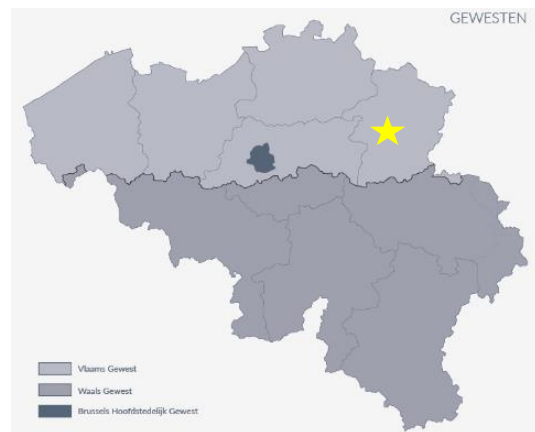


## DIVERSITY – CONTEXT WITHIN PXL UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

Belgium is a federal state composed of three communities (Flemish, French and German), three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region) and 10 provinces.



*Fig. 1: Communities*



*Fig. 2: Regions*

PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts is located in Flanders, in the province of Limburg (stars on the maps above).

Society in Belgium, as in the rest of the world, is becoming increasingly diverse. Superdiversity is the norm. Although different regions in Belgium experience similar benefits and challenges regarding this superdiversity, the situation is different in each region.



The province of Limburg has a rich history with various migration flows due to its mining past and more recent events such as conflicts within and outside Europe.

After WW2, there was a large labour migration flow. Coal was an important source of energy that was abundant in the Limburg mines. However, the work was heavy and dangerous, so mining companies also sought workforces abroad. In the first phase, mainly Italian and Eastern European (e.g. from Poland) workers were recruited. A decade later, new labour contracts with Spain, Greece, Turkey and Morocco followed. Consequently, there are many communities in Limburg with roots in these countries.

The fact that many people with a migration background live in Limburg is also represented in the student population within PXL.

Although the ratio of students with and without a migration background<sup>1</sup> does not fully represent society, the number of students with a migration background in PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts is higher than in the other universities (and universities of applied sciences) in Flanders and increases every year. Since students from migrant backgrounds are less likely to participate in higher education and are often underrepresented here, this is something we are proud of. The cultural diversity among students is seen as a great strength and a way to ensure that students have an impact in society and can be innovative.

In the academic year 2022-2023, 33.1% of the students in PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts had a migration background (above Flemish average), 1.2% students were newcomers (no Belgian secondary education diploma), 16.9% were multilingual students (in addition to Dutch,

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to students with a migration background if this student is

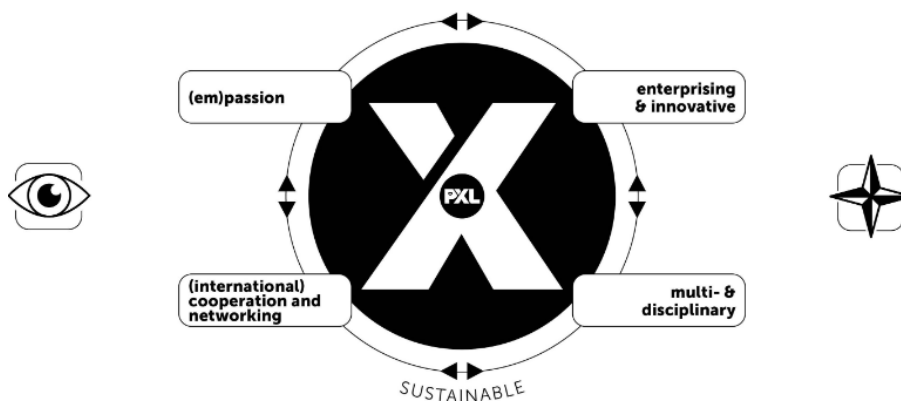
- has a main residence in Belgium
- does not have Belgian nationality themselves OR has at least one parent or at least two grandparents who do not have or did not have Belgian nationality at birth
- has a Belgian secondary school diploma himself/herself



another home language) and 1.9% were foreign-language-speaking students (they do not speak Dutch at home).

However, the study trajectory of these students tends to be slightly longer within PXL. Besides enrolment, progression in higher education tends to be less smooth for some of these students. That is why PXL demands extra attention to this in its current policy plans, and has included 10 key aspects to create an inclusive learning environment for a superdiverse student population:


- 1) Use the X-factor<sup>2</sup> as a compass in dealing with junior colleagues (our students).



- 2) Be attentive both to what students have in common and where they differ from one another.
- 3) Involve students in actions around (super)diversity. Give them a seat and a voice at the table.
- 4) Give space for all students to be themselves.
- 5) Let students connect with each other.
- 6) Empower students to make their own choices.
- 7) Address students in their strengths and thus increase their sense of competence.

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<sup>2</sup> The X-factor is a graphic representation of PXL's vision. If you 'ld like to learn more about it, please take a look at the following webpage: [About PXL](#)

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- 8) Make students aware that having a degree in higher education leads to more opportunities in their future lives.
  - 9) Make a solid analysis of the student population: What are the needs and opportunities that come out of this analysis? Take action, go deep and make sure that as many students as possible can benefit from those actions (UDL).
  - 10) Be aware of the fact that everyone has their own frame of reference, based on their own partial identities. Don't focus on just one aspect of people's identity.

Despite the fact that cultural diversity is represented among students and PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts is making real efforts to create an inclusive environment, there is always room for improvement. For example, we see that cultural diversity is much less represented in the teaching staff than in our student population and professionalisation for every lecturer would also be an added value. We hope to address the latter with this project, and we are looking forward to digging into the world of creating a culturally responsive teaching environment together with all of our partners and with you!

