

# A COMMON HOME

**MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN BELGIUM**





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# FOREWORD

**I**t has been a little over a year since Caritas International started to reflect on what binds two of its core preoccupations: migration and development.

Migration comes in many shapes and often brings along many challenges for the newcomers as well as for our society. Our organisation has been welcoming migrants and refugees in Belgium for many decades. We have been accompanying them, and defending their right to access social and legal services, both here and in their country of origin. This makes us no strangers to the challenges of migration. Sometimes these challenges take the form of injustices. We consider it our mission to denounce the unjust situations and obstacles with which many migrants are confronted with, often on a daily basis. us.

This brings us to search and advocate for structural solutions. Migration does not only come with its challenges, it also offers opportunities that we daily witness, if it is handled correctly and with solidarity—opportunities such as mutual learning, as well as social, cultural and economic development. These benefits apply to all of us, here and elsewhere, because the many paths that lead from migration to development not only converge in Belgium. They are also visible in the regions where Caritas International supports its partners in securing and implementing food, nutrition, health and sanitation programmes.

Our expertise in these areas supports our work of advocacy with the ambition of reaching a greater public, citizens as well as policy makers. Through this report, we hope to show what we see as crucial questions and to offer solutions to make our society a warm and welcoming place for all.

This report was written with the financial support of the European Commission for the MIND project. The implementation of the MIND project so far has been a particularly rich and educational experience. Not only has it allowed us to reflect on the pressing challenges within our organisation and in our society, but it has also opened doors to collaborate closely with excellent researchers—two of whom are the main authors of this report and whom I would like to name and thank explicitly Jean-Michel Lafleur and Abdeslam Marfouk.



*François Cornet,  
National Director, Caritas International Belgium  
May, 2019*





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**B**ased on an in-depth analysis of current events, policies, and debates related to migration and development in Belgium, this report develops knowledge, evidence and analysis to answer the following guiding question: *How, and in what circumstances, can migrants contribute to their own integral human development, as well as that of their societies of origin and residence?*

The first part of this report gives a brief overview of migration in Belgium. Migration has been a central feature of Belgium's society and economy since its founding in 1830. Originally a country of emigration, Belgian migrants went to work in France, the United States and Canada during the 19th Century, and sought refuge during the two World Wars. During the interbellum period, Belgium became one of the main destinations for foreign workers as heavy industries developed and required labour.

However, the economic decline and rising unemployment of the late 1960s required a new response. The government returned to a strict application of existing immigration laws and adopted new laws on the matter. Despite these restrictions, the number of immigrants arriving annually in Belgium continued to grow until 2011. Migrant flows then fluctuated, with decreases that were mainly a result of restrictive immigration policies towards non-EU nationals, and increases such as those seen in 2015.

The history of Belgium shows how migrants have played an important role in creating Belgium as we know it today. This includes the contributions of early waves of Italian, Moroccan, and Turkish migrants to post-war reconstruction and to the development of the welfare state. Today, migration continues to contribute to the development of contemporary Belgium in various ways.

Immigrants (people who are born abroad) constitute 16.4% of the Belgian population. The proportion of international migrants within a given population varies significantly depending on the region. 45% of those living in Brussels are immigrants, compared to 15% in Wallonia and 12% in Flanders. Most immigrants in Belgium are European (54% of the migrant population), followed by immigrants from Africa (25.8%), Asia (15.6%), America (4.2%) and Oceania (0.1%). With more

than 215,000 immigrants originating from Morocco, or 11.5% of the Belgium's total immigrant population, Morocco is the top country of origin for immigrants to Belgium. Morocco is followed by France (10.1%), the Netherlands (7.1%), Italy (6.5%) and Turkey (5.6%).

In 2016, free movement from EU countries made up the most significant channel for permanent migration to Belgium (54.6% of the migrant population). Family reunification was the second most significant (27%), followed by migration for humanitarian reasons (about 16%) and for employment (2.6%). Today, family reunification remains one of the few viable options for non-EU nationals to travel to Belgium legally, as migrating to Belgium for employment, studies or international protection has become more difficult for third country nationals.

All foreigners arriving in Belgium have the right to apply for international protection. In 2017, 15,373 people applied for international protection in Belgium for the first time. That same year, the CGRS granted international protection to 13,933 people. The main legal channel for seeking international protection in Belgium is the UN-led refugee resettlement program. In 2017, the number of resettled refugees accounted for 8.5% of the population of those who had been granted international protection in Belgium. Belgian law does not provide explicit rules for issuing visas on humanitarian grounds. They are instead issued at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration or his representative.

The second part of this report provides an in-depth analysis of the effect that contemporary migration has on development. It focuses specifically on the various contributions that migrants make to the economic, political, and social aspects of Belgian society, and of their countries of origin. A positive net outcome of migration is the increase in the variety of goods available to consumers in the migrants' new country of residence. By leveraging connections with their country of origin, migrants can develop cross-country economic activity and favour bilateral trade between their countries of origin and their place of residence. Migrants are also an important supply of labour, especially in certain sectors such as construction, healthcare, and wholesale

and retail trade. They stimulate the local market through their own consumption and entrepreneurship (a migrant is more likely to be an entrepreneur than a native). Finally, migrants contribute positively to public finances—an estimation of about 0.8% of the GDP.

Immigration is also a critical feature of Belgium's political development. The number of elected officials who are the children of first-generation immigrants is proof of the lasting impact of the wave of migration that took place following World War II. Similarly, various artists from different backgrounds have made a lasting influence on the country's cultural scene, reaffirming the capacity of migrants and their children to shape the country's social and cultural identity.

Diaspora associations play a key role in migrants' economic, political and cultural contributions, as they facilitate their economic inclusion, their education, their learning of the language and the promotion of the culture of the country of origin.

Several studies have shown that migration also has a positive impact on the economy of the country of origin. Remittances are one significant example. In 2017, some €4.16 billion in personal remittances were sent out by migrants from Belgium. Countries of origin also benefit from the investments of migrants, from their co-development projects (especially through diaspora associations) as well as from the transfer of technologies, norms, ideas and practices. The latter also includes the impact of migrants on the civic and political spheres of their country of origin when they participate in the elections or remain active in the politics of their country of origin from abroad.

The third part of this report identifies the main obstacles that prevent migrants from fully contributing to the development of their host country and of their country of origin. It is worth noting that the same obstacle usually affects the migrant's personal fulfilment, their contributions to their host country and their contributions to their country of origin.

One such obstacle is the lack of safe and legal pathways to enter the country of destination, which hinders migration and also leads some migrants to undertake dangerous routes. We observe slow progress regarding labour migration and restrictions in terms of family reunification. Obstacles hindering the recruitment of foreign workers are especially concerning because Belgium has a structural labour shortage in some sectors which continues to increase due to the aging of the population. Family reunification also faces various obstacles, such as high fees and the length of the procedure. In addition, pathways to enter Belgium legally for those seeking international protection are also extremely limited. The visa system is a real obstacle to their arrival. Resettlement quotas and the number of humanitarian visas granted are low.

This means that most applicants for international protection have no choice but to brave dangerous routes to apply for protection. These are routes that have become much more dangerous as the EU externalizes its borders through agreements with third countries (Turkey, Libya, etc.) in order to prevent migrants, including those seeking international protection, from arriving on European soil. At the same time, the Dublin Regulation prevents applicants for international protection whose fingerprints have been taken in another European country to request protection in Belgium. However, international protection systems of first-entry countries such as Greece or Italy are therefore overwhelmed by requests. These circumstances lead to serious human rights violations that have a drastic effect on the migrants' mental and physical state.

A second set of obstacles to migrant contributions is the fulfillment of their basic needs. Those struggling every day to satisfy their basic needs cannot put their knowledge and skills to work in service of their community.

We discuss the question of respect for social rights—notably the right to work and the right to social welfare—and access to housing. Due to discrimination in the housing market, finding a suitable home at an affordable price is a sizable challenge for migrants. This results in geographic segregation based on income, ethnicity and/or legal status, which explains the significant differences in workload across Public Centres for Social Welfare among communes. It also gives reasoning for the difference in quality of social services, which increases inequalities between municipalities.

We will also touch on the question of employment. Overall, migrants' employment rates and job quality remain low. The proportion of overqualified migrant workers is significantly higher than that of native workers. This explains the differences among local and native populations in terms of qualifications, professional and social networks, and linguistic competency, and also provides reasoning for the administrative requirements asked of the migrant population and the structural difficulties they confront in the labour market. The Belgian market has a high threshold for skills and qualifications. This is the reason for which language knowledge and recognition of academic degrees are so important to the inclusion of migrants in the market. The Belgian labour market is also segmented into two categories of employment. The first is marked by stable jobs and high salaries, while the second is marked by temporary jobs, lower salaries, more job insecurity. There is little mobility between these two sectors. Finally, migrants face several forms of discrimination within the labour market. This has been confirmed by numerous studies, one of which found that, on average, applicants with Turkish names must submit on average 44% more applications than applicants with Flemish names to receive the same number

**The history of  
Belgium shows how  
migrants have  
been an important  
contributor  
to what Belgium  
is today**

of acceptances. These forms of discrimination are fueled by negative views of migration. A substantial proportion of the Belgian public believes that migrants cause problems and are a threat to the economy, national security, and cultural identity of the country. Nevertheless, attitudes towards immigrants have become more favourable since the 2015 solidarity crisis and the resulting citizen aid movement.

With respect to the specific obstacles to migrants' contributions to the development of their country of origin, the high costs of transferring remittances discourage migrants from sending them and limit the benefits that the country of origin can receive. A few obstacles specifically hinder diaspora associations' work, and their potential to assist in co-development, notably the fact that they often lack the resources, time and experience. The situation in the country of origin can be both a catalyst for migrants' involvement in development and a hindrance to their ability to engage transnationally.

The final part of this report provides examples of practices that foster migrants' contributions to their own personal fulfilment, as well as to the development of their host communities and countries of origin. Policies that facilitate migrants' contributions to their country of residence are often grouped under the category of integration policies. Today, all three regions—Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels—have adopted a similar approach, which includes an orientation, socioeconomic assessment, language courses, and an introduction to citizenship, the country's norms, and values. Though these actions are positive, they suffer several shortcomings, among which the fact that sessions offer a one-size-fits-all approach, while the needs of migrants differ, for example, across geographical regions of origin and level of education.

At the local level, some Belgian cities can be seen as successful examples of integration and inclusion. The practice and experience of the city of Mechelen, featured in this report, illustrates that it has been active in promoting diversity and providing support in housing inclusion, language courses, employment, and psychosocial and administrative support for migrants and refugees.

Various initiatives and pilot programmes have been established in Belgium in recent years to encourage immigrant participation in the labour market. Among the notable pilot programmes, the labour-INT project strives to offer applicants for protection and refugees a path to integration and continuous support consisting of a skills assessment, assistance in obtaining training and seeking employment, and support during their integration into the workplace.

In general, all local projects that are focused on the specific needs of diaspora associations—namely in terms of training, project management assistance and access to funds—can be considered as positive practices. Indeed, many diaspora associations operating in Belgium are striving for the improved development of their host country or country of origin. For the purposes of this report, we highlight two successful examples of projects that have included diaspora associations. Through the Migration for Development in Africa project, health professionals have put their skills to use by organising medical missions during which they see patients and train colleagues in their countries of origin within the Great Lakes region. Likewise, Solidarco is an insurance scheme by which Congolese migrants residing in Belgium can purchase health insurance for up to seven relatives living in Kinshasa by paying a premium of €30 per month.

This report highlights Belgium's need for and dependence on migration to sustain its own development and well-being. In order to benefit from the contributions that migrants can make to the development of our society and that of their countries of origin, we believe it is essential to guarantee migrants decent and stable living conditions, social security and to access the job market. This does not just satisfy a moral directive. Those who must struggle every day to satisfy their basic needs can hardly make the additional effort to develop their knowledge and skills and put them to effective use in service of our society.

Our findings emphasize the urgent need to address the major obstacles to migration so that migrants can contribute fully to the integral human development of Belgium and to that of their countries of origin. The recommendations at the end of this report address key concerns that, if not resolved, could pose serious problems to Belgium's social cohesion as well as its capacity to build a just, unified and sustainable society.

## Glossary

<b>Actiris</b>	Actiris is the Public Employment and Vocational Training Service of the Brussels Capital region, responsible for bringing together supply and demand on the labour market and guiding job-seekers in the Brussels Capital region to work.
<b>Applicant for international protection</b>	A third-country national or a stateless person who has made an application for international protection for which a final decision has not yet been taken (former terminology: asylum seeker).
<b>Application for international protection</b>	A request made by a third-country national or a stateless person for protection from an EU Member State, who can be understood to seek refugee status or subsidiary protection status.
<b>CGRS</b>	The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons is an independent body, the key-player in processing applications for international protection, and it grants or denies refugee status or subsidiary protection status.
<b>Co-development</b>	Co-development concerns national, regional, or local policies and mechanisms that encourage migrants to contribute to the development of their countries of origin through associative platforms and co-financed projects. Migrants are asked to collaborate with States, regions, provinces, municipalities or other bodies.
<b>Dublin Regulation</b>	Regulation which lays down the criteria and mechanisms for determining the EU Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection—normally the State where the applicant first entered the EU (Dublin III Regulation – Regulation EU No 604/2013).
<b>Fedasil</b>	The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers is in charge of the reception of applicants for international protection and certain other categories of foreign nationals. It falls under the supervision of the State Secretary for Asylum Policy and Migration.
<b>Forem</b>	The Walloon Public Office for Vocational Training and Employment is responsible for bringing together supply and demand on the labour market and guiding job-seekers in the Walloon region to work.
<b>Immigration Act</b>	This is the central law regarding migration and asylum issues in Belgium (law of 15 December 1980 on the entry to the territory, residence, settlement and removal of foreign nationals).
<b>Immigration Office</b>	The Immigration Office is the public service responsible for the entry, residence, settlement and removal of foreign nationals. The Immigration Office is also in charge of applying the Dublin III Regulation and of managing applicants' residence requirements throughout the international protection procedure.
<b>Integration and insertion</b>	In the EU, integration is defined as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation between all immigrants and residents of EU Member States. In public discourse, however, integration often continues to refer to the dated conception of assimilation, or the requiring of immigrants to conform to the norms and values of the dominant majority in order to be accepted. Therefore, we prefer to use the term inclusion when possible to reflect a more positive and reciprocal approach.
<b>Myria</b>	The Federal Migration Centre, an independent public institution, analysing migration, defending the rights of foreigners and combating human trafficking and human smuggling.
<b>PCSW</b>	The Public Centre for Social Welfare ensures a number of social services and thus ensures the well-being of every citizen. Every municipality or city in Belgium has its own PCSW, offering a wide range of services.
<b>Refugee</b>	A person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Art. 1(A)(2), Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Art. 1A(2), 1951 as modified by the 1967 Protocol).
<b>Remittances</b>	Financial transfers from a migrant to a beneficiary/beneficiaries in the migrant's country of origin.
<b>Resettlement</b>	The selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third state which has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status.
<b>Subsidiary protection</b>	The protection given to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to their country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person to their country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined in Art.15 of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive).
<b>Third-country migration</b>	Migration from a country that is not a member of the EU as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the EU right to free movement.
<b>Third-country national</b>	Any person who is not a citizen of the EU and who does not enjoy the EU right to freedom of movement.
<b>Unia</b>	The Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities. Unia is an independent public institution that fights discrimination and promotes equal opportunities. They are internationally recognized as a national human rights institution.
<b>VDAB</b>	The Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service is responsible for bringing together supply and demand on the labour market and guiding job-seekers in the Flemish region to work.

# VISION AND VALUES OF CARITAS: MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2015, in his encyclical *Laudato Si' – On care for our common home*, Pope Francis stated that the Earth is “our common home”, and that we need to address economic, social, political and environmental challenges together in an integrated manner (CAFOD et al. 2018). Exclusion and poverty, warfare, global inequalities, climate change, unsustainable consumption and growth—as well as forced displacement and migration—demand our utmost attention and engagement. The encyclical quickly became a reference document for Catholic social service as well as development agencies worldwide, drawing attention both in and outside the Catholic Church.

With the national and European “*Common Home*” publications, Caritas draws on this message to explore the complex interconnectedness between migration and development with its faith-based ethical framework, which is respectful of human rights and dignity.

For Caritas, a human-centred, ethical and rights-based approach is fundamental to law, to every policy, and to all practice. Thus, an ethical interpretation of the relation between migration, development and the human person is essential to frame the vision and the objectives of the “*Common Home*” publication. Caritas’s vision, actions and views are rooted in legal and political instruments and sources, fundamentally in Christian and Roman Catholic Church values and teachings. These values and teachings have in common with international legal instruments and policy frameworks an affirmation of human dignity, equality, and inalienability of human rights as key moral principles to ensure the peaceful coexistence and basic well-being of all persons and peoples on this planet. These include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and eight fundamental United Nations human rights covenants and conventions<sup>1</sup>; the 1951 Refugee Convention on the Status

of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; and the International Labour Standards defining principles and rights for decent work. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda are especially relevant global policy frameworks. Catholic Social Teaching (CST), the doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of social and economic justice, and fundamental Christian values are the foundations for Caritas’s views and actions.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis (2015) has argued that, “the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development.” Moreover, he has called for a dialogue including everyone about, “how we are shaping the future of our planet”, questioning the current model of development and the present condition of global society where injustices are numerous, and more and more people are deprived of fundamental human rights. This demands “prioritising the weakest members of society as a way of measuring progress” (CAFOD et al. 2018).

Human rights can be defined as protections for individuals and groups, guaranteed under international law, against interferences with fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Human rights are inalienable and cannot be denied to or relinquished by any human being, regardless of any reason including legal or immigration status. They are universal in that they apply to everyone, everywhere. Human rights encompass civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and are indivisible, meaning that the different sets of rights are all equally important for the full development of human beings and their well-being.<sup>2</sup> Human rights instruments and customary international law generate three overarching obligations for States, namely: to respect, to protect, and to fulfil those rights.

<sup>1</sup> *The International Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Racial Discrimination (1965), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).*

<sup>2</sup> *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993.*

## Migration

Migration is a major feature of today's globalised world. In broad terms, migration is the movement of people from one place of residence to another. While the term migration covers population movement internal to a country—rural to urban or from one locality to another in a different jurisdiction, the MIND project addresses international migration. International migration is a distinct legal, political and social category, as people move from a nation-state in which they are citizens with the rights and protections that citizenship normally confers, to other countries where rights and protections of nationality, of access to social protection, and of common identity often do not apply and where social and cultural paradigms may be different.

While there is no international normative definition for migration, international conventions provide agreed upon definitions for refugees and for migrant workers and members of their families; the latter applicable to nearly all international migrants. The definition of a refugee in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees is: "Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." All EU member States have ratified both the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) states that: "The term 'migrant worker' refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national." The Convention recognises *frontier worker, seasonal worker, seafarer, offshore worker*, itinerant worker, and other specific categories of migrant workers as covered under its provisions. The ICRMW reiterates that all basic human rights cover family members present with and dependent on migrant workers. Data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) shows that nearly all international migrants, whatever their reasons for migration or admission, end up economically active—employed, self-employed or otherwise engaged in remunerative activity. A specific definition and the statistical standards needed to obtain reliable and comparable data on international migrants have been agreed under UN auspices and are used by most governments. For statistical purposes, an *international migrant* is defined as 'a person who has resided in a country other than that of birth or citizenship for one year or more, irrespective of the causes or motivations for movement and of legal status in the new country of residence.'

There are an estimated 260 million foreign-born people residing today in countries other than where they were born (UNDESA 2017). This figure does not include persons visiting a country for short periods such as tourists, nor commercial or transportation

workers who have not changed their place of residence. For an accurate analysis of the interconnectedness of migration and development, Caritas uses a broad understanding of migration, which includes all persons born abroad and officially residing in Belgium.

## Development

The pledge to leave no one behind and to ensure human rights for all is a cornerstone of the Resolution by the UN General Assembly 70/1 "Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" that contains the Declaration and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 sustainable development Targets, adopted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2015. This document endorsed by all 193 UN Member States expresses, under paragraph 8, their shared vision of and commitment to: a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

The 2030 Agenda has led to paradigm shifts in the perception of development. Development and sustainable development concerns all countries on the planet; protecting the environment and tackling inequality are considered key development goals; peace and social justice are seen as integral components of the universal development agenda; and the need for the commitment and participation of all groups within all societies and states is emphasised in order to achieve development for all. The new worldwide consensus on development is grounded on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and all human rights treaties; therefore, if states do not make progress on the actual realization of human rights for all, the SDGs cannot be reached.

The term *development* encapsulates the elaboration of productive means, forces, capacities, organisation and output of goods, services, technology and knowledge to meet human needs for sustenance and well-being. It comprises building the means for: extraction and transformation of resources; production of goods, services and knowledge; infrastructure for production, transportation and distribution; growth of capital as well as skills and labour; and human welfare/well-being in terms of housing, nutrition, healthcare, education, social protection and culture in its broad sense (Taran 2012).

Caritas uses the concept of integral human development, which places the human person at the centre of the development process. It may be defined as an all-embracing approach that takes into consideration the well-being of the person and of all people in seven different dimensions. First, the *social* dimension, which focuses on quality of life in terms of nutrition, health, education, employment, social protection and social participation as well as equality of treatment and non-discrimination on any grounds. Second, the *work* and economic activity dimension as the means of self-sustenance and those of kin, of socio-economic engagement and of direct contribution to development for most adults in all populations. Third, the *ecological* dimension, which refers to the respect for the goods of creation and to ensure the quality of life for future generations without ignoring this generation's cry for justice. Fourth, the *political* dimension, which includes issues such as: existence of the rule of law; respect for civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights; democracy, in particular as a representative and, above all, participatory tool. Fifth, the *economic* dimension, which relates to the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and distribution of income and wealth, sustainability of economic growth, structure of the economy and employment, degree of industrialisation, level of high-tech ICT, and the state's capacity to obtain revenue for human services and social protection, among other considerations. Sixth, the *cultural* dimension, which addresses identity and cultural expression of communities and peoples, as well as the capacity for intercultural dialogue and respectful engagement among cultures and identities. Seventh, the *spiritual* dimension. Taken together, those dimensions underpin an integral approach to development (Caritas Europa 2010). According to the Catholic Social Teaching, social inequalities demand coordinated action of all the people / the whole of society and the whole of government in all countries for the sake of humanity based on two grounds: 1) social questions are global, and 2) socio-economic inequalities are a danger for peace and social cohesion. In this sense, development of our own country and that of others must be the concern of us all—the human community.

## Migration and development

The link between migration and development is a centuries-old juridical, political and practical question. Since the end of World War II, migration and development has been the subject of intense discussion among policy-makers, academics, civil society and the public. Pope Pius XII dedicated an encyclical on “migrants, aliens and refugees of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, are forced to leave their native land” (*Exsul Familia* 1952), reaffirming that migrants and refugees have a right to a life with dignity, and therefore a *right to migrate*.

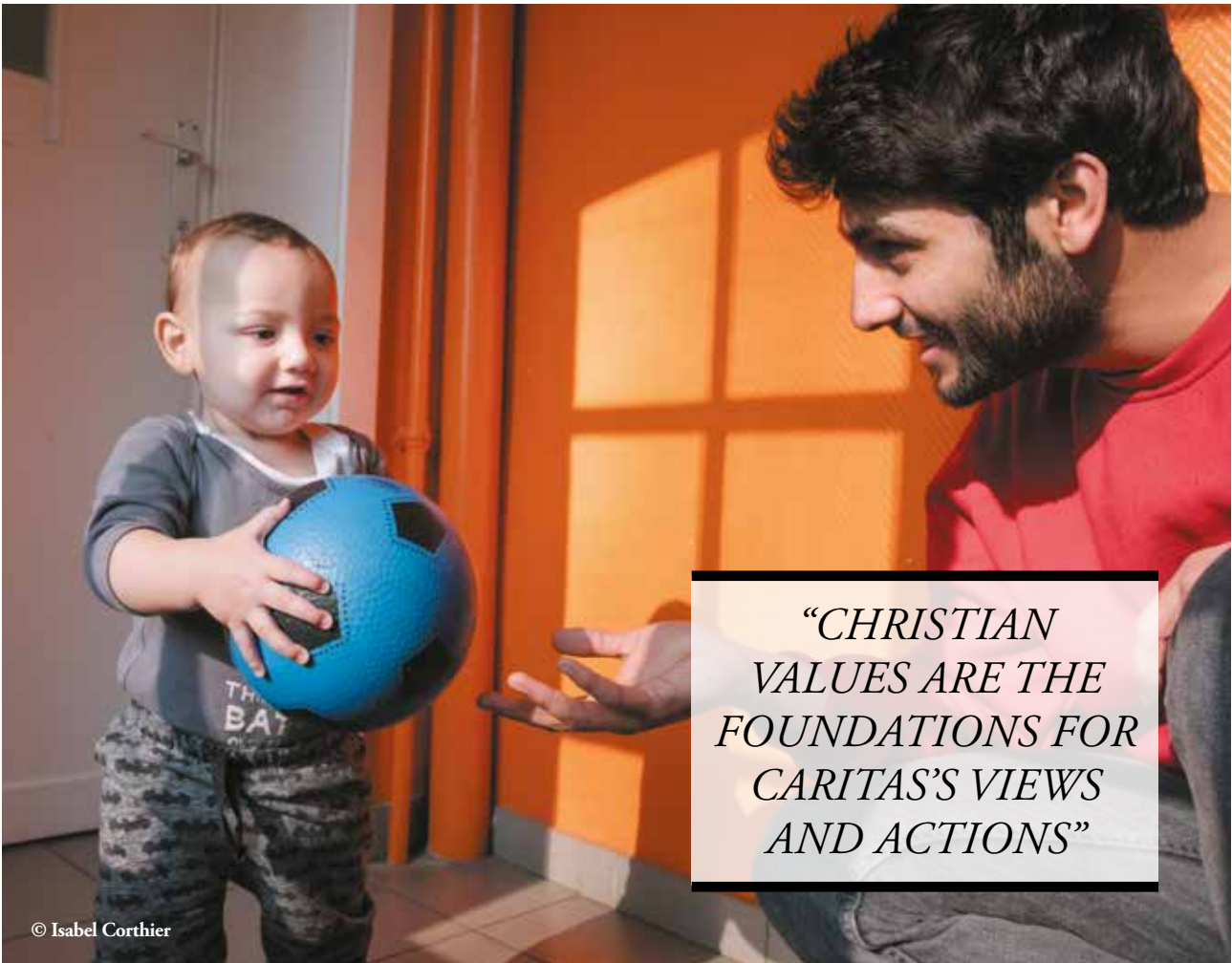
Migration became a fundamental pillar of development across several regions under regional integration and development projects, namely the European Economic Community succeeded by the European Union. Since the 1970s, migration has been essential to development through regional free movement systems in Central, East and West Africa. From the 1920s, large population movements—some forced—in the (former) Soviet Union underpinned industrial and agricultural development across the twelve USSR republics.

Spurred by geopolitical events that greatly affected human mobility on a global scale, the relationship between migration and development has become central in contemporary political and economic and social policy debates. The first global development framework to recognize the role of migration and its immense contribution to sustainable development worldwide was the Declaration and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994.<sup>3</sup> The overarching contemporary framework is the above-mentioned 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its SDGs. While explicit reference to migration and development was laid out in SDG Target 10.7 on safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility, more than 44 SDG Targets across 16 of the 17 SDGs apply to migrants, refugees, migration and/or migration-compelling situations (Taran et al. 2016). The New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito in October 2015 provides even more explicit attention to migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in its global development and governance framework for cities—where most migrants and refugees reside.

In 2016, in the wake of severe and protracted conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia and the collapse of effective protection for refugees in neighbouring countries, UN Member States adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (UN Resolution 71/1)*, calling for improved global governance of migration, and for the recognition of international migration as a driver for development in both, the country of origin and of destination. The *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)*, adopted at an inter-governmental conference in Marrakesh, Morocco in November 2018, and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) elaborated on those principles and proposed ways for implementing them through political dialogue and non-binding commitments. Both Compacts were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2018.

Caritas recognises that a growing number of people are forced to leave their countries of origin not only because of conflicts and persecution but also because of other existential threats. These include poverty, hunger, unemployment and lack of

<sup>3</sup> The ICPD was the biggest conference ever held on population, migration and development with 11,000 delegates from 179 countries and some 4,000 participants in the parallel NGO Forum. Two of the ten chapters of the Programme of Action were entirely about migration and development. Adopted by all 179 participating States/governments, the ICPD Declaration and 20-year Programme of Action (extended in 2010) continue to serve as a comprehensive guide to people-centred development progress.



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*“CHRISTIAN  
VALUES ARE THE  
FOUNDATIONS FOR  
CARITAS’S VIEWS  
AND ACTIONS”*

decent work or good governance, absence of access to education and healthcare, as well as those linked to the consequences of climate change. *Forced migration* for Caritas encompasses all migratory movements where an element of coercion exists. People fleeing conflicts and persecution have a natural right to international protection.

Caritas also recognizes that the overwhelming proportion of migration into Europe reflects most EU member countries’ need for foreign labour to sustain its own development. This *demand* results from rapidly evolving technologies, changes in the organisation of work, its location, and the decline of the activity of the local workforce reflecting the local population’s ageing and declining fertility.

For Caritas’s, those who migrate and those who remain—whether in country of origin or in country of residence—both have the right to find, wherever they call home, the economic, political, environmental and social conditions to live with dignity and achieve a full life. Regardless of the legal status in a country, all migrants and refugees possess inherent human dignity and human rights that must be respected, protected and fulfilled by all States at all times. Caritas calls for a human response of

solidarity and cooperation to assume responsibility for integral human development worldwide and for the protection and participation of people who have moved from one country to another—migrants and refugees. Migration contributes to the integral human development of migrants and of their countries of residence. Such a vision implies the recognition that migration, regardless of its drivers, is an opportunity for our societies to build a more prosperous, global *Common Home*, where everyone can make a contribution to and live with dignity.



# INTRODUCTION

**B**ased on an in-depth analysis of the current situation, policies and debates in Belgium related to migration and development, the following report develops knowledge, evidence and analysis to answer the following guiding question: *How, and under what conditions, can migrants contribute to their own integral human development, as well as that of their countries of origin and residence?*

The main objective of this report is thus to identify the key factors that influence the capacity of migrants and refugees to contribute to the development of Belgium and their country of origin. The analysis is based both on research and the extensive practical experience of Caritas International with migrants and refugees. The findings of this report are supported by available academic literature, statistic data, policy documents, and articles from different media sources. 17 interviews with administrative staff members, partners and Caritas International staff, as well as experts on migration and development, civil society representatives, migrant and diaspora organisations were conducted.

This publication will first review the complex national migratory context in Belgium. It will then discuss the development-based framing for migration before underlining the key contributions of migrants and immigration to the economy, society, and culture. It will then identify key obstacles that impede migrants' full contribution to their own development and that of their countries of origin and destination, as well as helpful policies and practices that can foster such contributions. This study concludes with some policy recommendations that may guide Caritas International and other relevant stakeholders in their future advocacy work to better protect migrants' rights and to better promote their integration and active participation in societal development, both here, and abroad.

It however seems important to first emphasise one point. Caritas International acknowledges that the level of contribution of a migrant is by no means a condition for solidarity. While this report gives examples of famous migrants who contributed, for example, to the cultural, political or sports life in Belgium, we acknowledge that most people, migrants or not, lead lives that do not receive such level of public and media attention. We believe that everyone, whether they be high- or low-skilled, can contribute to our society and/or to our world, if society gives them the chance and the means to do so.

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# THE MIGRATORY CONTEXT OF BELGIUM

## Migration and development in Belgian history

While migration has become a major source of political preoccupation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not a new phenomenon to Belgium (Lafleur and Marfouk 2017). Belgium's migration history has gone through different stages which produced different outcomes in terms of social, cultural, economic and political development.

Between its independence in 1830 and World War I, Belgium was primarily a country of emigration. A large share of its population had migrated to France, the United States or Canada for a range of reasons that are similar to today: the absence of decent work, land displacement, and economic opportunities abroad (Morelli 1998). In 1891, the Belgian population was estimated at over 450,000 people in France. Belgians even represented a majority of the population in northern French cities, such as Roubaix (Petillon 2006).

Historically, the Belgian emigration has played an important role in the economic development of other parts of the world (Morelli 1998). The development of the textile industry in Northern France and that of the agricultural sector of the State of Wisconsin in the United States are just two such examples.

Belgian emigrants' migratory reasons have not always been similar. Whereas emigration represented a crucial economic decision for hundreds of thousands of Belgians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is mostly armed conflicts that drove between one and two million individuals to seek refuge outside of Belgium during both World Wars. It is interesting to note that while public opinion in the Netherlands, France or the United Kingdom initially showed compassion for Belgian refugees, tensions later arose when they arrived in larger numbers. Such controversies echo the current negative reactions of the public opinion towards newcomers.

Belgian history of migration also has a darker past. This mainly includes its colonial history in Africa between the 1880s up to the Independence of today's Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. Belgium benefited enormously from

resources and wealth extracted from its colonies. Its colonial control, its politics of forced displacement and exploitation, its abuses, and the death of millions among African populations significantly hindered in contrast the development of those countries.

Immigration (people born abroad) to Belgium began prior to World War I. Immigrants arrived mostly from neighbouring countries, Eastern Europe and Italy in search of work. It then increased significantly during the interbellum period, as the Belgian government organised recruitment campaigns to attract foreign workers for its rising coal industry (Myria 2015). In 1930, the Belgian mining industry employed approximately 30,000 foreign workers (17% of the total amount of miners) (Caestecker and Morelli 2010).

During World War II, the coal mines were mainly occupied by prisoners of war. Their liberation caused an acute shortage of labour, particularly problematic for coal and steel industries, whose situation was all the more difficult since native Belgians were not satisfied with their salaries and their working conditions. Belgium thus decided to turn to foreign workers who would accept such conditions, instead of working to improve them (Myria 2016).

The 1946 agreement with Italy provided for the recruitment of 50,000 workers in exchange for the commitment from Belgium to sell to Italy 200 kg of coal per day of labour for each migrant worker (Lafleur, Martiniello, and Rea 2015). Over less than ten years, more than 111,000 Italian workers arrived in the country (Myria 2016). After the mine disaster of Marcinelle in 1956, immigration of Italian workers slowed down, as Belgium refused Italy's demand to ensure better working conditions for its nationals. Belgium turned then to Greece and Spain (1956) as well as Morocco and Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969), Algeria (1970), and Yugoslavia (1970). Several bilateral recruitment agreements were signed (Martiniello and Rea 2003). A distinctive feature of Belgium is that, despite its colonial past, it never actively sought to recruit citizens of its colonies. As a result, their presence in Belgium has always

been limited, except after Congolese independence and during the Rwandan genocide.

During this period, the Belgian government encouraged workers to bring along their families for two reasons. First, it hoped to bring up the birth rate (Myria 2015). Second, it wanted to encourage workers to remain in the country and benefit from the investment of their salaries in the economy (ibid.). In the early 1960s, the Ministry of Justice even stopped strictly applying the immigration legislation: a work permit was no longer considered a prerequisite for a residence permit. In this sense, the market and public policy de facto encouraged immigration. Many immigrant workers arrived in Belgium as tourists, looking for a job. Only later did they formalise their residence in the country. This arrangement was implicitly accepted by employers and tolerated by immigration authorities.

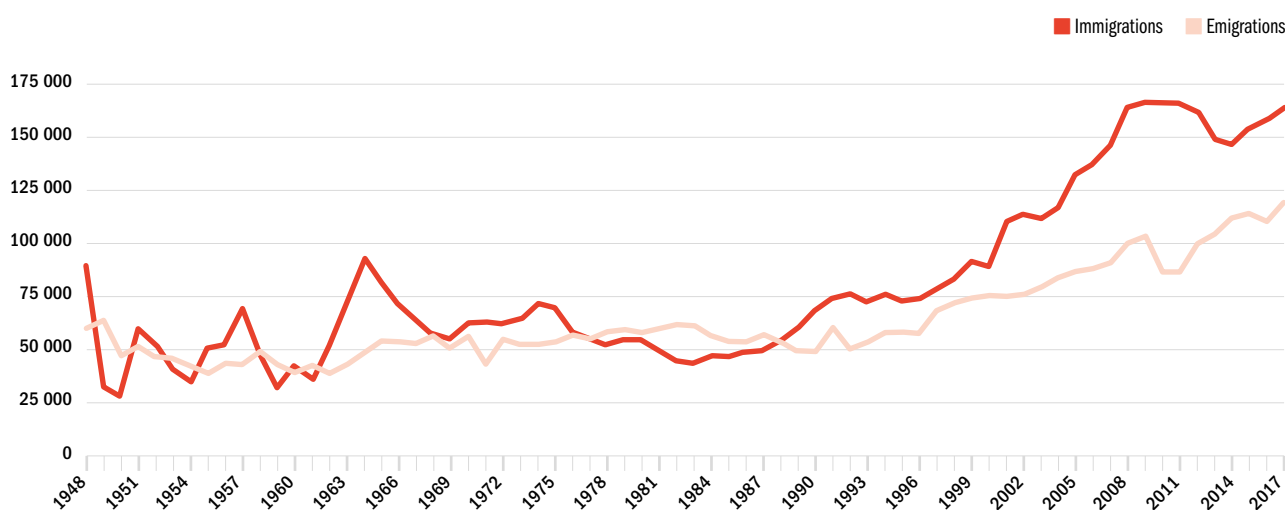
The worsening economic situation and rising unemployment in the late 1960s, however, demanded a new response. In 1967, the government returned to a strict application of immigration legislation. New laws were passed to control the granting of work permits; the goal was to regulate immigration more so that flows of immigrants into the country would drop (Martiniello and Rea 2003). In the early 1970s, the impact of the oil crisis on the economy and the unemployment rate (Boyle, Halfacree and Robinson 1998) led the Belgian government to adopt more policies to restrict immigrations.

Yet, these policies did not stop migration but rather transformed it. It changed migration systems from circular to chain migration. Migrants from non-European countries who had come under labour recruitment schemes increasingly settled permanently, as returning to their home country for long periods now entailed

a significant risk of losing their residence permit (Van Mol and de Valk 2016). As a result, many migrants started to bring along their families despite attempts by the Belgian government to limit family reunification (Hansen 2003; Castles et al. 2014). Besides, new migrants started to come for other reasons than work, such as refugees fleeing conflict (for example in Rwanda, the Balkans, Iraq or Syria), foreign students as well as migrants from new countries of the—enlarged—European Union (Lafleur and Marfouk 2017).

As a result, migration flows kept increasing until 2011 as shown in Figure 1. Migrant flows then decreased due to the adoption of a restrictive immigration policy towards non-EU nationals. Between 2011 and 2015, flows from the African continent decreased by 33% and the number of European citizens originating from non-EU countries—such as Switzerland or Ukrainians—dropped by 18% (ibid.). Yet, migration flows increased once again in 2015, mainly as a result of the arrival of asylum seekers from the Middle East.

Current discourses often portray the 2015 influx of migrants as a ‘migration crisis’ or ‘refugee crisis’. We refute this terminology. The term ‘solidarity crisis’ better describes this period. Indeed, the number of arrivals roughly amounted to 0.2% of the European population, which is far behind the situation of other countries such as Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey. This influx however revealed the lack of solidarity of the European Union towards third countries and among its member states.



**Figure 1. Migration Balance in Belgium: 1948-2017**

Source: Statbel (Direction générale Statistique - Statistics Belgium). Number of immigrations is the sum of entries from abroad (including Belgians and foreigners), registry changes and re-registrations of those automatically delisted. This means applicants for international protection appear as new entrants on the territory only once their residence permit has been granted. When excluding Belgians and applicants for international protection, 113,214 new migrants of foreign nationality arrived in Belgium in 2017. Number of emigrations is the sum of departures (including Belgians and foreigners) and re-registrations of those automatically delisted (Lafleur and Marfouk 2017).



## Migration in Belgium today

### Emigration and immigration

In 2017, the United Nations listed 562,626 Belgian emigrants, most of them (76%) living in another EU country—especially France (28%), the Netherlands (10.5%), Italy (8.4%), Spain (7.9%) and the United Kingdom (6.5%) (UNDESA 2017). The most common reasons for expatriation are work, education, the acquisition of linguistic knowledge, family reasons, and discrimination (Laffleur and Marfouk 2017). Some youth of foreign origins have left Belgium—typically for countries in the Maghreb or the United Kingdom—because of barriers on the labour market resulting from discrimination based on their ethnicity and religion (Fadil 2019).

In 2017, there were 1.9 million immigrants in Belgium, with immigrants defined as foreign born individuals. This share of migrants amounted to 16.4% of the total population (Statbel). This represents an increase of about 5 percentage points compared to 2005, which can be explained by the fact that the number of international migrants in Belgium has grown much faster (an average increase of 3.6% per year) than that of the total population (an average increase of 0.7% per year).

### Immigration and regional particularities

Disaggregated data show that the share of international migrants in the total population varies significantly across Belgian regions. In 2017, migrants constituted 45% of the total population in Brussels, compared to 15% in Wallonia and 12% in Flanders. 42% of the migrant population itself chose to live in the Flemish region in 2017, 29% in Wallonia and 29% in Brussels. The combination of these results shows that a migrant is more likely to live in the Flemish region, while the percentage of migrants living in Flanders remains small compared to that of the other regions.

Jayet et al. (2016) studied the determinants of migrants' choices concerning their place of residence. They underlined that the spatial repartition of immigrants in Belgium was determined by both network effects and local characteristics. The latter include housing and labour market conditions as well as the presence of public amenities. The relative importance of these determinants varies by nationality, but for all nationalities, local factors matter more than networks effects.

## Origin of migrants

Most migrants in Belgium are European. They represent 54% of the migrant population in Belgium (Statbel). They are followed by migrants from Africa (25.8% of migrant population in Belgium), Asia (15.6%), America (4.2%) and Oceania (0.1%).

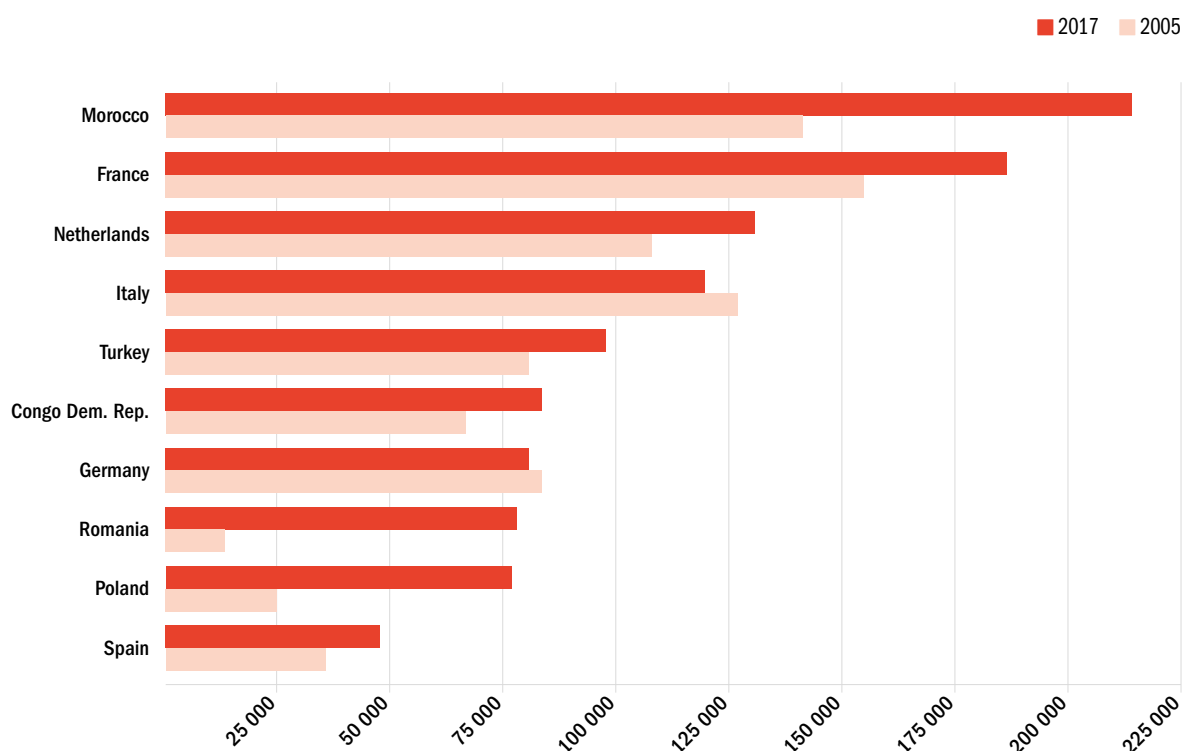
Most migrants in Belgium come from middle-income countries (50.5%), followed by migrants from high-income countries (about 45%) and far behind by migrants from low-income countries (about 5%).<sup>4</sup> This can be partly explained by the fact that the poorest usually do not have the means to finance international travels.

The graph below provides details about the top-10 group of countries of origin. In 2017, seven of them were European Union member states. Yet, Morocco was the first country of origin, with about 215,000 migrants, representing 11.5% of the total immigration population in Belgium. It was followed by France (185,000 people or 10.1%), the Netherlands (130,000 or 7.1%), Italy (120,000 or 6.5%) and Turkey (98,000 or 5.6%). In 2017, 60% of migrants in Belgium were coming from these 10 countries, 10 percentage points lower than in 2005. This shows

a substantial decrease in the concentration of international immigration in terms of origin.

In order to understand the recent evolution of migration in Belgium, it is necessary to consider migration flows rather than stocks. In 2017, 64% of new migrants were from the European Union, 15% from Asia, 11% from Africa, 6% from America and 3% from non-EU European States. Profound changes can be observed since 2001, notably the 11 percentage points rise of the share of EU citizens, partly due to the enlargement of the European Union, and the 3 percentage points rise of the proportion of Asian migrants in the total annual migration flows. By contrast, the share of African and American citizens respectively declined by 9 and 3 percentage points.

As shown in the graph on the next page, in 2017, European countries dominated the top-10 group of countries of origin in terms of flows. Yet, Romanians were the largest group of immigrants (14% of all new migrants). Romania was then followed by France (11%), the Netherlands (7%), Italy (5%), Poland (5%) and Spain (4%).

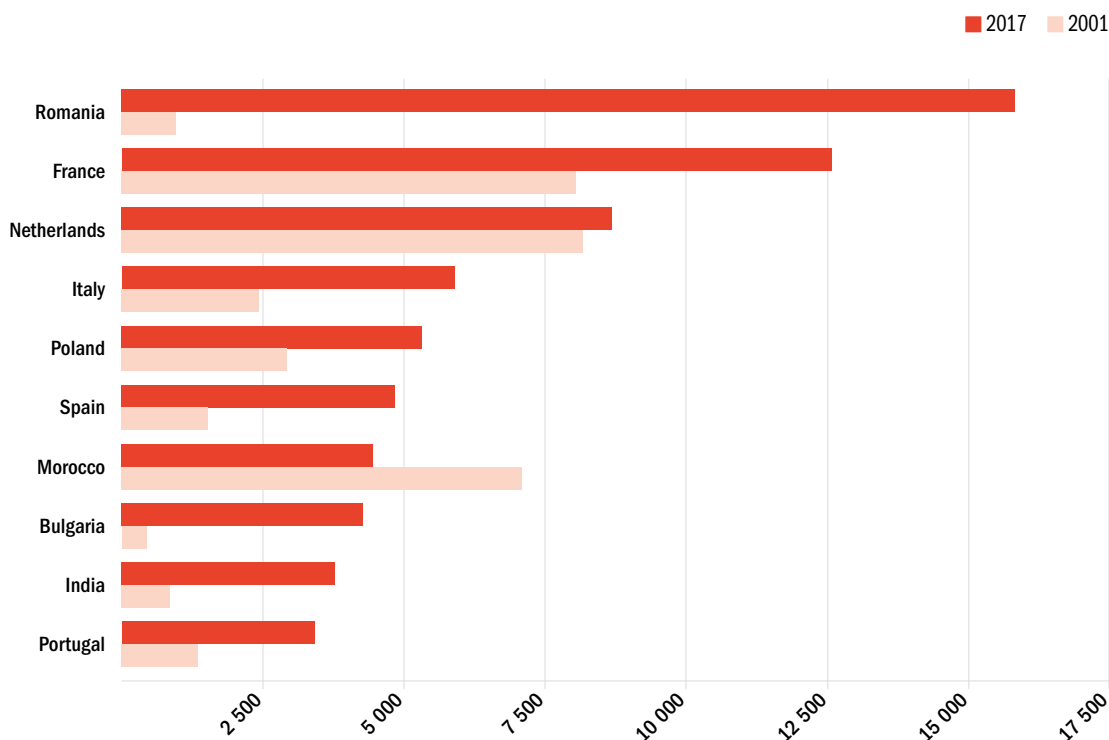


**Figure 2. Migrant stocks in Belgium: Top 10 countries of origin**

Source: Statbel (Direction générale Statistique - Statistics Belgium) and authors' calculations.

**Definition:** The immigrant **population** denotes the total number of immigrants living in Belgium at a given time. They are different from **flows**, which measure the number of people who arrive in Belgium from abroad during a given period (typically a year).

<sup>4</sup> Income groups are based on the 2017 World Bank classification. Low-income economies are those with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$995 or less; middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$996 and \$12,055; high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of \$12,056 or more. For more information see: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519>. Our analysis distinguishes 32 low-income countries, 58 middle-income countries, and 59 high-income countries.



**Figure 3. Migrant flows of foreigners in Belgium: Top 10 countries of origin**  
 Source: Statbel (Direction générale Statistique - Statistics Belgium) and authors' calculations.

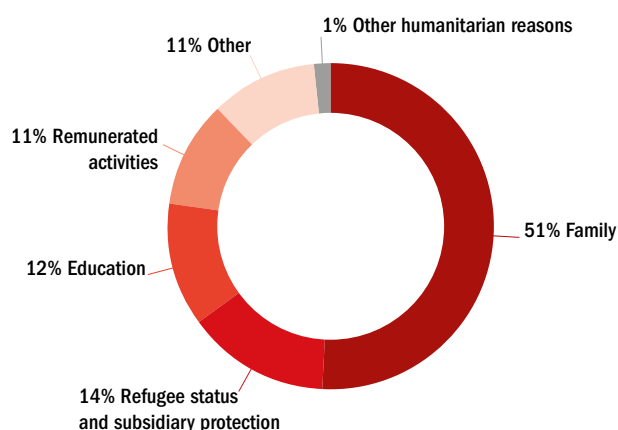
## Access to Belgium and Establishing Residency

Citizens of most countries outside the European Economic Area need a visa to enter Belgium. The visa can either be short-term (C visa) or long-term (D Visa).

Free movement within the EU constituted in 2016 the most important entry channel of migration to Belgium (54.6% of the migrant population). Family migration was the second most important channel (27%), followed by the arrival for humanitarian reasons (about 16%) and for work (2.6%) (OECD/ EU 2018).

The number of third-country nationals entering Belgium through family reunification is a controversial topic in Belgium. Some say it is a sign that migration is 'unproductive' and likely to be motivated by a desire to stay on welfare. Yet, as noted by Lafleur and Marfouk (2017), one should interpret the data on the motives of visa delivery with great care. As migrating to Belgium for employment, studies or seeking protection has become increasingly difficult for third-country nationals, family reunification has remained one of the few viable options to reach Belgium legally since the end of labour recruitment programmes in 1974. Accordingly, it cannot be deduced that family reunification is a type of migration unrelated to seeking employment in Belgium.

Migrants who wish to stay for more than three months need a residence permit. In 2017, 56,246 first-residence permits were delivered (Eurostat 2018a). Belgium is welcoming less third-country nationals than its European counterparts since its number of permits issued per thousand inhabitants is lower (4.9 in 2017) than the EU average (6.1 in 2017) (ibid.). The reasons that explain the issuing of residence permits to nationals of third countries are shown in graph 4.



**Figure 4. Reasons for the issuing of first residence permits to third-country nationals in Belgium in 2017**  
 Source: Eurostat (statistical office of the European Union).

## IRREGULAR MIGRATION

By definition, the number of undocumented migrants is difficult to estimate. Keeping in mind that the available data on this unobservable phenomenon should be interpreted with caution, the OECD has estimated—based on data of 2008—that undocumented migrants would represent on average between 6.6% and 13.9% of the total foreign resident population. It is in fact more likely that these estimates represent a lower limit than the actual numbers of undocumented migrants.

Eurostat's annual data on detections and apprehensions show a rise in the number of third-country nationals who were found undocumented and were apprehended in Belgium (from 13,800 in 2008 to 18,285 in 2017). Again, caution is needed as some people may have been counted more than once across different years. Furthermore, the recent increase may result from stronger border enforcement policy following the European 'solidarity crisis'.

At this moment, a population of about 600 people, called migrants-in-transit, are residing in Belgium without filing an application for international protection (Ciré 2018; Caritas International 2019) and can therefore be considered as undocumented. Most of them do not file an application for international protection either because 1) they are not informed about this possibility and their rights, 2) their identity has been registered in another Schengen country and do not want to be sent back there, or 3) they wish to continue their migration journey to another country such as the UK. Several political parties refuse to set up solutions or temporary housing for these migrants-in-transit. They are even subject to intensive investigation from the police, especially in major transit hubs and highway parking lots. This also leads to an ongoing tension between the Citizens' Platform - citizen initiative welcoming migrants including through housing with residents - and the government, which accuses them of encouraging undocumented migration.

## International protection

### Procedure for international protection

All foreigners arriving in Belgium are entitled to apply for international protection. They can do so at the premises of the Immigration Office, as well as with the Federal Police at the border and in penitentiary institutions. The vast majority of applicants for international protection in Belgium do not enter the territory through the official Schengen borders, such as the airports. Their first arrival is therefore not always detected (EMN 2018). Moreno-Lax (2018) estimated that up to 90% of subsequently recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in the European Union arrived on its territory irregularly and, often, through life-threatening ways.

Applicants for international protection are entitled to reception during the entire period that their application is being examined (cfr. *infra*). At the end of this procedure, the CGRS looks at whether the foreigner meets the criteria for international protection—either the status of refugee or subsidiary protection. The refugee status entitles to a temporary stay for 5 years (extendable to a stay of unlimited duration), whereas the subsidiary protection status entitles to a temporary stay for 1 year (extendable to a stay of unlimited duration after 2 extensions of 2 years) (AGII 2019).

In 2017, 15,373 people applied for international protection in Belgium for the first time (19,038 in 2018; see CGRS 2017 and 2018). Most of them came from Syria (25%), Afghanistan (6.5%), Palestine (5.3%), Guinee (5%) and Iraq (4%). This number is slightly higher than that of 2016 (14,670 people) but lower than the peak of 2015 (39,064 people).

In 2017, the CGRS granted international protection to 13,933 people. In 2018, this number dropped to 10,483 (CGRS 2018). In both cases, these numbers constituted about 50% of all applications filed.

### Legal pathways for protection

The main legal channel to seek protection in Belgium is the UN-led resettlement program. Refugees selected for resettlement to Belgium need a visa as well, but immigration and customs formalities are facilitated by the Belgian authorities (Fedasil 2019a).

Belgium has a structural resettlement programme since 2013. Its yearly quota has been increased from 100 refugees in 2013 to 1,309 in 2017 (and 880 in 2018) (*ibid.*). This number of resettled refugees constituted 8.5% of the population of recognised refugees and subsidiary protected in Belgium (8.4% in 2018).



The Belgian legislation does not provide explicit rules for the delivery of visas for humanitarian reasons. They are issued on a discretionary basis by the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration or his delegate (the competent service of the Immigration Office). They therefore have a wide margin of appreciation for granting such visas as there are no eligibility criteria. In other words, the granting of a humanitarian visa is a favour and not a right (Myria 2019).

Between 2015 and 2017, an estimated number of 1,600 Syrians (mainly Christians) received a humanitarian visa in the context of the so-called 'rescue operations'. This happened under the discretionary power of the former State Secretary for Asylum and Migration (ibid.). Those operations happened almost completely under the radar (except for the 'humanitarian corridors', cf. infra). The issue came to the attention of the public in early 2019, after one of the middlemen submitting candidates was accused of human trafficking.

In November 2017, an agreement was made between the official religious services and the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration to transfer, within one year, 150 Syrian refugees from Turkey and Lebanon to Belgium with humanitarian visas. This private-public partnership—also known as 'humanitarian corridors'—identified potential candidates to make a safe and legal journey to Belgium and apply for international protection upon arrival. Their housing as well as their material and social support was taken care of by the religious communities and not the government. Once recognised, these refugees had access to social benefits like all other refugees in Belgium. The project was a pilot project and it is not yet clear if it will be pursued.

Besides these specific rescue operations, former State Secretary Francken has explicitly positioned himself against issuing humanitarian visas for requesting asylum in Belgium. This was illustrated by the case of two Syrian families from Aleppo based in Lebanon, who filed a request for a short stay visa at the Belgian embassy in Beirut with the idea of claiming asylum in Belgium, once they would reach the territory. The State Secretary refused to issue them a visa, even after the court obliged him to do so. In Belgium, there is therefore no well-established practice regarding humanitarian visa applications for the purpose of international protection (ibid.).

Family reunification is thus often the only way for the beneficiaries of international protection to safely bring their family. More favourable conditions apply to their family members, if their visa application is submitted within one year after their status. We will come back to this in chapter 3.



## Reception of applicants for international protection

In Belgium, applicants for international protection are entitled to material aid during the entire procedure. This right to material assistance applies once the international protection application has been registered and expires at the end of the procedure. This material aid (so-called *Bed-Bath-Bread*) includes: shelter, food, clothing, medical, social and psychological aid, legal assistance and access to specific services such as the use of interpreters or trainings. In addition, applicants for international protection residing in a collective shelter receive a daily allowance (€7.40 per week) (Fedasil 2019b).

Applicants for international protection are not obliged to stay in the reception structure allocated to them, although the majority of them do so. These open reception facilities are managed by Fedasil or one of its partners. After four months, applicants for international protection are allowed to work.

The topic of services offered to applicants for international protection has been extremely politicised in Belgium for two reasons. First, because of the assumption that offering decent services to applicants for international protection will lead to increased migration, the so-called 'welfare magnet hypothesis' (see box).

## THE 'WELFARE MAGNET HYPOTHESIS'

This hypothesis is based on the idea that difference in migratory flows between countries is a result of the difference between the generousities of their respective reception or welfare systems. Several politicians have motivated the adoption of measures based on this hypothesis. In 2017, the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration justified the forced return of Sudanese migrants, declaring that he “did not want to send the wrong signal that Sudanese people are no longer sent back,” as “rumours always create a magnet effect regarding migration” (De Tijd 2017). More recently, he advocated for the collective reception of refugees, underlying that “local reception has a magnet effect, because the norm in our neighbouring countries is collective reception” (De Tijd 2018). Consequently, a number of individual homes for reception of applicants, operated by NGOs and Public Social Welfare Centres were closed, despite the fact that individual housing safeguards privacy and family life, and is less costly than collective shelters (Cour des comptes 2017).

Yet, studies on the subject tend to demonstrate that there is no causality between the “generosity” of the reception or welfare system of a country, and the number of applications for international protection in this same country. And if there is one, the latter is of minor extent (see Giulietti and Wahba 2012).

Moreover, this hypothesis does not consider migration as it is—a complex process determined by diverse factors, among which the attractiveness of the recipient system’s clout is marginal. According to Myria (2016), the presumption that migrants have the capacity to compare welfare systems and that they are properly informed of their own rights in this matter, is wrong. Studies have successfully demonstrated that migratory itineraries are rather influenced by variables such as economic perspectives, geographic accessibility, linguistic affinities or social networks. De Giorgi and Pellizzari (2006) identified the labour market outlook as a more determining variable than welfare provisions.

Secondly, because there is a concern regarding the cost of the asylum system and its impact on public finance in Belgium. Nevertheless, several arguments enable to counter-balance the arguments that offering protection is too expensive.

First, the number of applicants for international protection relying on the Belgian protection system remains relatively limited. During the highest peak of applications for international protection in 2015, applicants for international protection represented only 0.35% of Belgian population (Lafleur and Marfouk 2017). Belgium actually welcomed only 2.2% of total EU arrivals between 2014 and 2016 which is drastically lower than Germany (44%) or Sweden (8%) (ibid.).

Secondly, the budget devoted to Fedasil (€400 million in 2017, Fedasil 2017) should be put in perspective as it represents only a tiny proportion (0.17%<sup>5</sup>) of the total spending of the public administration. Furthermore, this budget is largely re-injected into the economy since it essentially covers the salaries of workers involved in the asylum process as well as expenditure of goods or services with private, public or non governmental operators (Lafleur and Marfouk 2017).

Thirdly—and as surprising as it may seem—, Belgian authorities have decided to consider the expenses associated with the reception of applicants for international protection as part of its official development aid budget. To this day, this controversial accounting practice allowed by the OECD has the surprising effect of making Belgium the main beneficiary of its own official development assistance (see 11.11.11 2016; Lafleur and Marfouk 2017; CNCDD/11.11.11 2018).

Fourthly, the short-term costs of accommodating refugees via social security benefits are compensated in medium-term. A study found that more than half of refugees are active on the labour market within four years of receiving refugee status (Rea and Wets 2014). In the next sections we will come back to this specific point.

It is important to question the use of economic motives or the fear of the welfare magnet hypothesis in immigration debates, especially when it comes to applicants for international protection. Receiving this vulnerable population is indeed a moral duty and a legal obligation for a democratic state such as Belgium, internationally committed to the defence of human rights. In particular, applying strict economic criteria could lead states to ‘cherry-pick’, that is to say, choosing and admitting only the best qualified refugees.

<sup>5</sup> Authors’ calculation based on the National Bank’s 2017 report.

## WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

In the collective imagination, international immigration is mainly composed of men. Yet, the facts speak differently. More than half of international migrants living in Belgium in 2017 were women. Women also represented 48% of new migrants in 2017 (authors' calculations based on statistics from Statbel).

The representation of women varies across countries of origin and levels of development, but beyond some fluctuations, it appears that women have always represented a major component of immigration in Belgium. In 2017, the number of women surpassed the number of men in migration from Europe (52%) and America (56%). They still accounted for a sizeable proportion of migrants from other regions: 49% for Asia, 49% for Africa, 48% in Oceania. Similarly, women represented 53% of migration from developed countries and 49.5% from developing countries (ibid).<sup>6</sup>

This false perception about the proportion of women in migration is probably the result of several factors which are difficult to distinguish from one another.

First, the fact that migrant workers hired in the aftermath of World War II in the mining and steel industries were exclusively men from the Mediterranean basin may lead some people to believe that this reality is similar for all migratory movements.

Second, some groups of migrants—mostly composed of men—receive more media attention than others, while they represent only a portion of the whole migrant population. It is typically the case of undocumented migrants or applicants for international protection. Eurostat data indicate that men represent 88% of the third-country nationals which are found undocumented and apprehended in Belgium. The CGRS revealed that in 2015 and 2017, respectively 72% and 62,5% of applicants for international protection were men. These high ratios are explained by the fact that many of these men decide to undertake the risky journey to Europe alone in order to request asylum and then bring their families through family reunification.

<sup>6</sup> Developed countries refer to high-income countries ; developing countries refer to low-income and middle-income countries. More information in footnote 4.



# REALITY ON THE GROUND: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIGRANTS TO DEVELOPMENT

Migration contributes to development in various ways—economically, socially and culturally. This section portrays migrants’ contribution both towards Belgium and their country of origin. One should already note that these contributions influence each other—a better contribution to Belgium often implies a better contribution to the country of origin.

## Migrants’ contributions to Belgium

As explained in the first part of the report, migration has been an important contributor to what Belgium is today. This includes the contribution of early waves of Italian, Moroccan, and Turkish migrants to the post-war reconstruction of the country and, as a corollary, to the development of the welfare state.<sup>7</sup> The following sub-sections analyse the current contributions of migrants.

### Contributions to the economy

Migration contributes to the economic development of contemporary Belgium in various ways. One of the great benefits of migration is the change in the variety of goods available to consumers (Aubry et al. 2016). The food industry is a sector that appears particularly praised by transnational entrepreneurs. There are many examples of migrants opening restaurants or importing gourmet products for specialized food stores. Different researchers (see e.g. Martiniello and Boussetta 2008) have also demonstrated that many migrants capitalised on their connections with their country of origin in order to develop cross-country economic activities. By providing information on the respective market systems of their countries of origin and of residence, migrants favour bilateral trade between them. Bignandi (2018) found out that, globally, a 10% increase of migrants from a specific country in a Belgian region led to an increase of 1.2% of the region’s exports from and 3.6% of its imports to the country in question.

Migrants also represent an important source of workforce. According to OECD statistics, the employment rate of migrants in 2017 was 56.5%. Regarding this, part of the public opinion is convinced that migrants take away jobs from native-born workers and thus increase their risk of unemployment. This persistent false perception is surprising as literature found no evidence on the adverse effects of immigration on native workers’ employment opportunities. Docquier et al. (2014) registered a positive or zero impact of immigration on employment of natives.

The belief that migrants take away jobs from natives is based on the idea that the total number of jobs in an economy is fixed and that, consequently, the arrival of migrants on the labour market leads to competition among workers that is likely to cause a reduction of the employment prospects of non-migrant workers. This reasoning is biased for three reasons.

First, this line of thought only takes into consideration the effect of immigration on the supply of labour and ignores its effect on the demand for labour. Yet, as consumers, migrants create demand for goods and services in the destination country and thus also for labour, which leads to the creation of jobs.

Secondly, it fails to acknowledge that migrants and native-born workers are not perfectly substitutable, as they generally have different skills. Migrants fill labour shortages in a variety of sectors, including the ones that demand specific skills, which are not available on the labour market of the country of destination.

OECD data give estimates about the participation of migrants across sectors, and while these data are somewhat out of date (most of them are from the year 2000) and present several shortcomings in terms of sampling, they remain useful to assess some trends. According to them, most migrants are working in the manufacturing sector as well as in the large category of “wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods”. Considering the limits of this quantitative data, qualitative research proves crucial to understanding the type of dynamics at play in the Belgian context. In some specific sectors (notably nursing and domestic

<sup>7</sup> This has been put forward on several occasions, namely through numerous publications, exhibits and press coverages e.g. for the recent anniversary of the signature for the bilateral recruitment agreement with Morocco (see Medboune et al. 2015; Timmerman et al. 2017).



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care), the importance of foreign workers is critical. Indeed, they fill jobs that allow middle class Belgian families to externalise household tasks or the care for children or ageing parents, and thus free up time for work or leisure. A study of the IDEA (2017) revealed that, in Brussels, most domestic workers active in the voucher-scheme system were foreigners. Vivas-Romero (2017) similarly demonstrated that numerous women active in the sectors of cleaning and care were part of the Latin American community.

Thirdly, this reasoning does not take into account the fact that many migrants are entrepreneurs and create their own jobs, although this professional choice is sometimes due to discriminations on the job market. In 2016, around 16.1% of immigrants were self-employed, compared to 13.1% of native residents (OECD/UE 2017). This entrepreneurship generates jobs for native Belgian workers. Approximately 30% of self-employed migrants born outside of the EU have employees (ibid). However, the enterprises of migrants are more at risk than those of natives since the same obstacles of discriminations and exclusion are likely to hinder the viability and success of their entrepreneurial activities.

That being said, the question remains as to whether migration has an effect on the salary and quality of natives' jobs. While posted workers—that is, workers who, for a limited period of time, carry out their work in an EU Member State other than that in which they normally work—could induce some race to the bottom, there is actually no study assessing this in the case

of Belgium. Foged and Peri (2016) found that immigration had positive effects on native unskilled wages, employment, and occupational mobility in Denmark, the increase in the supply of immigrants pushing less educated native workers (especially the young and low-tenured ones) to pursue less manual-intensive occupations.

Concerning the welfare system, an OECD study (2013) showed that the net fiscal impact of migration in Belgium was small but positive—an estimation of about 0.8% of GDP. Despite this reality, concerns are still expressed about the threat that migrants could pose to the sustainability of social security. The European Social Survey data revealed that almost half of Belgian citizens (48%) believe migrants have adverse effects on public finance. This false perception, which is not without consequence, is likely rooted in the fact that migrants are more severely affected by unemployment and have a higher birth rate than natives. This leads some to believe migrants are overrepresented among the recipients of social assistance, unemployment benefits and family allowances. And it is true. The above-mentioned OECD study (2013) demonstrated that, relative to their demographic weight, migrants in Belgium were overrepresented in these categories of recipients of social benefits.

However, migrants are underrepresented in the two most important categories of government expenditure: public pensions and disability benefits. This can be explained by the fact that migrants in Belgium are much younger than the native-born.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> About 76% of the migrants are aged between 18-64 years, compared to 58% of those native-born. 15% of the foreign-born population is aged 65 and above, compared to 19% of the Belgian native-born population (National register data).

The same OECD study (2013) also revealed that employment was the most important determinant of net fiscal contribution of migrants to national public finance. This is no surprise since the unemployment gap between native-born and migrants is about 8 percentage points (13.4% of migrants are unemployed, compared to 5.7% of native-born). Consequently, the implementation of policies and initiatives favouring the inclusion of migrants on the labour market would reinforce their fiscal gains. This inclusion is all the more important, as it allows to attenuate the effects of population ageing on public finance (OECD/UE 2015).

## UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS—WHAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY?

As mentioned in the first part of this report, it is difficult to evaluate the number of undocumented migrants in Belgium. Estimating their contribution to the Belgian economy is therefore equally difficult. Nevertheless, Meeteren et al. (2007) found that two-thirds of undocumented migrants in Belgium had an income thanks to a professional activity, the other third relying on the support of their network—family or friends. Boswell and Straubhaar (2004) did similar research at the European level and got similar results: the employment rate of undocumented migrants reaches 70% on average.

Meeteren et al. (2007) have also shown that undocumented migrants were mainly employed in Belgian sectors in which undeclared work was widespread. This includes the industry, construction, catering and horticulture sectors. Geets et al. (2006) explain the important role undocumented migrants play on the market of supply and demand for labour. In this sense, the fact that some Western European countries close their eyes to undocumented workers in certain periods constitutes an implicit recognition of their contribution to the society (ibid.).

## Political and cultural contributions

Immigration has played an essential role in the political and cultural development of Belgium. The presence of a number of sons and daughters of first-generation migrants in prominent positions at the political or cultural level is strong evidence of the long-lasting impact of the post-war migration wave. Italian migrants in particular have often been presented as a textbook-case of how to transform socio-economic inclusion into political power. The three decades of economic growth after 1945 played a particularly favourable role in this respect as it allowed immigrant workers involved in Belgium's trade unions to progressively turn this power into political influence (see Martiniello 1992). While it is only one example, the accession of Elio Di Rupo—the son of Italian labour migrants—to the position of Prime Minister in 2012 certainly represents the most prominent example of the socio-political inclusion of Italian migrants in Belgium. The growing participation of Turkish, Moroccan and Congolese first-generation migrants and their offspring in the federal, regional and local political arenas also demonstrates the influence of immigration on the Belgian political stage. Meyrem Almaci, current leader of the Flemish Green party and Zakia Khattabi, leader of the francophone Green Party are notable examples, just like Zuhair Demir, Nahima Lanjri, Meyriame Ketir and Yasmine Kherbache—all prominent members of parliament.

At the cultural level, different artists such as the Italian-origin singer Adamo or more recently the Rwandese-origin singer Stromae, have made a lasting impact on the country's musical scene. Other less known but equally (if not more) influential artists are the Belgo-Congolese artists Zap Mama, Baloji, Leki, Pitcho Skinf, Senso and Damso, the Puerto Rican musician Gabriel Rios and the Egyptian Tamino, the self-styled 'serial social entrepreneur' *Sihame El Kaouakibi*, the choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the theater makers Chokri Ben Chikha and Milo Rau, or the authors Thomas Gunzig, Chika Unigwe, Rachida Lamrabet, Mustafa Kör and Fikry el Azzouzi. Together with the successful national football team—the Red Devils—which counts several players of foreign origin among its top players, they confirm the ability of migrants and their children to shape the country's cultural and social identity.

## The key role of diaspora

Diaspora associations play a key role in the economic, social and cultural contribution of migrants, as they often facilitate their economic and social inclusion, their education, their language learning and the promotion of the culture of their country of origin.

Freedom of association is a right that immigrant communities in Belgium have used for several decades. However, due to the absence of a register that centralizes all immigrant associations existing in Belgium, establishing a complete overview of

such organisations is not an easy task. Yet, a large amount of qualitative data on immigrant associations does exist (see e.g. Martiniello 1992; Bousetta 2000; Jacobs et al. 2004; Ben Mohamed 2006). This extensive research allows us to highlight the main characteristics of diaspora associations in Belgium and understand how they facilitate the contribution of migrants. We will focus here on three large categories of migrants that have experienced different forms of associational development: Southern European migrants, Maghrebi and Turkish migrants, and Sub-Saharan migrants.

Southern European communities, and particularly Italians, grew in the period following the signature of post-war labour recruitment agreements. These diasporas played a key role in the inclusion of migrants in Belgium (Morelli and Pertini 1983; Martiniello 1992). These associations indeed developed at a time when integration policies were embryonic or non-existent due to the widespread belief among Belgian policymakers that migration was exclusively a temporary phenomenon and that migrants would necessarily return home at some point.

These diaspora associations are not the only ones that tried to organise the lives of migrants in Belgium. Italian authorities also set up their own social and cultural institutions for migrants. Nevertheless, migrants did not necessarily organise along those lines as some associations were created on the basis of regional origins. Hence, the promotion of the Italian identity, culture and language among migrants' associations sometimes went hand in hand with the promotion of regional identities.

Maghrebi and Turkish migration in the 1960s led to a strong development of associations throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Dasetto 1997; Ouali 2004). Similar to the situation observed with Italians, the lack of integration policies and, more generally, the lack of interest of policy-makers to the specific issues faced by these populations acted as a trigger for the creation of these associations.

Many of these associations focused on social and cultural activities (sports, education, language and home country culture) both to compensate the lack of investment of the authorities and to help create a sense of community among uprooted Maghrebi migrants (Torrekens 2007). As these immigrant communities faced difficulties in practicing their religion, many early associations focused on finding appropriate locations to pray and on organising the religious life of the community. To reach this goal, several communities, particularly the Turkish and Moroccan, could count on the financial and organisational support of the country of origin's authorities.

Towards the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, the issue of racism and exclusion had spread significantly towards these Maghrebi communities. Belgian authorities failed to deal appropriately with these issues. Tensions arose and were

epitomized by the 1991 Forest riots that opposed local youth of immigrant origin to the police. These events acted as a wake-up call to the authorities who saw the political emergency of acting in favour of immigrant-origin youth and set up different anti-discrimination policies and city re-development projects (Rea 2001). These events also encouraged diaspora associations to focus their activities on the second generation and, in particular, on education and the fight against racism.

Some leaders of these associations managed to turn their voice within their community into political power. It is notably the case of Fadila Laanan, a citizen of the Brussels' municipality of Molenbeek who, at the age of 18, was already leading a youth organisation called *Jeunesse Maghrébine*. She became Culture Minister of the French-speaking community of Belgium in 2004 and Secretary of State in the Brussels regional government in 2014. It is thus possible to draw a parallel between the leaders of the Italian community, who turned their associative leadership into political power, and North African migrants, and most importantly their offspring, who turned their influence within their community into prominent positions in political parties (cf. supra).

Sub-Saharan immigrant communities seem to have faced greater challenges in the process of self-organisation (Kagne and Martiniello 2001). Diverse factors can explain these challenges: ethnic, national and linguistic lines of division, issues related to the residence status of migrants and the perception by the migrants themselves that their stay is temporary.

The diversity of the socio-economic profiles and needs of migrants explains the variety of the activities proposed by the diaspora associations. Sub-Saharan women associations, for example, try not only to respond to their specific needs but also develop particular forms of solidarity towards their community. The tontine loan system is an example: Sub-Saharan immigrant communities agree to collectively save money and lend the capital to members of the community who deal with unexpected and serious expenses (see Boulanger 2014).



## Migrants' contributions to the country of origin

The economic impact of migrants on the country of origin is a major topic within the literature on immigrant transnationalism. Several studies have shown that this economic impact was on average positive (see Beine et al. 2008; Clemens 2011). It is both a result of typical economic aspects (financial remittances, international trade, investments, co-development, transfer of technology, etc.) and social aspects (transfer of norms including education, know-how, etc.). The positive impact of migration on countries of origin also serves as a rationale for the active policies of countries of origin to send migrants abroad (Lafleur 2013).

### Contributions to economic development

In 2017, global official flows of remittances to developing countries reached \$466 billion (World Bank 2018). This represents more than three times the size of Official Development Aid (ODA). Financial remittances can be an important source of development for the economies of origin countries. They can increase the income of receiving households and thus play an important role on poverty alleviation, children schooling and entrepreneurship (Adams and Page 2005; McKenzie and Sasin 2007).<sup>9</sup>

Belgium has high volumes both of remittance inflows and outflows. In 2017, it received €9.43 billion in personal remittances<sup>10</sup>, mostly from Belgian emigrants living elsewhere in the EU (95% of remittance inflows) (Eurostat 2018b). The same year, some €4.16 billion in personal remittances were sent out, €3.05 billion (73%) of which to other EU member countries (ibid.).

In fifteen years, the amount of remittances sent from Belgium has almost doubled (World Bank 2017). This increasing trend, mainly due to the growth of the foreign-born population in Belgium (66% increase during the same period), also reflects the impact of other factors, including the growth of migrant incomes, the increased scrutiny of flows since the terrorist attacks in 2001, and changes in the exchange rate<sup>11</sup> (World Bank 2006).

According to the Moroccan Balance of Payment data, Belgium is one of the seven major sources of remittances sent by the Moroccan diaspora. In 2017, the flow of remittances from Belgium reached around €300 million, which corresponds to almost 5% of the total remittances to Morocco (Office des Changes 2017).

In any case, caution is needed before drawing any conclusions based on remittances data. Indeed, it is difficult to obtain all the necessary data, especially since remittances are so diverse (e.g. cash and non-cash; channelled through formal and informal routes). According to a study by the World Bank (2006), unrecorded remittances represent 50% (or more) of recorded flows. As a result, there is no single data source that can guarantee accurate estimates (World Bank 2009).

Whereas financial remittances can be somehow measured (though with serious limitations), investments and economic activity of immigrants in the country of origin are much more difficult to capture. As noted in the previous section, migrants can be a bridge between their communities of origin and destination. This helps promote bilateral trade and foreign direct investment (Harris and Schmitt 2003).

Numerous migrants also develop small projects in their country of origin in order to help their community in diverse domains such as education, health, agriculture, etc. The next section comes back to this specific point.

Returnees also play a specific role regarding the use of the knowledge they acquired abroad. Several examples have shown that they are more likely to become entrepreneurs e.g. in Egypt (Wahba and Zenou 2009) or in the Maghreb (Gubert and Nordman 2008).

### Social remittances

Migration also enables the circulation of norms, ideas and practices between the country of origin and the country of destination. Levitt (1998) calls this “social remittances”. Social remittances can take many forms. They include the promotion of human capital or health care among residents in the countries of origin. Beine et al. (2008) have shown that migration towards OECD countries has had a positive effect on the average education level in 30 low-income countries.

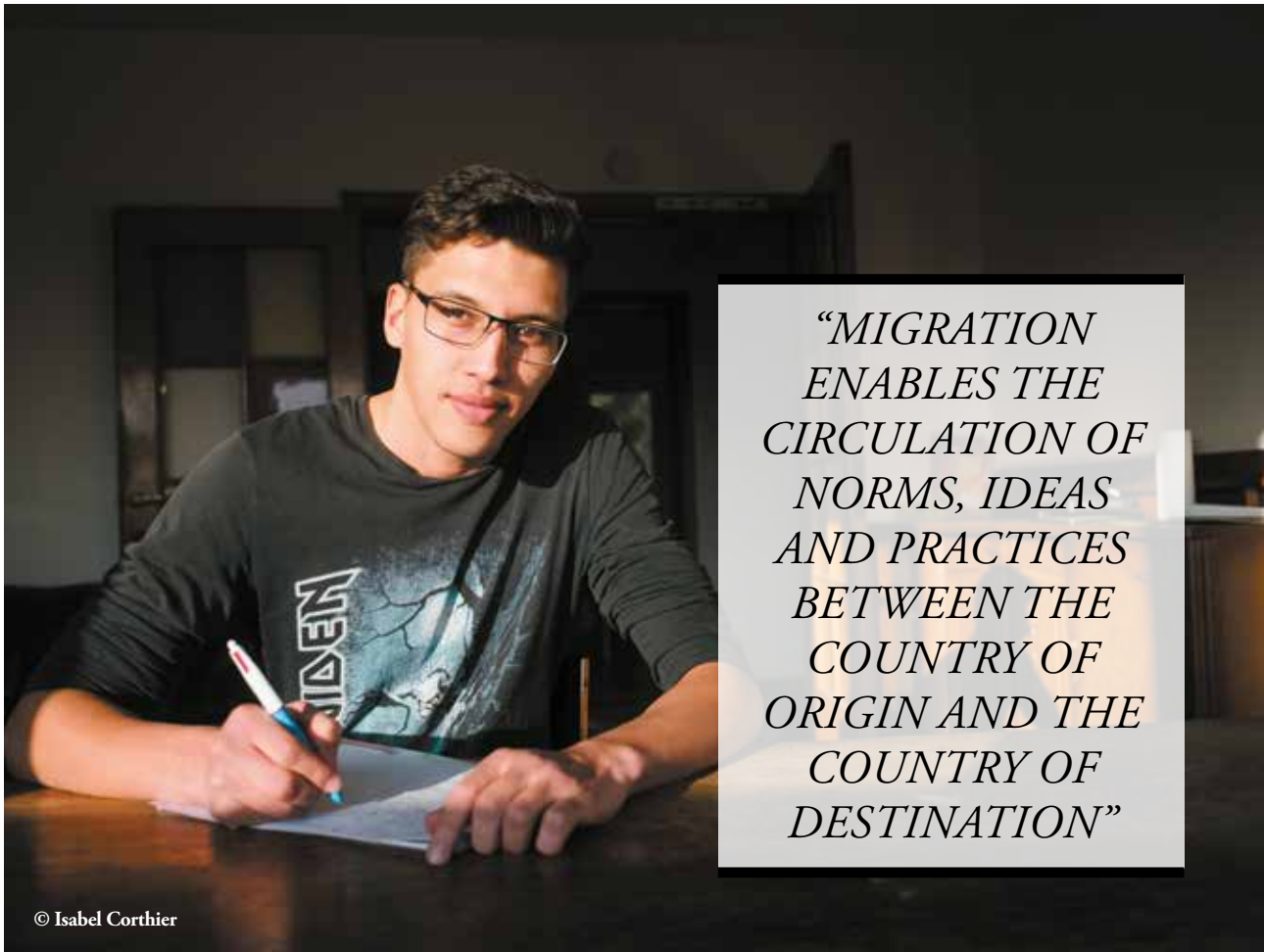
This transfer of social practices is often linked to financial remittances and their accompanying instructions for use. Within the Latin American community in Belgium, salaries of female migrants working in the cleaning or care sector often finance the health expenses of the family members in the country of origin (Vivas-Romero 2017; Camargo 2017).

This transfer of norms sometimes goes beyond the remittances' instructions for use. Some Latin American female migrants who became primary care-providers and breadwinners for their family

<sup>9</sup> While financial remittances are globally higher than Official Development Aid (ODA), they cannot be seen as a substitute since only ODA has the objective of poverty reduction—at least officially—and is based on a more systemic approach. Furthermore, and more importantly, financial remittances do not necessarily concern the same countries as most ODA inflows.

<sup>10</sup> “Personal remittances cover the transfer of household funds in cash or in kind and household assets to a non-resident household, usually situated in the migrant's home economy (including donations to family, etc.), but also the net income being generated through employment in other economies, either as seasonal or border worker, or as resident with non-resident entities (e.g. international institutions domiciled in the resident's home economy)” (Eurostat 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Given that they are reported in US dollars the variation of exchange rate of euro against US dollar can affect the volume of remittance flows.



*“MIGRATION  
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AND PRACTICES  
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COUNTRY OF  
ORIGIN AND THE  
COUNTRY OF  
DESTINATION”*

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back home, succeeded in questioning the traditional *machismo* that often defines gender relations in Latin America (Lafleur and Duchesne 2017).

Lafleur and Vivas-Romero (2018) demonstrated that once confronted to Western European social protection systems, some migrants become more aware of the advantage of enjoying a public health insurance or a public pension to face social risks. They then encourage their relatives in the country of origin to join them. Migrants thus have an impact on the way non-migrant relatives organise their own access to social protection in the country of origin. In certain cases however, the social welfare systems do not exist, are inaccessible to certain groups of citizens, or are just not “generous” enough in the country of origin, which leads some migrants to come up with alternatives from their country of destination to guarantee social protection for their relatives. It is notably the case of Solidarco (see chapter 4).

As mentioned in the previous section, migrants, especially returnees (i.e. migrants who move between their country of destination and country of origin) can contribute to the diffusion knowledge acquired abroad (Wahba and Zenou 2009). Lore van Praag researches diaspora involvement on climate issues in Morocco and describes an interesting example from her fieldwork:

People living abroad are better informed about climate warming. The elderly do see that things change, but they do not link it with climate change because they do not know about it. This knowledge can be brought back by migrants to their region of origin. In Morocco I visited the project of a Moroccan migrant who lives in Catalonia. He built a system on desert soil to collect water and pump it out of the ground on the basis of solar panels. On that land he then cultivated palm trees to harvest high-quality dates, and to sell these palm trees. People from the neighbourhood were each entitled to 1 plot. This project was subsidized by Catalonia and is a good example of how remittances can contribute to the community (Lore Van Praag, University of Antwerp, August 2018).

These social remittances can also be organised through diaspora associations. Indeed, while the motivation to create an association often initially tries to respond to the immediate needs of the migrants themselves (cf. *infra*), the necessity to mobilise around issues of the country of origin’s development naturally arises as it is a source of concern to most members:

When you are a migrant or a stranger, you can create links with the locals. But when bad times come, you find yourself alone. We have therefore created something in order to help each other in case of need. At first, it was only a support association [...]. We would have never launched international solidarity projects if it was not needed (Victoria, a female Sub-Saharan immigrant association leader active in hometown development activities and support to migrants, March 2015; in Schwanen 2016).

## SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Conflicts in the country of origin play an ambiguous role in the transnational engagement of migrants in their country of origin. On one hand, security concerns and lack of stability is a disincentive to launch development initiatives—such as the construction of infrastructure or the setting up of educational programmes. On the other hand, conflicts may also act as a trigger of transnational involvement out of a sense of social justice or civic duty towards the country of origin.

Catastrophic events in the country of origin can therefore be strong mobilising factors of migrant communities. It enables migrants to set political or ideological divisions aside while responding to the emergency. Earthquakes in particular, because of their unpredictable character and the shocking destruction they may cause, are among the best examples of the phenomenon. For example, the earthquakes in L'Aquila, Italy (RTBF 2011) and Mexico City (Guerrero 2017) have led to important mobilizations within these two immigrant communities, traditionally marked by important political lines of division.

## Political remittances

The notion of political remittances is a subset of the broader category of social remittances. Their specificity lies less in values and norms, and more in their impact on the civic and political sphere of the country of origin (Levitt 1998; Boccagni, Lafleur, and Levitt 2015).

The emblematic impact of migrants on the civic and political landscape of the country of origin is their participation to the elections of their country of origin. While there is strong variation among the ways in which migrants can register and cast ballots, there has been a growing trend among countries to enfranchise citizens abroad since the 1990s (Lafleur 2013). Today, over 100 states allow migrants to participate in at least one type of election in their country of origin.

While two of the largest communities present in Belgium—Moroccan and Congolese—do not have the right to vote from abroad, this possibility exists and has been taken up by many other migrants residing in Belgium in recent years. In 2018, 45,000 French migrants participated in the second round of the French Presidential election. The same year, 36,000 Italians voted in the national legislative elections while almost 50,000 had participated in the 2013 legislative elections. This decrease shows that migrants' interest in home country elections lessens over time. This is probably because migrants are settling in the destination country and are more distant from their country of origin. It is also likely due to a more general increase in the phenomenon of distrust towards the political class.

While such practice is usually barely noticed by Belgian authorities, several controversies have emerged in the Turkish case in recent years. In the 2018 Presidential elections, over 100,000 Turks residing in Belgium voted and massively supported the re-election of the incumbent President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. This support of Turkish migrants for Erdogan, has been interpreted as a lack of inclusion of the Turkish community in the Belgian society and as support for a party representing a threat to democracy.<sup>12</sup> However, it is worth noting that such controversies have never targeted other communities such as the French, the Polish or the Hungarians, a share of which also supports populist and extreme-right parties in their country of origin elections.

It is interesting to note that with immigration, new forms of transnational cooperation between political parties emerge. Some Belgian political parties have been actively encouraging migrants to vote for elections in their country of origin. The French-speaking socialist party (PS), for example, regularly sends letters to its members of Italian origin to encourage them to vote for the *Partito Democratico* (PD) in Italian elections. Conversely, the PD also enjoins its members residing in Belgium to support PS candidates in local elections.

<sup>12</sup> This was mentioned by Alain Destexhe in the *Figaro*, Theo Francken on his Facebook page, Bob De Brabandere on the website of the *Vlaams Belang* party, and Zuhail Demir on the website of the *N-VA*.

Voting from abroad is not the only way for migrants to influence the political and social landscapes of their country of origin. Some do it more directly, by maintaining their membership in a political party of their country of origin. They even sometimes retain a consequent political power. It is notably the case of Rafael Correa<sup>13</sup> and Carles Puigdemont<sup>14</sup>, immigrant political elites in Belgium who have remained active towards politics in Ecuador and Spain, respectively. Other migrants create sub-sections of political parties of their country of origin in the country of destination. Examples of foreign political parties being represented in Belgium have become very frequent. It is notably the case of the French party *France Insoumise*, of Italy's *Partito Democratico* or of the USA's *Democratic Party*.

Associational political mobilisation is however more frequently visible outside of the electoral arena. The Kurdish-Turkish conflict is an illustration of transnational political activities of certain immigrant communities. The negative events that hit the Kurdish community in Turkey (such as the arrest of a Kurdish leader and the adoption of unfavourable language policies targeting the Kurdish community) led to a rapid mobilisation of Kurdish organisations across Europe (Lafleur 2005). These virtual mobilisations transformed into demonstrations in Brussels. Despite its relatively small size in Belgium, the Kurdish community chose the city for its geographical location and for the presence of European institutions, their goal being to influence the European position on Turkish issues, in the hope that its foreign policy decisions favour Kurdish minorities.

Research also suggests that migration has a positive effect on the diffusion of democratic values and on the quality of institutions in origin countries (Spilimbergo 2009; Batista and Vicente 2011). The Congolese diaspora, for example, has been involved for decades in processes of democratisation and human rights' promotion in DRC. Another example is the inter-Rwandan Dialogue started in 2004 at the initiative of two migrants (one of whom was based in Belgium) pushed by a sense of duty towards their homeland (see Perrin and Martiniello 2011). Civil society organisations in Belgium had also organised roundtables with Tutsi and Hutu. These projects of dialogue and reconciliation among diaspora members were supported by the Belgian authorities on the one hand because stability of the country of origin was part of their foreign policy, and on the other hand because it would help preventing the exportation of foreign conflicts to Belgium.

## SOCIAL REMITTANCES: THE ROLE OF THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Unlike what is often assumed, migrants are not devoid of ideas and skills upon arrival in the country of destination. Social remittances are thus also shaped by what migrants 'brought with them prior to departure'. Italian migrants who arrived in the 1950s and opened chapters of the Italian communist party in Belgium are clear examples of this situation. Importing into Belgium their ideological framework, they set up organisations that not only helped Italian workers in Belgium while connecting with the Belgian labour movement, but that also intended to continue influencing Italian politics from abroad using the resources and skills acquired in Belgium to do so.

The country of origin's influence on immigrant social remittances is not limited to what they acquired prior to departure. Social remittances circulate in both directions. While new ideas or values may be acquired through migration, country of origin actors such as families or political parties may continue to influence relatives once they have left. This was the case of some Zairian students who came to Belgium. They were selected in the hope of the potential support they could later offer to the Mobutu regime and were accordingly closely followed by the Zairian authorities during their stay in Belgium. In turn, a share of these students broke away from the influence of the regime and applied for international protection in Belgium instead of going back.

<sup>13</sup> Rafael Correa, former President of the Republic of Ecuador, resides in Belgium since he left power in 2017. While his presence in Belgium appears as a strategy to avoid legal procedures in his country of origin, he has continued to be politically active in Ecuador leading the campaign of his party prior to the 2018 referendum that aimed to decide whether he could be allowed to run as candidate again in the 2021 Presidential election.

<sup>14</sup> Carles Puigdemont, a Catalan nationalist leader and former President of the autonomous community, has been residing in Belgium since 2017 following the issuance of an arrest warrant by Spanish authorities accusing him of sedition and civic disobedience.

# OBSTACLES HINDERING MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTION

The previous chapter has shown how migrants contribute to the development of Belgium and their country of origin. The objective of this section is to identify possible obstacles that hinder this contribution and impact, on the one hand, the fulfilment of the migrants and, on the other hand, the development of their societies of origin and of destination.

## Lack of safe and legal pathways

The first obstacle is the lack of safe and legal pathways. This shortage not only reduces the positive potential of migration—as migration contributes to the economic, social and cultural development of the country of origin and of destination (see chapter 2)—but also leads some migrants to take dangerous routes. The necessity to have more legal migration channels at the global level is reflected in several important international policy documents (cf. *supra*, introductory chapter on the Vision and Values of Caritas).

## Labour migration

In recent years, the EU has developed a number of guidelines on labour migration—notably the 'Blue Card' directive and the 'Single Permit' directive. In contrast, Belgium has turned a blind eye on the issue of labour migration since the adoption of its restrictive migration policies in 1974.

For instance, the transposition of the European directive of the Single Permit was only completed at the beginning of 2019—5 years past the initially fixed deadline.<sup>15,16</sup> One of the main causes of this delay is the division of competencies among the federal and regional levels of government. This Single Permit notably allows third-country employees to obtain a work permit and a residence permit via one single procedure (11.11.11 2018), the aim being to simplify the rules on labour migration and access to the labour market.

Alongside the new, nationwide procedural adjustments, the Flemish government has taken the momentum to make some changes to its labour market policy regarding migrant workers.<sup>17</sup> These changes were based on a concise policy note published earlier in 2018.<sup>18</sup> Key points include: attracting and retaining foreign (highly qualified) talent; addressing structural shortages on the labour market by simplifying the access for labour migrants executing specific 'medium-skilled' jobs; exceptional access to the labour market for 'low-skilled' migrant workers (in case of specific shortages on the labour market); administrative simplification; limiting unfair competition with local workers. The Brussels' and Walloon governments have not yet made any changes to the outdated labour migration policy they adopted from the federal government.

Although these changes mark, to some extent, a policy shift towards the opening of the labour market to foreign workers, the implemented measures remain modest. It is still too early to assess their effect. It can however be noted that multiple other points of concern remain unchanged. The perspective of the countries of origin, for example, remain unexposed in these new measures.

Belgium's hesitant attitude towards changing labour market policy is even more concerning as the country encounters a structural lack of labour force in some sectors, such as the construction industry. It will need more than 20,000 additional employers in the next years, according to the Federation of Belgian Employers. These deficits on the labour market are incidentally still expected to grow because of the ageing of the population. At the national level, the number of open vacancies is rising steadily (Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen 2019): since 2013 the number of unfilled vacancies more than doubled. In 2018, for every 100 jobs, 3.6 jobs remain unfilled. Belgium's vacancy rate (3.6%) is far above the European average (2.2%) and apart from Czech Republic, no member state does worse.

While we acknowledge that it may prove uneasy to publicly defend the recruitment of labour migrants in sectors affected

<sup>15</sup> *The Blue Card is hardly used in Belgium, since the national conditions for obtaining a work permit are more favourable.*

<sup>16</sup> *Article 16 of the Directive 2011/98/EU sets the deadline for transposition to happen by 25 December 2013.*

<sup>17</sup> *This excludes most (but not all) migrants who have gained a residence permit for other reasons than work. In most cases, these migrants will have access to the labour market based on their residency status.*

<sup>18</sup> *Flemish Government, Vision paper "Ontginnen buitenlandse tewerkstellingspotentieel in Vlaanderen".*

by scarcity of workers when high unemployment persists in certain regions of Belgium, facilitating labour migration could be a real ‘triple win’ solution for Belgium, for the migrants themselves as well as for the countries of origin. Indeed, many developing countries are pressured by strong demographic growth in combination with weak economic progress. In such a context, remittances entailed by labour migration might help to stimulate the economy (11.11.11 2018).

## Student migration

A tightening of rules has also been observed for some students wishing to study in Belgium—thereby offsetting the potential of promoting education through migration. In 2018, the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration announced a new screening system for Cameroonian citizens wishing to apply for a student visa in Belgium. His rationale was that the system was being ‘abused’ by individuals wishing to settle permanently in Belgium (RTBF 2018). To this end, Belgian authorities partly externalized the review process by setting up a partnership with the French Institute of Yaoundé where a screening of the motivation and skills of the candidates is conducted. In 2017 already, 53% of visas were refused to students from Cameroon—compared with 12% in Turkey and 1% in China (Myria 2018).

## Family reunification

Although living with one’s family is an essential step towards the inclusion of migrants, an increasing number of restrictions can be observed in the Belgian legislation on family reunification.

The 8 July 2011 Law on Family Reunification introduced minimum income requirements for people seeking to start the procedure of family reunification. The required level of income has since then to be at least equivalent to 120% of the social integration income but this cannot come from social assistance. While this requirement does not apply to beneficiaries of international protection during the first year following their recognition, it prevents the poorest migrants to live with their family.

The Law provides for a condition of income if someone wishes to bring a spouse, that is to say that one must have a stable, regular and sufficient income, the equivalent of 120% the amount of the social integration income, that is 1505 euros net per month. This is a high amount for some people, who because of that reason cannot be united with their spouses. This is the case for Belgian people or regularized persons for whom the condition of ‘income’ is applied, but this is also the case for beneficiaries of international protections who have waited too long, whose one-year period is exceeded and for whom the ‘income’



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condition applies as well. I have cases of recognised refugees who have not been able to apply for a visa within the first year, who cannot get those amounts and are therefore stuck (Social worker from Caritas International’s social service, February 2019).

Only spouses, registered partners and minor children can apply for a family reunification visa. The law excludes adult children (with no handicap), adopted children, fiancées and non-recognised spouses, parents (with the exception of parents of unaccompanied minors), grandparents, and brothers and sisters.

Beneficiaries of international protection suffer from additional obstacles regarding family reunification. First, Belgian embassies are not always located in the country where the refugee’s relatives live. For example, Afghan, Syrian, Eritrean and Guinean nationals have to go to a neighbouring country to get to a Belgian embassy. This implies a displacement of the entire family applying for a visa—which can be a major obstacle for security, logistic or financial reasons.

It is sometimes difficult for beneficiaries of international protection to apply for family reunification within the one year limit they have once they are recognised. Tracing of family members may indeed take months, even years.

Similarly, when unaccompanied minors want to bring their families, they should do so before they turn 18. However, they often receive their refugee status at the dawn of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, which means little time is left for their family members to collect the necessary documents and funds, and to be ready to move to a neighbouring country to apply for a visa.

Besides, the condition to provide official documents, such as birth and marriage certificates, to apply for a visa often poses problems in countries such as Somalia, Congo and Guinea. Refusals for reasons of non-compliance of some documents are very frequent.

The Immigration Office has become more and more strict. In recent months, we have registered numerous refusals, specifically concerning Guinean nationals. In their case, the Immigration Office systematically checks whether the civil status certificates fulfil the requirements provided for in the Guinean civil code. But, as we know, Guinea does not respect literally what is provided for by its laws. That's why there are many errors in the documents it delivers, which leads to the systematic refusal of numerous applications. Before, a DNA test was proposed if a birth certificate did not meet the required conditions. Since December 2018, this is no longer possible. The Office is therefore really trying to play on administrative details that could nullify the visa application process, even though the plaintiffs are putting forward evidence that they are really married, that they have no intention to defraud, etc. (Social worker from Caritas International's social service, February 2019).

The processing time of the procedure—up to nine months<sup>19</sup>—can also be an obstacle for those who have no other choice—for security, logistic or financial reasons—but to remain close to an embassy in the country of origin or in a neighbouring country.

Eritrean nationals need to apply for a visa in a neighbouring country. In most cases they choose Ethiopia and end up in camps on site. However, in order to apply for a visa, they must go to the capital city of Addis Ababa and thus have to obtain permission to leave the camp. Most of them will not return and will remain in the capital for the entire duration of the procedure (Social worker from Caritas International's social service, February 2019).

Another obstacle is the cost of the family reunification procedure. A visa costs €180 per person, to which must be added the cost of the trip, the costs for legalising and translating official documents, the cost for DNA-testing if requested, and the cost for a mandatory medical check-up (the price of which varies from one country to another).

## Pathways for international protection

Other pathways to enter legally in Belgium for people looking for international protection are extremely limited. As mentioned in the first chapter, the number of resettled refugees in 2017 only reached 8.5% of the total population of beneficiaries of international protection in Belgium. At the global level, resettlement opportunities declined both in 2017 and in 2018, while 1.4 million people are expected to be in need of resettlement in 2019 (UNHCR 2018 and 2019). Besides, the visa system generally represents an obstacle for people who need protection but find themselves outside resettlement programmes.

This implies that most applicants for international protection have no choice but to brave dangerous routes in order to apply for protection. These routes are all the more dangerous in that the EU has been externalising its borders through deals with third countries (Turkey, Libya, etc.)—deals aiming to reinforce the control of nationals and transit migrants in order to prevent their access to the European territory. This includes refusing access to refugees requiring protection, which in turn leads to drastic human rights violations as it happens in Libya (see UN Human Rights Office 2018).

In parallel, the Dublin Regulation prevents applicants for international protection whose fingerprints have been taken in another European country to request protection in Belgium. The international protection systems of first entry countries such as Greece or Italy are therefore overwhelmed by requests.

This situation has a drastic effect on the mental and physical state of applicants for international protection and migrants, and on their ability to live a dignified life. Caritas International daily witnesses the dramatic consequences of this reality on human life and dignity, as well as on the psychological development of these people.

Policies need to give back their dignity to refugees. Only by finding again their dignity will they be able to develop themselves and fully be part of the society (Caritas International's Vulnerable-Transit Project manager, December 2018).

## Infringement of basic needs


Immigrants who struggle on a daily basis to meet their basic needs face difficulties to use their skills and knowledge to contribute to society. This is why access to qualitative and affordable housing and respect for social rights are so essential.

## Qualitative and affordable housing

The first challenge for newcomers is finding qualitative and affordable housing.

In their search on the private rental market, migrants frequently face discrimination related to their ethnicity, their nationality or their religion. Several studies (Verhaeghe et al. 2017) have shown that some real estate agents discriminate housing applicants, while knowing it is illegal. Discrimination hits even more vulnerable populations, such as poor households or refugees. According to a study by Unia (2014) men of foreign origin, single mothers, and especially people who receive welfare benefits are the groups most at risk of discrimination on the housing market.

<sup>19</sup> In 2016, the processing period for the application for family reunification in Belgium was extended from 6 to 9 months, to cope with the high number of applications. However, the extension of the processing period was not revised when the number of asylum requests dropped.



*“THE FIRST  
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HOUSING”*

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Once officially recognised as refugees, people must leave the shelter within two months’ time. That’s very short. Because they do not speak our language—and often have little money—it is almost impossible for them to find a home on the private rental market. [...] It’s true that we often hit a ‘no’ with landlords who are afraid to rent out their home to refugees. After such a rejection you must reload yourself. Never give up (André, volunteer at Caritas International’s Housing-Café project, September 2017).

Discrimination in the housing market has dramatic effects on the inclusion of refugees and other third-country nationals. It results in geographical segregation based on income, ethnicity and/or legal status, which explains the drastic variation of workload across Public Centres for Social Welfares (PCSW). The quality of the social services thereby differs across communes increasing inequality among them.

We encourage families to look for housing outside the city because Public Centres for Social Welfare here are completely overworked and cannot ensure quality follow-up. Many refuse because they want to remain in the city, but this is because they do not know how things work here. A lot of them thus end up helpless (Social worker at Caritas International’s Housing-Café project, December 2018).

Moreover, there is a distressing shortage of social housing. The percentage of social housing in relation to the total housing market is low in Belgium; 5.6% in Flanders, 5.3% in Wallonia and 7% in the Brussels-Capital Region (figures of 2015—see Steunpunt tot Bestrijding van Armoede, Bestaansonzekerheid en Sociale Uitsluiting 2017). In Brussels, more than 40,000 prospective tenants are waiting for social housing in the Brussels-Capital Region. The waiting time varies from 8 years for a one-bedroom apartment to 11 years for a 3-bedroom apartment (Brusselse Woning 2019).

On the private market, tenants favour profiles that are strong economically and on the public market, there is a lack of housing (Staff member of Unia, December 2018).

This lack of social housing and the difficult access to property lead low-income households to rely heavily on the private rental market, causing strong pressure on the bottom layers of the market, bringing rental prices up. The difficulty in finding housing hinders the access to welfare benefits, since you need an official address to apply for welfare benefits in Belgium. A vicious circle, as without access to welfare benefits, it is difficult to find housing. This painful reality leads numerous civil society associations to defend the idea of using vacant housing in order to offer additional qualitative and affordable housing.

## Respect for social rights

Ensuring respect for the social rights of migrants, notably in terms of social welfare and labour right, is an essential prerequisite for their fulfilment.

Regarding social welfare, there is currently a dual system in Belgium. Most migrants from the EU, refugees and, to a certain extent, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, benefit from the same treatment as Belgian nationals with regards to social rights—although their specific situation sometimes renders access to such rights difficult. EU citizens living in Belgium thus benefit from a large body of EU legislation that ensure their access to health, the portability of their pension, and their access to family benefits even when their children are not living in the destination country with them. By contrast, non-EU migrants are very dependent on bilateral social security agreements, in the absence of which, their rights to social protection are limited.

Nevertheless, a series of differences remain between nationals and EU migrants. The most striking reform in this respect is the administrative practice of crossing welfare data with residence data for EU migrants residing in Belgium. It entails that EU



migrants who have been residing in Belgium for less than five years and who are considered to have made an abusive use of welfare can see their right to reside in Belgium removed. In this regard, Belgium relies on a restrictive interpretation of the 2004 Citizenship Directive which allows Member States to remove residence permits from individuals who represent a 'burden' on its public finances. Since 2011, over 12,000 EU citizens have lost their right to reside in Belgium on this basis. While such policy a priori only targets the minority of EU migrants who are unemployed and rely on welfare for subsistence, this reform has had a broader effect, as noted in previous studies (Lafleur and Mescoli 2018); newcomers arriving in Belgium tend to delay their registration as residents in Belgium and are reluctant to exercise their right to welfare by fear of losing their residence permit.

In terms of labour rights, Belgium has ratified most international human rights conventions and most International Labour Standards—including the two International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions on labour migration<sup>20</sup>—and has incorporated them in its national law. However, it has neither ratified the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families—guaranteeing important fundamental rights, including social, cultural and civil rights—nor the ILO Convention No. 143 on migrant workers. These ratifications are yet a vital step to ensure that national legislation effectively protects the human rights of all migrants.

Undocumented migrants are obviously the category of migrants that suffer the most from the lack of social and labour rights. They are excluded from most social protection schemes (except urgent medical care) which makes them extremely dependent on their job and/or on their relatives.

She asked me to work from 10 am to 10 pm and I only received 20 euros! But what could I do? It was better than staying at home anyway (Female migrant from Kosovo, undocumented for 8 years, May 2018).

Yet, even workers without working or residence permits have some labour rights: minimum wage, a wage paid separately to each individual and in regular intervals, freedom to spend wages indiscriminately, a wage paid independent of a decrease in revenue of the place of employment, reimbursement of transport costs, etc. (see Ciré 2014). Nevertheless, the vulnerable position of undocumented migrants (fear of being deported, job type, lack of access to information, etc.) daily puts these rights at risk.

For every three days I worked as a housekeeper, he only paid me two (Female migrant from Morocco who has been undocumented for 10 years, May 2018).

## REGULARISATION OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

Regularisations of undocumented migrants for exceptional circumstances (9bis<sup>21</sup>) and for medical reasons (9ter<sup>22</sup>) are extremely limited. Furthermore, the conditions to obtain regularisation for exceptional circumstances 9bis are not specified.

Three economists (de la Croix, Docquier and Van der Linden 2009) from the Catholic University of Louvain have evaluated the economic impact that more regularisation would have in Belgium. Following them, this impact would be similar to that of legal migration: it would improve macroeconomic indicators thanks to a positive fiscal effect and lower tensions on the market. The only negative effect might concern the employment rate of less qualified workers. However, this effect would remain limited, since most undocumented migrants already have a job, and would not last long, since these newcomers on the labour market would eventually create new productive activities.

## Access to the labour market

As stated in the first chapter, 56.5% of migrants aged between 15 and 64 were employed in 2017. While these numbers show that migrants are important actors in the labour market, the native-born employment rate is higher (64.7%). This 8-percentage point gap is almost three times larger than the EU average gap—which shows that the case of Belgium is not a good practice at the EU level.

The results in terms of activity of refugees on the labour market are lower compared to the rest of the foreign-population. Several reasons explain this as discussed in the next subsections. What can be noted immediately is that reducing the period leading to the recognition of their status would increase the speed at which they contribute to the society.

On average, between 2000 and 2015, about 40% of refugees were working 5 years after their recognition and 60% of them worked at least once during this period. After 10 years, 50% were working, and 80% had already worked. These results show the instability

<sup>20</sup> Convention 97 concerning Migration for Employment (ILO C-97) and convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers (ILO C-189).

<sup>21</sup> Application for a residence permit for exceptional circumstances introduced on the basis of article 9bis of the Law of 15 December 1980 (entered into force on 1 June 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Application for a residence permit for medical reasons introduced on the basis of article 9ter of the Law of 15 December 1980 (entered into force on 1 June 2007).

of the professional course of refugees in Belgium (Bruno Schoumaker, Catholic University of Louvain, January 2019).

Besides low results in terms of employment rate, migrants are over-represented in low and medium skilled jobs compared to Belgian native-born workers (OECD 2018). On average, in 2017, 60% of employed migrants in Belgium worked in low- or medium-skilled jobs, against 50% for native-born workers.

Part of this difference in employment rate, job quality and sector can be explained by specific patterns of the migrant population. These include differences in terms of qualifications, educational levels (35% of foreign-born people have not reached upper secondary attainment, compared to 25% of native-born (OECD 2013), social and professional networks, language skills as well as jobs requiring citizenship or administrative requirements (for instance, the fact that third country nationals need a work permit).

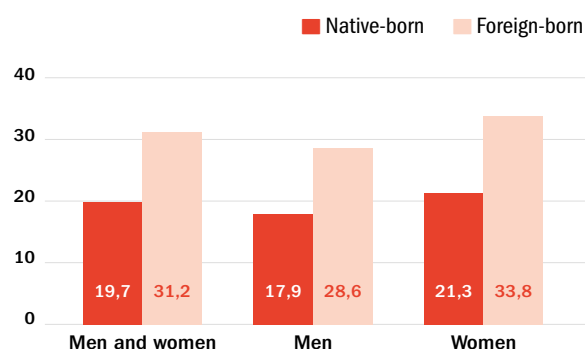
This difference is also the result of some structural characteristics of the Belgian labour market.

First, there is discrimination towards migrants on the Belgian labour market.

Second, the market has a high threshold in terms of skills and qualifications, which explains why language knowledge and recognition of diplomas are so important for the inclusion of migrants (EMN 2018).

Third, the Belgian labour market is highly segmented into a primary segment (marked by stable jobs, high salaries, etc.) and a secondary segment (marked by temporary jobs, lower salaries, more job insecurity, etc.). Little mobility between the two is feasible (ibid.). More generally, there is little mobility within the labour market as a whole (i.e. people in Belgium tend to work for a longer period of time in the same job/for the same employer/ in the same sector than in other countries) (ibid.).

The over-representation of migrants in low and medium skilled jobs reflects actually an issue of over-qualification<sup>23</sup> of migrants. Figure 5 indeed reveals that on average one out of every three (33.2%) migrants is overqualified for his job compared to approximately one out of every five Belgian native-born (19.8%). In addition, being a women significantly increases the risk of over-qualification (OECD 2015).



*Figure 5. Over-qualification rates among 15-64-year-olds, by place of birth and gender, 2012-13*

*Source: OECD/UE (2015).*

The following subsections explain these obstacles which migrants face on the labour market in greater details.

One should already note that if migrants, including refugees, were economically integrated in society, it would be beneficial for everyone. Migrants would allow increasing the working-age population, attenuating the effect of population ageing (OECD/ EU 2015) and filling in the sectors in need of labour (cf. supra).

## Language acquisition

National language acquisition is in most cases essential for finding a job abroad. Belgium is in that regard a complicated country, as it has three national languages. Although it is possible to follow language courses, practice is a bigger challenge, especially for those who rely on the aid of the PCSW. Indeed, the predisposition to work is a major prerequisite for receiving welfare benefits by the PCSW. Activities aimed at practicing a national language—such as volunteering—are therefore forbidden, unless explicitly authorised by the PCSW.

Many refugees make it to the last level of their language course but do not yet have the level required to find a job. They need to practice. But if they volunteer, they may lose their PCSW allowance. They are thus stuck (Caritas International's Vulnerable-Transit Project manager, December 2018).

Most PCSWs tend to opt for the 'fastest way to work'. In other words, it means that short, professional training courses (mostly for shortage occupations) are recommended and courses or studies taking up several years are not accepted. Nevertheless, the decision highly depends on the PCSW and practices vary from commune to commune.

<sup>23</sup> Over-qualification refers to a situation where an individual's level of education is higher than what his occupation requires. The over-qualification rate corresponds to the proportion of tertiary-educated workers who work in a job that is classified as low- or medium-skilled.

One of our beneficiaries, a doctor from Togo, had managed to find housing in Uccle. The PCSW allowed him to specialise in medicine while keeping his allowances. Another PCSW would have never allowed this, especially for a specialisation. I think Belgians do not realise how important housing is (Caritas International's Vulnerable-Transit Project manager).

## Recognition of diplomas and validation of qualifications

The recognition of diplomas and the validation of qualifications are an important step for every migrant who wants to develop a professional or personal project. Yet, this recognition can meet several obstacles, including access to documents (especially for refugees—see box), costs<sup>24</sup> (requests, official translations, etc.), timing (5 to 9 months), and limits applied for certain types of diplomas.

People who have finished their studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo between 1998 and 2014, for instance, do not receive an equivalence of diploma. In 2017, Ciré has condemned this country-specific focus, criticised the lack of transparency in this practice and explained that it stigmatised a specific group of people of the same origin. The lack of recognition of qualifications obtained abroad has a direct impact on the participation of these people in the labour market:

One of our beneficiaries, a child psychiatrist originating from Syria, had studied in his country, had made a specialisation in Belgium and then had returned home. Because of the war, he came back to Belgium to ask for international protection. His diploma equivalence was refused because he had obtained his main diploma in Syria—and even though he also had acquired a specialisation in Belgium. Disappointed, he left Belgium for the Gulf region. These irregularities in the system have serious consequences not only on the participation of these people in the labour market but also on their dignity (Caritas International's Vulnerable-Transit Project manager, December 2018).

In France, I obtained a Technician's Certificate—a programme which today has been replaced by another. I then got a Higher Technician's *Bac*—equivalent to a *Bac* + 2. The French community of Belgium did not recognise any of my diplomas, excepted that of primary school. I was highly frustrated for not receiving an equivalence for diplomas I had worked hard for. Furthermore, I missed a job opportunity because without this equivalence, I



did not have enough APE<sup>25</sup> points. I finally requested it to the Flemish Community and it was accepted (French migrant, arrived in Belgium in 2014, December 2018).

## Discrimination on the labour market

Discrimination is a major barrier that prevents foreign-born workers from fully participating in the labour market. This has been confirmed by numerous studies.

Using a “correspondence testing” method—in which fictitious job applications are sent in response to real job openings—, Baert et al. (2013) found that in Flanders young graduate applicants with Turkish-sounding names had less chance to be invited to a job interview than young graduates with Flemish-sounding names. On average, applicants with Turkish names needed to send 44% more applications if they wished to receive the same number of positive answers received by those with Flemish names. Baert et al. (2015 and 2016) further showed that people with a higher education level, more professional or volunteer experience, were less likely to be discriminated, especially in occupations where recruitment is difficult.

Qualitative data and opinion polls also highlight the existence of discrimination outside Flanders. A 2009 survey conducted by IPSOS showed that in Brussels and Liège, respectively, 44% and 41% of the population of immigrant origin declared that they had been victim of discrimination at least once upon looking for employment (see Lafleur and Marfouk 2017). In addition, about 16% of the migrants living in Belgium considered that they belonged to a discriminated group on the basis of their

<sup>24</sup> A new law (Decree of the Government of the French Community determining the conditions and the procedure for granting equivalence for titles, degrees and certifications of higher studies issued abroad, under publication in the Belgian Official Gazette, entered into force on 15 September 2016) has made positive progress—namely in the decreasing of costs (down zero cost for refugees).

<sup>25</sup> The Aide à la promotion de l'emploi (APE) is a form of employment assistance, granted to employers in the non-market sector in the form of points. The APE allows employers to benefit from an annual subsidy in addition to a reduction of their social security contributions.

ethnicity, nationality, or race. The proportion was even higher for third country migrants, as 35% of them declared belonging to a discriminated group (OECD 2015).

The Belgian population is well aware of the existence of this issue. A 2015 Eurobarometer revealed that 74% of the Belgian population considered that discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin was the most widespread form of discrimination in the country, followed by discrimination on the basis of religion or belief (67%).

Several court cases also revealed that the existence of discrimination on the Belgian labour market was not the sole responsibility of employers but also that of customers who pressure companies not to hire individuals of foreign origin. The case of the temporary work agency Adecco which had given instructions to its agents to exclusively send workers without immigrant origin at the request of its customers made front page in Belgium in the early 2000s. It was condemned by the Brussels Court of Appeal in 2015 (Unia 2016).

## THE LONG ROAD TO EMPLOYMENT: THE STORY OF AMIN

Amin fled Iran and arrived in Belgium in 2012, where he got recognised as a refugee. In Iran, he had a master's in telecommunication systems, owned three companies and had 14 years of working experience in the field of network engineering.

After finding a small studio in the city of Antwerp, Amin was able to sign up for an intensive Dutch course at the University of Antwerp. He passed the first two modules, but then had to give up because the PCSW would suspend his social benefits if he continued to follow the course. However, his Dutch was not yet at working proficiency level. Being eager to work, Amin turned to the VDAB, the Flemish employment agency. Because of his specific professional qualifications, the VDAB consultant couldn't give him adequate advice.

Amin tried to get a Belgian equivalence for his master's degree, but since he was searched for in Iran, he couldn't turn to his university to ask for the necessary documents. He decided to sign up for a professional networking course and found a school in Brussels. Despite his excellent score on the entrance exam, the school considered that he was overqualified and didn't accept him.

With the help of a friend he found a network installation course organised by the VDAB. However, he didn't meet the required Dutch level to enter the course. Amin persisted and after two additional interviews, he was finally able to register for the course that would start in September.

I was so happy to have found a course, but shortly after that good news my social assistant told me the PCSW found work for me as a cleaner. I had no right to refuse, otherwise it would be interpreted as unwillingness to work and would lead to the withdrawal of my social benefits. So I went to clean buildings for three months during summer. Luckily, I could negotiate the end of the contract with them in order to start my training in September (Amin, December 2018).

Two years later, Amin has an internationally recognised networking-certificate (CCNA) in his pocket. He passed with a 100% on all his exams. Before his training ended, he had already found a job at an IT-company, where he still works today. It's an international company so the working language is English.

It took me 5 years to find a job in English, a language that I already mastered before my arrival in Belgium. The road was full of obstacles, but I didn't give up. So many people arriving here have seen terrible things, they are traumatized. Those obstacles could take them down. People lose their motivation on the way, and once they do, it's not easy to remotivate them (Amin, December 2018).

## Public opinion and political discourse

Discriminations are fuelled by a specific context of beliefs around migration. A substantial proportion of Belgian public opinion considers immigration as a real source of problems and perceives migrants as a threat to national security, economy and culture. According to a European social survey administered between 2014 and 2015, a substantial part of the respondents consider that migrants increase crime in the country (about 65%), take away jobs from native-born residents (38%), have adverse effects on public finance (48%) and on the economy in general (44%) and undermine cultural life in Belgium (25%).

Figure 6 clearly however shows that attitudes towards immigration became more favourable after the 2015 Solidarity Crisis.<sup>26</sup> More precisely, the proportion of those who are in favour of restrictive immigration policy towards different types of migrants was much lower in 2016, compared to 2014. The same holds true for those who believe that immigration is bad for the economy, makes the country a worse place to live, and undermines the country cultural life. Yet, while the public opinion has become more tolerant towards migration over time, there remains a substantial part of the population with a negative view of migration.

Social science literature suggests that individual characteristics such as age, gender, level of education/qualification, situation on the labour market, and contact with migrants, are determinant factors for attitude towards immigration. Besides, a large body of empirical studies have pointed at the role of factors—other than socio-demographic factors—, including racism, immigration phobia and resistance to diversity. This literature has also emphasised that the adoption of public policies aiming

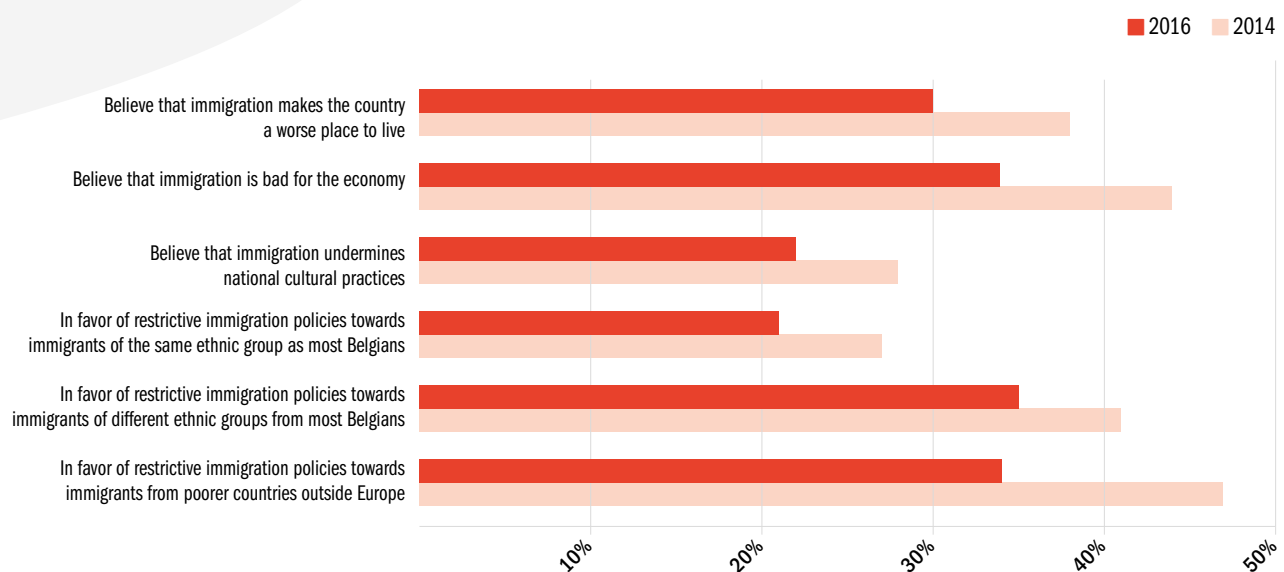
**Attitudes towards immigration became more favourable after the 2015 Solidarity Crisis**

at reducing individuals' fear of immigration and promoting tolerance, anti-racism, and multiculturalism could help to reduce anti-migrants sentiment.

Besides the individual characteristics of its natives, Belgium has a specific context that could explain why a substantial part of its population has a negative view of migration.

First, as a federal country with three different linguistic communities, Belgium offers a context of reception characterised by a weak national identity. And although the latter is not, per se, opposed to external influences brought about by migration, the presence of nationalist parties, particularly but not exclusively in Flanders, means that discourses and practices of refusal of foreigners also exist.

Secondly, while the economic context has been particularly favourable for the post-war Italian migration to transform its



**Figure 6. Belgian public opinion towards immigration**

Source: European social survey and authors' calculations.

<sup>26</sup> In order to examine the change in Belgian public opinion towards immigration after the recent arrival of refugees in Europe and Belgium in particular, we took advantage of the fact that six questions were included in two waves of the European Social survey's (EES) questionnaires. These two series of questions were respectively administered in 2014 and 2016.



economic power into political influence, migrants who came after the 1970s oil crisis have not experienced similar pathways and have been more affected by unemployment and labour market discrimination. The over-representation of migrants among the unemployed and their over-exposure to social risks have in turn led some political parties and a share of the population to put into question the socio-economic contribution of recently arrived migrants in Belgium.

Thirdly, similarly to the situation of post-war Italian migrants who experienced discrimination on the basis of their religious practices deemed ‘too extreme’ compared to Belgian catholic practices of the time, Muslim migrants in Belgium and their descendants also see their socio-cultural contribution to the country put into question. In particular, the rise of islamophobia since 2001 and its increase with the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks, have led the above-mentioned parties to openly question the compatibility of Islam with the largely undefined predominant values of the Belgian society.

These elements call for the strengthening of the public response towards discrimination in Belgium, in addition to the 1981 anti-racism law, the creation of Unia and the recent adoption of a law allowing the use of testing to flag labour market discrimination in the Brussels region. In spite of the increase in racist incidents in recent years—including the online harassment campaign against a black journalist from the public television or the violent assault against a young Belgian Muslim woman in 2018 in

Anderlues—the current government has still not implemented a federal plan to coordinate the fight against racism, which many actors in this sector, including Unia, have been calling for for a long time.

## Access to the nationality

In 2012, Belgium has reformed its Nationality Law (Law of 4 December 2012). It provides for stricter conditions for accessing nationality and extends the minimum period of residence before applying for citizenship from 3 to 5 years.

Whereas the previous legislation envisaged nationality as a first step towards integration, the 2012 Law provides, by contrast, a series of criteria designed to assess whether migrants are ‘integrated enough’ to be granted Belgian citizenship. Foreigners who have resided in Belgium for 5 years can apply for citizenship but must, inter alia, prove their knowledge of one of the three national languages. They must also demonstrate their social integration (e.g. with a school diploma or a certificate of attendance of integration courses) and their economic integration (i.e. with evidence that they have worked for at least 468 days in the past 5 years).

This change epitomises the role that Belgian authorities want to give to nationality acquisition in the integration policy of the country. Whereas a rapid access to nationality was earlier considered by policy-makers as a facilitator of integration (e.g. by allowing to overcome nationality barriers on the job market), the current reform aims, on the contrary, at conditioning nationality acquisition on proven prior integration.

This legislation is a hurdle to both countries of residence and countries of origin, in the sense that holding nationality of the country of residence significantly facilitates travelling between the country of origin and the country of residence (especially for beneficiaries of international protection). Moreover, it offers additional security to migrants who speak up against (or are accused by) strong-arm regimes in their country of origin. In 2018, for instance, Sweden naturalised the Iranian doctor and professor of medicine Ahmedreza Djalali, while he was in detention and sentenced to death in his country, thus putting a diplomatic pressure on Iran in the hope of preventing his death penalty (Deutsche Welle 2018).

## Obstacles to the contribution to the country of origin

### High remittances transfer costs

Financial remittances represent an important source of income for many developing countries. Besides, it has been proven that remittances depended negatively on transfer costs (Gibson et al. 2006; Freund and Spatafora 2008). Remittance flows are thus expected to decrease as costs increase.

According to the World Bank's Database (2018), the global average cost for sending \$200 approximately reached 7% of this amount in the second quarter of 2018. Despite the fact that this cost has decreased over the past years, many observers consider that it remains expensive. Of course, this cost varies significantly across money transfer operators, countries of origin and countries of destination (Beck and Peria 2009).

The World Bank's Database provides information on the cost of sending remittances from 48 sending countries to 105 receiving countries, including from Belgium to four countries, namely Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco, and Turkey. The average cost to send remittances from Belgium are as follows: 5.6% for Morocco; 7.7% for DRC; 8.2% for Turkey and 10% for Algeria.

In 2011 and 2014, the G-20, of which the EU is a member, committed to reducing the average global cost of transferring remittances to 5%. Yet, the above-mentioned figures demonstrate that sending remittances from Belgium remains expensive.

## Structure of diaspora associations

As noted above, some migrants organise themselves to set up development projects. Diaspora associations however often lack time, resources and experience because they rely on the good will of volunteers and the amount of time the latter devote to them outside of their professional and family lives. This reality reflects, on the one hand, in the activities organised by the associations and, on the other hand, in their ability—especially that of smaller and younger associations—to respond to public calls designed for more established CSOs.

Members take up engagements on top of their professional activities. If things go bad for the project, it's because they do not have more time to work on it (Interview association leader, Impact Sud, May 2015; in Schwanen 2016).

In a research conducted by Schwanen (2016), immigrant association leaders noted, on the one hand, that co-development policies had a symbolic and material importance and, on the other hand, that associations should receive more guidance and training to deal more successfully with public authorities. These shortcomings render the engagement of these associations difficult in the area of co-development. This research further showed that, due to their desire to commit in the area of co-development, migrants would be more willing to train and acquire skills. These efforts would not only benefit transnational engagement but would also foster inclusion in Belgium.

While migrants benefit from freedom of association in Belgium and this right has been critical in the development of transnational activities, it has been partly put into question by the recent modification of the Belgian Immigration Act. This reform allows Belgian authorities to expel foreigners—even when Belgian-born and even when in possession of permanent right of residence—if they are deemed to represent a threat to public order or national security. This new legislative provision, which has been used to expel 112 individuals in 2017, has created major outcry within Belgian civil society, which denounced the legislation because it is perceived as a restriction to freedom of expression, including the instance when it comes to defend opinion or demonstrate against perceived injustice whether they are targeting Belgian employers or country of origin and country of destination authorities. In other words, there is a higher risk that migrants, under this provision, may be more reluctant to denounce their working conditions, for example, by occupying factories or going on strike, or marching against human rights abuses committed in their home countries if they feel that this could be interpreted as a threat to public order.



*“SOME  
MIGRANTS  
ORGANISE  
THEMSELVES  
TO SET UP  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROJECTS”*

© Isabel Corthier

### Situation in the country of origin

The socio-economic and political context of the country of origin may either be an opportunity or an obstacle to the transnational engagement of migrants.

The major non-European countries of origin of migrants residing in Belgium, such as Morocco, the DRC and Turkey, are socio-economically unstable : high level of unemployment, limited educational opportunities and currency instability. This difficult environment may hamper the transnational engagement of migrants, for instance by rendering their financial investments too risky or by making it difficult for them to find skilled partners in the country of origin. While these conditions largely differ with other major European countries of origin such as France, the Netherlands or Italy, they do apply, to a certain extent, to the situation in Romania and Bulgaria.

The difficult environment of their country of origin may also lead migrants to act directly within the political sphere of their country of destination. Some Kurdish and DRC migrants consider that the lack of opportunities to participate in their home country’s political life justifies the use of direct action (such as protests and marches) as a form of participation in the country of residence. In the case of the DRC, the absence of the diaspora from the formal political arena has led, in the UK, to the creation of groups of “Combatants”, who defend the idea that violence is a

necessary mean to remove the regime in place in their country of origin and put an end to its “exploitation” (Demart 2013).

By contrast, the Syrian refugees arrived in Belgium these recent years have organised a limited number of marches because they have been focusing on securing their status of refugees and have been fearing that family members still residing in Syria would suffer the consequences of their opposition to the Assad regime. Nevertheless, their transnational engagement might still evolve as the intensity of the conflict in Syria decreases.

Another example of political influence from Belgium is the engagement of the Romanian diaspora. In the summer of 2018, it mobilised to denounce the corruption in Romania and organised repeated demonstrations in Bucharest. This situation took a particular turn in the Belgian context, as this period coincided with the electoral campaign for the 2018 local elections, in which the Romanian community mobilised for the first time. This dual context of elections ‘here’ and crisis ‘there’ pushed some community leaders in Belgium to use their experience in Belgium as arguments to oppose the regime in Romania. A repeated line of argument of diaspora leaders was the following: “If Belgian parties recognise us by lobbying for our votes and inviting us to stand as candidates on their list, why can’t the Romanian authorities give any credit to its own diaspora?”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The authors wish to thank Dr. Daniela Vintila (CEDEM, University of Liège) for bringing this example to their attention.



# NATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES FACILITATING MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTION

**B**y signing the Agenda 2030, Belgium recognised that migration played a key role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the signatory States. But what policies and practices does it implement to favour the contribution of migrants to its own development?

This chapter first analyses Belgium's integration policy. It then brings forward some pilot projects, initiatives and policies that aim at increasing the participation of migrants in the labour market and the political life in Belgium, and finally ends with an analysis of the measures aiming at facilitating the contribution of migrants to their country of origin, while addressing the issue of co-development and underlying how the countries of origin themselves facilitate these solidarity initiatives.

## THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN BELGIUM

In 2015, the world—including Belgium—committed to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Three years later, if Belgium has done a lot on the administrative level, its policy level is still lagging.

Belgium faces some major challenges to fulfil several SDGs, including those relating to Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Climate action (SDG 13) and Life on land (SDG 15) (Sachs et al. 2016; UN High Level Political Forum 2017). Despite its efforts to raise awareness and adopt measures towards achieving the SDGs, the recently published SDG Barometer shows that work remains to be done when it comes to awareness and knowledge about the SDGs in Belgium.

Yes, Belgium has publicly defended the Agenda 2030 and has mandated itself in all sorts of policy plans, strategies and declarations (e.g. reporting to the UN or attending central events with stakeholders). But this has not led to concrete actions. Indeed, three years later, we see a number of worrying trends. Hunger has been increasing for the first time, less has been spent on international solidarity—a 6% decrease between 2016 and 2017, which represented only 0.45% of the gross national income in 2017 (see CNCDD/11.11.11 2018)—and a negative trend has been observed in terms of poverty since 2004 (Statbel Data).

If Belgium continues at this pace, it will not reach half of its targets and will even considerably go backwards on a number of them. Yet, there is a law anchored in the Constitution and an institutional set-up for the implementation of the Agenda 2030. This ambitious agenda therefore requires the adoption of immediate and accelerated policy measures in order to instigate the drastic changes necessary for its implementation.

## A better contribution to Belgium

In Belgium, like in many other countries, the policies that facilitate the contribution of migrants to their country of residence are often grouped under the category of integration policies. Such policies, typically applied exclusively to migrants, aim at targeting issues faced by this population. However, other policies could also facilitate their social, economic or political contributions.

### Integration policies

Although considered as a political priority, integration in Belgium has never been defined through one single policy or programme. Furthermore, numerous changes have been observed in the area in recent years.

For several decades, integration policies have been designed at the regional level, which has led de facto to the development of two different approaches in French and Dutch-speaking Belgium. Whereas a *laissez-faire* approach has long-dominated in Francophone Belgium, Flanders adopted a more directive approach towards newcomers—the “*inburgering*”—in the early 2000s.

Nowadays, all three regions—Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels—have adopted a similar approach, which include a socio-economic assessment, language courses, and an introduction to citizenship, norms and values. Investment in language courses, in particular, responds to a long-standing demand by both policy makers and migrants themselves, who consider language skills as indispensable to participate economically and socially in Belgium. This approach to integration also includes sanctions against migrants who do not comply with minimal participation requirements (Adam and Jacobs 2014).

Although these actions are positive, they suffer several shortcomings, namely the fact that the mechanism offers a one-size-fits-all approach, while the needs and questions of migrants differ across geographical regions of origin or levels of education.

Caritas International organises integration sessions for resettled Syrian refugees. Their particularity is that these are held with intercultural mediators who are former refugees themselves. We are indispensable to make the link between Belgian and Arabic cultures, and to build a relationship of trust with newcomers. These sessions are complementary to those provided by the State—but the fact that the group only comes from one region and thus speaks the same language, ensures more efficiency in our work (Intercultural mediator at Caritas International, December 2018).

Immigrant-specific policies are not solely conducted by agencies in charge of integration; employment agencies, welfare agencies and public cultural institutions also facilitate the insertion of migrants. Initiatives by public theatres and concert venues to set up performances by refugees and/or about international protection play an important role in this process, as they highlight the potential of these populations, that are often perceived as precarious and/or a burden in the eyes of the general public.

There is an increasing awareness that integration is primarily done at the local level. In 2017, the Flemish city of Mechelen hosted a Global Conference on Cities and Migration—a preparatory event aimed at energising the local governments’ contribution to the development of the Global Compact for Migration—which resulted in the ‘Mechelen Declaration on Cities and Migration’. The choice of Mechelen to host this conference was no coincidence (see box on the ‘Mechelen Model’). Other Belgian cities have developed exemplary policies and practices on the matter—such as the European Coalition of Cities against Racism, of which Ghent and Liège are members—which have then been featured in the UNESCO-ECCAR ‘Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants’ comprehensive report on city approaches to reception, services, inclusion and integration across Europe.

As highlighted by a UNESCO report (2016), “cities are crucial for ensuring sustainable socio-economic and human development on the local, regional, national and European levels. Most migrants arrive to cities; cities are thus vital for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees. Urban spaces are areas where migrants interact with communities, society and, at least indirectly, with the State of the host country. Cities represent political and spatial scales that allow for re-imagining political communities and experimenting with alternative models of governance.” Local authorities however need political will, institutional capacity and financial resources to devise and implement effective policy to coordinate with other actors to welcome and integrate refugees and migrants

## DIVERSITY AT CITY LEVEL—THE ‘MECHELEN MODEL’

In 2016, the Flemish city of Mechelen was put internationally on the radar when its mayor Bart Somers won the 2016 World Mayor Prize for his engagement in favour of the participation of migrants to the city’s society, economy and culture. While more than 15 years ago Mechelen had a bad reputation as well as one of the highest crime rates and was a bastion for right-wing extremist party Vlaams Belang, it is today considered as a reference—nationally and internationally—for its inclusive policy and its diversity.

Mechelen has a horizontal diversity policy. This means that we conduct a general and inclusive policy aimed at the whole society and evolve towards the phasing out of a target group policy. Our intention is to ensure that diversity (and especially ethnic-cultural diversity) is embedded in all services, departments and management levels within the city’s administration. This clearly has a positive effect on the society of Mechelen and the mindset of the ‘Mechelaar’ (Corinne Huybers, staff member of the strategic cell of the city’s administration, December 2018).

In Mechelen, the percentage of positive attitudes towards different cultures increased from 21% in 2011 to 35% in 2017. Moreover, 81% of Mechelen’s population claims to be proud to be ‘Mechelaar’, 10% above the Flemish average.<sup>28</sup>

Several innovative projects in different departments show the transversal diversity approach of the city. In the field of education, for instance, the city works together with an association that convinces white middle-class families to send their children to the nearest neighbourhood school instead of sending them to a ‘white’ school further away, in order to create a better representation of the diverse neighbourhood in the school. Regarding housing, Mechelen has a pilot project running that combines social housing with private housing on one site. A few citizens have been selected to live on the premises in return for their investment in the project. For example, a teacher will spend a few hours a week to do homework support with the children from the neighbourhood. Specifically for refugees, the administration has a partnership with the Support Centre for Asylum and Migration, a local association providing free social, administrative and psychological support to refugees. In recent years, the city has invested in an accessible language policy for all the city’s service providers. City administration’s staff has been offered trainings on the process of language acquisition and an easy and clear communication strategy has been established. Every contact with the city services is indeed considered a chance to practice the language.

The adoption of the law that put an end to the subsidy regulation to support immigrants associations and the implementation of a horizontal diversity policy however have another consequence.

Mechelen’s policy vision is that, while it is necessary and useful that people organise themselves on the basis of origin, the city will not subsidise them just for being immigrant associations. However, the city is currently engaged in a European project aimed at increasing immigrant’s representation and participation in the decision process and in advisory boards. We are aware that the immigrant’s voice is still underrepresented, and all too often remains a voice on the margins. If during this project it becomes clear that we need different platforms or different ways to increase immigrant’s participation because classical advisory boards are not accessible enough, we will create them (Corinne Huybers, staff member of the strategic cell of the city’s administration, December 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Results from the latest city monitor, a survey conducted every 4 years in the Flemish cities.

## Projects, initiatives and policies in favour of insertion in the labour market

The increase in arrivals of applicants for international protection since 2015 has raised awareness that specific responses need to be implemented with those people who may suffer from specific disadvantages in the labour market, such as weak language knowledge, issues of diploma recognition or inapplicability of skills demanded in the home country's labour market but not in Belgium.

Later, diverse pilot programmes, initiatives and policies have been implemented in Belgium in order to encourage immigrants' participation in the labour market. Among the noticeable pilot projects, we can note the *Labour-INT* project that intends to facilitate the insertion of applicants for international protection and refugees. This project proposes a continuous support that includes an assessment of their skills, advice to obtain training and seek employment, as well as a follow-up all the way to their adaptation into their workplace.

Similarly, in the aftermath of the European solidarity crisis, non-State actors such as the FEB have set up a task force and published a guide designed to help employers in their administrative process to hire applicants for international protection and refugees (FEB 2017).

Lastly, in 2015, the government changed its regulations with regards to applicants for international protection's access to the labour market (SPF Emploi 2015) and reduced the waiting period after which the applicants for international protection can obtain a work permit from six to four months. Whereas most of the other measures taken by the government have contributed to create a hostile climate against applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection, this decision—taken following a consultation with employers and trade unions, can be interpreted as a sign of trying to facilitate their socio-economic inclusion.

These projects, initiatives and policies do however not represent the full range of actions taken in Belgium in favour of a better insertion of the migrants. Besides they already existed before 2015. Hence, since the 1990s, the Walloon Trade Agency (AWEX) has developed an internship programme first named Babel Export and then EXPLORT by which young Belgians are funded to conduct internships abroad in the area of international trade. During the 2017 Congress on 'entrepreneurship and diversity' organised by his political party (Mouvement Réformateur), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that this programme was particularly attractive to young Belgian of immigrant origin who could use their cultural and linguistic capital of second-generation immigrants for the benefit of the origin and destination countries.



## Migrants' political participation

At the political level, migrants residing in Belgium have had the right to vote in local elections since 2006. Despite their low level of participation in the 2006, 2012 and 2018 elections, this right has given a significant boost to their political inclusion in Belgium in different ways. It has pushed political parties and local authorities to engage with immigrant communities. Several local and regional governments even have designed awareness campaigns in order to both encourage migrants to register for the local elections and send a clear signal that they are an integral part of the political decision making process.

Some political parties have also adjusted their message to reach foreign voters, sometimes by including EU migrants on their electoral lists (third country migrants do not hold passive electoral rights). Some parties have also translated their electoral programmes in different languages in order to reach a larger public.

Overall, although only a minority of foreigners residing in Belgium do vote, this right contributes to raising awareness among foreigners about their membership in the city's decision making process and pushes them to engage with Belgian political parties.

## A better contribution to the country of origin

### The role of the diaspora and co-development

Numerous diasporas active on the Belgian soil work towards better development in their country of origin. For the purpose of this report, we will highlight two good examples of diaspora projects: MIDA and Solidarco.

Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) is a vast project that offers the opportunity to immigrant professionals (e.g. health professionals) residing in Belgium to return temporarily to their country of origin in the Great Lakes region in order to put their skills to good use, by seeing patients and training colleagues there (Perrin and Martiniello 2011).

Solidarco is an association created by the Congolese diaspora and the Belgian Mutual Fund Solidararis (see Lafleur and Lizin 2016), that offers the opportunity to Congolese migrants residing in Belgium to purchase health insurance for up to seven relatives residing in Kinshasa for a premium of €30 per month. While the payments are made to a European-based insurance company, health services can only be enjoyed by non-migrants in the country of origin. To this end, the insurance company signed an agreement with local health centres in Kinshasa, in order for them to provide basic health services to non-migrant family members at no extra cost.

This scheme, which initially received funding from Belgian authorities as part of their development policy, has been designed with two objectives in mind. First, it aims at providing a solution to non-migrant family members who have no or limited access to healthcare in their country. Secondly, and most importantly, it aims at reducing financial hardship on the immigrant themselves, as they often have to contribute to the health expenses of their relatives in the country of origin. Yet, these are by definition unexpected and can be very high. As noted by an interviewee, health of non-migrant relatives is a core concern:

For other things, we can avoid sending money. But in case of disease we do not want to be held responsible for a family misfortune. We thus send money to have a clear conscience (Congolese migrant, Brussels, 17 February 2013; in Lafleur and Lizin 2016).

Solidarco finally presents a clear advantage for migrants because it brings an additional player in the relation between migrants and their country of origin that acts as a safeguard against corruption and possible negative interferences of the authorities of the home country.

While Solidarco could at first sight be described as an advanced form of sending remittances designed to limit financial risks for migrants, its social impact in the home country is much larger than that of simple transfers. Congolese migrants developed this form of insurance together with a Belgian Mutual Insurance Fund because their experience as beneficiaries of the Belgian public health system triggered their desire to export that model to their country of origin. In doing so, they also seek to change the perception of their relatives that healthcare is a private service that can be purchased when needs arise. On the contrary, they want to demonstrate that purchasing an insurance can be beneficial.

While the limited number of migrants who participate in this scheme illustrates the challenge that changing perceptions on health care in the home country represents, Solidarco's cooperation with local health centres in Kinshasa has the potential to strengthen community-based forms of insurance in the country of origin and increase local support for this form of organisation of healthcare over more costly and less-efficient private solutions.

Generally, co-development projects initiated and run by diaspora associations are likely to be more successful if jointly supported by institutional frameworks, involving governmental and non-governmental organisations and companies of both the countries of origin and destination (Scheffran, Marmer and Sow 2012).

As Belgium is a federal state characterised by a great institutional complexity, it is unsurprising that public policies and initiatives for the involvement of the diaspora in the country of origin can be found at many different levels. While the diaspora in Belgium has been involved in their country of origin's development since several decades, their specific awareness of authorities and related support through formal policies is very recent. (See box for more details.)

## HISTORY OF CO-DEVELOPMENT IN BELGIUM

Just as it happened in France, it was during the 1990s with the growing influence of the discourse on co-development that the question of the diaspora's involvement in the country of origin gained salience. The year 1999 marked a turning point in this respect when the *Centre National de Coopération au Développement* (CNCD/11.11.11) in partnership with a Socialist development NGO (SOLSOC), took the initiative of organising an event during which development NGOs and immigrant organisations would meet. In 2001, this awareness reached the federal level as Belgium decided to add the theme of “migrants as partners for development” to its work programme for the presidency of the EU council. In 2001, the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration materialised the Belgian interest in the issue by creating the ‘Migration and Development Platform’ in order to stimulate joint efforts and cooperation between diaspora organisations and development NGOs.

Over the years, different budgets fed diaspora organisations for development activities either alone or in cooperation with NGOs. The early budgets reflected the national government's priority on immigrant return and their successful reintegration in the country of origin. Later, diverse public initiatives took place at the sub-national level in the area of migration and development, and regional intervention was officially recognised as necessary, as it was the case when the ‘*Cellule d'Appui pour la Solidarité Internationale Wallonne*’ was created, in 2003.

Similarly to initiatives at the federal level, the Walloons launched competitive calls to fund immigrant organisations in the field of development. For diaspora organisations, such calls offer two major advantages. First, as most development-oriented immigrant associations are small organisations with limited funding, public funds allow them not only to fund their activities in the country of origin but also to provide employment and/or stability for immigrant members of the association. Secondly, because these are public budgets that derive from public policies in the area of development, they constitute an official recognition from Belgian authorities that migrants are partners with the Belgian authorities in its development policy. Such explicit recognition allows changing the narrative on migration as a burden and instead fosters inclusion.

As noted by De Bruyn et al. (2009), the Walloon policies have been strongly influenced by the French ‘co-development’ approach and this may explain why Flanders has not followed a similar path. Indeed, whereas immigrant organisations are considered potential partners in the region's development policy, there is no separate bureaucratic structure or budget that would be reserved for them nor are they considered as privileged partners by regional authorities.<sup>29</sup>

At the city level, however, similar dynamics have been observed in Flemish and Francophone municipalities. The city of Brussels for instance, has set up a Consultative council on international solidarity by which civil society organisations—including numerous immigrant organisations—are asked to submit ideas on the city's development policy and participate in the decision process on the attribution of funds to CSOs involved in development.

We have a specific funding envelope for small international solidarity associations. Our goal is to support them in their international solidarity project. In doing so, we ask them to respond to public calls. However, we have no time to provide coaching regarding the development of their project (International solidarity department manager of the city of Brussels, December 2018).

As noted by Michielsen et al. (2012), the city of Antwerp launched a similar process of involvement of the diaspora in its international solidarity policies in 2010. Moving from its classic twin-city approach in its relations with the global South, the city launched a series of thematic actions (e.g. education, health) with specific destination countries, such as Morocco or the DRC. This change in policy relied on the core principle of co-development, according to which immigrant involvement in solidarity projects in their country of origin not only increases the sustainability and efficiency of these projects but also contributes to social cohesion in Belgian cities.

<sup>29</sup> With regards to the French-speaking context of solidarity organisations, see also Huyse et al. (2013).

## Involvement of countries of origin

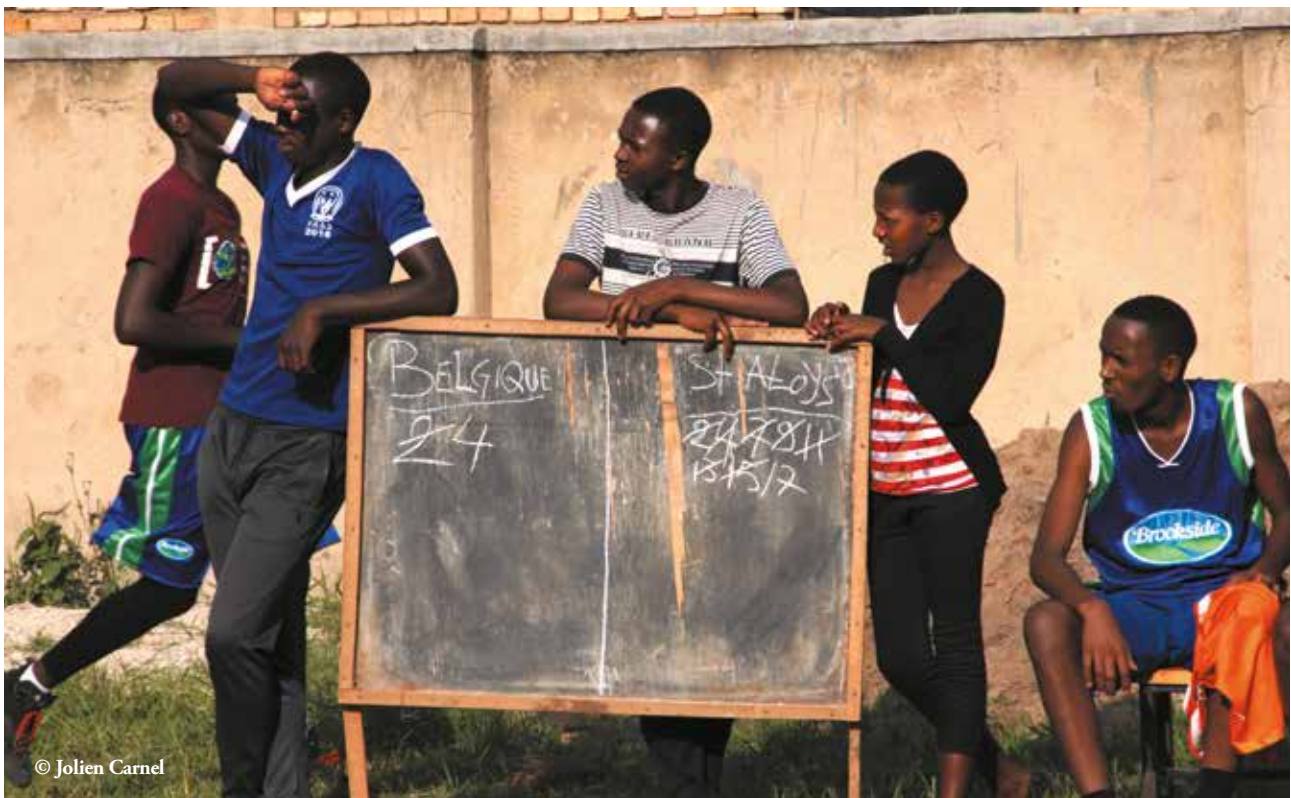
Policies of countries of origin play an important role as facilitators to enhance immigrant transnational involvement. Because investments and monetary flows rely on an attachment or even a sense of civic duty of migrants towards the country of origin, cultural and educational policies are often perceived as a tool to stimulate immigrant engagement. Organising language lessons and promoting the country of origin's culture or religion can indeed reduce the cultural distance that immigration sometimes imposes—especially with the second and third generations migrant—and facilitate the engagement of the migrants towards their country of origin.

Hence, European countries that have a large presence in Belgium, such as Italy or France, also have strong cultural institutions in Belgium, such as language schools, cultural centres or even high schools (*Lycée français*) through which they promote their language and culture. Similarly, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs or Dyanet is associated with a number of Mosques in Belgium and plays a significant role in allowing immigrants to practice their religion (Timmerman 2000). Morocco also follows pro-active policies that aim at encouraging immigrant investments in their country of origin. As noted by Mahieu (forthcoming), whereas Morocco traditionally supported remittance flows by setting up bank branches in the countries of destination, it now facilitates immigrant investments in key economic sectors such as real estate (through reduced taxation rates and targeted investment programmes), by creating business networks of Moroccans abroad (for instance by offering individual guidance to start-ups), and

conducting information campaigns for migrants about economic opportunities in Morocco (for example by setting up platforms, such as Maghribcom, to mobilise and create business networks).

An essential policy for transnational engagement that is today wide-spread at the global level is dual citizenship. It allows migrants to move back and forth between Belgium and their country of origin. It also removes barriers to investment that sometimes block foreigners wishing to invest or purchase real estate in their home country (e.g. Morocco). In the Belgian case, the DRC remains among the few to continue prohibiting dual citizenship in its constitution. Many migrants however do not respect such prohibition and this usually only poses a problem if an immigrant is elected to the Congolese Parliament.

As noted previously, external voting legislation adopted by the country of origin is an additional incentive for transnational involvement. Such policy usually pushes the country of origin's authorities and politicians to engage with migrants in order to get their support. In Belgium, this typically materialises in electoral campaigns with the presence of migrants on electoral lists and regular visits of officials. Practices however differ across countries of origin. Whereas France and Turkey are two clear examples of home countries developing strong campaigns on the Belgian territory, Morocco and the DRC remain among the few countries where one cannot vote from abroad.



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# CONCLUSION

Migration has always been a central feature of Belgium's history, as well as its economic and social development. A country of emigration until the early 20th century, Belgian immigrants to the United States, Canada, France and elsewhere made important contributions to the development of agricultural and other industries.

During the inter-war period, and especially after World War II, Belgium transformed itself into a major recruiter and receiver of foreign labour in order to re-industrialize and expand the interconnected coal, steel and manufacturing industries. Nonetheless, levels of exploitation of foreign workers were pervasive, leading the Italian government to formally protest the treatment of Italian migrant workers in Belgium.

It was only in the 1970s that the government adopted policies to regulate and limit immigration for economic reasons. These policies did not succeed in reducing migration, which continued to grow until 2011. Today, there are 1.9 million immigrants in Belgium, of which more than half originate from non-EU member states. The immigrant population in Belgium currently makes up 16.4% of Belgium's total population.

Migration plays a key role in Belgium's cultural and economic development. It also is central to economy and business, especially in terms of providing essential skills, services, goods, and labour. Immigrants in Belgium provide contacts, market access, and information on market systems to Belgium and their countries of origin, thus stimulating entrepreneurship, the sustainability of certain job sectors, and bilateral trade.

This report shows an important level of activity and creativity among immigrants residing in Belgium and demonstrates similar levels among Belgian emigrants abroad. This economic importance was underlined by the €9.429 billion in personal remittances received in Belgium in 2017, mostly from elsewhere in the EU. Of the some €4.16 billion in personal remittances that were sent out that same year, €3.05 billion went to other EU member countries. However, we underline the critical lack of data on remittances, and ask for them to be considered with care.

These remittances represent considerable amounts of money that produce micro-economic benefits to recipients and stimulate local and national economies through expenditures and investments in health, housing, nutrition, education and productive activity. It is also important not to forget about so-called 'social remittances', which convey norms, values and practices that can contribute to the economic, social and political development of the country of origin and of destination. These mutual influences can be economic, social, cultural, and even political.

Numerous studies insist on migrants' potential to development in Belgium and elsewhere. However, we note inadequate legislation, contradictory policies, several practices and hostile behaviour that act as obstacles to migrant contributions. The results of these obstacles are illustrated by low levels of employment and economic outcomes in Belgium for migrants and their children in certain regions.

Obstacles in the job market are particularly numerous, notably because of administrative difficulties regarding language learning and diploma recognition, as well as discrimination in the job market. Discrimination forces many migrants to work as independents, potentially in risky businesses as the same obstacles are susceptible to hindering the viability and success of their entrepreneurial activities.

**Migration  
has always been a  
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economic and social  
development**

Discrimination is also found in the housing sector, creating spatial segregation and inequalities among different areas.

Differences in the treatment of migrants and natives and these concrete forms of exclusion mentioned above are fueled by specific beliefs and attitudes surrounding migration. A substantial proportion of the Belgian public believe that immigration constitutes a source of problems for Belgian society. These beliefs are at least in part driven by anti-immigration political discourse and by negative news and social media coverage. Despite this, public opinion has become, on average, more favorable to migration since the solidarity crisis in 2015.

These obstacles hinder migrants' contributions to Belgian development and affect migrants' own development, thereby threatening their fundamental rights and dignity, and limiting their contributions to their countries of origin. This makes acts of solidarity with countries of origin more difficult. Restrictions to family reunification are a prime example, as they prevent migrants from living with their families, which is essential to their integration, to the establishment of a better life, and, eventually, to migrants' contributions to the development of their host country, as well as that of their country of origin.

We mention three other obstacles related to contributions to the country of origin: higher costs of sending remittances, structural and financial difficulties facing diaspora associations, and challenging conditions in the country of origin.

Policies that facilitate migrants' contribution to their country of residence are often grouped under the category of integration policies. Today, all three regions—Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels—have adopted a similar approach, which includes a socioeconomic assessment, language courses, and an introduction to citizenship and norms and values. Though these actions are positive, they suffer several shortcomings, namely their one-size-fits-all approach.

Besides integration policies, some pilot programs and local projects also encourage migrant integration—notably in the labour market—and also facilitate co-development projects. Local authorities generally possess the political will but lack the institutional capacity and financial resources to devise and implement effective policies and coordinate with other actors to effectively welcome and integrate refugees and migrants.

This report highlights Belgium's need for and dependence on migration to sustain its own levels of development and wellbeing. The findings underscore the urgency of addressing large obstacles to ensuring that migration, and migrants themselves, contribute to the integral human development of Belgium. The recommendations that follow address key concerns that, if not resolved, could cause serious problems for Belgium's social cohesion, and to its ability to build a fairer, more unified, and more sustainable society.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research behind this report and the long experience of Caritas International in its work with migrants and refugees, the following set of recommendations aims at developing possible courses of action to protect the rights of migrants, promote their inclusion in the Belgian society, and address the migration-development nexus from the perspective of the integral human development.

These recommendations are intended to all stakeholders, including federal, regional and local authorities, institutions, CSOs, migrants and diaspora associations and the population of Belgium.

## Enhance safe and legal pathways

### Resettlement

- Take into account the increasing global resettlement needs and increase the Belgian resettlement quotas, in addition to and/or independently of the resettlement programmes of the EU.
- Embed the resettlement programme in national legislation and include it in the federal budget—rather than in the European budget as it is now.

### Family reunification

- Guarantee the family unit based on affective and not strictly legal family ties.
- Ensure flexible processing of family reunification visa applications for family members of beneficiaries of international protection, even if not all required documents can be submitted or if the 1-year period for submitting a visa application has been exceeded for reasons beyond their control.
- Provide the visas to family members who are in war or emergency situations in a smooth and swift manner, even when the formal requirements for family reunification are unfulfilled.

- Provide a financial safety net for the costs of family reunification, which constitute, in numerous cases, an obstacle to the procedure (translation costs, visa fees, travel costs, registration costs, etc.).

### Labour migration

- Work on ambitious federal and regional legislations to facilitate labour migration for high-, middle- and low-educated third-country nationals.
- Provide an in-depth examination of the recent changes regarding labour migration at the Flemish level and ensure adaptations if necessary to align the recent legislation with a view of achieving an ambitious labour migration policy for third country nationals.
- Ensure without delay an effective dialogue between the different competent authorities, in order to guarantee a coherent labour migration strategy.
- Facilitate access to the labour market for third country nationals residing in Belgium, even if their situation is precarious because their residency procedure is pending.
- Consider the possibility to integrate undocumented people and take into consideration the needs and perspective of the countries of origin, when designing a labour migration strategy.
- Set up pilot projects in cooperation with the Belgian Development Cooperation to make circular migration possible for specific profession categories.

## Guarantee qualitative reception of applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection

- Guarantee a human and qualitative reception of all applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection.

- Provide all applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection the opportunity to move on to an individual home after a maximum of 6 months, as provided for in the actual law on reception.
- Encourage municipalities and PCSWs to anchor people locally. Local vacancy can be converted into an additional supply of quality and affordable rental housing, provided that there is a political will and that investments are made.
- Guarantee individual support to vulnerable refugees (including resettled refugees), especially from experienced CSOs that focus on a culture-sensitive approach and use intercultural staff.
- Strengthen and establish partnerships with civil society organisations that have experience and expertise in guiding recognised refugees who are looking for housing.

## Ensure protection of all migrants' fundamental rights

- Promote the ratification of the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990) and the ILO Convention 143 on migrant workers (1973) and ensure prompt legislative enactment and implementation of their respective provisions whether or not ratified.
- Ensure full implementation of the provisions of conventions ratified by Belgium on labour migration (ILO C-97) and on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (ILO C-189).
- Ensure that labour inspection in Belgium has an adequate mandate, resources and training to reach all the workplaces where migrants and nationals are employed. They must ensure compliance with decent work, safety and health standards for all workers, regardless of nationality or status and ensure the confidentiality of information related to work from immigration authorities.
- Guarantee access for migrants to public services and welfare systems, including health care and education, regardless of their administrative status, and ensure the confidentiality of administrative and social information from immigration authorities.
- Stop the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance and citizens' initiatives helping migrants in irregular situations.
- Clarify conditions of regularisation for humanitarian reasons (9bis) and facilitate prompt regularisation of migrants in long-term irregular situations and of people with family members in regular situations in Belgium, in particular people who do

not know for sure whether they can return or be returned to their home countries in safety and dignity due to situations beyond their control.

## Design and implement policies for better socio-economic inclusion of migrants

- Provide immediate access to language courses adapted to their level to all newcomers who need to learn national languages.
- Implement policies favouring the inclusion of immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection in the labour market, by tackling discrimination, facilitating the participation of women, encouraging active coaching and job reorientation, and reducing obstacles to language practice and recognition of diplomas, qualifications and relevant experience.
- Strengthen the role and the actions of local authorities in promoting and facilitating the inclusion of migrants in the Belgian society. Ensure that local authorities address all resident and arriving migrants, regardless of their status both as target groups and co-drafters of policy and practice, and that they foster the participation of migrants in the governance of the communities where they reside.
- Support CSOs that have experience and expertise in guiding migrants and beneficiaries of international protection all the way to their insertion.
- Involve diasporas, diaspora organisations, churches, associations and labour unions in local inclusion projects to provide migrants with a swift start and facilitate mutual understanding between migrants and the Belgian society.
- Facilitate dual citizenship and access to Belgian citizenship as a step towards inclusion.

## Prevent discrimination and xenophobia

- Strengthen anti-discrimination, anti-racism and equality legislation, including in the areas of employment, housing, education and regarding, public policies, business practices and trade union action.
- Work together with employer organisations, unions, faith-based groups, CSOs and diaspora organisations to launch anti-discrimination and equality campaigns, in cooperation with the local and regional authorities.
- Encourage political, social, educational, business, sports, religious and community leaders and public figures to speak

up through strong messages of solidarity, respect and equality of treatment for all, and to condemn all racist, xenophobic, religious or other forms of discrimination as well as the use of sensational wording, hate speech and violence.

## **Change the discourse and narrative on migration**

- Portray migrants as contributors to our country and society in all domains, by informing the Belgian population about facts and statistics on migration and development.
- Demand proactive communication and policy from the national, regional, and local administrations that welcome migrants and beneficiaries of international protection and encourage inclusion in the Belgian society.
- Support organisations that positively address migration issues and aim for a human and equal approach regarding migrants and beneficiaries of international protection.
- Call for media responsibility in disseminating news and awareness of the rights and contributions of migrants and beneficiaries of international protection.
- Establish partnerships with media actors and set up awareness campaigns on traditional and social media channels to counter anti-migrant/anti-migration and xenophobic campaigns.

## **Support migrants' contribution to the country of origin**

- Consider diaspora organisations as full partners in development cooperation, notably by providing them with specific funds in order to facilitate local projects of co-development and avoid competition with NGOs and private actors.
- Strengthen the resources and skills of diaspora organisations to help them implement their activities and respond to public calls.
- Design projects in which local, regional or national authorities collaborate with migrants, the authorities and/or CSOs of their country of origin, while safeguarding them against possible negative interferences of the home country authorities in their activities.
- Ensure policy coherence through enhanced collaboration and coordination among ministries of development cooperation, finance, economy, asylum and migration, internal and foreign affairs.
- Reduce the transfer cost of remittances to below 3% by 2030.

## **Do not compromise on budgets for development**

- Respect previous commitments by allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income to Official Development Aid (ODA), following realistic deadlines (3 years).
- Ensure that all (Belgian and European) ODA follows a strict objective of supporting sustainable development as enumerated in the 2030 Agenda. ODA should never fund border or migratory control actions. Also, the reception costs of applicants for international protection should not be counted as ODA.
- Ensure that all (Belgian and European) ODA respects the principle of leaving no one behind; beneficiaries should never be selected based on their migratory status or on their purported propensity to migrate.
- Ensure that all (Belgian and European) ODA is intended primarily for the most disadvantaged countries. ODA cannot be distributed primarily to countries occupying strategic positions for Belgian commercial or military interests or for migratory control agendas.
- Take a stand against any conditionality of all (Belgian or European) ODA linked to the management of migratory flows. Budget for migration and development can be linked only if they contribute to the sustainable development agenda and to humanitarian assistance.

## **Improve research, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge about migration in Belgium**

- Enhance collection, analysis and policy application of statistical and research data on migration and migrants inclusion in accordance with international standards on accurate, reliable and comparable data.
- Ensure that research and data collection address employment, education, health, social protection, housing and other relevant indicators regarding migrants, refugees and migrant origin populations.
- Advocate for data collection and research including a set of empirical tests that are disaggregated by age, gender, nationality, and national origin, in order to help to identify and address discrimination, as well as differential outcomes.

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## Interviews

Speaker	Date
Congolese migrant in Brussels	February 2013
Female Sub-Saharan immigrant association leader	March 2015
Association Leader of Impact Sud	May 2015
Volunteer at Caritas International's Housing Café Project	September 2017
Female migrant from Kosovo undocumented for 8 years	May 2018
Female migrant from Morocco undocumented for 10 years	May 2018
Lore Van Praag, Sociologist at the University of Antwerp	August 2018
Caritas International's Housing Project Coordinator	November 2018
Intercultural mediator at Caritas International	December 2018
French migrant arrived in Belgium in 2014	December 2018
Iranian refugee in Belgium since 2012	December 2018
Staff member of Unia	December 2018
Corinne Huybers, Staff member of the strategic cell of the administration of the city of Mechelen	December 2018
International Solidarity Department Manager of the city of Brussels	December 2018
Bruno Schoumaker, Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain	January 2019
Social worker from Caritas International's social service	February 2019

