



Country: Kingdom of Belgium

Committee: SOCHUM

Agenda Items: Tackling Refugee Trafficking,  
Protecting refugees' rights and freedoms in wars.

Belgium is a country in northwestern Europe. It is one of the smallest and most densely populated European countries, and it has been, since its independence in 1830, a representative democracy headed by a hereditary constitutional monarch. Initially, Belgium had a unitary form of government. In the 1980s and '90s, however, steps were taken to turn Belgium into a federal state with powers shared among Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels-Capital Region regions. Belgium and the political entities that preceded it have been rich with historical and cultural associations, from the Gothic grandeur of its medieval university and commercial cities and its small, castle-dominated towns on steep-bluffed winding rivers, through its broad traditions in painting and music that marked one of the high points of the northern Renaissance in the 16th century, to its contributions to the arts of the 20th century and its maintenance of the folk cultures of past eras. The Belgian landscape has been a major European battleground for centuries, notably in modern times during the Battle of Waterloo (1815) and the 20th century's two world wars. Given its area and population, Belgium today is one of the most heavily industrialized and urbanized countries in Europe. It is a member of the Benelux Economic Union (with the Netherlands and Luxembourg), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—organizations that all have headquarters in or near the capital city of Brussels.

When people are forced to flee, they leave behind more than just their homes. Being away from their familiar surroundings, they often lose their community support networks and end up being socially and culturally isolated. They lack access to essential resources and livelihood opportunities. Depending on where they flee to, they may lack a regular status.

These and other factors contribute to making refugees and other forcibly displaced people an easy target for traffickers, who prey on the precariousness of their situation to exploit them.

Many people fleeing conflict, violence, or persecution are also compelled to move irregularly to seek protection. For this, they often resort to the services of smugglers. In these circumstances, refugees are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked or to falling victim to serious crimes and human rights violations.

While immigration to Belgium appears to be rather low, with net migration for 2019 at 50,000 more arrivals than emigrants, immigration is still a key factor. In 2018, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, 87.5% of population growth was linked to people who migrated to the country, most of them because of the free movement permitted within the EU. The majority of migrants in Belgium, now a destination country, are in fact Europeans, followed by people from Africa, Asia, America, and Oceania. In 2019, there was a particular increase in asylum seekers, with an increase in applications for international protection of 18% compared to 2018 and 40.9% compared to 2017. In 2017, however, only 20% of applicants denied international protection actually left the country, while the remaining 80% remained. As a result, there was an increase in populations at Belgian detention centres and shelters, which caused quite a few protests, mainly due to the high number of unaccompanied minors detained in them.

Moreover, Belgium offers resettlement opportunities every year to a number of vulnerable refugees in need of international protection under the European programme in which it has participated since 2013: in 2019, for example, the programme enabled 239 refugees to come to Belgium, thanks also to the support of the IOM. In addition to this programme, the Humanitarian Corridors opened in 2018 following an agreement signed between the Belgian government, the Community of Sant'Egidio, and all the religious authorities of the country to promote the reception and integration of 150 Syrian refugees from Turkey and Lebanon.

In addition to migration, Belgium is also a transit and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for economic or sexual exploitation. Victims are mostly from Asia, Eastern Europe, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa, including Thailand, India, Romania, Morocco, and Nigeria. While the Belgian Government continues to work to prevent human trafficking, it has been encouraged to step up its efforts to proactively identify victims and to create a robust data system on the phenomenon that would make it possible to analyze the efforts undertaken as well as policies in this area.