

COMMON EUROPE CONGRESS 2025 STUDENTS EXPERIENCE

June 2 - 5, 2025



We are Gavin and Selim, both third-year Cybersecurity students at [Howest University of Applied Sciences](#). Howest is known for its innovative and interdisciplinary approach to education and research. In its [Bachelors program](#), we study specific problems in the field of security and learn how to arm organizations against them. Throughout our program, we had exposure to IBM technologies, which are still widely used and highly relevant in today's IT landscape. When we learned from [Common Belgium](#) about the Common Europe Congress and its NextGen initiative, we saw a unique opportunity to deepen our understanding of IBM i and IBM Power Systems, and to explore how advanced security is practiced on these platforms. We were particularly eager to connect our academic knowledge to real-world applications, discover best practices in cybersecurity, and broaden our professional network within the IBM community.

Common Europe Congress is a major annual event, bringing together over 450 participants and offering 9 parallel tracks of sessions, workshops, and networking opportunities. This scale highlights the congress's significance as a hub for knowledge exchange and innovation in the IBM ecosystem.

COMMON EUROPE CONGRESS 2025

02-05 JUNE
Gothenburg, Sweden

The largest conference in Europe
for solutions around IBM Power (IBM i, AIX, Linux) & IBM Storage


In association
with
Common Sweden



OVERVIEW

[Common Europe](#) is a European umbrella organization for IBM-based European IT user groups, supporting the exchange of knowledge, advanced training, and open dialogue among members and with IBM. It influences IBM's product strategies and international standards, while helping member countries connect nationally and globally, recognizing ITs importance for business and national success.

A key initiative, NextGen, provides complimentary registration for students and IT professionals under 30, under which we attended the [Common Europe Congress 2025](#) in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Common Belgium is the premier IBM Power Systems (IBM i / AIX / Linux) national user community, dedicated to harnessing the potential of IBM-based solutions to advance our members' businesses, skills and networking. Common Belgium is a part of Common Europe and is affiliated to [COMMON North America](#).

Day 1

The first day featured a series of insightful workshops. Proceedings began at 10:00 AM with Paul Chapman's engaging session on implementing Large Language Models (LLMs) on IBM Power Systems. He demonstrated the simplicity and efficiency of deploying LLMs locally, which reduces reliance on cloud-hosted models and addresses privacy concerns.

A highlight was the demonstration of IBM Power Systems' integration with .NET applications, showcasing the platform's versatility for both modern and legacy software. The session also emphasized the benefits of microservices architectures with OpenShift, leveraging containerization and multi-architecture clusters for flexibility and scalability.

The day ended with a lively welcome reception for NextGen participants, fostering dynamic group discussions and setting a collaborative tone for the conference.

Day 2

We started with the IBM Keynote, where experts unveiled the latest features of IBM i and Power Systems. This was followed by a session on forensic capabilities enabled by journaling in IBM i, expanding our understanding of forensic tools and procedures.

A deep dive into the current threat landscape for IBM i highlighted pressing security threats and mitigation strategies—information especially valuable for us as aspiring pentesters. After a networking lunch, Scott Forstie led a session on security best practices for Db2 for i, offering practical guidance for enterprise data protection.

The afternoon included a sponsor session on an AI-powered IBM i web application solution, emphasizing the accessibility of low-code development platforms. We also attended a talk on using Flutter and RPG microservices to modernize legacy systems.

The day concluded with a dinner **alongwith** the Common Belgium attendees, providing opportunities for informal networking and engaging conversations.

Day 3

We began with networking opportunities at the Expo, followed by a session from Ian Jarman on "10 Simple and Impactful Techniques to Improve Your Professional Skills." This talk highlighted the



importance of soft skills like listening, facilitation, and effective communication for IT professionals.

Later, Jesper Skov Johansen demonstrated live ransomware defense on IBM i, showing how IBM FlashSystem and Safeguarded Copy can protect business data. In the afternoon, Tonny Bastiaans discussed how cloud solutions can enhance disaster recovery and cyber resiliency. The day ended with fun activities at the Expo and the Congress Dinner, providing more chances to connect with peers and industry experts.

Day 4

Our return journey began bright and early, with a 6:00 AM flight — a necessity dictated by our student budgets — which meant, regrettably, we had to miss the final half-day of the conference. Despite this, the trip back to Belgium offered us a perfect opportunity to reflect on the wealth of experiences and professional growth this event provided. As we looked back on the sessions, discussions, and new connections made, we felt inspired and grateful for the invaluable insights and opportunities that will undoubtedly shape our future endeavors.

CONCLUSION

Participating in Common Europe Congress has been a significant milestone in our professional journey. The advanced security education we received—especially around IBM i and Power Systems—will directly benefit our future activities, whether we pursue further studies (such as a master's in cybersecurity) or seek roles focused on enterprise security and system administration. The exposure to real-world best practices and networking with industry leaders has broadened our perspective and will help us better align our academic learning with industry needs.

We are now more motivated to explore IBM technologies further, possibly focusing our future research or career on areas such as secure system design, digital forensics, or cloud-based security solutions. The practical knowledge and connections gained will undoubtedly enhance our employability and market value in the cybersecurity field.

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