



# Welcome to Brussels

This is a shorter version of the guide which is delivered by the Commission Welcome Office in Brussels (ADMINFO) to people who have received a job offer from the Commission.

The guide is for information purposes only. Any information it contains does not in any way represent a commitment on the part of the European Commission, which bears no responsibility for any incorrect or inaccurate information or subsequent changes which may be made.

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## 1. ACCOMMODATION



### 1.1. General

#### 1.1.1. *What is on offer?*

Unlike many European capitals, Brussels has not yet experienced a housing crisis. It is relatively easy to rent accommodation (apartments or houses). There is a very large and varied choice of accommodation at prices which are much lower than in most other European capitals, although they have been steadily rising over the last few years.

#### 1.1.2. *Temporary accommodation*

When you arrive in Brussels you might wish to rent temporary accommodation, perhaps a hotel, service apartment or furnished accommodation. Service apartments are more expensive than furnished accommodation but provide hotel-like services (cleaning and bedding) and offer a more flexible solution than a furnished apartment since there is no lease.

If you rent a furnished apartment, this includes not only furniture but also kitchen utensils, crockery and blankets. It does not usually include sheets, towels or kitchen towels. Ask for an inventory so that you are protected in the event of dispute. Bed and breakfast accommodation is also available.

#### 1.1.3. *How to find?*

#### • **Hotels:**

- The Tourist Office

It is open every day from 9.00 to 18.00.

Brussels Hôtel de Ville (Town hall)

Grand Place

1000 Brussels

☎ +32 2 513 89 40

- There is a free reservation centre: Belgique Tourisme  
Réservation ☎ +32 2 513 74 84

- **Bed and breakfast:** <http://www.bnb-brussels.be/>

#### • **Apartments/houses:**

- Via the Internet: <http://www.vlan.be>  
<http://www.immoweb.be>  
<http://www.maxipress.be/immotransitfr/>

- Specialised press: Vlan and Immo Transit
- Estate agents: beware of estate agencies as they are not all reliable. Contact the IPI (Institut Professionnel des agents Immobiliers - Professional Institute of Estate Agents) at <http://www.ipi.be>. This organisation can give you a list of approved estate agents which both sell and rent out accommodation.

## 1.2. Where to live?

### 1.2.1. Communes

The Brussels Capital Region has 19 communes which all have their own particular charm. The communes closest to the centre are more lively, and are better provided with public transport. A brief description of each commune is given in the Annex.

## 1.3. Lease: legal information

### 1.3.1. The lease

There are two types of lease contracts for a person's main residence (in Belgium):

- (1) A nine-year lease
- (2) A lease for three years or less

N.B.:

- A lease for three years or less has to be concluded in writing. Otherwise it will automatically run for nine years.
- Short-term leases can be renewed only once in writing. If no notice is given, they automatically become nine-year leases. We would advise you to only sign a short-term lease if you are sure that you do not want to renew the initial lease.

### 1.3.2. Terminating the lease

- When can the **owner** terminate the lease?
  - (1) Nine-year lease:
    - At any time by giving six-months' notice if he/she wishes to live in the rented house/apartment him/herself.
    - After three or six years by giving six-months' notice to carry out any improvements to the premises.
    - After three or six years for no particular reason: by giving six-months' notice + compensation to the tenant (equivalent to six or nine months' rent).

N.B.: If the owner gives notice, the tenant can leave the premises at one-month's notice without having to pay any compensation.

- (2) Lease for three years or less:

The owner **cannot terminate** the lease and must keep to the agreed terms.

- When can the **tenant** terminate the lease?

- (1) Nine-year lease:

At any time: by giving three-months' notice and paying an indemnity to the owner: three, two or one months' rent if the tenant leaves in the first, second or third year of the lease. After the fourth year no compensation has to be paid.

- (2) Three-year lease:

As a general rule, the tenant cannot terminate the lease before the agreed date unless a special clause was negotiated to this effect when the lease was signed. A clause authorising the tenant to terminate the lease before the agreed date is not authorised.

Both parties can terminate the lease by mutual agreement at any time, but it is vital that the tenant keeps written proof of the agreement made with the owner to terminate the lease and its conditions.

The death of the tenant or owner does not terminate a lease. It is transferred to the heirs.

Sale of the apartment or house does not terminate the lease.

### *1.3.3. What should you watch out for?*

- In the case of leases for three years or less, negotiate the following clause (so-called diplomatic clause):

"The tenant can terminate the lease at any time by giving three-months' notice and paying compensation equivalent to three, two or one months' rent if he/she leaves within the first, second or third year of the lease."

- Most owners will ask you for a deposit. This can never exceed three months' rent (excluding service charges) and the tenant cannot be obliged to hand over the deposit to the owner. It should be placed in a blocked account, opened in the tenant's name, with a bank.
- Service charges may be high. Before signing the lease, ask for recent statements of such charges (e.g. of the preceding year). Never sign a clause which says something like "charges include ...". Make sure the list of charges is restrictive and exhaustive. Make sure the charges are specified in the lease.

#### *1.3.4. Entry survey of property*

To be valid, a survey has, for legal purposes, to be detailed and drawn up in the presence of the tenant.

It can be carried out either by the tenant or owner or by one or more surveyors (experts).

If you cannot agree on the surveyor to be used, do not agree to anything and leave it to the owner to apply to the Juge de Paix (justice of the peace).

NEVER agree to a surveyor proposed by the owner. There is no guarantee that he will be objective as he may often have links with the owner. ADMINFO can give you the names of independent surveyors.

The survey should be made in writing, in the presence of both parties, be very detailed, and be signed by both parties or, at least, by the tenant.

The tenant would be advised to take photos of any visible damage.

Ask the surveyor to give you a written breakdown of his charges. Never accept any verbal promises.

To be valid, the survey has to be carried out before you move in or within the month in which you move in.

Check the report and do not hesitate to correct any wrong information, by sending back your modifications in writing as soon as possible.

N.B.: If no survey is carried out before you move in, the law will require the tenant to return the premises in the state in which he/she entered them. The owner may attempt to prove the contrary but this is very difficult to do.

The property has to be insured.

**Adminfo staff can check the lease of people who have been offered a job by the Commission to ensure that all its clauses are legal and suggest any improvements before the lease is signed. You will receive all contact details together with the job offer.**

#### *1.3.5. Estate agents*

- Never hand money over before you sign a lease. You do not have to pay the first month's rent until you have signed the lease. Some estate agents will try to get you to sign a rental undertaking: do not do it!
- Estate agents receive a commission from the owner, so never agree to pay a deposit!
- Never sign an exclusive agreement with an agent.
- If the agreement is signed by the owner's representative, check that he/she is authorised to represent the owner.

- Never forget that the agent is paid by the owner and represents the owner's interests.

## 2. TRANSPORT

### 2.1. International transport

Brussels lies at the heart of Europe and has very good transport links with other countries.

- **Airports**

National airport: situated in Zaventem, some 15 km from the centre of the city. The airport is easily reached by road, rail (Airport City Express) or bus (airport line)

Charleroi Airport: low-cost airlines operate here.

- **Trains**

The Belgian rail network is one of the most highly developed in the world: it has over 4 000 km of lines serving most towns and cities.

The network is operated by the SNCB (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges) or NMBS as it is known in Dutch.

The four main stations in Brussels are:

- Midi Station
- Central Station
- Luxembourg Station
- North Station

There is no terminus in Brussels. Trains operate between all stations and your ticket is valid everywhere. Many international trains serve a number of stations, with exception of the TGV, Thalys and Eurostar which only run from Midi Station.

### 2.2. Getting around in Brussels

Brussels is fairly congested. Over 300 000 vehicles enter and leave the city each day and this number is constantly rising. The number of parking spaces available in the city has reached saturation point (although spaces can often be found in paying car parks).

The public authorities have been making efforts for some years to encourage the use of public transport and bicycles.

- **Trains**

There are 29 stations in Brussels!

The rail network is under-used in Brussels despite being the quickest way of getting around.

The European institutions' main buildings are located near Luxembourg and Schuman stations.

- **Metro, trams, bus**

These run between 5 in the morning and midnight and are operated by STIB (French name) or MIVB (Dutch name).

Although services are very frequent at peak hours, they are much less regular after the evening rush hour.

There are three metro lines in Brussels (serving some 65 stations), 15 tram services and 43 bus services: in all there are 3 900 stops in the city.

There are many different types of tickets to suit all passengers' needs, ranging from a single ticket to an annual season ticket. There are also different rates according to age.

Don't forget to validate your ticket in the machine whenever you get on a metro, tram or bus.

A single ticket is valid for one hour irrespective of the number of times you change.

Your service badge allows you to travel free on the 21 and 22 buses which operate in the European institution area.

N.B.: Fines are very high and tickets are checked frequently.

STIB also operates special services for the disabled.

- **Taxis**

Brussels official taxis can be recognised by the special illuminated sign for the Brussels Capital Region.

It is not easy to hail a taxi on the street. The best way is to go to a taxi rank or ring for a taxi.

All taxis have a meter. There are different rates but these are always displayed in the taxi.

Service is included.

- **Bicycles**

More and more people are using bicycles and special bicycle lanes have started appearing in recent years.

There is an association (<http://provelo.be>) which can be of assistance: an experienced cyclist will help you plan your route and accompany you once to show you the way.

## 2.3. Your car



### 2.3.1. Driving licence

Any person over 18 with a valid driving licence can drive in Belgium.

Since 1 October 1998 driving licences issued by Member States of the European Union or the European Economic Area do not have to be exchanged for a Belgian licence. If they are of limited validity they must be exchanged before their date of expiry.

However, we recommend that you present your driving licence to your town hall which will take a copy, as this will make it simpler for you to obtain a replacement Belgian driving licence in the case of theft or loss.

### 2.3.2. Registration in Belgium of vehicles which have been imported or have already been registered in another Member State

Article 3(1) of Section 2, Chapter I, of the Royal Decree of 20 July 2001 on vehicle registration states that persons residing in Belgium must register any vehicle they wish to drive in Belgium in accordance with Article 6 even if these vehicles are already registered outside Belgium.

Residing in Belgium means being entered or recorded in the population register of a Belgian commune.

Consequently officials and other staff of the European institutions must register their vehicles if they have a special identity card or an identity card issued by a Belgian commune because this means they are entered in the population register.

**Vehicles must be registered within six months from the date of their drivers' registration with a commune.**

If you are stopped by the police, you may have your vehicle confiscated, be fined or even have to have your vehicle cleared by customs simply because you are entered in the national register but are driving your vehicle with foreign number plates.

No value added tax (VAT) has to be paid on vehicle registration in Belgium provided:

- The vehicle comes from an EU Member State;
- It is not a new vehicle, was first registered over six months earlier and has at least 6 000 km on the clock.
- The vehicle has passed a Belgian MOT (Technical control organised by the Ministry of Transport).

Registration conditions:

- You must be registered with the communal authorities;
- The vehicle must have a certificate of conformity issued by the manufacturer or importer in Belgium;
- The vehicle must be insured.

If you meet all these conditions, you can apply for registration to:

**D.I.V., Rue du Progrès 56 - Atrium City Building - 1210 Brussels**

**☎: 02-277.31.11 - Opening hours: 8.30-12.30/13.30-15.30.**

Your registration plates remain your property and are transferable if you buy another vehicle.

All holders of a registration number must pay an initial road tax followed by an annual road tax, the amount of which is calculated according to the horsepower of the vehicle.

### *2.3.3. Rules of the road*

- Cars coming from the right have priority except on motorways, roundabouts or priority roads.
- Trams always have priority.
- The speed limit is 50 km in built-up areas, 90 km on ordinary roads and 120 km on motorways.
- Seatbelts must be worn both in the front and back of vehicles.
- Children under 12 must sit in the back.
- The legal alcohol limit is 0.5%
- Vulnerable users (such as pedestrians or cyclists) have priority.

### 3. SERVICES IN BRUSSELS

#### 3.1. Banks



One of the first things you will have to do when you arrive in Brussels is open a bank account. Belgian banks are subject to strict supervision by the Banking Commission and have a reputation for reliability.

When you open an account you will be asked to give your address and to present your identity card and letter confirming your employment at the European institutions.

There are many banks in Brussels which have extensive networks of branches. Banks charge handling fees, and it may be interesting to compare rates.

Over 90% of financial transactions are now carried out electronically:

- Bancontact card: this card can be used to withdraw money from all ATM machines (irrespective of the bank which issued the card). You can also use it to pay in many shops. If you pay by card in the supermarket, you can ask for a larger amount to be charged on your card and receive the difference in cash.
- Proton is useful for small amounts. This is an electronic purse on your card's chip. You can load between €5 and €125 on the chip at any machine. This means that you do not have to use coins to pay for small amounts at, say, the baker's or newsagent's. You can also use it at many parking meters and telephone boxes.
- Self-banking: most banks have terminals where you can carry out many current operations: pay money into your account, pay your bills, order cheques, pick up your statements, etc.
- Most banks also offer a facility for transfers by phone.
- Finally, you can always manage your account via the Internet.

The most common way of paying bills is by bank transfer. Most bills will be accompanied by a special orange and white form. All you have to do is fill it in and sign it before giving it to your bank or transferring the amount electronically.

Another current practice is to set up direct debits for payments: you sign a document authorising your bank to pay certain bills (water, telephone, etc.) and these amounts are automatically deducted from your current account.

For fixed amounts, you can also ask your bank to set up a standing order, e.g. for rent.

Cheques are rarely used.

You can also change bank whenever you wish.

### 3.2. Gas and electricity

There is only one company which supplies all communes in Brussels:

SIBELGA - ELECTRABEL

Chaussée d'Ixelles 133

1050 Brussels

☎ +32 2 549 41 00

<http://www.electrabel.be>

You should submit a request for this utility one week ahead. You must have an identity card. The company will inform you when you are to be connected. You will have to be present on the premises to let the company's employee in and to sign that you have been properly connected. You can have someone to represent you, provided they have a photocopy of your identity card and a proxy from you.

Meters do not have to be closed. All the former and/or new tenant has to do is to return the transfer forms after they have been completed to the company (these forms can be obtained from the company on request).

You can choose how to be billed: on a monthly, weekly or quarterly basis. Your first bills will be estimates based on the previous occupant's consumption. Meters are read once a year and bills are then readjusted.

Electricity in Belgium is 220 volts (50 cycles).

N.B. Make sure that all the bills have been paid by previous occupants.

### 3.3. Water

There is also only one water company:

Compagnie Intercommunale Bruxelloise d'Eau (C.I.B.E.)

Rue aux Laines, 70

1000 Brussels

☎ + 32 2 518 81 11

<http://www.cibe.be>

Offices are open from 8.30 to 16.00.

All you have to do is write to the company giving the address of the property, the name of the new tenant and the date he/she is moving in and the meter reading at the time he/she moves in. The letter must be signed by the new tenant and the owner. If the meter has been closed, an employee from the water company will have to attend, e.g. where a dwelling is new or has been unoccupied for a long time. You will be billed for the connection costs. Billing is on an annual basis and based on consumption.

### 3.4. Cable television - Digital TV - INTERNET - Telecommunications

Belgium has one of the most highly developed cable networks in Europe. There are several cable distribution companies which service different areas of Brussels. If you subscribe to a cable network you will have access to the nine Belgian channels (four French-speaking and five Dutch-speaking), two local Brussels channels and thirty other European channels.

Télé-Bruxelles was set up in 1985 and puts out a programme of regional information in French (regular news updates from 12.00 to 02.00 at weekends and from 18.00 to 02.00 in the week).

TV-Brussel, which was set up in 1993, broadcasts in Dutch (regular news updates from 7 to 10, from 12.00 to 18.00 and from 18.00 to 01.30).

Useful addresses:

- **CODITEL: Cable television - Digital TV - Internet - Telecommunications**  
Rue des Deux Églises 28, 1000 Brussels - The Coditel shop is open from Monday to Friday from 0830 to 1230 and from 1330 to 1730.  
☎ 02-226 52 00: Monday to Friday from 0900 to 1800 and on Saturday from 1000 to 1800.  
<http://www.coditel.be>  
CODITEL serves the communes of Bruxelles-Ville (city) (including Laeken, Neder-over-Heembeek and Haren), St Josse, Anderlecht, Molenbeek-St-Jean, Watermael-Boitsfort and Wemmel.
- **BRUTELE: Cable television - Internet**  
Rue d'Alsace Lorraine 24/26, 1050 Brussels - ☎ 02-500.99.11.  
Offices are open from 0845 to 1630 - <http://www.brutele.be>  
BRUTELE serves the communes of Evere, St Gilles, Woluwe-St-Pierre, Ixelles, Auderghem and Uccle.  
Applications should be made by fax to 02/500.99.09, by Internet or letter.
- **UPC Belgium: Cable television - Internet**  
Avenue Chazal 140, 1030 Brussels, - ☎ 02-240 08 00.  
Offices are open from 0900 to 1700 - <http://www.upcbelgium.be>  
UPC Belgium serves the communes of Berchem Ste Agathe, Etterbeek, Forest, Ganshoren, Jette, Koekelberg and Schaerbeek.
- **WOLU-TV: Cable television - Internet**  
Avenue Georges-Henri 399, 1200 Brussels - ☎ 02-736 77 89.  
Offices are open from 0800 to 1200 and from 1330 to 1645 (to 1845 on Mondays) - <http://www.wolutv.be>  
WOLU-TV only serves the commune of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. Applications must be made on the spot.

The television standard in Belgium is PAL.

Satellite dishes: before installing a satellite dish you should contact your commune and, if you live in an apartment, the building manager. Although you cannot be prevented from installing a satellite dish there are urban planning and aesthetic restrictions, and you cannot simply install it as you think fit.

### 3.5. Telephone

- **Land line**

Since the telecommunications sector in Belgium was liberalised in January 1998 a number of companies now operate in this sector.

You have to go through one company, BELGACOM, to be connected up to the network:  
<http://www.belgacom.be>:

☎ 0800 33 800 (French) - ☎ 0800 22 800 (Dutch) - ☎ 0800 55 800 (English) -  
☎ 0800 44 800 (German)

Applications should be submitted in advance on special forms at your nearest Belgacom teleboutique. The addresses of Belgacom teleboutiques can be found in the Golden Pages under "Belgacom point of sales" - <http://www.goldenpages.be>.

Teleboutiques deal with all matters covering connections, telephone costs, rental charges, complaints, disputes, etc. You will be informed when you are to be connected up and your presence on the premises will be required. Only authorised installations or equipment can be connected up.

You can have an entry in the telephone book free of charge for each telephone line you have with Belgacom.

After your line has been installed you can use any of the following service providers:

CINQ/CINQ: <http://www.cinq-cinq.be>

HAPPYMANY: <http://www.happymany.com>

LCR Telecom: <http://www.primustel.be>

MONDIAL Telecom: <http://www.mondialtele.com>

NetNet: <http://www.netnet.be>

OPTICALL: <http://www.opticall.be>

PHONE-PLUS: <http://www.phone-plus.com>

EUPHONY Communications: <http://www.euphony.com>

SUN Telecom: <http://www.suntelecom.be>

TELENET: <http://www.telenet.be> (only in Dutch-speaking region)

TELE-WEST International: <http://www.tele-west.com>

TELLINK: <http://www.tellink.be>

TOLEDO: <http://www.toledo.be>

TELE 2: <http://www.tele2.be>

SCARLET: <http://www.scarlet.be>

EDPNET: <http://www.edpnet.be>

3U TELECOM: <http://www.3U.net> - <http://www.uuu.be>

CLEAR W'R: <http://www.clearwire.be>

- **Mobile phones**

There are three mobile phone operators:

PROXIMUS: <http://www.proximus.be>, linked with Belgacom

MOBISTAR: <http://www.mobistar.be>

BASE: <http://www.base.be>

You can change operator but still keep your telephone number.

- **Internet access**

You can access the Internet in Brussels via your normal telephone line, ADSL line or, in some communes, via the television cable.

### **3.6. Insurance**

If you want to check out more than one insurance company the best way is to contact a broker. For no extra cost, he/she will help you choose the insurance policy which best suits your needs and assist you in the event of a claim, acting as your go-between and representative with the main insurance companies.

The most common forms of insurance policy are:

- **Personal liability insurance ("family insurance")**

This is not compulsory but is recommended. It covers you for any accident, injury or damage to third parties caused by you, your children, your animals or any person for whom you are responsible.

- **Domestic staff**

This insurance is compulsory if you employ any domestic staff in your home, even on a part-time basis.

- **Car insurance**

Car insurance is compulsory. Your premium will go up or down according to the number of accidents you have had.

Legal costs and expenses insurance is not compulsory but is recommended. It covers the cost of hiring a lawyer and court proceedings in Belgium or abroad in the event of dispute of liability.

- **House insurance**

Home-owners are required to insure their homes but tenants are also required to take out a personal liability policy for the property they rent.

They do not cover the same risks. A home-owner's policy covers building-related risks whereas a tenant's policy covers the risks he/she bears as a tenant.

## 4. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN BRUSSELS

### 4.1. Daily life

#### 4.1.1. *Dealing with the authorities: use of official languages*

Although you can usually use other languages in shops, you will have to speak French and/or Dutch, depending on where you live, in your dealings with the authorities (e.g. commune, police, post office, water, gas and electricity, etc.). Depending on where you choose to live, it is extremely useful to have knowledge of one of these two official languages.

The Brussels Capital Region (19 communes) is the only region where both French and Dutch are used.

Wallonia is where French is spoken.

Dutch is spoken in the region known as the Flemish Region and communes with "facilities". Communes with facilities are communes in the Dutch-speaking region where French can be used. If specifically requested, in dealings between the authorities and residents. These are the six Flemish communes around Brussels (Wemmel, Drogenbos, Linkebeek, Rhode St. Genèse, Kraainem and Wezembeek-Oppem) and a number of communes along the linguistic border.

#### 4.1.2. *Refuse collections, sorting, bulky refuse, etc.*

Waste sorting is standard practice throughout Brussels. There are standard plastic sacks: white for household refuse, yellow for paper and cardboard, blue for plastic, metal and milk and juice cartons and, finally, but only in certain communes, green for garden waste.

There are two non-recyclable waste collections and a sorted waste collection once a week.

The days and times of the collections can be found at: <http://www.bruxelles-proprete.be>

NB: you will receive a hefty fine if you do not comply with the rules governing sacks and collection times.

There is a large number of bottle banks in all areas.

#### 4.1.3. *Postal service*

There is one postal delivery each day from Monday to Friday.

Letters with a national "prior" stamp are supposed to arrive at their destination by the following day.

More information can be found at: <http://www.post.be>

#### 4.1.4. *Domestic staff*

You are legally required to insure any person you employ, even on an occasional basis, in the form of a "gens de maison" insurance (special insurance to cover domestic staff).

You must declare any cleaning staff and pay their insurance contributions.

NB: if you employ an illegal person in Belgium you could be heavily fined.

One alternative is to use the "titres-services": <http://www.titres-services.be/>.

#### 4.2. **Places of worship**

Belgium is predominantly Catholic (75%) and the majority of churches in Brussels are Catholic. They are open to all, whether they be parishioners or not. Masses are usually held in French or Dutch.

There are also other churches or places of worship and a few Catholic churches in Brussels where services are given in a foreign language.

#### 4.3. **Integration**

##### 4.3.1. *Working in the institutions*

Anyone working in the European institutions (or members of their family) is free to participate in the leisure activities they organise to help them integrate and socialise with colleagues. There are fifty cultural and sports clubs at the Commission. There is a library and sports centre at the Council which is open to all staff members and their families.

##### 4.3.2. *Clubs*

There are many different national associations and clubs in Brussels.

Details of some of them can be found at:

[http://www.xpats.com/directory/directory\\_display.php?dircat=xPATs%20Clubs](http://www.xpats.com/directory/directory_display.php?dircat=xPATs%20Clubs)

although the list is not exhaustive.

##### 4.3.3. *Other activities*

- Voluntary work: The *association pour le volontariat* (voluntary association) publishes a list of all voluntary work.

Association pour le volontariat

11, rue Royale

1000 Brussels

☎ 32 2 219 53 70

- Télé Service (publishes a brochure of over 200 voluntary associations)

Boulevard de l'Abattoir 27-28

1000 Brussels

☎ 32 2 548 98 00

## 5. HEALTHCARE

Brussels is known for the quality of its healthcare and its highly skilled doctors.

Unlike other countries, Belgium allows you to choose the doctor you wish to visit and you can go directly to a specialist if you wish.

You have to pay for treatment and then submit your request for payment.

- **Doctors**

Doctors are free to set their own fees and some doctors, especially specialists, apply much higher rates.

There is an emergency service.

You will find a list of all family doctors in Brussels at: <http://www.mqbru.be/>

Most embassies have a list of doctors who speak your language.

- **Chemists**

Chemists are open from Monday to Friday and some are open on Saturday morning. There is an emergency service at night and at weekends. The addresses of chemists providing this emergency service are displayed at all chemists.

- **Medicines**

Most medicines available on the international market can be found in Belgium, but sometimes they may have a different name to that under which they are sold in your country of origin. Ask your doctor for a prescription giving the chemical composition of the medicine which you usually take to the chemist so that an equivalent can be found.

- **Hospitals**

There are many public, private hospitals, university hospitals and polyclinics in Brussels.

Public and private hospitals (some of which are university hospitals) have teams of doctors who specialise in different areas. They work for the hospital fulltime or also have private practices. In hospitals, doctors' fees, treatment fees and hospital stays are invoiced at a basic rate if the patient shares a room. Otherwise, the cost of medical treatment and room (one or two persons) is sometimes high.

Most large hospitals and clinics also have an emergency service where a doctor can be consulted at any hour of the day or night, at weekends and on public holidays.

## 6. YOUR FAMILY

### 6.1. Your spouse

#### 6.1.1. Language courses

A whole range of language courses is available in Brussels.

Language courses organised by the European institutions are open to the spouses of officials, subject to **availability**, in all the languages offered, *except in French and English* (given the very large number of applications) and *Dutch for beginners*.

An excellent database giving details of all the language courses available in Brussels can be found at: <http://www.siep.be>

#### 6.1.2. Working in Belgium

Under the Accession Treaties, nationals of the new Member States (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta) require a work permit during a transitional period of two years from 1 May 2004 and prolonged until 30 April 2009 (an exception is made for professions where there is a lack of candidates). Nationals of the new Member States have access to the labour market in accordance with national rules.

The spouses of officials or other staff of the European institutions are subject to the rules applying in Belgium. The Belgian authorities can issue special identity cards to persons working in the Community institutions and their family members. Under Article 12b of the Protocol on Privileges and Immunities signed by the Member States on 8 April 1965, these residence permits exempt them from the registration formalities applying to non-Belgian nationals.

However family members of holders of special identity cards do not have the right to a special residence permit if they wish to carry out gainful employment.

In this case they must return their special residence permits and apply to the authorities of the commune where they live for a communal identity card. The future employer should then take the necessary steps to obtain a work permit from the regional administration of their residence.

Generally, all EU legislation governing the free movement of persons applies to nationals of the new Member States in the same way as it applies to those of the former Member States, the only exception being restrictions on access to the labour market.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information on registration in the population registry, Belgian identity cards (residence permits) and the transitional period is valid up to 30 April 2006. After this date the situation will be reviewed in the light of the measures taken by Belgium to transpose Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 29 April 2004 on the rights of citizens in the European Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States and whether or not to extend the transitional period.

This information will be reviewed in 2006 in the light of any changes made to the rules applied by the Belgian authorities governing this transitional period.

(1) Work permit

Nationals of a Member State of the European Economic Area (EU + Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) do not require a work permit if they reside in Belgium or reside with:

- (a) their spouse;
- (b) their or their spouse's family members in descending line who are under 21 or who are dependants;
- (c) their or their spouse's dependants in ascending line, but not the relatives in ascending line of a student or of his/her spouse;
- (d) the spouse of the persons referred to in points (b) and (c).

(2) Identity card

If your spouse wishes to work in Belgium, he/she is advised to register with the communal authorities and obtain a residence permit rather than a special identity card from your institution as this will make subsequent formalities easier.

(3) Looking for a job

You may need certain qualifications or diplomas, professional experience or knowledge of a particular language to find a job.

Where to apply?

(a) Public employment authorities

The National Employment Office deals with applications for work permits and all unemployment and unemployment benefit-related matters. The regional and community authorities are responsible for job placements.

In Brussels the ORBEM is responsible for helping all workers in the Brussels region find jobs.

It also has a network of centres to which job seekers can apply for advice (free of charge), and obtain information on temporary employment (T-Interim). They run programmes to help the long-term unemployed.

The public employment authorities organise training courses for unemployed university graduates to help them acquire work experience. This service is also available to foreign

graduates. There is no specific department which deals with managerial recruitment. The public employment authorities deal with only 7% of managerial jobs and around 45% of the employment market.

(b) Temporary employment agencies

In Belgium, wide-scale use is made of private temporary employment agencies. There is also an independent public temporary employment agency known as *T-Service intérim*.

They focus on less-skilled jobs in administrative (in particular secretarial), technical and industrial areas. There is little temporary work at managerial level although some private temporary agencies and consultants are beginning to offer openings in this area.

(c) Recruitment agencies

There are many private recruitment agencies throughout Belgium. They are not highly regulated. Some simply recruit whereas other provide an entire recruitment and selection service, including advertisements in the press and psychological testing. Recruitment agencies are mainly used to recruit employed and managerial staff. At the upper end of the labour market there are recruitment agencies which deal with graduate and specialised recruitment.

(d) Media/advertising

Employers, recruitment agencies and consultants usually publish job offers at all levels in the press. According to research carried out by the newspaper *Le Soir*, 65% of job offers are published in the press, 20% of jobs are by recommendation and 15% are offered through headhunters.

The most useful daily newspapers to consult if you are looking for a job are *Le Soir* and *De Standaard* (in particular the Saturday edition). These two newspapers have special European and international sections. Most of the jobs published in these sections require professional experience.

Another useful source is the local press, including the free press, where a whole range of jobs, including managerial jobs, is advertised.

Leading recruitment agencies often place advertisements for jobs in the business sector in magazines such as *Knack* (NL), *Le Vif/L'Express* (FR) and *Trends/Tendances*.

(e) Internet

The main websites are:

<http://www.stepstone.be>

<http://www.jobs-career.be>

<http://www.monster.be>

### 6.1.3. Unemployment benefit

Rights acquired in one EU country may be transferred to another EU country under certain conditions.

You should contact the relevant institution of your country before leaving.

For more information on employees' rights in Europe contact Europe-direct at 00800 67 89 10 11

#### *6.1.4. Commission activities*

The *Cercle de familles* (Family Circle) helps partners of Commission officials and their families settle in their new environment.

A whole range of information and aid and assistance in all areas is offered at a half-day welcome session.

## **6.2. Your children**

### *6.2.1. Childcare*

- **Creche facilities run by the institutions**

The European institutions' creches provide care for the young children of parents from all Member States of the European Union who are far from their place of origin.

The ECC (Early Childhood Centre) provides some 700 places in three buildings, Palmerston, Beaulieu and Clovis, for EU staff working in Brussels.

The creches are open from Monday to Thursday from 08.00 to 18.15 and on Friday from 08.00 to 17.30. They are open all year except on official public holidays.

- **Childcare centres outside the EU institutions**

The community authorities are responsible for providing childcare facilities for small children in Belgium and are therefore Dutch or French speaking. Their staff may, however, be bi- or even multilingual.

Approved facilities are regulated by "Kind en Gezin" (Dutch-speaking) or the "Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance" (French-speaking) in respect of hygiene, educational programme and infrastructure. This also means that they apply the same rates based on socio-economic criteria (income, number of dependants, etc).

If you want to obtain a list of approved facilities in your commune apply to:

- For Dutch-speaking services in Brussels and Flemish Brabant:  
KIND EN GEZIN, Guldenvlieslaan 67, 1060 Brussels Tel.: 02/548.97.40
- For French-speaking services in Brussels:  
Comite subrégional de l'Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance, Boulevard Léopold 44,  
1080 Brussels, Tel.: 02/413.27.49.

- **After-school childcare**

The European Commission runs interinstitutional after-school childcare facilities for the institutions' officials and other staff at three locations, Wilson, Beaulieu and Van Maerlant 18, and at the three European Schools.

Childcare is provided by qualified teachers after school until 18.15 (18.30 at the European School centres) from Monday to Thursday and until 17.30 (17.45 at the European School centres) on Fridays.

Various activities are organised. These range from crafts to games, reading and sport. Directed study is also provided and continuity of staff ensured.

Facilities are also open during the school holidays, and non-public holidays for the institutions' staff, from 08.00 onwards. The closing times are the same as above.

- **Outdoor childcare centres during the school holidays**

These facilities are open to children from 4 to 14 during the Easter and summer school holidays at the European interinstitutional centres at Overijse and Haren.

Children are supervised by staff from the after-school childcare centres and students holding a childcare certificate and with the relevant experience.

They are open from 08.15 to 18.00 (except on Fridays when they close at 17.30). Children may be dropped off and picked up at Overijse or the Wilson or Beaulieu after-school childcare centres.

- **Baby sitting**

A useful address is: <http://www.liguedesfamilles.be>

- **Care of sick children**

Most communes organise care for sick children at home. For details, contact your commune.

The public social welfare centres (CPAS) in all communes can provide you with information about childcare facilities for young children in their communes.

## 6.2.2. Education

- **European schools**



There are three European schools in Brussels, in Uccle, Woluwe and Ixelles. A fourth European school is due to open in Laeken in September 2009.

These schools offer traditional education in 14 language sections (N.B.: some language sections only exist at one of the three Schools and some languages do not have a language section).

**If a language section exists at more than one School, there is no guarantee that your child will be enrolled in the School of your choice.** Enrolment policy is decided by the Board of Governors of the European Schools and has to take account of pupil numbers at the Schools.

Officials of the European institutions do not have to pay any school fees. Temporary and other contractual staff do not have to pay school fees for the duration of their contract with an institution if this is for one year or more. This also applies to seconded national experts who are seconded for an initial period of less than one year. Enrolment forms which are available from the Schools' secretariats and from Adminfo, must be accompanied by proof of employment.

The Parents' Association at each European School organises a transport service in Brussels. This is paid for by the institution for its officials and temporary and contractual staff who do not pay school fees and whose children are in the primary or secondary sections of the European School. This does not apply to seconded national experts or to auxiliary staff. Transport is not free for the kindergarten.

If your child has special educational needs (problems such as dyslexia or a disability), contact the School beforehand to know what services the European Schools can provide and what steps you have to take;

European School website: <http://www.eursc.org/>

BRUSSELS I: 46, Avenue du Vert Chasseur - 1180 BRUSSELS  
Secretary: Ms H  l  ne EVRARD  
(☎ +32 2 373.86.05)  
☎ +32 2 373.86.11 - ☎ +32 2 375.47.16  
[helene.evrard@eursc.org](mailto:helene.evrard@eursc.org)

BRUSSELS II: 75, Avenue Oscar Jespers - 1200 BRUSSELS  
Secretary: Ms Evelyne DEWEER  
☎ +32 2 774.22.11 - ☎ +32 2 774.22.43

[evelyne.deweer@eursc.org](mailto:evelyne.deweer@eursc.org)

BRUSSELS III: 135, Boulevard du Triomphe - 1050 BRUSSELS  
Secretary: Ms Reile RAMAEKERS  
[reile.ramaekers@eursc.org](mailto:reile.ramaekers@eursc.org)  
Ms Maggie VAN DEN OSTENDE  
[maggie.van\\_den\\_ostende@eursc.org](mailto:maggie.van_den_ostende@eursc.org)  
☎ +32 2 629.47.00 - 📠 +32 2 629.47.92

There is another European School in Mol, at some 100 km from Brussels, with boarding school facilities:

Europawijk 100, 2400 Mol

☎ +32 14 56.31.11 - 📠 +32 14 56.31.04

(1) Language sections (academic year 2006/2007)

The Brussels I European School at Uccle has **eight** language sections: Danish, English, German, French, Hungarian, Italian, Polish and Spanish.

- ✓ Children of Slovenian or Maltese nationality should be enrolled at the Brussels I European School.

The Brussels II European School in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert has **eight** language sections: Dutch, English, German, Finnish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish.

- ✓ Children of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian nationality should be enrolled at the Brussels II European School.

The Brussels III European School at Ixelles has **seven** language sections: Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek and Spanish.

- ✓ Children of Slovak or Cypriot nationality should be enrolled at the Brussels III European School.

(2) Admission age

(a) Nursery

Children must have turned four by the end of the calendar year in which they are enrolled.

(b) First year primary

Children must have turned six by the end of the calendar year in which they are enrolled to be admitted to first year primary.

(c) Second year and upwards

Admission is subject to the same requirements, with the age increased by the number of years corresponding to the class of admission.

- **International schools**

British School of Brussels (BSB)  
Leuvensesteenweg 19, 3080 Tervuren  
☎ 02/766.04.30  
☎ 02/767.80.70  
E-mail: [admissions@britishschool.be](mailto:admissions@britishschool.be)  
<http://www.britishschool.be/>

Deutsche Schule Brüssel  
Lange Eikstraat 71, 1970 Wezembeek-Oppem  
☎ 02/785.01.30  
☎ 02/785.01.41  
E-mail: [ds.bruessel@dsb.skynet.be](mailto:ds.bruessel@dsb.skynet.be)  
<http://www.dsbruessel.be/>

International School of Brussels (ISB)  
Kattenberg 19, 1170 Brussels  
☎ 02/661.42.11  
☎ 02/661.42.00  
E-mail: [admissions@isb.be](mailto:admissions@isb.be)  
<http://www.isb.be/>

Scandinavian School of Brussels  
5 Square d'Argenteuil, 1410 Waterloo  
☎ 02/357.06.70  
☎ 02/357.06.80  
E-mail: [scandinavian.school@ssb.be](mailto:scandinavian.school@ssb.be)  
<http://www.ssb.be/default.htm>

Lycée français de Belgique  
9 avenue du Lycée français, 1180 Bruxelles  
☎ 02/374.58.78  
☎ 02/374.98.43  
E-mail: [ljm-direction@biz.tiscali.be](mailto:ljm-direction@biz.tiscali.be)  
<http://www.lyceefrancais-jmonnet.be>

- **Belgian schools**

In Belgium, education is compulsory up to 18 and has four levels:

- nursery: from 2.5 to 6 (not compulsory),
- primary: from 6 to 12,
- secondary: from 12 to 18,
- higher education: from 18 onwards (not compulsory).

There are different types of school:

- State schools (run by the public authorities in communes, cities, provinces and communities),
- Non-state (mainly Christian) or private schools.

In Brussels, all education is provided in French or Dutch. In schools subsidised by the local authorities, a second language is compulsory from the third year of primary. Virtually all schools are co-educational and do not board. The school timetable is from 08.00-08.30 to 15.30-16.00. Most children stay at school at lunchtime (this is not compulsory) and all schools offer hot meals. Most have childcare facilities from 16.00 to 18.00 where children receive help with their homework (a small fee is requested for these services).

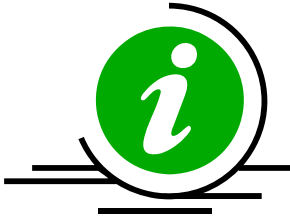
#### *6.2.3. Holiday activities*

You can find a large choice of activities at: <http://www.inforjeunes.be> and details of language courses at: <http://www.siep.be>

#### *6.2.4. Au pairs*

A special legal procedure governs the employment of *au pairs* in the Region where you live (Flemish region, Wallonia or Brussels Capital region). The Brussels-Europe Liaison Office can provide you with all information and the addresses of the relevant authorities.

## 7. USEFUL CONTACTS BEFORE YOU ARRIVE



- **Brussels-Europe Liaison Office**

The Brussels-Europe Liaison Office was set up to help the staff of the European Institutions settle in Brussels and to provide information about the European institutions to the people of Brussels.

It can provide assistance on many administrative matters in Brussels.

Brussels-Europe Liaison Office

63, avenue d'Auderghem

1040 Brussels

☎ +32 2 280 00 80

☎ +32 2 280 03 86

<http://www.blbe.irisnet.be>

e-mail: [blbe@blbe.irisnet.be](mailto:blbe@blbe.irisnet.be)

- **Brussels Tourist Information Office (TIB)**

It will provide you with information on cultural events, hotels and restaurants in Brussels.

It is open every day from 9.00 to 18.00.

Brussels Hôtel de Ville (Town hall)

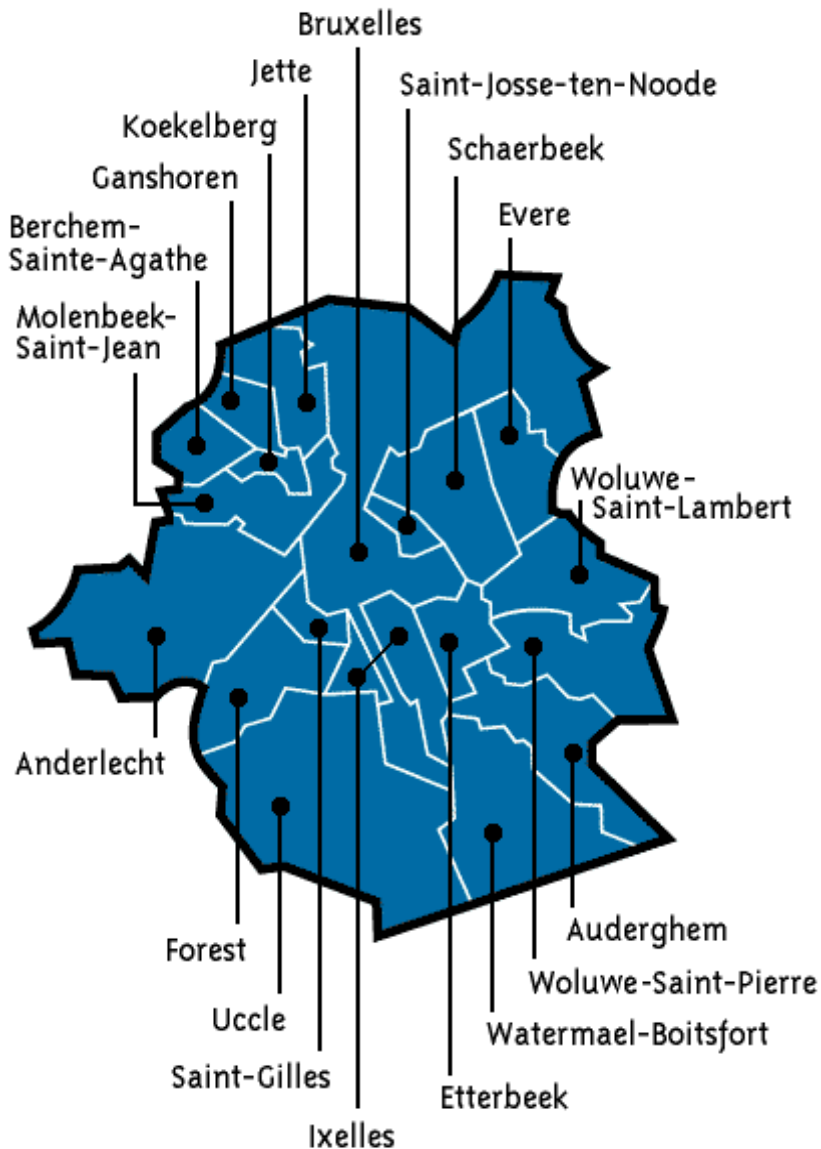
Grand Place

1000 Brussels

☎ +32 2 513 89 40

## 8. THE 19 COMMUNES OF BRUSSELS

See: <http://www.bruxelles.irisnet.be>



- BRUSSELS

The City of Brussels is made up of three very different parts.

The "Pentagon" is the historic centre of Brussels and lies within the inner ring road. A huge renovation programme has encouraged people to move back to this area which has been restored to its original charm.

The northern part of the city which includes the large commune of Laeken, dominate the adjacent communes which include industrial sites along the Canal (Neder-Over-Heembeek,

Haren, etc.). The King's residence is located in Laeken. This northern area combines the charms of the city and countryside.

The third area of the city of Brussels lies to the south encompassing the Bois de la Cambre, Ixelles, Saint-Gilles and Uccle. Avenue Louise is known for its luxury boutiques and majestic boulevard. Its neighbouring streets offer extremely attractive old properties for those who wish to live in the city.

- SCHAERBEEK

Schaerbeek is a commune with an unspoilt urban landscape which goes back to the end of the nineteenth century. There have been more recent developments on the outskirts which are not unattractive.

The commune is the proud owner of the Josaphat park (20 acres), which provides a healthy green environment for the city and a venue for many events. The park is surrounded by large, elegant houses and leafy avenues. There is another pleasant green area near the original station of Schaerbeek.

This area is undergoing rapid change.

- ETTERBEEK

Etterbeek lies close to the centre of Brussels and is host to some of the European institutions. It has a very uniform urban landscape which largely dates back to the nineteenth century. The commune recently embarked on an urban renovation programme.

- IXELLES

This commune lies in, what is known as, the upper part of the city. It is extremely lively and diverse, including the elegant boutiques of Avenue Louise and the Toison d'or and the African quarter of "Matongue", the university quarter and the fashionable place du Châtelain.

- AUDERGHEM

One third of this commune is made up of green areas. It is mainly residential and lies along the southern access routes of the Brussels region near the Namur motorway. It provides easy access to the European Schuman quarter. The European Commission's Beaulieu site is located in Auderghem.

- SAINT-GILLES

From a small rural village this commune developed into an urban suburb between 1840 and 1925 with the growth of the Brussels conurbation after its creation as the capital of Belgium in 1830.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the full-scale urban development of Saint-Gilles which became part of the city.

Its architecture is predominantly that of the Art Nouveau period.

Saint-Gilles has become a multicultural quarter, resembling a large village within the city.

- ANDERLECHT

This commune lies to the west of Brussels and forms an integral part of urban life with its shopping areas, slaughterhouses and industrial area. It is still a "green" commune with its rural outskirts. One of the main concerns of the communal authorities has been to create gardens and parks to provide green walkways from one area to another.

- MOLENBEEK

Molenbeek consists of two quarters: the lower, older quarter, with its bustling shopping areas, and the upper more recent and more residential quarter.

In the nineteenth century large industrial and commercial establishments were attracted to Molenbeek because of its available space, transport facilities, the intersection of communication links and abundance of labour. However, the twentieth century marked the beginning of Molenbeek's industrial decline with falling land and housing prices.

Molenbeek has embarked upon major urban, housing, commercial and social development projects, and others are planned.

- JETTE

Jette lies 5 kilometres from the centre of Brussels with which it has train, underground, tram and bus connections. It is easily reached from the north by the outer orbital ring. Jette lies in the north-west part of Brussels and is home to the regional King Baudouin Park which covers some 100 acres.

The commune is making strenuous efforts to improve its environment by redeveloping squares and streets, building new housing and renovating old properties.

The Miroir shopping area has many specialty shops and one of the largest markets in Belgium which is held every Sunday.

- GANSHOREN

Although this is the closest commune to the centre of the city, it is partly rural in nature.

The older part of Ganshoren lies a few steps away from Avenue Charles Quint, a busy expressway leading to the Belgian coast, an area of old farms, farmland and resolutely rural. It borders on the Baudouin Park (which lies in the neighbouring commune), the Rivieren Domaine, a nature and bird reserve appreciated by bird watchers and nature lovers.

- KOEKELBERG

The name of the commune of Koekelberg will always be associated with the Basilica. The Basilica is the fourth largest church in the world and extremely impressive. Its style has been called "Neobyzantine". Its cupola, stained glass and bronze statues all contribute to its grandiose air.

The completion of the Leopold II tunnel and the building of prestigious buildings along the boulevard leading from the Botanique (Saint-Josse) to the Basilica have encouraged extensive development of this area which forms the northern gateway to the City. Life goes on quietly in this small Brussels commune in the shadow of the Basilica.

- BERCHEM-SAINTE-AGATHE

Berchem-Sainte-Agathe lies a few minutes from the city centre and provides its inhabitants with a pleasant living and working environment.

Its woods, parks and wildlife sites, a relic of its rural past, make it a green commune in the Brussels Capital Region.

- FOREST

This largely rural commune was developed and industrialised during the nineteenth century. It is predominately a commune of parks and green spaces. Its architecture is heavily influenced by the Art Deco movement and there are still some very fine examples, which include the town hall.

- UCCLÉ

Uccle is one of the most extensive communes of the Brussels conurbation. It is also the fourth largest in terms of population. Its many green spaces and the 500 or more hectares covered by the Forêt de Soignes make it a mainly residential commune.

Its many diverse neighbourhoods, residential, popular and commercial quarters and green spaces, lie side by side in this huge commune.

Avenues of trees criss-cross the commune, and small rural dwellings nestle alongside large nineteenth century detached houses with attractive gardens.

- WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT

This residential commune borders on the Forêt de Soignes which covers over 750 of its 1 293 hectares.

Watermael-Boitsfort is an urban area with pockets of semi rural housing, workers' cottages and middle class houses which lend it an unusual charm.

The garden city areas (Logis and Floréal) are protected by conservation orders. They have an English village air about them.

- WOLUWE-SAINTE-PIERRE

This is a green residential commune.

Woluwe-Saint-Pierre has retained its pleasant residential character. There are many large detached houses and large old properties.

- WOLUWE-SAINTE-LAMBERT

Woluwe-Saint-Lambert is a leafy commune with fine avenues of trees through which the Woluwe river valley runs. This gives it many green areas of huge diversity. Woluwe-Saint-Lambert has succeeded in maintaining a balance between green and built-up areas and provides its residents with an agreeable environment and close access to the city. It also has a large business area in which many high-tech companies have set up.

- EVERE

Evere seems to have succeeded in achieving harmony between residential areas (mainly small family houses) and business areas by attracting non-polluting high-tech industries. Traditionally it has been divided into lower and higher Evere. Lower Evere's rows of small houses form a contrast to higher Evere's broad avenues and apartment buildings.

- SAINT-JOSSE-TEN-NOODE

This is the smallest commune in terms of surface area but the most highly populated. It is one of the most multifunctional (housing, office space, cultural and leisure facilities) in the city and has a multicultural population.

It lies near the city centre and the European institutions and is gradually being renovated.