



Reaching Undocumented Migrants

EMN Policy Event

27 March 2025

Funded by



Implemented by





- Intro by ICMPD RRF
- Fedasil
- Mixed Migration Centre
- Migration Policy Institute – Europe
- Q&A
- Next Steps



Overview of activities

- Evidence-based tools and processes to enhance outreach practices, improving accessibility to voluntary return options
- Field study visits
- Data collection and analysis
- Informed policy making
- Hands-on training module on mental health



Blueprint – Reaching Undocumented Migrants

Fedasil – outreach history



- Outreach activities since 2020 – Reach Out
 - EU funded + national program
 - Broadening the scope

- Conclusions and gaps → RUM



Concept – mutual learning



- **Field Visits:**

- Observing and analyzing real-world implementation of outreach strategies and methods for reaching and counselling undocumented migrants.
- Gain practical insights into diverse national approaches.

- **Peer exchanges:**

- Collaborative reflection.
- Reflect on observed practices and collectively enhance methodologies.



Blueprint: challenges



- **Trust:** Many migrants distrust authorities, requiring sensitive engagement.
- **Reaching them:** Migrants may avoid institutional contact and frequently relocate.
- **Addressing basic needs:** Essential needs like shelter, food, and medical care must be prioritized before legal or reintegration counselling can be done.
- **Legal barriers:** Navigating legal pathways is complex and varies across different localities.
- **Engaging network:** Many actors work in parallel with limited collaboration, requiring networking and service integration.



Blueprint: outreach strategies



- Establishing (low key) **presence in migrant spaces** – *be part of the space*
- **Mobile teams** including intercultural mediators – regular presence is crucial
- **Trust-building**: active listening while validating migrants' experiences before offering solutions / avoid judgemental approaches
- Providing **immediate assistance** (food, shelter, hygiene, medical aid, safety...) when possible, within a referral network.
- Recognize the **diversity in group of undocumented migrant profiles** to better offer tailor made support.



Blueprint: outreach strategies

- **Empowering:** counter misinformation, share material tools (such as rights cards), incorporate psychoeducation in counselling, carry positive energy while recognising hardship, promote dignity, etc.
- **Network and multi-stakeholder collaboration:** strengthen partnerships between government agencies, NGO's, healthcare providers, community-based organizations and legal aid organizations.
 - International collaboration platforms for better align services and knowledge exchange
- **Knowledge sharing:** Provide clear, accessible information on legal pathways (in Belgium, country of origin or elsewhere). Create platforms for exchange.



Blueprint: principles and conclusions



- Human-centred approach
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Information serves as a critical empowerment tool
- Multi-stakeholder approach
- Balancing control and tolerance



Thank you!



Reaching Undocumented Migrants | Reach Out 3.0

Selected research findings

Brussels, March 27th, 2025

Study objectives and research questions

Study objectives

Unpacking the **motivations, mobility patterns** of undocumented migrants in Europe

Better understanding their **sources and means of information on return options**

Understanding their **perspectives on return and knowledge of AVRR options**

Research questions

1. What are the **profiles** of undocumented migrants and their **journeys** in Europe?
2. What are their **migration related drivers and decisions**?
3. What are their current **access to basic services**?
4. What do undocumented migrants know about **AVRR options**, and how they perceived them?

Research Overview

Methodology

Individual survey interviews with undocumented migrants of selected nationalities(*), living in the urban and peri-urban areas of Brussels and Paris, conducted between July and December 2024

(* nationalities of sampling are: **Afghanistan, Algeria, Guinea, Morocco and Tunisia; quotas**)

Key survey themes

Undocumented migrants' **profiles** in France and Belgium, **migration drivers and decisions**, **access to basic services**, **knowledge and perspectives about Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) options in Europe – focus**

Limitations

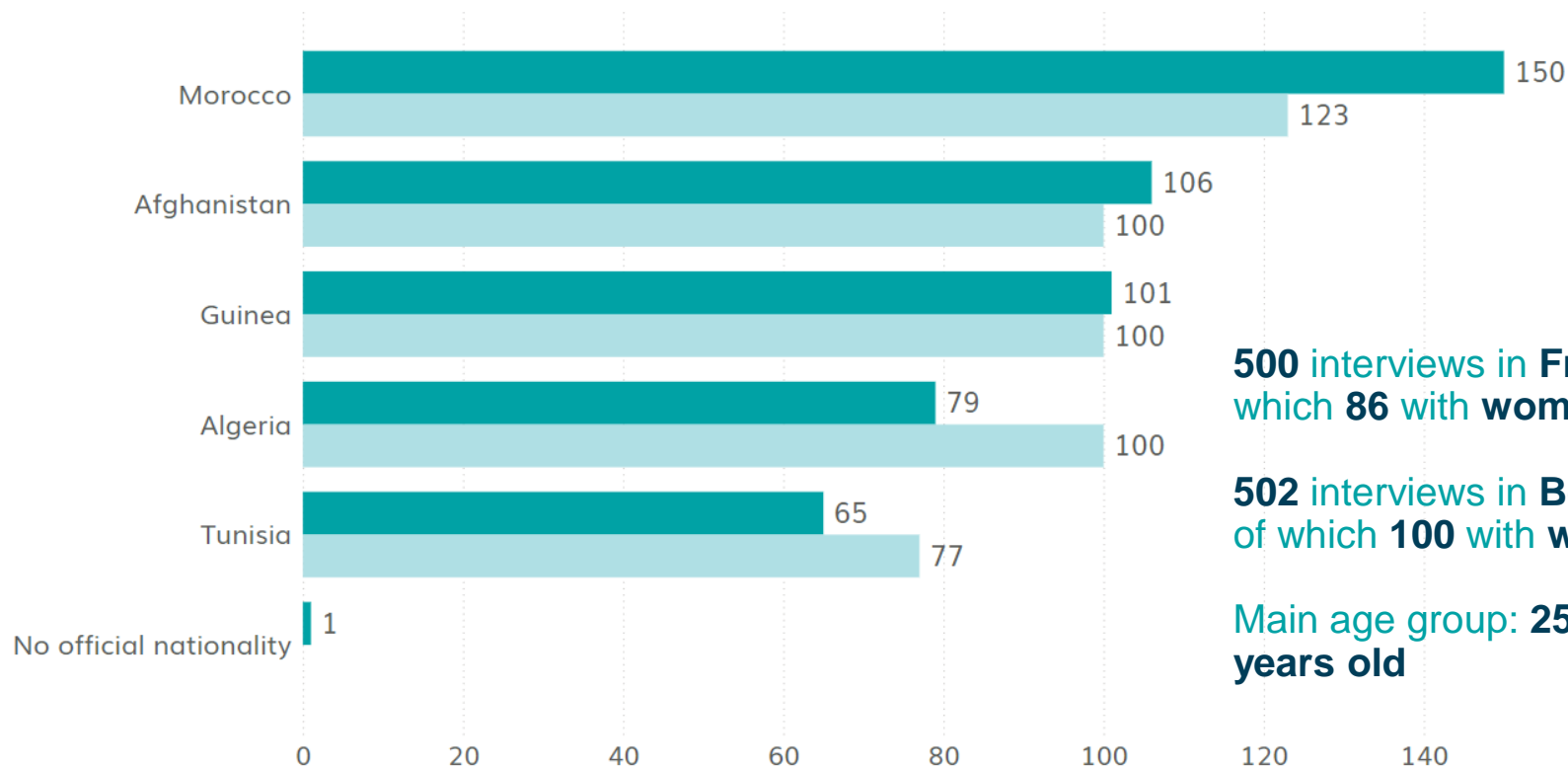
Results are **not generalizable** to larger groups

Demographic profile of the sample

(n=1 002)

What is your nationality?

Country of data collection ● Belgium ● France

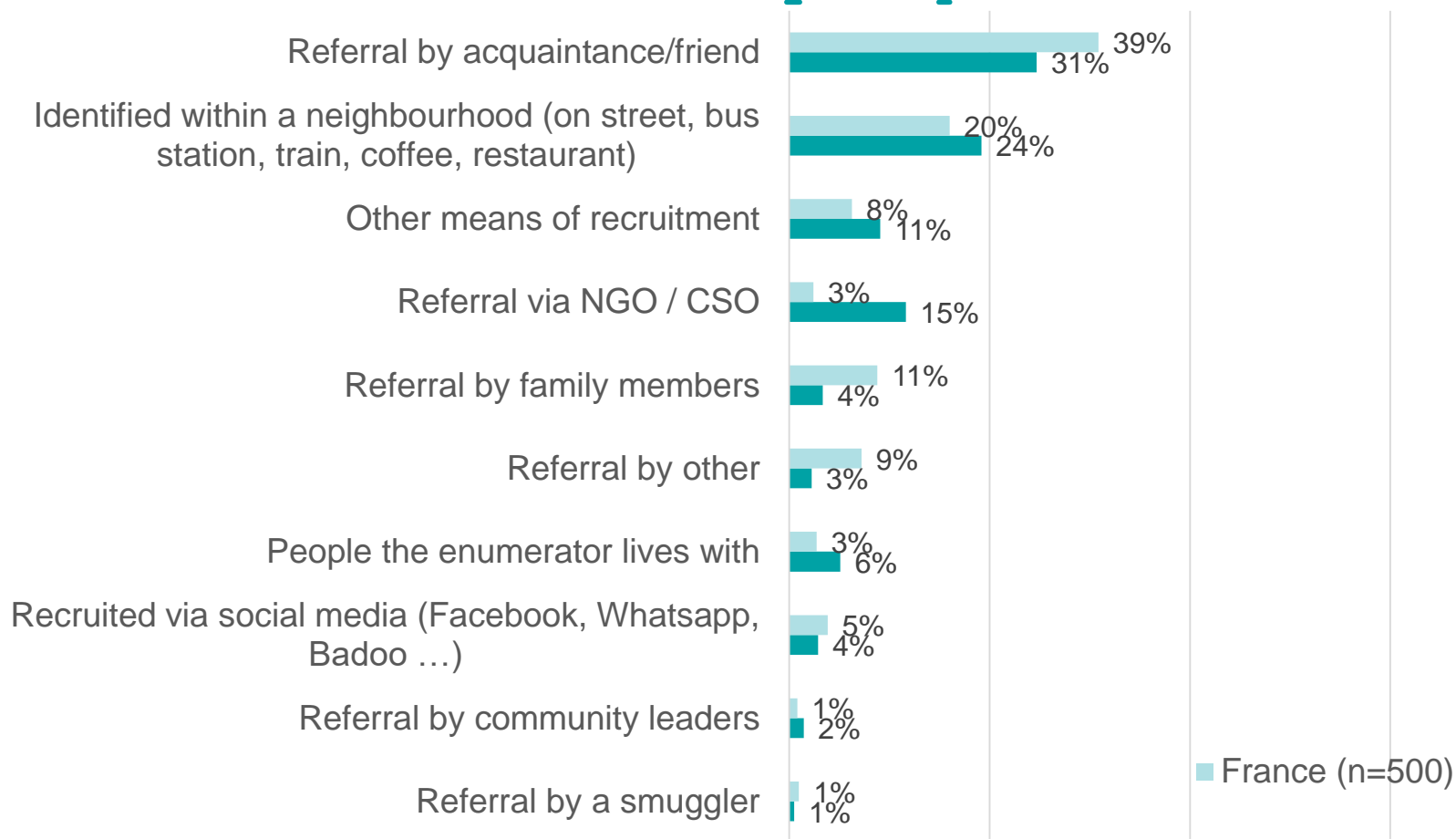


500 interviews in **France**, of which **86** with women

502 interviews in **Belgium**, of which **100** with women

Main age group: **25-35** years old

How did we identify respondents?



Key Finding 1: Irregularity as a 'fluid'
status

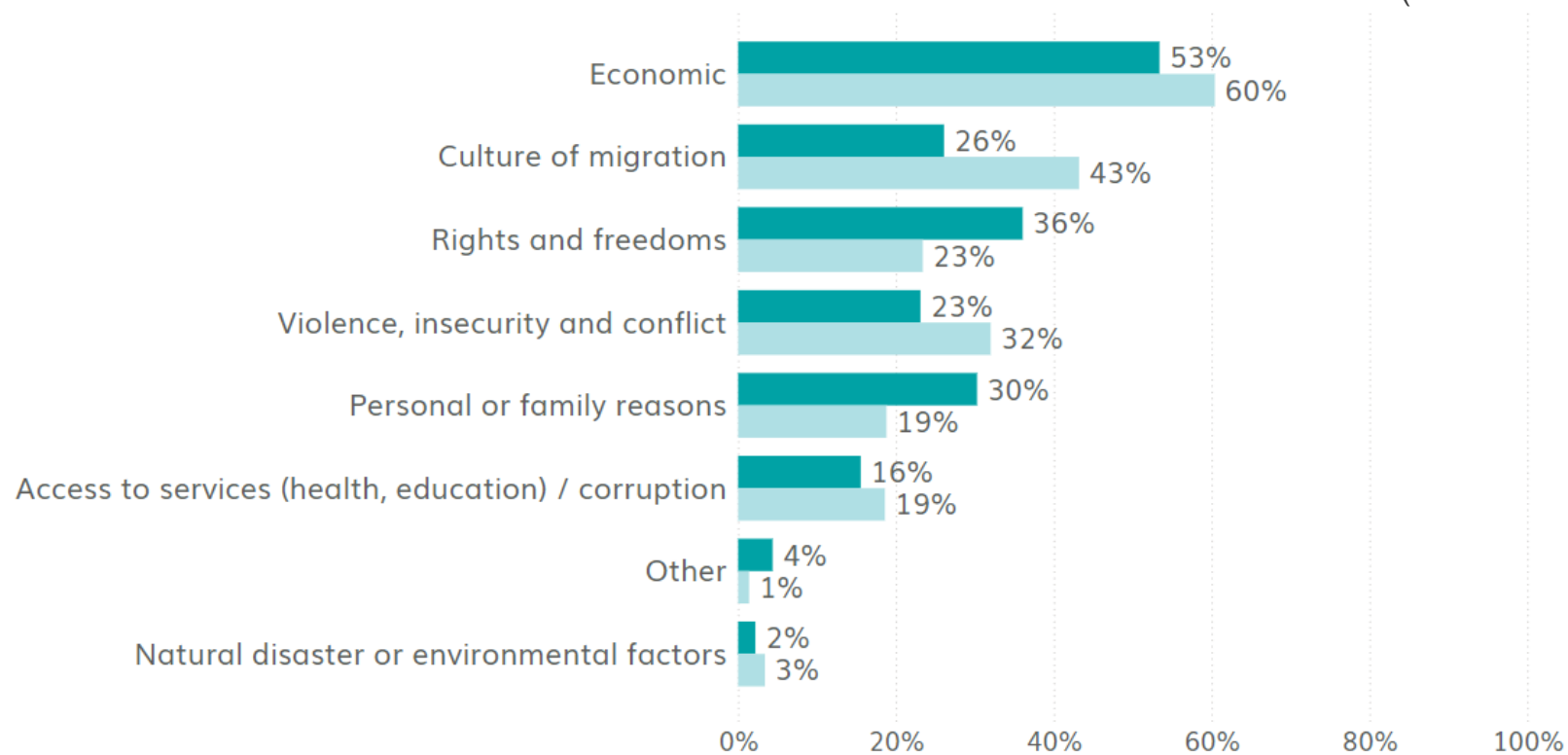
Multiple and overlapping factors shaped migrants' decisions to enter Europe through both regular and irregular pathways, with many subsequently seeking to regularise their status.

Migration drivers

Why did you leave the country you migrated from? (n=1,002)

● Belgium (n=502) ● France (n=500)

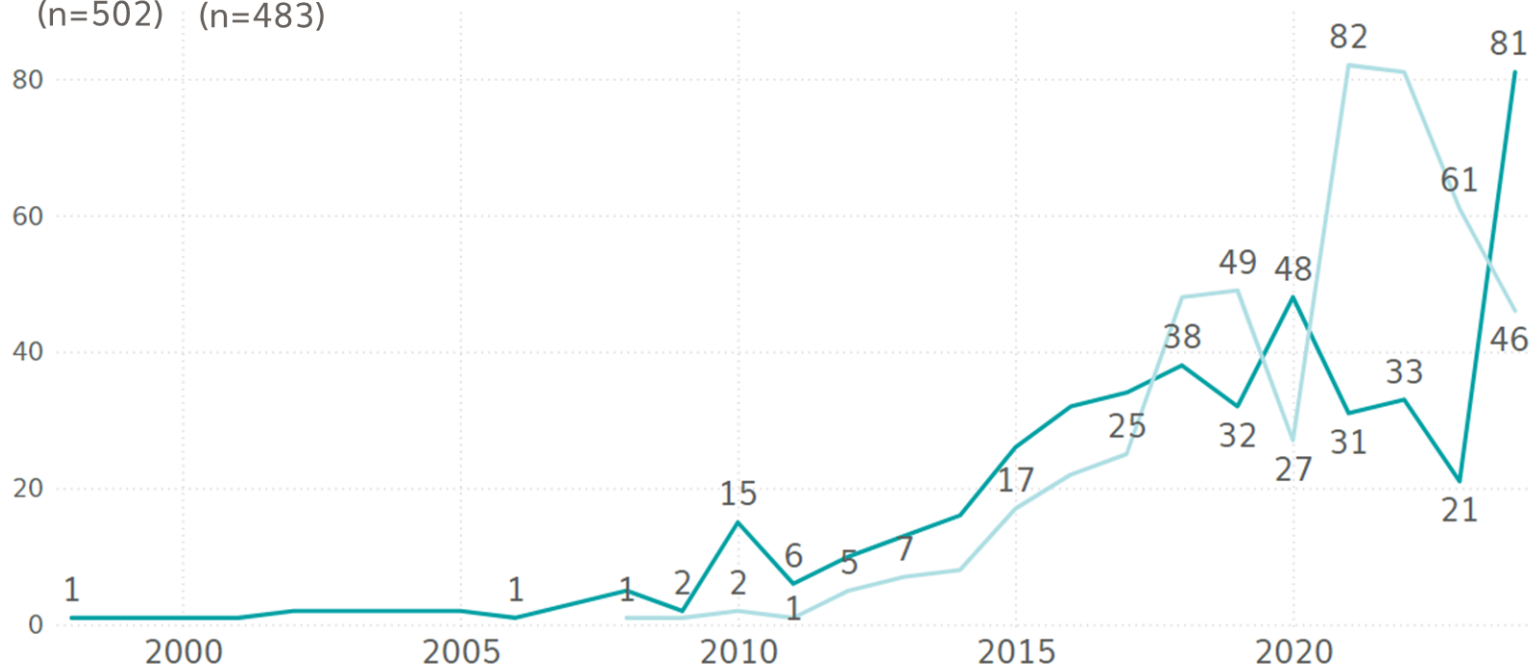
(Multi-select question)



Year of arrival in France/Belgium

Year of arrival in France / Belgium (n=985)

● Belgium (n=502) ● France (n=483)



Country of first arrival in Europe

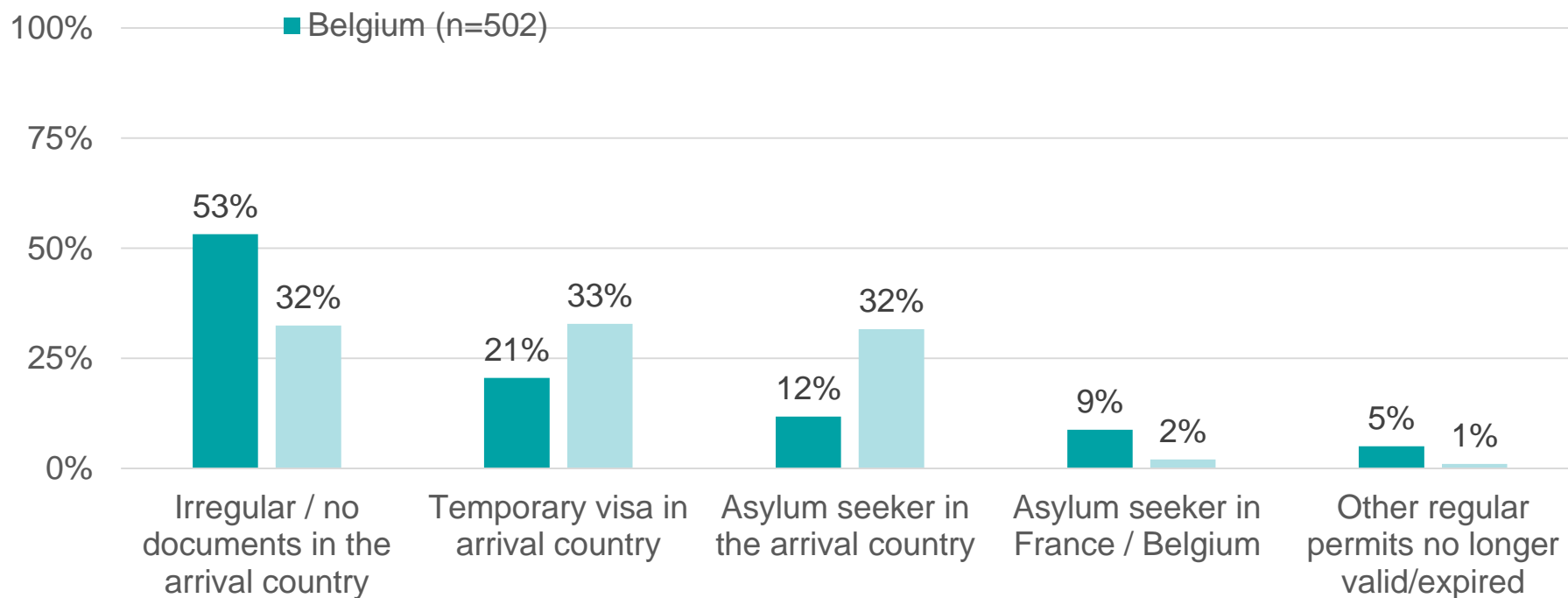
Which was your country of first arrival in Europe? (n=1,002)

Country of data collection ● Belgium ● France



Some became irregular after entering regularly in the EU

What was your status when you first entered in Europe? (n=1,002)



“I've been here for 10 years, and I've lost my residence permit and my job, and the prefecture doesn't want to renew my permit.

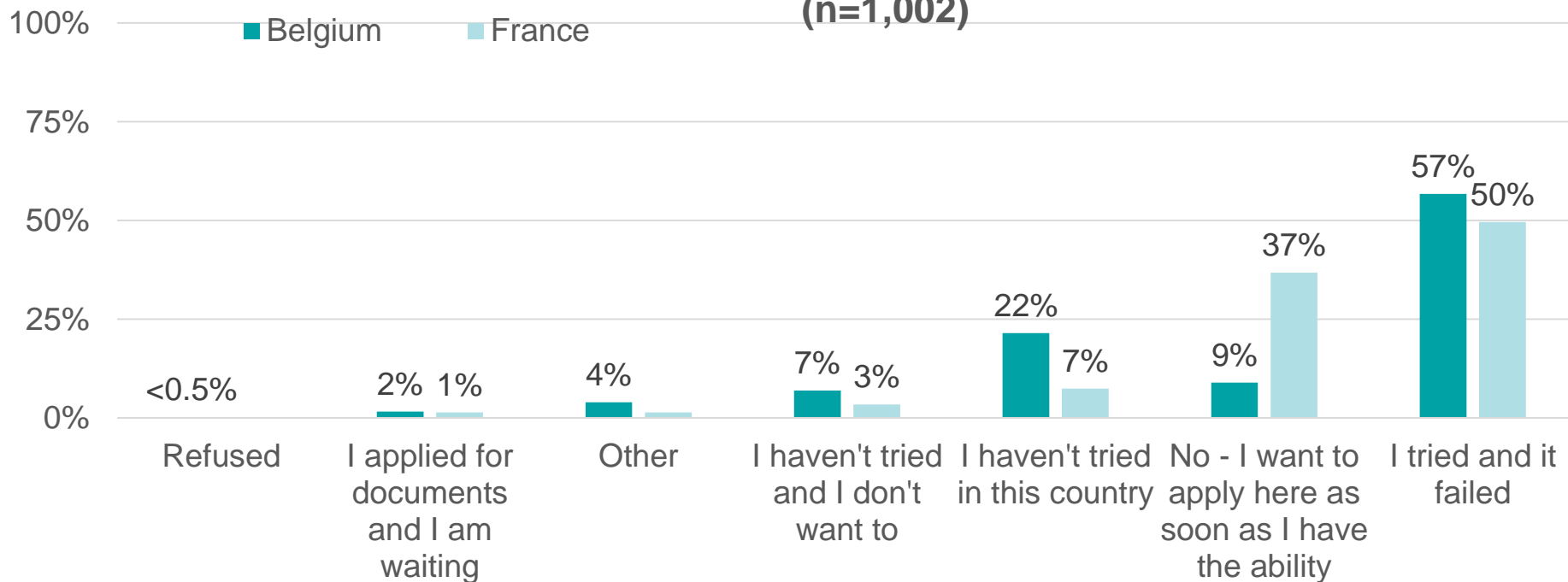
They sent me an OQTF [Obligation to leave the French Territory], which is a shame for this so-called human rights country. I don't feel protected.”

37-year-old Guinean man, interviewed in Athis-Mons (Paris Orly)

More than half tried to regularize their status and failed

Have you tried to obtain official documentation in this country?

(n=1,002)



“To get food, I need a work permit.

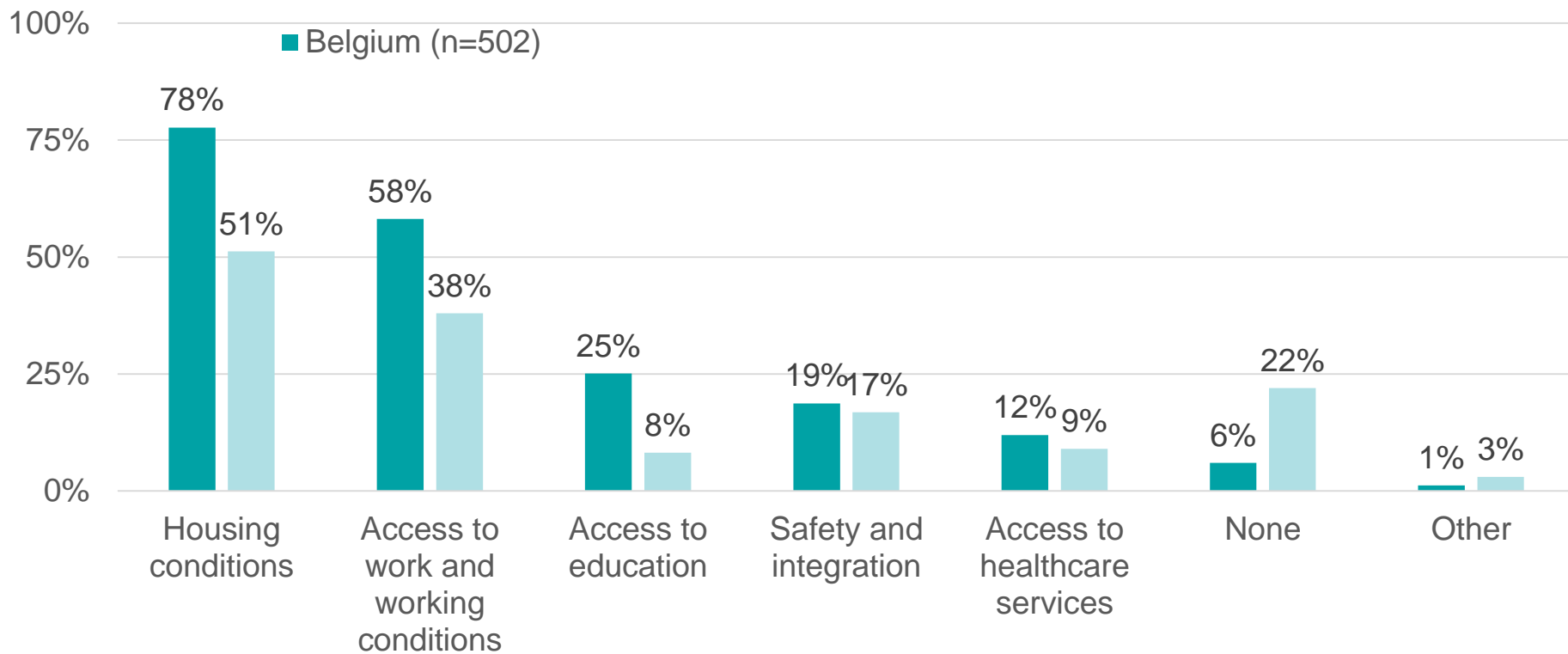
I contacted more than 15 lawyers, but no one helped me. Some of them asked me for 200€ in an hour appointment. The government is not working with non-documented immigrants. I am totally hopeless.”

27-year-old man Afghan man, interviewed in Paris

Key Finding 2: Irregularity undermines access to housing and employment

Limited access to documentation has restricted many migrants' ability to secure formal employment and stable housing, contributing to homelessness and social exclusion.

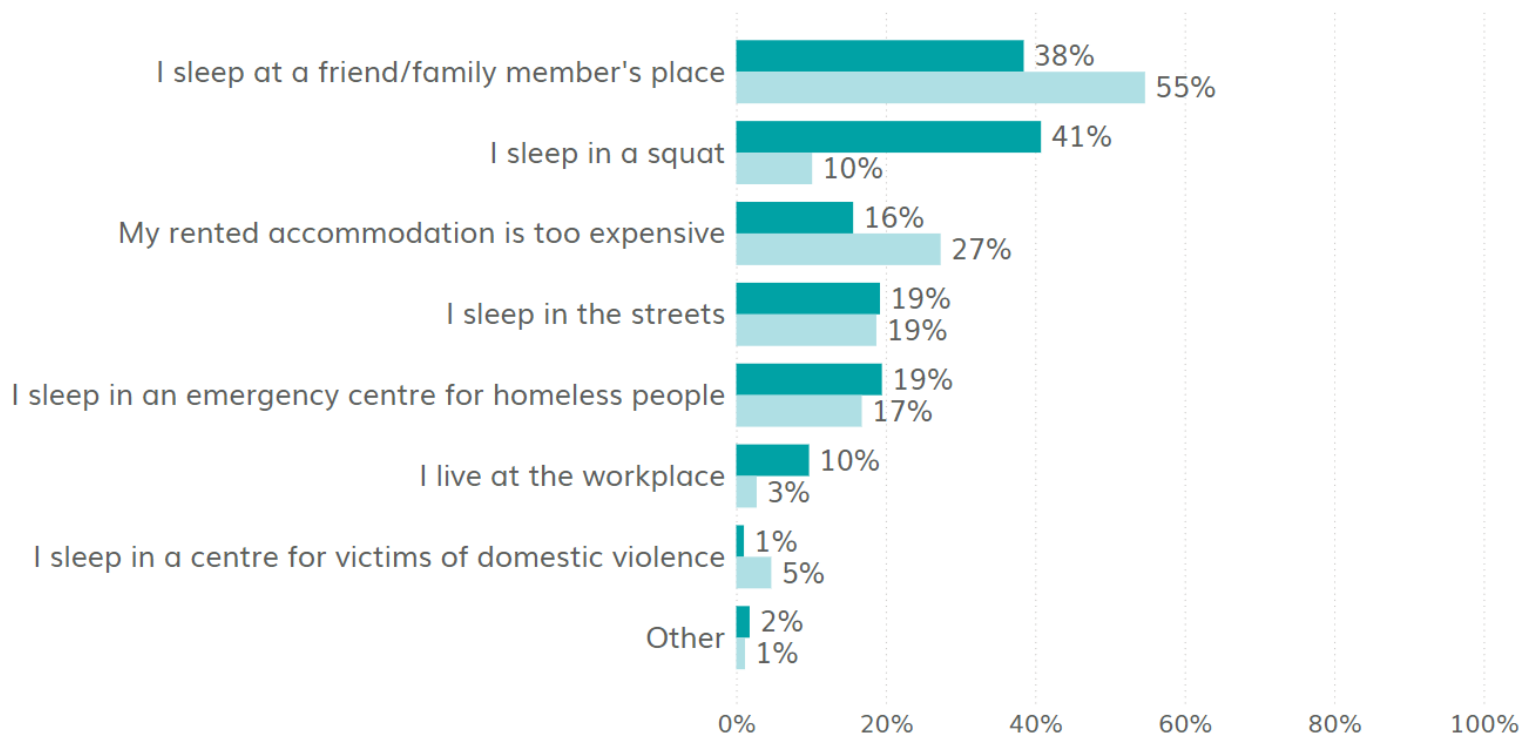
Among the following challenges, which one did you experience in the past month? (n=1,002; multi-select)



56% in Brussels, and 36% in Paris slept in emergency shelters and in the streets in the past month

What challenges with housing conditions did you experience in the past month? (n=646; multi-select)

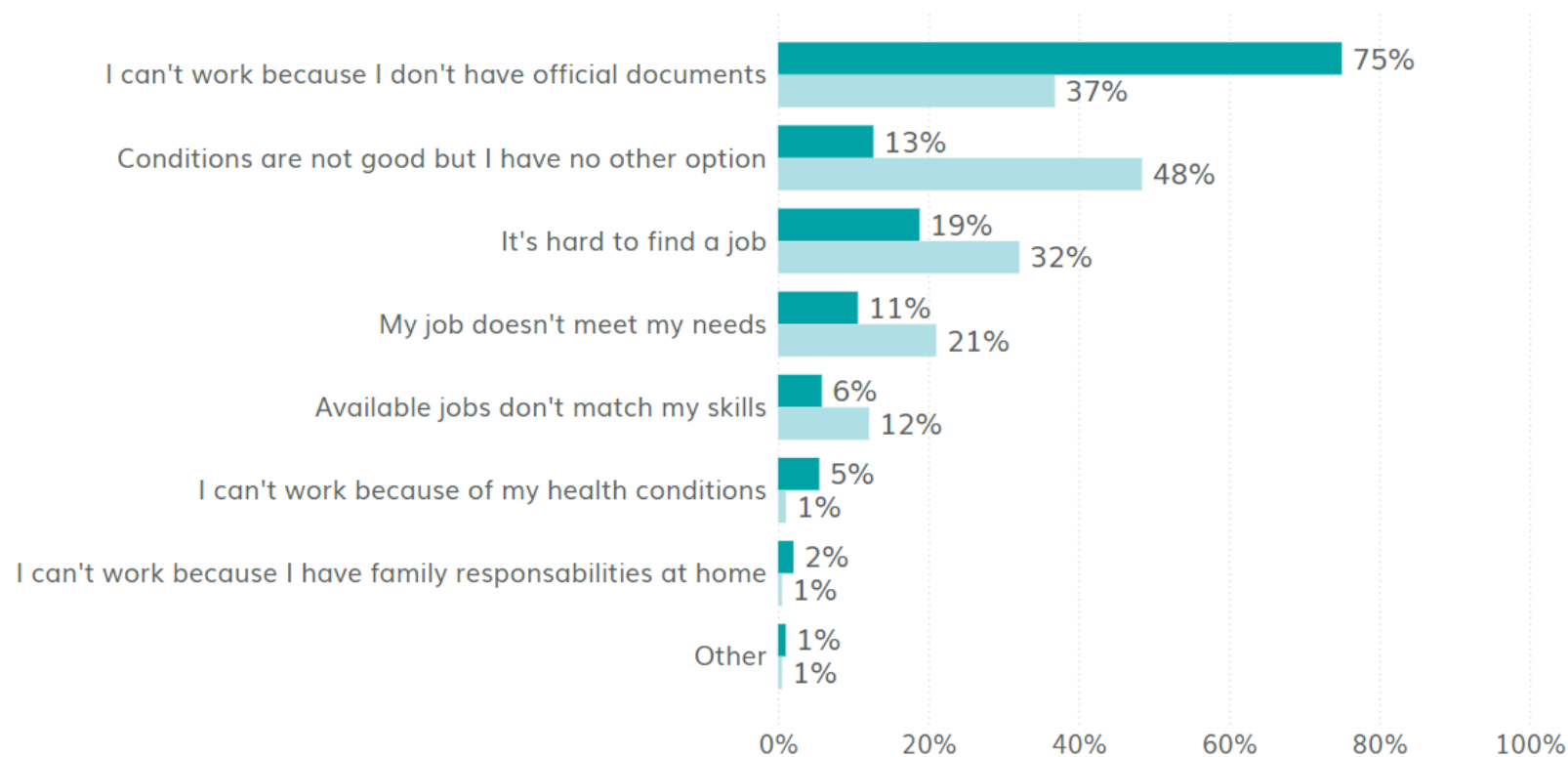
● Belgium (n=390) ● France (n=256)



Lack of documentation leading to unemployment and unfavourable working conditions

What challenges with access to work did you experience in the past month? (n=482; multi-select)

● Belgium (n=292) ● France (n=190)



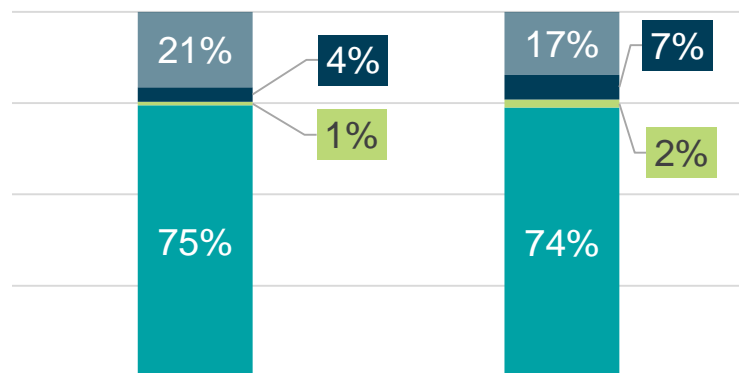
Key Finding 3: despite irregularity, very few planned permanent returns

Personal views on migration and conditions in the country of origin discouraged migrants from considering voluntary returns.

AVRR information is transmitted via solidarity networks, and reintegration assistance attract more interest than voluntary returns.

75% never considered returns, mainly due to conditions in the country of origin as well as perceptions about returns

Have you ever actively planned to return? (n=1,002)



Belgium (n=502) France (n=500)

- Yes - to visit and come back here
- Yes - to return permanently
- Refused
- No

Main obstacles preventing returns in Belgium (n=502; multi-select)

- Lack of rights and freedom in the country of departure (26%)
- Feeling of shame in returning home empty handed (23%)
- Lack of sufficient funds to go home (20%)
- Violence and conflict in country of departure (18%)
- Lack of employment in country of departure (16%)

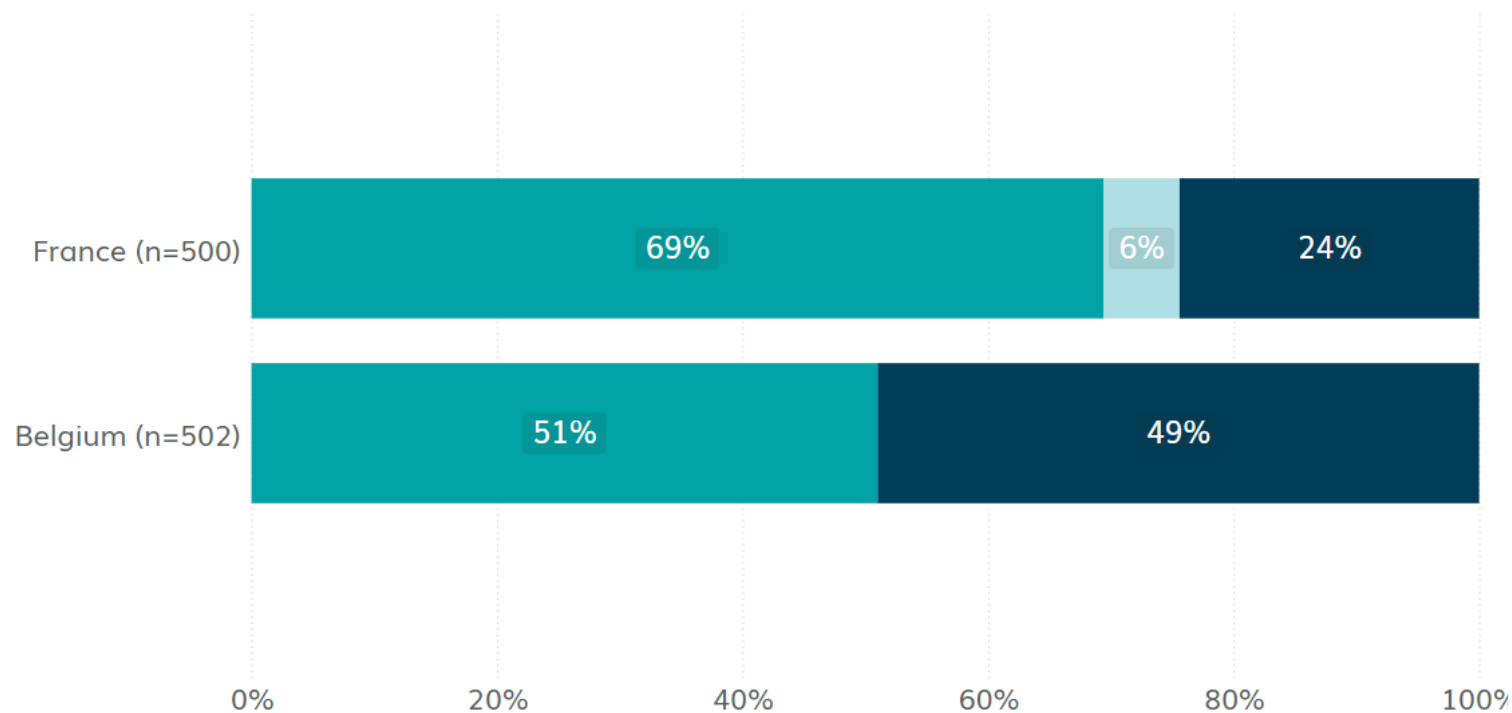
Main obstacles preventing returns in France (n=500; multi-select)

- Unwillingness to return (49%)
- Lack of sufficient money to go home (18%)
- Feelings of shame in returning home empty handed (14%)
- Lack of rights and freedom in the country of departure (10%)
- Violence and conflict (10%)

The majority had no awareness about AVR programmes

Have you heard about the assistance provided to people who want to return in voluntary return and reintegration programmes?(n=1,002)

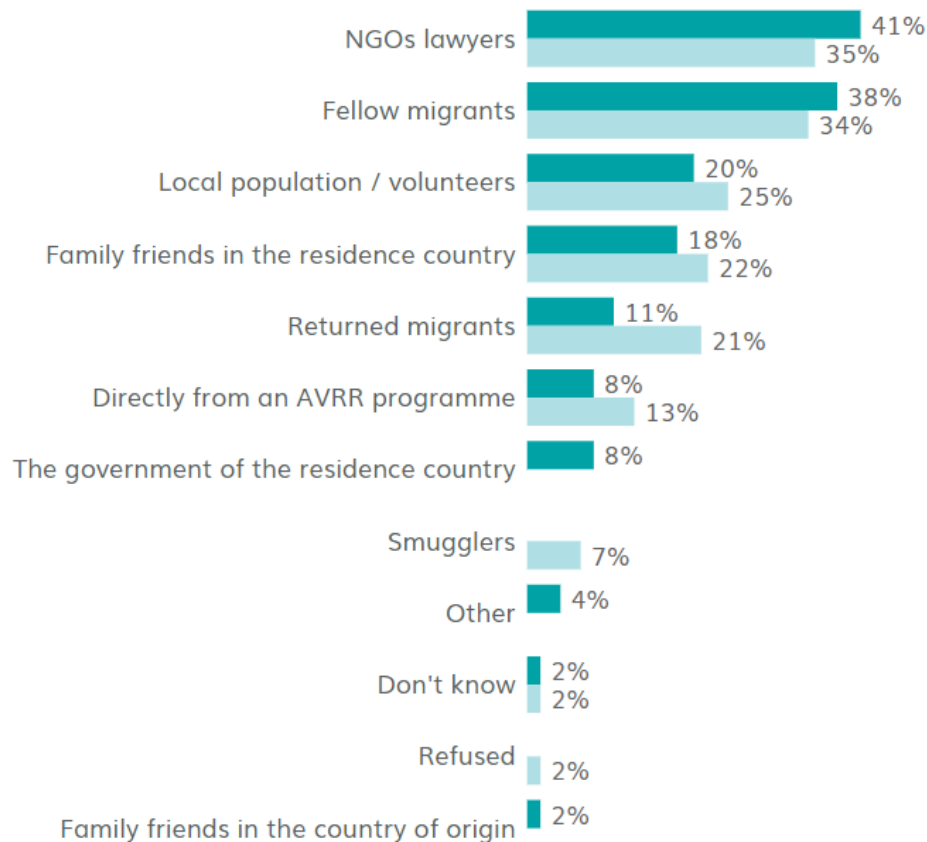
● No ● Refused ● Yes



Who did you get your information from?(n=367; multi-select)

● Belgium (n=245)

● France (n=122)

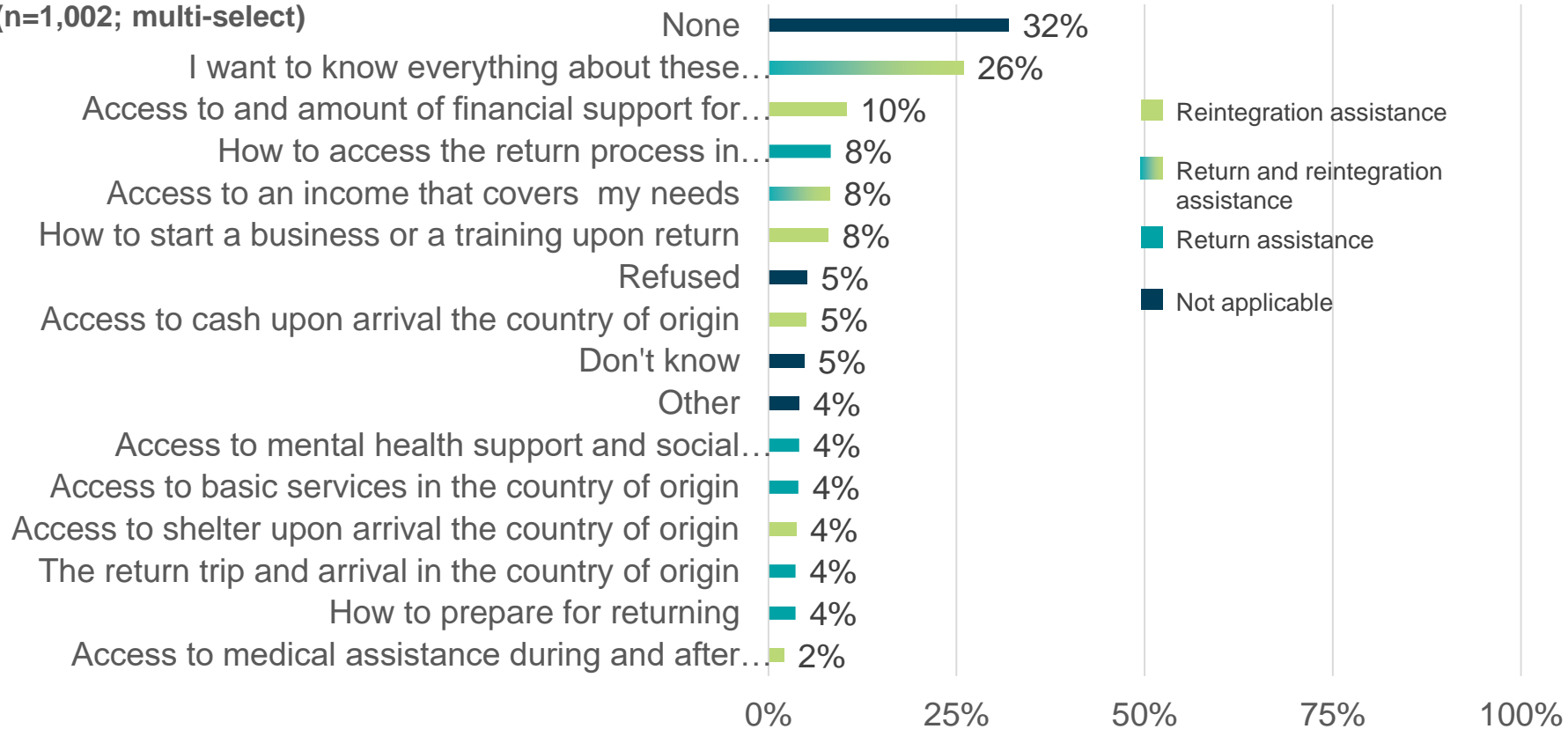


AVRR awareness came from legal support actors, fellow migrants, and solidarity networks in France and Belgium

Relatively more interest in reintegration assistance than in assisted returns

What information would you like to receive regarding assistance to return and reintegration?

(n=1,002; multi-select)



Conclusions

- Irregular status \neq recent irregular entry
- Irregularity compromises migrants' access to decent work and force them into further marginalization and over-reliance on emergency services
- Returns are rarely considered as an option, due to both contextual and personal factors
- Information about AVRR is channeled via formal and informal networks of solidarity, with more interest about reintegration support than return assistance



Mixed
Migration
Centre

Thank you
4M/1
Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative

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More information on the [Mixed Migration Centre](https://www.mixedmigration.org/)
website



Strengthening outreach and support for migrants in irregular stay

Findings from the 'Reaching Undocumented Migrants' (RUM) project
MPI Europe

27th March 2025, EMN Belgium Policy Event



Quick recap of MPI Europe's work under RUM:

- Three Community of Practice roundtable meetings
- One mapping of practices and existing evidence in the field
- One policy brief
- One indicator framework for frontline workers
- One webinar



What were the goals of these activities?

- build a strong community of practice (CoP)
- understand and analyse what counselling entails and how to define and measure success
- shape conversations and generate impact in the field



1. Build a strong community



1. BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY

| The CoP in numbers...

- 30+ participants attending each meeting (with a 85-90% consistency rate)
- 8 to 12 countries represented:

BE Belgium | DK Denmark | FI Finland | FR France | GR Greece | IT
Italy | LU Luxembourg | NL Netherlands | RS Serbia | ES
Spain | CH Switzerland | GB United Kingdom



1. BUILD A STRONG COMMUNITY

| The CoP...

- A diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from:
 - local governments
 - national governments
 - frontline workers (including psychologists)
 - civil society
 - academia



Fostering valuable cross-sector and cross-country collaboration



2. Understand what counselling entails



| Thematic CoP roundtable meetings:

To foster peer learning, identify and bridge knowledge gaps, and inform research

Each roundtable delved into a specific theme:

- *Understanding gaps in the field and defining success*
- *Reaching and counselling undocumented migrants with diverse mental health, trauma, or substance misuse issues*
- *The role of family and broader social ties in mobility decisions*



2. UNDERSTAND WHAT COUNSELLING ENTAILS

| A mapping of practices and gaps in the field informed by:

- insights from the roundtable discussions
- 24 bilateral interviews in 8 countries
- a thorough desk research

Aimed to identify what we know and do not know in the field (available data, challenges in measurement, profiles, factors influencing decision making, different approaches in outreach and counselling, etc)



| We identified some promising practices...

- **Investing in trust building and firewall mechanisms** (e.g. engaging civil society or people with lived experience/diaspora in outreach) is essential, but requires time
- **Expanding the scope of return counselling** to broader counselling (i.e., not just focus on return but broader legal perspectives to explain all possible options and generate consensus)
- **Introducing counselling methods that actively reach irregular migrants** where they are (e.g. through BBB, mobile teams, or outreach in health care centres)
- **Ensuring irregular migrants' stability precedes counselling** (i.e. need to get the target population out of survival mode and substance abuse before talking about their futures; providing a roof)
- **Securing multi-stakeholder involvement and coordination** (having coordination structures and clear roles in place)



2. UNDERSTAND WHAT COUNSELLING ENTAILS

...but we also realized there is much we do not know in the field, w/
a lot of diversity and fragmentation, and a limited evidence base

- The **size, profile, and behaviour** of the target population and **other factors** shaping their mobility patterns
- **Information on substance abuse and mental and physical conditions** and its impact on their engagement and mobility decisions
- The extent to which **mobility decisions** are made individually or collectively as a family or group
- The **reasons why some may choose to stay in a country with an irregular status**, or the
- The **performance of different outreach and counselling strategies**, the best methods to reach and engage different subgroups of the irregular migrants' population, in which contexts, and for what goals




3. Shape conversations and generate impact in the field




Policy Brief:

No One-Size-Fits-All: Outreach and Counselling for Irregular Migrants





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Funded by
the European Union

No One-Size-Fits-All
Outreach and counselling for irregular migrants

ISSUE BRIEF

JANUARY 2025

BY MARÍA BELÉN ZANZUCHI AND BERTRAND STEINER

Executive Summary

Irregular migration remains a pressing challenge for the European Union. Strategies to date have centred on preventing irregular entry via border management and returning those found to be staying irregularly within Member State territory. Heightened pressure on European governments to show results, however, has led policymakers and practitioners to consider other instruments, with a budding interest in outreach and counselling for irregular migrants living in or transiting through EU countries. Various actors have, unevenly, experimented with new methods to connect with this hard-to-reach population, particularly those who are not in contact with authorities, and to inform them about pathways out of irregularity—including assistance available to those who voluntarily return to their origin country, as well as in some cases options to regularise their status in the host country. Some initiatives take a broader approach, seeking to connect irregular migrants with essential services for which they are eligible, in part due to recognition that individuals have more capacity to plan for the future when their basic needs are met.

Various actors have, unevenly, experimented with new methods to connect with this hard-to-reach population.

The diversity of approaches in outreach and counselling—led by diverse stakeholders, targeting different groups, and with varying modes of operation—stems from the complex realities of irregular migration and fluctuating societal and political attention to this issue. The heterogeneity of irregular migrants (a group that includes people with a rejected asylum claim and a leave order, those who overstayed a visa, and unaccompanied minors, among others) has meant that many different actors have encountered or been mandated to work with this group. This includes national and local governments, civil-society organisations, and service providers, some of whom have adopted or developed strategies to connect and work with irregular migrants. Practices range from information provision via leaflets or posters, to setting up walk-in information centres, offering counselling services in emergency shelters, or running mobile outreach teams. Which tools are used and with which target audience reflects the—often very different—mandates of the organising entities. In turn, these varying target populations, approaches, and mandates, along with differences in case resolution options across Member States, often lead to a lack of coordination among stakeholders active in this space.

This patchwork of initiatives has led to uneven coverage and inconsistent results, with some groups overlooked while others are targeted by multiple, at





The image shows the cover of a report titled "No One-Size-Fits-All: Outreach and counselling for irregular migrants". The cover is primarily purple and white. At the top left is the logo for Migration Policy Institute (MPI) with the text "EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE" above it and "E U R O P E" below it. At the top right is the European Union flag with the text "Funded by the European Union" below it. The title "No One-Size-Fits-All" is in large white font, with the subtitle "Outreach and counselling for irregular migrants" below it. To the right of the title, the words "ISSUE BRIEF" are written vertically. Below the title, it says "JANUARY 2025" and "BY MARÍA BELÉN ZANZUCHI AND BERTRAND STEINER". The main body of the cover is white with a purple border at the bottom. The text "Executive Summary" is in purple. Below it is a paragraph of text. To the right of the text is a QR code. Below the QR code is a short paragraph of text.

The brief:

- takes stock of current efforts in the field: mapping the various approaches and actors
- highlights the "key ingredients" needed to design effective outreach and counselling initiatives
- provides recommendations to strengthen the evidence base



Dissemination - Reaching Irregular Migrants in Europe: Harnessing the Value of Counselling

23 January 2025 | Webinar

Jan Braat, Senior Policy Advisor, Migration, Diversity,
and Integration, Municipality of Utrecht, the Netherlands

Giulia Bruschi, Data and Research Project Manager
Europe, Mixed Migration Centre

Christina Jespersen, Senior Project Manager, Return
and Reintegration Facility

Jeroen Vandekerckhove, Head of International
Relations, Fedasil, Belgium

Recording available:
<https://shorturl.at/geBla>



Drafted a new monitoring and evaluation framework

- designed for frontline workers
- aims to systematize data collection in outreach and counselling, enabling a clearer understanding of the processes and measurement of their impact
- focused on three pillars...



A new monitoring and evaluation framework

...the pillars of the framework help document:

- (i) aspects of the service delivery processes: to help capture the different models (institutional frameworks, timing, formats) used counselling and the goals driving efforts
- (ii) the profiles of irregular migrants counselled: including sociodemographic and migration profiles, specific needs, intentions and barriers to return
- (iii) a comprehensive measurement of results: going beyond the number of returns to include the people reached, referred to other services, and more broadly supported in exiting irregularity



Thank you!

María Belén Zanzuchi: mzanzuchi@migrationpolicy.org

Policy Analyst, Migration Policy Institute Europe



Next steps for RRF: Support to Frontline Workers

Objectives:

- Foster collaboration between and amongst European representatives working in the field of voluntary return and reintegration as well as representatives of organisations working with the target group in a broader sense.
- Facilitate discussions on innovative ideas and common challenges related to outreach and counselling.
- Share good practices that will contribute to the daily work of frontline workers.



Thank you very much for your attention!

