

## **It takes knowledge to acknowledge: the example of Moroccan immigration**

Belgium is a unique laboratory which has always risen to the challenge of its diversity: both the diversity that preceded the creation of the Belgian State between Flemish and French-speakers, and the diversity linked to migration. It is constantly in search of a formula for living together, which is sometimes undermined by signs of cultural isolationism or discrimination against minorities.

The strong presence of a population of immigrant origin at all levels of education is a major factor and an asset in Belgium. Today, our young people are looking for a history that takes account of their origins and their parents' contribution to the betterment of European societies. Educational institutions have thus become schools of otherness, and require teachers of otherness.

Living together and working together necessarily involve valuing and acknowledging the other. Mutual ignorance is an obstacle to the experiences of living together, respect and the well-being of everyone. This acknowledgement must in particular involve teaching the history of immigration, reminding us of what we owe to others, and the contribution of immigration and emigration.

In Belgium, more than 400,000 people are of Moroccan immigrant origin and this presence pre-dates 1964, when the Agreement on the occupation of Moroccan workers was signed. From the early 20th century in Europe, these men and women contributed to the fighting and the war effort in both World Wars, then to the race for coal and to the industries that were essential drivers of our economy. Today, they make an active contribution to the social, cultural and economic development of the country.

In Belgium, they have also played a decisive role in demographic growth. Here and over there, they have fought for equality and recognition of human rights.

At a time when people from "the first generation" are gradually making way for the following ones, and often choosing to be buried in Belgium, one of the aims of this exhibition is to make sure they are not forgotten.

It is essential for their descendants, and for us all, that we show our thanks by giving them a place in our history books. Their story has become our common story and has forged our collective destiny.

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