

BELMIHISS

Belgian Migration History for Secondary Schools

DURATION

15/06/2019 – 15/06/2021

BUDGET

20 000 €

Valorisation of the BRAIN-be project

[IMMIBEL](#)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

IMMIBEL offers an in-depth analysis into Belgian immigration history between 1830 and 1914.

We valorize IMMIBEL within the academic world through scientific publications, workshops, conferences, collaborations with other research projects and institutions etc. Yet, from the onset the project aimed at reaching a wider audience too. We have done so in various ways using our website as a platform to reach out to various target groups. We collaborated with Heemkunde Vlaanderen to give seminars for amateur historians interested in migration history. A manual has been developed to promote the use of the individual files of the Sûreté Publique as a source for local history. Their interest has particularly been sparked through our database of 154 000 immigrants who arrived in Belgium between 1830 and 1890. This database includes the number of their individual file opened by the Sûreté Publique and preserved at the Royal State Archives (RSA). After completion the database has been integrated with the online search-persons tool on the website of the RSA, which in itself represents an important valorization milestone of the project. Academics and amateur historians, especially those interested in genealogy, have found their way to the database with satisfying results. To reach the general public we also engaged in collaborations with various museums such as the Red Star Line, Kazerne Dossin, the House of European History and Mundaneum. With these partners we are exploring the possibilities to translate our findings in their permanent collection, or in temporary and digital exhibits. In addition, IMMIBEL has reached out to governance actors by opening dialogues with the contemporary Sûreté Publique. We also gave input to Amsab-ISG and Faro who prepared a report for the Flemish Cultural Minister S. Gatz to integrate migration patrimony more structurally in cultural policy.

Another major contribution to valorizing our project and reach out various target groups has been through the organization of the First Day of Belgian Migration History (Brussels, September 23rd 2017). The event created a platform where research on Belgian Migration History is valorized in its own right. It brought together people from different backgrounds working on migration history to, from and within Belgium. This networking event increases the visibility of past and ongoing research to a broader public, creates new opportunities for collaboration and lays bare the gaps that still need to be filled. The success of the event turned it into an annual meeting with a specific theme trying to address lacunae. The second edition held in Leuven (6 October 2018) focused on the quasi-absence of migration history in text books and curricula for secondary school history education. The roundtable discussion organized on this theme convinced us that we needed to expand the valorizations actions of the IMMIBEL project to reach out to an overlooked but important target group, secondary school history teachers and their students.

With BELMIHISS we aim to develop a digital educational tool for secondary teachers introducing key concepts and models of migration studies in historical perspective. With the expertise gained during the IMMIBEL project we can link the macro-level perspectives on migration history, focusing particularly on structural push- and pull-factors, to meso and micro level examples, emphasizing information channels and networks and the individual level, resulting from the IMMIBEL project. By doing so we simultaneously bring in the agency and the perspective of common people and individuals in history education, which now often solely focuses on the macro-history from a structural perspective. The key archival source used in the project, the individual files of foreign migrants in Belgium, is exceptionally suited to acquaint students with migration history via an accessible, hands-on and personal approach. This bottom-up perspective of individual migrants and their life stories from the files allows to captivate students with concrete examples. These illustrations allow secondary teachers to link individual life stories and migration trajectories to key concepts of migration studies and relate them to broader trends over time, such as globalization, the rise of modern nation states, nationalism, racism, multiculturalism, superdiversity, etc. During this start-up project we intend to develop the lesson series, the support material and digital resources, next to questions and task to fulfil the learning objectives. This will allow teachers to better connect to curricular requirements (in both Flemish and francophone history education), stating that attention must be paid to migrations in the past, and that connections must be sought with (conceptual frameworks within) the academic discipline of history.



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Objectives and impacts

The intended achievements of the valorization action are manifold, but two key characteristics deserve to be highlighted. First, the dynamic tool will be developed to provide a durable platform for secondary school teachers to incorporate migration history as an integrated part into their curricula. Secondly, it answers a pressing demand acknowledged by policymakers to address this lacuna by using the IMMIBEL project as a case study to instruct future generations. Inherently this will instore a greater historical consciousness about migration, facilitating the dissemination of migration history studies.

We intend to convince as many teachers as possible to include migration history into their teaching packages by using our tools through our website. We will promote the tools via the teacher training networks at universities and the history teacher associations at both sides of the country through their websites, journals (such as Hermes) and networking events. We can measure the impact by having the users of our tools register and fill out the classes for which they intend to use it. This will serve as a platform to collect ideas, and suggestions for improvements based on first hand practices. In the long term we intend to transfer the tools to the website of the VVLG.

The added value of the tools to the present situation is that there is no alternative at the moment. Migration history has hardly received any attention in history textbooks in Flanders. At the same time migration has been incorporated as a key concept into the new final attainment levels for secondary education in Flanders effective in 2019. These new final attainment levels for secondary education also contain a section 'historical consciousness' which calls for more attention to critically reflect with and about historical primary sources. In francophone Belgium, migration history is part of the curriculum since almost a decade. In textbooks, however, particularly the macro-level has been addressed, while the meso- and micro-level (including the perspective of common people and individuals) have been neglected so far. Therefore, the tools developed by BELMIHISS come at a perfect time to encourage and facilitate teachers to meet the requests posed by the new final attainment levels in Flanders. At the same time, it complements and strengthens the attempts to establish it on the curriculum in Wallonia.

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