

Being a Migrant Artist in Belgium: Analysing Artistic and Migratory Careers through the Grounded Theory Method

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Being a Migrant Artist in Belgium: Analysing Artistic and Migratory Careers through the Grounded Theory Method

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I. Introduction

Belgium offers a complex and interesting context for studying the intersection between migration and artistic expression. Since “*the official halt to labour migration in 1974*”, different forms of mobility (asylum, family reunification, study, and intra-European migration) have continued to diversify the country’s population, making Belgium both a migration and post-migration society. Successive waves of immigration have led to long-term settlement and diversification within Belgian society (Martiniello, 2013, p. 122). In 2021, nearly eighteen percent of the population is born in another country, with high concentrations in urban centres such as Brussels, Liège or Antwerp (Statbel, 2023).

Despite a growing interest in the cultural dimensions of migration, the intersection between migration and the arts remains largely underexplored in sociology. Migrants are often framed as economic actors or social problems, rather than cultural agents, and artistic practices continue to be treated as peripheral subjects within the discipline (Martiniello, 2022, p. 1). Yet, for many migrants, art is a crucial medium through which to process, express and reinvent their experience. Martiniello (2022) calls for a multidimensional approach that takes into account identity, institutions, and local contexts (p. 7). Rather than focusing on a specific art form, he stresses the need to view artistic expression as central to the study of migration itself (p. 9).

This thesis explores a key question: *How does the evolution of a migratory career affect an artist’s vision of their art and its representation?* Inspired by the concept of the *migratory career* (Martiniello & Rea, 2014, p. 1084), it investigates how migratory trajectories shape influencing artistic identity and practice, but also visibility, recognition, and legitimacy. Art and migration are not treated here as separate spheres but as mutually shaping forces; linked through tensions, reinvention, and negotiation. The aim is to understand how migrant artists create meaning and navigate constraints across borders.

To explore this, the research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in lived experiences. Using the *Grounded Theory Method* (Lejeune, 2019, p. 21), categories were developed inductively from the narratives of first-generation migrant artists based in Brussels and Liège. An initial exploratory interview helped to refine the research focus (Van Campenhoudt & Quivy, 2011, pp. 58–59). The use of *semi-structured interviews* allowed for an in-depth exploration of personal trajectories.

While existing research has explored migrant artists’ visibility and political expression, few studies focus on how artistic practice is shaped through migratory careers. By applying the *migratory career* concept to artists’ own narratives, this thesis explores the dynamic interplay between mobility and creation. Furthermore, gender operates as a transversal dimension, revealing how artistic and migratory trajectories are further shaped by gender, status, and institutional encounters.

This thesis is structured around a literature review, a problematisation, a methodology chapter, a thematic analysis, and a case study. Each section contributes to a grounded understanding of how first-generation migrant artists construct and experience their artistic trajectories in the context of migration. By combining theoretical insights and empirical fieldwork, the study seeks to understand the complex interplay between artistic practice, personal narratives, cultural negotiation and institutional environments.

II. Literature Review

This chapter is structured in three main sections. These three components were selected to provide both a theoretical lens and a multidimensional understanding of the migrant artist's experience.

First, it introduces the concept of *career* as developed by Howard Becker and later adapted by Marco Martiniello and Andrea Rea into the migratory framework. This conceptual lens helps understand how both social structures and individual agency shape the artistic and migration paths of individuals over time.

Second, it explores the intersection between migration and art, a topic long overlooked in migration studies. This part highlights the contributions of Martiniello, Mescoli, and Zolberg, and focuses on how migrant artists are positioned in both cultural and academic discourse.

Finally, the review presents four key analytical themes that are central to this thesis: the transformative power of art, the role of institutions and the economy as well as the influence of gender and intersectionality on the artistic careers of migrants. Each theme contributes to a deeper understanding of how migrant artists navigate their personal and professional journeys within different social, economic, and political contexts.

Building on this foundational overview, the literature review starts by examining Howard Becker's concept of *career*. This concept helps us understand how people's paths develop over time, especially through their interactions with society and institutions.

1. The career concept by Howard Becker

Howard Becker's concept of *career* introduced in "*Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*" (1963), provides an important framework to understand how individuals develop within social contexts over time. Through this book, Becker challenges traditional perceptions of the concept of *deviance*, not as an inherent quality of certain acts, but as a label that society assigns to particular behaviours and people.

a. Deviance as a Social Process

Becker argues that *deviance* is a social construction. He writes: "*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders*" (p. 9). In this view, deviance is less about the act itself and more about other people's perception of it. Factors like origin, group membership, repetition of behaviour, and media portrayal shape public perception and the degree of stigmatisation (pp. 12–14).

In this chapter, he introduces the *labelling theory*, a process where social groups establish rules, thereby creating the possibility of rule breaking. Those who break these rules are then labelled as *deviant*. Importantly, it is not merely the act of rule-breaking that defines deviance, but the power

dynamics within society that determine which behaviours are labelled as such. According to Becker, powerful groups shape these norms and decide which actions and individuals are categorised as deviant (pp. 17–18).

b. The Deviant Career: A Learning Process

In one of his chapters, Becker applies the concept of *career* to a marihuana user to show how deviant behaviours can evolve over time. Using analytic induction, he identifies three key stages in the *deviant career* (p. 45).

For the author, the first phase of the career consists in “*learning the technique.*” The user needs to learn how to use marihuana properly, through observation or instruction. Once the user masters these techniques, they are able to achieve the desired effects.

The second step is “*learning to perceive the effects.*” At this stage, the marihuana user must recognise the effects of the drug and consciously associate them with smoking marihuana. The “*novice*” often seeks guidance from more experienced users, who provide tips and clues that help the individual to better understand the drug's effects (pp. 46–49). “*The novice, ..., picks up from other users some concrete referents of the term high and applies these notions to his own experience*” (p.50, 1963).

The third step is “*learning to enjoy the effects.*” This chapter explains how individuals progress from engaging in deviant behaviour as experimentation to regular consumption. These stages of learning, from initial learning to the integration of the behaviour becoming an integral part of the subculture, highlight how individuals' experiences shape their engagement with deviance. Becker uses a case study to illustrate how a deviant career progresses through learning processes and social interactions (pp. 53–58).

This process applies to the concept of *career*, which can be defined as a developmental trajectory characterised by structural progression, where individuals develop skills and learn roles, and can thus be compared to a professional career.

c. Moral Entrepreneurs and Rule Enforcement

Another central concept elaborated by Howard is the concept of *Moral Entrepreneurs*. Rules are the products of someone's initiative, and such individuals may be interpreted as *moral entrepreneur* (p.147, 1963). According to him, there are two kinds of entrepreneurs.

First, there are *rule creators*. These individuals define, choose, or reinforce moral norms. They act to change certain behaviours that are seen as dangerous or harmful. Their motivation stems from the belief that they are acting in the interest of society. Nevertheless, these altruistic purposes are not always the only driving force, and other motivations should be considered. Some entrepreneurs are guided by ethical and moral convictions, believing that certain behaviours are morally wrong and should be regulated. Others, however, are motivated by self-interest. For instance, during the Prohibition era, some

industrials supported these measures because they expected that they would provide a more manageable labour force (pp.147-152).

Second, there are *rule enforcers*. This category includes law enforcement personnel, such as police officers or judges, regulatory agencies, and informal enforcers like teachers or parents. Their role is to ensure that the rules are followed, and in some cases, they are prepared to punish those who fail to conform. Thus, the rules established by *rule creators* must be institutionalised to guarantee their implementation. Like *rule creators*, *rule enforcers* have varied motivations. For instance, power and authority are two significant motivational aspects. There is also the fear of losing one's job, which may pressure enforcers to justify their role by identifying *deviant* behaviours. Additionally, they may be driven by personal beliefs. *Rule enforcers* make decisions based on their own motivations, which shape both what they choose to enforce and how they do so. This divergence can lead to selective enforcement, bias, and discrimination (pp.155-162). As you can see, *moral entrepreneurs* are closely connected to the labelling theory because they play a crucial role in determining what is considered deviant or not. They create *outsiders* who are labelled as such and may suffer from legal punishment and social stigmatisation.

d. From Deviance to Broader Social Careers

Becker's concept of career does not only apply to *deviance*. It offers a broader sociological tool to understand how individuals follow paths shaped by interaction with institutions, social expectations, and collective learning processes. A career is not just a job; it is a sequence of experiences, learning phases, and identity transformations.

Building on Becker's idea of *career*, the next section introduces how Martiniello and Rea adapted this concept to migration. Their theory of the *migratory career* helps us better understand how migrants' paths are shaped by both personal choices and larger social and institutional forces.

2. The migratory career concept by Martiniello and Rea

This section first presents Martiniello and Rea's concept of *migratory career*, then explores its connections to Becker's theory, and finally discusses how this framework has been applied to integrated into the work of Christian Rinaudo.

Martiniello and Rea introduce the *migratory career* as a concept particularly suited to the comprehension of immigration trajectories. A migrant's path is shaped both objectively, through institutions, laws, and socio-economic conditions, and subjectively, through personal expectations and perceptions. The concept highlights the interplay between individual decisions and structural constraints, encompassing social, political, and economic contexts. For instance, changes in legal status and shifts in personal plans are seen as integral parts of this evolving process (2014, p.1084).

A key contribution of the concept is the emphasis on both subjective and objective understandings of achievement. These must be analysed from the perspectives of both the host societies and the country of origin. As the meaning of success can be perceived quite differently across contexts. Additionally, it is essential to examine how migrants subjectively and collectively perceive and define success and failure. The analysis should also focus on the skills that migrants acquire. For instance, a migrant may possess varying degrees of skills related to migration activities, such as “*knowledge of migration policies*”, as well as social, political, and cultural skills. It seems that assessing these skills should be conducted alongside obstacles faced by migrants. Indeed, these difficulties often contribute to the development of skills that shape a migrant’s career trajectory (pp.1085-1087). Another key element introduced by Martiniello and Rea is temporal because career is built with time, and migrants need time to develop and acknowledge new skills. Nevertheless, time is likely to seem subjectively different from a person to another. Furthermore, “*new technology of communication and information*” can reshape the temporal and spatial experience of migration (p.1087).

Martiniello and Rea emphasise that *migratory careers* are not linear. They propose an approach that considers “*the individual characteristics of migrants, the opportunity structures and constraints of international migration and the mobilization of resources*” (p.1088). This approach focuses on opportunities and constraints experienced by migrants and how structural factors have an impact in constructing the migratory career. For instance, a structural factor is the state involvement in the receiving and departing of migrants. Others important factors include “*welfare state policies*” and “*labour market*”. Nevertheless, the building process of a career cannot be summarised with structural factors. Individuals’ factors such as motivation, envy and viewpoints of the person need to be taken into account. There are also Eight individual factors that are important to explain the *migratory career*, “*length of stay in the host country, nationality, marital status, level of education, age, gender, legal migration’s situation and jobs*”. Finally, the last significant factor concerns the migrant’s capacity to engage in mobility. All these specific factors are not sufficient to understand the *migratory career* without making connections between each other. Indeed, it is important to identify and highlight how a migrant interacts with his resources and with others (pp.1088-1090).

What makes this concept particularly useful is its complexity: it encapsulates structural constraints, personal attributes, and transnational networks across both origin and host societies (p.1092). It presents migration as an evolving process shaped by both external pressures and personal agency. Rather than viewing migration as a singular event, Martiniello and Rea frame it as a dynamic path involving continuous negotiation and adaptation. This framework is especially relevant for studying artists whose mobility and creativity often link multiple landscapes (p.1081).

The French sociologist Christian Rinaudo draws on this theory to analyse artists in exile. He uses the *migratory career* concept to examine how the migration experience intersects with artistic

development (2023, pp.13–14). Rinaudo pays attention to both the material conditions of life and the symbolic narratives that artists express in interviews and artworks (p.14).

Like Martiniello and Rea, Rinaudo considers the *career* as a process developing over time, shaped by a mix of constraints and experiences. He differentiates objective elements, such as family, education, institutions, and socio-economic structures, from subjective dimensions, including hopes, expectations, and perceived realities (p.15). He shows how the *migratory career* lens helps identify shared themes among exiled artists, such as language barriers, insecurity, or a loss of hope (p.17).

Rinaudo also reflects on the terminology used to describe displaced artists. The term “*exile*” is particularly significant, as it emphasises the experience of leaving one’s homeland. This contrasts with terms like “*asylum seeker*”, which focusses more on the receiving country’s role in offering refuge. According to Rinaudo, the label “*artist in exile*” draws attention to these individuals’ ability to voice their experiences and contribute to society. This stands in contrast to the term “*migrant*,” which often conveys a sense of voicelessness (p. 18).

While the concept of *migratory career* offers a useful lens for understanding the trajectories of migrants, it is also important to consider the overlooked cultural dimensions of migration. The next section explores how migrant artists, and their work have long been neglected in both migration studies and the social sciences more broadly.

3. Immigrants and art, a neglected subject

According to Martiniello (2015), the relationship between immigrants and art has long been a marginal topic in sociology of migration. In the United States, the first major book on the subject appeared only in 2010, and in Europe, it has drawn growing attention only since the late 2000s (p.1229). Thanks to networks like IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe), this field has slowly gained visibility among European researchers (Martiniello, 2022, p.2).

This lack of attention may be explained by the dominant tendency to approach migration through economic or legal lenses, overlooking the cultural and artistic dimensions of migrant experiences (Martiniello, 2015, pp.1229–1230). Migrants are often viewed as a labour force within the global economy, rather than as cultural agents. As Martiniello (2022) points out, assumptions about their limited education frequently led to the rejection of their artistic contributions. More broadly, art itself remains a marginal subject in social sciences (p.1). Over the past two decades, the focus on human conditions and immigration policy, especially in the context of the so-called “migration crisis”, has likely contributed to this oversight. The 2020 pandemic further interrupted artistic production and visibility by obstructing many cultural activities (p.3).

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge the influence of migrant communities on local artistic landscapes. Their presence contributes to the evolution of culture through new forms of

expression, shaped by their experiences and perspectives (p.7). Martiniello (2015) notes, “*One approach was to show to what extent migrant and ethnicized minorities’ artistic productions inspired by their experience of migration and/or discrimination were changing and enriching local cultures through processes such as artistic métissage, fusion, and invention*” (p.1230).

In recent years, some studies have begun to explore how the artistic productions of minorities serve as expressions of their identity. Indeed, from a cultural perspective, migrant artists often draw inspiration from their personal experiences of migration, reflecting these journeys and emotions in their creations (p.1231). Martiniello (2015) argues that “*immigrants and their offspring, as well as other ethnicized and racialized minorities, do not simply assimilate into local arts; they transform the local artistic landscape and give birth to new artistic idioms that need to be better studied than they have been so far*” (p.1232).

From a social perspective, art promotes connection within local communities, serving as a bridge between different social groups (p. 1232). Martiniello (2017) also points out that artists are often overlooked in migration discussions, yet they can play a key role in raising awareness and engaging the public on the importance of migration (p.160).

Interest in the intersection between migration and art is progressively increasing, highlighting the crucial role artistic practices play in the lives of many migrants. For some, art becomes a daily tool for adapting to and transforming their environment and goals (Martiniello & Mescoli, 2024, p.1). Martiniello (2022) argues that studying these interconnections reveals the cultural dimensions of migration and calls for a multi-dimensional approach. This framework should consider elements such as “*local culture and artistic expressions, social relations and interactions, local cultural and integration policies, local political life, and the local economy*” (p.7).

Nevertheless, a combination of all these aspects must be integrated into a multidisciplinary approach, which can be challenging to implement in this type of work. This research should consider all these elements to enrich the study and to minimise potential errors and misunderstandings. In addition, Martiniello indicates the importance of not focussing on a specific type of art to understand the role art plays within migrant communities (p.9). Martiniello (2022) says: “*This is because the main objective is to contribute to migration studies and not so much to specialized artistic studies*”. (p.9). Ultimately, interest in culture and migration helps to rehumanise migrants, allowing to see them as individuals rather than mere statistics (p.10).

Since the role of art in migration is often overlooked, it is also useful to look at how sociology has studied art more generally. The next section focuses on Vera Zolberg’s work and how she explains the connection between art, society, and institutions.

4. Constructing a Sociology of the Arts

Before diving into the specific ways migrant artists engage with art, it is useful to take a step back and consider how sociology has approached art more broadly. Vera Zolberg's work, "*Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*" (1990), offers a foundational perspective on the complex relationship between artistic production, individual agency, and social structures.

a. Sociology vs. Art

As cited by Zolberg (1990), Bourdieu explains the ambivalent relationship between art and sociology. He suggests that "*sociology and art make an odd couple*" because artists' conception of art is often rooted in a world governed by the individuality of the creator and their beliefs. Artists tend to view sociologists as agents of change, as their attempts to provide explanations and insights can be seen as controversial (p.1).

On the one hand, aestheticians are alienated by the notion of the "*conventional image of the solitary genius*" (p.9). Moreover, it appears that "*these assumptions consist of three interrelated components: that a work of art is a unique object; that it is conceived and made by a single creator; and that it is in these works that the artist spontaneously expresses his genius*" (Zolberg, 1990, p.53). These principles are so deeply rooted in the minds of aestheticians that, for instance, in the case of collective art forms such as film, they tend to designate a single creator, typically the director (pp.82-83).

On the other hand, sociologists view art as a collective process involving multiple actors, arguing that all fields must be understood in their social context (Zolberg, 1990, p.9). Drawing on Howard S. Becker's work, Zolberg (1990) highlights how he was one of the first to consider art as a social phenomenon involving a multitude of different actors. He rejects the notion of the artist's uniqueness and originality, arguing that art is more of a social consensus about what it represents rather than a phenomenon that has purely aesthetic value (p.80). According to Zolberg's reading, Becker sees the artist as an actor embedded in a collective action with other actors and institutions that allow the creation and development of arts in general (p.126). In short, "*he sees art as a collective project that, without supporting personnel, may not lead to public expression.*" (Zolberg, 1990, p.132).

Zolberg (1990) reinforces this idea of art as a collaborative process, not the product of a isolated individual (p.197). The artist is embedded in a social structure and relies on both direct and indirect support. For instance, artists and the public are interdependent; artists must engage with the public to gain support (p.136). Institutions and market forces also shape artistic work, requiring artists to navigate social and political rules (pp.174–175). States, especially authoritarian ones, often exert strong influence over the cultural sphere (p.187).

Zolberg (1990) accentuates that, while acknowledging the assumptions of aestheticians and psychologists about the "*individual artist*", it is crucial to remember and analyse the social context in which the artist operates (p.196). "*This would show the awareness by sociologists of the fact that artists*

emerge from the interaction of initial propensities for talent and personality characteristics within the constraints of historically grounded opportunity structures, through changing processes and mechanisms of discovery, recruitment and socialization” (Zolberg, 1990, p.196).

Zolberg (1990) also notes that while it is important to examine the art object itself, this can introduce bias. Sociologists may make value judgments, so they need a reflexive approach to clarify their choices, methods, and findings. They must also avoid idealising or privileging certain groups of artists, which could misrepresent the diversity of artistic production (pp.212-213).

Anthropologists introduced the concept of *Cultural relativism*, encouraging sociologists to engage with all forms of art regardless of status, popularity, or stigmas (p.20). *Cultural relativism* is the idea that cultural practices and values must be understood within their own specific contexts rather than judged by external standards. As Brown (2008) argues, it is a guiding principle that encourages sensitivity to cultural difference while avoiding ethnocentric biases (pp. 371–372).

b. Three levels of analysis

According to Zolberg (1990), in order to understand how an artist is shaped, an analysis must be conducted on three different levels: the individual level (micro), the "*production matrix*" (meso), and the social environment (macro) (p.27). Furthermore, the author emphasises the importance of combining an ethnographic approach with an analysis of social structures to provide a more comprehensive understanding (pp. 70-71). In this context, approaching art sociologically requires considering the micro, the meso and the macro levels of society. Scholars need to pay attention to "*structure and agency, encompassing cultural values as well as material interests.*" Art must be understood in relation to the structural societal context. Since the growth of the sociology of art in the 1960s and 1970s, this area of study has expanded, evolved, and gained recognition for its significance in the field (p.214).

c. Cross disciplinarity and genre

Zolberg (1990) notes that sociologists like Gans, Becker, Bourdieu, and Adorno share common views, such as recognising inequality, hegemony, marginality, and their effects on artists, art forms, and audiences. They also emphasise the importance of genre and cross-disciplinarity in research (p.145). However, Zolberg warns that while sociology does not need to assign value to art, ignoring aesthetic elements can limit understanding. Without this, it is hard to grasp why some art forms are more appreciated than others. For a fuller perspective, sociologists should collaborate with aestheticians (pp.201–202).

d. Culture as a right

Zolberg (1990) expands on Gans's idea, arguing that culture should be treated as a right, like education or welfare, and should be provided by the state through cultural institutions. Given that lower-status groups have limited access to theatres, operas, or art galleries, he believes that public broadcasting plays a crucial role in offering marginalised populations better access to this culture (p.152).

After examining at how sociology conceptualises art, we can now focus more specifically on the power of art in the lives of migrants. The following section explores how art becomes a tool for expression, resistance, and community building.

5. Art as powerful tool

As noted, Martiniello (2015) emphasises that the artistic activities of migrants remain relatively underexplored in social sciences. Some researchers focus instead on what they consider more pressing topics: such as economic, social, or legal challenges associated with migration pp.1229–1230). According to Martiniello and Mescoli (2018), these assumptions are inaccurate, as numerous examples demonstrate otherwise. However, economic and social precarity often act as powerful forces for artistic creation and expressions of resistance, while cultural differences offer a valuable foundation for sharing and blending artistic traditions (p.11).

Damery and Mescoli (2019) point out that migrants are often represented by others in media and political spaces, with limited opportunities to speak for themselves. Their access to media and institutions is also restricted (p.2). Martiniello and Mescoli (2018) argue that art serves as a form of social action, allowing individuals to claim rights and address critical issues. As a powerful medium, it offers alternatives to verbal discourse, expressing messages through visual and physical forms. For example, in 2018 in Liège, the project “*Nous, avec ou sans papier, regards croisés au-delà des murs*” united artists with and without legal status, creating a space for collective reflection on migration, human rights, and personal experiences. This diverse group became a platform for dialogue, exchange, and mutual understanding (pp.11-12).

Damery and Mescoli (2019) note that art also facilitates community integration and enhances visibility (p.1). They refer to the 2018 project in Liège, explaining that such initiatives allow participants to share experiences, stories, and perspectives. Through art, participants can communicate their ideas and reach a broader audience beyond their immediate community (p.7). Martiniello and Mescoli (2018) conclude that “*Art can remain a powerful tool for raising awareness, strengthening self-esteem, understanding society, building social interactions, and expressing demands—in short, for building shared citizenship*” (p.13).

Furthermore, Martiniello and Lafleur (2008) argue that art, specifically music in their analysis, serves as a form of political action. More importantly, they emphasise how it enables a group of individuals to construct and affirm their identity in relation to others (pp. 1192–1193). From a political perspective, every aspect of music, including lyrics, performance, musical form, can be seen as part of a broader political dynamic. However, the authors call for a more balanced perspective, recognising that music is not only a political tool but also a medium of entertainment (p. 1195).

Indeed, art should not be viewed solely as a political tool for protesting or addressing migration issues. Some artists assert that they create “*for the sake of art*” or to build a sense of community (Damery

& Mescoli, 2019, p.10). This view is echoed by Kaer, a member of the group Starflam, who explains that he does not make music as a political figure. While his lyrics may highlight social realities, his main goal is to express emotion, freedom, and energy (Martiniello, 2016, p.159).

To conclude, Damery and Mescoli (2019) highlight the power of art among migrant communities, as it enables them to “*participate in the local socio-cultural life*” and to articulate clear claims about their conditions. These actions are essential for bridging the gap between legal and illegal statuses while promoting social cohesion and collective action. Art also allows migrants to be seen and understood, helping them move beyond their status as *outsiders*. Additionally, it opens the possibility of becoming “*invisible*” in the sense of being accepted by the host society (pp.14-15).

Frisina and Muresu (2018) examined various “*migrant cinema*” initiatives in Italy, focusing on how this activist cinema aims to portray the experiences of migrants and to combat racism (p.17). They argue that cinema creates emotional connections that encourage social engagement. Additionally, activist cinema invites audiences to reflect on Italian history and culture, opening dialogue between migrants and locals (p.27). To quote the authors, “*Participatory cinema keeps on playing an important role to enact a political solidarity with refugees(...), but also in a more general crisis of Italian democracy, by inviting citizens to challenge the new faces of fascism through the arts of de-bordering*” (2018, p.28).

Building on the idea that art can be powerful for migrant communities, the next section explores how institutions and the economy shape the artistic careers of migrants and influence their visibility and opportunities.

6. Role of institutions and Economy

According to DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly (2015), institutions create a paradox for migrant artists. On one hand, institutions constrain migrant artists; on the other, they sponsor their work. As a result, artists find themselves in a position where they must balance a commitment to their community with the need to cross boundaries in pursuit of success or purely aesthetic goals. Therefore, research needs to pay particular attention to how the host society shapes and directs the artistic forms created by migrant artists (p.1237).

DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly propose seven different models of *cultural incorporation*. The first model is *isolation*, where the migrant artist continues to follow their traditional methods of creating art without any engagement with the host community. However, this is an extreme case and remains largely invisible.

The second model, *core-periphery*, involves intermediaries who connect the immigrant culture with an audience in the host country that values “*authenticity*.” Maintaining this authenticity is

challenging, as these intermediaries such as government bodies, foundations, donors, and NGOs, must have both the desire and the influence to preserve authentic genres and cultural expressions.

The third category represents small groups that are too limited to sustain a viable market or production. In the *pan-ethnic synthesis* model, artists are pressured to blend their culture with others to ensure audience appeal and visibility.

Another model, *selective representation*, involves migrants choosing to share specific cultural elements for profit or strategic gain

Qualified assimilation allows migrants to participate in the broader cultural landscape by adapting their representation of their culture to fit assumptions of the host society or by enriching their artworks with elements of their own heritage. This is more common among second- or third-generation migrants, who are often more involved into the host society.

Outside appropriation occurs when the host society appropriates the code and the culture of migrants where the migrants themselves have little engagement. To appropriate the culture, three conditions must be met. Firstly, the host society needs to commercialise the culture. Secondly, the cultural aspect is known and significant. Finally, the migrant group does not challenge this appropriation.

The final concept is *expressive entrepreneurship*, where migrant artists use art as a means to gain income and recognition, as traditional paths to higher social spheres that are often more challenging to access. (pp.1238-1242).

These models reveal how global institutions, and economic systems shape the aesthetic expressions and professional paths of migrant artists. DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly demonstrate how organisations, governments, and market dynamics impact both their visibility and the challenges they face (p.1242).

As noted by DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly (2015), migrant artists often face challenges linked to institutional and economic constraints, including limited opportunities and uneven access to support structures (p. 1241). However, there are other factors to consider, including cultural differences, which can act as invisible barriers to participation and recognition. As noted by Rezanezhad Pishkhani and De Backer (2024), many artists are confronted with dominant Western artistic expectations, resulting in tensions and struggles related to “*ethnic, cultural, and gender identity*” (p. 2). These factors reveal how structural, cultural, and identity-based challenges intersect in the migrant artistic experience.

This theoretical framework echoes Martiniello’s call to recognise the cultural contributions of migrants beyond economic narratives. While DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly (2015) propose various institutional models shaping migrants’ artistic careers, Rezanezhad Pishkhani and De Backer (2024)

offer a grounded example of how grassroots spaces like the NGO Globe Aroma promote agency, micro-political expression, and creative inclusion.

This NGO based in Brussels, functions as “*an open arts house for artists and other individuals with a background as a refugee or asylum seeker. Its audience consists of professional and aspiring professional artists... simply looking for a convivial, homely atmosphere*” (Rezanezhad Pishkhani & De Backer, 2024, p.4). It provides not only materials and workspaces but also collaborative opportunities, community networks, and access to galleries (p. 8).

The Global Aroma’s contributions are numerous. For example, one of its projects prioritises the creative agency of migrants by focusing on their choices and ideas rather than imposing neo-colonialist directives, ensuring participants have decision-making power. Additionally, the organisation supports the development of “*micro-political actions*” that empower its participants (p. 10).

Similarly, in Germany, following the Dublin III agreement (2015), a significant influx of refugees arrived. The authorities launched a new “*welcome culture*” and integration programmes that used art to promote interaction across communities (Totah & Khoury, 2018, p.3). One theatre project involving migrant participants encouraged what the authors call a *transcultural reality* (p.4). According to Totah and Khoury (2018), this experience creates an opportunity to understand and foster a space where participants can explore a shared potential for solidarity rooted in diversity. It allows for open discussions and reflections on the ways in which diverse backgrounds contribute to collective understanding and mutual support (pp.6-7).

Another illustrative case is the Muziekpublique project, which released an album featuring migrant artists in Belgium. The goal was to provide public media exposure and access to the European music industry (Sechehaye & Martiniello, 2018, p.32). While the project received institutional funding and visibility, the media often emphasised the participants’ political or personal stories over their music (p.34).

However, this discourse on openness remains relatively limited due to European policies that closed borders in March 2016. This event had significant repercussions in Germany, ultimately amplifying the influence of the political right in the 2017 elections (Totah and Khoury, 2018, pp.3-4). According to Frisina and Muresu (2018), in Europe, the increase over the past ten years in policies aimed at managing and controlling migration has reduced legal pathways for migrants. Obtaining citizenship has become more difficult, and some migrants face detention and deportation. These measures serve as political strategies used by governments to manage and limit migration (p.17).

The Muziekpublique project also revealed institutional inflexibility: artists struggled to manage their careers due to administrative barriers (Sechehaye & Martiniello, 2018, p.41). Although the NGO facilitated coordination and managed group conflicts, the artists themselves had to rely on personal

resources to shape their trajectories (p.42). As Sechehaye and Martiniello note, meaningful participation in cultural life remains limited by systemic issues, including racism, sexism, and formal employment as a marker of integration. More nuanced forms of institutional support are needed, ones that recognise the complexity and specificity of migrants' artistic careers (p.43).

After exploring institutional and economic influences, the next section focuses on gender, examining how being a woman or belonging to other marginalised identities can affect the experiences and recognition of migrant artists.

7. Gender

Knapp, Muller, and Quiros (2009) argue that gender is a social construction that defines distinct features and connections socially associated with female and male roles. These gendered characteristics are shaped from the very beginning of a child's socialisation, influencing how individuals develop their identity and how societal expectations are built. Furthermore, this distinction produces specific behaviours and social expectations that are expected of women and men within a given group or structure. Gender is also influenced by broader social contexts, including politics, religion, and migration (pp. 1-2). This dynamic process not only affects personal identity but also influences access to resources and opportunities across cultures. Migration challenges and reshapes these norms as individuals renegotiate gender identities in new social settings.

According to Donato and Ruiz (2024), the European Commission has established that 5.3% of the European Union's population consists of non-EU citizens, with women making up more than 50% of this group. Yet, scholars have often overlooked the representation of women in the broader migration discourse. Gender plays a significant role in shaping migration processes (pp. 3-4). Ignoring this gender dimension is a risk to reproduce incomplete narratives that fail to capture the nuanced realities of migration.

By incorporating gender as a central analytical lens, researchers can uncover the complex interplay of power, identity, and cultural adaptation that shapes the lives of migrant women. For instance, Donato and Ruiz are part of WEMov (Women on the Move), a European research network dedicated to highlighting and analysing the significance and contributions of migrant women in shaping Europe. WEMov aims to amplify the visibility of women's roles through interdisciplinary research encompassing history, sociology, demography, economics, anthropology, political science, and art. By bridging these fields, WEMov connects research with public engagement and policymaking to shift societal perceptions about migrant women and their impact on European society (Women on the Move, n.d.).

Building on this gendered perspective, the concept of *intersectionality* offers a deeper analytical framework to understand how multiple axes of identity interact to shape the experiences of migrant women artist.

8. Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw's article "*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*" (1989) provides the foundational definition of *intersectionality*. Indeed, she argues that antidiscrimination law, feminist theory, and antiracist politics often treat origin and gender as separate analytical categories, failing to capture the experiences of those at their intersection, especially Black women (pp.139-140). For example, in "*DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*", the court dismissed claims from Black women plaintiffs because their experiences did not align precisely with either race-based or gender-based frameworks (p.141). Crenshaw critiques such "*single-axis frameworks*", which erase the realities of those facing cumulative forms of discrimination (p.140).

Intersectionality highlights how coexisting identities shape distinct experiences of exclusion. For migrant women artists, this framework helps unpack how gender, identity, and migration status intersect to produce unique challenges. These may include limited access to resources, marginal representation in art, and misrecognition within both cultural and institutional spaces.

A powerful illustration of this is Zeng's (2024) project "*Her Trajectory*", in which eighteen migrant women participated by mapping and representing their personal migration journeys through visual data and storytelling. This initiative was designed not only to highlight the importance of visual representation but also to connect it to the broader contexts of migration and gender. The participants involved were encouraged to articulate their migration experiences through aesthetic forms, thereby integrating the narratives of their gendered journeys. The project aims to create a space where art is not only a medium of expression but also a tool for reflection and understanding of the complex realities faced by migrant women. By centring the aesthetic experience, *Her "Trajectory"* invites a deeper engagement with the intersections of gender, migration, and identity, offering a nuanced perspective on how these elements are interlinked in the lives of migrant women (pp. 1-4).

III. Problematisation

This thesis addresses the following central research question: *How does the evolution of a migratory career affect an artist's vision of their art and its representation?* It draws on the concept of the *migratory career*, developed by Marco Martiniello and Andrea Rea. This theoretical framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how institutional structures, individual choices, and interactional dynamics shape migrant trajectories over time, both in migration and in artistic practice. By focusing on discourse and personal narrative, this research examines how “*artists in exile*” interpret and negotiate their position within the Belgian art scene.

This study investigates how the *migratory career* is closely linked to the trajectory of an artistic career, shaping opportunities and challenges faced by migrant artists. By analysing the interconnections between these two paths, the research explores how different stages of the *migratory career* influence artistic practice. This offers insights into how migration, as a lived experience, transforms the way artists create, reflect, and represent their work within a new cultural context.

Building upon the initial interviews and a micro-analysis of the exploratory interview, six key themes emerged: *artistic transformation*, *language and communication*, *accessibility to resources*, *tensions in the artistic journey*, *art as a tool*, and *negotiating identity and exclusion*. These interconnected themes provide a multidimensional perspective on how migration reshapes artistic identity and creative choices.

These six themes form the analytical framework of this thesis.

Artistic transformation looks at how migration changes the way artists create and imagine their work. Their style, materials, or themes may shift as they respond to new places, challenges, and audiences.

Language and communication appear as central to both expression and access. Migrant artists must often navigate linguistic barriers that affect not only how they share their work, but also how they interact with institutions, audiences, and fellow artists.

Accessibility to resources highlights the structural dimensions that shape an artist's ability to create, grow, and be visible. It draws attention to how institutional support, funding, and professional networks are inequitably distributed. It frequently relies on language skills, legal status, or networks. For many migrant artists, gaining access to these resources is not only a practical challenge but also a symbolic one: it reflects broader questions of recognition, legitimacy, and inclusion within the art world.

Tensions in the artistic journey highlight the structural and institutional barriers that limit creative autonomy such as legal status, funding gaps, and restricted access to mainstream art spaces.

These limitations underscore the importance of analysing institutional dynamics and the precarity of artistic labour.

Art as a tool draws attention to how artistic practice functions as a means of expression, empowerment, and micro-political engagement. For many artists, art is a way to process and communicate migration experiences, claim space, and create forms of belonging or resistance.

Finally, *negotiating identity and exclusion* show how migrant artists experience marginalisation and how these experiences influence the way they see themselves, both personally and professionally. Their art often becomes a way to challenge or reinterpret the labels placed on them and to express their complex and layered identities.

Gender is addressed as a transversal dimension influencing access, recognition, and artistic positioning.

Taken together, these dimensions offer a grounded and intersectional understanding of how migrant artists in Belgium navigate their dual careers; artistic and migratory. This research aims to illuminate the complex and shifting ways in which migrant artists in Belgium engage with their environments, challenge norms, and redefine their place in the cultural field.

IV. Methodology

1. Research Approach: A Qualitative perspective

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which is particularly suited to exploring complex, lived experiences that cannot be reduced to numbers or statistics. As Lejeune (2019) quotes Strauss and Corbin, "*Qualitative research is any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification*" (p. 21). The purpose of this thesis is to understand how migrant artists experience and reflect on their migration through their artistic practices. This requires deep engagement with their narrative discourses. According to Van Campenhoudt and Quivy (2011), this qualitative method allows for testing hypotheses by analysing the complete discourse of interviewees and constructing a solid foundation for analysis (p. 199).

2. Initial Exploration: Using the Exploratory Interview

The first step in this research was to conduct a semi-directive exploratory interview, a technique described by Van Campenhoudt and Quivy (2011) as a way to identify key aspects of the research object and define the boundaries of the study (pp. 58–59). This preliminary stage served as an essential entry point into the field, helping to clarify the scope of the investigation and refine the central themes of interest.

The exploratory interview was conducted with a Mexican artist living in Brussels, and it offered an initial understanding of how migration, identity, and artistic practice intersect. During the conversation, the artist reflected on his creative journey, the challenges of establishing himself in the Belgian art scene, and the cultural transformations involved in his practice. This first encounter highlighted the importance of institutional dynamics, the emotional impact of migration, and the complexity of negotiating artistic legitimacy in a new context.

Based on the insights, the researcher was able to identify several recurring themes that would later structure the topic guide for *the semi-structured interviews*: the role of art, the influence of migration on artistic identity, the relationship with institutions and access to opportunities, and the impact of gender and intersectionality. The exploratory interview also served to test the interview style and refine the researcher's posture, ensuring attentiveness and responsiveness to the dynamics of the interview.

3. Data Collection: Semi-Structured interviews

To explore the lived experiences of migrant artists in Belgium, the researcher conducted a series of *semi-structured interviews*, a method that allows for both structured exploration and narrative openness. According to Van Campenhoudt and Quivy (2011), the semi-directive interview strikes a balance between structured questioning and free conversation. Rather than rigidly following a set of

questions, the interviewer uses a topic guide¹ to ensure that key themes are addressed while allowing the interviewees to speak freely and develop their ideas in their own way (p. 171).

This approach allows the researcher to capture the complexity and subjectivity of individual trajectories, especially in relation to identity, migration, and artistic expression. As Cusenza (2019) notes, the topic guide provides thematic direction without constraining the flow of the conversation (pp. 65–66). This flexibility is particularly important in the context of this study, where personal histories and cultural perspectives differ significantly across participants.

4. Sampling Strategy: Purposive and Diverse

The research follows a *purposive sampling* strategy, targeting artists who can provide insights into the intersection of migration and artistic production. According to Robinson (2014), *purposive sampling* assumes that certain individuals possess relevant and diverse perspectives on the phenomenon being studied (p. 32). In this case, the objective was to identify first-generation migrant artists currently living and working in Belgium.

The sample includes artists from a variety of national backgrounds and artistic disciplines, ensuring a broad representation of creative practices and migratory experiences. No restrictions were placed on specific art forms or countries of origin, allowing the study to reflect the diversity of migrant artists' experiences in Belgium. This openness allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how different cultural and artistic traditions interact with the local context. It also aimed to capture how the migration experience affects various artistic mediums differently, whether visual arts, performance, music, or literature. This approach aligns with the research's exploratory nature and its aim to highlight multiple artistic voices rather than isolating a particular aesthetic or national identity.

5. Subjects of the Field: First-Generation Migrant Artists

The participants in this research are first-generation migrant artists currently living and working in Belgium. The decision to focus on this group is rooted in the core objective of the study: to explore how migration influences artistic practice, identity, and career trajectories. First-generation migrants are often in a unique position to reflect on both the culture of origin and of the host countries, making their perspectives especially valuable for understanding processes of transformation, adaptation, and negotiation within the artistic field.

Efforts were made to ensure diversity across multiple dimensions, including nationality, gender, and artistic discipline. The sample includes painters, performers, slam poets, musicians, an illustrator, a rapper, and multidisciplinary artists, offering a wide range of creative expressions shaped by migratory experiences. This diversity contributes to a richer comparative analysis and allows for the identification of both individual trajectories and shared patterns across different backgrounds.

¹ Appendix 1

6. Analysis method

a. Grounded Theory Approach:

The analytical framework used in this research is based on Lejeune's "*Méthode par théorisation ancrée*", more commonly referred to in English as the *Grounded Theory Method* (GTM). The objective of GTM is to explore and analyse empirical materials in a way that faithfully reflects the experiences of the participants. This method begins with empirical material, seeking answers and developing theories that are rooted in the data itself (pp.21-22). This aspect relates to the core purpose of GTM: grounding theory in data.

One of the key features of this method is its empirical nature, with the theory being developed progressively from the data itself. All interview materials (transcriptions, field notes, audio recordings) serve as the foundation for generating concepts and identifying relationships. This iterative process ensures that the analysis remains rooted in the lived realities of the participants (p. 32). As explained by Lejeune (2019), "*The maintenance of reports is inseparable from the scientific rigor of the qualitative approach.*" (p.36). In this model, Lejeune discusses "*theoretical sampling*", which aims to guide the collection of additional data based on emerging concepts, ensuring that the full range of a phenomenon's properties is explored and articulated (pp. 30–31).

b. Open Coding and Micro-Analysis

The first analytical step was *open coding*, which focuses on identifying the key elements of the research object. Its goal is to extract as many conceptual components as possible from the material in order to begin constructing a theoretical framework (p. 22). Open coding began with a phase of *micro-analysis*, conducted through a *line-by-line* reading of the transcripts. Each line of the interview was annotated and interpreted, with attention paid to preserving the exact meaning of the interviewee's words and intentions (pp. 43–48).

This step was initiated with the *exploratory interview*, which served as a first encounter with the material. It allowed for immersion into the field, helped uncover preliminary thematic pathways, and enabled the development of an interpretive posture coherent with the grounded nature of the method.

c. Labelling Process and Conceptualisation

Following the *micro-analysis*, the second activity is the *labelling process*, applied to what Lejeune called the *ground report*. These reports preserve traces of empirical elements found in the field, such as recordings, photos, observational notes, and transcriptions of interviews (p. 36). Labels were applied to segments of text to capture the meaning of participants' expressions. These were *researcher-generated labels*², created to interpret what the participant is experiencing or expressing. The purpose of labelling is not to simply categorise, but to generate conceptual and interpretative responses to the

² Appendix 2

actors' narratives, qualifying their lived experiences and reflecting variation across different situations (pp.65-66).

A common pitfall is confusing *indexation* with *labelling*. *Labelling* requires going beyond descriptive tagging to produce analytical insights that reflect how an experience may shift depending on context. Moreover, when participants speak about others, they often reveal aspects of their own position, values, or identity, an element that must be carefully considered during interpretation. Finally, verbs are preferred over nouns in order to express dynamic processes rather than static states. This approach allows for the identification of movement, transformation, and relational dynamics within the participants' narratives (pp. 67–76).

Labels were further refined through the identification of *properties* and *dimensions*. This attribution serves as the link between the material and the theory, allowing for the development of conceptual labels that can be used within the theoretical framework. The researcher aims to understand the characteristics of the studied phenomenon. Moreover, labels were either *properties* that express themselves in absolute terms, such as “*everything*” or “*nothing*.” Or *dimensions* existing along a “*continuum*.” capturing variations in intensity, frequency, or scope. These *properties* and *dimensions* were then grouped into broader conceptual categories that reflect the participants' lived experiences and allow for comparative interpretation (pp. 77–83).

d. Axial and Selective Coding

The second phase of analysis was *axial coding*, which involves exploring how the identified labels relate to one another. By testing and articulating connections between categories, *axial coding* helps to clarify how certain experiences are influenced by different contexts, circumstances, or structural conditions (p. 23) This process continued throughout the research, with the researcher continually refining and reviewing the strength and relevance of each connection as new material was introduced (p. 101).

During this phase, some of the previously identified connections were re-evaluated and removed if they no longer contributed meaningfully to the analysis³. This process of refinement ensured that only the most relevant and insightful elements were retained to help address the research question (p. 23). *Selective coding* then brought together the different links developed during axial coding and organised them into a clear and coherent structure. The aim was to identify the core categories of the study and connect them with the previously defined *properties* and *dimensions*. This allowed for a more refined understanding of how the different components of the data interact, and how they collectively contribute to the central narrative and theoretical interpretation of the research. In addition, a schematisation of all the *labels* and *categories* was carried out to provide an overview of the relationships and hierarchy

³ Appendix 3 and Appendix 4

between the main concepts identified during the analysis. (p. 118). The visual diagram can be found on page 35.

e. Scenario Reports and Validation

To support the analytical process and maintain transparency, several types of *scenario reports* were produced, as proposed by Lejeune:

- *Descriptive scenario reports on the actors' experiences*: These narrative syntheses present each participant's story in a clear and accessible way. They serve to validate the interpretation with the participants themselves, who are invited to suggest changes, corrections, or removals (p. 122).
- *Descriptive scenario reports on the research process*⁴: This report provides a global overview of the analytical path taken by the researcher. It revisits the initial questions, decisions made during coding, and how theoretical sampling evolved throughout the study (p. 123).

f. Translation of Interviews⁵

As this thesis is written entirely in English, a decision was made to translate all interviews conducted in French into English to maintain consistency and ensure readability. Switching between languages could potentially confuse the reader and disrupt the flow of the analysis. By translating the material, the aim was to make participants' contribution accessible while seeking to preserve the original meaning and tone of their statements, in order to respect their voices as faithfully as possible.

g. Gender as transversal analytical

Although gender did not emerge as a standalone thematic category in the final analysis, it was considered throughout the research process as a transversal dimension potentially influencing the experiences of migrant artists. During the coding and interpretation phases, special attention was given to possible gendered variations in the discourse, particularly in relation to access to resources, visibility, and artistic autonomy. However, the interviews did not reveal sufficient material to justify an independent gender theme. Instead, gender was treated as an underlying factor intersecting with the main categories, in line with the intersectional framework outlined by Crenshaw (1989, pp.139-140). This approach acknowledges the possible influence of gender dynamics without artificially isolating them from the broader social and migratory contexts addressed in this study.

⁴ Appendix 5

⁵ Appendix 6

7. Ethics

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Liège (FASS, n.d.). All necessary precautions were taken to ensure the confidentiality, dignity, and autonomy of the participants throughout the research process.

Before each interview, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without justification. A formal consent⁶ form was provided and signed by each participant. This document detailed the types of data collected, their use strictly for academic purposes, and the measures taken to protect participants' identities.

To ensure the confidentiality of personal data, all interviews were pseudonymised during the transcription and analysis stages. In the final thesis, all identifying information, including names and specific personal details, was fully anonymised to prevent any direct or indirect identification of participants. The choice of pseudonyms was not made at random, but rather with care to preserve a perception of the participant's origin or cultural background, while safeguarding their identity. This approach was designed to preserve the coherence and contextual integrity of the interview narratives, ensuring that the discourse remains close to the participant's lived experience while respecting their privacy.

As some participants shared experiences related to migratory precarity, institutional exclusion, and racial or gender discrimination, particular care was taken to approach sensitive topics with empathy and respect. The interviews were conducted in a tone that prioritised listening, openness, and the emotional well-being of the participants.

This research was not subject to formal review by an ethics committee but adheres strictly to the principles of research ethics outlined by the University of Liège and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR – EU 2016/679).

As mentioned before, each interviewee received a *descriptive scenario report* summarising the key points of their interview. This report was shared to give participants the opportunity to review how their story was represented, and they were explicitly invited to comment, request modifications, or ask for the removal of any part they felt uncomfortable with. This step was taken to ensure transparency, co-validation of the data, and ethical care in the representation of their words and experiences.

8. Researcher Positionality

This research is driven by both academic curiosity and personal history. I grew up in Seraing, in a family of Sicilian origin, holding both Belgian and Italian nationalities. From an early age, I was drawn to cultural differences, initially through my own heritage, and later through a broader fascination with

⁶ Appendix 7

other people's stories, places, and identities. My family's migratory background constructed a natural interest in understanding the meanings and consequences of displacement, belonging, and adaptation.

Although I am not an artist myself, I have always felt a strong emotional sensitivity to artistic expression. Cinema, music, video games, and painting have played an important role in how I engage with the world. I have long admired the figure of the artist, not only for their creativity but for the courage it takes to pursue a profession that often requires vulnerability, uncertainty, and perseverance. Choosing to study the experiences of migrant artists allowed me to connect this admiration with my personal interest in migration and identity.

Throughout the fieldwork, I felt deeply engaged with the stories that were shared with me. Each interview was an opportunity not only to explore the research question, but also a moment to be surprised, moved, and challenged by the complexity of the paths that migrant artists navigate. These encounters were never neutral. My personal background made me especially sensitive to issues of cultural negotiation, and at times I felt a strong sense of connection and recognition, even when our experiences differed.

However, the fieldwork was not without its difficulties. I often experienced doubt about my own legitimacy. Wondering whether I was "enough" to meet and interview artists, or whether I could build meaningful connections. Many artists did not respond to my messages, and I had to learn to face rejection and uncertainty, while continuing to search for participants through social media, events, associations, and personal contacts. These challenging moments became an important part of my growth as a researcher.

Rather than pretending to be objective, I chose to embrace reflexivity throughout the process. The "*Grounded Theory approach*" allowed space for the empirical data to challenge my assumptions.

9. The fieldwork

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Belgium, exclusively in the cities of Brussels and Liège, where a significant number of migrant artists are active. A *purposive sampling approach* was used to identify first-generation migrant artists whose experiences and artistic practices could provide insight into the intersections between migration, identity, and creativity.

a. Contacts

To establish contact with potential interviewees, a combination of strategies was employed. First, artists were contacted via social media platforms, where many of them actively promote their work. This direct form of contact allowed for an informal initial exchange and helped build trust. In addition, exhibitions, performances, and cultural events were attended to meet artists in person, introduce the research, and explain the project's objectives.

In parallel, associations and cultural organisations that support artists with a migratory background were contacted. These organisations often provide resources, visibility, and networks to emerging and established artists. Their involvement proved valuable in facilitating access to participants who might otherwise have been difficult to access. Finally, a few interviewees were met through personal connections or informal meetings.

These combined methods allowed me to access a diverse range of profiles, both in terms of artistic discipline and migratory background, while ensuring that participation remained voluntary, informed, and respectful of the artists' availability and comfort.

b. Interviews

In total, the fieldwork resulted in eleven *semi-structured interviews*: nine with first-generation migrant artists and one with a cultural worker supporting migrant artists within a professional framework. The decision to include this social actor was made to provide an institutional perspective on the challenges and support systems encountered by migrant artists, offering a broader understanding of the field beyond individual trajectories. Additionally, a second follow-up interview was conducted with one of the participating artists after the development of his exhibition. This additional interview allowed for a more detailed exploration of the artistic practice in action.

Interviews were conducted in French or English, according to the participant's preference, to ensure their ease of expression. One interview required the presence of a Turkish English translator due to the participant's limited fluency in the available languages. In this case, the spoken interview had to be shortened, and the participant was invited to provide more detailed written responses afterward. This adaptation was made to preserve the richness of the material while respecting the participant's comfort and communicative needs.

Each interview was guided by a flexible interview guide (Appendix 1) and adapted to the specific context. The average length of interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one and half hours, depending on the participant's availability and pace. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and fully transcribed for analysis.

c. Presentation of Interviewees

The sample consist of nine first-generation migrant artists and one cultural worker active in supporting migrant creators. The profiles were selected to represent a wide range of artistic disciplines, cultural backgrounds, and migration trajectories.

- 1) Javier is a musician originally from Mexico who has lived in Belgium for over 35 years. Specialised in traditional Latin American music, his work integrates musical heritage with

global influences. His long career highlights the challenges of preserving traditional art forms in a different cultural context.

- 2) Nadiya is a visual artist and painter from Ukraine, who also plays piano and sings. After living in Italy, she settled in Belgium in 2014. Her poetic and subtle approach reflects on resilience, displacement, and the search for beauty in times of crisis.
- 3) Mei, an illustrator from Taiwan, has lived in Belgium for about a year and a half. Her amusing and colourful work is shaped by cultural contrasts between East Asia and Europe, and she uses art as a tool for healing and positivity.
- 4) Verso, originally from Ecuador and raised in Spain, is a rapper, graffiti artist, poet, and tattoo artist. Now based in Liège, his powerful and socially engaged work speaks about discrimination, survival, masculinity, and transformation.
- 5) Yannick, a painter with academic training, comes from Rwanda and arrived in Belgium in 2013. His work explores dual identity, integration, and social justice, informed by personal experience and institutional exclusion.
- 6) Amina is a slam poet and theatre performer from Burundi. Currently studying at a conservatory in Brussels, her art reflects her experience as a woman, a migrant, and an artist navigating identity and visibility across cultural spaces.
- 7) Serkan, a visual artist from Turkey, focuses on painting, engraving, and sculpture. His art is heavily influenced by mystical philosophy and explores migration as both a personal and existential transformation.
- 8) Victor, a Spanish painter and exhibition curator living in Liège, combines art and everyday life in a practice that emphasises feeling over explicit meaning. He also manages an independent gallery space and actively collaborates with other artists.
- 9) Chiara, the only non-artist participant, is a cultural worker from Italy engaged in supporting migrant artists in Belgium. Her perspective offers insights into the structural barriers and forms of solidarity shaping the field.
- 10) Mathis, a French musician, theatre performer and slam poet living in Brussels, moved to Belgium as an adult. His work mixes personal reflection with social engagement. Rooted in lived experience, his artistic practice explores identity, community, and the transformative power of words, often shaped by collaborations and collective energy.

10. Tools and Software

To support the organisation, coding, and analysis of the interview material, the qualitative analysis software QDA Miner Lite was employed. This free tool was chosen for its accessibility and compatibility with the *Grounded Theory Method*, allowing for flexible annotation, coding, and categorisation of qualitative data.

The software was used to import and code all interview transcripts. Only the exploratory interview with Javier was analysed *line by line*, following a micro-analytical approach. For all interviews, only “*researcher-generated labels*” were used, developed inductively based on the participants' experiences. These labels were progressively refined, grouped into broader themes, and compared across interviews within the software environment.⁷ The use of digital tools allowed for greater organisation and consistency, while ensuring that the qualitative and interpretative nature of the research was preserved.

In addition to QDA Miner Lite, I also used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as a writing assistant during the redaction phases. This tool supported the reformulation of complex ideas, the clarification of paragraph structure, and the refinement of language. Its use was strictly limited to enhancing the clarity and consistency of written expression. At no point did ChatGPT replace the interpretative process or the analytical work fundamental to qualitative research. The tool was employed in a critical and reflective manner, in line with current academic discussions around the responsible integration of AI in research writing.

Basic language tools such as Grammarly and DeepL were occasionally used to improve clarity, coherence, and linguistic consistency during the writing process. These tools assisted in the formulation and refinement of the text but were not involved in the interpretative or analytical aspects of the research.

11. Limits of methodology

The research was conducted exclusively in French and English, which may have excluded participants who are more comfortable expressing themselves in other languages. A total of eleven interviews were conducted with ten participants, meaning that apart from one individual, only one interview was carried out per person. This limited the opportunity to revisit or further develop emerging themes over time.

In one case, the presence of a translator was required, which affected the flow and depth of the conversation. To accommodate linguistic constraints, the participant was given the option to respond in

⁷ QDA Miner Lite, Provalis Research. Available at: <https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/>

writing, either partially or fully. While this ensured that the participant could express himself clearly, it may have limited the spontaneity and nuance typically generated in verbal exchanges.

Another limitation lies in the selection process. While the *purposive sampling approach* allowed for a rich diversity of backgrounds and artistic practices, it also introduced a degree of self-selection bias. The artists who agreed to participate were often somewhat integrated into local artistic networks, or those with time and willingness to reflect on their trajectory. As such, the research may underrepresent more isolated or marginalised voices.

The research included only one participant from an institutional background, a cultural worker supporting migrant artists. No additional institutional actors were interviewed during the fieldwork, which limits the analysis of how institutions more broadly shape the experiences and trajectories of migrant artists. This represents a potential area for further investigation.

In grounded theory, *in vivo labels* refer to codes or labels derived directly from participants' own words, preserving their language and framing in the early stages of analysis. This approach is valued for maintaining closeness to the actors' perspectives and for grounding the conceptualisation process in the empirical material (Lejeune, 2019, pp. 65–66). However, it was not applied in this study. Instead, all labels were developed by the researcher, which means the interpretative process necessarily involved a level of abstraction and reformulation. This may have introduced some distance from the participants' original vocabulary and framing.

V. Analysis

This analysis section explores the artistic trajectories of migrant artists through the lens of the *migratory career*, a conceptual tool that allows us to understand how migration restructures not only biographical paths but also artistic practices, identities, and social positions. Drawing from the qualitative material collected through *semi-structured interviews* with first-generation migrant artists in Belgium, the analysis is guided by an inductive approach rooted in *Grounded Theory Method*. Rather than testing pre-established hypotheses, the objective here is to identify patterns and processes that emerge directly from the lived experiences of the interviewees.

The analytical framework builds on the idea that *career*, whether professional, artistic, or migratory, is not linear. Instead, they are shaped by interactions with institutions, cultural norms, structural constraints, and individual strategies. In line with Martiniello & Rea's (2014) model of the *migratory career*, this section focuses on how artists navigate and negotiate their positions within and across different social fields. These trajectories are interpreted not only as movements in space or time but also as transformations in meaning, identity, and practice.

The analysis is divided into nine sections: (1) *schematisation*, (2) *Artistic Transformations*, (3) *Language and Communication*, (4) *Accessibility to Resources*, (5) *Tensions in the Artistic Journey*, (6) *Art as a Tool*, (7) *Negotiating Identity and Exclusion*, (8) *Gender* and (9) *The case study of Yannick*. This order follows a logical progression based on the dynamics observed in the interviews. It begins with a schematisation of the 6 thematic themes, then explores how migration affects artistic identity, followed by issues of communication and structural access. The analysis then turns to artistic responses and identity negotiations, while gender is addressed as a transversal lens. The structure concludes with an illustrative case study. This organisation supports a clear and coherent understanding of how artistic careers evolve in the context of migration.

Each section examines the intersection of personal experience and social structure, with attention to how the artists themselves describe and reflect on their situations. Excerpts from the interviews are presented in the artists' own words, translated from French to English.

This approach allows for an interpretation of artistic careers not merely as professional progressions but as socially embedded, affectively charged, and politically situated paths shaped by the dynamics of migration.

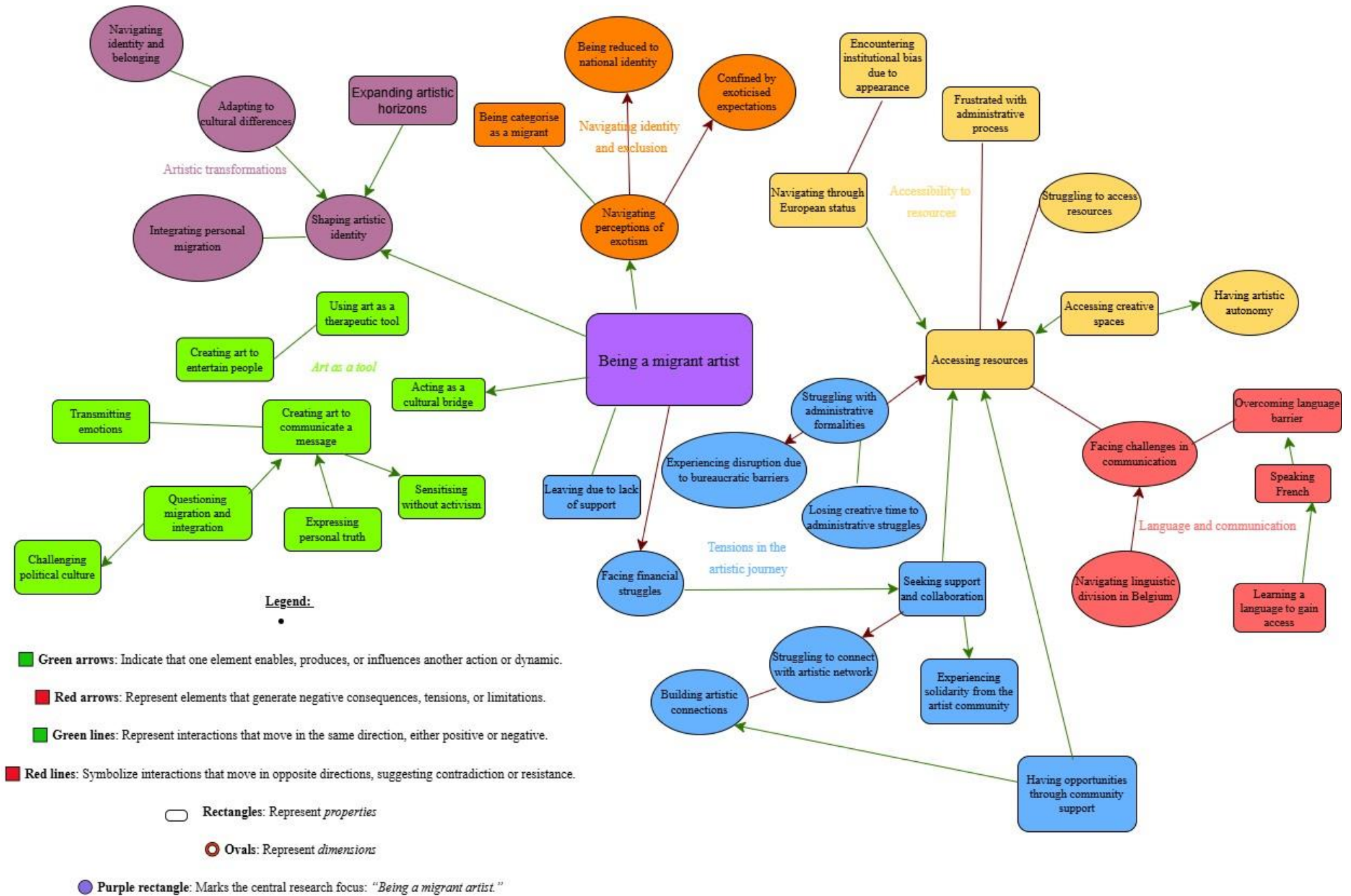
1. Schematisation

The following visual schema offers a representation of the thematic structure developed during the analytical process. It reflects the six main themes that emerged from the inductive analysis of interview data. Each theme is interconnected and reflects a specific facet of the participants' artistic and migratory experiences. This schema aims to guide the reader through the structure of the analysis and the conceptual logic supporting the findings.

At the centre of the schema is the notion of *being a migrant artist*, which constitute the core focus of the research. Six different colours represent the six main themes.

- The green arrows represent elements that enable or influence another properties or dimensions.
- The red arrows represent elements generate consequences, tensions or limitations.
- The green lines represent interactions moving in the same direction, either positive or negative.
- The red lines represent interactions moving in opposite directions, illustrating contradictions and resistance.

As explained by Lejeune (2019, pp.77-83), rectangles represent *properties*, expressed in absolute terms such as “yes” or “no”, while ovals represent *dimensions*, which capture variations in frequency or intensity that are along a “*continuum*”.



2. Artistic Transformation

Migration often leads to profound shifts in how artists perceive and practice their work. The act of moving across borders brings new influences, constraints, and opportunities that directly affect the construction of artistic identity. This section explores how the experience of migration transforms artistic trajectories, not only in terms of style or subject matter but also in how artists define themselves and position their work in new cultural contexts.

a. Being a Migrant Artist ↔ Shaping Artistic Identity

Migration is not a peripheral aspect of artistic practice; for many artists, it is central to how identity is formed and expressed. As artists move across borders, they carry with them not only their materials and skills, but also a set of memories, traumas, and aspirations that continuously shape their creative identity. Yannick describes how his personal experiences as a migrant directly inform the content and meaning of his work:

*"Because I speak about myself, about who I am, and also about the duality of being who I am. So it influences quite a lot the way I work, the way I think, and also the things I put much more into my work."*⁸

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, and drawer, March 10, 2025)

This shows how migration affects not only what artists talk about in their work, but also how they think and create. Moving between cultures leads them to reflect on who they are, and this process shapes both their ideas and their way of making art.

b. Shaping Artistic Identity ↔ Adapting to Cultural Differences

When artists migrate, they are likely to come across artistic traditions that differ from what they were originally accustomed to. These interactions might influence their artistic identity, pushing them to integrate elements from new cultures. For Verso, a rap artist, the encounter with Belgium's music scene triggered both fascination and creative experimentation:

"Being able to mix cultures, sounds, from the places where I've been, that's really the magic of Art, of Art in my case, music (...) so I think that when it comes to cultures, you also have to adapt. So, yeah, I think it's something interesting, how it changes from country to country. I really find it super, super interesting."

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)⁹

This shows how cultural differences can inspire, rather than block creativity. Verso takes what is new to him such as the mix of techno and rap, and blends it with his own style. His artistic identity

⁸ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.1

⁹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.2

becomes something fluid and open, shaped by different influences as he moves through new environments.

c. Shaping Artistic Identity ↔ Expanding Artistic Horizons

Migration often pushes artists to rethink and expand their creative identity. Moving across borders means encountering new traditions, ideas, and communities, all of which create space for transformation. For Mei, travel has become a key source of artistic inspiration. Similarly, Serkan sees migration as a space of exchange, allowing him to absorb new materials, techniques, and ways of thinking. Verso notes that his artistic style no longer reflects a single national identity. Amina reflects a desire not only to discover others, but to explore herself through artistic encounters across cultural lines:

"The desire to meet others, to reach out to others, the desire to discover myself as well, the desire to bring out words I don't yet know because I will have met people I don't yet know, from other cultures."

(**Amina**, slam poet and theatre performer, March 8, 2025)¹⁰

What emerges more broadly across the interviews is a shared sense that migration encourages artists to reinvent themselves. Migration, in this sense, is not simply a change of location. It is a continuous opening of perspective, where artistic practice becomes a site of movement, curiosity, and transformation.

d. Adapting to Cultural Differences ↔ Navigating Identity and Belonging

For many migrant artists, the process of adapting to a new society also involves rethinking who they are both personally and artistically. Yannick, for instance, shares how his migration career forced him to reflect deeply on his identity:

"I was questioning myself about my identity because, well, I arrived when I was 18, and I had left my country when I was 15. And integration well, maturity came along the way and also here, and I always met people who would say things like, 'Oh, you're integrated, you speak French,' things like that. But also, regarding the procedures I had to go through to get my papers, it was 'Integrate yourself, this is not enough, this is not enough.' So, I created a work called "Métissage", and really, I'm trying to embrace this identity that is both Rwandan and Belgian."

(**Yannick**, painter, sculptor, engraver and drawer, April 2, 2025)¹¹

Here, adaptation is not just about learning a language or navigating institutions. It is about integrating multiple cultural belongings into a coherent self. His artistic practice becomes the space

¹⁰ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.3

¹¹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.4

where this hybrid identity is negotiated and visualised. Migration, therefore, prompts not only a shift in environment but also a redefinition of the self that is inseparable from artistic practice.

e. Conclusion

Across the interviews, migration emerges as a powerful force shaping artistic identity. It is not only a contextual background but a lived experience that deeply influences how artists think, create, and define themselves. Through contact with new cultures, ideas, and practices, migrant artists develop flexible and evolving identities that reflect both where they come from and where they are now. Their work becomes a space where personal memory meets external change, it becomes a space to explore duality, belonging, and transformation. Whether through style, subject, or method, the process of adapting to new environments pushes artists to constantly renegotiate who they are. Artistic identity, then, is not fixed; rather it is always in motion shaped by movement, challenged by difference, and enriched by the crossing of borders. These transformations are closely tied to how artists communicate in their new environment especially through language.

3. Language and communication

Language is an essential aspect of the migratory experience, and for artists, it plays a crucial role in both everyday life and professional participation. The interviews reveal that beyond being a means of expression, language shapes relationships, resources, and access to spaces. In facing barriers, managing Belgium's linguistic divisions, or turning language into a strategic resource, communication appears as both a challenge and a tool. This section explores the different ways language influences migrant artists' trajectories, shaping their capacity to participate, express, and create in new environments.

a. Overcoming language barrier ↔ Facing challenges in communication

Language can be one of the first and most immediate obstacles faced by migrant artists upon arrival. For many, the inability to speak the local language initially creates a strong sense of dependence, isolation, and disempowerment. Overcoming the language barrier is not only about basic communication, but also a key step toward personal autonomy and artistic expression. Verso recounts the discomfort of having to rely on others to navigate daily life, and the effort it took to become autonomous:

“The difficulty, I can say, was the language at first because I didn't really speak French. Well, I didn't speak at all. I didn't know how to get by, I didn't even know how to go to the store, I couldn't do anything. So, I always had to be accompanied by someone who would speak for me and everything. That didn't make me feel very comfortable, it was a bit complicated at that time. But then I made the effort to learn the language, to learn how to speak and get by, and at one point, I had to manage on my own and that's what I've done until now.”

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)¹²

Amina describes how small obstacles arise from not sharing the same cultural references or social codes as others in the cultural sphere. Differences in expression may lead to misinterpretation, not necessarily out of bad faith, but simply because the viewer does not have the tools to fully grasp what is being shared.

Learning the language was a turning point because it allowed to act independently and feel more comfortable in the environment. In this context, overcoming the language barrier is not only a personal achievement, but a necessary step toward participating in society. It enables access to rights, spaces, and opportunities, and makes it possible to engage both socially and artistically without depending on others.

b. Navigating linguistic division in Belgium ↔ Facing challenges in communication

The linguistic complexity of Belgium creates an additional barrier for migrant artists. Unlike countries with a single dominant language, Belgium's division between Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia forces newcomers to navigate not only unfamiliar tongues, but also the cultural and institutional differences tied to each region. Chiara highlights how this can become a practical dilemma for artists:

“I think there's something particular about Belgium. It's very difficult, for example, the fact that Belgium is split into two parts: Flanders and Wallonia. That already creates problems for artists because they have to decide which language to choose.”

(Chiara, project coordinator in community support, January 16, 2025)¹³

The choice of language is not neutral, it influences access to funding, networks, and visibility. Serkan also notes how not understanding Dutch or French can make it difficult to engage fully with artistic institutions and funding systems. For migrant artists, this fragmentation creates uncertainty and limits their capacity to fully participate in the local art world. Communication is not just about language fluency. It's about navigating a divided system where each linguistic community has its own rules, structures, and opportunities.

c. Speaking French ↔ Learning a language to gain access

Language becomes a practical tool that facilitates access to employment and artistic opportunities. Without it, many doors remain closed: from job markets to funding systems and cultural institutions. Mei, for instance, frames language learning primarily to secure future employment:

¹² See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.5

¹³ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.6

“So, the very, very realistic purposes. I would love to find a job in the future. And I feel like, if I’m like, looking for a job. And yet, here I really need to speak French (...) So job is the first priority for me learning, and the rest is also interested in language. So why not?”

(Mei, *illustrator*, January 21, 2025).

This pragmatic approach reflects how language acquisition is deeply tied to questions of integration and survival. Learning French is not just about daily communication; it's also about fulfilling the structural demands of the host society. Whether to access basic services, apply for grants, or build visibility within the local scene, mastering the language often becomes a requirement for participating fully in public and professional life.

d. Speaking French ↔ Overcoming language barrier

For migrant artists in Wallonia and Brussels, mastering French becomes a key step toward gaining autonomy. It not only reduces everyday communication challenges but also allows them to engage more independently with institutions, audiences, and cultural spaces. Speaking the language means understanding the codes, expectations, and systems that shape social and artistic life. For Amina, this linguistic skill has been important:

“Let’s say it works out unlike for other people; I think the fact that I speak French helps me. For example, it’s a bit silly, but it really helps a lot. Because I see my African brothers and sisters, or even other foreigners here, how hard it is for them to be heard — it’s really tough. I think speaking French gave me the freedom to express myself and also to understand the system a bit, to grasp certain codes too.”

(Amina, *slam poet, theatre performer*, March 8, 2025)¹⁴

Here, language is more than a tool, it becomes a form of empowerment. Being able to express oneself freely, without relying on intermediaries, allows artists to navigate their environment with confidence. Speaking French thus marks a shift from dependence to participation, enabling artists to claim their place within the cultural and institutional landscape of their host society.

e. Conclusion

Language plays a fundamental role in the experience of migrant artists. From overcoming the initial barrier of not speaking the local language to navigating Belgium’s complex linguistic landscape, the ability to communicate shapes both daily life and artistic participation. Speaking French becomes a tool not just for survival, but for autonomy, enabling access to jobs, funding, networks, and creative spaces. It is also deeply tied to identity and empowerment, as artists learn to express themselves freely and engage with the systems around them. Whether seen as a strategic necessity or a personal

¹⁴ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.7

achievement, language is a recurring theme in the interviews both a challenge to overcome and a key that opens new paths for inclusion, visibility, and creative freedom. Nevertheless, speaking the language is only one part of integration; while accessing resources is another major challenge.

4. Accessibility to resources

For migrant artists, access to resources is rarely just a matter of talent or ambition. It is shaped by a complex interplay of legal status, institutional structures, and social networks. From securing funding and exhibition spaces to navigating administrative systems, these artists often face troubles that go beyond the artistic domain. This section explores how access influences the development of their *careers*. Through a variety of experiences, it becomes clear that while legal frameworks and community support can provide pathways forward, administrative barriers and institutional bias frequently create profound limitations. The analysis that follows reveal how resource accessibility not only affects artistic production but also defines the very conditions under which art can exist.

a. Accessing resources ↔ Struggling to access resources

The role of institutions in shaping an artist's career is crucial, especially when considering accessibility to resources and an artist's status. Limited access to resources, such as funding, exhibitions, or professional development opportunities, often results from institutional barriers. For migrant artists, these barriers can be even more pronounced due to the lack of institutional support adapted to their unique needs and circumstances. Institutions play a key role in either facilitating or restricting access to essential resources that help establish an artist's status within the broader art world. When institutions overlook or fail to recognise the contributions of migrant artists, it becomes harder for them to gain visibility, build professional networks, and secure the resources necessary to advance their careers.

Chiara explains that for artists in asylum or without legal status, small but essential obstacles can severely limit their ability to function as artists. Even basic tasks, like receiving payment, accessing internet, or purchasing supplies, can become difficult or impossible due to the lack of information or functioning bank accounts. These day-to-day challenges, she notes, can make the pursuit of an artistic career feel difficult to access.

Yannick also recalls the difficulty of those early years:

“There was that difficulty when I arrived, I applied for asylum and then I was undocumented for ten years, and during those years, it was very difficult because you don't have access to anything except emergency medical assistance. So even just to register for school, sometimes they ask for an identity card, etc., and so it was very, very difficult.”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, drawer, March 10, 2025)¹⁵

¹⁵ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.8

These testimonies show how access to resources is often shaped not only by artistic merit, but by legal and institutional structures that can exclude or marginalise. For migrant artists, the lack of basic administrative recognition can obstruct even the most fundamental steps of artistic development. Without inclusive systems of support, their ability to create, share, and sustain their work remains fragile and uncertain.

b. Accessing resources ↔ Struggling with administrative formalities

Accessibility to resources is deeply intertwined with the struggles faced in navigating administrative formalities, especially for migrant artists. Complex bureaucratic procedures, such as visa applications, work permits, or funding requirements, can create significant barriers to securing the resources needed to support their artistic projects. These administrative challenges can delay or even prevent access to essential tools, spaces, and opportunities, further constraining their ability to establish themselves and gain recognition. As artists face these challenges, their creative practice often becomes a negotiation between their artistic goals and the constraints imposed by administrative systems.

“One of the main challenges I have faced is the bureaucratic complexity of funding applications. Many grants and institutional support programs require extensive documentation, local references, and a history of artistic activity within Belgium, which can be difficult for artists who have recently arrived (...) I have faced barriers related to bureaucracy, cultural perception, and artistic recognition. The process of obtaining legal residency, securing funding, and integrating into established art circles often requires an understanding of administrative systems, application procedures, and language barriers”

(**Serkan**, painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art, March 2, 2025)

These reflections show how administrative formalities can become gatekeeping mechanisms that shape the extent to which migrant artists can access the art world. Beyond paperwork, these obstacles affect visibility, mobility, and the capacity to sustain a creative practice. For many, the challenge lies not in the art itself, but in the structures that determine who is allowed to participate fully.

c. Accessing resources ↔ Frustrated with administrative processes

Frustration with the pace of administrative processes can significantly impact an artist's access to resources and their ability to establish a recognised status. For migrant artists, the delays and inefficiencies in bureaucratic systems, whether related to visa applications, funding approvals, or exhibition permits, can hinder their ability to create, exhibit, or sell their work. The slow pace of these processes often results in missed opportunities, creating a sense of instability and frustration. This administrative blockage can prevent artists from fully engaging with the artistic community or from utilising resources that are essential for their growth, ultimately affecting their professional trajectory and recognition within the art world.

“In Belgium, I will say the process compared to Taiwan, is very slow here. Sorry to say that, because it's like, for like, a simple document, it will take so long to finish. Sometimes when you call them, sorry, I'm on holiday. I'm not going back in like this day, so maybe call me after two weeks, or something like that. So, it's kind of frustrating”

(**Mei**, *illustrator*, January 21, 2025)

This experience shows how delays in public systems, even when understandable, can affect an artist's ability to plan, access opportunities, and maintain creative momentum. When processes move slowly, it can lead to missed chances and uncertainty about the future.

d. Accessing resources ↔ Navigating through European status

Navigating administrative challenges through European status can provide migrant artists with a unique opportunity to access resources and establish their artist status more effectively. With European status, artists may benefit from greater mobility, simplified visa procedures, and access to funding or residency programs that are otherwise difficult to obtain. However, even with this status, the complexity of European bureaucratic systems can still present challenges, often requiring artists to learn how to navigate different legal and institutional landscapes. Despite these constraints, having European status can offer a level of recognition and legitimacy that facilitates greater access to artistic networks, opportunities, and resources, enabling migrant artists to solidify their presence within the European art scene.

“I have dual nationality because at one point, I told myself it made sense because this is where I live, this is where I work, etc.”

(**Victor**, *painter, illustrator, and exhibition curator*, April 11, 2025)¹⁶

Mathis, who works across France and Belgium, explained that holding a European nationality allowed him to maintain a more stable artistic career. By securing the French artist status and contributing to the French system through his employer, he could better access resources and structure his artistic activities

This illustrates how having a European legal framework can support continuity and access, even if navigating it still requires careful strategy and effort.

e. Encountering institutional bias due to appearance ↔ Navigating through European status

Physical appearance can create institutional bias, creating barriers to accessing support and resources. However, holding a European status may offer a degree of protection or facilitate certain processes, softening but not fully removing these challenges. The contrast between how one is perceived

¹⁶ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.9

and the privileges attached to legal status highlights the complex and uneven ways institutional systems respond to migrant identities.

“Me, I’m brown, so there’s the colour. I don’t let myself be walked over, but yeah, I won’t lie. I had a lot of complications, even from the beginning. What saved me were my European papers, otherwise I don’t know how it would have ended for me. But yeah, I don’t want to, I don’t want to make false accusations or anything, but still. The truth is that yes, I did have complications. there are institutions that, well, aren’t used to seeing people with my face, my appearance, and that’s it.”

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)¹⁷

His experience illustrates how even with the European status; appearance can remain a source of friction within institutional spaces revealing the persistence of implicit bias despite formal equality.

f. Accessing resources ↔ Seeking support and collaboration

The accessibility to resources is often linked with seeking support and collaboration. For migrant artists, navigating these aspects can be especially challenging, as they may face difficulties in accessing funding, studio space, or professional opportunities due to their status or lack of established networks. This lack of access can make it harder to initiate collaborations or gain the support needed to grow their careers. However, the pursuit of support often leads these artists to forge alternative paths, turning to independent initiatives, community-based collaborations, or peer support that offer resources and recognition absent from mainstream art institutions.

“Artists come here, they start working, and then over time, we as a team and along with the artists see if we can support their practice in a more structured way. That means helping them create a portfolio, putting them in real contact with exhibition or sales spaces.”

(Chiara, project coordinator in community support, January 16, 2025)¹⁸

Chiara also reflects that, compared to other countries, Belgium offers relatively accessible cultural infrastructure and a formal artist status that is open to all, which she views as a positive feature of the system.

This highlights how, despite structural barriers, some systems do provide openings that artists can navigate with the right support. While formal access may be imbalanced, community-based efforts and supportive institutions can play a key role in bridging the gap and helping migrant artists find visibility and stability.

¹⁷ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.10

¹⁸ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.11

g. Accessing resources ↔ Having opportunities through community support

Access to artistic resources is often limited for migrant artists, but community support can play a crucial role in bridging that gap. Through solidarity networks and local projects, artists can find spaces, materials, and opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach. These supportive environments not only encourage creative expression but also help counterbalance structural barriers, making the artistic field more inclusive and accessible.

Serkan explained that various organisations such as cultural centres and funding institutions have played a central role in helping him navigate the art scene in Belgium. Events and platforms like Cultuurloket, Globe Aroma, and Kunstenpunt have been particularly useful for understanding the funding system, finding residencies, and building a professional network. These experiences have allowed him to develop his practice and engage with the Belgian art world in meaningful ways.

Yannick also recalls that when he expressed his desire to study art at the Beaux-Arts, a social worker wrote a letter of support on his behalf. The school welcomed him, and thanks to local associations in Liège that assist undocumented individuals, his school fees were covered until he completed his studies. This support was essential for him to pursue an artistic education despite his precarious status.

Mathis shared a more recent example of structured support:

“Now, I’m supported by a non-profit called ‘Les Arts Urbains.’ It’s through a program called ‘Level-up,’ which supports artists in rap, slam, and dance. We’re supported for two years, and during that time they offer quite a lot of training sessions and all that. It’s cool.”

(Mathis, musician, theatre performer and slam poet, April 25, 2025)¹⁹

These accounts show how community support can significantly shape the trajectory of a migrant artist’s career not only by offering concrete resources, but by opening doors that might otherwise remain closed.

h. Accessing resources ↔ accessing creative spaces

Accessibility to resources is crucial in providing migrant artists with the creative space they need to develop ideas and projects. Many migrant artists face significant barriers to establishing themselves in new artistic environments due to limited access to funding, professional networks, or recognition of their status. However, providing them with dedicated creative spaces, whether physical studios, community hubs, or institutional support, can facilitate an environment where they can explore, experiment, and develop their practice. These spaces not only offer the resources necessary for artistic creation but also affirm the artist’s place within the broader cultural landscape, enabling them to reclaim autonomy and visibility in their new context.

¹⁹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.12

As Chiara explains:

“That means that for us, one of the most important things is to let artists with a migration background know that they can use this space when it’s available. So, for example, our work involves going to reception centres and presenting the project, saying: we’re here if you want to come. You are welcome.”

(Chiara, project coordinator in community support, January 16, 2025)²⁰

These kinds of efforts highlight how essential it is not only to provide creative space but also to ensure that it is visible and accessible. This can offer migrant artists the tools and recognition they need to build and sustain their practice.

i. Accessing resources ↔ Facing challenges in communication

Facing challenges in communication can exacerbate difficulties in accessing resources and achieving artist status, especially for migrant artists navigating unfamiliar artistic and institutional environments. Language barriers, cultural differences, or misunderstandings of expressive goals can limit an artist’s ability to present their work effectively to galleries, institutions, or audiences. These communication challenges may prevent artists from securing funding, building connections, or gaining visibility within the broader art world. As a result, the artist's potential to access vital resources is constrained, making it harder for them to succeed professionally and achieve recognition for their work.

Amina shared her own experience with the institutional system:

“In general, it’s really difficult when it comes to institutions. Me and institutions, we just don’t go together. I even created a small theatre piece about the absurdity we experience in the administrations here, when you go to get a document, an ID card, or even just to update something so small, how they can make it a nightmare sometimes. And that applies to many foreigners, African or not. But yeah, the fact of being able to connect with someone in their own language, that sometimes helps.”

(Amina, slam poet, theatre performer, March 3, 2025)²¹

This reflection shows that communication is not only about expressing artistic ideas but also about finding ways to connect with institutions and audiences. As Amina reminds us, speaking the same language can help ease interactions, making it easier for artists to access the support they need.

j. Conclusion

What emerges from these reflections is that access to resources is not simply a logistical matter, it is embedded in broader systems of inclusion and exclusion. For migrant artists, gaining recognition

²⁰ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.13

²¹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.14

or support often means learning to navigate bureaucracies, adapting to cultural codes, and finding allies in places where institutions fail to meet expectations. Community support and legal status can serve as protective mechanisms, but they do not erase the inequalities embedded in institutional processes. Ultimately, these artists continue to create despite the challenges they face, showing that resilience and solidarity are just as important as access to formal support. These access issues often lead to deeper tensions that shape the entire artistic journey.

5. Tensions in the artistic journey

The artistic path is rarely linear, and for migrant artists, it is often marked by intersecting difficulties. Beyond the creative challenges inherent in any artistic career, migration introduces a new layer of tension: unfamiliar systems, disrupted networks, financial precarity, and bureaucratic hurdles. These tensions do not occur in isolation, they interact with each other, influencing how and whether artists can continue their practice. This chapter explores the complex pressures migrant artists face as they attempt to sustain their work across borders, while negotiating institutions, identities, and survival itself.

a. Being a migrant artist ↔ Leaving due to lack of support

For many migrant artists, the decision to leave their country is not simply about seeking new opportunities, it is often the result of a lack of support or recognition in their place of origin. Institutional neglect, political repression, and social exclusion can make it impossible to sustain an artistic practice, pushing artists to migrate in search of freedom, safety, or simply the chance to continue creating. This displacement, while opening new possibilities, also brings challenges, as artists must rebuild their networks and navigate unfamiliar artistic landscapes while carrying the weight of having been unrecognised or unsupported in their homeland.

Yannick points out how support for artists can be extremely uneven depending on political or social criteria, particularly in countries where creative freedom is constrained by ideology or discrimination. Similarly, Chiara notes that many artists arrive in Belgium not by choice, but because they were unable to create freely at home. She references cases, such as a Georgian artist who felt unable to stage her performance in her own country due to anti-queer legislation.

Amina also reminds us of the broader tensions faced by artists who must navigate not only new artistic environments, but also complex social dynamics linked to exile and refugee status:

“It's the story of an artist who arrives and realises that not everything is so easy, that things are complicated, particularly when it comes to the relationships between those who fled, those who are already here, and those who come from the same country. Later, I received political protection, so I stayed here as a refugee”

(Amina, slam poet, theatre performer, March 8, 2025)²²

It reveals how many artists are pushed, rather than drawn, into mobility, they are not simply in search of new opportunities, but as a response to the absence of conditions that would allow them to continue creating where they are. What is left behind is not only support that never came, but also the possibility of pursuing an artistic future that once seemed imaginable at home.

b. Being a migrant artist ↔ Facing financial struggles

Being an artist often means navigating financial instability, a challenge that can be even more pressing for migrant artists. The struggle to secure funding, find paid opportunities, or sustain a career in an often-precarious art market can create constant uncertainty. Without institutional or governmental support, many artists must balance their creative practice with other forms of work, sometimes compromising their artistic aspirations. Financial struggles not only impact material conditions but also shape artistic choices, influencing the themes, mediums, and opportunities artists can pursue.

Without access to unemployment benefits or consistent support, some are forced to rely solely on their own means. This was the case for Nadiya, who explained that she never had access to state assistance and has always had to work to support herself, navigating the cost of living without the safety net available to others.

For Yannick, the financial pressure has led to a difficult compromise:

“As I was saying, today I work in another institution, and my artistic work has become secondary because if I really start focusing on that, I won’t be able to pay my rent at the end of the month or access opportunities, so that’s very, very difficult”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, and drawer, March 10, 2025)²³

In both cases, the economic demands of daily life weigh heavily on their creative practice. Financial insecurity does not just affect material conditions, it shapes the time, energy, and freedom artists have to experiment, take risks, or fully dedicate themselves to their craft.

c. Facing financial struggles ↔ Seeking support and collaboration

For many artists, financial instability is closely tied to the need for community and collaboration. When it becomes difficult to sustain a practice alone, seeking support is not only strategic, it becomes essential. Limited resources often push artists to rely on shared spaces, collective networks, or informal forms of mutual aid to keep creating.

Nadiya reflects on this dynamic:

²² See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.15

²³ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.16

“There are quite a few people we try to work with because we have to. Artists are never alone, at least not today, it’s no longer possible. Even if you take Art, Arte Povera, that’s not really the thing. You can go down that path, sure, that’s great. But the real question is: can you live off your art? Because if you live off your art, you have to, you’re forced to eat, to sell things and that’s a whole other issue. But obviously, I’m against the art market because it kills art. Still, you absolutely need someone who supports you at a minimum, who shows your work. Otherwise, you’re just doing it on your own. So, I try to surround myself with people as much as possible.”

(Nadiya, visual artist and painter, January 23, 2025)²⁴

Her words highlight the balance between preserving artistic integrity and navigating the practical realities of survival. A balance that, for many artists, depends on building supportive relationships to sustain both their work and their needs.

d. Building artistic connections ↔ struggling to connect with artistic network

The ability to establish artistic connections despite networking challenges reflects the tension many artists experience between aspiration and access. While opportunities may arise, they often depend on persistence, strategic effort, or being in the right environment, at the right time.

Victor noted that although he ultimately built strong ties with local galleries in Liège and Brussels:

“Difficulties? No, it was more often opportunities. I first attended the academy for several years, and I also met people who were like little windows that opened up. Sometimes I had to push a little, because you have to really want things. When you’re passionate, you eventually find the right people and manage to open doors. (...) As for my relationships with galleries, no I’ve always worked with galleries here in Liège or in Brussels. I haven’t experienced difficulties finding partnerships with galleries.”

(Victor, painter, illustrator, and exhibition curator, April 11, 2025)²⁵

This experience illustrates how building artistic connections can be both rewarding and demanding. While meaningful relationships and opportunities may eventually emerge, this is not always the case, and being a migrant artist can make it even more difficult to access or integrate into existing networks.

²⁴ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.17

²⁵ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.18

e. Struggling to connect with artistic network ↔ Seeking support and collaboration

Building a sense of community and establishing an artistic network can be a challenging yet essential part of an artist's journey. Migrant artists often struggle to connect with existing networks, facing barriers such as unfamiliarity with local scenes, lack of institutional support, or exclusion from established circles. However, the search for support and collaboration drives them to actively seek out new connections, creating alternative spaces for artistic exchange.

As Nadiya puts it:

“I even think that sometimes it's more difficult in Belgium because, honestly, and I don't mean this in a negative way, I completely understand, things often work through personal connections here. And since I was alone, I didn't know anyone.”

(Nadiya, visual artist and painter, January 23, 2025)²⁶

Her experience reflects the quiet but significant challenge of breaking into closed networks where access often relies on pre-existing relationships. For artists arriving without those connections, the path can feel isolating at first. Yet, by reaching out and building new relationships, many find ways to form their own communities and gradually establish their place in the artistic landscape.

f. Seeking support and collaboration ↔ Experiencing solidarity from the artist community

Looking for connection often leads artists to discover the power of solidarity within the artistic community. For migrant artists, navigating new cultural and professional landscapes can be isolating, making peer support essential. Acts of solidarity, such as shared resources, collective projects, or informal mentorship can help counter the challenges of exclusion and instability. In these spaces of mutual aid, artists not only find opportunities for collaboration but also build relationships that foster resilience, empowerment, and a sense of belonging.

This sense of collective care appears in many of the interviews. Chiara observed that within certain artist networks, solidarity takes the form of active support, artists recommending or helping others from their country to join spaces like her community support, rather than competing for limited resources. Similarly, Victor described how his gallery is part of a larger platform, an “ASBL” created with other art spaces, which allows them to pool resources and gain access to certain kinds of institutional support.

Amina describes her experience in this environment positively:

“I was lucky to be in contact with great people who were already active in the slam art scene, who were already working and producing a lot. So, I came here ready to work and to explore

²⁶ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.19

this world, while also showing what I can do. I think I was really lucky to be well surrounded, and I didn't struggle too much with that."

(**Amina**, *slam poet, theatre performer*, March 8, 2025)²⁷

For others, this sense of support takes on a more personal dimension. Mathis, for instance, sees collaboration not just as a practical necessity, but as a source of joy and connection, he is describing the artistic community as a kind of chosen family. In these expressions, solidarity emerges as a crucial counterbalance to the difficulties of artistic migration. It creates not only the conditions for artistic production, but also a shared sense of purpose and belonging.

This collective dimension of artistic life shows how support networks can offer more than just practical help. They also provide emotional grounding, creative energy, and a sense of not being alone in the journey. In contexts where formal institutions may fall short, it is often within these communities of solidarity that migrant artists find the most meaningful and sustainable forms of engagement.

g. Building artistic connections ↔ Having opportunities through community support

Building artistic connections is often facilitated by the presence of strong community support networks. For many migrant artists, these communities provide not only emotional and logistical backing but also tangible opportunities to collaborate, exhibit, and grow. Through shared spaces and collective initiatives, artists can forge meaningful relationships, opening doors to new projects and audiences. Community support thus becomes a vital foundation for artistic connection and visibility.

Serkan reflects on the importance of such networks in his own experience:

"I have also found that collaborative projects with other artists and cultural organisations create new pathways for artistic exchange. Art festivals, informal exhibitions, and collective studios offer platforms where the emphasis is on artistic merit rather than legal or institutional status"

(**Serkan**, *painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art*, March 2, 2025).

His reflection underlines how alternative artistic communities can offer spaces that value creativity over official recognition, making them especially important for artists navigating complex migratory or administrative realities.

h. Struggling with administrative formalities ↔ Losing creative time to administrative struggles

Bureaucratic procedures often place a heavy burden on migrant artists, who must navigate complex and time-consuming administrative systems to secure legal status, funding, or artistic

²⁷ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.20

recognition. These formalities, while necessary, can become difficult to manage and obstructive, losing significant time and energy away from creative work. As a result, these overlapping demands can be exhausting and emotionally demanding, leaving little room for artistic focus.

Chiara, who works closely with artists in community support, explains that many are overwhelmed by the number of administrative tasks they must handle. From looking for housing and legal assistance to managing visa applications and health coverage, these responsibilities create a heavy burden. As a result, artists do not often have the time or mental space to focus on their creative work, since so much of their energy is consumed by these essential but demanding obligations.

Yannick also reflects on how administrative obligations impacted his creative practice:

“In a way, yes, because I think, actually, it held me back because the time I could have spent creating, I was spending running after a document or this or that thing.”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, drawer, March 10, 2025)²⁸

These accounts highlight how administrative burdens are not just external constraints but active disruptions to the artistic process itself, delaying work and diminishing the mental space needed for creativity.

- i. Struggling with administrative formalities ↔ Experiencing disruption due to bureaucratic barriers

Administrative formalities and bureaucratic barriers often disrupt the continuity of artistic and professional lives, creating delays, uncertainty, and a sense of powerlessness. Migrant artists may find themselves caught up in complex procedures that consume time and energy, interrupt their creative momentum, and limit their integration into local systems. This struggle becomes a structural obstacle that shapes, slows down, or even pauses their trajectories.

As Nadiya recounts, these challenges were especially intense at the beginning of her journey:

“But in any case, I admit that at the beginning it was really, really hard because I didn’t have any documents. I mean, for me the documents were like a mountain of papers I had to fill out, but well, at some point it got really hard for me at the academy. Not at the academy in terms of working or creating, but in the way I was renting an apartment, they needed all the documents. I didn’t have documents, I didn’t have time, so at some point you tell yourself, how do I do this? And that was really hard and at one point I wanted to leave.”

(Nadiya, visual artist and painter, January 23, 2025)²⁹

²⁸ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.21

²⁹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.22

Yannick also described how the lack of proper documentation kept him from pursuing key artistic opportunities. Not being able to access the right papers prevented him from participating in competitions, including one abroad, where administrative restrictions made it impossible for him to share his work internationally. These bureaucratic obstacles became a repeated source of limitation, directly affecting his artistic mobility and career growth.

These accounts reveal how administrative burdens are not just background frustrations but central obstacles that shape the paths of migrant artists. The energy spent navigating paperwork, legal statuses, and institutional requirements often comes at the cost of creative time, mental clarity, and professional momentum. It is making the artistic journey as much about perseverance as it is about expression.

j. Conclusion

What these stories show is that the artistic journey for migrant artists is often marked by difficulty, but also by persistence. The challenges they face do not only impact their ability to produce work or access opportunities; they also influence how they imagine their future, connect with others, and understand what it means to succeed. Migration may offer new paths, but it also introduces uncertainty. The capacity to continue creating relies not just on talent or determination, but on the ability to move through systems that can be unwelcoming or restrictive. In this context, solidarity, resilience, and adaptability become essential resources, just as important as any tool or technique used in the artistic process. In response to these pressures, many artists turn to art itself as a source of strength and expression.

6. Art as a tool

a. Art as a form of expression:

For many migrant artists, art is more than a form of creative expression. It is a tool through which they make sense of their experiences, connect with others, and respond to the world around them. Whether used to express personal truths, raise social awareness, or simply offer moments of peace, art becomes a powerful means of navigating migration, identity, and belonging. This section explores how artists use their practice to express emotion, communicate messages, and reflect on complex social and political realities. From healing and humour to critique and resistance, their works reveal the many roles that art can play: personal, social, and transformative.

i. Creating art to entertain people ↔ Using art as a therapeutic tool

For some artists, the act of creating is not only about expression but also about comfort and healing. Mei shares how she uses her art to offer moments of lightness and calm in a stressful world. Her goal is not just to make people laugh out loud, but to give them a break, a sense of peace after a long day.

“I just want to draw something to make people laugh. Like, not like, laughing. But when they're like, I don't know, imagine you've been through a very tough day. You have your school, you have your work, and I don't know, you're exhausted at home. And when, when you saw my art, you just like, oh, relax and have a laugh. And make her more relaxed”

(Mei, illustrator, January 21, 2025)

Here, entertainment and emotional care go in tandem; by creating joyful and relaxing visuals, Mei transforms art into a gentle tool for wellbeing. Her work shows that artistic expression does not need to be political or heavy to be meaningful. Sometimes, simply offering beauty, humour, or peace is enough to shift someone's day. In this way, art becomes not only a personal means of expression, but a way of reaching others

ii. Creating art to communicate a message ↔ Expressing personal truth

For many migrant artists, artistic expression becomes a way to voice deeply personal truths that cannot always be spoken. Creating art is not just about delivering a message, it's about sharing something intimate and real. This emotional authenticity gives power to their message, making it resonate with others. Verso, for instance, describes how rap gave him the space to express what he really thinks:

“I fell in love with that the fact that you can express yourself, that you can really say what you think. That you can really make a kind of protest against so many things that are wrong in this world. I found that super interesting, and that's what drew me to rap.”

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)³⁰

For Amina, the need to speak out through art came from a personal and collective urgency. Her slam and theatre practice became a means to break silences and reveal the unspoken, both about herself and the people around her.

Mathis, too, sees artistic practice as something vital, not just a choice, but a necessity. For him, the artist carries something urgent and powerful, something that must be shared. It is this deep sense of responsibility and truth that gives art its emotional and social resonance.

In all three cases, creating art becomes a way to take back their voice and find strength. It is not just about telling a story, it's about saying something that matters, something that comes from within. By expressing what they have lived and felt, artists like Amina, Mathis and Verso use their work to connect with others who might have gone through similar things. Their art speaks honestly, not only for themselves but also for those who may not have the chance or the tools to speak out. In this way, personal

³⁰ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.23

expression becomes something more than a way to build bridges. It is also to share and experience, and to make space for new ways of seeing and understanding.

iii. Creating Art to communicate a message ↔ Transmitting emotions

Creating art to communicate a message often goes hand in hand with the desire to transmit emotions. Among many artists, the emotional impact is just as important as its meaning. It is through emotion that the message gains power and reaching people in ways that logic or explanation alone cannot. Verso highlights this emotional dimension as central to artistic power:

“But the power of an artist for me is really the emotions they’re able to transmit to people. Yeah, that’s the answer, it’s the emotions they manage to pass on to others through their art.”

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)³¹

Victor, too, speaks of the role emotion plays in shaping the creative process. One of his photography series was born from a strong emotional reaction, not with the aim of delivering a message, but with the desire to capture a feeling. The meaning, he says, emerged later, through the viewer’s own interpretations.

In these stories, art becomes a space where emotions and messages come together. Emotions embedded in the artwork enable a connection with the audience, while the message gives shape to those feelings. Sometimes, emotions express what words cannot say, and the message helps make that emotion clear. For artists like Verso and Victor, creating art is not only about sharing a message, but also about making people feel something. This emotional connection makes their work more powerful and easier for others to relate to. By mixing personal feelings with meaningful ideas, they create art that speaks both to their own experience and to something more universal, something that many people can understand or feel, even if their own story is different.

iv. Expressing personal truth ↔ Questioning migration and integration

Articulating personal experiences through art allows migrant artists to question mainstream ideas about migration and integration in a more intimate and human way. Instead of repeating general narratives, they share their own stories: stories shaped by loss, change, and the search for belonging. Through art, they show the emotional and social reality of starting over in a new place. Serkan, for example, describes how art became a way to process the transformations linked to migration:

“Migration, both physical and internal, has been a central theme in my life. Leaving one’s homeland is not just about changing geography; it is about navigating loss, transformation, and adaptation. Art became my way of processing these shifts, a space where I could translate emotions and experiences into something tangible.”

³¹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.24

(Serkan, painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art, March 2, 2025)

Yannick also questions what “integration” really means, asking whether it requires forgetting one’s past or creating something new from different cultural roots.

This way of expressing personal experience becomes more than just self-expression; it becomes a form of resistance. By telling their own truths, these artists challenge fixed ideas and invite others to see migration in a more nuanced way. From here, it becomes clear how art does not only express, but it also acts. It raises awareness, invites dialogue, and creates space for social changes.

b. Art as a tool for social change:

i. Questioning migration and integration ↔ Creating art to communicate a message

For many migrant artists, art becomes a way to question the dominant narratives surrounding migration and integration, not by providing clear answers, but by opening space for deeper reflection. Rather than portraying migration as a fixed story of departure and arrival, their work explores the complex emotional, social, and political layers of displacement and belonging. Through personal storytelling and symbolic imagery, they bring forward perspectives often left out of mainstream discourse.

“My artistic practice is not just about aesthetics but also about storytelling capturing the silent struggles, hopes, and resilience of those who have been displaced, just like myself. Through my art, I attempt to bridge personal and collective experiences, reflecting on how migration transforms not only individuals but also the societies they become part of (...) As a migrant artist, I inevitably explore the theme of displacement and belonging. However, I do not simply depict migration as a geopolitical phenomenon I am more interested in the emotional and existential layers of movement, exile, and adaptation.”

(Serkan, painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art, March 2, 2025)

Art, in this context, becomes more than expression. It questions dominant migration narratives by presenting nuanced, human-focused narratives. Many artists adopt a subtle approach, avoiding direct political activism, instead inviting reflection through their work. Their art opens space for audiences to engage critically and empathetically, raising awareness through personal interpretation.

“While I do not consider myself a political activist in the traditional sense, my work inherently carries social, cultural, and existential critiques, making it a form of visual activism”

(Serkan, painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art, March 2, 2025)

ii. Challenging political structures ↔ Questioning migration and integration

Building on this reflective and nuanced approach, some migrant artists extend their practice into more explicit political critique, engaging directly with issues of justice, visibility, and the power

structures that shape migration narratives. This does not mean that the art becomes militant or confrontational. Rather, artistic practice rooted in lived experiences can inevitably raise questions about the systems shaping those trajectories. By reflecting on how migrants are perceived and how their stories are framed within dominant narratives, the artist opens space for alternative ways of seeing and understanding.

“Moreover, my work engages with justice and visibility in the context of migration. I am deeply interested in how migrants are perceived and how their stories are told within dominant cultural narratives (...) In this sense, my work naturally becomes a form of activism, as it challenges the dominant narratives surrounding migration and displacement.”

(Serkan, painter and sculptor with an academic background in the visual art, March 2, 2025)

In Nadiya’s words, we can feel a kind of tension. Her art does not attack, but it observes, questions, and gently suggests that change might be needed. It reflects a personal point of view that encourages others to think differently about the world around them.

“Today, we understand some things, and tomorrow we understand more. We try to figure things out, to adapt but maybe also to adapt society itself. Maybe there's this side of it, I wouldn't say against society, but something against the political system.”

(Nadiya, visual artist and painter, January 23, 2025)³²

Yannick is more direct in his intention to raise awareness about social issues, using his art to address fear, exclusion, and racism:

“My message through my art is mostly to raise awareness, about the society we live in today where there's a lot of rejection toward others. Often, that comes from fear, from not knowing the stranger. It's something unknown, so we get scared, we protect ourselves, etc. (...) It's my job to raise awareness artistically about all these issues in society, racism, for example.”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, and drawer, March 10, 2025)³³

Here, the notion of activism is not a fixed identity, but a potential outcome of a deeper artistic inquiry. Through this lens, questioning migration and integration becomes not only an aesthetic concern, but also a way of engaging with power, politics, and representation.

iii. Creating Art to communicate a message ↔ Sensitising without activism

For many artists, the aim is not always to denounce, but to awaken something: a question, a feeling, a shift in perception. Rather than delivering a fixed message, their work leaves space for viewers

³² See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.25

³³ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.26

to reflect and interpret in their own way. Verso, for example, distinguishes between more direct messages in some of his songs and others that take a softer, more reflective tone. Similarly, Victor believes in the quiet power of imagery, not to dictate, but to inspire, to offer a pause for thought in a world that often moves too fast.

Amina describes her artistic mission as a form of contribution, both to society and to beauty itself:

“Let’s say that my goal in what I do is to be able to reach people and to take part in what’s happening in society, wherever I find myself whether it’s here or in Burundi. Wherever I feel involved in some way. For me, being an artist is a chance, an opportunity to create beauty around me, within me, and to contribute to making life even more beautiful than it was yesterday. So yes, that’s my vision.”

(Amina, slam poet, theatre performer, March 8, 2025)³⁴

In these expressions, art becomes a quiet and persistent force, not always militant but deeply engaged. It suggests rather than shouts, and invites viewers to think, feel, and perhaps see the world a little differently.

c. Conclusion

Across all these voices, art emerges as a deeply complex practice where meaning, feeling, and action come together. Migrant artists use their work to express personal truths, to comfort and entertain, or to question social realities. Art allows migrant artists to speak from the heart while engaging with the world around them. Some see their art to express something, while others use it to question or criticise the context in which they live but all share a belief in art’s potential to move, connect, and open dialogue. Whether through poetry, performance, music, or visual work, art becomes a space of freedom, care, and resistance. A way to navigate the complexities of migration and express personal experience. In this sense, artistic practice becomes not only a medium, but a tool for transformation, for the artist and for those who encounter their work. Yet even as art creates space for transformation, artists still face limits, especially in how their identity is seen, framed, or reduced by others.

7. Negotiating identity and exclusion

For many migrant artists, the experience of creating and sharing art is inseparable from how they are seen or categorised by others. Their identity is often shaped not only by their personal history but also by how institutions and audiences interpret their origins, appearance, or perceived difference. This section explores how migrant artists navigate these external perceptions and respond to pressure.

³⁴ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.27

Whether framed as “diverse,” “exotic,” or “migrant voices,” artists often find their work interpreted through reductive narratives that emphasise background over practice. Some may embrace these labels as part of their expression, others resist being confined by them. What emerges is a complex process of negotiation, where visibility, identity, and artistic freedom must be balanced in opposition to the symbolic expectation assigned to the artist’s story.

a. Being a migrant artist ↔ Navigating perceptions of exoticism

For many migrant artists, being perceived as “different” becomes part of the artistic experience itself. Audiences, institutions, and markets often approach their work through a lens of exoticism, emphasising cultural origins or perceived diversity over the creative content. This perception creates a double bind: it can open doors under the label of “diversity,” but also limit how the work is understood and where it can go.

Verso reflects on this ambivalence:

“There’s something a bit exotic about me, and I think that can attract people, but at the same time it can also make others not like it. But yeah, that’s part of variety too.”

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)³⁵

Here, artistic identity is not just shaped from within, it is also formed in dialogue with the perceptions and misunderstandings of others. Migrant artists must learn to navigate this space, balancing visibility and authenticity in a space where their work is often framed in advance.

b. Navigating perceptions of exoticism ↔ Confined by exoticised expectations

Being an artist in a migrant context often means working within a set of expectations shaped by others, expectations that link artists to origin, culture, and ethnicity. Migrant artists are frequently positioned as representatives for a specific identity, and their work is seen as meaningful primarily in relation to that background. While this visibility can create opportunities, it can also feel restrictive, reducing complex artistic voices to simplified cultural narratives.

Amina speaks openly about the weight of these expectations. While she acknowledges the importance of addressing issues like racism and migration, she also resists being confined to them. She describes feeling confined, as if her role as an “African artist” expected constant engagement with certain themes. This leaves little space for other forms of expression or concern.

“I don’t even want to be put in that box and stay trapped in those topics. It hurts me because a lot of people, well, I get it too, as an African artist, it’s seen as my responsibility to talk about

³⁵ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.28

those things. But then I felt excluded from other subjects, other concerns, other forms of expression that aren't just about those issues."

(**Amina**, *slam poet, theatre performer*, March 8, 2025)³⁶

Moreover, Mathis notices that certain institutions appear more focused on showcasing diversity than engaging with the depth of his artistic practice. He questions whether some projects are driven by real interest or by a desire to highlight cultural origins

Migrant artists often face the challenge of navigating how their work is perceived through the lens of cultural difference. These perceptions can carry expectations that their art should reflect a particular heritage or conform to a certain idea of what their identity represents. While some artists may choose to engage with these themes, the pressure to do so can also feel limiting, confining their practice to a single narrative or aesthetic. These framing risks overshadowing the complexity of their work and the diversity of subjects they wish to explore

Amina claims her artistic freedom by pushing back against being seen in just one way:

"It was when I decided that I was going to start talking about other things so that you see that I'm an artist before being African, that I'm a human being who's moved by many things. Even if I talk about racism and colonialism, I'm not going to talk about them the way you want me to. I have, how can I put it, I have my own way of seeing those things. We're not condemned to say the same things in the same way. We don't live them the same way. There's a freedom in all of that."

(**Amina**, *slam poet, theatre performer*, March 8, 2025)³⁷

While some artists express concern about being selected primarily for their background, others recognise how this visibility can also serve as a platform. Yannick, for example, acknowledged that institutions often invited him because of his migrant story and activist stance. Rather than seeing this purely as reduction, he viewed it as an opportunity, a way to speak about his experience, to raise awareness, and to be seen. In his case, being placed in the spotlight allowed him to share his voice on his own terms.

This complex negotiation of perception, expectation, and visibility is a part of the migrant artistic experience, as artists work to affirm their full creative identities beyond reductive cultural frames.

³⁶ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.29

³⁷ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.30

c. Being reduced to national identity ↔ Confined by exoticised expectation

In the art world, rather than being seen for the originality or depth of their work, artists may be invited or recognised primarily because of where they come from. This framing can reduce the richness of their practice and impose expectations about the kind of themes they should explore.

As Chiara observes from her experience working with artists:

“Artists that people might go after just because they have a certain nationality. And that’s very dangerous because then you no longer see the artistic part, only where they come from. Of course, that matters because it’s part of an artist’s life and career, coming from a certain country, with a certain education, culture, etc. But the danger is not seeing the artistic practice itself.”

(Chiara, project coordinator in community support, January 16, 2025)³⁸

As Nadiya explains:

“Because you’re a foreigner, they think you think differently maybe you don’t, but for them it’s a little extra because you come from another country, and it gives a kind of global feel. But then, they might ask you indirectly to lean into that, in a certain way.”

(Nadiya, visual artist and painter, January 23, 2025)³⁹

These reflections reveal how migrant artists often face the challenge of having to constantly explain or justify their presence through their origin stories. This can lead to their practice being reduced to a representation of their nationality, rather than being seen as a unique creative expression. It becomes crucial, then, to recognise and support their work beyond these frameworks, allowing it to be valued for its full artistic and conceptual depth.

d. Being categorised as a migrant ↔ Navigating perceptions of exoticism

Being perceived as a foreigner often means being viewed through a restricted lens shaped by stereotypes about origin, background, or personal history. In the art world, this label can carry both visibility and constraint. Artists may be invited to exhibit not primarily for their work, but for the story they represent.

Yannick reflects on this complex dynamic. He describes how certain institutions were more interested in the impact of his migration story than in the artistic value of his work:

“I think it’s because of my story. There are institutions, at least as I was saying earlier, that showcased my work because it helped raise awareness with the public. So, was it really for my

³⁸ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.31

³⁹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.32

work, or just because of my story? Because I'd arrive, I'd talk about my migration journey, etc., and people were kind of fascinated, like, "despite everything he went through, he still manages to do this." And for me, it helped a bit because I got to exhibit, but on the other hand, it also felt kind of weird."

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, and drawer, April 2, 2025)⁴⁰

Moreover, Mathis notices that certain institutions appear more focused on presenting diversity than engaging with the depth of his artistic practice. He questions whether some projects are driven by real interest or by a desire to highlight cultural origins

These situations can feel both helpful and confusing. On the one hand, being invited to show your work brings visibility and chances to connect. On the other, it can raise questions: is it really the art that's being valued, or the story behind it? For migrant artists, it's not always easy to know where that line is. The way institutions or audiences look at them can be shaped by curiosity, interest, or assumptions. All of which influence how their identity and work are received.

Beyond the art world, being labelled as a migrant can shape how individuals are perceived and treated in everyday life. These perceptions may lead to moments of exclusion or unfair treatment, especially when background, appearance, or accent draw attention. Such experiences are often difficult to separate from stereotypes connected to origin or difference.

Verso shares his personal reflection on this:

"Right now, I think we live in a world where there's so much mixing, so much culture, so much richness on a global level that discriminating against someone for their skin colour, the way they speak, or their origins. I honestly find it ridiculous. Even though I've been a victim myself, people insulted me, even the police. I got stopped just for walking down the street."

(Verso, rap artist, January 23, 2025)⁴¹

Verso's experience shows how being identified as a migrant can sometimes lead to unfair treatment in public spaces. Whether through comments, assumptions, or institutional actions, the way someone is perceived can affect how they are treated. These experiences may not always be openly discussed, but they are part of the everyday reality that some migrant artists must navigate alongside their creative work.

e. Conclusion

This section highlights the nuanced and often ambivalent relationship migrant artists have with visibility and categorisation. While their background may open doors, it can also become a filter that

⁴⁰ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.33

⁴¹ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.34

limits how their work is perceived. The danger lies in being reduced to a symbol of a country, of struggle, of difference, rather than being recognised for the full scope of one's practice. At the same time, these artists show remarkable agency in how they position themselves: resisting simplistic expectations, asserting the right to choose their themes, and insisting on being seen as complete creative individuals. The negotiation of identity, therefore, becomes not only a social process but an artistic one, shaping both how they are perceived and how they choose to express themselves through their art.

8. Gender

Gender was not defined as a separate theme within the main six analytical categories. From the beginning of the research, it was considered a transversal lens shaping the artistic and migratory trajectories of participants. Before turning to the analytical scenario, this short section draws on the narratives of four women to explore how gender interacts with experiences of migration, artistic practice, and institutional encounters.

Analysis of these interviews revealed how gender influenced access to resources, perceptions of artistic legitimacy, negotiation of identity, and engagement with institutional structures. Women participants often described an additional layer of expectations or obstacles related to their gender, reflecting the intersectional processes highlighted by Crenshaw (1989, pp. 139-141). These insights enhance the broader themes of the analysis and underline how gender influences the lived experiences of migrant artists.

Artists themselves directly spoke about constraints they face. For instance, Amina described the constant pressure of gendered perception:

“You’re seen as a woman before being seen as an artist... You’re judged by what you wear before anyone listens to what you have to say. That blocks you. It’s hard to be free with all that.”

(Amina, slam poet, theatre performer, March 8, 2025)⁴²

Her words highlight how gender operates as a filter through which artistic identity is interpreted: limiting recognition, legitimacy, and creative freedom. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in the analysis, Amina expressed frustration at being reduced to specific political or identity-based topics. Similarly, Nadiya reflected on cultural stereotypes she encountered upon arriving in Belgium as an Eastern European woman. Tied to both gender and migratory origin, these experiences reflect gendered constraints.

These individual experiences also resonate with broader patterns identified at the institutional level. According to Chiara, there is a clear imbalance in participation between men and women in the

⁴² See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.35

art field. Despite targeted efforts, such as women-only days, the persistent underrepresentation of women remains a concern.

Rather than being approached as autonomous creators, migrant women artists are often first subjected to social and cultural expectations rooted in gendered imaginaries. These experiences reveal how visibility and access in the art world remain unequally distributed, shaped by intersecting social markers such as gender, origin, and role expectations.

Through their art, some women challenge gendered norms and reimagine femininity. Nadiya's pearl project reflects on beauty and equality. Mei deliberately draws curvy women to resist dominant beauty standards.

Despite these pressures, Amina also articulated a strong sense of empowerment grounded in resilience:

"You're judged, you're looked at, everything you do is scrutinised, even though you're an artist and you're supposed to be free. You should be able to express yourself without worrying about who is watching what in you. (...) Being a woman artist means being strong and courageous."

(Amina, slam poet, theatre performer, March 8, 2025)⁴³

Her words emphasise the contributions of migrant women through strength, adaptability, and creative resistance. Artistic practice becomes not only a site of constraint, but also one of affirmation and transformation.

These reflections underline that gender is a force that shapes artistic and migratory experiences in profound ways. As Knapp et al. (2009) remind us, gender roles are socially constructed and embedded from early socialisation. Crenshaw's concept of *intersectionality* (1989) is crucial for understanding how gender, origin, and migration status merge to produce intersectional barriers. According to Donato and Ruiz (2024) and the work of the WEMov network, this transversal analysis reveals that ignoring gender risks reducing the complexity of migrant trajectories and minimising the challenges faced by migrant women in the cultural field.

9. Analytical Scenario: The Case of Yannick

In addition to the thematic analysis presented in the previous chapters, the following section offers a detailed analytical scenario based on the exhibition of Yannick, a painter, sculptor, engraver, and drawer. His personal and artistic exhibition provides a revealing case study of an exhibition.

After the first interview with Yannick, he organised an exhibition that explores the symbolic and material contradictions of chocolate, a product associated with Western pleasure but rooted in

⁴³ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.36

exploitative labour systems in the Global South, particularly in West Africa. According to Hinch (2017), forced labour and illegal child labour remain widespread in the cocoa industry. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, an estimated 144,000 individuals (including many children) work under conditions that meet the International Labour Organisation's definition of forced labour (pp. 83-84). Regardless of numerous national and international legal structures condemning such practices, economic interests often outweigh ethical concerns. This illustrates the ongoing labour abuses embedded in colonial legacies and the consumer unawareness about the realities of chocolate production (Hinch, 2017, pp. 78-88).

This artistic production reflects a powerful intersection of personal memory, political critique, and aesthetic expression. Hosted in a gallery in Liège, the exhibition draws directly on Yannick's migratory experience, exploring the tension between his childhood fascination with chocolate in Rwanda and his later discovery of the structural injustices behind its production. The project was conceived with complete creative freedom and realised through an intuitive, immersive creative process. By combining visual sensitivity and critical reflection, Yannick seeks not only to provoke thought, but also to open cultural spaces to new publics, particularly members of his own community.

a. Integrating Personal Migration ↔ Shaping Artistic Identity

Yannick's artistic work is directly rooted in his personal migratory experience, which serves both as a source of inspiration and as a framework for constructing his creative identity. His project draws on personal memories of chocolate in Rwanda and is shaped by his following migration to Europe. Initially associated with Western desire, chocolate becomes, through his journey and critical reflection, a medium to expose global inequalities and injustices. Yannick's artistic identity emerges from this process of transformation, turning lived experience into a form of political and cultural expression.

"I always ate chocolate when I was in Rwanda. [...] I attended a conference in Liège where they talked about children working in cocoa production. So over time, during my art studies, I decided to say to myself: 'why not tell this story in an exhibition?'"

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, drawer, April 28, 2025)⁴⁴

This quote illustrates how Yannick's migratory journey and artistic education combined to inspire the transformation of a personal memory into a critical and engaged artistic project.

b. Having Artistic Autonomy ↔ Accessing Creative Spaces

Autonomy in artistic creation is often contingent on the conditions under which artists are invited to work. Access to spaces does not automatically guarantee freedom of expression. However, when artists are given complete control over their projects, new possibilities for expression and experimentation emerge. Sometimes, this autonomy allowing artists to occupy and shape the space on their own terms. Accessing creative spaces therefore involves more than physical presence: it includes

⁴⁴ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.37

the capacity to imagine, decide, and act without external constraints. When such autonomy is available, artists can build projects that are both deeply personal and politically meaningful within institutional frameworks.

“Over there? Yes, they didn’t ask me what I was going to do. [...] They just sent me a message saying: ‘What’s the poster for the exhibition? You can give it a name, etc.’ But on the artistic side, they didn’t ask me for anything, so everything that was created was for the entire window display. I really imagined that display, going there, visiting, looking around. ‘Ah, that could work well in this window.’ I had complete creative freedom.”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, drawer, April 28, 2025)⁴⁵

This quote illustrates how Yannick experienced full creative freedom within the exhibition space. The absence of external demands or restrictions provided him with the autonomy to imagine and design the project exactly as he wished. His testimony underlines the importance of having the possibility to create without imposed limitations.

c. Acting as a Cultural Bridge ↔ Being a Migrant Artist

As discussed in the literature review, Martiniello (2015) highlights that migrants and racialised minorities do not merely assimilate into local arts but transform the artistic landscape by creating new creative expression. He also emphasises art’s role in facilitating connections within local communities, acting as a bridge between diverse social groups (p. 1232).

Artists who have migrated often find themselves navigating between cultural spheres. Their visibility in artistic institutions can serve as both representation and intervention. Positioned at the intersection of different cultural and social experiences, some migrant artists take the on role of bridging gaps between communities. Their practice challenges the symbolic borders that often separate mainstream art institutions from marginalised populations.

“My exhibition was held in a working-class neighbourhood, so it was very diverse. When I went back on Saturday, many young people from my community stopped by, mostly because they were intrigued by the window display, and then I invited them to come inside and explore. [...] It’s also something I dream about one day. Is it because I am here in the Occident that I don’t attract many people from my community? But it’s also about bringing them towards this and showing them: ‘In fact, the doors are not closed to us.’ So, if I can be the key for people from my community to open the galleries, then that’s it.”

(Yannick, painter, sculptor, engraver, drawer, April 28, 2025)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.38

⁴⁶ See the original excerpt in Appendix 6.39

This quote illustrates how Yannick used the context of his exhibition to invite people from his community to enter and discover the gallery space. His account shows how he positioned himself within the artistic setting to facilitate access and encourage interaction.

d. Conclusion

Yannick's trajectory illustrates how the experience of migration can shape artistic identity, artistic practice, and engagement. His project combines personal memory with critical reflection to address global inequalities, while his experience of artistic autonomy allowed him to fully realise his vision. Through his efforts to facilitate access for members of his community, Yannick's case highlights the complex positioning of migrant artists as both creators and individuals whose identities have been profoundly shaped by migration.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis managed to explore how the evolution of a *migratory career* affects an artist's vision of their art and its representation. Focusing on the theoretical framework of the *migratory career* developed by Marco Martiniello and Andrea Rea, and drawing on Howard Becker's concept of *career*, the research aimed to understand the dynamic interplay between migratory and artistic careers. Through a qualitative methodology inspired by the principles of *Grounded Theory Method* (GMT), the study was built on *semi-structured interviews* with first-generation migrant artists living in Brussels and Liège. The goal was to let the participants' narratives guide the analysis, with concepts and themes emerging inductively from the data.

The analysis was organised around six important thematic categories that reflect how migrant artists navigate, adapt, and shape their artistic paths in relation to their migratory trajectories. Each theme highlights a different dimension of the lived experience, while collectively revealing the broader social, cultural, and institutional dynamics at play.

The theme of artistic transformations reveals those participants frequently described migration as a significant turning point in their artistic journeys. For some, displacement prompted a deep re-evaluation of their identity as artists; for others, it opened new sources of inspiration and redefined the meaning of their practice. The encounter with different cultural contexts, artistic traditions, and social expectations often led to shifts in artistic mediums, aesthetics, and messages. Migration was thus a transformative force shaping how artists see themselves and engage with their work.

Language emerged as both a constraint and a resource in the migratory experiences of the participants. Several artists described the challenges of expressing themselves in a new language, particularly in professional and institutional contexts. Limited language competence often created barriers to accessing opportunities, building networks, or expressing the meaning of their work. Yet, for others, learning a new language became a form of empowerment: to gain autonomy, find employment, and engage with the local environment. The multilingual context of Belgium, especially the divide between French and Dutch-speaking regions, added another layer of complexity to their communicative practices.

The interviews revealed unequal access to material, institutional, and artistic resources among the participants. Several artists described the difficulties of navigating funding systems or accessing workspaces, particularly in the absence of local networks or formal recognition. Administrative barriers, such as visa status, residency permits, or unfamiliar bureaucratic procedures, often limited their ability to fully participate in the cultural sector. In response, some relied on alternative circuits, including community associations or informal collaborations, to sustain their practice. These strategies, while

creative and resilient, also underscored the structural constraints that limit access to mainstream artistic infrastructures.

The artistic journeys of the participants were often marked by tension, uncertainty, and contradiction. Many artists described the difficulty of balancing creative aspirations with material survival. The pressure to adapt to institutional expectations or market demands sometimes contrasted with personal visions or political commitments. Several also shared moments of doubt, questioning their legitimacy as artists or the purpose of continuing their practice under challenging conditions. These testimonies reveal the emotional and existential weight carried by migrant artists as they attempt to sustain their work in unfamiliar and often exclusionary environments.

The participants revealed the complex role of art in their lives, going beyond creative expression. For many, art serves as a powerful tool to process personal experiences, promote social connection, and engage critically with their environment. Artists use their work to express emotions, raise awareness, or simply provide joy, reflecting a wide range of intentions and approaches.

Artists frequently explain how others perceived and categorised them based on their migratory backgrounds. Several participants reflected on experiences of exoticisation or stereotyping, feeling reduced to “migrant artists” rather than being seen for their work’s value. Some resisted these imposed labels by asserting control over their own narratives. Others strategically navigated expectations, adapting aspects of their practice to fit local norms while subtly subverting them. These dynamics underscored how identity and belonging are continually negotiated, revealing both moments of inclusion and persistent forms of exclusion.

Although gender, as mentioned earlier, was not defined as a separate analytical category, it emerged as a transversal lens throughout the study. The narratives of the women participants highlighted how gender intersects with migration, artistic practice, and institutional positioning. Several described navigating additional layers of invisibility, gendered expectations, and structural inequality. Gender also shaped how their artistic work was perceived and received, often influencing recognition, opportunities, and access to support. These accounts underline the importance of incorporating intersectional perspectives when analysing the migratory and artistic trajectories of individuals.

This research contributes to the theoretical development of the *migratory career* framework by demonstrating how artistic practice is shaped through a continuous negotiation between structural constraints and individual choices. By examining the intersections between migratory and artistic careers, the study expands on the model proposed by Martiniello and Rea, showing how mobility not only reconfigures access to opportunities but also reshapes artistic identity, intention, and production. Drawing on Becker’s concept of *career*, the thesis also highlights the informal networks, institutional gatekeeping, and the determination of artists to sustain their practice. Finally, by integrating a transversal

gender lens, the study contributes to an intersectional approach that highlights the differentiated experiences of artists in relation to gender, legal status, and cultural positioning.

While this thesis offers a grounded exploration of the migratory and artistic trajectories of first-generation migrant artists, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, although gender was addressed through a transversal lens, the analysis focused primarily on the distinct experiences of women artists. As such, the study did not explore how gender dynamics operate in the trajectories of non-binary artists. This choice reflects the nature of the empirical material collected. Second, although the role of institutions emerged as a central theme in the analysis, the study included only one institutional actor. This limited the possibility of analysing how artistic institutions influence the careers of migrant artists from within. Finally, the sample primarily included artists who had already accessed some form of recognition or support through networks or associations. More marginalised or isolated figures were not well represented.

This study also opens up several potential avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the experiences of second-generation or diasporic artists, whose relationship to migration, identity, and artistic production may differ significantly from those who migrated themselves. Their positioning within both host and heritage cultures could reveal distinct forms of negotiation and representation. As noted by Martiniello (2013), Brussels constitutes a major migration city where different various institutional mechanisms have been implemented to manage diversity (p.113). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore whether differences exist between the experiences of migrant artists based in Brussels and others living in different urban contexts, such as Liège. Further research could also examine how gender dynamics affect the trajectories of non-binary artists. Moreover, the institutional perspective could include curators, funders, and policymakers to provide deeper insight into how artistic institutions shape or limit the place of migrant artists within the cultural field.

This research ultimately shows that the relationship between migratory and artistic careers is not secondary, but central. It shapes how artists find their place, tell their story, and give meaning to what they create.

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VIII. Appendix

1. Appendix: Topic Guide

This topic guide serves as a general framework for interviews, highlighting key themes to explore. It provides structure to facilitate conversations with artists and ensures that all relevant topics are addressed. However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed significant flexibility, providing interviewees the freedom to express themselves openly. The guide was intended as a reference, allowing for deviations as the discussion progressed.

Biography and background:

- Can you describe yourself in few words (what is your name? where are you from? How old are you? what are you doing for a living?).
- What inspired you to pursue a career in the arts?
- How long have you been living and working in Belgium?
- How do you describe your trajectory/path from your home country to Belgium?

Migration and career evolution:

- What challenges or opportunities have you encountered in making art in Belgium?
- How has moving from your home country to a new one influenced the direction of your artistic career and the kind of work you create?
- Have you experienced any forms of discrimination that have impacted your artistic career?
- How do your personal experiences as a migrant influence the messages in your artwork?
- Do you keep in contact with people from your country?

Artistic vision and identity:

- How would you describe your artistic vision or style?
- Has relocating to a different cultural environment affected your creative process or the themes you explore in your art? In what ways has living here changed your artistic style, subject matter, or the way you approach your work?
- How has your gender (or other aspects of your identity) influenced your experience as a migrant artist? Have you encountered particular challenges or advantages that you feel are linked to gender or cultural expectations in the art world?

Social and institutional context:

- What has been your experience with Belgian institutions since you arrived?
- How have Belgian cultural institutions (galleries, museums, art organisations) interacted with you and your work?

- How easy or difficult has it been for you to access funding, exhibitions, or project calls through these institutions?
- Have you ever felt treated differently by institutions because of your migrant background?
- Have you ever felt institutions were more interested in your migrant identity than in your artistic practice? How do you feel about this?

Art as a tool:

- What messages or topics do you share through your art?
- Do you use your art as a form of activism or social commentary, particularly on issues related to migration or identity?
- What is the power of an artist?

Reflection and outlook:

- What do you think about the expression of Art in Belgium compared to your origin country?
- What are your future goals as an artist?

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a migrant artist?
- Do you have any advice and tips for other artists who may go through similar journey?

2. Appendix: Labels and categories

The list below presents the labels developed through grounded analysis and grouped into the six main thematic categories developed during the research.

Artistic transformation

- Shaping artistic identity
- Adapting to cultural differences
- Expanding artistic horizons
- Navigating identity and belonging
- Integrating personal migration

Language and Communication

- Overcoming language barrier
- Learning a language to gain access
- Facing challenges in communication
- Navigating linguistic division in Belgium
- Speaking French

Accessibility to resources

- Accessing resources
- Struggling to access resources
- Struggling with administrative formalities
- Frustrated with administrative processes
- Navigating through European status
- Encountering institutional bias due to appearance
- Seeking support and collaboration
- Having opportunities through community support
- Accessing creative spaces
- Having artistic autonomy

Tensions in the artistic journey

- Facing financial struggles
- Thinking of giving up
- Leaving due to lack of support
- Building artistic connections
- Struggling to connect with artistic network
- Experiencing solidarity from the artist community

- Losing creative time to administrative struggles
- Experiencing disruption due to bureaucratic barriers

Art as a tool

Art as a form of expression:

- Creating Art to communicate a message
- Expressing personal truth
- Transmitting emotions
- Creating art to entertain people
- Using art as a therapeutic tool

Art as a tool for social changes:

- Sensitising without activism
- Challenging political structures
- Questioning migration and integration
- Acting as a cultural bridge

Negotiating identity and exclusion

- Being a migrant artist
- Navigating perceptions of exoticism
- Confined by exoticised expectations
- Being categorised as a migrant
- Being reduced to national identity

3. Appendix: Excluded labels

The following labels were considered during the coding process but ultimately excluded from the final analysis. In most cases, they were removed because they overlapped with more precise labels, lacked recurrence across interviews, or did not contribute clearly to the central analytical categories.

Excluded Label	Justification
Learning to navigate independently through language	Covered by broader labels such as <i>Overcoming language barrier</i> and <i>Facing challenges in communication</i> .
Maintaining connections with home country	Outside the main analytical themes.
Rejecting discrimination based on identity	Merged into more analytically precise labels within <i>Negotiating identity and exclusion</i> .
Embracing cultural diversity	Too general; lacked specific links to artistic or migratory career processes.
Emphasising perseverance and hard work	Present but unspecific.
Experiencing artistic freedom in Europe	Outside the main analytical themes.
Finding refuge in art	Outside the main analytical themes.
Achieving success through personal growth and self-reliance	Too vague or unclear as a label.
Providing for family as a success goal	Outside the main analytical themes.
Succeeding by continuing to create	Outside the main analytical themes.
Aspiring to international artistic recognition	Outside the main analytical themes.
Defying institutional constraints	Too close in meaning to <i>Challenging political structures</i> .

Excluded Label	Justification
Feeling institutional mistrust and fear	Not clearly supported by the overall interview material after full transcription review.
Easier access to artistic opportunities in Brussels	Not addressed due to time and scope constraints.
Feeling like origin is more important than art	Included in <i>Being reduced to national identity</i>
Rejecting categorisation in art	Merged into <i>Being categorised as a migrant</i> , which had stronger empirical support.
Determined to continue creating art	Outside the main analytical themes.
Having the freedom to express	Absorbed into the broader category of <i>Art as a form of expression</i> .
Fearing judgment from informal education	Only one mention; not conceptually central to artistic or migratory trajectory.
Managing the business of art	Outside the main analytical themes.
Balancing art and survival	Too vague; aspects are covered by <i>Facing financial struggles</i> and <i>struggling to connect with artistic network</i> .
Challenging the illusion of wealth and recognition through art	Irrelevant due to its highly specific nature.
Facing political repercussions through artistic collaboration	Excluded for ethical reasons at the participant's request.
Questioning artistic legitimacy across two realities	Outside the main analytical themes.

4. Appendix: Excluded combinations

The following table presents the combined labels that were considered during the coding process but were ultimately excluded from the final analysis. In most cases, they were removed due to overlap with more precise labels, lack of recurrence across interviews, or insufficient analytical contribution.

Excluded Combined Label	Justification
Expanding artistic horizons ↔ Exploring universal themes	Overlapped with Artistic Transformations theme; not distinctive enough to remain a separate label.
Expanding artistic horizons ↔ Exploring new artistic field	Conceptually repetitive with Expanding Artistic Horizons; merged under Artistic Transformations to avoid duplication.
Shaping artistic identity ↔ Navigating perceptions of exotism	Not supported by strong interview excerpts; aspects already addressed within Artistic Transformations and Negotiating Identity themes.
Overcoming language barrier ↔ Learning a language to access to a job	Repetitive with an existing combined label under Language and Communication; removed to avoid duplication.
Overcoming language barrier to communicate ↔ Having difficulties with meeting people	Not supported by interview excerpts.
Facing challenges in communication + Having difficulties with meeting people	Not supported by interview excerpts.
Speaking French ↔ Facing challenges in communication	Considered too operational; not supported by interview data and fully covered under existing Language and Communication labels.
Speaking French ↔ Having difficulties with meeting people	Not supported by interview excerpts.
Facing challenges in communication ↔ Struggling to connect with artistic network	Not supported by interview excerpts.

Excluded Combined Label**Justification**

Being a migrant artist ↔ Creating art to communicate a message

Covered by Art as a Tool theme.

Speaking to the youth and underprivileged communities ↔ Sensitising without activism

Not supported by interview excerpts.

Using art as a therapeutic tool ↔ Sensitising without activism

Not supported by interview excerpts.

Thinking of giving up ↔ Experiencing disruption due to bureaucratic barriers

Covered by an existing combined label under Tensions in the Artistic Journey; removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Being a migrant artist ↔ Thinking of giving up

Overlapped with Tensions in the Artistic Journey theme; removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Being a migrant artist ↔ Struggling with administrative formalities

Overlapped with Accessibility to Resources and Tensions in the Artistic Journey; removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Building artistic connections ↔ Being a migrant artist

Overlapped with Tensions in the Artistic Journey theme; removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Providing a creative space ↔ Having opportunities through community support

Overlapped with Accessibility to Resources; removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Accessing resources ↔ Struggling to integrate into mainstream art scene

Not supported by interview excerpts

Questioning migration and integration ↔ Sensitising without activism

Removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Challenging political structures ↔ Creating Art to communicate a message

Removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

Being a migrant artist ↔ Confined by exoticised expectations

Removed to avoid conceptual duplication.

5. Appendix: Descriptive scenario reports on the research process

a. Introduction to the Research Process

This research began with a broad interest in the experiences of migrant artists and the impact of migration on artistic creation. Theoretical inspiration came from the concept of the *migratory career* developed by Martiniello and Rea (2014), as well as Howard Becker's (1963) approach to artistic careers and Christian Rinaudo's (2011) reflections on identity transformation through art. The objective was to understand the ways in which migration influences both the life path and the artistic practice of first-generation migrant artists in Belgium. Rather than beginning with a predefined hypothesis, the study was guided by a grounded theory approach, allowing concepts to emerge progressively from the fieldwork itself.

An exploratory interview conducted with Javier, a Mexican artist based in Brussels, helped orient the study toward themes such as the power of art, the role of institutions, and the social constraints encountered by migrant artists. The exploratory phase contributes to the generation of the thematic interview guide and the formulation of the central research questions.

b. Initial Data Collection

The first wave of interviews was conducted with a small number of artists selected through purposive sampling. These initial participants came from varied backgrounds (Ukraine, Taiwan, Ecuador) and artistic disciplines (painting, illustration, music), but all shared the experience of having migrated to Belgium and developing an artistic practice here. Early interviews confirmed the relevance of the chosen focus and revealed complex intersections between identity, language, artistic practice and institutional navigation.

These first interviews were deliberately broad in scope and explored a wide range of topics. They served as fertile ground for identifying the initial dimensions of the migrant artistic experience, which contributed to the creation of the six key themes of the analysis.

c. Labelling Process and Conceptualisation

Following the initial micro-analysis, I began assigning labels to segments of the transcribed interviews in line with Lejeune's grounded approach (2014, pp.65-83). These labels were not predefined but created progressively, based on what the participants expressed and how they positioned themselves. I formulated most labels using verbs to highlight ongoing processes and actions rather than fixed categories (pp.75-77).

Throughout this phase, I prioritised general and interpretative labels that could reflect variation across situations (p.71). The goal was to remain as close as possible to the actors' lived experiences, while creating categories and dimensions (p.78-83). This labelling work became the foundation for identifying recurring patterns and for grouping codes into broader themes later in the process.

d. Analytical Adjustments and Theoretical Sampling

Each new interview contributed to the identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and new directions. It also helped refine the analytic focus. For instance, language emerged as a much more central issue than initially expected, particularly following the interviews with Amina and Serkan.

Decisions made during this phase were not based on representativity, but on analytic relevance. Each participant was selected to deepen or challenge an emerging theme, contributing to a grounded construction of meaning.

e. Axial and Selective Coding

As the corpus expanded, open codes were reviewed, merged, and reorganised into combined labels. This axial coding phase helped clarify how different codes related to one another, often forming pairs of interlinked experiences such as: *Being a migrant artist* ↔ *Shaping artistic identity*, *Confined by exoticised expectation* ↔ *Navigating perception of exoticism*, and *Seeking support and collaboration* ↔ *Experiencing solidarity from the artist community*.

These combined labels were then grouped into six major thematic categories forming the backbone of the analysis chapter:

- a) “Artistic Transformations”
- b) “Language and Communication”
- c) “Accessibility to Resources”
- d) “Tensions in the Artistic Journey”
- e) “Art as a Tool”
- f) “Negotiating Identity and Exclusion”

Each theme was designed to reflect both the participants’ voices and the conceptual journey of the researcher, allowing the thesis to articulate an interpretative narrative without reducing the diversity of lived experiences.

To support this process, I also engaged in mapping exercises to visually explore the relationships between labels and themes. This work resulted in a broader schematisation, in which all the combined labels were organised into a single visual plan centred around the main theme of *being a migrant artist*.

f. Reflections on Methodological Choices

The choice to work with QDA Miner Lite allowed for manual and interpretative coding, respecting the flexibility required by grounded theory. The software facilitated label organisation and cross-referencing.

A key methodological choice involved translating all interviews from French to English to meet thesis requirements. This translation aimed to preserve tone, meaning, and metaphorical language. A specific report gives the original interview excerpts.

The researcher's positioning as a non-migrant student working in sociology was acknowledged throughout. Rather than seeking neutrality, the analysis embraced a situated perspective, recognising that interpretation is always influenced by the positionality of the researcher. This process also involved moments of hesitation and doubt, particularly when interpreting sensitive or emotionally charged material, including the challenge of understanding and expressing the interviewees' words as accurately as possible, within the context of their experiences.

g. Challenges and Decisions

Several challenges marked the research process. Not all interviews provided the same level of depth; some were harder to code due to vague or fragmented responses.

Certain labels and combinations were excluded when they lacked sufficient recurrence or analytic clarity. Two reports provide a list of unused labels and combined labels that were not retained in the final structure.

Additionally, although gender was considered from the beginning of the research and a specific question on gender influence was included in the interview guide, it did not initially emerge as a dominant analytical category. A decision was made to acknowledge gender as a transversal lens in the analysis, with plans to revisit the interviews with female participants for further exploration.

h. Conclusion

This scenario report has traced the analytical path followed throughout the research, from the formulation of initial questions to the emergence of conceptual categories. Guided by grounded theory, the study relied on an iterative and inductive process in which the voices of first-generation migrant artists shaped both the structure and content of the analysis.

This process was neither linear nor without difficulty. It involved continuous adjustments, moments of uncertainty, and deliberate decisions about what to include, what to exclude, and how to interpret. By embracing a situated perspective and integrating reflexive attention to methodological choices, the analysis attempted to construct a meaningful, grounded, and theoretically informed account of the complex realities experienced by migrant artists in Belgium.

6. Original Interview Excerpts

The following excerpts correspond to the translated quotes included in the main analysis chapter. They are presented here in their original French version.

APPENDIX 6.1.

Y : Parce que je parle de moi, de qui suis-je et aussi de la dualité d'être qui je suis. Donc ça influence pas mal dans ma façon de travailler et dans ma façon de réfléchir et aussi des choses que je mets beaucoup plus dans mon travail.

APPENDIX 6.2.

V : Le fait de pouvoir mélanger un peu les cultures, les sons. Des endroits où j'ai été, c'est vraiment la magie de l'Art, de l'Art dans mon cas la musique. (...) donc je trouve que par rapport à les cultures il faut aussi s'adapter quoi. Donc euh oui je trouve que c'est un truc intéressant comme ça change de pays en pays, je trouve que c'est super super intéressant.

APPENDIX 6.3.

A : l'envie de rencontrer l'autre, d'aller vers l'autre, l'envie de me découvrir aussi, l'envie de sortir des mots que je connais pas parce que j'aurai rencontré des gens que je connais pas, d'autres cultures.

APPENDIX 6.4.

Y : Je me questionnais moi sur mon identité parce que donc je suis arrivé j'avais 18 ans et j'ai quitté mon pays j'avais 15 ans. Et l'intégration, donc la maturité je l'ai eu un peu plus sur le chemin et aussi ici et j'ai toujours rencontré des gens qui me dit « ah t'es intégré, toi tu parles français » des choses comme ça. Mais aussi par rapport au procédé que je devais faire pour avoir des papiers, c'était « intègre-toi, ceci c'est pas assez, ceci c'est pas assez ». Donc j'ai fait un travail qui s'appelle le métissage donc au fait j'essaie d'assumer cette identité qui est rwandaise mais aussi belge.

APPENDIX 6.5.

V : Des difficultés je peux dire que au départ c'était la langue parce que je parlais pas trop le français, ben je parlais rien du tout et voilà. Je savais pas comment me débrouiller, je savais même pas aller au magasin, je savais rien faire donc euh je devais tout le temps être accompagné de quelqu'un qui parlait pour moi et tout. Ça me faisait pas sentir trop à mon aise, c'était un peu compliqué à ce moment-là. Après voilà, j'ai mis mes efforts pour apprendre la langue, apprendre à parler pouvoir me débrouiller et tout et puis dans un moment donné j'ai du me débrouiller tout seul et c'est ce que j'ai fait jusqu'à maintenant.

APPENDIX 6.6.

C : Moi je crois que il y a quelque chose par rapport à la Belgique. C'est très difficile, par exemple le fait que la Belgique soit splittée en deux partie Flandre partie Wallonie. Ça pose déjà des problématiques aux artistes parce qu'ils doivent déjà décider quelle langue choisir.

APPENDIX 6.7.

A : Disons que ça se passe, contrairement à d'autres personnes, je crois que le fait de parler français ça m'aide par exemple. C'est un peu con mais ça aide énormément. Parce que je vois mes frères et mes sœurs africains, africaines ou même étrangers qui sont ici. Combien c'est difficile de se faire entendre, c'est trop difficile. Je crois que le fait de parler français m'a permis d'être libre dans comment je dois m'exprimer et de comprendre aussi un peu le système, de comprendre certains codes aussi.

APPENDIX 6.8.

Y : Il y avait cette difficulté quand je suis arrivé, j'ai fait la demande d'asile puis j'ai été sans papier pendant 10 ans et pendant ces années-là, c'était très difficile parce que tu as accès à rien à part l'aide médicale d'urgence et donc même pour s'inscrire à l'école, parfois on demande la carte d'identité etc et donc ça été très très difficile.

APPENDIX 6.9.

Vi : J'ai la double nationalité parce que à un moment donné, je me suis dit que c'était logique parce que c'est ici que je vis, c'est ici que je travaille, etc.

APPENDIX 6.10.

V : Moi, je suis brun donc voilà la couleur. Donc voilà je me laisse pas mais après ouais je vais pas nier j'ai eu beaucoup de complications même au départ. Ce qui m'a sauvé ce sont mes papiers européens, sinon je ne sais pas comment ça aurait fini pour moi. Mais voilà quoi, je veux pas être, je veux pas être, donner des fausses accusations ni rien mais voilà quoi. La vérité c'est que oui j'ai une des complications, il y a des institutions qui voilà quoi sont pas habitués de voir des gens avec ma tête, mon apparence et voilà.

APPENDIX 6.11.

C : Les artistes viennent ici, commencent à travailler après avec le temps, nous de l'équipe et les artistes voient si on peut soutenir la pratique de manière plus structurée. C'est-à-dire faire un porte-folio, les mettre en contact vraiment avec des espaces d'exposition ou de vente.

APPENDIX 6.12.

M : Maintenant, je suis soutenu par une ASBL qui s'appelle « les Arts Urbains ». Ça s'appelle « Level-up », un programme qui soutient les artistes dans le rap, le slam et la danse. On est accompagné pendant deux ans et du coup ils proposent pas mal de choses pendant l'accompagnement, des formations. C'est cool.

APPENDIX 6.13.

C : C'est-à-dire que pour nous un des choses les plus importantes, c'est de faire savoir aux artistes qui ont un parcours de migration, qui peuvent avoir besoin de cet espace quand il existe. Du coup, par exemple, notre travail c'est d'aller dans des centres d'accueil et présenter le projet et dire on est là si vous voulez venir. Vous êtes les bienvenus.

APPENDIX 6.14.

A : En général, c'est très difficile par rapport aux Institutions. Moi et les institutions, on fait deux vraiment. J'ai même fait une petite pièce de théâtre par rapport à l'absurdité qu'on vit dans les administrations ici quand on va chercher un document, une pièce d'identité ou quand on va juste actualiser un truc tellement petit, comment on fait vivre un cauchemar parfois et ça c'est par rapport à beaucoup d'étranger africains pas africains. Mais voilà, le fait de rentrer en contact avec l'autre dans sa langue, parfois ça aide.

APPENDIX 6.15.

A : Voilà c'est l'histoire d'une artiste qui arrive, qui se rend compte que tout n'est pas si facile, que tout n'est pas, y'a des choses compliqués par rapport à la relation entre les gens qui ont fui, les gens qui sont ici, les gens qui viennent du pays. Après, j'ai eu la protection politique donc je suis resté ici en tant que réfugié.

APPENDIX 6.16.

Y : Comme je disais aujourd'hui je bosse dans une autre institution et mon travail artistique est devenu secondaire parce que si je commence vraiment à me concentrer là-dedans je vais ne pas pouvoir payer mon loyer à la fin de moi ou avoir des opportunités donc ça c'est très très difficile.

APPENDIX 6.17.

N : Y'a pas mal de gens qu'on essaie de travailler avec parce qu'on est obligé. Les artistes c'est jamais seul, aujourd'hui en tout cas, c'est plus possible. Si on prend même l'Art, Arte povero, c'est pas le truc. On peut prendre cette voie-ci, on peut c'est super. Le problème c'est que est-ce qu'on vit de son art ? Parce que si on vit de son art, tu dois et tu es obligé de se nourrir, de vendre des affaires, ça c'est d'autres questions mais évidemment je suis contre le marché d'art parce que c'est pour tuer l'art. Mais

il faut absolument quelqu'un qui t'aide au minimum. Qui te montre ton art sinon tu fais, alors moi j'essaie de m'entourer au maximum.

APPENDIX 6.18.

Vi : Des difficultés, non c'est chaque fois plutôt des opportunités, c'est-à-dire que j'ai d'abord fréquenté l'académie pendant des années, j'ai aussi rencontré des personnes qui sont des petites fenêtres qui se sont ouvertes. J'ai parfois un peu forcé parce qu'il faut vouloir les choses. Quand on a eu une passion, voilà on finit par trouver les bonnes personnes, par ouvrir les portes (...) Alors au niveau de la relation avec les galeries, non j'ai toujours travaillé avec des galeries ici à Liège ou à Bruxelles. Je n'ai pas éprouvé de difficultés à trouver un partenariat avec des galeries.

APPENDIX 6.19.

N : Je pense que même parfois c'est plus difficile en Belgique parce que en fait, sans dire quelque chose de mauvais je comprends tout à fait. Souvent en Belgique, ça fonctionne par les connaissances en fait et comme j'étais toute seule, je ne connaissais personne.

APPENDIX 6.20.

A : J'ai eu la chance d'être en contact avec de belles personnes qui sont déjà engagée dans le domaine de l'art du slam, qui travaille déjà qui produise déjà beaucoup de choses. Et voilà, je suis arrivée en mode travail et expérimenter ce monde ici mais tout en montrant ce que je peux faire ici. Donc je crois que j'ai eu la chance de très bien être entourée et j'ai pas trop galérer par rapport à ça.

APPENDIX 6.21.

Y : D'une certaine manière oui parce que je pense, en fait, ça m'a freiné d'une part parce qu'en fait le temps que je pouvais passer à créer, je le passais à courir derrière un document ou tel ou tel truc.

APPENDIX 6.22.

N : Mais en tout cas, j'avoue que au début c'était très très dur parce que déjà que je n'ai pas eu de documents. Je veux dire pour moi les documents c'était une montagne de documents qu'il fallait compléter mais bon voilà à un moment donné j'ai eu tellement dur à l'académie. Pas à l'Académie dans la façon de travailler ou de créer mais dans la façon que je louais un appartement, il fallait tous les documents. Je n'ai pas de document, je n'ai pas le temps donc à un moment donné tu te dis comment faire et ça c'était très dur et un moment donné je voulais quitter.

APPENDIX 6.23.

V : *Je suis tombé amoureux de ça, le fait de pouvoir s'exprimer, de pouvoir dire vraiment ce que tu penses. De pouvoir vraiment faire une manifestation contre plein de choses qui vont pas dans ce monde. Je l'ai trouvé super intéressant et c'est ce qui m'a attiré par rapport au Rap.*

APPENDIX 6.24.

V : *Mais le pouvoir d'un artiste pour moi c'est vraiment les émotions qui arrivent à transmettre aux gens. Ouais c'est la réponse, c'est les émotions qu'il arrive à transmettre aux gens à travers de son art.*

APPENDIX 6.25.

N : *Aujourd'hui, on comprend des choses demain on comprend plus de choses. On essaie de trouver, de s'adapter mais peut-être adapter la société aussi. Peut-être, il y a ce côté, je ne dirais pas contre la société mais quelque chose contre le système politique.*

APPENDIX 6.26.

Y : *Mon message à travers mon art, c'est plus sensibiliser en tout cas à la, à la société dans laquelle on vit aujourd'hui et qui est, où y'a beaucoup de rejets par rapport à l'autre. Fin surtout parfois créer par la peur de ne pas connaître l'étranger, c'est quelque chose inconnu donc on a peur donc on se protège etcetera (...) c'est mon travail de sensibiliser de manière artistique à toutes ces questions de la société, le racisme.*

APPENDIX 6.27.

A : *Disons que mon objectif dans ce que je fais c'est de pouvoir atteindre des gens et pouvoir participer à ce qu'il se passe dans la société là où je me retrouve que ça soit ici ou au Burundi. Là où je me sens impliquer d'une certaine façon, mais pour moi le fait d'être artiste c'est une chance, c'est une opportunité de créer du beau autour de moi, en moi et de contribuer à ce que la vie soit encore plus belle que hier donc oui ma vision c'est ça.*

APPENDIX 6.28.

V : *J'ai un truc un peu exotique en moi et je pense que ça peut attirer et en même temps ça peut faire que les autres personnes n'aiment pas mais voilà c'est un peu la variété aussi.*

APPENDIX 6.29.

A : *J'ai même pas envie que l'on me mette dans cette case-là et que je reste emprisonner dans ces sujets-là. Ça me faisait mal parce que plein de personnes, fin je comprends aussi, en tant qu'artiste africaine c'est ma responsabilité de parler de ces choses mais du coup je me sentais mise à l'écart d'autres sujets, d'autres préoccupations, d'autres formes d'expressions qui ne sont pas que ces sujets-là.*

APPENDIX 6.30.

A : *C'est jusqu'à ce que moi je décide que je vais commencer à parler d'autres choses pour que vous voyez que je suis artiste avant d'être africaine, je suis être humain qui est touché par plein de choses. Même si je parle du racisme et du colonialisme, je vais pas en parler comme vous vous voulez que j'en parle. J'ai eu, j'ai ma façon de voir ces choses-là, je suis, comment dirais-je, on est pas condamné à dire les mêmes choses de la même façon, on ne les vit pas de la même façon. On a une liberté dans tout ça.*

APPENDIX 6.31.

C : *Des artistes qu'on peut aller chercher juste pour le fait qu'ils ont une certaine nationalité. Et ça c'est très dangereux parce qu'on voit plus la partie artistique mais juste la provenance. Evidemment, c'est important ça fait partie de la vie d'un artiste et de la carrière d'un artiste, de venir dans un certain pays avec un certain éducation, culture, etc. Mais le danger c'est de ne pas voir la pratique artistique.*

APPENDIX 6.32.

N : *Parce que tu es un étranger, ils pensent que tu penses différemment, peut-être que ce n'est pas le cas, mais pour eux c'est un petit plus parce que tu viens d'un autre pays, et cela donne une sorte de dimension globale. Mais ensuite, ils peuvent te demander indirectement d'aller dans ce sens, d'une certaine manière.*

APPENDIX 6.33.

Y : *Je pense que c'est par mon histoire, il y a des institutions en tout cas comme je le disais tout à l'heure qui m'ont exposé parce que ça sensibilisait le publique et donc c'est parce que c'était mon travail ou est-ce qu'ils avaient juste l'intérêt parce que mon histoire. Parce que donc j'arrivais je témoignais de mon parcours migratoire etcetera et un peu fasciné en voyant à travers ce qu'il a vécu malgré ça il arrive à faire ça et pour moi ça me servait un peu parce que j'exposais et de l'autre côté c'est quand même un peu bizarre quoi.*

APPENDIX 6.34.

V : *Là maintenant je trouve qu'on vit dans un monde où il y a tellement de mélange, il y a tellement de culture, de richesse au niveau mondial que voilà le fait de discriminer quelqu'un pour sa couleur de peau, sa façon de parler, ses origines. Je trouve ça même ridicule. Franchement, même si j'ai été victime, on m'a insulté, on m'a, la police même. Je me suis fait arrêter pour seulement marcher dans la rue.*

APPENDIX 6.35.

A : *Qu'on te voit comme une femme avant de te voir comme une artiste par exemple. On te voit avec ce que tu portes avant de te voir ce que tu portes comme paroles et ça ça bloque parce que c'est dur d'être libre avec tout ça.*

APPENDIX : 6.36.

A : *Comment t'es jugée, on te regarde, comment on va examiner tous tes faits et gestes alors que tu es une artiste et que tu es libre. Tu dois pouvoir t'exprimer sans penser à qui regarde quoi chez toi. (...) Être une femme artiste, c'est être solide et courageuse.*

APPENDIX 6.37.

Y : *J'ai toujours mangé du chocolat quand j'étais au Rwanda. [...] J'ai assisté à une conférence à Liège où ils parlaient des enfants qui travaillent dans la production de cacao. Alors, avec le temps, pendant mes études artistiques, je me suis dit : « pourquoi ne pas raconter cette histoire dans une exposition ? »*

APPENDIX 6.38.

Y : *Chez eux ? Oui, ils m'ont pas posé la question de ce que j'allais faire. [...] Ils m'ont juste envoyé un message disant : 'c'est quoi l'affiche de l'exposition, tu mets un nom etc.' Mais côté artistique ils ne m'ont rien demandé donc tout ce qui a été réalisé, c'est toute la vitrine. Cette vitrine, je l'ai vraiment imaginée, en allant visiter, en allant voir. 'Ah ça ça pourrait bien donner dans cette vitrine.' J'avais une carte blanche.*

APPENDIX 6.39.

Y : *Mon expo, il est fait dans un quartier populaire donc très diversifié. Le jour où je suis retourné samedi, j'ai eu beaucoup de jeunes de ma communauté qui s'arrêtaient pour la plupart parce qu'il y a la vitrine qui les intriguait un peu et puis je les ai invités à venir à l'intérieur et découvrir. [...] C'est aussi quelque chose qui me fait rêver un jour de. Est-ce que c'est parce que je suis ici en Occident que je n'attire pas beaucoup ma communauté mais c'est de les amener vers ça aussi pour dire : 'En fait, les portes sont pas fermées pour nous.' Donc si je peux être la clé pour que des personnes de ma communauté puissent ouvrir les galeries. Voilà.*

7. Consent form



Université de Liège

Formulaire de consentement pour l'utilisation de données à caractère personnel dans le cadre d'un travail de séminaire

La carrière migratoire des artistes migrants en Belgique

La carrière migratoire des artistes migrants en Belgique : une analyse qualitative à travers leurs trajectoires artistiques et identitaires.

Ce document a pour but de vous fournir toutes les informations nécessaires afin que vous puissiez donner votre accord de participation à cette étude en toute connaissance de cause.

Pour participer à ce projet de recherche, vous devrez signer le consentement à la fin de ce document et nous vous en remettrons une copie signée et datée. Vous serez totalement libre, après avoir donné votre consentement, de vous retirer de l'étude.

Responsable(s) du projet de recherche

Le responsable académique de ce travail est : [Martiniello Marco, M.Martiniello@uliege.be]

L'étudiant réalisant ce travail de séminaire est : [Martens Julien, julien.martenstudent.uliege.be]

Description de l'étude

Cette étude a pour but de comprendre comment l'expérience migratoire influence le parcours artistique, la production, et l'identité des artistes migrants vivant en Belgique. Elle sera menée, sauf prolongation, jusqu'à la fin de l'année académique 2024-2025.

Protection des données à caractère personnel

Le ou les responsables du projet prendront toutes les mesures nécessaires pour protéger la confidentialité et la sécurité de vos données à caractère personnel, conformément au *Règlement général sur la protection des données* (RGPD – UE 2016/679) et à la loi du 30 juillet 2018 relative à la protection des personnes physiques à l'égard des traitements de données à caractère personnel

Qui est le responsable du traitement ?

Le Responsable du Traitement est l'Université de Liège, dont le siège est établi Place du 20-Août, 7, B- 4000 Liège, Belgique.

Quelles seront les données collectées ?

Les données récoltées sont des données sur parcours migratoire, nationalité, âge approximatif, discipline artistique, récit de vie, opinions, réflexions personnelles, extraits de parcours professionnel et artistique Les données d'enregistrement audio sont des transcriptions des entretiens, et notes de terrain

À quelle(s) fin(s) ces données seront-elles récoltées ?

Les données à caractère personnel récoltées dans le cadre de cette étude serviront à la réalisation du travail de séminaire présenté ci-dessus. Elles pourraient, éventuellement, aussi servir à la publication de ce travail de séminaire ou d'articles issus de cette recherche, à la présentation de conférences ou de

cours en lien avec cette recherche, et à la réalisation de toute activité permettant la diffusion des résultats scientifique de cette recherche. Sauf mention contraire, ces données seront rendues anonymes dans les résultats de cette étude.

Ces données seront utilisées uniquement dans le cadre du travail de séminaire mentionné ci-dessus. Elles pourront également servir à la publication académique éventuelle des résultats (article scientifique, conférence, présentation de recherche, etc.). Toutes les données seront **anonymisées** dans les résultats. Aucun nom réel ou élément permettant une identification directe ne sera publié sans consentement explicite.

Combien de temps et par qui ces données seront-elles conservées ?

Les données à caractère personnel récoltées seront conservées jusqu'à la réalisation et la validation par le responsable académique du séminaire présenté ci-dessus. Le cas échéant, la conservation de ces données pourrait être allongée de quelques mois afin de permettre les autres finalités exposées au point 3.

Ces données seront exclusivement conservées par l'étudiant réalisant ce travail de séminaire, sous la direction du responsable académique.

Comment les données seront-elles collectées et protégées durant l'étude ?

Étape 1 : Réalisation d'entretiens enregistrés (avec autorisation préalable). Données de contact et enregistrements stockés séparément.

Étape 2 : Transcription et pseudonymisation. Un code est attribué à chaque participant pour dissocier ses propos de toute identité directe.

Étape 3 : Traitement des données sur un ordinateur personnel sécurisé (disque chiffré) avec accès protégé par mot de passe.

Étape 4 : Rédaction du mémoire à partir de matériaux anonymisés.

Étape 5 : Destruction des données identifiantes à la fin du projet.

Ces données seront-elles rendues anonymes ou pseudo-anonymes ?

L'article 193-1 de la loi belge du 30 juillet 2018 relative à la protection des personnes physiques à l'égard des traitements de données à caractère personnel prévoit que la personne concernée doit être avertie d'une anonymisation ou pseudonymisation (« encodage ») des données récoltées. Toutes les données seront **pseudonymisées** pendant l'analyse, puis **anonymisées** dans le travail final. Aucune donnée permettant une identification directe ne sera utilisée dans les publications ou le mémoire. Les noms, lieux précis, et détails pouvant permettre une identification seront modifiés ou retirés.

Qui pourra consulter et utiliser ces données ?

Seuls l'étudiant réalisant le travail présenté plus haut, le responsable académique (pour validation de la démarche scientifique) et ses délégués éventuels (assistants) auront accès à ces données à caractère personnel.

Ces données seront-elles transférées hors de l'Université ?

Non, ces données ne feront l'objet d'aucun transfert ni traitement auprès de tiers.

Sur quelle base légale ces données seront-elles récoltées et traitées ?

La collecte et l'utilisation de vos données à caractère personnel reposent sur votre consentement écrit. En consentant à participer à l'étude, vous acceptez que les données personnelles exposées au point 2 puissent être recueillies et traitées aux fins de recherche exposées au point 3.

Quels sont les droits dont dispose la personne dont les données sont utilisées ?

Comme le prévoit le RGPD (Art. 15 à 23), chaque personne concernée par le traitement de données peut, en justifiant de son identité, exercer une série de droits :

- Obtenir, sans frais, une copie des données à caractère personnel la concernant faisant l'objet d'un traitement dans le cadre de la présente étude et, le cas échéant, toute information disponible sur leur finalité, leur origine et leur destination ;
- Obtenir, sans frais, la rectification de toute donnée à caractère personnel inexacte la concernant ainsi que d'obtenir que les données incomplètes soient complétées ;
- Obtenir, sous réserve des conditions prévues par la réglementation et sans frais, l'effacement de données à caractère personnel la concernant ;
- Obtenir, sous réserve des conditions prévues par la réglementation et sans frais, la limitation du traitement de données à caractère personnel la concernant ;
- Obtenir, sans frais, la portabilité des données à caractère personnel la concernant et qu'elle a fournies à l'Université, c'est - à - dire de recevoir, sans frais, les données dans un format structuré couramment utilisé, à la condition que le traitement soit fondé sur le consentement ou sur un contrat et qu'il soit effectué à l'aide de procédés automatisés ;
- Retirer, sans qu'aucune justification ne soit nécessaire, son consentement. Ce retrait entraîne automatiquement la destruction, par le chercheur, des données à caractère personnel collectées ;
- Introduire une réclamation auprès de l'Autorité de protection des données (<https://www.autoriteprotectiondonnees.be>, contact@apd-gba.be).

Comment exercer ces droits ?

Pour exercer ces droits, vous pouvez vous adresser au Délégué à la protection des données de l'Université, soit par courrier électronique (dpo@uliege.be), soit par lettre datée et signée à l'adresse suivante :

Université de Liège
M. le Délégué à la protection des données,
Bât. B9 Cellule "GDPR",
Quartier Village 3,
Boulevard de Colonster 2,
4000 Liège, Belgique.

Coûts, rémunération et dédommagements

Aucun frais direct lié à votre participation à l'étude ne peut vous être imputé. De même, aucune rémunération ou compensation financière, sous quelle que forme que ce soit, ne vous sera octroyée en échange de votre participation à cette étude.

Retrait du consentement

Si vous souhaitez mettre un terme à votre participation à ce projet de recherche, veuillez en informer l'étudiant réalisant le travail séminaire, dont les coordonnées sont reprises ci-dessus. Ce retrait peut se faire à tout moment, sans qu'une justification ne doive être fournie. Sachez néanmoins que les traitements déjà réalisés sur la base de vos données personnelles ne seront pas remis en cause. Par ailleurs, les données déjà collectées ne seront pas effacées si cette suppression rendait impossible ou entravait sérieusement la réalisation du projet de recherche. Vous en seriez alors averti.

Questions sur le projet de recherche

Toutes les questions relatives à cette recherche peuvent être adressées à l'étudiant réalisant le travail, dont les coordonnées sont reprises ci-dessus.

Je déclare avoir lu et compris les 95 pages de ce présent formulaire et j'en ai reçu un exemplaire signé par les personnes responsables du projet. Je comprends la nature et le motif de ma participation au projet et ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions auxquelles j'ai reçu une réponse satisfaisante. Par la présente, j'accepte librement de participer au projet.

Nom et prénom :

Date :

Signature :

Nous déclarons être responsables du déroulement du présent projet de recherche. Nous nous engageons à respecter les obligations énoncées dans ce document et également à vous informer de tout élément qui serait susceptible de modifier la nature de votre consentement.

Martiniello Marco :

Date :

Signature :

Martens Julien, l'étudiant réalisant l'étude :

Date :

Signature :