

Country Profile - Belgium

Job market

What are my chances of getting a job?

EU citizens have the right to work in Belgium and are employed in a wide range of jobs. Some international organisations have offices based in the country and can provide good opportunities for overseas jobseekers.

- **Typical problems encountered:** many people living in Belgium are able to speak more than one language. If you only speak English, this could put you at a disadvantage. Belgium also has quite a high unemployment rate which could make it difficult to find work in certain areas.
- **How to improve your chances:** some employers report that they find it difficult to fill their vacancies as the jobseekers don't have the skills, qualifications and knowledge they're looking for. Make sure you show in applications how you're matched to the role and try to get experience in that particular area of work before applying.
- **Language requirements:** Dutch (Flemish) is the official language in the northern and north eastern provinces, while French is the official language in the south. German is spoken in a small region in the eastern part of Belgium. English may be spoken in the region you work in but you will be expected to have a good knowledge of the official language for any job you carry out. Brussels and its surrounding area is a designated bilingual region. If you can speak both French and Dutch, it could put you at a real advantage for work.

Where can I work?

- **Major industries:** engineering and metal products, motor vehicle assembly, transportation equipment, scientific instruments, processed food and beverages, chemicals, base metals, textiles, glass, petroleum. International organisations such as the [European Union \(EU\)](#) and [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#) are also large employers.
- **Shortage occupations:** varies between regions but includes engineers, nurses, accountants, software developers and project managers.
- **Major companies:** Anheuser-Busch InBev, KBC Group, Dexia, Solvay, Delhaize Group, Belgacon, Ageas, Banque Nat de Belgique, Colruyt, Umicore, Bekaert, D'Ieteren, UCB, Elia System Operator.
- **Search for more companies:** [Kompass](#) - a worldwide business directory searchable by country, [British Chamber of Commerce Brussels](#), [Europages](#), [Belgian Yellow Pages](#).
- **Major cities:** Brussels (capital), Antwerp, Gent, Charleroi, Liège, Brugge, Namur and Leuven.

What's it like working in Belgium?

- **Average working hours:** 38 hours per week, with an average of 8 hours a day. Agreed authorisation is needed if additional hours are to be worked above this.

- **Holidays:** accrued throughout your time working for the employer but usually you get around 20 days, plus 10 public holidays.
 - **Tax rates:** Belgium has one of the highest tax rates in Europe. The percentage of income tax you pay rises as your income increases. The rate of tax increases on a sliding scale from 25% to 50% depending on how much you earn. For more information on tax see [Ministry of Finance: Belgium](#).
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Applying for jobs

You do not need to be in Belgium to apply for jobs. The application process is very similar to that in the UK, with most employers requesting a CV and covering letter or an online application form.

The standard CV used in the UK can be used for jobs with large multinational companies or international agencies in Belgium. It's usually fine for these CVs to be in English but you may want to check this with the employer.

Make sure the CV is tailored to each individual job you apply for - don't just use one generic CV and covering letter. It should show how you have the skills and experience that were requested in the job advert and shouldn't be any longer than two pages.

CVs for smaller, local companies are mainly similar to this but are sometimes a bit longer. Keep any achievements brief and to the point so the employer gets a general overview of your experience and knowledge. Include information on extra-curricular activities, especially if they highlight a position of responsibility you've held and add in a summary of your professional goals at the end - but make sure they relate to the job you're applying for.

Job adverts are usually given in the language used by the company so you should match your application to this - unless they've stated that they'd like applications from other language speakers.

Interview formats vary with each company but will mainly follow formats that are also used in the UK. This could be a straight forward question and answer interview with a small panel or it may include presentations, aptitude or psychological tests, or several interview stages. You should be informed of what is to be expected before hand.

Will my UK qualifications be recognised?

Between EU countries there is mutual recognition of professional qualifications, including higher education and other post-school qualifications. If you wish to compare your professional, vocational or technical qualifications with those in Belgium, try the [ENIC-NARIC](#) website for help or to compare academic qualifications, refer to [Europass](#).

If qualifications have been taken outside the EU, or if your qualification is not recognised for a regulated occupation, you must apply to the appropriate authority or professional body for a permit to practise.

Do I still need to pay UK tax and National Insurance?

If you're planning to live and work in Belgium, check your UK tax and National Insurance position with [HM Revenue & Customs \(HMRC\)](#) to ensure that you're not losing any UK pension rights.

Vacancy sources

Job websites

- [Academic Jobs EU](#) - for academic and research jobs in Europe
- [European Commission Traineeships Office](#) - in-service training scheme for graduates with the European Commission and EU institutions
- [EURES - European Job Mobility Portal](#) - includes a searchable database of a large variety of jobs in EU countries, including Belgium
- [EuroBrussels](#) - for jobs in EU Institutions
- [Eurograduate - The European Graduate Career Guide](#) - an online service for European graduates which lists career opportunities
- [Expatica](#) - English language site for expats which includes jobs listings
- [Jobs-Brussels](#) - for jobs in Belgium, adverts written in English
- [Monster Belgium](#) - lists jobs for Belgium

If you speak Dutch or French, the following sites could be useful:

- [Jobat](#) - in Dutch and French, receive jobs by email and search jobs by sector or region
- [References](#) - in Dutch and French
- [Bachelor](#) - in Dutch, find useful links to higher education institutions and jobs

Recruitment agencies

Belgium is well served by recruitment agencies which specialise in particular career areas. Details of agencies can be found in the [Belgian Yellow Pages](#).

Recruitment agencies include:

- [Randstad Belgium](#)
- [Adecco Belgium](#)
- [Hudson Belgium](#)

Alternatively, a walk along the high street in most major towns or cities is also likely to identify the most popular agencies.

Newspapers

The main newspapers and magazines in Belgium are:

- [De Gazet Van Antwerpen](#) - Flemish
- [Het Laatste Nieuws](#) - Flemish
- [Het Nieuwsblad](#) - Flemish
- [La Libre Belgique](#) - French
- [Le Soir](#) - French
- [De Standaard](#) – Flemish

Links to other European newspapers can be found at [Kidon Media-Link](#).

Other sources

Some employers might contact your university's careers service if they wish to target specifically English-speaking students, so it is worth keeping an eye on your university's vacancy board.

Hidden vacancies

Some jobs are never advertised and are instead filled through word-of-mouth or networking. Sending a speculative application is a good way of finding out about such vacancies. Write a covering letter targeted at the company which specifies the sort of role you'd be interested in and the skills and experience you could offer. Include a copy of your CV and ask to be kept on the company's records for any positions that may come up in the future.

Take a look at the companies listed on the following websites for ideas of where to send speculative applications.

- [Kompass](#)
 - [British Chamber of Commerce Brussels](#)
 - [Europages](#)
 - [Belgian Yellow Pages](#)
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Work experience

Work placements and internships

- The Commission of the European Union offers an official in-service traineeships scheme which lasts five months and runs twice a year. Contact the [European Commission Traineeships Office](#) for more details.
- A searchable database of placements in Belgium in a variety of job sectors is available at [Europlacement](#).
- Course-related placements starting in the summer, lasting from four weeks up to one year for undergraduates of science, engineering, technology and applied arts courses are available with [IAESTE \(International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience\)](#).
- Search for internships in Belgium at [Intern Abroad](#).

Exchange programmes

- A student-run organisation with an international traineeship exchange programme which offers work experience for periods ranging from 6 weeks to 18 months - [AIESEC \(Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales\)](#).
- Vocational training exchanges and work placements with partner organisations in other countries are offered by the [Leonardo da Vinci Programme](#). Contact your institution's international office or careers service for more information.

Teaching schemes

- Teaching opportunities are available at the [International School of Brussels \(ISB\)](#).
- In order to teach English, you will need a Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) qualification, available through various organisations. TEFL jobs can be found on a variety of job sites including [TEFL.com](#), [tefl-jobs.co.uk](#), [ESL Base](#), and [i-to-I TEFL](#).

Volunteering

Details of volunteering opportunities in Belgium can be found at [Concordia International Volunteers](#) and the [International Voluntary Service \(IVS\) in Britain](#).

Casual work and short-term opportunities

Temporary recruitment agencies and government employment offices can help with finding short-term vacancies. Also try searching in employment sections in various newspapers.

Gap year opportunities

Belgium has an excellent road and rail network linking you to the rest of Europe making it a good location for a gap year.

Postgraduate study

How does the higher education system work?

The higher education system in Belgium includes universities and university colleges. In some areas there are also art academies. They all work to a similar structure of that in the UK, offering Bachelor degrees, Masters and PhDs.

Universities tend to offer degrees in academic subjects that lead on well to Masters programmes. University colleges offer more professional subjects which aim to get students ready for certain job roles.

What courses are available?

Masters programmes can be studied in a variety of subjects, generally covering topics that are available in the UK. They combine structured teaching with research and end with a dissertation. Masters degrees typically last for one or two years. Some subjects take longer to complete however, such as medicine or veterinary science or law.

PhDs can also be carried out in a range of areas. As in the UK, they must be based on original research and a thesis must be produced at the end of the course which usually has to be publically defended.

The majority of courses are taught in either Dutch or French, depending on which region the university is in. Foreign students are required to show they have a good knowledge of the language and may be required to take a proficiency test for some subjects. There may be a small proportion of courses that are taught in English. Most universities offer

language courses, sometimes in the summer vacation before the course begins, for foreign students.

Where can I study?

The universities in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, are:

- [Hogeschool – Universiteit Brussel](#)
- [Katholieke Universiteit Leuven](#)
- [Universiteit Antwerpen](#)
- [Universiteit Gent](#)
- [Universiteit Hasselt](#)
- [Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#)

The universities in the French-speaking Wallonia-Brussels region are:

- [Université catholique de Louvain](#)
- [Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix in Namur](#)
- [Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels](#)
- [Université Libre de Bruxelles](#)
- [Université de Mons](#)
- [Université de Liège](#)

There are also various university colleges in both regions. For further information see [Study in Flanders](#) and [Study in Belgium](#).

Applying for postgraduate study

UK qualifications are easily comparable to those in Belgium. If you want to study for a Masters degree you will need a Bachelors degree, usually in a related subject. Applications are made directly to the institution. You shouldn't need to get a recognition of equivalence of your qualification but check with the institution for specific entrance terms.

PhDs are available to those with a Masters or an equivalent level of study (which would usually have lasted five years). As in the UK, you will need to submit a draft thesis and have agreement from a tutor that they'll supervise you.

If you're accepted onto a course you must then complete the admissions process and pay any necessary fees.

Fees and scholarships

The average cost of living for a student is around €900 per month. This includes accommodation, healthcare insurance, food, course equipment and transport. Tuition fees will be additional to this, which are paid annually.

Fees can vary between institutions and may differ depending on the course. Foreign students may have to pay higher fees, although some institutions charge EU students the same amount as Belgian students. Foreign students may also be required to prove they have sufficient funds while they are studying. Contact individual institutions to find out the exact cost of fees.

Various scholarships may be available to you, including [Erasmus Mundus](#), which offers scholarships for joint Masters and Doctorates. For more information on the types of grants

and funding that you may be eligible for, see [Study in Belgium – Scholarships](#) and [Study in Flanders - Funding Opportunities](#).

Are there any exchange programmes?

Masters and PhD students may have the opportunity to study in Belgium on the [Erasmus](#) exchange scheme. This operates in a variety of countries and covers all subject areas. Talk to your tutors or those in the international office at your university to find out more information about what may be available to you.

Will my qualification be recognised in the UK?

A Belgian postgraduate course is directly comparable to the UK equivalent. If you do require help with comparing international qualifications, contact [UK NARIC \(National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom\)](#), which gives information and advice on vocational, academic and professional qualifications from over 180 countries.

Visa and travel information

Visa requirements and applications

EU nationals do not need a visa or work permit for Belgium. However, if you're planning a temporary stay of less than three months you should register with the local authority (administration communale). You'll need your passport to do this and will be granted a 'declaration of presence.'

If you want to stay in Belgium for longer than three months you must apply for a residence permit. For this you'll need your passport and declaration of presence. You'll also need to state your reason for staying, e.g. work, study, etc. Depending on which requirements are met you'll either be issued with a certificate of registration or your application will be sent to the Aliens Bureau.

Citizens of non-EU countries may be required to have a visa or work permit. Contact the Belgian embassy in the country where you are currently residing about how to obtain visas and work permits. If you're living in the UK go to the [Belgian Embassy](#).

You might also find it helpful to contact your ministry of foreign affairs (or your own embassy if you are not living in your home country) to ask whether there are any issues to be taken into account when considering working in Belgium.

Permanent residency

EU nationals can apply for permanent residency after living in Belgium for an uninterrupted period of three years. Their individual circumstances will be taken into consideration to decide whether it is granted. See the [Belgium Portal](#) for more information.

Help in an emergency

UK citizens can get help in an emergency from the [British Embassy Belgium](#). It offers a range of advice and services including issuing emergency travel documents, help if you've been the victim of a crime and details of local services.

The European emergency number 112 can be used in Belgium for ambulances, fire brigade and police.

Travel advice

You should always check before travelling whether there are any restrictions or warnings for the country you are travelling to. The latest travel advice can be found at the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#).

Country overview

Geography

- **Full country name:** Belgium
- **Population:** approx. 10.8 million
- **Border countries:** France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands
- **Climate:** temperate, winters are generally mild and summers are cool.
- **Terrain:** northwest consists of flat coastal plains, the Ardennes Forest in the southeast is built up of rugged mountains and there are rolling hills in central Belgium.
- **Natural hazards:** there is a risk of flooding along rivers, as well as in areas of reclaimed coastal land, where concrete dikes provide a protective barrier from the sea.

Living in Ireland

- **Cost of living:** living costs in Belgium are generally considered to be lower than in the UK but higher than in some other European countries. For more information on the cost of living in Europe, check [Mercer](#).
- **Internet domain:** .be
- **Health:** The standard of health care and medical facilities in Belgium is high. Residents of the European Economic Area (EEA) should get a [European Health Insurance Card \(EHIC\)](#) before travelling. You'll still need to have travel insurance but the card entitles you to state medical treatment. This will be provided on the same terms as for Belgian nationals, meaning you will only pay a fee for treatment if a Belgian national also has to pay a fee.
- **Laws and customs:** Belgian law requires everyone to carry some form of identification, so make sure you have your passport with you at all times. Possession of drugs and trafficking in drugs are serious offences. Since April 2011 it has been forbidden to wear clothing that hides a person's face either largely or completely in any public place. Those wearing this type of clothing (including tourists) could risk a fine of up to €137.50 and/or detention of up to seven days.

Economy and finance

- **Currency:** Euro (€)
- **Type of economy:** Western capitalist
- **Health of economy:** Belgium has few natural resources and so imports substantial amounts of raw material and exports a large amount of manufactured goods. This makes its economy vulnerable to volatility in world markets. Belgian banks were severely affected by the global financial crisis but there has been a small

improvement in Belgium's budget deficit since 2011. Public debt, however, remains at around 100% of GDP. The ageing population and rising social expenditure are also mid to long term pressures that the government may need to consider.

- **Unemployment rate:** 7.7% (World Factbook 2011 est.)
- **Main exports:** food products, finished diamonds, machinery and equipment, chemicals, and metal and metal products.

Culture

- **People:** Fleming 58%, Walloon 31%, mixed or other 11%
- **Major religion:** Roman Catholic 75%, Protestant and other 25%
- **History:** see [BBC Timeline: Belgium](#)

Politics

- **Type of government:** constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.
- **Major political parties:** political parties in Belgium are organized along ethno linguistic lines and are as follows: *Flemish parties*: CDV (Christian Democratic and Flemish), LDD (Libertarian, Direct, Democratic), Open VLD (Flemish Liberals and Democrats), Groen! (formerly AGALEV, Flemish Greens), N-VA (New Flemish Alliance), SP.A (Social Progressive Alternative), VB (Vlaams Belang - Flemish Interest). *Francophone parties*: Ecolo (Francophone Greens), CDH (Humanist and Democratic Centre), PP (Popular Party), MR (Reform Movement), PS (Socialist Party).

More information

- [Belgian Embassy](#)
- [BBC Country Profile - Belgium](#)
- [The World Factbook](#)
- [XE Universal Currency Converter](#)

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