Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Interface Demography

Class and ethnic disadvantages in educational attainment of the second generation revisited using the Belgian Census

-

Vicky Bastiaenssen

Vicky.Bastiaenssen@vub.ac.be

Working paper presented at the XXVI IUSSP International Population Conference. Marrakech – September 27th – October 2nd 2009.

Introduction

This study considers the role of migration and group-specific ethnic penalties in minority groups' life chances. More specifically it focuses on the ethnic and class inequalities in educational attainment obtained in 2001 by the 1973 to 1979 birth cohort in Belgium. In educational attainment we include the fact of obtaining a secondary education degree as well as the delay in obtaining the secondary education. Educational differences are explained as a function of age, ethnic background, gender, region and class origin by considering characterictics of the parental household in 1991.

Since knowledge and skills are crucial in determining an individual's position both in the labour market and on the social ladder, education is of key importance for the quality of one's future life. Better education is thus often considered as a strategy for integration, especially but not exclusively in the labour market. If Belgium's second generation immigrants, as an increasing share of the population, pass the educational system being systematically disadvantaged in their future life's chances, it is of the utmost importance to fully grasp the mechanisms underlying this disadvantageous position. Additionally this may justify the consideration of policy interventions.

The association between social class and educational attainment has been extensively documented (Duncan & Blau, 1967; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1991). Given this strong tie between parental input and the educational process, immigrant children find themselves in a disadvantageous situation to begin with due to their parents' lack of familiarity with the local schooling system. There are several reasons to expect that the extent of this disadvantage has declined over time and over the generations. On the one hand, immigrant groups have now produced an adult second generation, socialized in the receiving society and having the potential to challenge or cross boundaries that are more or less taken for granted in the case of its immigrant parents (Alba, 2005). In other words, later born children of immigrants are more likely to have more assimilated parents who will provide their children with better tools for success. On the other hand, one can expect the Belgian host society to have become accustomed to a considerable proportion of immigrants in its population and society itself will anticipate the needs of the immigrant group better, both in education policies as well as in integration in general (Riphahn, 2003).

Numerous studies have examined ethnic inequalities in education. In some cases ethnic minorities attain educational levels on a par with the natives, as for example the Indians in the United Kingdom (Rothon, 2005). Sometimes they even outperform them, as Asians do in the United States (Alba &

Nee, 2003). In most Western European countries however we find that this is not the case. Children from ethnic backgrounds systematically perform worse than their peers (Kalter & Granato, 2002; Simon, 2003; Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; De Valk & Crul, 2007). The extent however is often different for the various ethnic groups. Belgian research has also found evidence of this ethnic underachievement (Lesthaeghe, 2000; Neels, 2000; Timmerman e.a., 2003).

Minority ethnic groups are heavily concentrated towards the bottom of the class structure and it might therefore be expected that many of the inequalities in performance can be explained by the differential distributions of the major ethnic groups across the occupational framework. Therefore the question is if the ethnicity effect is caused by the fact that immigrant children generally come from less advantaged backgrounds?

The questions addressed here are first whether Belgium's second generation achieves comparable educational degrees to their native counterparts and whether there are obvious differences in educational attainment between the different ethnic backgrounds. Secondly we want to assess to what extent ethnicity explains differences in educational attainment and we ask ourselves if a substantial ethnic underachievement gap remains when variation is explained as a function of gender, region and social background (household position, occupational status, educational achievement and quality of housing of the parents)? Finally we examine if traditional explanatory socio-economic variables play a similar role in explaining educational differences for youngsters from different ethnic backgrounds.

A framework to integration

Classic assimilation theory is based on the premise that the process of individual adapation leads to the convergence of the individual and the group characteristics with those of the host society over time (Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964; Alba, 2005; et al.). This implies that the second generation would be closer to their peers from the host community in educational terms. Others argue that the integration experiences of many immigrant groups remain blocked in spite of increased knowledge of the language or of the host society's culture and traditions. Veenman (1996) describes it as the deficit-thesis which states that the ethnic gap in education can be accounted for in terms of deficient qualifications.

Today we are more sceptical to these structured patterns of assimilation. We came to realise that there is no general matrix that can capture the assimilation process for all societies and for all ethnic minorities. Its heterogeneity (diversity in socio-economic traits) and its heteropraxis (diversity in pace

and domain under consideration) have become widely accepted (Lesthaeghe, 2000).

Portes and his colleagues (Portes & Zhou, 2001[1993]; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) introduced the theory of segmented assimilation which describes the various patterns of adaptation followed by different ethnic minorities resulting in convergence or divergence with the host society and which applies specifically to the second generation. Three variants are distinguished. The first classical variant concerns immigrants with a greater than average human capital and who are (partly because of that) positively received by the government and the general population. Their children usually are quite successful. The second variant applies to immigrants with little human capital. The host society is not as hospitable upon their arrival, condemning them to live in poorer neighbourhoods where they come into contact with native minorities resulting in a process of downward assimilation. The third variant or so-called linear ethnicity may be experienced when the solidarity of co-ethnic communities strengthens the immigrants and provides them social capital that compensates for their lack of human capital (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Critics of this model argue that the perspective may erroneously attribute poor outcomes primarily to racialization when they may stem from low social class (including poor educational backgrounds) or factors that slow the rate of mobility. They also point out that a model whose empirical assessment has often had to stop with the second generation (particularly a young second generation) may misinterpret oppositional attitudes commonly found among the youngsters and misconstrue the pace of assimilation. Moreover, critics claim that, since empirical assessments of segmented assimilation theory have had to focus on the second generation, not enough time has elapsed for full economic integration to occur (Brown & Dean, 2006).

Crul & Vermeulen (2003) found that the typical US model of segmented assimilation cannot be transponed to the European settings. They found that the Turkish second generation seems to qualify for the variant of upward mobility through ethnic cohesion. The Moroccan second generation however doesn't fit the pattern and they conclude that the segmented assimilation model doesn't suffice to describe the European second generation.

The Belgian migratory context

Until the First World War Belgium was primarily an emigration country. The Belgian immigration history only commenced from the 1920s onward when Belgium took in guest workers from neighbouring countries and Central- and South-European (mainly Catholic) countries, namely Poland and Italy. The economic recession in the Interbellum temporarily halted this influx of labour

migrants.

After the Second World War the Belgian economy started to attract labour immigrants again through bilateral agreements in order to rebuild the national economy. The first post-war migrant wave were Southern Europeans, mainly Italians. After the mining disaster of Marcinelle where 136 Italians died, the Italian authorities demanded more guarantees for their citizens, thus clearing the path for recruitment of labourers of other countries such as Spain, Greece, Morocco or Turkey (Eggerickx e.a., 1999). The 'golden sixties' and its economic growth intensified the demand for low- and unskilled workers. Thus it resulted in increased recruitment of low- and unskilled guest workers originating from the broader Mediterranean and was facilitated by bilateral agreements. They primarily came from Turkey and Morocco. During the economic recession Belgium closed its boundaries for unskilled workers and proclaimed a moratorium on immigration. Since most immigrants were employed in the industrial sector, they fell disproportionally victim to economic restructuring and to massive unemployment. Because of the poor economic situation in their home countries and because of the family reunification or family formation programs, the intended return labour migration was no option for most 'guest' workers (Eggerickx e.a., 1999; Timmerman e.a., 2003). This family induced immigration assured the numbers of Moroccans and Turks to continuously grow and resulted in permanent settlement of immigrant families and communities. By the 1990s the first adult second generation of immigrant origin were leaving school and entering the labour market (Timmerman, e.a., 2003).

Summarizing Belgian immigration can be subdivided in an 'old' and 'new' immigration flow. The former, exclusively European, drew mainly from populations with a Catholic background and was directed towards the heavy mining and steel industries in Liège and Hainaut in Wallonia and towards Limburg in Flanders. The latter is non-European and mainly Muslim and was attracted to work in a broader scope of labour sectors, such as for example construction. They were primarily low and unskilled labourers (Lesthaeghe, 2000). Since the 1990s immigration has become much more diversified through a mixture of political and economical asylum seekers and refugees from Third World countries and from former European communist countries, entailed by the 'pull'-factor of the 'successful' West.

The Belgian educational system

Since Belgium is a federal state, the Dutch and Frenchspeaking communities (respectively Flanders and Wallonia) can formulate and implement educational policies independently. Yet the school system is completely similar and is characterised by a common hierarchical structure (figure 1).

Compulsory education in Belgium starts at 6 and continues until the age of 18. From the age of 2,5 years, children can attend nursery school. In the 1980s it was quite common for Turkish and Moroccan parents not to send their children to nursery school, thus encumbering their children with a drawback before their school careers even commenced. This situation has gradually changed, and now almost all their children go to pre-school as well (Timmerman e.a., 2003).

After 6 years of primary education, children enter the first two orientation years of secondary education. Pupils are already divided between a higher track and a lower track (only about 10% of the pupils), the latter accrues to vocational training only. Predominantly children who had to repeat at least one year of primary education end up in this lower track. Turks and Moroccans are overrepresented in this group. One of the main reason for this overrepresentation is insufficient mastering of the school language and this is especially the case in Dutchspeaking Flanders (Timmerman e.a., 2003).

At the age of 14 an important branching point occurs when students are channelled into three tracks of secondary education: the higher general track, the middle technical and the lower vocational track in secondary education. It are mainly those students who follow general and, to a lesser degree, technical secondary education who make the transition to higher education. Students who follow vocational education (either part- or full-time) enter the labour market either immediately or after one or more years of post-secondary education.

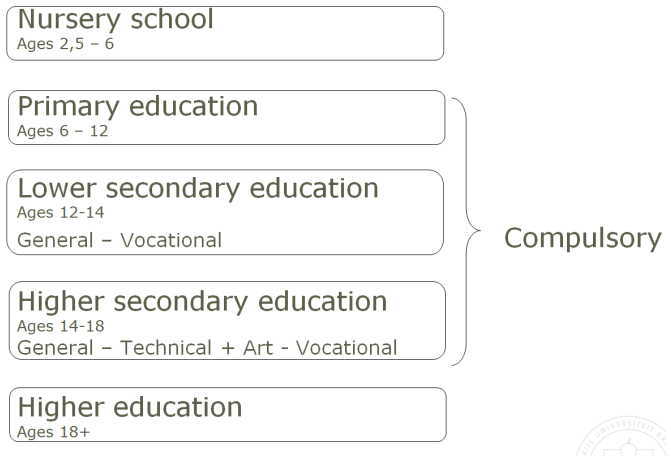

Figure 1: Overview of the Belgian educational system

The educational attainment of first-generation Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in Belgium is low. In general, Turkish immigrants of the first generation are better educated than their Moroccan peers. Over 50 percent of the latter had obtained no formal qualifications prior to emigration to Belgium. The educational attainment of first-generation immigrants from Morocco and Turkey varies considerably with age: the younger they are, the better educated they are (Reniers, 2000). First generation Turks and Moroccans are twice as likely (controlling for age and sex differentials), of

having no degree of secondary education (Eggerickx e.a., 1999).

Educational attainments of Belgian youngsters differ substantially and are subject to regional variation. This regional variation is a result of differing policies but also of differing tracking practices despite of the common hierarchical structures in education. Students who fail their exams in the French-speaking Wallonia are more often repeating class. The Dutch-speaking Flanders is characterised by the so-called 'cascading system' where pupils are more often reoriented 'downward' towards vocational tracks (Ouali & Réa, 1994). Turks are more likely to take up technical or vocational training and are mostly leaving school after graduating secondary education. Moroccans on the other hand are more likely to take up general subjects at the secondary level, but show higher proportions of dropping out (Neels, 2000). Despite of slight signs of improvement over the last decade, ethnic minorities still find themselves more at risk of ending up in the lower tracks of secondary education compared to their native peers (Bastiaenssen, 2009).

These ethnic differences in education coincide with the regional dispersion of the different ethnic backgrounds, as illustrated by figure 2, where you can see the dispersion of the ethnic origins. Here ethnic origin is measured by combining current nationality with nationality at birth.

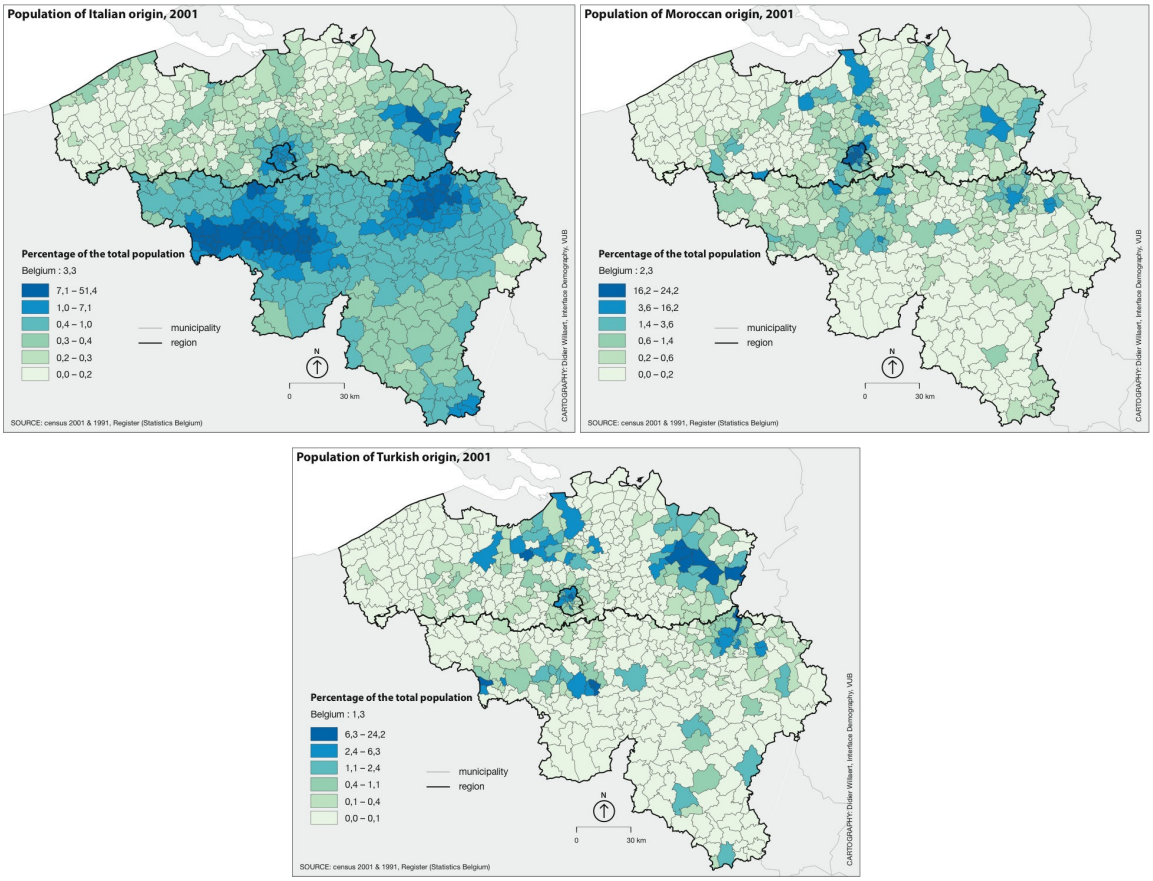

Figure 2: Regional dispersion of Italians, Moroccans and Turks, Census 2001 & Census 1991

(maps by Didier Willaert – Interface Demography)

For youngsters still living with their parents, the nationality at birth of the reference person is taken into consideration. Italians predominantly live in the Frenchspeaking Walloon area (south), Brussels and the east of Flanders (Limburg). The typical mining areas in Wallonia and Limburg can still be recognized as living areas for their Italian guestworkers. Turks more often live in Flanders, especially Limburg and around Antwerp, whereas Moroccans predominantly live in Brussels, in the main agglomerations in Flanders and the Walloon area.

The educational opportunities of youngsters are determined by their social, economic and cultural capital. Because of their sociohistorical background of immigration from relatively underdeveloped areas and considering their low levels of education, first-generation migrants often lack the necessary (or useful) capital to adequately support their offspring. Thus one can expect the second generation to perform worse than their peers. Marks (2005) found this ethnic achievement gap for the second generation in Belgium among the largest in comparison to other OECD countries.

Recent research examining the highest diploma of the Belgian second generation (Phalet, Deboosere & Bastiaenssen, 2007) found parental resources to be very powerful explanatory variables for ethnic minority and native people. It concluded that educational disadvantage of ethnic minorities indeed were perpertuated mainly through mechanisms of class disadvantage. Evidence of a cumulative ethnic and class penalty was found, especially among Turkish and Moroccan minorities.

Important regional differences were found by Bastiaenssen (2009) in regard to the educational track of different ethnic groups and in regard to the impact of the socio-economical explanatory variables. Apparently a clear ethnic gap in educational attainment remains after taking social background differentials into account. This ethnic gap is most notable in Flanders which indicates on the one hand that the local tracking practice of reorienting students more easily to the lower tracks of secondary education tends to attribute to the initial disadvantegous position second generation youngsters find themselves in. On the other hand it may also indicate that the Dutch language barrier is more difficult to overcome.

Data and methods

This paper uses data from the Belgian Census 1991 and Census 2001. The data consist of a twenty percent random sample of youngsters of the 1973 to 1979 birth cohort still living with their parents in 1991, linked with their outcome in 2001. The analysis is restricted to second generation youngsters and youngsters still living in Belgium in 2001.

This longitudinal dataset allows us to identify key demographic, socio-economic and ethnic

characteristics of parental households and to estimate their effects on the educational attainment of the next generation. The data enables us to map the position of the youngsters in detail without having to worry about sample sizes. On the other hand our data is limited to socio-demographic traits, with no characteristics on values or on social networks. Secondly, since Moroccans have more affinity with French because of the Moroccan colonial ties with France, and since French is the official language in the Walloon and the Brussels region compared to Dutch in the Flemish region, mastering the language of education is of enormous importance for educational success (Lesthaeghe, 2000). However due to the specific political and regional background of Belgium an official count of which language used is prohibited and is a shortcoming of these data. Another important limitation is the fact that unit and item non-response are higher in immigrant populations compared to the Belgian population (Stoop & Surkyn, 1996). Explanations have to be sought in language deficiency on the one hand and the social composition of the immigrant population on the other (e.g. respondents with little education are overrepresented). Moreover, the validity of immigrant responses to crucial questions (specifically on education and occupation) is often dubious because they are not adapted to educational or labour systems in the home country. These limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

We focus on the three biggest ethnic minorities in Belgium: namely Italians, Moroccans and Turks. Because of the enhanced possibilities for ethnic minorities and their children to obtain the Belgian nationality in the nineties, nationality in combination with nationality at birth no longer suffice to identify youngsters of immigrant origin. By taking both their and their parents' nationality at birth into account, various migrant groups are identified and distinguished. Thus different ethnic groups are identified through ancestry rather than nationality. The advantage of this method is that we thus homogenise the various ethnic groups and maximize the differences between the ethnic backgrounds. Table 1 shows the numbers included in the analysis (origin) and what their numbers would be reduced to when we would consider ethnic origin by nationality at birth, nationality in 1991 and nationality in 2001. It also shows the huge impact of the changed legislation to obtain the Belgian nationality in the nineties.

	origin		nationality at birth		nationality 1991		nationality 2001	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Belgians	68525,00	93,45	68087,00	94,50	69442,00	96,38	70069	98,33
Italians	2699,00	3,68	2201,00	3,05	1575,00	2,19	882	1,24
Moroccans	1126,00	1,54	943,00	1,31	848,00	1,18	210	0,29
Turks	981	1,34	819	1,14	771	1,07	98	0,14
Total	73331,00		72050,00		72636,00		71259	

Table 1: Ethnic groups (aged 18-28 in 2001) in analysis, measured by ethnic origin, nationality at birth,

nationality in 1991 and nationality in 2001.

The youngsters of mixed backgrounds form an interesting group on its own, since one can expect that they hold a middle position between the second generation and its native peers. This is however a research problem on its own and they were not included in this analysis.

Educational attainment will be modelled in this paper as the probability that a respondent has obtained a degree of secondary education at the time of the Census 2001. This probability will be modelled as a function of age in 2001, ethnic background, gender, region, and social background of the parental household in 1991.

As mentioned above regional dispersion and regional education practices are quite different, so it is both neceassary and interesting to include region (Flanders, Walloon area and Brussels) as a covariate. Furthermore we control for gender differences.

Social background of the parental household in 1991 is characterised by the following variables:

- Household type

  Since single parenthood may have differential effects, we include household type in the analysis. We distinguish between married, cohabitating or single households. Table 2 shows us the cross table of householdtype in function of nationality. Cohabitation appears to be very rare with people from Moroccan and Turkish descent.

		married	cohabitating	single
Belgians	N	52567	1700	14258
	% of Belgians	76,71%	2,48%	20,80%
Italians	N	2038	49	612
	% of Italians	75,51%	1,81%	22,68%
Moroccans	N	922	6	198
	% of Moroccans	81,88%	0,53%	17,58%
Turks	N	881	1	99
	% of Turks	89,81%	0,10%	10,09%

Table 2: Cross table of ethnic origin in function of household type (N=73331)

- Parental educational status

  Although most research on intergenerational mobility has focused on the role of the father as the main determinant of social class origin, using a scheme that includes social class of both parents might be useful in the light of the varying genderroles with various ethnic groups (Rothon,2005). Taking into account the educational achievement of both parents in 1991, where the parent whose socio-economic attainment is dominant tends to outrank the other, we distinguish between at least one parent has completed higher education; at least

one has completed higher secondary education; at least one has completed lower secondary education; at least one parent has completed primary education or both parents have no formal education. When children were living in a monoparental household or when information of one parent was missing, parental educational status is determined by the highest education qualifications of the single or non-missing parent alone.

One should remember that educational qualifications of many immigrant parents are based on qualifications obtained in the home country. In that sense, one might argue that they are not relevant in the host country nor can they be considered in the same way as for natives. However, they still form a good base for including both family-based human and cultural capital.

		both no formal education or primary education	at least one lower secondary education	at least one higher secondary education degree	at least one in higher education
Belgians	N	7628	17646	19785	20222
	% of Belgians	11,68%	27,03%	30,31%	30,98%
Italians	N	682	907	638	227
	% of Italians	27,79%	36,96%	26,00%	9,25%
Moroccans	N	670	198	102	22
	% of Moroccans	67,54%	19,96%	10,28%	2,22%
Turks	N	543	222	87	30
	% of Turks	61,56%	25,17%	9,86%	3,40%

Table 3: Cross table of ethnic origin in function of parental educational achievement in 1991(N=69609)

Table 3 illustrates the poor educational background of the second generation's parents in comparison to their Belgian counterparts. Especially the educational status of parents of youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish descent is very poor. About two thirds of them have no formal education or only primary education.

- Parental occupational status

Here too we develop a class scheme based on both parents' labour market activity in 1991. Collapsed EGP-class categories of both parents were used to determine the social class which the youngster grew up in. In the case of single parents, their class determines the student's social class. The following categories are distinguished: at least one parent in professional or managerial occupations; at least one parent in routine non-manual or skilled manual occupations, or working on his/her own account; at least one parent in semi- or unskilled manual work; not working (both parents, or a single parent, unemployed or economically inactive).

As table 4 shows, more than half of Turkish and Moroccan respondents lived with parents who were both not working in 1991. Although the parental occupational status of the Italian youngsters is more favourable, it still lags behind the parental occupational status of the

natives.

		at least one in professional or managerial	at least one in routine non-manual, skilled manual or working on his own	at least one in semi- or unskilled manual work	both not working
Belgians	N	26586	23445	7917	7953
	% of Belgians	40,34%	35,58%	12,01%	12,07%
Italians	N	366	1217	302	707
	% of Italians	14,12%	46,95%	11,65%	27,28%
Moroccans	N	33	238	233	577
	% of Moroccans	3,05%	22,02%	21,55%	53,38%
Turks	N	27	211	148	559
	% of Turks	2,86%	22,33%	15,66%	59,15%

Table 4: Cross table of ethnic origin in function of parental occupational status in 1991 (N=70519)

- Parental economical status: housing

  Very often the nature of self-reported earnings is unreliable, therefore the quality and ownership of housing provide a better estimation of material wealth. Combining information on quality of housing and on ownership enables us to distinguish between four groups: tenant of a low quality house, tenant of a high or middle quality house, owner of a low quality house and owner of a high or middle quality house.

  In 1991 housing status for all ethnic backgrounds was worse in comparison to the Belgians. Once again Moroccans and Turks find themselves in the least favourable position with the Italians holding a middle position.

		tenant, low comfort	tenant, middle or high comfort	owner, low comfort	owner, middle or high comfort
Belgians	N	6710	5704	14370	36093
	% of Belgians	10,67%	9,07%	22,85%	57,40%
Italians	N	365	220	727	1143
	% of Italians	14,87%	8,96%	29,61%	46,56%
Moroccans	N	387	84	340	131
	% of Moroccans	41,08%	8,92%	36,09%	13,91%
Turks	N	361	106	283	120
	% of Turks	41,49%	12,18%	32,53%	13,79%

Table 5: Cross table of ethnic origin in function of housing status in 1991 (N=67144)

Four models were generated to model the probability that a respondent has obtained a degree of secondary education at the time of the Census 2001:

- Model 1 includes age in 2001 and ethnicity.
- Model 2 adds gender and region to the model.
- Model 3 incorporates the social background differentials (household type, parental educational status, parental occupational status and housing).
- Model 4 includes all interaction terms with ethnic background.

Results of all models can be found in appendix 1.

Educational attainment at first glance

Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents who find themselves with a degree of secondary education at the time of the Census 2001, as a function of their ethnic background. The proportion that succesfully finishes secondary education is smaller for each ethnic background in comparison to their Belgian peers. About 85% of the Belgian respondents obtain a secondary education degree. This drops to 75% for Italians, to 68% for Moroccans and to 65% for Turks.

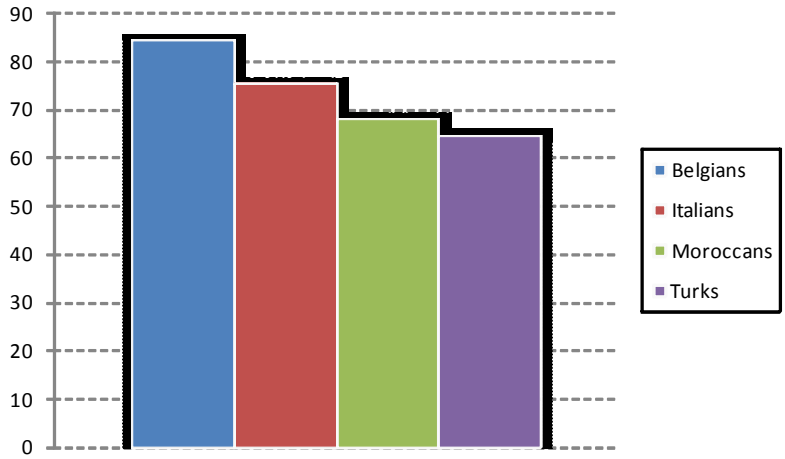

Figure 3: Percentage of ethnic groups obtaining secondary education degree (N=71190)

This does not however shed light on the track of secondary education youngsters obtain their degree in. Earlier findings (Bastiaenssen, 2009) showed that the proportion of students in the lower vocational track in secondary education is considerably higher for all ethnic groups compared to their native counterparts, especially for Turks and Moroccans. In comparison to Moroccans Turks are more likely to graduate from the lower tracks of secondary education and they are the most likely to leave school with less than full secondary qualifications. Moroccans on the other hand are more likely to take up the higher general track at the secondary level, but those who do more often drop out (Phalet e.a., 2007; Neels, 2000). Unfortunately track of secondary education one graduated in, couldn't be taken into account because of the large numbers of missings. When interpreting the results, we will however have to bear this in mind.

Ethnic underchievement in education?

Tables 6 elaborates on how the effect of ethnicity changes throughout the different models. Throughout the unsaturated models Turks have the least favourable odds of obtaining a secondary

education diploma. Moroccans only find themselves in a slightly better position. Whereas Italians do siginifcantly better than Turks and Moroccans but are outperformed by the natives. The gross ethnicity effect of model 1 is slightly weakened when we take gender and region into account (model 2), but almost completely disappears when controlling for the social background characteristics (model 3). Then only the odds for the youngsters from Turkish descent remain significantly different from those of the Belgian reference category. This would lead one to believe that ethnic underachievement can primarily be explained as a social class underachievement and is consistent with earlier findings (Phalet e.a., 2007). When interactions with ethnicity come into play (model 4) the impact of ethnicity for the reference category (an 18-year-old man living in Flanders and in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent has a higher education degree and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job), has increased once more and has become even bigger than the gross effects of model 1.

	model 1		model 2		model 3		model 4	
	Exp (B)	Sig.	Exp (B)	Sig.	Exp (B)	Sig.	Exp (B)	Sig.
ethnicity (ref. Belgians)		***		***		*		**
Italians	0,558	***	0,706	***	0,906	+	0,541	*
Moroccans	0,394	***	0,486	***	1,002		0,195	*
Turks	0,340	***	0,364	***	0,777	**	0,257	*

Table 6: Odds-ratios for ethnicity in all models

Significance levels: + p<0.10, * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001

Figure 4 shows the probabilities of graduating from secondary education successfully and shows that for our reference category men from Moroccan descent have the lowest probabilities, only to be overtaken by Turks at the highest ages under consideration.

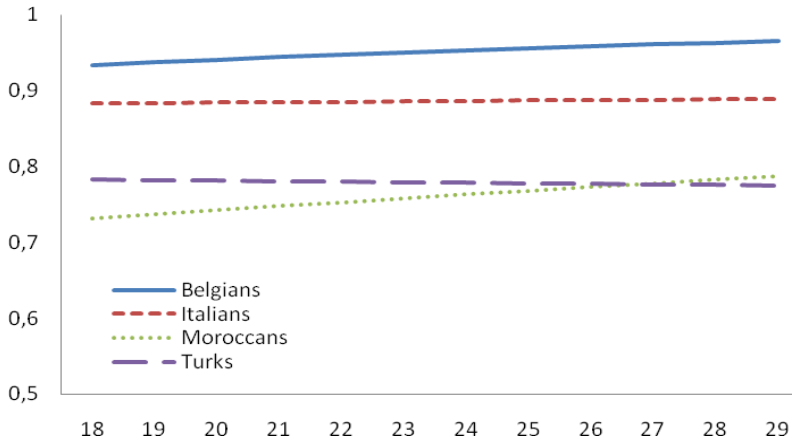

Figure 4: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age and ethnic background, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent has a higher education degree and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job

It is apparent that we need to enhance our understanding of the impact of the social background differentials and their interplay with ethnic origin.

Explaining ethnic underachievement by social background differentials

Since our main focus in this contribution is on the impact of social background differentials on the educational attainment of various ethnic groups, we start by discussing the characteristics of the family that the respondent grew up in.

(a) Household type

Figure 5 describes the predicted probabilities of having graduated from secondary education as a function of age, ethnic origin and household type. For Belgian children of the reference category, living with a couple that is living together without being married generates the least favourable probabilities. For Italians these are generated for those living in a monoparental household. Since cohabitation is very rare for Moroccan and Turkish families, we limit ourselves to the comparison of children in a married family versus children from singles. For all groups children from single parents demonstrate lower probabilities of having graduated from secondary education. However, all ethnic groups have bigger differences in probabilities when comparing children of married couples with children of singles.

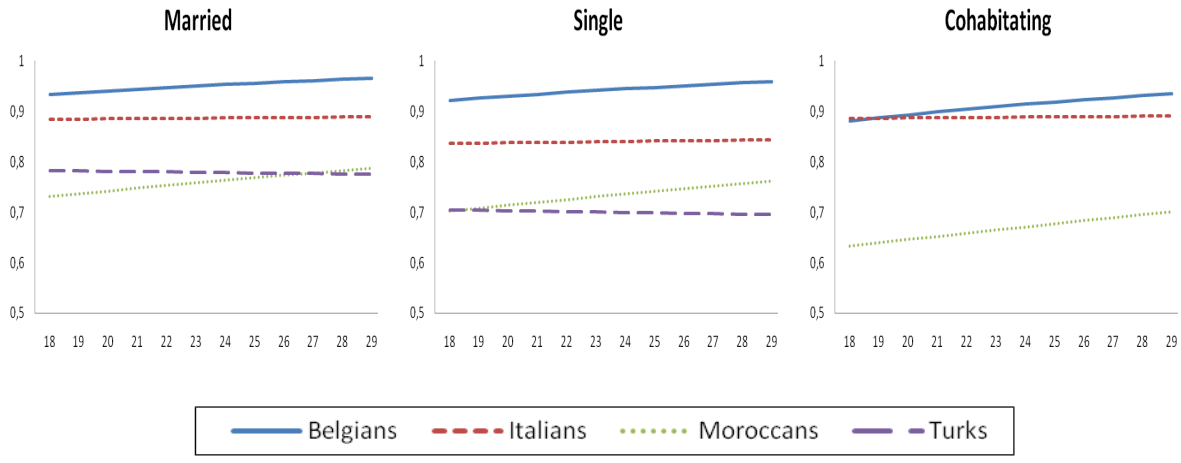

Figure 5: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and household type, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males in Flanders, in 1991 living in a household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job and of which at least one has a degree of higher education

(b) Parental educational achievement

Looking at the impact of educational qualifications of the parents on the probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree (figure 6), one quickly notices the huge differences that are generated by differences in parental educational status. One also notices a clear gradient: more educated parental backgrounds entail higher probabilities of finishing secondary education succesfully. This holds more or less for all nationalities. Only for Turks the gradient isn't completely endorsed. Turkish children of parents with a degree of tertiary education have lower probabilities of obtaining a secondary education degree than those living with parents without any formal education or with primary education.

Belgians generally have the best probabilities. Exception to this are the younger Turks in the lower educated families, they outperform the Belgians and have better probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree. Here we need to remind ourselves that this is regardless of track in secondary education and that this may explain the observed probabilities.

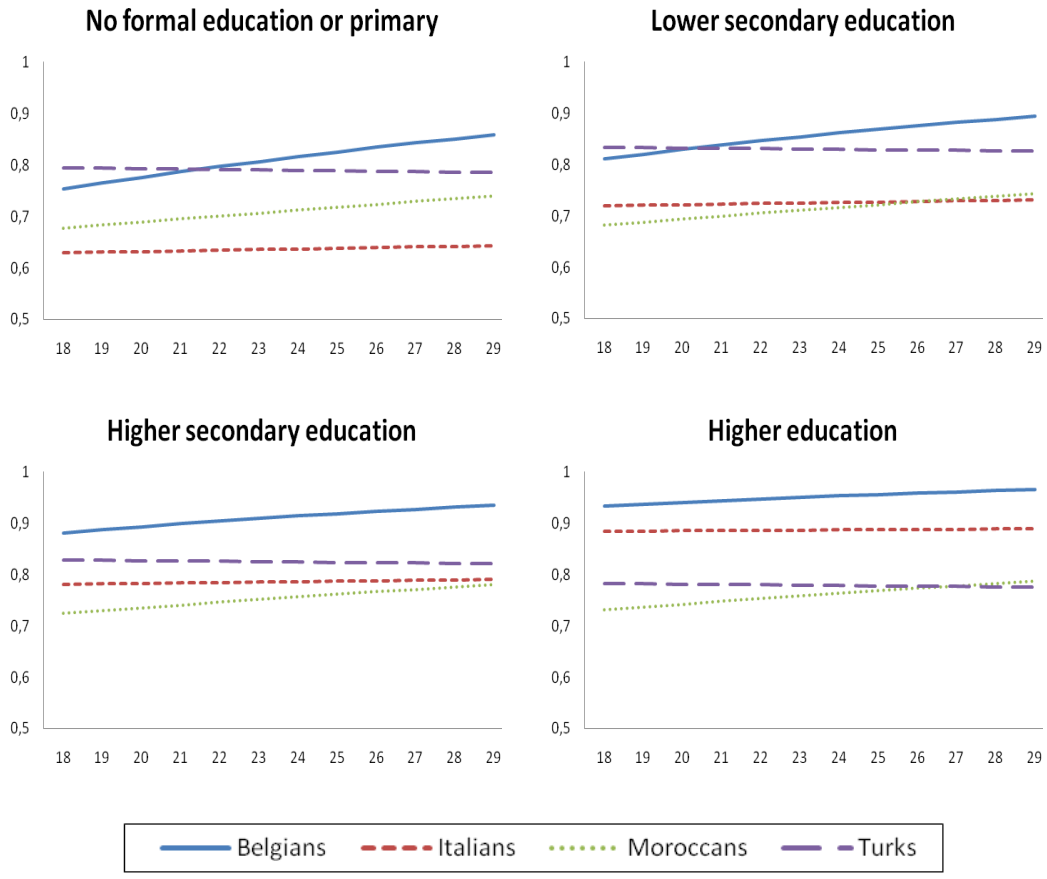

Figure 6: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and parental educational achievement, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job

The impact of differences in parental education is however not similar. Italians 'gain' the most in terms of probabilities with increasing parental education. So despite of demonstrating a clear gradient for all ethnic groups, the impact of parental education on the various ethnic groups is very different.

(c) Parental occupational status

In regard to the impact of parental occupational status on educational attainment figure 7 shows that regardless of parental social class Belgians have the highest probabilities of graduating secondary education.

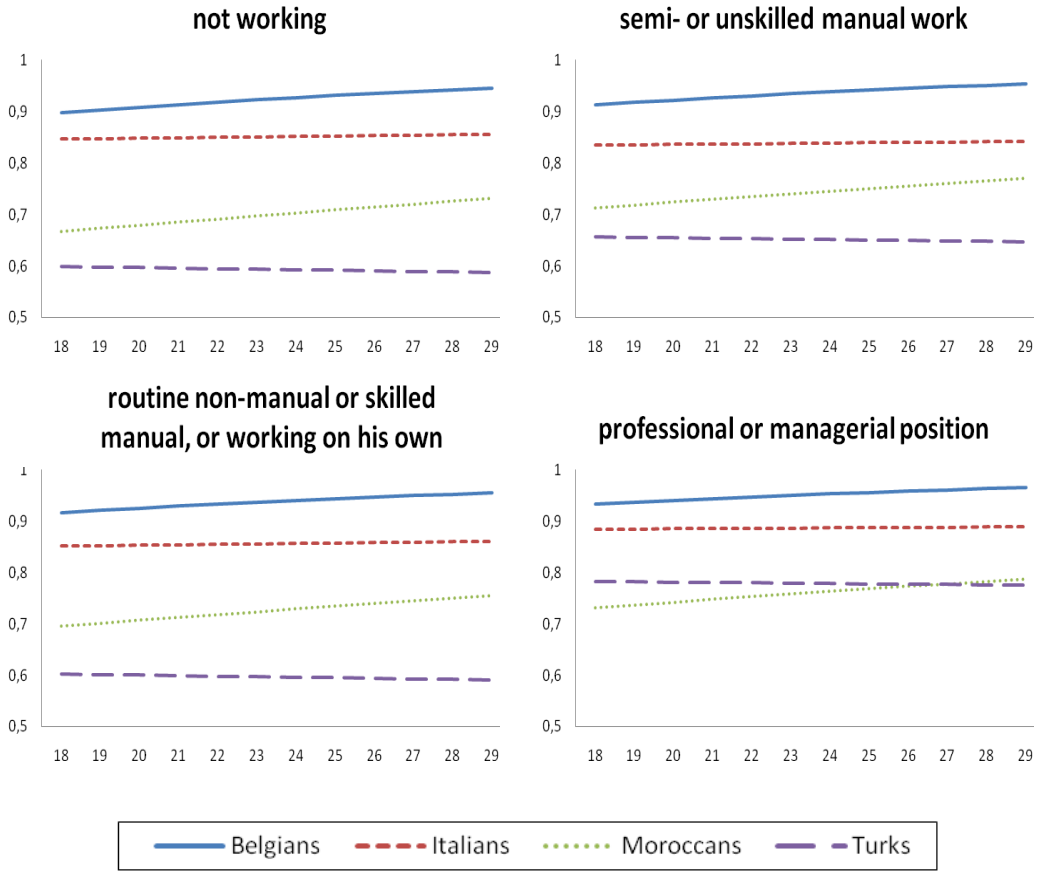

Figure 7: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and parental occupational status, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent has a degree of higher education

For parental social class a gradient can be observed as well and this once again for all nationalities. The higher the parents are on the social ladder, the lower the risk of ending without a secondary education degree. However the impact of parental social class is once more different for the various ethnic groups.

Apparently for Morroccans it is sufficient for one of the parents to work, regardless of the work status, to increase probabilities to finish secondary education successfully drastically. For them parental occupational status clearly has become less important in explaining educational differentials. For Turks however one of the parents has to work in a professional of managerial job in order to generate a drastic increase in probabilities. Evidently the impact of parental social class shows quite some variation.

(d) Housing

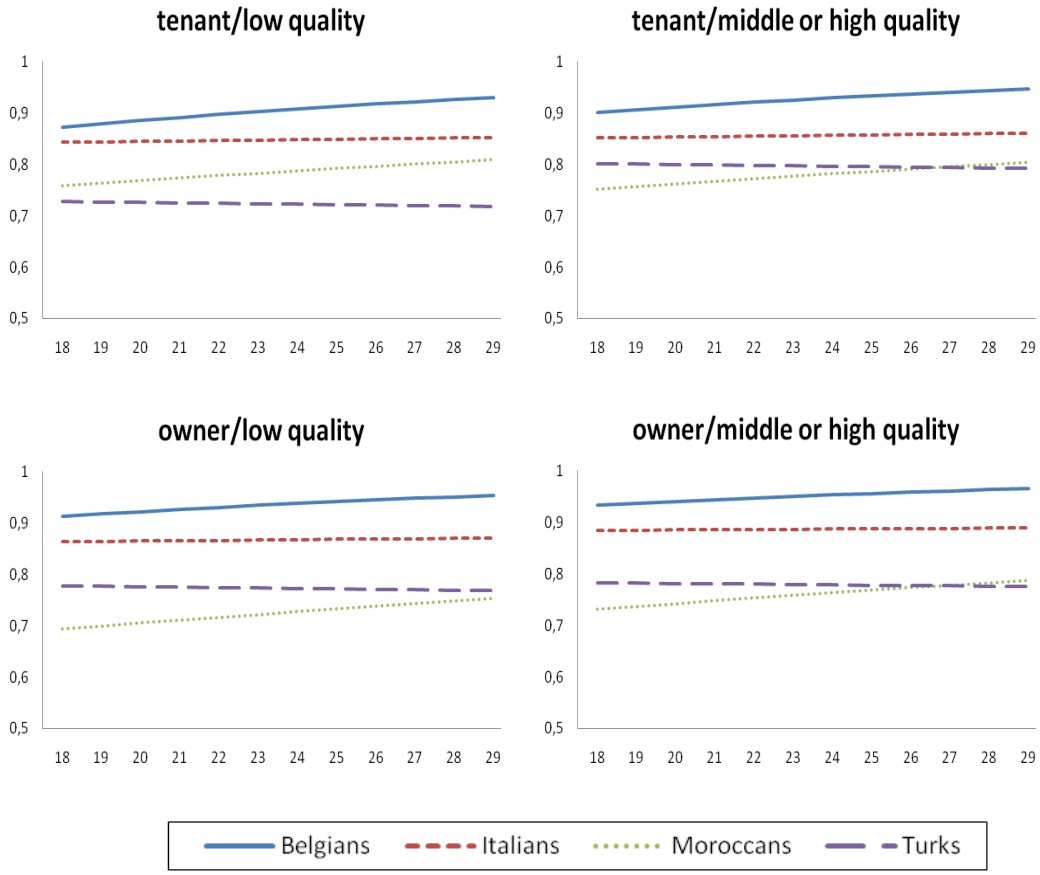

Figure 8: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and parental housing, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household of which at least one parent has a degree of higher education and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job

The final social background variable under consideration is the economic status, measured through the housing status. Quality and ownership of housing has the smallest impact for youngsters of Moroccan descent (figure 8). A clear gradient with regard to the discriminating power of housing can be observed for the Italian and Belgian group. For the Turkish group probabilities improve most when transition is made to a higher quality dwelling or to ownership of the housing.

Summarizing the impact of the social background differentials we can say that they play a very important role in explaing educational differences. Apparently the mechanism of the impact of the social background variables on educational differences appears to be very heterogenous for each ethnic group. Differences in parental educational occupation generate the biggest differences in probabilities.

Looking on class and ethnic disadvantages through gender and regional differences

Now that the impact of social class in educational attainment combined wth ethnic background has been elucidated on, we want to assess this in regard to gender and regional differences.

(a) Gender

As figure 9 points out, females have higher probabilities of obtaining a secondary education degree and this holds for all ethnic groups. The biggest gender gap can be observed for the Turks, followed by the Moroccans, the Italians and the smallest gender gap can be found for the Belgians.

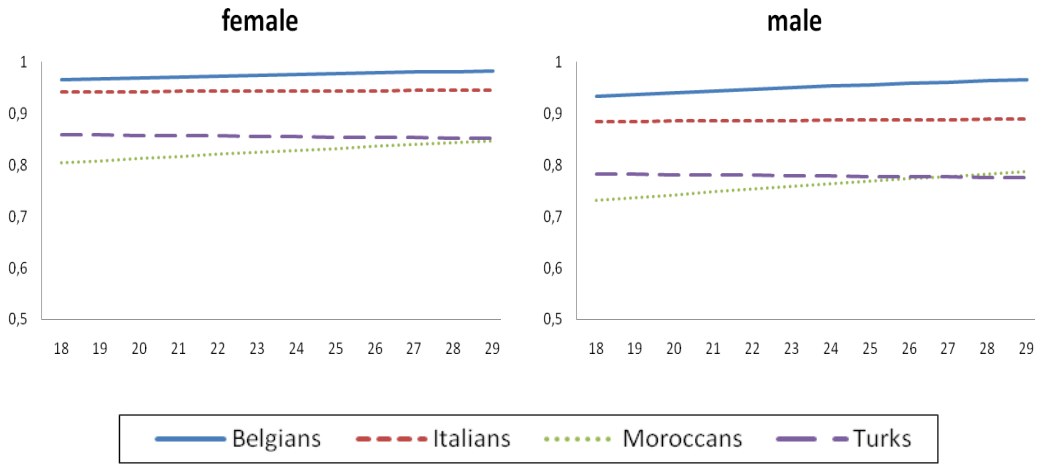

Figure 9: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and gender, model 4*

* Regression lines are for respondents in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job and of which at least one has a degree of higher education

This gender gap not only holds but increases when we take parental educational into account, as illustrated by table 7. By comparing the gender gap for youngsters from the highest parental

backgrounds to that for youngsters from the lowest parental educational background, we notice that only for Turks the observed gender gap remains about the same. Both the biggest increase and the biggest gender gap can be observed for Italians whose parents have no formal educational qualifications or have a degree of primary education at the most. For Moroccans there is a small increase in the gender gap. This also adds to the evidence found that the effects of social background differentials differ for the ethnic group under consideration.

		no formal education or primary		higher education	
		Probabilities	Ethnic gap (vs Belgians)	Probabilities	Ethnic gap (vs Belgians)
female	Belgians	86,0%		96,6%	
	Italians	78,3%	7,7%	94,1%	2,4%
	Moroccans	75,9%	10,1%	80,3%	16,2%
	Turks	86,6%	-0,6%	85,8%	10,8%
male	Belgians	75,3%		93,3%	
	Italians	63,0%	12,3%	88,3%	5,0%
	Moroccans	67,8%	7,6%	73,2%	20,1%
	Turks	79,3%	-4,0%	78,3%	15,1%
gender gap	Belgians	10,6%		3,2%	
	Italians	15,3%		5,8%	
	Moroccans	8,1%		7,2%	
	Turks	7,2%		7,6%	

Table 7: Expected probabilities, gender and ethnic gap in expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of ethnic background, parental educational status and gender, model 4*

* Probabilities for 18-year-olds in Flanders, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job

(b) Region

Regional differences in probabilities between the ethnic groups can be seen in figure 10.

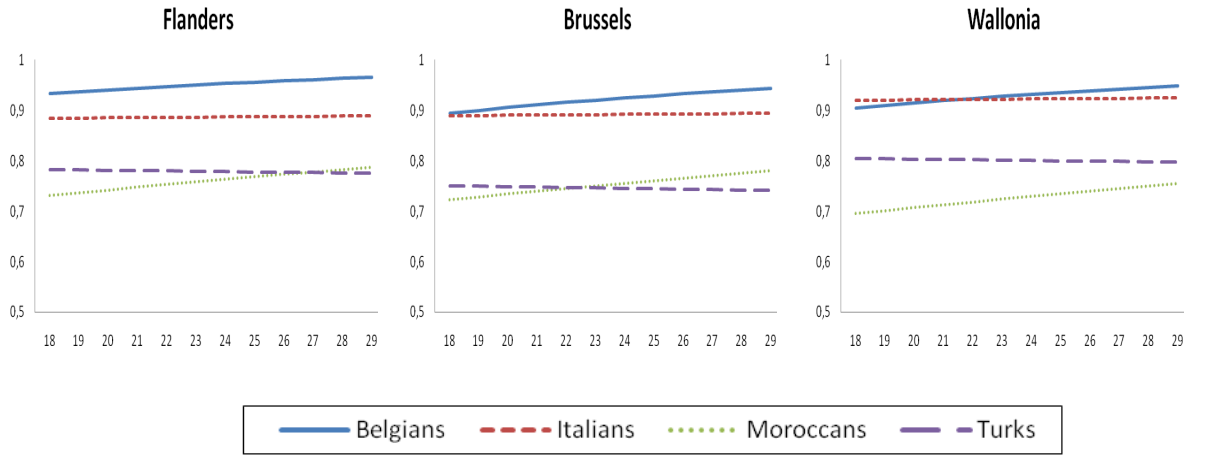

Figure 10: Expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of age, ethnic background and region, model 4*

* Regression lines are for males, in 1991 living in a household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job and of which at least one has a degree of higher education

For all regions the Belgian respondents have the best probabilities of graduating from secondary education. The younger Italians belonging to our reference group and living in Wallonia form an exception to this. They outperform the Belgians.

The ethnic gap with the Belgian reference group is the biggest in Flanders. Possibly the language barrier remains bigger here and is (at least partly) responsible for the bigger ethnic gaps observed. Moroccans in Wallonia also show a noteable ethnic gap with their Belgian peers. Although this gap reduces when we consider Moroccan and Belgian youngsters from lower social backgrounds (table 8). An ethnic gap in probabilities of 20,8% for the reference group at age 18, for example, is reduced to a 3,5 % ethnic gap for youngsters with parents without any formal education, all other covariates kept constant. This clearly indicates that Moroccan youngsters from the lower social strata are far less disadvantaged in Wallonia in comparison to their Belgian counterparts. In Flanders the same ethnic gap between Moroccans and Belgians is reduced from 20,1% to 7,6%.

Regardless of region youngsters from Turkish descent whose parents have the lowest educational qualifications show more favourable probabilities than Belgians. The ethnic disadvantage that could be observed for Turkish youngsters whose parents have the highest educational qualifications has turned into an ethnic advantage when considering youngsters of parents without education or with only a primary education degree.

		no formal education or primary		higher education	
		Probability	Etnic gap (vs Belgians)	Probability	Etnic gap (vs Belgians)
Flanders	Belgians	75,3%		93,3%	
	Italians	63,0%	12,3%	88,3%	5,0%
	Moroccans	67,8%	7,6%	73,2%	20,1%
	Turks	79,3%	-4,0%	78,3%	15,1%
Brussels	Belgians	65,0%		89,5%	
	Italians	64,2%	0,9%	88,9%	0,7%
	Moroccans	66,8%	-1,8%	72,4%	17,1%
	Turks	76,2%	-11,2%	75,0%	14,5%
Wallonia	Belgians	67,3%		90,4%	
	Italians	72,2%	-4,9%	92,0%	-1,6%
	Moroccans	63,8%	3,5%	69,6%	20,8%
	Turks	81,5%	-14,2%	80,5%	10,0%

Table 8: Expected probabilities and gender gap in expected probabilities of having obtained a secondary education degree as a function of ethnic background, parental educational status and gender, model 4*

* Probabilities for 18-year-old males, in 1991 living in a married household that owns a house of middle or high quality and of which at least one parent works in a professional or managerial job

This proofs that regional variation in regard to the impact of social background on the different ethnic groups cannot be discarded and that different paths explain the way social background differentials work in different regions.

Thus the explaining of ethnic differences in educational attainment becomes even more heterogenous: not only, as shown before, in regard to impact of the social background differentials but also in regard to regional variation in Belgium.

Conclusion

Generally ethnic minorities still find themselves more at risk of ending up without a degree of secondary education. Occasionally some specific youngsters of ethnic descent (especially groups of the lower socio-economic strata) outperform the Belgians. However these are more exceptions than rules. This can probably be accounted for by the fact that they tend to obtain degrees of lower tracks of secondary education as found in previous studies (Phalet e.a., 2007; Neels, 2000). Unfortunately this could not be included in our analysis.

Socio-economic background appears to be very powerful in explaining educational differences for native and migrant groups alike, however they are less powerful explanatory variables for the migrant groups. This is partly caused by the fact that the socio-economic composition of the ethnic minority groups shows less variation. The predominantly low education of the first generation, their working-class profile in addition to the higher rates of unemployment and inactivity and their economic less advantaged position all contribute to the higher risks of their offspring ending up in less favourable educational careers. It seems however, to be impossible to provide a general framework that explains educational differences in a sufficient way for all ethnic groups.

The effects of the socio-economic differentials appear to be different across the ethnic groups under consideration although mostly a gradient can be observed. This is most obvious and most general for parental educational status: the higher the parental education, the higher the probabilities of obtaining a secondary education degree. To a lesser extent this also holds for parental occupational status. Regarding economic status (housing) the gradient is less clear. However, the magnititude and impact of the observed gradients are different for the various migrant groups.

Since regional tracking practices in education and regional disperion of ethnic groups are important in Belgium, we focused on regional differences as well. Important regional differences were found in regard to the probabilities of obtaining a secondary education degree and in regard to the impact of the socio-economical explanatory variables. Apparently a clear ethnic gap in educational attainment remains after taking social background differentials into account. This ethnic gap is most notable in Flanders which may indicate that local tracking practice of reorienting students to the lower tracks of secondary education tends to attribute to the initial disadvantegous position second generation youngsters find themselves in. On the other hand it may also indicate that the language barrier is more difficult to overcome. Further research to disentangle this would be advised.

Thus support is found of a segmented assimilation, but clearly this assimilation differs from the one observed in the United States. Heterogeneity and differentiation appear to be the key words in explaining ethnic underachievement in education in Belgium, regarding the impact of socio-economic background, regarding the pace of change and regarding the regional features.

References

Alba, R. (2005). Bright vs. blurred boundaries: Second-Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(1):20-49.

Alba, R. & V. Nee (2003). Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bastiaenssen, V. (2009). Impact of Social Class and Ethnicity on Educational Attainment. Working paper presented at the workshop on Second Generation Research Dialogues. Berlin, January 16-17, 2009.

Blau, P.M. & O.D. Duncan (1967). The Process of Stratification. In: Blau, P.M. & O.D. Duncan (eds.), *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: John Wiley & Lens, p.163-177.

Bourdieu, P. & J.-C. Passeron (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.

Brown, S. & F. Dean (2006). New immigrants, new models of assimilation. Paper prepared for a Special Issue on "The Second Generation," Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC.

Crul, M. & H. Vermeulen (2003). The Second Generation in Europe. *International Migration Review* 37(4):965-986.

Eggerickx, T., C. Kesteloot, M. Poulain, K. Peleman, T. Roesens & H. Vandenbroecke (1999). *De allochtone bevolking in België*. Censusmonofieën, Vol 3. Brussels: National Institute of Statistics.

Gordon, M.M. (1964). Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins. New York: Oxford University Press.

Heath, A. & J. Ridge (1983). Social Mobility of Ethnic Minorities. *Journal of Biosocial Science Supplement* 8:169-184.

Heath, A. & S. Smith (2003). Mobility and Etnic Minorities*. New Economy - London* 10(4):199-204.

Hirschman, C. & Wong, M.G. (1986). The extraordinary educational attainment of Asian Americans: a search for historical evidence and explanations. *Social Forces* 65(1):1-27.

Kalter, F. & N. Granato (2002). *Ethnic Minorities' Education and Occupational Attainment: The Case of Germany*. Arbeitspapiere nr. 58 – Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung.

Lesthaeghe, R. (ed.) (2000). Communities and Generations. Turkish and Moroccan populations in Belgium. Brussel: NIDI/CBGS Publications.

Marks, G.M. (2005). Accounting for Immigrant-Non-Immigrant Differences in Reading and Mathematics in 20 Countries. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(5):925-946.

Neels, K. (2000). Education and the transition to employment. Young Turkish and Moroccan adults in

Belgium. In: Lesthaeghe, R. (ed.), *Communities and Generations. Turkish and Moroccan populations in Belgium*. Brussel: NIDI-CBGS Publications, p.243-278.

Phalet, K., P. Deboosere & V. Bastiaenssen (2007). Old and New inequalities in educational attainment. Ethnic minorities in the Belgian Census 1991-2001. *Ethnicities* 7(3): 390-415.

Platt, L. (2005). The Intergenerational Social Mobility of Minority Ethnic Groups. *Sociology* 39(3):445-461.

Portes, A. & R. Rumbaut (2001). *Legacies. The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Portes, A. & M. Zhou (2001 [1993]). The New Second Generation: segmented Assimilation and Its Variants. In: Grusky D.B. (eds.), *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender*. Oxford: Westview Press, p. 597-608.

Reniers, G. (2000). On the selectivity and international dynamics of labour migration processes: an analysis of Turkish and Moroccan migration to Belgium. In: Lesthaeghe, R. (ed.), *Communities and Generations. Turkish and Moroccan populations in Belgium*. Brussel: NIDI-CBGS Publications, p.59-94.

Riphahn, R. T. (2003). Cohort effects in the educational attainment of second generation immigrants in Germany: An analysis of census data. *Journal of Population Economics* 16:711-737.

Rothon, C. (2005). Black and minority ethnic educational attainment and engagement with school in Britain. Phd-thesis, Sociology, Oxford University.

Shavit, Y. & H.-P.Blossfeld (eds) (1993). Persistent inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Simon, P. (2003). France and the unknown second generation: preliminary results on social mobility. *International Migration Review* 37(4):1091-1119.

Stoop, R. & J. Surkyn (1996). In de wetenschap het niet te weten. Achtergronden van de non-respons in de Volkstelling van 1991. In: *Census Belgica 2001. Verslagboek (deel II) van de studiedag van 12 november 1996*. Leuven, Steunpunt Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Vorming.

Timmerman, C., E. Vanderwaeren & M. Crul (2003). The second generation in Belgium. *International Migration Review* 37(4): 1065-1090.

Valk, H. de & M. Crul (2007). Education. In: Crul, M. & L. Heering (eds.), *The integration of the European second generation (TIES): a survey in Amsterdam and Rotterdam*. Amsterdam/The Hague: IMES/NIDI, p.43-63.

Veenman, J. (1996). Keren de kansen? De tweede-generatie allochtonen in Nederland. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Appendix I: Logistic regression models of obtaining a second education degree, aged 18-28.

	model 1		model 2		model 3		model 4	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
constant	4,876	***	4,496	***	14,046	***	14,005	***
age in 2001 -18	1,023	***	1,024	***	1,058	***	1,064	***
ethnicity (ref. Belgians)		***		***		*		**
Italians	0,558	***	0,706	***	0,906	+	0,541	*
Moroccans	0,394	***	0,486	***	1,002		0,195	*
Turks	0,340	***	0,364	***	0,777	**	0,257	*
female			1,803	***	1,987	***	2,007	***
region (ref. Flanders)				***		***		***
Brussels			0,542	***	0,649	***	0,609	***
Wallon area			0,623	***	0,695	***	0,673	***
household type (ref. married)						***		***
cohabitating					0,523	***	0,524	***
single					0,813	***	0,839	***
parental education (ref. higher education)						***		***
no formal education or lower education					0,225	***	0,218	***
lower secondary education					0,310	***	0,305	***
higher secondary education					0,525	***	0,524	***
parental occupational background						***		***
routine non-manual or skilled manual, or working on his own					0,779	***	0,786	***
semi- or unskilled manual work					0,742	***	0,749	***
both not working					0,629	***	0,622	***
housing (ref. owner/high quality)						***		***
tenant/low quality					0,515	***	0,484	***
tenant/high or middle quality					0,653	***	0,644	***
owner/low quality					0,752	***	0,753	***
age * ethnicity								***
age by Italians							0,945	**
age by Moroccans							0,966	
age by Turks							0,936	*
gender * ethnicity								
female by Italians							1,055	
female by Moroccans							0,746	+
female by Turks							0,837	
region * ethnicity								***
Brussels by Italians							1,727	*
Brussels by Moroccans							1,574	*
Brussels by Turks							1,367	
Wallonia by Italians							2,265	***
Wallonia by Moroccans							1,244	
Wallonia by Turks							1,699	*
household type * ethnicity								
cohabitating by Italians							1,950	
cohabitating by Moroccans							1,206	
cohabitating by Turks							-	-
single by Italians							0,802	
single by Moroccans							1,032	
single by Turks							0,789	
housing * ethnicity								**
tenant/low quality by Italians							1,474	*
tenant/low quality by Moroccans							2,367	**
tenant/low quality by Turks							1,533	
tenant/high or middle quality by Italians							1,184	
tenant/high or middle quality by Moroccans							1,726	
tenant/high or middle quality by Turks							1,728	
owner/low quality by Italians							1,117	
owner/low quality by Moroccans							1,103	
owner/low quality by Turks							1,285	
ethnicity * parental educational status								**
Italians by no formal education or lower education							1,031	
Italians by lower secondary education							1,111	
Italians by higher secondary education							0,898	
Moroccans by no formal education or lower education							3,530	+
Moroccans by lower secondary education							2,568	
Moroccans by higher secondary education							1,836	
Turks by no formal education or lower education							4,896	**
Turks by lower secondary education							4,529	**
Turks by higher secondary education							2,545	
ethnicity * parental occupational status								
Italians by routine non-manual or skilled manual, or working on his own							0,967	
Italians by semi- or unskilled manual work							0,886	
Italians by both not working							1,174	
Moroccans by routine non-manual or skilled manual, or working on his own							1,062	
Moroccans by semi- or unskilled manual work							1,213	
Moroccans by both not working							1,180	
Turks by routine non-manual or skilled manual, or working on his own							0,535	
Turks by semi- or unskilled manual work							0,712	
Turks by both not working							0,665	
Model Chi-Square (sig)	541	***	1865	***	5214	***	5338	***
Nagelkerke R-square	0,013		0,044		0,146		0,150	
N	71190		71190		61177		61177	

Significance levels: + p<0.10, * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001