

# REFUGEE AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BELGIUM

A REPORT BY VICTORIA KELBERER-MCKEE

OCTOBER 2017





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This report was prepared for ARES by Victoria Kelberer-McKee as part of a study visit (October 2017) sponsored by the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States of America, Belgium and Luxembourg within the Fulbright Specialist Program (FSP) on refugees and migration issues.

The observations, interpretations and opinions expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of ARES, its Board of Directors or the institutions that its members represent.



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# **REFUGEE AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BELGIUM**

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THE COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG WITHIN THE FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST PROGRAM (FSP) ON  
REFUGEES AND MIGRATION ISSUES**

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# / 01. PREFACES

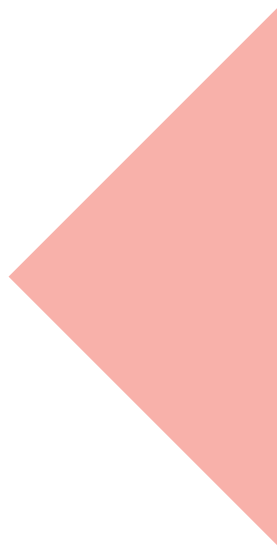
## 01. 1 / METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted in Belgium in October 2017, sponsored by the Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur (ARES) and the US Fulbright Commission in Belgium. During the course of the research, the Fulbright Specialist visited a variety of Belgian francophone Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as well as relevant contacts in private and public sector organizations. She consulted with 1 art school, 1 government administration, 2 migration research organizations, 2 private sector companies, 4 universities, and 4 university colleges. Additionally, a workshop at the end of the research mission hosted by ARES presented initial findings and received feedback from a variety of stakeholders, which has been incorporated into this report. The consultations during site visits took the form of meetings with HEI administrators, students, and professors; lectures with HEI students; and meetings with public officials and private sector representatives. The purpose of these visits was to provide a sample of the programs initiated by francophone Belgian HEIs, and the case studies explored here are by no means exhaustive. The amount and range of programs presented to the Fulbright Specialist by the institutions even in this limited study is indicative of the widespread development of programs for refugees within the Belgian higher education community. In addition to these consultations, the report is based on a desk review of relevant literature, which is presented in the Resources Appendix at the end of the report, and the Specialist's own experiences in the United States, the Middle East, and Europe.

Please note that all figures are current as of October 2017 unless otherwise noted.

## 01. 2 / ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Fulbright Specialist extends her deepest gratitude both to the ARES and the Fulbright Commission in Belgium, without whose support this project would not have been possible. She also thanks the individuals and institutions who participated in this research, and recognizes the time and effort they gave to make the research a reality. Finally, the Fulbright Specialist would like to thank in particular the professors, students, administrators, and others who have made initiatives for refugee students a priority in their institutions. Their enthusiasm and energy have led to the creation of important initiatives that impact the lives of so many people in Belgium, and she was truly impressed by the programs that have already been launched in the country.



# / 02. INTRODUCTION

## 02.1 / THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS: EUROPE AND BEYOND

Worldwide, the number of displaced persons has reached a historic level, with 65.6 million total estimated displaced persons, including 22.5 million refugees, commonly cited as the highest numbers of displaced persons since the end of World War II<sup>1</sup>. While the vast majority of the displaced live in developing countries, the migration crisis has also reached Europe's borders. From 2014-2015, the number of first time asylum applications in European Union countries climbed from approximately 552,000 to nearly 1.3 million, an increase of 123 percent<sup>2</sup>. More than one million of the new arrivals came by sea, largely through the Mediterranean to Greece, and more than 4,000 people are estimated to have died during the crossing<sup>3</sup>. In 2016, while the number of sea arrivals decreased sharply to 364,000, the number of deaths increased to more than 7,400 at sea and 1,100 in North Africa, according to the International Organization for Migration<sup>4</sup>. While many of the arrivals are categorized as "conventional refugees," or persons who meet the 1951 Geneva Convention's definition of a refugee<sup>5</sup>, many others fall under the categories of either "economic migrants" or those fleeing from generalized conflict and violence. The mixed nature of the migration flows have further complicated political efforts to address the crisis, as has the lack of documentation possessed by migrants when they arrive.

International refugee law and the modern humanitarian system were both created in the years following WWII, when more than 50 million people had been displaced by conflict in Europe. According to this system, the United Nations supports three "durable solutions" for refugees: return to the country of origin, integration in a host state or country-of-first-asylum, or resettlement to a third country. One of the key factors for the increase in irregular migration to Europe and elsewhere has been the historically low levels of official resettlement of refugees from host states and countries of origin to third states. In 2016, only 32 states participated in the global resettlement program, offering just over 140,000 resettlement places, despite the fact that the UN estimates that 1.19 million people were in need of resettlement in 2017<sup>6</sup>. As a result, only the most absolutely vulnerable refugees are typically recommended for resettlement, leaving millions without a legal pathway to migrate to a third country.

In 2017, the resettlement situation has further deteriorated, particularly because the United States – the largest resettlement country in the world historically – cut the number of resettlement places from 110,000 to just over 45,000, with serious restrictions on countries of origin and increases in security vetting practices. As a result of these restrictions, UNHCR reported only 24,559 actual resettlements to the US in 2017, and just over 65,000 worldwide, down 48 percent from 126,000 in 2016<sup>7</sup>.

Since 2015, mass media events – including the viral photos of the body of toddler Alan Kurdi washed up on a Turkish beach, and the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks – have polarized public opinion both for and against the reception of refugees in Western states. While some countries like Poland and Hungary sealed off borders and protested the EU relocation scheme, others such as Germany maintained open border policies despite domestic and regional opposition. In June 2016, in what was seen as a public referendum on EU migration policy, the United Kingdom shocked observers when more than 51 percent of its population voted to leave the EU in what has become known as "Brexit."

## 02.2 / THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN BELGIUM

In this context of increasing refugee arrivals, policy failures, and long-term questions of integration, Belgium has experienced a refugee crisis within its own borders that has challenged the small country's ability to respond. Divided into semi-autonomous federal regions, the francophone area of Belgium (Wallonia) has faced unique obstacles to integrating asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly because of language barriers. In 2015, the number of asylum applications peaked at nearly 39,000, reflecting a 178 percent increase from the more than 14,000 applications the country received in 2014<sup>8</sup>. While this number may seem small in comparison to the more than 441,000 applications received by Germany in the same year, statistically Belgium received more than 3,400 applications per one million inhabitants, while the UK, by comparison, only received 541 applications per one million inhabitants<sup>9</sup>.

1 <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

2 <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/>

3 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35194360>

4 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/number-refugees-reaching-europe-plunged-2016-170106132732972.html>

5 According to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, a refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or for holding a political opinion. Most migrants who flee their countries due to poverty cannot qualify for refugee status, and many who flee generalized violence also face challenges in accessing refugee protections. See: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-risks-and-challenges-worldwide>

6 <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/6/575e79424/unhcr-report-sees-2017-resettlement-needs-119-million.html>

7 <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement-data.html>

8 <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/>

9 Ibid.

These migration increases have been met with political upheaval and restrictive policies instituted by the federal government of Wallonia. Because of the closure of many reception centers in 2014, Belgium struggled to respond to the increased number of asylum seekers who arrived beginning in 2015<sup>10</sup>.

Backlash within the Belgian community and the rising prominence of the Flemish nationalist party (New Flemish Alliance or N-VA) has led to clashes over immigration both within the government and within wider society<sup>11</sup>.

Belgium reflects many of the inconsistencies of the current global refugee system: it is at once a transit state, a country-of-first-asylum (host state), and a resettlement state. Many refugees avoid registration in Belgium due to plans to continue onward to Germany, Scandinavian countries, and the UK. Some refugees who arrive do register in Belgium, where it becomes their host state while their asylum claims are processed. Although its resettlement program has not been large historically, in 2015 Belgium resettled 276 refugees, largely from Syria, and relocated 206 people from other EU states<sup>12</sup>. While the pace of refugee arrivals in Belgium have mirrored European trends, slowing in 2016 and 2017, many refugees and other migrants remain in makeshift camps – both official and informal – and recent controversy over refugees inhabiting the Parc Maximilien in Brussels (detailed below) reflects the difficulty the country as a whole is experiencing in attempting to respond to the refugee crisis.

There is a notable gap between the concerns of Belgian citizens and civil society institutions for refugees and scholars-at-risk and the policies of federal policymakers. In the case of Higher Education Institutions, in francophone Belgium regardless of the type of institution – whether it is an art school, a university, or a university college – there is a sense that the integration of refugees and other migrants into Belgian HEIs is one of the vital social responsibilities of the HEI community. Yet there is not a matching concern on the part of the federal government nor a corresponding level of financial and political support for HEIs. Rather, the current federal government has consistently faced criticism from the human rights and humanitarian communities for its treatment of migrants and refugees. In September 2017, the government of PM Charles Michel caused an uproar when his immigration minister Theo Francken of the Flemish nationalist N-VA invited Sudanese officials to identify and later deport nine undocumented Sudanese migrants in Brussels, who were allegedly tortured while traveling to Sudan<sup>13</sup>. The case is currently being investigated following the public outcry. Other high profile immigration sweeps in Parc Maximilien and Gare du Nord in Brussels reveal the ongoing tensions between the elements of Belgian society who desire more humane migration policies.

and those within the government who have taken a strict view towards immigration<sup>14</sup>.

For Belgian HEIs, many of their challenges stem from a lack of state resources to create programs for refugee students, and a lack of political will to leverage higher education access as an opportunity to improve integration outcomes, increase economic opportunities, and fully welcome refugees and migrants into francophone Belgian society<sup>15</sup>.

According to Belgian doctoral researcher Sarah Smit of the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL), although “in theory, everyone can access [higher education],” in reality, concrete obstacles such as the lack of recognition of or access to prior diplomas and the lack of support to enter university prevents migrants and refugees from exercising their right to higher education<sup>16</sup>.

## 02. 3 / REPORT OUTLINE

This report has three main goals: first, the report argues for the unique role that HEIs can play in addressing the global migration crisis; second, it highlights the initiatives and projects already launched by HEIs in Belgium related to refugees and other migrants; finally, it outlines the basic process of creating migration-focused initiatives and provides resources for HEIs to create and expand programs for refugee students and other interested members of the communities. To achieve this, Section 2 outlines the role of HEIs in the refugee crisis globally to provide the context for the role of Belgian HEIs in particular. Section 3 outlines the types of interventions that have already been created by Belgian HEIs, and provides sample case studies. In Section 4, it lays out a basic methodology for HEIs to create refugee-focused initiatives. Section 5 provides recommendations for stakeholders to facilitate the success and expansion of refugee-focused initiatives. The Appendices in Section 6 provides further resources for HEIs and other stakeholders to use in the implementation of their interventions.

10 <http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/europes-asylum-policy-in-crisis-the-case-of-belgium/>

11 <https://www.politico.eu/article/theo-francken-belgian-government-pulls-back-from-brink-in-sudanese-migrant-crisis/>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/citizens-rally-to-host-migrants-in-defiance-of-belgian-government>

12 <https://www.politico.eu/article/theo-francken-belgian-government-pulls-back-from-brink-in-sudanese-migrant-crisis/>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/citizens-rally-to-host-migrants-in-defiance-of-belgian-government>

13 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/world/europe/belgium-sudan-theo-francken.html?smid=tw-share>

14 <http://plus.lesoir.be/112779/article/2017-09-07/la-gare-du-nord-au-bout-de-lexil-limpasse-pour-les-migrants>

15 Author interviews, HEIs, October 2017.

16 [http://www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20170806\\_01037978/ces-migrants-qui-reprennent-des-etudes](http://www.lavenir.net/cnt/dmf20170806_01037978/ces-migrants-qui-reprennent-des-etudes)



## The Global Refugee Crisis in Europe

The increase in refugees and other migrants arriving at Europe's borders and on its shores since 2015 can be traced to several major trends<sup>17</sup>. First, the ongoing civil war in Syria has been a major contributing factor. More than 5.5 million Syrians have been displaced outside of the country in the regional host states, and an estimated ten million are displaced internally, representing more than half of Syria's pre-war population<sup>18</sup>. Although the vast majority of Syrian refugees – more than 90 percent – remain in host states in the region, since April 2011 more than 970,000 Syrians have applied for asylum in the European Union, with the largest numbers arriving since 2014. This trend is the result of many “push-pull factors,” including increased violence and depredation in Syria, deteriorating conditions and a lack of opportunities in the regional host states, and the lack of an imminent political solution to the conflict, particularly one that includes the departure of Bashar al-Assad from power<sup>19</sup>. Pull factors to Europe include economic opportunities, increasing “success stories” of friends and family members who resettled in Europe, and the closing off of other regional host state options due to violence or political reasons<sup>20</sup>. The increase in migrants to European Union member states since 2015 also reflects the protracted nature of several other long-standing conflicts, including those in Afghanistan and Iraq, among others. The top 5 non-EU countries of origin in 2015 and 2016 were Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria, although significant numbers also arrived from Kosouo and Albania<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to international laws on refugees, European Union member states are governed by EU migration policies, and in particular are bound by the Dublin Regulation. Also known as the Dublin III Regulation, the policy states that unofficial or irregular migrants arriving in EU member states should be fingerprinted, registered, and have their asylum claims processed in the country in which they first arrive<sup>22</sup>. Since it first came into force in 2008, the regulation has not been universally applied, especially since 2015 when Greece received more than 80 percent of sea arrivals, followed by Italy, and authorities were overwhelmed and unable (as well as unwilling) to register every single arrival. Germany controversially set aside the Dublin Regulation in September 2015, only to reinstate the rule in November the same year, and many other countries have failed to register all new arrivals or submit their asylum applicants to the EU relocation scheme.

Largely as a result of controversial political agreements with several key transit countries, including Turkey, Libya, and Sudan, sea arrivals to the European Union fell starting in early 2016 and have continued to decrease in 2017. The number of first-time asylum applicants held relatively steady in 2015, however, with more than 1.2 million first-time applicants. Given the decrease in both land and sea arrivals, it is assumed that the continued high number of first-time applicants is in part due to family reunification and in part due to persons who arrived in 2015 but did not apply for asylum at the time. In 2017, first time asylum applicants decreased by more than 54 percent in the second quarter of the year compared to the same period in 2016, indicating that the slowdown in arrivals is finally affecting the number of asylum claims<sup>23</sup>. Despite the decrease in both arrivals and asylum claims, European countries are left to grapple with the long-term implications of the influx of new migrants and refugees since 2015, including the question of social and economic integration.

17 <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/europe%E2%80%99s-migration-crisis-context-why-now-and-what-next>

18 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

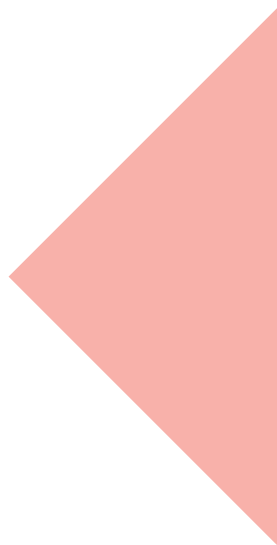
19 <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/europe%E2%80%99s-migration-crisis-context-why-now-and-what-next>

20 Ibid.

21 [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Countries\\_of\\_origin\\_of\\_\(non-EU\)\\_asylum\\_seekers\\_in\\_the\\_EU-28\\_Member\\_States,\\_2015\\_and\\_2016\\_\(thousands\\_of\\_first\\_time\\_applicants\)\\_YB17.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Countries_of_origin_of_(non-EU)_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU-28_Member_States,_2015_and_2016_(thousands_of_first_time_applicants)_YB17.png) - <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/>

22 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en)

23 [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report)



# / 03. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REFUGEE CRISIS

## 03.1 / WHY HEIS? COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in the social inclusion of all students in higher education, including migrants and refugees. The global refugee crisis is also a crisis of education. Just 50 percent of refugee children attend primary school, compared to 91 percent of non-refugee children globally. In secondary education, only 22 percent of refugee adolescents attend school, compared to 84 percent of adolescents globally; only 1 percent of refugees access tertiary education, compared to 34 percent of youth globally who go to university. This lack of access to HEIs can be traced to several key factors: recognition of prior learning and degrees, loss of social assistance, language barriers, and differences in educational systems and approaches<sup>24</sup>. Barriers to accessing higher education do not just prevent the social integration of refugees, but also their economic integration and ability to work in European labor markets. As many Western governments have retreated from an active role in seeking durable solutions for refugees, the involvement of HEIs in the refugee crisis has never been more important.

Globally, HEIs enjoy several areas of comparative advantage that allow them to create effective programs on multiple levels: interventions for refugee students and students from refugee families; initiatives to further community awareness about refugees; research to better understand refugee situations worldwide; and programs to protect Scholars-at-Risk. HEIs are able to mobilize diverse constituencies because of their contact with students, communities, researchers, and policymakers. Interventions can focus on multiple groups of people: refugee students or students from refugee families; Belgian students who are interested in the field of migration studies; Belgian communities; refugees and migrants living within communities; and refugees living in other countries, particularly host countries in other regions. HEIs also by nature have innovative environments that foster the invention of creative solutions to refugee challenges. HEIs recognize education as a means to integration, and can create environments of integration that are not prevalent in other fields, including in professional arenas. Finally, HEIs participate in local, regional, national, and global networks, which allow them to learn from the experiences of other HEIs and to leverage their contacts to build more effective interventions.

There are many constituent groups within HEIs themselves that have the capacity to launch interventions. First and foremost are the students of HEIs: they can form student groups, conduct advocacy with policymakers and HEI administrators, conduct research, and launch other projects to directly help refugees. Second are the professors in HEIs, who can incorporate refugee and migration studies into their curriculum, conduct and participate in refugee-focused research, facilitate student initiatives, increase student contact with refugees and other migrants, and introduce new pedagogical models that focus on the creation of direct interventions for refugees and other migrants. Staff and administration also can play important roles, particularly in welcoming refugee students. They can create programs to facilitate refugee access to higher education, create inclusive policies for all students, and support the work of students and professors. Working together, these constituent groups can leverage all of their activities to coordinate and achieve a greater impact on the people with whom they seek to work.

## 03.2 / EXAMPLES OF HEI INTERVENTIONS IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Globally, many HEIs have already instituted successful initiatives for refugees, including HEIs in Belgium<sup>25</sup>. The Fulbright Specialist worked at Boston University (BU) for seven years, from 2010–2017, as an administrator and academic advisor, an undergraduate and graduate student, and a founding member of the Pardee School Initiative on Forced Migration and Human Trafficking<sup>26</sup>. During her time at BU and while she was active in the Boston-area refugee studies community, she observed the following examples of refugee-focused initiatives:

- » **Support services:** BU has an International Students and Scholars Office, multiple academic advising offices, and language courses that facilitate refugee student (and other international student) success, both academically and socially. Certain First Year Experience courses led by the Academic Advising services are targeted to first generation and English as a Second Language as well as international students, although not targeted specifically towards refugees.

24 Author interviews, Myria and Belgian HEIs, October 2017.

25 Examples of Belgian initiatives are discussed in Section 3.

26 <http://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/research/fmht/>

- » **Research initiative:** In 2015, Prof. Noora Lori and Kaija Schilde launched the Pardee School Initiative on Forced Migration and Human Trafficking (FMHT) to support research, education, and advocacy around these issues. FMHT has since won an EU Jean Monnet Erasmus+ grant to host a series of local and international workshops to compare the migration experiences of the US and other regions, and to connect policymakers, academics, and students to create innovative solutions.
- » **Pedagogical model:** In 2016, Prof. Lori initiated an innovative pedagogical model in her course Forced Migration and Human Trafficking, which has since been adopted permanently by the university. The model requires students to design a direct intervention for a global challenge. The first class worked on the refugee crisis in Jordan, the second focused on unaccompanied minors in Europe, the third on countering violent extremism in the US. The classes created Urban Refuge27, an aid locator app for refugees in Jordan; the Abeona Initiative, which created an SMS tracking system for organizations in Europe working with unaccompanied minors; and the Inkblot Project28, an online and in-person community platform to combat violent extremism.
- » **Student initiatives:** Student-led initiatives for refugees and migrants are widespread and numerous in the Boston area. Working with FMHT, BU student groups coordinated Refugee Education Week and Human Trafficking Education Week in 2016-2017, which offered different programming including film screenings, expert discussions, panels of local organizations working on these issues, and a fundraiser and donations drive to support the work of local NGOs. Dozens of student groups have created projects for refugees and migrants at BU in recent years, and a wave of advocacy and student-led protests erupted on campus following the US President's controversial Muslim Ban in 2017.

Additionally, many other universities have launched research groups, such as the Tufts University Refugees in Towns<sup>29</sup> research project, created in 2017 to research integration outcomes across a multitude of different case studies. The Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies has also had a refugee focus since it was founded in 2014, and supports a scholar-at-risk program at Northeastern University<sup>30</sup>. To coordinate the activities of Boston HEIs, Prof. Myron Weiner of MIT created the Inter-University Committee on International Migration in 1974, which operates to this day<sup>31</sup>.

While Boston-based initiatives are heavily focused on student interventions, research, and community awareness, there are significant barriers for refugee student access to HEIs in the United States generally and in Boston in particular.

The foremost obstacle to HEI access in the US is the cost of tuition. On average, public HEIs in the US now cost 9,650 USD per year for in-state residents, and 24,290 USD for out-of-state residents<sup>32</sup>. Private universities – including Boston University, Northeastern University, MIT, and other key Boston institutions – cost an average of 33,480 USD per year.

These averages are only for tuition; room and board costs per year ranged from 10,440-11,890 USD at public and private universities respectively in 2016-2017. Overcoming the financial challenge remains a central focus of refugee inclusion efforts, and while many scholarship opportunities exist for US students including some targeting refugee students, the amount available is not enough to meet the financial needs of all refugee students.

27 <http://www.urbanrefuge.org/>

28 <https://www.inkblotproject.com/>

29 <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

30 <http://www.bcars-global.org/>

31 <http://web.mit.edu/CIS/www/migration/index.html>

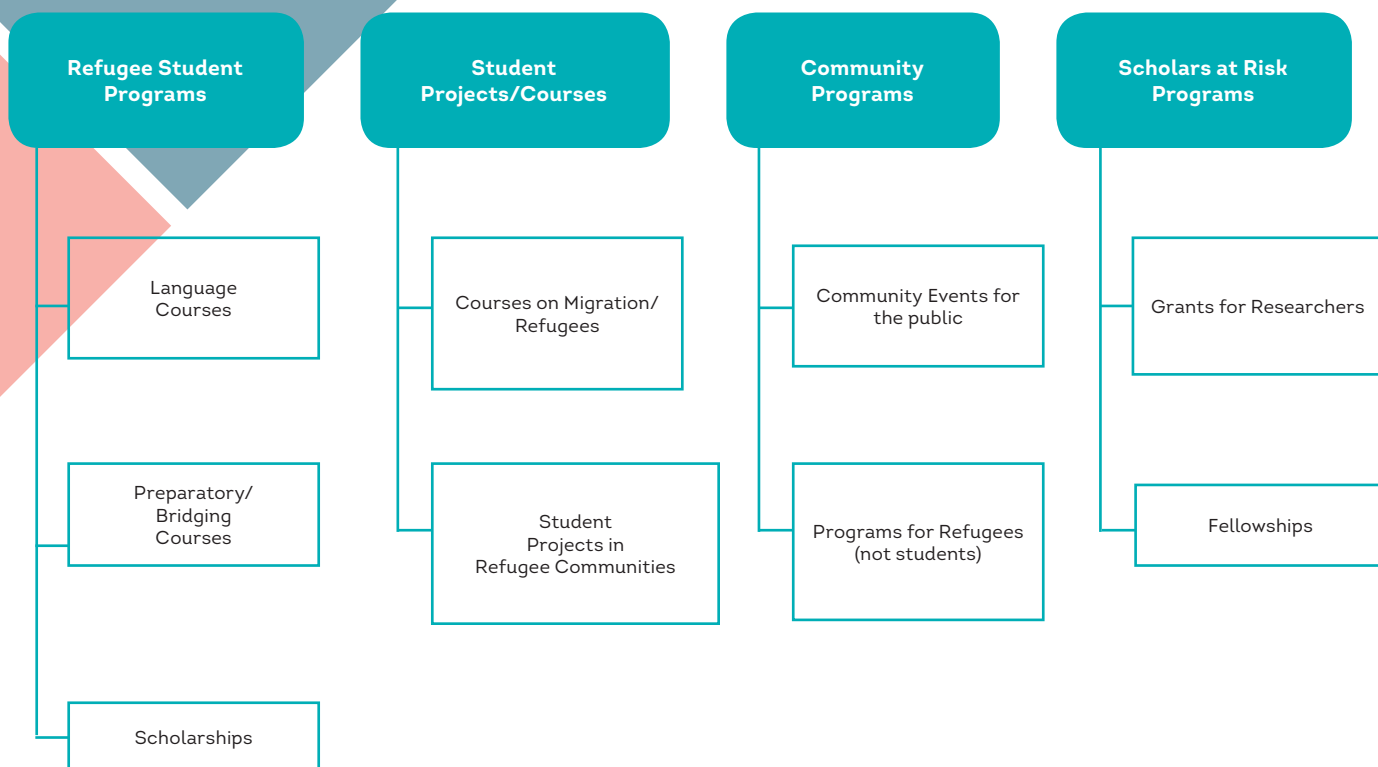
32 [https://www.collegedata.com/cs/content/content\\_payarticle\\_tmpl.jhtml?articleId=10064](https://www.collegedata.com/cs/content/content_payarticle_tmpl.jhtml?articleId=10064)

# / 04. INITIATIVES OF BELGIAN HEIS FOR REFUGEES

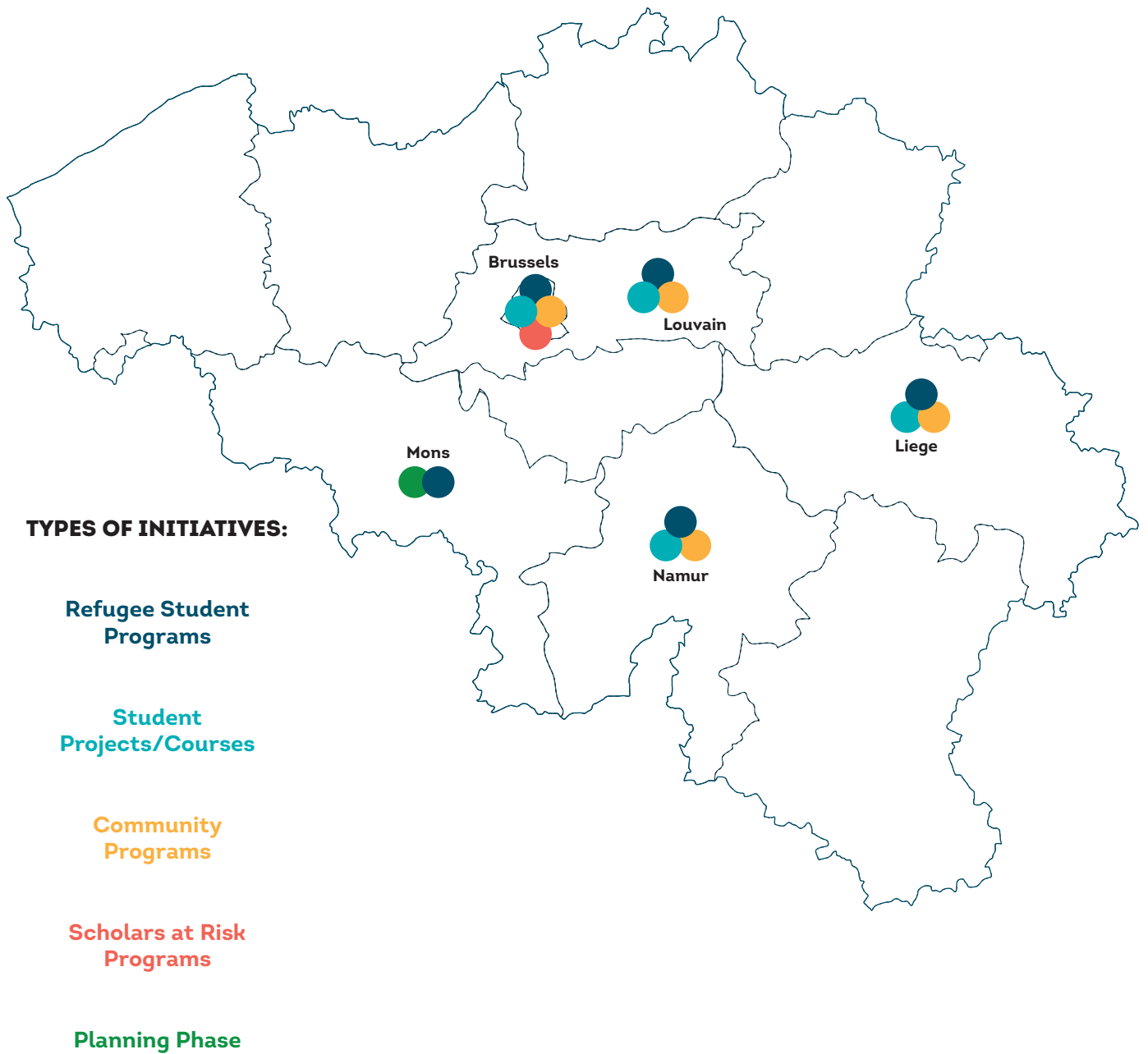
## 04.1 / TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS

In Belgium, HEIs historically have held social inclusion as one of their central pillars, and the right of all Belgian residents to higher education is inscribed in public opinion, as well as in Belgian law under article 24(3) of the Constitution. Belgian HEIs benefit from the fact that cost of attendance is not as large of a barrier to access, and many HEIs waive fees for refugee students who meet the income requirements (which are the same as for other Belgian students). Belgian HEIs have the opportunity not only to launch initiatives focused on refugees, but also to create inclusive policies and environments for refugee students, with far fewer obstacles than is the case in the United States. Many shared challenges with the US still exist, however, for refugee students to access higher education: recognition of diplomas and degrees, identification of refugee students, potential loss of public support, language barriers, and differences in educational systems. Additionally, HEIs in both Belgium and the US must contend with sometimes hostile public opinion towards refugees.

Despite these challenges, in response to the rising number of migrants and refugees in Belgium, Belgian francophone HEIs have already launched initiatives on multiple levels. There are four primary types of refugee-focused projects in Belgium: programs for refugee students, student projects and courses focused on refugees, community programs, and scholars-at-risk programs.



These programs have been launched throughout franco-phone Belgium, including at Universities, University Colleges, and Art Schools. These case studies do not reflect every single initiative created at francophone HEIs, and do not include any examples from the Flemish and German communities of Belgium. They are intended to reflect the diversity of programs and initiatives underway, and include all those personally observed by the Fulbright Specialist, or reported by institutions during the course of the research project. The already well-developed and varied nature of the programs explored here indicates that a large number of projects are likely not specifically mentioned, due to the limited time of the research and ability to schedule additional site visits.



## 04. 2 / CASE STUDIES

### 04. 2.1 / REFUGEE STUDENT PROGRAMS

Many universities in particular have launched initiatives to attract and support more refugee students. These programs generally involve preparatory courses in language and other subjects, access to administrative support for registration, and mentorship and peer exchanges with students and other members of the community.

#### 04. 2.1.1 / Université catholique de Louvain

This year, UCL is launching the Access2University program, which builds on their previous efforts to integrate refugee students. The program includes three central components: language courses (in-person, online, and exchanges with peers); limited preparatory university classes, including one regular course combined with other courses or MOOCs; and mentorship and personalized advising for refugee students. This program targets refugee students who are almost ready to continue their studies, and has been launched in October 2017 with its first cohort of students.

#### 04. 2.1.2 / Université libre de Bruxelles

ULB, on the other hand, has instituted a Refugee Welcome/ Help Desk to assist refugee who are interested in enrolling in the university<sup>33</sup>. It serves as a single point of contact for refugee students, and is run through the regular student social service office (which can help to destigmatize the service as a “refugee” service), in collaboration with the registration department. Refugee students are offered language lessons in order to bring their knowledge of French and/or English up to the level required for their degree programme. Since its creation in 2016, the help desk has experienced some challenges in identifying refugee students, who are not universally identified by status in their registration, and in sensitizing all administrative staff to refugee student needs. ULB also has a well-established refugee studies center (the Migration, Asylum, and Multiculturalism Center<sup>34</sup>), hosts an annual summer school on EU migration law policy<sup>35</sup>, and in 2016 offered 10 scholarships for the summer school for refugee students<sup>36</sup>.

#### 04. 2.1.3 / Université de Liège

In 2015, ULiège created a program to offer French classes to refugees living in camps. Because these camps were located far away – up to an hour – from the university, the program received a budget to provide transportation and food for the refugee students. After the program’s launch, however, the university discovered that this population of students was not likely to continue their studies at university beyond the language classes. The environment of the camp was highly non-conducive to learning, and refugees were focused on meeting basic needs over accessing higher education.

As a result, the program has shifted towards refugees settled in the community who were more prepared to begin university studies, and provided them with both language courses and preparatory university classes on a limited bases (short courses). The program has faced the challenge of retaining refugee students past the preparatory phase, as many participants preferred to move on to areas with greater perceived employment prospects such as Brussels.

#### 04. 2.1.4 / Université de Namur

Since September 2015, UNamur launched Action Réfugiés UNamur, a program to support refugee students at UNamur with several key partners in the community. With the Red Cross and Hennalux, UNamur offers refugees and asylum-seekers French language courses and professional counseling on how to find internships/jobs and how to continue their studies. The program also provides some enrolled refugee students with housing and transportation, and this year will feature a mural by refugee artists in the cafeteria.

### 04. 2.2 / STUDENT PROJECTS AND COURSES

Many students and professors have launched projects and courses to assist refugees and to further research on migration topics. Courses are particularly important to include in refugee-focused initiatives, because they train the future professionals and leaders in francophone Belgium who will work with refugees and other migrants. Student projects are also important for refugee inclusion in the social life of HEIs, and foster community awareness of and support for refugees.

#### 04. 2.2.1 / Student Projects

##### a) Kot à Projets

Francophone Belgium’s model of Kot à Projets provide a rich environment for student innovation on refugee issues. The projects allow students to live together and work on a project for the academic year, and since 2015 projects at Université de Namur and Université catholique de Louvain have focused on refugees and other migrants.

##### b) ULB

Students at ULB have independently launched various different projects for refugees. “Plateforme Discovering Diversity” is a cultural exchange platform that focuses on fostering links between refugee students and Belgian students and communities through social events. The Equality Law Clinic was founded in 2014 and provides law students with the opportunity to work on real-world cases involving refugees and migrants, as well as anti-discrimination cases. Legal Team ULB, on the other hand, goes into refugee communities – particularly in tented and other informal settlements – to provide legal information on refugee and migrant rights in Belgium. Finally, Migration au-delà des préjugés sends ULB students into secondary school classrooms to teach about

33 <https://www.ulb.be/deskrefugees/index.html>

34 <https://www.ulb.ac.be/rech/inventaire/unites/ULB692.html>

35 <http://odysseus-network.eu/2016-summer-school2/about-the-summer-school/>

36 [https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20160608-ulb-university-refugee-summer-school-asylum\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20160608-ulb-university-refugee-summer-school-asylum_en)

refugees and migrants and address stereotypes and other prejudices held by the younger students.

### c) CEDEM

At Université de Liège, the Centre d'Études de l'Ethnicité et des Migrations (CEDEM) is the oldest Belgian research institution dedicated to the study of migration. Founded in 1995, CEDEM maintains its active research role in the community, and some of its faculty and PhD/post-doctoral research projects focus on important refugee-focused topics. One project is researching levels of mobilization of and around refugees and shifts in public opinion about refugees. Another is creating a program to train social workers and language/translation instructors in the Meuse-Rhine Euregio to make their work with refugees more effective in promoting integration.

### 04. 2.2.2 / Courses

Many professors across francophone Belgium have responded to current events as well as student interest by incorporating elements of refugee and migration studies into their courses. This work is an incredibly important pedagogical shift that will ensure that students in Belgian HEIs are educated on these issues and have real world experience with migrants and refugees in their communities. Limited examples of courses visited by the researcher include:

- » Haute École de la Province de Namur (HEPN): An undergraduate International Cooperation course included courses about refugees and migration, as well as site visits to the refugee center in a nearby town.
- » Haute École Libre de Bruxelles Ilya Prigogine (HELB): Social Work course engages students with refugees and migration through professor's own experiences working with refugees living in nearby communities as well as lectures on the topic.
- » Haute École de la ville de Liège (HEL): A pedagogy course for future teachers and professors includes lessons on how to teach about migration and refugee-related topics, including how to confront and discuss preconceptions and stereotypes held about refugees and how to encourage students to think of concrete actions they can take to be involved in these issues.
- » Haute École Libre Mosane (HELMO): An undergraduate international law course includes lessons on international human law and refugee and migration policy in Belgium for students who aim to concentrate on law and international cooperation.

While it can often seem like an obvious and incremental first step, including refugee and migration issues in curricula across disciplines is not only crucial to the ability of students to understand current events, but also necessary to educate the next generation of Belgian citizens about forced migration.

Community programs are vitally important to both raise awareness about refugees in Belgium, and also to involve motivated community members in refugee-focused projects. These programs can help ameliorate relations between Belgian communities and refugees, and improve political will to resolve challenges.

### 04. 3.2.1 / ESA Saint-Luc Bruxelles

In 2016-2017, a professor at ESA Saint-Luc Bruxelles launched a community project that involved art students and refugees. Art students in their third year were given the class project of hosting workshops for refugees who were enrolled in services at the local welcome center, for which they received academic credit. Refugees created artworks about their experiences of exile in multiple mediums, and at the end of the program the school hosted an exposition with local artists that included the refugee students' work, including selling the artwork. The program experienced multiple challenges, including recruitment and retention of refugee students, and some concerns about contacts between refugees and art students. The program, however, was successful in meeting its primary goals as well as in creating lines between the refugee community, art students, and local communities.

### 04. 3.2.2 / UNamur Refugee Action

As part of its comprehensive refugee interventions, Université de Namur also launched a program to target non-student refugees and asylum-seekers and their families. The program provides French classes, professional development, subsidized internships, and limited housing in university facilities. Additionally, UNamur hosts a sensibilization program for the community that includes conferences, seminars, and other public events to raise community awareness.

### 04. 3.2.3 / Inter-HEI NGO project

NGOs based at many different francophone HEIs have chosen the theme of migration for their initiatives in 2017-2018. While still in the initial planning phases, the network envisions that this program will include both programs for refugees and awareness-raising programs for different Belgian communities.



### 04. 3.1 / SCHOLARS AT RISK PROGRAMS

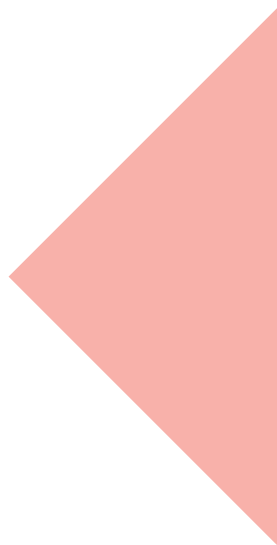
Because of their specific educational missions, HEIs are also particularly concerned by the situation of refugee scholars and scholars who are at risk in their country of origin or of residence due to their academic work or political affiliation. Scholars-at-Risk (SaR) are often people who qualify for international refugee status, and they include all professors, researchers, and scholars who are in danger in their countries of origin or residence due to their academic work or political affiliation. Universities worldwide are providing funding and immigration support to enable such scholars to work for some length of time at an institution in a safer country<sup>37</sup>.

The only SaR program the researcher visited in francophone Belgium was at ULB, where 2-year fellowships for 8 Syrian researchers and 1 Iraqi researcher were established in 2016. After the attempted coup in Turkey, an additional two fellowships were created for Turkish scholars at risk. ULB created 3 further fellowships for SaR in September 2018, for which there were over 120 expressions of interest. This year ULB financed six grants for refugees and Scholars-at-Risk, but the program involves a certain number of challenges: selecting candidates, defining and ascertaining “risk,” allocating resources in a tight budget, and overcoming visa obstacles such as confiscated passports<sup>38</sup>. ULB Professor Thomas Berns issued a statement in December 2017 on behalf of the university reaffirming the institutions' support for academic colleagues being persecuted in Turkey and elsewhere.

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37 <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/protection/>

38 Author interview, ULB administration, October 2017.



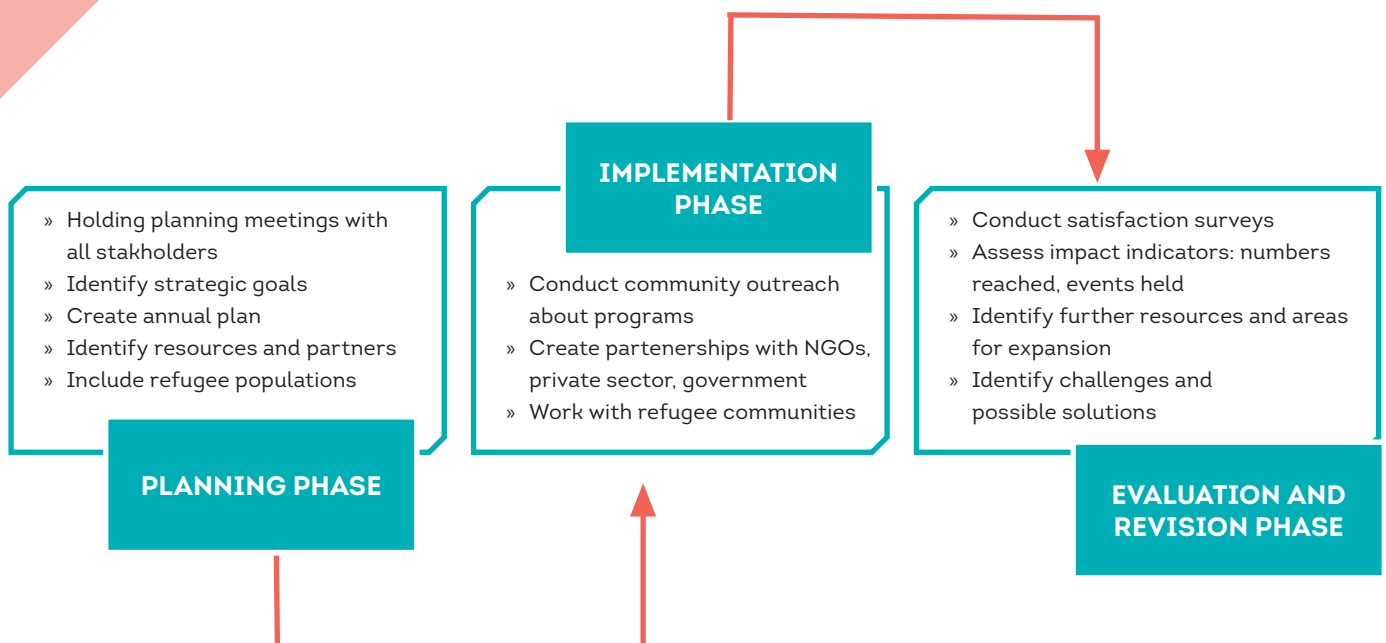
# / 05. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: CREATING INITIATIVES FOR REFUGEES IN HEIS

## 05.1 / GENERAL PROCESS OUTLINE

Although each refugee-focused initiative will be different, all can utilize the following general process to systematically create programs and ensure their sustainability. The first step is to identify the groups that an intervention is intended to include: refugee students, Belgian students, Belgian communities, non-student refugees in Belgium, and/or refugees living in other countries or regions. After defining the programs' target populations, stakeholders can begin the strategic planning phase, in which they define goals, hold meetings with all stakeholders (including refugees and other target populations), create an annual plan, and identify resources and partners. Throughout this planning, goals and benchmarks should also be defined and refined as expectations are aligned with human and material resources.

In the implementation phase, stakeholders launch their programs in the community, conducting outreach, fostering partnerships, and including refugees and other members of the community. At the end of the first implementation phase (as defined in the strategic plan), it is necessary to reflect on the activities and interventions to improve and expand them. The evaluation and revision phase can include satisfaction surveys of targeted groups, creation and assessment of impact indicators, identification of further resources, and identification of challenges and possible solutions.

These phases are intended to be iterative, and following the completion of the evaluation and revision phase, implementers can return to the planning phase to continue the initiative in a sustainable manner.



## 05. 2 / BEST PRACTICES

In addition to following this general outline for creating refugee-focused initiatives, HEIs in Belgium and elsewhere should consider some areas of “best practices” identified by HEIs that have previously created their own initiatives. Additionally, the inHERE Project has published a catalogue of case studies and best practices for European HEIs creating refugee-focused initiatives.

### 05. 2.1 / BE AMBITIOUS

Ambition in planning seems like a simple first step, but it can be a daunting one for resource-strapped HEI administrators, professors, and students. Although HEIs cannot address every single challenge faced by refugees in society, they are more capable than stakeholders may realize and even small interventions can have wide-ranging and deep impacts. While maintaining realistic goals, HEI initiatives should also be ambitious in their goals. Realize that while not every objective will be achieved, that should not prevent stakeholders from reaching for their highest potential. Across the range of HEI groups the researcher worked and consulted with in the US and Belgium, most express surprise at what they have been able to accomplish even with scarce resources and a lack of state or institutional support when they were ambitious and willing to take risks in their plans.

### 05. 2.2 / CREATE PARTNERSHIPS

Initiatives perform better and have a wider and deeper impact when HEIs work with community partners. These partners can include other HEIs through the creation of education networks (both Belgian and other HEIs); public sector entities like government agencies, NGOs, and other non-profits; and private sector entities, especially those that can provide financial and other economic resources such as job matching.

### 05. 2.3 / FOCUS ON RESOURCES

While financial resources for initiatives continue to be a challenge, HEIs should recognize that they in fact have access to many different types of resources that can support refugee-focused initiatives. These include human resources, and capital resources. Often providing university space and offering opportunities for groups to meet and collaborate can be a crucial means of institutional support. Identifying and leveraging each HEI's resources and committing them to initiatives can help to increase the impact of interventions, both within HEIs and among partners.

### 05. 2.4 / WORK WITH STUDENTS AND REFUGEES

Finally, HEIs should always take into consideration how they are including both student populations and refugee populations. The most successful initiatives will include these groups in participatory planning processes and every phase of initiative implementation and evaluation to ensure that interventions are matched with community expectations.

# / 06. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

To capitalize on the current progress made by HEIs in Belgium, stakeholders should consider how they can incorporate the following recommendations into their programs for refugees and other migrants. Interventions for refugees require HEIs to employ systems level thinking, and to carefully review how each component of their institution can contribute to these programs in different, complementary ways.

## 06.1 / HEI ADMINISTRATION

The administration of HEIs can play a crucial role as a facilitator, a convener, and a coordinator of multiple interventions for refugees in the same institution. HEI administration is typically the central stakeholder in programs for refugee students and Scholars-at-Risk. Members of HEI administrations in Belgium should consider the following as they create their programs:

- » ***Incorporate refugees and migration into strategic planning processes:*** The inclusion of refugees and other migrants in higher education, as well as migration-focused curricula in courses, is not only beneficial for refugees, but also fulfills many of the strategic goals of HEIs. Including refugees and migration in HEIs supports HEI internationalization, social inclusion, and long-term integration. HEI administrations should explicitly tie refugee programming to institutional goals to ensure its sustainability and ability to garner resources.
- » ***Create forums for collaboration:*** HEI administration also has a high level of convening power to bring together different actors across disciplines and universities. They can bring together different stakeholders to ensure that actors in different areas are working together.
- » ***Provide recognition:*** HEI administration can also use their convening power to recognize the work of faculty, staff, and students in their school media, at meetings, and with formal prizes/awards for humanitarian work.
- » ***Provide resources:*** Although financial resources are useful to refugee initiatives, even HEIs whose budget cannot support significant activities can provide other resources like spaces for meetings and events, communications and outreach support, faculty and staff time to work on initiatives, etc.

- » ***Foster professional development for all staff:*** HEI administration has the ability to launch professional development programs to ensure that all staff are trained to recognize and support refugee and other migrant students, and to raise awareness about the particular challenges these students face.

## 06.2 / HEI PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS

HEI faculty and students are at the forefront of most community projects, student projects, and courses that incorporate refugees and migration. They are often the first HEI actors to launch programs for refugees and other migrants, and many of their grassroots initiatives focus on leveraging their academic studies to serve the needs of refugees and the communities.

- » ***Incorporate refugees and migration into coursework:*** Sometimes overlooked as an explicit initiative for refugees and other migrants, incorporating refugee and migration studies into coursework is a crucial element of building robust refugee initiatives. Students are much more effective actors if they are well-educated and have contact with the community of refugees and migrants prior to taking action. The variety of faculty already taking steps to incorporate migration into their courses – whether it is an international cooperation, a social work, or a pedagogy course – shows how professors can do so regardless of academic discipline.
- » ***Create interactive projects:*** When launching projects, students and professors should always seek to include the voices of refugees and migrants in their work. In the Boston University Urban Refugee app project, students incorporated Syrian refugee peer consultants into their teams using WhatsApp and Skype, and consulted with them about the app idea, design, and user interface, and the group's legal director is a Syrian refugee lawyer in Boston. By a show of hands, the students in HEPN's international cooperation course revealed that prior to their professor arranging a site visit to a nearby refugee center, almost none of them had ever actually met a refugee. Contact between faculty, students, and the communities they seek to work with is an absolutely fundamental element of success in refugee projects.

## 06.3 / POLICYMAKERS

Perhaps the greatest divide between the current reality and policies in Belgium exists outside of HEIs themselves and within the government. Policymakers in Belgium – as in the United States – should recognize that education provides vital pathways to long-term societal and economic integration, particularly higher education due to the advanced economies of these countries. For the refugees and migrants already in Belgium, higher education access increases their contact with the local community, improves their language skills, and enhances their long-term employability. For Belgians at HEIs, refugee students increase the international character of the school, introduce new viewpoints and experiences, decrease xenophobia, and diversify courses.

Moreover, policymakers can shape data-driven policies to encourage refugees to get training in fields where there are labor market gaps in Belgium, supporting this education using scholarships and grants. Recognizing the mutual benefits that can be gained by the Belgian and refugee communities, policymakers should encourage refugee access to HEIs and a stronger field of migration studies by:

- » **Ensure adequate resources for refugee programs:** Create grants for programs related to integration and inclusion in HEIs. Support HEI budgets with supplemental funds to integrate refugee students. Foster research by faculty and students on refugees and migrants in Belgium to ensure the availability of robust data to drive policies. Policymakers hold the purse strings of the most significant resources that could help support refugee initiatives in Belgian HEIs.
- » **Continue to pursue foreign degree recognition:** The government should continue to expand on its current project to recognize foreign degrees, one of the largest impediments to refugee enrollment in Belgian HEIs. This is a role that falls almost solely to policymakers, in consultation with the HEI community, to ensure that the refugees who are qualified to continue their studies can do so.
- » **Convene stakeholders and recognize HEI success:** Like HEI administrators, policymakers can use their convening power and resources to recognize and reward institutions, faculty, and students who are employing best practices and making real impacts in their communities. Policymakers should organize workshops, conferences, and other events to bring together the HEI and policymaking communities, as well as non-governmental refugee organizations and members of the private sector, to foster linkages beyond education.

## 06.4 / ARES

ARES has already demonstrated its commitment to supporting HEI efforts for refugees through its sponsorship of this research project, and its work in the last years to help HEI partners in their work. Because the researcher was hosted at ARES, the following recommendations are more specific to the organization and more numerous.

- » **Increase cross-institutional collaboration:** ARES can create a standing schedule of inter-institutional planning and development meetings. Meetings can focus on sharing experiences and project updates, fostering collaborations, recognizing achievements, training administrators/faculty, and increasing contacts between institutions. ARES can also support working groups from these meetings to focus on specific areas, such as Scholars-at-Risk programs in pertinent institutions.
- » **Support public awareness efforts:** ARES can also use its networks to spread awareness about the work done by HEIs in francophone Belgium on this issue, and work with media to generate public relations materials about different projects.
- » **Share information:** Institute a systematic way to update all stakeholders, such as a bimonthly newsletter that provides updates on upcoming events, project progress, highlights different initiatives, and shares news.
- » **Foster collaboration:** Implement small tools to help foster collaboration, such as creating a contact list of refugee researchers, professors, student projects, and updating and sharing it regularly so that stakeholders can connect both within and between institutions.
- » **Foster refugee inclusion:** Invite refugees to a collaborative workshop with HEIs to ID specific needs, challenges, and opportunities, to set the precedent of including refugees in all programming that targets them.
- » **Formally document HEI project:** Following on this report, implement an annual report about the projects that have been undertaken in the previous year, their success, best practices, and lessons learned.
- » **Recognize success:** In addition to formal documentation, ARES can recognize success with prizes, exhibitions, and micro-grants to encourage stakeholders to continue and expand on their work.

There is no doubt much work to be done in Belgium, as in the United States, to foster the inclusion of all students in higher education. Yet Belgium enjoys many advantages over the US in its efforts to do so, including the fundamental right to education and the role of HEIs in fostering social inclusion. The wide variety and success of the programs already launched by HEIs for refugees and migrants reveal what a fertile environment francophone Belgian HEIs can provide for these types of initiatives. By enhancing cross-institutional collaboration, recognizing and expanding on successes, and involving external stakeholders like policymakers and – critically – members of refugee communities themselves, Belgian HEIs can seize the opportunity to take a central role in the national refugee response.

# / 07. ANNEXES

## 07.1 / LIST OF INSTITUTIONS VISITED

- » Myria
- » European University Association (EUA)
- » Private Sector: Impact Investment firm and Evaluation Consulting Firm
- » École Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc Bruxelles
- » Haute École de la Province de Namur
- » Haute École en Hainaut (HEH)
- » Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI)
- » Université catholique de Louvain (UCL)
- » Haute École Libre de Bruxelles Ilya Prigogine (HELB)
- » Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)
- » Haute École de la ville de Liège (HEL)
- » Université de Namur (UNamur)
- » Centre d'études de l'ethnicité et des migrations (CEDEM) de l'Université de Liège
- » Haute École Libre Mosane (HELMo)

## 07.2 / RESOURCES

### 07.2.1 / WEBINARS

- » <https://wenr.wes.org/2016/04/providing-pathways-for-refugees-practical-tips-for-credential-assessment>
- » <http://www.ineesite.org/en/blog/webinar-connected-learning-for-refugee-higher-education>
- » <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/future-diverse-classrooms-can-new-digital-and-pedagogical-innovations-help-bridge-education>
- » <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/migration-europe-what-trends-watch-2018>
- » <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/legal-channels-refugee-protection-europe-pivotal-moment-strategic-thinking>
- » <https://moonliteproject.eu/events/webinars>
- » <https://vimeo.com/208508544>
- » <https://knowledge.wes.org/on-demand-facilitating-access-to-higher-education-for-refugees-with-limited-documentation.html>

### 07.2.2 / NETWORKS

- » Syria Consortium (International Institute of Education): <https://www.iie.org/en/Programs/Syria-Scholarships/Syria-Consortium-Member-Institutions>
- » InHERE Project: <https://www.inhereproject.eu>
- » Refugees Welcome Map: <http://refugeeswelcomemap.eua.be/map>
- » Scholars at Risk Network: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org>
- » Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies: <http://www.bcars-global.org>
- » Refugees in Towns Project: <https://www.refugeesintowns.org>
- » Pardee School Initiative on Forced Migration and Human Trafficking: <http://bu.edu/pardeeschool/fmht>

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- » *Missing Out: Refugee Education in Crisis*. Report. Geneva: UNHCR, September 2016.
- » [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/missing-out-refugee-education-in-crisis\\_unhcr\\_2016-en.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/missing-out-refugee-education-in-crisis_unhcr_2016-en.pdf)
- » Mouritsen, Per, and Astrid Jaeger. *Designing Civic Education for Diverse Societies: Models, Tradeoffs, and Outcomes*. Report. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, February 2018.

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- » *Good Practice Catalogue (GPC)*. Report. Brussels: InHERE Project, 2017.
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## **THE FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST PROGRAM**

The Fulbright Specialist Program sends U.S. faculty and professionals to serve as expert consultants on curriculum, faculty development, institutional planning, and related subjects at academic institutions abroad for a period of 2 to 6 weeks.

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## **REFUGEE AND MIGRATION INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BELGIUM**

**A REPORT FROM A STUDY VISIT COMMISSIONED BY ARES AND SPONSORED BY THE COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG WITHIN THE FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST PROGRAM (FSP) ON REFUGEES AND MIGRATION ISSUES**

### **CREDITS**

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