

IGeLU 2023 Conference and Developers' Day  
September 11-14, 2023



# From Fee to Free

How our library moved from a paid to a free ILL service

Fabienne Prosmans, Fulfillment and ILL Manager  
François Renaville, Head of Library Systems





# Abstract

*Since summer 2022, our interlibrary loan service has become free of charge for ULiège students, faculty, and staff members. A feasibility study, started in 2019, was completed 3 years later. In March 2020, because of COVID-19, ILL service had become temporarily free for the ULiège community. This was a great opportunity for a real two-year pilot phase. Thanks to the length of the pilot, solid statistics and usage data were obtained and the ILL operators had two years' experience in a free context. Additionally, changes in our workflows such as a new subscription to RapidILL, peer-to-peer resource sharing between Alma institutions and more automation in some tasks have reduced our ILL charges. As a result of the feasibility study, the two-year pilot, some changes in our workflows, and based on reactions of users and ILL staff, it was decided to keep a free ILL service for the ULiège community, with some safeguards to prevent abuses and avoid uncontrolled costs.*

# Context and Facts



## A multisite university in Wallonia



## 11 Faculties

- Philosophy and Letters
- Medicine *in association with Liège University Hospital*
- Psychology, Speech Therapy and Education Sciences
- Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech
- Law, Political science & Criminology
- Applied sciences
- HEC Liège, Management School
- Architecture
- Sciences
- Veterinary medicine *in association with Liège University Veterinary Clinic*
- Social Sciences

## One of the broadest selection of courses in Belgium

**37**  
BACHELOR'S  
*degree courses*

**207**  
MASTER'S  
*degree courses*

**65**  
*Specialised*  
MASTER'S  
*degree courses*



**24,520**  
STUDENTS



**2,120**  
DOCTORAL  
STUDENTS



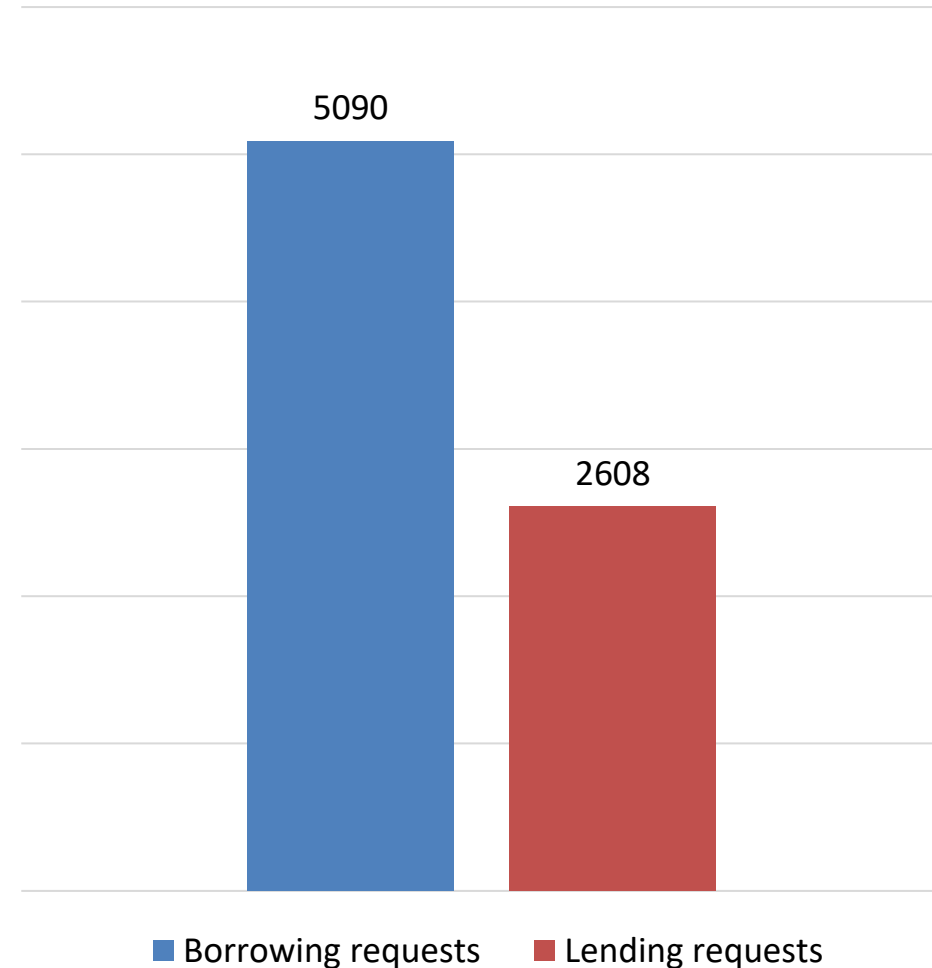
**1,400**  
TEACHERS



# University of Liège Library

- One library
  - composed of 15 branches
- Staff: ca 100 people
- Current situation for ILL:
  - Staff: 1 FTE (6 operators)
  - Coordinator: 0,1 FTE
- Systems for ILL:
  - myDelivery (homemade, until 2015)
  - Alma (since 2015)
  - RapidILL (since 2020)
  - Impala (since 90s), national broker ILL system
  - Subito (since 90s)
- Paid service (until Spring 2020)

## ILL Requests in 2022





# ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (1)

- 1) > **2014**: 8 different ILL units (15 operators)
- 2) **2015**: 5 different ILL units (10 operators)
- 3) **2018**: 1 single ILL unit (6 operators)
  - Alma Resource Sharing Library
  - More collaboration between ILL operators
  - Harmonization of practices between operators
  - Operators take turns the ILL tasks (shared calendar)
  - Change was not easily accepted by everyone
    - Transparency is not always accepted
    - ILL work = preserve of some ILL operators
    - Cost and profit sharing (pooling of HR, revenues and costs)



Successful results, although change was underprepared

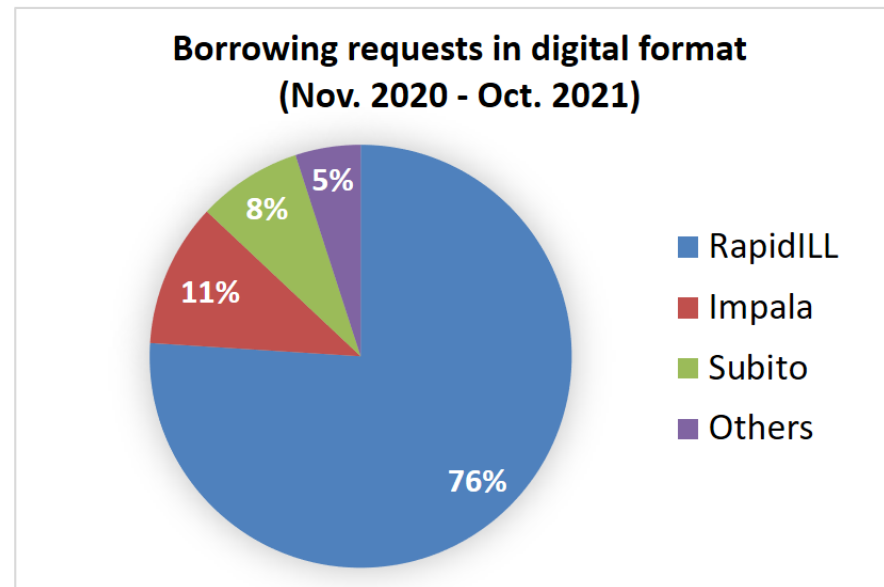
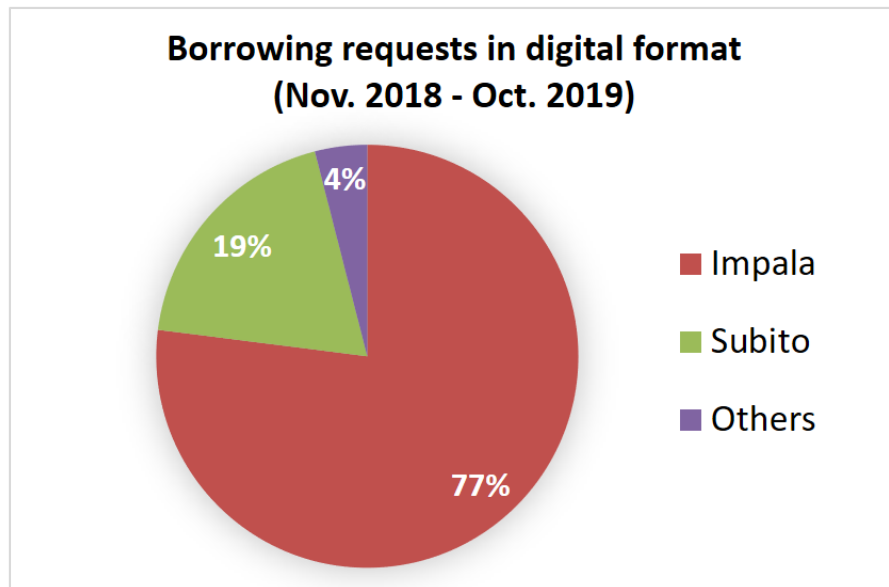
More info in [One Resource Sharing Library to Rule Them All](#)



# ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (2)

## 4) 2020: Subscription to RapidILL for article and chapter delivery

- Partially integrated with Alma
- RapidILL = main supplier





# ILL - Major changes at ULiège Library since 2014 (3)

## 5) **2022**: Full integration of RapidILL with Alma

- If the request is accepted and processed in RapidILL, the scanned file is directly emailed from Alma to the requester (without any intervention of an operator)

## 6) **2022**: Start of P2P resource sharing between Alma institutions in Belgium for physical items

- Effective with the Free University of Brussels (ULB)
- Test underway with other partners



# Towards a Free ILL Service



# How it began...

- 2014: Outdoor activity of the Library Board members
  - To rethink the Library's goals, missions and future
  - Towards “Library as a Service” (LaaS)
- 2018: Mandate from the Board to carry out a **feasibility study**
  - Also a social aspect (students with low-income)
- 2019: Start of the study (completed only in 2022)
- 2020: Because of Covid-19 (and in parallel to the study), ILL service has become temporarily free of charge for ULiège students and faculty members
  - Great opportunity for a real **pilot**



## (A) Feasibility study

- 1) Internal context
- 2) External context
- 3) Stakeholders
- 4) SWOT analysis



# 1) Internal context

- Current organization of the ILL service
- History and recent milestones
  - Recent major changes
  - ILL tools used so far
- Facts and figures, statistics (since 2018)
  - Borrowing requests by format
  - Borrowing requests by Faculty
  - Requesters' profile
  - Partners
  - Costs and revenues



## 2) External context

- Survey among Belgian academic libraries
  - Paid or free service?
- Literature review
- Chronic subscription cost increases of many scholarly journals
- Factors at that time:
  - Covid-19 crisis:
    - no physical delivery (for some months)
    - increase of digital delivery
  - RapidILL trial/subscription



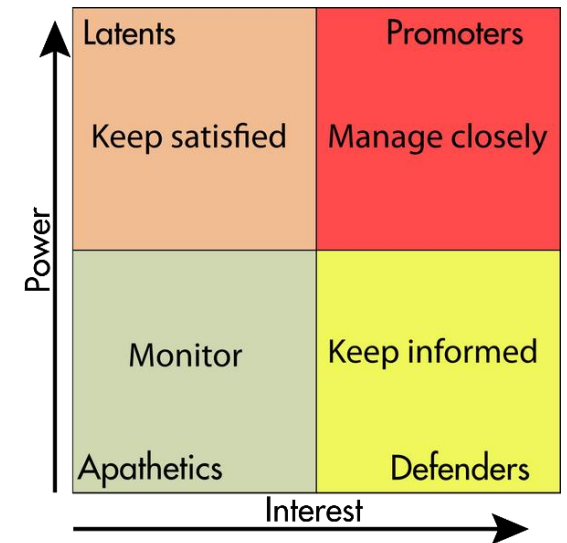
# 3) Stakeholders

- Stakeholder Analysis
  - Primary stakeholders: most affected, either positively or negatively
  - Secondary stakeholders: indirectly affected
  - Tertiary stakeholders: impacted the least
- And power-interest grid to identify
  - Stakeholders' interests
  - Potential risks and misunderstandings (“me issues”)
  - Mechanisms to positively influence other stakeholders and the project
  - Negative stakeholders as well as their adverse effects on the project
    - Major risk at the level of the sponsor itself (until 2021)
- Personal interviews with 8 key stakeholders
  - Min. 1 hour + recorded + transcribed + approved

Transparent process!

Key stakeholders (mainly ILL operators) were in favor of a free ILL service!

(A) Feasibility study





## 4) SWOT Analysis

(A) Feasibility study

- All internal and external factors summarized in a SWOT analysis

= compilation of a project's **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats





## (B) Pilot during Covid19

- From Spring 2020 (1<sup>st</sup> lockdown) to Spring 2022
  - 1) Real statistics and usage data collected
  - 2) First reactions and observations:
    - ILL operators could have an overview of what ILL would look like if it remains free
    - Patrons started to get used to a free ILL service





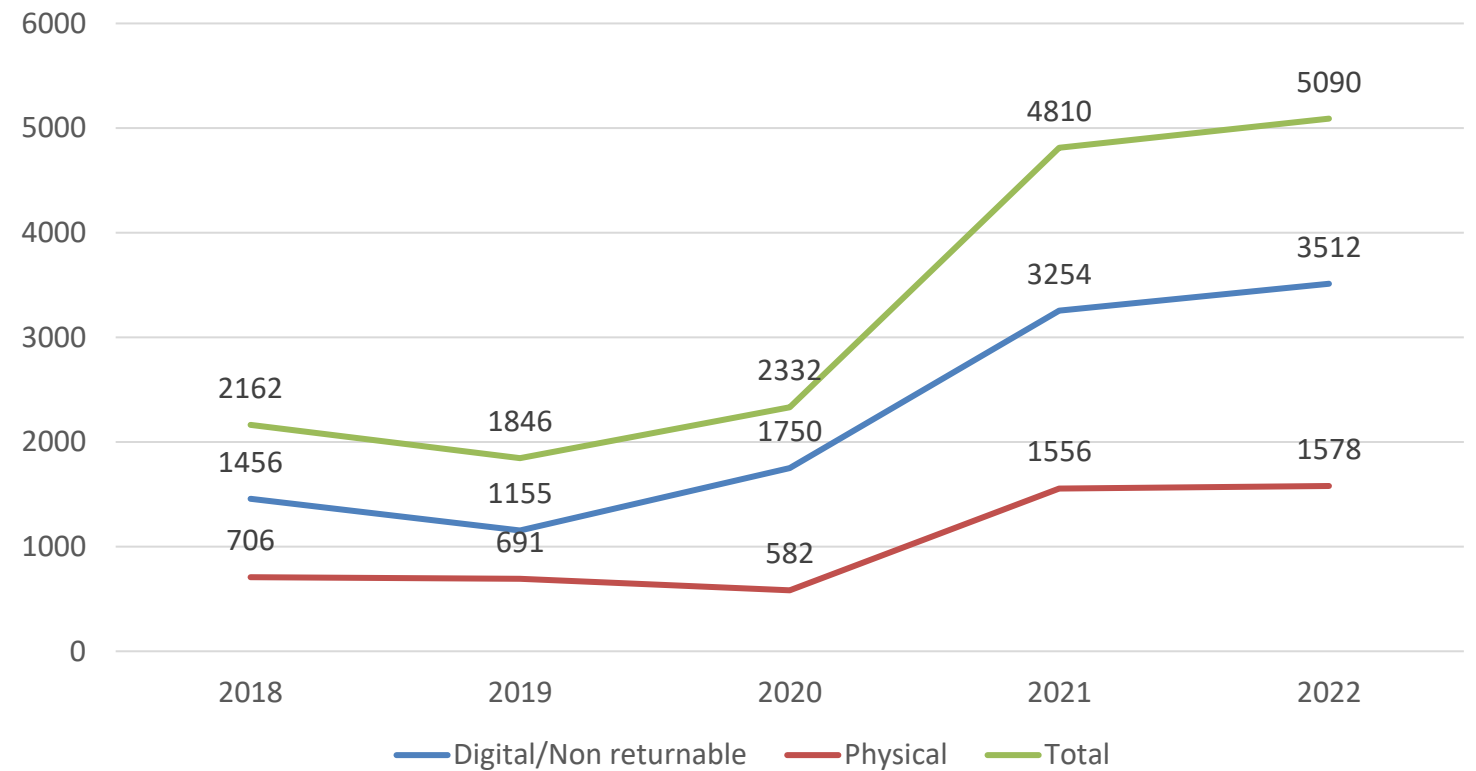
# 1) Usage data (1)

(B) Pilot during Covid19

## ■ Factors

- Pre-Covid vs Covid vs post-Covid
- Pre-RapidILL vs RapidILL
- Paid vs Free

Completed Borrowing Requests (2018-2022)

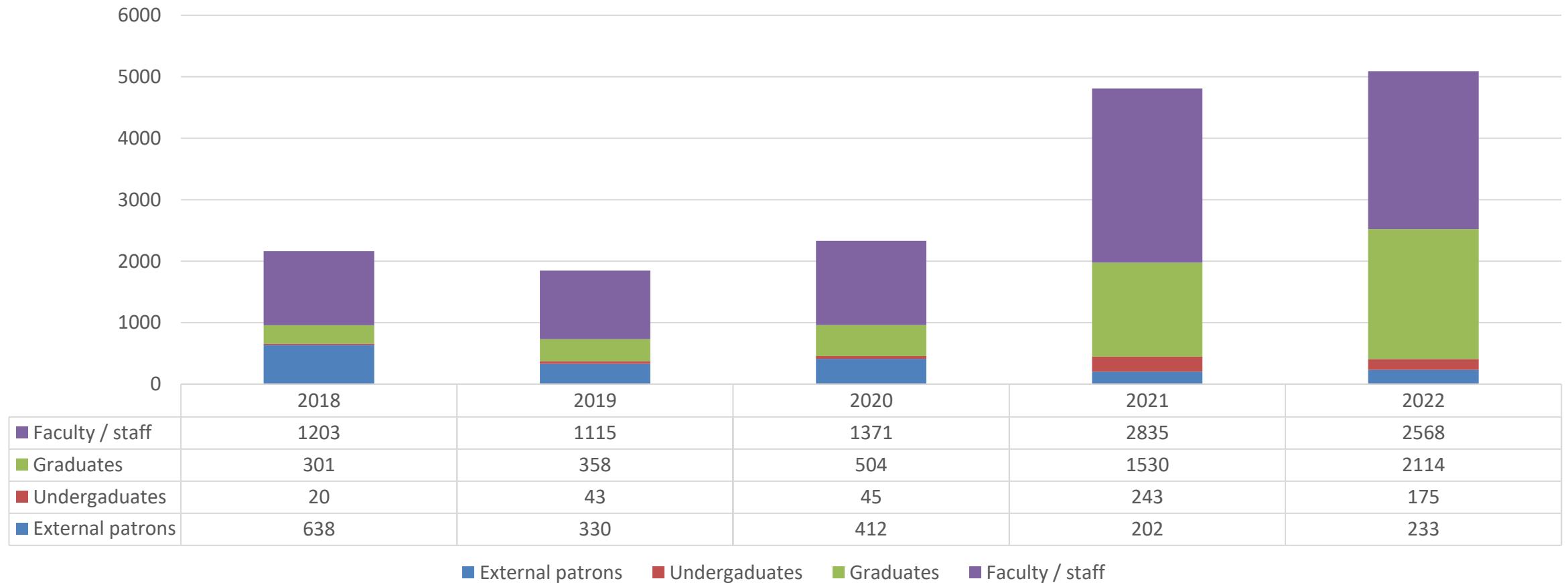




# 1) Usage data (2)

(B) Pilot during Covid19

## By Patron types (2018-2022)





## 2) First reactions and observations (1)

(B) Pilot during Covid19

- Satisfaction of the end-users
  - Why should they pay for materials they need, but that the library doesn't hold?
- Request increase seems to meet a need
- Time saving for operators and secretaries in administrative tasks:
  - Operators should no longer
    - Care about how to invoice ULiège researchers and teachers
    - Add and manage the ILL fees for students in Alma
  - Secretaries should no longer produce invoices for researchers and teachers
  - No longer necessary to check if ILL fees have been paid



## 2) First reactions and observations (2)

(B) Pilot during Covid19

- Some requests for books in physical format are very expensive because of the shipping costs (which can be very high if from abroad or outside the EU)
- Since the service is free, a few students/faculty members request many books (several dozens) in physical format in a year
- A few students/faculty members do not consult/loan the books they have requested
- More requests to complete, but more automation (RapidILL and Alma 2P2)
  - Automation helps to balance the overload
  - The more automated, the cheaper!

# Recommendations to the Board



# Recommendations to the Board

- Free ILL should be considered as a priority within the Library as a Service model
- Free ILL service should be maintained for the ULiège community
  - With no limit for digital articles and chapters delivered via RapidILL
  - With an increased library budget for postal charges
  - With no symbolic contribution to the costs
  - And Alma P2P for physical delivery should be encouraged



# With some safeguards

- ILL fees increased for some external patrons
- Charging a contribution to the costs for physical item requests from abroad (from the 4<sup>th</sup> request) and for frequent requests in journals that are not in RapidILL holdings
  - Monitoring via Analytics
- Purchasing a print copy or the ebook version (if any) in case of too high costs for delivery or item frequently requested
  - Monitoring via Analytics
  - From ILL to DDA (+ budget)
- Raising awareness among patrons that there are always hidden costs (for the University)
  - In Alma letters

Free service is not a pipe dream as long as costs remain under control



# References

Prosmans, F., & Renaville, F. (2022). *Gratuité du service du prêt interbibliothèques à ULiège Library — étude de faisabilité*. ULiège Library.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2268/296151>

Prosmans, F., & Renaville, F. (2018). *One Resource Sharing Library to Rule Them All*. Paper presented at 13th IGeLU Conference, Prague, Czechia.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2268/227174>



# Thank you!

Fabienne Prosmans  
Fulfillment and ILL Manager  
[fprosmans@uliege.be](mailto:fprosmans@uliege.be)

François Renaville  
Head of Library Systems  
[francois.renaville@uliege.be](mailto:francois.renaville@uliege.be)