

MIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN BELGIUM



Policy Insight

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Summary

This paper looks at the socio-economic integration of immigrants within Belgium.

The particularities of the Belgian multi-level governance system and the involvement of multiple actors at the local level allows us to make both a broad and a detailed comparison of different strategies for the integration of immigrants. The ultimate objective of the study is to determine why local actors (local authorities, public employment services, local agencies for civic integration, and social partners) are more efficient and successful at integrating immigrants than others.

Using region- and province-level data from the Belgian Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS), we first document a substantial variation in immigrants' labour market outcomes within Belgium. Further, we summarise insights from semi-structured interviews conducted with local stakeholders, in particular with representatives of Belgian local integration centres (such as In-Gent, BAPA VIA, BON, CRIC, CRIPEL), local social partners working on integration, and with local officials in charge of integration.

Our results show that a target-based approach, combined with efficient communication and cooperation between different institutions, are important factors leading to better integration of immigrants at the local level. In places where different institutions face conflicts of interest or a lack of communication channels, the integration of immigrants appears to be less successful, mostly due to poor outreach to the disadvantaged groups (e.g. refugees or female immigrants) by employment services and other integration initiatives.



Migrant integration policies at the local level in Belgium

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1. Introduction

Immigrants underperform relative to the native population across many economic and social outcomes – a fact that has been documented in many EU member states.¹ A lower employment rate and lower civic participation, as well as lower educational attainment of immigrant children all point to a lack of integration in host countries. This is a social concern and calls for policy action.

While many policies relevant for immigrant integration are decided at national level, namely inclusion in the welfare system, labour market regulations, access to education, residency or citizenship requirements, integration essentially happens locally. Local authorities and stakeholders can implement national policies in different ways and design their own programmes. Moreover, the local economy and demographic profiles of the local area strongly influence the type of incoming migrants and shape their subsequent integration paths. As a result, immigrants living in the same country and thus facing the same overall institutional and regulatory framework can still perform very differently, depending on local factors.

The European Commission announced its ‘New Pact on Migration and Asylum’ on 23 September 2020, with explicit emphasis on supporting integration into local communities.² The pact indicates that successful integration benefits newcomers and local communities and shows how Europe can manage migration, build open and resilient societies and set a positive example. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to look into existing integration policies at the local level and to benefit from the lessons learned across Europe’s local communities.

This paper aims to understand the drivers of immigrant integration at the local level: why are some areas more successful at integrating immigrants? To what extent can observable local economic and demographic characteristics, or the concentration and diversity of immigrants, explain within-country differences in integration outcomes? What is the scope and role of local migration governance?

The setting for our analysis is Belgium, due to its multilevel governance system and high degree of autonomy at the regional and municipal levels.³ These factors lead to variation in the migration policies within the country. As of 2018, 16.8% (or 1.9 million) of the Belgian population came from a foreign country, among which more than one million were non-EU citizens.⁴ Over 2009-18, Belgium issued an average of 54,000 first residence permits per year. Among them, about 50% were for the purpose of family reunification, 11% for education, and 9% for work; the remaining permits were issued for other reasons, with international protection being among them.

¹ See, for instance, MEDAM (2017, 2018).

² For more on the ‘New Pact on Migration and Asylum’ and integration into local communities (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum/skills-and-talent_en).

³ For more information on the autonomy of the Belgian municipalities, see Plees, Y. (2005).

⁴ Eurostat, Population on 1 January by sex, country of birth and broad group of citizenship.

In relative terms, the size of the Belgian foreign-born population is comparable to that of the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and France. Like many other EU member states, Belgium faces difficulties integrating its non-EU immigrant community. For instance, as of 2017, the difference in employment rates between the native Belgian population and non-EU immigrants amounted to about 20 percentage points for men and 35 percentage points for women.⁵ Previous studies demonstrated regional differences in the approach to immigrant integration in Belgium.⁶ Our study aims to understand the role and scope of policies undertaken at lower administrative levels.

While acknowledging that integration represents a complex multidimensional concept,⁷ in this work we focus on economic integration outcomes, which we measure as the difference in employment rates between immigrants and the native population. Large differences would indicate that local economic opportunities are underused by immigrants due to missing human capital, higher frictions in the labour market, or discrimination.

We first conducted a quantitative analysis of the labour market integration outcomes of immigrants at the regional and provincial levels and then complemented the results with qualitative interviews and desk research. To that end, we used the data from Belgian Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS) to show the differences in labour market integration of the migrant population within Belgium.

To shed more light on the reasons behind these differences, we conducted about 20 semi-structured interviews with representatives of Belgian local integration centres (such as In-Gent, BAPA VIA, BON, CRIC, CRIPEL) and local social partners working on integration. In addition, we conducted interviews with municipality officials in charge of integration, as well as with regional stakeholders.

The interviews highlight several messages. In Belgium, regional and local authorities have extensive administrative powers, with the municipal council being the highest political body at the local level.⁸ First, local authorities have a certain discretion over fund allocation for the implementation of national policies or own integration projects. Local stakeholders are, to some extent, aware of the EU funds, but have difficulties ensuring the continuation of funds for successful projects (often due to the lack of evaluation and project metrics). Second, the degree of communication and coordination among local authorities and key players of the integration process varies across regions, cities and municipalities. In municipalities where different institutions face conflicts of interest and lack channels of communication, the integration of immigrants appears to be less successful, mostly due to poor outreach to the disadvantaged groups (e.g. refugees, non-EU immigrant women) by employment services and other integration initiatives. Third, there are difficulties in implementing a target-based approach

⁵ Eurostat, age group 15-64.

⁶ See for example Adam (2013, 2018).

⁷ See for instance, Sobolewska et al. (2017).

⁸ See for example, Plees, Y. (2005).

tailored to the needs and specificities of the municipalities, because regional and subnational data is not readily available to practitioners and policymakers.

Our analysis shows a substantial variation in immigrants' economic integration within Belgium. The variations could partly be explained by economic factors, immigrant concentration and diversity.⁹ According to our analysis, demographic characteristics such as the size or age structure of the immigrant do not play a decisive role. A large segment of the variation remains unexplained, even when we take into account province's observable characteristics.

This paper is structured as follows: the following section summarises the approach to immigrant integration in Belgium, highlights the interconnections between different governance levels and identifies main players. The main task is to identify the scope of decision-making and responsibilities at the local level. Section 3 presents insights from the quantitative analysis of the Belgian Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS) statistics. We characterise the variation in integration outcomes between Belgian provinces. Section 4 presents the results of the qualitative analysis by summarising the key points raised during semi-structured interviews with key local players in the integration process. Section 5 concludes. A description of the main stakeholders involved in the integration of immigrants is included in Annex 1 of this report.

2. Governance of integration-related policies in Belgium

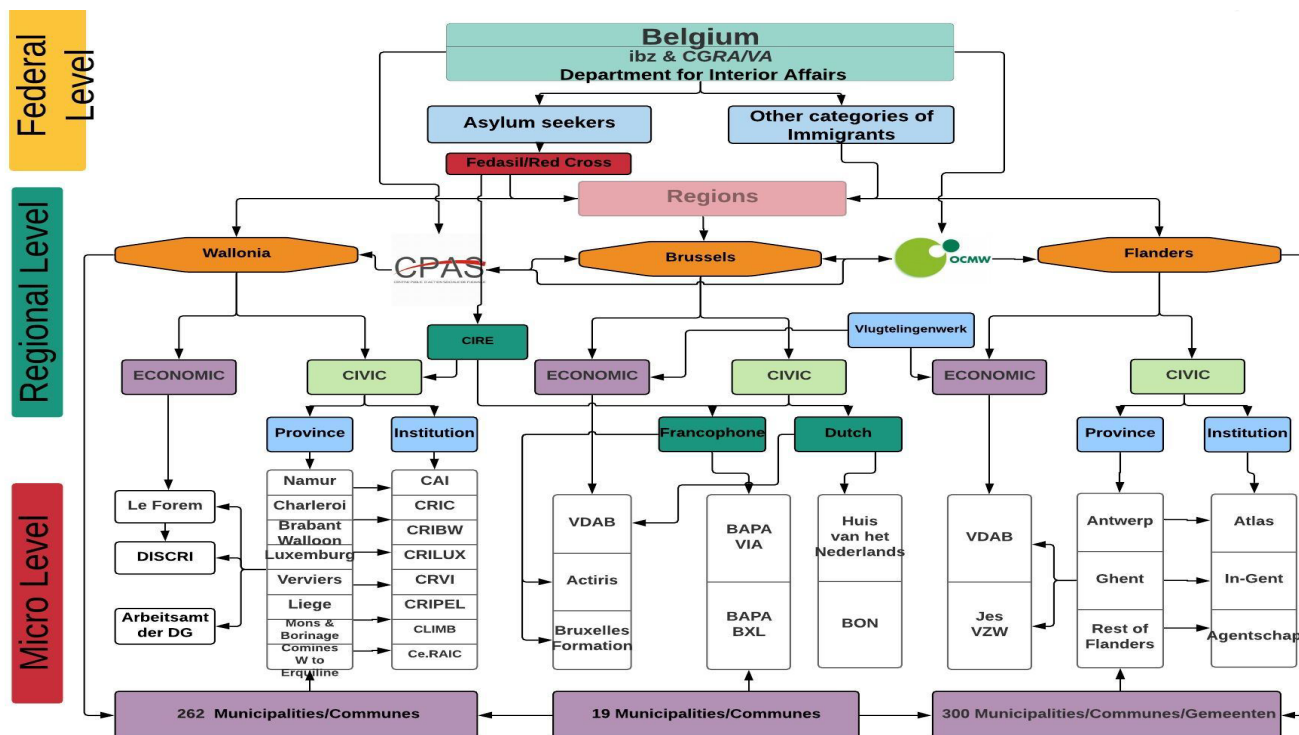
The integration of immigrants in Belgium is subject to policies that can either refer to the whole population (e.g. the social security system, and active labour market policies) or directly target immigrants (e.g. admission criteria, citizenship regulations and civic integration requirements). The relevant policies exist at the federal, regional, and municipal levels. Figure 1 illustrates the governance levels and key players in the immigrant integration process in Belgium.

The federal government sets the rules for obtaining the Belgian residence permit or citizenship, and for the settlement or expulsion of irregular immigrants. More generally, the federal government is responsible for regulating social security (Public Centre for Social Welfare), taxation and, to a limited extent, employment. Yet the federal government does not directly define the explicit integration policies; these are set autonomously by the regional governments: Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels. Economic measures for immigrants are part of the regional active labour market policies targeting the whole population. The key players are regional employment agencies, such as le Forem in Wallonia, VDAB in Flanders and Actiris in Brussels. These agencies operate at the regional level and comprise a wide network of local offices. All three Belgian regions have developed a framework for civic integration programmes, which include a certain number of hours of language lessons, social orientation and citizenship classes, and some individual counselling. In Flanders, the approach is more centralised, with Agentschap being responsible for civic integration programmes throughout the region, except for Ghent and Antwerp, which have their own integration centres. In Wallonia, the coordination

⁹ See (Lens et al., 2018) for economic explanations.

of civic integration programmes is implemented by the eight centres for integration at the province level.

Figure 1. Main institutions in charge of migration and/or integration in Belgium



Source: authors' own compilation based on interviews with the integration stakeholders.

In Flanders and Wallonia, the integration curriculum is mandatory for non-EU newly arrived immigrants (e.g. individuals under international protection, family members of employees or spouses of Belgian nationals) who wish to reside in Belgium for more than three months and for Belgian nationals who have not lived in the country for long and cannot speak the local language.¹⁰ The regulation does not apply to minors, people with disabilities, students, employees, seriously ill individuals, or the elderly. In Brussels, on 11 May 2017, the Joint Community Commission established a mandatory integration programme for migrants between 18 and 65 years who have not lived in Belgium for more than three years and whose residence permit is valid for more than three months.¹¹ Other categories of immigrants can voluntarily attend integration classes. Furthermore, all immigrants in Belgium (both EU and non-EU) are required to present proof of civic integration, whether through following programmes organised by integration centres or other measures such as educational attainment in one of Belgium's universities or involvement in social activities, if they wish to

¹⁰ In 2001, Flanders developed its civic integration programmes and since 2004 the region has had a mandatory integration programme for newcomers. In 2014, Wallonia adopted the mandatory integration programme for the initial reception module and in 2016 made it compulsory for all the components of the programme (reception module, learning French (120h), citizenship training (20h) and socio-professional orientation for those who need it).

¹¹ For more information, see: <https://emnbelgium.be/news/integration-programme-become-mandatory-brussels-capital>

obtain Belgian citizenship. Regional governments provide the biggest share of funding for the economic and civic integration of immigrants. The programmes can be supported by funds from the federal government and EU funds on an ad hoc basis.

Finally, at the lowest administrative level, Belgian municipalities are responsible for the implementation of national and regional policies, as well as for conducting their own programmes. Immigrants are required to register at the municipality in which they wish to reside for the long term. After registration in the municipality or commune, immigrants receive a letter inviting them to attend the integration programme organised by province- or city-level integration offices. Although Belgian municipalities are not directly involved in developing policies for migrant integration, some, such as Ostend and Ghent, have appointed specific policy officers to be responsible for the integration of immigrants. The role of policy officers is to facilitate collaboration between organisations involved in immigrant integration and to identify efficient integration policies.

Municipalities decide autonomously on investments in infrastructure (such as housing, which can affect the settlement of immigrants, or education) and can allocate funds to projects aimed at fostering immigrant integration and reducing social segregation. In terms of budgeting, the municipalities and communes can draw on internal funds and regional and federal funds. They can also apply directly for European funding, such as the AMIF (Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund). The EU has allocated a total of €3.1 billion to support immigrants' management and integration at different levels as part of the AMIF from 2014-20.¹² Belgium can apply for €98 million of these funds and is required to spend one-third of the amount specifically on integration.¹³ Belgian local authorities benefit from the AMIF to implement their integration projects.

Box 1. Integration policies for refugee migrants in Belgium

After receiving their positive decisions from the office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGVA/RA), refugee migrants are free to choose where to live. They are first required to register at the municipality or commune and then they instantly become eligible for the social welfare provided by the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW). The PCSWs aim to stabilise the living conditions of immigrants and support them with labour market integration through individualised trajectories. The trajectory for integration includes language training, career orientation and a minimum integration income, depending on the social conditions of each individual.

Belgian universities:

Belgian universities provide services for language acquisition and some have open-door policies for refugees wanting to pursue higher education. Admission requirements for recognised refugees with foreign pre-qualifications are the same as those for all international degree students. Some universities e.g. VUB in Brussels, have developed skills-recognition tools for those who cannot present the necessary documents due to the practical circumstances of migration.

¹² Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission, (2018).

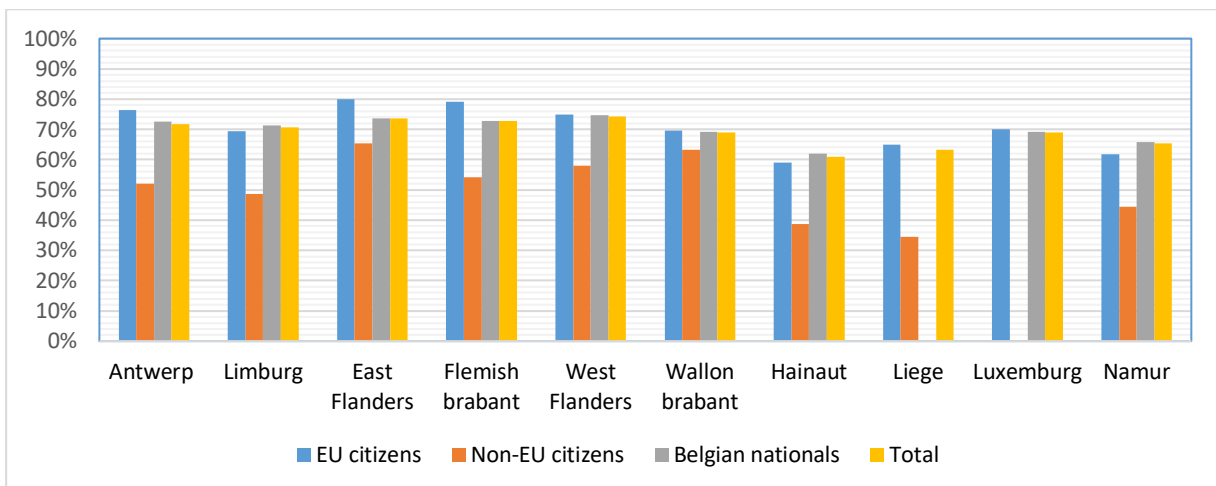
¹³ Esf-vlaanderen.be (2018).

Each study programme has its own admission requirements, including prior qualifications and language prerequisites. Universities that organise language classes for international students also welcome refugees to classes, under certain conditions. The language courses at universities are usually more expensive than ordinary language schools; refugees therefore cannot always afford to take such classes.

3. Variations in the labour market participation of immigrants within Belgium

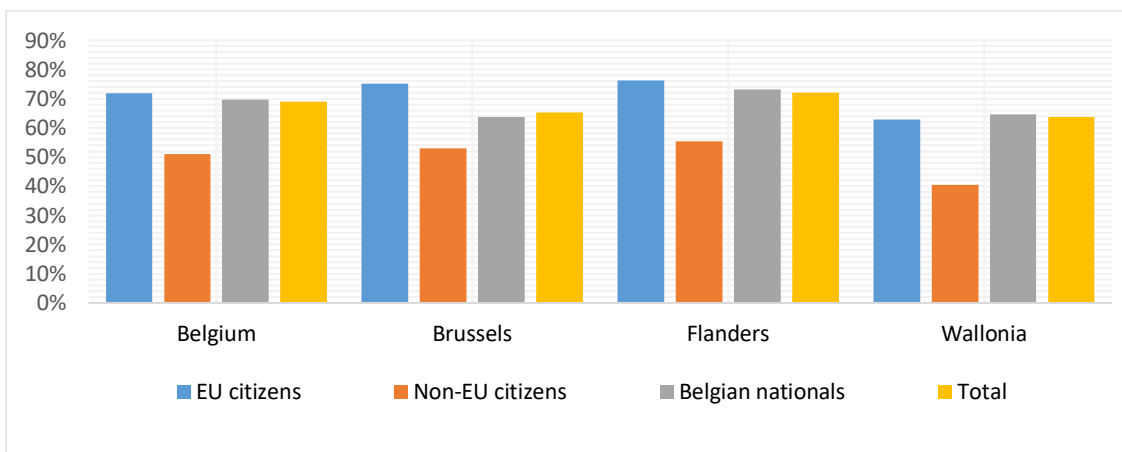
The graphs below indicate regional variations in the employment rates of EU citizens and non-EU citizens compared to Belgian nationals as of 2019. Figure 2 depicts the differences in labour market outcomes across Belgian provinces, showing a significant gap in employment rates between the third country nationals and others. Figure 3 shows the variations in employment across the regions. The data show that employment rates are the lowest in Wallonia for all categories of population. However, non-EU citizens are particularly disadvantaged compared to the other populations in that region.

Figure 2. Variations in employment rate of immigrants across Belgian provinces



Sources: Eurostat, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) complemented with IWEPS statistics.
 Note: Statistics for non-EU citizens were not available for Luxemburg and partially for Namur.

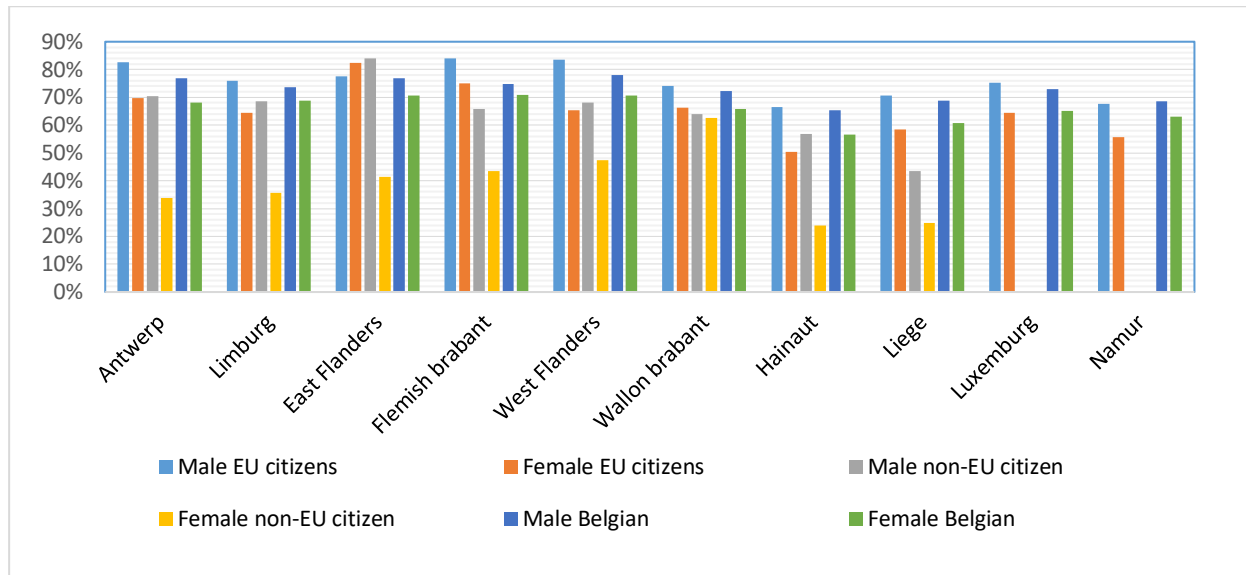
Figure 3. Variations in employment rate of immigrants across Belgian regions



Sources: Eurostat, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) complemented with IWEPS statistics.

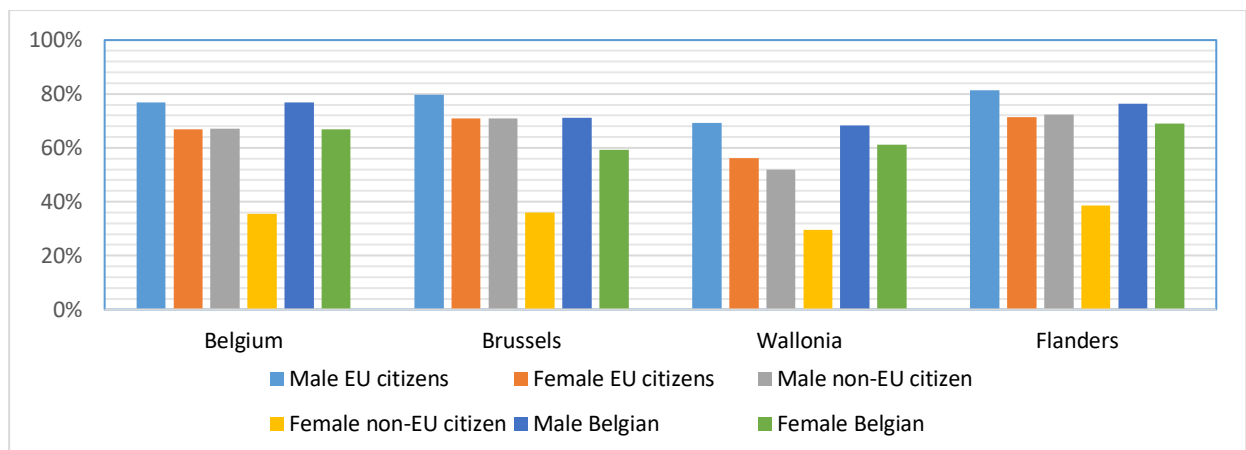
Figure 4 shows the variation in labour market outcomes among men and women in different Belgian provinces. The data depicts considerable differences between non-EU men and women in the provinces of Antwerp, Limburg, East Flanders, Hainaut, West Flanders and Liege and relatively smaller gap in Walloon Brabant. Similarly, Figure 5 (in Box 2) shows the differences in male and female employment across the regions. Overall, non-EU female immigrants appear to be the most disadvantaged group in terms of their labour market outcomes.

Figure 4. Variations between male and female employment across Belgian provinces



Sources: Eurostat, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) complemented with IWEPS statistics

Figure 5. Variations in male and female employment across Belgian regions

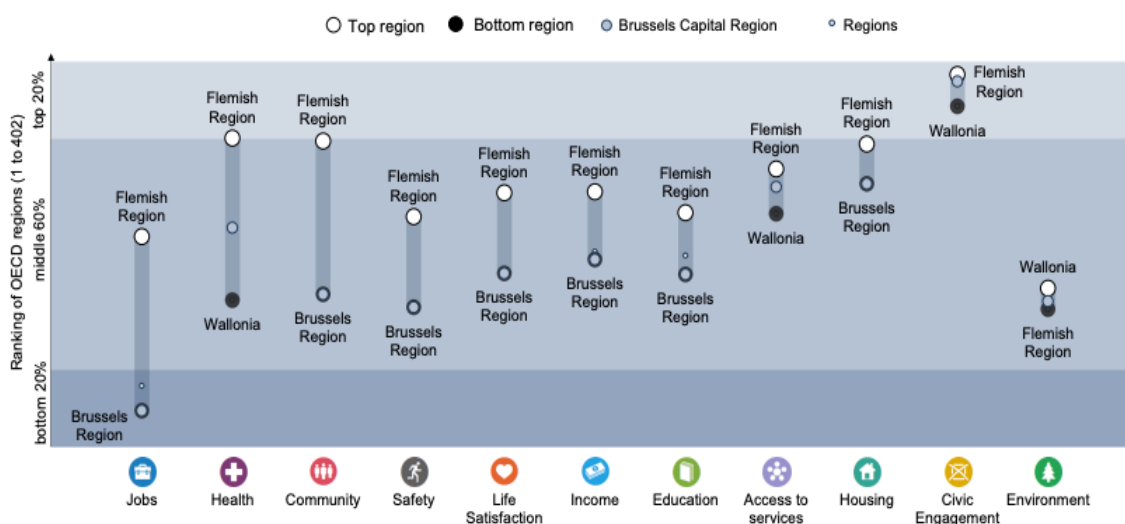


Sources: Eurostat, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) complemented with IWEPS statistics.

The variations in the labour market performance of migrants could be to some extent be explained by differences in the economic performance of a province or region (see Figure 6) and by existing residential segregations. According to the OECD World Regions and Cities at a

Glance Report (2018), although the gap in GDP per capita has narrowed across regions, the regional economic disparities remain higher than the OECD median. The employment rate for men and women aged 20-64 in the Flemish region was 70.4%, while in Wallonia – 64.6% and 62.4% in Brussels Capital region in the first quarter of 2020.¹⁴ Also, the spatial isolation of disadvantaged migrants in Belgian cities has an impact on the overall socio-economic performances of the migrant populations.¹⁵ However, we have shown that even in similar provinces (e.g. Antwerp and Flemish Brabant or Hainaut and Liege), there are differences in employment rates of non-EU migrants. Hence, the next section strives in explaining some of these differences based on interviews with individuals directly involved in the local migrant integration process. In our analysis, we did not solely focus on the main provinces represented by the data but also conducted interviews at the lower levels, such as municipalities.

Figure 6. Differences in well-being across regions



Relative ranking of the regions with the best and worst outcomes in the 11 well-being dimensions, with respect to all 402 OECD regions. The eleven dimensions are ordered by decreasing regional disparities in the country. Each well-being dimension is measured by the indicators in the table below.

Source: OECD (2018).

4. Discussions

Our data analysis at the subnational level shows that considerable differences exist within Belgium with regards to immigrants' economic integration. This section complements the quantitative analysis with insights gained during semi-structured interviews with local politicians, civil servants and societal stakeholders directly involved in the integration process. These interviews show that the cities and municipalities with customised integration policies and those with better communication and coordination obtain more desirable integration results than those without a specific agenda for the integration of third country nationals. Here

¹⁴ Statbel (2020)

¹⁵ See Costa and de Valk (2018) for more details.

we elaborate on the main policies that helped the cities to better integrate migrants and the absence of them will hinder integration of migrants at the local level.

4.1 Communication and coordination of key players for integration at the local level

Communication among the integration stakeholders at the local level is key to better integration. In Belgium, the successful integration of immigrants often depends on the coordinated activities of a number of players: municipalities, local Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW), providers of civic integration programmes, public employment services, and NGOs, among others. Many interviewed stakeholders highlighted the need for the exchange of information and coordination of actions between the different parties involved. The interviews show that the level of communication in many local communities is low, however. Sometimes this is even evident in major cities; for instance, stakeholders in Brussels mentioned that there are poor links between different providers of civic integration e.g. the Flemish integration centre (BON), the French Community (BAPAs) and PCSW barely communicate and each tends to have different integration objectives. This leads to varying standards of programmes being offered by different providers, conflicting objectives, a lack of mutual recognition, and additional costs for immigrants in terms of greater time needed to navigate the system.

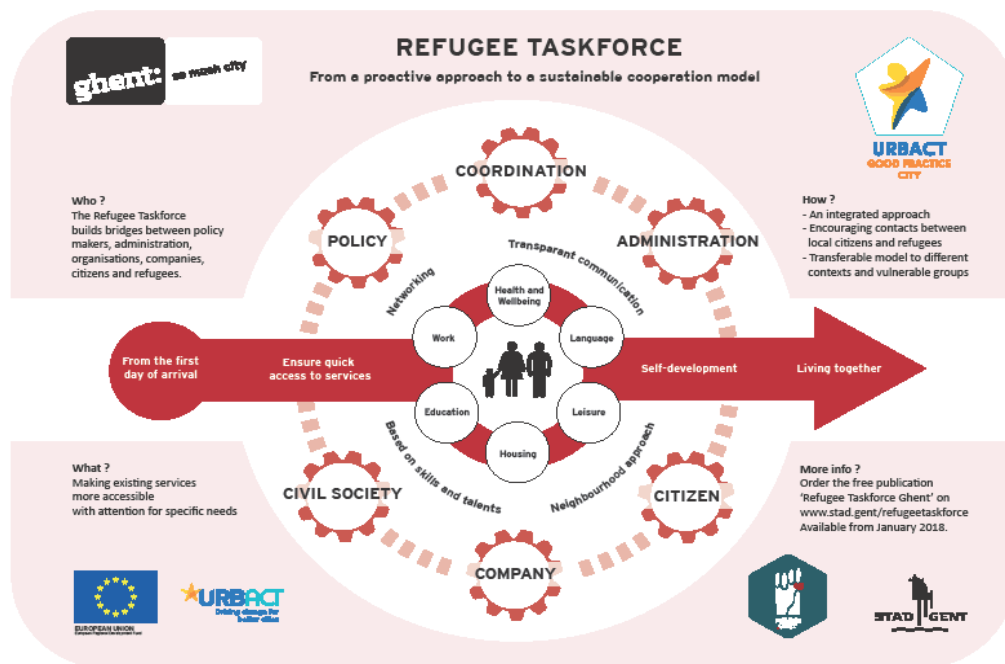
However, some cities (in particular, those having been exposed to a large inflow of immigrants) have developed specific solutions to improve the communication and coordination of different actors. For instance, since 2015, as a response to the increased inflow of refugees, the city of Ghent has implemented a refugee task force and a centralised information service providing also called a 'one stop shop' to help immigrants with their questions on administrative procedures and integration (see Box 2, below). Ostend has specific policy officers coordinating the integration of migrants. Among others, the policy officer coordinates a task force called the 'Integration Council' aiming to connect various stakeholders involved in integration. Ghent and Antwerp city administrations financially support the civic integration centres and serve as coordinators for the relevant stakeholders. In Brussels, the ULB university and BAPA integration office developed the CAMIM (Co-créons un meilleur Accueil et une Meilleure Intégration des Migrants à Bruxelles) project to tackle immigrant integration issues by involving all relevant actors. This three-year project aims to improve immigrant integration through research and participatory action involving migrants, associations, government institutions and integration offices. In Mechelen, the city administration supports immigrant integration through mentorship initiatives and attempts to tackle the issue of residential segregation. In Liège, CRIPEL has its own platform to coordinate integration issues with all other provincial and local NGOs and institutions working in this field. The platform also strives to communicate integration issues to regional and provincial governments. Additionally, the representatives of CRIs (Centres Régionaux d'Intégration) in Wallonia see raising awareness about civic integration among municipal officials as crucial to ensuring the timely outreach to newly arrived immigrants (as municipalities are usually the first to 'meet' the newcomers).

Box 2. A refugee taskforce in Ghent

Following the large migration inflows in 2015, Ghent city developed several initiatives to address the issue. First, the city authorities created a 'one stop shop' to manage and provide accurate information for newly arrived immigrants. They then organised a 'refugee task force' to enhance cooperation between the city administration, private sector, civil society and citizens to facilitate the settlement and integration of refugees. According to city officials, past experiences with accommodating a large number of immigrants, in particular following EU enlargement, improved the ability of the city to mobilise different actors over a short period of time.

Migration Counter: Ghent city administration included a migration information counter at the Civil Affairs Office (Dienst Burgerzaken)¹ to provide the immigrants with information on their immediate needs, like administrative procedures, housing, school for children, among others.

Figure 7. Ghent refugee task force



Source: Stad Gent. (2018), [Refugee Taskforce](#).

4.2 Awareness and goal-setting at local level

While all three Belgian regions have developed general frameworks for immigrant integration, it emerged from the interviews that local policymakers vary in their awareness of integration issues. The majority of municipalities are not actively involved in integration policies but rather

leave other stakeholders (e.g. civic integration centres or PCSWs) to deal with the issues in a decentralised way. Some municipalities, however, are well aware of the importance of their role on migrant integration and see the integration of immigrants as an integral part of their socio-economic policies.¹⁶

The local policymakers that are aware of and actively involved in integration-related issues take measures to assess the issues and find relevant solutions. From our qualitative evidence, the approaches of several cities stand out. First, these cities focus on policies addressing concrete problems (e.g. reducing segregation, ensuring socio-economic inclusion of all inhabitants, training or hiring specialised police officers, and activation policies). Second, they do not attempt to maintain the status quo and understand that both immigrants and the native population need support to adjust to the changing environment. Third, they avoid philosophical discussions and focus on solving structural problems. Mechelen, for example, has come a long way in the implementation of strategies to address segregation. According to the mayor, the city administration, and especially the representatives of political parties in the city council, did not follow the traditional partisan approach but instead took a ‘combination approach’ to offer the best possible solutions to the existing issues. The city adopted robust measures to fight criminality and promote the rule of law, to improve city infrastructure without distinction across neighbourhoods and harness the inclusion of all members of society. The issues were tackled mainly on an individual basis rather than according to neighbourhood, ethnic or religious groups. In terms of fund allocation, in line with its main goal, the city supports projects that aim to minimise segregation, e.g. the ‘[School in zicht in Mechelen](#)’ project, which focuses on diversifying segregated schools, a buddy-project¹⁷ (also called ‘Samen Inburgeren’ or ‘Integrating Together’) where locals support immigrants with labour market and social integration. As part of this project, the residents mentor refugees to practise their Dutch language, help them with the job search and orientation around the city. In return mentors learn about the culture and traditions of the refugees.¹⁸

4.3 Access to funds

The allocation of funds for migrant integration is decided at the federal and regional levels. Additionally, some big cities like Ghent and Antwerp have their own funds for integration. It is at the discretion of the regions and cities to allocate funds and to provide guidance to different local stakeholders about accessing the regional, federal and the EU funds. Several stakeholders mentioned that they receive information about the EU funds from the city administration.

¹⁶ Such differences are likely to be endogenous to the underlying local conditions; establishing the causal link between policymakers’ awareness and immigrant integration success is thus not trivial and is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁷ In December 2019, the Flemish government extended the buddy projects to other Flemish cities and devoted €400,000 to the project (<http://www.flanderstoday.eu/buddy-projects-get-funding-improve-integration>).

¹⁸ For current and further projects, see <https://www.mechelen.be/huidige-projecten>.

At the federal level, two major instruments are used to fund migration and integration related activities, the Impulse Fund for Migration Policy (FIPI) and the Urban Policy Grant.¹⁹ Both fund public and private initiatives for, inter alia, migrant integration, including language courses, support for professional experience, active support for employment, projects to prevent discrimination and promote intercultural dialogue, etc.

In addition to the government funds for integration, local municipalities also apply for European funds. The most prominent European fund for the integration of immigrants is the AMIF fund where the European Commission devoted €3.1 billion to asylum, migration and integration for the period 2014-20.²⁰ The AMIF fund is divided between Flanders, Wallonia and the Federal Public Service. Two types of project are financed: projects on the social activation of newcomers, and projects facilitating the training of social workers. The PCSWs deal with some of the AMIF projects as well. Social workers are trained to help migrants with the psychological trauma and mental health issues linked to migration.

Belgian cities also make wide use of these European funds for integration. However, one issue raised was that the EU does not fund projects in the long term. Funds are usually available for a limited period only and the question about how to ensure the continued funding for the projects often arises. Another constraint is that it is difficult to apply for the funding of an existing project because EU funds usually require innovative approaches. While this constraint is designed to weed out unsuccessful projects, it has a negative impact on the successful projects. For instance, one of the challenges in the labour market integration of refugees in remote areas is the lack of a driving licence. Obtaining a licence requires adequate preparation and the fees are not affordable for refugees. In Ostend, they had a project to support refugees to obtain their driving licences and help with their integration into the labour market. According to our interviewee from Ostend, the project was working very well, with significant results, but it was turned down for EU funding. Additionally, numerous local initiatives and grassroots organisations come up with great ideas to support immigrants with integration and deserve funding. For instance, Duo for a Job²¹ is a project that has enabled over 2,300 migrants find a job through volunteer mentors since 2013. However, it has taken the city council, the EU and other foundations a long time to provide only partial support for them.

4.4 European dimension: networks of stakeholders in Belgium and across the EU

The civic integration centres in all regions are to some extent connected with other European cities, through the Euro Cities initiative, however, there is no intra-regional cooperation between integration centres or NGOs in charge of migrant integration. To cite Ghent once

¹⁹ Committee of the Regions report (2016).

²⁰ For the period 2021-27 the European Commission has proposed €5.08 billion for Asylum and Migration Fund, of which 40% is for countering irregular migration, 30% is for asylum and 30% (€1.52 billion) is devoted to legal migration and integration. Additionally, every EU member state will receive a fixed amount of €5 million in addition to the amount allocated for them. Belgian regions and local authorities will be able to apply for these funds.

²¹ For more information see: <https://www.duoforajob.be/en/>

again, the city is actively involved in European initiatives on both refugee integration and issues of Roma people and migrants from Eastern Europe. Antwerp, Brussels, and Brussels Capital Region are full members of the network of major European cities (Euro Cities); Ghent is an executive committee member and Kortrijk, Leuven and Ostend participate as associate partners. The level of participation of Flemish city administration officials in European-level discussions on migration issues is more prominent than that of Wallonia and Brussels.²² In addition to the city administration, the integration offices of all regions participate in the implementation of European projects. For example, the social integration office for Antwerp – Atlas, participated in the European project on women and young immigrant children.

4.5 Comprehensive response and political priorities

The local authorities with which we conducted interviews could be divided into two categories: those that considered migrant integration to be a concern in their municipalities and those that did not. In the first category are mainly the bigger cities, which attracted more migrants than other municipalities, and two types of responses were encountered. First, increasing funds, coming up with new initiatives, coordinating work and task forces, appointing integration policy officers, etc. were issues for Ghent, Ostend, Liege. Second, implementing directly or indirectly preventive policies to control the settlement of newcomers by imposing restrictions on access to housing, e.g. Antwerp. The policies of course depend on the political party holding power in the given municipality or city.

The second category, which did not consider migrant integration to be a concern, includes small municipalities and towns that received very few migrants or those that thought integration should happen naturally, without intervention from the state. However, our interviewees from the integration offices believed that integration is not only the responsibility of the integration offices but that the whole community should work together and help them with this task. They further stressed that since municipalities are the first to receive migrants, they should play a key role in guiding them to relevant institutions. They argued that if the municipalities invested in integrating immigrants, unemployment rates would decrease in that municipality, which in turn would increase the revenue of the given municipality or city.

4.6 Ambivalence in the interests of stakeholders

A major issue that hinders immigrant integration is the variation in the policies of regional and local actors in implementing civic integration programmes. The Flemish Community has developed more centralised integration policies with more instruments than Wallonia. The Flemish Community integration system is a mix of assimilationist, multiculturalist and interventionist approaches regarding the cultural dimension of integration. In that regard, there is no region- or community-specific integration curriculum across the regions and the content of courses is similar in all the regions. However, the integration certification of Wallonia

²² For instance, Bart Somers, Mayor of Mechelen, was elected as leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Committee of the Regions.

is not acceptable to the Flemish authorities, which means that if migrants undergo civic integration programmes in Wallonia and later want to move to Flanders, they have to redo the civic integration programmes under the Flemish integration agenda. In order to apply for citizenship, immigrants must prove their integration into society, which means proof of certain hours of taxed work, a certificate of social integration and other required documents. The integration certificate becomes important when immigrants want to apply for citizenship. If they undergo integration in one region and five years later while applying for citizenship move to another region for work purposes, for example, they have to retake the integration classes.

Furthermore, in response to the question on the overall objectives of the organisation, definition of integration and priorities for supporting immigrants, we received mixed results. For the municipalities, the priorities were housing, the education of children and employment. For the integration centres, it was stable long-term careers, educational attainment and citizenship. For the employment offices, it is language acquisition, vocational training, and employment, while for the social welfare office, since they are not only focusing on refugees or immigrants, the priority is restabilising people's social lives through rapid labour market integration in order to make them self-reliant. This also depends on the stated or unstated goal and definition of success for the organisations. For instance, encouraging more people to follow integration courses and higher levels of accomplishment is considered as a success for the integration offices, while putting as many people as possible onto the labour market in the shortest possible time is success for the social welfare offices. This heterogeneity in objectives causes a certain amount of confusion for immigrants, especially for vulnerable groups, and creates obstacles to desired integration outcomes. For example, if a refugee wishes to first follow language courses, then enter higher education institutions and gainful employment, this would be welcomed by the social integration office and the refugee will receive support from them, such as assistance with applications, translation and recognition of diplomas, communication with universities, etc. Yet this plan would not be supported by the social welfare office, as they believe it is a long process entailing a burdensome financial allowance, or even that refugees may not be able to finish their studies due to incompatibility with the new education system, for example. Some social welfare offices automatically assign immigrants to employment offices without consulting their preferences. In such situations, since immigrants are financially dependent on social welfare, they must obey the instruction of the social welfare office and disregard the integration plan suggested to them by the integration office. In most cases, migrants agree to take a low-skilled and unappealing job just to satisfy the social welfare office, and once they are employed, the quit-rate from their first employment is very high. Previous studies on the labour market integration of refugees in Belgium also indicate the extensive drop-off rate of refugees after their first job.²³ The issue of ambivalence in the interests and objectives of integration stakeholders, as indicated above, could be one possible justification for immigrants leaving their first employment.

²³ See, for example: Lens, D., I. Marx, and S. Vujić, (2018) "Is Quick Formal Access to the Labor Market Enough? Refugees' Labor Market Integration in Belgium", Institute of Labour Economics.

Tackling the issue of institutional ambivalence towards migrant integration is not straightforward as the power structure and governance system are very complicated in Belgium. Each of the stakeholders is funded by different channels, each has distinct competences and none would agree to give up their competences. However, the best way to tackle this issue is to increase the level of coordination and to put the priorities of migrants at the top of the agenda. Usually, local stakeholders implement policies that are devised at the federal and regional levels, while integration policies should be devised by local actors based on the needs of immigrants. There should be a regular communication and consultation process between policymakers and the immigrants themselves.

5. Conclusions

Migrant integration policies are traditionally decided at the national and regional levels, such as inclusion in the welfare system, labour market regulations, access to education, and residency or citizenship requirements, but integration essentially happens locally. In Belgium, local authorities and stakeholders can implement national policies differently and design their own programmes. Additionally, the local economy and demographic situation strongly influence the type of incoming migrants and shape their subsequent integration paths. As a result, immigrants living in the same country and experiencing a similar institutional and regulatory framework can still perform very differently due to local factors. This study shows that local actors (local authorities, public employment services, local agencies for civic integration, and social partners) in some Belgian municipalities are more efficient and successful at integrating immigrants than others.

Two types of analysis were used for this study. A quantitative analysis of province- and region-level data from the Belgian Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS) to document the substantial variation in immigrants' socio-economic integration across Belgium, based on immigrants' gender and EU non-EU citizenship. The second analysis was of the qualitative data we collected through semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders, not only to explain the variations but also to come up with relevant recommendations for improving migrant integration at the local level. The results show that the major elements that influence integration at the local level are:

Communication and coordination of key players for integration: communication and coordination among the local integration stakeholders is inadequate. We encountered local initiatives for coordination in only a few cities; the systematic means and methods of communication among stakeholders remain weak. Coordination and communication at the regional level and among the stakeholders in different regions is non-existent.

This paper recommends improving communication and coordination, not only among local-level stakeholders within the regions and cities, but also at the regional level and between stakeholders from different regions.

Awareness and goal-setting at the local level: the report shows that the level of awareness varies among the local authorities responsible for migrant integration within and across regions. Many municipalities (communes) are not actively involved in integration policies but rather rely on social welfare and civic integration centres to handle the issues in their own way. Nevertheless, there are still certain municipalities that consider the integration of immigrants to be an important part of their socio-economic policies and actively collaborate with other stakeholders. Additionally, apart from a few cities that are exposed to a large inflow of immigrants, many local municipalities did not feel concerned by the integration of immigrants.

In the municipalities where local policymakers are aware of and actively involved in migration-related issues, the outcome of socio-economic integration is considerably higher, especially considering the volume of migrant flow to the given city. By contrast, the level of integration is relatively low in the municipalities that attempt to maintain the 'status quo'. The study encourages municipalities to maintain a central role in the coordination and support of stakeholders, set target-based goals on integration issues and allocate sufficient funds for integration. Additionally, the regional authorities should provide guidance on the responsibility of all local actors for integration.

Access to funds: in Belgium, funds for migrant integration are mainly decided at regional level. However, some cities, e.g. Ghent and Antwerp, have their own funds for integration. The report does not show considerable shortages of funds for integration-related projects and institutions, but funding allocation depends on the socio-economic performance of the regions. The local-level integration funds are mainly devoted to language courses, support for professional experience, active support for employment, and projects to prevent discrimination and promote intercultural dialogue. In Flanders and Wallonia, the integration curricula are provided by the regional authorities; local stakeholders have a limited role in conceiving projects and coming up with new initiatives for migrant integration.

In addition to regional and local funds, the report notes that Belgian integration stakeholders are well aware of European funds for integration. Those Belgian cities that are concerned with integration apply for European funds, and among the interviewees many had some experience of using European funds for their projects. The biggest concern about European funds for integration was inconsistency in the continuation of the funds. Some projects that had a very good outcome according to local stakeholders did not manage to prolong their funding through European channels. The report suggests that the EU should implement better project evaluation mechanisms to distinguish between effective and ineffective projects at the local level and allow the extension of funds for effective projects.

European dimension: networks of stakeholders within Belgium and within the EU: based on the Euro Cities initiative the civic integration centres in all regions are to some degree connected with other European cities. However, there is room for more cooperation here.

Comprehensive response and political priorities: responses to large inflows of immigrants vary among local stakeholders. Some cities tried to maintain collective action to tackle the issue while many others ignored them. The lack of a comprehensive approach is evident, even among

those who tried to tackle the issue in a collaborative manner. Additionally, some cities that were exposed to large inflows maintained preventive policies for the settlement of additional migrants.

This report suggests that collaborative work and a comprehensive approach among the stakeholders and the authorities would help better integration and ease the pressure of migrant settlement in those cities that attract massive migration.

Ambivalence in the interests of stakeholders: the study encountered major variations in the policies of regional and local actors in the implementation of civic integration programmes. The perception of migrant integration and priorities for immigrant integration differs among local stakeholders. This results in each stakeholder pushing for their own objectives and priorities. This ambivalence gives rise to several issues: longer periods needed for the socio-economic integration of immigrants, forcing them to take unwanted jobs; the high volume of drop-outs from the first experience of employment; and ambiguity for immigrants about how to follow integration paths.

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Annex 1. Key players in Belgium's migrant integration process

In this annex, we first present an overview of the players at the federal level and then describe the main stakeholders by region (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), before introducing the main integration stakeholders at the local level.

Players at the federal level

ibz and Fedasil

In Belgium, the Federal Government Department for Interior Affairs (ibz, Service public fédéral Intérieur) is responsible, inter alia, for managing migration flows, asylum seekers and illegal 'aliens'. The ibz's Directorate General Immigration Office is the competent body for access to territory, residence, settlement and expulsion of foreign nationals. In addition, two independent bodies focus on refugee migration: the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA), in charge of refugees and stateless persons and the Aliens Litigation Council (CCE), and an administrative court composed of judges who rule independently on appeals brought before it.

Fedasil is the Federal Agency responsible for the reception and voluntary return of asylum seekers and other similar target groups in Belgium. Fedasil facilitates material aid to asylum seekers and to other categories of foreigners with equal right to reception (in accordance with the 'Reception Act' of 12 January 2007). Fedasil distributes the asylum seekers across Belgium based on the availability of lodging in Fedasil's centres, balance between regions, and if possible, taking account of the personal interests of asylum seekers such as language, family and health-related issues. Fedasil promotes the integration of immigrants while they reside in the reception centres to the local communities in the framework of various initiatives.²⁴ Asylum seekers, after receiving a decision on their asylum application, are required to leave Fedasil's protection centres within a period of 2 to 4 months. Unlike some other EU countries, Belgium does not implement a mandatory settlement policy for recognised refugees.

Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS/OCMW)

The Public Centre for Social Welfare, known as *Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn* (OCMW) in Dutch and *Centre Public d'Action Sociale* (CPAS) in French is responsible for ensuring the well-being of every legal inhabitant of Belgium. The PCSW has an office in every municipality of the three regions and acts as the main stakeholder for financial assistance of people with international protection (Refugees/Subsidiaries). They investigate what type of help is most appropriate, given the personal or family circumstances, and to some extent offer the solutions to meet people's needs.

²⁴ For instance, Fedasil signed separate agreements with VDAB and Le Forem for the labour market integration of asylum seekers.

National Employment Office (NEO/ONEM/RVA)

The national employment office (NEO) is the public social security, employment measures, unemployment insurances and 'career time credit' institution for Belgian citizens and immigrants. Refugees and people with subsidiary protection are also entitled to unemployment benefits but only if they have lived and worked in Belgium or in a country with which Belgium has a bilateral agreement, for a sufficient amount of time. If the refugee or person with subsidiary protection is recognised for unemployment allowance, the NEO will pay an unemployment benefit that decreases over time. The unemployment benefit is paid only if the employment ends involuntarily and will not end unless the recipient is suspected of fraud.

Flanders: Civic and Economic Integration

Since 2003, in Flanders, participation in Civic Integration programmes is compulsory for three types of resident, recently arrived migrants, individuals with a migrant origin who are not yet able to speak Dutch, and foreigners who are leaders of religious communities.²⁵ Asylum seekers and newly recognised immigrants with international protection will receive an invitation letter after four months of residence on Belgian soil to follow integration programmes. Other immigrants will receive a letter from the municipality shortly after their registration. The Flemish integration approach consists of three mandatory parts along with some voluntary activities. The mandatory parts include 60 hours of Social Orientation trainings, a minimum NT2 level of Dutch language training, and Career Orientation trainings based on their interest, previous experience and aspirations. The curricula for civic integration courses are designed by the regional integration agency Agentschap and implemented within the agency's branches in each city. The integration agencies for the city of Antwerp Atlas and In-Gent for Ghent follows the curriculum from Agentschap on mandatory parts, although for the content of classes and voluntary activities they follow their own initiatives. The voluntary activities include providing translation services, organising get-together events with the locals, summer camping, etc. by using European and Regional Funds for diversity. The Flemish regional government funds Agentschap and the cities Ghent and Antwerp finances Atlas and In-Gent. Between the years 2016 to 2018, based on the Flemish Government Decree of 13 May 2016, the cities (including Antwerp and Ghent) could apply for the Flemish subsidies, which have been allocated to cities and municipalities to deal with the increased influx of refugees.

There are several organisations in charge of civic and economic integration programmes in Flanders. The main regional civic integration player is Agentschap. Antwerp and Ghent exceptionally have their own independent civic integration providers - Atlas inburgering en integratie and In-Gent.

The OCMW or Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW) facilitates inter alia the immigrants with integration allowance income, language courses, and labour market support. The Flemish office for Employment, VDAB, is the main organisation carrying out vocational training and

²⁵ More info: <https://integratie-inburgering.be/>

employment services. Other important players are Jes vzw,²⁶ which focuses on education and integration of immigrant children and youngsters, Vormingplus, which concerns adult teaching and cultural trainings, Solentra, which provides diagnostic and therapeutic support to refugees and migrant children and their families, CVO Centre for Adult Education, Syntra Vlaanderenand, an entrepreneurship centre,²⁷ CEMIS,²⁸ etc.

Civic integration: Agentschap, Atlas integratie & inburgering, and In-Ghent

The Flemish Agency for Local and Provincial Government and the Civic Integration Policy Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering is the main integration institution within the Flemish communities of Flanders and Brussels.²⁹ This agency works directly with the municipalities, cities, provinces, local authorities and other organisations to implement the Flemish decree on mandatory integration. The agency is determined to draw integration policies to ensure the socio-economic and socio-cultural participation of all residents on an equal basis. Apart from designing and implementing civic integration programmes, the agency provides linguistic support for interpretation and translation of documents, as well as legal consultation for newly arrived immigrants and individuals with a migrant background. The agency covers all the Flemish provinces and municipalities in the provinces of Brussels, East-Flanders, Flemish Brabant, Limburg and West-Flanders, except for the cities of Antwerp and Ghent.

Atlas is the civic integration organisation for the city of Antwerp and its peripherals. Atlas is a non-profit organisation funded and supported by the City of Antwerp and the Flanders region. Some of Atlas' projects are also funded by the European Social Funds.

The civic integration programmes include the social integration classes, linguistics support, guidance to the Dutch language schools, as well as helping the minor (underage) immigrants and parents of children to find schools and other activities. Atlas works on projects and collaborates with a wide variety of stakeholders such as the City authorities, OCMW in Antwerp, Samenlevingsopbouw (Constructing/Building the Society), CAW Antwerpen vzw (Center for General Welfare Work), Agentschap, In-Gent, and VDAB.

The social orientation classes are organised in the evening and during the weekend as well as during working hours to make them more accessible to those who work or study. Participants come from very diverse backgrounds and therefore the classes are organised in the languages that are understandable for them, and grouped according to their level of education. The main goal behind these social orientation courses is to give people the tools with which they find their way in society.

²⁶ More info: <http://www.jes.be>

²⁷ More info: [https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/demo/documents/Pelfrene\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/demo/documents/Pelfrene(1).pdf)

²⁸ More info: Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (CeMIS, University of Antwerp)

²⁹ Emnbelgium.be. (2016), *Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection Into the Labour Market in Belgium* [online] https://emnbelgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/integration_of_beneficiaries_of_international_protection_into_the_labour_market_in_belgium_final.pdf [Accessed 2 Mar. 2018].

The social orientation classes are not aimed to be educational classes and the participants are not necessarily required to sit a knowledge test. The main objective is to inform participants how the social security system works, how to find work, why they have to pay taxes etc. Each interested participant is expected to take a 60- hour social orientation course, the philosophy behind being to give them basic knowledge of Flemish society on the one hand, and the further steps to take for their social integration process, on the other. Atlas also instructs people in need of civic integration with recognition of their diplomas and previous qualifications, for instance, if the newcomers have a bachelor's degree, and helps them with the further steps to get their diploma recognised.

The teachers and instructors of social integration programmes are not necessarily required to have a degree in teaching but are rather preferred to be native speakers from the countries of origin of the immigrants. As a result, about 70% of people who coach the social orientation classes are native speakers.

In-Gent designs and implements civic integration programmes for the city of Ghent. In-Gent is funded and supported by the City-hall of Ghent. They follow the curriculum developed by Agentschap for mandatory parts of the integration programme and other activities and initiatives of In-Gent are similar to those of Atlas in Antwerp. In-Gent offers an integration programme containing a personal guidance counsellor (trajectbegeleider), 60 hours of Social Orientation Courses, and Dutch language courses including an interview, test and referral to the right course. Apart from providing services for immigrants, In-Gent also offers assistance (translation and interpretation, cultural trainings) to local organisations, e.g. firms, schools, hospitals. Among others, In-Gent is working on projects with several organisations for migrant women's empowerment and anti-racial discrimination. They also fund social activities aimed at increasing the social networks of immigrants. Some examples of these projects are Netwerker Samenleven (Netwerker of Living Together) and Samen Gentenaar (Ghent Residents Together) that work to build connections between immigrants and residents and to match the newcomers with residents based on their interests.

The main objective for the existence of In-Gent is to provide equal opportunities for the inhabitants of Ghent and to implement indispensable diversity values. The organisation aims to increase the participation of people with a migrant background in society; helps the public service organisations to consider diversity as a benefit and to influence society in a positive way. In addition, In-Gent acts as a mediator between the government, integration stakeholders and the immigrants, meaning that In-Gent informs the government and its partners about the societal trends concerning immigrants.

Economic integration: Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB)

The Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) is the main public employment and vocational training service provider for the Flemish communities of Brussels and Flanders. Its mission is to ensure, organise and promote job placement, guidance and

vocational trainings for job seekers, including newly arrived immigrants, and to assess the compatibility of workers' skills to the labour market needs. VDAB works with other local institutions to facilitate job opportunities for immigrants. There are no special requirements or restrictions for immigrants to receive support from the VDAB. Even those who are not able to speak any of the local languages can sign up as a jobseeker with the VDAB. VDAB also provides long- and short-term vocational trainings for recently arrived immigrants. Newcomers are invited for a quick mediation through screening followed by giving them the choice to select their future professions. VDAB started investing in mentoring programmes for labour market integration of refugees in 2019.

Other important initiatives

The Centre for Basic Education, or in Dutch Centrum Voor Basiseducatie (CVB) is the open school for adult learners with a low level of previous education. The centre provides basic education training in 13 schools throughout Flanders and Brussels in order to increase the literacy level through education and training among adults. The training contains learning and increasing (literacy) competences, Dutch language courses, mathematics, basic information and communication technology and social orientation. People with an immigration background can attend the CVB schools without being required to have previous education or Dutch language skills. The schools provide personalised learning paths for their students through using the experience-sharing methods as well as through personalised guidance during the learning processes. In order to strengthen the provision of services, the centre has set up a strategic policy plan for the period of 2017 until the end of 2020. During this period, the centre will focus on the joint development of strategies, expertise, knowledge and processes.

Where immigrants have a basic or preliminary education or they successfully accomplish the required level in CVB, they are directed to CVO to pursue further education. **The Centre for Adult Education (CVO)** is a language and socio-cultural centre for participants within the Brussels-Central Region and the Flemish peripheral municipalities. Immigrants under the protection of social welfare services are exempt from paying the tuition fees. The Centre focuses on offering services in different languages, ICT skills, route counselling, and acquisition of the Dutch language.

Wallonia: Civic and Economic Integration

In 2016, the Walloon government approved the decree on a mandatory integration pathway. The target group and general structure resemble that of the Flanders region, albeit with differences in governance and programme composition.

Civic integration: CRIs

CRIs are the regional civic integration centres for Wallonia. Presently, eight regional civic integration centres (CRIs)³⁰ are responsible for the implementation civic integration

³⁰ These regional centres are CRIPEL in Liège, CRIBW in Walloon Brabant, CRVI in Verviers, CRIC in Charleroi, Ce.R.A.I.C in Trivières (central region and Wallonia Picardy), CRILUX in Luxemburg, CAI in Namur, and CIMB in Mons and Borinage.

programmes for immigrants in Wallonia. In their turn, CRIs are supported by DisCRI, which is a non-profit organisation, acting as the main coordinating hub for civic integration in Wallonia. DisCRI supports the eight CRIs by providing technical, logistical and educational advice. The organisation also helps to connect the CRIs with other regional and international institutions. In addition, DisCRI is in charge of adapting the integration methodologies and curricula for the CRIs as well as facilitating experience-sharing opportunities among the CRIs.

The CRIs are funded by the Walloon regional government, while the centres can apply for separate project funds to the European Social Funds for Wallonia (ESF) and other partners. The governance of civic integration reflects a historic ‘bottom-up’ approach to integration initiatives in Wallonia. The newly arrived immigrants with a residence permit of more than three months receive a letter from their respective municipality with the guidance to attend the civic integration courses in their admissible CRI. CRIs coordinates the implementation of the social orientation classes taught by local teachers recruited and trained by CRIs. At the CRI, the immigrants are required to complete 20 hours of mandatory social orientation classes, which are mostly organised in the native language of the participants. Immigrants who are non-native French speakers are required to take at least 120 hours of French language courses and can then follow 60 hours of non-mandatory citizenship courses in French. Moreover, the immigrants who complete social orientation courses are entitled to up to 3 years of individual support. The individual support consists of legal advice, social and economic integration, individual trajectories, and guidance to democratic participation.

Economic integration: Le Forem and Arbeitsamt der DG

Le Forem is the main service provider for Public Service for Employment and Vocational and Educational Training (VET) in French-speaking Wallonia, covering the provinces of Hainaut, Walloon Brabant, Namur, Liège, and Luxembourg with 170 sites. Its goals include the sustainable integration of the French-speaking job seekers into the labour market, offering jobseekers personalised advice, guidance, assistance in finding a job and skills development missions. It also helps newcomers assess their employment and training needs. The employment office Arbeitsamt der DG is the employment office providing services for the German-speaking population of Wallonia, including the immigrants living in this region.³¹ The office works closely with other Belgian employment and vocational training offices in Wallonia and Flanders to facilitate job opportunities for people residing within the German community.

Other important initiatives

The Platform ‘Diversité en Wallonie’

The Platform Diversity in Wallonia is a project carried out by a consortium composed of several organisations. The consortium, with the cooperation of all the CRIs, develops a campaign of communication to raise awareness among the population, employers, and public services about ‘the management of diversity in human resources and about the struggle against

³¹ http://www.adg.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-1888/3212_read-37405/

discrimination. The participant organisations include EGID-Ulg (Unit of Research of the Ulg – Studies on Gender and Diversity in Management), DISCRI, Le Forem, the Cell of Struggle Against Discriminations (CLCD), the Walloon FTGB, the service for diversity CSC·Inter-federal Centre for Equality of Chances and Struggles Against Discriminations (UNIA), and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. This project is co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Le Guide Social

The social guide or Le Guide Social is a platform for all types of social organisations and populations in Wallonia and the Walloon region of Brussels. This agency provides information and ‘well-being’ solutions for people in need of socio-economic assistance, employment, civic integration. They have a special focus on immigrants and integration. Professionals, NGOs, and other organisations sign up through the website and it connects them with people who need their services or who are looking for employment.

Brussels: Economic and Civic Integration

In Brussels, immigrants are encouraged to attend a Civic Integration programme. They can choose to be part of the French Community Commission (COCOF), Flemish Community Commission (VCG) or Common Community Commission (COCOM). However, it is not obligatory to choose between one of these communities. Pursuing a Civic Integration programme in Brussels Capital Region is not mandatory, yet the Civic Integration certificate is one of the required documents for the naturalisation process and citizenship application.³² Moreover, a new Brussels parliament ordinance passed on 11 May 2017 made civic integration compulsory for newcomers in 2019.

Apart from organisations focusing directly on the civic or economic integration of immigrants, the primary government body involved in immigrant integration is the Social Centre for Public Welfare (PCSW), which provides immigrants with financial assistance and guidance towards other integrating institutions. There is a PCSW office in every municipality/commune in Brussels, where, during the first years of integration, people with international protection are required to take between 90 to 240 hours of French or Dutch classes. Afterwards, they are directed to the providers of public employment services such as Actiris or other job centres.

Civic integration: BON, BAPA VIA and BAPA BXL, Huis van Het Nederlands

The Reception Office for Integration (BON) is the predominant provider of civic integration in Brussels supported by the Flemish government. From 1 January 2015, BON is officially part of the Flemish Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering. The agency welcomes all types of immigrants who have been living in Belgium for more than three months. The BON civic integration courses provide information on social life in Belgium, rights and duties of residents, future-oriented counselling, workshops focused on employment, education and societal participation in over 13 different languages in four campuses in Brussels. The courses are organised for seven to

³² Brussels.be. (n.d.). Belgian nationality. [online] Available at: <https://www.brussels.be/belgian-nationality> [Accessed Mar. 2018].

eight weeks, but the organisation provides individual trajectory support afterwards for one year.

In addition, BON organises pilot projects with employment services for short-term vocational trainings and workshops for refugees and other immigrants (more information [here](#)). In case of further social assistance, BON directs and introduces immigrants to other relevant NGOs and organisations.

The Huis Van Het Nederlands or the Dutch Language Houses of Brussels were established based on the Flemish Decree of 2004, aiming at facilitating inhabitants of Brussels with language courses and civic integration platforms. There are eight Dutch language houses in Brussels. The Houses do not organise classes but they assess the level of Dutch language of the applicants and direct them to a relevant language course in their preferred location.

The BAPA VIA and BXL³³ are French Community Commission (COCOF) supported civic integration organisations, providing services for all documented immigrants living below three years in Brussels, since 2016. Their objective is to support immigrants through reception paths, personal support in their native language, citizenship training courses, French classes and socio-professional guidance.³⁴ The welcoming programmes are organised for non-Belgian nationals who are registered in one of the 19 municipalities of Brussels. The participants should be over 18 years old, hold a residents' permit of more than 3 months and have lived in Belgium for less than 3 years. BAPA (VIA and BXL) is organising a primary 10-hour course called "Information and Animation" in order to assess the primary needs and the level of language of the participants. Then they have another 50 hours citizenship course followed by individual support for one year. The French classes are not organised within the BABA campuses but they direct the participants to those language centres that have an agreement with COCOF. In addition, BAPA (VIA and BXL) is working with 12 other COCOF supported organisations on socio-cultural and citizenship issues. The methodology used for the orientation classes are developed from experience and in cooperation with the Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action, in French, Le Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle (CBAI). The teachers and trainers come from very diverse backgrounds. BAPAs work with several other organisations to carry out the task of integration through long term and short-term projects. The project CAMIM or "Let's co-create a better welcome and better integration of migrants in Brussels" is an example of such projects. This 3-year project is organised by BAPAs, University of Brussels (ULB) and two other NGOs. The goal behind this project is to improve the resilience of Brussels on migration, through research and participative action, including migrants, institutions and organisations active in welcoming migrants, and citizens of the Brussels region. Researchers, social workers of BAPAs, volunteers and migrants explore the welcoming process, and offer to bring real solutions to the local needs in terms of inclusion of newcomers. The starting point is the needs, resources and the means available on the Brussels territory. The goal is to work on long-term rather than short-term

³³ <http://www.bapabxl.be/>

³⁴ <http://www.via.brussels/en/>

integration, which is usually the focus of other organisations. In this project, the newcomer is not only seen as a user or beneficiary, they are the main focus of the project.

Economic integration

Actiris is the main actor and provider of employment solutions in the Brussels-Capital Region with representative offices located in 18 out of the 19 Brussels municipalities. It serves both the French and Dutch speaking population including immigrants and individuals under international protection. It assists unemployed individuals and those who want to change their profession with VET, improve their professional skills, and sustain their business. Concerning individuals under international protection, consultants from Actiris assess their experience, skills level, and motivation, and henceforth, direct them to either a professional education programme or the labour market. Actiris officially cooperates with VDAB Brussels and Bruxelles Formation and has partnerships with many other organisations such as Le Forem, Region De Bruxelles Capitale, Syner Job, Le Fonds Social Européen, E-Procurement and over 20 other platforms and institutions that provide education, training and employment services in Brussels.

Brussels training or Bruxelles Formation is the official body responsible for vocational training of job seekers and workers within the French-speaking community of Brussels. Bruxelles Formation cooperates with Actiris and 53 other socio-professional organisations to provide services for professionals and job-seeking immigrants. **VDAB Brussels** provides vocational training and job matching services for the Flemish societies of Brussels.



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