



# Inburgering: Integration courses in Flanders and Brussels

Flemish government



INBURGERING 



*'As a newcomer, I felt lost at times, almost like going back to being a baby... In a way, you are starting all over again. The integration training courses have encouraged me to take those first steps. I picked up the language and the social 'rules of play'.*

*Juan Carlos - Peru*







## The integration programme

Flanders and Brussels are home to people hailing from all corners of the globe. New citizens who need to find their place in this society in every sense. They need to be able to assume their role as a citizen, as a parent, an employee, an entrepreneur, a student, a member of an association, ...

The integration programme is their first step on this path. The programme allows persons integrating to acquire the necessary know-how and to further develop their skills. Which is why the primary integration programme, which is organised by the welcome office, consists of a training programme that is underpinned by individual coaching and guidance efforts tailored to the individual needs of the persons integrating. The training programme consists of Social Orientation, Dutch language lessons and Career Orientation.

The masculine form used in this brochure is intended to be gender neutral.

## Social Orientation

As part of the Social Orientation training course, persons integrating become acquainted with Flemish and Belgian society. Part of this training course is aimed at very practical things such as: How do I use public transport? Where do I find healthcare? What care and educational facilities are open to my children? ...

Students are taught the know-how and skills needed to actively engage in society. In all cases, lessons set out from the learning needs of the persons integrating and their prior skill levels. Persons integrating who have school-going children for example will have more questions about education than a single person integrating who is looking for suitable medical care for his sick mother.

*'I learnt so much at the Social Orientation training course. I have been living in Belgium for the past 30 years, but I learnt a lot more during those six weeks that I did in 30 years!' Mimi from Morocco*

*'I had a question about how to apply for child benefit for my two children. In class, with the help of the teacher and together with other parents who had the same question, we looked into where to turn to. Now I know who to speak to if I have a question about child benefits. During our search, we also found out where to turn to with other child-related questions.'*  
Touran from Iran

The answers to questions and learning needs are not just read out by the teacher. Students are expected to actively contribute to the lessons. They are required to find solutions for problematic situations, both on a self-reliant basis as well as by working together with their fellow students.

Next to knowledge and skills, values and standards also assume a central place. It is paramount for persons integrating to be aware of the values and standards on which multicultural Flemish and Belgian society is based.

Social orientation lessons are made available by the welcome office. A standard training course involves 60 teaching periods (hours). Students can take the lessons in their own native language or in what is referred to as a contact language. Lessons are available as daytime lessons, evening classes as well as weekend classes.

## Dutch as a second language

Integration starts with learning the language. It goes without saying that new citizens are expected to learn the language of their new homeland. As part of the integration programme, persons integrating are taught the basics of Dutch. In order to determine which type of 'Dutch as a second language' (NT2) training course is best suited to individual persons integrating, the welcome office calls on the advice of the Huis van het

Nederlands (House of Dutch). To this end, a consultant from the Huis van het Nederlands conducts an intake interview with the persons integrating. People who have only had rudimentary prior education or those who are 'slow learners' are referred to a centre for elementary education. The standard training course involves 240 teaching periods. People with a higher level of prior education or those who are fast learners are referred to an adult education centre, where they take a standard training course involving 120 teaching periods. Persons integrating who are keen to embark on advanced education, and who comply with the admission requirements for higher education, can join a training course involving a maximum of 90 teaching periods. These training courses are organised by university language centres. For persons integrating who are illiterate or who have had only very rudimentary prior education, an NT2 programme involves 600 teaching periods.

## Career Orientation

The target group of the Integration programme is very mixed. Each person integrating comes with his own background in terms of know-how and skills. Each person integrating also has his own expectations as to how he is planning to build a new life in his new homeland. The aim of Career Orientation is to support the person integrating in making or learning how to make choices to lend further shape to his professional career. In



doing so, the Career Orientation sets out from the wishes of the persons integrating and the experience and qualifications (such as diplomas) previously acquired.

Three types of Career Orientation exist.

- Persons integrating with a 'professional perspective' can be given coaching in their search for employment or on their way towards self-employment or setting up their own business.
- Persons integrating with an 'educational perspective' are coached on their way towards further education.
- All persons integrating have a 'social perspective' and are offered coaching on their way towards taking part in socio-cultural life, voluntary work and other types of leisure activities. This type of Career Orientation is also referred to as 'social participation'.

For the purpose of providing Career Orientation to persons integrating who have a professional perspective, the welcome offices in Flanders call on the services of the

Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (VDAB) (The Flemish public employment service). All other guidance efforts are handled by the welcome offices themselves. Bon, the Brussels welcome office, itself stages the three types of Career Orientation on offer.

*'Together with the VDAB, I found a sequel training programme that suits me perfectly. In fact, I wanted to work the land, the way I used to in Liberia. But it soon became clear to me that farming in Belgium is an entirely different thing. Now I am taking a 'groendienst' (local authority-run parks and public gardens department) training. It is not agriculture as such, but it enables me to work with plants. And I love it.'* Bocar from Liberia

*'In what we do, we try to make things understandable to people, as they have so much paperwork they come to us with. We also take the time to explain all these things'.* Tom, programme counsellor.

## Programme counselling

From the very outset of the integration programme, each person integrating is assigned a programme counsellor who is on hand to guide him on his way to completing the integration programme. Language is not an impediment in this respect. If the person integrating does not speak any or insufficient Dutch yet, either a contact language or the native language of the person integrating is

used, or the services of an interpreter (by phone) are called in.

The programme counsellor is tasked with the administrative follow-up of the integration programme. He refers people to the Huis van het Nederlands and the VDAB or Actiris in Brussels, draws up the integration contract and makes sure the person integrating attends the training programme.

More than anything else however, the programme counsellor is a confidential counsellor with whom the person integrating can speak on all manner of issues. If the person integrating has specific questions or needs specific guidance, the programme counsellor will put him in touch with the appropriate services or organisations. For example, the programme counsellor is on hand to provide support to be awarded diploma equivalence, he can help find a suitable school for the children, or help find a lawyer, a psychologist, or suitable living accommodation, ...



It is important that the person integrating involves himself in finding solutions in answer to his need for assistance. In doing so, the programme counsellor is mindful of what the person integrating has learnt at the Social Orientation training course and the type of things he is therefore capable of finding solutions for on a self-reliant basis. The programme counsellor is aware of the basic competences, the skills and the network of the person integrating. In doing so, the help offered by the programme counsellor is gradually run down over the course of the programme, the idea being that any such help is made superfluous at the end of the integration programme.

*'You need to adapt to a new culture which is not always easy. The welcome office helps you out with a lot of things, such as official documents. They explain to you about healthcare, money, education: everything you need to know when you have newly arrived in Belgium. They also help you find your own way if you get lost sometimes.'* Maria from Bolivia

## The integration contract and the integration certificate

The type of integration programme a person integrating is in is laid down in his integration contract. The contract specifies which components of the training programme he will be taking and where and when the training courses will be held. In doing so, the welcome

office takes full account of the learning needs of the persons integrating, and of the recommendations put forward by the Huis van het Nederlands and by the VDAB, insofar as necessary.

In drawing up the integration contract, the programme counsellor or intake consultant also considers the work and family situation of the person integrating: is the person integrating combining the integration programme with a job or another training course? Does the person integrating need child care? What bus or train is the best public transport solution to take the person integrating to the lessons? As and where necessary and possible, the programme counsellor helps the person integrating to eliminate the difficulties on his way.

The persons integrating who sign an integration contract commit to take and attend the training programme on a regular basis. Which means they are required to attend at least 80% of the lessons for each component of the training programme. Upon completion of the integration programme, the persons integrating are awarded an integration certificate. Persons integrating who hold an integration certificate can link up directly to join the secondary integration programme.

## Social participation

Integrating is not something you just do inside a classroom. The command of Dutch acquired and the know-how picked up as part of the Social Orientation training course do not become concrete and applicable until the person integrating actively joins to take part in society. Throughout the course of the primary integration programme, the welcome office encourages the persons integrating to build up a social network, to get to know their local town or community, to practise their Dutch, to sign up to become a member of a local association or sports club, to take up voluntary work ...

Some examples:

### Volunteers doing their bit for persons integrating

'Inburgering Antwerpen not only encourages persons integrating to take up voluntary work, they can also rely on some 15 keen Flemish volunteers who do their bit for persons integrating. For instance, they help persons integrating to choose which voluntary work to go for, to find a sports club or cultural organisation and make sure the acquaintanceship works out. This helps to dispel people's initial inhibitions. Our volunteers also give guided tours around town, organising cultural and educational outings.'

Eva and Nathalie, Maatschappelijke Participatie team, Inburgering Antwerpen.

### Encouraging persons integrating to take up voluntary work

*'Amongst other things, my job is to direct students towards voluntary work and to allow them to discover new things. Recently, I was coaching Driss, a Moroccan man, aged 33. He is illiterate, only spoke a little French and hardly any Dutch. For years, he had been sewing kaftans by hand. He cannot operate a machine and he had very low self-esteem. After his Social Orientation course, he wanted to take up voluntary work. But in his own mind he was convinced his only skill was to make kaftans. I found him a post doing voluntary work at the 'Harmonie' community centre where he helps out in the kitchen and serves meals at the restaurant. This is enabling Driss to rack up a wealth of new experiences, he is expanding his social network and practising his Dutch.'*

Ingrid, Maatschappelijke Participatie team, bon - Inburgering Brussel



### Learning to cycle

To most of us, pedalling a bicycle is something we take as a matter of course. It is something we pick up in early childhood. Quite a few persons integrating are unable or afraid to ride a bike. The Inburgering Gent welcome office referred 15 persons integrating to Gent local council's Cycling Project. Participants not only learnt how to ride a bike, they were also given road safety lessons, were taught the basic rules of traffic and shown how to service and repair their bike. The Cycling Project was concluded with a joint cycling trip.

### A Belgian in the classroom

*'Why do Belgians give each other flowers? How do you take care of your old-age pensioners? How important do you consider animals? Marriage? Family? Religion? What do you know about our country? Why do so many people ride a bike Belgium? How and when are you supposed to congratulate someone? ...'*

During the Social Orientation lessons,

persons integrating are given input from the teacher, one another and a number of profession guest speakers in cases. Although they prefer to address their questions on the topics of faith, upbringing, human relationships, customs and traditions on 'regular' Flemings. Which is why Inburgering Oost-Vlaanderen and Inburgering Gent frequently invite volunteers during the course of the training lessons to engage in conversation with a group of persons integrating.

Across the whole of Flanders and Brussels, similar schemes are staged by the welcome Office or which the welcome Office is involved in: Stadsklap (Antwerp), Brusselaar in de klas (Brussels), Café Combinne (Flemish-Brabant) VriendENtaal (Limburg), Dzjambo (Gent) are just some examples.

## The secondary integration programme

During the primary integration programme, persons integrating acquire a set of skills and knowledge enabling them to make choices for their further life career. During the secondary integration programme, they are given the opportunity to lend further shape to the choices they have made. For instance, the person integrating can go on a vocational training course or enrol for a training course for those seeking to set

up their own business in self-employed status or as an entrepreneur. In addition, the person integrating can enrol for further 'Dutch as a second language' sequel courses and continue his studies.

Unlike the primary programme, the secondary programme is not organised by the welcome office. Instead it is made available by the regular educational services.



# Who is the integration programme intended for?



The integration policy is intended for foreigners aged eighteen and above who are coming to take up long-term residence in Flanders or Brussels.

Belgians who were not born in Belgium and who have at least one parent who was not born in Belgium either, also rank among the target group of integration policy.

All persons belonging to the integration target group are entitled to an integration programme. Moreover, certain categories are required by law to take an integration programme. These categories are:

- persons who recently migrated to Belgium and who have taken up residence in Belgium;
- creed ministers in a faith practised by local church or religious communities recognised by the Flemish Government.

The duty to integrate does not apply in Brussels. Citizens of European Union

member states, the European Economic Area and Switzerland and their family members are exempt from the duty to integrate. This exemption does not apply to family members of Belgians or persons holding Belgian nationality who have recently taken up residence in Flanders.

Persons integrating who are bound to observe the duty to integrate and who fail to comply with their duty as well as persons who are entitled to integrate who fail to comply with the terms of their integration contract, may be imposed an administrative fine. The system of administrative fines does not apply to the Brussels-Capital Region.

# Integration of minors

The integration of under-age newcomers who speak a foreign language is not made to occur by way of an integration programme, but largely by attending school. As applies to all children of the same age, under-age newcomers who speak a foreign-language are entitled to education as well as coming under compulsory education. A lot of schools stage reception classes which are intended to enable these children to learn Dutch and to integrate them as quickly as possible. In primary education, this is made to occur by way of regular classes. In secondary education this is achieved by assigning these pupils to the type of education and field of studies that are closest in keeping with their individual abilities.

The welcome Office sees to it that under-age newcomers who speak a foreign language are referred to a suitable school or to reception classes. If necessary, they are referred to the appropriate welfare and healthcare services. The local council informs them of the available socio-cultural offering (e.g., associations, sports and cultural activities, facilities for youths) in the local community.

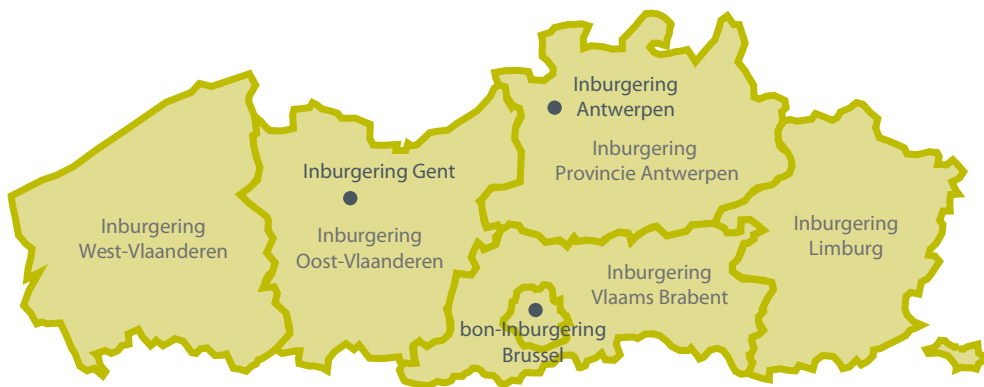




## The welcome office

A total of eight welcome offices are in place: one in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and the five Flemish provinces. The welcome offices organise the primary integration programme and guide the persons integrating from the time they present themselves until the time they obtain their integration certificate. To give substance to the integration programme, they work in joint consultation with the Huizen van het Nederlands and the VDAB.

In addition, a whole string of other organisations are closely involved in the integration programme. The adult education centres, elementary education centres and the university languages centres all offer the 'Dutch as a second language' training course. Local councils, OCMWs (public social welfare centres), the Agentschap voor Binnenlands Bestuur (Home Affairs Government Agency) and social housing organisations by Decree have been given the task to inform persons integrating of their right or their duty to integrate.



A total of eight welcome offices are in place. Together, they serve all local communities in Flanders and Brussels-Capital Region. Below, please find the contact details for the main offices. Full contact details for all offices are available at [www.inburgering.be](http://www.inburgering.be) or at the website of the welcome office.

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