

Refugee families’ contributions to Belgian society: obstacles and mitigating practices

Submission for the “Report on Revisiting migrants’ contributions from a human rights-based approach: a discussion on facilitating and hindering factors” of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

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Introduction

This submission identifies various obstacles in law and practice for refugee families in Belgium in accessing housing, education and employment. It also highlights some promising practices that counter or mitigate these hindering factors.²

The term '*refugee families*' refers to families in which at least one family member has an international protection status obtained in Belgium, either refugee status or subsidiary protection.³ Both families who have arrived in Belgium together and families who have reunited in Belgium through family reunification are included.

Housing, education and employment are three essential life domains for facilitating migrants' inclusion in the host society. Belgium has a federal state structure, with a complex division of competences: accommodating applicants for international protection is a *federal* competence, housing and employment are *regional* competences (Flemish, Brussels-Capital and Walloon Region), and education is a *community* competence (Flemish, French and German-speaking Community).

Main findings

Housing: In Belgium, there are no institutional structures in place to facilitate the transition from organized accommodation during the asylum procedure to individual accommodation afterwards. The restrictive requirements to access social housing are particularly concerning in the Flemish Region, where the requirement of a 'local bond' excludes newcomers from the possibility to find affordable housing.

Education: Policies and practices lack a long-term vision which includes the family as an important actor in refugee children's education. Such a vision would include: assessing families' needs prior to allocating accommodation during the asylum procedure, to avoid relocation afterwards; combining language learning and social participation; and providing adequate psycho-social care. Belgium would also benefit from a centralized registration system to keep an overview of the total number of newcomer children needing specialized secondary education.

Employment: The Belgian labour market has been identified as particularly prone to discrimination, and structured in a way that hinders the participation of persons with an international protection status. The Dutch or English language requirements also remain an obstacle to enter the labour market, notwithstanding some inspiring initiatives of the regional employment agencies.

² van den Bogaard, R., 'Obstakels voor vluchtelingengezinnen in hun toegang tot huisvesting, onderwijs en arbeid', in: Geldof, D. et al. (eds). *Gezinnen na Migratie; hulpverlening en gezinsbeleid in een superdiverse samenleving*. Garant, 2022, pp. 247-260.

³ The submission does not include beneficiaries of temporary protection, granted to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine.

1. Key barriers to access housing

1.1 Difficult transition from reception facilities to individual accommodation

During the asylum procedure, applicants for international protection are generally accommodated in federal reception centres or local reception initiatives. When it comes to finding new accommodation after obtaining international protection, no specific institution in Belgium has been assigned the task to facilitate this transition. This can be identified as a concerning gap in policy, which is illustrated by the various initiatives developed to cover this gap.⁴ Examples include a Housing Club at regional welfare centre CAW De Kempen (see Box 1), Neighbours without Borders and BioTope Ghent.⁵

HOUSING CLUB

The 'Housing Club' (*Woonclub*) at the local welfare centre CAW De Kempen was initiated as a result of the increased number of arrivals of persons seeking international protection in 2015. The initiative is mostly run by volunteers, who search for suitable housing for persons with an international protection status. Once accommodation has been found, they also support the person or family with any administrative tasks and provide them with their first house appliances through their own 'give away shop' (*weggeefwinkel*).

Box 1 – Housing Club CAW De Kempen

1.2 Inaccessibility of the housing market

Inaccessibility of the (social) housing market constitutes another obstacle for refugee families to access decent housing. On the *social housing market*, a refugee family without a home would score high in terms of urgency. Yet, the requirement of a local bond (i.e. having lived in the respective town or city for a certain amount of time) that is applied in Flanders is hard to meet.⁶ Moreover, the long waiting list at social renting offices does not provide a solution to refugee families, as they need to find housing within a period of two to four months after having obtained international protection.⁷

On the *private housing market*, rental prices are often too high for refugee families, especially during the initial period after being granted international protection.⁸ Additionally, private property owners in Flanders and Wallonia will often be hesitant to rent their property to persons who would like to receive rent subsidy, since this may come with an additional requirement to prove that the housing is of sufficient quality⁹, which may lead to additional maintenance costs for the owner. In Brussels, financial aid for

⁴ E.g., D'Eer, L., Robeyns, L. & Geldof, D., *Vluchteling zkt. woning. Draaiboek voor wie werkt aan woonondersteuning met vluchtelingen*, 2019, pp. 39-55 (see https://www.kcgezinswetenschappen.be/sites/default/files/publicaties/woonbegeleiding_draaiboek_web_0.pdf).

⁵ Ibid, pp. 39-56.

⁶ In Flanders, local 'social rental offices' (*sociale verhuurkantoren*) and 'social housing agencies' (*sociale huisvestingsmaatschappijen*) have merged together into 'housing agencies' (*woonmaatschappijen*) per locality as of June 2023. Since this merger, social housing facilities are now assigned by a 'local allocation council' (*lokale toewijzingsraad*) consisting of various local actors as well as members of the municipal councils and the home owners of the social housing facilities. Each locality can shape their own allocation policies, whereby a more stringent version of the 'local bond' requirement is now still applied to standard social housing allocations as well as to social housing allocations for specific social groups. See Flemish Housing Code (Book 6); Wonen in Vlaanderen, *Leidraad voor de opmaak van een toewijzingsreglement* (available [here](#)).

⁷ See Groeninck, M. et al., *Veerkracht in beweging. Dynamieken van vluchtelingengezinnen versterken*. Garant Uitgevers, 2019, note 272, p. 211.

⁸ Research has shown that it is more difficult for migrants to exit social assistance than it is for Belgian native citizens: Carpentier, S., Neels, K., & Van den Bosch, K., Exit from and re-entry into social assistance benefit in Belgium among people with migration background and the native-born. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 2017, 26, pp. 366-383.

⁹ These housing quality standards are determined in the federal Housing rental law (art. 2, Law of 20 February 1991) and further specified in the (regional) Flemish Housing Code (*Vlaamse Codex Wonen*) (Book 3, art. 3.1). When persons apply for housing subsidies, their housing must

housing purposes is only available to persons who have been on the waiting list for social housing with high priority and who already reside in Brussels. Refugee families may qualify for this type of financial aid, although the requirements are more stringent than in Wallonia and Flanders.¹⁰

1.3 Discrimination on the housing market

Discrimination and prejudices by landlords constitute another obstacle to access housing. This finding reflects a broader problem of ethnic discrimination on the Belgian rental housing market.¹¹

1.4 Housing and family reunification

The family reunification procedure leads to further obstacles to finding decent housing. Family members can apply for family reunification once the sponsor in Belgium received international protection. Persons with international protection status are exempt from the requirement to prove decent housing, if their family member succeeds in filing the application within one year after the obtainment of international protection.¹² Up until the arrival of the family members, the beneficiary of international protection does not usually have the financial means for a house suitable for a larger family. This regularly results in a need to change house once the family has arrived, because the accommodation no longer suffices. Hence, after a challenging search for housing for the (individual) person with international protection, the challenge commences again after a one-to-two-year period.¹³ Moreover, if family members do not succeed to submit the family reunification application within one year, then the sponsor must comply with the requirement of decent housing *prior* to the reunification.¹⁴

1.5 Housing and municipal registration

The interactions between access to housing and municipal administrative practices lead to additional challenges. Registration at the municipality can only be finalized after a positive verification of residence. Yet, refugee families may receive a negative verification of residence, due to ‘inappropriate’ housing. Even though the housing quality criteria¹⁵ are not applicable when conducting a verification of residence¹⁶, some local police officers may still file a negative verification of residence if the accommodation is, for example, considered too small for the number of family members or ill-equipped (e.g., no fridge). In case of a negative verification of residence, family members who reunified with their sponsor cannot obtain the residence card which confirms their temporary residence right in Belgium (A card).¹⁷

Moreover, additional social welfare benefits (such as children’s allowance or financial aid from a social welfare centre to finance the deposit of the new family home) will not be granted until the newly arriving family members are registered in the foreigners’ register. Hence, as long as the family members are unable

comply with the minimum housing quality standards as defined by law (see Resolution Flemish Housing Code (*Besluit Vlaamse Codex Wonen*), art. 5.177).

¹⁰ <https://huisvesting.brussels/huren/huurtoelage/>.

¹¹ Verstraete, J. & Verhaeghe, P., Ethnic discrimination upon request? Real estate agents’ strategies for discriminatory questions of clients. *Journal Housing and the Built Environment*, 2020, 35, 703-721; Verhaeghe, P. et al., *Discrimibrux - Discriminatie door vastgoedmakelaars op de private huurwoningmarkt van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest*, 2017, Universiteit Gent.

¹² Art. 10 §2 para. 4, Law 15 December 1980.

¹³ Luyten, N. & Debruyne, P., *Beleidsnota: gezinshereniging & wonen*, Orbit, Woning Gezocht Buren Gevonden and Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, August 2019 (see [here](#)).

¹⁴ Art. 10 §2 para. 5, Law 15 December 1980.

¹⁵ Included in the housing rental law (*Woninghuurwet*) to ensure a healthy and safe living environment

¹⁶ For more information, see [here](#).

¹⁷ Bouckaert, S., Baeyens, P. & Vanderscheuren, N., *Handboek Vreemdelingenrecht*. Wolters Kluwer, 2016, pp. 436-437.

to finalize their registration at the municipality, they will not obtain their residence card and cannot receive additional social welfare benefits as a family. Consequently, the search to find a larger accommodation is obstructed, because the family will not have access to increased social welfare benefits that are supposed to fund a bigger place to live.¹⁸

1.6 Lack of data

Data on the use of social housing by persons with an international protection status is not available in Belgium. Such data would provide the basis for a more effective social housing policy.

2. Key barriers to access education

2.1 Information about the education system

Families need to be informed about the Belgian education system and possible schools in the area, both following their allocation to a reception facility and when moving to individual housing after having been granted international protection. There is currently not one specific body or agency who is assigned with this task, which makes it at times difficult for parents to be fully informed. In the Flemish region, Local Consultation Platforms (*Lokale Overlegplatformen*) have been put in place since 2002 to ensure equal access to education in the region. There are around 70 such platforms around the region. Some of them have taken on the task of informing and guiding newcomers in their area, but this is not always the case.¹⁹

2.2 Placement and relocation of asylum seeking and refugee families

The fact that reception of asylum seekers is a federal competence, and education a regional one, leads to the inefficient (re-)placement of asylum seeking children around Belgium.²⁰ First, the needs of the family as well as their language skills are not always considered when they are allocated to a reception facility.²¹ Furthermore, families may be moved around Belgium – including across language borders – throughout the asylum procedure. These relocations are due to the regular opening and closing of reception facilities across the country. Moreover, families may move upon obtaining their international protection status, if they feel that the place of residence allocated during the asylum procedure does not correspond with their needs. However, the challenging process of finding suitable housing may also force refugee families to move to a new area, which implies that children have to continue their education at a new school.

Gaining trust in a new environment can be challenging and demanding, especially for asylum seeking and refugee children.²² Changing schools should therefore be avoided at all costs, if this appears not to be in the best interests of the child. Moreover, the need for additional training to better support newcomer children was flagged, as the general qualifications of schoolteachers in Belgium appear to provide an insufficient basis in this respect.²³

¹⁸ Expert interview, municipal official, 3 September 2021.

¹⁹ Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018, p.34.

²⁰ Ibid, p.61.

²¹ Justice & Paix, *L'accueil des élèves migrants, un espoir d'intégration?*, December 2017, p. 4

²² Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018.

²³ Ibid.

Furthermore, there is currently no centralized registration system where migrant children, who wish to enroll in the special program for newcomer children in the age of secondary school (OKAN/DASPA), are tracked. In practice, this means that each high school keeps individual waiting lists of children wanting to enroll, and that there is no overview of the total number of newcomer children in need for education.²⁴ This makes it very difficult to ensure that all children below the age of 18 are enrolled in the Belgian education system by the 60th day of their registration in the foreigners' register, as is obliged under Belgian law.²⁵

Lastly, communication between schools has also been identified as a weakness in the current education system, meaning that valuable information may be lost whenever asylum seeking or refugee children are moved around from school to school.²⁶

2.3 Ineffective approach to language learning

Initially, there seems to be too much exclusive emphasis on learning the local language, instead of combining social participation with language learning. For example, classes for newcomers are often separate from regular classes, which limits interaction with native speaking children at school. Furthermore, other social or educational programs often require fluency in French, Dutch or English. However, a policy and practice where language learning and (social) participation co-exist would likely enhance the language learning as well as the inclusion process.²⁷

For this reason as well, the current re-placement of families seeking international protection across regions in Belgium is problematic. Ideally, upon arrival, a proper assessment takes place to see whether a family would thrive better in a Dutch or French-speaking community. Once this has been identified, further movement to other cities or regions in Belgium should be avoided to ensure durable incorporation in the school environment and thereby a durable approach to language learning.²⁸

A related challenge is the approach towards multilingualism of newcomer children in education. Especially in Flanders, there is a strong tendency to exclude the use of the native language of newcomer children in their school environment. This “*language-bath-model*” (*taalbadmodel*)²⁹ implies that children are expected to fully submerge themselves into the new language of the host country, whereby use of the native language is dismissed – and reportedly even punished in certain schools.³⁰ In Dutch, newcomer children (as well as adults) are regularly referred to as *anderstaligen* (*otherlinguals*), while the term

²⁴ Expert interview, municipal official, 7 February 2024.

²⁵ Art. 1 §7 Law of 29 June 1983 (Wet van 29 June 1983 betreffende de leerplicht/ Loi du 29 juin 1983 concernant l'obligation scolaire).

²⁶ Justice & Paix, *L'accueil des élèves migrants, un espoir d'intégration?*, December 2017, p.4 ; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, *Maximale onderwijskansen voor elke vluchteling & asielzoeker*, 2017 (see [here](#)).

²⁷ Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018, p. 55;

Justice & Paix, *L'accueil des élèves migrants, un espoir d'intégration?*, December 2017.

²⁸ Justice & Paix, *L'accueil des élèves migrants, un espoir d'intégration?*, December 2017.

²⁹ Van Avermaet, P., *Waarom zijn we bang voor meertaligheid? Levende Talen Magazine*, 2015, pp. 6-10.

³⁰ Dekeyser, G., “*Miss, That's Not Special. Everybody Speaks Multiple Languages*” *Children's Voices about Being Multilingual Within and Beyond their Family. A Multimethod study in Antwerp* (PhD thesis), 2020, KU Leuven.

multilingual could very well be used in this context.³¹ This attitude raises concerns with regard to the wellbeing of newcomer children and its influence on their educational developments.

For older students, the language courses offered by universities to prepare them for higher education are not free of charge, and therefore often not affordable.³² Yet, higher education will usually require a B2 level in Dutch or English.

2.4 Insufficient resources and attention for psycho-social care

Another important issue concerns the lack of attention and care for the psycho-social well-being of children with an international protection status.³³ Teachers are confronted with the consequences of psychological distress and trauma of these children on a daily basis, but they do not have the training nor the time and resources to address this. When properly trained, teachers could help identify the psycho-social needs of their pupils and refer them to professional psycho-social care if needed.³⁴

2.5 Continued education around the age of majority

Lastly, effectively accessing and enjoying education has proven particularly challenging for young students who are around the age of majority. When following higher education or adult education, the Flemish government foresees a special allowance for persons with an international protection status, to cover part of the study costs. However, this allowance does not cover all the expenses. Furthermore, the local welfare agency will determine whether persons with an international protection status can retain their social allowance while studying (depending on the local welfare policy). Alternatively, the local activation policy may provide social assistance while studying, if the training concerns a field in which there is a high demand for employees.³⁵ Hence, the possibilities for persons with international protection to continue studying after they turn 18 will largely depend on the local welfare and labour market policies. There are, however, examples of inspiring local practices, which aim to address this issue (see Box 2).

OPEN SCHOOL ANTWERPEN

Open School Antwerpen created special courses for children in OKAN education aged 17-21 years old, upon request of the OKAN schools in Antwerp. The courses were developed for young people who, after finishing the OKAN trajectory, were not yet ready for work or a specific professional education. The courses very much aim to let the students explore their interests and talents, combined with subjects such as Dutch, math, IT, sports and communication. The students are also supported in their search for a professional education, in order to facilitate participation in the Belgian labour market. The courses offered at the Open School Antwerpen are offered in collaboration with other (local) organisations (VDAB, Atlas Integratie en Inburgering, CVO Viva, VCO Encora and Buursport). For more information, see [here](#).

Box 2 – Open School Antwerpen

³¹ Ibid. See also: Pulinx, P., Van Avermaet, P., & Agirdag, O., Silencing linguistic diversity: the extent, the determinants and consequences of the monolingual beliefs of Flemish teachers, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2017, 20(5), pp. 542-556.

³² Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018, p. 55.

³³ Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018; Justice & Paix, *L'accueil des élèves migrants, un espoir d'intégration?*, December 2017; Baccichet, M. (2018). *Quel accueil des enfants migrants à l'école?*, Eduquer.

³⁴ Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018, pp.58-59.

³⁵ Ibid, p.47.

3. Key barriers to access the labour market

3.1 Entering the labour market

After obtaining international protection, the person or family will first need to find their own accommodation (see section 1), arrange education for the children (see section 2), complete the civic integration course and so on. It may therefore take time before persons with an international protection status succeed in becoming economically active in Belgium. Labour market participation of persons with an international protection status remains low as compared to other categories of migrants.³⁶

For that purpose, the local welfare agencies (OCMW/CPAS) offer special programmes, which aim to get persons (back) into the labour market. An example is the “*Article 60*” programme, which is subsidized employment with the purpose of gaining work experience and working the minimum period of time to be eligible for unemployment benefits after this programme. Notwithstanding some positive evaluations,³⁷ the programme has been criticized for being prone to a selection bias.³⁸

A second example of a subsidized employment scheme is the *Service Voucher Scheme (SVS)*. The scheme enables subsidized domestic work and has grown significantly in the last 10 years. In 2019, the vast majority (97%) of the 170,000 employees working through the scheme that year, were female. Given that most of these migrant female workers were born in one of the EU12 countries and a substantial portion of them are highly-skilled, EU labour migration appears to possibly exclude more vulnerable groups (such as non-EU migrants) from enrolling. Moreover, the SVS rarely leads to more long term employment in other professions, so the scheme as a whole does not appear to fully meet its objective in that regard.³⁹

At the same time, various social initiatives have arisen to support persons with international protection on their path to work. Examples include Refu Interim (see Box 3)⁴⁰, Duo for a Job⁴¹ and Mentor2Work⁴².

REFU INTERIM

The initiative “Refu Interim” brings together newcomers (including applicants for and holders of international protection) who are looking for work experience with employers able to offer such positions. The initiative focusses on volunteer work as an initial opportunity for persons with an international protection status to get work experience, broaden their network and develop their language skills. Next to that, volunteer work is also more easily combined with other activities, such as school, civic integration classes or a language course. The initiative started out in Ghent but has now more than 10 locations around Flanders and Wallonia. Hence, this social initiative has by now grown into a sizeable organization, active all around Belgium.

Box 3 – Refu Interim

³⁶ Lens, D. et al.; Double Jeopardy: How Refugees Fare in One European Labor Market. *IZA Journal of Development and Migration*, 2019, 8(8). See also: Belspo, *IMMILAB final report - Improving the Labour Market Position of People with a Migration background in Belgium*, June 2022.

³⁷ Vzw Gent, Stad in werking, *Van nieuwkomer tot werknemer: een draaiboek over versnelde activering van nieuwkomers*, November 2018 (see [here](#)).

³⁸ Cockx, B. & De Ridder, G. (2001). Social employment of welfare recipients in Belgium: An evaluation, *The Economic Journal*, 111(470), pp. 322–352.

³⁹ Belspo, *IMMILAB final report - Improving the Labour Market Position of People with a Migration background in Belgium*, June 2022.

⁴⁰ <https://www.refuinterim.be/>

⁴¹ <https://www.duoforajob.be/nl/onthaal/>

⁴² <http://www.mentor2work.be/>

3.2 Language skills

Language skills appear to be a significant obstacle whenever persons with international protection wish to enter the Belgian labour market. Therefore, the regional employment agencies have taken various initiatives in this regard.

As such, the Flemish job agency (VDAB) introduced a new approach titled ‘integration through work’. This approach enables jobseekers with a migration background, including persons with an international protection status, to find work where language learning and employment are combined. Applicants are subject to a technical screening to assess skills and talents, whereby language skills are considered secondary. In this way, jobseekers can start working while continuing to improve their language skills.⁴³

In Brussels, the job agency Actiris provides general information in 22 languages and offers the possibility of using an interpreter to facilitate communication with the agency.⁴⁴

In Wallonia, Forem is part of the initiative *AB Réfugiés emploi*⁴⁵, a project developed upon request of the European Commission to support the inclusion of refugees across national borders. The project provides training and networking opportunities for local companies and persons with a migration background, to accelerate the recruitment process. As part of this project, an app was developed that can help persons with a migration background with language difficulties in their professional environment. The app, called FACT, was developed for workers in specific industries, such as cleaning, gardening and the metal industry.⁴⁶

3.3 Recognition of prior qualifications and work experiences

Skills and qualifications acquired prior to arrival in Belgium are not always considered, or are not considered to be sufficient. This leads to time consuming procedures to obtain the recognition of qualifications.⁴⁷ To that end, the French-speaking and the Flemish communities have their own procedure. It is said that Wallonia is more strict when it comes to the requirement to prove that a qualification is equivalent to a Belgian qualification.⁴⁸ Flanders is considered more flexible, also taking into account relevant work experiences and training.⁴⁹ Positively, in both communities, the procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications is free of charge for persons with an international protection status.⁵⁰

⁴³ VDAB, *Nieuwe techniek ‘taalarme screening’ van VDAB laat toe anderstalige werkzoekenden met migratieachtergrond sneller op de arbeidsmarkt te integreren*, 20 June 2017 (see [here](#)).

⁴⁴ <https://www.actiris.brussels/en/citizens/>

⁴⁵ https://www.leforem.be/content/dam/leforem/fr/documents/AB_Refugiés_Emploi.pdf and <https://www.ab-refugies.eu/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ab-refugies.eu/fact>

⁴⁷ Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs voor vluchtelingen: warm onthaal, vlotte leerloopbaan en duurzaam toekomstperspectief*, 2018. See also: Chiswick, B., & Miller, P., The Effects of educational-occupational mismatch on immigrant earnings in Australia, with international comparisons, *International Migration Review*, 2010, 44(4), 869-898; Borjas, G. J., The economics of immigration, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 1994, 32(4), 1667–1717; Friedberg, R., You can’t take it with you? Immigrant assimilation and the portability of human capital, *Journal of Labour Economics*, 2000, 18(2), 221-251.

⁴⁸ Rea, A., & Wets, J. (eds.) (2014). *The long and Winding Road to Employment; An analysis of the Labour Market Careers of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Belgium*, Academia Press.

⁴⁹ Martiniello, M., Rea, A., Timmerman, C., & Wets, J. (eds.). *Nouvelles migrations et nouveaux migrants en Belgique/Nieuwe migraties en nieuwe migranten in België*, 2018, Academia Press.

⁵⁰ See [here](#) and [here](#).

3.4 Labour market discrimination

Discrimination of foreigners on the Belgian labour market has been confirmed in various studies⁵¹ and has been considered stronger than in some other EU member states.⁵² In Belgium, discrimination is said to be “woven in rules and procedures, but also in unwritten behavioral rules and norms”⁵³. It takes place both when attempting to enter the labour market (e.g. not being invited for an interview) as well as during employment (e.g. earning less than peers).⁵⁴

The Belgian government has taken some initiatives to try to address discrimination on the labour market. Firstly, a new law enables the use of anonymous research methods (such as mystery-calls) to find out whether employers are violating anti-discrimination policies. Secondly, the employment agency in Brussels (Actiris) offers free assistance to companies to support their recruitment and human resource services to increase diversity in their workforce.⁵⁵

3.5 Disadvantageous characteristics of the Belgian labour market

Some particular characteristics of the Belgian labour market further hinder access to employment for persons with an international protection status. Firstly, the Belgian labour market has an institutional structure that enforces a strong insider-outsider divide, meaning that it protects persons that are employed through strong structures that protect wages and working conditions (i.e. wage agreements and labour legislation protecting workers). Second, Belgium has relatively little low-wage jobs on the labour market. Third, the Belgian labour market knows a relatively high number of posted workers, i.e. workers that are legally employed in another EU member state and come to Belgium temporarily to work. Posted workers are often cheaper than locally hired employees, because their social security contributions are paid in the EU member state where they are legally employed. Moreover, for posted workers, there are often fewer or no recruitment requirements (such as fluency in Dutch/French).⁵⁶

⁵¹ Kalter, F. & Kogan, I., Ethnic Inequalities at Labour Market Entry in Belgium and Spain. Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 2002, Working paper nr. 49; Carpentier, S., Neels, K. & Van den Bosch, K., Exit from and re-entry into social assistance benefit in Belgium among people with migration background and the native-born, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 2017, 26, 366-383; OECD, OECD employment outlook, 2008, OECD; Corluy, V., & Verbist, G., Can Education Bridge the Gap? Education and the Employment Position of Migrants in Belgium. ImPROvE Working Papers, 2014, No. 14/02.

⁵² Kalter, F. & Kogan, I., Ethnic Inequalities at Labour Market Entry in Belgium and Spain. Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 2002, Working Paper No. 49.

⁵³ Own translation: “[discriminatie] zit verweven in regels en procedures, maar ook in ongeschreven gedragsregels en normen”. See UNIA & Federale Overheidsdienst Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg, *Arbeidsmarkt en origine 2018*, Socio-Economische monitoring, March 2020, p. 292.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Belspo, *IMMILAB final report - Improving the Labour Market Position of People with a Migration background in Belgium*, June 2022.

⁵⁶ Ibid.