Chapter 9

Bulgarian Immigrants in Brussels

In this chapter, we will present the research results obtained from the exploratory study about undocumented and professional Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels, by focusing on the outcomes of collecting information on the thirteen topics defined in Chapter 7.The theoretical questions which ask, to what degree do the social capital theory and the cumulative causation theory offer a substantive explanation for the occurring Eastern European migrations, will be addressed in Chapter 11. The issues of the social status of undocumented immigrants; if they constitute a marginalized group of people and if so, what are the potential opportunities for them to change their position in the society will be addressed in Chapter 12[1].

Even though we have accumulated wide ranging information about the research groups and will attempt to discuss some theoretical propositions, the reader should bear in mind the tentative nature of the results since the research on Polish and Bulgarian migrants is focused on an understudied phenomenon and could not be based on or built upon any systematic knowledge of Eastern European migrants in Belgium. The research results should also be generalized with caution as the participants in the current study belong to an unknown or "hidden" population, which is hard to identify and about which no lists or information about its size and structure is available. This unique characteristic of the participant group thus made the application of random sampling techniques not applicable. Even though the latter issue has been explicitly addressed and controlled for, the circumstances surrounding a new research phenomenon and a hidden research population have called and allowed for conducting exploratory research that provides only a preliminary knowledge about Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels.

[1] Appendix 11 offers a summary of the main findings about undocumented and professional Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels.

1. The population under study

As we have discussed in detail in Chapter 8, one of the major problems in conducting research on understudied and invisible populations, such as the population of undocumented immigrants, is the identification of potential respondents. Indeed this was a major issue during the fieldwork, which began at the end of 2003. Applying snowball sampling procedure, as designed by Biernaki and Waldorf (1981), 140 Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels were identified and initially contacted during the period January 2004 – March 2005. For reasons of refusal to participate fully in the research, 18 Bulgarians have been excluded from the sample. The reasons for non-response are several: 7 migrants declared lack of interest in participating in the study and unwillingness to reveal personal information; 5 migrants failed to show up at three consecutive meetings scheduled for conducting the study and apologized with unexpected and too high working load while suggesting that the interviews will be better postponed for indefinite time; 2 migrants started the interviews but after some minutes stated to lack the necessary to time to participate; 4 migrants refused to participate without providing an explanation why.

In the course of snowball sampling, we have become aware of the major problems with implementing the technique, ranging from identifying respondents, starting a referral chain, to achieving some level of representation while avoiding bias. As mentioned earlier, the major mistake in the sampling procedure is a failure to encompass the broad variety of immigrants' legal and occupational statuses, and failing to depict reliably all groups of undocumented immigrants, as well as their precise geographical distribution in Brussels. To avoid this potential fault, the snowball sampling procedure was implemented by initiating diverse respondents' chains with different origins, which reflect the described distinct immigrant status of the respondents.

In total, 17 referral chains have been initiated and the principle of "maximum diversity" of the first informants has been strictly followed (See Table 9. 2. in Appendix 5). The first respondent of each referral chain has been selected to have a different residence status (undocumented, false student, documented, and naturalized immigrant), different marital status (married, divorced, and single); residing in different municipalities in

Brussels (the primary respondents are residing in ten from the 19 municipalities in Brussels); and in the case of the Bulgarian respondents - different ethnic origin (Bulgarian, Bulgarian Turkish and Turkish Belgian). There are municipalities in Brussels, where no primary informant with an undocumented status or an informant who knows an undocumented migrant has been identified and therefore, no referral chain from this municipality was possible to initiate. Appendix 6 should be consulted for a detailed presentation of the referral chains.

To assure cooperation and full participation, anonymity has been guaranteed to all respondents. Information revealing too much personal information such as second or family name, exact address of residence in Brussels or in the country of origin and exact date of birth has not been collected at any stage of the research. The respondents have been assured of the scientific nature of the research and lack of connection between the researcher and the state authorities of Belgium. Each respondent has also been well informed about the ways of obtaining contact with him or her. Some of the interviewees were first contacted by an already identified respondent who inquired if they would not mind being contacted for an interview as well.

Interviews were conducted in an environment preferred by the respondents on a date and time specified by them. In cases where the respondents did not object, the interviews have been tape-recorded (18 undocumented migrants and 15 professional migrants). For the remaining cases, all the answers were recorded by hand. The length of an interview was influenced by the manner in which respondent's information was recorded. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 3 hours depending on whether or not it was tape-recorded or transcribed by hand. In some cases, a single interview was conducted over the course of two consecutive days.

2. The undocumented Bulgarian immigrants

The final studied population consists of 122 Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels (66 men and 56 women). Of these, 32 are highly qualified professionals (12 men and 20 women), 15 are former undocumented migrants who have regularized their status (7 men

and 8 women), and 75 are undocumented migrants (47 men and 28 women). The group of undocumented migrants includes people who are commuters, undocumented settlers, false students, and migrants who have lost their residence documents (see below).

We define highly qualified professionals, as individuals with advanced university education (usually holding at least one master degree and/or a Ph.D.), and who are professionally active within their field of expertise. In the course of research, we have distinguished two primary groups of professionals: those active in the business sector including banking, financial and business consulting, legal consulting, auditing, and I.T.; and those active in academic and/or research and development sectors.

In order to illustrate more completely the wide variety of situations in which migrants reside or work illegally in Belgium, we propose the identification of four groups of undocumented migrants: commuters (12 persons), false students (14 persons), undocumented "settlers" (45 persons), people who no longer possess residence documents (4 persons), and regularized migrants (15 persons). This distinction is necessary since it reflects the different motivations for migration, different settlement practices and as it will be shown later, different future migration plans.

We use the term, *commuter* to refer to those migrants who have not settled permanently in Brussels and who work in Belgium for periods of three to four months, usually two to three times per year. Commuters return to the country of origin at the end of the third month in order to avoid overstaying the period, which is legally allowed (90 days). This arrangement assures secure entry to Belgium upon their next visit.

We classify *false students* as those migrants who have used educational studies as the only way to legally migrate to Belgium. It should also be noted that for false students, pursuing educational studies is not a primary goal for coming to the country. All false students are working and use the claim of studies to prolong their residence in the country. The foreign students, as a rule, are excluded from all types of migration research. It could be argued that exploiting the channels for education remains one of the few ways for legal migration especially for those who are younger, who have received a good education, and possess some language skills. The practice of enrolling in different academic or language

courses once abroad is widespread among the non-EU students for whom this is the only strategy for remaining abroad. These individuals will attempt to settle by securing a legal employment, establishing a family, or migrating to another country if the possibilities for remaining in Belgium are limited. Nevertheless, the distinction between false and genuine students is sometimes blurred. In some cases, a person enrolls as a genuine student and then, over time a motivation for non-return develops. This causes the academic system to be viewed as a way to work towards permanent settlement aboard. Once the academic career for which the student has arrived is completed and no options for settlement are present, the genuine student might become a false student simply to remain legally in the country.

In the current research, persons who have *lost residence documents* and are residing and working in Brussels without the necessary authorization are former students whose residence permit has not been renewed and who have remained in Belgium more than three months after their residence document has expired.

We define undocumented *settlers*, as the migrants who live and work in Belgium for more than three months, who are not in possession of any residence documents and who do not commute to the country of origin.

Regularized migrants are those who have obtained residence documents, or for example, who have regularized their status after a certain period of living in Belgium illegally.

An important remark before proceeding with the presentation and the discussion of the obtained results concerns the ethnic origins of the Bulgarian migrants. The group of Bulgarians in Brussels is not ethnically homogenous and includes ethnic Bulgarian, Bulgarian Turks, and Bulgarian Roma, thus reflecting the ethnic diversity of the population in Bulgaria. In our sample, we distinguish the three groups: 92 ethnic Bulgarians, 25 Bulgarian-Turks, and 5 Bulgarian Roma. The distribution of these ethnic groups by gender within the already specified immigrants groups is presented in Table 9. 1.

Table 9. 1. Gender and ethnic distribution of the Bulgarian respondents within the different migrant categories

Demographic Charact. / Status	Gender							
	Male				Female			
	Ethnicity			**Total**	Ethnicity			**Total**
	BG	BG-Turk	BG-Rom		BG	BG-Turk	BG-Rom	
Undocumented settlers	11	15	1	**27**	9	5	4	**18**
False student	8	1		**9**	5			**5**
Commuter	8	2		**10**	2			**2**
Professional	12			**12**	20			**20**
Regularized	6	1		**7**	7	1		**8**
Lost documents	1			**1**	3			**3**
Total	**46**	**19**	**1**	**66**	**46**	**6**	**4**	**56**

Observing the distribution of the different ethnic groups among the so identified migration statuses (e. g. undocumented settlers, false student, commuter, professional, regularized, and lost documents) reveals that migrants from different ethnic origins are not equally represented in all migrant groups. The group of the undocumented settlers is composed of an equal number of Bulgarian and Bulgarian-Turkish immigrants and of all the Bulgarian-Roma immigrants. However, in all other groups, the Bulgarian-Turks are highly underrepresented. The "professional" and "lost documents" categories include only ethnic Bulgarian immigrants. Similarly, the composition of the "false student", the "commuter", and the "regularized" categories are exclusively represented by ethnic Bulgarians.

The average age of the Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels is 36 years (35 for the undocumented immigrants and 38 for the professionals). The false students and the

immigrants with lost documents constitute the youngest two groups, with average ages of 27 and 26 years, respectively.

In the following paragraphs, we will present the main research results pertaining to the group of the undocumented immigrants (75 persons) e.g. the undocumented settlers, the commuters, the false students, and the people who have lost residence documents. Considering the small numbers of migrants in the "false student", "lost documents", and "commuters" categories, we will present a more general portrait of all undocumented immigrants. Furthermore, we will explicitly stress the differences between migrants from the four categories only if they are substantial and differ significantly from one another.

2. 1. The geographic origins

The undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels originate primarily from two major regions in Bulgaria: 1) North-Eastern Bulgaria and more precisely from the big cities in the region such as Rousse, Targoviste, Razgrad, Veliko Tarnovo, Varna, and Bjala; 2) The two biggest Bulgarian cities Sofia and Plovdiv (A map of Bulgaria can be found in Appendix 7). These areas, however, do not send equal proportions of migrants of Bulgarian and Turkish ethnic origin to Brussels. While the Bulgarian Turks originate mainly from the North Eastern cities, no specific pattern in the origin of the ethnic Bulgarians can be observed. In the latter case, immigrants come from 15 different destinations from all around the country with a slight predominance of migrants from Sofia.

The previously stated sending regions reveal the first element of the portrait of the Bulgarian migrants in Brussels. Contrary to what might be expected on the basis of classical theories of migration, the Bulgarian migrants are the city dwellers of some of the biggest Bulgarian cities, and are not residents of the most impoverished and economically and industrially stagnant villages within the country. On the contrary, the North-Eastern Region is the second region from which Bulgarians are migrating. Ironically, this is where the proportion of the economically active population is highest (after the South-Western

region where the capital Sofia is located) (NSI, 2004). The industries in this region are diverse and increasingly attract foreign investments.

In order to provide a more detailed understanding of the sending region the following succinct presentation of the primary industrial strengths of the major immigrants' sending Northeastern cities is introduced.

Varna, the biggest city on the Black Sea with a population of 304,400, has the most diverse economic profile. This includes machine building, shipbuilding, chemical industry, sea and air transport, tourism, food processing and wine industries. The industrial zone of Varna is composed of over 100 enterprises for shipbuilding and repair, diesel engines, communications, sea-navigation, medical and household goods, textile and ready-made clothes, furniture and metallurgy. Food and wine industries produce fruits and vegetable conserves, sugar, salt, beer, soft drinks, fresh and processed meat and milk products. Concentrated near Varna (in Devnya and Beloslav) are large-scale chemical plants producing soda ash, cement, polyvinylchloride, fertilizers, detergents, washing and cleaning products, glass and sanitary glass, and household chemical products. Varna is also the second largest port (after Bourgas port) in Bulgaria, offering a direct transport to Ukraine by ferryboat. The agriculture in the region is also strong predominantly in the production of grains and fodder cultures, vineyards and orchards.

Rousse, the second largest Bulgarian city in the region, and the biggest city on the Danube River, has a population of 150,000 citizens. The leading goods produced in Rousse and the Rousse area are food, drinks, tobacco and tobacco products. Additionally, the area is rich in the production of chemical and petroleum products; the production of vehicles; the production of textile and knitted fabrics; tailoring production; fur-goods, leather and shoe-manufacturing industry; production of rubber and plastic products; production of electro technical machinery and precise techniques; and mining.

The industrial development in the Northeastern region is largely stimulated also by the free economic zone in Rousse, which was established in 1988 to encourage the production of goods for export. Since 1999, the free zone operates in accordance with the

European Customs Code. Currently over thirty foreign companies have chosen to work with Rousse as a partner and location for new ventures.

Veliko Tarnovo (63,300 citizens) is a city with a strongly developed tourism industry and is gradually becoming one of the most visited locations in Eastern Europe. The economic profile of the city is to a large degree, a response to its position as a major tourist destination. One of the region's primary specific products includes artisan items, wood gravures, decoration items and frames, traditional textiles, home accessories, furniture for the home, for the business and the hotel sectors. Other leading industrial sectors produce plasma screens; TV sets, CD and DVD players, cables, etc; the production of electronic equipment; the production of polymer packaging materials; the production of textile and clothing; and last but not least, the processing and production of food and the beverages.

The Razgrad region with a population of 128,600 (33,000 alone in the city of Razgrad) has a rich industrial profile including machinery, electrical and electronic industry; chemical industry; silicate industry; textiles; construction materials industry; logging and wood processing industry; food processing industry, bakery and flour mills; construction; trade; and transportation.

The aforementioned description of the Northeastern region is testimony to its reconstruction and successful development after the fall of the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria. Taking this into consideration, it begs the question, why is it also the primary area from where immigrants to Belgium originate? We will attempt to reveal the reasons for migration by looking in detail at the migrants' employment situation and living conditions before migration and consequently, at their personal motivations for coming to Brussels. However, we will first broaden the demographic knowledge about the studied population by looking at the migrants' family status, educational profiles and language competencies, the latter being an indirect factor for stimulating migration, but one that allows for the migrant to gain a job more easily after arrival to Brussels.

2. 2. Family situation

Examining the family status of the undocumented Bulgarian migrants reveals that 40% of the respondents are married, 40% are single, 8% are divorced, and 8% are cohabitating with a partner in a stable relationship. This normal pattern of distribution of the family situation is, however, not observed if the variable of gender is taken into account. While the men are married or cohabitating in 34.7% of the cases and reside together with their souse or partner in Brussels, this is not the case in the female population, in which only 12.3% women have a partner or a spouse.

One-half of the undocumented respondents have no children. In the remaining cases, the number of children is predominantly one or two, with only five respondents having three children. Nevertheless, the practice of taking the children to Brussels is rather rare and only seven of the undocumented migrants and more precisely, from the category of the "settlers" have children residing in Brussels. In the remaining cases, plans for taking the children to Brussels could be described as rather vague. The respondents confirm that their professional situation in Belgium is uncertain, the prospective for remaining permanently and legally in Belgium is not sure, while the motivations for return migration are also not clear. Due to these conditions of personal insecurity and with no long-term plans for the future, the undocumented migrants prefer to leave their minor children in the care of grandparents or relatives in Bulgaria, and to help raise them by remitting money. None of the undocumented migrants expressed a desire to have their children educated in Belgium. On the contrary, the respondents share the view that to bring children into a new linguistic and educational environment will have more negative than positive impacts on the child, in terms of integration, and coping with studies in a foreign language. As a final argument against bringing children to Brussels, the parents stress their unwillingness to expose their professional and legal status in Belgium to their children. Finally, respondents admit that they do not have the physical and financial resources to properly raise their children in Brussels. Parents of minor children consider the possibility of reunification in Brussels, but only after the children have graduated from high school and have acquired some knowledge in French in order to eventually pursue a university degree in Belgium. Yet, considering the

age of the children, we could not expect this migration to happen sooner than four years, or in some cases as much as fifteen years, after these research interviews were conducted.

This section will conclude by looking at the household composition of the undocumented migrants. In line with some migration theories, e.g. the cumulative causation theory and the new economics of migration, we could expect that the household constitutes one of the primary units influencing the decision for migration and simultaneously, the household is the primary unit from which further migration or chain migration could arise. The household size (before migration) of the undocumented respondents varies from 2 to 14 persons. There is no significant difference between the household compositions of immigrants from ethnic Bulgarian or Turkish Bulgarian background. The individuals defined as members of the household in the current research are the respondent and if applicable, his or her spouse/partner, child/ren, parent/s, grandparent/s, grandchildren and siblings. The most predominant household size is five to seven persons. This extended family size is typical for 53.3% of the undocumented respondents.

2. 3. Educational level and language abilities

The following is a detailed presentation of the educational level and language knowledge of the undocumented respondents. It will reveal that the population under study is composed of educated people, who in most cases have a specific professional qualification that provides an easy access (especially for the men) to the sectors where undocumented workers are usually employed. For example, in building, construction and renovation. Thus, contrary to what one would expect, undocumented Bulgarians are not those with the lowest qualifications, but indeed possess professional qualifications and advanced education.

All undocumented Bulgarians in our study have achieved some level of education. There is no single respondent who does not have any education whatsoever. The educational level of the undocumented Bulgarians differs for the undocumented settlers and the commuters on one side compared to the false students and people with lost documents on the other. As anticipated, the “false students” and the persons with lost documents, who

were former students in Belgium, are exclusively holders of bachelor or master degrees, or are in process of obtaining one. The most predominant careers in which the respondents from these two groups are specialized and have obtained diplomas include disciplines such as engineering, law, economics, information technologies, and mathematics. Without exception, the false students and the people with lost documents have enrolled at Belgian universities in the same field of study in which they studied in Bulgaria. Two of the false students arrived in Belgium as Ph.D. students. As previously stated, the false students have decided to come to Belgium with a single and unique motivation to achieve access to the job market by first entering legally through the status and provisions made available to foreign students. The choice to pursue educational studies in Belgium was chosen over other possibilities for one economic reason – the relatively inexpensive inscription fees. This is in contract to other Western European countries where master courses are taught in a language spoken by the respondent.

Within the commuter category, the mostly represented educational types are secondary technical (33.3%), two years of college (25%), secondary (16.7%), and university (16.7%). The majority of the undocumented settlers have a secondary technical education (22.2%).

Differences in the level of educational attainment are also observed in relation to the respondent' ethnic origin. The educational level of the ethnic Bulgarians is higher than those of the Bulgarian Turks. Those who hold university diplomas are exclusively ethnic Bulgarian, while most of the Bulgarian Turks have obtained secondary technical education (30.4%), followed by general secondary education (26.1%), two years of college (13%) and primary education (13%).

Respondents with non-university educations are mainly specializing in the fields of mechanics, electro mechanics, building, or construction. Some 21.3% of the respondents without a university degree have no specialty whatsoever.

Once in Belgium, only a tiny minority of the respondents continued their education. Excluding the false students, only eight persons admit to be formally involved in an educational activity, and this is, without exception, the study of French or Dutch language.

The motivation to study either French or Dutch is rooted in a belief by respondents that better and wider language proficiency is the only opportunity to improve their chance for employment. The language knowledge of undocumented Bulgarians also differs depending on ethnic origin. The Bulgarian Turks speak only French and Turkish language[2]. All of the ethnic Bulgarians speak some French and claim to have a good knowledge of Russian as well[3]. A minority of the respondents (only nine persons) has some knowledge of Dutch language.

The main spoken language by all false students is English, with German or Spanish as a second language. Those false students, who have started their studies in Leuven and have later on migrated to Brussels, have a good understanding of Dutch language and a very basic knowledge of French. The false students who have come directly to Brussels (ten persons) admit to having only a basic to intermediary understanding of French language. One important fact that should be mentioned is that the false students express a strong unwillingness to invest efforts in studying French, even though they have plans for settling in Brussels. The main reason for this could be attributed to the fact that these respondents are already bi, or trilingual (not counting their native language) and are looking for employment possibilities in either European Institutions, foreign companies or international companies located in Brussels, where the most common spoken language is English. Additionally, the false students stress that in their observation, the majority of their friends and acquaintances, who are employed in an international company, do not speak French well and do not need French knowledge to work in Brussels. The general opinion of the false students is that good professional qualifications and proficiency in English and another foreign language is more than enough for securing a job in a multinational city like Brussels.

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[2] All respondents speak Bulgarian as a native language.

[3] The widespread knowledge of Russian language is a result of the educational system in Bulgaria before 1989 in which Russian was included in the compulsory curriculum for seven to eight years (depending on the school type: general secondary school; specialized technical schools; specialized school for extensive training in a foreign language; arts school, etc.).

2. 4. Living conditions

The living conditions of undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels are similar to those of other undocumented immigrant groups in Brussels, about whom some initial research has already been undertaken and was respectively presented in Chapter 6. Undocumented Bulgarians are currently present in 13 out of 19 municipalities of Brussels. However, the major neighborhoods where the population under study is concentrated are those central neighborhoods in the city, where foreign populations typically prevail. These include the municipalities of Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode, Schaerbeek, and Anderlecht with 12% of the respondents living in each of these. Bruxelles and Saint-Gilles account for 10.7% of the respondents per municipality. There is no significant difference in the pattern of residence of the migrants from different ethic origins (e.g. ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks) or who utilized a different type of migration pattern.

For all respondents, the only criteria for choosing a place to live are the price of the accommodation and ease by which the public transportation system can be accessed. This explains why the vast majority of the undocumented Bulgarians reside in a one bedroom apartment (33.3%), a studio (29.3%) or a room (22.7%), shared with one or two colleagues or friends in order to reduce the expenses for rent and keep common charges to minimum. However, only four of the immigrants who are in Brussels together with their family share their residence with a third person. On average each respondent pays a rent between 100 € and 200 €, in which all expenses are already included. It should be noted that the housing of undocumented migrants is not of good quality. The studios, the one-bedroom apartments, or rooms where respondents reside, are usually located on subterranean levels or in attic spaces. The rooms are in buildings rented per room, where the respondents have to share a bathroom and toilet facilities with their neighbors, who in some cases number more than twelve persons. It is not uncommon that tenants of small apartments or studios do not have toilet facilities in their apartment either for these facilities to be located in a hall connecting two or more apartments. In total 75% of undocumented Bulgarians, do not have a bathroom and toilet for their private use.

Consistent with the immigrants' motivation to spend as little as possible on housing, residences of undocumented Bulgarians offer only basic facilities such as electricity and warm water. Furnishings are minimal and only provide the most necessary amenities such as a bed, a small refrigerator, electric stove, and a radio. Less than half of the respondents have a TV set. More than 75% of the respondents do not have the following appliances or utilities: washing machine, video or a DVD player, freezer, gas connection, furniture, PC, Internet connection, or a car. The remaining respondents, who possess the listed facilities, are those individuals who are in the process of regularization and who are establishing a small business under the PECO agreements, and those respondents with families or children in Belgium. In other words, the people with better-furnished accommodations are those who are attempting to achieve a permanent or a longer-term settlement in Brussels. The remainder of respondents does not buy any goods in Brussels besides those needed for their immediate survival, such as a cell phone.

The only group who admitted to buying goods in Brussels were thirteen false students and the people who are in process of registering themselves as self-employed. The false students are positive that eventually over time, they will be able to secure a qualified employment offer and find it reasonable to invest in items such as good clothes, domestic appliances, and books. Individuals who are in a process of regularization purchase machinery and tools exclusive to and necessary for their work.

One last residence-related issue we have examined is if we can reveal patterns of upwards social mobility. We have defined one indicator of social mobility as the intra-city migration to a better municipality and to better accommodations, especially among migrants with a longer work history in Belgium. In line with the research results about the Polish undocumented populations in Brussels as described in Chapter 4, our hypothesis is that over time, the migrants will accumulate savings and if they do not return to Bulgaria, eventually a desire for a better quality of life will develop. Longer exposure to the living standard of the local middle class population is expected to alter the personal motivations and make one strive for better accommodation and better facilities. Nevertheless, the present research results testify firmly against our hypothesis. The undocumented Bulgarians

in Brussels do not tend to change their residence or neighborhood even after working in Belgium for two or more years and do so only if it is absolutely necessary. Examples of "absolute necessity" are defined by the respondents to include situations when a family member is joining the migrant and more space is needed to accommodate the newcomer, or when the living conditions deteriorate significantly while rent remains the same, or when the rent is increased. In total, 64% of our respondents live in the same municipality as they did when they first arrived in Brussels. In the remaining cases, the former false students from Leuven or Antwerp have moved to Brussels or intra-city migration has occurred to a municipality and housing type similar to the one from which they left. Examples of such changes of residence include the migrations to and from municipalities such as Schaerbeek, Molenbeek, Anderlecht, Saint- Gilles, and Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode.

The main motivation for residing continuously in the same place is initially related to the respondent's reluctance to enter into the time consuming and sometimes troublesome process of looking for new accommodations, the hassle involved in contacting potential landlords, having to explain their legal situation in the country, or to provide an adequate justification as to why they cannot sign a rental contract. The undocumented Bulgarians are not afraid that this process could lead to their discovery by the state authorities, or to eventual deportation, but they simply want to avoid all the "troubles" related to the process of moving to a new residence. This is especially true for the migrants who have good relationships with their landlords and in this sense, do not see the need to move to a better place, at which contact with the new landlord may be problematic. Another argument against changing accommodation voiced by respondents is the unavoidable financial costs related to moving.

Considering the situations we have described, we can conclude that there is no particular tendency of mobility within Brussels, which functions as an indicator for upward social mobility.

2. 5. History of previous migration

In this section, we will reveal the individual migratory experience of the undocumented Bulgarians before coming to Brussels and will attempt to outline the relationships between the past history of migration and the traditions in family migration, if any, and the current migration to Brussels. To assess the past migration patterns we have looked at both international migrations and migrations in the territory of Bulgaria, for example, from the town of birth to another location in the country. "Past migration" is defined as all abroad travel lasting for more than one moth and which falls outside the scope of tourist and recreational activities. Thus, we have calculated past migrations to include all trips for the purposes of work (legal or undocumented), to seek employment, to applying for asylum, studies, research activities, and/or trading activities such as the import-export of goods.

The research results indicate that a relatively large proportion of all undocumented Bulgarians (30.7%) have no migration experience whatsoever and the trip to Brussels is a unique migration step. For 37.3% of the respondents the migration to Brussels constitutes a second migration; 17.3% have made two previous migration trips before coming to Brussels and only 8% have traveled outside their city of birth, for reasons other than from tourism for more than two times[4].

The most important destination for the previous migration has been to the capital city of Sofia, where 14.7% of the respondents have migrated and in one-half of the cases decided to settle permanently in Sofia. The next three preferred destinations include Turkey, Germany, and The Netherlands. The duration of the journeys used to be rather short – usually between five and fourteen months. Excluding the migration to Sofia, at the time of past migration, achieving a permanent settlement was never a goal for undocumented Bulgarians. This rather weak past migration behavior explains why in 68% of the cases, the respondents resided in their city of birth before migrating to Brussels.

Taking into account the ethnic origin of the migrants indicates that the group of ethnic Bulgarians has experienced more past migrations and has migrated to more

[4] In these numbers are included both national and international migrations.

destinations (29 ethnic Bulgarians have migrated at both national and international levels), in comparison with the group of Bulgarian Turks[5]. In the latter case, 11 persons have traveled outside of their city of birth, and for six of the respondents, their destination was Turkey. The major reason for traveling to Turkey was an attempt for permanent migration and to find a job. If the respondent was unsuccessful at achieving these goals, return migration took place. A supplementary reason for going to Turkey was to import goods for a small business, which the respondents operate back in Bulgaria.

The primary reasons for the past migrations of ethnic Bulgarians include the desire to find better employment opportunities in the capital city or abroad; or migration for the purposes of education.

Most of the past migrations took place in the period 1990-1997: the first years after the official fall of the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria, when free travel was allowed and during the years when the Bulgarian population experienced the strongest economic hardship.

Looking in more detail at the relationship between past and present migrations reveals that the experience of past migration is not viewed as an important asset for implementing the trip to Brussels. The respondents do not relate the two events and describe their decision to migrate to Brussels as an outcome purely motivated by economic factors. As to the question of whether or not substantial economic hardships in Bulgaria provoked past migrations and if no settlement abroad has been achieved, the respondents answer that they did not have the opportunity to regularize their status abroad, that they did not have enough income from working illegally or have been previously deported. Therefore, respondents preferred to return to Bulgaria and to try migrating to another country (in this case, Belgium) to "test their luck" in a new place.

[5] The group of the Bulgarian Roma respondents is too small (five persons) to be included as a separate group for analysis. In the currently discussed case of past migration, this group of respondents admits to have applied for asylum in The Netherlands and fleeing to Belgium when their applications were rejected and when the deportations of Bulgarians became a popular practice in The Netherlands in the period 2000-2002.

2. 6. Migration to Brussels

The undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels are a rather new phenomenon. In the course of the snowball sampling, we could not identify migrants who arrived before 1995. Migrants who emigrated prior to 1995 do have legal residence in Belgium. The peak of the arrivals is observed to occur in late 2001 and 2002, two years during which 53.3% of the undocumented Bulgarians have come to Brussels for the first time. This fact could be partially explained by the abolition of the visa requirement for short-term trips to EU countries for Bulgarian nationals in 2002. From this time forward, Bulgarians were allowed visa-free entry up to a period of three months for the purpose of tourism to all Schengen countries. In the years before 2002, Bulgarians entered Brussels with a short-term tourist visa, which was usually valid for a maximum of 21 days and thus, their stay exceeded the maximum days allowed. Some entered as asylum seekers and did not leave Belgium after their application for asylum was rejected.

Most of the undocumented respondents migrated to Brussels alone (62.7%) and in rare cases were joined later on by another family member: in ten cases by a spouse and in two cases by a child. A joining family member could only be observed in the group of the undocumented settlers. There are no ethnic or gender differences in the previously described pattern of migration.

In general, the trips of undocumented Bulgarians were not stimulated or supported by people already living in Brussels. A grand majority of the undocumented respondents (68%) did not have any friends living in Brussels and even more migrants (73.3%) did not have family or relatives in Brussels or other parts of Belgium before arriving in the country. Respectively none of these migrants received help from a co-national or another person during the first days in Belgian territory. In this sense, the respondents share an experience, which was one of hardship and having to survive completely on their own. The common strategy for making first steps towards settlement is staying in the cheapest possible hostel for a couple of days while in the meantime, looking for an accommodation to rent and for a job. The respondents who arrived without having any contact with a person who could possibly support them during the initial period of settlement, came with a cash amount of

money between 300 € and 600 €. This amount is perceived as sufficient to live on for a few weeks. The first action undertaking by undocumented Bulgarians was to purchase a Belgian cell phone card and to start answering job announcements printed in free local newspapers. Simultaneously, the respondents used to visit and present themselves to potential employers in the restaurant and the construction industry sectors. The first job offer was received usually within the first two weeks after arriving in Brussels.

The factors for coming to Brussels are exclusively of an economic nature. For the four groups of undocumented Bulgarians the major reasons for leaving Bulgaria are defined as very difficult living conditions in Bulgaria and no assurance that this situation would change in the near future. Other factors shaping the decision for migration include the lack of money for starting or maintaining a small business, lack of money for house reconstruction, and lack of money to purchase items which assist in achieving a better quality of life in Bulgaria. Such items include a car, and decent household appliances and equipment.

The people who once maintained a small business in Bulgaria such as a food or clothes store, woodcrafts and wood engravers atelier, or a small furniture production made a decision to migrate after being a victim of a robbery, an incident which left them without any means for reestablishing their small business. Three of the respondents have migrated for the same reasons to The Netherlands but came to Belgium after the Dutch government started initiating several mass deportations of Bulgarians from the end 2001 and beyond.

The reasons for choosing Belgium as a destination country do not coincide with those identified by similar research in other countries or for other undocumented immigrants in Belgium, except for the minority of respondents who had a friend or a relative in Belgium (28 persons) and migrated either with their help, based on the information provided by them, or who were motivated to join them. For all other respondents the choice of Belgium could be described in terms of “least harm,” meaning that the respondents canceled out other destinations countries (such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and France) because they are perceived as more difficult

to access, and to find a job there. Respondents envisioned Belgium as a place where it would be most easy to survive without documents or to regularize their status. We can speak about an existing *belief* upheld by Bulgarians that Belgium is the EU country most open towards migrants, and is one that financially supports migrants who "report their presence at the police office by giving up their passport" (Financial incentives amount to 500 € per month)[6]. Belgium is also "famous" (under these commonly held assumptions) for being a country where finding a job is rather easy and where the earning potential is high.

More than half of the respondents declare to be knowledgeable of salary level, the possibilities for work, the prices of accommodation and food, and the legislation concerning foreigners before migrating to Brussels. The 28 persons who had a family member or a friend in Brussels who could provide primary information (and practical experience) about Brussels were invited to explain in more detail how this information was obtained.

In the case of the false students and the former students, who no longer have residence documents, the main channel for obtaining information about Belgium is the Internet. With only one exception (a person who used the student's status to join his partner in Brussels), the false students have chosen Belgium after a detailed comparison of universities in different countries, conditions for acceptance and cost of education for non-EU citizens. Taking into account all these factors, Belgium appeared to be the most easily accessible country, where registration fees are most affordable, and where a variety of masters degree programs are taught in English.

The information sources about Belgium are, however, difficult to objectively identify in the case of the remaining undocumented migrants. It is important to stress that the respondents' perceptions about opportunities to find work, to earn a good income and to be supported financially by the state, do not result from personal experience and are not based on their own research about the conditions of living and working in Belgium. This

[6] The undocumented migrants refer to the situation of the asylum seekers in Belgium, who until 2001 used to receive financial support after their applications were pronounced as admissible and respectively awaited a final decision on their application.

kind of information is not even provided by a close friend or a family member. On the contrary, the positive aspects of a life in Belgium have been heard from persons who have heard something from a third person and so on. Removing the false students and the joining family members, who have been well informed about the actual conditions in Belgium, the large proportion of the remaining undocumented migrants has amassed information about Belgium based on the *beliefs* and the opinions of "friends of friends", and other members in the community of origin. Remarkably, none of these informants has had a first hand experience with Belgium, thus identifying the true origin of how information is circulated is a rather difficult task. For the respondents however, identifying the original data source was not of primary importance, since the circulating opinions about Belgium were largely similar. We can conclude that before migration, knowledge available about Belgium was acquired uncritically, was rooted in prevailing stereotypes, and was not based on factual knowledge. Undocumented migrants have based their "knowledge" on community beliefs, for example, the most popular being the notion that everyone who goes to the police and delivers his or her Bulgarian passport will receive a monthly stipend of 500 €, which we see is not rationally grounded in truth. To summarize, these kind of attitudes about Belgium are based primarily on irrational ideas such as so-called "city myths" or "urban legends"[7]. Therefore, no objective and scientific explanation of why the least informed migrants have come to Belgium can be offered.

The previous discussion of how background information about Belgium is obtained before migration offers an explanation of why the respondents who had factual knowledge about the country admit that their expectations were not too different from the reality they have faced in Brussels; and why the people who have used their beliefs and underground "knowledge" as a main source of information have experienced more hardship and suffered more disappointments after arriving in Brussels. In this context, it is illuminating to stress the fact that once in Belgium, none of the respondents have ever tried to receive financial

[7] For an in-depth analysis of the city myths and the urban legends, their irrational nature and the ways they keep on circulating in the society, one could consult the work of Rodney Dale "*Book of Urban Legend*" (2005).

assistance as a refugee. When asked why obtaining the so-called 500 € was not achieved, respondents admit that this imagined reality turned out to be nonexistent.

2. 7. Professional situation

The grand majority of undocumented Bulgarians (85.3%) did have a job in Brussels at the time of the interview. The sectors where undocumented Bulgarians are active in general, do not differ from those where we find undocumented workers. The women are active as maids; cleaning ladies in households, hospitals, and homes for senior citizens; and work as baby sitters; and kitchen personnel. We have also identified a small number of women (five persons) working as prostitutes of their own will; that is to say, they are not victims of human trafficking. Men find employment in the construction and renovation business, providing all type of services such as building, painting, installing insulation, plumbing, electrical services, tile and parquet floor laying, etc. Thirty percent of undocumented men have graduated from specialized technical schools where a professional qualification in building, construction, electric works, or mechanics has been obtained. These respondents have been professionally active in one of the abovementioned sectors or in similar ones before migrating to Brussels and therefore, admit to having had an easier time finding a job once in Belgium.

Examining the professional activity of the four categories of undocumented migrants reveals that the construction and renovation sectors seem to offer professional opportunities for the undocumented settlers and for commuters, but not necessarily for the false students and individuals with "lost" documents. The latter are employed as non-qualified workers in the restaurant and auto-repairs industries, in the chocolate and yogurt factories, and in greenhouses. Those who are pursuing studies in information technologies, arts, or music are finding work in smaller industries such as computer maintenance, decorating and painting, or are able to give private lessons in their field of expertise.

All undocumented Bulgarians work irregular hours depending on the job that is required by the client. The majority of undocumented settlers and commuters work 60 hours per week or more. The false students work less (between 30 and 38 hours per week,

mainly in the evenings, and during the weekends) in order to be able to cope with their studies and in order to study to pass the necessary exams, which are required to extend the validity of their residence documents[8].

One of the most often asked questions, concerning the professional activities of undocumented immigrants in general is, how do these people gain access to work. How do they find job opportunities if they are new in the country, without possessing the right to work and without having any previous contacts with an employer or a person who can assist them? For those who already know someone in Brussels, the answer to these questions is as one might expect: relatives or friends in Brussels assist the newcomer by either arranging work for him or her, or by connecting the individual to others who are looking for a service which can be provided by the undocumented Bulgarian. The rest of the people, however, are in a more difficult situation. As mentioned earlier, the respondents who could not rely on the support of family or friends have advertised their services through local newspapers or on bulletin boards available in supermarkets and tobacco stores, and have sought to find work in restaurants or construction sites around Brussels. One strategy employed by some of the Bulgarian women (eight altogether) is to pose as Poles when publishing a small announcement. It is believed that Polish women already have a "good" name in Belgium. Thus, it is supposed that a Belgian employer would prefer to contact a Polish rather than a Bulgarian woman. This strategy is only used to gain access to potential employers. Once an appointment for an interview is secured, the respondents reveal their true nationality. For six of the women this "trick" proved to be successful. The respondents were able to successfully obtain a job as a cleaning lady or as household help after a conversation with the interested family. According to the women, being honest about the reasons for initially hiding their nationality was one of the crucial factors for getting the job. Two of the women did not receive jobs on their first attempt. In one case the "client" was disappointed that the woman had concealed her real nationality and therefore, deemed that she could not trusted to work in the house. In the second case the

[8] Re-inscribing in the municipality of residence each academic year is possible if the student provides a proof that, the required by the curriculum examinations have been passed.

Bulgarian woman did not get the job because the "client" did not wish to have contact with a person without legal residence in Belgium.

One important difference in the process of finding employment is observed between the ethnic Bulgarians and the Bulgarian Turks. The ethnic Bulgarians admit that only in rare cases help was provided by a co-national, while the Bulgarian Turks were extensively supported by Turkish families in Brussels, who either, if available employ Bulgarians in their own business, or refer them to other Turks who are looking for extra workers. According to the Bulgarian Turks, the major factor for this is their knowledge of the Turkish language, which allowed them to contact Turks already in Belgium. The fact that they could speak to them in their own language and because of a sense of shared common identity between Turks and our respondents is not insignificant. One particular example in this context is a Turkish Bulgarian woman, whose history in Belgium was observed continuously from March 2004 until September 2005. The respondent had arrived in Belgium alone in the beginning of 2000 and a few weeks after arrival had rented a room from a Turkish family in Schaarbeek. This family had introduced her to some close relatives who ran a small restaurant in Brussels and thus, they employed the respondent as kitchen personnel. Three months later, the woman's husband arrived in Belgium. He was also was assisted in finding a job by the same family. At the end of 2002, the family brought over their two minor children. When in 2003 the Turkish family expanded their business and opened a second cafeteria in Brussels, our respondent asked if they would need extra help and if they would agree to employ her niece, whom she guaranteed would be a reliable and hard working person. The family agreed. Therefore, in 2004 the niece arrived in Brussels together along with her minor child.

Examining the hindrances for finding a job reveals three major problem areas: for 22.7% of the Bulgarians the biggest problems after arriving is the lack of information about jobs in Brussels, and the lack of social network on which one can rely for help. Another 22.7% think that accessing a job is made more difficult because of the existing

discrimination against foreigners. Finally, for 17.3% the problem lies in the lack of documents, which makes potential employers reluctant to make a job offer.

However difficult this process might seem, the experience of 74.4% of the respondents shows that the first job is found in no more than three weeks after arriving in Brussels. 61.3% of the respondents said that it was not difficult to find a job in Brussels.

Finding employment in Brussels is therefore, only a problem in the first weeks after migration. Once a job has been found none of the respondents has experienced a period of continuous unemployment. To achieve this, respondents try to secure future work while being employed. This is of fundamental importance for all undocumented workers since none of the jobs are long term. Jobs in the construction sector continue until one site is finished and smaller jobs in household maintenance and repair last for only a few days. In the very best cases, male respondents are able to find two months of work at one construction site. Even so, earnings are sometimes not enough to provide the necessary income. In this case, respondents will take on a number of extra smaller jobs, to be completed in their free time. Once undocumented migrants enter the job market, all possible efforts are made to broaden future job possibilities. It would not be an exaggeration to say that migrants are quite resourceful in their persistence to find work. All of the people who have changed jobs have found a new job while working, or in less than a week after one “contract” has finished. Migrants who have resided in Brussels for longer than a year admit that over time, clients will contact them directly, having obtained their contact information from previous employers or clients. These migrants have established a large network of clients who are satisfied with their work and confirm that there are instances when the number of job offers is so abundant that they cannot handle them all at the same time. In these situations, migrants will usually recommend a close colleague or friend who could perform the job and reciprocally, the recommended person will transfer jobs back to his friends when the workload becomes too overwhelming. Over time a network of co-workers develop and teams of different specialists act together in an informal way. In the current research, we have identified six networks of this type in which a carpenter, electrician and construction worker act as a team. Two of these teams, including

undocumented migrants who are working in Belgium for over three years, have already established their "good" name, and are often contracted to work in other locations in Belgium and in Dutch cities, along Belgium's border.

A major goal of all undocumented Bulgarians is finding legal work within the field of their expertise, however, soon after arriving, migrants realize that there are practically no ways to achieve this. In this case, those with relevant professional experience and a diploma might try to establish a small firm in Brussels. As it will be shown later on, this way for regularization is not chosen by many, since the procedure is perceived as complicated, it requires a lot of paper work in both the country of origin and in Belgium, which may include collecting and translating proof of qualification. And, in the end, a decision to grant regularization may not occur. If this is the outcome, migrants fear deportation if they remain in the country after their application has been turned down. Due to the uncertainty of the outcome, migrants prefer to remain in their current situation. A commonly heard statement is "We are living like this for a long time, we have nothing to lose, and we can wait until Bulgaria becomes a member of the EU when our situation will change".

Income levels of undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels falls predominantly in the range of 501 € – 1000 € (for 34.7% of the respondents) and 1001 € – 1500 € (for another 37.3%). Eight respondents did not provide an answer to the question regarding their income. Two respondents have a net income of 2000 € or more, and three respondents who cohabitate with a Belgian person earn less than 500 € per month. The majority of the respondents (44%) did not indicate an income per hour and declare that their fee structure is different depending on the type of work performed. For example, a roof repair which includes changing insulation and painting for a period of four days of full time work (between 10 and 12 hours per day) and that employs two persons is priced at between 500 € and 800 €; making furniture, such as a wardrobe or a set of shelves costs between 50 € and 100 €, depending on the size and the design of the piece; the price for painting an apartment varies between 20 € and 50 € per day, and so on and so forth. The people who work per hour (such as cleaning ladies, baby sitters and painters) earn between 4 € and 10 € per hour.

Individuals who give private lessons typically earn between 15€ and 20 € per hour, but as previously mentioned, they work fewer hours per week.

One-half of the undocumented Bulgarians who were interviewed perceive their income sufficient to provide for a comfortable standard of living. The rest of the interviewees indicate that for a comfortable standard of living, they would need at least 500 € more than their current income. Undocumented Bulgarians avoid buying goods in Brussels besides those, which are needed for everyday life. The respondents prefer to save as much as possible in order to secure their future in Brussels if unemployed, or to take with them if their return to Bulgaria becomes inevitable. Commuters who are thinking about developing businesses in Bulgaria (or have already started their small business) save their income in order to further develop or expand their small company.

The overview of the research about undocumented immigrants in Brussels has revealed that undocumented migrants are the category of workers most susceptible to exploitation and to be underpaid. Testing these presumptions within our population reveals that 28% of the respondents have experienced incorrect payment in one way or another, and it has occurred between one and nine times. In some cases, the respondents did not receive any payment after the job has been completed, while in others, the payment was a lesser amount than was originally agreed upon. The problems with receiving payment for services rendered typically occur among the male populations of both ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. The principal way of "cheating" is when the client or the employer claims that the worker has not understood the terms of agreement or the way in which pay is calculated and remitted to the worker. According to the Bulgarians, the reasons for this can be explained by the fact that because they are undocumented, they can neither complain nor rely on the help of any state institution for advocacy in an unfair situation. The instances where experiences of incorrect or unfair payment occur are isolated mostly to cases where the Bulgarian works for other foreigners or Belgians of foreign descent. Eleven respondents claim to have been cheated while working for Moroccans, seven while working for Moroccans and Turks, one while working for a Russian person, and one involving an Italian client. After such an experience involving a client who is of the aforementioned

nationalities, respondents will try to avoid working for people of the same origin in the future. Incidents of incorrect payment are typical during the first months after arriving in Brussels and are more common among the respondents who did not have a relative or a friend who could introduce them to a potential employer.

When asked if they are satisfied with the working conditions in Brussels, 52% of the undocumented respondents reply that they are satisfied with the jobs they have. This percentage includes mainly undocumented settlers and commuters who are generally satisfied with both their jobs and the working conditions. The most important factor influencing the positive perception of working in Brussels is salary, which is incomparable to what the respondents can earn in Bulgaria, second is the perceived availability of jobs. Working long hours, performing all types of manual labor jobs, living in bad conditions, and illegally is preferred over a life in Bulgaria, where respondents do not even know if they will be able to secure any income, where the unemployment rate is high, and the salaries are extremely low. For most of the respondents a monthly income of 1500 € in Brussels is more than what they could earn for a whole year in Bulgaria. To illustrate the importance of financial gains from working in Belgium, one only needs to look as far as salary levels and the average income in Bulgaria. In 2004, the average annual income per household member reached 1,149 €, the highest in comparison to all previous years from the beginning of the transition period in 1989. The average annual nominal salary was 1,809 € (or 150 € per month)[9]. Salary level in 2004 increased 1,6 times compared to levels achieved in 1998 and are over 40 times higher than they were in 1995 (NSI, 2004)[10].

On the contrary, false students and respondents who used to have qualified or semi-qualified work in Bulgaria are dissatisfied with working conditions in Brussels. The false

[9] Contrary to common expectations, the annual salary levels were higher in the public sector (2,192 € or approximately 182 € per month) than in the private sector where the average annual nominal salary was 1,598 € (approximately 133 € per month).

[10] The income and the salary levels have been presented in Bulgarian Leva in the original source (NSI, 2004). We have opted for calculating the expressions in Euros on order to achieve easier comparison with the EU economic conditions.

students have come to Brussels with the goal of finding qualified work and were confident that their education and skills could be easily leveraged in Brussels. Once they realize that this may not be so easy to achieve, they begin to perceive their current situation not as just a temporary way of surviving, but as the only way for securing an income in the future. All respondents who are dissatisfied with working conditions in Brussels point out that the only reason they stay in Belgium is because of the possibility to earn and to save money. Even though their income is much better than it might be in Bulgaria, respondents often experience an erosion of their self-esteem, because they now have to work in jobs, which are often dirty and are physically demanding. Adding to this deterioration of self-worth, they now must work longer hours and in harsher conditions than they previously did.

To summarize it is the individuals with better education, greater aspirations, and higher expectations who have negative impressions about the working conditions in Brussels.

2. 8. Remittances

As we have already indicated in the beginning of the current chapter, the average household size of the Bulgarian immigrant is five to seven persons. People who have a stable income are, however, not more that three persons per household, including the respondent. One-half of the respondents do not support financially dependent family members in Bulgaria if there is another family member who could help. The rest of the interviewees are financially responsible for family members in Bulgaria and remit between 100 € and more than 600 € on a monthly basis. Family members who receive financial support from the migrants are usually dependent minor children and retired family members. Supporting elderly family members is easy to justify by simply looking at the average pension amount in Bulgaria. It is insufficient to allow pensioners to physically survive on their own, without additional assistance from other family members. To illustrate, in 2004, when pension levels were at their highest in Bulgaria, the average monthly pension was 62 €. This is only 6.3% higher than it was in 2003, but is 44% higher than it was in 1998. This figure, however, is somewhat inaccurate because it conceals the

fact that by December 2004, 46.4% of the pensioners had a pension lower than 50 €. In blatant terms, almost one-half of Bulgaria's elderly population lives below the poverty line (NSI, 2004).

The major ways for sending money home is in person: usually by paying 10 € to the bus driver of a Bulgarian bus company which operates service between Belgium and Bulgaria. This individual guarantees a safe money transfer. In contrast, only a few transfers are conducted by bank transfer. Remittances are mainly used for primary everyday needs, such as purchasing food and clothing, paying bills, and in some cases for renovating homes. It may also be used to increase savings, or for direct investment in a small business. Undocumented migrants remitting more than 400 € are financially supporting large families with more than two children of school age. The primary motivation of parents with school-age children in Bulgaria is to provide the best education, and to invest in private lessons in English and another foreign language. It is widely believed that this is the best way to ensure a successful future for their children.

2. 9. Future migration plans

A next goal of our research is to look for answers about the future migration plans of undocumented Bulgarians. The task of predicting future migration, especially in times, which are free from armed conflict or natural catastrophes, is far from easy. Furthermore, conclusions reached by interpreting data from questionnaires, which ask directly about future migration plans, is not necessarily a reliable indicator of whether or not future migration will take place.

In Chapter 6, we presented the profiles of undocumented immigrants in Belgium. The profiles point to the fact that many migrants plan to return to their country of origin but that the return never took place. The reality of why this happens can be explained by several reasons, the most common being the inability to save enough money or lack of prospects for a decent life in the country of origin upon return. Therefore, the only certain fact is that unless forced by extremely unfavorable conditions or being subject to deportation, the undocumented migrants who have no prospects for a better life in their

country of origin are highly unlikely to return. Sometimes the decision to return is implemented but then once back in their country of origin former immigrants realize that the quality of life upon return and professional possibilities are not as good as what they imagined they might be while abroad. But, however uncertain peoples' future movements could be, we will still seek to analyze the immigrants' plans for the future, as shared during the interviews. By doing so, we lay the groundwork for a potential future research which could show to what degree our interpretations of expected future migratory behavior of undocumented Bulgarians are correct. In the current study, we could hypothesize that one group of migrants who have stronger ties to the country of origin are the commuters and that their chances for return are among the highest within this population of undocumented workers.

Exploring the respondents' accounts about their future migration or settlement plans reveals two major tendencies. The first one is that undocumented settlers are generally determined to stay in Brussels. 35.6% of these respondents are planning to work in Brussels in the same type of job, until the EU accession of Bulgaria gives them a chance to regularize their status. Another 13% are trying to find a legal job in Brussels and 8.9% plan to become self-employed in Belgium. The rest of the undocumented settlers express some ambiguous intentions to return to Bulgaria and develop their own business or look for an employment opportunity. Nevertheless, none of these respondents have made steps for establishing a small business in Bulgaria or have attempted to look for job possibilities in their country of origin. In addition, the precise time of return is never specified or if specified, it is distant in the future, usually two or more years later. Thus, this makes it difficult to make predictions about a returning to the country of origin. A major factor, which would allow the consideration to return, would be to save enough money from working in Brussels, or to no longer find job possibilities in Belgium.

The false students and the immigrants who have lost documents are also hoping to find a legal job in Brussels and to settle permanently in Belgium. On average, these two groups of people are spending at least two hours a day looking for possible job openings and applying for work.

The second tendency, as discerned in the group of commuters is to return to Bulgaria and develop their own business, a plan pursued by 58.3% of the commuters. Another 25% would like to return to Bulgaria and to find paid employment. The commuters indicate that on each return to Bulgaria they invest in their business or make steps to further establish their enterprise. Due to the fact that the group of the commuters is not so numerous, we cannot outline any general trends in the sector of business development. However, we can instead indicate some of the major areas in which investments are made. These include a small family seaside hotel business, the establishment of a taxi company, the building a restaurant, the opening of a shop for clothing and sports equipment, the opening a grocery market, and the purchase of more land and agricultural equipment in order to develop a family farm.

2. 10. Deportations

Working as an undocumented migrant brings the risk of being discovered by the police or other state agents and consequently, deportation. Undocumented migrants therefore, take all possible measures to avoid being discovered by the authorities. Some of the precautions include simple actions such as always using public transportation with a valid ticket, avoiding crowded cafés in neighborhoods heavily populated with migrants, avoiding scenes where a noisy argument or a fight could erupt and thus attract the attention of the police; and avoiding places that are frequently monitored by police.

However, being discovered cannot always be avoided, especially for undocumented men who work on open construction sites that may be subject to regular controls initiated by the employment inspection service and the police. Being aware of these controls or having heard stories about the discovery of undocumented workers and the sanctions, which followed, is key to survival. However, despite the inherent risk less than half of the respondents, or 28 persons from the group of undocumented settlers, admit to being afraid of such inspections and will take measures to remain hidden at the workplace. The explanation for this lack of anxiety about being discovered and subsequent deportation is twofold. On the one hand, respondents admit that the risk of deportation always exists when

working illegally and therefore, one cannot always be hiding and living in a constant terror, always wondering what will happen if the authorities discover his or her presence. Over time people get used to their routine life in Belgium, they get to know many other people who are in a similar situation and who have never been discovered. This creates a feeling of security, which is complemented by an attitude of "it can't get any worse". In other words, undocumented workers share an opinion that even if the risk of deportation exists they have nothing to lose because their personal living conditions in Bulgaria are so bad that it is better to take the risk of working illegally in Brussels than to stay in Bulgaria. After all, any work in Belgium provides a good profit for the respondents. Moreover, this is still better than avoiding all risks by not migrating and living a life in poverty and deprivation at home.

The other explanation for the lack of fear of being discovered could be understood in light of the fact that 27 of the respondents (26 men and one woman) have been caught by the police while working and have been either deported or have received an order to leave the territory of Belgium within three days. With only three exceptions (one false student and two commuters), all these cases refer to members of the group of undocumented settlers. The deportations and the orders to leave the territory of Belgium indeed did not lead to the successful and permanent deportation of these individuals. In the cases of deportations, the migrants were able to return to Belgium in the first days after being deported and were not stopped by border control officers at any land border or at airports[11]. In the cases of receiving an order to leave the country, the migrants either did not obey the order or did not leave the country for at least six months. Some of the people from the latter group traveled to Bulgaria later on (by bus and in a few cases by airplane) and have not been identified by the border control officers as migrants with a history of detention and deportation from Belgium. When border control checks took place on the way to Bulgaria, the migrants have been asked about their intended length of stay in Belgium and their reasons for visiting the country. In our research, only four respondents have been identified

[11] An inquiry initiated by the Italian Government in five European Countries brings the conclusion that international airports are the most easily accessible portal for undocumented immigrants (UN, 2002a).

as “overstayers” by the border control services and had to pay a small fee. In none of the cases, however, was the migrant added to a black list, which would prohibit future entry access to any EU member state.

Since the visa regime for short-term trips to Schengen countries has been abolished for Bulgarian citizens, migrants entering Belgium choose not to reveal the real reason for traveling. Furthermore, they do comply with the requirements for entering the Schengen countries, which include holding a valid passport, enough cash to prove means of sustenance while in Belgium and, in some cases, even an invitation from a person legally residing in Belgium. The situations we described took place in the period of 2002 – 2004, a time during which, the respondents claim that the border control for people leaving the country was less strict in comparison with the years prior to 2002.

The question that remains open is how people with a history of deportation or a failure to comply with an order to leave the country can enter Belgium by flying to Brussels? Since this last question falls out of the scope of the current work, we will just elaborate on what the impact of events of this type are on the undocumented migrant population in Brussels. In the first place, the migrants who have been subject to police control and who have never experienced negative consequences believe that the local authorities are not very strict in dealing with undocumented immigrants, especially if the individual has no criminal dossier. The people who have returned after deportation are even more suspicious about the abilities of the Belgian authorities to effectively enforce sanctions on undocumented immigrants. Information about cases like this begins to circulate among the undocumented migrants and this causes a feeling of certainty that they are “irremovable” to be reinforced. It is further validated by hearing about similar accounts experienced by other undocumented migrants from Eastern Europe. Over time, the undocumented Bulgarians conclude that because Bulgaria is awaiting accession to the European Union, no strict measures would be taken against people whose only misdemeanor is working without documents in Belgium. As we will show later in this chapter, around half of the undocumented Bulgarians are aware that Bulgaria’s inclusion into the EU will not have an immediate impact on their legal status in the country and will

not give them unlimited access to work, if it provides access at all. Bulgarian respondents believe that, they will be the next group to be tolerated after Polish migrants and that the same attitude will be displayed towards Romanian undocumented migrants. A commonly shared opinion held by many is that it may be better to wait a few more years to obtain full settlement and working rights in the EU after Bulgaria's accession is completed. This is not viewed to be such a long time, especially when the perception of future economic development in Bulgaria is rather bleak and living and employment conditions back at home are not envisioned to be better than before migration. Moreover, the undocumented settlers perceive themselves as achievers in Belgium: they have found jobs, they earn "good" money, and they are able to financially assist their parents and relatives in Bulgaria. Furthermore, they are able to save money, and they are planning to regularize their status or to wait until full rights are granted to Bulgarian nationals. Therefore, the overall firm opinion is that police controls are the last factor, which can remove someone from the country. What is considered as a dangerous or distressing event is losing one's jobs or having an incapacitating accident, which reduces the possibilities for surviving in Belgium, but not the prospect of being discovered or deported.

2. 11. Social networks and personal contacts

Exploring the personal contacts of the Bulgarian undocumented migrants reveals that the social networks of the respondents are rather weak and even if the numbers of people defined as acquaintances reach more than twenty in some cases, contact with these people is rather irregular, not actively sought and maintained only for utilitarian reasons, for example, work-related matters.

The numbers indicate that 16% of Bulgarians in Belgium do not have any close friends in Brussels and 42.7% admit to not having more than three close friends. The remaining respondents have between four and seven persons, who they define as friends.

The close friends of the undocumented Bulgarians are exclusively co-nationals (24%), or foreigners (20%). The main nationalities of the foreign friends are Polish, Russian, or other Eastern Europeans. Only twelve out of the 75 respondents have a Belgian

person among their friends. In three of those cases, a friend is defined as a Belgian person or couple for whom the respondent works for as a live-in maid or baby sitter; and in three other cases the Belgian person was known to the respondent from the past and had assisted the Bulgarian respondent with their migrate to Brussels. In the remaining four cases, the Belgian friend is a former first or second generation Turkish immigrant with acquired Belgian citizenship.

No specific pattern in the frequency of meeting or contacting the friends could be determined. Equal proportions of undocumented Bulgarians declare to contact their friends on an irregular basis, more than once a week or once in two weeks depending on when they have free time to talk or meet with a friend.

The network of acquaintances of the undocumented Bulgarians is significantly bigger in comparison with network of friends. On average, our respondents have up to fifteen acquaintances. Some 30.7% of the respondents declare to have more than 20 acquaintances, and 21.3% have between eight and eleven. The origin of the acquaintances is also more diverse in comparison with those of friends. The majority of the studied population (34.7%) declares to actively maintain social contact with equal numbers of Belgians, co-nationals, and foreigners, the latter being primarily other Eastern Europeans or Turks. Broadening the social contacts with people from different nationalities, establishing relations with Belgians, and actively maintaining the personal social network are perceived as the only means for securing employment and for obtaining information about future job opportunities. However, almost half of the studied population (45.3% including both ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks) does not actively try to establish new contacts. The argument they provide to explain this is that they do not have the time and the need to look for new contacts because their workload is already too big. The remaining respondents, including the group of commuters, say that are simply not interested in making social contacts because they are in Brussels solely to work, to earn money, and not to settle permanently. At the same time, these people do not feel accepted by the local society and therefore, do not see a reason to actively search for new contacts.

In situations in which help might be needed (other than looking for a job) such as medical help, child care or looking for new accommodations, the respondents will either rely on the help of a relative or spouse, or will try to resolve the problem without external help.

The process of initiating and maintaining social contacts usually ends when enough job contacts are made and when clients and potential employers start contacting the respondent. It is at this time that individuals feel it is no longer to necessary to actively search for jobs in order to survive in Brussels.

2. 12. Integration and social isolation

Even though the social contacts of the undocumented Bulgarians are not very broad and are not actively maintained after a certain level of professional security has been achieved, 61.3% of the respondents do not perceive themselves as living in social isolation. In the words of the respondents, the major reasons for not feeling alienated are because of strong ties with family members in the country of origin. For example, 32% of the respondents call their relatives in Bulgaria at least once a week, another 13% are traveling to Bulgaria at least once in six months, and 18.7% are both calling and traveling to Bulgaria. Another factor suppressing the feeling of alienation and loneliness is the consciousness that the only reason for coming to Belgium is because of economic hardship in Bulgaria. In their leisure time, the half of the respondents prefers to take rest at home. The remaining interviewees spend their free time going to cafés with their foreign or co-national friends and acquaintances. Considering the long working hours maintained by undocumented Bulgarians, it is understandable that only a few hours are left for socializing and other leisure activities.

In the context of social interactions and social life in Belgium, we have also inquired if, and to what degree the undocumented Bulgarians could describe themselves as integrated. Furthermore, if they do feel integrated, what criteria is used to evaluate this notion. The interview results indicate that a substantial group of the respondents (39% altogether) does not feel integrated in Belgium and does not want to make efforts to

integrate and to be socially accepted by local populations. Again, the reason given is that their only purpose for residing in Brussels is to earn money and to make a living, which is impossible to do in Bulgaria. The respondents however express the opinion that even if foreigners want to integrate in Belgium, this is largely impeded by the reluctance of the local people to interact with foreigners in situations other than a client-worker relationship, and thus, this provokes feelings of exclusion. The respondents' experience is that to initiate more contact with Belgians at a level beyond superficial is difficult and that no close relationships can be established with the local people. The primary arguments supporting this opinion refer to simple every day life situations such as not being contacted by Belgians for free time activities, no interest in the history, the culture, the country and the character of the Bulgarians by the local people. Based on these experiences the respondents conclude that there is predominantly a negative attitude towards the non-EU foreigners in Belgium, which is cause for negative feelings as far as the subject of integration is concerned.

It is important to stress that all undocumented respondents unanimously share this feeling of lack of integration. Virtually all members of the commuters' group describe themselves as non-integrated and do not intend to make efforts to integrate. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, the commuters perceive Brussels only as a place where one can earn money quickly. However, their main orientation is towards Bulgaria. Therefore, it is of no particular interest to them to invest efforts in establishing social contacts, learning the languages, or to become familiar with Belgian customs or to follow the local news.

Despite having more contacts with people due to their students' status, the false students share the same feelings about the hindrances towards integration of foreigners in Belgium. These respondents admit that they had the opportunity to know many Belgians in the course of their compulsory class attendance, but that at the end of the day, no stable relations with Belgian students were established.

Casting aside this subjective feeling about integration, the undocumented Bulgarians perceive themselves as well integrated according to formal external criteria. This includes knowledge of French, and holding down a job and living in way that does not

interfere with the lives of other people. Nevertheless, the unanimous opinion is that integration is not only a matter of fitting into the new country linguistically and professionally, but it is also having the chance to interact on a personal level with the citizens of Belgium and to be accepted by them as a person and not simply as a worker.

2. 13. Health status

The majority of the undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels describe their overall health status as good (34.7%) and very good (45.3%). The respondents admit that they never or only sometimes experience stress and tension, or have complaints such as headaches, stomach pain, or mild depression. Among the men, working in the construction and renovation sectors a common complaint is back and neck pain (56%). In general, the respondents did not have any health problems before migration. This result is consistent with the previously established fact that the population of undocumented immigrants around the world is composed of young people in a good health. This makes sense when you consider that to live in a constant state of transition, or to work in heavy conditions could hardly be tolerated by people who are in bad health.

In the case of addressing medical problems, the coping strategy is to self-medicate, sometimes after consulting a friend, relative, or a colleague. Respondents indicate that they have a good supply of medicines from Bulgaria and buying medication from Belgium is avoided unless there is an emergency. However, the interviewees prefer not to take any actions unless the problem is really serious. Only a minority of the immigrants has used medical services in situations, when medical intervention has been absolutely necessary, such as severe cuts or joint dislocations. The undocumented immigrants save for the false students do not have any form of health insurance and this explains why medical intervention is avoided if possible. Half of the respondents have never been kept from working because of health reasons. Those who had to stop working because of a health problem tried to recover in three to four days and to return to work as soon as possible. None of the respondents has experienced mistreatment from an employer or a client in those cases. The respondent's job has been preserved for him while being on "sick leave".

2. 14. Stimulation further migration

The undocumented Bulgarians are rather unwilling to stimulate further migrants to come to Brussels, or to provide help to newcomers. Some 21% of the respondents are not willing to give their opinion about migration to prospective immigrants since their experience shows them that migration is a personal decision and not everyone can succeed abroad. Another 16% would not advise co-nationals to migrate to Brussels because they are not sure if the newcomers will be able to cope with the difficult life and hard work encountered in Brussels. The rest of the respondents would advise potentials migrants to come to Brussels, but under the condition that the newcomers know the local languages, have some specialization, and are prepared to live a harsh life and to work long hours. In general, the interviewees would advise the prospective immigrants to secure accommodation and to find work with the help of co-national before migrating. However, when asked if there are migrants who came to Brussels with the respondent's help, it turns that only thirteen migrants have helped another Bulgarian to come to Brussels and in all of the cases, this was a family member. Even though the respondents realize that having a broad social network is the only way to secure work and to obtain information about possible ways for regularization when residing without documents and even though the same respondents have been in a situation of relying on the help of other foreigners, they would not like to be in the position to provide help to newcomers in Belgium. It seems that the undocumented Bulgarians are not willing to invest time and effort in helping newcomers, since no profit is expected from a possible relationship with a new immigrant without a legal status. An often-heard argument is that contacts with other people are necessary only if they are beneficial for the respondent.

2. 15. Regularization and stay in Brussels

Our research indicated that 42 of all respondents have plans to regularize their status and to some extent, they are aware of the procedures necessary to complete the process. 23 of these persons have already started a procedure for regularization. As it has already been described, the undocumented settlers is the group of Bulgarians who has the firm intention

to stay in Belgium and this group constitutes the major part of the immigrants who have initiated regularization procedures. In the majority of the cases regularization is sought by becoming self-employed and in a few cases, an individual application for regularization is based on the fact that residence in Brussels has been longer than five years and the relationships with his or her community of origin and job prospects in Bulgaria have been so greatly reduced due to lack of contacts with previous employers.

The main reason, for which regularization is sought, is to open possibilities for legal work and to escape from the "hidden" life. The respondents who have a wife and children in Bulgaria are willing to bring their family over, but remain afraid to do so before being granted legal status in Belgium.

2. 16. Anticipated impact of the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union

In this section, we attempt to answer the question whether or not the future accession of Bulgaria to the European Union has an impact on respondents' perceptions of their future professional or legal status in Belgium. A related issue is whether EU enlargement will increase the motivations for settling in Brussels, or if it will, on the contrary, encourage return migration to Bulgaria?

The current research results reveal that 60% of the respondents do not believe that the EU accession of Bulgaria will have any impact on them, either positive or negative, in terms of having the right to work legally in Belgium or to obtain residence rights. This opinion is largely shared by the undocumented settlers, the commuters, and the "lost documents" groups. People are aware that the legal status and the conditions for settlement and work for nationals of the new member states do not change with the EU enlargement. They express the opinion that legally residing foreigners are not wanted in Belgium. Thus, EU enlargement per se will not facilitate their stay in the country.

The false students have a slightly more positive perception about the implications of EU enlargement. Those who express an optimistic view believe that in general, being Bulgarian will open more possibilities to legally work in Europe and in particular, the European institutions in Brussels. The false students share an opinion that well-educated

Bulgarians cannot be excluded from the job market forever. They are well informed that legally, Bulgarians will not have any rights to residence and employment in the European Union, but they predict that the level of tolerance towards citizens of the new member states will increase, especially in multinational organizations and EU structures. This view is largely the result of having contact with persons living in the new EU member states from 2004, who have been able to secure a job or an internship at an EU institution before their country has become a full member of the European Union.

The perception about EU enlargement and its ability to bring positive developments to Bulgaria, particularly with respect to improved economic status and improved general quality of life are rather negative. One-half of the 75 undocumented respondents believe that the accession of Bulgaria into the EU will not result in better opportunities for professional realization or will improve the standard of living in Bulgaria. On the contrary, these respondents are certain that EU enlargement will bring another transitional period to the country. This period of transition will be one during which prices will increase substantially, while the professional opportunities and the salaries will remain the same. Among the remaining respondents, 25% have no opinion about the potential impact of EU enlargement and prefer not think about an answer to this question because their knowledge of the European economy and politics is rather limited and does not allow then to make any predictions about the effect of future geopolitical changes in Europe.

Relating the opinions expressed to the different types of undocumented migrants, reveals that the only group who believes that the accession of Bulgaria to the EU will bring positive changes in the country, is the commuters. The commuters share the opinion that although a harsh transitional period will be unavoidable future membership of Bulgaria in the EU will allow for a simultaneous free flow of capital and will attract more investments, which in the long-term is beneficial.

Plans to stay in Brussels are not influenced by the EU enlargement process. 36 respondents indicated they would like to stay in Brussels after Bulgaria joins the EU and 27 respondents said they would like to spend the rest of their life in Brussels. However, a major factor impacting the decision to remain in Brussels is that respondents have the

opportunity to increased professional opportunities in Belgium or the possibility to earn a good income. The people who want to stay permanently in Brussels are predominantly a group of undocumented settlers who are of Bulgarian and Bulgarian Turkish origin. The false students would like to stay in Brussels if a qualified legal job in their field of expertise becomes available. The rest of the interviewees indicated they would like to live somewhere else, but cannot definitively say where that might be.

2. 17. Positive and negative perceptions of Brussels

In this final section of the first research stage focusing on the characteristics and profiles of the undocumented Bulgarians in Brussels, we will reveal the positive and negative perceptions these immigrants have about living in Brussels. We will also examine whether or not these perceptions have an influence on one's decision to stay in Belgium. The information related to positive and negative perceptions about being a migrant in Brussels has been collected through open-ended questions. This gave the respondents the opportunity to express freely all of their positive and negative feelings about Brussels, without guiding their answers by pre-defined answer categories. We will proceed by presenting the negative impressions of the undocumented migrants and then we will reveal the positive feelings about different aspects of living in Brussels.

Reviewing the respondents' answers to the question, "which parts of life in Brussels do you like the least?" indicate that that the number of listed negative feelings ranges between zero (for eight respondents) and 16. More than half of the respondents are, however, mainly discontent with one to three aspects of life in Brussels. These include: on 1) the lack of provisions for legal economic migration and regularization; 2) the feeling that undocumented EEI are perceived as a "second-rate" category of people, who do not deserve equal opportunity and who should not be given the possibility to assimilate into Belgian society; and 3) the personal concern that the Belgian society is rather closed and unwilling to accept foreigners who are not of privileged status or to offer any form of assistance in helping others to integrate. One negative aspect related to the latter, is the migrants' feeling that the local population is not interested in them. Even if the migrant seeks active social

contact with Belgians, it does not result in the development of stable relationships or friendships. Our research indicates that negative feelings concern the process of migration itself, not necessarily, what life in Brussels is like. The respondents were encouraged to think of experiences related specifically to life and work in Brussels. However, the response we obtained is that these general negative feelings would be the same no matter where the person was living, in Brussels or another city in Belgium. The most common statement we heard during interviews is that undocumented migrants who are in Brussels are driven principally by financial motives. But, due to the long working hours and limited opportunities for social contact, the grounds for accurately assessing the negative aspects of life in Brussels are rather restricted. In addition to the three primary topics of discontent we have already discussed, the respondents have enumerated several other negative aspects related only to the city of Brussels. The most commonly mentioned issue (by 25% of all undocumented migrants) concerns the presence of other visible minorities in the city, which provoke feelings of insecurity and according to the respondents, creates a "bad image of the city". What is perceived as a problem is not ethnic diversity itself, but the fact that the youngsters of foreign ethnicities seem to be omnipresent on public transportation, in the city center, and in many central municipalities of Brussels during the whole day, as if they are unemployed. The interviews reflect a general negative attitude towards the migrants in Brussels, further perpetuated by the presence and visibility of people of distinct ethnic origins "on the streets". In this same context, other 14.7% of the undocumented migrants express the opinion that Brussels "does not look like Europe" and is quite different from what was expected before migrating. When asked to elaborate on what is meant by the expression, "Brussels does not look like Europe," the respondents answer that typical migrant neighborhoods are slowly being transformed into Sub-Saharan African cities. The petty crime rate in such places is perceived to be higher, the streets are dirty, and the buildings are not well maintained. Additionally, there are often many beggars and homeless people. It should be stressed that these opinions and perceptions are shared exclusively by the Bulgarians who have no previous migration experience and who have arrived in

Brussels without first having objective information about the living and working conditions in Belgium.

Taking into account the demographic characteristics of the undocumented Bulgarians reveals no difference in the opinions shared by men, women, ethnic Bulgarians, Bulgarian Turks, families and single people, older or younger migrants. There is, however, a difference of opinion expressed by Bulgarians from different migration statuses, as defined in the beginning of this chapter. Even more so are the differing opinions among the false students or the former students who have remained without residence documents and the remaining migrants categories. The primary difference is that the false students and the former students are discontent with more aspects of life in Brussels and during the interviews have elaborated in more detail on the arguments supporting their opinions. The group of the false students could be described as more perceptive and more concerned about a wide range of topics, such as living and working conditions throughout the migration process, what the consequences and profits are of being an undocumented migrant, or what are the possibilities for improving one's quality of life. Besides the abovementioned negative perceptions about Brussels in general, the false students express a strong discontent with several aspects. One of the most widely shared opinions (35.7%) is that there is a large discrepancy between the widely publicized state concern about contemporary social problems and in particular, problems related to migration and undocumented migrants and the actual steps which are being taken to solve these problems. The false students confer that their first impression after arriving in Belgium is that the country values multiculturalism, however, in practice foreigners are not welcome. The reality suggests that the possibilities for finding work as a foreigner are minimal and that the entire state system (including provisions for obtaining legal rights for residence and work) functions in a way to discourage or prevent people from settling permanently in the country. The respondents recognize the fact that the European Union is de facto closed for economic migrants from third-world countries, but argue that under these conditions, the states' policies towards minorities should be consistent with the present day reality of "zero migration to the EU" which holds that migrants should be explicitly and effectively

prohibited from staying in the country. Otherwise, migrants are pushed into a gray zone, where they are tolerated but not granted any formal rights.

A second negative perception about life in Brussels shared by the false students is related to the way the state administration, as represented by the local municipalities, functions. The respondents' negative experiences exclusively pertain to the time consuming procedure of obtaining residence documents as a student, and the process for obtaining a student work permit. The interviewees describe the procedure not only as time consuming, but designed in a way that prolongs the actual delivery of documents. The public personnel is described as impolite; overtly expressing dissatisfaction with the fact that foreigners are in the country; not providing the necessary information as to what formalities should be fulfilled for obtaining a residence card or a working permit and by doing so, it forces people to go to City Hall several times to initiate even the simplest administrative registration procedure.

A third set of negative aspects regarding living in Brussels (and Belgium) concerns the lack of client orientation and bad service. Among the particularities most difficult to comprehend, the false students mention business hours for shops and the fact that nothing is open on Sundays, the lack of free home delivery service for big items, and the underdeveloped Internet shopping capabilities (e.g. from shops like IKEA, or from shops for machinery and tools).

A fourth concern shared by the false student is the impossibility to establish and maintain close social contacts with Belgians. Beyond superficial every day interactions with colleagues, the social network of the migrants only includes other foreigners. As indicated above, the respondents only occasionally describe themselves as suffering from social isolation because of the strong ties with their family members who are in Bulgaria or because residence in Brussels is not permanent decision or expected to be a long-term Nevertheless, the difficulty experienced by foreigners to establish and maintain close contacts with Belgians is considered alarming.

Despite these negative attitudes towards life in Brussels, the migrants also express a substantial positive perception of their experiences as migrants. Reviewing both the

positive and the negative statements reveals a certain balance between the two, with the majority of the respondents acknowledging the fact that there are no perfect places where one could be entirely content and satisfied with all aspects of life and work.

Analyzing the positive perceptions about Brussels indicates largely converging opinions shared between migrants with different demographic and migration statuses. The false students comment more on the positive aspects involving non-material factors, which will be presented below. But, first, we will introduce the positive perceptions about Brussels as shared by our entire research population of undocumented Bulgarians. The first and foremost acknowledged positive aspect to living in Brussels is the possibility of finding a job, the prospect of earning a decent income, especially in comparison to what one could earn in Bulgaria, or to use the words of the respondents "to make a living". Since the decision to migrate by and large is dictated by economic reasons, unemployment and poverty in Bulgaria, one could easily understand why the possibility of securing a job in Brussels and having a steady monthly income much above what could be earned in Bulgaria, is perceived unanimously as the major positive aspect to living in Brussels. A related aspect to living in Brussels is the possibility to have a decent quality of life even with irregular, unqualified, and undocumented work. Around 60% of all undocumented respondents say that even with a relatively low income, in Brussels one could still pay rent, purchase clothing and food, and pay some bills, which is impossible to achieve in Bulgaria. In this context, the respondents also recognize the importance of having access to numerous Turkish-owned shops and inexpensive stores such as LIDL and ALDI, both of which offer goods to people with limited income. Comparing the prices of the goods in these stores to the prices of similar goods in Bulgaria is often made to show that indeed the prices of food and everyday household goods (excluding domestic appliances and furniture) in Bulgaria are often more expensive than in Belgium.

Less often mentioned positive aspects about life in Brussels include the good public transportation system, the lack of, or at least perceived invisibility of crime, the easiness with which one can live in Brussels due to the good remuneration and constant need for undocumented work; the calmness and the patience of the people working in shops and

cafeterias, the anonymity, in the sense that there are no spontaneous police controls which could reveal a migrant's undocumented status, and the way the state authorities tolerate the presence of undocumented workers and avoid applying harsh methods for prosecuting should they be discovered.

Other evaluated aspects are job related and include the correctness of the Belgian employers in terms of paying the agreed salary and providing promised jobs, the fact that the quality of work of the undocumented Bulgarians is recognized and former employer and clients recommend the respondents to future clients, which provides steady employment opportunities.

The positive aspects about Brussels recognized exclusively by the false students include in the first place, the fact that Brussels is a multinational and multilingual city where one can meet people from all around the world and get to know different cultures and diverse lifestyles. Indeed the multicultural environment is what makes life in Brussels pleasant and challenging. The diversity of people and cultures provides a forum for stimulating international dialogue. Once is able to broaden her knowledge about different cultures just by the mere presence of many foreigners living in the same city. In the same vein, the false students are content that one can function in Brussels in more than one language, and that English is well spoken and widely used by many people.

The false students are also individuals who explicitly value the high quality of education available in Belgium. They also value the possibility to pursue numerous careers using the English language, the accessibility of academic institutions, and the affordable cost to receive an education.

3. The professional Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels

Throughout the following paragraphs, we will present a portrait of the professional Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels by concentrating on the same topics of interest, as discussed in the group of undocumented respondents. As indicated in Chapter 7, the purpose of studying the professional Bulgarian migrants is to outline the portrait of this group of migrants, to explore their motivations for migration and to determine if they have

future migrations plans. By doing so, we reveal if and to what degree this group differs from the undocumented Bulgarian migrants. This information will provide grounds for drawing a conclusion about which group of migrants is more likely to remain and Brussels for a longer term, a topic discussed in the Conclusions to the current thesis.

As defined in the beginning of this chapter, the professional immigrants are those immigrants with advanced university education and who are professionally active within their field of expertise. The results presented below are based on interviews conducted with 32 professional Bulgarian immigrants residing in Brussels (12 men and 20 women).

3. 1. Demographic data, household composition, and living conditions

The group of the professional Bulgarian migrants is predominantly (21 persons) from Sofia and Plovdiv, the biggest and most developed cities in Bulgaria. The remaining respondents have been born in a third city, but all of them have migrated to Sofia before they are seventeen or eighteen years of age, which is the average age for beginning university in Bulgaria. All of the professional migrants are of Bulgarian ethnic origin and are on average, 38 years old.

Observing the marital status of the respondents reveals that half of the women are either divorced or single and do not have a partner at the moment of the interview and for at least the last couple of years before the interview. The rest of the female respondents are either married or live with a partner in a stable relationship. On the other hand, the majority of the male respondents are married or cohabitating.

About half of the respondents have no children. The rest of the professional migrants have between one and three children. The predominant household size among the professionals is three to five persons (including the respondent), thus it is slightly smaller than it is for the undocumented migrants. The professional migrants come from small families, with parents who are holders of advanced university degrees. With a few exceptions, the professional migrants are a single child.

The majority of the professional migrants have Bulgarian nationality. Seven respondents have both Bulgarian and Belgian citizenship and in one exception, it was

obtained after a marriage to a Belgian partner The only person who has obtained citizenship based on years of residence in Belgium has done so after fourteen years of residence in Belgium and was refused citizenship after eleven years of uninterrupted legal residence and legal work in Belgium.

The professional Bulgarians are to be found in twelve Brussels' municipalities but tend to be concentrated in Uccle, Woluwe-St-Pierre, and Etterbeek, which are among the best residential areas in the city. Eleven of the respondents are owners of their home and the majority of the remaining persons resides in a two-bedroom apartment, paying a rent in the range of 500 € - 700 €.

Once in Belgium, exploring the mobility pattern of the migrants reveals it is insignificant. The current place of residence is usually the same as it was upon arrival or if a migrant has moved, it has been within the same municipality. A few of the owners have moved towards Zaventem, Dilbeek, and Grimbergen. There is, however, a visible tendency to move to Brussels from other areas of Belgium. One-third of the interviewees have resettled in Brussels after first residing in Leuven, Antwerp, or Brugge. The main argument for resettlement in Brussels is the need to live in a multinational city, the desire for a more varied social and cultural life, and the existence of a social environment comprised of people from different nationalities and cultures and not only of Belgians. Additionally, it is appealing that Brussels is a city in which a migrant can function entirely using English.

3. 2. Educational level and language abilities

As we have already mentioned, all migrants from the "professional" category hold at least one university degree. The prevailing academic specializations fall into one of the following two fields: 1) physics, biology, pharmacy, mathematics, engineering, I.T.; and 2) law, economics, finance and business administration. The majority of the respondents did not continue their formal education in Belgium. Some of the respondents active in the academic or research and development sectors (exclusively in the field of the exact sciences) are also pursuing a doctoral degree.

The major working language of the professionals is English. All respondents are however, are tri or quadri-lingual (not counting the native language). Before migrating, the grand majority of the respondents have graduated from a specialized school for foreign languages[12], which grants proficiency in one foreign language and a good level in a second language. The remaining respondents have graduated from specialized schools in mathematics, physics, or natural sciences, where foreign language training is also extensively covered by the curriculum. Some 80% of the professional migrants admit to having a moderate understanding of French language, but lack written and oral proficiency. This is due in part to the fact that French is not required in their professional career. A number of respondents (11 persons) declare to have a moderate to good understanding of the Dutch language.

3. 3. Migration histories and migration to Belgium

The vast majority of the professional migrants have a history of past migration before coming to Belgium, ranging from one to more than six past migrations. Those respondents who did not migrate in the past have arrived in Belgium when they were of school age or immediately upon graduating from the university. These are factors, which can explain a lack of past migratory behavior. Excluding migration to Sofia for education, destinations of past migrations include most European countries, the USA, Japan, and Morocco. In half of the cases the reason for the first past migration is to pursue an education or specialization. In the remaining cases, migration was related to working abroad. In the case of more than one past migration, the second, and the following migration movements were exclusively for reasons related to employment. Eleven of the

[12] The Foreign language schools in Bulgaria (initially only English, French and German, and later on Spanish and Italian), are a form of specialized secondary education of 5 years training, accessible for children with completed basic education (7th grade) after passing entrance examination in mathematics and literature. After a preparatory year of intensive language training, all subjects (besides Bulgarian language, mathematics, music, and sports) are taught in the foreign language during the remaining four years. A second foreign language by choice of the student is taught after the preparatory year.

professional migrants moved to Brussels from the place of past migration and the rest migrated to Belgium from Bulgaria.

The main reason for coming to Brussels for 50 % of the professional migrants is a job offer from Brussels or a job transfer. In the remaining cases, Belgium was chosen as a destination country for pursuing formal studies. In the case of migrants prior to 1991, they applied to seek asylum in Belgium. Save for the last category of migrants, the rest of the respondents do not define themselves as immigrants or as persons with an immigrant mentality, or sought to leave Bulgaria under all circumstances. Instead, migration is defined as a carefully made decision based on a careful comparison of countries offering different employment possibilities, which catered to the expertise of the migrants. All of individuals who migrated after 1991 have had a good professional career in Bulgaria and an improved quality of life. However, despite their success, many feel that the possibilities for professional development are still limited because of the bad economic situation, in general. For example, respondents who are active in the field of science admit that their work was hindered largely by the lack of necessary equipment and machines, materials, library facilities and the like. Those active in the field of legal and financial consulting believed that their qualifications would be better validated in a Western country. Over time and a history of traveling abroad, the latter group of persons begins to hold higher expectations of how a better quality of life and higher income are defined, and what exactly constitutes a more challenging professional career. Furthermore, they understand these aspirations cannot be realized by working in Bulgaria. These respondents express an opinion that their qualifications will never be fully valued in Bulgaria and that working in Bulgaria even with good remuneration is still considered not as profitable since possibilities for full professional and personal development rarely exist.

Migration to Brussels was not implemented with the particular help of other individuals or family members. The professional migrants view themselves as self-sufficient and stress that migration to Brussels is their own endeavor and is solely a personal achievement. Relevant information about major aspects of life in Belgium such as salary levels, employment opportunities, social security provisions, housing and real estate

prices, and legislation concerning foreigners has been obtained before making the final decision to move to Brussels. Migrants have obtained some help by employers (such as arranging accommodation) or friends who have provided information, but this assistance is not viewed as vital for implementing the trip to Brussels.

3. 4. Professional situation

At the time of the interview, all professional migrants were employed within their field of expertise. On average, the working hours per week fall in the range 38 to 48 hours. Those employed in legal and financial consulting work around 45 hours per week, but often the workload requires more than 60 hours per week. The minimum net income of all professional migrants is 2000 €. The majority of the respondents also enjoy additional perks, such as access to a company car, mobile phone, and meal reimbursement.

In general, the professional migrants have worked for the same employer since moving to Brussels. Only a small number of persons, including those who have arrived more than five years ago, have changed employment more than once. The main reason for changing jobs was to find better paying work and more interesting professional activities. In two cases, the respondents have become self-employed and have established their own business.

Among those active in the academic research and development fields, a small number of respondents are working on a limited contract and are considering searching for additional employment within their field of expertise, either in Belgium or in another country.

The highly qualified Bulgarians in Brussels have not experienced significant difficulties in securing employment in Brussels, but they attribute this to the fact that they do not work for Belgian companies. The respondents' opinion is that finding a job in a Belgian company is practically impossible for non-nationals. The reason for this is the perceived discrimination towards foreigners in Brussels, especially toward those who are well educated. These highly qualified individuals are viewed as competition within the marketplace and therefore, are perceived as a threat.

3. 5. Remittances

The professional migrants come from families in which all family members have an income. One-third of the interviewees has financially dependent family members in Bulgaria, but indicates that those family members are not solely dependent upon them to remit a portion of their income and the remittances only serve to improve the quality of life of the dependents. In all cases of declared financial support of family members in Bulgaria, the remittances are used for everyday needs, for purchasing household appliances, new furniture, for home renovation and for taking holidays. The monthly remittance amounts to 300 €, on average.

3. 6. Personal contacts, social networks, and social isolation

The professional migrants have a broad network of social contacts. The average number of people defined as friends, ranges between one and seven persons and if acquaintances are included, it increases to more than 20 persons for the majority of the respondents. Both friends and acquaintances are foreigners from other EU countries, the USA, or Asia. Only a few persons maintain close contact with other Bulgarians who are part of the professional category. Social contact with Belgians is a rather exceptional phenomenon and the respondents explain that maintaining contacts with local people in the territory of Brussels is hindered by two major factors: firstly, by their professional environment, which is multinational and therefore does not offer a chance for establishing contacts with many Belgian; and secondly, because the attempts to maintain close relationships with local people have been unsuccessful. There is a largely shared opinion that in general, the Belgian population avoids Brussels because of highly diverse and international structure, where a mixture of foreign languages are spoken and where the local languages are neither required for survival nor for guaranteeing a high quality life; where the diversity of nationalities is too large and the social environment changes at a fast pace very often. If the professional migrants have close contacts with Belgians, it is because the latter are described as, “not typical Belgians”. The close relationships maintained by the

professional migrants are with people from their own field of work or with people active in other foreign or multinational companies. The presence of Belgians in these places, who, moreover, maintain personal contacts with the foreign staff, can be explained by a different personality profile of the Belgian colleague. The latter is described as more open, interested in the social diversity and looking to actively enlarge his or her network of international contacts. As it will be shown later on, the structure of social contacts maintained in Brussels could be related to the subjective perception of integration and is often used by professional migrants as an explanation for why integration is not adequate in Brussels.

The frequency of meeting friends depends on the work schedule of the migrant. Since the majority of the respondents declare to work an average of ten to eleven hours per day, regular contact is maintained only with friends from their direct professional environment. With the rest of the people, meetings take place on very irregular basis. Telephone and E-mail contact are often substitutes for personal meetings. The majority of professional migrants are not actively looking to establish new social contacts because the number of existing contacts is viewed to be sufficient and they lack time for social interaction. The minority of respondents, who are still actively looking for new contacts, are those who arrived most recently, and who are still in the process of establishing their social network in Brussels.

When free time is limited to one or two days per week, major free time activities include resting at home or participating in social activities. If free days number three or more, the major activity will be travel abroad.

3. 7. Future migration plans

Nearly half of the respondents plan to keep on working on the same job in Brussels. The rest are planning to migrate to another country and a few of the oldest respondents are considering retiring in Bulgaria. The individuals who have been working in Brussels for more than two years plan to apply for Belgian nationality or permanent residence and are certain they will not migrate in the future. The reasons for this are mainly practical in nature and include motivations such as avoiding future obstacles related to taking jobs in

EU countries, avoiding contacts with local district authorities every year when residence documents have to be prolonged, and being able to travel without a visa to more countries. The desire to become a Belgian citizen or permanent resident are clearly perceived as a means, and not as an end, as only less than five professional migrants indicate he or she wants to reside in Belgium in the future.

An important element to stress is the perceived need by professional Bulgarians to integrate. Two thirds of the respondents do feel integrated but these are primarily people who migrated as asylum seekers, those who have been in Belgium for more than six years and those who have a Belgian spouse or partner. The rest of the Bulgarians do not see integration as a necessary component of life in Brussels. A largely shared opinion is that integration in Brussels is a rather vague concept and respondents believe that being a "resident" of Brussels is like being a "citizen of the world," in the sense that no identification with the state is felt. Respondents clearly do not tend to assimilate to either the Flemish or the Francophone cultural model. The reason given for this is that with the large proportion of foreigners in Brussels, coupled with the large representation of multinational and foreign enterprises and European institutions, there is no specific reality into which one should integrate.

3. 8. Health status

The subjective perception of their own health status is rather positive for all professional migrants. Stress, tension, and headaches are the most common complaints, the reason for which is found in the heavy workload and the lack of free time for relaxation and recreational activities. None of the respondents perceives these ailments as requiring a particular kind of treatment.

3. 9. Stimulation of further migration

The professional migrants have arrived in Brussels alone and the cases in which a spouse or a child has joined the family, are the exception. The respondents unanimously declare that they have not helped other persons to migrate to Belgium and are not planning

to do so in the future. A widely shared opinion is that the decision to migrate is a personal decision and cannot and should not be influenced by people who are already abroad. The respondents are willing to provide information about the living conditions in Belgium, but try to be impartial in doing so, because each individual migration experience occurs in a different way. Positive descriptions of life in Brussels and its impact upon migratory behavior could prove to be more harmful than helpful. The respondents share the opinion that they have succeeded in working in Brussels only because of a combination of factors, such as relevant education, professional experience and submitting a job application at the opportune moment. According to our respondents, successful or unsuccessful migration for professional reasons depends only on the amount of invested personal effort and not on the indirect help provided by the individuals who are already abroad. Social contacts are viewed as important insofar as social adaptation and coping with loneliness is concerned, but not in terms of achieving the desired professional career. Therefore, the Bulgarian professional migrants restrict themselves only to providing descriptive information about Brussels and will only volunteer information when asked to do so.

3. 10. Anticipated impact of the EU enlargement

The professional migrants share an almost unanimous opinion that the accession of Bulgaria to the EU will not have any personal or legal impacts in the short term. The respondents are well aware of the impact of the transitional period imposed on new member states and the restrictions related to granting residence status to citizens of new member states.

One small portion of interviewees thinks that EU enlargement will bring positive developments to Bulgaria. The widely shared opinion is that the economic situation in Bulgaria will not improve merely because of accession to the EU because of the severity of several major issues in Bulgaria. For example, the level of corruption, the lack of political stability, and the lack of an entrepreneurial spirit.

3. 11. Positive and negative perceptions of Brussels

To follow the structure of presenting the opinions of the undocumented Bulgarians about Brussels, we will first introduce the negative impression expressed by the professional migrants about Brussels. Then, we will focus on the positive aspects to living in the city.

A review of the negative perceptions expressed by the professional Bulgarians reveals that this category of migrants has more and stronger negative experiences about life in Brussels in comparison with the undocumented migrants. Additionally, the female professional migrants are more discontent than their male counterparts and hold a larger number of negative perceptions. In the following paragraphs, we will first concentrate on the impressions of the women. Next, the fewer negative impressions expressed by male within this population will be discussed. The reader should keep in mind, however, that the size of the studied professional population is rather small and does not allow for any definitive conclusions. Thus, the presented results should be regarded only as preliminary and non-generalizable.

The first and foremost negative impression expressed by the Bulgarian professional women (14 out of 20) refers to the difficulty in initiating and maintaining non-superficial social contact with Belgians living and working in Brussels. Since the Bulgarian women are predominantly employed in international or foreign companies, they have social contact primarily with foreigners than with Belgians. However, the experience of this population is that even if one attempts to become close friend with the local people, this is usually difficult to achieve. Contact between foreigners and Belgians remain only possible within the workplace and seldom develop into a deeper personal relationship. The professional Bulgarian women confer that their social life is restricted only to contacts with foreigners, which is evaluated as positive. On the other hand, the respondents express that their expectation for living in Brussels over a long term was to have strong ties with Belgians in the first place and then secondly, with other foreigners.

The second negative aspect to living in Brussels is defined by the Bulgarian women as lack of good service, lack of client orientation, and lack of strong professional ethnics.

The respondents compare the service sector of Belgium with that of other industrialized countries where they have lived or worked and share the opinion that numbers of service related factors and organization of work were expected to be better than in reality. The most common complaints refer to the opening hours of the shops, the disinterest of the shop attendants in their clients, the lack of home delivery service, the disregard to uphold announced delivering deadlines for furniture or big domestic appliances and the like. The respondents are also discontent with the fact that the prices of different service providers, such as for fixed telephones, internet, mobile telephony, cable television are virtually the same and that the choice of service providers is rather low, thus hindering competition and preventing the stimulation of good service offerings.

Another topic of discontent raised by the professional Bulgarian women refers to the perceived lack of coherence between the state and the public concerns about some social topic such as migration management and migrant integration on the one hand and the measures actually taken to resolve these problems on the other. The widely shared opinion is that issues related to migration are highly discussed in a way that attracts strong social attention. However, the practical solutions to these problems are seldom offered or implemented.

A review of the male respondents' expressed opinions regarding the negative sides of living in Brussels reveals that the mentioned areas of discontent as shared by the women are also raised but to a lesser degree. One negative aspect indicated by the professional men is the impression that the city center is not well maintained, it seems to be dangerous, there is a lot of petty crime such as breaking into cars and pick-pocketing. Overall, the ambiance is not pleasant and is not inviting to someone wanting to spend time outside in the later hours of the day.

What is important to mention with regard to the population's negative opinions about Brussels and Belgium, is that these negative sentiments have developed after residing at least two years in the city. In the first years immediately following migration, none of the respondent remembers having had any discontent. Thus, a particular focus and observation of the negative aspects have started to appear once the migrants have settled in the country

and once they have been engulfed by everyday life in Belgium. In this context, it is understandable why the professional migrants openly consider the possibility to migrate to another country, if a possibility for professional relocation exists.

Looking at the positive impressions expressed by Bulgarian professional migrants reveals that the opinions of the male and the female populations eventually converge. Both agree that it is possible to have an easy going and calm life in Brussels once a professional career has been established. The respondents share the opinion that despite a not quite perfect service sector, life in Brussels is very well organized in terms of having access to efficient public transportation and efficient train systems, to banking and crediting services and the like. The professional migrants find that the small size of the city and the good transportation system makes communication easy, and can appreciate the fact that the geographical position of the city makes it relatively easy to access the rest of the world.

Another positive factor about Brussels mentioned by the professional Bulgarians is the multinational environment of the city and the possibility for having regular contact with people from all over the world. In this sense, Brussels is described as a place where life in interesting and challenging, offering a possibility for life-long learning. It is a city conducive to broadening one's horizon through exposure to many persons of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Our respondents greatly appreciate the opportunity to live and to work in such a multinational environment, where many languages are spoken, and where all foreigners are open to and actively seek interaction with new social contacts. In this context, Brussels is often described as a city existing on its own, that is to say, "just Brussels," and not part of Belgium. It is not a typical city compared to others, which are not as ethnically diverse. Brussels is perceived as a place where there is a place for everyone; where all newcomers can find their social niche and where they do not have to interact formally with Belgian society, if it is not desired.

One final positive aspect to living in Brussels is the cheaper price of property in comparison with other European capitals. Those respondents who do not have their own

property in Brussels consider purchasing a house or an apartment, as it is viewed as a good investment even if permanent settlement in Belgium is not envisioned.