



# PANORAMAS OF ALLIANCES BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY : LIEGE

The Migration Alliance is a project founded and run by :



**OC-U**  
ORGANISATION  
POUR UNE CITOYENNETÉ  
UNIVERSELLE



**ANVITA**  
ASSOCIATION NATIONALE  
DES VILLES ET TERRITOIRES ACCUEILLANTS



## **For an unconditional welcome and universal citizenship**

### **Towards a common base of territories**

The Alliance Migrations<sup>1</sup> aims at a local and global change to get out of the dramatic impasse in which the current policies of non-reception lock us. To do so, it works on a French, European and international scale to encourage and promote concrete alternatives led by local authorities in conjunction with civil society in terms of dignified reception, citizenship and respect for fundamental rights.

By relying on inspiring territories, the Alliance Migrations wishes to weave a red thread around 4 main objectives:

- The promotion of alternative policies carried out by the territories
- The multiplication of good practices and cooperation between territories
- The anchoring of the Alliance's project in the field: proof by action!
- In the long term, the support of a common plea for another governance of migrations

This project was initiated in 5 pilot cities in 2020 (Lisbon, Barcelona, Palermo, Grenoble and Montreuil), and was continued in 2021 in 3 other territories: Berlin, Liege and the Pays Vignais. For each of these territories, volunteers took part in the actions carried out by local actors and carried out an analysis over 5 months.

The work of the volunteers of the Alliance Migrations provides us with an overview of the issues surrounding migration in each of these territories and examples of "good practices" carried out by local authorities in conjunction with civil society. These examples, which are not exhaustive, allow us to highlight points of attention, recommendations and prospects for joint projects to strengthen practices in favor of reception and citizenship at the local level and to build on these concrete alternatives to bring about a change of course in migration policies. This is how the common base of the territories for a welcome was co-constructed, through three pillars, from the 8 territories:

- The guarantee of a local citizenship that allows each inhabitant to participate in the political life of their city
- The promotion of interculturality as a vector of inclusion and social cohesion
- The guarantee of unconditional access to rights.

This document is addressed to local authorities and elected officials, associations, researchers and all those concerned in order to encourage and highlight concrete alternatives carried out by local authorities, in support of civil society, in terms of dignified reception, citizenship and respect of fundamental rights.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Alliance Migrations", an alliance between local authorities and civil society for a different kind of governance of migration, is a dynamic supported by the National Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories (ANVITA) and the Organization for Universal Citizenship (O.C.U., made up of Emmaus International, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, the Utopia Movement and the Latin American network Espacio Sin Fronteras)

# LIEGE

This panorama was realized and written by Marie Dufossé, who was on a voluntary mission within the framework of the Alliance Migrations, from October 2021 to March 2022. The mission was supervised by the National Development Cooperation Center (CNCD 11.11.11) and the association « Le Monde des Possibles ».

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## INSPIRING PRACTICES HIGHLIGHTED

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## Glossary

### Acronyms :

AMIF:	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AMU:	Emergency Medical Assistance
ASBL:	Non-profit association
CCE:	Council for Foreigners' Litigation
CEPAG:	André Genot Popular Education Center
CGRA:	General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons
CIRÉ:	Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners
CNCD-11.11.11:	National Development Cooperation Center
CPAS:	Public Center for Social Action
CRACPE:	Collective of Resistance to the Centers for Foreigners
CRI:	Regional Centers for Integration
CRIPEL:	Regional Center for the Integration of Foreigners or People of Foreign Origin
CVFE:	Collective against Family Violence and Exclusion
ECCAR:	European Coalition Against Racism
EEC:	European Economic Community
FGTB:	General Federation of Labour of Belgium
FPS:	Federal Public Service
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OE:	Aliens Office
ONE:	National Children's Office
RIS:	Social Integration Income
SNCB:	Belgian National Railway Company
UMN:	Union Migrant Net
VSP:	Voice of the Undocumented of Liege

## I. The migration context in Liege

### **The history of international migration in Belgium: from a position of openness to a position of border closure**

Today, one Belgian in four has a foreign-born parent. Since the 1800s, Belgium has been a country of immigration: the Liege basin hired many German miners and metallurgists, and the north and east of Belgium employed Dutch domestic workers. Many migrants were highly qualified and aimed at social advancement: they came from the United Kingdom, Italy, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland... At the time, any foreigner who could support himself was welcome: no travel documents - passport or visa - were required. However, towards the end of the 1880s, the situation changed: Belgians were distinguished from foreigners, and unemployed foreigners were excluded from the country.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, colonial emigration (at that time around the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo) became the main emigration movement. This movement came to an abrupt halt in 1960 with the independence of the former colony, and many Belgian colonials returned to Belgium. At the same time, labour immigration became dominant again and Belgium became a "country of immigration". Heavy industry and especially the mining sector stimulated migration to Belgium. The people arriving in Belgium came mainly from Poland and Italy, but also from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Belgium also received refugees from Russia and later from Germany.

After the Second World War, a protocol was signed between Belgium and Italy. It provided for the sending of 50,000 Italian workers to the Belgian mines in exchange for a stock of coal. In reality, more than 75,000 men arrived in Belgium, sometimes followed by their families. At the bottom of the mine, Italian miners worked alongside displaced persons from Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Hungary, East Germany). Belgium concluded bilateral agreements with Spain and Greece, then Morocco and Turkey to recruit workers in the mines, then in metallurgy, chemistry, construction and transport. After the independence of the Congo (1960), Congolese immigration to Belgium gradually intensified while remaining a very marginal phenomenon in quantitative terms, mainly composed of students. From the beginning of the 1970s, following the economic recession and the increase in unemployment (closure of coal mines), the Belgian government reviewed its policy on access to the labor market for immigrants. At the same time, European construction introduced a distinction in rights between two categories of immigrants: those who were nationals of an EEC member state and those who were not. The first ones enjoy numerous provisions aimed at promoting equal treatment between nationals and foreigners.

After the first oil crisis, Belgium decided to close its borders to economic immigration. In 1974, the government decided to strictly limit new entries to qualifications not available in the country. This decision was accompanied by a first operation to regularize the situation of foreigners in

Belgium illegally: 7,448 people were regularized (mainly Turks and Moroccans). This regularization operation was mainly carried out thanks to the action of trade unions and immigrant organizations. The number of regularizations was particularly high due to a strong mobilization of civil society: occupation of a church, hunger strike, expulsion of strikers. From the 1980s onwards, more and more people applied for asylum, and the political response was to tighten the conditions for access and examination of applications. In 1999 and again in 2009, two "one-shot" regularization measures (limited in time) were introduced in response to mobilizations in favor of access to residence for undocumented migrants. Since then, the number of undocumented migrants has continued to rise, and these demands are still relevant, especially since there are no clear criteria for regularization of residence in the legislation, as the matter is left to the discretionary judgement of the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration.

Immigration in Belgium is mainly European: almost two thirds of the foreign population in Belgium is composed of nationals of the European Union. As far as third country nationals are concerned, the main ways of entering Belgium are family reunification, studies, work and application for international protection.

## **Belgium's migration policy and the complexity of the different levels of power in the country**

The commune of Liege is located in the French Community, in the Walloon Region, in the Province of Liege. Belgium is in fact a Federal State divided into Communities and Regions. The established Communities are based on the language and culture of the people who compose them: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community correspond to population groups. The three Regions are based on the history and economy of the territories: the Flemish Region, the Brussels Capital Region and the Walloon Region. The Belgian Regions are to some extent comparable to the German Länder. Each region is subdivided into provinces and municipalities. The distribution of competences has evolved around the federal State, the Communities and the Regions. Each level has exclusive competences in which only the institution with the relevant field of action can intervene and enact legislation.

Immigration is a competence of the Federal State. The access to the territory, the stay, the establishment and the expulsion of foreigners in Belgium is governed by the law of 15 December 1980<sup>2</sup>. Decisions on access to the territory, stay, establishment and removal are taken by the 'Aliens Office' (OE)<sup>3</sup> and the 'Council for Foreigners' Litigation' (CCE)<sup>4</sup> is the administrative jurisdiction competent to deal with appeals against decisions taken in application of the law of 15 December 1980. Since 2020, Sammy Mahdi is the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration in charge of asylum and migration issues within the federal government. The processing of applications for international protection is the responsibility of the Federal Public Service (FPS)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/loi/1980/12/15/1980121550/justel>

<sup>3</sup> The Aliens Office (OE) is a Belgian federal service directly dependent on the Federal Public Service of the Interior, in charge of the management of the immigrant population and the waiting list for asylum seekers. It is responsible for the access of foreigners to the territory, their stay, their settlement, as well as for removal measures.

<sup>4</sup> The Council for Foreigners' Litigation (CCE) is the competent administrative jurisdiction in case of appeal against the decisions of the CGRA, against the decisions of the Office des Etrangers, and against all other individual decisions taken in application of the Law on Foreigners (Law of December 15, 1980 on the access to the territory, the stay, the establishment and the removal of foreigners)

Interior, namely the Aliens Office (OE) and the General Commissioner for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA)<sup>5</sup>. The Belgian State is a signatory to the Geneva Convention on the granting of refugee status<sup>6</sup>, supplemented by a circular<sup>7</sup> transferring the European Directive 2004/83/EC introducing the subsidiary protection status. Applicants for international protection are received in accommodation – mostly collective centers – coordinated by Fedasil or by mandated partners (the Red Cross and G4S Care in particular)<sup>8</sup>. There are currently several centers in the province of Liege. The employment of foreigners is the responsibility of the Regions, especially concerning the granting of work permits<sup>9</sup>. The Regions also coordinate the "integration pathway"<sup>10</sup> for newcomers, via the CRIs<sup>11</sup> (Regional integration centers). In Liege, the CRIPEL<sup>12</sup> is in charge of these aspects.

At the municipal level, the foreigners' department of each city issues residence documents transmitted by the Aliens Office. In each city, the CPAS (Public Center for Social Action), a public organization, applies the legislation on social assistance. For foreigners, the CPAS grants conditional material and financial aid, especially to recognized refugees, and coordinates access to urgent medical aid (AMU)<sup>13</sup>. This social assistance can take several forms: social assistance, emergency housing, "article 60"<sup>14</sup> contracts, etc. Finally, although the municipality does not have jurisdiction over migration, it does have jurisdiction over matters of « communal interest »<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the municipality exercises its competences in areas that concern migrants, such as social cohesion, the fight against discrimination, employment, housing, education, the municipal police, etc.

## In Liege, a political and associative context favorable to the reception

Historically, the municipality of Liege has a socialist majority: the Socialist Party (PS) has maintained its position as the dominant party since 1976. Since 1999, the mayor is Willy Demeyer (PS). The municipality of Liege – even more than elsewhere in Belgium<sup>16</sup> – is endowed with a dense and militant associative fabric. Many ASBLs (non-profit associations) are committed to welcoming and supporting migrants, as well as trade unions and citizens' groups, a dynamic that is encouraged by the commune's socialist history.

<sup>5</sup> The General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) is the Belgian body that examines asylum applications and issues civil status documents for recognized refugees and stateless persons. It is an independent federal administration, the central asylum authority in Belgium.

<sup>6</sup> International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, signed in Geneva on July 28, 1951

<sup>7</sup> Circular on the status of subsidiary protection of October 5, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fedasil.be/fr/les-centres-daccueil>

<sup>9</sup> <https://emploi.wallonie.be/home/travailleurs-etranagers/permis-de-travail.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://parcoursintegration.be/fr/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.diversitewallonie.be/qui-sommes-nous/les-cri>

<sup>12</sup> <https://cripel.be/>

<sup>13</sup> The AMU in Belgium is under federal jurisdiction.

<sup>14</sup> Employment contract by which a recipient of the social integration income (RIS) can benefit from a job placement measure.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter VIII "Provincial and Communal Institutions" of the Belgian Constitution (Constitution of 17 February 1994).

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kbs-frb.be/fr/zoom-barometre-des-associations-2020> 2020 Association Barometer



In 1997, the closed center of Vottem – a commune on the outskirts of Liege – received its first inmates. The same year, the CRACPE<sup>17</sup> (Collective of Resistance to the Centers for Foreigners) was formed to demand its closure. Every Saturday since then, its members have organized "mini-demonstrations" in front of the center, as well as numerous actions of political questioning and support for the detainees. Since the 2000s, many citizens have been involved with undocumented migrants to support their demands for regularization and housing. In 2009, 26,000 undocumented migrants obtained regularization of their stay thanks to this mobilization<sup>18</sup>. In 2014, the 'Voice of the Undocumented' of Liege (VSP) was born with the objective of bringing together under the same roof people without legal residence permits in order to demand respect for their dignity, and a VSP Support Committee was formed in the process. The VSP of Liege settled in the form of an occupation, first in an empty building in Sclessin, then in a former horticultural school in Burenville<sup>19</sup>. 98 people, including 27 children and 22 women, organized themselves collectively to make their daily life as dignified as possible. Writing, painting, audiovisual, mechanical, sewing and cooking workshops were created, as well as a solidarity SECU<sup>20</sup>. The buildings were sold in 2019 and the inhabitants received an eviction notice. Some of the women and children were rehoused by the Socialist Welfare Women of Liege (an association linked to the Solidaris mutual insurance company and the FGTB trade union). After long negotiations, the City provided housing for all the people who still lived in Burenville in 2020. Thus, since 2020, five houses made available by the City provide housing for about 60 undocumented migrants. At the end of 2018, the Collectif of Liege in support to undocumented workers<sup>21</sup> was formed, composed of citizens, activists, ASBLs and union representatives, in order to build a political advocacy in connection with other collectives in the Kingdom, particularly in Brussels.

Following a citizen's questioning in the national campaign initiated by the National Center for Development Cooperation (CNCD-11.11.11), the City of Liege declared itself a "hospitable, responsible, welcoming and open city"<sup>22</sup> and made many commitments to improve the reception and stay of migrants in respect of human rights. The Collective Liege Hospital City was created at the same time to monitor the implementation of the commitments made by the city and to bring back observations and proposals<sup>23</sup> from the field. Moreover, the city is part of several networks such as the European Coalition Against Racism – ECCAR, launched in 2004 and whose aim is to fight against racism, discrimination and xenophobia; or Union Migrant Net – UMN launched in 2020<sup>24</sup>, whose aim is to promote the social and solidarity economy as a means of inclusion for migrants.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cracpe.be/>

<sup>18</sup> Adam, I., Nadia, B. M., Bonaventure, K., Martiniello, M., & Rea, A. (2002). *Histoires sans-papiers*, Bruxelles : Vista, p. 9, and Myria, Régularisation de séjour et droits des personnes en séjour irrégulier, chapitre 6, <https://www.myria.be/files/Migration2016-6-Regularisation-et-sejour-irregulier.pdf>, consulted on 12/11/2021. See also Martiniello, M., & Rea, A. (2002). Les sans-papiers en Belgique. *Hommes & Migrations*, 1238(1), 89-99.

<sup>19</sup> District of the City of Liege on the heights of the left bank of the Meuse

<sup>20</sup> In Liege, within the occupation of the Voice of the Undocumented, a mechanism of social security for undocumented migrants has been created, based on the cooperative model. The participants participate in a collective fund of 5 euros per month, supplemented by citizens' solidarity contributions. This fund finances certain medical care that is not covered by emergency medical aid.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Collectif-li%C3%A9geois-de-soutien-aux-sans-papiers-102386631246561>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/ville-engagee/liege-se-declare-ville-hospitaliere-responsable-accueillante-et-ouverte>

<sup>23</sup> Cf part on Liege, a hospitable City

<sup>24</sup> Cf part on Union Migrant Net

Today, one of the primary concerns in terms of reception is employment. The unemployment rate is particularly high in Liege: in 2018, 17.1% of the active population aged 15-64 are unemployed<sup>25</sup>. The problem of access to employment therefore affects the entire population of Liège, but is accentuated for people in precarious situations, including those seeking international protection, refugees, family reunification, etc. According to the OECD<sup>26</sup>, Belgium has one of the lowest employment rates for migrants. This figure is explained by several factors, such as the lack of recognition of qualifications and skills, the language barrier, ethnocentrism, making access to employment very complicated for migrants.

Access to housing is also a priority in terms of reception and inclusion in Liege<sup>27</sup>, and takes different forms depending on the administrative situation of the person. Applicants for international protection are housed in reception centers from the beginning of their procedure until its end. People without a residence permit or with a precarious residence permit are forced to turn to solutions that are often very unstable. For several years, migrants in transit have been housed by volunteer citizens from the Liege region. Then in 2020, the Region financed *de facto* collectives for the accommodation of migrants in transit<sup>28</sup>. This subsidy covers part of the needs, so that Belgian families continue to house these people. Thus the question of housing/accommodation for migrants is very complex: if it depends on the situation of the people, it remains a brake to their inclusion.

Whether it is for employment, housing, or others, the institutional context of Belgium makes it more difficult to solve problems of access to rights. Therefore, many actors in the city of Liege among associations, organizations and unions mobilize every day around the issue of the reception and integration of migrants and the respect of their rights. Solutions are then found at the local level by Liege actors, often in consultation with the city.

In a European political context that sees the closing of borders and xenophobia increasing, the city of Liege - a cosmopolitan commune - stands out thanks to the dynamism of the associative and militant sector supported by the municipality.

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<sup>25</sup> INSEE figures

<sup>26</sup> OCDE (2020), *Perspectives des migrations internationales 2020*, Éditions OCDE, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6b4c9dfc-fr>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/services-communaux/logement/actualites/la-ville-de-liege-adopte-la-declaration-de-politique-communale-du-logement>

<sup>28</sup> "Transit migrants are people who have entered the European Union, most often via southern Europe. They wish to travel to another European country (usually the United Kingdom) to apply for asylum or to stay there (for family, work or study reasons, for example)." CIRE asbl (2019), *Migrants en transit et personnes solidaires, quels droits?*

## II. Liege, a "hospitable, responsible, welcoming and open" city

### From a regional campaign to the adoption of communal commitments

In 2017, the National Center for Development Cooperation (CNCD-11.11.11) and the Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners (CIRE) launched the campaign "Let's make our Commune hospitable" in Wallonia and the Brussels Region. This campaign aroused a real citizen's interest, and very quickly the idea emerged to push the Commune to adopt a motion declaring the city hospitable for migrants. Hundreds of people and about eighty associations and collectives mobilized to question<sup>29</sup> the City of Liege during the Common Council of October 2, 2017<sup>30</sup>. It is proposed to submit to the vote a motion by which the municipality of Liege declares itself hospitable and committed to improving the reception and daily life of migrant people and to guarantee the respect of their rights. The Mayor of Liege has organized a working group at the level of the Commune to rework the motion. The associations and committed citizens have organized themselves in a Collective, and have worked together with the City to adjust the text.

Finally, with the unanimous vote of this motion by the City of Liege's Common Council on November 27, 2017, the City declares itself a "hospitable, responsible, welcoming and open city" and commits to concretely improve the reception of migrants present on Liege's territory, regardless of their status, and to raise awareness of migration issues among the population<sup>31</sup>. The six-page motion brings together some 50 commitments in several areas, including housing, social assistance, education, training, culture, sports, police relations and citizen awareness. Since 2017, the City and the Collective have been organizing to work together on the points in the motion. In 2018, communal elections took place and a new majority was installed in the Communal Council, which confirmed its willingness to pursue the implementation of the motion "Liege Hospital City"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Any inhabitant of Liege may address the Communal Council on a question during the public session of the Council. The questions are transcribed in the minutes of the meeting of the Communal Council and are published on the website of the commune.

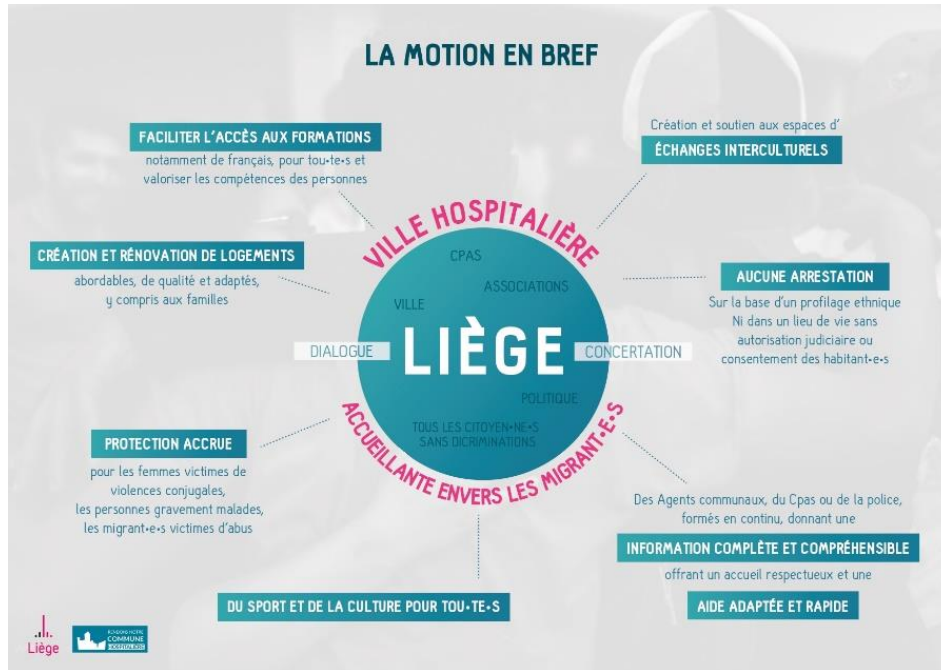
<https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/vie-politique/conseil-communal/interpeller-conseil-communal>

<sup>30</sup> List of Signatories of the citizen interpellation for migratory justice at the Common Council on October 2, 2017.

[https://www.cncd.be/IMG/pdf/liste\\_signataires\\_liege.pdf](https://www.cncd.be/IMG/pdf/liste_signataires_liege.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/ville-engagee/liege-se-declare-ville-hospitaliere-responsable-accueillante-et-ouverte>

<sup>32</sup> Common College Policy Statement 2018-2024: <https://www.yumpu.com/fr/document/read/62382589/declaration-de-politique-communale-du-college-communal-2018-2024>.



Visual from the campaign of the CNCD-11.11.11 "Liege Hospital City "

## A concerted effort between the Collective and the City

The Collective and the City have organized themselves to be able to work together: a real work of consultation has developed between the city and the civil society. All the citizens, associations and groups that support the Collective are not necessarily active, but they join the demands and actions carried out in the name of the Collective 'Liege Hospital City' and relay them. About twenty people, particularly active in leading consultations with the City and/or actions on behalf of the Collective, make up the "carrier group", the "active members" of the Collective. One person assumes the role of spokesperson with the local authorities (for two years).

The Collective and the City meet at least twice a year. These meetings allow for the establishment of a concerted mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of concrete measures. At the same time, bilateral discussions are organized with the various services (police, CPAS, civil status, etc.) to deal with specific issues based on the priorities identified by the actors in the field. Finally, awareness-raising, mobilization and interpellation actions are regularly organized. In order to prepare the consultations with the City in connection with the spokesperson, and to formulate demands that take into account the specific realities of each issue, the Collective has set up several thematic working groups in which everyone can get involved according to their field of action, interest or expertise:

## Woman

(access to care for women and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence)

## CPAS\*

(improving relations between the PCSW, the voluntary sector and the migrant population, improving access to their rights)

## Training and Teaching

(improving access to training and education for migrants)

## Accommodation

(access to safe house)

## Police

(improving relations with the police and raising awareness of migration issues among police officers)

## Civil status

(improving relations between the "civil status" department of the municipality and raising awareness on civil status issues for migrant persons)

## Local ID card

(wish to set up a local identity card on the Liege territory)

\*CPAS = Public Center for Social Action

These sub-groups are autonomous and meet directly with the people in the City who are working on these issues. In the event of political blockages, the Mayor makes decisions.

## Remarks and recommendations

Such work of exchange and cooperation between civil society and local authorities is inspiring. It shows the recognition of the reality on the ground by local authorities and their voluntarism, by institutionalizing their commitments through the vote of a motion and measures for the reception, and by systematizing the relations with the collective mobilized on these issues. This work is bearing fruit: several improvements in the reception of migrants have been implemented under the label of "Liege Hospital City", whether in terms of access to housing by making accommodation available to people without residency status<sup>33</sup>, or through the "landlords in solidarity" campaign, which aims to support landlords in renting out their property to people who are often in a precarious situation and to fight against discrimination<sup>34</sup>, or in terms of access to health care for undocumented pregnant women<sup>35</sup>.

The points worked on are very precise and technical, and often require the modification or simplification of procedures, and the sensitization of public service staff to migration issues. The demands of the Collective rarely concern financial aid, and focus on negotiations and consensus.

<sup>33</sup> Cf part 4

<sup>34</sup> <https://proprietairesolidaire.be/>

<sup>35</sup> Cf part 5

As a result, the points worked on by the city and the Collective make it possible to improve the reception and daily life of migrants in a concrete way.

However, on the City side, there is no working group defined to manage the files related to "Hospital Liege". The Mayor is responsible for this commitment, and depending on the issues raised, the aldermen and employees of the municipal administration in charge of these issues can work in consultation with members of the Collective 'Liege Hospital City'. Concretely, the Mayor is in charge of the subjects related to safety, the Alderman is in charge of everything related to Social Cohesion, Solidarity, People's Rights, etc.

This organization raises several points of attention. The work of the Mayor alongside the Collective requires that time be specifically dedicated to him, while many missions are assigned to him and the period marked by the health crisis and the floods in Liege has been particularly busy. Concerning the Aldermen in charge of certain files, the exchanges are more complicated since there are no longer bilateral meetings between the thematic working groups of the Collective and the Aldermen in charge of the file. It is important to designate contact persons both at the level of the Collective and at the level of the Commune for each theme and that a dialogue is fluid between them. Finally, it is important to remain vigilant about the durability of this collaborative work. From one municipal election to the next one, how can we be sure that the collaborative work will continue between the Collective and the City if the newly elected municipal agents and/or aldermen do not want to work on these issues? One of the Collective's requests is to set up a referent person within the municipality, allowing for a precise interlocutor for all the files pertaining to Hospital Liege, and to ensure the continuity of the collaborative work between the Collective and the Commune of Liège.

At the level of the Collective, a greater representativeness of the populations concerned by the measures would make it possible to reinforce the legitimacy of the group even more and to ensure that it is adapted to the reality of the experience of the migrants present on the Liege territory. For the moment, some members of the Voice of the Undocumented Migrants of Liege are present in the hospital dynamic, but they alone cannot represent all the people concerned by the Hospital Liege motion.

### III. Numerous dynamics in favor of access to rights for migrants

#### A multi-actor collaboration around projects for the professional integration of exiles

##### Numerous projects in Liege are part of a process of professional integration of exiled persons

Liege is at the heart of the Union Migrant Net (UMN) project, a project that aims to improve the inclusion of people of foreign origin through work within the Social and Solidarity Economy in the municipalities. This AMIF<sup>36</sup> project is supported by the European Trade Union Confederation and is operational in Liege thanks to the partnership between the City of Liege, the 'World of Possibles' ASBL<sup>37</sup>, the federal FGTB<sup>38</sup> and the CEPAG ASBL<sup>39</sup>. The Union Migrant Net dynamic focuses on the existing collective projects of migrants, with or without a residence permit, who wish to integrate into the cooperative economy. It aims to promote the necessary relays to open the fields of socio-professional integration and the creation of enterprises in cooperative format by and for migrants. Although the most important obstacles remain in the migration and reception policy which depends on the national and European levels, these local projects can allow to work not only for an effective inclusion, but also for a stabilization of the residence status of these people through work.

Systemic unemployment, coupled with the inadequacy of certain socio-professional integration measures for migrants, leads us to look at innovative practices: how can we promote access to employment for migrants via the Social and Solidarity Economy? Within the framework of the Union Migrant Net project, a guide has been published for European municipalities and trade unions. This guide is an awareness-raising tool that focuses on the inclusive potential. Meetings in Liege are taking place to introduce the good European practices of inclusion of migrants through the Social Solidarity Economy and a cooperation with the cities of the network.

In addition to the UNM project, several social and solidarity economy initiatives are used by the City of Liege as a lever for the social inclusion of migrants.

Some projects contribute to linking migrants, the host society and companies: Univerbal<sup>40</sup> is a service of interpreters in a social environment of foreign origin, the association Live in Color<sup>41</sup> promotes interculturality by providing young migrants with a network of welcoming companies.

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<sup>36</sup> Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund <https://fse.be/index.php?id=2931>

<sup>37</sup> Training center for French as a foreign language and computer skills for newcomers located in Liege. <https://www.possibles.org/lassociation/>

<sup>38</sup> General Federation of Labour of Belgium, Union that defends workers in Belgium. <https://www.fgtb.be/la-fgtb>

<sup>39</sup> Popular Education Center André Genot, center of permanent education which develops trainings and animations with the popular public on themes in connection with the political, the social, the cultural and the economic. <https://www.cepag.be/cepag>

<sup>40</sup> <https://projetuniverbal.wordpress.com/service-dinterpretariat-social/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.liveincolorassociation.com/>



The association Interra<sup>42</sup>, which was created in 2019 with the objective of promoting meetings between migrants and Liege residents, set up the Interlab<sup>43</sup> in 2020, the first incubator for entrepreneurs with foreign origins, with the support of the Walloon Region. The Sirius Hub project of 'Monde des Possibles'<sup>44</sup>, a training and digital agency composed of Belgian and immigrant computer developers, proposes to train and capitalize on the participants' skills to find common clients and economic opportunities. It is in line with the association's 109 project<sup>45</sup>, which sets up senior/migrant pairs to fight against exclusion by creating intercultural and intergenerational links.

The Social Solidarity Economy can also be used as a tool to guide people towards employment, or as a springboard towards entrepreneurship. This is the case of the Liège textile association Atemos<sup>46</sup>, where dozens of women with and without papers make and sell textile and culinary creations, the profits of which help supporting undocumented women. This association was born from a meeting between women who lived in the Burenville occupation and women who came to share their passion. The project welcomes beginners and confirmed women, in a spirit of mutualization in order to increase the competence of the whole group. The objective is also to demonstrate their sustainable local anchorage and their employability in order to strengthen their current application for regularization of residence. The City of Liege wishes to support this project; a reflection on the provision of a third place with a social purpose to host the activities of migrants and disadvantaged people is underway.

Also in Liege, Sirius Hub's main objective is to support the acquisition of coding skills by migrants, job seekers, people undergoing professional retraining and young people who have dropped out of school (NEETS). After participating in the training, an opportunity for socio-professional inclusion is offered via Sirius Coop to the trainees who are most able to invest in the process of developing a business and who are sensitive to the social economy and the principles that constitute it (shared values). The project is currently funded by the Digital Belgium Fund Skills<sup>47</sup>.

## Remarks and recommendations

The number of collaborative projects between several associations, trade unions and the City of Liege with the aim of setting up projects for the professional integration of exiled people testifies to a local voluntarism in terms of inclusion. However, there is still a lack of recognition of the work of the people who take part in these professional integration projects, notably because of the difficulty for some workers, especially undocumented ones, to be recognized as employees. These inspiring efforts and projects could contribute to a plea for a necessary evolution of the legislative framework regarding the employment of migrants.

One of the demands of the associative sector is that the City provides a place where people can come during the day, gather and take part in activities - including training and professional integration activities.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/InterraCult/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.rtb.be/article/liege-naissance-du-premier-incubateur-d-entreprises-destine-aux-primo-arrivants-10780691?id=10780691>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.possibles.org/inscriptions-formation-initiation-webmaster/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.possibles.org/109-2/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://m.facebook.com/Atemos-ASBL-107493164219333/>

<sup>47</sup> Belgian Federal Public Service "Strategy and Support" - <https://dt.bosa.be/fr/dbsf2021>



## Mobilization at different levels around housing and accommodation

Several people with different life objectives and administrative statuses are concerned by the issue of housing. Depending on their situation, different solutions are available in Liege: people seeking international protection are housed in reception centers<sup>48</sup>, some undocumented migrants have turned to the occupations, some of whom have been rehoused (1), some women who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence have been able to be housed thanks to Liege's associative sector (2.1), and migrants in transit can be housed in the homes of citizens who show solidarity (2.2)

### 1. The rehousing and provision of five houses for undocumented migrants by the City

The City has played an important role in the field of accommodation and housing for undocumented migrants for the past fifteen years. Following several events which, at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, marked the population of Liege - the construction of the VOTTEM closed center and then the murder by suffocation of a woman who was to be expelled by the Belgian authorities - movements of undocumented migrants were formed.

In 2009, these movements decided to occupy a building of the SNCB<sup>49</sup> which was to be destroyed at the Bressoux station<sup>50</sup>. In order to establish an occupation agreement with the SNCB, a public authority was needed as guarantor and the City of Liege agreed to sign. In addition to acting as guarantor, municipal employees restored the electricity and sanitary facilities, installed a prefabricated building with showers and sanitary facilities and installed a heat pump for heating. This was the city's first financial and material assistance to undocumented migrants and lasted almost a year. From that moment on, a contact was created between the Undocumented Migrants Support Committee<sup>51</sup> and the City.

Four years after the occupation of Bressoux, in 2014, undocumented migrants gathered in the Collective 'The Voice of Undocumented', met with the Support Committee for Undocumented Migrants to organize a new occupation and notified the Bourgmestre. However, as the building (a public building, former ONE<sup>52</sup> building) was too small for the number of people involved and composed of asbestos, the Mayor decided that they had to leave the building.

In September 2015, the 'Voice of Undocumented' decided to occupy a former horticultural school located in the Burenville neighborhood. As with previous occupations, the collective notified the Mayor and asked the City for a relocation solution when, in 2016, this building was

<sup>48</sup> Belgium has nearly 80 reception centers. They are managed by Fedasil, the Belgian Red Cross or another private partner. They are 'open' centers: residents are free to enter and leave the center. In the reception centers, refugees and applicants for international protection receive the material aid to which they are legally entitled. In the first instance, this material assistance consists of a bed, meals, sanitary facilities and clothing.

<sup>49</sup> National Company of the Belgian Railways

<sup>50</sup> Neighborhood in the city center of Liege

<sup>51</sup> The Support Committee to undocumented people of Liege was created in 2004 with the aim of supporting (logistically, materially, politically) the undocumented migrants' movement in the city of Liege.

<sup>52</sup> National Children's Office

sold to a private person. The people remained in Burenville until a solution was found. It took four years of negotiations with the City to address this need, as the Common Council voted in October 2020 to provide five houses for Burenville residents. These houses provide housing for between 70 and 80 undocumented individuals. The one-year agreements were renewed in November 2021.

These five houses, as well as a house made available by a private individual, a house made available by the municipality of Ans, and the Ostal (see below), allow for the housing of approximately 100 undocumented migrants in the Liège area.

## Associative and citizen initiatives to house vulnerable groups

### *L'Ostal, an associative initiative for women and their children*

L'Ostal, in the Saint Nicolas district, is a building belonging to the Liege cooperative 'Les Tournières' and rented to the Women Socialists Providers<sup>53</sup> to accommodate about ten women with an immigrant background and their children. This house came into being in 2017 so that the women who were in the Burenville occupation could have a more suitable space for themselves and their children. Often victims in the past of gender-based and/or sexual violence, they need a space where they feel safe. Together and supported by the association Promotion & Culture, they initiated the Atemos project<sup>54</sup> described in Part 3.

### *Citizen accommodation for migrants in transit*

In 2015, faced with the absence of solutions proposed by the Belgian State, the situation of migrants in transit<sup>55</sup> has led to the commitment of many voluntary citizens and associations. Some of these actors have gathered around the 'Citizen's platform of support for refugees' to organize the accommodation of people in Belgian families. At first only in Brussels, the citizen accommodation<sup>56</sup> has spread to all the provinces of Belgium, including Liege.

There are more than thirty citizen collectives active in the reception and accompaniment of people, some of which are united under the Wallonne Coordination in support to migrants in transit<sup>57</sup> and about ten of which are in Liege.

## Remarks and recommendations

<sup>53</sup> Movement of permanent education which carries out actions, projects or campaigns on various themes such as secularism, equality, health or citizenship.

<sup>54</sup> Atemos is a project in which undocumented and documented women create and market textile and culinary creations whose profits are used to ensure the survival of undocumented women, see part 3

<sup>55</sup> Transit migrants are people wishing to reach a destination country other than Belgium (generally the United Kingdom due to the impossibility of obtaining a residence status in European countries).

<sup>56</sup> "The term "citizen accommodation" is used by Belgian host families and citizen collectives to describe their practice of hospitality towards migrants. It is a social practice that consists in welcoming these people in their homes or in a collective housing (managed by volunteer citizens), with the aim of offering occasional accommodation to exiled people so that they can rest, eat their fill, take care of their hygiene and their ailments, enjoy moments of sharing or calm, etc." Alice Clarebout, « L'hébergement citoyen en Belgique : effacement des frontières entre hébergeurs et hébergés », *Analyses of l'IRFAM*, n°5, 2020

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/coordinationwallonneMET/?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/coordinationwallonneMET/?_rdc=1&_rdr)

The City has positioned itself as a true supporter by accepting the occupations, refusing to evict the people and restoring certain facilities. As for the rehousing in the five houses, although it took four years to be decided, it is a salutary measure for the people who can (finally) live in decent conditions.

It is important that the municipality takes a position in favor of the rehousing of undocumented migrants, as it is in favor of regularization, because it recognizes the inhabitants of the houses as real Liege residents inserted in the territory of the municipality. However, the fact that the municipality signs precarious occupation agreements for one year raises concerns about the durability of this solution. What will happen to the residents if the agreement is not renewed next year?

Although it is difficult to have estimates of the number of undocumented migrants in Liege, it is estimated that between 100,000 and 150,000 undocumented migrants live in Belgium. As Liege is the most populated city in Wallonia, it is easy to assume that beyond the 100 undocumented migrants housed in these houses, many remain homeless in Liege. This effort must be sustained to identify and target housing needs and to enable more undocumented migrants to have access to sanitary housing. The network of associations is ready to organize the reception of migrants in transit in particular, but lacks stable premises.

## **Negotiating locally for access to care for pregnant women living in precarious conditions**

### **Pregnancy care for exiled women living in precarious conditions, the result of a collaborative effort between various local actors**

Four years ago, pregnancy care for exiled women without a residence permit or with a precarious residence status was problematic in the city of Liege. These pregnant women in difficult situations were not (or hardly) monitored during their pregnancies, and were sometimes turned away from emergency rooms or referred to the Public Social Action Centers (CPAS<sup>58</sup>). Access to care for these people, who are sometimes victims of domestic and/or gender-based violence, is compromised by financial difficulties, lack of information (for both individuals and staff), the unsuitability of services for these problems, and sometimes discrimination against these women. However, a lack of care can lead to significant health problems for both the mother and the child, as well as high costs that could probably have been avoided if the pregnancies had been monitored.

Based on this observation, the women's working group of the Collective Liege Hospital City set up a collaboration with the Citadelle (Hospital of Liege), the National Children's Office (ONE<sup>59</sup>) and

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<sup>58</sup> A CPAS, or a "public social welfare center", provides a number of social services and looks after the welfare of every citizen. Each municipality or city has its own CPAS offering a wide range of services. <http://www.cpasdeliege.be/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.one.be/public/cest-quoi-lone/pageone/>

the Louise Michel Family Planning<sup>60</sup> for the management of pregnancies of undocumented women. Gradually, the maternity wards of other Liege hospitals joined the dynamic (Bruyères, Mont-Légia). Partnerships were thus established to guarantee access to care for pregnant women in precarious situations. Indeed, the professionals who were the main interlocutors of this public have established a dialogue with the professionals involved in their medical follow-up hospital staff (at the reception, nursing assistants, doctors, gynecologists, nurses), CPAS staff, 'Health Relay'<sup>61</sup> staff, Family Planning staff, social workers, or lawyers for example, to make them aware of these issues and the need to better manage their obstetric care, their delivery, as well as the administrative and legal procedures that follow. As a result, medical, social and legal care has improved considerably, particularly thanks to the synergy and involvement of various social services. The Collective against Family Violence and Exclusion (CVFE)<sup>62</sup>, the Legal Aid Office, Family Plannings, CPAS of Liege, Hospital of 'La Citadelle' and Montlégia, the ONE, social services of the City of Liège, and the Victims' Assistance Office have seen their cooperation develop and strengthen.

This coordination has made it possible to develop new measures, particularly with regard to social and legal support for women in precarious situations, such as the rental deposit loan from the CPAS, the granting of RIS<sup>63</sup> handled rapidly by social workers in cases of domestic violence, and collaboration with the Legal Aid Office for the appointment of lawyers. In addition, the attentiveness and availability of the staff of the Liege maternity hospitals, the social service of the hospitals and the ONE are very important and have enabled many vulnerable people to give birth in good conditions despite the health crisis that has been underway since 2020.

The care of victims of domestic violence and the obstetrical follow-up of vulnerable persons is one of the important axes of the Liege Hospital City system, in response to a central problem of access to care for particularly marginalized persons.

## Remarks and recommendations

This collaborative work is important for the health of pregnant women in precarious situations. Similarly, the services and sectors involved in situations of domestic violence with vulnerable people have learned to work together and developed a better understanding of the problem.

Nevertheless, these collaborations are not formalized; they have been established through dialogue between the different actors in contact with these populations. These de facto partnerships are very effective but uncertain in the event of staff changes (e.g. hospital or CPAS). It is therefore necessary to perpetuate this system of assistance and care, which could be coordinated with adequate human and financial resources in order to ensure the long-term care of these people.

Although today enough staff are aware of the issue, which allows for effective care of pregnant women in precarious situations, this group remains unknown to many sectors and services that

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<sup>60</sup> <https://louisemichel.be/>

<sup>61</sup> The 'Health Relay' is a service of the CPAS of Liege for anyone who has difficulty accessing healthcare.  
<http://www.cpasdeliege.be/index.php/action-sociale/relais/relais-sante>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.cvfe.be/>

<sup>63</sup> Social Integration Income

could be in contact with them. The CPAS medical assistance system<sup>64</sup> is also rather complicated and not well known. It is therefore necessary to extend this awareness-raising work to all the actors likely to work with this group in order to ensure that these women are well taken care of and that the possibilities open to them are well understood.

Finally, in order to avoid the development of difficult situations upstream, priority should be given to information on rights, prevention on these subjects and support for reception structures for women victims of violence in Liege.

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<sup>64</sup> Any person who lives in Belgium on a regular basis can be entitled to social assistance from the CPAS (see 1976 law). Some categories of people are nevertheless subject to restrictions or excluded from this right: people without legal residence are limited to Urgent Medical Assistance; some European nationals are limited to Urgent Medical Assistance; applicants for international protection are excluded from this system (with some exceptions) because it is in principle Fedasil, and not the CPAS, that is responsible for access to medical care for asylum seekers.

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