



# UMBRELLA REFUGEE COMMITTEE

**JUNE 2026**

**URC COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:**



## YEMENI FORUM IN BELGIUM



# 1. ABOUT THE YEMENI FORUM IN BELGIUM

The Yemeni Forum in Belgium is a non-profit organisation (vzw/asbl) based in Antwerp that brings together Yemeni expatriates and Arab refugees from across Belgium. The Forum was formally established in 2024, after operating as an informal initiative since 2023, and before that as a solo volunteer effort dating back to 2019. It has grown into a vital community anchor for Arabic-speaking newcomers.

*"Our vision is to be the primary destination for every Yemeni in Belgium and to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society we live in."*

The Forum's main branch is located at Pesthofstraat (Poort 5), 2060 Antwerp (2nd floor), where it offers regular drop-in hours. It also maintains active connections with community members in Brussels, Ghent, Liège, and West Flanders, providing remote assistance in areas where it has no physical presence.

## 2. SERVICES & DAY-TO-DAY WORK

The Forum operates as a practical, hands-on helpdesk covering the full spectrum of challenges faced by newly arrived or long-settled migrants. Services include:

- Translation and explanation of official documents: ID cards, residency papers, contracts, bills
- Guidance on renewing residence permits and registering new family members
- Accompanying and interpreting at appointments with landlords, social services, and utility companies
- Assistance with electricity, gas, and water contracts
- Referrals and coordination with the asylum authority (CGRS), social assistance (OCMW/CPAS), lawyers, and psychological support services
- Advice on the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and recognised refugees
- Information sessions to prepare for asylum interviews
- Digital and administrative support: emails, online forms, electronic services
- Arabic and Dutch language classes for children and adults
- Cultural and sports activities, including a youth football championship
- Dedicated support for vulnerable groups: unaccompanied minors, single mothers, the elderly, and those with disabilities or serious health conditions

The Forum serves all Arab nationalities. While founded by and for Yemenis, it actively extends its services to the wider Arab community and other nationalities, and describes its space as a place of welcome, not only a place of help.

**20–50 people**

helped per week (peak periods)

**570+ members**

in the community WhatsApp group

### 3. THE COMMUNITY

Belgium is home to between two and three thousand Yemenis, many of whom prefer to live in the Antwerp area in order to find work. Many arrived fleeing the civil war that erupted in Yemen in 2015 — one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world — while others have arrived in more recent years. The community is spread across several Belgian cities: Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Liège, and others.

The Forum maintains a WhatsApp group of more than 570 people as its primary communication channel, alongside social media and its website. The group is used to share information, coordinate appointments, and provide peer-to-peer support — reflecting a genuine culture of mutual aid within the community.

The Forum also collaborates with other Yemeni community groups in Ostend, the Ghent cultural centre, and Brussels, working towards a coordinated national network. Partners include Bindus, which provides technical support and donated equipment; Al-Hikma VZW; and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has funded projects including the RISE project and a women's empowerment event. Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen has also funded projects and provides training on legal frameworks, regulations, and policies. The Forum is furthermore very pleased to have joined the Umbrella Refugee Committee at the start of 2026 — an organisation run by refugees that has made a real mark — and looks forward to being a genuine added value to the Committee.

On the international stage, the Yemeni Forum participated in a high-level official meeting at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — a recognition of its growing role at the formal institutional level.

The Yemeni Forum in Belgium has also become a sponsor within the Department of Sociology and Migration Research at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) — AIMS Lab, contributing to the centre's research objectives by providing access to research samples. The Forum has furthermore established itself as a primary destination for research on Arab migrants and Arab communities in Belgium.



## Recent Activities & Events

The Forum's activity record reflects a genuine breadth of community engagement:

- December 2025: First Yemeni Women's Event, funded by IOM, under the theme 'A strong woman builds a happy family.'
- December 2025: Yemeni Arts, Heritage & Culture event
- September 2025: Commemoration of the Yemeni September and October Revolutions
- March 2026: Eid gathering with a Yemeni theme, bringing together women from diverse cultures across Belgium
- 2026: Participation in a high-level meeting at UNHCR

## 4. HISTORY & ORIGINS

---

The Forum's story begins with two people. First, Mr. Walid Al-Dahhali. In 2019, he arrived in Belgium, and within two weeks encountered an Iraqi man who needed help navigating the asylum system. There was no guidance and no organisation to turn to, so he stepped in — and has not stopped since.

For years, this remained a solo, informal effort. Then, his colleague Dr. Othman Al-Aidrous joined around 2022–2023 and proposed turning the initiative into a formal institution. Together, they transformed it into an official entity: activities were formally registered in April 2023, and the Forum received non-profit (VZW) status on 30 August 2024. What began with helping one stranger has developed into a recognised organisation.

*"In 2019 I stayed two weeks. I found an Iraqi person who asked to go to the asylum office. I didn't know anything. Before, there was no help at all."*

## 5. AIMS & VISION

---

The Forum's vision is both ambitious and grounded. Its leaders describe their goals as:

- Securing a permanent, suitable premises that can accommodate growing demand
- Expanding equipment: projectors, laptops, printers
- Growing the volunteer and translator team to cover languages beyond Arabic
- Establishing a school or regular programme to teach children Arabic, Dutch, and civic values
- Intensifying Dutch-language practice for adults beyond twice-weekly sessions, towards daily immersion
- Developing a structured welcome package for newly arrived people, including a rights guide and referral directory
- Strengthening current women's empowerment programmes
- Building deeper partnerships with official bodies: UNHCR, CGRS, municipalities, and legal aid.

The Forum's leaders hope that within five years it will be operating from a larger, better-equipped centre — one that has moved beyond survival mode and is delivering consistent, professional-level integration support to all nationalities arriving in Antwerp and beyond.

## 6. HUMAN STORIES

The following two stories, shared by the Forum during an interview, illustrate the depth and breadth of its impact. Names and identifying details have been withheld.

### Story 1 — From Mental Health Crisis to Family Reunification

*A man arrived at the Forum in a state of severe distress. He had been separated from his family due to the war in Yemen and felt completely alone in Belgium. His mental health had deteriorated to the point where he expressed thoughts of ending his life. The Chairman of the Forum intervened immediately, not simply by providing paperwork guidance, but by accompanying him to a psychologist and supporting him through ten days of acute crisis, remaining present throughout. Once stabilised, the team guided the man step by step through the family reunification process: identifying the required documents, explaining where to go for legalisation, booking appointments on his behalf, and smoothing the bureaucratic path at each stage. His family was eventually reunited. He still visits the Forum, no longer in crisis, but to seek advice, stay connected, and smile.*

### Story 2 — Fighting for Rights When No One Else Would

*This is another memorable story of this community that overcame obstacles with support.*

*A community member contacted the Forum about a persistent problem with a service provider, a utility company that had failed to resolve a billing or connection issue for weeks, despite repeated promises. The Forum stepped in, making call after call on the man's behalf, refusing to accept delaying responses. The process took nearly two months of persistent advocacy. Eventually, the company relented, and the man received what he was owed. The Chairman of the Forum noted that this case is not exceptional; it is the norm. Many newcomers lack the language skills, knowledge of consumer rights, or confidence to keep pushing. The Forum acts as that advocate, and does not give up.*

*Today, this forum has expanded further, led by the same enthusiasm, kindness, and support that initiated it all. It demonstrates how the personal effort of a person can become the strength and hope of the whole community.*

*"You always feel better when you help. He came every week — and I saw him smile."*

## 7. A NOTE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING

---

The Forum currently runs Dutch and Arabic language sessions for both children and adults, and sees language acquisition as a cornerstone of integration. However, its leadership is candid about the limitations of the current model: two sessions per week are not enough to achieve fluency or functional independence.

What participants need is daily practice — conversation with native Dutch speakers, immersion in everyday environments, and confidence built through repeated real-world interaction. The Forum is actively seeking partnerships with Belgian civil society organisations, language schools, and volunteer networks that can provide this. Tandem language exchange programmes, involvement in local clubs and associations, and structured mentorship between newcomers and Belgian residents are among the approaches the Forum welcomes.

For children, the Forum sees equal importance in maintaining the Arabic language — preserving cultural identity and family communication — alongside acquiring Dutch. A dedicated children's programme covering language, civic values, and cultural heritage is a stated priority for the Forum's next phase.

## 8. CHALLENGES FACED

---

According to an interview with the Yemeni Forum, the organization is currently facing significant challenges, primarily related to limited funding. Financial constraints affect their ability to cover essential expenses such as rent and the purchase of necessary equipment, including laptops and printers. Despite receiving some support from other organizations, they do not receive any funding from the Belgian government, which adds to the strain. The Forum identifies three main challenges: a shortage of equipment, difficulties in securing adequate space for both housing and office activities, and language barriers, which require the assistance of mediators to ensure effective communication across different languages.



## 9. HOW TO ENGAGE & SUPPORT

---

### For Individuals

- Volunteer as a translator (Arabic, Dutch, French, English, Tigrinya, Nepali, or other languages)
- Donate to the Forum's official account to support running costs
- Offer Dutch conversation practice or tandem language exchange
- Spread the word — many people who need help do not yet know the Forum exists

### For Organisations

- Provide or subsidise a dedicated workspace in Antwerp
- Second experienced staff for mentorship in social work or legal assistance
- Co-develop projects in women's empowerment, youth, and digital skills
- Include the Forum in referral networks so that newcomers are directed here early

## 10. CONTACT & FIND THE YEMENI FORUM

---

The Forum can be reached through its website, social media, and its community WhatsApp group.

**Website:** [yemeniforum.be](http://yemeniforum.be)

**Email:** [Info@yemeniForum.be](mailto:Info@yemeniForum.be)

**Office:** Pesthofstraat (poort 5), 2060 Antwerp — 2nd floor



## ABOUT THE UMBRELLA REFUGEE COMMITTEE

The Umbrella Refugee Committee (URC) is a refugee-led non-profit community organisation based in Brussels. It was created by and for people who have experienced forced displacement. URC brings together ten independent refugee committees under one platform, including the Yemeni Forum in Belgium, with elected representatives and volunteers working across areas such as housing, education, employment, data collection, and broader integration support. Our work is grounded in the principle that refugees should be at the centre of decision making on issues that affect their lives, and we aim to build bridges between communities, institutions, and public authorities in order to contribute to more inclusive and empowering responses for asylum seekers and newcomers.

<https://refugee-committee.org/>  
[administration@refugee-committee.org](mailto:administration@refugee-committee.org)

This article was written by Nour Moufed Aldahabreh with the support of Dhruba Adhikari, as part of a cooperative project between the Umbrella Refugee Committee and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Thank you for this collaboration!



**UMBRELLA  
REFUGEE  
COMMITTEE**