



Free University of Brussels

Helping to integrate student refugees

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On the occasion of the start of the academic year, the Dean of the Free University of Brussels (Université libre de Bruxelles / ULB), Didier Viviers, announced the opening of a dedicated helpdesk to mentor student refugees, as well as the creation of 10 “Khaled al 'As-ad” postdoctoral chairs.



Considering that the conflict in the Middle East and Central Africa has predominantly led to young people fleeing their countries, ULB authorities have decided to set up a "welcome desk" to guide student refugees in their integration efforts. The aim is to help them with registration, language learning, scholarships and the search for accommodation.

ULB has reserved ten apartments for refugees and a reference person has been designated in each faculty. The desk is also involved in training the staff of [Fedasil](#), the Belgian agency for the reception of asylum seekers, and provides information on how refugees can register for programmes at ULB from the reception centres.

Ten new university-funded chairs

Since the beginning of September, about forty refugees have used this service and 12 students (two women and ten men) have already registered (three in Economics & Management, three in

Political Science, and one in each of Computers, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Law, Polytechnics and Development Science). Those registering come mainly from Syria.

The ten one-year (renewable) chairs are called “Khaled al'As-ad”, the name of a 82-year old archaeologist who was beheaded by ISIS for participating in international scientific conferences and collaborating with foreign colleagues. ULB finances them with its own money and through donations via a [crowdfunding platform](#). Two women and eight men are beneficiaries of these chairs, which are distributed between medicine, literature, philosophy & social sciences, sciences, polytechnics and law. They come from Syria, with the exception of one, who is from Iraq.



Towards other initiatives

"ULB could not be a simple spectator of the current migration tragedy," said Mr Viviers. The longstanding commitment of the university to supporting refugees goes back to the big influx in 2015, and to the establishment of the '[ULB Students With Refugees](#)' association, which began organising the hosting of refugees in private homes, in partnership with the Centre d'Action Laïque (Secular Action Centre). Host families were found for more than 300 migrants in October 2015.

Other initiatives will be launched during the academic year, including intensive French classes and an “alien law clinic”, which will build on the activities carried out so far by the students.

(Sources: [Belga](#), [Le Soir](#), [ULB](#))

(Pictures: ULB, UWR)

