's liveability in the long term and presents a particular problem for the fully-fledged development of young people who grow up in the poorer districts. Nevertheless, there are neighbourhoods where people with very diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds live together.

3. Increasing population pressure

The population projections for Brussels predict that if the present demographic trends continue, the 19 Brussels municipalities will have approximately 1 million 300,000 inhabitants by the middle of this century (see table 3). These projections do not take account of possibilities for growth in housing or for the consequences of increasing demographic pressure on the cost of housing. Nonetheless, it is very clear that such a demographic evolution will present the Brussels-Capital Region with an important challenge.

4. Finding an answer to growing polarisation

The socio-economic divide between the Brussels agglomeration and its suburban (or peri-urban) periphery is becoming greater; especially through socially-selective internal emigration (the access to the suburban area is increasingly restricted to the more affluent section of the population). This socio-economic polarisation overlaps with the complementarity of the spatial area in demographic terms in the lifecycle of individuals and households. The city offers advantages to young people and the existing organisation of the peri-urban area meets the expectations of those in the 30 to 45 year olds and their children. In spite of its problems, the city plays a social role that the peripheral area is increasingly less able to guarantee due to the type of housing provision (little or no social housing, limited and shrinking rental accommodation since the 1980s). We can obviously try to intervene by making changes to the housing provision. In the meantime, the city fulfils an important social function. The cost of this has to be carried fairly, also by the periphery that is not able to guarantee this function.

The present housing market is also causing pernicious evolutions within the region. Despite the intensity of the migration and the comparatively larger provision of rental accommodation than in the rest of the country, the present housing market in no way guarantees an optimal allocation of housing to households. Overcrowding, under-utilisation and housing that does not meet the housing code are all commonplace. Under pressure from continuous population growth, the new build sector is not able to bridge the gap. As a result, it is especially the socio-economically weaker population that are hard pressed on the property market, mainly because of the poor share of the social housing sector. Furthermore, the will to keep or bring back the middle-classes to the city (which goes against the present trend) could actually compound this pressure.

A number of contradictions therefore emerge that need to be resolved. Will the region be able to combine the inflow of international executive staff, the will to keep the middle-classes in the city and the integration and care of the socially weak population groups? Is an increased densification of the population feasible? Are there any alternative paths that can be trodden?

III. Policy options

The demographic evolution of the Brussels-Capital Region presents a great challenge to the future of our country. With the right policy measures, the demographic evolution of Brussels can make a positive contribution. Brussels not only contributes to a rejuvenation of the population, it also remains an economic engine for the country because of the role that it plays in population growth. Brussels continuously attracts young people with an enormous potential for talent and new ideas. The presence of international and European institutions together with international migration also contributes to its dynamic character. Brussels is an interesting city with much cultural charisma at the edge of French and Dutch culture and open to the whole world.

However, Brussels also requires a future-oriented project in order to make it a liveable city for the 21st century. Brussels needs to be a pleasant place to live, in all respects. The demographic evolution calls for special attention to be paid to development within the disadvantaged districts and especially to the situation of young people and children who live in these districts. There is a need for an integrated policy plan that focuses on the many facets of education, employment, housing, the living environment, health etc. The geographical embedding of the disadvantaged districts in Brussels gives, in contrast to the situation in some other countries, enormous possibilities for addressing social segregation and to turn this city into a liveable city for everyone.

The projections for population growth in Brussels are not based on the future development of the housing provision, but on the present dynamic of the various components of population growth. It is not self-evident that the region has the financial capacity for the expected population increase. In any case, the tension between the expected population growth and the existing housing provision presents clear challenges in terms of densification and socio-spatial reordering. Which scenarios need to be followed for an endurable and sustainable living environment? How are we going to deal with the limited space? Are high-rise buildings and the conversion of existing buildings (industrial premises, office spaces) options for the future? What influence will all this have on mobility within the city and the retention of sufficient green space and a child-friendly city environment?

Brussels has a particularly important role in the integration process of young people on the employment market because of the position that the region plays in agerelated migration flows and also because of the range of higher education that it offers. Brussels must manage the critical transitional phase to the employment market even more than in the rest of the country, which is why it is so important to invest in young people. This requires a global approach across all age groups; an approach that combines diverse means: education and training, eliminating all forms of inequality, but also paying attention to the expansion of the infrastructure (for example, would a day nursery add to the well-being and easier integration of young parents in the employment market?).

A sustainable future for Brussels can not be a job just for the Brussels population. The challenge surpasses the possibilities of the region, which fiscally is under threat of bleeding to death and which geographically is stuck by the present state structures. Flanders and Wallonia will have to make a contribution. Either directly or indirectly, this can only serve to benefit their populations. In many respects, the future of Brussels will help determine the future of our country's entire population.

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Appendices

	1998	2004	Growth ratio
Anderlecht	1.174	1.638	1,40
Oudergem	303	340	1,12
Sint-Agatha-Berchem	211	243	1,15
Brussel	2.138	2.658	1,24
Etterbeek	561	587	1,05
Evere	370	435	1,18
Vorst	658	786	1,19
Ganshoren	202	259	1,28
Elsene	913	1.091	1,19
Jette	453	604	1,33
Koekelberg	244	359	1,47
Sint-Jans-Molenbeek	1.241	1.717	1,38
Sint-Gilles	665	788	1,18
Sint-Joost-ten-Node	504	554	1,10
Schaarbeek	1.802	2.240	1,24
Ukkel	797	783	0,98
Watermaal-Bosvoorde	245	220	0,90
Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe	485	558	1,15
Sint-Pieters-Woluwe	379	428	1,13
Brussels-Capital Region	13.345	16.288	1,22

Table 1. Births according to mother's municipality of residence: 1998 & 2004 Source: Birth Certificates, Observatory for Health and Welfare

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Population without Belgian nationality	273.613	262.771	260.040	260.269	263.451	265.211	273.693	283.527	295.043
Total population	959.318	964.405	978.384	992.041	999.899	1.006.749	1.018.804	1.031.215	1.048.491
Share of population without Belgian nationality	28,52	27,25	26,6	26,24	26,35	26,34	26,86	27,49	28,14

Table 2. Total population and share without the Belgian nationality: Brussels-Capital Region 2000-2008 Source: ADSEI

	2000	2006	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060		
Population on 1st January	959.318	1.018.804	1.072.063	1.200.108	1.255.791	1.264.310	1.289.164	1.327.652		
Natural balance	3.413	6.669	9.274	11.232	10.509	9.474	9.612	9.881		
Births	13.626	16.214	18.553	20.117	19.244	18.724	19.384	19.855		
Deaths	10.213	9.545	9.279	8.885	8.735	9.250	9.772	9.954		
Balance of internal migrations	-5.861	-13.457	-15.724	-16.381	-16.822	-16.560	-16.890	-17.425		
Internal immigrations	69.403	76.946	85.255	91.931	91.724	91.644	93.339	95.314		
External emigrations	75.264	90.403	100.979	108.312	108.546	108.204	110.229	112.739		
Balance of external migrations	6.741	17.588	20.745	15.347	7.712	8.533	10.864	11.698		
External immigrations	22.729	35.482	40.645	38.660	29.883	29.076	31.533	32.986		
External emigrations	15.988	17.894	19.900	23.313	22.171	20.543	20.669	21.288		
Growth of population	4.293	10.800	14.295	10.198	1.399	1.447	3.586	4.157		
Statistical adjustment	794	1.611	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Population on 31st December	964.405	1.031.215	1.086.358	1.210.306	1.257.190	1.265.757	1.292.750	1.331.806		

Table 3. Population projections: Brussels-Capital Region 2000-2060. Source: Predications 2000-2006: RR – ADSEI, Calculations FPB; Population Projections 2007-2060, FPB – ADSEI

		Belgians			EU-15 Turks/Mc			s/Moroc	Moroccans		Others		
	88-90	94-96	04-05	88-90	94-96	04-05	88-90	94-96	04-05	88-90	94-96	04-05	
BCR	-9,5	-8,2	-11,5	1,6	1,5	0,5	1,0	2,5	3,9	1,7	2,7	6,5	
First crown*	-8,7	-10,5	-14,2	1,6	0,9	-0,8	1,4	3,6	5,5	1,1	2,7	7,0	
Second crown	-10,5	-5,4	-8,0	1,5	2,2	2,1	0,5	1,2	2,0	2,3	2,7	5,8	
Anderlecht*	-8,5	-11,5	-6,7	-0,6	1,1	-0,1	0,9	4,3	6,6	0,3	2,2	7,5	
Bruxelles*	-6,6	-10,3	-11,4	0,5	0,4	-0,5	0,6	2,3	5,1	1,5	2,4	6,2	
lxelles*	-14,6	-10,0	-10,3	5,3	4,7	2,3	-0,2	0,2	1,4	1,7	0,2	7,5	
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean*	-7,4	-8,4	-14,9	-0,1	-2,2	-1,3	5,0	5,5	6,9	0,4	4,2	4,1	
Saint-Gilles*	-7,9	-8,9	-18,5	5,5	0,4	-3,5	-1,1	1,9	3,6	0,7	3,9	9,2	
Saint-Josse-ten-Noode*	-10,8	-11,9	-28,0	-0,3	-0,6	-1,1	8,6	7,3	5,1	4,4	1,3	10,9	
Schaerbeek*	-8,0	-12,0	-21,8	2,2	1,3	-2,3	1,1	5,9	7,6	0,9	4,0	7,7	
Auderghem	-9,6	-5,6	-4,1	1,4	3,6	2,9	0,0	0,6	0,4	3,6	2,8	7,4	
Berchem-Saint-Agathe	-4,6	-1,2	0,2	1,3	-0,1	2,1	0,0	1,2	3,1	0,8	3,8	3,8	
Etterbeek	-18,8	-12,1	-17,9	1,2	3,8	1,9	1,6	1,4	1,0	4,3	2,1	6,1	
Evère	-11,8	1,8	-5,5	1,7	3,2	1,3	0,5	3,0	3,6	2,8	4,1	7,7	
Forest	-11,6	-8,2	-15,9	0,0	1,7	-1,2	0,3	1,3	3,3	1,1	1,9	5,8	
Ganshoren	-4,7	-7,1	-3,0	0,9	1,2	2,5	1,0	1,9	3,3	1,0	2,6	7,2	
Jette	-6,9	-5,0	-4,4	1,6	2,1	0,9	0,8	2,8	3,7	4,5	3,0	5,6	
Koekelberg	0,4	-12,4	-8,0	-0,8	1,1	1,2	1,6	1,7	8,6	2,6	1,9	8,5	
Uccle	-9,3	-3,3	-5,6	2,3	2,0	3,6	0,5	0,8	0,6	0,6	3,8	4,4	
Watermael-Boitsfort	-8,9	1,6	-6,5	2,0	2,8	0,0	0,4	0,3	0,2	2,3	1,6	2,0	
Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	-14,4	-6,7	-11,2	2,0	2,3	4,9	0,0	0,2	0,4	3,6	1,4	7,0	
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	-12,5	-6,1	-5,5	2,3	1,7	2,4	0,1	0,3	0,4	1,2	2,7	6,2	

Table 4. Average annual migration balance per 1000 inhabitants according to nationality: 1988-2005 Source: National Register, ADSEI, courtesy of Interface Demography

Erratum: data for Ixelles have been corrected on 20 january 2009.

	1971	1980	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005
Anderlecht	113	101	94	91	88	84	81	79	75	77
Auderghem	159	135	129	125	120	117	120	118	113	108
Berchem-Sainte-Agathe	137	126	122	119	115	111	108	104	99	102
Bruxelles	133	101	87	84	80	79	78	79	74	76
Etterbeek	139	104	99	95	92	89	90	88	83	82
Evère	132	126	115	108	102	101	98	97	92	88
Forest	141	113	102	99	95	92	95	91	90	86
Ganshoren	155	131	123	119	115	113	107	103	100	101
Ixelles	152	116	100	94	91	91	92	91	88	87
Jette	139	126	115	115	108	105	104	98	96	94
Koekelberg	132	112	101	98	91	91	90	87	84	83
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	109	94	82	78	73	75	72	69	66	65
Saint-Gilles	100	79	72	70	67	66	67	71	66	67
Saint-Josse-ten-Node	106	72	57	53	51	48	49	53	52	52
Schaerbeek	118	94	84	81	76	75	76	76	72	70
Uccle	197	158	133	128	121	121	120	120	113	110
Watermael-Boitsfort	165	144	131	128	121	120	118	115	116	114
Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	170	147	127	120	118	114	114	111	105	102
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	206	170	136	129	123	124	122	120	117	112
Brussels Capital Region	139	114	101	98	93	92	91	90	86	85

Table 5: Evolution of average taxable income per inhabitant in the Brussels-Capital Region compared to the evolution in Belgium (Belgium=100): 1971-2005

Source: ADSEI, Federal Public Service of Finance, courtesy of Interface Demography