

Foreign workers in social services

Country Report - Belgium

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Introduction

The international project Foreign Workers in Social Sector (ERASMUS+ project, No. 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-VET-000025630) involves partners from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Austria, and Greece. The project seeks to remove barriers and create equal opportunities for foreign workers, to support their inclusion in the social care labour market. To this end, the project aims to develop guidelines and recommendations on the employment of foreign workers in social care and create a vocational training program for HR staff and managers.

In the framework of the project, a survey and several interviews were carried out among social services providers in the different countries involved. The aim was to **identify obstacles foreign workers face in taking up employment, in order to better understand their needs and develop recommendations and guidance for organisations employing or seeking to employ foreign workers.**

The Belgian survey was conducted in the months of May 2022 to January 2023 and contained:

- One online questionnaire for employers and one for employees, in two languages (French and Flemish).
- 9 interviews with social services providers and employers' representatives
- Three focus groups

For this project, a foreign worker is defined as "a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not nationals", according to [Art. 2\(1\) of the UN Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#).

I. Legislative analysis

In Belgium, the proportion of non-Belgians increased from 8.2% in 2002 to 10.6% in 2012 and 12.8% in 2022. The 51.8% of Belgians of foreign origin and non-Belgians are from non-EU27 nationality. This is followed by people with EU27 nationality (28.2%) excluding neighbouring countries, and 20% from neighbouring countries' nationality (France, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, United Kingdom).

However, according to [STATBEL](#), there are important differences when comparing the three regions. The region of Brussels has the highest proportion of people whose nationality of origin is outside the EU27 area: 60.5% compared to 57.1% in Flanders and 38.4% in Wallonia.

The [socio-economic monitoring](#) carried out by the FPS ETCS and Unia in 2022, shows that Belgium is the European country with the largest difference in employment rates between Belgian people and people with a foreign origin. However, there was a change between 2012 with 15.4% of people with a foreign origin working in Belgium and 16,9% in 2022.

1. Access to the labour market for foreign nationals in Belgium

In order to employ foreign workers in Belgium under an employment contract, it is usually necessary to apply for a work permit. This does not apply to Member States nationals from the European Economic Area or Swiss nationals and people with another specific residence status.

In accordance with the [EU free movement of workers](#), citizens from European Union Member States can move to another EU Member State to work. They are also entitled to equal treatment regarding access to work, working conditions, tax and social security. The family of these workers have also the right to reside in the other Member State.

The immigration office is the one in charge of providing the residence document, which will provide access to the labour market.

People who can work in Belgium without a work permit due to their residence status:

- Nationals of the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein or Switzerland.
- A foreign worker who is posted in Belgium on secondment, this is a seconded worker whose foreign employer has posted them in Belgium to work for a set time. The worker is under the employment of their foreign employer.
- Foreign nationals coming to work in Belgium for a limited period of time, generally limited to 90 days.

- Foreign nationals in possession of one of the documents stipulated by the royal decree dated 30 October 1991. The residence documents in Belgium of certain foreigners give them the right to obtain these documents.
- Foreign nationals with a temporary residence, in accordance with the template in appendix 6 of the royal decree dated 8 October 1981.
- Foreign employee who has not come to Belgium to work, but for another reason, for example, in the context of family reunification or as an asylum seeker. There are two possibilities, they can get an **indefinite right to residence** and thus they do not need a work permit. They may perform any form of work with any employer. Or they can have a **right to residence for a fixed term**, which specifies whether the foreign national is permitted to work in Belgium or not.
- Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian nationals who reside in Belgium under temporary protection, have unlimited access to the labour market as workers.
- More exceptions [here](#).

Belgium regions (Flemish Region, Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region) have the responsibility to regulate foreign workers' procedures and permits. However, the Federal State retains regulatory competence with regard to the occupation of foreign nationals in a particular residence situation and defined the duration of the work in Belgium.

2. Possibilities of residence of foreign nationals in Belgium in relation to access to the labour market

Foreign nationals have to register at the municipal administration offices, eight days after arriving in Belgium. When a foreign national stays in Belgium for more than three months, the person will be classified as a resident.

Questions relating to "residence" are a federal and not a regional competence.

EU citizens need to present only their national identity card or passport when moving to Belgium. However, third-country nationals (non-EU/EFTA citizens) will normally need to apply for a Schengen Visa regardless of the purpose of the stay (work, study, research, humanitarian, etc.).

The type of visa depends on the nationality and the duration of the stay in Belgium. Some nationalities are exempt from the visa [requirement for a short stay](#). However, all nationalities are subject to a visa requirement for a long stay in Belgium.

A foreigner who applies for permission or admission to stay in Belgium beyond the term set out in Article 6, shall be informed that his or her integration efforts will be monitored and shall sign a declaration stating that he or she understands the fundamental values and norms of the society and will act in accordance with them.

Art. 6 of the [law dated 15/12/1980](#) states:

“Unless otherwise provided by an international treaty, by law or by Royal Decree, a foreigner who has entered the Kingdom legally may not stay for more than ninety days, unless the visa or authorisation link to his passport or travel document specifies a different duration.

A foreign national is considered to be staying in the Kingdom for more than 90 days if he or she stays for more than 90 days in any period of 124 days. It implies examining the period of 124 days preceding each day of stay, in the States parts of an international convention on the crossing of external borders, binding on Belgium.

For the application of paragraph 2, the date of entry is considered the first day of stay in the territory of the Contracting States and the date of exit is considered as the last day of stay in the territory of the Contracting States. Periods of stay authorised on the basis of a residence permit or a long-stay visa shall not be taken into account in calculating the duration of stay in the territory of the Contracting States.”

All countries that are part of the Schengen zone have common rules for the issuance of visas. Foreign nationals who need to apply for a visa when travelling to Belgium, are [third country nationals that has not reached a visa liberalization agreement with the EU](#). The second case is citizens from a third country that has reached a visa liberalisation agreement with the Schengen states but are rejected from entering Belgium or any other Schengen country visa-free.

2.1 Types of Belgian visa

Short-term visas/C visas: These are visas that permit stays up to 90 days for some activities such as tourism or business but not to work.

When the examination of the application is positive (the applicant has proven that he/she meets the conditions of entry), the Belgian embassies and consulates can grant the visa without consulting the Belgian Immigration Office. This decision is usually made within 15 days.

Short-stay Belgian visa types:

- Airport Transit Visa
- Tourist visa
- Visitor visa
- Business visa
- Official visit visa
- Medical visas for Belgium
- Short-term study visa
- Cultural, sports or film visa

Non-Immigrant visas/D visas: These are longer-term temporary visas for studying or working on fixed-term contracts, where the holder doesn't intend to stay in the country beyond a fixed period. As a rule, this person must submit their application abroad in the form of a D visa

application to the Belgian diplomatic or consular post responsible for the location where the person usually resides. Exceptionally, in [some cases](#), they may submit their application in Belgium.

As a rule, the residence permit is issued for a limited period of time and the person receives an A card. It is possible to extend the stay by applying for the renewal of the A card and presenting the documents proving that they meet the conditions for the renewal of their A card. It usually also includes proof of integration into Belgian society.

The request has to be submitted to the municipal administration of the citizen's place of residence before the expiration date of the residence permit (between the 45th and 30th day).

Non-immigrant Belgium visas available:

- Student visas in Belgium: For Non-EU students who want to study in Belgium for a period exceeding 90 days and under some requirements.
- Visas for temporary workers/au pairs: There are three temporary Belgian work visas. Each allows the holder to work in Belgium for a period of up to 12 months.
- Non-immigrant family visas.

Immigrant visas in Belgium: If the person is relocating to Belgium or planning to come for a significant period of time (longer than a year), he/she will need to apply for a category D long-stay Belgian visa. Which visa to apply for, depends on the purpose of moving to Belgium.

Immigrant Belgian visas available:

- Family reunion visas
- Adopted children
- Work visas
- Entrepreneur visas
- Retirement to Belgium

Foreign nationals in a [special residence situation](#) must apply for a residence permit card to be able to work in Belgium. With this residence permit, the foreign national is automatically authorised to work in Belgium. They do not have to apply for a work permit from the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Region or the Walloon Region.

The Belgian residence permit is a card issued to foreign nationals who want to live in Belgium for a specific or indefinite period of time.

2.2 Type of residence Permit

Type of residence permit	Description
Belgium temporary residence permit	If you want to stay in Belgium for more than three months, you need to apply for a <u>long-stay visa (known as a D visa)</u> for a temporary residency. This residence permit allows you to study, work and live in Belgium for up to five years.
Belgium permanent residence permit	After you have lived in Belgium for five years, you can apply for permanent residency. Long term residence allows you to stay indefinitely in the country with the <u>same rights as Belgian nationals</u> . It is valid for five years, and it is renewable.

3. Work permit to hire foreign workers from outside the European Union

It is usually the employer or his/her representative who has to apply for the permit to the regional employment agencies, in order to employ a foreign national. For every application a proof of payment of the fee must be included. If the application is approved, the foreign national receives either a work permit, which is valid for a maximum of 90 days, or a permit obtained via the single permit procedure.

When a work permit is delivered, it does not automatically lead to the Immigration Office delivering a single permit. The single permit is only delivered to people meeting the conditions mentioned in articles 61/25-1 and following the law dated 15/12/1980.

A third-country national who wishes to work in Belgium must first apply for a work permit from the competent Region through their employer. This application for a work permit is equivalent to an application for a residence permit (single application) or a work permit B.

If the application is accepted, the Immigration Office issues a single permit stating that the holder is authorised to stay in Belgium for more than 90 days in order to work.

3.1 Type of working permits

- **Work permit B:** It is a fixed-term permit on a contract of **fewer than 90 days (but is renewable)**. The application must be made in the region where the worker will be employed.

Regulations for the employment of foreign employees (work permit B or exemption) remain valid for the following workers:

- Workers coming to work in Belgium for a period below 90 days.
 - Au pairs.
 - Researchers having a hosting agreement.
 - Those needing permission to work in Belgium, without the need for a residency permit. For example, frontier workers and people residing in hotels.
 - Workers subject to transfer within an undertaking (Directive 2014/66/EU of 15/05/2014). In this case, a work permit B is only provided for a period of up to 90 days, with exemptions only valid for short-term mobility.
 - Certain apprentices.
- **Single work permit:** It certifies the right to stay and work in Belgium for a period of more than 90 days. The single permit is an electronic card for non-EU nationals giving authorisation to both work and reside in Belgium. In January 2019 the administrative process has been simplified into one single request, which aims to increase the employment mobility of non-EEA nationals to Europe. The application to the "single permit" has to be done via the "Working in Belgium" one-stop shop.
 - **Unlimited single permit:** After 4 years of work covered by a single permit or a work permit B, the worker can usually apply for a single permit with an indefinite duration.

The application for a work permit B as well as the single permit with an indefinite term will be done at the regional level.

- [Brussels-Capital Region](#)
- [Flemish Region](#)
- [Walloon Region](#)

If the employee is not yet in Belgium, the original work permit is sent to the municipality where the employer is based. Employers have the responsibility to send the permit to the employee in the foreign country. The employee has to present the work permit to the Belgian embassy in the country of origin to obtain an entry visa. However, if the employee is in Belgium, the original work permit is sent to the municipality where the employee lives.

Both, the work permit and the residence permit can be renewed every year, proving the actual work with the employer who submitted the work permit application.

In some cases, the work permit will only be granted if there are no workers available on the labour market in the sector concerned or for the specialisation concerned. Each region in Belgium has its own public employment service, each of which studies labour market shortages extensively through shortage occupation lists.

Brussels-Capital Region

As in the other Belgium regions, the type of authorisation that needs to be requested depends on the situation of the worker, the duration of employment in Belgium and the type of work.

In Brussels region, this is determined by Brussels Economy and Employment, which also includes the different work [categories](#).

Flemish Region

In Flanders, a work permit can only be granted if the sort of work that the foreign national will perform belongs to one of the [categories](#). There are different conditions, requirements and procedures for every category.

There are more flexible conditions for workers planning to exercise a profession for which there is a labour shortage, such as carers and health care assistants. The VDAB Study Department publishes a shortage occupation list every year, [List for 2022](#).

Walloon Region

The work authorisation is granted to some categories of workers. For each of these categories, there are conditions and a specific procedure for work permit application. This authorisation is issued by the Direction of Employment and Work Permits of the Public Service of Wallonia, which put in place a [mechanism](#) to define the authorisation needed in each circumstance.

II. Results of the questionnaires and structured interviews

Results of the survey among social service providers and employers

These results are based on responses from 60 persons answering the questionnaire and on interviews with 9 employers.

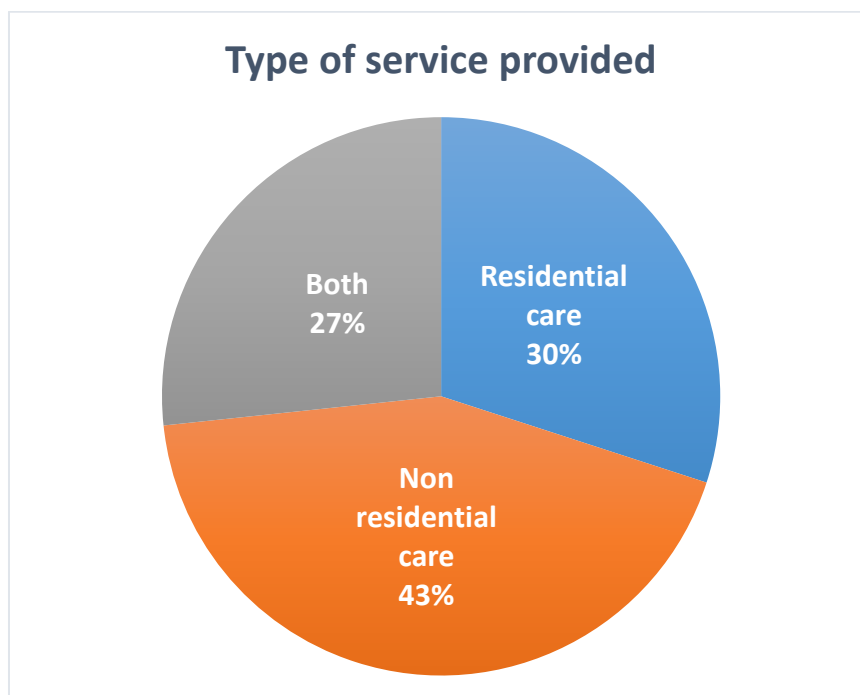
The questionnaires were answered by respondents anonymously online.

Interviews were carried out between September to November 2022, via Teams and phone calls, in French and English.

Acquisition of respondents was done through emails sent by the Social Employers to social services employers' organisations in Belgium, namely [UNIPSO](#), [UNISOC](#), [Bruxéo](#) and [Vlaams Welzijnsverbond vzw](#). We thank them, as well as the survey respondents, for their contribution.

1. Identifying features of the surveyed social services providers

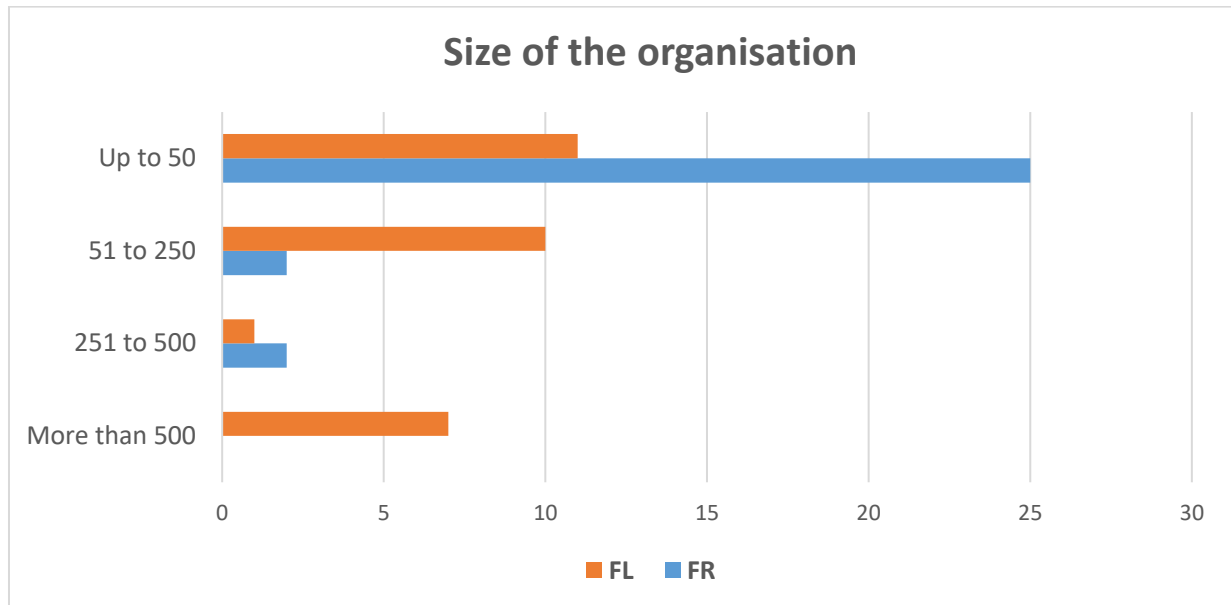
In terms of the type of social services provided by respondents, 18 of them were residential, 26 were non-residential and 16 provide both types of services.



In terms of the size of the organisation or the number of employees, 62% of the organisations surveyed employ up to 50 employees.

It must be noticed that there is a large difference between the Flemish-speaking respondents and the French-speaking ones. Organisations responding in the French-speaking part of Belgium are by far smaller organisations, compared to Flemish respondents. The only larger organisations (7 in total) are from the Flemish part.

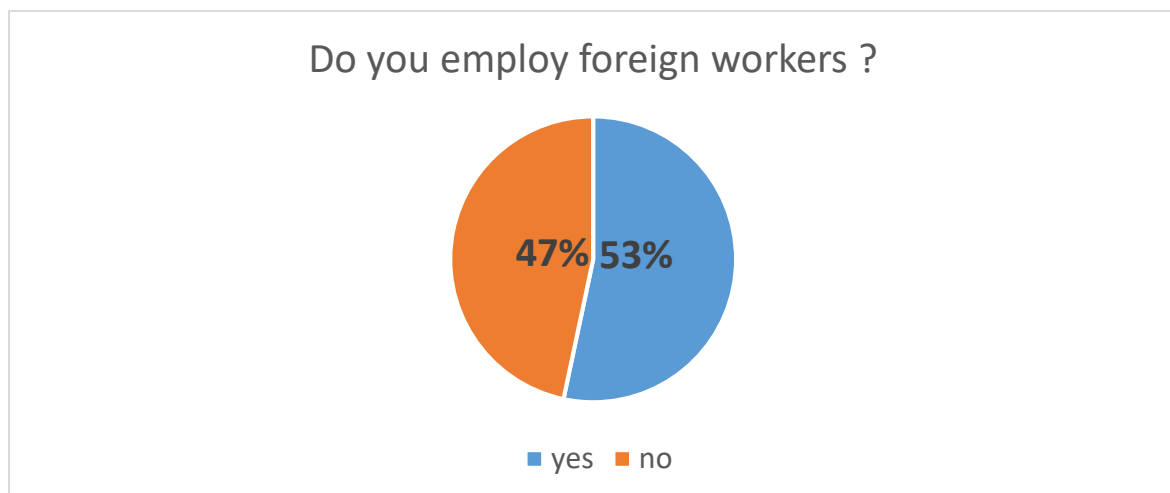
This may influence the answers.



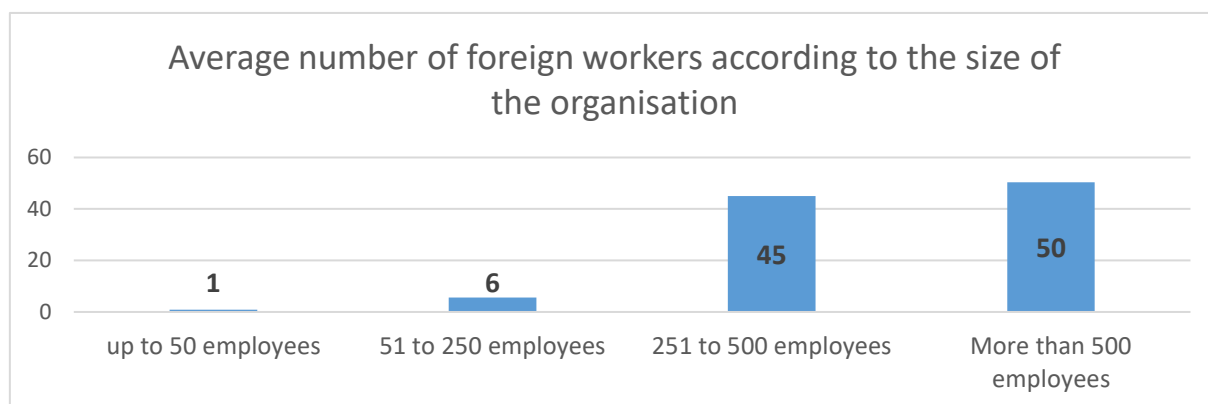
2. Presence of foreign workers in the organisations

The survey aimed to assess the presence of foreign workers in the organisations, on the basis of an employment contract and/or as employees of an employment agency.

More than half of the respondents, (32 out of 60) reported they employ foreign workers in their organisations - see chart below.



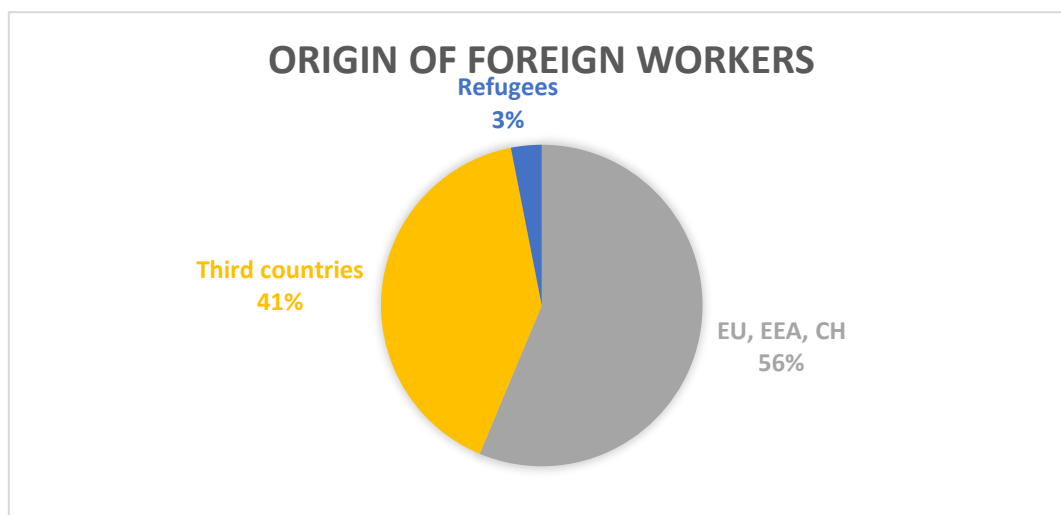
Naturally, the number of foreign workers employed is related to the size of the organisation and can be found in the chart below.



The use of an employment agency to employ foreign workers was not reported.

The survey also tracked the number of foreign workers broken down into EU, EEA and Swiss citizens, third country citizens, including citizens of Ukraine before the migration wave triggered by the Russian attack on Ukraine, as well as persons with refugee status. The resulting structure is shown below.

The results show that **most foreign workers in the organisations surveyed are EU, EEA and Swiss nationals (56%), followed by third country nationals (41%)¹. Persons with refugee status make up 3% of foreign workers in the social care field surveyed.**

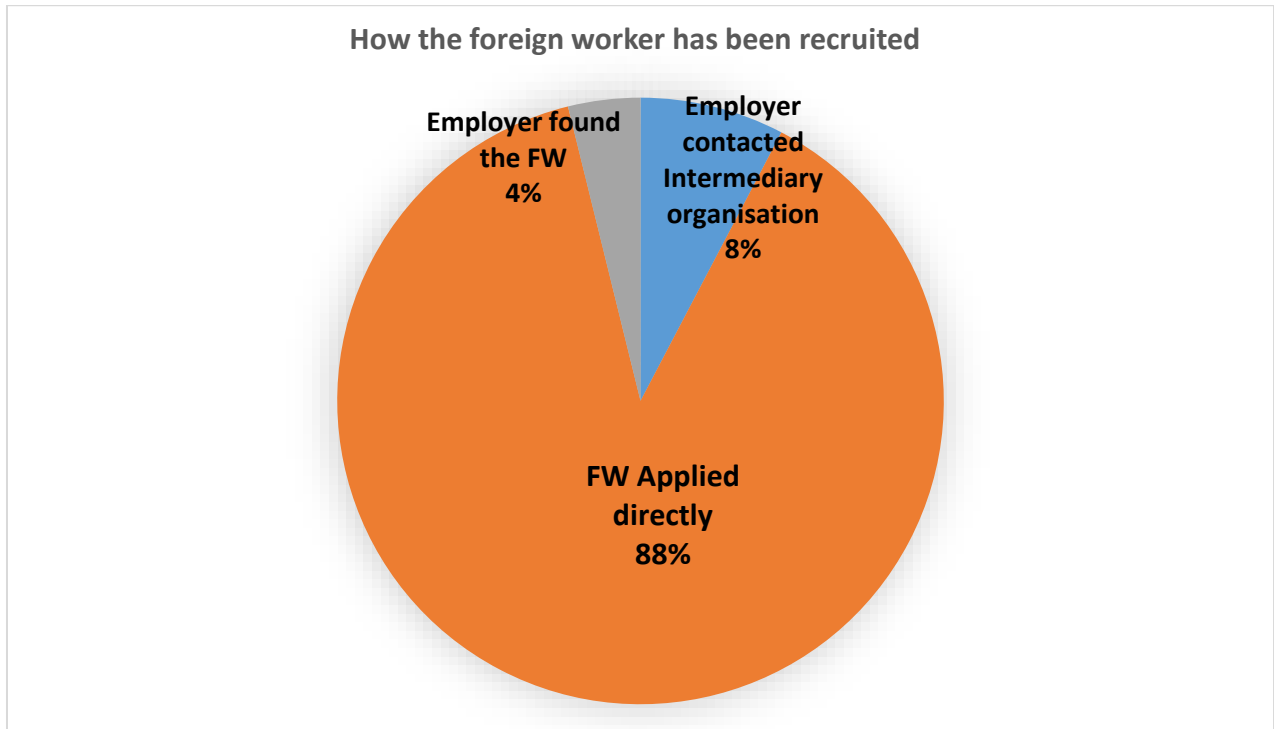


¹ Third country nationals are defined by the European Commission as “Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of [TFEU](#) and who is not a person enjoying the European Union [right to free movement](#), as defined in Art. 2(5) of the [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/399 \(Schengen Borders Code\)](#). According to this definition, nationals of NO, IS, LI and CH are not considered to be third-country nationals.

3. Recruitment of foreign workers

Concerning recruitment, **88% of organisations indicate that the foreign workers directly applied for a job without any intermediate.**

In 8% of cases, the employer **contacted an intermediary organisation** in order to recruit foreign workers.



4. Positions held by foreign workers

The most represented job positions occupied by foreign workers are by far:

- Operational workers (professionals in support functions)
- Care givers (carer, care assistant, homecare worker, etc)

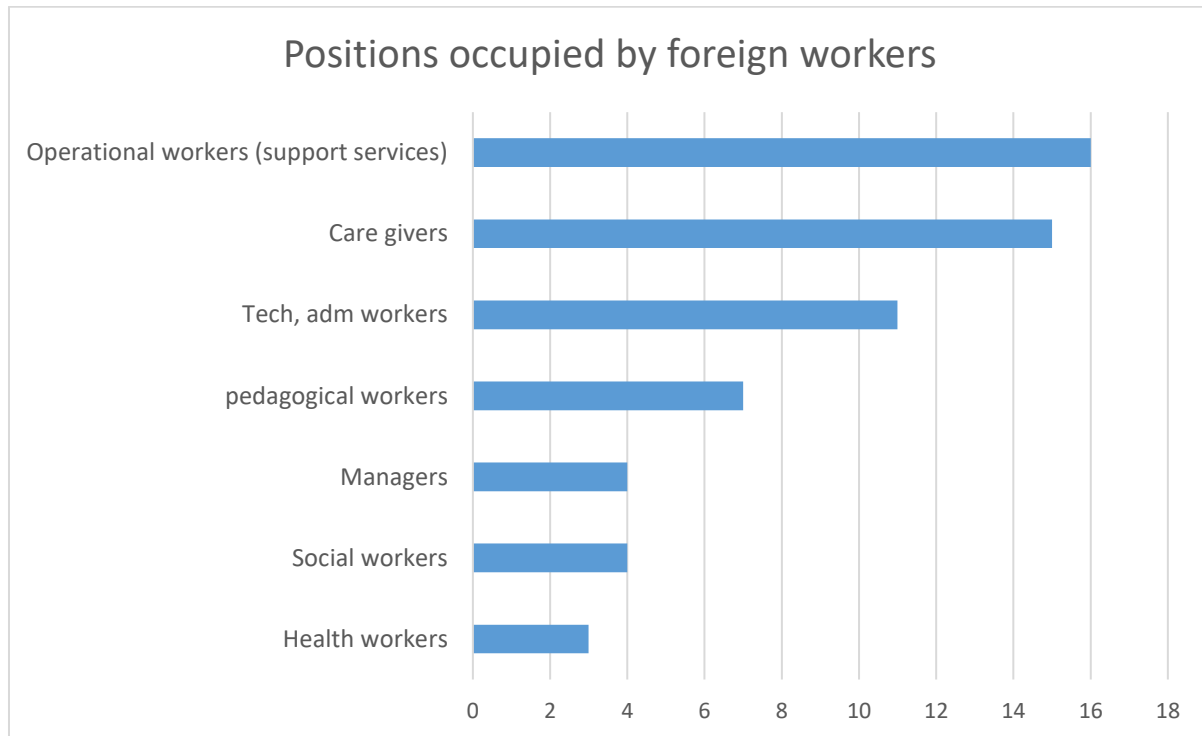
This is followed by technical, administrative and financial workers.

Taking into consideration that managers represent only around 10 % of the workforce in social services, foreign workers seem to also represent a significant proportion of this position.

Social workers and health workers are not very present, maybe due to the difficulties to get certificates recognised. The employers interviewed confirmed the difficulties to get certificates recognised, especially for some positions such as social workers and health workers and for people coming from 3rd countries. It occurs that foreign workers get a position under their real qualifications. It was stated “It happened that a foreign worker coming from a 3rd country, with nurse studies had to take the position of a carer until the validation of the

university certificates in Belgium. The person had to wait for a long period and needed extra courses to validate the studies.”

In the case of job positions for which certificates are not mandatory, employers usually focus on actual skills and competences of the person to properly implement the function.



5. Reasons for employing foreign workers

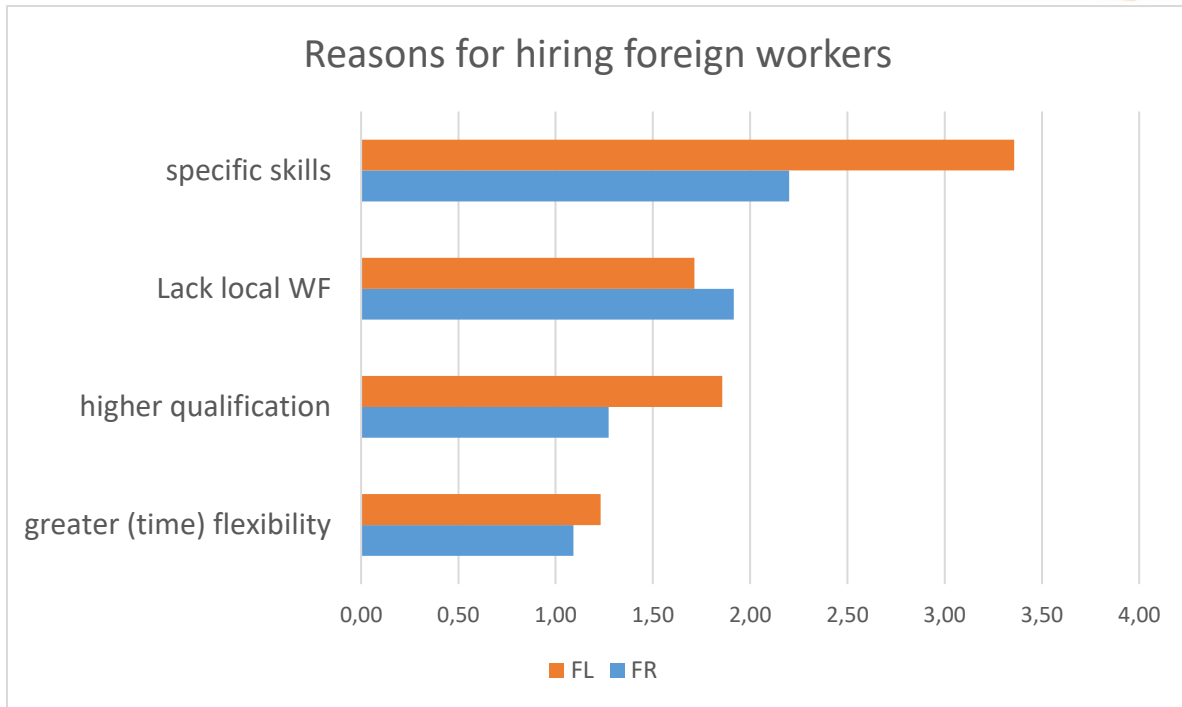
As part of the survey, social services that employed foreign workers were asked to rate the reasons given for employing foreign workers. The reasons were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented an insignificant reason and 5 a very significant reason.

The reason the most mentioned, is the foreign workers ‘specific skills’, this is especially mentioned by the Flemish respondents.

The second most significant reason was the lack of adequate 'home' labour.

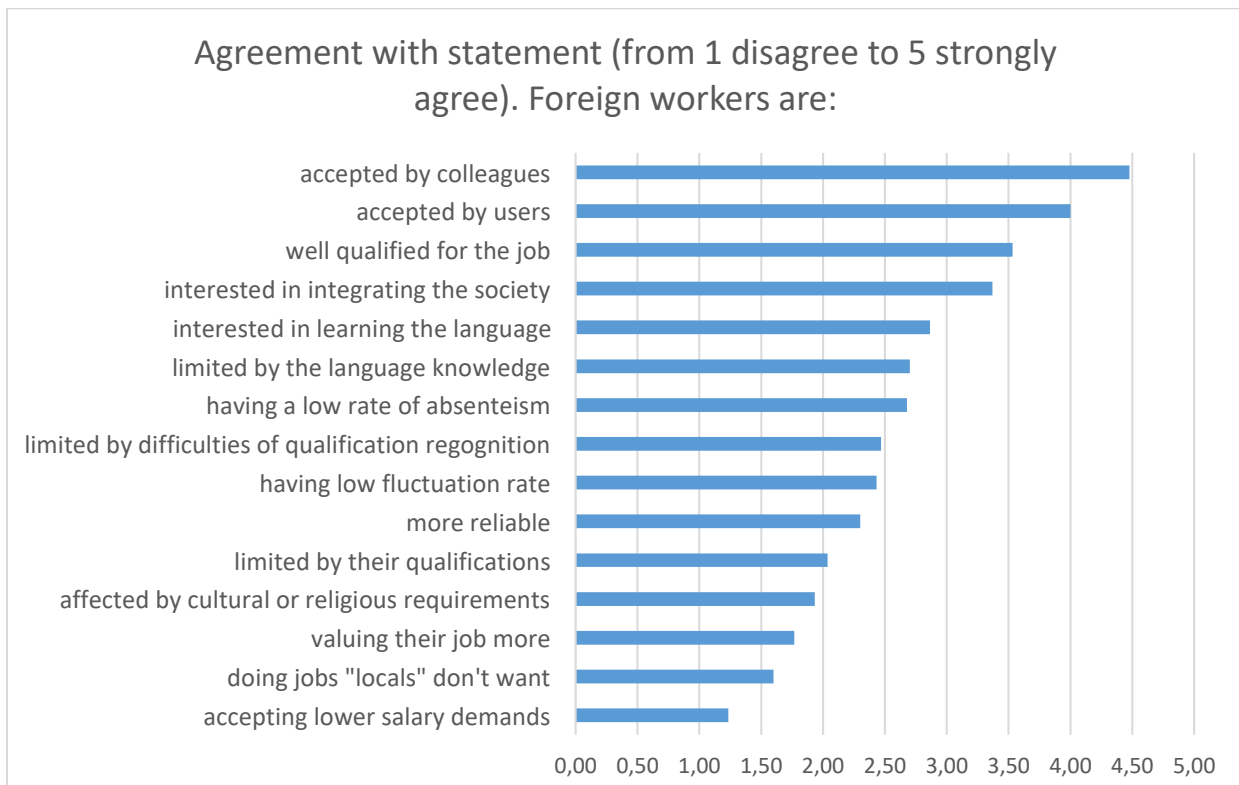
The third most significant reason is the higher qualification of foreign workers, this is particularly mentioned in the Flemish part and confirmed during the interviews.

Lower wage demands (zero answer) and greater time flexibility of foreign workers are not considered as reasons for employing them.



6. Foreign workers characteristics

In the survey, social service providers who employed foreign workers were asked to rate several statements regarding the situation of foreign workers working in social services. Individual statements were rated using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented strong disagreement with the statement and 5 represented strong agreement.



- Above all, respondents affirm that foreign workers are very well accepted by colleagues and services users. As reported in one interview “In some cases users look for the carer from his/her same country of origin, because they feel more comfortable”.
- They are also seen as well qualified for the job, interested in integrating in the society and in learning the language.
- At the same level, they are reported as having a low rate of absenteeism.
- The survey answers show that foreign workers are limited by their knowledge of the language and by difficulties in having their qualifications recognised. The importance of speaking the language for a better inclusion in the workplace and community was repeatedly pointed out during the interviews.
- The respondents consider the statements that foreign workers “are affected by religious or cultural requirements”, “value their jobs more”, “do jobs local don’t want to do” and “accept lower wages” as not accurate/relevant.

7. Actions taken to support the integration of foreign workers

Around one fourth of the surveyed organisations employing foreign workers implement activities to facilitate the integration of their employees at the workplace.

The interviews revealed that in most cases, the lack of time and budget hinder initiatives/activities to support the inclusion of foreign workers. Moreover, some employers reported to be more interested in initiatives for the integration and wellbeing of all workers in general.



In most cases, this involves language lessons and occupational training or working time adaptations, in order to attend training, mentoring by colleagues and administrative support.

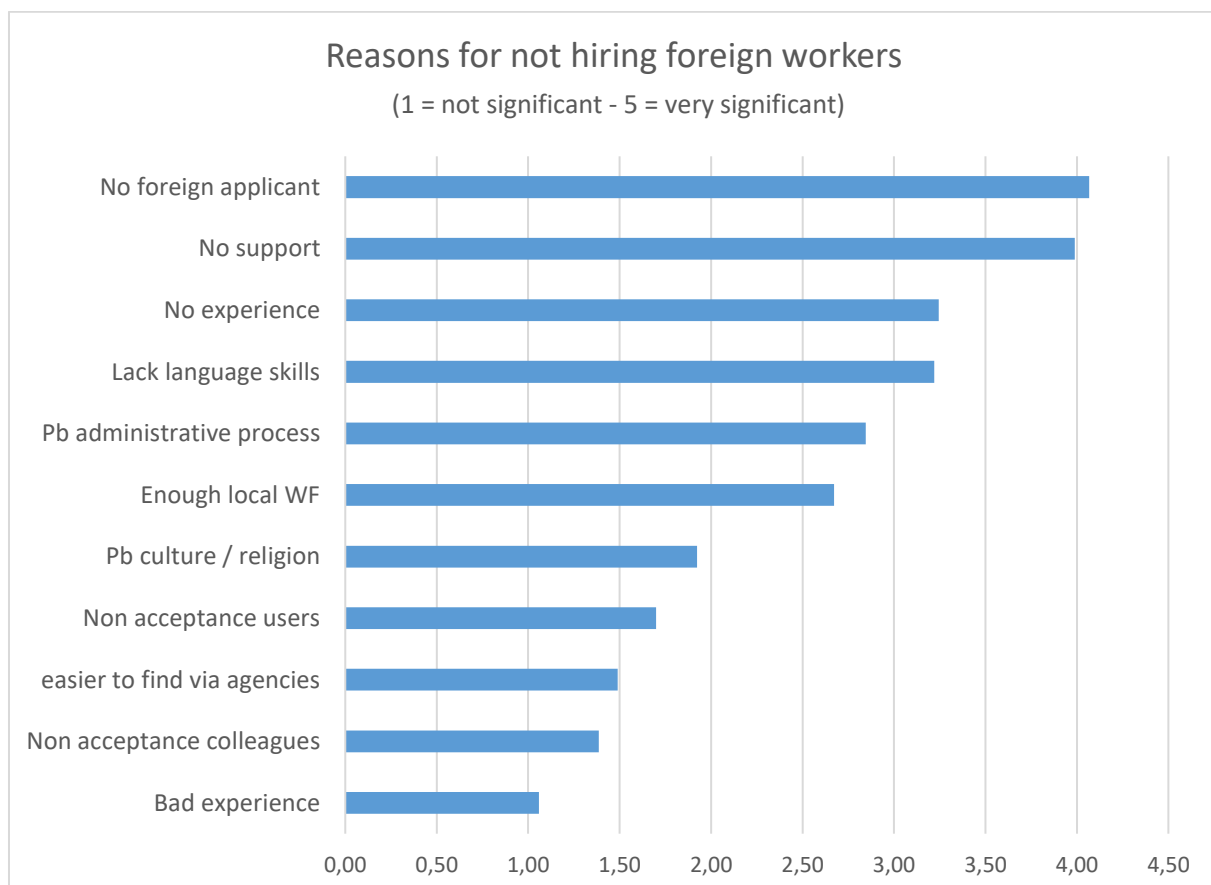
Internally, assistance between colleagues is often promoted and supported by employers; for example, on the first days of work, to continue learning the language, to learn the specific vocabulary, or to organise cultural exchanges.

In a few cases a (quite informal) support is provided to facilitate integration outside the workplace.

8. Barriers in the employment of foreign workers

A set of possible reasons for not employing foreign workers was presented to **social services providers that do not employ foreign workers (28 out of 60 respondents)**.

They were asked to rate the relevance of each reason from their perspective on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being an insignificant reason and 5 being a very significant reason.



The results clearly show that **the most important reason** why the surveyed organisations did not employ people of other nationalities was the fact that they simply **did not apply for jobs in their organisation**. Another important reason is that the **organisations have no experience in employing foreign workers or do not benefit from a support service to do so**.

The results also show that some organisations feel concerned with problems related to the lack of language skills (value of 3,2 on the scale). Concerns about the difficult administrative process when employing a foreign worker were also observed and rated 2,85 on the scale.

The interviewees reported **difficulties to recruit sufficient staff in general due to the lack of applications**. The **difficult administrative procedures** and the **lack of language skills** are seen as the most relevant barriers to not employ foreign workers.

Administrative processes are long and difficult for both employer and employee. Interviewees highlighted their lack of knowledge, availability of clear information, and support on the different procedures to employ foreign workers. One interviewee states: “the procedures can take many months and a lot of efforts, that at the end it is faster and easier to wait and employ a local person”.

Regarding the language skills, interviewees stressed the need of basic skills of the working language (French or Dutch) to employ the foreign worker, especially if they will work in direct contact with users. Depending on the position and the service delivered, the language level needed can change. For example, especially in the provision of care for children and people with disabilities, the need to be fluent in the language spoken at the workplace was reported. For supporting jobs, such as kitchen and laundry, language requirements are lower.

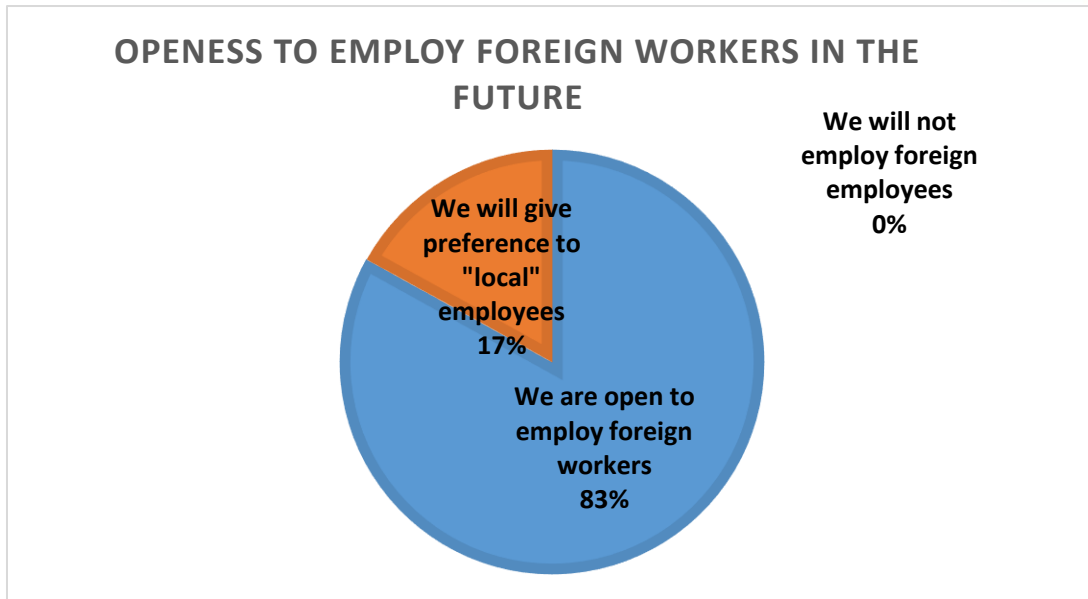
In addition, it is reported in the questionnaires that there is a sufficient "domestic" workforce, which does not allow for the recruitment of citizens from third countries. This, however, stands in contrast to the interviews, in which employers report that they do not receive sufficient applications, whether from foreign workers or not.

Concerns about issues related to culture or religion, fear of foreign workers not being accepted by colleagues or service users, and reference to bad experience with the employment of foreign workers seem to not be relevant reasons for not employing them. This was also confirmed during the in-depth interviews.

9. Openness to employ foreign workers in the future

A very large majority of respondents stated that they were **open to employing foreign workers in the future**, while 17 % indicated they would give preference to local recruitments. **None of the respondents indicated they would not be open to employ foreign workers in the future.**

The interviewees see the employment of foreign workforce as a possible solution to the current staff shortages in the social services sector. However, to be able to recruit foreign workers to alleviate the shortages, they also pointed out the need to facilitate the administrative process and provide assistance, as well as more support to offer language courses in the workplace.

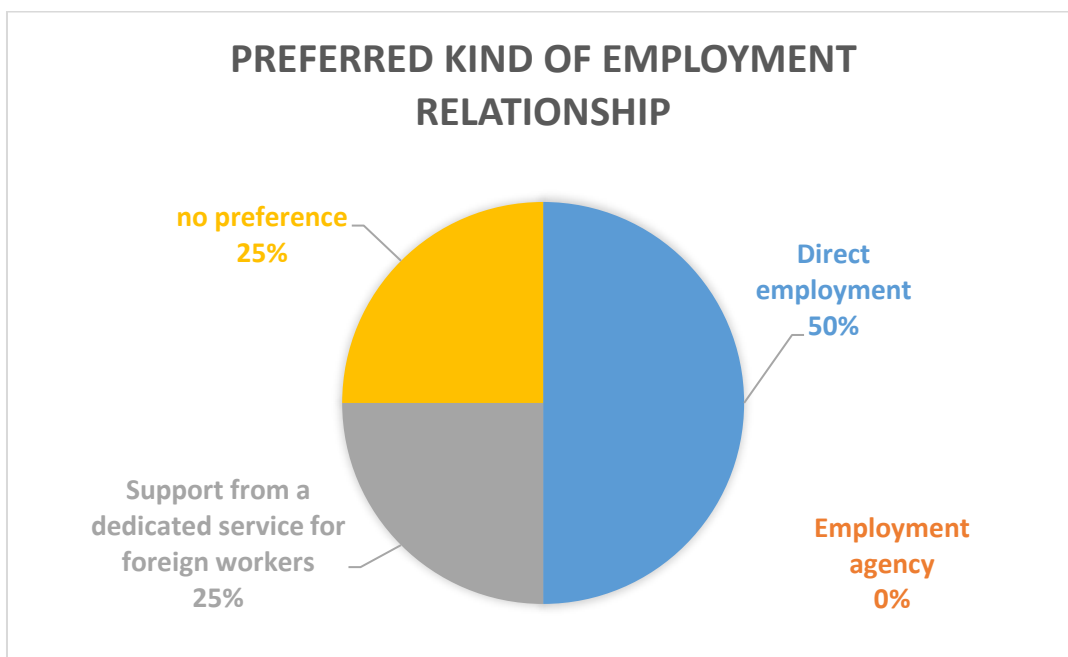


Regarding the question about any preference in terms of nationality (EU, EEA, or Switzerland / 3rd countries or refugees), 93% of respondents claim they made no difference.

In terms of the employment relationship under which foreign workers would work in the organisation, **50%** of respondents indicated that they **would prefer to have a direct employment relationship with the employee.**

The preference for an employee who is supported by an organisation that helps the integration of foreigners was stated in 25 % of cases.

None of the respondents stated they would prefer employment through an employment agency. Conversely, **25% of the social service facilities have no preference regarding the employment relationship.**



10. Training on the employment of foreign workers

In the survey, **16% of respondents expressed interest in attending a training programme** which focuses on the issue of employing foreign workers. 43% of respondents were “rather interested”.

On the other hand, **41% of surveyed entities expressed no interest in such training.**²

During the interviews, employers expressed their interest in a training that covers the following topics:

- Administrative procedures to employ foreign workers, including getting to know the contact points (government, NGO’s, etc.) to address with specific problems.
- Belgian legislation to recruit foreign workers.
- Learn about the work culture and structure of degrees in other countries.
- Initiatives to improve the inclusion of foreign workers in the organisation. For example: how to better welcome foreign workers, how to achieve a better integration between colleagues, how to coach them better, give them more chances of succeeding and how to work well together in general.
- Trainings for human resources/managers on diversity.
- Sensibilisation and raise awareness on how to better integrate foreign workers in the workplace.

11. Comments & Recommendations

During the interviews, employers provided possible measures and initiatives to face the challenges to recruit foreign workers, focusing on these main issues:

Administrative procedures:

- Support to employers from the national and regional agencies in charge of employment regarding the administrative procedures, including clear information on the legislative procedures in Belgium.
- Simplification of the administrative procedures to employ foreign workers, especially for lower skilled jobs.
- Coach/mediator, to support employers, and thus reduce the administrative burden.

Recognition of qualifications:

² Note: organisation answering to the Flemish questionnaire seem to be more interested in a training, maybe because their structures are bigger, which improves the opportunities to hire foreign workforce and makes the training more relevant.

- Accelerate the procedures for the recognition of certificates and individual assistance during the procedure.
- Facilitate the access to the trainings to validate the certificates, while working.
- An exam from an education institute to confirm that the competence of the person matches with the qualification needed for the position.

Language skills:

- More financial support from national/regional or local authorities to have more language trainings.
- Internal or external linguistic tutor, which will also help the foreign worker to better integrate in the workplace and community.
- Internal initiatives in the workplace to support the language learning. For example, use of cards with useful words for the job implementation.

Inclusion in the workplace:

- Initiatives to improve diversity in the workplace and the relation between employees. For example, activities to better understand other cultures, promote an open exchange.
- Inclusive approach to recruitment and career progression, which will also improve the attractiveness of the sector.
- Team building and workshops on diversity, as well as a coaching for the team.
- Create and promote a safe environment in the workplace, where employers and employees can freely share experiences.
- Promote the internal support between colleagues.
- External expertise to moderate/mediate difficult situations.
- Finance support to put in place activities/workshops to work on diversity.

Attractiveness of the sector:

- Support foreign workers in the administrative and employment procedures, including clear information on the Belgian recruitment process and how to apply for open positions.
- More visibility and accessibility to the organisation/associations supporting foreign workers with the administrative process.
- Give visibility to the job offers in the sector by informing foreign workers about the relevant contact points.
- There is currently a project where people can learn the social care work on the ground. It could be an opportunity to also target foreign workers with such a project.
- Give more possibilities to learn the language, to know how to do an interview, and the CV.
- Provide employment offers in more languages and better dissemination at all levels.

Results of the survey among foreign social services workers

The survey was answered by 12 foreign employees working in the social services sector. It means their representativeness is low and the interpretation of the results must be cautious.

The limited responses to the questionnaire and the lack of in-depth interviews are due to the difficulties to directly reach foreign workers employed in social services in Belgium. The questionnaire was disseminated by the Social Employers in the network of social services employers' organisations in Belgium and by the employers who answered to the questionnaire. During the interviews, employers also agreed to circulate the questionnaire among the foreign workers in their organisation. Several attempts were made to boost the questionnaire, but with very limited success.

Other reasons can be the lack of interest from foreign workers or concerns about future consequences of replying to the questionnaire and more concrete by holding an interview.

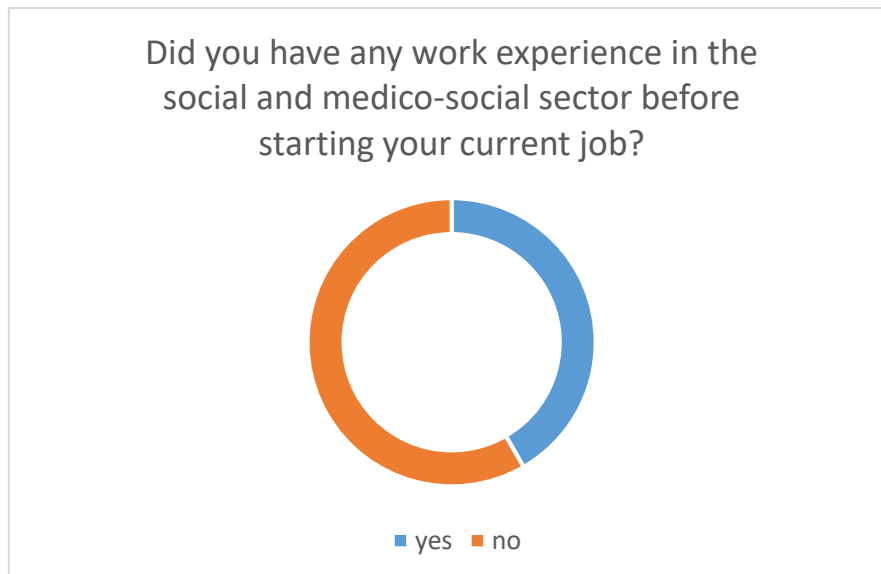
1. Identifying features of foreign employees

Most of the respondents work in Belgium for more than 5 years (8 people) and 5 respondents arrived in Belgium during the last 5 years.



2. Employment in the social services sector in Belgium

Most of the respondents (7) expressed not having any work experience in the social and medico-social sector before starting their current job.



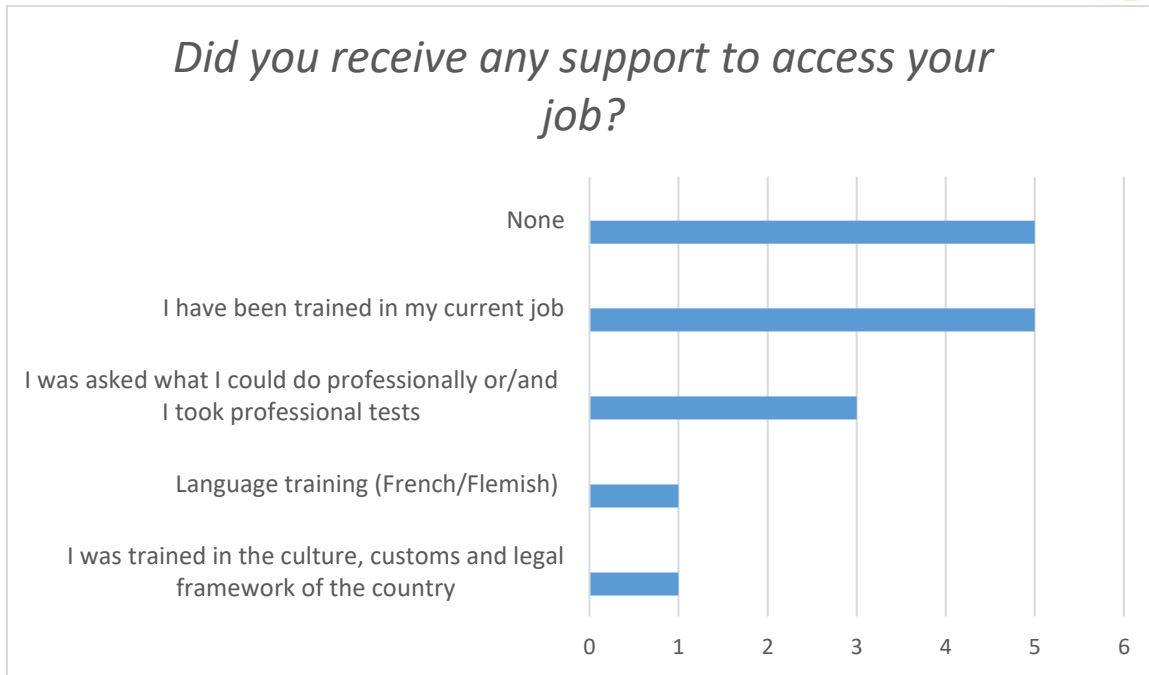
The question regarding how they found their current job had different replies. The most common is through an advertisement (3 respondents). Other respondents (2 in each case) learned about the possibilities to work in the social services sector through a friend/relative, by sending their application or after an internship or a short-term contract in the organisation.

Only one person affirmed they received support from an organisation supporting foreign workers to find the current job and another one received support from the school in their town.

The survey shows that 7 respondents confirmed receiving different types of support, the most representative being trainings in their current job, followed by the assessment of their professional skills and competences.

Language training and cultural/legal orientation or training were provided to only one person in both cases.

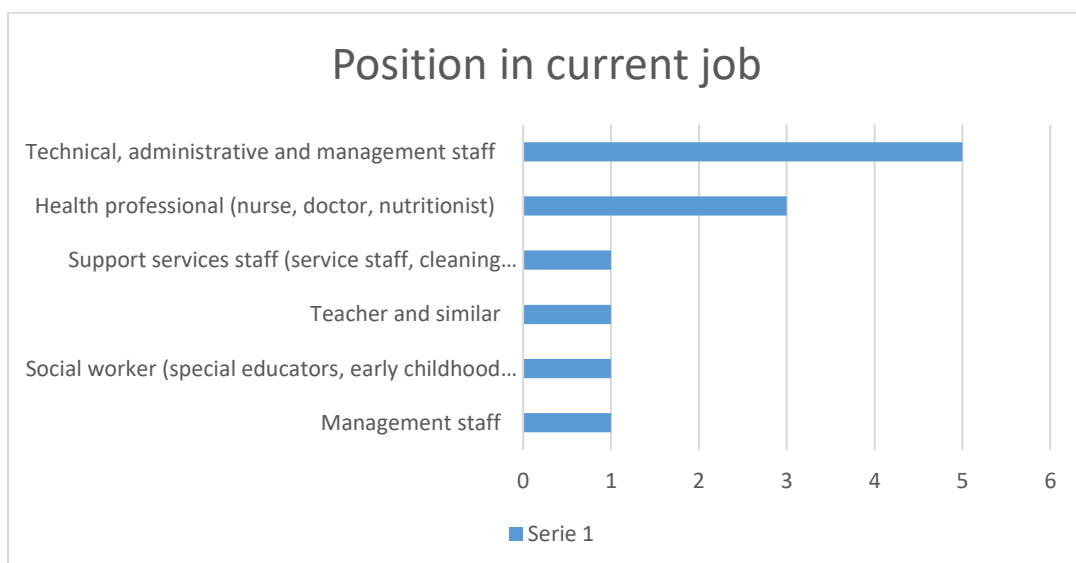
All respondents expressed satisfaction with the support received and highlighted the relevance of the different trainings for the implementation of their tasks.



Regarding the level of education, most respondents (10) have a university degree/higher education background. Only one person has a secondary education level and another 2 years of education out of 3 in accounting that he/she could not finish because of work schedule and limited public transport.

10 respondents out of 12 also confirmed using their educational knowledge and certificates in their current job.

The most common positions among respondents are **technical, administrative and management staff** (5 respondents), followed by **health professionals** (3 respondents), which includes nurses, doctors, nutritionists, etc.



3. Legal and administrative procedures

From the foreign workers answering to the questionnaire, 9 did not need a visa or work permit to work in Belgium. The other 3 people did not report any difficulty to obtain the work permit or visa.

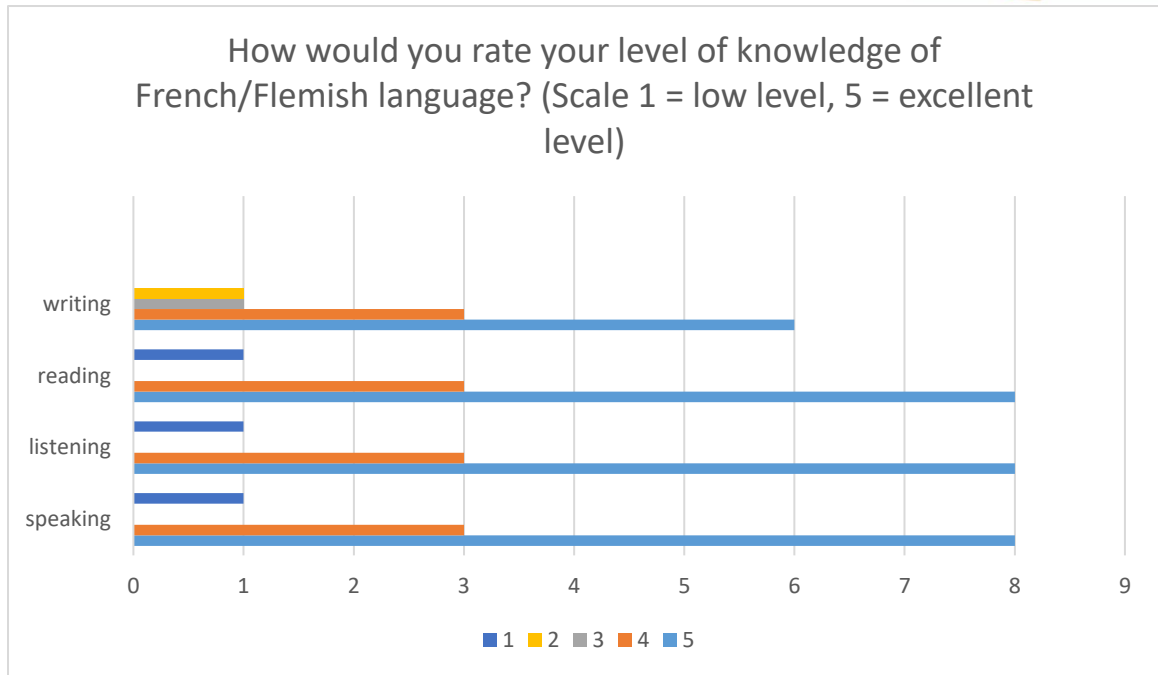
However, one respondent coming from an EU Member State reported difficulties to obtain the identity document once in Belgium. This issue did not allow the person to access the employment assistance, renovate the driving licence and thus hinder the access to the labour market.



Only one respondent needed to provide a proof of the level of education, with the support of his/her partner. The respondent reported difficulties to get the certificate in a short period for a person who does not speak the language.

4. Knowledge of French/Flemish language

The knowledge of French or Flemish is reported to be an issue only for one respondent. The data shows that most respondents have a good or very good knowledge of French/ Flemish, especially in speaking, listening and reading.



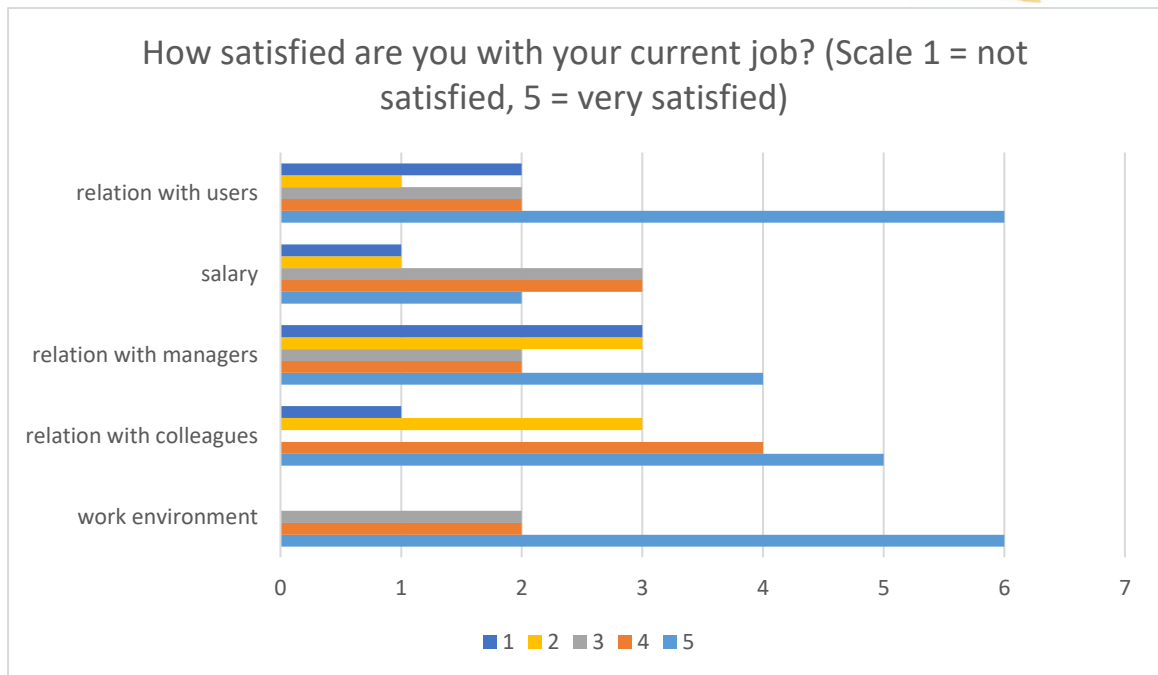
Half of the persons responding to the questionnaire participated or are participating in activities to improve their language skills. 5 of them in courses provided outside of work, 1 person in language courses provided by the employer and another respondent participates in a training on the job-specific vocabulary and language.

5. Level of satisfaction at work and in the society

In general, foreign workers replying to this questionnaire feel very satisfied or satisfied with the work environment. This is followed by the relation with colleagues and users, in both cases, only 3 do not agree with this affirmation and one person felt discriminated at work.

Regarding the relation with managers, there is a division of opinions. 6 respondents do not feel satisfied with the relation with managers, 4 are very satisfied and another 4 satisfied.

The salary is also controversial, only 2 people reported being very satisfied, 6 satisfied and 2 not satisfied.



Only 1 out of 12 social services employees surveyed was concerned about securing its own housing and 4 did not have to organise their own accommodation.

The questionnaire also focused on the support received to facilitate their inclusion in the new country of residence. One person reported receiving support out of the working place, 9 did not receive any kind of support and 2 did not need it because they live in France.

In the comments section, one respondent stated: *“as a European citizen we have a more solid comfort, in terms of culture (even if between citizens there can be differences) organisation and legal procedures”*.

6. Comments & Recommendations

The questionnaire includes a section to collect the comments and recommendations from the respondents.

Participants highlight the need of:

- Better collaboration between countries for administrative requirements and procedures.
- Simplification and support for administrative procedures, in order foreign employees can enter in the labour market and have access to the benefits they are entitled of.
- Better management of conflicts between employees from managers, HR or any other relevant person.

The focus group was held during the 11th and 12th January 2023, in several sessions with a total of 7 participants. The participants were employers and persons with relevant experience in diversity and the employment of foreign workers in the social services sector in Belgium.

During the focus group the main findings of the Belgian report were presented. The main objectives were to discuss and analyse the key findings, confirm the results from the questionnaires and interviews and validate the draft recommendations.

The focus group was centred around 3 main aspects:

- **Positions held by foreign workers:** The survey shows that the most represented job position occupied by foreign workers is “operational workers” (professionals in support functions). The main reasons discussed during the focus group were the absence of certificate and language requirements for this position. Another reason is the need of the person to get an income and a job as soon as possible, to facilitate his/her inclusion in Belgium. In addition, operational workers usually do not need to have extensive knowledge of the requirements in Belgium, to implement the tasks, which is needed in other positions such as social workers.

The knowledge of work opportunities in the sector, through integration services for foreigners, could be reinforced in order to orientate them to these jobs that require more and more staff.

- **Main challenges in employing foreign workers and recommendations:** The participants agreed with the three main difficulties highlighted in the results of the survey: difficult administrative procedures, lack of language skills and the recognition of certificates.

The recommendations pointed out to face the three main challenges were also discussed and other relevant initiatives were highlighted such as:

- validation of assets of experience.
- Support during the administrative process, including in the recognition of certificates and possibilities of employment from the arrival.
- More administrative collaboration and communication between the different organisations that provide support to foreign workers and employers.
- More support services to foreign workers, with special knowledge of their country of origin and the impacts for the inclusion of the person in Belgium.

- **Recommendations for inclusion in the workplace:** raise awareness on diversity in the team, including trainings on diversity management for employers, managers, HR and colleagues was highlighted as the most important initiatives for a better inclusion.

Participants also discussed other relevant initiatives to facilitate the inclusion of any employee in the workplace and promote diversity.

- Establish a diversity management plan, including policies, coaching, trainings on diversity management and communications and designate a person in the team as “trust person” to be in charge of diversity management in the workplace. This person will be the reference to employees to discuss any issue in a safe space.
- Mentoring/tutoring tailored to the needs of all workers. The mentor must be rewarded for this additional task. Mentoring can also consist of explaining specific vocabulary.
- Strong collaboration between organisations in the social services sector and structures that support the inclusion of foreign workers.
- Facilitate the relevant information to employees, concerning rules and rights in the workplace, as well as for foreign workers.

IV. Conclusions

In 2022, the proportion of non-Belgians in Belgium was up to 12.8%. Out of all non-Belgians and Belgians of foreign origin, 51.8% are of non-EU27 nationality. This is followed by people with EU27 nationality (28.2%) excluding neighbouring countries, and 20% from neighbouring countries' nationality (France, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, United Kingdom).

The [socio-economic monitoring](#) carried out by the FPS ETCS and Unia in 2022, shows that Belgium is the European country with the largest difference in employment rates between Belgian people and people with a foreign origin. However, there was a change between 2012 with 15.4% of foreign workers in Belgium and 2022 with 16,9%.

To employ foreign workers in Belgium under an employment contract, it is usually necessary to apply for a work permit. This does not apply to Member States nationals from the European Economic Area or Swiss nationals and people with another specific residence status. In some cases, a D visa is required to have access to the labour market.

The responsibility to regulate foreign workers procedures and permits falls under the Belgian regions and the regulation of visa permits is done at national level.

Key findings about foreign workers in social services in Belgium

More than half of the respondents to the survey, (32 out of 60) reported they employ foreign workers in their organisations. Most of them are EU, EEA and Swiss nationals (56%), followed by third country nationals (41%). Persons with refugee status make up 3% of foreign workers in the social care field.

Regarding the job positions occupied, operational workers (professionals in support functions) and care givers (carer, care assistant, homecare worker, etc) are by far the most occupied by foreign workers.

The main reasons discussed during the focus group were the absence of certificates and higher language requirements for these positions. Another reason for entering a job with lower requirements is the person's need to have an income as soon as possible to facilitate his/her inclusion in Belgium. In addition, operational workers usually do not need to have extensive knowledge of the requirements in Belgium, to implement the tasks, which is needed in other positions such as social workers.

In general, foreign workers replying to the questionnaire feel either very satisfied or satisfied with the work environment. Employers interviewed also perceive foreign workers as very well accepted by colleagues and services users.

Challenges and recommendations

The interviews and focus groups helped to discuss some initiatives or activities to improve the access of foreign workers to the social services labour market in Belgium, as well as to improve the inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

The recommendations focus on initiatives to face the 5 main challenges identified in the report.

Administrative procedures:

- Support to employers from the national and regional agencies in charge of employment, for the administrative procedures, including clear information on the legislative procedures in Belgium.
- Simplification of the administrative procedures to employ foreign workers, especially for lower skilled jobs.
- Coach/mediator to support employers, and thus reduce the administrative charge.

Recognition of qualifications:

- Accelerate the procedures for the recognition of certificates and individual assistance during the procedure.
- Facilitate the access to support/trainings to validate certificates, while working.
- An exam from an education institute to confirm that the competences of the person match with the qualification needed for the position.

Language skills:

- More financial support from national/regional or local authorities to have more language trainings.
- Internal or external linguistic tutor, which will also help the foreign worker to better integrate in the workplace and community.
- Internal initiatives in the workplace to support the language learning. For example, use of cards with useful words for the job implementation.

Inclusion in the workplace:

- Initiatives to improve diversity in the workplace and the relation between employees. For example, activities to better understand other cultures, promote an open exchange.
- Establish a diversity management plan, including policies, coaching, trainings on diversity management and communications and designate a person in the team “trust

person” to be in charge of diversity management in the workplace. This person will be the reference to employees to discuss any issue in a safe space.

- Mentor/tutor tailored to the needs of all the workers including the foreign ones. The mentor must be rewarded for this additional task. Mentoring can also consist in explaining specific vocabulary.
- Inclusive approach to recruitment and career progression, which will also improve the attractiveness of the sector.
- Create and promote a safe environment in the workplace, where employers and employees can freely share experiences.
- Facilitate the relevant information to employees, concerning rules and rights in the workplace, as well as for foreign workers.
- Promote the internal support, between colleagues.
- External expertise to moderate/mediate difficult situations.
- Financial support to put in place activities/workshops to work on diversity.

Attractiveness of the sector:

- Support foreign workers in the administrative and employment procedures, including clear information on the Belgian recruitment process and how to apply for open positions.
- More visibility and accessibility to the organisation/associations supporting foreign workers with the administrative process.
- Give visibility to the job offers in the sector by informing foreign workers about the relevant contact points.
- There is currently a project where people can learn the social care work on the ground. It could be an opportunity to also target foreign workers with such a project.
- Give more possibilities to learn the language, to know how to do an interview, and the CV.
- Provide employment offers in more languages and better dissemination at all levels.
- Strong collaboration between organisations in the social services sector and structures that support the inclusion of foreign workers.

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