

RWAN Organization and Women Empowerment

*A professional report by
Raise Women's Awareness Network 2021*

Authors

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Disclaimer & confidentiality note

This professional report has been produced by the RWAN Organization's volunteer team of researchers to share its vision, goals, activities and achievements with the public interested in supporting **the integration of women**, and shall not be used, disseminated, copied or reproduced for any other purpose.

We do not allow the information described and mentioned in this report to be used or analyzed without our permission.

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Authors



Lama Jaghjougha has accumulated more than 6 years of experience in public relations and communications in the Middle East and in Europe. She has worked for many different companies and nonprofit organizations and has developed a specialization in the field of migration. She is the founder of Raise Women's Awareness Network (RWAN). She holds a master's degree in European Public Affairs and communications at IHECS, and a master's degree in International Migration with a specialization in International Development at the University of Kent. She also has significant project management experience and speaks Arabic, English and French.



Eva Allibone is a recent graduate of the University of Kent Brussels School of International Studies where she was awarded a Master's Degree in International Development with a Specialization in Conflict and Security. She has spent 3 years working with non-profits and has built international experience in her time working in Thailand. In her current role as COVID-19 Response and Data Integrity Associate at Neighborhood Housing Associates in Chicago, she works to administer emergency relief and secure affordable housing. She is also part of the Disaster Action Team with her local Red Cross chapter.



Lia Martina is a biomedical scientist with a particular interest in reducing the gender gap and social inequalities. She is finalizing her PhD on the fundamental principles of pathogen-host interactions at the protein and post-translational level, at the faculty of Medicine and Health Science at University of Ghent, Belgium. Currently, she supports the work of the Citizens and the Social Innovation Matrices as a Blue Book Trainee at the Research and Innovation Directorate General of the European Commission. She is the founder and chief executive officer of Belgian Aid Network, a non-profit organization that offers humanitarian aid to refugees in need.

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A photo from one of our organization's workshops

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A photo from one of our organization's workshops

2. About US

In the next section, this report provides an overview of the RWAN Organization: how the organization started; RWAN's Mission, Vision and Values; RWAN's founders; and RWAN's goals and participation.



<https://www.rwan-initiative.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/RWANinitiative>

<https://twitter.com/RWANinitiative>

2.1 Raise Women's Awareness Network (RWAN)

The RWAN initiative started in 2018 under the umbrella of the European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI) with the support of the European Student Union (ESU) by the Together, Moving Forward (TMF) programme.

RWAN was officially registered as a non-profit organization in Belgium in April 2021.



*'Raise Women's Awareness Network (RWAN) initiative'
is an official organization (ASBL) in Brussels, Belgium.*

2.2 The Founders



Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels

Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels received her PhD in Government and MA in German and European Studies from Georgetown University, Washington, DC. She received an AB from Harvard University. Amanda is a reader in Migration and Politics at the University of Kent's Brussels School of International Studies (BSIS) and Director of the MA in International Migration. She was visiting scholar at Harvard University's Center for European Studies 2012-13 and visiting professor at the University of Vienna, in the Research Group Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion, in 2009. Her list of publications is available here: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/brussels/people/2612/von-koppenfels-amanda-klekowski>



Lama Jaghjougha

Lama has accumulated more than 6 years experience in PR and communications in the Middle East and in Europe. She has worked for many different companies and nonprofit organizations and has grown an interest in the field of migration. She is the founder of Raise Women's Awareness Network (RWAN). She holds a master's degree in European Public Affairs and communications at IHECS and a Master's degree in International Migration with a specialization in International Development at the University of Kent. She also has a great experience in project management and speaks Arabic, English and French.

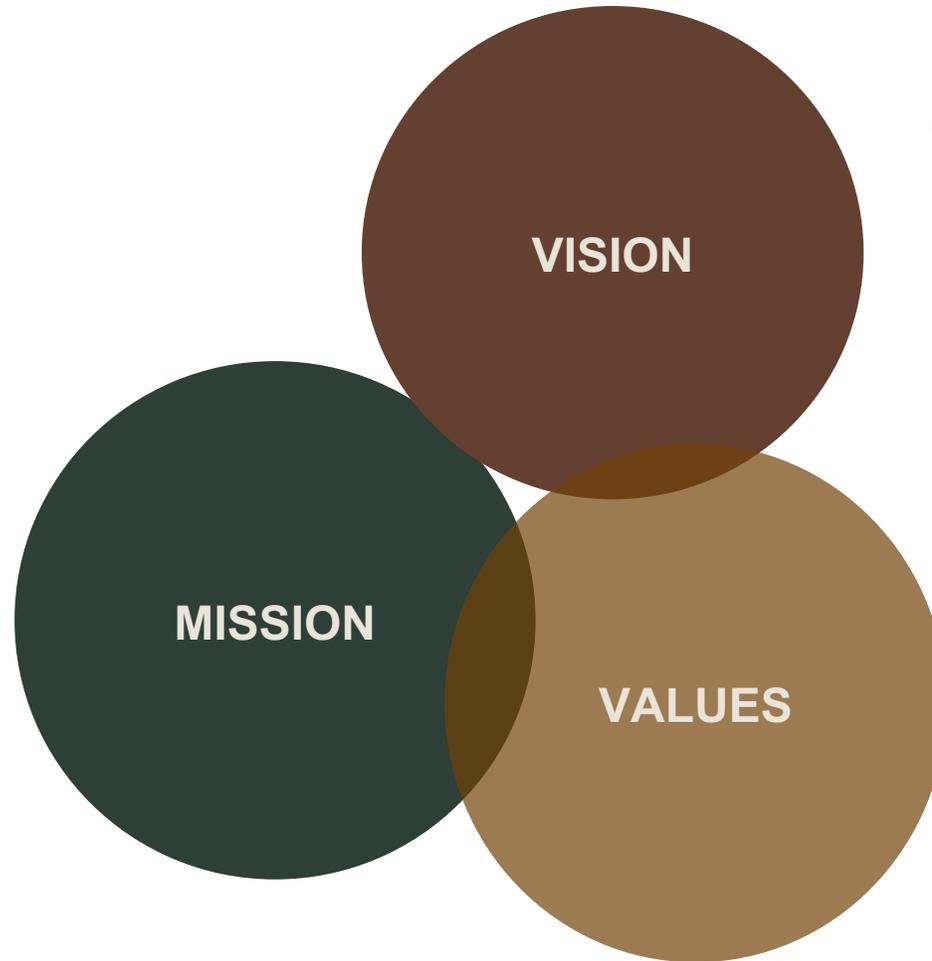


Isabel Marques da Silva

Isabel a European Affairs Correspondent at the Euronews' Brussels delegation. Migration, Environment and Sustainable Development are her main areas of expertise. Isabel has a BA in Communication Sciences (1995) from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal) and a MA in Communication for Development (2017) from the Malmo University (Sweden) with a thesis on Higher Education opportunities for young displaced people. Outside journalism, Isabel worked as the Communication Officer for Portugal at the United Nations Regional Information Center, in Brussels (2015/2016).

2.3 Our Mission, Vision and Values

RWAN's mission is to **empower women** by enhancing their awareness of their rights and of the resources available to them through education, ICT training and access to the labour market.



We envision a world where women can access **equal opportunities** in education, work, culture, and art.

The values that inspire our work are **Integrity, Trust, Transparency, Collaboration, Passion in Our Purpose, Social Responsibility, and Courage.**

2.4 RWAN's aim

The goal of the RWAN non-profit organization is to empower women by providing them with opportunities to be active in society. RWAN achieves this goal by helping, supporting, encouraging, and empowering all women to be informed and utilize resources in order to have a more active role in their communities.

Our project aims to support women who face difficulties integrating into their community or establishing themselves professionally. In this way, we work towards greater gender equality.

RWAN aims to support all women with a focus on women with immigrant or refugee backgrounds and the particular obstacles that they face. We promote activities that increase women's participation in educational, professional, entrepreneurial, and leadership activities.

RWAN seeks to bridge the gap between individuals and universities, institutions, organizations and all other actors that bear the responsibility of supporting women—especially those from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. In doing so, RWAN provides a space to share contacts, make proposals and create new opportunities for dialogue and cooperation.



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

2.4 RWAN's aim

Our organization seeks to achieve its goal by:

- ✓ Highlighting the importance of women's role in society.
- ✓ Promoting activities that increase women's participation in education, professional life, entrepreneurship, and leadership.
- ✓ Promoting women's integration through education, raising awareness, shared experiences, and networking.
- ✓ Advocating for the social inclusion of women in society.
- ✓ Conducting research and advisory activities aimed at closing the gaps in equality in society.
- ✓ Conducting training activities to support women's innovation and entrepreneurship.



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

2.5 RWAN's Team

The RWAN team consists of a group of women moved by a great passion for helping and supporting women in different fields. Our international team includes people with diverse backgrounds, including European and non-European members as well as those with immigrant or refugee backgrounds.

Our team members with immigrant or refugee backgrounds organize our activities and workshops. These team members are able to communicate with our participants in their mother tongue and better understand their needs.

This diversity plays a focal role in our work. Our multilingual team is well-connected and can effectively communicate our vision with a wide range of European actors that support women's integration.

This combination of diverse backgrounds profoundly contributed to the success of our initiative. Our diversity is valued by our team members and has enriched the experience of the women who participated in our workshops.

2.6 RWAN's Participation

We work to share our experiences in identifying the support women will need the most throughout the integration process. We have found several urgent needs in these key areas: Employment, Integration, Education and Youth, Digital Skills, Health, Equality, Access to Social Services and Housing, Social inclusion, and Poverty.

The following is an **overview of the conferences** where we presented our recommendations related to our experience in integrating women into European society.



2.7 Cooperating with RWAN

We work with institutions specializing in immigration and integration, organizations that make integration and inclusion policies, and organizations that support gender equality through empowering women. We share our perspectives and experiences in different conferences to provide input for international institutions, and other organizations.

INPUT

We provide comments and input to policies in the field of migration, integration, gender equality, and social inclusion.

OUTPUT

We collaborate on identifying, designing, implementing, and monitoring projects. We facilitate workshops, undertake research, collect surveys, deliver presentations, and engage in academic consulting.

3. General overview

Our organization seeks to support all women with a focus on women who have immigrant or refugee backgrounds and face difficulties integrating into society.

In the following section, we will share our experiences supporting women with migrant or refugee backgrounds.

This is an outline of the background and challenges of refugee and migrant women.



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

3.1 Background

Refugee women and girls are exposed to various challenges; either in their country of origin, during their journey to Europe, or upon arrival in their host country. To better support these women, due consideration should be given to their specific needs and host countries should adopt gender-responsive measures.

Refugee women typically receive less integration support than men. Refugee women typically receive less language training upon arrival which leads to lower levels of host-country language skills in the first 2-3 years after arrival. This disparity presents an obstacle as women try to access education and employment (Regeringen).

For millions of refugee women and girls, education remains only an aspiration. Early marriages, poverty, insecurity, and gender roles are all factors that limit the accessibility of education. Lack of education perpetuates and amplifies integration challenges such as finding work, building a healthy lifestyle, and developing resilience.

Women refugees in the EU also face considerable barriers in accessing employment opportunities. These barriers include the inability to secure childcare support, discrimination within the host community while looking for employment, and facing discouragement from males accompanying them in attempting to find work. Many refugee women are forced to look for work in the informal or shadow economy, exposing them to unfair wages and unsafe conditions.

Integration challenges hinder immigrant and refugee women from knowing their rights. This barrier is associated with poor health, low education achievement, and low levels of employment. Even within the refugee community which is already at high risk, women are more vulnerable to these risks than men (OECD Library).

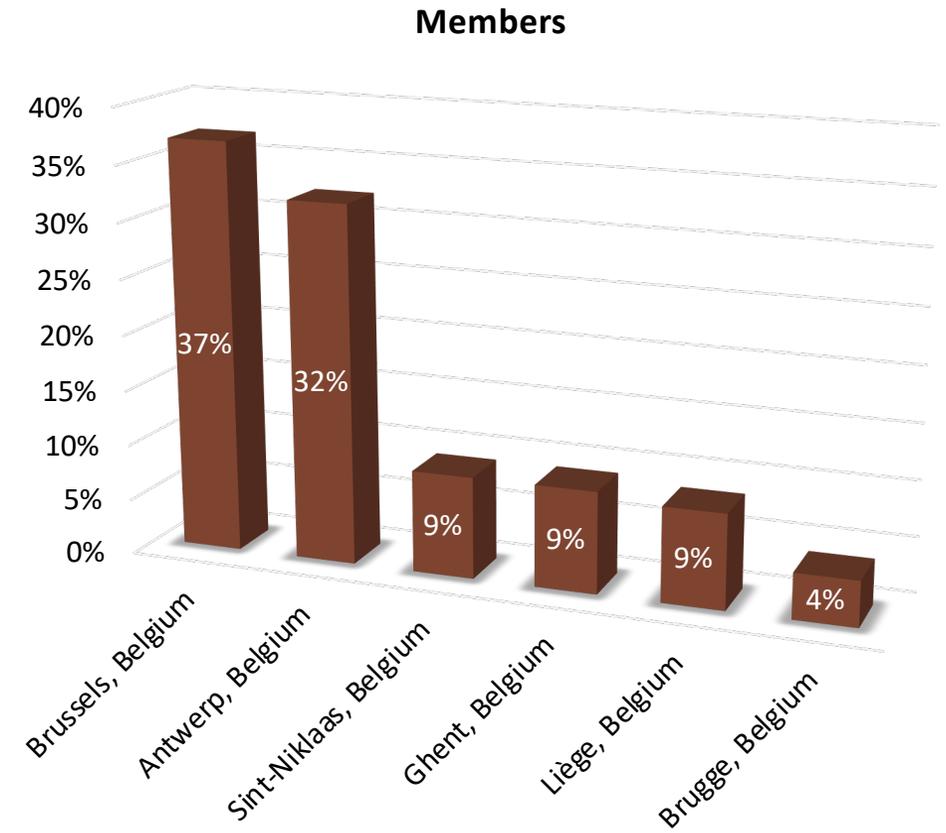
3.2 Communication with the community

We communicate with a community of women through our Facebook group, which has 672 members.

Additionally, we reach our target community through other Facebook groups which reach more women who might be interested in attending our workshops.

Our diverse team's ability to speak several languages allows us to communicate with women of many nationalities.

Notably, many women reported they were more likely to join this initiative when they learned our activities are for women only.

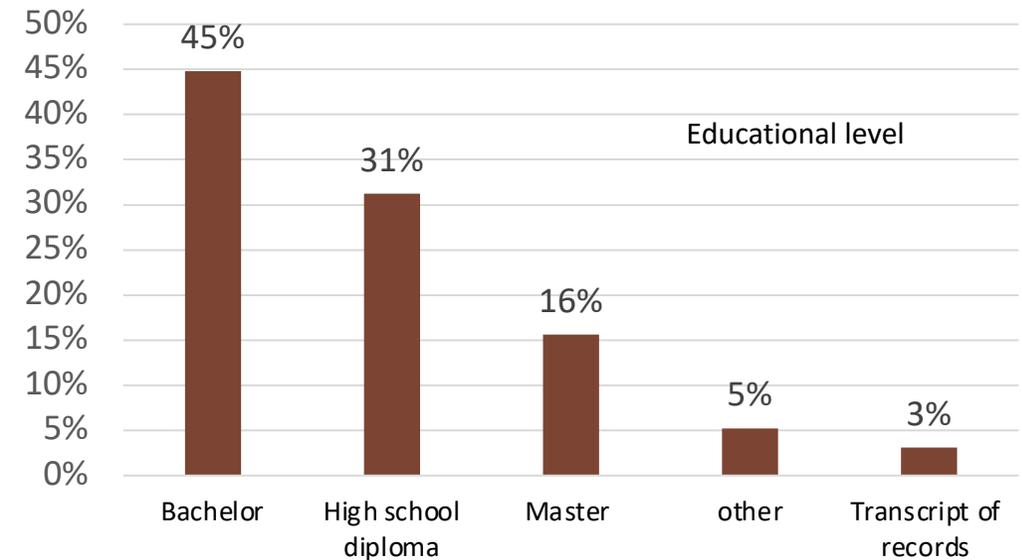
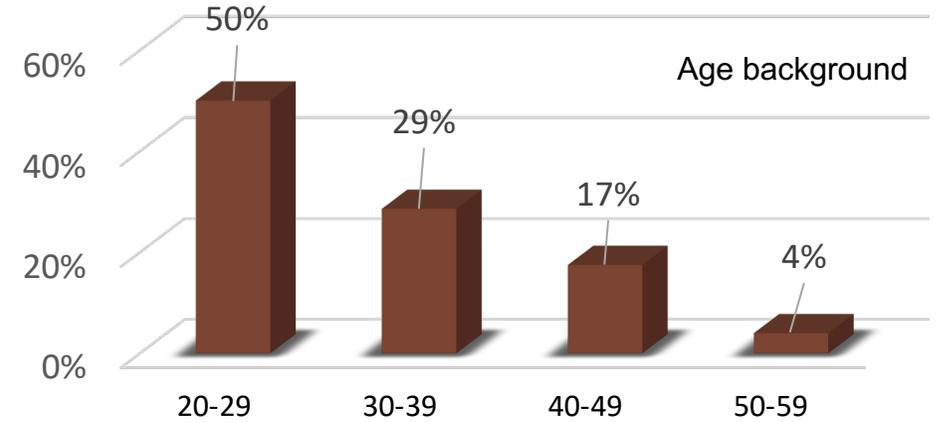


Our Facebook members are from the following regions

Source: "Facebook Group insights Members Report"

3.3 Age & educational background

Most of the women from RWAN's community are young adults between 20-29. More than half have academic degrees, including both Bachelors and Masters degrees.



4. Challenges & Obstacles



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

This section will present the challenges and obstacles that hinder women from entering the Belgian labour market, pursuing education, and knowing their rights.

This information was collected from our meetings with these women.

4.1 Factors That Hinder Women from Entering The Labour Market

1. Inability to master the language. *“Our inability to gain job or internship opportunities hinders the development of our acquired language skills due to the lack of language practice”.*

2. Lack of computer and digital skills. *“We are not able to join any computer training due to the language barrier.”; “I do not have a computer in my house.”*

3. Lack of awareness of the necessary processes. *“We are not properly guided to the labour market by the integration organizations”*

4. Wearing a veil. *“Many employers refuse to hire us if we wear the headscarf, which has led to many women from our society being isolated. Many of us have high skills and competencies, but we are always rejected.”*

5. Difficulty obtaining information and opportunities. *“We do not have the skills to search for work in the European labour market”.*

6. Insufficient networks. *“Lack of experiences in the host country hinders us from getting recommendations from professional or academic professionals”.*

7. Equivalence of diplomas. *“The equivalence of our diplomas in the host country does not mean our qualifications will be recognized or transferred into skills or experience desirable in the Belgian labour market: for example, a BA in Arabic literature.”*

8. High competition in the labour market.

4.2 Factors That Hinder Women from Pursuing their Education

1. Language. *"There is a lack of specialized academic courses to support and empower us, and if any, we do not know about it."*

2. Lack of encouragement to study. *"There is a group of women who had ambitions to complete their academic background, but they were forced to accept work that did not match their ambition or the skills and certifications they had."*

3. Age. *"People over the age of 30 are not encouraged to study."*

4. Equivalence of diplomas. *"We do not know what programs we are qualified to apply for based on our previous studies."*

5. Integration system weakness. *"The staff does not have enough experience to guide us."; "There is no clear and unified integration system in Belgium."*

6. Educational options awareness. *"We are not aware of educational options and schedules that could suit personal life as a woman."*

7. Requesting support. *"We do not know where to seek help."*

8. Transcripts. *"I have a university transcript, but I was not directed how to continue my studies."*

4.3 Factors that Hinder Women from Knowing Their Rights

1. **Lack of language skills.** *"Lack of existing initiatives or projects that support women and speak our mother tongue."*
2. **Lack of communication.** *"We lack contact with the local community."*
3. **Lack of support.** *"We need volunteer translators to help us when we lack language skills."*
4. **Lack of sources.** *"Information from approved sources is unavailable to us."*
5. **Fear & embarrassment.** *"We are afraid and/or embarrassed to ask about our rights because we fear that this may affect other matters or be misunderstood."*



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

5. Women's suggestions



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

This section outlines the women's suggested solutions in response to the previously highlighted challenges.

Labour Market

1. Supporting women's projects and initiatives, as many women prefer to join women-only projects than projects that are mixed. *"My husband allowed me to join your initiative when he learned that this initiative is only for women."*
2. Supporting organizations that support women's rights and help empower them in the labour market through training and workshops.
3. Promoting understanding and acceptance of our culture and religious identity.
4. Providing job opportunities that welcome women from our community in all fields.
5. Encouraging organizations and companies to employ refugees.

Education

1. More awareness workshops on conditions, application, and study options.
2. Providing introductory courses to enter the university.
3. Supporting specialized academic language courses.
4. Providing an interpreter/ or other support who speaks our language.
5. Psychological support and work to improve our living conditions.

Awareness of Rights

1. Knowing more information about our rights and duties in our mother tongue. *"In the current situation of poor communication with the host community and inefficiency of the language courses, learning the language of the host country may require many years."*
2. Supporting initiatives and projects that promote acceptance of migrants and refugees in host communities.
3. Supporting women's projects and initiatives. *"We need support from people who speak our language to guide us to get better opportunities".*
4. Providing workshops to support us psychologically. *"We do not need psychologists; we need to communicate with others."*

5.1 Suggested solutions by the women's group that have highlighted previous challenges.

6. RWAN's role in solving these challenges



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

6.1 Workshops Offered by RWAN

How did RWAN contribute to solving these challenges?
By identifying these challenges our initiative provides targeted workshops in four fields.

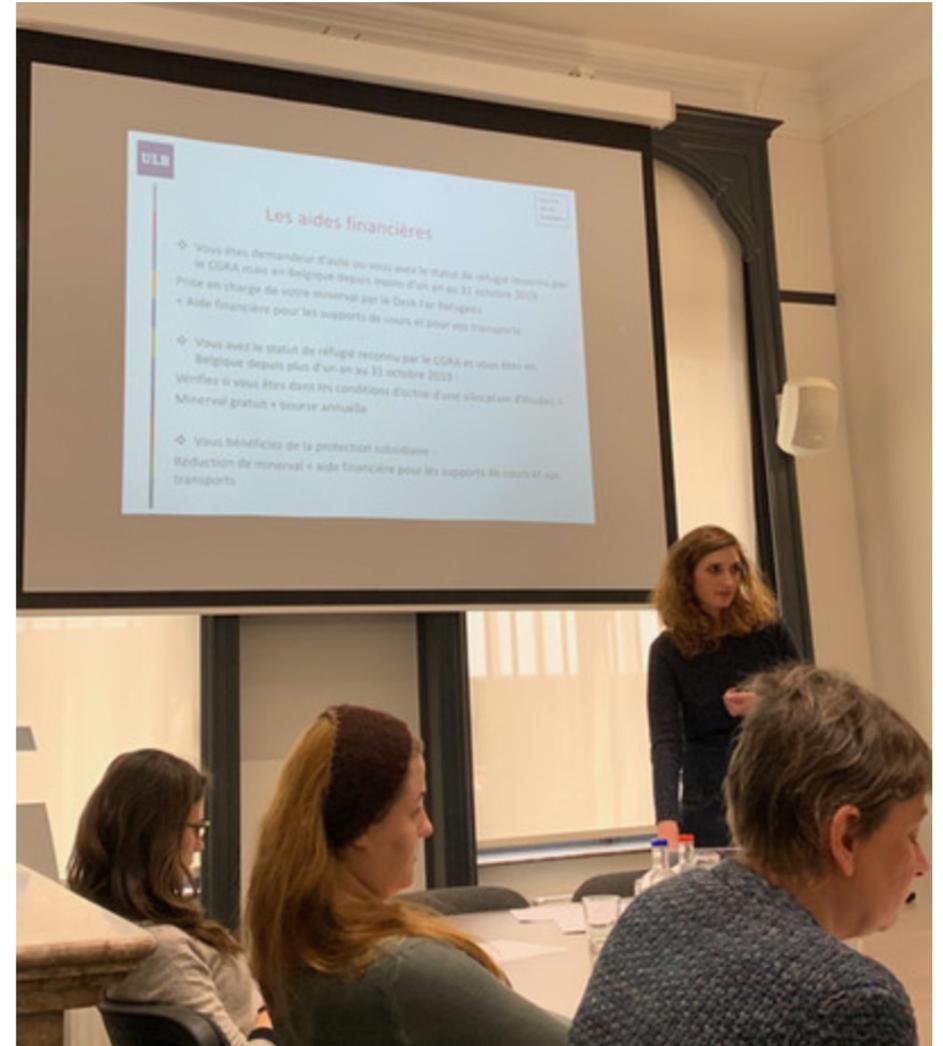
Digital literacy training
2020 -2021

Access to Education Workshops
2019 -2020

Advocacy Workshops
2019 -2020

Access to Labour Market Workshops
2019

Click [here](#) for more info.



6.2 Access to Education Workshops

Our education workshops share opportunities to access educational resources. These presentations inform women on their education options, how to ease their transition, and how to prepare via skill building or language courses.

- Preparatory Courses
- Entrance exams
- Equivalence diplomas
- Apply for admission
- Free Digital Learning
- Language Learning
- Scholarships



6.3 Access to Labour Market Workshops

Our labour market workshops intend to make finding employment more accessible. We equip women with the skills and confidence necessary to find work.

- Career Planning
- Labour Skill Development
- Mentorships
- Internships and training opportunities
- Networking
- Training to develop a CV
- Training to develop Letter of motivation
- Training to develop a LinkedIn account
- Training to develop digital skills
- Startup business
- Development of Entrepreneurial Skills



WELCOME HOME
INTERNATIONAL
One world one people



List of institutions that support entering the labour market and that have joined the workshops provided by our organization.

6.4 Advocacy Workshops

Our advocacy workshops are designed to empower women by educating them on their rights and how to access resources.

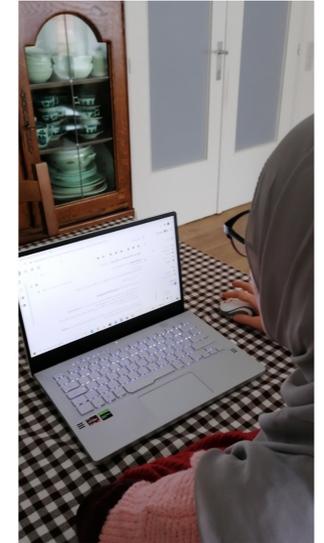
- Legal Empowerment
- Contract Expectations
- Sick leave, maternity leave
- Media Literacy
- Combating Negative Stereotypes



6.5 Digital Literacy Training

One of our current activities is a digital literacy course that will run from 2020-2022. To work towards solving integration challenges, this course has already given more than 50 women the opportunity to learn the basics of using computers in their mother tongue (Arabic) during the difficult conditions imposed during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Below are the expected outcomes of this training:

- Learn basic skills in using a computer; dealing with files and settings.
- Learn basic skills related to internet surfing and internet research.
- Learn to send and receive emails; using Google Drive.
- Learn the basic skills required to use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.



Pictures from RWAN's digital literacy course shared from our students

7. RWAN's Recommendations

Based on the needs expressed by the women, RWAN can provide six recommendations that focus on three dimensions of integration: access to the labour market, access to educational opportunities, and knowledge of rights.



A photo from one of our organization's workshops

7. RWAN's Recommendations

CAREER PLANNING

Career Planning: Women need to understand their skills and what jobs they are qualified for. Women also need access to pathways to gain skills (workshops or free courses) and how to market these skills (developing their CV).

NETWORKING

Women need to meet with representatives of organizations and companies to make connections with potential employers and support resources.

RESOURCE AWARENESS

Women need information on what resources are available to them to make education accessible such as scholarships, preparatory courses, and integration support during their academic career.

7. RWAN's Recommendations

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

The women want an outlet to support or get involved with women's projects or initiatives in this community.

SPREADING AWARENESS

Women need access to clear information on their rights in their mother tongue.

SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

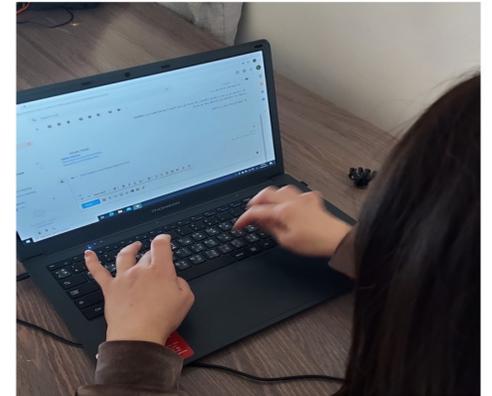
Women need resources to improve their language abilities, digital literacy, study habits, and other skills needed to succeed in an academic environment.

8. Our Next Projects,

Currently, we are focusing on training women to acquire **computer and digital skills** through providing them with various courses that support their integration into society.

- Computer course for beginners (Windows - Email - Google Drive)
- Microsoft Word course
- Microsoft Excel course

Our goal for 2021-2022 is to train 100 women



Support us in reaching **4000 euros** in **donations** by December 2021 to offer **20 scholarships** to 20 migrant and refugee women to get a digital training course.

These donations will support the project through two phases:

1. Costs related to the project (trainers' fees, printing, Microsoft Office subscription license for participants).
2. Providing any needed supplies that can support the women to join the training (transportation, computers, headphones, cables, etc.).

We run entirely on grants and donations to supply free integration services for women with a human touch.

If you believe in our project and want to support us, kindly make a **donation** to:

Name: RWAN ASBL

IBAN number: BE29 3632 1181 1664

Do you need more info?

Please contact us

Rwan.belgium@gmail.com

RWAN 2021 | Women Empowerment



Raise Women's Awareness Network organisation
Digital literacy course

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3. Hasselt University: <https://www.uhasselt.be>
4. Antwerp University - THEA project: <https://www.auha.be/vluchtelingen-en-thea/>
5. Gent University - Open Design course for refugees and asylum seekers: <https://opendesigncourse.be>
6. Welcome Home International: <https://www.welcomehome.international>
7. European Student Union (ESU): <https://www.esu-online.org>
8. Together, Moving Forward [TMF] programme: <https://www.togethertomovingforward.eu/get-inspired/>
9. Antwerp University – Linguapolis: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/centres/linguapolis/>
10. VDAB - Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding- <https://www.vdab.be>
11. Microstart: <https://microstart.be/fr>
12. Actiris: <https://www.actiris.brussels/fr/citoyens/>
13. Duo for a job: <https://www.duoforajob.be/en/>
14. YMCB: <https://ymcb.eu>
15. Bruxelles Formation: <https://www.bruxellesformation.brussels>
16. kiron: <https://kiron.ngo/en/>
17. EAVI: <https://eavi.eu>
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