



# Integration of Migrant Women in Belgium: Policies and Measures

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The European Migration Network Belgium is a multi-institutional entity composed of experts from the Immigration Office, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), Myria - the Federal Migration Centre, and Fedasil - the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers. It is coordinated by the Federal Public Service Home Affairs.

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*The European Migration Network (EMN) is coordinated by the European Commission with National Contact Points (EMN NCPs) established in each EU Member State plus Norway.*

### **Belgian study and EU comparative study**

**Belgian report:** This is the Belgian contribution to the EMN Study 'Integration of Migrant Women: Policies and Measures'. Other National Contact Points (NCPs) produced a similar report on this topic for their (Member) State.

**Common Template:** The different national reports were prepared on the basis of a common template with study specifications to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability.

**Synthesis report:** On the basis of the national contributions of 23 NCPs, a *Synthesis Report* was produced by the EMN Service Provider in collaboration with the European Commission and the EMN NCPs. The Synthesis Report gives an overview of the topic in all the (Member) States.

**Scope and aim of the study:** The study aims to explore the integration of migrant women in Belgium within the main sectorial areas covered by the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, including education and training, employment and skills, health and housing as the basis for societal integration, in the period 2016 to 2021.

**Available on the website:** The Belgian report, the Synthesis report and the links to the reports of the other (Member) States are available on **[www.emnbelgium.be](http://www.emnbelgium.be)**.

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# 1 Introduction

This study focuses on the integration of migrant women in the main sectorial areas covered by the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027<sup>1</sup> including education and training, employment and skills, health, and housing as the basis for societal integration.

## 1.1 Background and rationale

Recent studies show that migrant women face a so-called 'double disadvantage' due to the intersection of being a woman and being a migrant.<sup>2</sup> For example, migrant women in the EU generally have a higher unemployment rate than both non-migrant women and migrant men. For women with young children, the unemployment rate is significantly higher for migrant than non-migrant women.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, refugee women are worse off when it comes to education or employment compared to other migrant women, pointing to a 'triple disadvantage'.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, there are also unique integration opportunities for migrant women, who are – for example – equally likely to be as highly educated as non-migrant women and are more likely to be highly educated than migrant men.<sup>5</sup>

The above elements show the importance of a gendered approach in migrant integration policies and measures. However, a 2017 study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found little evidence of a gendered approach in national action plans and integration strategies.<sup>6</sup> The European Court of Auditors in its 2018 report identified a lack of policies for addressing the specific integration challenges of migrant women.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, a recent study published by the European Network of Migrant Women in 2020 identified shortcomings in addressing the needs of migrant women in Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) projects implemented through direct management, noting that: "Although gender mainstreaming is briefly referred to in the majority of the calls, there seems to be a lack of clarity what this term implies in practical terms. The specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls are also largely overlooked".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, 'EU Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027', COM(2020) 758 final, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uuid=CDFE0088-C151-66D5-846F7C422DE2A423>.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission – Joint Research Centre, 'Gaps in the EU Labour Market Participation Rates: an intersectional assessment of the role of gender and migrant status', 2020, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC121425>.

<sup>3</sup> OECD, 'How to strengthen the integration of migrant women?', 2020, Migration Policy Debate No. 25, pp. 4 and 6, <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/migration-policy-debates-25.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> OECD, 'Triple Disadvantage? A first overview of the integration of refugee women', 2018, pp. 16 and 19, [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage\\_3f3a9612-en;jsessionid=QdS1wA6MXnTSSOMYsBcF9LOj.ip-10-240-5-190](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage_3f3a9612-en;jsessionid=QdS1wA6MXnTSSOMYsBcF9LOj.ip-10-240-5-190).

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>6</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 'Together in the EU - Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants', 2017, p. 7, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2017-together-in-the-eu\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-together-in-the-eu_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> European Court of Auditors, 'The integration of migrants from outside the EU', Briefing Paper, 2018, p. 23, [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing\\_paper\\_Integration\\_migrants/Briefing\\_paper\\_Integration\\_migrants\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing_paper_Integration_migrants/Briefing_paper_Integration_migrants_EN.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> European Network of Migrant Women, 'Follow the €€€ for Women and Girls', 2020, <http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/Follow-the-Money-for-Women-2020-AMIF.pdf>.

In its 2016 Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, the European Commission made a commitment to engage in a dialogue with Member States to ensure that concerns related to the gender dimension and the situation of migrant women are taken into account in planned policies and funding initiatives.<sup>9</sup> The assessment of the Action Plan, however, noted that it only recognised to a limited extent the specific needs of certain categories and the possible intersections between the migrant status and other segments of discrimination including gender.<sup>10</sup>

In its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, presented in November 2020, the European Commission proposed targeted integration support that takes into account individual characteristics that may present specific challenges such as gender through gender-specific processes that complement the mainstreamed approach.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the importance of a gender-sensitive response to different policy areas has been emphasised by the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which also emphasised the dual approach of targeted measures to achieve gender equality, combined with strengthened gender mainstreaming.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 Aim and scope of the study

The aim of this study is to document if and to what extent Belgium considers the distinct situation of migrant women in its integration policies and measures. It also provides an overview of research and statistics available at national and regional level on the integration opportunities and challenges faced by migrant women. The study also aims to raise awareness on gender-specific integration issues.

The study focuses on the integration of migrant women in the main sectorial areas covered by the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 including education and training, employment and skills, health, and housing as these are considered by the Action Plan the basis for societal integration. While the term 'integration' is contested and other terms such as 'inclusion' are increasingly preferred in policy, in this study the term 'integration' is used in a wide meaning to encompass integration and inclusion policies and measures addressing migrant women.

The study's main objectives are to map current integration policies and measures with a view of documenting to what extent they specifically target women and to provide examples of good practices and lessons learned on integration measures for migrant women at the national but also regional and local level.

Integration policies refer to targeted integration strategies and action plans but also broader policy instruments relevant to the integration of migrant women, such as sector specific governmental programmes (health, education, employment, housing, etc.).

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<sup>9</sup> European Commission, 'Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals', 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication\\_action\\_plan\\_integration\\_third-country\\_nationals\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, 'Assessment Of The 2016 Commission Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals', SWD(2020) 290 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/20201124\\_swd-2020-758-commission-staff-working-document.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/20201124_swd-2020-758-commission-staff-working-document.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, 'EU Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027', COM(2020) 758 final, pp. 6-7, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uuid=CDFE0088-C151-66D5-846F7C422DE2A423>.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, 'A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025', COM(2020) 152 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>.

Measures include systematic initiatives (multi-year / long term), projects (ad-hoc) and legislative (structural) measures that are used to implement the integration policies (including those funded by government but implemented by NGOs on behalf of the government).

Integration policies and measures are categorised along the focus areas of labour market and entrepreneurship, education and language training, housing and health and civic integration.

The reporting period for this study ranges from 2016 to 2021, depending on the area of analysis (i.e., data, policies, measures) and – where relevant – includes developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While many policies relevant for immigrant integration are decided at national or regional level, namely inclusion in the welfare system, labour market regulations, access to education, residency or citizenship requirements, integration essentially happens at the local level. As stated in the 2021-2027 EU Action plan on Integration and Inclusion: “Integration happens in every village, city and region where migrants live, work and go to school or to a sports club. The local level plays a key role in welcoming and guiding newcomers when they first arrive in their new country. In addition, civil society organisations, educational institutions, employers and socio-economic partners, social economy organisations, churches, religious and other philosophical communities, youth and students’ organisations, diaspora organisations as well as migrants themselves play a key role in achieving a truly effective and comprehensive integration policy”.<sup>13</sup> The brief research transcribed in this report certainly does not allow an exhaustive presentation of all the local integration initiatives. However, the study will underline several examples of local integration policies and measures.

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 11, pp. 7-8.

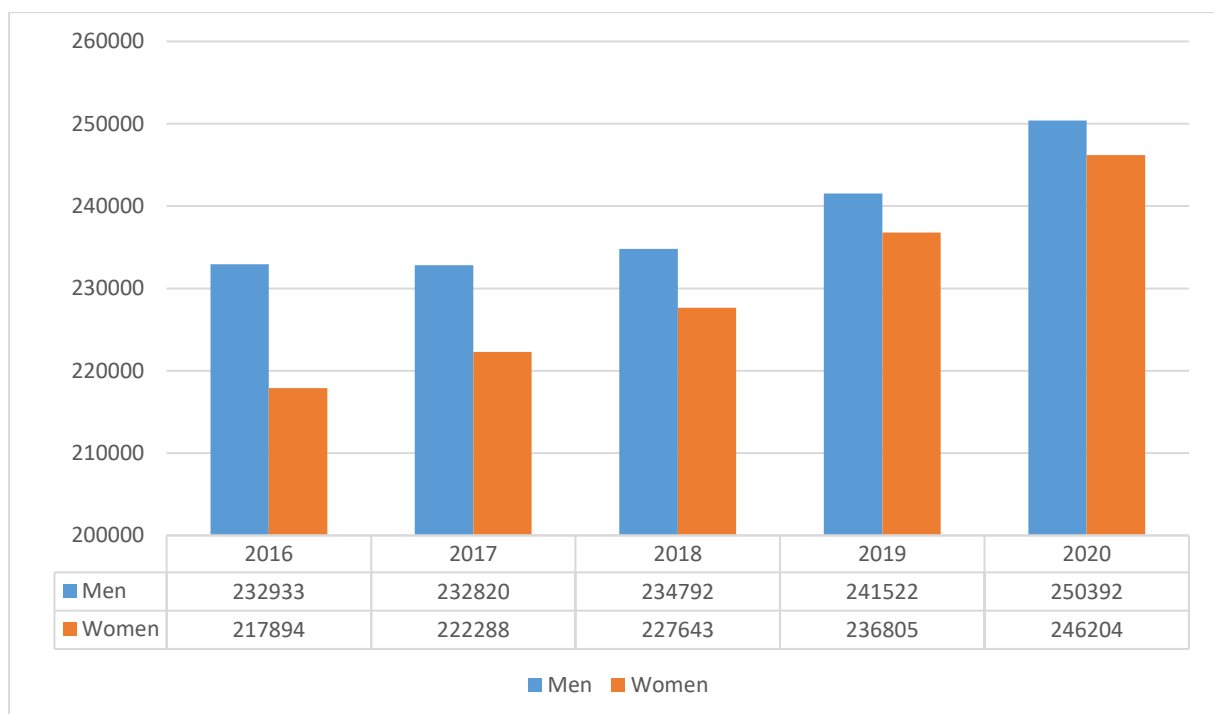
## 2 Migrant women in Belgium

This section presents an analytical overview of the situation of migrant women in Belgium (2.1), based on Eurostat data. In addition, it provides an overview of key integration indicators showing specifically the situation of migrant women (2.2). Finally, it shows key opportunities and challenges regarding the integration of migrant women (2.3). As such, it serves as a basis for understanding the opportunities and challenges faced by migrant women when integrating in Belgium, and for understanding the policies and measures introduced by Belgium to facilitate their integration.

### 2.1 Migrant women in Belgium: analytical overview

The number of third-country national women in the total Belgian population is smaller than the number of third-country national men. However, this gap is decreasing, as the number of third-country national women grows faster (increase with 13%) than the number of third-country national men (increase with 7,5%) throughout the years 2016-2020 (see figure 1). Especially when considering the number of third-country national women as a share of the total population, third-country national women reached almost the same level (2,14%) as the percentage of third-country national men (2,17%) in 2020 (see figure 2).

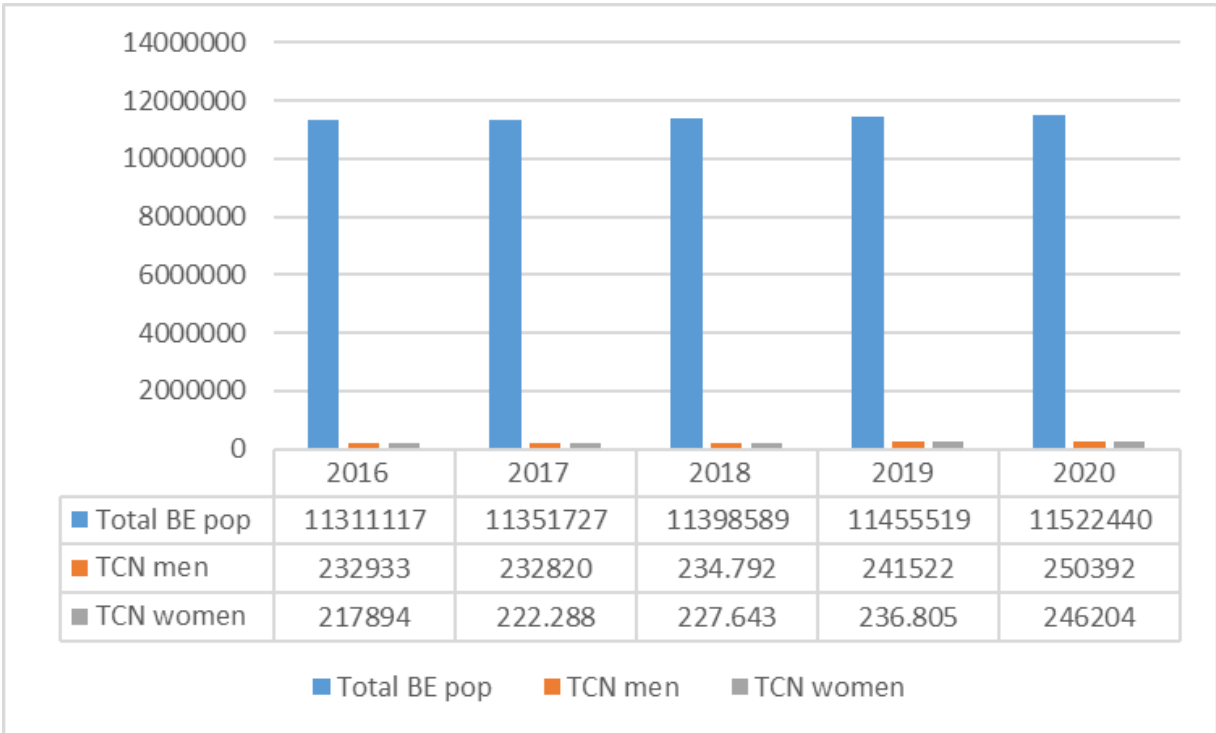
**Figure 1: Evolution of the number of third-country nationals (TCN) between 2016 and 2020**



Source: Non-national population by groups of citizenship. Extracted from Eurostat on 06.12.2021.



**Figure 2: Evolution of the share of third-country nationals (TCN) as part of the total population of Belgium between 2016 and 2020**

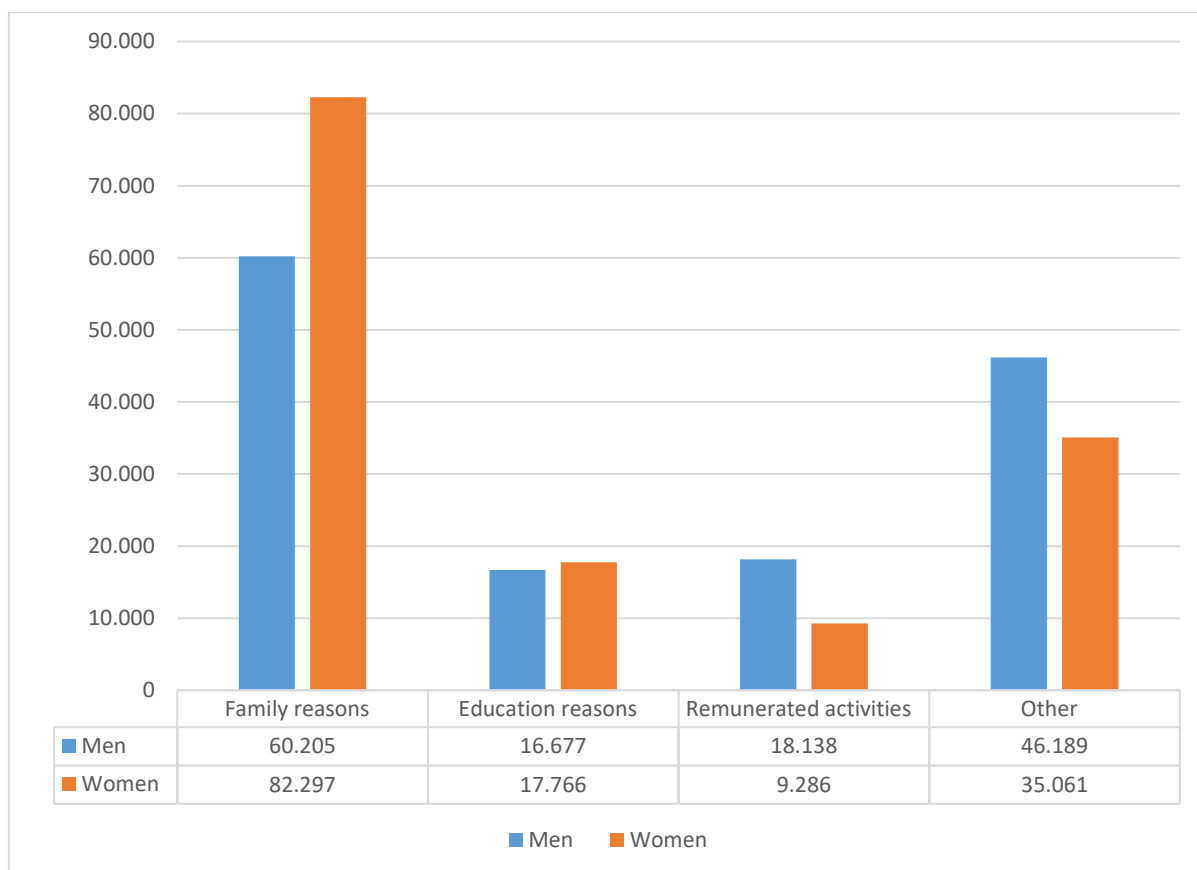


Source: Non-national population by groups of citizenship. Extracted from Eurostat on 06.12.2021.

More women than men received a first residence permit in the period 2016-2020.<sup>14</sup> The main motive behind immigration for both sexes is family reasons, however women made up a larger part in the first residence permits issued on this basis. However, more men were issued a first residence permit on the basis of remunerated activities. With regards to immigration for educational reasons, there are no significant differences between men and women (see figure 3).

<sup>14</sup> Residence permit means any authorisation valid for at least three months issued by the authorities of a Member State allowing a third-country national to stay legally on its territory. First permit means the residence permit issued to a person for the first time. A residence permit is considered as a first permit also if the time gap between expiry of the old permit and the start of validity of the new permit issued for the same reason is at least 6 months, irrespective of the year of issuance of the permit.

**Figure 3: First residence permits according to motive and sex**



Source: First residence permits by reason, age, sex and citizenship. Extracted from Eurostat on 06.12.2021.

There are no differences between the main countries of origin of third-country nationals of men and women, nor any significant evolutions in the period of 2016-2020. The main differences in citizenship can be noted through the use of migration channel (e.g., labour migration versus international protection; see figure 3) but not between the sexes. The top three of countries of origin are Morocco, Turkey, and India.

## 2.2 Opportunities and challenges

Despite hoped-for results of policies and measures taken to increase the positive integration of migrant women, little information on opportunities and ample examples of challenges for migrant women’s integration were found. Four main challenges, that encompass a multitude of contributing factors, were identified.

### 2.2.1 Low employment rate of third-country national women

Women with a migrant background are hindered by a multitude of factors from entering the paid, formal labour market.<sup>15</sup> This is a fundamental obstacle for their successful integration, a violation of their social rights and moreover a problem for the authorities trying to activate more people in the labour market.

<sup>15</sup> Please note that ‘women with a migrant background’ is an umbrella term. There is a lot of internal diversity based on education, socio-economic background, reason for immigration, etc.

The unemployment rate of Belgian nationals is 5,8% for men and 4,5% for women in 2021, whereas the unemployment rate for third-country national men is 19,9% and 19,6% for women.<sup>16</sup> The data on activity rates, however, show an even more pronounced difference between TCN men and women and national men and women. The activity rate for TCN men fluctuates (between 2016 and 2020) around 70%, which is similar to the activity rate of national women. However, the activity rate for third-country national women fluctuates around 40%. This shows that there is a quite large pool of third-country national women that could potentially still be activated.<sup>17</sup>

The factors restricting access to the labour market<sup>18</sup> for women migrants are, inter alia:

- **Socio-cultural reasons**<sup>19</sup>: traditional gender roles such as the idea that women should stay at home, difficulties in positioning themselves in the face of socio-cultural differences between the environment of origin and the professional postures usually expected on the Belgian labour market.
- **Language barriers**: the language barriers are particularly high for migrant women, as a direct consequence of the above-mentioned factors but also because of the poor accessibility of language training to women (for instance, lack of evening or weekend courses, or of childcare facilities). Language barriers not only influence access to the labour market, but also impact social integration, social inclusion and active citizenship, access to housing and health.
- **The lack of job qualifications or study choices (voluntary or otherwise)**<sup>20</sup>: for example, girls with an immigrant background in Flanders are strongly represented in the group of early school leavers, and under-represented in attendance in preparatory courses for higher education. This means that girls with a migrant background in Flanders often leave education as low-skilled individuals and/or with qualifications that offer fewer opportunities on the labour market.
- **Little recognition of previous qualifications**, particularly in the case of refugees.
- **The lack of network and role models**
- **Structural discrimination on the labour market**<sup>21</sup>
- **The lack of information and bureaucracy relating to the labour market**

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<sup>16</sup> Statbel, 'Unemployment rate in Belgium according to origin, 2022'. Statistics received in June 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Eurostat, 'Employment, Unemployment and Activity Rate according to groups of citizenship'. Extracted on 6 December 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Kanmaz M., 'Give her a Break! Over armoede en uitsluiting bij vrouwen met een migratieachtergrond. Eindrapport bevraging via participatief traject bij vrouwen met een migratieachtergrond', 2016, Minderhedenforum.

<sup>19</sup> Minderhedenforum, 'Kortgeschoolde vrouwen met een migratieachtergrond' (2019).

<sup>20</sup> Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen, Commissie Diversiteit, 'Advies Laaggeschoolde vrouwen met een migratie-achtergrond, 2018, <https://www.serv.be/diversiteit/publicatie/advies-laaggeschoolde-vrouwen-migratieachtergrond>.

<sup>21</sup> Bruggaerve, K. and Pitton, C., *The economic consequences of the flow of refugees into Belgium* (2016), issue i, *The Economic Review of the National Bank of Belgium*, pp. 43-61. The researchers indicate that in Belgium, more than in other European countries, racism and discrimination on the labour market are major obstacles for asylum seekers.

### 2.2.2 Side effects

The above-mentioned factors in turn cause internal side effects resulting in a vicious circle that impedes further integration of female migrants. Women are confronted with the cumbersome and strict nature of bureaucracy, causing negative experiences and disappointments (not finding a job, no coordination between services involved in guiding migrant women to work, trajectories followed without resulting in finding work, etc.). This further contributes to a lack of trust in government institutions, (fear of) unfair treatment or being brushed aside, etc.

### 2.2.3 Legal status of immigrant women

The legal status of immigrant women too often depends on the restrictive conditions governing family reunification. Studies demonstrate that refugees who had already reunited with (at least part of) their family were more likely to focus on integration than refugees who were still on their own, waiting to be reunited with family members, and argue that refugees who cannot reunite with family members are more likely to endure stress and develop mental health issues, impeding their focus on language courses and social integration.<sup>22</sup>

According to the UNHCR, family separation affects the ability to learn a language, to re-train, to negotiate bureaucracy and officialdom, to search for work, to look for housing, and to build friendships. Enduring isolation and grief in the absence of family reduces an individual's ability to function.<sup>23</sup>

A recent study of the European University Institute concluded that while family reunification has not yet happened, migrants face higher uncertainty about their duration of stay. This might lead to a focus on working and earning in the short term. At the same time, migrants might neglect investments in human capital that would increase their wages over the longer term. This would explain the finding of lower wage growth among migrants who initially had to wait to reunite with their spouse.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2.4 Discrimination

Discrimination has an impact on various aspects of life, including but not limited to employment, housing, and education. Unia, the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, maps in its 'Diversity Barometer' the degree of discrimination, tolerance, and participation for specific target groups in society, characterised by their origin, age, handicap, sexual orientation and so forth.<sup>25</sup> The Diversity Barometer shows the prominent level of discrimination that migrants still face in all aspects of society, but particularly in access to the labour market.

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<sup>22</sup> Mlati, F. and C. Duarte, 'L'unité familiale, enjeux et impacts sur l'insertion professionnelle des réfugiés statutaires' (2005), Le regroupement familial des réfugiés, France Terre d'Asile, [http://www.france-terre-asile.org/images/stories/publications/pdf/CduS\\_06-vweb-finale.pdf](http://www.france-terre-asile.org/images/stories/publications/pdf/CduS_06-vweb-finale.pdf) and Beaton, E., A. Musgrave and J. Liebl, 'Safe but not settled: The impact of family separation on refugees in the UK' (2018), Refugee Council and Oxfam.

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR (2013), A new beginning - Refugee Integration in Europe, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/52403d389/new-beginning-refugee-integration-europe.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Poeschel, F., 'Out there on your own: absence of the spouse and migrants' integration outcomes' (2020), Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, n°4.

<sup>25</sup> Unia Diversity Barometer, <https://www.unia.be/en/publications-statistics/statistics/unias-statistical-studies>.

Within the discussions on discrimination on the labour market, various subdiscussions are taking place. For example, a lack of available teachers is becoming increasingly problematic. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and ensuing quarantines, a public debate on this issue took place in the Flemish Parliament on 20 October 2021.<sup>26</sup> In this debate, the discussion about whether female teachers can wear a veil was raised. Although schools can implement their own policies on veil-wearing, most schools do not allow it. In an effort to curb the lack of teachers, the education umbrella organisations made various proposals, such as allowing undocumented migrants to help or even teach in the classroom, which then spurred a debate amongst many Muslim females (born in Belgium or with a legal residence) with a teaching degree to re-insist on their call for allowing the veil. In a similar spirit, the discussion of whether the veil for Muslim women working in public administration should still be forbidden is raised regularly in public debates.

Another public debate revolves around the question of safe spaces for women (such as separate swimming or gym hours). The debate goes larger than the integration of female migrants, but nevertheless the issue is often intersected with cultural aspects. The debate – although recurring frequently – was particularly prominent in the summer of 2021 in the Brussels-Capital Region. The local organisation ‘Pool is Cool’ opened a pop-up open-air swimming pool in Brussels, where one hour a week was reserved for women only. Furthermore, all swimwear (including the burkini) was allowed at the temporary pool. This raised the issue of forbidding or creating safe spaces for women again to the political agenda.<sup>27</sup> The issue gets tense in general, but particularly when intercultural aspects are at play.

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<sup>26</sup> Vlaams Parlement, Actuadebat, 20 October 2021. Available in Dutch on: <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/actueel/nieuws-uit-het-vlaams-parlement/actuadebat-over-lerarentekort-in-het-onderwijs>.

<sup>27</sup> Vlaams Parlement, Verslag vragenuurtje, 7 July 2021. Available in Dutch on: <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/parlementair-werk/plenaire-vergaderingen/1540995/verslag/1543206>.

## 3 Overarching integration policies

### 3.1 Integration in the Belgian political landscape

#### 3.1.1 State structure

Belgium is a federal state with competencies distributed across the Federal (national) level, Communities (language-based entities i.e., Flemish Community, French Community and German-speaking Community) and Regions (area-based entities i.e., Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital Region).

Since the second State reform of 1980, person-related matters such as integration fall under the responsibility of the Communities. While the national government oversees migration matters (access to the territory, residence, return), the Communities' governments set priorities for given periods of time and establish integration programmes for newly arrived third-country nationals. Furthermore, various integration-related policy themes are also de-federalised. For example, education is a Community competence, labour matters are spread over the Communities, Regions, and the federal government.

Finally, local governments also have a role to play in integration matters. In both the French and the Flemish Community, the law refers to the role of local governments in integration matters with respect to the principle of subsidiarity. Local authorities are involved in all integration programmes, particularly in the design of citizenship and languages courses. They can also be involved in the selection of projects to be financed in the framework of the integration strategy. Furthermore, the recent update of the civic integration programme in the Flemish Community (cf. *infra*) foresees a significant role for local governments. The new pillar 'Participation and network' creates a 40-hour trajectory to improve local integration. This trajectory can take the shape of a buddy project, volunteering, an introductory internship, etc. Local governments will oversee this new pillar in the civic integration programme (see *infra*).

#### 3.1.2 Inter-Ministerial Conference on Migration and Integration

The successive State reforms have transferred competences or parts of competences on migration and integration policy to the federated states. For numerous reasons, cooperation between the various policy levels does not always run smoothly. In order to coordinate the policy of the federal government and the federated states, an Inter-Ministerial Conference (IMC) was established on 12 February 2021 and will hold consultations on a regular basis. The intention is to contribute to an efficient, global, and coherent policy across policy levels. To this end, the IMC wants to provide a consultation platform where issues that fall under different competences and policy levels can be discussed.

A working group consisting of representatives of each member of the IMC will be set up to prepare the meetings. The representatives in the IMC are Ministers and State Secretaries of the different governments tasked with policies that pertain to migration and integration. In addition, specific Ministers can join if the matter discussed falls within their competence.

## 3.2 Integration of migrant women as a policy priority

### 3.2.1 Gender mainstreaming

Belgium affirms the dual approach of gender equality based on gender mainstreaming (the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities) and gender-specific measures.

#### **Federal Plan Gender Mainstreaming**

On 12 January 2007, Belgium adopted a law to promote equality between women and men by integrating the gender dimension into Belgian federal policy structures, making gender mainstreaming at the Belgian federal level a legal obligation.<sup>28</sup> The law provides that each Minister integrate the gender perspective in all policies, measures and actions within their competence, on the one hand, and that they watch over the implementation of the strategic objectives set by the government on the topic of gender equality, on the other hand.

The Law of 12 January 2007 also provides for the drawing up of an evaluation report to measure the impact of each legislative and regulatory project on the respective situation of women and men, the so-called 'gender test'. The Law provides that the government submit two evaluation reports to the Federal Chambers (the first in the middle of the legislature and the second at the end of the legislature).

The Royal Decree of 26 January 2010 stipulates that a federal plan must be drawn up at the beginning of each legislature to integrate the gender dimension into all policies in order to prevent or correct inequalities between women and men.<sup>29</sup>

The third Federal Plan Gender Mainstreaming for the period 2020 to 2024 was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 11 June 2021. The Secretary of State for Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities and Diversity commits to integrating the gender dimension in domains concerning integration. The Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration furthermore commits to integrating the gender dimension as a priority in domains related to reception of applicants for international protection and the reform of the legislation on family reunification and commits to appointing a gender mainstreaming coordinator at the Immigration Office and at the Federal Agency for the reception of asylum-seekers (Fedasil) and to ensure the publication of gender-disaggregated data by the asylum- and migration authorities.

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<sup>28</sup> Law of 12 January 2007 aimed at monitoring the application of the resolutions from the world conference on women held in Beijing in September 1995 and at integrating the gender perspective into the whole of the federal policies, published in the Belgian Official Gazette on 13 February 2007. This law replaces the law of 6 March 1996 aimed at monitoring the application of the resolutions of the World Conference on Women in Beijing from 4-14 September 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Royal Decree of 26 January 2010 laying down the composition, tasks and operating rules of an interdepartmental coordination group as well as the minimum qualifications of its members in implementation of Article 8 of the Law of 12 January 2007 aimed at monitoring the application of the resolutions from the world conference on women held in Beijing in September 1995 and at integrating the gender perspective into the whole of the federal policies, published in the Belgian Official Gazette on 8 February 2010.

## **Manual for the application of gender mainstreaming within the Belgian federal administration**

Pursuant to the Law of 12 January 2007, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men is charged with the guidance and support of the integration process of the gender perspective within public policies, measures, and actions.

The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men published the 'Manual for the application of gender mainstreaming within the Belgian federal administration', whose primary vocation is to better understand the gender mainstreaming approach. It also aims to facilitate the application of the Law of 12 January 2007 on gender mainstreaming, as much at the level of the content of defined policies in all federal areas of expertise as in the organisation and functioning of the various federal administrations, by supporting it with useful examples and recommendations to put this principle easily into practice.

### **3.2.2 Policy priorities**

In the **Flemish Community**, the integration of migrant women is a policy priority but focuses on their economic integration. There has been a change from migrant labour policies to inclusive labour policies: after some years of specified policies for migrants, the focus was lifted from activating migrants to activating 'long term unemployed', 'young and old workers', 'women' and 'disabled persons' on the labour market. Furthermore, a large budget has been put aside for the civic integration process, amongst others focusing on activating newcomers.

In the **French Community**, the integration of migrant women is not a policy priority as such. However, in specific topics contributing to the integration of third-country nationals, migrant women are specifically targeted. For example, in terms of poverty reduction, a specific focus on taking measures to support precarious and single-parent families (often headed by women) with a particular attention to multiple discriminations (for example migrant women) is adopted.

In the **German-speaking Community**, the integration of migrant women is not in itself a policy priority. However, actions specifically focusing on migrant women have been taken. For example, the government has introduced language and integration courses exclusively for women who follow the same integration programme. Furthermore, projects for women and girls have been implemented, such as the creation of social meeting places (cf. infra). In addition to offering courses specifically for women, mothers and children, these meeting places offer both foreigners and Belgians a space for intercultural dialogue.

### **3.2.3 Equal opportunities**

Equal opportunities policy primarily focuses on the realisation of equal opportunities for women, LGBTQI+ persons and people with disabilities. Integration policy primarily focuses on the inclusion and civic integration of people of foreign origin. Both these policy domains are horizontal policy domains, which means that other departments are expected to pay attention to these themes in their policies and measures (both on the federal and federated level). The intention is that central spearheads in the field of equal opportunities on the one hand and integration and civic integration on the other are taken up and implemented in other policy areas in order to reach a comprehensive policy in which the needs of different target groups, including people of foreign origin, are integrally included.



Indirectly, this working method often crosses different identity axes such as socio-economic class and ethnicity for instance in the poverty policy.

The policy division of equal opportunities on the one hand, and integration and civic integration on the other is often considered to be an obstacle to a coherent, far-reaching, and truly inclusive policy. Women with a migration background, who in principle are the subject of both policy areas, the equal opportunities policy (because of their gender) and the integration and civic orientation policy (because of their migration background), fall in between chairs. Since these axes ('gender' and 'ethnic-cultural origin') are not structurally crossed, as a group they do not form a fully-fledged part of both policy areas. This increases their invisibility. Moreover, their, often urgent, needs and requirements are in danger of being relegated to the margins.<sup>30</sup>

In the **Flemish Community**, since the last legislature, more parallels are now being drawn between the two policy areas.<sup>31</sup> The new Plan Living Together integrates equal opportunities (women, LGBTQI+, disability) and persons of foreign origin (see infra). In the plan, most of the objectives are aimed at all groups. Only for objectives like 'accessibility of buildings' and 'racism' are there separate targets specific to the group involved. There is also more attention for intersectionality in the current policy than in the past.

In the **French Community**, the two policy domains of equal opportunities and integration are also growing closer through an intersectional approach and a larger focus on the horizontal aspects of both policy domains.

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<sup>30</sup> Ella Kenniscentrum Gender en Etniciteit, 'Anders gaan werken: vrouwen met een migratieachtergrond op de Vlaamse arbeidsmarkt', 2016, <https://ellavzw.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Project-Arbeid-ella-vzw-EINDRAPPORT.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Vlaams Parlement 13-R (2020-2021) – Nr. 1 28 oktober 2020 (2020-2021) Beleids- en begrotingstoelichting Gelijke Kansen, Integratie en Inburgering Begrotingsjaar 2021.

## 4 Integration policies for migrant women

In this section, a non-exhaustive selection of integration policies and measures for migrant women in the areas of employment, education and language training, housing, health, civic integration, gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings are described.<sup>32</sup>

### 4.1 Labour market integration

#### 4.1.1 Asylum seeker searches match

In December 2021, the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration and the Flemish Minister of Employment launched a plan to bridge the gap between applicants for international protection and the labour market. This action plan, developed by Fedasil, is based on seven pillars, focusing on competence acquisition (such as training, language lessons, etc.), the elimination of barriers (such as the prolonged procedure for equivalence of diploma and/or experience) and the activation of applicants for international protection towards salaried employment or voluntary work.

On the one hand, applicants for international protection can help to alleviate the shortage on the labour market or make a positive contribution to social life through voluntary work. On the other hand, the participation of applicants for international protection in social and economic life provides for integration into the local community and mutual recognition and appreciation.

Although no specific mention of women is made in the plan, indirectly they are taken into account. For example, the barriers identified to be eliminated are often barriers that women are particularly affected by, such as the focus of employers on stronger profiles (highly educated, multilingual...) and the lack of childcare. Furthermore, in its own pilot projects and partnerships with job placement services and companies, Fedasil also tries to choose a variety of employment sectors, with a balance between the so-called 'hard' (such as construction and logistics) and 'soft' (such as the hospitality and care industry) sectors.

#### 4.1.2 Service voucher scheme

The Belgian service voucher scheme subsidises a restricted list of household services including cleaning, washing, and ironing, in order to create low-skilled jobs, reduce the informal sector activities and improve the work-life balance of the users. The scheme is organised through licensed service voucher companies that serve as an intermediary between the users, the employees, and the government.

Although the scheme does not have a specific focus on women or migrant women, the service voucher companies mainly employ women and 46% of the service voucher system workers are foreign born. However, although the initial aim was to create low-skilled jobs that could provide a leverage to other jobs, the system largely fails to offer transitions to non-subsidised work, despite many of the migrant women working in this system often being overqualified.

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<sup>32</sup> With regard to policies, if there is no difference in how migrant women are addressed with regards to the highlighted sectors in the different Communities and Regions, an answer for Belgium as a whole is provided. Otherwise, a distinction will be made according to the existing policies in the different Communities and Regions.

### 4.1.3 Activating newcomers

In **Flanders**, migrants (men and women) with a perspective of entering the labour market (migrants who can work) have to enrol at the public employment service (VDAB) to start and actively participate in a trajectory leading to work. This trajectory contains trainings, re-/up-skilling programmes, on-the-job learning, employment-focused education. With the help of consultants, a personalised trajectory is developed. Migrant women are specifically targeted through concrete measures such as (partial) reimbursement of childcare costs. Furthermore, the Flemish Government has developed a system of Earlier Obtained Competences. This system makes the competences and skills obtained in a variety of contexts (free time, school, work context) more visible, independently of where the competences were obtained. Through recognition of these competences, women with lower education can enjoy easier access to the labour market.

### 4.1.4 Cooperation with non-profit organisations

In **Wallonia**, migrant women with a valid residence permit with unlimited access to the labour market benefit from the services of the public employment service (Forem) in the same way as other citizens. Within the framework of the Forem's newcomer scheme and the call for projects within the framework of adapted support, there is no exclusivity for women, but some non-profit organisations such as the women's collective *Vie féminine*, organise actions more specifically aimed at migrant women focusing on the provision of information regarding rights and administrative aid.

## 4.2 Entrepreneurship

### 4.2.1 SheDIDIT

In **Flanders**, until recently, there was little attention for female migrant entrepreneurs. In recent years however, more subsidies have been granted to organisations who encourage this. If women (newcomers or at a later stage in the integration process) go to the public employment service VDAB and mention they would like to become an entrepreneur, VDAB will give them information on organisations that can guide them in the process. One such organisation is SheDIDIT.

SheDIDIT is a project on female entrepreneurship, to offer a realistic picture of enterprising women in today's diverse Belgium, and to send a positive signal to Flemish society about the unknown group of enterprising women with a migrant background to hopefully create a snowball effect encouraging other girls and women to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.

The project started in July 2018 with a campaign starring successful role models, providing a platform for women, and a talent pool in which women with a migrant background can register and talk about their interests, their expertise and what they would like to learn more or grow further into. Through events, coaching sessions, networking opportunities and mentoring, entrepreneurial women with a migrant background get a voice and support. Furthermore, SheDIDIT visits schools to raise awareness amongst young girls to encourage entrepreneurship, whilst telling young boys that they should not be afraid of ambitious and enterprising women.

#### 4.2.2 Rainbow Economy Project

In the **Brussels-Capital Region**, subsidies are provided to organisations who encourage entrepreneurship for migrants (whether male or female). For example, the project Rainbow Economy Project encourages applicants for international protection to develop and explore their entrepreneurial skills and competences.

### 4.3 Education and language training

#### 4.3.1 Special vocational training

In the **Flemish Community**, no distinction is made between men and women with regards to education and language training. However, after a certain level of language courses, there are specific introductory/intermediate courses to prepare for special vocational training (e.g., healthcare professional for elderly residential care). These courses typically attract a higher number of female candidates.

#### 4.3.2 Measures to incentivise language training for women

In the **French Community**, the language training courses, organised by operators subsidised as 'local integration initiatives' by the Walloon Government, are equally accessible to women and men, but the funding of training courses is made conditional on the gender mix in the training groups. There are no specific measures aimed at migrant women. Nevertheless, operators organise training courses on a staggered timetable or on the weekends, with a view to enable women with young children to attend courses.

In the **German-speaking Community**, language courses are aimed directly at women, and families with children can benefit from childcare facilities.

#### 4.3.3 NGO-supported action

Parallel to the authorities, many initiatives are taken by civil society. For example, in the **Brussels-Capital Region**, there are around 85 non-profit organisations who offer language trainings, financed by the Social Cohesion Service of the French Community Commission. Certain organisations (such as *Vie féminine Bruxelles*, FAFFI, *Le Figuier*, FEZA, *Groupe santé Josaphat*, *La voix des femmes*, Welcome Babelkot) target women specifically.

### 4.4 Housing

There are no specific policies targeting migrant women in terms of housing in Flanders, Wallonia, or the Brussels-Capital Region. For social housing, there are specific criteria, which are the same for migrants and non-migrants. In **Wallonia**, women migrants can get a rent allowance (*Allocation de Déménagement et de Loyer - ADeL*), however they are not specifically targeted but can fall under the conditions to receive the allowance. In **Flanders** and in the **Brussels-Capital Region**, a specific fund for housing exists (*Vlaams Woningfonds & Fonds du Logement Bruxelles*), which allows people with a lower financial status to receive rental aid or buy property, for example through 100% loans. Women migrants can also fall under the conditions to benefit from the aid of the fund but are not specifically targeted.

## 4.5 Health

Officially, there are no differentiated policies in public health targeting women migrants. However, in an attempt to reach specific categories of people, such as women migrants, for instance for prevention, screenings, or vaccinations, there can be specific actions or campaigns subsidised by the government.

### 4.5.1 Access to healthcare and urgent medical care

Healthcare is accessible to all people; however payment of medical care is subject to specific regulations according to residence status.<sup>33</sup> Individuals who cannot make use of the health insurance system can also benefit from access to healthcare. A system of medical care, commonly referred to as 'urgent medical assistance', covers medical expenses related to consultation with a doctor, whether a general practitioner or specialist, hospitalisation, purchase of medicines or medical equipment. This system benefits undocumented migrants, without distinction of gender.<sup>34</sup>

### 4.5.2 Intercultural mediators

The Belgian government chooses to rely on intercultural mediators instead of interpreters for the provision of health care for migrants and ethnic minorities, because their mission is not only to bridge language gaps but also socio-cultural barriers and interethnic tensions or discrimination.<sup>35</sup>

Hospitals can submit an annual application to the Federal Public Service Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment to receive funding for an intercultural mediator and/or intercultural mediation coordinator. The processing of the applications and the evaluation and supervision of the initiatives in the field of intercultural mediation are then carried out by the Coordination Unit for Intercultural Mediation. As it is impossible to recruit intercultural mediators in all care institutions and still be able to help as many patients as possible, the Federal Public Service also offers 'remote intercultural mediation'. All hospitals can make use of this service free of charge. In the near future, general practitioners will also be able to make use of it.

### 4.5.3 Mental health

In the field of mental health, there are several associations that specialise in accompanying and supporting migrants who encounter difficulties related to their exile. These associations have developed specific approaches that take into account the cultural differences of migrants and provide support in a number of foreign languages.<sup>36</sup>

In **Wallonia**, since May 2016, with the support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Walloon Region, CRÉSaM, the reference centre for mental health in Wallonia, has been supporting and organising the 'Exile and Mental Health Consultation' which brings together

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<sup>33</sup> Visit the website of the non-profit organisation Medimmigrant ([www.medimmigrant.be](http://www.medimmigrant.be)) for an overview the regulations that apply to (the payment of) medical care for each residence status.

<sup>34</sup> Royal Decree of 12 December 1996 regarding urgent medical assistance by the public centres of social welfare for foreigners who reside irregularly in the kingdom.

<sup>35</sup> FPS Public Health, Safety of the Food Chain and Environment, 'Guide for Intercultural Mediation in Health Care', 2016, <https://www.health.belgium.be/nl/gids-voor-de-interculturele-bemiddeling-de-gezondheidszorg>.

<sup>36</sup> For more information, please consult the EMN Inform 'Mapping Mental Health Policies for Third-Country Nationals', July 2022, <https://emnbelgium.be/publication/inform-mapping-mental-health-policies-third-country-national-migrants>

teams specialised in therapeutic and psychosocial support of foreigners or people of foreign origin. The objective is to reinforce the coherence of mental health actions for foreigners or people of foreign origin carried out on the Walloon territory. However, no distinction is made between men and women.

## 4.6 Civic integration

### 4.6.1 Civic integration programmes

Civic integration programmes in the three Communities and in the Brussels-Capital Region do not distinguish between men and women. However, the social orientation courses, which are part of the civic integration programme, address the issue of equal opportunities and gender equality within Belgian society. In the different Communities, there are categories of newcomers who are required to follow civic integration, others can participate on a voluntary basis and others are excluded, but here also no distinction is made between men and women migrants.<sup>37</sup>

### 4.6.2 Special programmes for low-literate or illiterate persons

In **Flanders**, a specific civic integration programme was developed for low-literacy parents with young children. The programme combines learning to understand and speak Dutch, a course on living and working in Belgium, support and care for the children, and information on caring for the child. The Integration and Civic Integration Agency works together with the Agency Growing Up and the Centres for Basic Education. The programme is open to parents who have at least one child under the age of three or whose partner is pregnant, who have low literacy levels and who experience practical or psychological barriers to participating in the regular social orientation, Dutch as a second language or childcare services. This programme was set up after a successful pilot project on a customised civic integration programme for low-literate women with young children in 2016, funded by AMIF.<sup>38</sup>

### 4.6.3 Spaces for intercultural dialogue

In Belgium, there are numerous organisations and associations that create spaces for intercultural dialogue for newcomers and persons who do not speak the respective national language. These services provide a welcome and support in completing administrative formalities, they provide information on the school system, the labour market, the society as a whole and raise awareness about discrimination, equality between men and women, intercultural dialogue, etc. A number of these organisations focus specifically on migrant women.<sup>39</sup>

The **Frauenerzählcafé**, for example, is an initiative in the **German-speaking Community**. It is a meeting point for girls and women from abroad and here, of all ages, generations, and education. It is a network outside the family to meet, talk, discuss, create, act, inform, etc. By exchanging with other women, women strengthen their self-agency and are enabled to participate in the development of the society. This exchange promotes

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<sup>37</sup> More information on civic integration programmes for each Community can be found on their respective websites: Flemish-speaking (<https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/>); French-speaking (<https://parcoursintegration.be/fr/>); German-speaking ([https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4795/8506\\_read-47195/](https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4795/8506_read-47195/)).

<sup>38</sup> More information (in Dutch) can be found on <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/nl/inburgeringstraject-opmaat-van-laaggeletterde-anderstalige-moeders-met-jonge-kinderen>.

<sup>39</sup> The projects mentioned are examples of what is being organized, although many more initiatives exist.

tolerance, acceptance, and curiosity. The project also aims to provide a space where migrant women can learn the language more easily as there are no constraints, pressure, or expectations. The project has been in place for 15 years and is implemented by the local community and its community house *Viertelhaus Cardijn* in cooperation with the *Frauenliga and Miteinander Teilen*, while funded by the integration budget of the German-speaking Community.

In certain municipalities of the **Brussels-Capital Region**, the **OUMMI project** aims to improve social and cultural participation of Syrian mothers (and more particularly from the Dom ethnic group, a nomadic group often marginalised in Syria) and help them find their place in society. VIA Brussels – a reception office for newcomers – organises trainings to increase an understanding of the social and cultural norms, that are experienced as different from those prevailing in their country of origin, in Arabic, and with methods adapted to an illiterate public.

## 4.7 Varia

### 4.7.1 Gender-based violence

For many years now, Belgium has dedicated its efforts and resources to combating gender-based violence because it considers this issue an essential element in the equality between women and men. Since 2001, Belgium has pursued its policy to combat gender-based violence by means of a National Action Plan, supported by the Federal Government, the Communities and the Regions. The plan is coordinated by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. On the proposal of the Secretary of State for Gender Equality, the sixth Action Plan (2021-2025) was approved in November 2021 by the Council of Ministers. For the first time, a specific budget of € 2.5 million has been earmarked to combat gender-based violence.<sup>40</sup>

The policy to combat gender-based violence considers intersectional discrimination and addresses all target groups affected by violence in their specific characteristics, in particular migrants, the elderly, LGBTQIA+ persons, people of foreign origin, people with disabilities, people in prostitution, etc. Some forms of gender-based violence addressed by the National Action Plan affects migrant women exclusively, such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation and so-called "honour crimes". One of the specific objectives of the fourth pillar, 'Ensuring that gender-based violence is considered in asylum and migration policies' of the plan concerns specifically the reception of and response to the specific needs of applicants for international protection (women and LGBTQIA+ persons) affected by gender-based violence. Another objective concerns the improvement of the residence status of victims of gender-based violence residing in the context of family reunification.

### 4.7.2 Victims of trafficking in human beings

Belgium puts a high emphasis on combatting all forms of trafficking in human beings, including trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes or forced prostitution, to which migrant women often fall victim.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> More information on the National Action Plan to combat all forms of gender-based violence is available in Dutch and French on: <https://iqvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/activites/violence/pan>.

<sup>41</sup> For more information, please consult the EMN Study 'Third-Country National Victims of Human Trafficking: Detection, Identification and Protection', March 2022, <https://emnbelgium.be/publication/third-country-national-victims-human-trafficking-detection-identification-and->

## 5 In the pipeline

### 5.1 Plan 'Living Together' in Flanders

On 20 October 2021, the Flemish Minister for Home affairs, Administrative affairs, Civic integration and Equal opportunities presented the Plan 'Living Together'.<sup>42</sup> The Minister stated that as part of its integration and equal opportunities policy, Flanders had supported 380 projects and 413 training courses, making the policy too fragmented and of minor impact. From 2022 onwards, the Minister will focus its resources on 24 projects that meet seven clear objectives. For this the Minister has earmarked € 33 million to improve the safety and quality of life in cities, increase focus on Dutch language learning, strengthen competences, encourage more people to work, tackle discrimination, offer citizens a network, and combat segregation.<sup>43</sup> The Plan is aimed at the 28 local administrations in Flanders where at least 7 500 people with a non-EU15 migration background live.<sup>44,45</sup> The Minister will conclude a separate contract with each of them, deciding on which projects will be implemented and which objectives will be pursued.

The Plan acknowledges several challenges faced by migrant women:

- **Dutch language:** knowledge of Dutch is the gateway to education, employment, and participation in social life. It explains, in part, why women with a migrant background are far behind in the employment rate.
- **Employment:** the most important access to social mobility, apart from education, is the labour market. Work is a key area for full participation in society as it provides an income, but also a social network. Yet, there are still citizens who are not active in the labour market, and special attention should be paid to citizens of non-European origin and women. An outreach, targeted, and integrated approach is needed to eliminate their underrepresentation in the labour market. One of the projects to be developed under this objective is the project 'Entrepreneurship for everyone'. The aim is to accompany 500 newcomers every year, of which 60% is still working as an entrepreneur after two years, and to have 200 women become members of entrepreneurial networks every year.

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<sup>42</sup> The Plan Living Together is available on the website of the Flemish Minister for Home affairs, Administrative affairs, Civic integration and Equal opportunities, <https://bartsomers.be/nieuwsberichten-detail-page/bart-somers-komt-met-plan-samenleven/?lid=6755>.

<sup>43</sup> € 9 million in 2022, € 11 million in 2023 and € 13 million in 2024.

<sup>44</sup> The term EU-15 refers to the 15 Member States of the European Union as of 31 December 2003, before the new Member States joined the EU. The 15 Member States are 14 EU Member States, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom which left the EU in 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Brussels can also conclude a contract via the Flemish Community Commission.



## 5.2 Reform of the Flemish civic integration programme and impact on the Brussels-Capital Region

In **Flanders**, on 1 January 2022, the redrafted integration and civic integration decree entered into force.<sup>46</sup> Below is an overview of the main changes this decree introduces:

- Applicants for international protection no longer belong to the eligible target group for civic integration;
- Registration with the Flemish (VDAB) or Brussels (Actiris) public employment services becomes mandatory;
- Previously free of charge, the programme will now entail a fee of at least € 360;
- The result commitment is tightened via standardised tests, and the sanctioning procedure is extended;
- Greater emphasis is placed on the importance of shared values and norms;
- The language component is also reinforced: persons integrating who are not working or studying 24 months after obtaining their civic integration certificate are required to demonstrate their verbal (listening and speaking) command of the B1 Dutch language level<sup>47</sup>;
- Local government become the primary level responsible for the implementation of the civic integration programme.

The most important change however regards the introduction of a new (fourth) pillar to the Flemish civic integration programme: 'social networking and participation'. In addition to the first three pillars (Dutch lessons, social orientation, and strengthening of economic self-reliance), the new pillar offers individuals who are integrating an additional tailor-made programme of 40 hours to strengthen their social network, and/or to enable them to better participate in society. Although mandatory, individuals can join at any time during their civic integration programme (no language prerequisite), and is optional for persons who work or study. The programme focuses on initiatives that lead to participation at a social level, and where there is a possibility of speaking Dutch and interacting with others. This can take the form of a buddy project, an introductory period at a company, association, organisation or local government, an initiation into voluntary work or introduction pathways to culture, youth, or sports associations. Local governments are required to facilitate access to initiatives available at their level, and as such, are a priority partner for this part of the civic integration programme. In the course of 2023, the networking and participation trajectory will start.

In the amended Decree and the Decision of the Flemish Government, no specific mention is made of female newcomers. The decision was taken that childcare will no longer be reimbursed by the civic integration programme. In the minutes on behalf of the Committee on Home Affairs, Equal Opportunities and Integration on the draft decree amending the decree of 7 June 2013 on the Flemish integration and civic integration policy, the Minister for Home affairs, Administrative affairs, Civic integration and Equal opportunities states that "the B1 language level would be an emancipatory measure for women. In that case, however, it is also necessary to provide childcare. An important reason why they drop out of (language) courses early is the lack of childcare. As long as there is no childcare, women

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<sup>46</sup> Decree of 9 July 2021 amending the Decree of 7 June 2013 on Flemish integration and integration policy.

<sup>47</sup> For illiterates and low-literates, the current A2 language level will continue to apply.

must look after their children and cannot complete their education or take advantage of the opportunities that come with it". However, he adds that "childcare is the responsibility of the Minister of Welfare", placing the responsibility for the organisation of childcare in another area of competence.<sup>48</sup>

The redrafted integration decree in Flanders has a significant impact on the **Brussels-Capital Region**. The integration of newcomers in Brussels is dependent on the language community the persons integrating choose to belong too. Considering civic integration is free of charge for the French Community, but will have a fee for the Flemish Community, this causes a difficult limbo in Brussels. The Minister in charge of the integration of newcomers in the Brussels-Capital Region has expressed his concerns at various occasions and has called for a clear separation of competences and a better cooperation between the various governments in order to address this issue<sup>49</sup>. Although no concrete solution has been found at the time of writing, the policy change in the Flemish Community is likely to cause policy changes in the Brussels-Capital Region, where both the French and Flemish Community overlap. Since 1 June 2022, the integration path for newcomers became mandatory in Brussels for newcomers. The obligation applies to individuals registered in the register of foreigners of a Brussels municipality with a residence permit of a minimum three month validity period, from 1 June 2022, and with less than three years of legal residence in Belgium.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vlaamse Parlement, 'Verslag namens de Commissie voor Binnenlands Bestuur, Gelijke Kansen en Inburgering uitgebracht door Maaïke De Vreese en Katrien Partyka over het ontwerp van decreet tot wijziging van het decreet van 7 juni 2013 betreffende het Vlaamse integratie- en inburgeringsbeleid', 818 (2020-2021) n°5, <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/parlementaire-documenten/parlementaire-initiatieven/1536603>, p.28.

<sup>49</sup> Brussels Capital Region, Parliamentary debates of 4th October 2019 accessible in French on: <https://www.parlementfrancophone.brussels/documents/compte-rendu-de-la-seance-pleniere-du-4-octobre-2019/document>.

<sup>50</sup> For more information, please see <https://bewelcome.brussels/en/welkom/#>

## 6 Conclusion

The main integration opportunities and challenges for third-country national women relate to integration on the labour market. Third-country national women remain the biggest untapped resource to gain a higher employment rate in Belgium, and the difficulties they face to access the labour market hinders their integration. In Belgium, participation on the labour market is seen not only by policy makers as an important tool for integration, but also by the public in terms of perception. However, discrimination on the labour market, particularly intersectional discrimination (women and migrant) and other thresholds that limit migrant women's participation in the labour market remain a challenge.

On all other dimensions, integration of migrant women is not seen as a policy priority. Migrant women are treated either as part of the group of migrants or as part of the group of women. With few exceptions, little attention is paid to the specific needs of migrant women. Although in the three Communities specific projects exist, there are hardly any tailor-made routes (except for low-educated mothers/parents with small children). There is also little or no distinction made by category of migrant women, except for illiterate or low-skilled women and applicants for international protection. Especially when confronted with two 'minority' factors intersecting, this can provide a challenge to integration for migrant women.

Furthermore, there seems to be little coordination to date between the various policy areas within the regions in Belgium. The recently established Inter-Ministerial Conference on Migration and Integration could contribute to the creation of a transversal policy for migrant women that takes into account the multitude of challenges that they face.

## Annex 1: Publications by EMN Belgium (2019-2022)

The present annex lists the studies and reports published by EMN Belgium between 2019 and 2022. Studies and reports published before 2019 can be found on the website of EMN Belgium. The other EMN National Contact Points produce similar reports on these topics for their (Member) States. For each study, the EMN Service Provider, in cooperation with the European Commission and the EMN National Contact Points, produces a comparative Synthesis Report, which brings together the main findings from the national reports and places them within an EU perspective.

The Belgian studies and reports mentioned below, as well as those realised before 2019, are available for download on [www.emnbelgium.be](http://www.emnbelgium.be).

The reports from the other National Contact Points as well as the Synthesis Reports are available on: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-publications/emn-studies\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-publications/emn-studies_en).

### 2019

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<i>February 2019</i>	The labour market integration of third-country nationals in Belgium and in the EU
<i>March 2019</i>	Impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination
<i>June 2019</i>	Annual Report on Asylum and Migration Policy in Belgium – 2018
<i>July 2019</i>	Socio-economic profile and socio-economic careers of people granted international protection in Belgium
<i>August 2019</i>	Attracting and Retaining International Students
<i>November 2019</i>	Beneficiaries of International Protection Travelling to their Country of Origin: Challenges, Policies and Practices
<i>December 2019</i>	Migratory Pathways for Start-ups and Innovative Entrepreneurs in the EU and Belgium

### 2020

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<i>May 2020</i>	Comparative Overview of National Protection Statuses
<i>June 2020</i>	Annual Report on Asylum and Migration Policy in Belgium – 2019
<i>July 2020</i>	Pathways to Citizenship for third-country nationals

### 2021

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<i>January 2021</i>	Attracting and Protecting the Rights of Seasonal Workers
<i>June 2021</i>	Annual Report on Asylum and Migration Policy in Belgium – 2020
<i>July 2021</i>	Data Management in the Belgian Asylum Procedure

### 2022

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<i>April 2022</i>	Annual Report on Asylum and Migration Policy in Belgium – 2021
<i>May 2022</i>	Third-country National Victims of Human Trafficking: Detection, Identification and Protection
<i>August 2022</i>	Detention and Alternatives to Detention in International Protection and Return Procedures