PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС



Belgium

General Information

Population

11 941 781 (World Bank 2025)

11 825 551 (STAT BE 2025)

Immigration

2 349 032 (UN Immigration Stock 2024)

194 212 (STAT BE 2024)

Emigration

610 254 (UN Emigration Stock 2024)

128 168 (STAT BE 2024)

Working-age population

7 563 359 (World Bank 2025)

7 076 347 (STAT BE 2024)

Unemployment rate

6.2 % (World Bank 2025)

6 % (STAT BE 2024)

GDP

725 466 462 859.7 current prices USD (World Bank 2025)

620 271 700 000 current prices EUR (STAT BE 2024)

Refugees, Asylum seekers, IDPs

Refugees

186 393 (UNHCR 2025)

15 668 (Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons 2024)

Asylum Seekers

58 725 (UNHCR 2025)

39 615 (Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons 2024)

IDPs

0 (UNHCR 2025)

Citizenship

By Birth

Yes (conditional) (GLOBALCIT 2024)

By Descent

Yes (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Years of Residency

5 years of residence required (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Territory

30 528 km^2 (CIA World Factbook)

Data from international sources is updated automatically as it becomes available.

Migration Authorities

Responsible Body

Federal Public Service Interior

Line Ministries

Federal Public Service for Justice

Federal Public Service, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Federal Public Service for Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue

Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy

Public Service for Employment and Vocational Training in Wallonia

ADG Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft

Agencies

Immigration Office (IBZ)

Statbel (Statistics Belgium)

Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil)

Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS/CGVS)

Federal Migration Centre (Myria)

Key Policy Documents

Proactive Return Policy Law

Migration Policy Notes (Note de politique generale)

Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims

Royal Decree of 16 May 2004 on smuggling and trafficking in human beings

1984 Belgian Nationality Code

1980 Belgian Immigration Act

Relevant Publications

Exploring the Potential of Digitalisation in Migration Management in the Prague Process Region

Digitalisation and labour migration: the use of modern technology, challenges and opportunities

How will migration to Europe look in the Future?

Intra-corporate Transferees (ICTs): The benefits for the EU and the opportunity cost

ICMPD Report on the Mapping of the Key Stakeholders from Public and Private Sectors in Georgia and Belgium in Migration Management and Innovation Ecosystem, 2024

ICMPD Policy Brief, The Promise of an EU approach to Community Sponsorship, 2021

Belgium is primarily a country of immigration. As of 1 January 2025, Belgium's population stood at 11,825,551, marking an increase of 61,901 people (0.52% growth) compared to the beginning of 2024. Migration has been the driving force behind population growth in Belgium over the last decade offsetting the negative natural increase. In 2024, Belgium recorded a positive net migration balance of 66,044.

Belgium's long history of welcoming migrants, fast growing economy, the presence of EU institutions and a rich mix of cultures has shaped it into a diverse and cosmopolitan society. According to UN DESA, international migrant stock in Belgium in 2024 was around 2,35 million people, with the largest foreign communities originating from Morocco, (246,575), France (196,995), the Netherlands (136,488), followed by Romania (131,417), Italy (116,143) and Türkiye (110,089).

In 2024, immigration flow to Belgium reached 194,212 people, including 22,506 returning Belgians , who represented the largest group, followed by 18,845 Romanian, 14,423 French and 12,633 Ukrainian nationals. The number of first residence permits issued to non-EU nationals has steadily increased over the past four years: from 63,504 in 2021 to 78,828 in 2024. The majority of 2024 first permits were granted for family reunification (45,7%), followed by education (13,3%), employment (10,5%) and other reasons, including protection (30,5%). The main recipients were nationals of Morocco (7,296), Türkiye (5,215), India (3,085), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2,148). The steady rise in the first permits has contributed to the overall increase in the total number of all valid permits in Belgium, which grew from 366,790 in 2015 to 527,949 in 2024. The majority of valid permits are held for family reasons (56%), followed refugee status (15%), employment (10%), and the rest for other grounds.

Since 2014, Belgium's three territorial regions have had the authority to develop their own labour migration policies. As of 2023, foreign nationals can apply for a single permit of unlimited duration, which grants unrestricted access to the Belgian labour market, eliminating the need for obtaining a new permit when changing jobs. The employment profile of the foreign-born population in Belgium mirrors both the country's diversified economy and migrants' concentration in certain occupations. According to OECD, migrants are particularly represented in industry and construction (21,7%), followed by wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food services (12,2%), and administrative and support services (11,7%). Employment in health and social work activities accounted for 9,9%, and public administration, education and defence for 8%. In 2024, Belgium participated in the "Care/Soins" Global Skills Partnership Project, a bilateral mobility scheme with Morocco facilitating legal migration in the care sector. To further attract and retain talent, Belgian government has also granted non-EU foreign university students full access to the labour market upon completion of their studies. In 2023, Belgium hosted 50,884 international students, most of whom came from France (33,4%), followed by the Netherlands (7,3%) and Cameroon (5,9%).

According to UN DESA, 610,254 Belgians lived abroad in 2024, with the largest communities found in France (27,7%), the Netherlands (11,1%), Spain (9,1%), Italy (7%), Türkiye (6,7%) and Luxembourg (4,1%). Many Belgians move abroad in search of better work opportunities, as well as for education, or family reasons. In 2024, emigration rose to 128,168 people, up from 117,085 in 2022, with Belgians, Romanians and French making up the largest groups. Ukrainians continued to represent a notable share of emigrants, accounting for 4.6% in 2024.

In 2024, Belgium received 39,615 asylum applications, including 484 persons who came as part of the resettlement. Since 2022, the number of applications has consistently exceeded 35,000. Most 2024 applicants came from Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Türkiye. In 2024, 6,469 persons filed a subsequent application for international protection. Notably, the share of subsequent application was remarkably high among nationals of Afghanistan and Georgia. Refugee status was granted to 15,668 persons and subsidiary protection status to 601 persons, corresponding to a protection rate of 47.2%. Refugee status was mostly granted to Palestinians (3,281), Syrians (2,774), Eritreans (2,155), Afghans (1,944) and Burundians (1,326). As of mid-2025, the Belgian Federal Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers and its partners were hosting over 33,000 asylum seekers, with one-third of whom were minors. Of these, 52% were families (parents and children), 33 % were single men, 10 % single women, and 5 % unaccompanied minors. The number of refugees in Belgium has risen sharply over the past two decades, from 12,583 in 2003 to 167,831 in 2023.

To address the rising number of asylum application, the Belgian Parliament adopted the Proactive Return Policy Law in 2024. It introduces amendments to the Aliens Act, aiming to streamline return and Dublin III transfer procedures and to respond to the growing share of secondary movements, which accounted for 14% of all applicants in Belgium. The law also introduces dedicated reception places for people subject to return or Dublin procedures, as well as proactive counselling to prepare them for a potential transfer or return. It defines a duty of cooperation for the concerned individuals and clarifies which authority responsible for decision on extending the transfer period in Dublin cases.

Belgium has played an active role in hosting and supporting people displaced by the war in Ukraine. According to UNHCR, by end of August 2025, 93,350 displaced persons had temporary protection in Belgium. Some of them have entered the Belgian labour market, with over 5,000 people registering with regional employment services in Brussels and Wallonia between February 2022 and March 2023. By February 2023, their labour market integration rate stood between 13,8% and 17%. Most jobseekers were young, educated women (around 75% female, 70% aged 25-49, and 60% highly skilled), although many held degrees not formally recognised in Belgium. Most were employed in temporary occupations, hospitality, retail, administration, and cleaning.

In 2024, 10,150 non-EU nationals were found to be illegally present in Belgium, mostly nationals of Morocco (2,485) and Algeria (1,610). This figure has remained relatively stable over the past four years and is significantly below the peak of the last decade, which reached 19,320 cases in 2016. About 24,475 in 2023 and 24,660 in 2024 were ordered to leave, and roughly 2,655 actually returned in 2024, up from 1,950 in 2023, implying a 9% return rate in 2024.

Belgium – a destination and transit country for trafficking in human beings – continues to demonstrate sustained efforts to combat this phenomenon, according to the US Department of State TIP Report. The country maintains robust victim support structures and

active prosecution efforts. Most trafficking victims originate from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with exploitation taking the form of sexual and labour trafficking in sectors such as construction, agriculture, hospitality, and domestic work. Myria has reported a growing number of labour exploitation cases in Belgium, a trend linked to the increasing number of people in vulnerable situations.

The legal framework governing migration in Belgium is based on the Law of 15 December 1980 on the entry, residence, settlement and removal of foreign nationals, and the Royal Decree of 8 October 1981, both of which have been amended multiple times to reflect evolving migration policies. The most recent amendment of the Law 1980, effective September 2024, broadened family reunification rights. It introduced the possibility for certain relatives of Belgian nationals who have not exercised EU free movement rights to join them, and expanded reunification rights for beneficiaries of international protection, including disabled adult children and parents of unaccompanied minors, while also shortening deadlines for certain applications. In the area of asylum, in addition the mentioned Proactive Return Policy Law adopted in 2024, the Belgian Council of Ministers approved a package of crisis measures in April 2025 to address persistent challenges. These include limits on reception, restrictions on repeat applications, tighter family reunification rules, and the end of integration income for asylum seekers. Moreover, Belgium is currently drafting a new Migration Code to codify and streamline migration and asylum legislation, aligned with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Belgium actively participates in several regional and global migration dialogues, including the Prague Process, Rabat and Khartoum Processes, and the Budapest Process, as well as in the implementation of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

latest update: 26 November 2025