

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Belgium

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

In general, volunteers create associations and apply for subsidies. These associations are based on a limited number of permanent and some volunteers. For example:

1. **HERITAGE DES FEMMES** is an association of women of foreign origin (4-5 regular and around 10 occasional volunteers). They organize activities (cooking workshops or design classes for instance) with women of Moroccan origin. During the last months, they also supported for refugees during the reception phase. Based in Brussels, "[Heritage des femmes](#)" has partnerships with some Brussels municipalities and other small associations. This is a small structure with limited impact in terms of target group: women of Moroccan origin located in Brussels.
2. **TYN ASBL** is a Brussels's association created by highly qualified professionals from the 2nd and 3rd generation of Moroccan migrants. Since 2014, teenagers (between 16 and 20 years) from foreign origin and living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are helped by people who are successful in their professional career to give them tools to better integrate.

Inspired by the experience of African-American associations, [TYN](#) has 5 permanent and around 20 occasional volunteers, and is based in Brussels. Thirty adolescents are receiving its [services](#) through internal workshops, and hundreds through fairs they organise, both in [partnership](#) with several structures (in the training sector mainly). Volunteers also carry on lobbying activities towards State organisations.

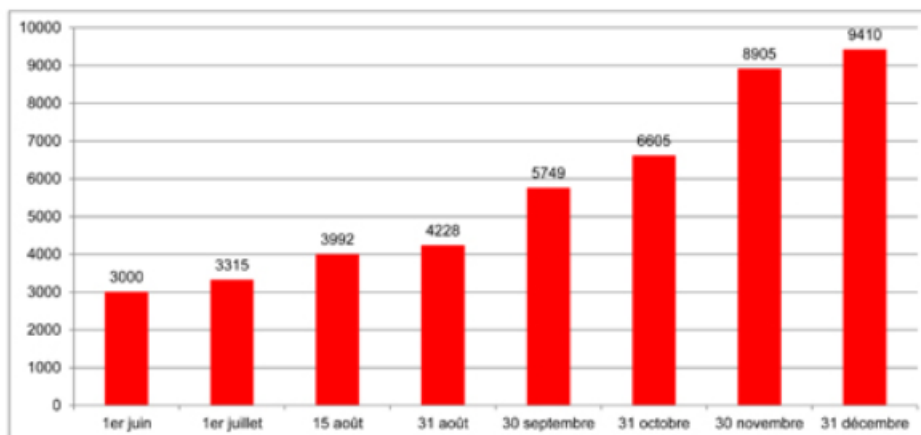
3. **SCHOLA ULB** is a non-profit organisation that conducts activities in education in Brussels, particularly around school support, through the management of a [Tutoring Programme](#) since 1989. Students from Brussels Universities and High Schools help small groups of primary and secondary students struggling to follow their school programmes. In 25 years, the Programme has enabled nearly 26,000 students being helped by some 2,600 tutors. It is now present in 1 on 3 schools in Brussels (48: 31 secondary and 17 primary in 2014-2015) and is the largest school support programme. The association is interested in setting up projects at European level (contact person: [Claire Sourdin](#)).
4. **DUO FOR A JOB** organises mentoring activities in Brussels since 2012. Young immigrant job seekers are put in contact with retired or senior professionals, ideally from the same area, which support them in their job search. Both young people and seniors at [DUO for a JOB](#) must meet several criteria, including be under 30 and reside in Brussels and one of the national languages, for mentees and more than 50 years and available for at least 6 months, for mentors. Since the creation of the association, 122 mentors were trained in coaching and 163 pairs were created. The association has partnered with employment governmental structures ACTIRIS.
5. **FOR YOUTH** is a youth association created by Turkish migrants. It promotes personal development and active participation of the youngsters (16-25 years) in social life. They are given an active role and participate community projects such as cultural and sport events (as movie nights, city trips, museum visits and indoor soccer for example). They are also trained to the use of social media, drug prevention or painting. For Youth has set up a "Young Entrepreneurs Platform" which encourages young people to launch entrepreneurial activities after a Certified training proposed in collaboration with business institutions including Unizo, Voka, UCM. The goals of "[For Youth](#)" is both to develop their competences and their sense of responsibility. With 6 offices in Belgium (Brussels, Anvers, Charleroi, Gent, Liège and Limburg), the association has strong links with the Federation of Active Associations of Belgium [Fedactio](#) which promotes social cohesion. Altogether, its activities involve around 70 volunteers and 1200 beneficiaries.

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

New initiatives have emerged following the recent influx of refugees. These initiatives involve a greater number of volunteers.

1. **CIVIC PLATFORM FOR REFUGEES** is a big initiative that is active since September 2014. It started in the "Parc Maximilien" in front of the Brussels' Migration office. It is designed as a space of information and actions coordination in solidarity with refugees and undocumented migrants, and provides basic medical, school, legal services but also purely reception help with clothes and meals for example. With over 29.000 fans on [Facebook](#), a large amount of citizens and local associations like Inaya ASBL, Héritage des femmes, Coordination des Sans Papiers, as well as NGO's like Oxfam, [Médecins du Monde](#), Croix-Rouge were involved in the [Platform](#) and thousands of refugees were supported during the reception period. Partnership was made with local and federal authorities.
2. **CARITAS INTERNATIONAL** has been providing individual home solutions to refugees for a while and thanks to an agreement with the federal state and refugee institutions CIRE and Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, manages almost 700 reception places, scattered throughout Belgium. The NGO also offers a translation service, administrative and medical help, and language courses. In reaction to the 2015 influx, [Caritas](#) has launched volunteer recruitment campaigns.
3. **THE RED CROSS** has 18 reception centres for asylum seekers in Belgium, which offer over 4000 seats, or 20% of the host capacity in Belgium. Red Cross' [activities](#) involves 10.000 volunteers in total - 318 of them deal exclusively with refugees' reception -, which provide assistance for the maintenance of the buildings, aid to specific services such as accommodation or translation. Since September 2015, the Red Cross has been mandated by the federal authorities to organise the pre-reception of more than 9.000 newly arrived asylum seekers at the [WTC3](#), a building close to the Immigration Office.



Evolution de nos structures d'accueil en nombre de places

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

New initiatives involve a greater number of volunteers. The Civic Platform for Refugees has aroused great wave of solidarity including citizens of different profiles, ethnic background, socio-economic situation. Immigrant volunteers were clearly visible in the various activities of the platform. In long-standing organisations, which have launched specific activities to responds to the 'crisis', such as Red Cross and Caritas, the volunteer profiles remain unchanged. The profile of volunteers also depends on the type of association. While mainstream "Duo For Job" and "Schola ULB" essentially attract native volunteers, "For Youth" and TYN involve primarily citizens of respectively Turkish and Moroccan origin.

Generally, new initiatives attract more volunteers than old initiatives.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

New initiatives are punctual; their innovative aspect lies in the commitment and the quickness of volunteers' mobilisation while long-standing initiatives (especially Duo For Job, For Youth, TYN) are marked by their ingenuity, especially when worn by young teams. They give a special attention to both social inclusion, recovery of dual belonging, and enhancement of social activity, social success and entrepreneurial activity.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

New initiatives have succeeded in involving more immigrants, which were previously only numerous among those run by immigrants (For Youth, TYN, Héritage des femmes). Coaching and support activities of associations like "TYN" and "For Youth" have no equivalent in the State's activities. The community fibre continues to facilitate the recruitment of both volunteers and mentees.

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

Activities of the Civic Platform for Refugees boosted NGOs and state structures.

First, a working partnership was sealed with various NGOs, then lobbying activities were conducted toward the federal government to both open new reception centres and facilitate the integration of refugees.

Activities of old initiatives also have had a positive impact on other NGOs and state structures. The mentoring and coaching of young immigrants is increasingly used by associations, with the support of State structures.