

Belgium



Like many other OECD countries, the Belgian economy went into decline in the third quarter of 2008, with unemployment rising by one percentage point from the second quarter

of 2008 to the first quarter of 2009.

Belgium nonetheless saw an 8% increase in labour migration work permits in 2008, reaching a level of almost 25 000, about double the 2006 level, which in turn was almost double the level of 2005. Almost half of work permits in 2008 went to Polish nationals, another 5 500 to citizens of Bulgaria and Romania and almost 2000 to Indian nationals, followed by the United States (about 700), Japan (500) and China (350). Most of the increase thus comes from members of the new EU member states, many working in lesser skilled jobs. As a result, the proportion of highly qualified workers among those entering for work reasons fell from about one third in 2006 to less than one sixth in 2008.

The number of work permits granted to persons who entered for reasons other than work also stood at about 25 000 in 2008, down slightly – by about 1 100 – from the previous year. Permits do not necessarily translate into the number of workers, because they are granted automatically to certain groups (*e.g.*, international students, asylum seekers who applied more than six months earlier) who may or may not decide to work depending on circumstances.

Net migration remains below the OECD average. It has nevertheless accounted for over 70% of population growth in recent years.

Persons born in other European Union countries made up over 45% of all migrants in 2008. Overall, this group had an unemployment rate (close to 9%) closer to that of persons born in Belgium (5.9%) than to those born outside the European Union (20.7%).

Some 12 250 asylum applications involving about 15 600 persons were made in Belgium in 2008, an increase of about 10% compared to 2007. This remains low compared to the average of 18 800 observed over the 1990-2007 period. There were a little over 2 100 positive decisions on refugee status in 2008.

In 2009, Belgium arrived at an agreement providing for the regularisation of certain irregular migrants. The agreement clarified the criteria for regularisation procedures already allowed under Belgian law. Persons eligible include those awaiting decisions on asylum applications for long periods, persons in urgent humanitarian situations, families with children resident for more than 5 years and whose asylum request was made before 1 June 2007. Beneficiaries generally receive a permanent permit. An additional category – for which applications must be filed between 15 September and 15 December 2009 – is open to persons having “durable local ties” established over at least five years of residence, and persons in Belgium since 31 March 2007 and who can present a work contract. If accepted, these applicants receive a 1-year renewable type B work permit. It is estimated that some 25 000 persons are eligible according to all these criteria.

Transitory provisions concerning the eight new member countries of the European Union were lifted on 1 May 2009, and citizens of these countries acquired the right to free circulation and employment in Belgium. On the other hand, transitory provisions for Bulgarians and Romanians remain in place until 1 January 2012.

Finally, the exemption from work permits allowed under specific circumstances for executives has been extended to other management professionals.

For further information:

www.employment.belgium.be

www.ibz.be

www.dofi.fgov.be

Recent trends in migrants' flows and stocks

BELGIUM

Migration flows (foreigners) National definition	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average		Level ('000)			
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Per 1 000 inhabitants</i>										
Inflows	5.2	5.6	8.8	..	5.7	..	..	
Outflows	3.3	3.5	3.6	..	3.3	..	..	
Migration inflows (foreigners) by type Permit based statistics (standardised)	Thousands		% distribution		Inflows of top 10 nationalities as a % of total inflows of foreigners					
	2007	2008	2007	2008						
Work	2.5	3.4	6.3	7.8						
Family (incl. accompanying family)	12.3	14.3	30.5	32.7						
Humanitarian	1.8	2.1	4.6	4.9						
Free movements	23.7	24.0	58.7	54.6						
Others	..	..	..	..		
Total	40.3	43.9	100.0	100.0						
Temporary migration	2000	2007	2008	Average 2003-2008						
<i>Thousands</i>										
International students						
Trainees	..	..	..	..		
Working holiday makers	..	..	..	..		
Seasonal workers	..	16.5	19.9	8.1						
Intra-company transfers	..	..	..	..		
Other temporary workers	..	13.5	14.3	6.7						
Inflows of asylum seekers	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average	Level				
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Per 1 000 inhabitants</i>										
	1.1	4.2	1.0	1.1	2.5	1.3	12 252			
Components of population growth	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average	Level ('000)				
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Per 1 000 inhabitants</i>										
Total	3.6	3.4	..	..	3.0	..	..	
Natural increase	1.0	1.0	1.9	..	0.9	..	..	
Net migration	2.7	2.5	..	..	2.8	..	..	
Stocks of immigrants	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average	Level ('000)				
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Percentage of the total population</i>										
Foreign-born population	..	10.3	13.0	..	..	12.1	..	
Foreign population	9.0	8.4	9.1	..	8.5	8.6	..			
Naturalisations	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average	Level				
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Percentage of the foreign population</i>										
	2.9	7.2	3.7	..	5.0	..	45 204			
Labour market outcomes	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average					
					1997-2002	2003-2008				
<i>Employment/population ratio</i>										
Native-born men	67.8	70.8	69.7	69.1	68.9	69.1				
Foreign-born men	59.0	62.2	60.9	63.5	60.8	60.6				
Native-born women	46.9	53.8	57.2	57.8	51.5	55.9				
Foreign-born women	31.8	37.3	41.5	43.0	36.1	40.4				
<i>Unemployment rate</i>										
Native-born men	6.3	4.2	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.9				
Foreign-born men	16.8	14.7	15.8	15.3	15.6	15.9				
Native-born women	11.2	7.4	7.5	6.8	8.5	7.5				
Foreign-born women	23.9	17.5	17.2	15.7	18.2	17.2				
Macroeconomic indicators	1995	2000	2007	2008	Average	Level				
					1997-2002	2003-2008	2008			
<i>Annual growth in %</i>										
Real GDP	2.4	3.7	2.9	1.0	2.5	2.1				
GDP/capita (level in US dollars)	2.2	3.4	2.2	0.2	2.2	1.5	30 567			
Employment (level in thousands)	0.7	2.0	1.6	1.9	1.2	1.2	4 538			
<i>Percentage of the labour force</i>										
Unemployment	9.7	6.9	7.5	7.0	8.0	8.0				

Notes and sources are at the end of the chapter.

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