



Mission Report

Type of mission	HERE international mission (Study Visit)
Subject	Inclusive mobility: from good intentions to measurable outcomes
Location	Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Brussels, Belgium
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General Context

- *Social inclusion and mobility is not only a matter of financial capabilities, it is an issue of academic and pedagogical approaches. There are good examples, like the Support Center for Inclusive higher education, which aims at equity through identifying barriers and eliminating them, in order to create the appropriate environment. It is important to highlight that inclusion is a “process”, and we need to advocate inclusion without barriers. Additionally, it is important to monitor inclusiveness and mobility, the monitoring is very critical for the success of this approach.*
- *Diversity enhances the quality of learning and research, both of which are critical for the university.*
- *Within the scope of the Flemish example, there is an ongoing dialogue between the government and higher education institutions through a number of structures, including the Flemish Educational Council, the Flemish University Council, the Flemish University and Colleges Council, and the Flemish Council of Associations of University and University Colleges. The Flemish model presents a situation close to ideal, in relation to the situation in countries like Lebanon, whereby the social services offered to students within the scope of higher education are embedded within the laws, and budget, etc. Centers for Inclusive higher education are critical to the success of such initiatives (SIHO), as they offer services and a bridge between the government and the higher education institutions. This center works towards making the universities rethink their strategies in order to make changes in their institutional policies towards an approach of “Brains on the Move”¹.*

¹ 25% coming from unrepresentative groups (with grants, disabled, working students).

- *The absence of a national strategy for inclusion (which is not present in Lebanon) puts the country at a disadvantage of addressing issues of vulnerable students, which include categories of disadvantaged students are widely recognized as physical disabilities. Furthermore, there needs to be strong linkages between national strategies and institutional strategies (another issue that is not present in the Lebanese context).*
- *It is important to address success measures in order to support students who are mobile, especially if they come from different linguistic or economic backgrounds, which may lead to stigmatization.*
- *Defining the disadvantaged student is critical in achieving inclusive mobility. Disadvantaged categories of students include students with any or all of the following: disabilities, educational difficulties, economic obstacles, cultural differences, health problems, social obstacles, and geographical obstacles. It is very common to focus on physical disabilities and overlook other issues that may place students at a disadvantage.*
- *Key success factors for inclusive mobility include commitment and support of institutional leadership, direct involvement of stakeholders, the involvement of the entire university community, government support, and the availability of a diverse learning environment for improving the student experience.*

Discussions

- *There are a number of target groups for social inclusion and inclusive mobility that are important to take account of particularly linked to the locality of the student (rural areas), special needs (financial and non-financial), residential status (emigrants, refugees), minorities, neighboring countries, and groups coming from countries where they are not integrated.*
- *The discussion presenting different practices from several countries all reiterate the need for national policies and legislative approaches that are collaborative in order to address social inclusion and inclusive mobility in higher education.*
- *A number of barriers that emerged include attitudes and states of minds, levels of awareness among key stakeholders, and issues of access to university.*

My contribution

- *The audience were divided into two groups, each group discussed possible strategies for inclusion and internationalization/mobility, using the Flemish university experience as a reference point. Dr. Nada Moghaizel-Nasr was the rapporteur for one of the groups, to which she reported back on the approaches to social inclusion and inclusive mobility in universities.*
- *Actively contributed to multiple discussions on the topics addressed throughout the two days study tour. Proposed concrete measures to be implemented in this field.*

Lessons learned

- *In Lebanon, we need to develop an education sector plan that engages basic education, technical education as well as higher education in order to better align the system, implement equity measures and allow students to have pathways across the different levels of education.*
- *It is important to develop a higher education sector plan, and ensure the alignment with institutional plans. These plans need to address issues of social inclusion and inclusive mobility.*

Furthermore, these plans need to go hand in hand with developing practices of quality assurance. An example of addressing inclusivity at the institutional level include establishing a support center that supports the creation of a culture for equity, and helps identify barriers for social inclusion and inclusive mobility and eliminate them.

- *There are no best practices for social inclusion and inclusive mobility, but rather evolving practices that need to be customized to fit the local context. Inclusiveness needs to be highlighted as a criteria of quality within institutions. It is important to explore a needs-based approach to identifying what needs to be addressed. It is critical to embed social services within the national law, with implications to the budget in order to have an impact on the services offered addressing inclusive mobility.*
- *The importance of dialogue platforms between national authorities and HEI*

Ideas for exploitation

- *It is important to further address the issue of social inclusion and mobility in Lebanon, particularly in light of the changing labor market needs*
- *Follow up on this discussion and taking this forward through HERE activities (perhaps part of the activity with AUF, as well as a survey we can replicate what they have done on ICM already but on Lebanon)*
- *Mapping national activities and initiatives of social inclusion and inclusive mobility. We recently learned from the NEO in Lebanon that we have over 2000 mobility in the country, most of which are students. However, these practices are still not found across all institutions of higher education in the country for several reasons. It is important to map the success stories and create a momentum to support institutions that still are not engaged in this practice but are interested.*
- *Lobbying for National Quality Assurance Agencies: Basic Education sector, Technical Education sector and Higher Education sector. Including Equity, Social Inclusion and Inclusive mobility in their criteria and standards.*
- *Lobbying for dialogue platforms between national authorities and HEI addressing the question of equity and social inclusion*