



RAISE WOMEN'S AWARENESS NETWORK

Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference



11 March 2022

From 10:00 to 14:00

This conference supported by



About 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) program.

After the successful record of this initiative, RWAN was officially registered as a non-profit organization (ASBL) in Belgium and Brussels in 2021.

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. Inspired by our passion for social responsibility and guided by our core values—integrity, trust, transparency, collaboration, and courage—we assist women to prepare for the new challenges by building on their past experiences and by providing guidance about the new tools needed for a brighter future. In order to achieve this goal, we help, support, encourage and empower all women to be informed and to utilize the resources available to them.

About RWAN



RWAN seeks to build bridges 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.

Our organization aspires to provide real opportunities—especially for refugee and migrant women who face difficulties integrating and establishing themselves professionally. Further, RWAN is working towards more support for gender equality within European society. RWAN aims to pave the way through sharing personal experiences, matching resources, enhancing education opportunities and entrepreneurship as well as creating best practices. We strongly believe that this will lead to a better intercultural understanding between refugees/immigrants and host communities. We are convinced that not only women but all of society will benefit from this initiative.

RWAN 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 gaps in equality in society.

Conducting training activities to support women's innovation and entrepreneurship.

About RWAN



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.

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.

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

Institutions and organizations that have cooperated with us



Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference Agenda

**10:00 -10:20 Lama Jaghjougha - RWAN Founder
Introduction about Raise Women's Awareness Network & event purpose.**

10:20 - 10:40 Lydia Mutyebale - The City of Brussels

**10:40 – 11:50 Angela Broux - DLA Piper
The effect of maternity on women's professional careers.**

11:50 - 12:00 Coffee Break

**12:00 - 12:45 Khaola Al Rifai - VUB university
The impact of motherhood on women's education.**

**12:45 - 13:30 Barbara Winn-Hagelstam - Welcome Home International
The impact of motherhood on women's social life.**

13:30 - 14:00 Interactive Session

The Conference Aims &Topics

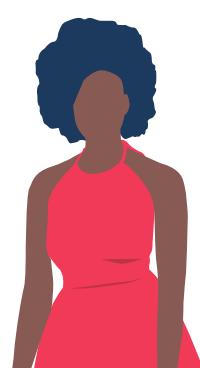
The effect of maternity on women's



**Professional
Careers**



Education



Social Life

About The 'Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion' Conference

The 'Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion' conference was organized by RWAN in collaboration with the City of Brussels and took place on the 11th of March 2022 via Zoom.

The conference gathered together partners and supporters such as DLA Piper, VUB and Welcome Home International as well as direct beneficiaries of RWAN's initiatives and activities.

The aim of the conference was to discuss the challenges faced by women in Belgium by focusing on three dimensions:

- The effect of maternity on women's professional careers.
- The impact of motherhood on women's education.
- The impact of motherhood on women's social life.

The conference was held in English and Arabic translation was provided to enable the participants to interact with the speakers and organizers in their mother tongue by sharing their experiences and challenges as mothers, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic.

59 participants were registered to attend the conference and around 40 people attended. Participants attended sessions that were topically interesting to them. For example, 22 people attended the session dedicated to motherhood and career, while 25 people attended the session on education.

The conference opened with a welcome and brief introduction from Lama Jaghoiuga, one of the founders of RWAN and a keynote speech by Lydia Mutyebele Ngoi from the City of Brussels. In her remarks, Ms. Mutyebele Ngoi highlighted how inequalities — exacerbated by the current health crisis — placed a heavy burden on the most vulnerable women, who became more marginalized. This was particularly true for mothers juggling work, (child)care and other domestic responsibilities.



The session continued with the intervention of Angela Broux and Alison Farquhar from DLA Piper, who provided information about women's rights in the workplace in Belgium.

After this session, Khaola Al Rifai — the coordinator of the refugee program at VUB — introduced VUB's vision and mission on gender equality and diversity, highlighting the increasing presence of women both among students and staff. Ms. Al Rifau also provided information about women's rights in education in Belgium and the support the university can provide to mothers who want to continue their studies.

Lastly, Ms. Barbara Winn-Hagelstam — the Director of Welcome Home International — presented two projects to support women in their social life.

Women's voices: experiences and challenges as mothers.

The 'Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion' Conference gave an opportunity for women to make their voices heard, share their needs and the challenges they face, ask questions, and seek help.

Three women with an immigrant or refugee background shared their experiences of work, study, and social life as mothers in Belgium.

During the session dedicated to women's rights in the workplace, Ms. Ghanwa said: "As mothers, we do not know what types of contracts are available to us in Belgium, what maternity rights we are entitled to have, and the supporting bodies we can address to claim our rights."

Ms. Marwa attended the session on education and said:

"We as mothers do not know if there are any facilities or rights that we can demand to complete our studies. Mothers struggle to find the programmes and majors available at the university. Is there help from the university to guide us?"

Ms. Duaa commented on the subject of social life:

"As mothers, we also do not know about the services provided to receive children here in Belgium, and there are probably many activities that we do not hear about. Furthermore, we as mothers lack the ability to practice the language in the community, and therefore I would like to ask a question: Are there activities to practice the language with the local community with solutions to care for children?"

Our panelists responded to the women's questions by providing useful, detailed information.

The solutions provided by the speakers to these challenges.

DLA Piper gave an overview of the employment contracts available in Belgium — fixed-term contracts, indefinite contracts, interim agency contracts, internship agreements — as well as of employee rights in the context of motherhood. For instance, detailed information was provided with regard to women's right to maternity leave, including when and how to request it, payment entitlements, and employer duties.

Interestingly, DLA Piper's representatives also explained the functioning of similar mechanisms such as paternity leave (for fathers) and parental leave (for mothers and fathers) and their effects on benefits, answering several questions that women raised.

Another important aspect of this presentation concerned the protection against dismissal and discrimination mothers are entitled to have in their workplace in Belgium and the sanctions against non-compliant employers.

Finally, participants were given a list of organizations and additional resources where they could seek advice.

The next session of the conference focused on women in education. Khaola Al Rifai — the coordinator of the refugee programme at VUB — introduced the VUB's vision and mission on gender equality and diversity, highlighting the increasing presence of women both among students and staff. However, while the student body sees a higher female presence (in some programmes up to 80%, with a lower percentage in STEM disciplines), the percentages of female and male staff members are relatively equal — 47% vs 53% respectively — although women only account for 39% of the professorial body.

International Women's Day

Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference

11 March 2022

From 10:00 to 14:00

Online via Zoom



However, VUB noticed a very big gap in access to higher education when it comes to students from migration background. Although access to education is a human right, for millions of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds education remains an aspiration, not a reality.

Challenges don't start on arrival in the host country. In conflict zones, women are amongst the most vulnerable, exposed to exploitation, abuse and sexual violence. When they arrive in the host countries there is a lack of information about education, and women often go through a sort of identity crisis because of religion, patriarchy, family and power imbalance. All these factors play an important role on why women are not highly registered in higher education.

VUB started many initiatives, for instance, the "Student Refugee Programme". VUB is committed to providing information to students with migrant or refugee backgrounds, including how to register, which career path to choose, and the requirements they need to meet. In order to reach out to refugee and migrant women across Belgium, VUB also organizes targeted workshops and events.

IN CAMPUS PROGRAMME: in this programme (a preparative programme) the number of women is higher. VUB provides language and psychological support. Participants only take two courses which enable them to adapt and get a taste of what going to university in Belgium looks like.

Access to daycare at VUB: babies can go to the VUB daycare. Furthermore, there is a medical practice which gives specific support to pregnant women and babies, and the university tries to adapt women's study schedule to their situation.

VUB and ULB will launch a post-grad course on WOMEN IN IT, which is aimed at increasing the influx of women into IT jobs and alleviating the shortage of IT professionals.



Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference

IN THE PRESENCE OF
VUB UNIVERSITY



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION
WWW.RWAN-INITIATIVE.ORG



Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference

IN THE PRESENCE OF
DLA PIPER



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Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion Conference

IN THE PRESENCE OF WELCOME HOME INTERNATIONAL



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Welcome Home International presented two projects to support women in their social life.

Unrooting Violence: tackling social norms for the prevention of gender-based violence.

The UNROOT project has been designed to intervene at the individual, collective and societal level in rural communities in order to:

- Sensitize and advocate for raising awareness on various aspects of GBV and their negative consequences for women, men, families, and the community at large;
- Strengthen participants' knowledge through training and support;
- Help participants to reduce harmful traditional practices, behaviors, and customs contributing to GBV;
- Create an open dialogue with community members about GBV issues and gender stereotypes.

The Sustainable Life Skills Café project aims to ensure social inclusion and enable these women to acquire knowledge to develop attitudes and skills by welcoming them with their children to participate in this project to practice their language skills with other people.

Participants' feedback.

Feedback was received from the participants at the end of the conference and via the WhatsApp number of the RWAN organization, Where it was easier for many women to communicate directly with us.

One of the participants pointed out the necessity of providing this type of meeting on a regular basis, even if it is online. Another participant said, "The existence of this type of activity helps us feel that we are part of society and not isolated at home."

WHAT IS WOMEN'S RIGHTS WEEK 2022?



The Equal Opportunities Unit will be highlighting the following theme:
The hurdles and prejudices surrounding motherhood



**From March 5-13 2022, the City of Brussels is organizing
Woman's Rights Week**

Yet other participants pointed out the importance of the information provided by the speakers, which they do not have the possibility to obtain elsewhere. This is due to their poor computer skills and their inability to search online for this sort of information. In addition, the language barrier constitutes a major obstacle for them. Therefore, the provision of an interpreter was ideal to deliver the information women need to protect their rights to work, study and social life.

There were also two European women among the participants, and they contacted us and shared their opinion with us saying that, "Although we are European women working in Belgium, we have never known our rights as women/mothers."

Also, another woman explained that she had recently refused a work contract because she did not know what her rights as a woman and mother were, and thought that she might not be able to take this job because of her obligations to her family. However, now she might dare to accept another contract because she is now aware of her rights.

The representative of VUB indicated that it was the first time that she was requested to provide this information.

Thus, while preparing her presentation, she was surprised to find out how weak the initiatives that defend the rights of women and mothers in education in universities are.

Therefore, this conference has highlighted the weakness of societal initiatives to enhance women's awareness of their rights at various levels, whether they are European women or women from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. Hence, a lot still needs to be done.

We look forward to meeting periodically in order to maintain communication and dialogue and to understand more about what women need to become more integrated into Belgian society and to ensure equal rights between men and women.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2022



Recommendations for organizations, institutions, initiatives working on women's issues

Working to provide more information about work rights, education and activities that facilitate socialization.

Support initiatives that highlight the challenges faced by women in Brussels and Belgium, and work to provide solutions to support gender equality.

Promote social inclusion by creating spaces for dialogue and learning between the women's community and the relevant institutions.

Provide information about protecting women's rights in several languages as the language barrier continues to be the main deterrent to supporting women from immigrant backgrounds in Belgium.

Raise Women's Awareness Network

Credits

RWAN would like to give a special thanks to

- All institutions and organizations that participated with us to support the 'Women as Mothers & Social Inclusion' Conference.
- All participants who trusted us and attended our workshops.
- Our entire volunteer team for their contributions and commitment to working towards achieving these great results.

Donate to support our mission

We run entirely on grants and donations to supply free, personalized integration services for women.

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

Name: RWAN ASBL

IBAN number: BE29 3632 1181 1664

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