

Fostering sustainable labour market integration of migrants **in Belgium:**

Skills matching policies and instruments

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The European Migration Network (EMN) is a Europe-wide network providing information on migration and asylum. The EMN consists of National Contact Points (NCPs) in the EMN Member (EU Member States except Denmark) and Observer Countries (Norway, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania), the European Commission and the EMN Service Provider (ICF).

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Foreword

This publication is based on Belgium's contribution to the comparative EMN study "Fostering sustainable labour market integration of migrants: skills matching policies and instruments". This publication was prepared by Elisabeth Kamm, Andreia Ghimis, Jo Antoons (Fragomen Consulting Europe) and Wout Van Doren and Pauline Chomel (Fragomen Belgium), under the coordination of the Belgian National Contact Point to the EMN (EMN Belgium).¹

The information provided in this publication is based on desk research complemented by input from key stakeholders in the field of labour market integration in Belgium. Contributions were received from the Flemish Government Agency for Home Affairs; the regional public employment services VDAB, Le Forem and Actiris; the regional integration centres CRVI Verviers and CRILUX; the Brussels integration authority Vivalis; the employer organisations VOKA; the municipalities and local integration agencies Atlas Antwerp and AMAL Ghent; the mentoring organisation Duo for a Job; and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Belgium and Luxembourg. All input was received in September 2025. Their insights were invaluable in providing a detailed overview of skills matching practices and challenges in Belgium.

(1)

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Definitions

Unless otherwise specified, and apart from terms relating to skills, the definitions are taken from the EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary², version 10.0. The definition of skills in turn are mostly based upon CEDEFOP.³

Beneficiary of international protection: A person who has been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection status.

Beneficiary of temporary protection: A person who enjoys temporary protection.

Employment: The exercise of activities covering whatever form of labour or work regulated under national law or in accordance with established practice for or under the direction and / or supervision of an employer.

Labour market integration: The extent to which migrants will achieve the same range of labour market participation as nationals of EU Member States by using their skills and realising their economic potential.

Labour matching: The process by which the skills and qualifications of a worker are compared with the requirements of a particular job vacancy, to establish whether they match wholly or partly.

Migrant: In the EU/EFTA context, a person who either:

- ▶ establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another EU/EFTA Member State or a third country; or
- ▶ having previously been usually resident in the territory of the EU/EFTA Member State, ceases to have their usual residence in the EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months.

Migrant worker: A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not nationals.

Qualification: The formal outcome of an assessment and validation process by a competent body determining that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.⁴

(2) European Commission, 'EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary', https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/europeanmigration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en, accessed 11 December 2025.

(3) CEDEFOP, 'Skills matching', <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index/skills-matching>, accessed 11 December 2025.

(4) European Commission, 'European Skills, Competences, Qualifications', <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/about-esco/escopedia/escopedia/skill>, accessed 11 December 2025.

(5) European Commission, 'European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations - Qualifications', <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/qualifications>, accessed 11 December 2025.

(6) Lise, J., Postel-Vinay, F., 'Multidimensional skills, sorting, and human capital accumulation' (2020), *Journal of Economic Surveys*, https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/documents/news/conferences/2017/0921-labor-supply-sortingwages/papers/lise_postel-vinay-multidimensional-skills-sorting-human-capital-accumulation.pdf, accessed 11 December 2025.

(7) Joss, S., Collings, D. G., McMackin, J., Dickman, M., 'A skills-matching perspective on talent management: Developing strategic agility' (2024), *Human Resource Management*, 63 (1), p. 141, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hrm.22192>, accessed 11 December 2025.

(8) The following definitions were developed by EMN Austria for the purpose of the EMN study based on existing research.

(9) Redmond, P., Brosnan, L., 'Skills mismatch in Europe', <https://www.trails-project.eu/skills-mismatch-in-europe/>, accessed 11 December 2025.

(10) Albert, C., Davia, M. A., Legazpe, N. (2021). Educational mismatch in recent university graduates. The role of labour mobility. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 26(1), p. 119.

(11) Somers, M. Cabus, S., Groot W., Maassen van den Brink, H. (2019), 'Horizontal Mismatch Between Employment And Field Of Education: Evidence From A Systematic Literature Review' *Journal of Economic Surveys* 33(2), 567-603.

Refugee: In the EU context, either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it, and to whom Art. 12 (Exclusion) of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive) does not apply.

Skill: The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills can be described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).⁵ The term skills covers generic (skills that are not specific to a particular job or industry, such as problem-solving or communication skills) and specialised (e.g. technical expertise required for certain professions) skills.⁶

Skills matching: A process by which individuals' skillsets are aligned with organisations' skill needs.⁷ In the context of this study skills matching also includes when the educational qualification and/or field of study is aligned with the job performed/recruited for.

Skills mismatch: A situation of imbalance between the skills and/or (educational) qualifications possessed by the workforce (supply) and those needed by the labour market (demand). The term as used in this report includes mismatch in terms of skills and educational qualification, as well as of one's field of study:

- ▶ **Vertical skill mismatching:** when an employee's skills or education level is either higher (overqualification) or lower (underqualification) in relation to their occupation, e.g. a nurse working as a nursing assistant. Vertical skills mismatching can manifest in the following ways:⁸
 - Overskilling: the individual has more skills than required to perform a job adequately.
 - Underskilling: the individual has less skills than required to perform a job adequately.
 - Overeducation: the individual has a level of education and training higher than that required to perform their job.
 - Undereducation: the individual has a level of education and training lower than that required to perform their job.
- ▶ **Horizontal skills mismatching:** when the individual's field of education or (vocational) training does not relate to field of the occupation they work in ('out-of-field employment'),⁹ e.g. a nurse working as a marketing manager.¹⁰ Horizontal mismatch is usually measured by comparing an employee's attended field of study and the field required for the job the employee holds.¹¹

Third-country national: Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).

Executive Summary

Effective skills matching, ensuring that migrants' qualifications and competences correspond to labour market needs, is essential for both economic growth and social inclusion.

Skills matching outcomes ([section 1](#)) between migrants and the native-born population in Belgium broadly reflect patterns observed across the European Union (EU) when it comes to overqualifications or a lack of successfully matched jobs. A distinguishing contextual factor is Belgium's highly educated labour market, which raises the bar for migrants. Hence, highly educated third-country nationals are more likely to work below their qualification level, while those with lower education often find employment in low-skilled sectors. Third-country women are particularly disadvantaged, with lower employment rates and higher inactivity rates. Migrants who obtained their higher education diploma abroad face high overqualification rates, while those with a Belgian degree fare much better.

The main **drivers of mismatch** ([section 2](#)) are limited language proficiency, slow and complex diploma recognition, and gaps in social capital and labour market knowledge. Gendered barriers, such as care responsibilities and limited childcare, weigh especially on third-country women. On the employer side, discrimination, risk aversion, and limited small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) capacity to recruit or integrate internationally trained talent add to the challenge.

Recent **policy debates** ([section 3](#)) reflect this, with a general focus away from attracting newcomers towards activating and working with those in the country. Another key debate centres on who should be primarily responsible for successfully integrating migrants and helping them to find jobs that match their skills: the migrants themselves or other actors?

Across the regions, several **policy developments** ([section 3](#)) have taken place. In the Flemish Region, civic integration has been more tightly linked to activation and the Dutch language proficiency target raised from A2 to B1 (orally). Pilot projects have tested early professional orientation and upgrading trajectories, and results are being mainstreamed. In September 2025, the Flemish Region also decided to make civic integration mandatory for third-country labour migrants. The Walloon Region has introduced stronger testing in its civic integration programme and is preparing faster validation procedures for competences in shortage occupations. The Brussels-Capital Region introduced a mandatory bilingual civic integration trajectory in June 2022.

According to stakeholder exchanges, persistent **challenges** ([section 4](#)) include limited in-work support (as most measures target unemployed/inactive individuals) and unequal access to services across the country.

Several **initiatives** ([section 5](#)) are showing positive results. This includes first-stop services, personal coordinated entry points and combined language and vocational training. Early experience from the activation pilots in the Flemish region show the value of sector-specific orientation and upgrading trajectories for those working below their education level. Mentoring initiatives are frequently reported as successful in building networks and strengthening migrants' confidence. Sectoral funds allow to offer traineeships and on-the-job training based on sector-specific needs.

Evidence and interviews highlight recurring **lessons** ([section 5](#)). These are also widely discussed in Belgium, in both the policy discourse and the academic literature. Language training has been reported to be most effective when offered in real-life contexts rather than only in classrooms, and when combined with employment and childcare support. Continuous guidance after job entry helps migrants progress toward employment corresponding to their skills. Exchanges with the local integration actors highlighted how SMEs often value intermediaries and hands-on support to manage recruitment and mentoring and to overcome initial doubts (on company fit, skills and capabilities) when thinking of hiring migrants. Various actors report the need for recognition to become faster and more flexible, for example via validation of skills embedded in integration and job search (or similar) support delivered through PES. A modular approach could be one approach to help ensure outcomes are not limited to "yes/no/partial" but instead give migrants a clear view of their current status and the concrete next steps needed. Finally, stronger coordination across Belgium's regions is reported as essential to provide equal opportunities for all migrants irrespective of location.

01 BELGIUM'S SITUATION IN THE EU: A COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOT



Skill mismatch refers to a situation of imbalance between the skills and/or qualifications possessed by the workforce and those needed by the labour market. Measuring mismatch is complex, as several dimensions are involved, such as vertical mismatch (over- or underqualification by education or skills) and horizontal mismatch (working outside one's field of study or training).

In Belgium, third-country nationals (TCNs) experience skills mismatch more frequently than the native-born population. This section presents key indicators to situate Belgium's migrant population and skills profile in a broader European context.

- ▶ **Migrant population.**¹² At the beginning of 2024, almost one in five residents in Belgium was born outside the country, representing approximately 2.3 million people. Overall, 8% were born in another EU country and 11,6% were born in a country outside the EU. In European comparison, Belgium has thus a similar share of migrants in its population to Germany (20%) or Sweden (21%), and slightly higher than Netherlands (16%) or France (14%).
- ▶ **Education level.**¹³ Belgium's labour force is among the most highly educated in Europe. In 2024, nearly half of all 25–54-year-olds held a tertiary degree, compared to 40% across the rest of Europe. Education levels, however, differ strongly by citizenship. Third-country nationals are evenly split across three broad education levels, with 36% having not gone further than lower secondary education and 36% tertiary educated, which is above the EU average for their peers. They are, however, lower educated than the native born where only 1 in 10 has gone no further than lower secondary education and one in two holds a tertiary degree. These patterns influence opportunities for adequate skills matching in the labour market.
- ▶ **Employment rate.**¹⁴ In 2024, employment rates among the 20-to-64-year-olds in Belgium are comparable to the EU average for the native-born, but migrants lag. Employment stood at around 77% for native-born men and 72% for native-born women, compared with approximately 68% for men and 50% for women born outside the EU. The gender gap in employment among third-country nationals is therefore considerably wider than among Belgian-born residents. Regional differences exist but generally remain within ten percentage points, both between migrants and native-born persons within the same region and among migrants across regions.¹⁵
- ▶ **Employment rate by formal education.**¹⁶ Overall higher levels of education are linked to overall higher employment rates, a pattern seen across Europe. In Belgium, migrants with at most secondary education are more likely to be employed than their native-born peers. However, the gap reverses at the top end: among 15–64-year-olds in 2024, the employment rate of tertiary-educated migrants was 79%, compared with 88% for the native-born. This gap is driven mainly by women, where the difference reaches 12 percentage points. This reversal of the rate in Belgium follows the same overall pattern as most European countries, with differences similar to Sweden and the Netherlands, but smaller than in France or Germany.

(12) Eurostat, *Population on 1 January by age group, sex and country of birth (migr_pop3ctb)*, extracted 23 September 2025.

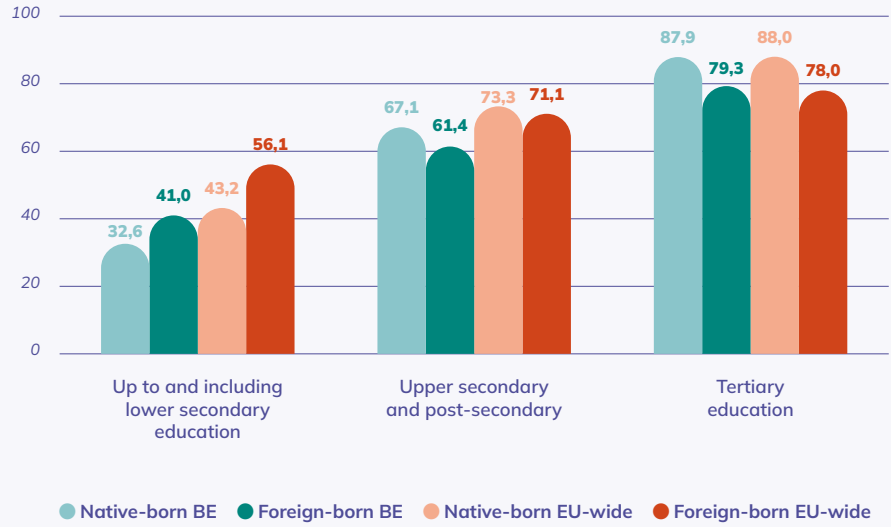
(13) Eurostat, *Population in private households by migration status, citizenship and educational attainment level (lfsa_pganedm)*, extracted 23 September 2025.

(14) Eurostat, *Employment rates by migration status, citizenship and educational attainment level (lfsa_erganedm)*, extracted 23 September 2025.

(15) Eurostat, *Employment rates by educational attainment level, country of birth and NUTS 2 region (lfst_r_lfe2emprc)*, extracted 25 September 2025.

(16) Eurostat, *Employment rates by migration status, citizenship and educational attainment level (lfsa_erganedm)*, extracted 23 September 2025.

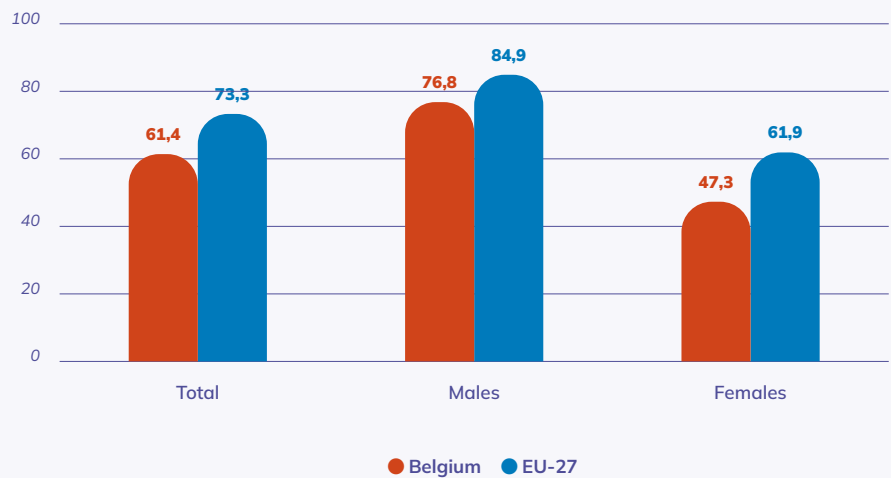
Employment rates by place of birth and educational attainment, Belgium and EU wide, 2024



(17) Eurostat, *Labour force participation rates by citizenship* (lfsa_argan), extracted 25 September 2025.

► **Labour force participation.**¹⁷ Another key factor influencing the labour market outcomes of migrants in Belgium is the labour force participation rate, which indicates whether a person is available to the labour market. In 2024, the labour force participation rate among the 20-to-64-year-olds of TCN women in Belgium was only 47%, the lowest among all EU countries (where the average was 62%), and contrasts with 74% for Belgian women. Among men, participation rates are broadly similar across groups (77% vs. 81%). These differences suggest that reaching and activating third-country women remains a particular challenge in Belgium.

Labour force participation rates of third-country nationals, by gender, 2024

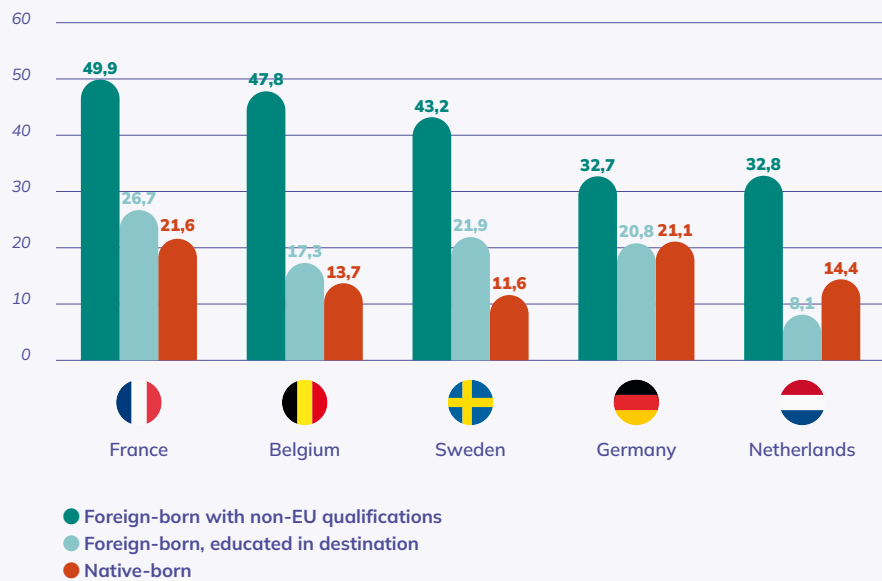


(18) The overqualification rate measures the share of highly educated workers (tertiary education, ISCED Levels 5–8) who are employed in low- or medium-skilled occupations (ISCO Levels 4–9). Source: OECD 2025, shared for the EMN Inform based on European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) 2023.

(19) OECD 2025, shared for the EMN Inform based on OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2023.

- ▶ **Overqualification.**¹⁸ As in most countries, migrants in Belgium are more likely to be overqualified for the job they do than the native-born. In 2024, close to two in five highly educated workers born outside the EU were employed in medium- or low-skilled occupations (38%). This share was roughly twice that observed among Belgian-born workers (20%). Belgium mirrors broader European patterns, with foreign-born workers, especially those born outside the EU, much more likely to be overqualified for their jobs.
- ▶ **Place of education and degree.**¹⁹ Overqualification is significantly higher for migrants with foreign degrees. Migrants who obtained their qualifications in Belgium face only a slightly higher overqualification rate than the native-born (17% vs. 14%). By contrast, nearly half (48%) of third-country-educated migrants are formally overqualified, and even EU-educated migrants also experience a disadvantage, with a rate of 26%.

Share of highly educated who work in a low or medium-skilled job, by place of qualification (2022-2023)²⁰



(20) The selection of countries in this graph provides contextual comparison while reflecting data availability constraints. The comparison includes Germany and Sweden due to their similar share of foreign-born populations, and France and the Netherlands due to geographical proximity. Aggregated EU-wide data are not available.

- ▶ **Migrants' own perspectives.** When asked directly, survey data among migrants in Belgium from 2021 highlights that, overall, migrants do not report exceptionally high barriers to finding suitable jobs in European comparison. The main self-reported obstacle is the lack of language skills, followed by the self-assessment that no suitable job is available.²¹ Finally, as elsewhere in the EU, about 29% of third-country nationals highlight that they feel they have the skills for more demanding work than their current job requires, a share about 8 percentage points higher than among the native-born.²² This perceived underutilisation of skills suggests that formal qualifications alone do not fully capture the barriers to achieving adequate employment.

This statistical overview shows that Belgium's skills matching outcomes are broadly in line with those seen across the EU. One contextual factor that stands out, however, is the highly educated labour market. Migrants face both objective mismatch (overqualification, inactivity) and subjective mismatch (feeling over-skilled). The outcomes are not evenly distributed: migrants with low education often have higher employment rates than their native-born peers, whereas among the highly educated the reverse is true, with migrants, especially women, less likely to be employed. In addition, women born outside the EU, are most affected by inactivity.

(21) Eurostat, *Foreign-born population in private households by main obstacle to get a suitable job, country of birth and educational attainment level (2021)*, (lfso_21obst01), extracted 25 September 2025.

(22) OECD 2025, shared for the EMN Inform based on OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2023. Percentage of respondents aged 16 to 64 who feel that they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties than those required to perform in current job.

02 DRIVERS OF SKILLS MISMATCH



Based on the statistical overview, this section presents available evidence as to why we observe these differences in Belgium. It investigates challenges migrants face in securing employment that matches their education and skills. This is reflected in both vertical mismatch [V] (overeducation or underemployment) and horizontal mismatch [H] (working outside one's trained field).

The literature identifies a combination of factors that drive these mismatches. A recent systematic review of studies in Belgium identifies discrimination, human and social capital gaps, and institutional rigidities as the main drivers of this persistent disadvantage.²³ The below synthesises this literature and evidence from the expert interviews, organised into migrant-specific ([2.1](#)) and employer/institutional drivers ([2.2](#)), with a final section outlining factors due to the unique labour market situation in Belgium ([2.3](#)).

(23) Devos, L., Lippens, L., Lens, D., Rycx, F., Volral, M. and Baert, S. (2025) 'Labour market disadvantages of citizens with a migration background in Belgium: A systematic review', *De Economist*, 173, pp. 121–175.

(24) Jacobs, V., Mahy, B., Rycx, F., & Volral, M. (2021). Over-education among immigrants: the role of demographics, time, and firm characteristics. *Applied Economics*, 53(1), 61–78.

(25) Fays, V., Mahy, B., Rycx, F. and Volral, M. (2021) 'Wage discrimination based on the country of birth: Do tenure and product market competition matter?', *Applied Economics*, 53(13), pp. 1551–1571.

(26) Gorodzeisky, A. and Semyonov, M. (2017) 'Labor force participation, unemployment and occupational attainment among immigrants in West European countries', *PLoS ONE*, 12(5).

(27) Binst, B., Bircan, T., Pineda Hernández, K., Purkayastha, D., Rycx, F. and Volral, M. (2023) *Personen met een migratieachtergrond naar gender op de arbeidsmarkt in België*. Brussel: Koning Boudewijnstichting.

(28) Piton, C. and Rycx, F. (2021) 'A broken social elevator? Employment outcomes of first- and second-generation immigrants in Belgium', *De Economist*, 169(3), pp. 319–365.

(29) Kanas, A. and van Tubergen, F. (2014) 'The conditional returns to origin-country human capital among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in Belgium', *Social Science Research*, 46, pp. 130–141.

(30) OECD (2023) *Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Flanders: Working Together for Integration*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(31) Idem.

(32) Lens, D., Marx, I. and Vujčić, S. (2018) *Does migration motive matter for migrants' employment outcomes? The case of Belgium*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 11906. Bonn: IZA.

(33) Kanas, A. and van Tubergen, F. (2014) 'The conditional returns to origin-country human capital among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in Belgium', *Social Science Research*, 46, pp. 130–141.

(34) Verhaeghe, P.-P., Van der Bracht, K. and Van de Putte, B. (2015) 'Inequalities in social capital and their longitudinal effects on the labour market entry', *Social Networks*, 40, pp. 174–194.

2.1. Migrant-Specific Drivers

Imperfect transferability of human capital (= migrant origin) [V]. Foreign-acquired education and work experience abroad are often undervalued in Belgium, as in many other countries. Third-country nationals originating from Asia and North Africa are more likely to be employed below their qualification level than the native-born.²⁴ They also face lower wage returns, though tenure has a moderating effect.²⁵ Third country-born migrant men are less likely to work in high-status jobs compared to the native-born.²⁶

Language proficiency [V/H]. Limited language proficiency is frequently cited in the literature as a key factor associated with skill mismatch. In a multilingual country like Belgium, this impact also varies by region and language. In the Flemish Region, only 40–50% of migrants report more than basic Dutch proficiency, compared with 70–75% reporting intermediate French in the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region.²⁷ Higher language proficiency increases returns to origin-country work experience and improves employment access.²⁸ Migrants are better able to benefit from their origin country work and education experience when they enter the labour market of the same language. For example, migrants from former French-speaking colonies benefit more from their experience/education in finding employment in French-speaking areas than in Dutch-speaking ones.²⁹ Overall, the literature suggests that provided the overall lower level of language skills in Dutch and the demand of high-level Dutch proficiency of many employers, this has been highlighted as a particularly significant factor in the Flemish Region.³⁰

The primary channel of arrival (= migration category) [V/H]. Employment outcomes differ by the primary reason for migration. Labour migrants (especially those with a job arranged before arrival) and student migrants perform far better than refugees or migrants reuniting with their family.³¹ Beneficiaries of international protection are more likely to work in temporary jobs and below their skill level, while beneficiaries of family reunification face low employment rates and higher overqualification.³²

Social networks (= social capital) and sectoral channelling [H]. Co-ethnic networks provide initial job access but channel migrants into specific, often narrow occupational niches. For example, Turkish and Moroccan migrants relying on ethnic networks are more likely to be concentrated in low-skill or clustered sectors, limiting mobility into jobs aligned with their training.³³ Broader evidence shows that reliance on co-ethnic ties constrains occupational mobility compared to the native-borns' wider networks.³⁴

(35) Kil, T., Neels, K., Wood, J. and de Valk, H.A. (2018) 'Employment after parenthood: Women of migrant origin and natives compared', *European Journal of Population*, 34, pp. 413–440.

(36) Maes, J., Wood, J. and Neels, K. (2019) 'Early labour market trajectories of intermediate and second generation Turkish and Maghreb women in Belgium', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 61, pp. 65–78.

(37) Wood, J. and Neels, K. (2017) 'Transition to parenthood and labour market participation among migrants in Belgium', *Demographic Research*, 37, pp. 1493–1524.

(38) Maes, J., Wood, J. and Neels, K. (2019), op. cit., pp. 65–78.

(39) Gorodzeisky, A. and Semyonov, M. (2017) 'Labor force participation, unemployment and occupational attainment among immigrants in West European countries', *PLoS ONE*, 12(5).

(40) Maes, J., Wood, J., Marynissen, L. and Neels, K. (2022) 'The gender division of paid work over family formation: Variation by couples' migration background', *Advances in Life Course Research*, 53, 100497.

(41) Kasztan Flechner, T., Neels, K., Wood, J. and Biegel, N. (2022). 'Exploring Women's Uptake of Active Labour Market Programmes: The Role of Household Composition Across Migrant Origin Groups.' *Social Inclusion*. 10. 117-131.

(42) Lens, D., Marx, I., Oslejova, J., & Mussche, N. (2023). Nice work if you can get it: Labour market pathways of Belgian service voucher workers. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 33(1), 117-131.

(43) Lens, D., Van Looy, K. and Marx, I. (2025) 'Is temporary employment a stepping stone for unemployed immigrants?', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 100, 101092.

(44) OECD (2023), op. cit.

(45) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, CRILUX, CRI Verviers, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Belgium and Luxembourg, September 2025.

Gender [H/V]. Gendered barriers are a major driver of mismatch and underemployment, particularly for third-country women.³⁵ Female migrants face weaker labour market outcomes than men even before childbirth, suggesting that disadvantage cannot be reduced to family status alone.³⁶ Nevertheless, studies suggest that family formation and childcare responsibilities may further reinforce these patterns: many migrant women exit or downgrade careers after childbirth, often moving into care or service sectors regardless of qualifications.^{37,38} Some of these differences may reflect household preferences, making it difficult to isolate policy effects.^{39,40}

Household composition has also been shown to shape migrant women's uptake of occupation-specific training in the Flemish region: women with a partner of non-migrant origin show higher uptake than women with a migrant origin partner or single women, and presence of children in the household reduces women's training participation.⁴¹

When activation policies are applied, there is evidence of lock-in effects. For example, the Service Voucher Scheme – a publicly subsidised system for household services – was created with the dual aim of creating entry-level and stepping stone jobs and reducing informal work, and workers employed under the scheme enjoy extensive labour and social security rights. However, it has been shown that a very significant number enter from steady employment at odds with its objectives. It is further found to offer limited upward mobility, thus partly locking highly educated migrant women in cleaning roles.⁴² Recent evidence also shows that temporary employment is less effective as a steppingstone for migrant women than for men, underscoring persistent gendered barriers to labour market integration.⁴³

Age and age at arrival. Younger migrants typically achieve better labour market integration outcomes, especially when educated in the host country. This overall pattern is also visible in Belgium. Data for the Flemish Region suggests that migrants arriving at younger ages are much more likely to be employed than those arriving after 45 years of age. The gap between older (46-55) and younger arrivals grows over time for both men and women. Among women, however, those arriving at ages 20-25 show weaker early outcomes, potentially due to childbirth and care responsibilities.⁴⁴

Income first and remittance-related decisions. Some migrants accept any available job in order to support their family both in Belgium and abroad. This has been examined in broader European studies, but not specifically for Belgium. The decision to work first, often in any kind of job, has however been highlighted in the expert interviews conducted for the EMN study and this national report.⁴⁵

Digital skills and sector-specific technologies [V/H]. Employers, especially in IT and technical sectors, often highlight gaps between the technologies migrants are trained in abroad and those used in Belgium. In addition, limited digital literacy can hinder not only job performance and advancement but also initial job search and effective engagement with online job search tools, digital recruitment channels, and publicly or privately provided employment support services.⁴⁶

Labour market knowledge gaps [H]. While often highlighted as a factor in occupational mismatch, there is no Belgium-specific scientific research that clearly identifies this mechanism. It has been flagged by practitioners, however.⁴⁷

Self-confidence [V/H]. A final individual driver of skills mismatch, highlighted in several expert and practitioner interviews, is the decline in self-confidence among migrants following repeated unsuccessful attempts to secure suitable employment.⁴⁸ Prolonged job searches, recurrent rejections, and experiences of undervaluation can erode individuals' belief in their own competencies and professional worth. This reduced self-efficacy may, in turn, discourage migrants from applying for positions that match their qualifications or from pursuing upskilling opportunities. While such psychological effects are not unique to migrants, they are often amplified by the challenges of adapting to a new labour market, unfamiliar recruitment norms, and perceived or actual discrimination.

(46) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris, Le Forem, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Belgium and Luxembourg, September 2025.

(47) Stakeholder consultations with Atlas Antwerp, AMAL Ghent, CRILUX, CRI Verviers, and IOM Belgium and Luxembourg, September 2025.

(48) Stakeholder consultations with Atlas Antwerp, VDAB, and IOM Belgium and Luxembourg, September 2025.

2.2. Employer and Institutional Drivers

(49) Binst, B., Bircan, T., Pineda Hernández, K., Purkayastha, D., Rycx, F. and Volral, M. (2023) Personen met een migratieachtergrond naar gender op de arbeidsmarkt in België. Brussel: Koning Boudewijnstichting.

(50) Chakkar, S. and De Cuyper, P. (2019) De gepercipieerde waarde van diploma-erkenning op de arbeidsmarkt: Een analyse vanuit een werkgevers- en aanvragersperspectief. Leuven: HIVA-KU Leuven.

(51) De Cuyper, P., De Rick, K., Vandermeersch, H., Reidsma, M. and Vermeersch, L. (2019) @level2work: naar een job op niveau voor hoogopgeleide anderstalige nieuwkomers. Lessen uit de AMIF proeftuinen. Leuven: HIVA-KU Leuven.

(52) OECD (2023), op. cit.

(53) OECD (2025) Improving the Economic Migration Framework to Attract and Retain Qualified Talent in Flanders. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(54) Jacobs, V., Mahy, B., Rycx, F., & Volral, M. (2021). op. cit., 61–78.

(55) Fays, V., Mahy, B., Rycx, F. and Volral, M. (2021) 'Wage discrimination based on the country of birth: Do tenure and product market competition matter?', *Applied Economics*, 53(13), pp. 1551–1571.

(56) Baert, S. and De Pauw, A.-S. (2014) 'Is ethnic discrimination due to distaste or statistics?', *Economics Letters*, 125(2), pp. 270–273.

(57) Deros, E., Pepermans, R. and Ryan, A.M. (2017) 'Ethnic discrimination during résumé screening: Interactive effects of applicants' ethnic salience with job context', *Human Relations*, 70(7), pp. 860–882.

(58) Baert, S., Albanese, A., du Gardein, S., Ovaere, J. and Stappers, J. (2017) 'Does work experience mitigate discrimination?', *Economics Letters*, 155, pp. 35–38.

Recognition of qualifications and licensing [V/H]. Recognition procedures in Belgium are described as slow, costly and unpredictable. Only around one-third of third-country higher education graduates apply for recognition, and fewer than half obtain full or partial equivalence.⁴⁹ Employers have been reported to undervalue even recognised diplomas⁵⁰ and formal recognition often has low market value outside regulated professions.⁵¹ Downgrading of foreign qualifications (such as when a master's degree is only recognised at bachelor's level) and bureaucratic procedures discourage both migrants and employers. Licensing rules in regulated professions (e.g. healthcare, teaching) have been observed to direct skilled migrants toward other sectors, contributing to horizontal or vertical mismatches.^{52, 53}

Statistical discrimination [V/H]. Employers often rely on group-level stereotypes about migrants' education or productivity. This so-called statistical discrimination contributes to why migrants from Asia and Africa are more likely to be educated to a higher formal level than required for their jobs, and experience wage discrimination, in many countries and likewise in Belgium. There is mixed evidence of "learning" on employer side, such as when these penalties narrow over time with longer tenure in the job⁵⁴ or decrease in highly competitive markets where discrimination and the resulting skill waste is more costly.⁵⁵

Taste-based discrimination [V/H]. This describes personal biases or preferences by employers, co-workers, or customers against working with ethnic minorities (including native-born), regardless of their actual skills or productivity. In practice, this limits access to roles that match migrants' qualifications in Belgium.⁵⁶ Résumé experiments show that applicants with darker skin tones were rated less suitable for client-facing jobs, even when qualifications were equal.⁵⁷ Correspondence experiments in Belgium confirm that candidates with identical qualifications, but foreign-perceived names receive fewer callbacks, though work experience reduces the gap.⁵⁸

Rigid labour market institutions [V]. Belgium's labour market institutions have been described in the literature as limiting incentives for employers to recruit workers trained abroad. High minimum wages, a compressed wage distribution, and strong collective bargaining may reduce entry-level opportunities, particularly for lower-skilled positions.⁵⁹ These structural factors, combined with high labour costs and employment protection rules, have been associated with overqualification and the underuse of migrant skills.^{60,61,62}

Financial disincentives to work [V/H]. Rigid labour market rules do not only make it costly for employers to take risks on foreign-trained workers; for some migrants themselves, taking up low-paid jobs can be financially disadvantageous once the loss of benefits and the cost of commuting/childcare are factored in.⁶³ This has been associated with higher inactivity and underutilisation of skills among some groups.

Citizenship and legal status [V]. Access to Belgian nationality improves outcomes by signalling integration and opening access to public sector jobs.⁶⁴ Naturalised migrants enjoy higher employment rates and lower risks of overeducation than non-naturalised peers, although gaps with the native-born remain.⁶⁵ Interviews also highlighted that migrants' residence status, including the type of work permit held, influences their position in the labour market.⁶⁶ For instance, those with a single permit that is not employer-specific were considered to have greater flexibility in changing jobs.

Housing and location. In many countries, residential segregation or distance to jobs can reinforce mismatch. In Belgium, the small size of the country and relatively dense public transport network may reduce this effect, but it remains underexplored in the scientific literature. It has been flagged repeatedly during the expert interviews with the regional integration centres in the Walloon Region.⁶⁷

(59) Baeyens, A., Cornille, D., Delhez, P., Piton, C. and Van Meensel, L. (2020) *De economische impact van immigratie in België*. Brussel: Nationale Bank van België, *Economisch Tijdschrift* (Special Edition).

(60) OECD (2020) *OECD Economic Surveys: Belgium 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(61) Høj, J. (2013) *Enhancing the inclusiveness of the labour market in Belgium*. OECD Economics Department Working Paper No. 1009. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(62) OECD (2025), op. cit.

(63) Zawistowska, J., Dabbouz, F. and Manço, A. (2025) 'Pièges : peut-on travailler à perte?', *Etudes de l'IRFAM*, 3. available at: <https://www.irfam.org/pieges-peut-on-travailler-a-perse/> (Accessed: 23 September 2025).

(64) Corluy, V., Marx, I. and Verbist, G. (2011) 'Employment chances and changes of immigrants in Belgium: The impact of citizenship', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 52(4), pp. 350–368.

(65) Piton, C. and Rycx, F. (2021) 'A broken social elevator? Employment outcomes of first- and second-generation immigrants in Belgium', *De Economist*, 169(3), pp. 319–365.

(66) Stakeholder consultations with IOM Belgium and Luxembourg, September 2025.

(67) Stakeholder consultations with CRILUX and CRVI Verviers, September 2025.

2.3. Belgium's Specific Labour Market Situation

Institutional and regional complexity is an important factor shaping skills matching outcomes in Belgium. Recognition of foreign diplomas, access to training, and employment support differ across the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region. Stakeholders consistently identified fragmented responsibilities and complex administrative procedures as factors contributing to persistent mismatches.

In the **Flemish Region**, a high-skill economy combined with advanced Dutch language requirements creates additional barriers for some migrants. The region has a strong concentration in knowledge-intensive industries, such as life sciences, technology, and advanced manufacturing, and a large share of tertiary-educated workers. Employers frequently require high-level Dutch and sector-specific skills, which can intensify mismatch when qualifications are not recognised or when language proficiency remains limited.^{68, 69}

In the **Walloon Region**, lower labour demand and fewer entry-level opportunities contribute to weaker outcomes for migrants. The region's economy is characterised by traditional industry and lower-skill sectors, including manufacturing and public employment. This context results in fewer high-skill positions and limited suitable entry-level jobs, as low-wage employment is relatively costly under Belgium's wage-setting structures. Migrants are therefore more likely to be concentrated in secondary labour market segments.^{70, 71}

The **Brussels-Capital Region** exhibits a dual labour market. It combines an international, high-skill service economy (where bilingualism in Dutch and French, and often English, is essential) with a large low-wage service sector in hospitality, cleaning, and logistics. Many first-generation third-country nationals are employed in these lower-wage segments, resulting in a pronounced occupational divide.⁷²

(68) OECD (2025), op. cit.

(69) Devos, L., Lippens, L., Lens, D., Rycx, F., Volral, M. and Baert, S. (2025), op. cit., pp. 121–175.

(70) Baeyens, A., Cornille, D., Delhez, P., Piton, C. and Van Meensel, L. (2020) *De economische impact van immigratie in België*. Brussel: Nationale Bank van België, *Economisch Tijdschrift* (Special Edition).

(71) OECD (2020) *OECD Economic Surveys: Belgium 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

(72) Devos, L., Lippens, L., Lens, D., Rycx, F., Volral, M. and Baert, S. (2025), op. cit. pp. 121–175.

03 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICIES



This section outlines the main policies, instruments and governance arrangements that shape skills matching for migrants in Belgium. It first maps the key actors involved and their respective roles ([section 3.1](#)), before outlining current policy debates and recent reforms influencing skills matching between 2023 and 2025 ([section 3.2](#)). It then presents the key types of policies and instruments currently used to improve skills matching, illustrated with selected examples ([section 3.3](#)), and concludes with concrete local initiatives that operationalise these approaches on the ground ([section 3.4](#)).

3.1. Key actors in skills matching of migrants

Belgium's federal structure and fragmentation across different policy areas and administrative work-streams (notably employment, integration and education), results in a broad constellation of actors involved in promoting skills matching for migrants. Responsibilities are shared across levels of government, with public employment services and integration agencies taking a central role, complemented by social partners, employers, municipalities, and civil society organisations. The main groups of actors can be summarised as follows:

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (PES)

- ▶ **Actiris** (Brussels-Capital Region) manages the compulsory registration of newcomers as jobseekers and implements labour market activation policies, including guidance and services supporting transitions towards sustainable and quality employment. Actiris also provides language courses and works closely with Welcome Offices for Newcomers (*Bureaux d'accueil pour primo-arrivants, BAPA*) and training providers.
- ▶ **Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training** (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, VDAB*) is responsible for labour market activation, vocational training, language and work trajectories, skills assessment, and labour market related programmes for newcomers. VDAB works closely with both the Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration and the two municipal agencies for civic integration: Atlas (Antwerp) and AMAL (Ghent). In addition, VDAB also collaborates with the NT2 (Dutch as a second language) providers in adult education. The civic agencies are responsible for the civic integration trajectory, including social orientation and language learning within the integration pathway.
- ▶ **Le Forem** (Walloon Region) is the Public Service for Employment and Vocational Training in Wallonia. Its main objectives focus on helping jobseekers in their job searchers and employers in their recruitment, training, and financial needs.
- ▶ **Employment Office of the German-speaking Community** (*Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, ADG*) is responsible for labour market activation and training and cooperates closely with a vocational training centre.

INTEGRATION AGENCIES

- ▶ **The Brussels welcome office for newcomers** (*Brussels onthaalbureau voor nieuwkomers*, BON) is the Dutch-language integration agency in the Brussels-Capital Region, providing civic integration, language training, and socio-professional guidance. It is part of the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration.
- ▶ **BAPA Via, BAPA BXL and BAPA Convivial** are the (French and Dutch) reception and integration centres in the Brussels-Capital Region (with BON, the Dutch integration centre which is under the authority of the Flemish Community), that deliver civic integration programmes, language support, socio-professional guidance and referral to services for newcomers. These centres are accredited to implement the mandatory newcomer welcome and integration parcours in the bilingual (French/Dutch) Brussels-Capital Region. Since 2024, the BAPA network operates under the regulatory and funding authority of the Common Community Commission (*Commission communautaire commune*, COCOM / *Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie*, GGC), with its administrative body, **Vivalis**, overseeing aspects of policy implementation and programme coordination.
- ▶ **Agency for Integration & Civic Integration** (*Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering*, AGII) and **municipal integration agencies** (Atlas Antwerp, AMAL Ghent) are Flemish agencies responsible for civic integration, language courses, and tailored guidance, including diploma recognition guidance and referral to VDAB.
- ▶ **Operational Directorate-General for Local Authorities, Social Action, and Health** (*Direction générale opérationnelle des Pouvoirs locaux et de l'Action sociale*, DGO5) and the eight **Regional Integration Centers** (*Centres Régionaux d'Intégration*, CRIs) coordinate the Walloon Region's civic integration pathway and work with local language providers and Le Forem to support newcomers and link them to socio-professional training and employment services.
- ▶ **Info-Integration** is the integration agency of the German-speaking Community, offering civic orientation and language support with links to ADG employment services.

REGIONAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS

- ▶ **Regional ministries of employment and social economy** (i.e. Flemish Government – Department of Work and Social Economy; Walloon Public Service – Economy, Employment and Research; Brussels-Capital Government – Work and Vocational Training; Ministry of the German-speaking Community) design policies, coordinate with public employment services (PES), and implement European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)-funded projects.

- ▶ **Federal actors** including the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, the Federal Public Service Social Security, and the Immigration Office, regulate employment conditions, social benefits, and migration status, all of which shape labour market access.
- ▶ **Myria** is the Federal Migration Centre, which monitors equal rights and integration outcomes and feeds evidence into policy debates.

RECOGNITION BODIES

- ▶ **NARIC-the Flemish Region and the Diploma Recognition Service of the Walloon Region-Brussels Federation** oversee diploma recognition and equivalence. This is divided into two services one for higher education and one for secondary education.

EMPLOYERS AND SOCIAL PARTNERS

- ▶ **Employer organisations VBO/FEB⁷³** at federal level; Voka and UNIZO⁷⁴ in the Flemish Region; AKT⁷⁵, the unified employer organisation representing Walloon businesses; UCM⁷⁶, representing self-employed persons and SMEs in French-speaking Belgium; and BECI⁷⁷, the employers' organisation for the Brussels-Capital Region, shape debates on skills shortages, labour market needs and vocational training priorities.
- ▶ **Sectoral organisations and their training funds** (*sectorfondsen / fonds sectoriels*), can complement public employment services by supporting sector-specific training, internships and workplace learning, in cooperation with social partners and employers.
- ▶ **Trade unions** (ACV/CSC, ABVV/FGTB, ACLVB/CGSLB)⁷⁸ provide counselling to workers with a migration background, raise concerns about discrimination, and engage in sectoral training initiatives.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

- ▶ **Bruxelles Formation** and **Le Forem Training Centres** offer vocational and language-linked programmes, closely coordinated with Actiris and the BAPA offices.
- ▶ **Centres for Adult Education in Flanders** (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*, CVOs) offers Dutch language and adult education, crucial for labour market access. **Syntra training centres** (*Syntra Vlaanderen*) form part of the Flemish adult learning landscape and offer practice-oriented vocational and entrepreneurial training, with accessible pathways for newcomers.

(73) *Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen VBO / Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique* FEB is Belgium's largest employers' organisation.

(74) *Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers* (UNIZO), is a Belgian association of entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises and liberal professions.

(75) AKT is the unified brand bringing together Wallonia's main employer organisations, replacing the *Union wallonne des entreprises* (UWE) and the regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It is not an acronym.

(76) *Union des Classes Moyennes*.

(77) Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry.

(78) *Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond*, ACV / *Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens*, CSC is Belgium's largest Christian-oriented trade union. *Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond* ABVV / *Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique* FGFB is the General Labour Federation of Belgium. *Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België* ACLVB / *Centrale générale des syndicats libéraux de Belgique* CGSLB is the the General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium.

- ▶ **Universities and colleges** (*hogescholen / hautes écoles*) organise bridging programmes and special admission procedures for foreign-trained students and professionals.

LOCAL AND MUNICIPAL ACTORS

- ▶ **Municipalities** play a frontline role in integration and skills matching, often acting as the first contact point for newcomers and supporting referral to PES, integration agencies, language courses, or training.
- ▶ Their role is coordinated and strengthened by municipal associations:
 - **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (*Vlaamse Vereniging voor Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG*) in the Flemish Region,
 - **Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia** (*Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie, UVCW*) in the Walloon Region,
 - **Brulocalis**, the Association of the City and Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region.
- ▶ Larger cities (e.g. Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels) have developed dedicated local services and projects linking integration with employment.

Civil society and NGOs also play an important role in supporting skills matching for migrants. Organisations such as *LEVL vzw* (advocacy on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination), *Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen*, *CIRÉ asbl*, *Convivial*, *Duo for a Job*, and *Caritas International Belgium*, as well as *Groep INTRO*, *Groot Eiland*, *Casablanca*, *Plan International*, *FMDO*, *Orbit*, *LIRE ET ÉCRIRE*, *Hobo vzw*, *JES*, *DiversiCom*, and *the Ligue Braille*, provide targeted job coaching, literacy and vocational training, bridging programmes, mentoring, and legal or social support (see [section 3.4](#) for more information on some of these local initiatives).

In sum, Belgium's skills matching landscape is highly multi-layered. PES and integration agencies are the central operational actors, but their success depends on effective collaboration with education providers, recognition bodies, municipalities, and social partners. Employers' engagement is crucial to translate skills into actual labour market opportunities, while civil society provides tailored support and mentoring. This dense but fragmented governance structure reflects Belgium's system: it enables regionally tailored approaches but requires strong coordination to ensure equal opportunities for migrants across the country.

3.2. Current policy debates on skills (mis-)matching

Between 2023 and 2025, Belgium has seen a series of policy debates and reforms that directly or indirectly affect the skills matching of migrants. These debates reflect both political tensions around migration and practical efforts to address structural labour shortages. Another recent EMN-OECD study, *Labour Migration in Times of Labour Shortages*, and the accompanying Belgian standalone report provide a complementary overview of policies and debates related to the recruitment of third-country workers and is thus not repeated here.⁷⁹

At the **federal level**, migration continues to be a prominent topic. Some political actors are calling for limitations on new labour migration with greater emphasis placed on activating those already present in Belgium, as well as retaining international students and other residents already familiar with the country. This has been also discussed in relation to skills matching, as debates on work permit rules and the recognition of professional qualifications have become tied to the wider discussion of whether labour needs should be met primarily through new migration or through better use of resident talent. Federally, these debates are framed by the national goal of raising the employment rate to 80% by 2030, highlighted in the Belgian Federal Government's Coalition Agreement of 2025⁸⁰, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups that lag behind, which includes among others migrants, low-skilled workers and women, as well as by the 2025 Minister of Asylum and Migration policy orientation paper, which stresses stricter integration obligations and self-sufficiency requirements.⁸¹

While federal-regional coordination and regional differences have been at the centre of the policy debate as a structural challenge, several other **cross-cutting debates** stand out in the interview discussions and across all regions:

- ▶ **Funding and accessibility of adult education and training.** Recent budget adjustments in adult education and language provision have reduced the availability of affordable pathways for newcomers, even as demand rises. This has led to discussions about the balance between short-term fiscal constraints and long-term integration outcomes.⁸²
- ▶ **Shift in responsibility for integration.** Recent discourse places greater emphasis on individual responsibility for integration and skills acquisition, shifting emphasis from publicly funded integration programmes toward individual responsibility for integration outcomes.⁸³
- ▶ **Employer engagement.** While social partners recognise urgent needs, many SMEs lack the resources or know-how to engage in migrant recruitment, mentoring, or recognition processes. Stakeholders continue to debate the role of intermediaries (integration actors, chambers of commerce, municipal job services).⁸⁴

(79) EMN-OECD (2025), *Labour Migration in Times of Labour Shortages*, available <https://emnbelgium.be/publication/labour-migration-time-labour-shortages> accessed 5 January 2026.

(80) Belgian Federal Government, *Coalition agreement of 2025-2029*, available https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/federal_authorities/federal_government/policy/government_agreement, accessed 30 September 2025.

(81) Federal Government (2025). *Policy Statement on Asylum and Migration [Exposé d'orientation politique – Asile et Migration / Beleidsverklaring – Asiel en Migratie]*. Brussels: Chamber of Representatives, 13 May 2025. <https://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/56/0767/56K0767069.pdf>, accessed 25 November 2025.

(82) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris, AMAL Ghent, Atlas Antwerp, CRVI Verviers, CRILUX, VDAB, and Forem, September 2025.

(83) Stakeholder consultations with Le Forem, VDAB and the Flemish Government Agency for Home Affairs, September 2025.

(84) Stakeholder consultations with VOKA, Actiris, CRILUX and CRVI Verviers, September 2025.

- ▶ **Gender and activation.** The particularly low participation rates of third-country migrant women have gained attention, with questions on how to remove structural barriers such as childcare shortages, inflexible training schedules, and discriminatory hiring practices.⁸⁵
- ▶ **Employment first versus education first.** A recurring debate concerns whether newcomers should be channelled into jobs as quickly as possible (work first) or whether priority should be given to strengthening their skills base through language courses, recognition procedures, or additional training before labour market entry.⁸⁶
- ▶ **Language requirements and the role of English.** High proficiency in Dutch or French remains a key requirement for most jobs, and stakeholders note that this requirement limits access for many newcomers. At the same time, the growing use of English in certain sectors (IT, international companies, academia) raises concerns about creating parallel labour market structures. Debates also focus on how to balance the pragmatic use of English with the need to ensure long-term integration through local language acquisition.⁸⁷
- ▶ **Recognition bottlenecks and alternative validation.** While diploma recognition is a recurring issue, there is also debate about the appropriate use of alternative routes such as validation of prior learning. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of making recognition and validation faster and more flexible.⁸⁸ At the same time, even if successful, the practical impact of diploma recognition can be questioned. Its demonstrable benefits vary considerably across sectors and may remain limited when employers are unfamiliar with what recognition entails. In contrast, employers tend to prioritise demonstrable, job-related competences over formal recognition and thus tools that make migrants' competences visible may be just as important as the recognition process itself.⁸⁹
- ▶ **Retention and mobility of migrants.** Stakeholders have also discussed how to promote longer-term and sustainable careers. Many migrants, including highly educated ones, remain in lower-skilled jobs, drop out of the labour market (and are on incapacity benefits) or leave rural areas/secondary labour markets quickly. The question is how to retain them in sectors and regions that face structural labour shortages, and a debate not only centred on migrants, but also relevant to the Belgian born population.⁹⁰
- ▶ **Retention of international students/graduates.** International graduates are increasingly seen and publicly debated as a talent pool to address shortages, given their "pre-integration" into society, potential language skills and recognised diplomas. Debates focus on increasing their retention, easing post-study work and residence pathways, strengthening university-employer links, and improving guidance on career options.⁹¹

(85) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Forem, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg and Actiris, September 2025.

(86) Stakeholder consultations with CRVI Verviers, CRILUX and VDAB, September 2025.

(87) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Vivalis, and Forem, September 2025.

(88) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Forem and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(89) Chakkar, S. and De Cuyper, P. (2019), op. cit.

(90) Stakeholder consultations with Forem, CRVI Verviers and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(91) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

- ▶ **Access to municipal support measures.** Several interviews, especially with the regional integration centres highlighted that municipalities are on the frontline of skills matching but may lack sufficient resources or are unable to offer their services to individuals who have a job.⁹² The debate here is how to strengthen local capacities and ensure municipal initiatives and regional PES policies reach also those target groups.
- ▶ **Balancing labour migration with activation of residents.** Political priority has shifted from recruiting new labour migrants towards activating those already in Belgium, with retaining international students seen as a pragmatic compromise.⁹³

At the **regional level**, skills matching has also remained a prominent theme. Regional governments have integrated the issue into their latest policy notes and declarations, reflecting both continuity with earlier reforms and the introduction of new measures that are still being developed or piloted. Several of the initiatives described below are therefore in the design or early implementation stage, signalling a policy commitment even where outcomes have not yet been evaluated.

- ▶ The **Flemish Region** has anchored labour market integration more strongly in its civic integration policy. The Policy Note on Employment 2024-2029⁹⁴ highlights the untapped potential of women with a migration background and commits to removing barriers such as slow diploma recognition, limited childcare, and high Dutch language requirements. The Policy Note on Integration and Living Together 2024-2029⁹⁵ builds on the 2022 reform of the civic integration system, strengthening the four-pillar model by raising the Dutch proficiency target from A2 to B1 (orally), tightening VDAB involvement, and linking low-skilled newcomers to vocational training or second-chance education. Since 2024, several pilot projects on activation have been testing new ways to better connect integration trajectories with employment pathways, for example through sector-specific orientation tracks and on-the-job language support.⁹⁶ The results of these pilots will inform a new, permanent activation framework to be rolled out from 2027. In September 2025, the Flemish Government also announced that third-country labour migrants and their partners will become subject to (simplified) mandatory civic integration, with online pre-arrival modules and a six-month completion period after entry⁹⁷. While this measure does not directly address the initial skill-based job matching (labour migrants by definition already have a job), it aims to increase knowledge of the society and labour market functioning, that can support adequate skill matching both for the partners of the labour migrants and the principal applicants themselves later on.

(92) Stakeholder consultations with CRVI Verviers, CRILUX, VDAB, Vivalis, AMAL Ghent and Atlas Antwerp, September 2025.

(93) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Actiris and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(94) Flemish Government (2024). Policy Note on Employment 2024-2029 [Beleidsnota Werk 2024-2029]. Brussels: November 2024.

(95) Flemish Government (2024). Policy Note on Integration, Civic Integration and Living Together 2024-2029 [Beleidsnota Integratie, Inburgering en Samenleven 2024-2029]. Brussels: November 2024.

(96) Flemish Department of Chancellery and Public Governance (2025). Towards Smooth and Sustainable Activation of Civic Integration Participants [Naar een vlotte en duurzame activering van inburgeraars]. June 2025. Available at: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/beslissingen-van-de-vlaamse-regering/naar-een-vlotte-en-duurzame-activering-van-inburgeraars>.

(97) Flemish Government (2025). Civic Integration for Third-Country Labour Migrants [Inburgering voor derdelands arbeidsmigranten]. Brussels: Flemish Government, 19 September 2025. Available at: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/beslissingen-van-de-vlaamse-regering/inburgering-voor-derdelands-arbeidsmigranten> (accessed 23 September 2025).

(98) Walloon Government (2024). Regional Policy Declaration of The Walloon Region 2024–2029 [Déclaration de politique régionale de Wallonie 2024–2029, AVOIR LE COURAGE DE CHANGER POUR QUE L'AVENIR S'ÉCLAIRE]. July 2024.

(99) While not specified in the Walloon Policy Declaration itself, the Swedish “Fast-Track” (Snabbspår) model refers to accelerated labour-market integration pathways for newly arrived migrants. It is an educational measure aimed at people with foreign education who need to supplement their education in Sweden in order to be able to work in the profession they are trained in. The track is designed to reduce unemployment durations by rapidly identifying and validating skills, combining language training with vocational or work-based learning, and facilitating early entry into employment, particularly in shortage occupations. There are roughly 14 signed fast tracks for around 40 different professions.

(100) Stakeholder consultations with CRVI Verviers, CRILUX and Le Forem, September 2025.

(101) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris and Vivalis, September 2025.

(102) EMN Belgium (2024): Annual Report on Migration and Asylum in Belgium 2023. Available at: https://emnbelgium.be/sites/default/files/publications/EMN%20Belgium%20Annual%20Report%20Asylum%20and%20Migration%202023_final.pdf.

- ▶ The **Walloon Region** has committed in its Policy Declaration 2024–2029⁹⁸ to tightening the civic integration pathway with standardised French language and integration testing, sanctions for non-compliance, and better accessibility (e.g. transport support). It also plans to introduce a fast-track model for quicker validation of foreign skills (based on the Swedish approach⁹⁹), particularly in shortage sectors such as healthcare, and separately, to improve diploma recognition in cooperation with the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. At the same time, a review of CRI and local integration initiatives (*Initiatives Locales d'Intégration*, ILI) has been announced to ensure better alignment with labour market integration. Debates focus on how to balance stricter obligations with effective support. Interviews also highlighted regional challenges such as retaining skilled migrants in rural areas, where many integrated or higher-skilled workers (including Belgian-born) tend to leave quickly.¹⁰⁰
- ▶ The **Brussels-Capital Region** introduced a mandatory bilingual civic integration trajectory in June 2022. Newcomers must register within six months after registering with their local council in a welcome office and sign an integration contract with the welcome office. Civic integration is provided by BAPAS (Vivalis) (FR and NL) and BON (AGII) (NL), which deliver language training and social orientation, and refer participants to Actiris or VDAB and vocational training. Newcomers need to choose between the French- or Dutch-language track: most opt for French (leading to overcrowded courses), while the Flemish system is often undersubscribed even though it is considered by some as less fragmented and better linked to labour market outcomes.¹⁰¹ Coordination challenges between Actiris and the integration agencies also remain, particularly regarding diploma recognition, the use of differing IT systems, and referrals to mentoring and employer engagement programmes.
- ▶ In the **German-speaking Community**, skills matching is addressed mainly through ADG's employment support and language training, reflecting the region's small scale and limited migrant population.

In summary, there is broad agreement that skills matching is important for both economic growth and migrant inclusion. Current policy debates in Belgium however reflect differing views on migration management and the practical options to mobilise all available talent. Given the **regional disparities** and the need for policy coherence in creating integration and training opportunities, an Inter-Ministerial Conference on Labour migration and Integration was established in 2021 to improve coordination across levels of government.¹⁰² However, stakeholders noted limited public information on the conference's recent activities or outcomes.

3.3. Policies and instruments to promote skills matching

Belgium applies a wide range of instruments across federal, regional, and local levels to improve the matching of migrants' skills with labour market needs. The following overview outlines several key areas of action and illustrative initiatives. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive mapping of all existing measures but to highlight examples that illustrate the main approaches currently in use.

LINKING CIVIC INTEGRATION AND LABOUR MARKET ACTIVATION

Civic integration in Belgium is closely tied to activation policies implemented by the regional public employment services (VDAB in the Flemish Region, Actiris in the Brussels-Capital Region, Le Forem in the Walloon Region, and ADG in the German-speaking Community). Newcomers register with the PES early in their integration pathway and receive career orientation, job coaching, and referrals to training. Coordination between integration agencies and employment services remains a central feature of this model.

RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF SKILLS

Recognition of foreign diplomas and validation of prior learning remain among the most frequently cited challenges for third-country nationals. A distinction is made between formal recognition (equivalence of qualifications or diplomas) and validation (assessment of competences acquired through work or non-formal learning). Both processes contribute to reducing skills mismatch by aligning migrants' qualifications with Belgian labour market requirements. Partial or general-level recognition (e.g. at bachelor's or master's level) can help address vertical mismatch even when access to regulated professions remains limited. Validation of prior learning (EVC/VPL) is increasingly used as a flexible alternative, though its individualised nature makes large-scale application challenging.

LANGUAGE AND WORKPLACE-BASED LEARNING TOOLS

New initiatives complement traditional classroom-based approaches to language learning. These include workplace-based language trajectories, online and digital tools such as *Wallangues* (offering free French, Dutch, English, and German courses), and *Parlangi*, a volunteer-based app that connects learners with native speakers for conversational practice. Such tools facilitate continued language acquisition and support access to training and employment, especially for migrants with limited time or mobility.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Employers' organisations play a key role in linking migrant skills to labour market demand. Joint initiatives, such as sector-specific training, internships, and mentoring programmes, help lower hiring risks for companies while addressing shortages in key sectors such as construction, healthcare, and information technology. Sectoral funds can complement these initiatives by providing training opportunities and workplace-based learning in cooperation with social partners, employers and public employment services.

SUBSIDISED EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS – “ARTICLE 60”

Article 60 employment is a social employment mechanism implemented by Public Centres for Social Welfare for individuals receiving social assistance who do not yet qualify for unemployment benefits. Under this scheme, beneficiaries are employed by the Public Centres for Social Welfare for a limited period, typically between six months and two years. The scheme aims to provide Belgian work experience while enabling participants to build entitlement to unemployment benefits. From a skills-matching perspective, Article 60 employment can offer initial labour market exposure, opportunities to practise French or Dutch in a professional setting, and the development of local work references.

PRE-ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION MEASURES

In 2025, the Flemish Region introduced pre-arrival civic integration modules for third-country labour migrants and their partners. These online courses provide basic information about Belgian society, the labour market, and civic integration requirements. They can be completed within six months after arrival and are designed to facilitate faster adaptation and orientation in the host society.

EUROPEAN AND REGIONAL FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programmes and regional funding instruments support workplace inclusion initiatives for vulnerable groups, including migrants. In the Walloon Region, stakeholder consultations indicated that both CRIs and Le Forem rely on European project funding to support socio-professional integration activities and employer-migrant matching. Local mentoring and coaching schemes, such as DUO for a Job, have also benefited from European project support in previous funding cycles, while several Flemish measures (such as workplace Dutch and recent activation pilots) draw on a mix of regional budgets and occasional EU co-financing. These initiatives typically focus on adapting workplaces, promoting diversity in recruitment, building employer engagement, and supporting retention through targeted company partnerships.

3.4. Examples of local initiatives

Across Belgium, municipalities, regional integration centres, and civil society organisations implement practical initiatives that make national and regional instruments accessible on the ground. These programmes translate broader policy objectives into tailored support for migrants, focusing on language practice, mentoring, childcare support, and employer engagement. The examples below, while not exhaustive, illustrate the diversity of local approaches that aim to improve skills matching in practice.

DUO for a Job.¹⁰³ The mentoring initiative DUO for a Job pairs young migrants with experienced mentors from the same sector for a six-month, one-to-one coaching process. Mentors support participants with curriculum vitae preparation, interview techniques, and sector knowledge. Evaluations indicate that the approach helps build professional networks and strengthens participants' confidence in engaging with employers.¹⁰⁴ Impact measurement showed that the programme increased the employment rate of youth with migrant backgrounds by 28% compared to a matched control group, generating a double return on investment.¹⁰⁵ The model has been replicated in several Belgian (and French and Dutch) cities and receives multiannual structural funding from the public employment service Actiris in the Brussels region. In the Flemish and Walloon regions, the model relies on support from local cities and project subsidies (regional and EU), but currently no structural funding from VDAB or Le Forem.

CRI Verviers – Direct Company Matching.¹⁰⁶ The Regional Integration Centre (CRI) in Verviers (Liège province) developed a matching mechanism that connects newly arrived migrants directly with local employers. At intake, individual competences are mapped and shared with a designated contact person at each participating company. Placements typically begin with a four-week internship and include a workplace tutor to facilitate adaptation and feedback between the migrant and the employer. Stakeholders reported that the model fosters closer cooperation between integration services and businesses and provides hands-on experience for participants.

Groep INTRO (Brussels and Flemish Region).¹⁰⁷ Groep INTRO provides personalised activation and guidance for migrants, youth (including those not in employment education or training) and older jobseekers through combined learning and work experience pathways. Its workshops on job search, vocational orientation, and career assessment help address career gaps, limited labour market knowledge, and recognition of prior learning. Operating across several of the Brussels-Capital Region's communes and Flemish cities, the organisation works in partnership with Actiris, VDAB, and municipalities to support inclusion of newcomers and long-term unemployed migrants.

(103) <https://www.duoforajob.org/nl-be>

(104) Bagnoli, L., Estache, A and Fourati, M. (2021) Mentoring as a pathway to labour market integration: Evidence from a Belgian programme. ECARES working paper 2021-11. https://www.mentoringeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-11-BAGNOLI_ESTACHE_FOURATI-mentoring.pdf.

(105) DUO for a JOB (2021) Ervaringsverslag: Mentoring – een brug naar de samenleving en de arbeidsmarkt voor jongeren met een migratieachtergrond? Brussel: DUO for a JOB. (Includes results from the Brussels Employment Observatory's evaluation of the Social Impact Bond as well as findings from the 2016 KOIS Invest impact assessment, Results & Key Learnings of a 3-Year Journey – The First Impact Bond in Belgium.)

(106) <https://crvi.be/>

(107) <https://www.groepintro.be/nl/>

Groot Eiland (Brussels-Capital Region).¹⁰⁸ Groot Eiland offers an integrated approach to training and employment for jobseekers distant from the labour market, including migrants and refugees. It combines professional training, social economy work experience, and targeted coaching in key sectors such as hospitality, catering, and construction. Supported by Actiris and the Brussels-Capital Region, the programme contributes to reducing both vertical and horizontal skills mismatches by providing practical entry points to work.

VOKA “Welt” Programme.¹⁰⁹ The employers’ organisation VOKA implements the Welt (Work-Experience Learning Trajectories) programme to support companies in developing more inclusive workplaces. The programme focuses on strengthening HR policies aimed at enabling workforce participation irrespective of background, age, or recruitment pathway. Participating companies receive guidance, take part in learning networks, and are supported in developing a concrete action plan. The programme places particular emphasis on promoting sustainable career pathways within companies. The initiative is implemented in cooperation with regional service providers and social partners, including trade unions, and is supported through Flemish and European public funding.

ATLAS Antwerp Projects.¹¹⁰ The municipal integration agency Atlas in Antwerp offers various tailor-made programs that combine citizenship integration with support in finding work. The Taalbubbels+ program offers language training, social orientation, and parenting support for low-literate mothers. In the past, this program was offered in combination with a ComPas program in which participants could have their soft skills validated in relation to their search for work or training. In addition, other Atlas services offer guidance on diploma recognition and career counselling. These projects aim to support participants in the transition from civic integration to work or further education.

CIRÉ asbl – Travail, Équivalences et Formations (TEF).¹¹¹ In the Brussels-Capital Region, CIRÉ asbl runs the *Travail, Équivalences et Formations* (TEF) service, which assists migrants with diploma recognition and training pathways. The programme provides group workshops, individual counselling, and coordination with training centres and employers. It supports migrants with foreign qualifications (particularly beneficiaries of international protection, family migrants, and labour migrants) in navigating recognition and upskilling processes.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how local actors across Belgium adapt national frameworks to regional and municipal realities. They underline the role of collaboration between integration agencies, employers, and public employment services in improving access to jobs that match migrants’ qualifications and experience.

(108) <https://www.grooteiland.brussels/>

(109) <https://www.voka.be/eng>

(110) <https://www.atlas-antwerpen.be/nl>

(111) <https://www.cire.be/nos-activites/travail-equivalences-et-formations/>

04 PERSISTING CHALLENGES



Despite a broad set of policies and instruments, several challenges continue to limit effective skills matching for third-country nationals in Belgium. The elements described below have been consistently mentioned in stakeholder interviews and are outlined in part in the academic literature as discussed above (see [section 2](#)). They partly reflect structural barriers that remain difficult to address across regions and migrant groups.

Recognition of qualifications and experience. The recognition of diplomas and validation and acknowledgement of work experience acquired abroad remains one of the main challenges. Migrants often face fragmented and complex procedures, which differ by region, level of education and type of validations sought. Limited guidance before application, unequal processing times, and perceived inconsistencies in outcomes delay access to jobs matching migrants' qualifications. Stakeholders from public employment services and integration agencies also noted that the process can be discouraging for applicants unfamiliar with administrative requirements and highlighted the importance of honesty and transparency with migrants about realistic outcomes given the complex and lengthy processes.¹¹² Meanwhile formal recognition in certain regulated professions has been described by stakeholders as extremely difficult or practically inaccessible for many migrants.¹¹³

Language proficiency. Limited proficiency in the local languages remains one of the most persistent barriers to skill-adequate employment in Belgium. The multilingual context makes this particularly complex: while most migrants acquire basic communication skills, employers (especially in the Flemish Region) often require advanced skills and proficiency. Stakeholders noted that such linguistic demands frequently exceed what is realistically achievable within short integration programmes (that often do not support to that level).¹¹⁴ Moreover, opportunities for workplace-based or contextual language learning remain limited, and coordination between civic integration and onwards professional language training is not always smooth. As a result, migrants may struggle to access positions that match their skills.

Discrimination and disadvantaging recruitment practices. Discriminatory attitudes and a lack of inclusive recruitment strategies persist in parts of the labour market. Studies highlight that applicants from certain regions or with foreign-sounding names receive fewer interview invitations (see [section 2.2](#)), and that diversity management policies are less common among SMEs. Stakeholders noted that awareness of foreign qualifications and anti-discrimination measures within human resources practices remains very uneven.¹¹⁵

Career interruptions and limited recognition of informal skills. Some migrants experience long periods outside the labour market due to asylum procedures, family responsibilities, or difficulties re-entering employment after breaks.¹¹⁶ Such interruptions reduce opportunities to maintain or demonstrate skills, particularly when informal experience is not recognised. These challenges are most evident among women, older workers, and beneficiaries of international protection.

Limited access to networks and information. Many third-country nationals lack access to varied professional networks or practical knowledge of the Belgian labour market. Reliance on narrow ethnic networks can lead to occupational concentration and migrants starting to work in (and then remaining) in skill mismatched positions. Municipal and civil society initiatives¹¹⁷, such as mentoring

(112) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Le Forem, Vivalis, CRILUX and Atlas Antwerp, September 2025.

(113) Stakeholder consultations with CRILUX, Vivalis, Atlas Antwerp and Forem, September 2025.

(114) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Le Forem, Vivalis, AMAL Ghent, and CRILUX, September 2025.

(115) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris, Duo for a Job, VOKA, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg and Atlas Antwerp, September 2025.

(116) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Actiris, Le Forem, AMAL Ghent and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(117) Stakeholder consultations with Duo for a Job, CRVI Verviers, Atlas Antwerp, AMAL Ghent and Vivalis, September 2025.

programmes, help mitigate this gap, but coverage, access and take up remains uneven across regions.

Financial and time constraints for upskilling. Participation in vocational, digital, or further professional training is often restricted by financial and practical barriers. Costs of courses, transport, and childcare, as well as inflexible training schedules, limit access particularly for low-income households and women with care responsibilities. Stakeholders also underlined that the shift towards greater individual responsibility for integration and lifelong learning, combined with reduced public funding, risks widening inequalities between those who can afford to invest in training and those who cannot.¹¹⁸ These constraints affect not only language learning but also broader opportunities for upgrading qualifications and progressing in employment.

Regional disparities in access to support. Access to employment, training, and integration support continues to vary significantly across the Regions. These disparities reflect differences in political priorities, available budgets, institutional structures, and programme design. Stakeholders underlined that newcomers' access to equivalent services can depend strongly on their place of residence. While larger cities have extensive support infrastructures (and even transport options etc), smaller or rural municipalities often lack the administrative capacity, staff, or resources. In the Walloon Region, this challenge is compounded by population mobility: both migrants and highly skilled locals tend to move from rural areas to larger urban centres, making it difficult to retain talent and sustain local integration initiatives. The result is an uneven geography of support, where similar profiles of migrants may experience very different opportunities for skill adequate employment depending on where they live.¹¹⁹

In-work and long-term support. Once migrants enter employment, access to further training or career progression support is often limited. Most activation and upskilling measures are designed for registered jobseekers rather than workers already employed below their qualification level or those who re-enter employment quickly after arrival. As a result, migrants who initially prioritise rapid job entry (often in lower-skilled positions) may later struggle to access support once they seek to upgrade their skills or move to jobs matching their qualifications. Stakeholders pointed to cases, where beneficiaries of temporary protection who found work shortly after arrival later approached the regional PES for training but were no longer eligible for certain activation pathways.¹²⁰ In addition to such eligibility gaps, time constraints and limited flexible learning options make it difficult for employed migrants to combine work with upskilling. Employers are rarely incentivised to invest in training for lower-skilled staff, which contributes to the persistence of vertical mismatch.

(118) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Actiris, Le Forem, AMAL Ghent and CRVI Verviers, September 2025.

(119) Stakeholder consultations with Vivalis, the Flemish Government Agency for Home Affairs, Le Forem, CRVI Verviers and CRILUX, September 2025.

(120) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, Atlas Antwerp, AMAL Ghent and VOKA, September 2025.

05 LESSONS LEARNED & GOOD PRACTICES



This section presents key lessons learned and examples of good practice emerging from research and stakeholder consultations. It highlights the importance of integrated and coordinated service delivery ([section 5.1](#)) and discusses targeted and practice-based approaches that support effective skills matching ([section 5.2](#)). It concludes by identifying systemic enablers that facilitate scaling and sustainability of measures ([section 5.3](#)). The presented examples are illustrative rather than comprehensive and do not constitute policy recommendations.

5.1. Integrated and coordinated delivery

Across all regions, stakeholder consultations and evaluations observed that skills matching outcomes are more consistent when language learning, recognition, and job-linking services are coordinated through an accessible entry point. Municipal and regional structures such as *Actiris Primo Arrivant*, Municipal Integration Centres, and International Houses provide newcomers with centralised guidance on language training, diploma recognition, and employment pathways. These “first-stop” models reduce fragmentation between civic integration and activation services, ensuring smoother transitions between regional and local levels.

Stakeholder exchanges¹²¹ noted that early referral and joint follow-up between integration and employment services (where it exists) improve continuity and reduce duplication or lack of support. Although Belgium does not operate a full “one-stop-shop” model everywhere where all integration and employment services are co-located and managed, existing coordinated entry systems can perform a similar bridging function if well-coordinated. These can be complemented by ongoing improvements in referral procedures and new data exchange between agencies.

Integration agencies and the regional public employment services also provide counselling and referral to help migrants navigate between diploma recognition, level recognition, and validation of prior learning. While these services are not yet standardised, counsellors play a key role in orienting newcomers toward the appropriate procedure and managing expectations about outcomes and timelines.

(121) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris, VDAB, Le Forem, and CRVI Verviers, September 2025; supported by regional PES documentation (VDAB, Actiris, Le Forem websites, accessed November 2025).

5.2. Targeted and practice-based approaches

Targeted vocational and orientation measures that combine language acquisition with sector-specific or workplace experience have been described in interviews and evaluations as among the most effective ways to help migrants find employment matching their qualifications.

Workplace-based training. Public employment services have developed training pathways that combine Dutch or French language learning with sector-specific training, including in shortage occupations such as healthcare, information technology, and construction. Research indicates that such integrated approaches improve labour-market outcomes and reduce vertical mismatch for participants in the Flemish Region.¹²² Longitudinal evidence from the Flemish region shows that a direct link to employers matters and workplace-based learning instruments (such as individual vocational training in enterprises) yield the highest returns in terms of stable employment, for both resident migrants and newcomers.¹²³ In the Walloon Region, the *Coup de poing pénurie* scheme combines remunerated training with guaranteed employment in shortage sectors, while in the Brussels-Capital Region, Actiris has piloted comparable training pathways in healthcare, IT, and construction.¹²⁴

Early orientation and pre-arrival preparation. Early guidance has been observed to help newcomers set realistic expectations¹²⁵ and plan for diploma recognition processes and timelines but also for upskilling in Belgium. The Flemish pre-arrival civic integration modules for third-country labour migrants and their partners, announced in 2025, are a further step in this direction. These online courses provide information on Belgian society, workplace culture, and civic integration obligations, with completion required within six months of arrival.¹²⁶ According to stakeholder consultations,¹²⁷ such preparatory information can improve newcomers' motivation and reduce early drop-out from integration or training courses.

Employer partnerships through sectoral or project-based arrangements. Collaboration with employers, sometimes facilitated through sectoral or project-based arrangements and often in partnership with public employment services, enables the organisation of internships and on-the-job training for migrants. Evidence from the literature¹²⁸ and stakeholder exchanges¹²⁹ highlights that such employer-linked workplace learning mechanisms can help familiarise employers with foreign-trained workers and contribute to addressing sectoral labour shortages, particularly when supported by intermediaries and structured guidance.

(122) OECD (2023), op. cit.

(123) Wood & Neels (2020). 'Wegwijs naar werk. Longitudinale analyse en evaluatie van inburgerings en activeringstrajecten in Vlaanderen, 2005-16.'

(124) Stakeholder consultations with Actiris and Le Forem, September 2025.

(125) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Forem, Actiris September 2025.

(126) Flemish Government (2025). Civic Integration for Third-Country Labour Migrants [Inburgering voor derdelands arbeidsmigranten]. Brussels: Flemish Government, 19 September 2025. Available at: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/beslissingen-van-de-vlaamse-regering/inburgering-voor-derdelands-arbeidsmigranten> (accessed 23 September 2025).

(127) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, Actiris, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(128) Devos, L., Lippens, L., Lens, D., Rycx, F., Volral, M. and Baert, S. (2025), op. cit., pp. 121–175.

(129) Stakeholder consultations with Le Forem, the Flemish Government Agency for Home Affairs, CRILUX, CRVI Verviers, and Actiris, September 2025.

Mentoring and coaching programmes. Initiatives such as *DUO for a Job* link migrants with experienced professionals to strengthen social capital, sector-specific knowledge, and familiarity with the Belgian labour market. Other similar programmes exist across Belgium (*Team4Job*, *MentorYou*, *Duo Solidaire*) though they do not all target jobseekers with a migration history specifically. Evidence from the evaluation of the AMIF-funded pilot projects *@level2work*, which assessed eight regional pilots combining mentoring, job matching and workplace learning across the Flemish Region and the Brussels-Capital Region, confirmed that mentoring and job-coaching approaches can significantly enhance migrants' confidence, professional networks and understanding of sectoral opportunities when supported by professional intermediaries.¹³⁰ These findings align with broader evidence showing that tailored guidance can help prepare migrants for participation in more effective, employer-linked activation pathways.¹³¹ Stakeholder consultations also highlighted that mentoring to work fosters realistic labour market expectations and supports the integration of highly educated newcomers into jobs commensurate with their skills.¹³²

(130) De Cuyper, P., De Rick, K., Vandermeerschen, H., Reidsma, M. and Vermeersch, L. (2019), op. cit.

(131) Wood & Neels (2020). 'Wegwijs naar werk. Longitudinale analyse en evaluatie van inburgerings en activeringstrajecten in Vlaanderen, 2005-16.'

(132) Stakeholder consultations with DUO for a Job, Actiris, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, Atlas Antwerp, September 2025.

(133) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB, the Flemish Government Agency for Home Affairs, Actiris, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(134) Flemish Department of Chancellery and Public Governance (2025). Towards Smooth and Sustainable Activation of Civic Integration Participants [Naar een vlotte en duurzame activering van inburgeraars]. June 2025. Available at: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/beslissingen-van-de-vlaamse-regering/naar-een-vlotte-en-duurzame-activering-van-inburgeraars>.

5.3. Systemic enablers and scaling

Beyond specific programmes, several structural and institutional elements were identified as influencing the long-term effectiveness of skills-matching measures.

Stakeholder consultations¹³³ indicated that pilot initiatives tend to achieve greater continuity and reach when integrated into the regular operations of public employment services rather than implemented through short-term projects. Stable funding, clear institutional ownership, and long-term evaluation cycles were considered key to sustaining promising approaches such as mentoring and workplace-based training.

An example of structural embedding is found in the Flemish activation pilots (*proeftuinen activering*). Since 2024, these pilots have linked civic integration with professional orientation and workplace language learning. The Flemish Government communication "Towards Smooth and Sustainable Activation of Civic Integration Participants (2025)" outlines how these pilots are being consolidated and extended through structured cooperation between the integration agencies, VDAB and employers. It notes that the evaluation of these pilots will guide the design of a new structural activation framework planned for 2027.¹³⁴

Longitudinal evidence from the Flemish region has highlighted that the impact of effective activation depends not only on their design but also on how access is organised. Selective access to employer-linked measures may limit their reach among migrants who could benefit most from direct workplace exposure.¹³⁵

There are also ongoing efforts to modernise recognition and validation systems. Stakeholders highlighted gradual progress toward ideas and initiatives making recognition more modular and having transparent procedures, including flexibility for applicants lacking documentation. Research¹³⁶ has pointed to concrete examples of such measures such as introducing conditional or authenticity-only recognition options, creating a precedent database of previous decisions to increase transparency, and improving cooperation between communities to ensure automatic mutual recognition within Belgium. These elements were also mentioned in stakeholder consultations as ways to make procedures more predictable and accessible for migrants and employers.

At higher-education level, both research and emerging initiatives show increasing attention to the transition of international students and refugees with tertiary qualifications into the Belgian labour market. The OECD report on the Flemish Region¹³⁷ and stakeholder consultations¹³⁸ note that facilitating post-study employment is seen as a way to simplify skill matching (through recognised local degrees) and reduce employer uncertainty and retain international talent already trained in Belgium. Current discussions and pilot initiatives highlight the value of stronger university-employer cooperation, targeted career services, and clearer post-study work pathways. For example, in the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region, the *Camp2Campus research project*¹³⁹ explores how universities can support newcomers, in accessing internships, guidance, and employment opportunities adapted to their qualifications and thus transitioning post-graduates into the labour market.

(135) Wood & Neels (2020). *Wegwijs naar werk. Longitudinale analyse en evaluatie van inburgerings en activeringstrajecten in Vlaanderen, 2005-16.*

(136) SERV – Advisory Committee on Economic Migration & Commission for Diversity (2024). *10 Measures for an Efficient and Accessible Recognition of Foreign Qualifications [10 maatregelen voor een efficiënte en toegankelijke erkenning van buitenlandse studiebewijzen]*. Brussels: SERV, 23 August 2024.

(137) OECD (2025), op. cit.

(138) Stakeholder consultations with VDAB and IOM Belgium & Luxembourg, September 2025.

(139) Camp2Campus (2024). *Camp2Campus: Supporting the Academic and Professional Integration of Newcomers in Higher Education and the Labour Market*. Brussels/Liège: Camp2Campus Consortium, 2024. Available at: <https://camp2campus.be/>.

Conclusion

Skills mismatch among migrants in Belgium remains widespread, particularly among the highly educated and among women from third countries. Overqualification rates for third-country nationals are almost twice as high as those of the native-born population, reflecting both structural and individual factors. The main drivers identified in research and stakeholder exchanges include limited Dutch and French language proficiency, slow and fragmented procedures for diploma recognition, gendered care responsibilities, and restricted social and professional networks. On the employer side, rigid labour-market institutions, high hiring costs, and discrimination have been reported as constraining the full use of migrant skills.

Recent policy developments link civic integration more closely with labour-market activation. Examples include the Flemish Region's reformed civic-integration system and ongoing activation pilots, the Walloon Region's plans for fast-track competence validation in shortage sectors, and the Brussels-Capital Region's bilingual civic-integration trajectory. While these initiatives differ in scope, they share an emphasis on language learning, recognition of competences, and employer engagement.

Stakeholder consultations and evaluations describe a range of practices associated with improved outcomes, including coordinated entry points between integration and employment services, combined language-and-vocational training in shortage sectors, mentoring schemes, and sectoral partnerships offering workplace-based learning.

Across studies and interviews, experts consistently underline the importance of coherent coordination across regions, sustained support for mentoring and upgrading trajectories, and the modernisation of recognition procedures. Effective skills matching, they noted, depends on continued cooperation between integration and employment systems, early orientation, and accessible in-work support enabling migrants to progress toward employment corresponding to their qualifications and experience.



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