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Welcome policies of companies and relocation services for migrant workers

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WELCOME POLICIES OF COMPANIES AND RELOCATION SERVICES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS¹ (BEL180741T)

Introduction

1.1. The PALIM-project and the role of UGent

The European Union, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Belgian development agency Enabel test an innovative labour migration model linking Morocco's growing ICT sector with Flanders' qualified ICT workers shortages. This Global Skills Partnership model is based on the assumption that labour mobility can only benefit the parties when potential employees are able to find a qualified job both in their country of origin and in the country of destination.²

The '**Pilot Project Addressing Labour Shortages Through Innovative Labour Migration Models**' (PALIM) runs from 1 March 2019 to 31 August 2020. It is implemented by the Belgian development agency Enabel, in partnership with the Flemish and Moroccan employment services (VDAB and ANAPEC), Flemish employers federations VOKA and Agoria and their Moroccan counterparts CGEM and APEBI, as well as Fedasil and the Flemish Agency for Integration.³

¹ This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union and the ICMPD. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of UGent and cannot, in any case, be considered as reflecting the position of the European Union or ICMPD.

² <https://www.enabel.be/content/palim-european-pilot-project-linking-moroccan-ict-development-and-labour-shortages-flanders>

³ <https://www.enabel.be/content/palim-european-pilot-project-linking-moroccan-ict-development-and-labour-shortages-flanders>

The research conducted at Ghent University aims at, inter alia, **mapping the “welcome policies” offered by companies and other private actors in Flanders and Brussels** to foreign workers upon arrival in Belgium.⁴

Therefore, this explorative research will have a closer look at existing welcome policies that companies offer to their foreign employees. Also, we will give a first insight into relocation services offered by private companies.

This study starts by explaining our research methodology. In our second chapter, we give an overview of welcome policies offered to migrant workers by the interviewed companies. In chapter 3, we give an overview of relocation services offered by the interviewed relocation agencies, preceded by key factors facilitating and barriers to integration of foreign employees. The best practices and recommendations are formulated in chapter 5. We end this study with some final conclusions.

1.2. Research Methodology

Practical issues of relocation include elements like visa application, housing, contact with different authorities, (public) transport, opening a bank account, finding day-care and school for children etc. When it comes to dealing with these practical challenges of settling in as foreign worker in a new country, there are three possible options: the foreign worker arranges (part of) the practical issues him- or herself, the workplace takes (partially) care of it, or the foreign worker is assisted by a relocation agency. In the latter case, the relocation agency can either be contacted by the worker directly, or be hired by the employer. Therefore, this research aims to offer a preliminary analysis of **welcome policies offered by companies** as well as relocation services of **relocation agencies**.

As such, we started from a general Google-(internet) search, which led to the identification of numerous companies employing migrant workers and relocation agencies. They were first contacted by phone and asked if they were interested in taking part in a survey regarding the PALIM-project. In October-November 2019, two different questionnaires (in Dutch) were sent out by e-mail to 24 companies employing migrant workers⁵ and to 16 relocation agencies offering relocation services to foreigners and their family members.⁶ An information leaflet regarding the PALIM project and an informed consent form were included.⁷

Six companies in Flanders⁸ and five relocation agencies in Flanders and Brussels⁹ accepted to answer the questionnaire through an individual phone interview (response rate of 25% and 31% respectively).

⁴ The research at Ghent University focuses firstly on the mapping of integration actors in Flanders and Brussels. Moreover, UGent has developed practical fiches for employers and employees regarding the single-permit application procedure. More information available at:

<https://www.ugent.be/re/epir/nl/afdelingen/publiekrecht/onderzoek/migratierecht/onderzoek.htm>

⁵ Annex I.

⁶ Annex II.

⁷ Annex III.

⁸ The following companies participated in this survey: Daikin, Delaware, Jan De Nul, Vanhellemont, Ghent University (UGent) and X (company preferred to remain anonymous.) Even though Ghent University is not a for-profit-company as the other respondents, for the sake of simplicity, we will use the overall denomination “companies” to refer to this group of respondents.

⁹ The following relocation agencies participated in this survey: Bright Expats, Expat Management Group, Foreign Relocation Service (FRS), Relocation Belgium, Xine.

These interviews were conducted in December 2019 and January 2020 and took approximately one hour each. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.¹⁰

All but one interviewee explicitly accepted to be identified in the report (both name of the company/relocation agency, and name of the individual respondent). The relevant parts/quotes of the report have been reviewed and approved by the research participants.

The **first part** of the survey comprised **general questions** about the company (size, number of foreign workers, sector of activity) or the relocation company (size, type of relocation services offered, client profile, prices, internal structure).

The **second part** of the questionnaire included **questions about the welcome policies/relocation services** offered to foreign employees by the company/relocation agency respectively.

All interviewees – companies and relocation agencies – received questions about the following services offered to foreign workers:

- *Welcome brochure*
- *Housing facilities*
- *Administrative support (single permit, registration at the municipality, utilities, other)*
- *Relocation of the family*
- *Opening a bank account*
- *Buddy support*
- *Religious facilities*

Given the limited set-up of the study as to the number of respondents, no representativeness or exhaustiveness is claimed. Nevertheless, the analysis does allow to tentatively identify some '**best practices**' and **recommendations** for more effective welcoming policies of **migrant workers and their family members upon arrival in Belgium**.

¹⁰ The authors wish to thank Eleonore de Neve, Klaas Van Craeynest, Bas Schuermans and Margot van Cauwenberghe for their research assistance.

2. Welcome policies offered by companies

2.1. Profile of the companies

- All **six companies, of different size**, are **based in Flanders**. The smallest company has 70 employees working in Belgium, the biggest company 9000 (including foreign workers).
- All six companies **currently employ foreign workers**.¹¹ Two smaller companies (<100 employees) stated that they currently do not have the capacity to employ third-country nationals, but these companies do employ EU-nationals.¹² One of these companies explicitly cited the *complexity of the single permit procedure* as a reason why third-country nationals were no longer hired.¹³ It is worth mentioning that the company in question received the “Price for diversity” in 2012 by “Jobkanaal”, an initiative rewarding companies that highly value diversity.¹⁴
- All companies have **more than 10 years of experience** in working with foreign employees.
- The companies are active in **different sectors** (textile, horticulture, ICT, construction, heat pumps and higher education).
- In general, foreign employees find it **particularly important** that their **new company provides help for settling in**, as different interviewees stated: *“Especially the administrative part is worrisome for our foreign employees such as registration at the municipality, single permit, paperwork etc.”*¹⁵ or *“an effective relocation is the most important element for expats, the process of relocation should be smooth, they don’t want to worry.”*¹⁶
- Three bigger companies (> 1000 employees) pointed out that **recently** (< 5 years ago), they developed a **structural approach** regarding the **access to welcome policies for their foreign workers**. Case-by-case management in this regard seemed to be less appropriate. These companies have a **focal point** or **Human Resources (HR)-expert** specialised in international mobility.

¹¹ The questionnaire defines “foreign workers” as EU- and non-EU nationals.

¹² EU-nationals are exempted from the single permit procedure.

¹³ Interview with Mario Vanhellemont, Vanhellemont, 29 November 2019.

¹⁴ *“In the framework of the diversity plans, Fruit Vanhellemont implemented a variety of measures over the years. This includes measures to improve the mutual understanding between workers, such as courses of basic Dutch for the workers, or the introduction of a “god-mother/ godfather system”. Furthermore, lists of words and short sentences in Dutch are used in order to allow mutual understanding on the work floor. A visual welcome flyer was also developed for the workers. Security signs in different languages are also made available. Workshops have also been organized, inter alia to improve the understanding of other cultures.”* in EMN, *Labour market integration of third-country nationals in Belgium*, Study of the Belgian contact point of EMN, September 2018, 86-87, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/02a_belgium_labour_market_integration_final_en.pdf

¹⁵ Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

¹⁶ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

“Until two years ago, we worked case-by-case, but we noticed that this created problems. Some employees did have a network, others didn’t. Some employees could rely on colleagues to guide them within the company or in Belgium, their new home country. However, others had bad luck. Therefore, two years ago, we decided to set up some things, to monitor our ‘cases’ closely....for example, by searching what we can offer, through HR, on a standard basis in order to facilitate their job and life in Belgium. So today we offer brochures, flyers, with a checklist what you should do upon arrival in Belgium. For example, information regarding the opening of a bank account or affiliation with a health insurance. We also offer the necessary documents in order to speed up the process.”¹⁷

“ Five years ago, we created a “Welcome Team” with a branch “international files”. For them, we have developed a roadmap and improved processes.”¹⁸

2.2. Welcome policies offered by companies to their foreign employees

2.2.1. Welcome brochure/briefing

- Five out of the six companies offer a welcome brochure (in English) with **specific information for their foreign employees**. This welcome brochure differs from the welcome leaflets offered to their Belgian employees. Most of the welcome brochures contain different types of information. The most detailed welcome brochure of one of the interviewed companies addresses all following topics¹⁹:
 - Single permit
 - Opening a bank account
 - Finding a place to live
 - Schools and education
 - Utilities
 - Household assistance
 - Mobile phone
 - Garbage collection
 - Transport
 - Driving your own car/driving offences
 - Expenses
 - Salary
 - Holidays
 - Healthcare
 - Child allowance
 - Tax
 - Expat network

¹⁷ Interview with Jasper van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019 re the question “Do you have a structural policy on integration services for foreign employees or do you work case-by-case?”

¹⁸ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

¹⁹ Daikin, *Brochure for international employees in Belgium (2017)*, 22p. This concerns an internal document of Daikin.

- One of the companies stated that they just recently drafted a welcome leaflet for foreign workers:

“ It’s something rather new, something we developed in-house. We just recently started using it. It took us a while to design it. It’s a brochure about “Welcome in Belgium” and more specifically “Welcome in Aalst, Ghent and Brussels”. For example, we explain in this brochure how the health insurance works, where you find a doctor...Such kind of practical information. Also information about the NMBS, De Lijn, how garbage is sorted, information regarding sport clubs in the neighbourhood and references to interesting websites for expats where they can find more information about tax regulations etc.”²⁰

- Two companies offer a specific **“welcome briefing”** to foreign employees (different from the briefing for Belgian employees). When organizing these briefings, companies may rely on **specialised partners**.

“Three times a year, we organise an information session with VDAB and IN-Gent where we provide specific information regarding voluntary work, how to register at the VDAB, how to receive reimbursements, where to find free Dutch courses etc.”²¹

“We advised our Hungarian employees to follow civic integration [inburgering], this was not an obligation but this could facilitate their integration. A consultant of the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration came to our company offering an explanation of the integration program.”²²

- One company offers the **same welcome brochure to foreign workers as to Belgian employees**.²³ This information brochure contains information regarding the work schedule, a plan of the factory, safety instructions, how to reach the company etc. There is no specific information on “welcome policies” for foreign workers. Noteworthy is the fact that this brochure contains a lot of pictures instead of a comprehensive description, which can be helpful for non-native speakers.

2.2.2. Housing facilities

- Four out of the six companies offer housing facilities to their foreign employees. Three companies have their **own apartments** at the disposal of their foreign employees²⁴, one company offers **housing in a hotel**.²⁵ One company decided to provide no longer for accommodation.

“In 2009, we had a project regarding the employment of Hungarian seamstresses (...). We worked together with Adecco Cross-boarders, they searched for housing and found 3

²⁰ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan De Nul, 19 December 2019.

²¹ Interview with Hilde van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

²² Interview with X, 29 November 2019.

²³ Welcome Brochure, Vanhellemont.

²⁴ Delaware, Jan De Nul, UGent.

²⁵ Daikin.

*apartments located above each other. We offered furnished accommodation including rent guarantee and fire insurance. (...) At a later stage, we didn't provide housing anymore as we noticed that our employees organized themselves. Sometimes, they co-housed with other colleagues.*²⁶

- Some accommodation is offered for **free**, the **duration** may vary.

*"Our foreign employees receive free housing upon arrival during 3 months. During this period, the foreign employee should go searching for a house on the private market. I offer help in this search. This period can be prolonged for another 3 months, if the worker hasn't find housing yet or if he has signed a rental contract which starts later. In that case, we ask for a small financial compensation. If they haven't found a house after 6 months, they can extend another 3 months. We can offer a total of 9 months housing support. (...)The apartments are located in Aalst, close to our office, only 2 km away. Thereafter, some people remain in Aalst, others move to Ghent or Brussels."*²⁷

- One of the companies refers its international employees to a **specialised in-house section**, "Housing Facilities".²⁸ This department offers different kinds of paid accommodation: single studios, flats for couples and flats for families. The rental period is flexible: minimal 2 weeks, maximum 6 months.
- Most companies continue to offer **ad-hoc support** (e.g. reviewing the rental agreement²⁹, supporting access to utilities) once the foreign employee starts renting on the **private market**.
- All companies consider the **rental guarantee** as a private matter, only one company provides support for the deposit under the form of a free loan.³⁰
- One employer stressed being **flexible** towards foreign employees in **order to find private housing**.

*"New foreign employees can reside at a hotel for one month until they find adequate housing. In general, this works out. We won't lay off people but prefer to mobilize them in order to find a place as soon as possible. Our employees are entitled absence from work in order to visit apartments."*³¹

- Challenges to find **adequate housing** differ as to the specific locality of the city.

²⁶ Interview with X, 29 November 2019.

²⁷ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan De Nul, 19 December 2019.

²⁸ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

²⁹ Rental agreements in Flanders are mostly drawn up in Dutch and thus not comprehensible for the foreign worker.

³⁰ Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

³¹ Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

“In Ostend, this [the house search] works out very well as our company is the biggest employer in the region and presenting a work contract of our company opens new doors. Brussels is more difficult and more expensive.”³²

“Some of our foreign employees explicitly ask to work [in our operations] in Brussels or Antwerp, rather than in Kortrijk. We presume because of the international communities that are located over there.”³³

2.2.3. Administrative support

- The employer has to submit the **single permit application** at the Flemish Service of Economic Migration and Regulation. Upon arrival in Belgium, the foreign employee has to register at the municipality within 8 working days. When **registering at the municipality**, the foreign employee is **always assisted by a person** of the company (e.g. the international HR-expert), in three of the companies interviewed.³⁴

“I assist the foreign employee personally at his registration at the municipality upon arrival. The foreign employee has to go several times to the town hall, mostly 3 to 4 times. Each time, I am present because of the notification in the town hall ‘if you don’t speak Dutch, you should be accompanied by a person who speaks Dutch’.”³⁵

- One company explained having a **direct agreement with the municipality for registration** of its foreign employees.

*“When signing the contract at our premises, the foreign employee has to fill in an arrival form. We - instead of the municipality - ask the foreign employee to provide the passport, the visa, and we start the registration process via a specialised email-address. The city of Ghent is familiar with this workflow. Once this process is started, the police officer will visit his home to check whether the employee actually lives at the indicated address. We receive feedback regarding the **residence check**. As soon as the residence check is positive, we send an email to the employee to contact the municipality. We invite him to pick up the A card at the town hall. (...) So they don’t need to book an appointment at the counter of the municipality. This agreement with the city of Ghent exists 6 years.”³⁶*

2.2.4. Support for family members

- Four out of six companies provide (administrative) **support for the family members** (spouse/partner, children) of the foreign employee. This includes: visa request support for the

³² Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

³³ Interview with Jasper van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019.

³⁴ Delaware, Daikin and Jan de Nul offer administrative support in person once the foreign employee has to register at the municipality.

³⁵ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan de Nul, 19 December 2019.

³⁶ Interview with Hilde van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019. More information: https://stad.gent/sites/default/files/media/documents/20171128_PU_Expats%20Derdelanders%20ENG_0.pdf

family member, enrolment in the nursery³⁷, enrolment at the (international) school, job offers for the spouse/partner, etc.

“ A lot of partners are interested in working as a volunteer upon arrival in Belgium. We send the partners of international employees to IN-Gent and Level2work. They can provide further assistance.”³⁸

- Some companies provide **enrolment at a (private) international school**, other companies refer to **(free) public schools**.

“We have a close contact with the international school [in Ghent]. We offer financial support on a yearly basis for children who want to enrol there. We provide yearly 13 grants for children. However, a lot of foreign employees prefer to enrol their children at a local school where they can also learn the Dutch language.”

“We don’t arrange registration at the international school as our international employees are treated in the same way as our Belgian employees when it comes to school enrolment. If they choose for an international school, they have to bear the costs themselves. (...) We recently welcomed some foreign employees from China and Croatia with their children. So I helped searching for a school. I discussed with them how the Belgian educational system looks like. As one of the families decided last minute to move to Belgium, I looked for an OKAN class.”³⁹

- Several companies stress the fact that **enrolment in a school** can be stressful and **requires forward-planning** as some schools and municipalities require pre-registration.⁴⁰

2.2.5. Religious facilities

- Three out of six companies offer **religious facilities** to their foreign employees, such as a “silent room” or flexible working hours during Ramadan.

“We offer a room for praying. In the past, we also took into account our foreign employees’ religion when preparing their work schedules, for example during Ramadan. This was much appreciated by our employees.”⁴¹

“Recently, we welcomed a group newcomers from Malaysia. We made arrangements for these colleagues so that they could freely live their faith. We provided a room where they could pray, we offered adjusted meals and flexible work schemes during Ramadan.”⁴²

³⁷ One company has its own nursery in which the children of foreign employees can enroll.

³⁸ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

³⁹ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan De Nul, 19 December 2019.

⁴⁰ Signing up or pre-registration for a public school means that you have to pre-notify at which school you want to enroll your child. Following the notification, you still have to register your child at the school.

⁴¹ Interview with Mario Vanhellemont, Vanhellemont, 29 November 2019.

⁴² Interview with Jasper Van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019.

2.2.6. The buddy system

- Four out of six companies set up an **informal “buddy system”** to orient the foreign employee upon arrival in Belgium.⁴³
- Most of the companies try to find a buddy with **similar characteristics as the foreign employee**, in particular related to nationality, language and family composition, in order to optimize the communication and assistance provided by the buddy involved. Preferably the person is experienced and working in the same team.

“Even before the effective recruitment takes place, we start looking amongst our employees who could assist the foreign employee: who has the perfect profile? For example, does the buddy have children, is he working in the same team, does he have enough experience within the company etc.? We have a positive working culture, people support each other, both in private and professional life. New colleagues know that they can count on others. We have been confronted with cases where a foreign employee felt lonely and isolated, we started looking within that specific team for a solution to overcome this.”⁴⁴

- The buddy fulfills **various tasks** when supporting the foreign employee. In some companies, the buddy supports the foreign employee outside the work environment. Other companies have a strong emphasis on work related matters.

“The buddy plays an important role when looking for a private house. (...) The buddy commits himself to orient the newcomer in Belgium or to take him out for a trip.”⁴⁵

“The buddy system is not private related but rather work related. The buddy provides practical information such as: tour of the workplace, how to make a reservation of a classroom, show-and-tell of work equipment, information on travel to work and parking, information on meal and drinks etc.”⁴⁶

Transport

- Most companies offer **public transport support** (third-party system) to the foreign employee or a **bicycle**. Two companies stressed the fact that some foreigners do not know how to bike.

“ We explain how to apply for a train or bus subscription with the NMBS or De Lijn. (...) When residing in our apartment, we provide a bicycle, a fluorescent jacket and a helmet. However, some of our foreign employees are not used to cycling.”⁴⁷

⁴³ At UGent university this is a formalized procedure, provided to **all** new colleagues, regardless their nationality. The emphasis is on the informal aspects of one’s work. For more information, see, <https://www.ugent.be/en/work/talent/welcoming-new-staff/introduction/welcome-by-department.htm>

⁴⁴ Interview with Jasper Van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019.

⁴⁵ Interview with Jasper Van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019.

⁴⁶ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

⁴⁷ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan De Nul, 19 December 2019.

- **None of the companies** offers support for **exchanging a foreign driving license** into a Belgian one.

Removal support

- Some companies pay (partly) **for the moving expenses**.

“We offer a relocation budget to our foreign employees which they can use for their removal. We can advise on moving companies, but they have to organise their removal themselves.”⁴⁸

“We offer a fixed budget to a specific category of our foreign staff for their relocation. They have to arrange everything themselves, they do not have to present the invoices.”⁴⁹

Intercultural training

- **Two out of six companies provide intercultural training**. When offered, they **rely on external experts**.

“We offered courses intercultural communication via external agencies and teambuilding activities where people get to know each other’s culture. For example, our Congolese employees took their other colleagues to the Matonge neighbourhood in Brussel. Or Iraqi employees took their colleagues to Antwerp for a dinner. The foreign employees take the initiative and the company offers the framework. It is a two-way exercise. In this regard we also went to a chocolate factory with all our employees to get to know our regional products.”⁵⁰

“We had once or twice a ‘culture clash’ in the workplace; inappropriate comments were made towards certain persons. (...) In the past, we have worked together with Unia in order to resolve such conflicts.”⁵¹

“General guidelines or an overview of all integration services doesn’t exist, so we refer to external agencies who can help us such as Atlas or Nova in Antwerp.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

⁴⁹ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019. Although it should be stressed that the buddy system applies for all employees at UGent

⁵⁰ Interview with Mario Vanhellemont, Vanhellemont, 29 November 2019.

⁵¹ Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

Unia is an independent public institution in Belgium that combats discrimination and promotes equal opportunities. For more information, see <https://www.unia.be/en/about-unia>

⁵² Interview with Jasper Van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019. See also: PALIM, “Mapping integration actors for foreign workers in Flanders and Brussels”, p.7; “Moreover, there is no central database or website available which lists all integration actors in Flanders and Brussels. The individual immigrant has to embark on his/her own investigation.”

Language courses

- Some companies provide **language courses in-house**⁵³, others **refer** their employees to **external organisations**.⁵⁴

“We offer Dutch courses at our offices in Aalst. Sometimes a language coach teaches in smaller groups for 2 hours a week. But when the starting level is too different, we provide for individual skype sessions with a teacher.”⁵⁵

“We offered Dutch courses via VDAB. Our manuals were translated for the foreign employees and we worked a lot with pictograms in the beginning.”⁵⁶

“We do not reimburse language courses, we refer our employees to the UTC⁵⁷ as they are obliged to obtain a B2level to start.(...) We inform our foreign employees about the possibility to follow free Dutch courses at the Agency for integration and civic integration.”⁵⁸

Opening a bank account

- **None of the companies experienced problems** for foreign employees who wish to open a bank account. Foreign employees are **free to choose** where to open a bank account.

⁵³ Jan de Nul, Delaware, Daikin.

⁵⁴ UGent, Vanhellemont, X.

⁵⁵ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan de Nul, 19 December 2019.

⁵⁶ Interview with X, 29 November 2019.

⁵⁷ Universitair Centrum voor Talenonderwijs.

⁵⁸ Interview with Hilde Van Overberghe, UGent, 20 December 2019.

3. Relocation agencies

3.1. Profile of the relocation companies

- Four relocation companies are **based in Brussels** and one in **Flanders**. They operate and offer their services mainly in Brussels, Flanders and to a limited extent in Wallonia.
- All five relocation companies are rather **small** and **work independently**. Some agencies are run by one or two persons⁵⁹, others by 10-15 persons.⁶⁰ Often, relocation agents are **former labour immigrants** themselves. Some of the relocation agencies hire experienced **freelance consultants**.

“ A large number of persons working in this sector, have been an expat themselves. This is also the case with our company. It’s also an added value when you have colleagues who have been living as expats in Belgium.”⁶¹

“Ideally, our consultants lived abroad themselves, if not, they often have an international background. They are used to working in an environment of other cultures. It’s essential to understand what it is to live in another country, you need to be able to empathize. Without empathy, you are not made for this job.”⁶²

- All relocation companies have **5 to 10 years of experience**.
- Some of the **relocation agencies** in Belgium are **members of one or both of the following umbrella organizations** :
 - EURA (European Relocation Association) is a European and worldwide association which assures access to qualified professionals of relocation services.⁶³
 - ABRA (Association of Belgian Relocation Agents) is a non-profit organization representing the interests of its members, relocation professionals in Belgium.⁶⁴
- Relocation agencies can have two **types of clients**⁶⁵:

⁵⁹ In this survey: Xine and FRS Relocation.

⁶⁰ In this survey: Brights Expats, Relocation Belgium and Expat Management Group.

⁶¹ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

⁶² Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

⁶³ Three out of five participating relocation companies are a member of EURA.

⁶⁴ Three out of five participating relocation companies are a member of ABRA. ABRA members not only include relocation agents, but also specialist insurers for expats, banking services, accommodation providers, furniture rental agencies, international schools and more. For more information, see: <https://abra-relocation.com/>

⁶⁵ For completeness, a third kind of client should be added: the “relocation management company (RMC)”, also commonly referred to as a global mobility provider. The RMC offers relocation services to an organization and its employees through internal or outsourced providers.

- *Individuals or family units* who want to settle in Belgium. The relocation company can guide them throughout the whole process of relocating, even before they arrive in Belgium.
- *Employers* who want to ensure that their international employees get a full settling-in support.⁶⁶

Three out of five relocation agencies in this survey offer their services both to private clients and employers. Two other relocation companies choose to work only with employers.

“It’s much easier and straightforward to work with companies employing for example 100 expats on a yearly basis. With such clients, you are sure your invoices will be paid on time, and a stable stream of revenue for the company would be ensured. On the other hand, if an individual approaches our company, we will offer our services and assist him/her, without question.

For example, an American women requested support when she wanted to retire in Belgium. Private client files are in most cases more difficult files. It gives an added value to our employees’ and company’s day to day business when handling such files. Our intention is also to give back to the community by handling pro bono immigration files.”⁶⁷

- Clients find the relocation agencies through **internet**, advertisement on **social media** and mostly via **word-of-mouth**. One relocation agency explained to look proactively for new clients by contacting HR-departments of different companies.⁶⁸
- All relocation agencies offer an extreme **wide range of relocation services**: house viewing, reviewing of rental agreements, orientation tour, subscriptions to utilities, registration with the municipality, single permit, car importing, pet importing, school registration, contact with the removal company, expense management, job coaching, opening a bank account, house search, etc.
- The **working language** is English, but services are also offered in Dutch and French. Some relocation agents speak German, Spanish or Chinese.
- None of the relocation companies wish to disclose their **prices**. All five companies explain that they offer ‘**packages**’ (e.g. standard, premium, VIP) to their clients depending on the requested relocation services. Some packages contain only single permit support, other packages provide full settling-in services.
- Most relocation agencies **stay up-to-date** on the **latest (legal) developments** that affect their job and sign up for external training or consult experts.

⁶⁶ Also called the Destination Service Provider (DSP).

⁶⁷ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

⁶⁸ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

“Regarding the single permit for example, different governmental agencies set up briefing sessions which we attended. (...) Also, we rely on an external expert who has more than 30 years of experience in immigration matters. We consult her daily.

Regarding changes in rental legislation, we consult real-estate agencies and we receive briefings of their legal departments. In this way, we stay informed and up-to date.”⁶⁹

“I follow webinars and legal trainings on immigration regarding changes in immigration law. (...) In the Netherlands, my colleagues and myself follow intercultural training sessions. It is very important in our branch to know how to approach an Indian or Chinese client as this is not the same as addressing a French client. It’s crucial to know how to treat such clients and to make sure that our staff is trained on these issues.”⁷⁰

3.2. Relocation services offered by relocation companies

3.2.1. Welcome brochure

- The five interviewed relocation companies do not provide/develop their own welcome brochures but make use of **existing documentation** such as brochures issued by Flanders, 365 Brussels or Expats in Brussels. One agency indicated having set up an online information platform for its clients:

“We developed an IT-system where clients can log in and find all useful information. It took a while to create this tool but we noticed that our clients no longer use information brochures. So we developed files regarding specific topics which clients can consult online. For example, we have files regarding medical care where you can find hospitals nearby or files regarding the service-vouchers system.”⁷¹

3.2.2. House search

- All five relocation companies of the survey provide (extensive) **house search** as a settling-in-service. Some relocation agencies consider a **pre-departure orientation tour (before the removal)** crucial to the success of the relocation process. During such a tour, the expat is offered a guiding tour in the city and neighborhood where he will start living.⁷² However, some relocation agencies mentioned that employers consider these orientation tours too expensive.⁷³ The house search includes support for utilities, reviewing the rental agreement, removal arrangements etc.

⁶⁹ Interview FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁷⁰ Interview with Massimo Maesen, Expat Management Group, 10 January 2020.

⁷¹ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

⁷² Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

⁷³ *“In the past we offered this service more often, however employers consider it now time-consuming and proceed to cost-cutting.”* Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

“We review all rental agreements, make changes and corrections until it is ok for our clients. We don’t translate the full contract to our clients but offer a standardized English rental contract. We indicate our clients the differences with the standard rental agreement and make sure they agree on everything. We guide them through the rental process, pick up the keys and show them around in their apartment.”⁷⁴

3.2.3. Administrative support

- Providing administrative support, in particular regarding the **single permit**, belongs to the **core business** of all interviewed relocation agencies. Since relocation agencies can act as **proxy holders** for the employer when applying for the single permit, these relocation agencies follow up the process from the start till the issuance - and the renewal - of the permit.

“Most of the single permit applications are straightforward; you gather the documents, you submit the application form and the permit is granted. However, sometimes the application is more complicated (...). We follow the request with the competent authorities and provide an update for the client. We inform the client about the next step and once the single permit is granted. We alert the client where to pick up the visa. We also provide instructions how to register at the municipality. If needed, we can accompany the client. We take a copy of the residence permit so that we know when the card expires and when to apply for a renewal of the card.”⁷⁵

- All five relocation companies provide **personal administrative support** to labour immigrants when **registering at the municipality**. Depending on the city where the expat wants to register, this registration runs smoothly or not.

“Registration in Brussels is hell. To be honest, I do not wish to do it [the registration at the municipality] anymore. It took me once 6 hours (...). Nobody understands this. It is a disaster. (...) All relocation agencies are confronted with this problem, we once tried to communicate this. It’s a disgrace for the capital of Europe. If you make an appointment today [19 December 2019], you will obtain an appointment for February. This compromises your client as he’s not allowed to stay longer than 90 days on the territory.”⁷⁶

“In Ghent, this [registration at the municipality] goes well. Ghent is listening to us, they are planning to set up a new project regarding working migrants, together with us.”⁷⁷

- Some relocation companies offer help for the **exchange of the drivers’ license**, but state that this is a complex and time-consuming process.

⁷⁴ Interview with FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁷⁵ Interview with Massimo Maesen, Expat Management Group, 10 January 2020.

⁷⁶ Interview with FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁷⁷ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

“When you deposit your non-Belgian driving license at the municipality, you’re not allowed to drive anymore. In some municipalities, it can take up to 4 weeks before you receive your driving’s license. This is problematic if you need to drive a car for work reasons.”⁷⁸

- All interviewed relocation agencies make sure that at **the end of the expat experience**, all the **administrative paperwork** is taken out of the labour immigrant’s hands.

“We cancel all subscriptions, we cancel insurances, alarm systems, post, make sure that our client receives his rent guarantee, that he is no longer registered at the municipality etc.”⁷⁹

3.2.4. Support for the family members

- All five relocation companies pay a lot of attention to the family members of the labour immigrant. They consider the **wellbeing of these family members** – the spouse/partner and children – to be a **key element for successful integration**. Therefore, they will focus in particular on the partner of the expat.

“It’s important for an employee, when relocating to Belgium, to know that his partner feels happy in Belgium. If the partner and eventually his children, integrate well, then the employee feels better. Also, the employee will face less difficulties concentrating on his job. If the integration for the partner and the children doesn’t work out, I often noticed a failure of the relocation process and the employee returning to his home country. Therefore, it’s extremely important to focus on the partner and the children.”⁸⁰

“Often, family members are assisted by the employers for their visa application but as soon as they arrive in Belgium, they are on their own. I guess that one of the main reasons why a relocation turns out to be a failure, is when the family members aren’t happy. Or when they are feeling homesick.”⁸¹

“A relocation can be successful or not, this depends on how the partner feels. Indeed, the expat coming to Belgium has his job but we will focus on the partners as the relocation is more difficult for them. A lot will depend on the partner’s mentality. It’s important for the partner to meet new people. We try to organize small activities where we can invite these partners. For example, soon we will organize a Christmas brunch. (...) This is not requested by the employers. The partner doesn’t get a lot of attention from the employers.”⁸²

- The focus on the partner (or the family) by the relocation agency, is reflected in the **wide range of activities** offered to spouses/partners and children. Some activities consist of informal meetings, other agencies also offer professional coaching to partners in order to find a job.

⁷⁸ Interview with FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁷⁹ Interview with FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁸⁰ Interview with Elke Van Dormael, Xine, 20 January 2020.

⁸¹ Interview with Massimo Maesen, Expat Management Group, 10 January 2020.

⁸² Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2012.

“We also offer help searching a job or voluntary activities for the partner. This is very important, given the fact that relocation is sometimes a failure. In 50% of the cases, we think this is related to the fact that the partner couldn’t adapt to his new environment.”⁸³

“Last Monday there was an event, the Glocals expo, a professional network event in Ghent where expats and their partner could find several information booths.”⁸⁴

- Most relocation companies provide support for **school enrollment** for the children’s labour immigrants. They observe a tendency of enrollment in **local schools** instead of international schools.

“We’ve noticed a large increase of “local school search”. Foreign employees prefer to enroll their children in a local school instead of an international school so they can easily integrate in Belgium and adapt to language and culture. However, in practice this can be difficult to arrange as foreign employers often arrive in the middle of a year and school has started already.”⁸⁵

- Relocation agencies provide **leisure information** if requested by their clients.

“Given the personal contact with our clients, we know what they are looking for, what they like, which sports their children exercise. We give them also information where and how to find a babysitter.”⁸⁶

3.2.5. Other support

Intercultural and language support

- Several relocation companies mentioned that employers spend less and less money on (in-house) **integration and language courses**, although they consider this a key element for a successful integration. Furthermore, research has shown that language barriers are – on a worldwide level – expats’ biggest concern before moving abroad.⁸⁷ None of the relocation companies offers language courses in-house. One relocation company tries to fill the gap of intercultural training by offering lectures with an external speaker about the theme *“Culture shock in Belgium and how to integrate in Belgium.”*⁸⁸

Bank account

⁸³ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

⁸⁴ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2012

⁸⁵ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

⁸⁶ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

⁸⁷ Internations, *Expat insider 2019*, 28. Also available at https://cms-internationsgmbh.netdna-ssl.com/cdn/file/cms-media/public/2019-09/Expat-Insider-2019_The-InterNations-Survey_0.pdf. Language barrier is the number one concern, other concerns are: distance from home country/family, high cost of living, not being able to find friends, effect on future finances, culture shock, insufficient health care standards, lack of safety and security, unhappiness of partner/spouse/family, financial dependence on partner, bad local infrastructure and unappealing location.

⁸⁸ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2012.

- **None of the relocation companies experienced problems** for foreign employees who wish to open a **bank account**. Relocation companies refer their clients to (large) banks with an **expat service**.

Expense management

- Some relocation companies provide **guidance on expense management** as they are often confronted with questions about rental prices, utility prices, costs of social security etc.
- Most relocation companies offer support concerning Belgian **tax return** and **social security systems**.

3.3. Key factors facilitating and barriers to integration of foreign employees

3.3.1. Elements facilitating the integration of foreign workers

During the interviews, **companies** listed – amongst others – following factors as contributing to the integration of foreign workers:

- Respecting each other, treating everybody equally and with dignity.
- Having a focal point within the company, specialised in international relocation, e.g. the “international relations officer” or a “mobility team”.
- Offering a place to stay for the foreign employee upon arrival.
- Managing expectations.

“Companies should work more on ‘expectation management’: what can the foreign employee expect when arriving in Belgium, not only on a professional level? What is his personal motivation to work in Belgium? What does he know about Belgium? In this way, the company can offer a job which better fits the expectations, ambitions and self-development of the employee. (...) They [the employees] often have a romantic idea of working in Europe, there are more push factors than pull factors which make them relocate. It’s important to be aware that relocation can be a disappointment too. It’s the company’s responsibility for anticipating this disillusionment and to offer an answer as how to deal with this.”⁸⁹

Relocation companies identified – among others – following factors as facilitating integration:

- Not focusing solely on the foreign employee, but making sure the family members feel also welcome in their new country.
- Speaking Dutch in the workplace.

⁸⁹ Interview with Jasper Van Mullem, Delaware, 4 December 2019.

- Having empathy with the foreign employees.
- Making sure the relocation process runs smooth: before, upon and after arrival in Belgium. Do not limit the administrative support to the single permit request, but provide also support for social security and tax issues.

3.3.2. Obstacles to integration

Single permit procedure

- Both the companies employing foreign workers and the relocation companies stress the fact that the single permit application procedure is **complex** and **too long**.⁹⁰ As a result, companies may be **less stimulated to recruit** employees from **outside of the European Union**.

“Applying for a single permit is lengthy and during this period, the employee is not allowed to work. This concerns a period of 4 to 5 months which is too long.”⁹¹

“Because of the fact that the new single permit procedure could last longer than 6 months, some of our employees lost their work permit and they were no longer allowed to work. Also, they lost their salary. It gives the impression that foreign workers are no longer welcome here. Furthermore, our managers tend to say that they no longer want to recruit outside the EU because it takes too long for the employees to arrive. We note a growing competition from other countries, such as Germany, where the process runs faster. (...) However, we are currently looking for specific profiles, especially in the IT-branch such as software engineers, which are hard to find even in Europe.”⁹²

“...Why is it so hard to employ a highly skilled foreign worker and to bring him to Belgium?”⁹³

“...the new single permit procedure, it takes much longer than the old procedure while it was meant to create an easier one...”⁹⁴

“Foreign employees are surprised that the capital of Europe, such a small country, has developed such a complicated procedure for the employment of third-country nationals. In the Netherlands for example, this goes much quicker. They have expat houses.”⁹⁵

Language barriers with local authorities

⁹⁰ Please see footnote 116 with respect to recent changes in the application procedure, triggered by the COVID 19 pandemic.

⁹¹ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan de Nul, 19 December 2019.

⁹² Interview with Greet Velghe, Daikin, 6 December 2019.

⁹³ Interview with Massimo Maesen, Expat Management Group, 10 January 2020.

⁹⁴ Interview Elke Vandormael, Xine, 20 January 2020.

⁹⁵ Interview with Pauline Six, Bright Expats, 12 December 2019.

- Some companies and relocation agencies mentioned the **lack of flexibility** regarding **the use of the English language** by municipalities and other administrative authorities.

“It is strange that foreigners can’t be assisted in English at the immigration desk of the municipality. It’s a shame when we assist our clients and the person behind that desk understands everything what the clients says in English but we still have to come along and translate everything to our clients. It is, above all, an immigration desk. (...) Surely, it cannot be possible that they are requested to come back to the immigration desk assisted by a person who speaks Dutch. (...) In some municipalities it is explicitly mentioned “Here you should speak Dutch”. Even though we are aware about the language legislation, this is not really welcoming.”⁹⁶

“There should be more flexibility on the language, for example, all documents regarding the health insurance need to be in Dutch .”⁹⁷

“We assist our foreign employees when they go the health insurance. The health insurance company request the presence of a Dutch’ speaking person.”⁹⁸

Discrimination

- Some relocation agencies mention that **discrimination** may hinder integration of the foreign employee in Belgium.⁹⁹ Research has indeed shown that enhancing mutual respect, fighting discrimination and promoting equality of opportunities and diversity are important elements to favor the (labour market) integration of third-country nationals in Belgium.¹⁰⁰

“I am quite shocked by the right-wing atmosphere in our country and I find it important to inform the client about it. For example, that they might encounter difficulties when searching a house on the rental market because of their background. This can be challenging for the foreign employee and this cannot be underestimated.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Interview with FRS Relocation, 19 December 2019.

⁹⁷ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

⁹⁸ Interview with Elke Wauters, Jan De Nul, 19 December 2019.

⁹⁹ See also: OECD, *Settling in 2018 : indicators of immigrant integration*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels, 256 : “Close to one in five third-country nationals EU-wide feel that they belong to a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race. The sentiment varies widely from country to country, however. Almost 40% of **non-EU nationals** in Greece and **more than one-third in Belgium consider that they belong to a group that has been subject to discrimination.**” (<https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Main-Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration.pdf>)

¹⁰⁰ See also: EMN, *Labour market integration of third-country nationals in Belgium*, Study of the Belgian contact point of EMN, September 2018, 35-36 : “These elements are presented as priorities at the federal level and the level of the federated entities. For example, one of the objectives of the Flemish Horizontal Integration Policy Plan 2016-2019 is to improve mutual respect regarding people of foreign origin, through – inter alia – measures for diversity and against stereotypes, as well as measures to fight against discrimination and racism.” (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/02a_belgium_labour_market_integration_final_en.pdf)

¹⁰¹ Interview with Deborah Loones, Relocation Belgium, 13 December 2019.

“The current mentality in Flanders can be an obstacle for a successful integration of foreign employees. I am not sure whether expats are following up the shift to the right in their host country. I am not sure whether we can – from an ethical point of view - inform or “warn” the foreign employee about it. But I wonder if foreign employees watch the news here and what they think about it. For example the fact that it was so difficult for Belgium to sign the Migration Pact.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Interview with Massimo Maesen, Expat Management Group, 10 January 2020.

4. Best practices

4.1. Why providing settling-in services can make a difference

Relocating can be a stressful, confusing experience for even the most experienced foreign workers. As mentioned by several relocation agencies (see 3.2.4.), the success of an international assignment hinges on how quickly employees and their families feel at home in their new community. Finding the right accommodation, schools and other facilities has a major impact on how easily the foreign employee can settle into a new home country. Thus, **providing settling-in services** can contribute to **guaranteeing a flying start** to foreign employees.

Of course, it can be challenging for some employers, especially small and medium-sized companies, to offer settling-in services. As revealed during our interviews, **large enterprises** which recruit several international professionals can afford to provide services, such as housing facilities, school search, orientation tour... that assist expats settling in. They are also able to offer **experience** and **resources** in this area. Whereas for small organizations, it can be (too) expensive to hire or develop resources to support the foreign workers settling in. Thus, **large private companies have an advantage over smaller firms** because they are able to offer this type of assistance.

As a consequence, smaller and medium-sized organizations might be inclined to “neglect” this kind of assistance. However, research has shown that this type of assistance can be a **worthwhile investment**, as foreign workers are more likely to have a **positive performance at work** and may **even stay longer in their new country** if they have a smooth entry.¹⁰³ Therefore, it can be counterproductive for the hiring company to neglect the importance of practical issues in a relocation situation.

In sum, it is recommended, even for **smaller and medium-sized organizations** to make sure that (limited) **settling-in services** are on the **employer’s list** upon arrival of the foreign employee.

4.2. In-house settling-in services or relocation agencies?

An employer recruiting international staff might be hesitating between offering settling-in services in-house or relying on external relocation agencies.

Whether an employer will ask global mobility professionals to take over (partially) the relocation process will depend on different elements such as the size of the company, the number of international employees recruited, the available resources, the in-house experience etc. Again, large private companies have an advantage over smaller firms, especially when they have access to (or decide to set up) an **HR team, specialised in international mobility**.

But even larger companies can take advantage of a relocation agent who will help the foreign employee with all sorts of practical and technical guidance ranging from immigration, to cost of living allowances, and even cultural changes. Most relocation agencies have a **strong experience** in home searching, have knowledge of pros and cons of certain districts and schools, **have a large network** etc. In addition, as shown in the interviews with the relocation agencies, most relocation agents are “self-

¹⁰³ Oxford Research A/S, *The expat study (Denmark)*, 2014, 28-29, also available at <https://oxfordresearch.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Expatriate-Study-2014.pdf>

experienced” when it comes to challenges and the culture shock that come along with the relocation process. Finally, while companies tend to approach the settling-in services more in a homogeneous way, relocation agents are able to offer **individual and tailor-made** integration services to the foreign employees. Of course, this service tailored to the needs of foreign employees comes with a **price**.

In sum, it may be well worth **exploring all options available before** making the decision who is best placed to provide the settling-in services to foreign employees.

4.3. Five “must-have” elements of a “welcome” policy

Following the interviews with relocation agencies and companies, we identified five “must-have” integration services which can be offered to international employees as a welcome policy.

1. Offer a welcome brochure and an arrival check-list

A **welcome brochure** with **basic information** guiding international employees through Belgium will facilitate their **first steps in their new home country**. If your company does not have the resources/time to develop a “company-tailored” welcome brochure, you can find a lot of brochures online.¹⁰⁴ Finally, some cities developed their own expat guides as a useful tool to connect with local residents or to meet up with fellow internationals.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, it can be useful to develop a **checklist of actions** (e.g. registration at the town hall, social security, setting up telecommunication, insurances, etc.) that should be undertaken for the international employee **upon arrival in Belgium**.

2. Provide translated basic work documents

Research has shown that proficiency in the local language is an essential first step toward upward socioeconomic mobility of immigrants in the host country.¹⁰⁶ In our interviews, all companies emphasized the importance of offering language courses to their international staff with a view to facilitating the integration process. However, it remains important to **translate basic documents** such as a **contract, the employment regulations, a manual for machines etc. in English** (or a language which the international employee understands) in order to ensure a smooth start of your international employee. On the workplace, the employer can also work with pictograms and signs.

3. Indicate a buddy

Appointing a buddy can help the international employee to settle into his new position more quickly, and reduce the chance of him feeling isolated or unsupported. The **role** of the buddy is to **provide informal support and guidance** to a new member of staff: this can range from showing the employee around, accompanying the employee for lunch on their first day, facilitating networking, helping the

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.expatica.com/be/>, <https://expatsinbrussels.be/fr>, <https://www.internations.org/belgium-expats>, <https://www.angloinfo.com/belgium>

¹⁰⁵E.g. Leuven: <https://www.internationalhouseleuven.be/living-in-leuven/connecting-with-other-people>, Ghent : https://stad.gent/sites/default/files/page/documents/Welcome%20to%20Ghent%20-%20Expat%20guide.%20v%20dec2016_0.pdf

¹⁰⁶ Hertog, J, Zorlu, A., *The Impact of Language on Socioeconomic Integration of Immigrants*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics, April 2018, 1 available at <http://ftp.iza.org/dp11485.pdf>

employee understand any particular local working practices and activities, to taking the employee out for a trip in his/her new home town. In this way, having a buddy can be a gateway to Belgian society.

4. Appoint a focal point for settling-in (administrative) questions

As the settling-in process of the foreign employee comes with a lot of **administrative formalities**, documents and registration activities (municipality, bank, social security, telecom etc.), it is very helpful and less stressful if the international employee has a **focal point within the company** to address questions related to this paperwork to. Moreover, it must be born in mind that most of these documents are not provided in English, but only available in Dutch or French.

5. Offer housing facilities

While all settling-in services listed above are quite easy (and cheap) to provide, this aspect of a welcome policy can rather be classified as “nice-to-have” instead of “must-have”. Offering housing facilities to your foreign employee, whether close to the office or not, whether free of charge or not, will release some pressure of your new employee. Finding a **place to live on the private market can be time-consuming and stressful**, therefore it is worth considering to offer housing during the first period after arrival, so that newly arrived foreign workers can focus on their new work position and get used to their new environment.

5. Recommendations

Following our interviews with companies and relocation agencies, a few recommendations came to light.

1. To the federal and regional governments: Simplify the single permit procedure

The **long, complex and paper application** procedure for a single permit has been put forward as a **hurdle** by all interviewed companies and relocation agencies. One of the interviewed companies even stated that the lengthy procedure discourages the recruitment of third-country nationals and puts limitations on their competitiveness. Therefore, **fast-track** and **shortened** processing times, reduced documentary requirements, **online applications, assistance and support from the Immigration Office** would improve the process for recruiting foreign workers.¹⁰⁷

2. To the municipalities: Provide accessible service counters and offer language courtesy

Several interviewed relocation agencies and companies complained about the language barriers the international employee faces.

Given the fact that all international employees with a single permit have to register at the municipality,¹⁰⁸ these municipalities play an important role upon arrival of these labour immigrants. They will be the **first authority** to ensure that international employees can find their way and guide them in their new hometown. Therefore, the creation of a **warm welcome and accessible service counter** seems to be a must. Municipalities in Flanders can rely on the Flemish government for guidance in this regard.¹⁰⁹

The use of languages by public authorities in Belgium is extensively regulated.¹¹⁰ However, it should be noticed that the Law regarding the use of languages in administrative affairs¹¹¹ allows for a derivation through the principle of “**language courtesy**”. This implies that the person concerned, for example at the municipality counter, can use another language than one of the three official languages.¹¹²

Another possibility in this regard for cities is to set up an **expat counter**, specifically **addressing migrant workers**. These expat counters can offer a **fast-track registration** and issuance of the residence permit. Good examples cited by the interviewees include the Expat Counter in Ghent and the International House in Leuven.

¹⁰⁷ The COVID-19 epidemic has led to the digitalization of the single-permit procedure in the Flemish region. Since 20 March 2020, applications for a single permit in Flanders can be submitted by email. Moreover, as from 1 July 2020, this online application will become obligatory for the Flemish region. Regarding the Brussels-Capital region, it has been made temporarily possible to submit an online application during the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁰⁸ Art. 12 Aliens Law, 15 December 1980.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/toegankelijk-onthaal>

¹¹⁰ In principle, any contacts with the authorities take place in the language of the area where they are located. In Flanders this is Dutch, in Wallonia, French or German and in Brussels, Dutch or French.

¹¹¹ Law regarding the use of languages in administrative affairs, 18 July 1966.

¹¹² Art. 12 Law regarding the use of languages in administrative affairs.

3. To companies: Include the family member(s) of the international employee

According to *Internations*, Belgium ranks third – on a worldwide level – as a place where expat families love to live, thanks to, *inter alia*, the availability and affordability of childcare and the high-quality education.¹¹³ However, it should be stressed that accompanying spouses/partners and children are an important element to retain international employees. Moreover, as cited by all interviewed relocation agencies, the **wellbeing of the family members of the expat** is considered to be a **key element for integration**. Therefore, it is recommended to companies to pay attention to these family members of the migrant workers. This can be realized for example by setting up **informal meetings** after business hours for these family members to get in touch with other internationals, or by organising small **events** for Christmas, Saint-Nicolas, End of Ramadan, New Year, ... for all (migrant) workers and their family members.

¹¹³ Internations, *Expatriate insider 2019*, 48. Also available at https://cms-internationsgmbh.netdna-ssl.com/cdn/file/cms-media/public/2019-09/Expatriate-Insider-2019-The-InterNations-Survey_0.pdf.

6. Conclusion

The practicalities of settling in for an international employee are challenging when coming to a new country. As shown above, offering **settling-in services** to international staff is a **worthwhile investment**, given that these challenges can negatively impact on the productivity at work.

Whether companies should choose to arrange these settling-in services in-house or to rely on a relocation agency, will depend on different factors. **Exploring all available options** – and costs – is strongly recommended. While relocation agencies are more inclined to offer tailored services, companies tend to offer a more homogeneous approach in this regard.

It is important to note that this study **does not give a comprehensive answer** on the question how to organize welcome policies international employees upon arrival in Belgium.¹¹⁴ But the - even limited number of - interviews provide **insight** into the **wide range of services** that can be offered to labour immigrants in order to facilitate their integration upon arrival in their new home country.

In this way, the report offers **guidelines** for companies in Flanders and Brussels wishing to employ Moroccan workers in the PALIM-project and which have no or little experience in hiring international staff. Furthermore, the study formulates **recommendations** to companies experienced in employing international workers. After all, the better integrated international employees feel, the longer they will remain in their new country.

¹¹⁴ Although not representative, the conducted interviews can be considered as samples in order to meet the objective of this research project.

ANNEX I: Questionnaire companies

VRAGENLIJST - Bedrijven

1. Algemene vragen:

1. Hoeveel werknemers telt uw onderneming?
2. Hoeveel buitenlandse werknemers (EU en niet-EU werknemers) stelt u tewerk (percentage ten opzichte van uw totaal aantal)? a. Zijn er specifieke profielen waarvoor u een beroep doet op buitenlandse werknemers?
3. In welke sector bent u actief?
4. Waar is de hoofdzetel van uw bedrijf gevestigd? Heeft u meerdere vestigingen in België?
5. Hoelang stelt U al buitenlandse werknemers tewerk?
6. Heeft u een concreet/structureel beleid omtrent integratievoorzieningen voor buitenlandse werknemers of werkt u geval per geval? Indien u een specifiek beleid heeft, hoe lang hanteert u dit beleid al?

Vragen betreffende integratievoorzieningen:

1. Organiseert U een <u>onthaal bij aankomst</u> van de buitenlandse werknemers in België? Is dit onthaal voor buitenlandse werknemers anders dan voor de Belgische werknemers? Zoja, hoe? a. Beschikt u over een <u>welkomstbrochure</u> specifiek voor buitenlandse werknemers? b. Is er een <u>contactpersoon</u> aangewezen in uw onderneming die instaat voor het onthaal van buitenlandse werknemers? c. Voorziet u een <u>rondleiding</u> doorheen het gebouw (eetgelegenheden, rookruimtes, human resources, administratie)?
2. Voorziet U ondersteuning bij <u>huisvesting</u> voor de buitenlandse werknemer? Zo ja, is dit voor korte of lange termijn en op welke wijze? a. Voorziet u ondersteuning bij het afsluiten van nutsvoorzieningen (EGW, internet, telefonie, ...)? b. Voorziet u ondersteuning voor de huurwaarborg? Zoja, op welke wijze? c. Leest u huurcontracten na en geeft u advies hierover? d. Voorziet u ondersteuning bij verhuisfirma's?
3. Voorziet U een <u>transportregeling</u> voor de buitenlandse werknemer voor dagelijks transport heen/terug naar/van de werkplek? Is dit transport voor buitenlandse werknemers anders dan voor de Belgische werknemers? Zoja, hoe? a. Gaat het om collectief vervoer, privéwagens, andere, ...? b. Biedt u ondersteuning voor het verkrijgen van een rijbewijs? i. Ondersteuning in het behalen van een rijbewijs voor personen zonder

<p>buitenlands rijbewijs?</p> <p>ii. Ondersteuning in het omwisselen van een (niet-) Europees rijbewijs in een Belgisch rijbewijs?</p> <p>c. Biedt u ondersteuning m.b.t. alternatieve vervoersmethoden (openbaar vervoer, fiets, ...).</p>
<p>4. Voorziet U een <u>welkomstbriefing</u> voor de buitenlandse werknemer omtrent integratievoorzieningen, zo ja, wat houdt deze in en in welke taal wordt dit voorzien?</p>
<p>5. Wordt er voorzien in <u>taalfaciliteiten</u> (zoals op vlak van arbeidsreglement, veiligheidsreglementering, ...)? Zo ja, welke?</p>
<p>6. Zijn er specifieke <u>opleidingsmogelijkheden</u> voorzien voor de buitenlandse werknemer (arbeidsgerelateerd en niet-arbeidsgerelateerd)? Zo ja, welke?</p> <p>a. Biedt uw bedrijf ondersteuning voor Nederlandse taallessen? Zoja, hoe? (privé-aanbod binnen bedrijf, extern, andere, ...)</p>
<p>7. Wordt er voorzien in <u>administratieve ondersteuning</u> voor de buitenlandse werknemer? Zo ja, welke?</p> <p>a. Bij de inschrijving in de gemeente met het oog op het bekomen en hernieuwen van het verblijfsdocument?</p> <p>b. Wat betreft aansluiting bij een mutualiteit?</p> <p>c. Andere administratieve ondersteuning?</p>
<p>8. Organiseert U ondersteuning bij de <u>relocatie van gezinnen</u>? Zo ja:</p> <p>a. Is er assistentie bij inschrijving crèche/schoolinschrijving?</p> <p>b. Voorziet u administratieve ondersteuning voor de aanvraag van het visum van de partner/kinderen?</p> <p>c. Voorziet U arbeidsmogelijkheden voor de partner? Zo niet, biedt u ondersteuning voor de tewerkstelling van de partner?</p> <p>d. Andere ondersteuning bij relocatie?</p>
<p>9. Ondersteunt U bij het openen van een <u>bankrekening</u>? Zo ja, op welke wijze?</p>
<p>10. Voorziet U een <u>mentor/peter/buddy</u> voor de buitenlandse werknemer binnen (of buiten) het bedrijf? Zo ja:</p> <p>a. Hoe wordt de mentor/buddy aangesteld (aanduiding, vrijwillig)?</p> <p>b. Heeft de mentor/buddy een specifiek profiel (min. aantal jaren dienst, zelfde team als buitenlandse werknemer, etc)?</p> <p>c. Hoe wordt contact onderhouden tussen mentor en buitenlandse werknemer?</p> <p>d. Voor welke zaken kan men contact opnemen (arbeidsgerelateerd, privé, andere)?</p>
<p>11. Welke voorzieningen inzake <u>interculturaliteit</u> (alle mogelijke culturele aspecten) biedt uw onderneming aan (zoals training rond multiculturaliteit, teambuilding, ...)?</p>
<p>12. Worden er <u>religieuze faciliteiten</u> voorzien (zoals feestdagen, gebedsruimtes, ...)?</p>
<p>13. Is er ondersteuning bij het <u>einde</u> van de tewerkstelling (o.a. bij de beëindiging van allerhande overeenkomsten, o.m. huurovereenkomsten, telecommunicatie, ...)?</p>
<p>14. Peilt u kort na aankomst (binnen de maand) of op een later tijdstip van tewerkstelling bij uw buitenlandse werknemer hoe de integratie (zowel binnen het bedrijf als privé) verloopt?</p> <p>a. Zoja, op welke wijze bevraagt u dit?</p>

- b. Heeft u in het verleden reeds een bevraging uitgevoerd bij uw buitenlandse werknemers op welke wijze u hun integratie kan bevorderen?
- c. Indien u momenteel niet zoiets onderneemt, plant u in de toekomst een dergelijke bevraging?

15. Wat is uw algemene visie omtrent de tewerkstelling van buitenlandse werknemers?

- a. Zou u kunnen zeggen dat de integratie van uw buitenlandse werknemers goed en vlot verloopt?
- b. Welke elementen/factoren worden door uw buitenlandse werknemers aangehaald als de belangrijkste (3) voor een succesvolle integratie?
- c. Zijn er algemene aanbevelingen die u zou kunnen doen op vlak van integratie voor andere bedrijven/voor overheid/voor civil society?

(Uw bedrijf wenst wel/niet vermeld te worden in het onderzoeksrapport van de UGent)

ANNEX II: Questionnaire relocation agencies

VRAGENLIJST - relocation agencies

Algemene vragen:

1. Wanneer werd <u>uw bedrijf</u> opgericht? A. Hoeveel werknemers/consultants heeft U in dienst? B. Biedt U uw diensten aan in Vlaanderen, Brussel en Wallonië?
2. Welke <u>diensten</u> biedt U aan voor de expat ? A. Hoe onderscheidt U zich van andere relocation agencies? B. Biedt U relocation services aan voor vertrek naar België/tijdens het verblijf in België/ bij beëindiging van de expatervaring?
3. Wie kan er bij U terecht, enkel <u>particulieren of ook bedrijven</u> ? In welke situaties doen bedrijven beroep op uw diensten?
4. Kan U meer informatie geven over de <u>kostprijs</u> van uw diensten?
5. Hoe ondersteunt uw onderneming uw <u>eigen werknemers</u> om dienstverlening aan buitenlandse werknemers te verbeteren (training, opleiding,...)?
6. Hoe is <u>de interne structuur</u> van uw onderneming georganiseerd en hoe wordt dit vertaald naar uw cliënteel?
7. Aan welke <u>specifieke doelgroep</u> biedt u uw diensten aan (aan expats in het algemeen of specifiek aan arbeidsmigranten, andere)? A. Indien het gaat om arbeidsmigranten, richt u zich op specifieke sectoren (diplomatie, EU/NAVO korps, internationale NGO, ICT, ...?) B. Hoe komen deze expats bij u terecht (website, aanbeveling andere expats,...)?

Vragen betreffende integratievoorzieningen:

1. Voorziet U ondersteuning bij <u>huisvesting</u> voor de expat? Zo ja, is dit voor korte of lange termijn en op welke wijze? A. Voorziet u ondersteuning bij het afsluiten van nutsvoorzieningen (EGW, internet, telefonie, ...)? B. Voorziet u ondersteuning voor de huurwaarborg? Zoja, op welke wijze? C. Leest u huurcontracten na en geeft u advies hierover? D. Indien u de verhuis niet zelf voorziet, biedt u ondersteuning bij het beroep doen op verhuysfirma's? E. Voorziet u ondersteuning bij aankoop/renovatie van een woning? F. Andere?

2. In welke <u>talen</u> biedt u uw relocation services aan?
3. Zijn er specifieke <u>opleidingsmogelijkheden</u> die u aanbiedt aan de expat (arbeidsgerelateerd en niet-arbeidsgerelateerd)? Zo ja, welke? A. Biedt u ondersteuning voor Nederlandse taallessen? Zo ja, hoe? (privé- aanbod binnen bedrijf, extern, andere, ...) B. Andere?
4. Wordt er voorzien in <u>administratieve ondersteuning</u> voor <u>de expat</u> ? Zo ja, welke? A. Bij de inschrijving in de gemeente met het oog op het bekomen en hernieuwen van het verblijfsdocument? B. Wat betreft aansluiting bij een mutualiteit? C. Inzake transportregeling (o.a. ondersteuning bij het behalen van een Belgisch rijbewijs of omzetting van een (niet-)Europees rijbewijs in een Belgisch rijbewijs, alternatieve vervoersmethoden (openbaar vervoer/fiets), etc.). D. Andere administratieve ondersteuning?
5. Biedt U <u>administratieve/juridische ondersteuning</u> aan de <u>werkgever</u> van de expat? A. Biedt U ondersteuning aan bij de aanvraag van een Work Permit (Single Permit)? Zo ja, wat houdt deze hulp in? B. Andere?
6. Organiseert U ondersteuning bij de <u>relocatie van gezinnen</u> ? Zo ja: A. Voorziet u ondersteuning bij de procedure tot gezinshereniging? Voorziet u administratieve/juridische ondersteuning voor de aanvraag van het visum van de partner/kinderen? B. Biedt u ondersteuning aan bij het zoeken naar tewerkstelling voor de partner van de expat? C. Is er assistentie bij inschrijving crèche/schoolinschrijving? D. Andere ondersteuning bij relocatie?
7. Ondersteunt U bij het openen van een <u>bankrekening</u> ? Zo ja, op welke wijze?
8. Biedt u diensten aan met het oog op <u>sociale integratie</u> ? A. Biedt u een rondleiding aan in de nieuwe woonplaats (dorp, gemeente, stad...)? B. Doet u voorstellen met betrekking tot vrijetijdsbesteding? C. Zorgt u voor het in contact brengen met (professionele en niet-professionele) verenigingen? Helpt u met het uitbouwen van een (sociaal) netwerk? D. Andere?
9. Welke voorzieningen inzake <u>interculturaliteit</u> (alle mogelijke culturele aspecten) biedt uw onderneming aan (zoals trainingen rond multiculturaliteit,...)?
10. Houdt u bij het aanbieden van uw diensten rekening met <u>religieuze en culturele overtuigingen</u> ?
11. Is er ondersteuning bij het <u>einde</u> van de expatervaring? (o.a. bij de beëindiging van allerhande overeenkomsten, o.m. huurovereenkomsten, telecommunicatie, ...)?
12. Zijn er mogelijkheden tot <u>latere wijziging of aanvulling</u> van de aangeboden 'relocation services'? In hoeverre kan u uw diensten individualiseren (aangepast aan de specifieke noden van de expat)?

13. Bent u van mening dat de integratie van expats in België op (niet-)professioneel vlak succesvol verloopt op basis van de eigen ervaringen?
- A. Wat zijn volgens u de succesfactoren voor een geslaagde integratie van expats?
 - B. Wat zijn volgens u knelpunten die een geslaagde integratie van expats in de weg staan?
 - C. Zijn er verwachtingen van uw cliënteel die u niet kan invullen? Waarom niet?
 - D. Zijn er algemene aanbevelingen die u zou kunnen doen op vlak van integratie aan ondernemingen/aan overheid/aan civil society?

(Uw relocation company mag wel/niet vermeld worden in het UGent onderzoeksrapport)

ANNEX III: Informed consent and information leaflet

INFORMED CONSENT

ONDERZOEK PALIM Project – Integratievoorzieningen buitenlandse werknemers

Bedankt voor uw deelname aan het onderzoek. Het interview zal gemiddeld 30 min in beslag nemen.

Ik, ondergetekende (naam)

Verklaar, als deelnemer aan het onderzoek "PALIM Project" uitgevoerd door Universiteit Gent, het volgende:

- Ik heb het informatieformulier gelezen. Dit formulier geeft uitleg over het doel van het onderzoek en de aard van de vragen.
- Ik neem totaal vrijwillig deel aan het onderzoek
- Ik ben ervan op de hoogte dat ik op elk moment het recht heb om het interview stop te zetten, of mij terug te trekken uit het onderzoek
- Ik verwacht geen vergoeding of compensatie voor mijn deelname aan het onderzoek
- Ik heb alle vragen kunnen stellen die ik wilde, en ik begrijp dat ik de onderzoekers op elk moment in de toekomst kan contacteren met verdere vragen.

Inzake het interview ga ik akkoord met het volgende:

- Het interview wordt opgenomen en getranscribeerd. Enkel personen betrokken bij het onderzoek zullen toegang krijgen tot de transcriptie.
- Alle verwijzingen naar inhoud van de interviews en/of citaten, die publiek gemaakt worden via bijvoorbeeld een onderzoeksrapport, academische publicaties of nieuwsartikels zullen geanonimiseerd gebeuren, zodat ik niet geïdentificeerd kan worden.
- De opnames en transcripties zullen vernietigd worden na het einde van het onderzoeksproject en de valorisatieperiode. Tot dan, zullen deze data met een paswoord beveiligd worden, en enkel toegankelijk zijn voor de personen die betrokken zijn bij het onderzoek.
- Mogelijke afwijkingen van wat hierboven gesteld werd, zullen steeds uw privacy en veiligheid respecteren.
- Ik kan een kopie van het transcript van het interview vragen en daar wijzigingen aanbrengen die nodig zijn om de vertrouwelijkheid te garanderen.

Handtekening van de deelnemer:

Datum:

Handtekening van de onderzoeker:

Datum:

Voor alle vragen inzake het onderzoek kan u terecht bij

- Mevr. Geertrui Daem, Universiteit Gent, geertrui.daem@ugent.be
- Prof. Ellen Desmet, Universiteit Gent, ellen.desmet@ugent.be

Indien u bezorgd bent over het onderzoek of de manier waarop gegevens verwerkt worden, kan u contact opnemen met de Data Protection Officer van de Universiteit Gent, Mevr. Hanne Elsen (hanne.elsen@ugent.be)

INFORMATIEFORMULIER

PALIM Project

De Europese Unie, het International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) en het Belgisch ontwikkelingsagentschap Enabel testen een innovatief migratiemodel uit. Dat legt de link tussen de ontwikkeling van de IT-sector in Marokko en de krapte aan goed opgeleide informatici in Vlaanderen. De aanpak volgt het 'Global Skills Partnership'-model. Dat gaat ervan uit dat arbeidsmobiliteit alleen gunstig is voor alle partijen als de potentiële werknemers gekwalificeerd werk vinden in hun land van oorsprong én in hun land van bestemming.

De UGent onderzoekt in dit kader de "welcome policies" en integratievoorzieningen die Vlaamse of Brusselse bedrijven (of hun HR-partners) aanbieden aan hun buitenlandse werknemers, hoofdzakelijk tijdens de eerste maanden van tewerkstelling. Tegelijkertijd wordt ook onderzocht welke integratievoorzieningen private actoren aanbieden aan buitenlandse werknemers. Dit gebeurt via een bevraging (mail) en semigestructureerde interviews. Tijdens het interview wordt dieper ingegaan op de antwoorden, en gepeild naar "good practices" en aanbevelingen voor de toekomst. Als laatste zal het onderzoek ook eventuele aanbevelingen geven betreffende de wetgeving en de toepassing van de "single permit".

Het onderzoek wordt georganiseerd en uitgevoerd door Enabel, in samenwerking met de VDAB en ANAPEC (Vlaamse en Marokkaanse arbeidsbemiddelaars), alsook de Vlaamse werkgeversorganisaties VOKA en Agoria, hun Marokkaanse tegenhangers CGEM en APEBI, Fedasil en het Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering.

Voor alle vragen inzake het onderzoek kan u terecht bij;

- Daem Geertrui, Universiteit Gent, geertrui.daem@ugent.be
- Prof. Ellen Desmet, Universiteit Gent, ellen.desmet@ugent.be