



BELGIUM – 2022

Key findings

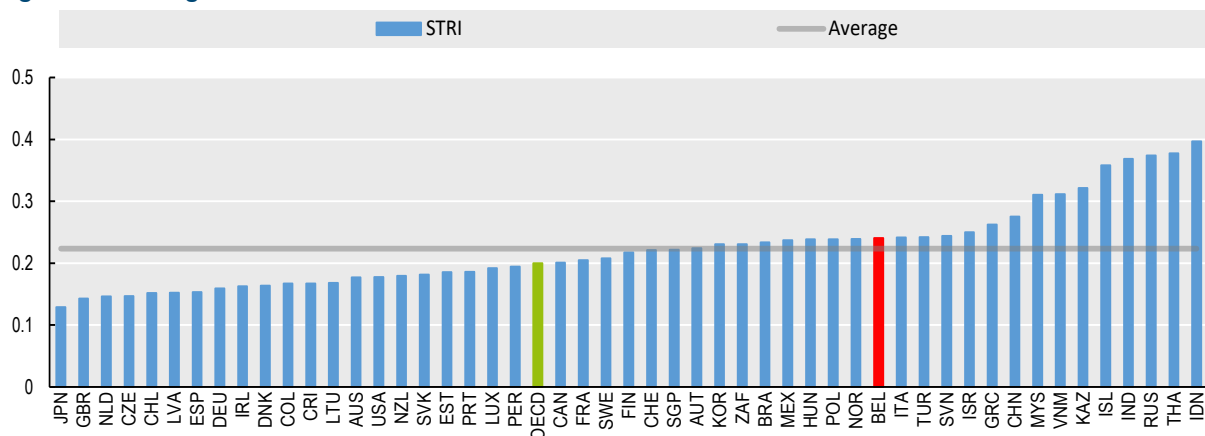
- The 2022 average STRI of Belgium is relatively high compared to the OECD average but the indices have varied only slightly compared to 2021.
- Conditions on the entry of natural persons seeking to provide services in the country on a temporary basis as intra-corporate transferees, contractual services suppliers or independent services suppliers remain more cumbersome than international best practice
- Legal services are the most open sector in Belgium while architecture services are the most restricted.

Recommendation

- Open and well-regulated services markets are essential to facilitate economic recovery, strengthen resilience to future shocks, and promote a more sustainable trading system. To ensure that the benefits of open markets and a rules-based international trading system are preserved, policy makers should focus on minimising barriers that increase trade costs for services providers, weaken the gains from digital transformation and undermine competitiveness.

The 2022 STRI of Belgium is relatively high compared to other countries in the STRI sample (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average STRI across countries, 2022



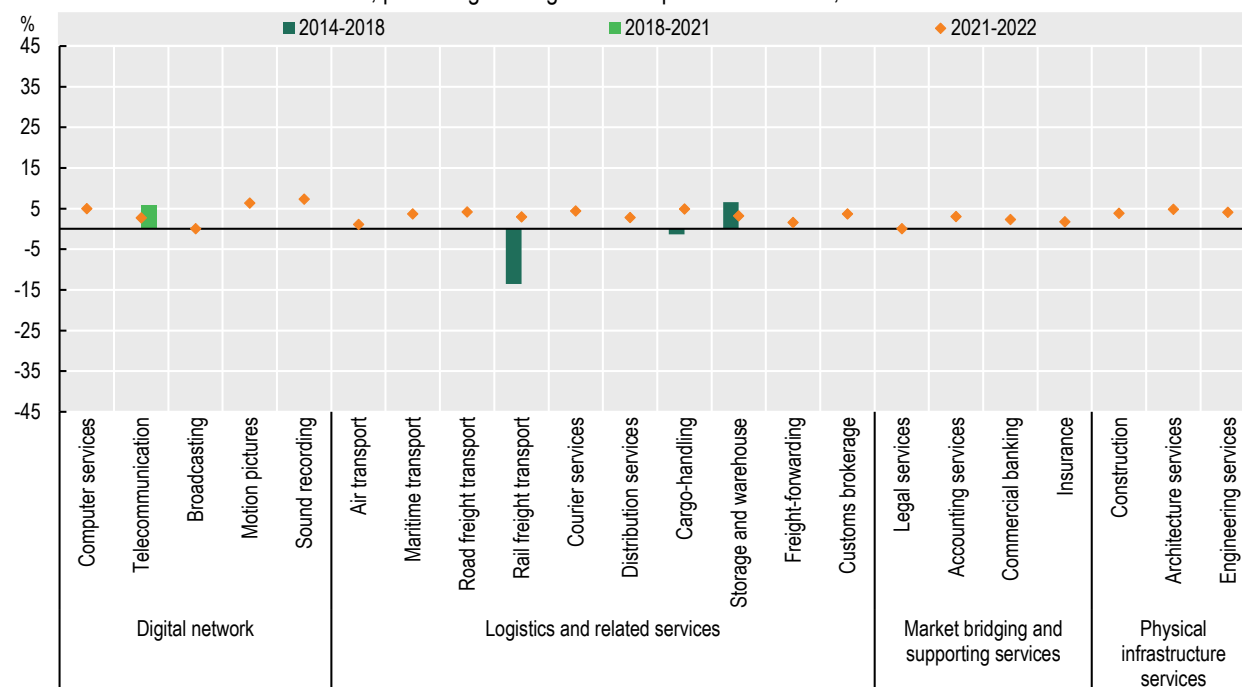
Note: The STRI indices take values between zero and one, one being the most restrictive. The STRI database records measures on a Most Favoured Nation basis. Air transport and road freight cover only commercial establishment (with accompanying movement of people). The indices are based on laws and regulations in force on 31 October 2022. The STRI regulatory database covers the 38 OECD Members, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Peru, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and Viet Nam. The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law. OECD (2022). STRI and TIVA databases.

Belgium limits the duration of stay, on their first entry permit, for workers seeking to provide services in the country on a temporary basis to 12 months for intra-corporate transferees and contractual services suppliers, and 24 months for independent services suppliers. Rights under the Public Procurement Act are limited to local suppliers, suppliers from European Union (EU) member countries and other suppliers coming from countries offering reciprocal treatment to Belgian nationals. The standards for cross-border transfer of personal data are set at the EU level. Transfers to non-EEA economies can take place when these ensure an adequate level of data protection or, in the absence of this, appropriate safeguards (e.g. binding corporate rules or standard data protection clauses) are in place. Finally, a minimum amount of capital must be deposited in a bank or with a notary in order to register a business.

There has been moderate change in the STRI of Belgium since 2016, including some liberalising reforms in rail freight transport and logistics cargo-handling and a moderate tightening of regulation in logistics storage and warehouse and telecommunications. In 2022 the STRI increased for all sectors except broadcasting and legal services due to new EU-wide measures affecting access to procurement markets (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Evolution of STRI indices by sector in Belgium

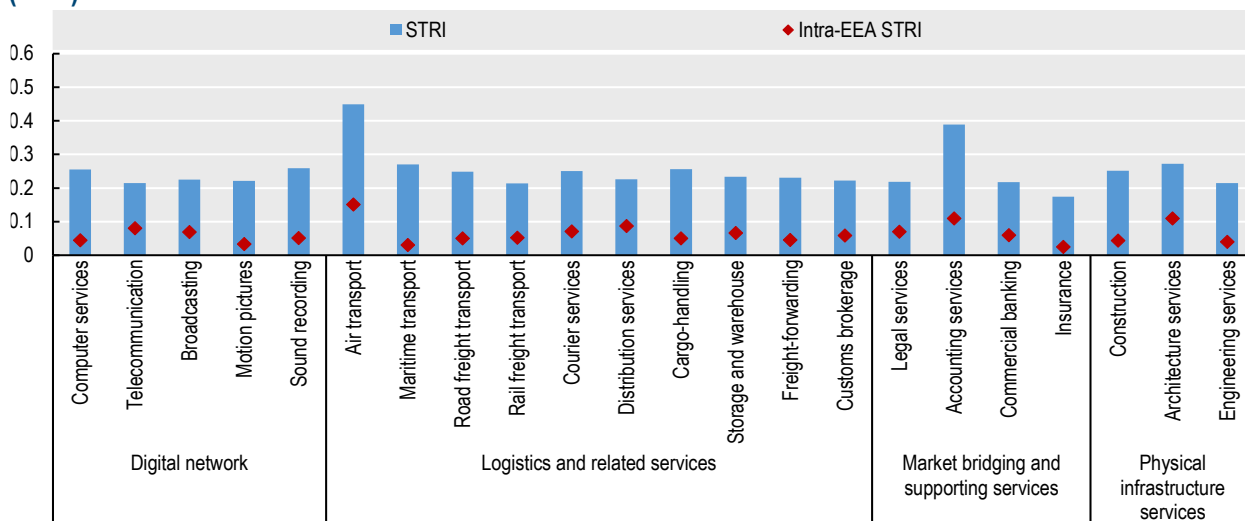
Services Trade Restrictiveness Index, percentage change over the period 2014-2018, 2018-2021 and 2021-2022



OECD (2022). STRI database.

Services trade barriers are significantly lower within the European Economic Area across all services sectors (Figure 2b). Belgium maintains an open market for services suppliers from other EU Member States.

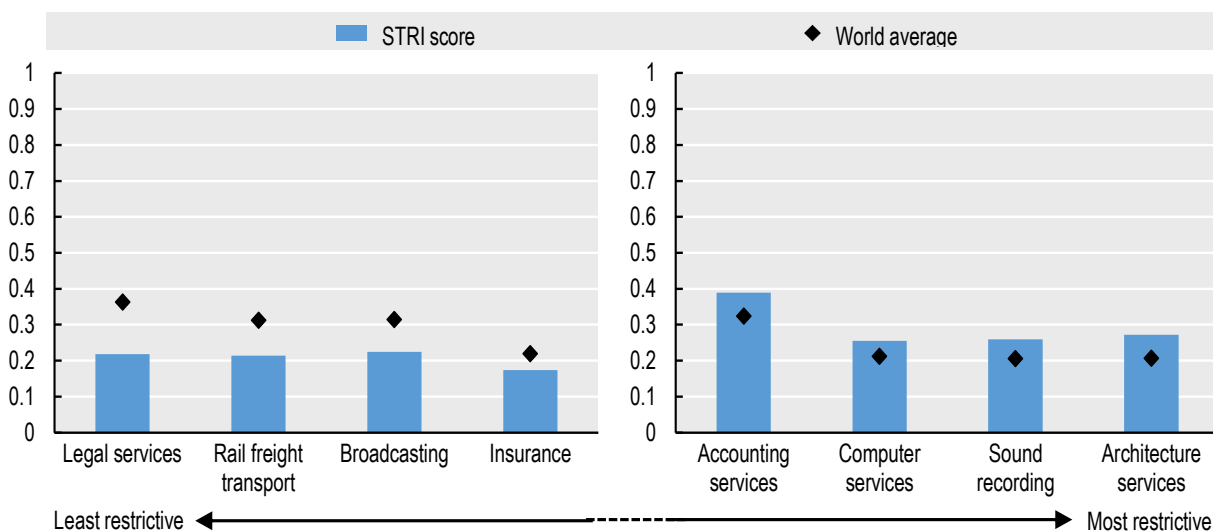
Figure 2b. Regulatory barriers affecting services trade within the European Economic Area (EEA)



Note: The traditional STRI indicates the level of restrictiveness on a Most-Favoured Nation basis towards third countries, and the intra-EEA STRI indicates the level of restrictiveness towards EEA members. Intra-EEA STRI covers 24 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden).
Source: OECD (2022). STRI database.

Legal services, rail freight transport, broadcasting and insurance are the sectors with the lowest score relative to the average STRI across all countries (Figure 3). Accounting services, computer services, sound recording and architecture services are the sectors with the highest score relative to the average STRI across all countries.

Figure 3. Sectoral breakdown - The least and most restricted sectors in Belgium

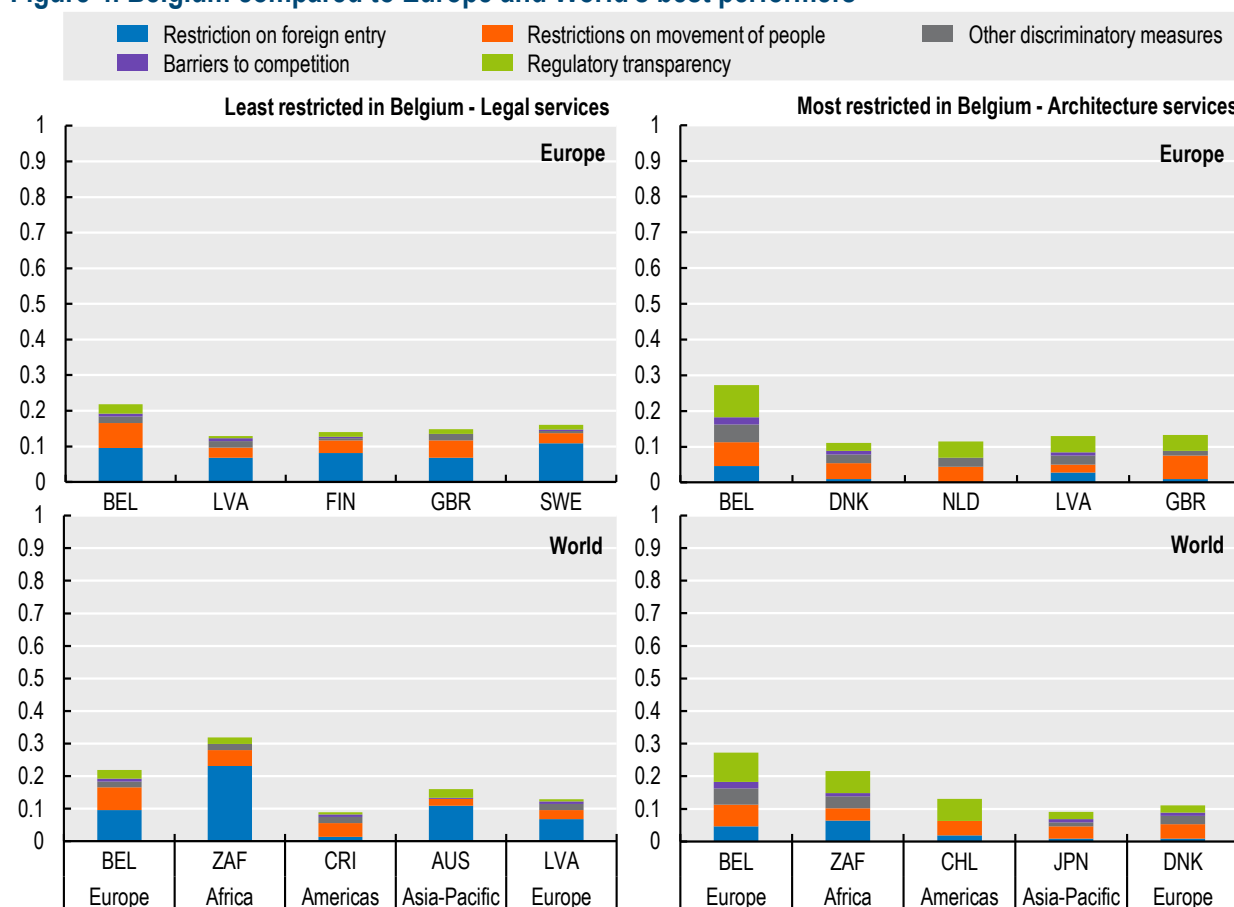


Note: Selection was made based on how far the sectors' score were from the world average score, as a percentage difference i.e. $(STR I_{country, sector} - STR I_{world average, sector}) / STR I_{world average, sector}$
Source: OECD (2022). STRI database.

Legal services are the least restricted sector in Belgium. Compared to Europe's and the world's least restricted in this sector, the composition of the scores indicates that restrictions on foreign entry and movement of people have had an impact compared to other countries. The measures that contributed to this score include requirements for commercial presence and residency for directors. Architecture services are the most restricted sector in Belgium. Restrictions to movement of people and regulatory transparency are significant compared to best performers. Some of the measures that contribute the

most to the score include business visa constraints and no process for the recognition of foreign qualifications (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Belgium compared to Europe and World's best performers



Source: OECD (2022). STRI database.

Recent policy changes

Recent changes affecting Belgium were due to changes in EU law. From 1 July 2021, the EU abolished the VAT de minimis regime for goods valued under EUR 22. Regulation 2019/452 allows EU Member States to maintain, amend or adopt mechanisms to screen foreign direct investments in their territory on grounds of security or public order. In maritime transport, Regulation 2020/436 extended the existing block exemption to liner shipping consortia from competition law until April 2024. Moreover, EU-wide requirements on accounting separation entered into force for port authorities in receipt of public funds. In August 2022, EU Regulation 2022/1031 entered into force aiming to regulate access of third-country (non-EU) goods and services to the EU's public procurement and concession markets. No relevant measure has been adopted by the European Union at this stage. It applies to public procurement and concessions where the EU has not undertaken market access commitments in an international agreement.

More information

- » Access all country notes, sector notes, and interactive STRI tools at <http://oe.cd/stri>
- » Read more about services trade policies and their impacts in [Services Trade Policies and the Global Economy](#)
- » Contact the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate with your questions at stri.contact@oecd.org