



commissioner  
.brussels   
europe & international

2021

# Annual report

of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe  
and International Organisations





# Preface

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So here it is... the seventh activity report of the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO)!

Year after year, we try to share in this document the detail of our activities, the scope of the challenges we face and the enthusiasm we put into carrying out the missions entrusted to us by our Government.

The CEIO has now reached a certain maturity, recognised and appreciated by the international institutions and organisations, as well as by those who make them work, solicited from all sides on the all-important issues related to Brussels' host region status, and observed by many other capitals in search of international DNA. We can in all modesty consider that Brussels has confirmed its status as a European and international capital.

But a position like this is earned every day. The people of Brussels live with all that this precious international presence brings to our daily lives: employment, an important part of our 'wealth', and a reputation that extends far beyond our borders. They must also accept the particular features of this mission. When it comes to languages, this means accepting that multilingualism is practised everywhere, alongside our national languages of course, to facilitate the reception of this important community of expats – in particular in our local and regional administrations. It also means ceasing to consider these institutions and their civil servants as intruders who come to disturb our good old ways. Finally, they must stop blaming expats for all the "evils" that their (poorly explained) status might supposedly cause: "they don't pay taxes, they earn so much money that their purchasing power leads to an increase in real estate prices, etc."

After all, 22% of Brussels residents are expats! Nearly a quarter of the inhabitants of Brussels were not born in Belgium but live there every day! We can no longer erase these facts from our history, or even let them languish in our excessive indifference. In close cooperation with the Brussels Government and, more particularly, its Secretary of State for International Relations, our Office has over the past few months launched one of the first participative democracy initiatives aimed specifically at this part of the Brussels population, which is prevented from expressing itself like the rest of us in the regional elections. Through the project "Live here. Speak, hear." expats have drafted a manifesto addressed to our Members of Parliament which presents the perspectives of these "non-standard" citizens on numerous themes such as mobility, cleanliness, the development of public spaces... We will continue, as long as our Constitution has not been "adapted" in this respect, to give this quarter of Brussels' inhabitants a voice in regional policy through a Consultative Council which, we hope, will manage to make decision-makers aware of this slightly different point of view.

Finally, I would not like to conclude this introduction to our report without underlining the very positive development in our relations with the Federal Government, which is still competent in matters of host policy. I particularly note the increasingly frequent contacts and positive cooperation by and between our Office and the federal services dedicated to these matters. I hope that we will be able to strengthen these practices in the future by structuring them better and by doing everything possible to ensure that our country, in all its institutional dimensions, is truly effective in the very specific framework of its host policy.

**Alain HUTCHINSON**

*Commissioner of the Brussels Government*

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# **A host region policy**

# 1 ■ The mission of the CEIO

The **host region policy** can be defined as a hospitality policy for supranational and intergovernmental organisations having their headquarters or representation in the Brussels-Capital Region, including diplomatic missions and regional and local representations. The Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations is appointed and mandated by the regional Government to conduct this hosting task. He represents the Government and coordinates this policy under its authority. The Commissioner operates exclusively within the broader context of the regional competences, with the harmonious development of the Region and the interests of its citizens as priorities. The mandate conferred on the Commissioner and his team comprises five specific missions:





## 2. The international community in Brussels

If Brussels is referred to as the “Capital of Europe”, it is because of its diversity, its accessibility, and particularly the presence of the major European Union institutions, in addition to many other significant intergovernmental and supranational organisations. Though rather small in size, its growing international position has made it a political world-region, where incessant decision-making and consultation, both on a multilateral and on a bilateral diplomatic level, on matters of global significance take place.

### 2.1 The international players



## 2.2 Employment

The international presence generates up to 23.2% of regional employment.

Around **49 000 direct jobs** :

- **37 340** European Union staff
- **7 673** diplomatic personnel
- **3 304** intergovernmental staff
- **648** European schools staff

The 5 main European institutions, agencies and bodies create the majority of these jobs.



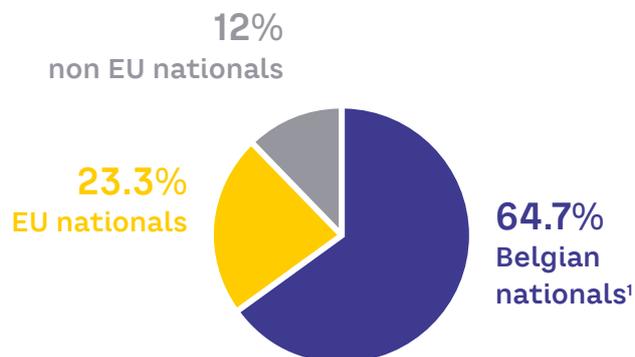
Between **10 000 and 14 000 lobbyist jobs**.

## 2.3 Population

The impact of the international role of Brussels is more evident than ever in the composition of its population. After Dubai, Brussels-Capital Region is the most cosmopolitan city-region in the world:

- more than 1 in 3 Brussels residents has a foreign nationality
- more than 1 in 5 is an EU national.

In the last 20 years, the number of EU citizens has practically doubled. On the 1st of 1 January 2020, Brussels had a population of **1 218 255 residents**, of which:



<sup>1</sup> including Belgian nationals with dual nationality.

### TOP 5 FOREIGN NATIONALITIES IN BRUSSELS

**FRANCE**  
64 218 residents

**ROMANIA**  
41 858 residents

**MOROCCO**  
34 984 residents

**ITALY**  
33 718 residents

**SPAIN**  
28 480 residents

The publication "Brussels, International Capital – the figures 2020" reveals in more detail these key figures on the international presence in Brussels.



# 3. Pursuing an effective host region policy

Enhancing the international and European dimension of the Brussels-Capital Region goes hand in hand with the firm ambition of its authorities to make Brussels a metropolis on a human scale.

More than a mere slogan, this broadly shared objective translates into strong and ambitious policies and concrete measures which meet the challenges at hand.

Year after year, this momentum strengthens the position of Brussels on the European and international scene as a service-oriented region, mindful of the well-being of its inhabitants and where people, businesses and institutions can prosper and develop with ease.

The Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) has two main units (institutional liaison and administrative support) which both play a vital role in implementing the host region policy. By developing a strong network and a positive image among their counterparts and contacts, they are able to fulfil and reinforce the host policy for international institutions and their staff, a responsibility which is incumbent on Belgium in general and the Brussels-Capital Region specifically.



High level meeting BCRG-EU on 30.06.2021 at the European Parliament

In 2021 the CEIO focused on further developing synergies and cooperation to provide our political and administrative partners in Brussels with prompt and pertinent information on issues concerning the EU institutions. Meanwhile, the EU institutions increasingly see the CEIO as the single point of contact for all issues related to their presence in Brussels.

Our host region policy involves competences at both federal (representation, security, diplomatic status, European schools, etc.) and regional (real estate policy, environment, mobility, etc.) levels. Practically speaking, the two levels already collaborate on a regular basis, in particular through the Committee for the Host Policy (CIPS) and the CEIO. The efforts made in the context of Belgium's bid to host the European Medicines Agency and the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre provide recent examples of fruitful cooperation between the federal government and the Brussels Region. In 2021 the CEIO was invited by CIPS to a coordination meeting following the request of the African Development Bank to open an office in Brussels and was also involved in the Belgian bid to host the UNICEF Office of Innovation in Brussels.

Nevertheless, the CEIO calls for a more structured coordination between the Federal Government and the Region at the political and operational level, joining forces to defend this host strategy together and to apply it unambiguously in relations with the European institutions and international organisations based in Brussels.

On a regional level, structural dialogue continued on the initiative of the Secretary of State for European and International Relations, Pascal Smet. Several coordination meetings were held in 2021 (3 March, 26 May, 1 September and 24 November), involving hub.brussels, Brussels International, visit.brussels, the CEIO and representatives of the ministerial cabinets responsible for the image of Brussels. This main objective of this structural dialogue is to better coordinate the missions and actions of the various Brussels agencies, particularly in terms of the Region's international development.



# 4. The team and the governing bodies

The dynamic and multilingual CEIO team fulfils a **liaison role** between Brussels public authorities and the European and international institutions (and their staff) established in Brussels.

**Alain HUTCHINSON**  
*Commissioner*



**Karin IMPENS**  
*Director*



## Expat Welcome Desk



**Amélie BOVY**  
*Senior Legal Adviser*



**Hélène JACUB**  
*Assistant at the Head Office*



**Anaïs JOUZDANI**  
*Junior Legal Adviser*

## Institutional Liaison desk



**Jean-Pierre BOUBLAL**  
*Urban Development Adviser*

## Communication



**Natacha BRIEVEN**  
*Communication and Office Manager*

## Reception



**Laurent GILARDENGI**  
*Reception Desk Assistant*



The General Assembly and Board are composed of representatives appointed by the Brussels-Capital Region government at the beginning of each legislature.

### General Assembly

- Alain HUTCHINSON, President
- Daan FONCK
- Stefan VANDENHENDE
- Evelyne HUYTEBROECK
- Julien JOST
- Aurélie MAHOUX
- Jeremy ONKELINX
- Rebecca OVERLOOP
- Alexandra PHILIPPE
- Frédérick PIRARD
- Lesia RADELICKI
- Laurent VAN DER ELST

### Board

- Alain HUTCHINSON, President
- Daan FONCK
- Stefan VANDENHENDE
- Evelyne HUYTEBROECK
- Julien JOST
- Aurélie MAHOUX
- Jeremy ONKELINX
- Alexandra PHILIPPE
- Frédérick PIRARD
- Lesia RADELICKI
- Laurent VAN DER ELST

### Brussels Parliament

In 2015, the Brussels Parliament created the **European Affairs Committee**, showing the importance that the Brussels Region attaches to the presence of international organisations on its territory. In accordance with the CEIO's statutes, the 2020 annual report was presented to the European Affairs Committee of the Brussels Parliament on 4 October 2021.



# **Institutional liaison**

# 1 Role of the institutional liaison unit

## 1.1 Context

Strengthening the **international and European prestige of the Brussels-Capital Region** goes hand in hand with the resolute determination of the Brussels authorities to make it a **metropolis on a human scale**.

More than a mere slogan, this broadly shared objective translates into strong and ambitious policies and concrete measures which meet the challenges at hand.

Year after year, this momentum strengthens the position of Brussels on the European and international scene while responding to the desire to be a service-oriented region, mindful of the well-being of its inhabitants and where people, businesses and institutions can prosper and develop with ease.

It is therefore only natural that this dynamic should also fully guide the actions of the Institutional Liaison Unit of the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO).

This unit works on a daily basis to enable Brussels, as a leading political and diplomatic centre, to develop and capitalise on its positive attributes. The Region can thereby assert itself internationally and across the European Union by pursuing a **host region policy** that strengthens our role in welcoming the international community and institutions.

This welcome is made even more attractive by the fact that it is supported by a Region that is committed to be cosmopolitan, open to the world, dynamic, creative, innovative, rich in history and traditions, friendly and pleasant to live in.



## 1.2 Mission

As its name implies, the Institutional Liaison Unit **liaises** with both the Brussels public authorities and the European and international institutions on issues related to the presence of the latter in the Region. This mission applies in particular to all policies affecting the physical locality, such as urban development, architectural heritage, the environment, mobility, tourist flows or the management of public spaces (in terms of safety as well as conviviality).

Our role as a **privileged point of contact** makes it possible to identify and respond better to the expectations of all the organisations that come to settle in Brussels. This task is facilitated by our role as a **one-stop shop** for all requests that fall under regional competence.

A flexible and responsive operation enables us to provide **bespoke solutions**, to **engage in a constructive dialogue** and to improve the life of all the people and institutions present on the Brussels territory. These range from the European institutions, with thousands of staff and dozens of buildings, to international organisations, embassies and diplomatic missions, to smaller regional and local representations throughout the Region.

In addition, we make sure that the various measures and actions are in line with the stated **strategy** of projecting a **positive image** of the Region and strengthening our position as an **international metropolis**.



Press conference on the European Commission's building strategy on 25.05.2021 at CEIO

# 1.3 Assets of the International Liaison Office

## Expertise and networks

- Deep knowledge of the Belgian, European and international institutional system and context;
- Role as a trustworthy interlocutor and competent intermediary;
- Expertise in numerous fields such as urban planning, mobility, safety and the environment;
- Experience in project management and implementing concertation techniques;
- Privileged contacts in the Belgian political and institutional world, as well as in international organisations and representations;
- A dynamic, multilingual, service- and result-oriented team.

## A constellation of tried and tested contact points

- Brussels ministers and their cabinets;
- Regional administrations and agencies;
- The Brussels Parliament;
- The political authorities of the Brussels municipalities;
- The urban, mobility and spatial planning departments of the Brussels municipalities;
- The Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (CIPS), the federal administrations and cabinets;
- Political and administrative officials of the European institutions;
- Embassies and diplomatic missions;
- Regional and local representations.



## 2. Method

### POLITICAL DIALOGUE

In addition to the numerous political dialogues held with its interlocutors in various institutions, the CEIO organises a **political summit** once a year, bringing together the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region and the highest representatives of the European institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, European External Action Service). These meetings make it possible to highlight the various projects that the European institutions are planning in Brussels, as well as the major redevelopment work that the Brussels-Capital Region has undertaken to carry out, for example in the European Quarter. The **decisions** taken and the **guiding principles** established during these summits guide many of the CEIO's activities in the weeks that follow: setting up workgroups; new cooperation arrangements by and between the EU institutions and regional and local administrations; contacts and exchanges of information which respond to the challenges on the Brussels territory, particularly in terms of planning. In addition, the systematic inclusion of the **minutes** of this summit on the agenda of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region guarantees that the decisions and guiding principles chosen are taken duly into account and followed up.

**The 8th edition of the meeting between the Brussels Government and the European institutions** was held on 30 June 2021 in the offices of the European Parliament. The participants discussed the measures taken or still to be taken to respond to the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (the vaccination campaign, the EU digital certificate, the difficulties linked to the Special Identity Card, etc.) but also the other strategic priorities and objectives of the different parties (mobility, public works in the European Quarter, security, the building policy of the European Commission, etc.).



High level meeting BCRG-EU on 30.06.2021 at the European Parliament

## A GUARANTEED AD HOC ASSISTANCE

The Institutional Liaison Unit is called upon throughout the year by its ever-increasing number of interlocutors on a variety of issues (property issues, road works, mobility issues, public facilities, issues relating to parks and public spaces, etc.). The work of the unit is guided by the need to provide **guidance and support throughout the various procedures** with the competent authorities and to **encourage dialogue** by and between the stakeholders.



Official meeting with European Commissioner, Johannes Hahn on 19.02.2021 at the European Commission

## DIALOGUE ON FUTURE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Institutional Liaison Unit continuously monitors the development of urban planning dossiers, specifically those linked to the **development of the European Quarter**. We engage in dialogue with all stakeholders at all political levels on each project: the Region, the municipalities involved by the presence of the institutions on their territory (City of Brussels, Ixelles, Etterbeek and Saint-Josse) and the federal Government. A permanent exchange is maintained in this respect with the CIPS concerning real estate and mobility projects. Maintaining this dialogue is essential to promoting the **quality of our urban space** so as to ensure the **harmonious development** of the European Quarter, the Region and its inhabitants.

## WORKGROUPS

To address certain specific issues in an efficient and comprehensive manner, we have developed proven expertise in setting up workgroups. These are organised and coordinated by the Institutional Liaison Unit and make it possible to bring together key contacts on specific and technical issues, to **maintain a regular and constructive dialogue** between the various stakeholders and to **develop connections built** on trust between them.

Various workgroups have been set up in the course of 2021:

### On matters of image and tourism

- The workgroup on updating and monitoring the European Quarter's branding and image strategy (benchmarking, signage, visitor numbers, logo, etc.);
- The workgroup on the introduction of new signage in the European Quarter;
- The workgroup on the **European Quarter Network** (follow-up and recurrent meetings);
- The workgroup on **Local Commerce in the European Quarter** intended to enable the CEIO and hub.brussels to identify courses of action and recommendations to revitalise commerce in the European Quarter;
- The **"tourism" workgroup** (active since 2015) in partnership with visit.brussels, intended to promote the appeal of the European Quarter and to network the visitor services of the EU institutions.



The European Quarter Networking Event on 29.09.2021 at Stam Europa

### On matters of security

The workgroup monitoring the work on the Security by Design guide intended to improve security in public spaces.

## On matters of urban development

- The workgroup for the "Luxembourg-Schuman" **pedestrian-cyclist footbridge** intended to enable cyclists to pass directly between these two hubs of the European Quarter;
- The workgroup attempting to draw up standard specifications for roadworks that integrate safety aspects for the institutions (with Bruxelles Mobilité and BPS);
- The workgroup on the **inter-institutional tunnel** project linking two European institutions in the vicinity of the Rond-point Schuman;
- The workgroup on the **car park of the Committee of the Regions** and the Economic and Social Council of the EU;
- **The European School Task Force**, in which the CEIO ensures the coordination and proper circulation of information to the various stakeholders, including the Brussels authorities.

## PERMANENT INFORMATION EXCHANGE NETWORK

The CEIO considers it essential to be a catalyst and a major player in the collection, distribution and circulation of **quality information**. This means permanent access to, dialogue with and listening to all stakeholders working in our fields of competence. It also means maintaining and stimulating **new cooperation arrangements** by and between the Brussels and international authorities.



Delegation from the Region Île-de-France, September 2021, eat! BRUSSELS



# 3. Issues addressed in 2021

The CEIO deals with a number of issues throughout the year, some of which result in projects of considerable scope in terms of resources deployed as well as time spent. The most notable examples are:

## NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

The New European Bauhaus is an initiative launched by the President of the European Commission in late 2020. By building bridges between backgrounds, crossing disciplines and relying on participation at all levels, the New European Bauhaus inspires a movement to facilitate and guide the transformation of our societies according to three inseparable values: sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion.

The Brussels-Capital Region and its authorities have been supporting and participating in this initiative since its launch. In this respect, the CEIO offers its expertise and participates in the work of the New European Bauhaus. We are working to connect the European authorities with the various Belgian and Brussels-based interlocutors. This strategic and logistical support is even more necessary in the context of the organisation of the European Bauhaus Festival, which the European Commission is holding for the first time in Brussels in the spring of 2022. We facilitate meetings and the search for the right interlocutors. These actions, which are necessary for the success of the operation, are intended to give visibility to the actors of change, to encourage them to share their progress and results, and to foster citizen involvement.



## MONITORING MAJOR URBAN PROJECTS AND ISSUES IN THE EUROPEAN QUARTER

### The (new) European Commission buildings policy

This was presented jointly on 25 May 2021 by Commissioner Johannes Hahn, Minister-President Rudi Vervoort, Secretary of State Pascal Smet and Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson. Under the new policy, the European Commission will divest itself of half of its buildings, but of only 25% of the working space. This move towards a carbon-neutral Commission that can focus its resources on people, sustainable real estate and digital transformation is worthy of support.

The CEIO provides assistance and expertise to help the Brussels authorities and the European Commission in their goal to promote inclusive and accessible spaces, where dialogue between different cultures, disciplines, genders and ages offers a unique opportunity to imagine liveable places in the European Quarter.



Press conference on the European Commission's building strategy on 25.05.2021 at CEIO

### The new vision for the European Quarter / Loi Urban Master Plan

In its role as a leading intermediary, the CEIO contacted and prepared the participation of the European institutions in the discussions on the territorial development of the European Quarter initiated by the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region in 2021. In concrete terms, the CEIO has helped the Commission and other relevant institutions to make recommendations and proposals to help the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region move towards a vision for the area that would make it more sustainable, inclusive, aesthetic, and welcoming.



The CEIO therefore ensured that particular attention was paid to the participation of key stakeholders in the European Quarter in the discussion process. In addition, the CEIO provided analysis, advice and participated in the six thematic workshops (organised by perspective.brussels) that took place from October 2021 to January 2022. The objective was to draw up a framework for the district's progress and development. It will chart the way forward for all public and private actors.

Finally, the CEIO has ensured that the new contours defined for the European Quarter's vision have the advantage of being able to fall in line with the philosophy of the "New European Bauhaus" initiative in certain respects. This last point is beneficial to the image of the European Commission as well as the Brussels-Capital Region.

### **A new European Commission conference centre**

The CEIO guides, supports, facilitates and brings together the various stakeholders in the follow-up of the planning permit for the building that will house the new conference centre of the European Commission.

The CEIO has also been involved in other projects related to this emblematic district, such as monitoring the redevelopment of the **Schuman Roundabout**. We monitored the relevant needs of the various institutions and reported to the Brussels authorities.

The CEIO took an active part in the discussions on the redevelopment of the European Parliament building. The CEIO acted as a facilitator to provide guidance and support for the administration of the European Parliament.

### **Other projects relating to spatial planning and urban development throughout the Brussels area kept the CEIO busy, such as those submitted by:**

- **Eurocontrol** : The CEIO followed up on development projects for the new operational centre (planning permission, environmental permits, etc.).
- **NATO** : The CEIO took appropriate action to facilitate the process of making the area around NATO safe for cyclists and pedestrians, a process which entailed numerous contacts with Bruxelles Mobilité. We also facilitated the exchange of information in the context of the implementation of a reception centre for refugees and people in great difficulty on the former site.
- **Slovenia** : The CEIO offered its expertise to the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia in order to facilitate the move and settlement of this representation to the EU. This involved contact with urban.brussels and the City of Brussels for urban planning permits.



Inauguration of the new Eurocontrol Operations Center on 30.08.2021

## ENVIRONMENT

Working closely with the Minister for the Environment, his cabinet and the regional administration, the CEIO was able to provide its expertise and contacts so as to enable the Brussels-Capital Region to achieve its environmental objectives by raising awareness among European and international institutions.

The CEIO continued to follow dossiers concerning the application of environmental permits for European Parliament buildings. Our office is also regularly called upon for many aspects relating to the management and maintenance of green spaces such as the Léopold Park and the Cinquantenaire Park. Whether a matter of organising events, ensuring the quality of the facilities or facilitating access for visitors, the CEIO has on each occasion put the parties concerned in contact with each other.

Finally, we were asked to help introduce "Recupel" collection points in the European institutions.



## DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH REDUCED MOBILITY

Our action in favour of people with disabilities or with reduced mobility is carried out on many levels. By way of example, we work with the European institutions to correct the difficulties encountered by their staff, trainees and visitors with disabilities when they come to the office and, more generally, when they move about the buildings and grounds of the European institutions.

We pass on information and liaise with the Brussels authorities to ensure that the best possible solutions are found.

## SECURITY

In view of the challenges posed by security issues in the public space and in the vicinity of the international and European institutions, the CEIO has been involved in all circles of reflection and action aimed at promoting security in strategic areas where it is needed.

The CEIO has been regularly called upon to bring stakeholders to the table and accompany discussions around sites including headquarters of international organisations, European institutions and diplomatic missions.

The "Guide to the integration of security devices in the public space in the Brussels-Capital Region", written by the regional agency perspective.brussels, is the main instrument for guiding choices in concrete cases of security and clearly states the "security by design" approach adopted by the Brussels Region.

The CEIO has contributed to this effort, as it regularly contributes to exchanges on BPS-BPV projects concerning international organisations and participates in meetings of the "Security Technical Committee".

## TOURISM, IMAGE AND CULTURE

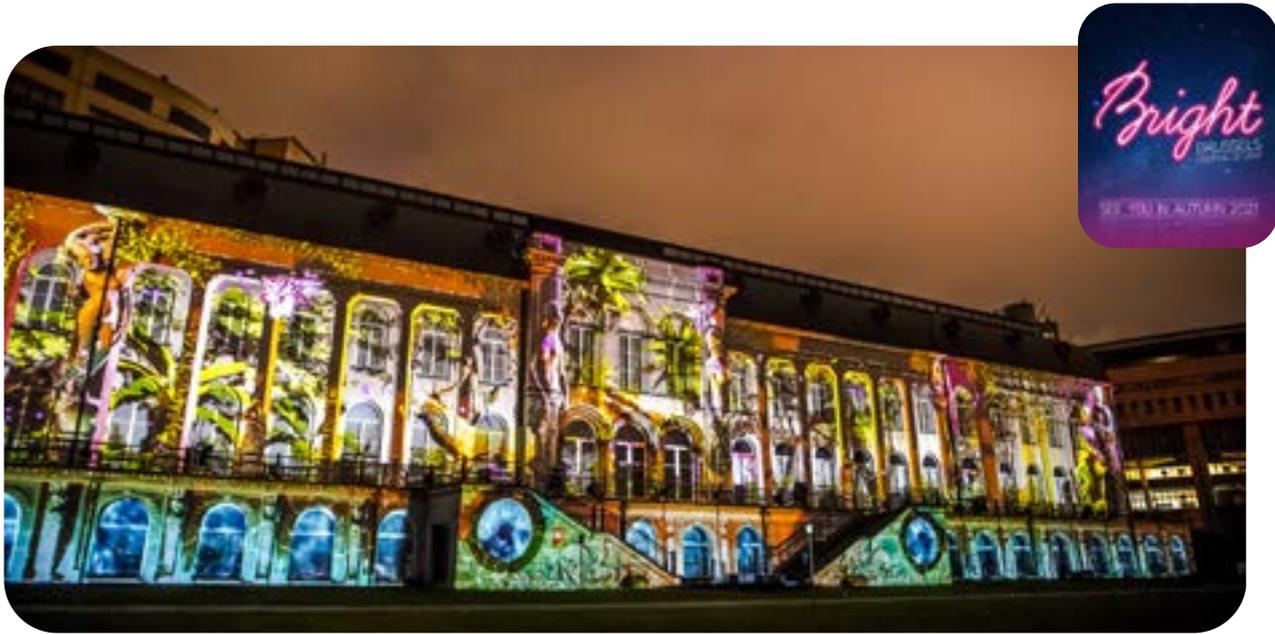
The Brussels authorities and private operators have clearly understood the increasingly decisive impact of the tourism sector on the 'wealth' of our Region, its municipalities, as well as on employment, culture, multilingualism, leisure and the MICE sector.

### European Quarter Networking Events

In 2021, together with visit.brussels we co-organised further networking days, gathering institutional, cultural, tourist and commercial players in the European Quarter. Our action aimed to put in place mechanisms to

combat the disastrous impact that the pandemic has had on tourism, economic life and the cultural offer in the European Quarter. We also had to prepare for the post-pandemic period.

The CEIO shares and transmits objective information on the district's offer to all institutional, cultural and tourist partners. The aim is to preserve, create and/or launch new projects that will contribute to the development of tourism in the European Quarter.



### Updating and analysing the brand and image strategy of the European Quarter

In order to implement one of the objectives set out in the government agreement, namely the regional and European ambition to develop tourism in the European Quarter, visit.brussels and the CEIO carried out collaborative work in 2019 with the key players in the European Quarter. This process resulted in the note "Improving the image and attractiveness of the European Quarter of Brussels: challenges, actors, method, solutions", which sets out the main strategic objectives for this district. The updating of this document in a new strategic note was initiated at the end of 2021 to take into account the impact of the COVID pandemic on the district. This strategic approach is being developed in coordination with hub.brussels and perspective.brussels. Numerous contacts are being made with the European institutions, and also with the municipalities, shops, museums and other cultural players and all the stakeholders in the district.

The CEIO is contributing its expertise to this initiative aimed at capitalising on Brussels' unique advantage over other European capitals (namely the presence of the EU institutions on its territory) to promote the attractiveness of the European Quarter. We are fully involved in this process, which is based on co-creation and territorial marketing.

## CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

### The "Live here. Speak, hear."project #brusselsvoice

Launched in June 2021 with the support of the Brussels Secretary of State for European and International Affairs, this innovative project aims to give international Brussels residents the opportunity to tell the regional government what it can do to make their lives easier.

This is the first major democratic participation project specifically aimed at this community. It is important for them to have their say, as regional policies really affect their daily lives. In a first step, a digital participation platform was created. International Brusselers could read what others were suggesting or register to post their own proposals. We invited them to submit proposals around 4 main themes, but they could give their creativity free rein and come up with other ideas. The topics included proposals to give these particular Brussels denizens a meaningful political representation in the Region.



To achieve our goal of "the widest possible consultation", we launched a large media campaign through several channels: the digital platform, dissemination of videos, a well-referenced website, numerous mailing campaigns and newsletters (from us and from our partners such as the European Commission and the European Parliament), dissemination of educational content on social networks, etc.

The campaign was launched in mid-summer and was a success. At the end of this participatory process, which finished at the end of 2021, the ideas collected were translated into real policy proposals during a series of interactive workshops led by (academic) experts. These concrete proposals should form the basis of a "Manifesto", which will be presented at the end of April 2022 to the elected members of the Brussels Parliament during the "Day of the International Brusseler".

# 4 Regional and local representations

Brussels is a magnet for **regional and local lobbyists** as one of the top ranking **international capitals**. For the regions of the EU Member States, it has become the norm to establish a representation to the European institutions in Brussels.

However, regional offices have no official status and do not always operate in a legal form. As a result, they are often faced with **complex administrative problems** inherent in their establishment. To remedy these problems, the Region created the **regional certificate** in 1994. Although this certificate does not confer official status on delegations, it does indicate that the office in question is recognised by the Brussels-Capital Region as a body representing a sub-national authority. In practice, this certificate helps representations to solve administrative problems. It is conferred every other year to the **240 or so regional and local entities** and is signed by the Secretary of State for European and International Relations. The CEIO sees to all the administrative follow-up.

Regional representations were created for **specific reasons**, such as obtaining European funds, influencing European policy, the geopolitical visibility of the region in question and the possibility of being part of the networks and the international community in the sphere of the European institutions. They are consequently recognised as partners in the European political community, with the core activity of **collecting, processing and filtering information on EU policies and institutional developments that may be of interest to their region**.

The Brussels-Capital Region does not have this type of representation to defend its interests in the EU. The Brussels delegation to the EU is integrated into the Belgian Permanent Representation (which has different tasks).



## 5. COVID-19 and the institutional world

Has COVID-19 encouraged the European 'bubble' to shift to digital working once and for all? As the coronavirus crisis continued and worsened, the way of working in and around the European and international institutions underwent profound changes.

For many organisations, large-scale events that were part of the annual programme were put on hold. All sectors were forced to move to digital interconnectivity. All of this has had a profound impact on the European Quarter, arguably the area of the Brussels Region hardest hit by the pandemic.

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way people work. By way of example, the European Commission is rethinking its human resources strategy: teleworking, flexible working, diversity and gender equality, etc. This 'new' way of doing things will make it easier for people to find work, but it will inevitably have an impact on the European Commission's real estate policy in Brussels.

As for the fight against the pandemic itself, the intensive cooperation of the CEIO with all European and international institutions and the close collaboration with the Protocol Directorate of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs was continued in 2021.

In addition to the structural exchange of information on the measures issued by the international institutions, the Brussels-Capital Region and the federal level, the focus in 2021 was on the vaccination of all international staff. More specifically, access to the national vaccination campaign for European and international civil servants and staff of diplomatic missions, consular posts, and their families, as well as for retired staff.

Several meetings were held to prepare for the optimal integration of all these institutions into the Brussels vaccination strategy managed by the administration of the Joint Community Commission (COCOM).

In-house vaccination centres in the European Parliament and the European Commission were accredited by COCOM and in-house medical staff in the international institutions could be vaccinated as of 1 March. Officials with an established comorbidity were then included in the priority order for the next phase. All the institutions declared that they would adhere strictly to the phases set by the Belgian authorities in January 2021.



Interview with Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson, France 24, Schuman roundabout on 28.10.2021

# 6 ■ Conclusion

Since its creation, The Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations has played a central role by building up an image with its interlocutors as a trustworthy interlocutor and competent intermediary. This makes it possible to **fulfil and strengthen the host region policy of the international institutions** for which Belgium in general and the Brussels-Capital Region in particular are responsible.

This essential aspect of the host region policy carried out by the CEIO deserves greater attention. This could be achieved by **strengthening the coordination processes** between the different levels of government.

The establishment of dialogue and coordination mechanisms in which the CEIO plays a leading role would in fact help to make Belgium an even more attractive location for international organisations.

In our opinion, the CEIO's know-how and the various fruitful contacts it has established with its interlocutors at both Belgian and international level over the past few years should undoubtedly be valued within any existing or future body, with a view to **building tomorrow's host policy**.

We call for a strategic host policy to be charted for the Belgian and European capital, supported by the federal and Brussels authorities.

This strategy should aim in particular to adopt a clear and coherent positioning with regard to the institutions currently present on our territory, but also to defend the international status of Brussels and its many advantages for hosting new institutions. This necessary common positioning should notably concern the security management of international European institutions, the status of the personnel of international institutions and representations, etc.

Finally, this strategy should also lead to close coordination by and between the Federal Government and the Region at a political and operational level to combine their forces to defend this strategy with a single voice and to apply it unambiguously in their relations with the European institutions and international organisations which have their headquarters in Brussels/Belgium.



**Expat  
Welcome Desk**

**T**he Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) is an integral part of the host policy operated by the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO).



To facilitate the settling in of the international community in Brussels by way of a personalised administrative assistance. The objective is to offer our visitors advice for any practical and legal problems that may occur during their arrival and throughout their stay, and to guide them through all type of administrative formalities (registration in the commune, marriage, legal cohabitation, tax return, etc.).

## 5 REASONS FOR USING OUR SERVICES

1. Free
2. Independent public service
3. Multilingual (EN, FR, NL)
4. One-stop shop
5. Direct link with administrations at the local, regional and federal level



## 4 WAYS TO ASSIST YOU

- > By phone : +32 (0)2 430 66 00
- > By e-mail : [info@commissioner.brussels](mailto:info@commissioner.brussels)
- > Via our website : [www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels)
- > By appointment



## Our target audience

- Staff of European institutions: officials, parliamentary assistants, seconded national experts, contracted staff and trainees
- MEPs
- Staff of international organisations
- Teachers at European schools
- Personnel of regional representations
- Diplomatic personnel
- Foreign lobbyists and journalists
- Foreign researchers and postdoctoral personnel
- Anyone wishing to set up professionally in Brussels
- Family members of all the above

## Our privileged contacts

- HR services of all European institutions
- NATO human resources service
- Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools
- Brussels Ministers
- Immigration and population services in the 19 Brussels communes
- Mayors and Aldermen of the 19 Brussels communes
- Regional Ministry of Economy and Employment
- Federal Interministerial Committee for the Host Nation Policy
- Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs
- Federal Public Service of Finances
- The Belgian Immigration Office
- The tenants' federation ("Syndicat des Locataires")
- The regional tourism agency (visit. brussels)

## Our expertise

- More than 25 years of experience providing services to the international community in Brussels
- Global and deep knowledge of matters relating to European officials
- Expertise relating to privileges and immunities of the European Union
- Close contacts with Belgian authorities and the European institutions
- Dynamic and multilingual team

## Our multilingual team



### 2 OFFICES

- **Head office** : Avenue d'Auderghem/Oudergemlaan 63, 1040 Brussels
- **European Parliament antenna** : ASP – Bureau 00H160

### 3 TEAM MEMBERS

- **Amélie BOVY**, Senior Legal Adviser at the head office
- **Hélène JACUB**, Assistant at the head office
- **Anaïs JOUZDANI**, Junior Legal Adviser at the European Parliament

**Our office in the European Parliament**, completely renovated early 2018, positions us as a key partner for welcoming and assisting its personnel: MEPs, officials, parliamentary assistants, contracted staff, trainees, etc. This proximity enables us to strengthen ties between the CEIO and the European Parliament.



# 1. Method

**EWD INFORMS** the international community free of charge in 3 languages (FR, EN, NL), on all matters related to their settling and stay in Brussels. The EWD also provides information sessions within European institutions and international organisations for various target groups (trainees, spouses of officials). Our priority is to be accessible and responsive to all "expats" living in Brussels, many of whom are lost in the complexity of Belgian administrative procedures and rules.

**EWD ADVISES** by examining each case on an individual basis, offering personalised advice and providing genuine consultancy work.

**EWD SOLVES** certain bureaucratic problems faced by the "expat" community, mostly due to a poor knowledge of one of our national languages or to their particular and sometimes complex situation (diplomats, European civil servants, seconded workers, etc.).

**EWD ORGANISES** seminars throughout the year for its audiences (officials and interns in European institutions and international organisations, spouses of European officials, diplomats, etc.).

**EWD BRINGS TOGETHER** its key contacts at frequent working meetings on the different issues encountered by European officials during their move to and stay in Brussels.

**EWD RAISES AWARENESS** by informing local, regional, and federal authorities of any problems or inconsistencies in administrative procedures that affect European officials and seeks to resolve them.

**EWD COMMUNICATES** clearly and frequently via targeted actions and communication supports to make itself known to its target audiences.

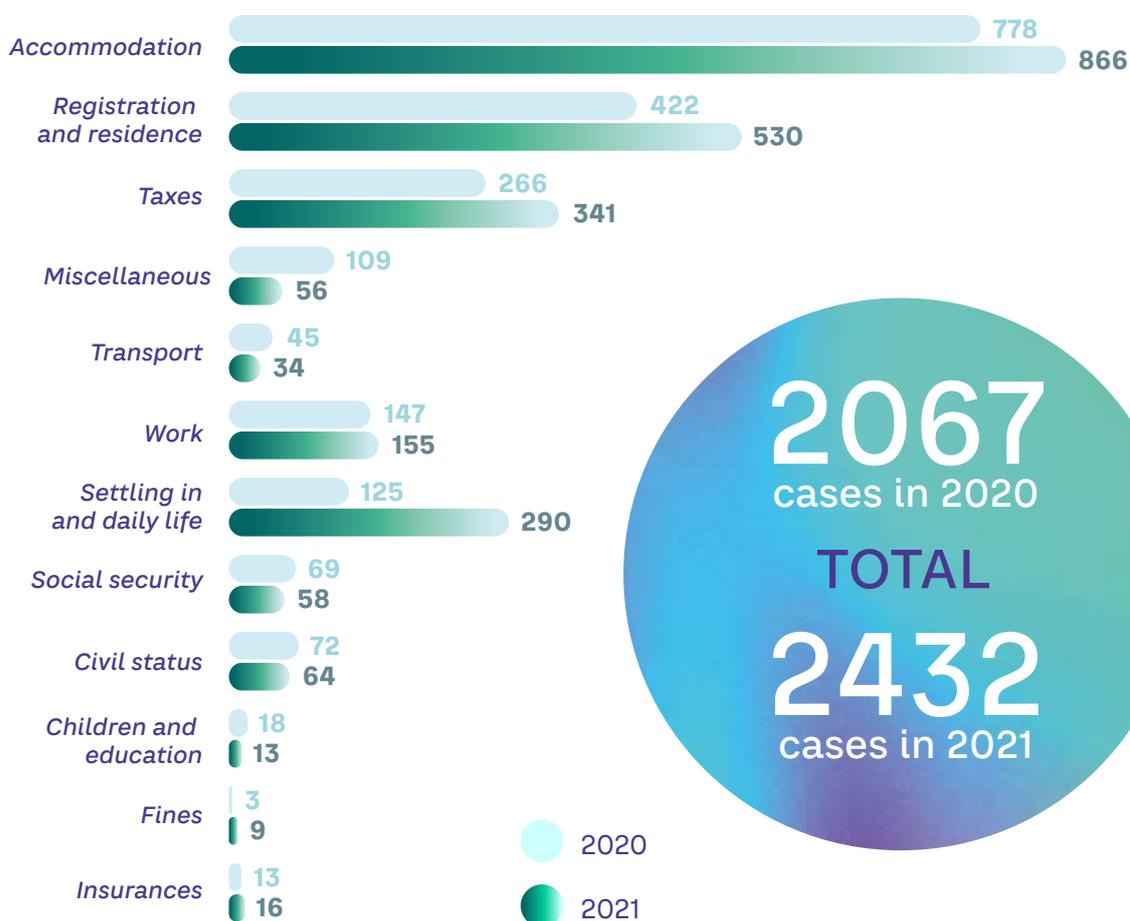
## **EWD CONVEYS A POSITIVE IMAGE**

of Brussels by providing a high quality, tailor-made welcome to the growing international community in Brussels. Anyone who is given the necessary and timely assistance during their time in Brussels will be an excellent ambassador for our Region abroad.

# 2. Cases taken up in 2021

## 2.1 Statistics

Number of EWD cases by type, over two years (2020 et 2021) :



Compared to 2020, there has been a significant increase in the number of cases, which is mainly due to covid-related issues accounted for in the "Settling in and daily life" category. Questions regarding M-card applications for British citizens have also led to increases in the "Registration and residence" category. And finally, the "Taxes" category has been growing over the years, reflecting the real challenge expats face in finding answers to their questions without having to deal with a tax adviser.

## 2.2 Testimonials

### NATO

*"I am writing on behalf of NATO IS Head of Staff Services, who participated at the webinar on Tuesday 8 February. First of all, he would like to thank you for the very thorough presentation and was wondering if we could receive the slides by email. Thanking you in advance for your efforts in trying to clarify the complex situation following Brexit, but also for your insights and help in trying to resolve all of the cases of my NATO colleagues that I refer to you for your expertise and advice.»*



### ANNE (GERMANY)

*"Thank you so much for the review and detailed information. I am so glad I reached out to your organization. Organizations such as this one should be in every country. We recently worked in the United Arab Emirates and this type of support is dearly lacking. Please continue the great work."*

### GUIOMAR (SPAIN)

*"Thank you very much for all that information. It is really helpful to us and we really appreciate you taking the time to review and comment on the lease agreement. Thank you also for attaching all the other documents. This will certainly make things much easier for us. We did not know about the Expat Welcome Desk before and the service is really great."*



### TOMMI

*"I wish to sincerely THANK YOU for having taken the time to meet online with our 19 new S&D trainees on Thursday 18th February. The first days and weeks are very important and create the basis of a successful traineeship – in this respect, your input is particularly appreciated. We look forward to continue to cooperate with the commissioner.brussels / Expat Welcome Desk."*

## 3 Meetings and other challenges

### 3.1 Online applications for single permits

Since June 2021, applications for single permits and work permits may no longer be sent by email or post to the relevant Region. They must instead be entered online by the employer via the dedicated platform 'Working in Belgium', which is hosted on the socialsecurity.be website, and to which each employer must have access rights.

This has created problems for the European institutions, specifically in the case of single permits for non-European interns. It is difficult for these major institutions to access the platform, which requires the entry of private personal data via the itsme® application and involves the personal responsibility of the individual who connects to the Belgian platform and signs the application. Moreover, all notifications relating to interns (including Annex 46) are sent to a joint inbox used by all staff members of the institution concerned, which may lead to violations of the confidentiality of personal information.

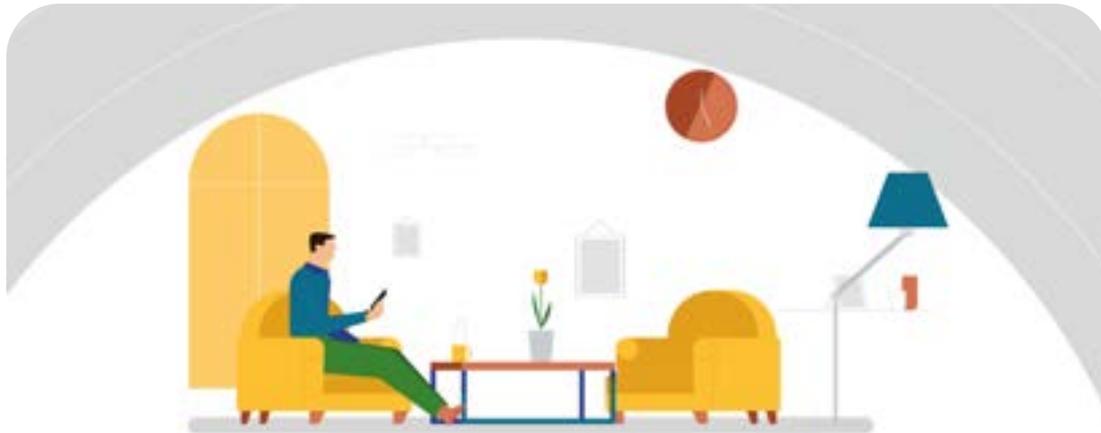
Solutions are being considered at each of the European institutions concerned, and ONSS, which is responsible for access to the platform, has made itself available to help work out alternatives which could be considered if problems persist.





## 3.2 Development of local registration offices in the Brussels-Capital Region

As part of the digitalisation of public services, numerous online apps now offer users essential services. Examples include Tax-on-web, MyPension, MyCareer, the municipal e-desks, IRISbox, etc.



**Let's simplify administration!**

People connect to these applications by using their e-ID card or the *itsme*® service. However, these access methods are not available to certain users, such as transborder workers and non-resident foreigners, as well as holders of a special ID card issued by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other citizens may find themselves unable to use e-ID or *itsme*®, for instance if they do not have a card reader or lose their PIN.

This is why the Federal Public Service Strategy and Support (FPS BOSA) developed the Local Registration Application (LRA) in 2018. Thanks to this application municipal clerks can issue citizens with an activation code which lets them activate a digital key for online services without having to hold a smart residence card. However, very few Brussels municipalities had implemented this system since its creation.

With the support of *easy.brussels*, the Brussels-Capital Region's agency for administrative simplification, the CEIO contacted the 19 Brussels municipalities by e-mail to raise awareness of the LRA. Our aim was to overcome a number of administrative issues encountered by the international community.

By the end of 2021, fifteen Brussels municipalities had implemented the LRA system. A dedicated newsletter on this subject will be published in early 2022 with the purpose of informing the entire international community.

## 3.3 Applications for M cards by UK nationals

All UK nationals and their family members who wished to benefit from the protection offered by the Withdrawal Agreement had to apply for Withdrawal Agreement status during the application period: 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021. During the application period, their residence rights were automatically protected.

The CEIO has received several questions from British citizens concerning the issuance of the M card: when to apply, which documents to provide, what the consequences are, etc.

At the beginning of November, the Immigration Office (Office des Etrangers) sent a letter to all British citizens and their family members, reminding them that they had to regularise their status as residents by the end of the year.

While the situation was clear in the case of British citizens, it was not always so for family members. They often did not know whether or not they should apply for an M card and what the advantage of doing this would be over other residence permits to which they might also be entitled.

The CEIO therefore sent a message in early December to UK nationals and family members, in order to clarify the procedure for this target group.





# 4. Seminars

Depending on the demands we receive, the EWD organises seminars in English on various subjects for specific groups. These seminars are led by specialists called upon by the EWD to ensure that the subjects are prepared thoroughly. They are usually held at the premises of the CEIO, at the heart of the European quarter. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the seminars have been taking place via webinar in order to comply with the health measures in force.



06/05/2021

**Webinar "Buying property in Belgium: the role of the notary"**

84 PARTICIPANTS VIA WEBEX



09/02/2021

**Webinar "UK citizens' rights in Belgium: residence and work formalities"**

105 PARTICIPANTS VIA WEBEX

27/05/2021

**Webinar "10th Networking Meeting of Diplomatic Liaison Personnel in Brussels"**

24 PARTICIPANTS VIA WEBEX

03/06/2021

**Webinar "Filing your Belgian income tax return"**

90 PARTICIPANTS VIA WEBEX

09/12/2021

**Webinar "How to terminate a lease contract in Belgium?"**

59 PARTICIPANTS VIA WEBEX

# 5. Information sessions

Throughout the year, the EWD takes part in information sessions organised for the international community with interactive presentations for each target group (cultural matters are covered by [visit.brussels](http://visit.brussels) and administrative matters by the EWD).

Due to the health situation, several events were cancelled during 2020, including the 'Info Day at the European Commission, the Open Door Day at the European institutions, and the coffee mornings for the spouses of European civil servants.

Furthermore, all information sessions were held remotely to comply with the health measures, via platforms such as Webex or Microsoft Teams.

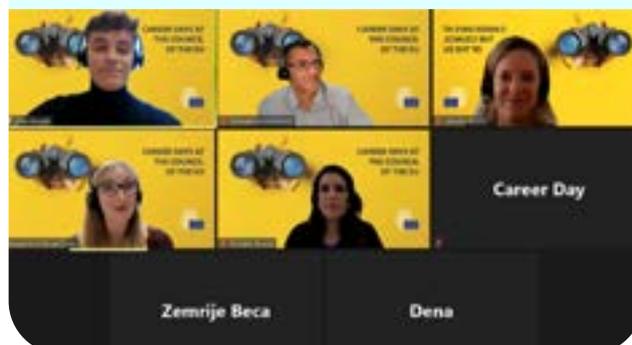
**Welcome for the official trainees of the European institutions**

**13/01/2021 and 22/09/2021  
Welcome for students from the University of Kent**

**Information sessions "How to fill in a tax return form as a trainee of an EU institution?"**

**14/10/2021  
Presentation of EWD's services during the "Workshop international students" hosted by [perspective.brussels](http://perspective.brussels)**

**26/11/2021  
Presentation of EWD's services during the Career Day hosted by the EU-Council**





# 6 ■ The Expat Welcome Desk facing Covid-19

## Communication

The Expat Welcome Desk produced numerous articles about Covid-19 to keep the "coronanews" webpage on our website up to date. We considered it essential to have all the information in one place so as to better inform our audience about the new rules in force. It should also be noted that the English version of our "coronanews" webpage was mentioned by the COCOM administration as being the source of English-language information for Brussels.



## Vaccination and availability of the vaccination certificate

The EWD received a lot of enquiries throughout the vaccination campaign. People initially wanted to know how and when they could be vaccinated. We helped many EU officials to find their national register number, which was not mentioned on their special identity card. Access to the MyHealth platform presented many problems for holders of special identity cards, since they had no access due to the absence of a chip on their card. Finally, the introduction of the Covid Safe Ticket (CST) also raised many questions, particularly from newcomers from third countries who were not always vaccinated with a vaccine recognised in Belgium.



## Travel and commuting

We continued to receive many questions related to entering and leaving the country during the lockdown. In mid-January the Interior Minister reinforced the rules for travellers entering Belgium by bus or train from non-EU and non-Schengen countries (including from the United Kingdom). This raised several questions from UK citizens wishing to travel between London and Brussels on the Eurostar, particularly regarding the completion of the "passenger location form".



## Testing/quarantine

Questions about testing and quarantine compliance were still frequent this year due to the constantly changing and evolving health situation. The EWD therefore communicated regularly on this subject to its audience.

# Conclusion

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2021 marks our seventh year of operation. The pandemic has once again had a major impact on our activities this year. It has also had a disastrous impact on the European Quarter. In the coming years we will clearly have to do everything we can to revitalise this district economically, but also to give it a new impetus, a new urban face, a real identity.

But we want this report to offer a positive message. A culture of dialogue is increasingly taking root, with both European and Brussels political leaders ready to abandon their own positions and engage in joint reflection, to "get things done together" in the capital of Europe. The refurbishment of the Schuman Roundabout will be a first major milestone. The aim is to give a new face to this emblematic public space in the heart of the European Quarter and to turn it into a real meeting place for the people of Brussels, the public of the European institutions and tourists from all over the world.

Brussels must also regain its leading position in the world as a convention city. The Region must make even greater use of its role as the most politically influential host region. Brussels has the potential to rival global cities such as London or Paris but must continue to work hard to turn this potential into reality.

Several key moments ahead are bound to help. The Belgian presidency of the European Union, starting on 1 January 2024 will be a sterling opportunity to put our Region in the international spotlight. And, further ahead, let's think about Brussels' candidacy as cultural capital 2030, coupled with the celebration of Belgium's 200th anniversary and the transformation of the Cinquantenaire Park, Belgium's largest museum complex.

As the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations, we have a role to play here by virtue of our function as an interface between the Brussels authorities and the European and international authorities settled in the Region. But our success depends to a large extent on the openness of the regional administrative and political structures to the role of our Office and on their knowledge and recognition of our missions.

We cannot stress enough that we are fully at the service of the Region and its Government and that we will continue to contribute to building the future of Brussels as an international capital.

We would like to thank the Brussels Government for the confidence it has bestowed upon our work, and in particular the Minister-President and the Secretary of State for European and International Relations, who are our supervisory ministers.

Finally, a word of thanks is in order for the small but dynamic team at the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations. None of this would have been possible without their commitment, skills, and contribution.



**Karin IMPENS**  
*Director*

**Alain HUTCHINSON**  
*Commissioner*

On the initiative of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region:



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Team **Lease contracts** Nationaliteit  
Séminaires **Huurovereenkomst** **Europe** **Taksen** Expat  
Mission Solidarité **Onthaal** Desk **Brussels** Welcome  
**Public space** Dynamic **Expats** Desk  
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