

# EMN Report Migrant Access to Social Security – Policy and practice in Belgium

## Short Summary

This study provides an overview of the social security entitlements of non EU immigrants in Belgium and analyses their socio-economic position. The study reveals that the Belgian social security system is an inclusive one. For social insurance programs, the general rule is that everybody who works and resides legally in Belgium, is entitled to social security benefits, provided that they fulfil the general conditions of eligibility such as waiting periods and minimal contributions. When it comes to social aid or guaranteed minimum resources, all legally resident immigrants are covered by the residual social aid program, but depending on their status, will be excluded from some specific sub-programs.

In the course of the last two decades, Belgium has steadily developed a stronger link between social security (social aid) policies and immigration. We can distinguish two types of policies that make out the immigration-social security nexus. One type of policy has to do with a differentiation of minimum income resources (social aid) by immigrant category: in the course of the last two decades, policies gradually differentiated between several types of immigrants. Some categories of *new comers* (asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, EU new comers, some regularized immigrants) saw their social aid entitlements drastically reduced or eliminated. At the same time, social aid entitlements of *old comers* (settled immigrants registered in the population register) were expanded. Another set of policies that involve social security entitlements have in common that they revolve around stronger participation and integration requirements for immigrants.

Despite the largely inclusive story of Belgium's social security system, Belgium faces a grim contrast between the inclusiveness of its social security system and the very bad socio-economic situation of immigrants in Belgium. Belgium scores worst among all EU member states when it comes to employment levels of third country nationals. Moreover, due to their higher unemployment rates, immigrants are overrepresented in the unemployment program, but receive lower levels of benefits (due to their worse wages and employment history). In contrast, both the average take-up and the level of pension benefits are much lower for immigrants than for natives. At the same time, in the non-contributory system of guaranteed minimum resources, immigrants are overrepresented. Finally, the poverty levels of third country nationals are appallingly high in Belgium.