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International Student Experiences in Three Superdiverse Higher Education Institutions: Institutional Policies and Intersectionalities

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Abstract: Higher education has been facing many challenges due to factors including increased diversification, internationalization, massification, and the expansion of different forms of mobility, which are transforming the landscape of higher education towards “superdiversity”. These challenges are addressed within the framework of “inclusive education”, aiming to increase participation and foster a culture of welcome at higher education institutions. However, scholarly discussions on the ways these initiatives impact the lived experience of students who may face divergent and intersectional forms of exclusion, inequalities, tensions, and discrimination are limited. To address this gap, based on the experience of three participating universities in the European University of Post-Industrial Cities (UNIC) alliance, this paper aims to examine and reflect on the diversity and inclusion practices of the institutions, particularly those targeting concerns for international students with different profiles. Drawing on both existing and emergent data through an extensive case study analysis, the paper focuses on the scope and effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. It concludes that improving the experience of international students and promoting their inclusion at universities requires a combination of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms, as well as centralised and decentralised services. Systematic data collection using a range of engaged research tools also ensures that policies respond to real needs.

Keywords: superdiversity; higher education; migration; mobility; international students



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1. Introduction

This article draws on the experiences of three universities collaborating within the scope of an EU Commission funded alliance titled “European University of Post-Industrial Cities (UNIC)¹” initiated in October 2020. The UNIC alliance aims to develop an international campus promoting student and staff mobility and the exchange of good practices in terms of inclusion and the management of (super)diversity. Within the scope of this project, the authors of this paper could find venues to reflect on the differing realities of, and approaches implemented across institutions, as well as the way in which these policy and practical approaches are integrated and linked to the challenges encountered in accessing higher education, both in an institutional and an urban context. There are different student groups across the universities under study with an “international” character and the term may refer to full time degree-seeking students, exchange/short term students, as well as refugees and asylum-seeking students. For practical reasons, we use the term international in a comprehensive way, but when relevant, refer to the specific challenges of different groups categorized under this term.

In suggesting a model framework for an intercultural integration strategy at the national level for people with different backgrounds, CoE (2021) refers to the importance

of valuing diversity as a resource, promoting diversity in institutions, residential and public spaces, and reducing segregation in social, cultural, economic, and political life, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Higher education institutions have a very critical role to implement relevant policies associated with these aspects while influencing and inspiring other members of the communities. More specifically, in this article, we analyse the challenges faced by international students through case studies from three participating institutions (Cork, Koç, and Liège). We elaborate on the challenges faced in accessing education, study and life experiences, and student interactions with institutional policies and services. Particularly, we consider the role of intersectionalities between certain identity markers, such as race, nationality, ethnicity, and gender identity, and how they intersect with forms of discrimination and exclusion. By reflecting on the convergences and divergences across these three institutions, we aim to better understand these complex experiences and explore how to inform more effective initiatives to address them. The research question underpinning our analysis is: what are the main difficulties that international students face in higher education and what mechanisms can be put in place (and how) to better address them?

The article is structured as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework for our analysis, which is based on the literature on superdiversity in higher education. Next, we detail the methodology for data collection. We then look in detail at each of the three case studies on which this article focuses, before providing some cross-cutting thoughts and concluding remarks.

Superdiversity in Higher Education

New features of migration in superdiverse societies yield new challenges for cross-cultural communities of practice (Vertovec 2023), which are mirrored in our education systems (Guofang et al. 2021). These challenges require multi-levelled responses to address significant diversification variables that affect where, how, and under what circumstances students from diverse backgrounds experience the education system (Taylor 2021). Examples of such variables include ‘differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights (that can directly affect rights to education)’, spatial distribution patterns, and local area responses to diversity and integration (Gogolin 2011, p. 241). The interplay of these factors is significant when examining the diverse needs of students, not only in terms of demographics, but also when considering the complexities associated with structural and systemic inequalities and inequities which confront learners (Lu and He 2022; Guofang et al. 2021). While the experience of transnational students will vary due to different statuses, histories, and cultural and social backgrounds, many will face similar challenges relating to linguistic and cultural disconnection between home and college life, discrimination, and social and academic exclusion (Li 2018).

Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2021, p. 227) argue that ‘Teaching and learning in higher education (HE) must evolve to be able to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student cohorts in equitable ways’. Challenging existing norms in our education system will require reflecting on access to education, including the multi-layered levels of mobility and how diversity and cross-cultural practice is embedded within and across institutions to support superdiverse learners (Guofang et al. 2021; Phillimore et al. 2017; Arstein 1969). The increasing diversity of our student populations has led to multiple calls to action to improve teacher education in recent years (Gagné 2021; Senyshyn 2018; UNESCO 2016). This will require support for educators to allow them to adapt and thrive on ‘shifting landscapes of politicized transnationalism and immigration in superdiverse classrooms and schools’ (Gagné 2021, p. 103). Underpinning this approach is a recognition of the conceptual and methodological frameworks that promote decolonising practices and bolster participation, exemplifying the changes that are occurring in superdiverse societies (Taylor 2021). It also requires opening new spaces for critical reflection, embracing superdiversity, and considering how best to capture and capitalise on the diverse layers of complexity in superdiverse populations, diverse student motivations, and experiences within the global

sociopolitical climate and how to maximise students 'sociocultural and academic' chances of success (Guofang 2021). This involves citizenship participation and what Arstein refers to as:

a redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set. (Arstein 1969, p. 24)

Yet, to date, this has been poorly reflected and rarely features in education, governance and policy development (Phillimore et al. 2017).

Ensuring superdiverse responses are embedded in higher education presents challenges and opportunities, both in terms of policy development and practice outcomes, but more importantly through how such responses are managed for students accessing higher education (Vertovec 2023; Guofang et al. 2021). Application of the concept of superdiversity opens the scope for more inclusive policy and transformative practice through an application of participatory frameworks that are explicitly anchored in a questioning of systemic structures and critical reflection on the structures and processes of power and inequality that are conditioned by processes of exclusion in superdiverse societies (Vertovec 2007; Hall 2017; Arstein 1969).

Since the successful development of the concept of superdiversity by Steven Vertovec (2007), the literature on superdiversity has grown significantly, encompassing a variety of fields and objects of study (Vertovec 2019). The use of this notion means emphasizing the complexification of socio-cultural identities and the human experiences linked to them, beyond linear and reductive explanatory approaches. In the context of higher education, this means highlighting the multiplication and combination of identity variables in the lives of students (and staff) and in their study (and work) experience, as well as recognising universities as 'global scapes' (Powell 2012). The State-of-the-Art Report (Altok et al. 2021) developed as part of the UNIC project identifies a range of challenges and demonstrates the existing gap between students' "multi-dimensional complex identities, rapidly changing needs, and activist mindsets; and institutional strategies and policies which largely still rely on single-dimensional identity markers, gradual policy responses and identity politics" (Altok et al. 2021, p. 6). The identity categories considered depend on each specific context and include "country of origin, language, migration channel and immigration status (as three components of migrant and minority background), socio-economic and first-generation status (in lieu of human capital), gender, age (mature status) and special needs status" (Altok et al. 2021, p. 7). Adopting a multi-dimensional and multi-layered approach to policy and practice in relation to the student experience (including access, attainment, retention, and outcomes) means taking account of the intersectionality that characterises it, in terms of the challenges and opportunities it presents. The literature shows that this approach is indeed still challenging (Nichols and Stahl 2019; Mitchell et al. 2014; Thornton-Dill 2009).

2. Methodology

Data for this study have been gathered through several different methods. Firstly, a peer review process was implemented across all UNIC partners in the UNIC project, which aimed to compare the approaches of the universities on the implementation of superdiversity and inclusion, both at the beginning and end of the project. It comprised peer-to-peer evaluations and further reflexivity on the policies and practices of each institution. The evaluation covered a range of areas of the university experience and functions, including student life, with a focus on students with special needs, students from diverse backgrounds, and international students. This process involved defining a framework around which peer-to-peer discussions would take place. For this purpose, a template including questions and a self-assessment was prepared considering key areas highlighted in the [EUA Report \(2019\)](#) on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions. Continuing on from this, universities were then coupled based on

their differences rather than similarities, and on the contingency that they did not share a close working relationship. This approach was used to expose universities to differing and alternative practices as a way of comparing best practices within and across institutions and to bolster knowledge exchange. Finally, counterparts met over digital platforms for a discussion and reports were submitted to the coordinating university. In the peer review process 72 university members (academic, administrative and student) took part from three universities covered in this study.

Secondly, again within the scope of alliance that brought together these universities (alongside others), challenge-based participatory meeting platforms (CityLabs) have been implemented on a number of different societal challenges, including student and different university member experiences. They are physical and/or virtual meeting points where students, citizens, academia and city stakeholders work together to identify, discuss and solve societal challenges faced by post-industrial superdiverse cities (<https://www.unic.eu/en/city-labs>, accessed on 14 September 2023). Along with the peer-to-peer reports, significant efforts have been made across all partner institutions to promote CityLab frameworks and engaged research as a priority when engaging with students, staff, city stakeholders, and community organisations within and across institutions. The CityLab methodology is based on the principle that research must be relevant to society and carried out in collaboration with its members, particularly those directly affected by the subject under study. The latter are therefore actively involved in all phases of the research process, including the drafting of the research report, so that they also have an insight into the research results and their application. The CityLab methodology is a tool for an engaged research approach, aimed at addressing societal challenges through the active collaboration of different stakeholders. This research tool (among others) responds to the need for a new paradigm of knowledge production (Nowotny et al. 2003), making it possible to identify socially relevant research questions, co-design participatory research methods and tools, and ensure that research results are used to address societal challenges and bring about change. In the case of engaged research undertaken on migration-related issues, this new paradigm also implies taking account of the various vulnerabilities and forms of oppression (Comfort et al. 2018) to which the people involved may be subjected, which gives the research process a moral commitment to inclusiveness. This is particularly relevant when conducting research with young migrants and international students, ensuring a platform for their voices in the process. In this way, they are not just viewed as research participants but as active agents of change in superdiverse educational and societal spaces. Finally, in some cases, respective university officers have been consulted to collect/clarify further information on different aspects of international student life. Such a multi-layered approach contributed to the triangulation of data gathered via different means.

As demonstrated through the research, data collection can take different forms across localities and the participating institutions of Cork, Koç, and Liège, yet they reveal similar and overlapping challenges facing international students. These cross-cutting challenges, while addressed in divergent ways within institutions and localities, also provide important elements of analysis which will be addressed in the latter part of this paper. They also highlight how migrants and international students experience additional layers of exclusion and demonstrate the importance of migrant voices, and of participatory and engaged approaches to reveal important factors for consideration in the implementation of policy and practice. Because of the social relevance of the subject of the international student experience, in terms of the well-being of young people but also in terms of the social cohesion of the local environment, it was important to mobilise engaged research tools to study this subject. In addition, all the methodological tools used ensured that the students themselves and their testimonies were considered in the analysis. Some student representatives and university staff members were involved in the preliminary drafting of the reports used for this article. From an ethical point of view, this means that our analysis endeavours to strictly reflect the experience of international students and their own views on it.

In Liège, the main material used for this article came from a CityLab set up as described above, involving around thirty participants, including former and current students, university staff (administrative services), researchers, and members of civil society (local administration and local associations working with migrants). In addition, a survey (around 450 entries) carried out by the international relations office among international students involved in the university buddy programme (2021–2022) was considered, as were further exchanges with this department carried out within the framework of the UNIC project. At Koç, the main sources of data were the peer review reports, focus group with a group of international students coming from different backgrounds (the invitation to the focus groups was sent to all registered international students and 7 students from 5 nationalities and different study levels participated), and information exchange with two respective international student related university units. The data for the UCC case was drawn from a review of the literature on barriers to education and a peer review mapping exercise based on observations drawn from the collected data for the peer reviewers and interactions with key players across the university on the themes of diversity, equality, and inclusion, most specifically, the EDI Office, the University of Sanctuary, and the Access Office. Data were also drawn from a mapping of teaching around diversity, equality, and inclusion. Data collection also involved an exploration of current participatory initiatives being implemented at the local level and how student participatory initiatives speak to deeper understandings of exclusion. The peer reviews included an extensive mapping of student and staff diversity across the university, evidence of superdiverse teaching practices, academic and non-academic support activities at the school, department, faculty, and university levels. It also involved mapping administrative and structural procedures, recruitment, access, and policy interventions at strategic and policy levels within the university to ensure the promotion of diversity and inclusion.

The data collected for the cases were analysed using an inductive method, identifying emerging themes and bringing together related explanatory elements (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). The authors first familiarized themselves with the data by organizing, reading and making notes. While doing so, recurring themes were identified on a case-by-case basis and across different cases. Through highlighting the main topics as they emerged in the reports and discussions, overall conclusions were drawn, highlighting some of the key experiences and challenges for the universities.

3. Results of the Case Studies

3.1. Case Study 1: University College Cork, Ireland

3.1.1. Background

Legislative frameworks and reforms adopted from the late 1990s onward in Ireland have shed light on inequalities in access to higher Education and saw the establishment of several legal instruments guiding the principle of equality, including equality in the Irish education system (Harris and Ni Chonail 2016). The Equal Status Act was enacted in 2000 and prohibits discrimination on nine grounds, inclusive of race and ethnicity. Additionally, the focus on equality of access features in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, and the Universities Act 1997. The White Paper on Adult Education, published in 2000, set out the state's commitment to promoting: (a) equality of access, participation, and outcome and (b) the need to frame education policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population (White Paper on Adult Education 2000). The White Paper also addresses the need to provide mechanisms whereby all minority and marginalised groups have the possibility to influence policy and shape interventions concerning them (Department of Education and Science 2000).

A key issue facing migrant and international students in Ireland is language barriers in higher education, though this is not the only one (Dunbar 2008; HEA 2008; Harris and Ni Chonail 2016). Other factors include racism and discrimination. Linehan and Hogan's 2008 study highlighted racism and discrimination at all levels of the education system. A study by Darmody et al. (2014) revealed that racism and discrimination are experienced

at several levels, including School admission policies and procedures, tracking practices and a distinctive lack of clarity given to migrant students about eligibility of progress to higher education. Additionally, international students are often treated as a homogenous group, obliterating both the didactical as well as pedagogical challenges stemming from differences between education systems.

Coupled with language barriers and treating international students as homogenous, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping significantly impact access to education in Ireland (Linehan and Hogan 2008), limiting opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills. These challenges also present further difficulties for students from diverse backgrounds who are trying to navigate the education system. These structural disadvantages reveal the need to re-position how universities strategically embed their diversity policies. O'Connor (2017) points to the contradictions and tensions which arise from a drive to promote diversity through the recruitment of international students while failing to embed policies which that promote the integration of migrants more broadly. Such strategies often perceive highly skilled international students as 'the best and the brightest' who exhibit 'high levels of social and human capital' (O'Connor 2017, p. 339). Within this framework, international students 'occupy a contradictory position' within a hierarchy that values economic investment' but fails to recognise the diversity of needs 'to better facilitate social inclusion' (Ibid). In analysing government migration policies and university international recruitment strategies, O'Connor (2017) reveals how hierarchies, shaped by desirability and revenue generation, also subject students to surveillance and racialisation depending on their status as non-EU students. Addressing this imbalance requires the implementation of institutional and migration policies that recognise both structural and cultural barriers and the layers of complexities and intersectionalities that exist in superdiverse educational institutions.

3.1.2. The Experience of International Students with Culturally Diverse Backgrounds at UCC

Several initiatives have been implemented at University College Cork (UCC) to counteract some of the barriers that students from diverse backgrounds experience. The absence of an explicit integration policy that explicates the values of equality, diversity, and inclusion set in motion the establishment of UCC's Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Unit, which was launched on 8 March 2017. While an Equality Committee had been in place previously, the establishment of the EDI Unit was a significant move towards making the EDI agenda more visible across the university. Several offices, committees, and working groups reside under the umbrella of EDI that address the diversification in the higher education sector, including the Race Equality Committee, targeted access initiatives to assist diverse populations, and the setting up of the University of Sanctuary Working group and Executive Committee. These initiatives place a strong focus on civic and community engagement and student participation alongside the promotion of the values of equality, diversity, inclusion, and respect. Addressing the varied levels of access and exclusion and how they accumulate and inter-relate for students from diverse backgrounds is paramount.

The University of Sanctuary was established in 2018 with the aim of providing an environment of inclusion and the promotion of cultural diversity in higher education. Within this culture of welcome and inclusion, an emphasis is placed on offering support and opportunities for educational advancement, particularly for asylum seekers and refugees and students from culturally diverse backgrounds. It also provides scholarships to students in the asylum system, students that would otherwise be denied access to the higher education system. The scholarships cover full fees and tuition costs, plus some living expenses. Seven scholarships are awarded for full time programmes annually and two further scholarships are provided biennially, and over 75 students have accessed accredited courses through the Adult Continuing Education Sanctuary Scholarships at the university covering a wide range of subject areas. The language centre also provides scholarships for English language courses. The UCC Fáilte Refugees (meaning Welcome Refugees in the

Irish language) Society, entirely comprising student body members, was also founded in line with the implementation of Sanctuary Scholarships and is dedicated to ensuring that UCC lives up to its promise as a University of Sanctuary. Fáilte Refugees is a student-led society with an active presence within the university that runs regular events on campus while also engaging directly with outreach projects and awareness campaigns to support inclusion and cultural diversity and promote solidarity. Student voices are represented on the University of Sanctuary Working Group Committee through representation from students from Fáilte Refugees.

While the University of Sanctuary model within the university provides structures of inclusion for asylum seekers, the unevenness of the barriers that students from diverse backgrounds face remains a concern. This issue was highlighted by the Access Office and the EDI Office at the initial mapping stage and fed into the peer review process at the local level. In responding to this issue, the Access Office put in place a student Access Ambassador Project, using this as a case-study initiative focused on enabling diverse student voices to be heard within university structures. This model of engagement will follow a CityLab type of intervention, involving inclusive, participative, and engaged structures that provide an important platform for the voices of students from diverse backgrounds. It aims to provide an evidence base for the development of participatory mechanisms to ensure that student voices are represented in and across the university. This initiative responds to the concerns raised by the peer reviewers relating to the lack of student representation and consultative mechanisms at the local university level.

Similar to international students, asylum seeker and refugee students encounter cultural isolation and racism and discrimination through dominant institutional and teaching practices. This issue was also captured in the mapping exercise during the peer review process. While there are several modules in existence across disciplinary programmes, explicit practices to decolonise teaching practices are mainly confined to the humanities. Stereotyping and unconscious bias have also been identified by the EDI Office as factors influencing student perceptions of higher education, along with legal and administrative issues presenting for non-EU international and migrant students. These are additional barriers that Irish and EU do not face. This can impact overall well-being and hinder the ability to engage fully in educational activities, including the formation of social connections and relationships with peers (Guofang 2021). However, while the burden of disadvantages can prove demanding for international students, asylum seekers and refugees encounter the added effect of a challenging migration experience, social and economic disadvantages, status issues, and restricted mobility, presenting a greater disadvantage, in relative terms, than that experienced by other students (Lambrechts 2020). Factors such as these have been highlighted by the EDI Office locally at the university level and were also noted in the mapping exercise of the peer review process. Training for staff has now been implemented by the EDI and will be significant in addressing some of these challenges. The EDI Office and the University of Sanctuary Working Group at the local level also highlighted that without adequate supports and services to address these additional layers of disadvantage, students may struggle with building social networks, leading to social isolation and a distancing from peers and teachers. The peer review process has been instrumental in highlighting the need for additional resources to address student exclusion. The conditions for students in the asylum system also require addressing. Living in the asylum system can mean limited access to transport, living in environments that are not conducive to a positive study experience, lack of access to adequate study spaces, regimented day-to-day living, and limited access to financial resources. These factors act as significant barriers to a productive university experience for students from diverse backgrounds.

3.1.3. Recommendations and Follow Up

The UNIC peer review process which reviewed the implementation of inclusive policies and practice at institutional level has been particularly significant in highlighting important areas requiring attention. The peer review process (conducted by the university

of Liege) revealed gaps at the local level that required improving. These were highlighted following an intense mapping of all activities, initiatives, strategies, and policies at the university level. The peer review assessment revealed the importance of addressing diverse student and staff needs with a specific focus on the need to increase the number and diversity of students participating in decision-making processes at the university level. It also highlighted the need to promote more inclusive practices and the normalising of diversity at the institutional level. To address some of these issues, the Access Office in UCC has set up a student forum, prioritising student voices as an important part of tailoring support services to the needs of students. This new forum, established in October 2022, is known as the Access UCC Student Ambassador and Advisory Group. The shared goal is to ensure that students and staff work to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are 'uniquely placed to help put the student voice at the centre of how we support our students' (DPR News UCC 2022, p. 1). Obtaining students' evaluations of their learning experiences and establishing student representation on decision-making bodies is viewed as a way of seeing students as partners and co-creators at institutional level. In this way, students are viewed as agents of change, often taking on a leadership role (Seale 2015). Engaging with students in this co-creative way provides insight into the gravity, complexity, and unevenness of experience of students from diverse backgrounds, where their experiential knowledge speaks to forms of exclusion, often otherwise invisible in the higher education system. As active participants, students are viewed as enquirers, who, in partnership with university staff, co-produce knowledge (Taylor and Wilding 2009; Neary et al. 2014), creating sites of expertise that speak to exclusion in a more in-depth way and providing new ways of understanding the needs of diverse students. Part of this process is evaluating the extent to which initiatives promoting student voices in higher education meet the needs of students from migrant and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Along with documenting the diverse student experience, the peer review process also involved documenting the extent to which superdiverse teaching practices are implemented across the university. At the local level, this process revealed that while there is an extensive range of modules/courses addressing race, diversity, equality inclusion intersectionalities, the collected data on module content reveal the need for a more explicit foregrounding of decolonising teaching practices and a more pronounced embedding of the concept of superdiversity across programmes and institutional practices. Furthermore, the peer review process, which allowed UCC the opportunity to review another European University, provided the opportunity to learn more about practices across institutions and provided an opportunity to gain deeper understanding of exclusion processes and how these are managed and challenged at different institutions.

Additionally, in providing a space to document the extent and array of activities taking place across the university, the peer review process allowed an opportunity to document activities often taking place in isolation across the university. Through compiling the document for the peer review, it offered a space for building stronger networks across the university. Collating activities has provided opportunities for more coordinated thinking across disciplines and for building solidarity on core migrant and superdiverse issues.

3.2. Case Study Two: Koç University (KU), Türkiye

3.2.1. Background

The higher education system in Türkiye is supervised by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), which is responsible for the central planning, coordination, and governance of the higher education system in accordance with the Turkish Constitution and the Higher Education Laws. Currently, there are 208 higher education institutions (129 Public, 79 foundation/private), including both universities and vocational schools². Within this framework, especially in the last two decades, an important reality in Türkiye has been the increasing number of institutions throughout the country without the associated quality-related concerns and schemes (Mızıkacı 2006; Gök 2016; Özoğlu et al. 2016). Internationalization of higher education and creating global education opportunities, one of the

mostly relevant lines of work for diversity and inclusion, may be viewed as a rather recent, evolving space and as a hot topic in Türkiye, for which there has been an increasing amount of activity, diversity, and professionals during the past several decades (YÖK 2017). Taking part in the European educational programs have also contributed to this dynamic space substantially, starting from the beginning of the 2000s, with international programmes, funding, study abroad, and networking. These schemes also opened doors to other regional and global initiatives ranging from recruiting students to the formation of joint degree programmes and new mobility schemes.³

The migration and status of respective students have become a critical issue for Türkiye due to their increased number and different backgrounds, as well as policy-level developments. There are studies that focus on the access of refugees to higher education which explain Türkiye's geographical, historical, and cultural ties with neighbouring communities (Kondakçı and Önen 2019); the challenges of Syrian students due to legislative rules and implementations, the recognition of prior learning, the need for new programs to overcome language barriers, and the need to keep the quality of education high (Erdoğan and Erdoğan 2018); the need for inclusivity through scholarships and the promotion of women's participation, and a balanced distribution of students throughout the country (Ergin and de Wit 2020); the challenges faced by Syrian and other refugees and asylum seekers at the backdrop of a system that involves supply–demand imbalance, unemployment among university graduates, and a common misconception in the public opinion that Syrian refugees are admitted without fulfilling requirements. Yıldız (2019) depicts the welcoming nature of the Turkish higher education at the policy level and refers to the access-related exceptions that were created in the Turkish higher education for Syrian students such as accepting students as “special students” for those not able to show official documentation or “transfer students” for those who can show documentation. These exceptions were also implemented for a few other country's nationals. However, the same document also states that there is no difference between the admission process for migrant students and other internationals as first-time applicants. The only difference between them is when migrant students cannot present official documentation for equivalency and need to go through an additional process at the provincial ministries of education. Besides access-related aspects, there are also studies that focus on the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of this group of students in Türkiye. Levent et al. (2021) found that Syrian university students experienced a language barrier, knowledge gap, problems with interacting with peers and different university members, and issues finding proper accommodation. To portray the acculturation experiences and psychological well-being of Syrian refugees attending universities, Ayvazoğlu and Künüroğlu (2021) revealed that a majority of the participants reported high levels of life satisfaction in Türkiye; however, in contrast, they described negative psychological states such as experiencing depressive feelings and re-experiencing the traumatic events through intrusive distressing thoughts about the past; and markers of poor social well-being such as low levels of sense of connectedness and inclusion in the new context.

The international student category, comprising students with different characteristics and needs, recognizes a new group of students in the country, which contributes to more diversity, but at the same time, fails to accommodate the needs of different students. Some universities may take the initiative to address the needs that converge and diverge with the support of different student life and support-related units and resources; however, the centralized higher education system and lack of communication between different public bodies and within universities limits the quality of responses. Additionally, societal responses to the recruitment of international students can be problematic regarding higher education policy-making, as this group of students, especially with a migration background, are often thought of as taking up the spaces of local students at the universities.

In the early years of the Syrian mobility, according to studies conducted in Türkiye, there were access-related flexibilities provided to Syrian students, as they were not able to show documentation for their level of studies and required background for the program in

which they were interested (Ergin and De Wit; Erdoğan and Erdoğan; Yıldız). However, based on recent implementations, it is possible to suggest this flexibility is not implemented anymore. At certain times, the higher education authority may issue notes to universities for having flexibility/alternative implementations on payment and admission processes for specific nationalities due the socio-political situation in a certain country, but this does not translate into a structural policy and implementation at the national and university level. Consequently, students with a migration background are considered and registered as international students, even though they may come with more disadvantaged experiences and additional needs.

3.2.2. The Experience of International Students at KU

Koç University is a foundation (private) university which was established in 1993 in Istanbul, Türkiye. It is one of the leading universities in the country and is located in a region well-positioned to attract national and international research funds and faculty members/researchers with international experience. KU provides a comprehensive education across different fields and study levels, predominantly in English. When we look at the international students on campus who study for one semester or who are degree seeking, we see several sub-categories and realities: exchange students who come through the Erasmus+ program or global exchange program, degree seeking undergraduate students, degree seeking graduate students/researchers, and short-term visiting students and/or interns. One significant difference can be considered between nationality-based international students and admission type based international students. Students with dual citizenship (Turkish and one foreign citizenship) are examples that illustrate this difference. One type of information which increases transparency and contributes to the recognition of this student body are info-grams prepared by the International Student Recruitment Directorate that reflect information on the following categories of full-time international students: nationality, region, admission type, source of funding, gender, college, first generation status, and academic standing (standardized test scores and grades)⁴.

Besides its education and research infrastructure, the institution offers a multisided campus environment with the assistance of numerous student support units and opportunities for student involvement. Sustainable and growing teaching/learning support, first year programs such as mentoring, orientation days, academic-life skills courses, international student orientations, and language learning/practice opportunities, and the existence of an international community office are some of the support mechanisms available for local and international students. As has been stated in the peer review reports, KU is seen as an environment in which different groups can live together and make their identification visible, including students with non-binary gender identities. Support for economically disadvantaged regions and students is recognized through a special scholarship program. There is an office dedicated to students with special needs which tracks students' needs and supports them during their studies. Additionally, students with different identities and interests can institutionalize and communicate their needs via student clubs and/or communication with the Dean of Students, and there is an international student community as well as a section of the International Office (International Community Office) dedicated to the better integration of international students to life in Istanbul and on campus.

As per the results of peer review reports and interviews carried out with university officials and students, students' concerns can generally be grouped under bureaucratic, housing, student life, integration with the locals, and communication between/with the different university units. In general, access to the university is determined by the centralized higher education system in the country and universities have limited capacity to manoeuvre. Within this framework, international student access is more flexible and is left to the discretion of the academic boards of individual universities to some extent; however, there is again a legal framework in terms of admission conditions, quotas, registration, and residence permit/visa procedures. In terms of financial support to ease access, there are mainly government scholarships called "Türkiye Scholarships" and university entrance

merit-based ones. Besides merit-based entry-level scholarships and Turkish Scholarships, to provide access opportunities to underprivileged students, KU has cooperated with several international NGOs for the provision of a limited number of scholarships for students from Syria with financial needs. Unfortunately, there may be age- and nationality-based limitations on some scholarships that do not consider possible educational delays in countries affected by circumstances such as war, natural disasters, etc. Additionally, international students cannot work on campus or cannot even find internships. The peer review report had also mentioned the importance of implementing scholarship mechanisms that target the needs/access of different superdiverse populations.

When we consider issues concerning the intercultural integration of students, there are numerous on-campus resources for students' personal, interpersonal, and professional development. However, integration with the locals is still limited, as expressed by administrators, students, and peer reviews. One critical concern raised has been the use of English in the "academic bubble" but not necessarily in the daily life of the university across different spheres and functions (student life and some administrative units) as well as the reluctance of local students to becoming close friends with international students, even during student activities. This outlook translated into additional measures taken by the respective university offices such as the organization of an international week, the Istanbul Guides program, buddy program, host families, etc. Another raised concern has been finding affordable accommodation off-campus and dealing with the rental process in Turkish with private landlords and the lack of access to legal support if needed. The university officials also emphasized difficulties associated with taking standardized tests due to financial status and/or logistical reasons as well as challenges related to residence permit applications, the opening of bank accounts, the inability to request certain information from universities abroad, and the inability to find on-campus jobs at academic or administrative units within the university because of the lack of a legal mechanism and the unwillingness of units. One of the important points raised was also the lack of communication between international students and different administrative units as well as between different administrative units. As a follow up to this thread, it was also stated in the peer reviews that students' communication with different research centres could be strengthened.

One of the most important conclusions of the peer review reports was also that "implicit inclusion on campus should be driven forward (with transparent monitoring and supervision of processes) in order to be able to define the goals and constantly monitor their achievement". Such a framework would be important to sustain a superdiverse outlook in higher education.

3.2.3. Recommendations and Follow-Up

Although concerns about bureaucratic and legal aspects are vocalized, the role of universities in creating quick and sustainable change may unfortunately be limited for these issues. However, the institution supports these procedures and students by creating an office dedicated to guiding students on these matters accordingly, with a dynamic agenda and support system, as well as by providing numerous programs and establishing different mechanisms (life skills courses, language courses, different orientation programs, buddy-mentoring systems, learning-teaching centre support, etc.). Unclear messages and implementations that come from authorities become more of a challenge, especially under crises situations such as the pandemic; therefore, international student support units should be empowered to help students navigate through this uncertainty and change.

Having said this, several other measures could be taken to further promote efforts on campus. For instance, stronger connection and communication between different university units to consider the needs of superdiverse populations on and off campus can be promoted. Diverse scholarship schemes that consider different needs and identities may be introduced. KU is one of the most active universities in promoting a many-sided and enriching student experience for all at international standards; however, it is still possible to detect points

of improvement considering different student needs, and superdiversity can be a very influential concept to further improve the already existing mechanisms.

3.3. Case Study Three: University of Liège

3.3.1. Background

In the Belgian higher education system, a distinction is made between the various types of institutions, including universities, *Hautes Ecoles*, and colleges of arts. The organisation of the higher education system reflects the multi-level functioning of the Belgian government and, more particularly, the division of the country into linguistic communities. On the French-speaking side, the restructuring of the higher education landscape under Minister Marcourt's reform (2013) is strengthening integration between universities, colleges, and colleges of arts into a common steering and coordination system of the Wallonia–Brussels Federation, the *Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur* (ARES) (Wayens et al. 2014). Since 2019, Valérie Glatigny (MR, liberal party) has been the Minister at the government for the Wallonia–Brussels Federation, for Higher Education, Social Promotion, University Hospitals, Youth Aid, Houses of Justice, Youth, Sport, and Promotion in Brussels. Studies demonstrate that access and success rates at university are influenced by a number of factors, including socio-economic background, previous educational path, and gender (Wayens et al. 2014; Van Campenhoudt et al. 2008). The development of higher and university education and the extension of access to it to a growing proportion of the younger generation are part of a common European strategy based on the enhancement of a “knowledge economy” (Vermandele et al. 2010). Internationalisation is a part of this process (ARES 2020).

The University of Liège was founded in 1817 on the initiative of King William I of the Netherlands and became a state university in 1835. ULiège is one of the higher education institutions recognised by the French-speaking community, as stipulated in the higher education legislation of the Wallonia–Brussels Federation (articles 10 to 13 of the “landscape” decree 2013)⁵. It is the only complete public university in French-speaking Belgium, with 11 faculties on 4 campuses.

3.3.2. International Students at ULiège

At ULiège, in order to have an overview of the figures and profiles of students coming from abroad, we needed to combine a set of data. Firstly, those relating to the foreign nationality of ‘regular’ students; secondly, those relating to students with refugee status; thirdly, those relating to students coming to ULiège as part of an international exchange. In the academic year 2022–2023, out of 23,138 students, 2599 came from European countries other than Belgium, and 1722 from third countries. The most represented countries of origin are France, Italy, and Luxembourg for European countries, and Cameroon, Morocco, and Congo for third countries. There are 75 refugee students this year at ULiège, from various countries (Syria, Congo, and Afghanistan, for example). As regards students involved in international exchanges, data for this academic year are not available, but in 2021–2022, there were 871 students coming to ULiège mainly from France, Italy, and Spain, either under an Erasmus programme or under other inter-university agreements.

These students have access to all university services according to their needs. However, since students from abroad are considered to be in a “special situation”, their needs are given special attention and the response to them is the subject of ongoing reflection and conversation within the institution.

3.3.3. The UNIC CityLab on “Students in Exile”

In October 2021, in the framework of the UNIC CityLabs festival, a seminar was organised to address the challenges faced by students “in exile”⁶. The seminar was organised by the research centre CEDEM—Centre for Ethnic and Migration studies of the University of Liège, in collaboration with partners from the local civil society⁷ and with representatives of the ULiège students' federation. By adopting the CityLab methodology

from an engaged research perspective (presented above), the aim of this seminar was to bring together several stakeholders to discuss the identified object of study and social issue, and to elaborate on possible solutions based on collective exchanges.

The aim was to promote dialogue with current and former university students in order to address the topic of the challenges faced by international students in Liège through the narration of diverse life trajectories in present times and in the past. Indeed, this is still a highly topical issue, but not a new one, since certain problematic issues persist concerning the international student experience. During the CityLab, it was possible to listen to the experience of a female engineer who arrived in Belgium from Colombia in 2014 as part of an Erasmus Mundus exchange programme. She has a doctorate in Applied Sciences and is currently working as a researcher at a HEI in Liège. The second speaker was a man born in Morocco, a former graduate in psychology from the University of Liège in 1987, author of numerous novels on the theme of exile, now in charge of violence prevention in schools in the city of Liège. The legal issues related to the experience of international students in Belgium were addressed by Estelle Berthe, a lawyer at the bar of Liège, specialising in foreigners' rights, and a member of a law firm based in Liège, dedicated to the defence of human rights. The debate was moderated by a journalist, also a former graduate in Political Sciences from the University of Liège, who arrived in Belgium from Togo in 1993. In the audience were members of the staff of the University of Liège (including heads of student services), members of Liège associations, researchers, students, etc.

The exchanges took place around two main issues, which are legal aspects that impact the study experience of international students and aspects of daily life and inclusion in the new country and educational context.

3.3.4. The Legal Aspects of the Experience of International Students at ULiège

Students who start a course of study outside their country of origin encounter legal difficulties⁸, acting both before departure, during their installation, and after their studies.

First, obtaining a visa to enter Belgium from third countries requires a procedure carried out at the Belgian embassy in the country of origin and the submission of a file including a valid passport or travel document, as well as the proof of payment of the fee and of the enrolment or admission to an institution of higher education. Moreover, students have to prove sufficient means of subsistence, not be a threat to public health, not be a threat to public order, and have health insurance. Complying with these conditions means that students must go through a set of administrative procedures which are slow and costly⁹ and whose outcomes are not necessarily positive.

If they obtain their visa, and once they have arrived in Belgium, foreign students must register with the municipality where they are going to settle in order to obtain a residence permit—which will have to be renewed every year during their studies. The recently amended legal framework also includes deadlines for the student to meet in terms of academic success and obtaining credits.

The legal possibilities for a foreign student to stay and work on Belgian territory after his/her studies are very limited. In particular, the “single permit”¹⁰ potentially concerns students who have been trained in Belgium under certain very strict conditions. These are potential highly qualified workers, post-doctoral researchers engaged in scientific research, and professionals in occupations experiencing labour shortages. The processing of these files can take several months. Before the expiry of their residence permit, students can apply for residence as former students looking for a job or developing a professional project¹¹ as self-employed. This status lasts for twelve months and is not renewable. During this period, the persons concerned no longer have access to the labour market as a student, which undermines the possibility of obtaining sufficient resources through work. Settling permanently to Liège appears, then, to be a challenge. Those who succeed and may wish to apply for nationality have to comply with a series of binding conditions and must follow procedures that have often proved to be arbitrary¹².

The legal framework and the procedures to be followed by foreign students who start a course of study in Belgium are therefore complex, and some have also experienced important administrative contradictions—for example, receiving an order to leave the territory for an expired residence permit, and at the same time, a positive answer to the application for naturalisation. Furthermore, the press has recently reported on several cases of foreign students with visas who have been ordered to leave the country and confined in a closed centre (for the expulsion of illegal residents) due to various and not very understandable administrative reasons¹³. Because of this complexity, it is considered necessary to inform foreign students as soon as they arrive at the university of the constraints, procedures, and legal deadlines concerning their stay and their studies. There is no legal support service for students at the University of Liège, who are generally redirected to the youth information centre of the city of Liège¹⁴. The network of associations in Liège is also very well developed in the area of foreigners' rights (among others), and there are several specialised lawyers and law firms in the city. It is therefore stated as important that foreign students be systematically made aware of this possibility to obtain information and help.

3.3.5. Daily Life and Inclusion

Knowledge of the French language is fundamental for the administrative procedures involved in settling in Liège and to study at the university. ULiège offers French courses for international students, but the testimonies collected show the difficulty of following them (in combination with the study course, for example).

The question of housing also poses certain problems, not only related to the possibility of finding adequate and accessible housing, both during studies and afterwards, during the job search. Indeed, the difficulties encountered are also administrative, and there are questions of discrimination as well as landlords' refusal to rent for short periods.

Financial issues impact the lives of international students, especially given the cost of living in many destination countries. Economic difficulties can be overcome (in whole or in part) by receiving a scholarship from institutions in the home¹⁵ or host country. However, this possibility is increasingly rare compared to the past, and the steps to be taken to obtain a scholarship are becoming more complex.

The trajectories of international students at the University of Liège, today as in the past, are diverse. For some, Liège represents a stage in their life and study path which continues in their country of origin or elsewhere. For others, Liège becomes theirs, and they develop an anchorage which is passed on through several generations. In all cases, very strong links with this environment can be established. In addition, whether temporarily or permanently, these students wish to be integrated into the active life of the city, also by working during and after their studies. The limited opportunities for living and working in Belgium have an impact on the day-to-day lives of international students, implying a significant psychological burden due to the concerns and uncertainties experienced.

Strategies to cope with psychological distress include—among the testimonies collected—writing down their experiences and searching for interpersonal support, mutual aid networks¹⁶, or formal help. The University of Liège offers psychological support to students experiencing stress, depression, mental fatigue, and reduced motivation. These aspects can have an impact on the success of their studies. It is not possible to produce statistics detailing the percentage of success by year and by nationality in a useful timeframe. Nevertheless, statistics provided by the Radius service of the University of Liège show that the success of international students, and more particularly, those from countries outside the European Union, is more problematic: the success rate of non-EU bachelor students is almost half as high as the success rate of Belgian students. Furthermore, a gap of 20% (lower, on average) separates Belgian master's students from their non-EU counterparts¹⁷. Moreover, foreign students must often take additional courses (language, missing credits), which causes organisational problems and more risks of failure with a more demanding and complex programme.

The support services of the University of Liège (student affairs, registration, international relations, and social service) are described as beneficial in helping students in a more targeted and better-informed way to deal with the difficulties they encounter. In the past, a ‘diversity’ unit was set up to provide support for specific student profiles, to organise initiatives focusing on interculturality, and to encourage meetings and exchanges between new arrivals and local students. In 2015 and 2016, this unit was particularly concerned with the support of refugee students, in order to address the specific problems that these people encountered¹⁸ and to respond to the institutional desire to take an active stance in dealing with the “refugee crisis” and the reception of refugees at the time. This approach has changed over time, switching to support on a ‘case-by-case’ basis rather than through a comprehensive policy. It appears from the testimonies collected that the re-establishment of a specific support service that also coordinates the different inclusion actions, as well as the continuity of such a service beyond contingent crisis situations, would be more beneficial for students. A unit of this type could also contribute to better administrative support in relation to the legislative framework concerned.

3.3.6. Recommendations and Follow-Up

The analysis of the University of Liège case study highlighted the difficulties encountered by international students at several points in their experience, concerning legal aspects, daily life, and socio-professional inclusion in the city. While initiatives and support mechanisms are in place to help international students cope with these difficulties, they are not necessarily sufficient and require further reflection and action.

Based on the exchanges that took place during the October 2021 CityLab, it was possible to elaborate some recommendations. While the first theme addressed—legal aspects—is a question whose limits exceed the fields of competence of the university institution, necessitating coordination with a wider group of stakeholders to help adopt an advocacy position (developing awareness-raising action towards the competent authorities, as well as the population in certain cases), the second theme—daily issues and inclusion—offers more concrete possibilities for action. Among the recommendations submitted to the ULiège authorities are to ensure that students are informed and accompanied during the legal procedures relating to their stay; to help students find scholarships and work opportunities; to help students access accommodation; to facilitate attendance at French courses and exchanges with local students; and to set up a specific service to coordinate support initiatives.

Concrete proposals related to these recommendations are currently being discussed within the framework of the working group Liège welcoming University (*Université hospitalière*), which has promoted a motion adopted at ULiège to encourage the development of initiatives aimed at ensuring better inclusion of international students (among others).

4. Discussion

The peer review process reports, CityLabs and focus group meetings used in our case studies as described above to gather data on the experience of international students, highlight differing organisational structures and functional responsibilities among staff within partner institutions, and overall reveal operational structures within institutions at various levels to address inclusion and diversity. However, the collected materials reveal several gaps that indicate universities do not guarantee an environment that is ‘superdiverse ready’. As mentioned earlier, it is particularly difficult to address the intersection of the different facets of students’ lives and study experiences, not only from a theoretical perspective, but also from a policy (and practical) one. For instance, as the KU example reveals, in the words of students, “everything is in English in the academic bubble but as soon as we leave class and academic environment, language can become an issue in communicating with the locals and some university units”. In the case of Liège, the extent of the language difficulties encountered by students depends on whether or not they were

familiar with French prior to migration, or whether they were actually able to combine language courses with other courses.

In addition, combining top-down and bottom-up mechanisms to develop support initiatives will require an effective balance that may prove challenging to achieve. For example, the articulation of decentralised and centralised services, as well as the bringing together of different stakeholders (as we saw, for example, in the case of Liège, with regard to the need to involve the local legal services to support the settlement of students in the city) will be significant. The KU example shows that even if there are special units dedicated to international students' needs, communication with other relevant units may be of concern. In UCC, while supports are made available for students in the asylum system through the provision of scholarships, interventions also need to take account of the additional layers of disadvantage people in the asylum system experience outside of fee related matters i.e., the institutionalised nature of living in the asylum accommodation system and the barriers this creates. Integration of services will be significant in developing a coherent way to ensure the consistency of diversity and inclusion policies and initiatives. Additionally, in order to monitor the actions implemented, it is necessary to collect and analyse relevant and comparable data ([EUA Report 2019](#)), which is also a challenge due to national personal data protection measures—which often target diversity-related identity categories.

Taking account of the above-mentioned general conclusions, it is evident that considering the lives of international students, devising a superdiverse approach that translates into policy and actions to subvert exclusion becomes critical. Firstly, the existence and access routes open to different groups must be recognized and addressed in ways that consider the national, cultural, and social backgrounds of students, the nature of admission systems, the availability of scholarships, and status of admission. There are similarities between the experiences of different international student groups in terms of experiencing language barrier, navigating the socio-cultural life in a locale, understanding the educational setting and student support mechanisms. However, the ways in which these common challenges are faced/felt can be different for different groups. For instance, language barrier can be less of a concern for short-term/exchange study mobility whereas it can present as a much deeper concern for students within the migration process. Alternatively, language related concerns can be numerous across different settings ranging from acquiring the required proficiency for carrying out studies to establishing connection with the locals. In a similar fashion, discrimination, administrative-legal issues, and financial constraints can be more pressing for migrant students compared to regular international degree seeking students. For these reasons, there needs to be special units and/or tools that guide students re administrative-legal concerns which may include strengthening relations of international students with other internal and external bodies. Secondly, there may be similar and/or influential universal support mechanisms, but local needs and factors must be taking account of complex needs and intersectionalities to create sustainable, inclusive and meaningful outcomes. Within this framework, different academic and administrative units' functions must be reviewed based on the needs of different groups. Thirdly, assessment and continuous feedback must feed into university systems to be able to address lived experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, one important mechanism to address change and promote inclusive practices can be through the setting up of spaces of participation and co-creation (student forums, CityLabs etc.) which would act as resources for expert knowledge. In this regard, a better understanding of how diverse student groups (both migrant and international) engage with their learning environment is important. While doing so, identifying challenges that culturally diverse groups experience can assist in informing the development of targeted supports and structures of inclusion.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we explored the experience of international students in higher education, using three case studies (Universities of Cork, Koc, and Liège) as the main sources of our

analysis. Through the application of engaged research methodological tools (UNIC4ER 2022 Engaged Research Strategy), we collected data from each location to explore the challenges these students face, with the aim of discovering what difficulties they encounter and how these can be addressed through effective policy and practice. The methodological tools of engaged research make it possible to actively involve the stakeholders concerned in the subject of the study (students, staff members, local associations, etc.) and to focus on socially relevant issues. The results of our analysis can therefore be used by university authorities to improve the mechanisms in place and ensure that they meet students' needs.

Our analysis highlights that the challenges faced by international students are diverse and intersectional and depend on the context considered, although there are convergences between the three case studies (for example, concerning the main areas in which these challenges appear, such as the study experience itself as well as everyday life in the city). It also highlights the need to combine multiple approaches to ensure effective measures and to put in place structural data collection systems. Although in the higher education contexts considered, a process of reflection targeting inclusion and diversity practices is underway, thanks in part to the UNIC project in which these universities are participating, further action needs to be taken and is recommended in this article.

From a theoretical perspective, our analysis aims to contribute to the literature on superdiversity in higher education by showing that there is a gap between recognising the superdiverse characteristic of the higher education population and translating this into effective policies and practices to address the diverse needs that emerge (Altıok et al. 2021). This means that the potential empirical use of the superdiversity concept—apart from its descriptive scope—is not yet fully exploited. Our contribution aimed to operationalise the concept of superdiversity through the formulation of follow-up recommendations based on the study of relevant empirical material. Our paper also suggests that engaging with superdiversity as a conceptual tool for analysing data can bring a deeper understanding of the complexities experienced by students and can be used as a framework for decolonising practices that reflect the superdiverse lives of student cohorts both in terms of learning and teaching practices, as well as embedded EDI policies within and across institutions.

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Notes

¹ See <https://unic.eu/en>, accessed on 12 June 2023.

² Retrieved from the Higher Education Council Information Management system on 9 February 2023: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>.

³ See: 2019–2023 Strategy Plan of the Higher Education Council (CoHE) of Türkiye; Internationalization Strategic Plan 2018–2022; Target Oriented Internationalization of Higher Education.

- 4 Retrieved from: <https://international.ku.edu.tr/undergraduate-programs/admission-statistics/> accessed on 14 September 2023.
- 5 See <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=28070&navi=4519>, accessed on 14 June 2023.
- 6 See https://www.unic-citylabs.uliege.be/cms/c_14469791/en/students-in-exile-testimonies-and-proposals, accessed on 13 March 2023.
- 7 The associations Interra and Le Monde des Possible, and the HEPL—High School of the Province of Liège.
- 8 The Belgian normative framework of reference is mainly based on the law of 15 December 1980 on access to the territory, residence, establishment and expulsion of foreigners, plus successive modifications, and integrations, also aiming at the adoption of European directives more targeted at students in mobility situations.
- 9 For example, to obtain the equivalence of their secondary school diploma. Some also report discriminatory practices in the processing of some files more quickly than others. Students on exchange for a limited period under Erasmus programmes who are already enrolled in a university course at a higher education institution in their country of origin are not concerned by the equivalence request.
- 10 The *permis unique* combines the residence permit and the work permit. The procedure and the legal reference framework are available on the website of the Foreigners Office at this link: <https://dofi.ibz.be/fr/themes/ressortissants-dun-pays-tiers/travail/permis-unique>, accessed on 13 March 2023. From 1 March 2023, researchers from third countries who come to Belgium for research purposes will also be subject to this long and complex procedure.
- 11 The project must be of particular economic, social, and cultural interest.
- 12 The case of ULB sociologist was mentioned in the press (see <https://www.lalibre.be/belgique/societe/2020/12/15/je-suis-tombe-de-ma-chaise-andrea-rea-professeur-a-lulb-depuis-20-ans-sest-vu-refuser-la-nationalite-belge-NWM7JROXYNEOTIGP3XIRGPZOIQ/> accessed on 13 March 2023), in addition to other experiences of some participants.
- 13 See for example <https://www.lesoir.be/397896/article/2021-09-30/un-etudiant-congolais-place-en-centre-ferme-luclouvain-marque-son> and https://www.rtf.be/info/belgique/detail_une-etudiante-marocaine-de-23-ans-placee-11-jours-en-centre-ferme-avant-d-etre-expulsee-vers-la-roumanie?id=10903687 accessed on 13 March 2023.
- 14 See <https://www.liege.be/fr/vie-communale/services-communaux/jeunesse/le-centre-j-centre-informations-pour-jeunes> accessed on 13 March 2023.
- 15 It was possible to collect examples of scholarships in some countries that take the form of ‘loans’ to be repaid in full after the studies if the person concerned moves elsewhere, or partially if he or she returns to the country of origin.
- 16 The “social capital” (Bourdieu 1980) of migrants, which develops in particular through interpersonal relations and membership of networks, has a positive influence on the inclusion process. These relationships and networks may also involve migrants of different generations who arrived in Belgium at different times and in different historical contexts.
- 17 *Réussite du PAE*—Statistiques, Radius, field document.
- 18 Social downward (Leo 2022; Lundberg 2020; Çelik and İcduygu 2019) is one of them, concerning both the decrease in the socio-economic status of the person, and the fact that he or she has to start studying again, often already being qualified because of the university training courses completed in the country of origin.

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