



Social Inclusion and Access to Basic Services of Third-Country Nationals (AccessIN)

Toolkit for Policymakers *AccessIN Deliverable D2.6 (Work Package 2)*



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Toolkit for Policymakers

Presentation:

Although the social inclusion of third-country nationals (TCNs) has been a key priority across the EU, persistent gaps in their access to basic services demonstrate that additional actions are needed to support integration.

AccessIN contributes to these ongoing efforts to tackle TCNs' social vulnerabilities by focusing on four EU Member States from different European regions: Belgium, Germany, Hungary & Spain.

This report provides an executive summary of the project's main findings and recommendations for identifying and reducing barriers in access to services. It is done in a transversal and multi-sectoral approach that covers five core policy areas: healthcare, housing, education, employment and social assistance.



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I. Overview of the AccessIN project

Drawing on the collaborative work of a consortium including universities, civil society organisations and a public administration, the AccessIN project (2022-2024)¹ has tackled the social vulnerabilities of **third-country nationals (TCNs)** in four EU Member States: **Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain**.

The actions implemented during the project aimed to identify and reduce barriers in access to services across five core policy areas: **healthcare, housing, education, employment, and social assistance**. These actions were distributed across several Work Packages, whose results inform this policy toolkit.

Work Package 2: Mapping, Informing, and Improving the Eligibility Conditions for Migrants' Access to Basic Services

Co-led by the University of Liège and Caritas International, this Work Package mapped the legal eligibility conditions under which third-country nationals can access basic services in Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Spain. The analysis served to develop activities aiming to: a) raise awareness on migrants' social rights; b) inform policymakers about challenges in migrants' social inclusion.

Work package 3: Removing Barriers in Migrants' Access to Basic Services: The Role of Service Providers

Co-led by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Solidaridad Sin Fronteras (SSF), this Work Package examined service providers' viewpoint and role in ensuring migrants' access to public services. It concentrated on: a) organizational capacity, resources and training needed by first-line practitioners; b) their latent attitudes and cultural beliefs that may hinder migrants' access to services.

Work package 4: Migrants' Experiences in Accessing Basic Services and Tools for Improving Healthcare Provision

Co-led by the Universities of Marburg, Oxford and the City of Frankfurt, this Work Package focused on migrants' awareness regarding social rights and their experiences in accessing basic services. The Work Package also developed an intervention aimed to improve the access of third-country nationals to healthcare services.

Work package 5: Strengthening the Role of CSOs in Fostering Migrants' Access to Basic Services

Led by Menedék, this Work Package focused on the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in migrants' access to basic services. It developed different tools and activities aiming to foster CSOs' capacity to undertake their tasks more effectively, while also providing a forum for networking and information exchange between CSOs, both nationally and transnationally.

¹ More information on the project team and consortium can be found on [our website](#).



The actions implemented by the AccessIN project focused on **four EU Member States**, whose specificities in terms of public service provision are briefly summarized below.

Belgium

Belgium is a complex federal country, whose social inclusion programmes are spread and/or organized through **multilevel governance** involving the federal level, regions and municipalities. Additionally, horizontal actors such as unions, ‘pillarized’ Social Security agencies, and CSOs are also involved in the everyday governance of the Belgian welfare state.



The Belgian system combines a contributory component of **work-based social insurance** with a residual non-contributory system of **social assistance**.

The **institutions** relevant to migrants’ access to basic services are (1) ‘Public Centre for Social Assistance’ (CPAS), a public institution providing social assistance services and benefits; (2) ‘Federation of Self-Organizations’ (FZO), a socio-cultural umbrella association standing for the integration and participation of migrant communities in Flanders and the Flemish part of Brussels.

Two key programs help newly arrived **migrant pupils**, including asylum seekers and refugees, to overcome linguistic barriers before attending regular schooling: the ‘bridging classes’ (in the French-speaking part: DASPA) and the ‘reception classes’ (in the Flemish-speaking part: OKAN).

Regional authorities provide school materials and social assistance schemes to support parents in need (i.e., allowances and other benefits for parents or legal guardians of immigrant pupils). In general, there is a strong network of **NGOs, migrant associations and public agencies** working together to provide guidance and support to newly arrived migrants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees.

Important recent changes include a part of labour migration policies with the “one stop shop”-the **unified permit** and protective policies concerning housing of foreign employees.

Germany



The German system **social insurance programs** are based on individuals' labor activity –depending on period of contributions – and social assistance benefits provided regardless of contributions.

The clearing offices (**Clearingstelle**) are intended primarily for newly arrived immigrants who received a residence permit for the first time and their families. At these offices, immigrants can get information about the regularization process, the recognition of foreign qualifications, benefit entitlements, and resources from the Immigration Advice Service for Adult Immigrants (MBE) and the Youth Immigration Services (JMD).

The level of inclusion of third-country nationals is regulated by the **Residence Act (AufenthG)**, which specifies the rules for integrating resources at the federal level, focusing on integration courses. The **Asylum Procedures Acceleration Act** introduced job-related language training which promotes labor market integration through vocational language promotion courses.

Resources for primary and secondary education teachers to better support **migrant pupils** include the “welcome” classrooms (special classes enrolling students with no/little German knowledge), the course of German as a second language (Daz) and the figure of school social workers.

Overall, there is a strong network of **NGOs, migrant associations, and public agencies** working together to guide and support newly arrived migrants.

TCNs with regular residence are largely on an equal footing with German nationals in terms of access to **social rights**. The system of differentiation of social rights begins before the receipt of a regular residence title and affects asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers with tolerated stay, but also EU citizens who only have limited access to social rights. Despite the extensive equality of TCNs under social and labour law, there are a number of exclusion mechanisms from central areas of the social life.

Hungary

In Hungary, there are **no separate ministries** for employment/labour, education, health or social welfare (Hungarian Act II of 2022). Since 2011, ex lege, these domains have been divided into sub-fields put under the competences of several ministers. The coherence and effectiveness of social policies thus depend on the coordination between these different institutions.



The Hungarian system is a **work-based redistribution system**. The main beneficiaries of social benefits are those who are/were in paid employment. Beneficiaries of international protection, temporary protection applicants, persons holding permanent residence permits, and (with certain limits) holders of a student residence permit can take up employment without a work permit. These groups have the same social rights as Hungarian citizens.

Healthcare institutions operate on a territorial level, based on the address of residence. People with a declared job can receive free public healthcare. This also applies to beneficiaries of international protection, persons with permanent residence permits and third-country nationals with work permit. Refugees and persons with permanent residence permits who are not working must pay a monthly social security contribution (just like Hungarian nationals).

Primary **schools** also operate on a territorial basis, with a compulsory admission requirement for children living in the school area. Admission to secondary schools and universities is by entrance examination. There are government-funded English-language scholarship programmes for non-EU university students.

Beneficiaries of international protection and persons with permanent residence permits have access to mainstream **social housing** options: homeless shelters, homes for abused women, and temporary accommodations for families in need. They can also apply for municipalities' social rental housing tenders. For people with a work residence permit, it is common for employers to arrange accommodation in a work shelter.

Spain



With the exceptions of pensions and unemployment benefits, which remain under the responsibility of the central government, the **Autonomous Communities** (regions) represent central actors in the development, financing and provision of education, healthcare, social services, and social housing. As such, migrants' access to basic services varies across Spain, depending on the priorities established by regional governments and the resources they mobilise in this regard.

The Spanish system combines **social insurance programs** based on the individuals' labor activity and **universalist schemes** based on residence.

On paper, migrants can easily access to **healthcare**. There are two main **social assistance programs** aiming to support individuals without sufficient resources: the Minimum Insertion Income (RMI) and the Minimum Vital Income (IMV).

Teachers of primary and secondary education count with resources to better support **migrant pupils**. Example from the Community of Madrid: the programs 'link classroom' (for migrant pupils with language difficulties), 'SAI' (supporting migrant pupils who recently joined school and do not master the Spanish language), and 'SETI' (providing translation and interpretation services during tutorial sessions between educators and parents) were created to address the needs of migrant pupils.

In general, **NGOs, migrant associations and public agencies** work together to provide guidance and support to newly arrived migrants.

II. Key challenges and recommendations

This section informs about the key barriers regarding migrants' access to basic services in the four countries under study, while also sharing good practices and potential solutions on how to overcome such challenges.

The information is based on **extensive fieldwork** and 282 in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group conducted in Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Spain, **with 177 migrants** (of different nationalities and legal statuses), **as well as 105 service providers** working with migrant populations.

To study the Belgian case, semi-structured interviews were organised with 41 migrants, as well as 23 service providers working with migrant populations. For Germany, the fieldwork was conducted in the cities of Offenbach, Frankfurt am Main, Fulda, and Marburg with 48 migrants, as well as 31 service providers. In the case of Hungary, this research was conducted in Budapest, Mogyoród, Debrecen, and Gödöllő with 40 migrants and 20 service providers working with migrant populations. For the case of Spain, the study draws on 48 interviews with immigrants, as well as 31 service providers working with migrant populations. For the specific area of education, it also includes insights from an original survey that was conducted with educators in the Community of Madrid.

This section focuses in particular on migrants' access to services across 5 specific policy areas: (A) employment, (B) education, (C) healthcare, (D) housing, and (E) social assistance.

A. Employment

This section explores the current landscape of access to employment for migrants in Belgium, Spain, Hungary, and Germany, focusing on **the challenges that hinder their inclusion into the labour market**. Despite these challenges, including discrimination and a lack of recognition for foreign qualifications, several **best practices** have emerged, illustrating effective ways to enhancing migrants' access to employment and their economic empowerment across these four countries.



State of play and challenges in relation to employment

The AccessIN project has identified several challenges faced by migrants when it comes to their practical access to the labour market. Common obstacles include **administrative barriers, lack of access to information, and precarious employment conditions**, which hinder migrants' ability to navigate the labour market effectively. Additionally, **discrimination** based on nationality and gender, coupled with limited social support networks, further hinders their integration, often relegating them to low-skilled jobs and undermining their professional qualifications.

Belgium

In Belgium, labour market mobility is considered 'halfway favorable' according to MIPEX (2020). Newly arrived migrants can access public employment services, vocational training, and recognition of qualifications. Yet, they may face delays and constraints in accessing private and self-employment. The language courses, information, and guidance offered by civil servants and CSOs foster migrants' inclusion into the Belgian labor market. Immigrants with a National Register Number can access public employment services, vocational training, and the recognition of their foreign diplomas/qualifications. Yet, they –especially non-EU migrants– face obstacles when accessing private employment or self-employment, with targeted support being often limited to language courses and general orientation provided by specialized services to job seekers.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Pre-conditions for migrants' economic inclusion**

Overall, newly arrived migrants need to overcome certain administrative obstacles and have digital skills before entering the labor market. Professionals highlight how important it is for migrants to get adequate information that can facilitate administrative tasks (e.g. opening a bank account in Belgium) before obtaining a job. Knowledge on how to use digital devices can facilitate migrants' job search.

> **Discrimination in the labor market**

Prejudices and mistrust remain important obstacles for migrants' labor inclusion in Belgium. Professionals and migrants alike raise attention on discriminatory practices of Belgian employers, particularly towards migrant workers originating from Arab countries. Service providers consider that attributes related to race, origin, and nationality influence employers' decisions for hiring immigrant workers. While highly skilled migrants seem less discriminated against, biased practices remain an important issue at different levels, from the bureaucratic process to obtain a legal authorization to work, to lower salaries to workers because of their residence permits or the lack of such permits.

> **Lack of social networks in Belgium**

The absence of relatives or friends in Belgium can also hinder the labor market inclusion of migrants in general, and of newcomers in particular. The lack of networks, especially among undocumented and/or newly arrived immigrants, hinders their opportunities of finding employment, especially for jobs that are not publicly advertised. Social circles are important for getting work interviews and informal contacts that could potentially help in finding employment.

Germany

Germany has reinforced its support for equal opportunities for non-EU immigrants to progress into stable quality employment. According to MIPEX (2020), Germany ranks in the Top 10 countries internationally in terms of labor market mobility. One particular strength consists of targeted support measures and improved procedures to recognize foreign qualifications and skills. Yet, not all temporary residents enjoy immediate access to the labor market, vocational training, or public sector jobs. Access to employment depends primarily on obtaining residence permits, which remains a key pre-requisite. Having a good command of the German language and work experience in Germany also influence migrants' employability.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Migrants' labor and social precariousness**

Long working hours are mentioned as the main reason impeding migrants to attend training courses aimed at improving employability. It is especially difficult for those who, along with precarious employment, have dependent family members and weak social networks in Germany. Labor precariousness is further aggravated for people with no residence/work permit. Asylum seekers stand out from the rest, as they are not allowed to work in the regular labour market.

> **Lack of employment history and job skills to work in Germany**

Job counselors emphasize that the German labour market needs highly qualified workers with language proficiency. However, the lack of work experience and training in Germany is perceived as a key factor shaping employment opportunities. Professional/academic credentials obtained in origin countries are not always considered by German employers and the amount of time and financial resources that migrants need to invest in obtaining recognition for their qualifications remains important. Proficiency in English is also key in accessing high-quality jobs.

> **Digital gap**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the suspension of in-person attendance led counselors to shoulder the responsibility for assisting immigrants how to deal with online applications, which was seen as a rather difficult task since: (1) some immigrants are not proficient in German; and (2) some do not have devices (laptops, tablets) nor internet access at home.

> **Discrimination in the labor market**

Employers' practices are determinant in migrants' employability. Providers and migrants alike describe situations where (1) migrant workers' labor rights are not respected (unpaid holidays, excessive working hours, unfair dismissals), and (2) have to cope with racism. They mention that although there are hostile attitudes towards several groups, including Eastern Europeans and Asians, migrants of Turkish or Arab origins face stronger hostility at the workplace. Interviews also mentioned the attitudes of personnel working at the Foreigners' Registration Office, with several references to their misbehavior towards immigrants who come to the service to apply for residence and work permits.

Hungary

In Hungary, integration policies in the area of employment have slightly improved since 2014, when immediate access to the labor market was extended to temporary workers and non-EU citizens from neighboring countries, according to MIPEX (2020). Several barriers hamper migrants' inclusion into the Hungarian labor market, especially in higher quality jobs. Migrant workers often take up jobs with low salaries and long working hours.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability and skills**

Migrants' dependence on their jobs implies that even if they are informed about their employment rights, they often do not enforce them out of fear of being fired. Interviewees pinpoint that immigrant workers tend to be concentrated in low-skilled jobs, some under exploitation. Many are employed through temporary work agencies, which may apply different regulations. The lack of a social support network often makes it more difficult for immigrants to access the Hungarian labor market. Highly qualified immigrants also face difficulties with the recognition of labor experience and academic qualifications from abroad, which hinders their opportunities to access jobs similar to the ones they previously had. This downgrade is also associated with the language barrier.

> **Discrimination in the labor market**

Job counselors and migrants draw attention to prejudices from Hungarian employers and colleagues towards immigrant workers, especially those from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Professionals and migrants alike also underline the Islamophobia faced by Muslims. In predominantly domestic work environments, racialized migrants are more prone to feel discriminated against based on physical appearance or their command of the Hungarian language.

> **Bureaucracy**

The complex and time-consuming paperwork that migrants must deal with to regularize their status often delays their access to the labor market. Changes in migratory statuses – particularly from student to employee – often discourages employers from hiring immigrants. Obtaining the social security number that allows immigrants to work in Hungary is the most challenging bureaucratic hurdle identified. Non-Hungarian speakers often resort to immigration lawyers to collect these administrative requirements.

> **Gender aspects**

Professionals state that female migrants often have lower language proficiency, qualifications, and work experience than their male counterparts, which hamper their access to the Hungarian labor market. Female migrants must also cope with further difficulties in balancing their responsibilities as workers and mothers. Since they are often responsible for family care, child-friendly jobs – usually characterized by low salaries – tend to be the only alternative for them. Specific prejudices towards immigrant women by employers also constrain their chances of pursuing a career in Hungary.

Spain

Labor market mobility in Spain is "slightly favorable" compared to other EU Member States, according to MIPEX (2020). Migrants enjoy full access to the private sector and self-employment, on equal terms as Spaniards. They are also granted the same access to public employment services and main professional training courses. Access to employment is largely contingent on pre-acquiring a residence permit in Spain. Holding a resident permit decreases labor instability in terms of types of work contracts, salaries, and promotion opportunities. Furthermore, obtaining this permit facilitates the task of labor counselors in charge of advising and guiding immigrants in their access to employment. Yet, other barriers such as having a good command of the Spanish language remain important.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Lack of information about the Spanish labor market**

Limited knowledge about the functioning of the Spanish labor market hinders migrants' employment and job search. Many immigrants interviewed indicated that they were not aware of the free job specialization courses offered by entities such as the Immigration Offices or the requirements to apply for certain jobs (e.g., food handler's license). This slows down their labor placement. The situation is further aggravated for migrants with limited language skills in Spanish, who face additional difficulties in finding a job or in (re)negotiating their salaries or employment conditions.

> **Discrimination in the labor market**

Discriminatory treatment remains an important obstacle for migrants' economic inclusion in Spain. Professionals offering employment support raise attention on employers' discriminatory behaviour, especially towards migrants originating from Morocco or Sub-Saharan Africa. This was confirmed in interviews with migrants, who also reported discriminatory practices from their Spanish employers and co-workers. Service providers consider that Muslim women, particularly those wearing religious clothing, are more likely to suffer discrimination at work. The professional and academic skills and qualifications that migrants obtained before coming to Spain are not always considered, or have the same recognition, by their employers.

> **Lack of social support networks in Spain**

The absence of social support groups in Spain also hinders migrants' labor market inclusion. Such networks are particularly important for facilitating migrants' job search and for fostering networking with other entities –migrant associations and NGOs– and public agencies such as employment offices and municipal social services.

Best practices related to access to employment

The AccessIN project has identified several best practices to enhance migrants' access to employment and facilitate their inclusion into the labor market. These include legal support through Pro Deo lawyers in Belgium, digital training initiatives in Germany, and collaborative efforts between job centers and social entities in Hungary, all aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by migrants. Additionally, Spain's emphasis on telephonic assistance and partnerships with civil society organizations highlights the importance of tailored support systems that can empower migrants to secure stable and quality employment opportunities.

Belgium

> **Pro Deo lawyers**

Service providers emphasize how their extensive work is highly constrained by legal stipulations concerning their intervention. They recommend the use of Pro Deo lawyers (or lawyers usually subsidized by the state for persons without sufficient resources) to help migrant workers in their job search and in finding work opportunities better adapted to their qualifications and previous experience.

> **Mentoring**

Mentoring programs (sometimes personalized or even informal) proposed by civil society organizations and service providers can help migrant workers in accomplishing their professional goals.

Germany

> **Digital training and spaces with technological devices for immigrants**

Considering the digital barriers that some migrants and asylum seekers face, several public institutions and organizations provide them with digital training and places where they can be guided in processing online applications.

> **Long-term immigrants supporting those recently arrived**

Professionals indicate that some NGOs tend to match immigrants with a longer period of residence in Germany with newcomers, so that the former can serve as role models and support those newly arrived in their work and training pathways.

> **Language training for migrant women**

Bearing in mind the specific constraints that female migrants face in accessing jobs, some CSOs and NGOs provide them with training specifically tailored to their schedules, mainly German courses.

Hungary

> Partnerships with social entities

When migrants visit job centers with problems that go beyond job search (e.g. finding accommodation, school enrolment), professionals working in those centers often contact other organizations or social workers who can assist in specific cases.

> Employment facilitators

In an attempt to fight discrimination, some job counselors often accompany migrant workers during the first day of work. Some labor advisors also organize community events to raise awareness about the culture and characteristics of different countries. They indicate that some human resources departments and job-seeking organizations hold seminars on the history and religion of Hungary, to ensure that immigrant workers are also well informed about the local culture. Certain NGOs have created labor market projects with local companies, fostering communication channels and matching immigrant workers with companies with specific labor demands.

Spain

> Providing telephonic assistance and collaboration for labor orientation

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that employment professionals can provide telephonic assistance to keep in touch with migrants searching for work. Such initiative is particularly useful for communication with migrants lacking technological tools and/or digital skills. A close collaboration between employment agencies and CSOs that supply training and job counseling to migrants is particularly useful to increase their chances of finding more stable and better-quality jobs. Including informal interpreters –volunteers mainly from CSOs, as well as immigrants' relatives and friends– is a useful strategy to facilitate communication between service providers and immigrants in search for a job.

Recommendations on the access to employment

Drawing on the above-mentioned fieldwork and findings, the AccessIN project has developed a **series of recommendations** for policymakers, public authorities' providers and civil society organisations, in view of addressing the identified challenges related to migrants' **access to employment**. These recommendations highlight the urgent need to address the barriers that hinder **migrants' economic inclusion in the labor market**. Key strategies include implementing anti-discrimination campaigns, facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications, and improving bureaucratic processes to support migrants.

Belgium

As discrimination remains a key obstacle to migrants' economic inclusion, this toolkit encourages the creation of **awareness campaigns** to fight against discriminatory practices within the labor market. Such campaigns seem particularly needed in **the private sector** where prejudice especially against non-European migrants is an important obstacle that remains to be tackled. The design and implementation of such campaigns should also ideally come as the result of **joint cooperation between public authorities and civil society organizations**.

Germany

To ensure migrants' inclusion into the labor market, it is important to facilitate the **recognition of their skills and prior qualifications**, also meeting the needs of the German labor market. Additionally, it is necessary to **boost communication** between civil society organizations and the Foreigners' Registration Office, also enabling employment counselor to accompany migrants to these offices. It would also be useful to launch awareness-raising campaigns targeting officials of the Foreigners' Registration Offices and human resources staff.

Hungary

Facilitating bureaucratic processes, particularly for the recognition of migrants' prior skills and qualifications acquired in origin countries, is crucial for their inclusion into the Hungarian labor market. An effective and less time-consuming recognition system could increase migrants' probability of accessing similar job positions, helping to overcome labor precariousness. Facilitating the process of **obtaining a social security number** is also needed to overcome labour market informality. Additionally, awareness campaigns on the benefits of migration and integration dynamics in the workplace could be useful in tackling the discrimination often experienced by immigrant employees at the workplace.

Spain

It is particularly important to **facilitate the regularization process** and the recognition of prior skills and qualifications that immigrants obtained prior to arriving in Spain. Especially for newcomers, this could increase their chances of overcoming labor instability and informality. Additionally, greater efforts should be encouraged from the government to keep fighting the discrimination by employers and colleagues based on **stereotypes and prejudices** related to immigration.

B. Education

This section examines the state of play regarding **access to education** for migrants in Belgium, Spain, Hungary, and Germany, highlighting the key challenges identified each country. Despite various **obstacles**, several **best practices** have emerged that demonstrate effective strategies for supporting migrants with different profiles. By analyzing these best practices alongside targeted policy recommendations, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of **how to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes** for migrants across these four countries.



State of play and challenges in relation to access to education

This section underlines the state of play and current challenges observed in relation to access to education for migrant pupils in Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Spain. We observe that this access is significantly hindered by common challenges, including socio-economic vulnerabilities, linguistic barriers, and the digital divide exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Belgium

Compared to other EU Member States, the Belgian educational system is rather favorable to the inclusion of foreign pupils (MIPEX, 2020). Public education is compulsory from 6 to 18 years of age. All migrant pupils can access public education, and their parents receive periodic information in multiple languages about the educational system. There are programs to overcome the linguistic barriers of newly arrived migrants before attending regular schooling. Continuous educational support in the language of instruction of pupils is offered in both pre-primary and compulsory education, with intercultural education also being a principle of the teacher training system.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability in migrants' households**

Family social vulnerability affects migrant pupils' educational inclusion and performance in many ways. The precariousness of migrant pupils' living conditions often goes hand-in-hand with low educational performance. Especially during the pandemic, service providers noticed a clearer digital divide and differentiated access to digital resources between pupils of different origins, which affected the possibility to conduct or follow online classes.

> **Linguistic barriers**

Poor command of the local language is a key obstacle affecting not only migrant pupils' integration into the educational system and their performance at school, but also the communication between educators and migrant parents. Learning Dutch/French is one of the main barriers, particularly in multi-lingual administrative divisions such as Brussels. Difficulties to communicate with educators can also demotivate migrant pupils from regular school attendance. Some unaccompanied migrant pupils face significant barriers, mostly due to lack of familiar guidance and educational intermediators.

> **Limited organizational resources and infrastructure**

Limited organizational resources remain a structural barrier for educational inclusion. Service providers mention the lack of trained and well-equipped personnel as a key obstacle. They require diversity and psychological training, to ensure a better communication between educators and migrant pupils and their families. Some educational locations in which pupils can learn Dutch/French before schooling are not suitable for accommodating the number of migrant pupils in need. Service providers consider that the fixed period for which migrant pupils are requested to learn Dutch/French is too short.

Germany

In Germany, education has slightly improved as a priority for integration policies. The educational system ranked above most European countries' average, according to MIPEX (2020). However, more needs to be done to target migrant pupils' needs through comprehensive orientation, language support and teacher training. Compulsory education requires all children aged 6 to 15 to attend school full-time at the primary and secondary levels. Despite a range of programs and resources available to teachers to support migrant pupils, the latter return lower academic performances than German pupils.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability in migrant households**

Immigrant parents sometimes have scarce time and limited competences to follow the academic development of their children and help them with homework. Families with refugee status are in a particularly complicated situations in which their labor and housing circumstances impede the regular follow up of children' educational trajectories. Some pupils originating from migrant households face a significant digital barrier, which are reflected in (1) the shortage of technological devices (computers, tablets), even a lack of internet access in some cases, and (2) parents' lack of digital skills.

> **Linguistic barriers**

Learning German remains one of the main obstacles affecting migrant pupils' performance at school. The risk of academic failure among migrant pupils is further aggravated when parents are not proficient in German, which entails significant difficulties in: helping children with homework; communicating with teachers; and understanding guidelines and recommendations provided by educational centers and their personnel. Based on the importance attached to language, early exposure to German language is also a determinant for the academic development of immigrant pupils.

> **Educational divide between the country of origin and Germany**

The gap between the educational curricula in migrants' origin countries and Germany is another significant barrier. Non-EU pupils (especially those originating from the Maghreb) seem to face greater difficulties due to this gap in educational systems.

> **Cultural distance and diversity training**

Educators and migrant parents alike consider that the educational pathways of migrant pupils can also be influenced by cultural patterns, with a focus on gender role models. Most references point to the strong role division among Muslims, with mothers being primarily responsible for childcare. According to teachers, it usually leads to situations in which their sons seek to strengthen their masculinity by challenging maternal authority. To provide better assistance to migrant pupils, professionals assess positively the possibility of attending diversity management courses.

Hungary

Hungarian policies for migrants' educational inclusion are considered "critically unfavorable", according to MIPEX (2020). Migrants' access to compulsory and non-compulsory education is restricted, and schools receive little to no governmental support to address the needs of migrant pupils. There are no public language courses available for migrant pupils. In educators' view, incomplete information from their families or legal guardians about how the Hungarian educational system works remains an important challenge.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Language barriers and interpretation**

In the case of newly arrived pupils, the lack of linguistic proficiency in Hungarian affects both their academic success and social integration at school, often leading to isolation. Educators believe that such challenges can be overcome when parents and educators speak English. Concerns focus on the scarcity of language training courses and Hungarian as a foreign language teachers. Educators further mention that although in some schools interpreters can attend the meetings with parents if requested, since there is no funding for this service, with either educators or pupils often being the ones who end up facilitating this communication.

> **Limited information regarding the functioning of the Hungarian educational system**

Educators and immigrants feel that no detailed information is provided to migrant families about the requirements and procedures for school enrolment. Overall, the Hungarian educational system seems to be difficult to understand for both nationals and immigrants. The website of the education authority offers pertinent information, but only in Hungarian, with the linguistic barrier generating a structural divide between Hungarian citizens and foreigners.

> **The digital gap, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Limited technological resources in migrant households may affect pupils' performance at school. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, online education created a digital divide that affected both Hungarian and migrant households, especially for low-income families with no/limited digital devices. Educators observed that while migrant children were often comfortable with using apps and online programs, they did not participate in online classes as much as in on-site settings.

> **Differences between educational systems and perceptions of cultural differences**

Differences between the educational systems in origin countries and in Hungary constrain migrant pupils' success. For pupils coming from different academic backgrounds, integration into the Hungarian schools might be particularly difficult since the latter is seen as very rigid, old school and non-multicultural friendly by the educators and migrants interviewed. According to teachers, Hungarian schools often reject enrolling Syrian and Arab children, arguing that their ways of life and customs may hinder their school integration.

Spain

In Spain, schooling is compulsory and free of charge until the age of 16, regardless of their administrative situation of pupils or their families. The educators interviewed drew attention on the fact that foreign pupils generally face greater difficulties at school when compared to Spaniards. This is especially the case non-European pupils. According to professionals, such challenges also explain the relatively lower educational performance and higher absence rates observed among migrant pupils. Academic performance and linguistic barriers also affect the perceptions held by educators to either recommend foreign pupils for tertiary education or to encourage them to pursue a social scholarship, in contrast to Spanish pupils.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability in migrants' households**

The high concentration of immigrants in precarious jobs with long working hours often hinders them from learning Spanish, which makes their interaction with educators more difficult during parent-teacher sessions. Job instability is particularly problematic among irregular workers. Immigrants who financially support their family in origin countries often tend to work long hours in Spain. It can decrease parental authority at home and increase the risk of school failure among migrant pupils. Pupils originating from migrant households that are more socio-economically vulnerable also face a significant digital barriers at school.

> **Linguistic barriers**

Migrant pupils who are not originating from Spanish-speaker countries still face important language barriers that affect their performance in class, despite the resources deployed in Spanish schools to overcome this obstacle. This is particularly the case for pupils of Moroccan and Chinese origins. Educators also report that some Latin American pupils face communicational difficulties in Spanish schools, due to their different grammatic usage of the Spanish language. Having strong linguistic skills in Spanish also seem to influence educators' perceptions of pupils' educational performance and future trajectories: the AccessIN survey conducted with educators in Spain indicate that educators would not recommend pupils with low or medium language proficiency for tertiary education.

> **Gender roles and cultural diversity**

Educators and immigrants alike consider that migrant pupils' pathways in the Spanish educational system can also be influenced by cultural differences and gender roles. Educators mention that in households with strong gender role divisions where the mother takes the primary responsibility for childcare, sons sometimes seek to strengthen their masculinity by challenging maternal authority, leading also to deficient academic performances in classrooms. Survey results indicate that some educators perceive less favorably male pupils originating from Romania, Morocco, Senegal, or the Dominican Republic in terms of their potential for continuing with tertiary education. Overall, there is lack of training of educators in intercultural diversity management.

Best practices related to access to education

This section highlights best practices related to access to education for migrant pupils in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, showcasing innovative strategies that enhance communication and support. In Belgium, initiatives such as informal interpreters and personalized monitoring have proven effective in fostering connections between educators and migrant families, while Germany's collaboration with local civil society organizations facilitates navigation of the educational system. Similarly, Hungary's emphasis on networking with parents and mentorship, alongside Spain's creative use of technology and informal interpreters, demonstrate a commitment to improving educational outcomes and inclusivity for migrant students across these countries.

Belgium

> **Material and resources to support education in diversity**

Some private and public institutions such as universities have created material to teach and recognize the different educational necessities of newly arrived migrant pupils. The European project 'RefugeesWellSchool' set up by the University of Leuven is an illustrative example.

> **Individual monitoring and personalized communication with migrant pupils**

A good practice emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, when educators maintained personalized communication with their pupils, including those with an immigrant background, in order to reduce anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

> **Ensuring equal access to technological equipment**

Educators emphasized the importance of ensuring pupils' equal access to technology and mentioned the important role of private donations to help buying laptops for schools in view of addressing the challenge of unequal access to technological equipment.

> **Informal interpreters to facilitate communication**

Some educators indicated that they act as translators (or identify colleagues as informal facilitators for the educational personnel) to work with migrant pupils and to stay in touch with their parents or legal guardians.

Germany

> **Initiatives to facilitate communication with migrant pupils and their families**

Educators believe that one of the strengths of German schools is their extensive collaboration with local CSOs that can help migrant families navigate the German educational system. At times, these organizations provide schools with interpreters.

> **Multilingual information**

Given the limited German language skills of some migrant parents and their lack of information on how the German educational system works, some schools have websites with information in several foreign languages.

Hungary

> Networking with parents

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, educators mention how important it was for them to have the contact details of families' social support workers, particularly in cases of vulnerable migrant households. In some schools, teachers implemented a register of absences through Google Drive, more user friendly for immigrant parents. Some educators also contacted parents every week to monitor the situation of each family.

> Mentors

Educators emphasize the positive role of mentor teachers. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, many pupils –mostly immigrants– started to receive the support of mentors, which proved to be a great help in improving pupils' educational achievements.

Spain

> The 'teacher assistant' to encourage participation

Migrant pupils' active participation in the classroom can be motivated if they are asked to act as 'teacher assistants.' Educators consider that offering to migrant pupils' leadership positions in the classroom may elevate their self-esteem and interest at school.

> Migrant pupils as liaison

Some educators purposefully ask migrant pupils to act as mediators and report about conflicts in class, including episodes of discrimination.

> Ensuring equal access to technological equipment

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that migrant pupils' performance and participation in class can be incentivized if they are provided with adequate technological equipment (laptops, tablets, Wi-Fi cards, etc.). During the lockdown, such initiatives were particularly important for the most economically deprived pupils living in households without internet connection, PCs or smartphones.

> Finding new ways of communication with migrant parents

The exchanges between educators and migrant parents who lack digital skills can also be improved by opting for more intuitive and user-friendly methods of communication, such as instant messaging as well as blogs instead of virtual classrooms.

Recommendations related to access to education

This section outlines policy recommendations aimed at improving **access to education** for migrant pupils in the four country cases, highlighting common challenges and potential solutions. A significant **point of convergence** is the recognition of **linguistic barriers as a critical obstacle** to academic success, prompting calls for increased language support and the institutionalization of effective educational programs. Additionally, all four countries emphasize the need for **enhanced training for educators** and the hiring of additional personnel to better address the diverse needs of migrant students.

Belgium

Professionals and migrants alike raise attention to the fact that linguistic barriers still hamper the academic performance of migrant pupils despite the existence of programs and projects to overcome such challenges. Concerns emphasize the fact that the bridging courses aiming to **ensure educational inclusion** either in Dutch or in French are inflexible to unstandardized curves of learning and the lack of infrastructure. A careful **evaluation** of these elements is thus recommended to find adequate solutions. Such evaluation may also assess if the educators' initiatives above mentioned could be institutionalized as a way to guarantee support catering to the needs of all migrant pupils.

Germany

Teachers emphasize the **shortage of personnel** and **excessive bureaucracy** faced in their daily work as the most significant barriers to assisting migrant pupils. Along with parents, they also point to the uneven implementation of educational programs aimed at meeting the specific needs of these pupils across German schools. Therefore, any measure intended to improve this situation should include hiring personnel (both teachers and administrative staff). There is also a need for **training courses** aimed at increasing teachers' knowledge of other cultures and curbing the spread of racial prejudice, especially towards Muslims.

Hungary

Bearing in mind that language is the main hurdle identified by both professionals and migrants, it becomes necessary to **increase the number of HFL teachers** (Hungarian as a foreign language) and to extend this program to all schools counting with a high percentage of immigrant pupils. The institutionalization of this service, ensuring retribution for these educators, could be a way to guarantee that this needed assistance is adequately provided. In addition, it would be desirable for educational authorities to provide detailed **information** to migrant families on the **functioning of the educational system** in their languages of origin.

Spain

Professionals and immigrants alike raise attention to the fact that **cultural divides** and linguistic barriers hamper the academic performance of migrant pupils despite the existence of programs and projects to overcome such challenges. Concerns focus primarily on the fact that these programs are not implemented in all schools that need them. While providers have seen the need to create initiatives aimed at improving the communication between educators, parents, and pupils, no guarantee warrants the continuation of these good practices in the long term. **Institutionalization of educators' initiatives** may be a way to ensure support caters to the needs of all migrant pupils and equal access to technological equipment for everyone in schools.

C. Healthcare

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the state of play regarding **access to healthcare** for migrants in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, highlighting the current challenges faced by these populations, such as **language barriers and socio-economic vulnerabilities**. It also showcases best practices and offers policy recommendations aimed at improving healthcare access and outcomes



State of play and challenges related to access to healthcare

We examine here the current state of play and challenges to the **access to healthcare** for migrants in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, highlighting significant challenges such as **language barriers**, **socio-economic vulnerabilities**, and **limited awareness of healthcare services**.

Belgium

Belgium ranks in the Top 10 EU Member States in terms of migrants' access to public healthcare, according to MIPEX (2020). All residents can access public healthcare, regardless of their nationality; yet administrative obstacles can emerge, especially for the undocumented. The Belgian healthcare system is based on reimbursement and mandatory insurance. For most services, there is a co-payment from patients. In Belgium, any salaried worker and assimilated categories have access to the healthcare system, regardless of their nationality. The system relies on a reimbursement procedure and the access to healthcare services is conditioned by individuals' affiliation to a sickness insurer and the payment of a 6-month minimum contribution. There is no statutory difference between Belgian and foreign residents in terms of accessing financial support in case of sickness.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Linguistic barriers**

Practitioners believe that the difficulty to communicate in Dutch, English or French is a significant barrier that hinders migrants' access to healthcare and adequate care provision, particularly among those recently arrived. Linguistic barriers also constraint how patients talk about their symptoms and understand medical indications.

> **Cultural differences and discrimination**

Different cultural beliefs and customs constraint how migrants access medical services. Professionals and migrants alike believe that origin, age, and gender are the main grounds of discrimination against immigrants when accessing the Belgian healthcare system. They also consider that female immigrants usually have face more difficulties to access healthcare than men. Migrants who possess a residence permit can also more easily access medical care than those without one.

> **Limited information about the Belgian healthcare system**

Professionals and migrants emphasize the complex functioning of medical assistance in Belgium and migrants' difficulties to understand it. Service providers highlight the necessity of providing more information about primary care or programs on sexual education to female immigrants as prevention. Interviewees also point out that not all migrants are aware of the administrative steps to follow for obtaining healthcare attention (e.g. the need to register with a general practitioner shortly upon arrival). This becomes particularly challenging for immigrants who lack digital skills.

Germany

Germany's approach to migrants' health remains average for Western European countries, according to MIPEX (2020). However, state and federal policies still restrict access to health services for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. The German healthcare system is financed through payroll-based contributions from employees and employers. Most residents in Germany are covered by the social health insurance, which is mandatory for employees below a certain income threshold. Foreigners with resident permits are typically enrolled in this insurance system and have the same entitlements as German nationals, although on average, they use services less frequently. Most refugees and asylum seekers are eligible for healthcare in Germany under the provisions of the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act and the Residence Act. However, the extent of their eligibility and access to healthcare services and health insurance can vary based on their specific residence status.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> Labor precariousness

Migrants' socio-economic vulnerability acts as a key obstacle for accessing health services. Migrants who cannot afford health insurance are only entitled to emergency care. Asylum seekers are the most disadvantaged group. Although the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act grants them access to medical assistance, additional healthcare benefits that go beyond regular care require additional permits to cover costs. For the most vulnerable profiles, the Humanitarian Consultations is the only alternative. However, doctors working for these consultations consider the total number of hours to be insufficient given the increasing number of patients and the shortage of clinicians.

> Familiarity with the German health system

Migrants with little command of the German language and lower educational levels face significant problems in accessing healthcare services. Migrants' limited awareness about the functioning of the German healthcare system is sometimes also explained by the differences with the systems in their origin countries (e.g. primary care, regular medical check-ups, etc.). It may result in the spread of misconceptions about the consequences of accessing the service, particularly among undocumented migrants who often refuse to go to primary healthcare centers out of the fear of being deported. Alongside the lack of technological resources, the digital skills gap is also considered as a major factor hindering migrants' access to healthcare.

> Cultural distance and gender roles

According to clinicians and migrants, migrants' customs sometimes entail difficulties in using health services due to the different concepts of illness and body in some cultures. In this scenario, migrant communities play an important role in supplying medical care, which leads some migrants to use the German healthcare resources in a more sporadic way. Cultural differences in gender roles also affect service provision, with some male companions showing reluctance to involve women directly in healthcare discussions. Both professionals and migrants point to the need for adapted communication strategies to effectively engage with female migrants.

Hungary

Hungary's policy to migrant healthcare falls slightly below the European average (MIPEX, 2020). The system is financed through social security contributions from employees and employers. Refugees and permanent residents who are unemployed must pay a monthly contribution. Migrants without health insurance must pay the full price for services in public facilities.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Limited knowledge of the Hungarian healthcare system**

Migrants and refugees usually rely on the help of social workers when seeking medical assistance in Hungary. English-speaking migrants provide a positive assessment of English-speaking doctors. Yet, most migrant patients do not speak Hungarian nor English, and most doctors do not speak English. Health apps and online platforms are usually not available in foreign languages and the lack of knowledge about the public healthcare system leads many immigrants to resort to private clinics.

> **Bureaucracy and socio-economic vulnerability**

Access to the Hungarian healthcare system depends on having certain economic resources, which leads to the exclusion of migrants in vulnerable living conditions. It is particularly hampered by two administrative procedures, namely: 1) the social security number, which involves a long bureaucratic process, and 2) the health insurance. Immigrants without health insurance must pay the full price for medical services. If refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or holders of permanent residence permits cannot afford to cover their health insurance costs, they may apply to the government office for "medical care for persons in need".

> **Cultural and gender differences in healthcare provision**

Practitioners highlight the differentiated cultural practices for healthcare and treatment observed among some migrant communities. They mention how gender aspects sometimes shape migrants' access to health services. Especially in the case of Muslim patients, women often ask to be assisted by a female doctor, particularly in gynaecological matters or childbirth. Meanwhile, Muslim male patients tend to be reluctant to be cared for by female clinicians, especially in medical checks involving physical contact.

Spain

Spain ranks at the top of EU Member States in access to universal healthcare, according to MIPEx (2020). All residents, regardless of their nationality or employment status, have the right to primary and emergency health care, free of charge. To access healthcare, foreigners must be registered in the population census of their municipality of residence (Padrón).

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Immigrants' socio-economic vulnerability**

Migrant patients often experience difficulties in attending medical appointments and health education courses due to lack of time and incompatibility with their work schedules. Hence, they do not access routine and periodic prevention care with the same frequency as Spaniards do. A lack of fluency in Spanish, along with a limited understanding of the Spanish health system also hinders some migrants' access to health services. According to professionals, Chinese and Moroccan immigrants may be the most disadvantaged groups in terms of language for communicate their symptoms. Although the Spanish healthcare is universal, the fear of unaffordable costs for medical services sometimes influences migrants' decision of not seeking medical attention.

> **Cultural differences**

Health professionals consider that migrants' cultural beliefs and customs sometimes shape their likelihood of accessing healthcare in Spain. Their general assessment is that migrants usually make only occasional use of health services, especially those originating from communities relying on traditional medicine. On occasions, cultural differences regarding the concept of health and body pose barriers to diagnose and provide appropriate care to migrant patients.

> **Lack of awareness about the Spanish healthcare system**

Some immigrants lack the necessary information about the functioning of medical assistance in Spain, the types of medical treatment and their costs, the procedures for medical appointments, or the usage of technological resources for accessing services. Migrants particularly point towards their misinformation on how to acquire the health card, mainly: (1) the need to be registered in the municipality of residence or to have the foreigner identification number (NIE) for those with a residence permit; and (2) the obligation to go to the Processing Units to manage this resource, for those in an irregular situation. Healthcare providers also mention that the lack of digital skills prevents migrants from carrying out online procedures such as getting medical appointments and downloading clinical records.

Best practices on healthcare

This section highlights **best practices related to access to healthcare** for migrants in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, emphasizing the importance of collaborative networks and solidarity initiatives across these countries. Common strategies include **inter-institutional cooperation** to assist vulnerable populations, the **translation** of healthcare information in several languages, **and informal communication channels** among healthcare providers to enhance support for migrant patients.

Belgium

> **Inter-institutional network**

Providers working in associations resorted to direct contact with other organizations and the CPAS to assist vulnerable immigrant patients in accessing healthcare services.

> **Practices of solidarity**

Several solidarity initiatives have aimed to assist especially immigrants in vulnerable situations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professionals mentioned the vaccination campaigns for undocumented migrants as an example of solidarity.

Germany

> **Collaborative network of organizations**

Alliances with other services –such as Clearing Offices- and CSOs are one of the main strengths of the German healthcare system. This cooperation allows clinicians to reach out to the most vulnerable groups such as migrant sex workers, Roma migrants, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. Providers oftentimes ask CSOs and migrant associations for translators and interpreters.

> **Information exchange with colleagues**

When clinicians are unaware of the requirements that migrants and refugees must meet in accessing medical services, they usually turn to their peers for information. Although this is an informal practice, they believe that it would be desirable to promote meeting places for sharing experiences and knowledge on how to provide better assistance to migrant patients.

Hungary

> Facilitating health information to non-Hungarian speakers

A significant initiative promoted by healthcare providers consists of translating healthcare guidelines into English and –when possible– emailing them to migrant patients. This initiative is very appreciated by migrants, since having the information written down allows them to translate it with Google Translate or similar apps.

> Providing psychological assistance

Migrant patients often experience problems that go beyond physical distress. Some practitioners mentioned the case of African migrants who are occasionally reluctant to accept psychologist or psychiatrist assistance. In this context, providers put them in contact with religious communities and churches that align with their beliefs, both to improve their mental health and to promote their social inclusion.

> Immediate assistance from humanitarian organizations

Upon arrival in Hungary, refugees receive medical care from charities. For instance, in 2022, tents near major railway stations in Budapest were set up by various NGOs to assist newly arrived refugees from Ukraine.

Spain

> SMS groups among colleagues

Practitioners mentioned the existence of instant messaging groups among colleagues, in which they share doubts and suggestions on how to proceed when treating migrant patients. Although this is an informal practice, it is worth considering how useful it would be to institutionalize these channels of communication among professionals.

Recommendations on access to healthcare

This section presents policy recommendations aimed at **improving access to healthcare** for migrants, highlighting the need for targeted information dissemination and intercultural training. Common recommendations across country cases include the **implementation of campaigns** in multiple languages to **raise awareness** about healthcare services, the establishment of interpreter services to bridge communication gaps, and the **provision of training** for healthcare professionals to enhance their understanding of cultural diversity.

Belgium

Information campaigns regarding the **functioning of the Belgian healthcare system** in the most popular languages of migrants in Belgium can help increase awareness about healthcare services, including in primary care and prevention. Targeted **campaigns on diversity and inclusion** can also be addressed to service providers, to help overcome discrimination practices towards immigrant patients.

Germany

As migrants make less use of the German healthcare system when compared to non-migrants, particularly because of language barriers, cultural beliefs and misconceptions, there is a need for more information campaigns on access to healthcare. **Counseling by social workers** trained both in social law and **intercultural competencies** is also deemed necessary to help migrants navigate the healthcare system efficiently. Professionals also highlight the need to receive more **training** to increase their knowledge about the social rights and healthcare resources that migrants are entitled to.

Hungary

Given that the language barrier hampers a proper medical diagnosis and follow-up, **interpreter services** in hospitals and healthcare centres could significantly improve the communication between professionals and migrant patients. It is recommended that hospitals and general practitioners try to provide medical information in different languages. Information campaigns and public courses on how to navigate through the National eHealth Infrastructure website could help **tackle digital barriers**, especially in the case of elderly migrants. There is a need to facilitate the bureaucratic processes to obtain health insurance and the social security number, as they are key steps for receiving medical care. A useful measure would be the distribution of **informative leaflets** explaining the administrative procedure to follow.

Spain

Information campaigns in the most popular languages among migrant communities in Spain (Arabic, English, French, Romanian, and Spanish) on how the Spanish healthcare system works can increase awareness about medical services. Additionally, clinicians should be informed on the resources available to provide better care to migrant patients, such as the **tele-translation service**.

D. Housing

This section explores the access to housing for migrants in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, highlighting the current challenges such as discrimination, socio-economic barriers, and inadequate support systems that hinder their ability to secure stable housing. It also identifies best practices and offers policy recommendations aimed at improving housing access for migrant communities in these countries.



State of play and challenges related to access to housing

This section examines the current state of **access and challenges related to housing** for migrants in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, highlighting significant challenges such as **discrimination**, **unawareness** about housing services and **socio-economic disparities**.

Belgium

In Belgium, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees with residence permit are entitled to access the public housing system. Yet, housing is a challenging area for both foreigners and nationals, given the rise in costs and lack of social housing. Finding accommodation is particularly problematic for undocumented migrants. Migrants without sufficient resources are entitled to social housing with a rent adapted to their income. The claim for social housing is usually requested via the Belgian Public Centre for Social Welfare. Yet, there are waiting lists to access this service and especially in Brussels, it can take several years to access social housing.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Discriminatory practices**

Professionals and migrants alike consider that the Belgian housing system slightly reproduces discriminatory practices and gender biases towards migrants. Both real estate agents and owners revealed some cues of existent stigma in public opinion (especially negative perceptions towards Arab populations), and discrimination practices when homeowners assesses if selling/renting or not and to whom.

Germany

Social housing is based on funding, which can be obtained by all types of owners who must observe the obligation of restricted allocation. However, state and federal policies still restrict access for undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers. The Wohnberechtigungsschein is the official certificate that a tenant must submit to prove entitlement to move into social housing. Migrants face some important barriers when it comes to renting given the general supply constraints, namely: dwindling stock of housing, lack of social accommodation, and strict criteria for accessing it. In the case of migrants wishing to access social housing, only those with a German residence permit linked to a job are eligible.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Migrant housing needs**

Social housing is not tailored to migrants' profiles and family characteristics. The German housing market is characterized by small flats with no more than two rooms, which make it difficult for larger families to live in them. The situation is particularly serious for those with special needs, such as disabled

and elderly migrants, as the available social housing is often not adapted to their needs. In the case of asylum seekers, shelters are the only alternative. Additionally, although the law stipulates that asylum seekers must live in reception centers for up to 24 months, this period is often exceeded due to delays in processing asylum applications and lack of housing alternatives.

> **Unawareness of housing services**

Professionals state that some migrants lack information on how the housing counseling services work. Many refugees are unfamiliar with the waiting times and requirements for accessing social housing. According to providers and migrants' experience, a good command of German is often a well-regarded characteristic by housing office personnel when it comes to allocating social dwellings.

> **Attitudes towards migrants**

Some migrant groups suffer from greater prejudices by homeowners and personnel of the social housing office. Many homeowners refuse to rent housing to them out of fears of payment defaults.

> **Gender aspects**

Single mothers with children find it more difficult to access social and private housing than male-headed households. Female migrants tend to have a more precarious socio-economic situation than their male counterparts since they tend to concentrate in part-time jobs that allow them to set time for childcare. As homeowners and housing office personnel are often reluctant to rent housing to them, many of these women are forced to move to the outskirts of cities, far from their workplaces and public services.

Hungary

It is common for employers to arrange accommodation of migrants with work residence permits in a work shelter. Beneficiaries of international protection and permanent residents have access to the municipal rental system, homeless shelters, houses for abused women, and temporary homes for families in need (solidarity accommodation). In the context of the diminishing social housing sector affecting the country, immigrants encounter major barriers to accessing secure and stable accommodation. No housing subsidy scheme supports access to affordable housing, and renting a property requires certain financial resources that migrants often lack. Moreover, homeowners frequently display discriminatory attitudes towards migrants, showing reluctance to rent their properties to certain groups, especially families with children.

Key challenges identified during the project:

- **Socio-economic vulnerability**

Migrants' labor and social precariousness hamper their chances of renting a property. Some housing organizations can provide rental support or economic aid raised through international funders, but this solution only covers, as best, half of the lease. As Hungarian homeowners usually require the payment of a deposit alongside the rent, lower-income migrant families cannot access these housing programs. Language also remains a barrier. Migrants who do not speak Hungarian find it more difficult to understand how the Hungarian housing system works. Oftentimes, neither the administrative staff nor the homeowners are fluent in languages other than Hungarian. Sometimes, it leads to situations in which migrants are unable to properly assess the conditions of renting or buying.

> **Discrimination**

Landlords sometimes display prejudices towards immigrants. Providers report situations where homeowners refuse to rent to immigrants, with some being particularly reluctant to rent their homes to migrant families with children for long stays.

> **The housing crisis**

The shortage of public and private accommodation forces people to live in poor conditions. Professionals complain about the lack of government support for social housing, despite growing every year. In principle, migrants with permanent address in Hungary may request accommodation in the municipal rental system. Yet, since registration in this system requires having a social security number –which implies a time-consuming bureaucratic process– this is not a permanent solution. As landlords often rent to migrant families only for short periods of time, they are forced to move out constantly.

Spain

The significant increase in housing prices is a key issue for Spaniards and foreigners alike. Spain is one of the EU Member States with the lowest share of social housing, making access to the private rental and purchase market the only viable alternative for low-income migrants. In recent years, tenants have had to bear the cost of the rental default insurance. Although this is legally optional, it has become an additional requirement for renting a property in Spain, imposed by homeowners.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Migrants' labor instability**

Real estate agents identify migrants' socio-economic vulnerability as a key obstacle in accessing housing. It is particularly evident among newcomers, which tend to have worse living conditions. This situation is aggravated by a tendency to rent instead of buying a property among migrants, particularly if their stay in Spain is intended to be temporal.

> **Attitudes towards migrants**

Real estate agents note that banks are less prone to grant mortgages to migrants without the Spanish citizenship or those newly arrived. Some nationalities that benefit from a fast-track access to the Spanish citizenship (such as most Latin Americans) seem to be better placed in renting and buying properties than other foreigners. Real estate agents also mention that homeowners are often reluctant to rent and sell properties to migrants, due to mistrust towards specific groups.

Best practices on the access to housing

Across Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, best practices for **improving access to housing** for migrants emphasize the importance of **collaboration between CSOs and housing providers**. Common strategies include outreach initiatives, financial support mechanisms, and mediation efforts that facilitate communication between migrants and landlords or financial institutions, ultimately **fostering a more inclusive housing environment**.

Belgium

> **Voluntary work**

To better assist newly arrived migrants, professionals working at NGOs usually reach out to homeless undocumented migrants and also recruit, inform, and facilitate that Belgian citizens provide shelter to asylum seekers and refugees.

Germany

> **Alliances with CSOs**

For social housing, collaborating with CSOs is seen as an opportunity for: (1) guaranteeing dwellings tailored to migrants' needs, and (2) providing adequate resources to this population, mainly by referring users. In addition, such collaboration gives providers the possibility to fill some service deficiencies, for instance, by providing them with translators.

Hungary

> **Financial support from social entities**

Housing organizations give subsidies in the form of allowances to migrant families. These subsidies are paid by the organisations on the basis of a valid tenancy agreement on which homeowners are obliged to pay taxes. Although suppliers provide a very positive assessment of these allowances, they also warn that some homeowners prefer to avoid paying taxes, which contributes to preventing the availability of housing.

> **Collaboration with other social organizations**

Considering the lack of government aid, housing organizations' effectiveness is contingent upon networking with other entities. Housing NGOs work closely with social workers, job counsellors and trade union members to try to help migrants with matters even beyond their competencies.

> **Negotiation with homeowners**

Housing organizations often negotiate the terms and conditions of rental contracts with landlords, thus facilitating migrants' access to housing.

Spain

> **Mediation with banks and owners**

This mediation is rather informal and can be perceived, for example, in actions through which real estate agents aim to convince banks and homeowners to facilitate the financial requirements imposed on migrant clients, particularly those who have experienced difficult economic conditions in the past.

Recommendations on the access to housing

In Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, policy recommendations for **enhancing access to housing** for migrants highlight the **critical role of social networks** and the need for legal frameworks that address discrimination and improve housing availability. Strategies such as fostering community solidarity, increasing economic support, and implementing measures to combat discriminatory practices are essential for **creating a more equitable housing landscape for immigrants**.

Belgium

Social networks may support migrants' access to housing by sharing the associated costs, obtaining **bank guarantees** for renting, providing **information about housing options**, and suggesting CSOs that work with migrants. Professionals may include strategies in their exchanges with migrant clients suggesting opportunities for solidarity among migrant communities to overcome the obstacles that migrants face before renting or buying a property. Policymakers and migrant associations can exert pressure on real estate companies **to avoid discriminatory practices** while ensuring better conditions for short-term rent without negatively affecting homeowners. The latter is to avoid informality and the abuse of owners who may take advantage of the migratory status of their potential renters to charge them extra fees or ask additional documents before renting.

Germany

It appears necessary to implement legal measures aimed at **increasing the supply of housing** – both social and private – in cities with a high proportion of migrants, tailored to the specific needs of this population. In the case of refugees and asylum seekers, measures should include **reducing the waiting times** for accessing social housing.

Hungary

It is necessary to implement legal initiatives towards **expanding the social housing** available for immigrants and refugees. Increasing economic aid could also improve access to housing and avoid instability. Additionally, it is necessary to regularize **solidarity accommodation** to ensure that housing complies with habitability conditions. Easing the process of obtaining a social security number can also facilitate foreigners' access to the municipal rental housing system. The discriminatory behavior often displayed by landlords must also be tackled and **sensibilization campaigns** or **economic incentives** for landlords to rent their properties to migrants could help address this challenge.

Spain

Migrants' networks are key to facilitate access to housing in Spain. Networks may support immigrants by **sharing** the associated **costs**, and by **obtaining bank guarantees** for renting. Professionals may include strategies in their exchanges with migrant clients suggesting opportunities for solidarity among migrant communities to overcome the obstacles that immigrants sometimes face before renting or buying a place to live.

E. Social assistance

The state of access to social assistance in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain reveals a complex landscape marked by varying challenges, including bureaucratic hurdles and resource limitations. This section presents key challenges, along with best practices and policy recommendations in view to address those challenges across Europe.



State of play and challenges to the access to social assistance

The current state of access to social assistance in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain is characterized by significant disparities, as explained below.

Belgium

Immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees are entitled to social services from the Belgian Public Center of Social Welfare (CPAS). The minimum guaranteed income is available to individuals without sufficient resources who have an effective residence in Belgium, including EU nationals and their family members, non-EU foreigners registered in the Belgian population registry, stateless persons and individuals with refugee status or subsidiary protection.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Limited awareness about the Belgian social assistance system**

Both migrants and social workers consider that some migrants have a limited awareness regarding how the service works. Not all migrants are well informed of their social rights, particularly when it comes to the bureaucratic processes for claiming social assistance.

> **Attitudes towards migrants**

Social workers partially agree that no nationality should receive more attention than others in terms of social deservingness. They highlight that specific situations or groups of nationalities are more likely to get discriminated against (e.g., Muslims) by private and public service providers.

> **Linguistic barriers and digital divide**

Navigating the Belgian welfare system seems more challenging for migrants with limited digital and linguistic skills. Migrants originating from countries with more limited technological access are sometimes in need of more assistance from professionals in Belgium in order to obtain information about (or process requests for) social assistance.

Germany

The Clearing Offices are created for newly arrived migrants who have received a residence permit for the first time. They offer information about the regularization process, recognition of foreign qualifications, and advice on benefits available. For migrants with resident permit who are registered as unemployed, the responsible authority is the Jobcenter. This institution is in charge of the disbursement of unemployment benefits as well as for the provision of other benefits and measures for integration into the labor market; job training, support with job applications, language courses etc. For persons who are not registered as unemployed (e.g. because they have reached the age of retirement or are unable to work due to health-related reasons), the responsible authority is the Social Welfare Office.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability**

Social workers are concerned about migrants who struggle to meet basic needs. Socio-economic precariousness is particularly acute among those who do not have regular and stable legal status –e.g. asylum seekers– especially if they belong to most vulnerable groups such as disabled, elderly, and LGTBQA+ people. This precariousness is often associated with a significant digital barrier in terms of: (1) scarcity of technological devices at home (laptops, tablets, etc.) and 2) lack of digital skills.

> **Limited language and academic skills**

Knowledge of the German language and recognition of qualifications obtained in origin countries are essential to ensure migrants' socio-occupational inclusion. The digital barrier is closely linked to immigrants' language proficiency: those who cannot understand German find it much more difficult to surf public agencies' websites. Additionally, they are constrained to communicating via telephone with employment counselors or civil servants. Newcomers who arrived with low or non-academic qualifications find it particularly difficult to learn German and are more in need of social assistance. Social workers and migrants alike concur that obtaining recognition of prior academic qualifications and training is a tortuous and costly bureaucratic procedure for newly arrived immigrants. They also emphasize that immigrants lack information on how the social assistance system works, which frequently leads to not using social services in situations of need.

> **Gender aspects**

Migrant women often have different social assistance needs than men. From female migrants and providers' perspectives, this is associated with the fact that women tend to be the main responsible for caring for dependent family members, which restricts their possibilities of attending German courses and vocational training given schedule incompatibility.

Hungary

Foreigners must have a permanent residency permit to be eligible for social benefits. Newly arrived migrants must demonstrate at the time of application that they are able to live in Hungary without public support. Social assistance services involve several areas, with social workers assisting migrants in accessing housing, education or healthcare, while also advising them on the management of online procedures. They often accompany immigrants in vulnerable situations to appointments with public services to ensure that they understand the procedures and the information provided by civil servants.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> **Socio-economic vulnerability**

Financial struggles contribute to migrants' social exclusion and the need for social assistance support. Social workers consider that migrants' socio-economic vulnerability is closely linked to their labor precariousness (unstable and low-paid jobs). The most vulnerable groups –such as elderly migrants– are particularly in need of assistance since they are often excluded from the labor and housing markets.

> Linguistic barriers

Immigrants who are not proficient in Hungarian are particularly exposed to the risk of social exclusion. The social workers and migrants interviewed mentioned that the administrative personnel do not usually speak foreign languages, and frequently, they do not assist people who do not speak Hungarian. Since this barrier affects all services, social workers perceive that their physical presence is essential during the administrative appointments that migrants have with service providers. Interviewees observe that language difficulties are particularly evident among African migrants.

Spain

Municipal social services aim to assist residents who are in more socially vulnerable situations, regardless of their nationality or legal status. This includes attention to migrant families and minors at risk of social exclusion, as well as counseling on the procedures for claiming social benefits and aids and for accessing housing aids. Social workers are also responsible for preparing migrants' social integration reports, which are relevant to demonstrate a link with the place where immigrants have resided over the last three years. Social entities and CSOs also have personnel to advise migrants and accompany them in accessing different social services.

Key challenges identified during the project:

> Unawareness of the Spanish social assistance system

Social workers note the lack of information among migrants about the social aid and resources available in Spain, as well as the procedures to access them. In their view, such unfamiliarity often occurs for two reasons: (1) the non-existence of social assistance services in some origin countries; and (2) rumours in some migrant communities about the risks faced when using social services (e.g. the fear of losing custody of children).

> Language and economic precariousness

Fluency in Spanish is key to use social assistance services in Spain. Social workers consider that this partially explains a greater usage of social assistance services by Latin Americans since communication with professionals can be easier. The lack of social networks (relatives and friends) in Spain often implies less psychological and economic support in hard times and correspondingly, higher probabilities to be in need of social assistance. Social workers tend to perceive that Moroccan migrants face worse living conditions and weak social networks and therefore, require more social assistance in emergency situations. In contrast, Chinese and Sub-Saharan migrants tend to make less use of social assistance.

Best practices on the access to social assistance

In Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, best practices for **enhancing access to housing** for migrants emphasize the importance of social support, legal assistance, and community engagement to address the challenges faced by this population. **Common strategies** across these countries include the provision of language training, the establishment of social networks, and the use of innovative communication methods to empower migrants and facilitate their integration into society.

Belgium

> **Social interpretation and legal assistance**

Social workers discussed some initiatives that they or their colleagues from CSOs put forward to provide immigrants with legal assistance or to act as social interpreters when immigrants are required to attend an appointment or do paperwork.

> **Socio-cultural activities**

Social workers also organize cultural and social activities to increase interpersonal contact among immigrants and non-immigrants or just to have a better understanding of their needs and requests.

Germany

> **Multiplier actions to empower migrants**

To promote immigrants' independence of social assistance and increase their autonomy, some providers carry out training actions aimed at: (1) encouraging social leadership (namely, immigrants helping immigrants), and (2) stimulating their associationism (for instance, by implementing courses on how to set up civil society organizations).

> **Specific training for migrants**

As female migrants face specific constraints affecting their possibilities to attend training, some civil society organizations provide German courses adapted to their schedules. Additionally, practical-oriented language courses for immigrant students are offered by some organizations, addressed to those who want to improve their speaking skills, for whom regular school lessons are not sufficient.

Hungary

> **Integration programs**

Since stay-at-home immigrant women may be more isolated, social workers of NGOs have created smaller groups and social clubs to enable them to meet other women and learn more about the Hungarian culture and lifestyle. Some professionals have also implemented Hungarian language training courses, which are supplied by teachers and volunteers, to learn the local language and to prepare immigrants for the citizenship exam.

> **Translation apps and intercultural mediators**

Service providers mentioned that, since no official translation services are available to facilitate communication with migrants who are not fluent in Hungarian, they often use alternative tools, such as translation apps/websites and intercultural mediators to smoothen the communication with migrants.

Spain

> **Alternative means of communication with migrants**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it new ways of communication between social workers and migrants who do not have a good command of digital tools or easy access to them. Some social workers in Spain have kept direct contact with immigrants through telephone calls and instant messaging.

Recommendations on the access to social assistance

Our policy recommendations for improving **access to social assistance** in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Spain highlight the need for enhanced information dissemination, targeted support services, and increased public investment to better serve migrant populations. Across these countries, promising avenues include providing multilingual resources, facilitating labor market integration through language and childcare support, and expanding public housing options.

Belgium

To address the challenge of limited awareness, it is encouraged to further diversify the official sources of information regarding the Belgian social assistance system, also in the languages of the main migrant communities (e.g. Arabic). Adequate official information about social services may avoid rumors among immigrant communities about the risks faced when using social services, while also raising awareness among social workers with the aim of reducing prejudices and stereotypes towards specific migrant communities.

Germany

Facilitating and speeding up the process of recognition of migrants' academic qualifications and skills is necessary to promote their rapid inclusion into the German labor market, which would reduce their dependency on social services. It is also important to allocate resources to promote the labor market integration of newly arrived women, specifically language courses and childcare services adapted to their working hours.

Hungary

Social workers demand increased spending on public housing available for lower-income migrant families who cannot rent a property even with rental support. If these essential services were to be provided by the government, social workers' role could be complementary to the state aid and not the only resource available. Moreover, it is important to generalize the interpreter service in the appointments of third-country nationals with administrative personnel, to avoid miscommunications and workload for social workers. Any measure to improve this situation should promote migrants' labor inclusion, particularly migrant women, by offering language courses and public childcare services adapted to their work schedules.

Spain

As a potential solution to the barriers identified by immigrants and social workers interviewed, it seems important to encourage an increase in providing adequate official information about social assistance services to may avoid misconceptions about their use, procedures or risks for claiming or receiving social benefits. It is also particularly important to raise awareness among social workers regarding migrants' situation in view of fighting prejudices and stereotypes towards migrants from specific communities.

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