



## Belgium at a glance

- **Population:** 11 094 850
- **GDP (Per capita):** 119 PPS (available for 2011 only)  
PPS=Purchasing Power Standard, based on the EU: 27 average of 100
- **Asylum applications total:** 28 105
- **Total decisions reached in 2012:** 24 525
- **Positive decisions (refugee status and subsidiary protection):** 5 555

*2012 data, published by Eurostats in May 2013*

## The Belgian resettlement programme at a glance

### Resettlement quota and actors

**Start of ad-hoc or pilot programme:** 2009

**Most recent quota:** 100 persons for 2013

**Main national actors:** Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA), Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL), Immigration Office in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Welfare Centres (CPAS/OCMW); Caritas International and Convivial.

### Resettlement numbers

YEAR	ACCEPTED	ARRIVALS	NATIONALITY ↔ COUNTRY OF ASYLUM OF LARGEST GROUPS
2013 anticipated		100	Congolese ↔ Burundi Burundian ↔ Tanzania
2012	<i>No programme</i>		
2011	25	25	Eritrean, Congolese ↔ Tunisia
2010	<i>No programme</i>		
2009	47	47	Iraqi, Palestinian ↔ Iraqi/Syrian border, Syria, Jordan

## UNHCR Submission categories considered for resettlement

- Legal and physical protection needs
- Survivors of violence and torture
- Medical needs
- Women and girls at risk
- Family reunification
- Children and adolescents at risk
- Lack of foreseeable alternative solutions

## UNHCR Priority levels accepted (with sub-quota where applicable)

- Emergency** *max. 7 days between submission and resettlement*
- Urgent** *within 6 weeks between submission and resettlement*
- Normal** *within 12 months between submission and resettlement*

## Belgium's Resettlement Programme

### Legal Basis & Background

The 'Law on entry, stay, settlement and removal of foreign nationals' of 15 December 1980 (amended in 2006) forms the legal basis for all national asylum and migration affairs in Belgium. There is **no specific legal provision** for resettlement.

Belgium considered resettlement for many years, and engaged in two ad-hoc resettlement initiatives in 2009 and 2011. In 2009, Belgium received 47 Iraqis and Palestinians ex-Iraq from Syria and Jordan as a response

to the November 2008 EU Council Conclusions calling for EU countries to resettle displaced Iraqis. In 2011, Belgium responded to the UNHCR Global Solidarity Initiative by resettling 25 refugees of various nationalities ex-Libya from Shousha refugee camp in Tunisia.

In May 2012, the Belgian government announced that 100 resettled refugees would be received into the country within the framework of the Joint European Resettlement Programme for 2013, marking an evolution from ad-hoc resettlement operations to a more structured approach. Resettlement stakeholders in Belgium hope that this will ultimately result in a permanent annual quota for resettlement.



## Resettlement Criteria

### ■ Basic Criteria

A refugee must be recognised as such according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

### ■ Criteria related to integration

None

## Identification and Selection

Belgium has two contrasting experiences with the selection of refugees for resettlement through the ad-hoc resettlement exercises of 2009 and 2011. In 2009, the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) carried out a **selection missions** to the Al Tanf refugee camp on the Iraq-Syria border, and to urban populations in Syria and Jordan. In 2011, instability in Shousha refugee camp prevented on-site selection interviews, and CGRA therefore selected refugees on a **dossier basis**.

In both cases, the CGRA made a proposal for selection of resettled refugees to the State Secretary for Migration and Asylum. After approving those selected, the Minister instructed the Immigration Department to issue travel documents for them.

For 2013, around 80 of the 100 person quota will be selected via interviews

conducted during selection missions, and the remaining 20 on a dossier basis. Processing time from submission to departure for refugees selected during selection mission is **2-3 months**<sup>2</sup>. Urgent cases are processed for departure within **6 weeks** from initial submission, while normal priority cases accepted on a dossier basis are processed within 2 months. Belgium has not yet received emergency cases.

## Refugee Status, Permanent Residency & Citizenship

Belgian legislation does not permit asylum to be granted outside of the national territory, and resettled refugees must therefore **apply for refugee status upon arrival** into the country. The CGRA aims to expedite this process so that resettled refugees are granted formal refugee status as soon as possible after their arrival in Belgium. Refugees resettled from Shousha camp in 2011, for example, were granted refugee status within 2 days of arriving into Belgium. When applying for refugee status, a refugee will receive a document (Annex 26) stating that an asylum application has been lodged. Within 8 working days, the municipality of his/her main residence will issue an 'attestation d'immatriculation'

<sup>2</sup> Processing time between submission and final decision is 2 months (estimation based on the first mission in 2013).

type A, which is valid for residence until refugee status is granted. As other refugees in Belgium, resettled refugees receive a permanent residence permit once refugee status has been granted.

From 1st January 2013, new legislation reforming the Belgian Nationality Code<sup>3</sup> means that persons wishing to apply for naturalisation can do so after a period of 5 years legal residency. Applicants must also demonstrate A2 level proficiency in one of the national Belgian languages (Dutch, French or German), and evidence their social integration<sup>4</sup> and economic participation<sup>5</sup>.

## Family reunification

Besides married partners, children under 18 and parents of children under 18, other family members who are eligible for family reunification include:

- 
- 3 Service Public Fédéral Justice, Act amending the Belgian Nationality Code (Loi modifiant le Code de la nationalité belge afin de rendre l'acquisition de la nationalité belge neutre du point de vue de l'immigration), 4 December 2012
  - 4 Article 9(d), Act amending the Belgian Nationality Code, 4 December 2012  
Possible proofs of social integration include :
    - Diploma or certificate of at least upper secondary education delivered by an institution recognised by the Belgian state; or
    - Professional training of at least 400 hours recognised by a competent authority; or
    - Following an integration course; or
    - Continuous employment for the 5 years preceding the application.
  - 5 Article 9(e), Act amending the Belgian Nationality Code, 4 December 2012  
Possible proofs of economic participation include:
    - Having worked for at least 468 days during the past 5 years;
    - Having paid social contributions due in Belgium as an independent worker for at least 3 quarters over the last 5 years.

- Registered partners (including same-sex partners).
- Children over 18 suffering from a mental or physical disability.

The applying family member must evidence a stable, regular and sufficient income, appropriate accommodation and medical insurance. These requirements are waived for refugees making applications within one year of the grant of refugee status and where the family link already existed prior to the refugee's arrival in Belgium.

## Resettlement in Practice

### Linking Phases

**How is information transferred between selection and reception of refugees in order to prepare for their arrival?**

- Briefing stakeholders after selection missions or receipt of dossiers
- Forwarding pertinent information from Refugee Referral Form (RRF) to integration actors
- Sharing information gathered during Cultural Orientation (CO) - where CO is arranged, FEDASIL collects social and medical information on refugees and forwards to actors in reception centres.
- Other: National stakeholder meetings ahead of selection missions/receipt of dossiers

## Pre-departure

☑ **Cultural Orientation (CO):** In 2009, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL) offered a pre-departure CO programme to Iraqi and Palestinian refugees ex-Libya. In 2011, instability and lack of security in Shousha camp meant FEDASIL was unable to offer a CO programme, although translated information leaflets on resettlement in Belgium were distributed.

FEDASIL planned 2 CO missions for 2013, the first of which took place in Tanzania in June. Delivered with the support of IOM, the **3-day programme** provides refugees with information about the Belgian resettlement programme.

☑ **Medical Exam:** IOM fit-to-fly assessments

☑ **Travel arrangements:** IOM

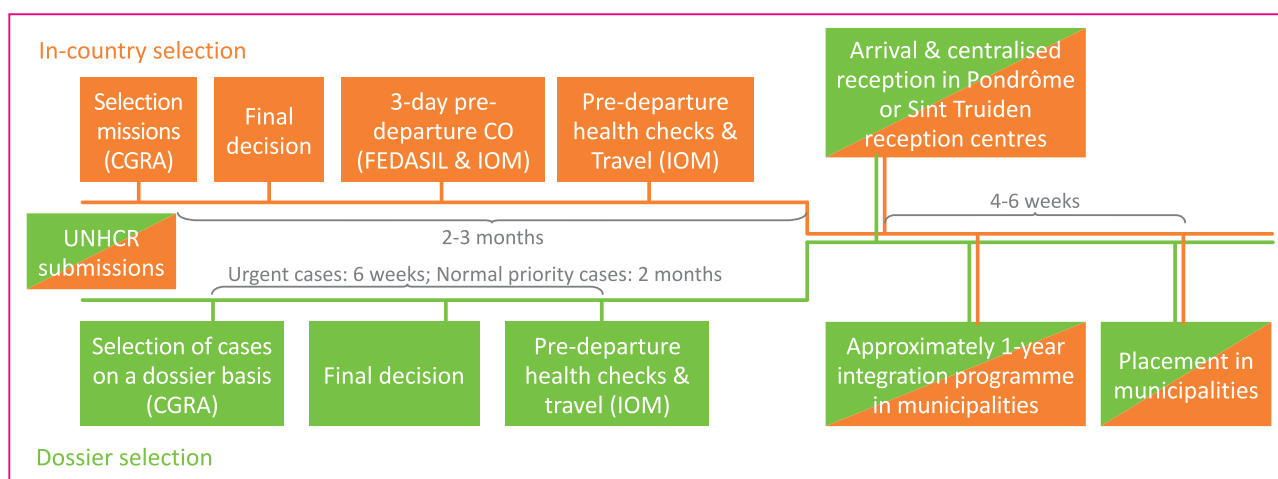
## Integration in Practice

### Reception

Representatives from FEDASIL meet refugees on their arrival and accompany them to **reception centres** in either **Pondrôme** (Wallonia - French-speaking region) or **Sint Truiden** (Flanders - Dutch-speaking region). Arrival groups are generally split equally between the 2 centres, where family composition allows. The reception centres also house asylum seekers whose application is under consideration. Resettled refugees generally spend 4-6 weeks in the centre before moving to municipalities.

### Placement policies

Municipality involvement in receiving resettled refugees is entirely **voluntary**. Placement depends on whether the local branches of the Public Welfare Centres (CPAS in Wallonia and OCMW



in Flanders) can make housing available ahead of refugees arrival into Belgium or before they depart the reception centre. The NGOs Caritas and Convivial can also assist refugees to locate suitable housing through their own networks, sometimes in municipalities where refugees have relative/friends or existing networks.

## Integration services & support

**Length:** 12-18 months (including 6 weeks in the reception centre)

For refugees in the Sint Truiden reception centre in Flanders, the integration programme is developed by the authorities responsible for the wider civic integration programme in the Flemish region. The Ponderôme centre in Wallonia runs an internally developed integration course. Both courses cover elements of language tuition, and basic information about moving on from the reception centre and living in Belgium.

The NGOs **Caritas International** and **Convivial** will meet refugees in the reception centres, introducing themselves and their role in the integration process and determining what kind of assistance individual refugees and families will require. After refugees move to municipalities, NGOs assist with interpretation and translation, administrative steps such as registration

with the municipality, and accessing mainstream services such as financial assistance and medical insurance.

There is **no specialist integration programme** specifically for resettled refugees in Belgium. Resettled refugees can access mainstream integration programmes for other refugees, migrants and newcomers to Belgium. In Flanders, attendance at the integration programme is mandatory. All refugees (including resettled refugees) sign an integration contract in which they undertake to attend Dutch language (up to 600 hrs)<sup>6</sup> and civic orientation classes, and social and employment orientation services. Failure to follow the programme can result in a fine and possible termination of social welfare payments. In Wallonia, integration activities including French classes and registration at the employment agency are optional. In the bilingual region of Brussels, language and civic orientation classes are provided both in French and Dutch on a voluntary basis. Integration policy is currently under review in both Wallonia and Brussels (for the French-speaking organisations).

Outside of provision for integration, resettled refugees access **mainstream services** together with the wider population, although additional services for specific needs such as psychological

<sup>6</sup> For illiterate or very low-skilled persons, the programme consists in 600 hrs of Dutch tuition. Standard course involves 240 hours of Dutch tuition.



counselling may be arranged through direct referral by an NGO or the CPAS/OCMW.

### **Integration in Focus - Integration coaching in Flanders**

As part of the programme 'Integrating Together in Flanders', a one-to-one integration coaching programme has been developed for newcomers to Flemish cities. The programme recruits local people to act as volunteer 'coaches' willing to mentor newcomers, by helping them to orient themselves in their new surroundings, practice their developing language skills and find out about specific areas of interest such as sport, employment and

education. The programme matches volunteer mentors to newcomers arriving into the city, and many mentors and newcomers go on to become friends after the initial 6-month coaching period has ended.

## **Use of the European Refugee Fund (ERF)**

### **Pledges made to resettle under ERF specific categories for 2013**

- Persons resettled from a country or region designated for the implementation of a Regional Protection Programme
- Women and children at risk
- Unaccompanied minors



*Learning about waste management with Caritas International/Caritas International*

- Survivors of torture and violence
- Persons with serious medical needs that can only be addressed through resettlement
- Persons in need of emergency resettlement or urgent resettlement for legal or physical protection needs

### **Pledges made to resettle under ERF resettlement common EU priorities for 2013**

- Congolese refugees in the Great Lakes Region
  - *40 refugees will be resettled in 2013 from this group.*
- Refugees from Iraq in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan
- Afghan refugees in Turkey, Pakistan, Iran
- Somali refugees in Ethiopia
- Burmese refugees in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand
- Eritrean refugees in Eastern Sudan

#### **Highlight**

The 2009 ad-hoc resettlement operation in Belgium was part-financed both by the European Refugee Fund (ERF) Community Actions and the national ERF programme. The 2011 ad-hoc operation was financed by ERF Community Actions (urgent actions). Within these programmes, FEDASIL and CGRA introduced a joint project in partnership with two NGOs, Caritas International and Convivial, a new collaboration that produced some positive results for refugees and the

resettlement process in Belgium. In 2013, for the first time, resettlement operations in Belgium will benefit from resources allocated through the resettlement pledging exercise under the Joint EU Resettlement Programme priorities.

## **Evaluations**

The operation of the first 2009 ad-hoc programme and the experiences of refugees resettled within it are currently being researched by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism ('Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme') and the University of Ghent. The study began in 2012 and due to be carried out over a three-year period.

## **Strengths and Challenges**

### **Strengths**

- Resettlement in partnership with UNHCR and NGOs is a relatively new phenomenon in Belgium. The 2009 and 2011 ad-hoc resettlement programmes began a new and positive process of engaging partners, developing different approaches to reception and integration, capturing and learning from these experiences.





- The new 2013 quota programme marks a more structured approach to resettlement in Belgium, and reflects a **strong commitment** on the part of the Belgian government to continuing resettlement activities.

## Challenges

- Locating **housing** that meets the needs of resettled refugees, in particular larger families, can be problematic. For the 2013 programme, at least some refugees will arrive into reception centres without housing having yet been arranged in a receiving municipality. They will therefore need to make these arrangements after arrival with the assistance of NGOs.
- **Municipalities** themselves are not yet actively engaged in or aware of refugee resettlement. This lack of awareness can mean complicate some administrative steps for refugees, such as registering residence with the municipality, and securing social benefits and medical insurance. NGOs are working to engage municipalities more fully so as to overcome these difficulties.

## New Developments

Local branches of the Public Welfare Centres (CPAS/OCMW) were not previously engaged in resettlement during the 2009 and 2011 ad-hoc exercises. Ahead of the 2013 programme, however, the Belgian government made specific and successful efforts to engage them as new actors in the resettlement process.