

## METADATA:

# CALCULATION OF THE POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE BELGIAN AND EUROPEAN DEFINITIONS

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

In this document, you will find the technical explanation for the calculation of the legal population figure, published by every year by Statbel on this [website](#) (mid-June) and in the Belgian Official Journal (September). This figure and the corresponding municipal population figures are widely used. However, the main application is financial and administrative. Indeed, the legal population figure is used in a number of allocation keys in order to distribute the financial resources among the various administrative levels. The legal basis is Article 24(4) of the Law of 4 July 1962 and the amendments in the Laws of 1 August 1985 and 21 December 1994.

In this context, it should be noted that there are three main periods in the production of population statistics:

1. Before 1992, Statbel only had at its disposal aggregated population data and the figures from the census.
2. Between 1992 and 2010, Statbel had at its disposal a number of tables from the National Register of Natural Persons (RNPP). These tables contained data at individual level. A first part of the data processing was managed at central level. After this first processing, the data were further processed and analysed by Statbel's employees.
3. To date, Statbel still has at its disposal a number of tables from the RNPP, but almost the entire flow (processing of data and production of statistics) is now in the hands of data managers and statisticians at Statbel.

In 2019, work was carried out to make the figures as coherent as possible over the different periods, which led to some minor adjustments in the 1992-2010 series. As a result, the population figures for the period 1992-2010 slightly differ from the legal population figures published at the time. However, from 2011 onwards, the population figure is also the legal population figure.

## 2. THE POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE BELGIAN AND EUROPEAN DEFINITIONS

The population figure is determined as the residential population as registered in the National Register of Natural Persons (RNPP). In other words, it is the population registered on 31 December at midnight (1 January) in a Belgian municipality. In practice, this refers to all National Register numbers for which a Belgian municipal code is registered in the information type 001 (municipality of residence) of the RNPP.

The Belgian population is composed of Belgians and foreigners who are admitted or authorised to settle or stay on the Belgian territory. But it does not include foreigners who stay in our country for less than three months, asylum seekers and foreigners in an irregular situation.

The non-inclusion of asylum seekers in the calculation of the Belgian population is embedded in the Belgian legislation. However, in this regard, the European definition differs from that of Belgium. In order to calculate the European population figure, the population in the waiting register (the asylum seekers) is taken into account, if they (will) stay for a period of 12 months in Belgium.

The figures published on Statbel's website are all based on the Belgian definition of the population. However, when delivering data to Eurostat and other international organisations, the figures are calculated according to the European definition.

### 3. THE CALCULATION IN PRACTICE

#### 3.1. POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE BELGIAN DEFINITION

The population is calculated based on an average of the RNPP. This average is established once a year during March by the Directorate General for Institutions and Population of the FPS Home Affairs and sent to Statbel. Concretely, this means that all transactions carried out between 1 January and 1 March (excl.) relating to the period prior to 31 December will still be taken into account to calculate the Belgian population.

This waiting period of two months was deliberately introduced to give the population services of municipalities and the RNPP the opportunity to complete the National Register as exhaustively as possible. The majority of registrations have a legal deadline within which they must be made, but this does not apply to every registration and in practice, it appears that these deadlines cannot always be met. This waiting period makes it possible to maximize the quality and completeness of the measurement.

In addition, this waiting period allows for the application of a corrective principle with regard to persons who have been automatically deleted. This correction means that persons who were automatically deleted before 31 December, but for whom a re-registration follows in January or February of the following year, are still included in the Belgian population on 1 January under certain conditions. The rationale is that it is most likely that these people were staying in the municipality of the re-registration on 1 January.

Finally, Statbel also corrects the population figure in the negative sense, because cancelled files are not taken into account. This correction also includes a direct application of the introduction of the waiting period, because no account is taken of cancellations that were only registered after 1 January.

Statbel calculates and publishes a quality indicator for the legal population figure, the so-called statistical adjustments. The design of this indicator is simple: the population on 1 January of one year must be equal to the sum of the population on 1 January of the previous year and the balances<sup>1</sup> during the previous year. In other words, the difference between the population figure in successive years that cannot be explained by the balances is called the statistical adjustment. Statistical adjustments of the population are in the order of a thousand units. Out of a total of hundreds of thousands of registrations that determine the evolution of the population throughout a year, this is a minimum error rate.

It should also be noted that there is a second Belgian population figure calculated by the Directorate General for Institutions and Population (FPS Home Affairs). They already publish their population figure in the third week of January and so, do not apply the waiting period. However, this figure is very close to the figure calculated by Statbel, because the calculation method differs only slightly. The greatest impact is due to the different extraction period. This has an upward impact on the population figure. As a result, Statbel's population figure is by definition slightly higher at the Belgian level (however, this may be the opposite for individual municipalities).

#### 3.2. POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN DEFINITION

The population according to the European definition is calculated as the sum of 1) the population according to the Belgian definition and 2) the people in the waiting register (asylum seekers) who (will) stay for at least 12 months in Belgium.

For the calculation of the European population figure, Statbel also estimates, based on an algorithm, the number of asylum seekers (who (will) stay in Belgium for at least 12 months). This estimation also includes additional methodological manipulations that are laid down in the European population definition. Statbel does not determine the number of asylum seekers directly on the basis of figures from the Immigration Office, but on the basis of this algorithm. This is why Statbel does not publish its own figures for the number of asylum seekers. These figures can be found on the website of the [Immigration Office of the FPS Home Affairs](#).

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<sup>1</sup> At Belgian level: the natural balance (births and deaths) and the international migration balance (international immigration and emigration), plus, at lower geographical level, the internal migration balance (moves within the country).