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THE LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION
OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN **F**LANDERS
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS CONCERNING
THE ENTRY INTO THE LABOUR MARKET OF YOUTH OF MIGRANT DESCENT

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Summary

People of ethnic minorities are not equal to those of the ethnic majority in Flanders. On average, young people of migrant descent (mostly second or third generation migrants) are less highly educated, and they have higher school drop out rates than natives do. Compared to natives, these non-natives are from a more disadvantaged social background. In particular, the position of non-natives of Turkish or North-African descent, is highly precarious. Their parents are very often lowly educated, their fathers are often unemployed, the educational level they achieve is low, and they have a much higher probability of leaving secondary education without qualifications than non-natives of Southern European or other migrant descent do. These findings are not new, and are documented in our earlier study 'Wit krijgt schrijft beter' (Duquet et al., 2006).

The key problem of interest in our new book 'Zwart op wit' (Glorieux et al., 2009) is how their educational disadvantage and their weak social background affect the opportunities of children of migrants on the labour market. Do they have a more problematic entry into the labour market; are they excluded from the more advantageous positions; do they end up in bad working conditions? We find that youngsters of migrant descent do worse than natives when entering the Flemish labour market. It takes them longer to find a first job and they have a lower employment rate than natives do. When they succeed in finding work, they often start off in less challenging jobs that have lower occupational prestige and poorer job conditions.

In this summary we will highlight some of the main findings concerning the position of children of migrant descent at the start of their working career. We start with a description of the data and our definition of ethnicity. Next, the transition from school to work is characterized by the duration of unemployment and the characteristics of the first job after leaving school. And finally we discuss the extent to which the entry positions of non-natives can be attributed to their problematic school careers and / or to their disadvantaged social milieu of upbringing.

Full references

Glorieux, I., I. Laurijssen & Y. Van Dorsselaer (2009), *Zwart op wit. De intrede van allochtonen op de arbeidsmarkt [Black on white. The entry of non-natives into the labour market]*. Garant, Antwerpen-Apeldoorn (117 p).

Duquet, N., I. Glorieux, I. Laurijssen & Y. Van Dorsselaer (2006), *Wit krijgt schrijft beter. Schoolloopbanen van allochtone jongeren in beeld [White chalk writes better. The educational careers of non-native youth mapped out]*. Garant, Antwerpen-Apeldoorn (106 p).

1 Research among three cohorts

To map the transition from education to the labour market, we use the longitudinal SONAR-dataset. The Flemish inter-university research group SONAR¹ (acronym for Research Group from Education to the Labour Market) started collecting data about the transition from school to work in 1999, with face-to-face surveys among different cohorts at different moments in time. For youth born in 1976, 1978 and 1980 and living in Flanders, Belgium, a-select samples were taken from the National Register of about 3.000 persons for each birth cohort. All of them were interviewed at the age of 23 (N= 9.010). Those born in 1976 and 1980 were questioned a second time at the age of 26 in 2001 and 2004 (N=4.162). In 2005 an interview also took place at the age of 29 among the cohort born in 1976 (N=1.657).

TABLE 1: COMPOSITION OF THE SONAR-DATA

	age 23	age 26	age 29
born in 1976	C76(23) 1999 N=3.015	C76(26) 2002 N=2.060	C76(29) 2005 N=1.657
born in 1978	C78(23) 2001 N=3.002	C78(26) 2004 N=2.102	-
born in 1980	C80(23) 2003 N=2.993	-	-

1.1 Ethnicity: who is non-native?

Ethnicity is often defined in terms of nationality. In countries where the rates of naturalization are high, as in Belgium, a high number of people of foreign descent is removed from the statistics. We chose to have ethnicity defined more broadly. The ethnic background of respondents in the SONAR-research is based upon the following information:

- the nationality of the respondent
- the country of birth of the respondent
- the nationality of the grandmother (mother's side)
- the country of birth of the grandmother (mother's side)
- the language that is spoken at home (with parents)

Someone is native if he or she (1) has the Belgian nationality, (2) uses Dutch as the most important or only language at home, (3) was born in Belgium, has a grandmother (on mothers side) who (4) was born in Belgium and who (5) has the Belgian nationality herself.

¹Acronym for "Studiegroep van Onderwijs naar Arbeidsmarkt", translated freely as "Research Group from Education to the Labour Market".

Everyone who does not meet one of these criteria is considered non-native. Using this definition, 86% of our sample is considered native, 14% is non-native (table 2). To prevent that respondents from the German-speaking and French-speaking parts of Belgium would be wrongly counted among the non-natives, we excluded from the analyses the 167 respondents who speak (mainly) French or German at home but match the natives on the other criteria.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER

	Men	Women	Total	% Sample	% Non-native
Native	3930	3752	7682	85,6	
Non-native	557	597	1154	14,4	
Turkish	93	98	191	2,6	17,9
North-African	85	104	189	2,6	17,9
Southern European	88	88	176	2,2	15,0
Other	291	307	598	7,1	49,2

We subdivide the non-natives furthermore based on the region of migration background. The same indicators were used to make the distinctions, i.e. language spoken at home, and country of birth and nationality of the respondent and the grandmother. The considered regions are: (1) Turkey, (2) North-Africa (Morocco en Algeria), (3) Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal en Greece) and (4) a left-over category with non-natives whose origin lies outside of these three regions. This group of “other” non-natives consists mainly of respondents whose ethnic roots lie within the borders of the European Union.

1.2 Background characteristics of non-natives

The non-natives in our sample mainly belong to the second or even third generation. Almost three quarters of the respondents of migrant descent were born in Belgium (72,1%), and 82% of them have the Belgian nationality (table 3). Due to the research eligibility criteria, all of them also went to (at least) secondary school in Flanders. Although a majority (57%) of the non-natives in our research speak Dutch at home (at least among other languages), a significant minority do not. In particular, those of Turkish, and to a lesser extent those of North-African origin, mostly speak another language at home than they do at school.

TABLE 3: BEING BORN IN BELGIUM, BELGIAN NATIONALITY, AND MOST IMPORTANT LANGUAGE USED AT HOME BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND (%)

	Born in Belgium	Belgian nationality	Dutch at home (only language)	Other language is most used
Native			97,5	-
Non-native	72,1	81,7	40,1	42,8
Turkish	75,0	84,6	0,9	85,2
North-African	66,1	73,2	3,9	56,6
Southern European	85,4	76,6	27,7	47,1
Other	69,2	85,4	71,2	21,2

Despite the fact that the respondents in our sample are all from the region of Flanders and Brussels, that they have all been in the Flemish secondary educational system and have a sufficient knowledge of Dutch (in order to participate in the research), they are quite different from native respondents on a number of marks. Compared to native youth, the non-natives have lower educational qualifications, and more often leave the educational system without qualifications (table 4). In addition, more of them are from lower socio-economic background (see also Duquet et al., 2006). In particular the position of the non-natives of Turkish and North-African descent is precarious, while the “other” non-natives are more similar to native youth. The situation of the young adults of Southern European descent points in the same direction as those of Turkish or North-African descent, although not to the same extent.

TABLE 4: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND (%)

	No diploma²	Father: low education	Father: not working	Working father: blue collar
Native	14,4	38,9	11,3	29,4
Non-native	34,5	61,8	32,7	42,1
Turkish	54,1	90,4	64,5	71,6
North-African	49,8	85,9	46,9	71,9
Southern European	31,4	66,7	25,5	49,0
Other	22,7	41,2	18,2	28,6

2 Entry into the labour market

We find that non-natives enter the labour market with more difficulty than natives do. They need more time to find their first job and a larger proportion of them do not have a job one year after school-leaving (table 5). The percentage non-workers is twice as high for those of migrant descent compared to natives. Non-natives of Turkish or North-African descent in particular show high numbers of inactivity (almost one out of two does not work one year after leaving school). There are large gender differences though; with the highest rates of inactivity among women of Turkish and North-African descent. Likewise, long-term

²No successfully finished 6th year in full-time secondary education (or higher).

unemployment at entry into the labour market is concentrated mostly among women of migrant descent (table 6). Among them 15% need more than two years to escape unemployment, while this number is only 3% for native women and non-native men.

TABLE 5: NOT WORKING ONE YEAR AFTER SCHOOL-LEAVING BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER (%)

	Men	Women	Total
Native	12,7	16,2	14,4
Non-native	22,2	43,4	33,1
Turkish	25,5	67,0	47,1
North-African	38,6	56,5	48,5
Southern European	21,0	28,8	24,7
Other	15,7	31,5	23,6

TABLE 6: DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT AFTER SCHOOL-LEAVING BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER (CUMULATIVE %)

	≥ 6m	≥ 12m	≥ 18m	≥ 24m
Men				
Native	9,4	4,7	2,6	1,7
Non-native	16,2	7,4	3,8	2,7
Women				
Native	11,5	5,8	3,6	2,7
Non-native	29,0	21,2	17,9	15,1

3 First job characteristics

In their first job, non-natives work in blue collar jobs (type of contract) more often, they have a permanent contract less often, on average they earn less, and they work in the public sector less often. Non-natives also indicate more often that their educational level is too high for the work they are doing (vertical mismatch) and that their first job does not match with the subject fields in which they graduated (horizontal mismatch). The jobs in which non-natives start seem, on a number of indicators, of a lesser quality. They work in less healthy circumstances more often, their job involves less mental demands or cooperation with others, they have less job autonomy, and their work is more monotonous than that of natives is. Finding a job that is challenging, is more difficult for non-natives than for natives, and the occupational prestige of their first job is lower. All these differences are the largest between those of Turkish and North-African descent on the one hand and natives on the other. The non-natives of Southern European or other descent take up an in between position.

3.1 Challenging first job

Our analyses show a strong association between many of the first job characteristics. Using categorical principal components analysis we developed a synthetic measure that we call “challenging” first job. The measure is a continuum with on the positive side first job characteristics like being self-employed, working in a job with much variation, a lot of mental effort, autonomy and in which one can realize oneself. On the other end we find characteristics that are usually considered less favourable, like working in a job that does not match the education of the employee (subject field and level), being at work ad interim, and work with little autonomy, variation, little opportunities to realize oneself in one's work, and in which little mental effort is required. The more positive the score on this dimension, the more challenging the job is; a negative score indicates a job that is less challenging.

TABLE 7: CONTENT OF THE SCALE ‘CHALLENGING FIRST JOB’

	Non-natives
Mental effort	less
Variation	less
Realize oneself	less
Autonomy	less
Content education matches first job	More mismatch
Level education matches first job	More often overeducated
Worker status	More often blue-collar contract
Type of contract	More ad interim ; less permanent contract

Table 8 shows the mean scores on the scale of ‘challenging first job’, by gender and ethnic background. Like in the separate analyses (see summary in table 7), the non-natives and those of Turkish and North-African descent in particular, are in a less advantageous position. Non-natives are less likely than natives to start in a challenging first job. The group of non-native women and certainly those of Turkish and North-African descent do better than the non-native men, but only native women as a group are on the positive side of the continuum.

TABLE 8: MEAN SCORE ON THE SCALE ‘CHALLENGING FIRST JOB’ BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER

	Men	Women	Total
Native	-0,09	0,08	0,00
Non-native	-0,41	-0,26	-0,34
Turkish	-0,76	-0,47	-0,62
North-African	-0,79	-0,32	-0,55
Southern European	-0,47	-0,29	-0,38
Other	-0,13	-0,16	-0,14

3.2 Occupational prestige of the first job

The prestige or social status of the occupation is another synthetic measure that reflects the quality of a job. The occupational codes (SBC) were translated to the (Ultee & Sixma) prestige scores. This scale of occupational prestige ranges from 15 (low prestige) to 86 (high prestige). The mean scores on this scale (table 9) indicate that natives are in more prestigious first jobs than non-natives. This is the case for men as well as for women. The non-natives of Turkish and North-African descent have lower prestige in their first job than the natives do, the non-natives of Southern European descent score in the middle, and those of other migrant descent match natives more closely. Gender differences are only significant within the group of natives. On average, native men have a slightly lower prestige in their first job than native women do. Among non-natives the gender differences are not significant.

TABLE 9: MEAN SCORE ON THE SCALE 'OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE' BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND GENDER

	Men	Women	Total
Native	41,87	43,25	42,55
Non-native	35,98	34,79	35,39
Turkish	29,41	25,85	27,70
North-African	30,67	31,03	30,85
Southern European	36,59	34,27	35,45
Other	40,24	39,44	39,83

3.3 Bad working conditions

Bad working conditions relate to another dimension of job quality, one that is not part of the challenging job indicator. Poor work conditions refer to hard work physically, to work in noisy or smelly environments, to work in which one gets dirty, or to dangerous work. Non-natives are at a much higher risk to work in these bad working conditions in their first job than natives are (table 10).

TABLE 10: MEAN SCORE ON THE SCALE 'BAD WORKING CONDITIONS' BY ETHNICITY AND GENDER

	Men	Women	Total
Native	4,60	3,44	4,03
Non-native	5,17	3,97	4,58
Turkish	5,93	4,49	5,23
North-African	5,25	4,32	4,78
Southern European	4,94	3,63	4,29
Other	4,92	3,78	4,35

4 Explanatory models

Young migrants in Flanders, mainly with Moroccan or Turkish roots, experience deprivation when entering the labour market. On average, it takes more time for them to find their first job and these first jobs are qualitatively less favourable than those of native young people. Non-natives have blue-collar jobs more often than natives do and they have permanent contracts less often. Their jobs are also less challenging: they imply less autonomy, variation or possibilities for self-fulfilment, etc. and they more frequently involve bad working conditions. Particularly workers of Turkish or North-African descent have jobs of a lesser quality when entering the labour market. This inequality could perhaps be justified based on meritocratic ideology. Those who are talented and develop that talent – which is certified by an educational degree – get more opportunities on the labour market. Earlier we concluded that the educational system does not work as meritocratically as we would like to think. Social background plays an important role in the distribution of educational opportunities (see Duquet et al., 2006). The question here is whether the inequality at the entry into the labour market can be entirely attributed to the educational deficits of non-natives. Or are there other factors at work? Are there indications that non-natives are being discriminated in the labour market? Does their disadvantaged socio-economic background keep impacting their adult life? To this end, we use statistical models to explain the duration of unemployment, having a challenging first job, having high occupational prestige, and working in bad working conditions in the first job, by indicators of the socio-economic background and of the educational career.

4.1 Duration of unemployment

Our analyses (table 11) show that the low social background of non-natives – and in particular of those of North-African and Turkish descent – offers almost no explanation for their longer duration of unemployment after leaving school. Even after controlling for the father's educational level and his labour market status, the odds of finding work after leaving school remain twice as low for those of North-African or Turkish descent than for natives. The same goes for the attained educational level: it does not explain the longer duration of unemployment for these non-natives. The effect of educational level on the odds of finding work, is gendered. Lowly educated men find work rather easily after leaving school, even if they have low qualifications. It takes lowly educated women much longer to find a job than it takes higher educated women. Ethnic background is also much more important for women than for men. Particularly, women of Turkish and North-African descent have low chances of starting to work and risk long-term unemployment.

TABLE 11: RESULTS COX-REGRESSION: ODDS TO EXIT UNEMPLOYMENT AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL (N=7.969)

Exp(B)	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Cohort					
1976 (ref)	1	1	1	1	
1978	1,02	1,02	1,03	1,03	
1980	1,01	1,00	1,02	1,02	
Ethnicity					
Native (ref)	1	1	1	1	
Turkish	0,51***	0,55***	0,58***	0,82	
North-African	0,53***	0,56***	0,58***	0,77*	
Southern European	0,86	0,88	0,92	0,93	
Other	0,93	0,94	0,96	0,95	
Gender					
Man (ref)		1	1	1	
Woman		0,91***	0,87***	0,98	
Educational level father					
Higher education (ref)		1	1	1	
Secondary education		1,02	1,04	1,03	
Lower education		0,94	1,00	1,00	
Activity father					
Working (ref)		1	1	1	
Not working		0,93*	0,95	0,95	
Educational level					
University level education (ref)			1	1	
Non-university higher education			1,19***	1,11	
Secondary education			0,95	1,03	
No diploma			0,87**	0,99	
Estimated educational result					
First quarter (best) (ref)			1	1	
Second quarter			0,94*	0,94*	
Third quarter			0,88**	0,87***	
Fourth quarter (weakest)			0,86**	0,85**	
Gender * educational level resp					
University level education (ref)				1	
Non-university higher education				1,09	
Secondary education				0,83**	
No diploma				0,70***	
Gender * ethnicity					
Native (ref)				1	
Turkish				0,55***	
North-African				0,61**	
Southern European				0,97	
Other				1,02	
	-2LL	128.021	127.847	127.740	127.669

Sig. ***p<0,001, **p<0,010, *p<0,050.

Since the relatively difficult entry into the labour market of non-natives is not fully explained by social background or by educational level differences, one can speculate that at least some of the differences between non-natives of North-African and Turkish descent and natives are due to either discrimination on the labour market (demand side) or cultural differences or orientations (supply side). The fact that it is particularly women of North-African and Turkish descent and not the men that have difficulty in accessing the labour market, rather points in the direction of the cultural explanation. It is not unlikely that traditional roles and orientations prevent a smooth entry into the labour market even more among non-natives than among natives. In our analyses of the educational careers of non-

natives we had strong indications that the problematic educational careers of girls of migrant descent – and in particular their channelling into ‘lower’ subject fields – go hand in hand with traditional attitudes about the role of women. It seems that these cultural differences also manifest themselves at the entry (or non entry) into the labour market after leaving school.

4.2 Challenging job

TABLE 12: RESULTS ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: CHALLENGING FIRST JOB (N=7.297)

B-coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2
Cohort			
1976 (ref)	0	0	0
1978	-0,06*	-0,08**	-0,05*
1980	-0,08**	-0,08**	0,01
Ethnicity			
Native (ref)	0	0	0
Turkish	-0,62***	-0,37***	-0,17*
North-African	-0,54***	-0,36***	-0,21**
Southern European	-0,35***	-0,24**	-0,07
Other	-0,15**	-0,14**	-0,04
Gender			
Man (ref)		0	0
Woman		0,17***	-0,01
Educational level father			
Higher education (ref)		0	0
Secondary education		-0,22***	-0,04
Lower education		-0,40***	-0,07*
Activity father			
Working (ref)		0	0
Not working		-0,19***	-0,14***
Educational level			
University level education (ref)			0
Non-university higher education			-0,01
Secondary education			-0,80***
No diploma			-0,90***
Estimated educational result			
First quarter (best) (ref)			0
Second quarter			-0,09***
Third quarter			-0,15***
Fourth quarter(weakest)			-0,30***
	R ²	0,02	0,05
			0,20

Sig. ***p<0,001, **p<0,010, *p<0,050.

The extent to which one takes off in a first job that we can label as ‘challenging’, was operationalized in our analyses as a combination of the extent in which it allows self-fulfilment, the extent of autonomy, of mental effort and variation, the extent in which the level and content of the education closely matches the job, and a more or less advantageous and secure type of employment contract. Non-natives clearly have lower chances to find a challenging first job. This difference is partly linked with social background differences (table 12). In particular non-natives of Turkish and North-African descent are from a low social background, with lower educated parents and fathers that are often unemployed. But the different opportunities to a challenging job are mainly due to educational differences. The

higher educated – under-represented among non-natives of Turkish or North-African descent – are much more likely to obtain a challenging job than the lower educated. But even when non-natives are compared to natives with the same social background, and the same education, those of Turkish and North-African descent have less challenging first jobs, This allows for explanations referring to cultural differences and orientations or discrimination. The differences between natives and those of Southern European or other migrant descent however, can be explained entirely by social background and educational differences.

4.3 Occupational prestige

TABLE 13: RESULTS ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE OF THE FIRST JOB (N=6.983)

B-coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2
Cohort			
1976 (ref)	0	0	0
1978	0,5	-0,0	0,7
1980	-3,3***	-3,2***	-0,2
Ethnicity			
Native (ref)	0	0	0
Turkish	-14,0***	-8,1***	-1,9
North-African	-10,5***	-5,6***	-1,2
Southern European	-6,5***	-3,5*	1,0
Other	-2,6**	-2,5**	0,3
Gender			
Man (ref)		0	0
Woman		1,2**	-3,0***
Educational level father			
Higher education (ref)		0	0
Secondary education		-7,3***	-1,6***
Lower education		-13,3***	-3,6***
Activity father			
Working (ref)		0	0
Not working		-2,6***	-1,1*
Educational level			
University level education (ref)			0
Non-university higher education			-7,8***
Secondary education			-26,0***
No diploma			-31,7***
Estimated educational result			
First quarter (best) (ref)			0
Second quarter			-1,6***
Third quarter			-2,9***
Fourth quarter(weakest)			-2,5**
	R ²	0,03	0,11
			0,41

Sig. ***p<0,001, **p<0,010, *p<0,050.

The difference in occupational prestige between non-natives and natives who enter the labour market for the first time, can be attributed to differences in educational level between both groups (table 13). The on average better school careers and higher educational attainment of natives explain why larger numbers of them can start in a first job with higher occupational prestige. Dropping out of school often blocks the access to those better situated positions, for non-natives as well as for natives. If on average non-natives were to have the

same educational qualifications as natives do, no differences would be left in the first job occupational prestige of both groups.

4.4 Bad working conditions

The differences between non-natives and natives in the working conditions (physical effort, noise pollution, safety, ...) of the first job can be accounted for in part by differences in social background (table 14). For non-natives of North-African and Southern European descent it is their lower social background that can explain why their first job is characterized by worse working conditions. This is not true for non-natives of Turkish or other descent. Even with the same social background as natives, the working conditions are worse for those non-natives. However, the main predictor for these working conditions at entry into the labour market is the educational level. After statistical control for educational level we find no more substantial differences in the working conditions of the different groups of natives and non-natives.

TABLE 14: RESULTS ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: BAD WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FIRST JOB (N=7.260)

B-coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Cohort					
1976 (ref)	0	0	0	0	
1978	-0,17**	-0,12	-0,16**	-0,16**	
1980	0,31***	0,29***	0,08	0,07	
Ethnicity					
Native (ref)	0	0	0	0	
Turkish	1,13***	0,64***	0,19	0,23	
North-African	0,53**	0,14	-0,19	-0,18	
Southern European	0,25	0,03	-0,30	-0,27	
Other	0,29**	0,30**	0,10	0,10	
Gender					
Man (ref)		0	0	0	
Woman		-1,14***	-0,84***	-0,76***	
Educational level father					
Higher education (ref)		0	0	0	
Secondary education		0,68***	0,27***	0,28***	
Lower education		1,04***	0,34***	0,37***	
Activity father					
Working (ref)		0	0	0	
Not working		0,28***	0,17**	0,17**	
Educational level					
University level education (ref)			0	0	
Non-university higher education			0,62***	0,45***	
Secondary education			1,82***	1,17***	
No diploma			2,48***	1,72***	
Gender * educational level resp					
University level education (ref)				0	
Non-university higher education				0,18	
Secondary education				1,24***	
No diploma				1,32***	
	R ²	0,01	0,10	0,20	0,21

Sig. ***p<0,001, **p<0,010, *p<0,050.

4.5 Summary

The analyses show that both ascribed and achieved characteristics are important for the position at entry into the labour market of (non-native) youth. Both types of characteristics, however, are not equally important. Social background conditions explain part of the differences between natives and youth of migrant descent, but it is really the achieved characteristics (i.e. the educational level) that explain most of it. Non-natives would take up similar positions in the labour market if they were to come from the same social backgrounds, and even more importantly, if they would have attained the same educational levels. This goes for the occupational prestige associated with the first job and for the extent of bad working conditions. It is however not completely true for having a challenging job nor for the duration of initial unemployment. Non-natives of Turkish and North-African descent remain disadvantaged as to starting in a challenging job, also with ascribed (gender, father's educational level and working status) and achieved characteristics (educational level) controlled for. In addition, they are confronted with a significantly longer duration of unemployment than natives are. Non-natives of Turkish or North-African descent do worse in the transition from school to work, even considering the relevant ascribed and achieved characteristics. These unexplained differences leave room for explanations that stress cultural differences or discrimination.

5 General conclusions

All our analyses point to the importance of the achieved educational level for the start of the working career. Educational qualifications determine both the chances to find a job as well as for finding a challenging job with higher occupational prestige and good working conditions. In itself this is good news. It implies that the labour market works in a relatively meritocratic fashion. However there are a number of ascribed characteristics that keep influencing the entry into the labour market. The social background has a (rather small) direct impact on the extent to which the first job is challenging, on the occupational prestige, and on the working conditions of the first job. The educational level of the fathers and gender also directly affect the occupational prestige and the working conditions at entry. Being of non-native descent influences the first job characteristics directly only for the dimension of challenging work, and (unexplained) differences are small. However, all these direct effects are relatively small compared to the impact of the educational level on the quality of the first job. Again, this is rather good news. Education makes a difference indeed, and that is what we expect from our educational system: to select and develop talent. Were it not that our educational system itself does not function that meritocratically. The educational level someone achieves in the end, is shaped by both gender and ethnic background as well as by the working status and educational level of the father. It is exactly through these factors that ethnic background has the strongest impact. Non-natives - but in particular those of Turkish and North-African

descent - much more often come from disadvantaged families with parents with lower educational levels, which lowers their opportunities for educational achievement. In our view, non natives' disadvantaged position on the labour market, has rather little to do with deficiencies in the labour market, but much more with deficiencies in the selections during education. This implies a more meritocratic functioning of the labour market than can be said of the educational system. Where the educational system should be the centre of the meritocratic society - that selects the talent and prepares it for the labour market - mechanisms alien to meritocratic principles strongly influence educational opportunity. But that was already one of our conclusions based on our analyses of the educational careers of non-natives in the Flemish educational system in 'Wit krijgt schrijft beter' (Duquet et al., 2006).