

Chapter 8 – Demographic Profile of Syrians in Belgium

Sophie Vause¹ & Bruno Schoumaker²

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8.1 Introduction

The war in Syria has generated the largest number of new refugees in the world in recent years, both through internal displacement or external displacement. At the end of 2017, UNHCR (2017) reported that 12.6 million Syrians were forcibly displaced, half of them outside their country (both asylum seekers and recognized refugees) and the other half inside Syria (internally displaced persons). The 6.3 million Syrian refugees represent one fourth of all refugees around the world.

At the beginning of the crisis in Syria in 2011, Syrians first turned to countries in the region. These countries still host the vast majority of Syrian refugees. In 2017, Syrian refugees were found in 125 countries around the world, including substantial numbers in several European countries. According to UNHCR data, EU countries were hosting just over 800,000 Syrian refugees in 2017, representing 13 percent of the 6.3 million Syrian refugees.

Syrian refugees in Belgium were a little over 9,000 in 2017. They represented about 0.1 percent of all Syrian refugees outside Syria, and 1.1 percent of Syrian refugees within the EU. (In terms of total population, Belgium represents about 2.2 percent of the EU as a whole.) Most of them arrived in Belgium recently as asylum seekers and were usually granted international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) quickly after their arrival. However, the population of people from Syria living in Belgium is substantially larger than the population with an international protection status. First, some 5,000 Syrians were already living in Belgium by 2011. Sec-

¹ Federal Centre for Migration (Myria), and associate researcher at the Centre for Demographic Research, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

² Professor at the Centre for Demographic Research, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

only, and more importantly, Syrians have also gradually arrived in Belgium by other legal means, especially through family reunification. As a result, the population of Syrian origin has increased rapidly, and was estimated at around 23,000 in 2017.

In this chapter, we assemble statistics from various sources to document the population of Syrian origin living in Belgium. We first describe migration flows, distinguishing between asylum migration and other types of migration. Next, we show how these flows have influenced the size and the composition (by age and sex) of the population of Syrian origin living in Belgium. Finally, we briefly describe family arrangements and labor market participation of the population of Syrian origin.

8.2 Data sources and literature on population of Syrian origin in Belgium

The presence of Syrians in Belgium is very recent. Apart from NGO reports and a few qualitative studies (Bircan, 2018; Bircan and Salman, 2018), literature on the Syrian population in Belgium is almost inexistent. Published data on characteristics and migration flows of the Syrian population in Belgium are also rare.

In this chapter, we mainly use data from the Belgian National Register. The National Register is a centralized system that records and updates information on (almost) all persons living legally in Belgium. It combines several registers, such as the Population Register and the Register of Foreigners in the municipalities, as well as the Waiting Register containing information on asylum seekers. This is the register in which asylum seekers are recorded, pending their registration in another register (population register or register of foreigners). Asylum seekers remain in the waiting register until they leave the country or they are granted international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection), or are regularized on another legal basis.

Several types of data are available in the national register: age, sex, country of birth, nationality at birth, current nationality, marital status, municipality of residence, type of residence permit, etc. The register also keeps track of immigration from abroad and outmigration to a foreign country. Data from the waiting register al-

so provide information of the asylum procedure, that among others allow documenting the recognition rate of asylum seekers.

We also use data from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS). The CBSS integrates data from multiple administrations and from the national register. We use of data on labor market and social protection, for a 25 percent sample of the Syrian-born people aged 25 and over, who arrived in Belgium between January 1999 and December 2014. These data are available as part of the LIMA project (Legal framework's impact on migrants' agency, www.limaucloouvain.eu).

As discussed later in this chapter, these administrative data have a number of limitations, and may differ from people's experiences in a number of ways. For instance, the municipality of residence in the register refers to *de jure* place of residence, which may differ from the *de facto* place of residence. The employments recorded in the BCSS only refer to registered employment, and will thus tend to underestimate employment levels. Motives of migration also refer to administrative categories, which do not reflect the complexity of migration motives. Another possible issue is that data on outmigration is not as reliable as data on immigration, since people may fail to report their outmigration. As discussed later, we think this issue is of limited importance among Syrians.

Finally, the way the data are treated and published may also be problematic when documenting migration trends. For instance, published official statistics only include asylum seekers after they have been granted protection status (refugee status or subsidiary protection) or after they obtain a residence permit for another reason. This means that asylum seekers are not visible in the published statistics on foreign residents. Moreover, they are registered as immigrants only when they obtain their protection status or are regularized, and the date of immigration for these people is thus recorded with a delay. However, the impact of this situation is limited for Syrians, as the recognition rates for asylum seekers have been very high and the waiting time before recognition has been short. As shown later, we can correct this issue in some situations.

Despite these limitations, the data are unique and reliable. Their exhaustive and longitudinal nature make them a very powerful

data source to document international migration, especially on small populations.

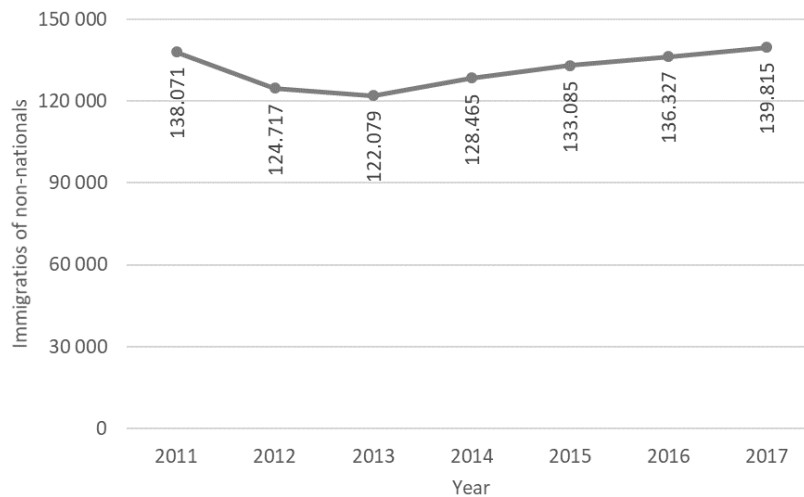
8.3 Syrian migration into Belgium, 2011-2017

In this section we start by describing migration flows to Belgium between 2011 and 2017, and we compare migration from Syria to migration from other countries. Second, we recalculate migration trends from Syria to correct some of the issues with the registration of asylum seekers. Third, we focus on asylum seekers, to document the way they arrived in Belgium and their recognition rates. Next, we describe changes in the composition of migration flows in recent years in terms of age, sex, and migration motives. Finally we report trends in outmigration among Syrians.

8.3.1 Immigration to Belgium: recent trends

In recent years, the number of foreigners immigrating to Belgium has fluctuated between 122,000 and 140,000 entries each year (Figure 8.1). Historically, the main immigration flows to Belgium have involved EU citizens because of their geographical proximity and the facility of migration within most of Europe.

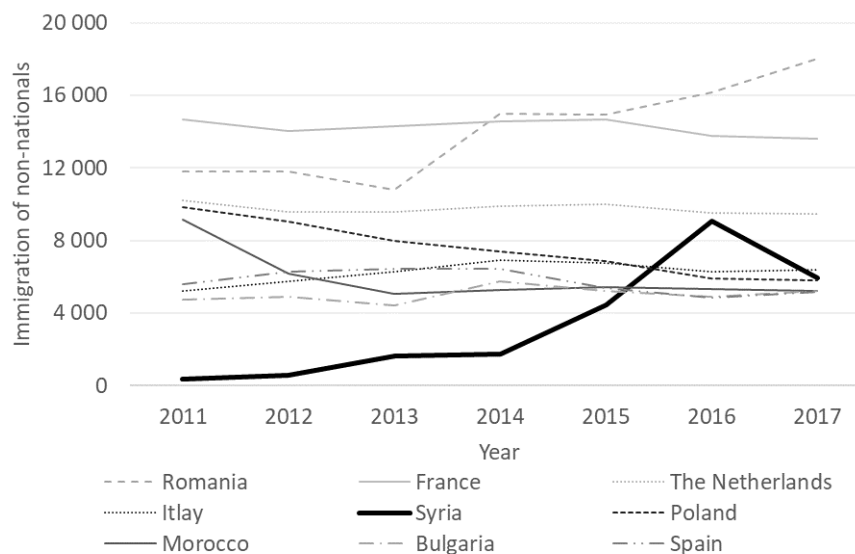
Figure 8.1. Immigration flows of foreigners to Belgium, 2011-2017



Source: Statbel, National Register, authors' calculations

In the recent period (2011-2017) more than 6 out of 10 immigrants in Belgium came from the EU, with France and Romania sharing the top two places among sending countries (Figure 8.2). Citizens from other European countries mainly come from the Netherlands, Italy, Poland and Spain. Alongside EU nationalities, Moroccan and Turkish nationals have also always been well represented in migration flows, first through bilateral agreements concluded with Belgium in the 1960s and 1970s for labor migration, and later through family reunification and migration for education. In 2011, Morocco still ranked fifth among the sending countries, but Moroccan immigration decreased from 2012, partly as a result of the reform of the right to family reunification (Myria, 2015).

Figure 8.2. Immigration flows for the main foreign nationalities in Belgium, 2011-2017



Source: Statbel, National Register, authors' calculations

Between 2011 and 2017, 23,778 Syrians were recorded in immigration flows in Belgian national statistics. Of these, just under 20,000 occurred between January 2015 and December 2017. During

these three years, immigration from Syria accounted for 11 percent of all immigrants from non-EU countries, and for 5 percent of all international immigrants. In 2016, more than 9,000 Syrian immigrants were registered in Belgium, twice as many as in 2015 and five times as many as in 2014 (Figure 8.2). The year 2016 marks the peak of Syrian immigration to Belgium as measured in national statistics. Syrians ranked fourth among foreign immigrants in Belgium in that year, just after Romanians, French and Dutch people. However, by 2017 the Syrian immigration flow declined to around 6,000, following the trend in international protection applications with a few months' delay (see below). These trends illustrate that Syrian migration flows to Belgium have largely resulted from the crisis in Syria. In this respect, they differ significantly from flows from neighboring countries, or flows from Morocco which have remained at sustained levels since the 1960s.

8.3.2 Declared migration and international protection

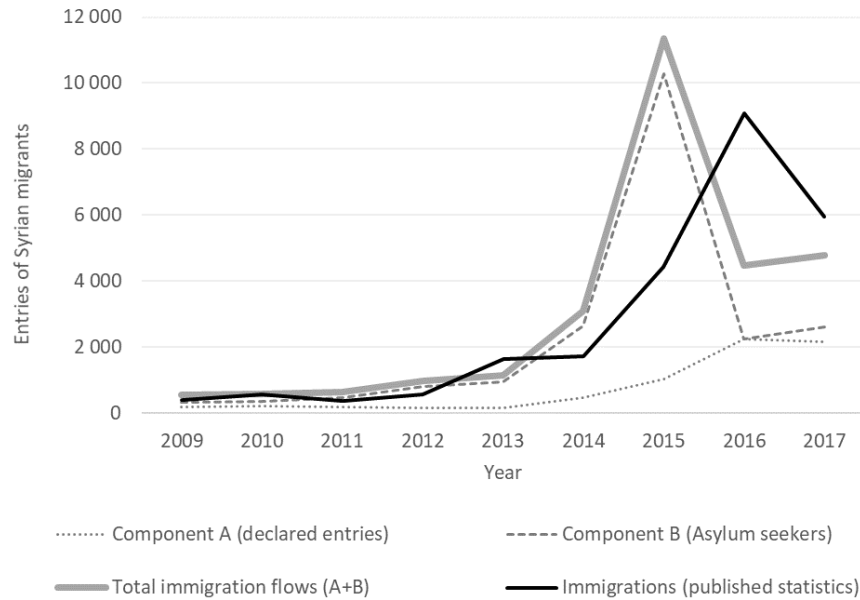
In total, between 2011 and 2017, close to 24 000 Syrians were recorded as immigrants in national statistics. To understand the discrepancies between published statistics on immigration and 'real' entries, we need to refer to the way official statistics estimate international migration. In Belgium, international immigration is the sum of three components :

- *Declared immigrations* are all entries in Belgium for more than three months declared by individuals during the year under study. They include, for instance, people arriving through family reunification. These persons are included in national statistics as soon as they register in their municipality of residence, and the recorded date closely corresponds to the arrival date.
- *Re-registration of automatically deregistered immigrants* refers to persons who have been unduly deregistered, and who are re-registered in the register. This is a sort of statistical adjustment, meaning that some people may be counted in the immigrations without actually immigrating. However, these situations are rare.
 - *Changes of register* concern persons who move from the Waiting Register to another register. This includes people granted international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) and people regularized on another legal basis. In contrast,

refused asylum seekers are not included, and the date of change of register does not correspond to the date of entry in Belgium. Given that the recognition of Syrians is very high (see below), a large majority of asylum seekers find themselves in immigration statistics, but with a delay until their asylum procedure is completed. For details on calculation of immigration and emigration flows and methodological changes over time, see Myria (2013).

Since published statistics tend to underestimate entries (rejected asylum seekers are not included) and include refugees with a delay, we have recalculated the flows to reflect better the volumes of entries of all Syrian migrants in recent years, whether they have applied for asylum or not, and regardless of the outcome of their protection application. This is done by adding, for a given year, the number of Syrians who arrived in Belgium through ‘classical’ migration (declared entries, component A of Figure 8.3) and the number of Syrians who made a first asylum demand in Belgium (component B of Figure 8.3). Re-registered migrations are not included, but there are only a few of them (around 20 per year).

Figure 8.3. Syrian immigration flows to Belgium, 2009-2017



Source: National register, Statbel for declared entries; national statistics and Immigration Office for applications for protection, authors' calculations.

In this way, we can better perceive the total flows of Syrians who have arrived in Belgium in recent years (total A+B on Figure 8.3). The main conclusion here is that the peak year of Syrian immigration was 2015 and not 2016 and above 11 000 entries (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1. Syrian immigration flows to Belgium, 2009-2017

Year	Component A (Declared entries)	Component B (Asylum seekers)	Recalculated total immigration flows (A+B)	Immigrations (national statistics)
2009	204	340	544	396
2010	230	360	590	575
2011	186	470	656	373
2012	160	815	975	572
2013	175	965	1 140	1 640
2014	468	2 635	3 103	1 726
2015	1 046	10 295	11 341	4 438
2016	2 247	2 235	4 482	9 074
2017	2 163	2 625	4 788	5 955
Total	6 879	20 740	27 619	24 749

Source: National register, Statbel for declared entries and national statistics and Immigration Office for applications for protection, authors' calculations.

8.3.3 Syrian asylum seekers in Belgium: Mode of arrival and recognition rates

Between 2009 and 2017, more than 20,000 Syrian asylum seekers arrived in Belgium. They represented three quarters of all the entries of Syrian immigrants in Belgium during that period. Most asylum seekers mainly arrive on their own and apply for asylum once they arrive in Belgium, but a number of Syrian refugees have also arrived in Belgium through resettlement and relocation programs.

Resettlement programs consist in selecting and transferring refugees from a country where they sought protection to a third country which has previously agreed to grant them a permanent right of residence. This measure offers a solution for people who cannot return to their country of origin but also cannot benefit from sufficient protection or local integration prospects in the country of first reception. Since 2013, Belgium, as other European countries, has committed itself to hosting a contingent of vulnerable refugees every year (Fedasil, 2019). Between 2014 and 2018, 3,051 refugees have been resettled.

tled in Belgium, including 2,633 Syrians (Table 8.2). The majority of them were living in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan before settling in Belgium. Once resettled in Belgium, these persons follow an accelerated asylum procedure leading to granting of protection status.

Table 8.2. Numbers of Syrians who benefitted from resettlement and relocation programs in Belgium between 2014 and 2018

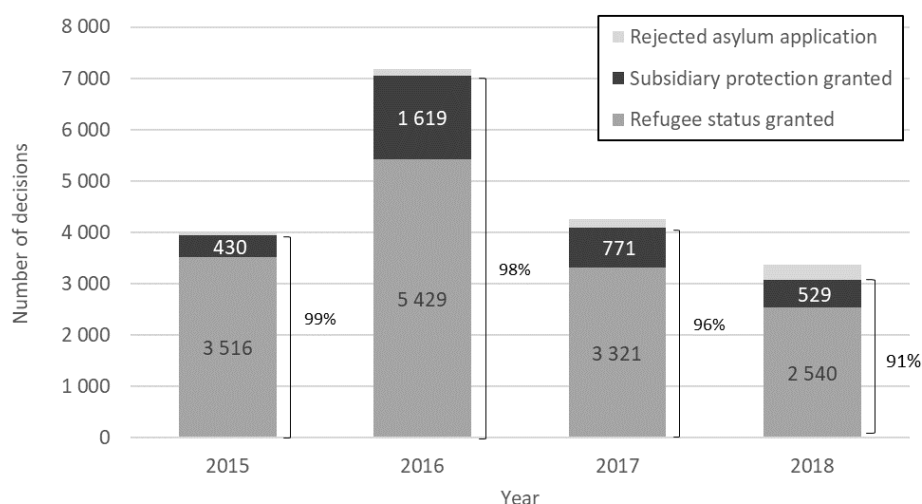
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Resettled	28	188	424	1 191	802	2 633
Relocated	0	0	139	524	2	665
Total	28	188	563	1 715	804	3 298

Sources: Fedasil for resettlement and CGRA for relocations.

Relocation program. In 2015, in response to the migration crisis, the European Commission set up a program to relocate asylum seekers (European commission, 2017). Its purpose was to assist Italy and Greece, which faced a significant number of arrivals on their territory of persons seeking protection, and could not comply with the essential reception guarantees. Between 2015 and 2018, Belgium relocated 1,167 refugees from Italy and Greece, including 665 Syrians (Table 2). Once relocated to Belgium, these people follow a standard asylum procedure, but the vast majority obtain protection status. Together, 3,298 people arrived through resettlement and relocation programs between 2014 and 2018 (Table 8.2). These people are included in statistics on asylum, and represented roughly 15% of Syrian asylum seekers between 2014 and 2017.

Given the situation in their country of origin, Syrian asylum seekers have almost all obtained protection status in Belgium. Recognition rates fell slightly between 2015 and 2018 but have remained above 90% (Figure 8.4). The duration of the procedure has also usually been very short for Syrians (EMN, 2018).

Figure 8.4. Recognition rates for Syrian asylum seekers in Belgium between 2015 and 2018.



8.3.4 Demographic changes in immigration flows

The demographic composition of Syrian immigration in Belgium has changed rapidly in recent years. In 2015, the year of peak arrival (around 11,500 people in a year), adult young men clearly outnumbered adult women (Figure 8.5), and children under 18 were relatively few (35 percent). Two years later, the age and gender distribution had changed significantly. Adult women outnumbered men and there were about as many young people under 18 years of age (47 percent) as there were people 18 and over. In 2013, only one-quarter of immigrants were under the age of 18. As shown on Figure 8.6, the peak in arrivals in 2015 is clear for both men and women, but young men were strongly overrepresented in inflows that year (Figure 8.5). In contrast, 2016 and 2017 are characterized by a slightly larger inflow of women compared to men. The larger shares of women and young (under 15) in 2016 and 2017 than in previous years indicate a progressive shift from a predominantly male migration for international protection to family migration, as well as family reunification with recognized refugees.

Figure 8.5a. Age and gender distribution of Syrian immigrants in 2015 (recalculated flows)

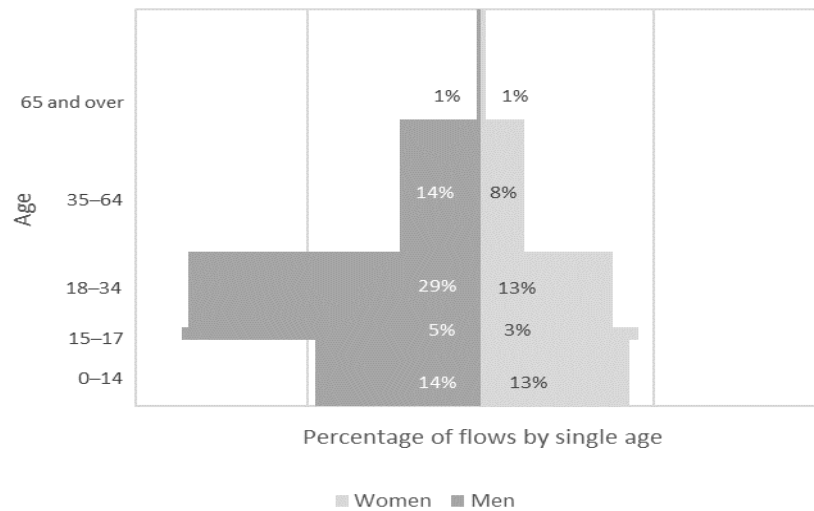
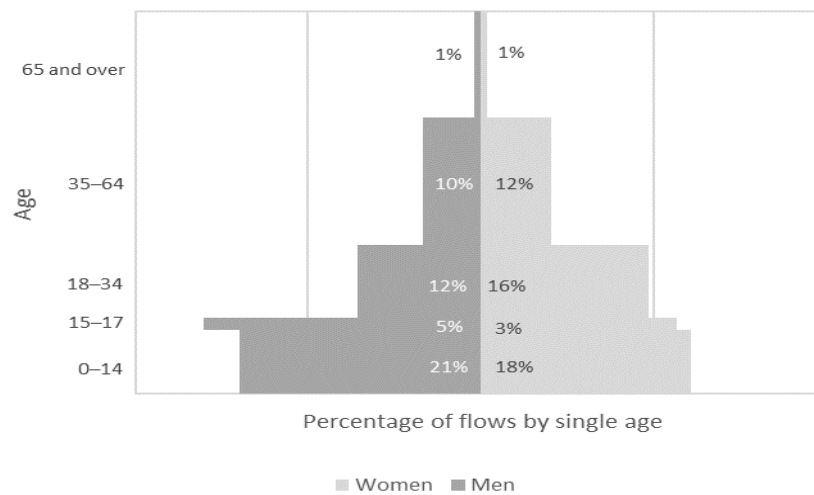
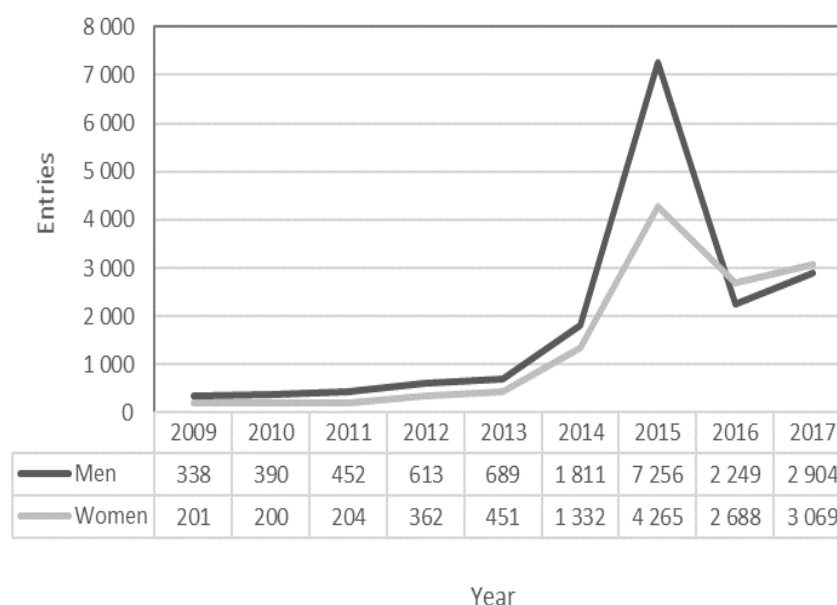


Figure 8.5b. Age and gender distribution of Syrian immigrants in 2017 (recalculated flows)



Source: National Register, Statbel for declared entries, Immigration Office for protection applications, authors' calculations.

Figure 8.6. Recalculated flows for Syrians into Belgium by gender, 2009-2017



Source: National register, Statbel for declared entries, Immigration Office for applications for protection, authors' calculations

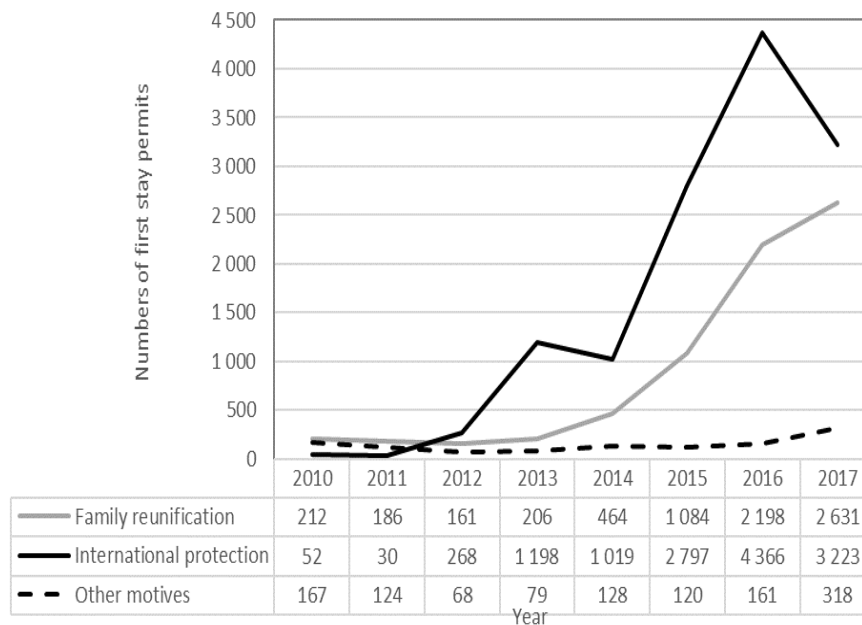
8.3.5 Legal processes for Syrian immigration

These changes in age and sex structure also reflect changes in the type of migration. This is visible in Table 8.1, where the share of asylum seekers in the total immigration is much lower (roughly 50 percent) in 2016 and 2017 than in previous years (close to 90 percent between 2011 and 2015). This can also be documented in a different way using statistics on residence permits. Foreigners settling in Belgium must declare their arrival to their municipality of residence and are issued a first residence permit on the basis of the type of visa or authorization they hold (Myria, 2018). As with the published statistics on immigration flows, asylum seekers are not included as such in the statistics on first residence permits. They are only included in the statistics if and when they obtain a protection status or a first residence permit on another basis. For beneficiaries

of international protection status, these data refer to the year the protection was granted, which may be later than the year of arrival.

Despite this limitation, these data give an indication of the types of migration and confirm what was said above. In 2015, 70 percent of Syrians to whom a first residence permit had been issued had been granted international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) from an asylum procedure introduced in Belgium, 27 percent had received their first residence permit for family reasons, and 3 percent for other reasons. By 2017, the pattern had changed: 52 percent of immigrants were beneficiaries of international protection, while 43 percent were accepted for family reasons. Among the latter category, some residence permits were for children born in Belgium.

Figure 1.7. Evolution of the number of first residence permits issued to Syrians according to motive, 2010-2017



(Source:Immigration Office)

While the majority of Syrian immigrants in recent years reflect asylum flows, an increasing number of immigrants arrived by

other means, especially through in family reunification. This is probably partly linked to the more favorable conditions granted to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to have their family members (spouse and children) joining them in the first year after their recognition. Family reunification with an internationally protected person is indeed facilitated within 12 months of recognition of the status. The requirements related to material conditions (e.g. income, housing) also do not apply to recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who bring their spouse and/or children in the year of their recognition. However, family reunification, even if facilitated for this category of individuals, often remains complicated. The person who wishes to join a family member already in Belgium has to apply for family reunification from abroad. In war-torn countries, access to the Belgian diplomatic post is often complicated. For a detailed analysis of the difficulties encountered by beneficiaries of international protection in using family reunification to bring their families to Belgium, see Myria (2018).

8.3.6 Outmigration

Before describing trends, a short explanation of the way official statistics estimate outmigration is necessary. In many countries, statistics on outmigration are inexistent or unreliable (Schoumaker and Beauchemin, 2015). In Belgium, outmigration of foreigners is estimated as the sum of three components:

- *Declared out-migrations*, which include all exits from the territory for more than three months, declared by individuals to their municipality of residence during the year under study.
- *Deregistered persons*, which include persons whose departure has been confirmed by the authorities, or whose residence permit has expired.
- *Changes of register*, which concern persons who move from a register (of population or foreigners) to the Waiting Register.

While data on declared immigration are overall reliable, the registration of emigration is more questionable. Declaring a departure may be tedious, or may in some cases be intentionally avoided by those who wish to continue to benefit from certain registration advantages (social assistance, right to stay, etc.) or fear losing them. As far as Syrians are concerned, the category of persons who are de-

registered from the National register represents the vast majority of outmigration (77 percent). It is therefore through a statistical adjustment that these exits from the register are counted as out-migrations. Of the 270 Syrian out-migrations recorded in 2017, only 33 (12 percent) are reported by individuals themselves. In contrast, changes of register of this type are rare, since few people lose their refugee status.

In total, 870 departures of Syrians from Belgium were recorded between 2011 and 2017. Compared to immigration, Syrian outmigration is thus very low, resulting in a largely positive net migration (Figure 8.7). Several factors explained this situation.

The first is the very recent nature of Syrian migration to Belgium: the shorter the duration of residence in the host country, the less likely outmigration from that country will occur. This is particularly the case for non-EU nationals. For Moroccans or Turks, for example, only 15 percent of the cohort arriving in Belgium at the end of the 1990s had left Belgium after 7 years of residence (Myria, 2013).

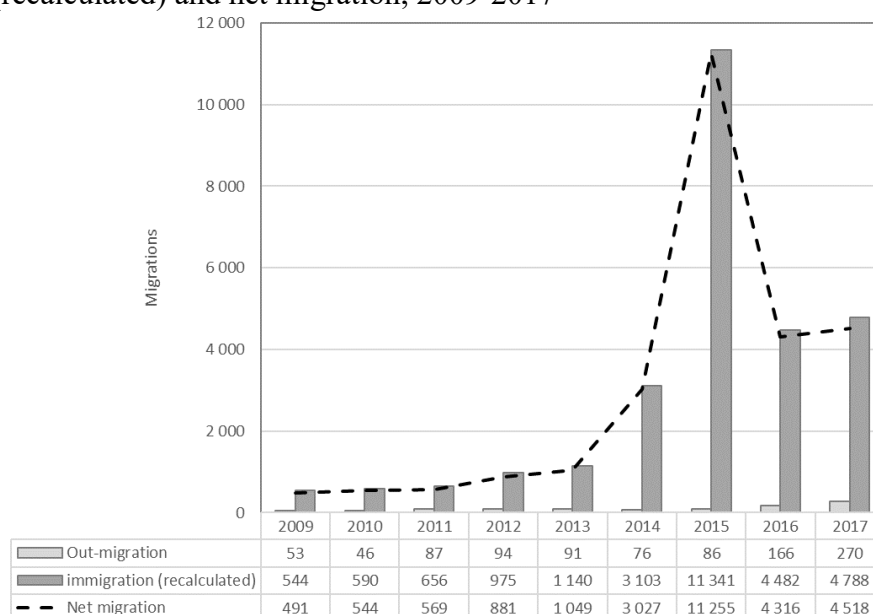
The second factor is related to the international protection status of the majority of Syrians residing in Belgium. Benefiting from international protection (refugee or subsidiary protection) has a restrictive effect on the possibilities of mobility. Beneficiaries of international protection are allowed to move within the State that granted them protection. Apart from that, their free movement within the Schengen area is possible, but only for a short period and after five years of continuous residence in the country that granted protection.

Finally, with regard to mobility outside the State that granted protection status and the European Union, beneficiaries of international protection are allowed to travel, including to their country of origin. However, this would mean that circumstances in the country of origin have changed, which is sufficient reason for their status to be withdrawn. The European Qualification Directive defines the conditions under which a third-country national or stateless person ceases to be a refugee (Article 11) or a beneficiary of subsidiary protection (Article 16).

Since the vast majority of departures are recorded by the authorities (deregistration) and not declared by the individuals them-

selves, very little is known about the destination of Syrians who have left Belgium. Of the 33 departures reported for the year 2017, 8 declared their destination, and they were returning to Syria. Data are missing for the others.

Figure 8.8. Outmigration and immigration flows of Syrians (recalculated) and net migration, 2009-2017



Source: National Register, Statbel, authors' calculations

8.4 Population of Syrian origin: size and composition

As the previous section has just highlighted, immigration of Syrians into Belgium is very recent. Between 2011 and 2017, approximately 26,500 Syrian immigrations were recorded (based on recalculated flows, Table 8.1) and the number of Syrians leaving Belgium remained very low (less than 1,000 people in 7 years, Figure 8.8). As a result, the stock of people of Syrian origin in Belgium is strongly correlated to flows and has increased rapidly. In 2017, it stands at around 20-25,000 people, depending on the indicator chosen (see below).

Box 1. Indicators of foreign presence in Belgium

The available data make it possible to measure the evolution of foreign presence in Belgium according to different indicators, from 1991 to 2017. On 1 January 2017, the population living in Belgium stood at 11,322,088 people. Of these, 1,327,776 (11.7 percent) were foreign nationals and 991,031 (8.8 percent) were Belgians born with a foreign nationality. Together, these two categories of individuals constitute the population of *foreign origin* (2,318,807 people, or 20.5 percent). In other words, one in five residents in Belgium was born with a foreign nationality. Not all these people are immigrants, since some of them were not born abroad. In Belgium, as of 1 January 2017, 1,695,716 people of foreign origin (foreign nationality at birth) had migrated to Belgium to live there. These figures point to the different indicators available to measure the foreign or immigrant presence in Belgium. To compute these indicators, three variables are used: country of birth, nationality at birth, and current nationality.

- **Immigrants.** The country of birth makes it possible to distinguish immigrants from people born in Belgium.
- **Foreigners.** The current nationality is the criterion that distinguishes foreigners from Belgians, or those who have become Belgians. Foreigners may be born in Belgium, and not all foreigners are therefore immigrants.
- **Population of foreign origin.** Nationality at birth makes it possible to take into account the origin of the person. The population of foreign origin includes persons born with a foreign nationality, including those who have meanwhile acquired Belgian nationality. Not all of them are immigrants either.

8.4.1 Syrian nationals (Current Syrian nationality) and people of Syrian origin (Syrian nationality at birth)

On 1 January 2011, a few months before the start of the war in Syria, there were relatively few **Syrian nationals** in Belgium (Table 8.3, Figure 8.9). The 2,138 Syrians residing in Belgium on that date represented about 0.2 percent of 1,119,256 foreigners present in Belgium or 0.6 percent of 371,483 non-EU nationals. A few

years later, on 1 January 2017, this number had increased ninefold to 19,397 people, representing 1.5 percent of all foreigners and 4.5 percent of non-EU nationals respectively (Table 8.3, Figure 8.9).

Over the same period (2011-2017), the number of people **born with the Syrian nationality who had become Belgian** increased slightly (x 1.4), from 3,054 people on 1 January 2011 to 4,131 people on 1 January 2017.

In total, taking into account nationality at birth – regardless of the current nationality - the **population of Syrian origin** in Belgium has increased by a factor of 4.5 over six years. On 1 January 2017, 23,528 persons of Syrian origin were found in Belgian statistics, representing respectively 1 percent of all persons of foreign origin (all nationalities combined) and 2.1 percent of persons of foreign origin from outside the European Union.

Table 8.1. Evolution of three indicators between 2011 and 2017 for all persons of foreign origin, for non-EU nationals and for Syrians

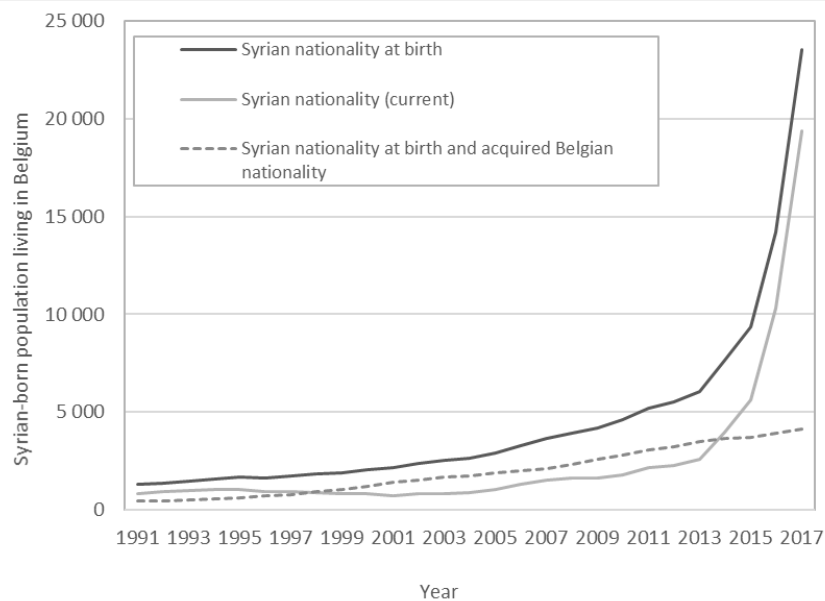
	foreign nationality (current) (A)	born with a foreign nationality, now Belgian (B)	Total born with a foreign nationality (A+B)
Total (all foreign nationalities)			
1/1/2011	1 119 256	863 570	1 982 826
1/1/2017	1 327 776	991 031	2 318 807
Δ 2011-2017	<i>x 1.19</i>	<i>x 1.15</i>	<i>x 1.17</i>
Non-EU nationals			
1/1/2011	371 483	581 786	953 269
1/1/2017	432 703	689 710	1 122 413
Δ 2011-2017	<i>x 1.60</i>	<i>x 1.19</i>	<i>x 1.18</i>
Syrians			
1/1/2011	2 138	3 054	5 192
1/1/2017	19 397	4 131	23 528
Δ 2011-2017	<i>x 9.07</i>	<i>x 1.35</i>	<i>x 4.53</i>

Source: National Register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

The population of Syrian origin who has acquired Belgian nationality is relatively small and has not increased rapidly (Figure

8.9). The data for this figure are available in the appendix to this chapter.

Figure 8.9. Number of Syrians, persons of Syrian origin and Syrians who became Belgians on 1 January of each year, 1991-2017)

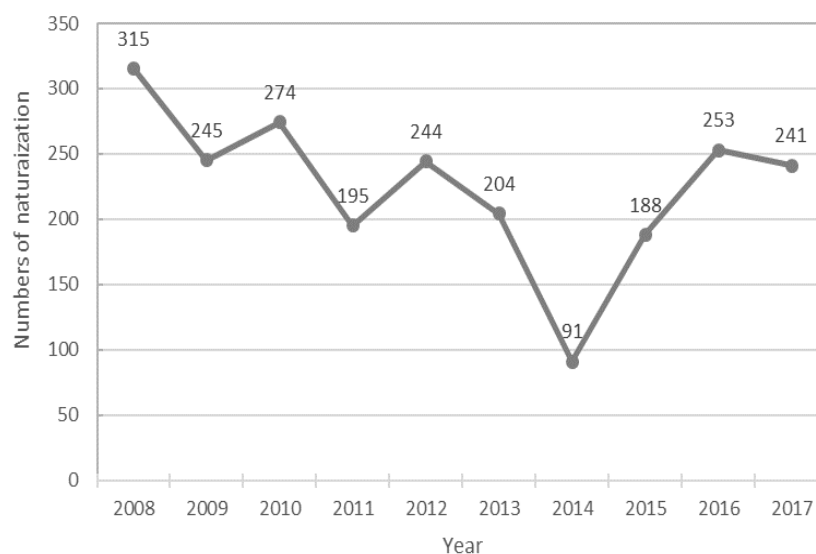


(Source: National Register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations)

Over the past 10 years, an average of 225 Syrians became Belgian each year (Figure 8.10). The conditions for access to citizenship, and specifically the conditions related to length of residence, are probably the most important explanatory factor. To become Belgian, a foreigner must hold an unlimited residence permit, have 5 years of uninterrupted legal residence and fulfil the conditions for social, linguistic and economic integration (art. 12bis of the Belgian Nationality Code). Syrian migration is a recent migration and, as a result, the duration of residence of Syrians in Belgium is not yet very long. Moreover, persons enjoying protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) do not benefit from more flexible conditions in this matter. Since July 2018, the required 5 years of residence begins to run as soon as the asylum application that led to the recognition of refugee status is introduced, whereas before that

date, the minimum duration of stay only began when refugee status was granted. Access to Belgian nationality may thus increase in coming years. However, this change does not apply to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

Figure 8.10. Annual number of Syrians who acquired Belgian nationality, 2007-2017



(Source: National register, authors' calculations)

8.4.2 Country of birth of people of Syrian origin in Belgium: a large majority of immigrants

The vast majority of people of Syrian origin currently residing in Belgium are immigrants, i.e. people born abroad and who subsequently arrived in Belgium. In 2011, the proportion of Syrian immigrants among all people of Syrian origin was already 84 percent (Table 8.4). In 2017, this proportion rose to 93 percent for Syrians and remained stable for other nationality groups (Table 8.4, Figure 8.11, Figure 8.12). By comparison, this proportion was respectively 72 percent and 73 percent for all foreign nationalities and all non-EU nationals, and 62 percent for Moroccans, a non-EU nationality that has long been present in Belgium. These figures il-

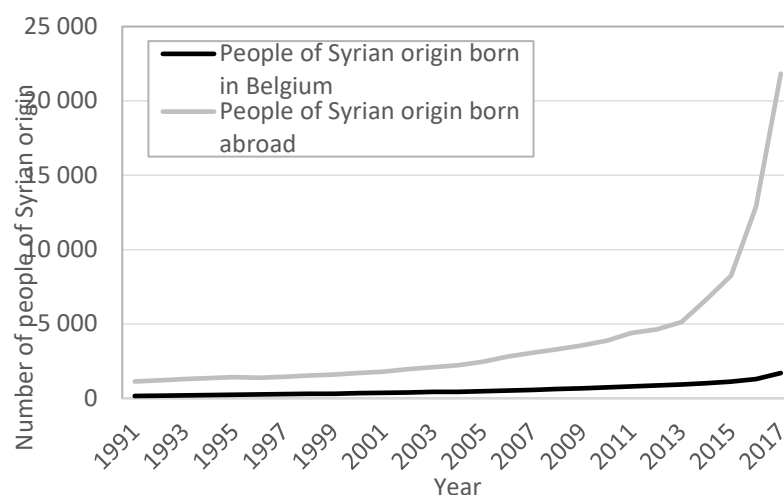
illustrate the very recent nature of the Syrian population in Belgium, and the fact that the second generation is still very small.

Table 8.2. Changes in the number of people of foreign origin by place of birth between 2011 and 2017

	foreign origin born abroad	foreign origin born in Belgium	foreign origin (foreign nationality at birth)	Proportion immigrants
	(A)	(B)	(A+B)	(A/(A+B))
Total (all foreign nationalities)				
1/1/2011	1 424 830	557 996	1 982 826	72%
1/1/2017	1 695 716	623 091	2 318 807	73%
Non-EU Nationals				
1/1/2011	696 784	256 485	953 269	73%
1/1/2017	831 213	291 200	1 122 413	74%
Syrians				
1/1/2011	4 385	807	5 192	84%
1/1/2017	21 831	1 697	23 528	93%

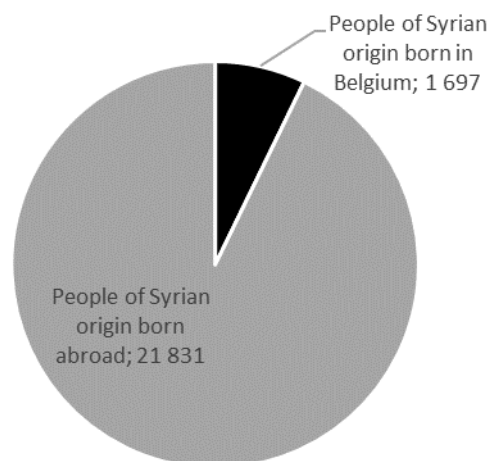
Source: National Register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

Figure 8.11. Stocks of persons of Syrian nationality at birth by country of birth on 1 January, 1991-2017



Source: National Register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

Figure 8.12. Distribution of people of Syrian origin by country of birth on 1 January 2017

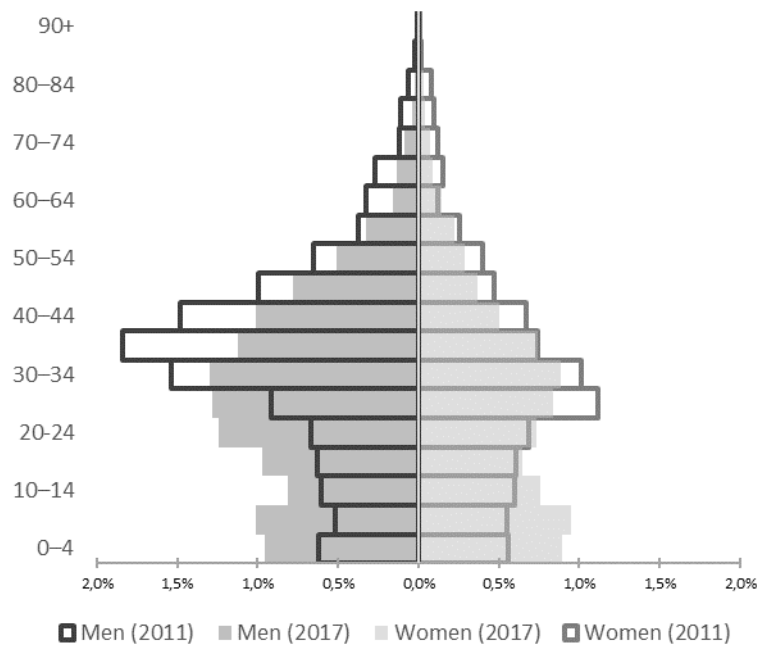


Source: National Register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

8.4.3 Changes in age and sex composition, 2011-2017

Between 2011 and 2017, the number of people of Syrian origin living in Belgium increased from 5,192 to 23,528. The age structure has also changed considerably (Figure 8.13), with a population 5 years younger in 2017 (28 years) than in 2011 (33 years). The proportion of people under 19 rose sharply, from 23 percent in 2011 to 35 percent in 2017, while the share of other age groups decreased, especially for people over 40 years of age (Table 8.5).

Figure 8.13. Age and sex structure of the population of Syrian origin and living in Belgium in 2011 (N=5,192) and in 2017 (23,528)



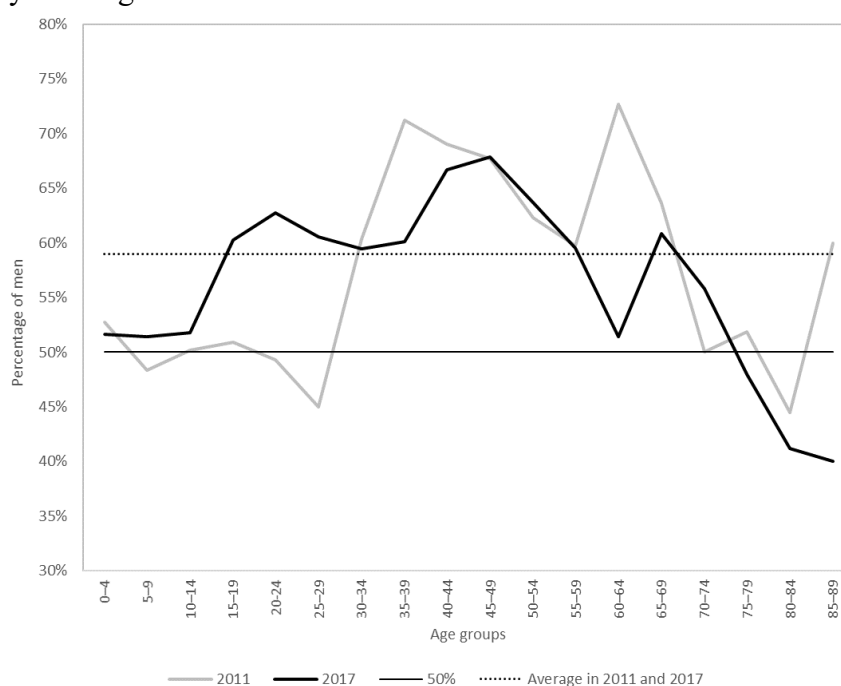
On the other hand, gender composition has remained stable, with an over-representation of men (Figure 8.14). The proportion of men of Syrian origin was 59 percent on 1 January 2011 and still 59 percent on 1 January 2017. However, given recent trends in the composition of immigration flows, the proportion of women in the population of Syrian origin is expected to increase in coming years.

Table 8.5. Age and sex of the population of Syrian origin living in Belgium in 2011 and in 2017

Age groups	2011	2017
0-19	23%	35%
20-39	43%	41%
40-59	27%	20%
60 & over	8%	4%
<i>N</i>	5.192	23.528

Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

Figure 8.14. Percentages of men by age groups in the population of Syrian origin in 2011 and 2017



8.4.4 Comparison of age and sex composition with other groups

The age and sex structure of the population of Syrian origin in Belgium in 2017 differs significantly from that of other non-EU

natives, EU natives and Belgian natives residing in Belgium (Figure 8.15 and Table 8.6). The proportion of women is only 41 percent for Syrians, while they represent more than half of the population in the other three groups. Even though Syrian flows have recently become more feminized, the strong male presence in the first asylum flows to Belgium is well anchored in current stocks. The population of Syrian origin in Belgium is also young, as shown by the broad base of the population pyramid in Figure 8.15, with 35 percent of people of Syrian origin under 19 compared to 17 percent among non-EU natives, 16 percent among EU natives, and 24 percent among Belgian natives. On the other hand, the top of the Syrian pyramid is very narrow: the population over 65 represents only 3 percent, while the proportion is 6 percent for non-EU natives, 15 percent for EU natives and 20 percent for Belgian natives. Again, the very recent nature of Syrian immigration plays a key role in this age structure.

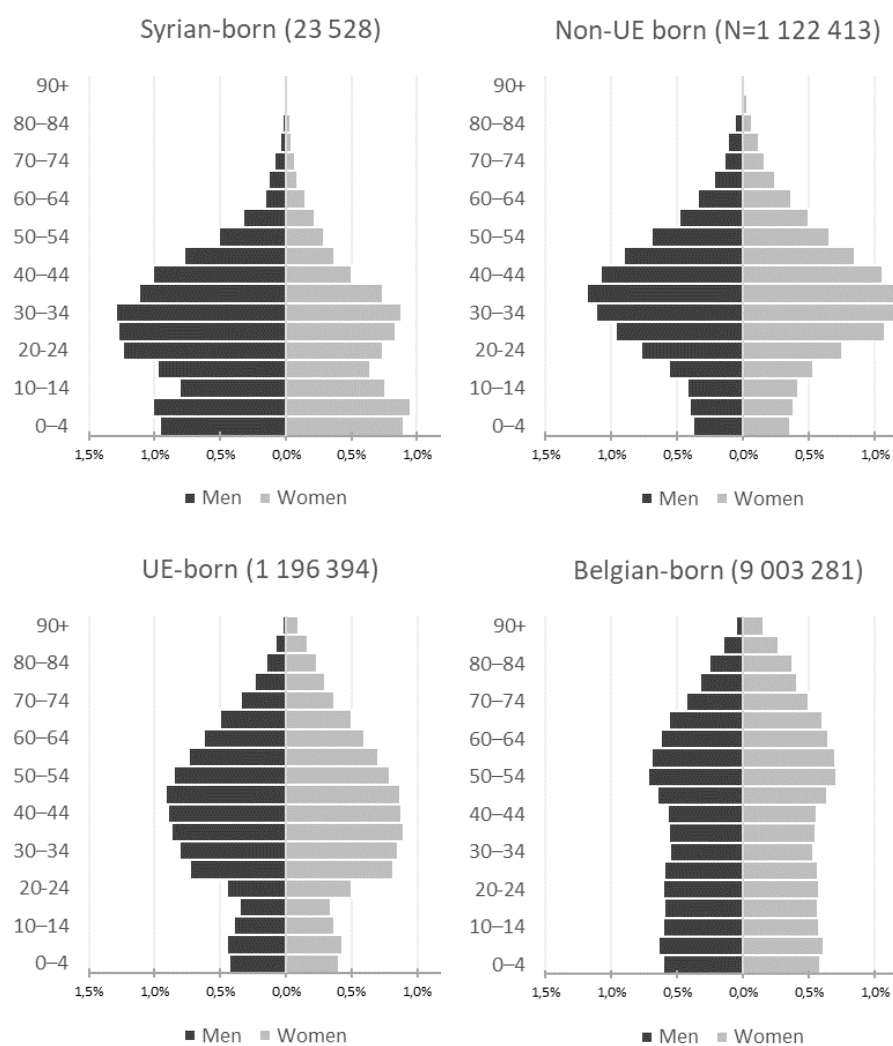
Finally, the demographic dependency ratio once again highlights the specific characteristics of the population of Syrian origin in Belgium. The ratio among people of Syrian origin stands at 42 dependent persons (under 15 or 65 and over) for every 100 persons of working age (15 to 64), almost twice as high as the value of 22 dependents per working-age person for all non-EU citizens. The dependency ratio of the Belgian natives, on the other hand is even higher than for Syrians, 63 dependent persons per 100 persons of working age, but in this case reflecting a large share of old persons.

Table 8.6. Age structure, dependancy ratio and sex composition of four categories of persons living in Belgium in 2017

		Syrian-born	Non EU-born	EU-born	Belgian-born
Age groups	< 20	35%	17%	16%	24%
	20–39	41%	42%	30%	23%
	40–64	22%	35%	39%	33%
	65 +	3%	6%	15%	20%
Dependancy ratio		42	22	38	63
Women (percent)		41%	51%	51%	51%

Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

Figure 8.15. Age and sex structure of four categories of persons living in Belgium in 2017 (Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations)



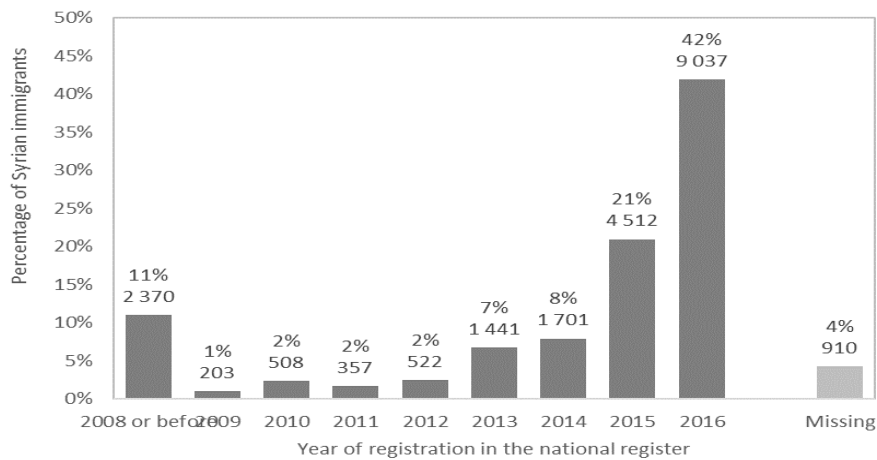
8.5 Characteristics of Syrian population circa 2017

In this last section, we present some characteristics of the Syrian population circa 2017: their duration of presence in Belgium,

their type of residence permit, their geographical location, as well as some information on their household composition and on their labor market participation.

The duration of stay in Belgium highlights the very recent nature of Syrian immigration (Figure 8.16). In January 2017, almost two-thirds of the Syrian immigrants had been in Belgium less than two years, and almost 80 percent had been in Belgium for less than five years. These durations are somewhat underestimated, since they are computed from the dates at which individuals entered the register of foreigners. As already stressed, asylum seekers who did not obtain a protection status are excluded, and the duration of stay is underestimated since asylum seekers arrived in Belgium some time before obtaining their protection status. Nevertheless, clearly most Syrian migrants have spent only a short time in Belgium.

Figure 8.16. Distribution of Syrian-born foreigners residing in Belgium on 1 January 2017 by year of registration



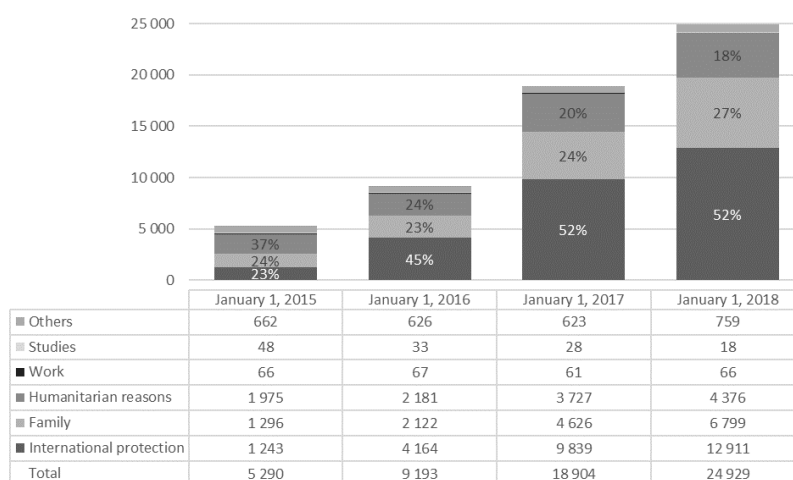
Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

8.5.1 Type of residence permit

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Syrian migration to Belgium has been primarily an asylum migration, with a gradual increase of family migration. According to the data on the reasons for

residence permits issued to foreigners (published by the Immigration Office), more than half of Syrians residing in Belgium in January 2018 held a residence permit provided on the basis of international protection (52%). Family reasons represented 27% of the residence permits, and humanitarian reasons 18%.

Figure 8.17. Distribution of Syrian immigrants living in Belgium by type of residence permit and year



Source: Immigration Office, authors' calculation.

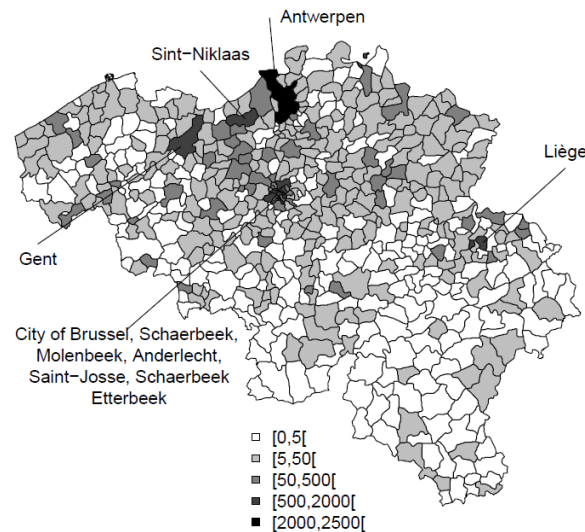
Residence permits issued for humanitarian reasons concern situations at the intersection of the first two grounds: in the vast majority of cases, these are persons for whom family reunification as such is not authorized, as they do not meet the conditions for it. In this case, these persons can obtain a humanitarian visa to cross the Belgian borders, and once there, a residence permit for humanitarian reasons is issued to them (Myria 2017). They may be adult sons or daughters, dependent on parents holding a residence permit or having the status of beneficiaries of international protection in Belgium; minor brothers/sisters of an unaccompanied minor benefitting from international protection in Belgium, if the parents of the unaccompanied minor have submitted an application for family reunification;

or couples married under religious or under customary law (Myria 2017). No data is available on undocumented migrants.

8.5.2 Geographic Distribution

Belgium is a federal state composed of three regions: Flanders in the Northern part of the country, Wallonia in the Southern part, and the Brussels-Capital region in the center. It is made up of 589 municipalities (Figure 8.18). In January 2017, half of the people of Syrian origin living in Belgium were registered in Flanders (Figures 8.18 and 8.19), with Antwerp as their first municipality of residence (11 percent). One third were located in the Brussels-Capital Region, mainly in four municipalities (Schaerbeek, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, Anderlecht and Brussels City). The remaining 16 percent are spread over Wallonia, with Liège as the first municipality of residence.

Figure 8.18. Distribution by municipalities of residence of Syrian-born persons, 1 January 2017

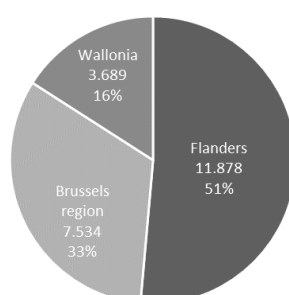


(Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations)

Syrians are disproportionately located in Brussels and Antwerp, reflecting the attractiveness of these two largest cities in Belgium which have long been major immigration reception areas (Eg-

gerickx & Sanderson, 2004). Flanders receives a proportionately larger share of Syrians than does Wallonia, which may partly result from better labor market conditions.

Figure 8.19. Distribution by region of residence of Syrian-born persons, 1 January 2017



Source: National register, UCL/DEMO, authors' calculations

8.5.3 Family status and living arrangements

Data from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security provide some data on household composition among Syria-born living in Belgium, including asylum seekers. The data we have refer to December 2014, and are thus not the most up-to-date information. They also only cover people who arrived in Belgium as adults (18 and over) between 1999 and 2014, so people who arrived as adolescents are not included in the data. For this reason, we restrict the analyses to people ages 25 and over, so that people who arrived at ages 18 and over between 2008 and 2014 are included. Table 8.8 indicates the distribution of people ages 25 and over by type of household in which they live. Apart from the large share of unknown household types, the most striking feature is that a large percentage of Syrian immigrants live in households formed by married couples and their children, or unmarried couples and their children. Had younger people been included in the statistics, the share would be even larger. Single parent families are few, reflecting the fact that family reunification is frequent and suggesting union dissolution is not common among Syrian-born people living in Belgium.

Table 8.8. Distribution of Syria-born population by household type, December 2014

LIPRO Status of the household	Percentage of people aged 25 and over
Married couple with children	32.4
Married couple no children	3.8
Couple not married, with children	8.4
Couple, not married, no children	3.0
Single-parent family	7.3
Single person household	7.3
Other or unknown household types	37.3
Collective household	0.6
Total	100.0
N	1818

Data source: Crossroads Bank for Social Security. (25% sample of Syrian-born aged 25+ who arrived between 1/1999 and 12/2014.

8.5.4 Economic activities

Data from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security also provide some information on employment and social assistance among Syrian immigrants living in Belgium, including asylum seekers (Table 8.8). Despite their limitations, similar to those for household composition, these data show a few key features. Only a fifth of Syrian-born people aged 25 and over were working (employed or self-employed) as of December 2014. Approximately the same share rely on social assistance, and a few have unemployment benefits (meaning they are looking for work and had worked before long enough to obtain these benefits). A large share is in the “other” category, which mainly comprise inactive people, i.e. people dependent on other people from the same household (for instance student or non-working spouse).

Table 8.8. Distribution of Syrian-born population (ages 25 and over) by activity status, by gender, December 2014

Status	Gender		Protection status			Total
	Men	Women	No asylum	Applied for asylum (rejected or pending)	Refugee or subsidiary protection granted	
Working (employed or self-employed)	25.9%	10.5%	25.5%	20.0%	17.9%	20.7%
Unemployment benefits	6.6%	3.7%	7.5%	7.3%	3.6%	5.6%
Social assistance	22.9%	18.5%	6.7%	5.1%	38.6%	21.4%
Retired, illness, career interruption	2.0%	3.4%	3.6%	2.9%	1.5%	2.5%
Other	42.6%	63.9%	56.7%	64.6%	38.4%	49.9%
Total	100 %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	1203	612	550	409	856	1815

Data source : Crossroads Bank for Social Security

These data show that gender differences are pronounced: while a quarter of men are employed or self-employed, only 10 percent of women are in that category. Labor market participation is slightly lower among people granted international protection (roughly half of the people) compared to other categories. A much larger share of them benefit from social assistance. Further research is necessary to identify the reasons for these differences, and this is beyond the scope of this chapter. But given the short duration of stay of Syrian people in Belgium, and especially among refugees, this low employment rate is not unexpected and is consistent with the slow access to employment among refugees in Belgium (Carpentier and Schoumaker, 2019). However, it clearly highlights the difficult integration on the labor market of Syrian immigrants, as is the case for many immigrants from non-EU countries.

Factors such as the lack of recognition of diplomas, limited knowledge of the national languages, or lack of social capital may contribute to the low employment rates. In contrast, obtaining a work permit is not expected to be a serious barrier to employment for people who benefit from international protection, since refugees can work without a work permit, and people with subsidiary protection can work with a C permit, which is not linked to a specific employer. Since January 2010, asylum seekers have also been allowed to work with a work permit C if they had not received a negative decision within 6 months of their asylum request (Carpentier and Schoumaker, 2019).

The BCSS data also indicate the most common types of jobs that Syrian-born people hold in Belgium (Table 8.9). The largest category is the cleaning sector, as is frequent among non-EU migrants (SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale & Unia, 2017).

Table 8.9. Types of jobs of Syrian-born population in Belgium, December 2014

Type of job	Percentage
Cleaning	13.8%
Building industry	9.0%
Interim work	8.4%
Care activities	8.7%
Trade	8.4%
Hotel and catering	7.7%
Education	7,1%
Other industries	6,4%
Other	30.6%
Total	100.0%
N	311

Data source: Crossroads Bank for Social Security.

The building industry, care activities, trade, hotel and catering, education and other industries each represent more than five percent of the activities. Interim work is also frequent, and may cover different types of activities. In summary, a large share of Syrian-born people hold jobs that do not require high levels of education.

While we do not have information on the level of education among Syrian migrants, it is likely to some of these people are overqualified for these jobs, as is frequent among non-EU migrants in Belgium (OCDE, 2007; Adam et van Dijk, 2015; Westerveen et Thys, 2016).

8.6 Conclusion

The population of Syrian origin in Belgium increased rapidly over the last few years, from less than 5,000 persons in 2010 to close to 25,000 persons in 2017. The increase largely results from the war in Syria and the migration flows that it has generated. These peaked in 2015. The majority of new Syrian immigrants have come to Belgium as asylum seekers, and more than 90 percent of asylum seekers have been granted international protection status. Since 2016, migration flows became more feminized and include more children, in parallel with an increasing share of migration for family reasons. Young men are still overrepresented in this population, but we may expect the share of children and women to continue increasing.

Given the strong increase in migration from Syria since 2010, most people have been in Belgium for very short durations. They are still dealing with the challenges of settling in a new environment, in addition to the other difficulties associated with fleeing their country at war. One of these challenges is finding a decent job. Offering training and employment opportunities to Syrian populations will be important to mitigate their economic difficulties.

8.7 References [to be completed]

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Annex

Table annex 1. Age and sex composition of the population of Syrian origin in Belgium in 2011 and 2017 (January 1st). (Source : National Register, authors' calculation).

	2011		2017	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
0–4	162	145	1 126	1 055
5–9	134	143	1 186	1 119
10–14	156	155	956	889
15–19	163	157	1 147	757
20–24	173	178	1 460	868
25–29	237	290	1 506	982
30–34	398	262	1 523	1 039
35–39	478	193	1 318	875
40–44	385	173	1 186	592
45–49	258	123	915	433
50–54	170	103	596	340
55–59	98	66	384	261
60–64	85	32	184	174
65–69	70	40	157	101
70–74	31	31	106	84
75–79	28	26	47	51
80–84	16	20	28	40
85–89	6	4	14	21
90+	2	1	7	1
Total	3 050	2 142	13 846	9 682

Table annex 2. Evolution of the size of the presence of the population of Syrian origin in Belgium between 1991 and 2017 according to the current nationality and nationality at birth. (Source: National Register, authors' calculation).

	According to the current nationality and nationality at birth		
Year	Syrian nationality at birth	Syrian nationality (current)	Syrian nationality at birth and acquired Belgian nationality
1991	1 286	855	431
1992	1 385	935	450
1993	1 490	998	492
1994	1 573	1 026	547
1995	1 657	1 020	637
1996	1 642	932	710
1997	1 730	941	789
1998	1 829	905	924
1999	1 900	833	1 067
2000	2 031	835	1 196
2001	2 144	739	1 405
2002	2 351	813	1 538
2003	2 517	846	1 671
2004	2 666	908	1 758
2005	2 912	1 027	1 885
2006	3 305	1 325	1 980
2007	3 629	1 499	2 130
2008	3 924	1 609	2 315
2009	4 213	1 633	2 580
2010	4 610	1 809	2 801
2011	5 192	2 138	3 054
2012	5 495	2 273	3 222
2013	6 055	2 564	3 491
2014	7 656	3 993	3 663

2015	9 358	5 636	3 722
2016	14 197	10 301	3 896
2017	23 528	19 397	4 131

Table annex 3. Evolution of the size of the population of Syrian origin in Belgium between 1991 and 2017 according to the country of birth (Source: National Register, authors' calculation).

	According to the place of birth		
Year	People of Syrian origin born in Belgium	People of Syrian origin born abroad	Total
1991	155	1 131	1 286
1992	174	1 211	1 385
1993	203	1 287	1 490
1994	218	1 355	1 573
1995	240	1 417	1 657
1996	254	1 388	1 642
1997	280	1 450	1 730
1998	297	1 532	1 829
1999	311	1 589	1 900
2000	340	1 691	2 031
2001	362	1 782	2 144
2002	393	1 958	2 351
2003	423	2 094	2 517
2004	441	2 225	2 666
2005	465	2 447	2 912
2006	514	2 791	3 305
2007	569	3 060	3 629
2008	623	3 301	3 924
2009	660	3 553	4 213
2010	734	3 876	4 610
2011	807	4 385	5 192
2012	857	4 638	5 495

2013	932	5 123	6 055
2014	1 022	6 634	7 656
2015	1 115	8 243	9 358
2016	1 302	12 895	14 197
2017	1 697	21 831	23 528