



2020

Annual report

of the Brussels Commissioner for
Europe and International Organisations

commissioner
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europe & international

Preface



Brussels is known as "the Capital of Europe" due to its diversity, accessibility and above all the presence of the main European Union bodies and numerous other key intergovernmental institutions. This international dimension is reflected in its population, a third of which consists of non-Belgian citizens from around 180 different countries.

The Brussels-Capital Region may not have a large surface area, but its growing international role has led to it becoming a global region and a political powerhouse where consultations and decisions on vital issues for our planet are constantly being taken at both multilateral and bilateral levels.

Over the years, Brussels has gradually become one of the world's major international capitals. The presence of leading international institutions and their impact on our region's economy thus represent undeniable assets which many other cities and regions can only dream of!

It has taken time, a lot of time, for many Bruxellois to become aware of this evolution, to appreciate its true worth, and finally to accept it.

The perception of these beneficial effects has long been eclipsed by supposed disadvantages, but now the balance is starting to shift. With the arrival of new people and new generations, even the initial sceptics have gradually come to appreciate the positive aspects of this "exceptional" status. These days, the most attentive observers acknowledge this as a fact, while the younger generations are enthused by the positive effect of our city-region's global role upon their future.

Meanwhile, the recent developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic have turned our world completely upside-down... The lockdowns and supporting measures have radically changed how we organise our lives, our society and our economy... What's more, we're having to be more attentive than ever to this "international" status that's so vitally important for our economy and employment, as well as for the appeal of Brussels to visitors and the return of those linked to our region's international role.

That is why I wish to once again draw the attention of Brussels' political and social stakeholders to the ever-clearer impact of this international stature on the prosperity of our region and its municipalities, as well as on employment, culture, multilingualism, touristic appeal, etc.

In the wake of this pandemic which has greatly affected the region, it is more vital than ever to sustainably anchor this international presence in our local context and in our regional policies!

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:

SHAPE A HOST REGION

POLICY under regional competences and in harmony with the development of the Region and the interests of its citizens.

MAKE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

to the Brussels Regional Government on all projects that might have an impact both on international organisations and on the Brussels urban landscape.

PERPETUATE THE STRUCTURAL RELATIONS

between the Brussels (regional and local) authorities and the European institutions, international organisations and diplomatic missions located in Brussels.

ACT AS SINGLE CONTACT POINT

for all European institutions and international organisations through the institutional liaison desk.

WELCOME THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

through the customised administrative support offered by the Expat Welcome Desk.

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 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 as 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**

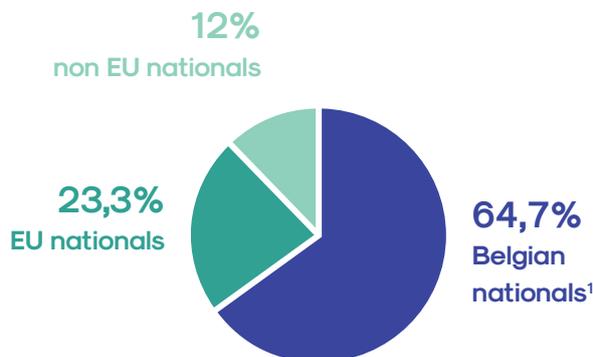
2.3 Population

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 January 2020, Brussels had a population of **1.218.255 habitants**, of which:



¹ 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 The CEIO as privileged point of contact

In 2019, the CEIO further developed synergies and fostered cooperation to provide our policy and administrative partners in Brussels with timely information on issues related to the European institutions. In return, the EU institutions increasingly see the CEIO as the single contact point for all matters relating to their presence in Brussels.

Our sphere of action covers all the areas for which the Brussels Region is competent. We take a proactive approach to resolve potential problems at an early stage and in a structural way. On the strength of its experience, the Expat Welcome Desk identifies global problems based on isolated practical cases and finding structural solutions.

A regional framework agreement of 2019 provides for structural consultation between the State Secretary for European and International Relations and hub.brussels, Brussels International, visit.brussels, the CEIO and the representatives of the ministers in charge of the Image (promotion) of Brussels. The dialogue was launched in 2020, with coordination meetings on 21.01, 15.05, 14.07 and 9.12.



High level meeting BCRG-EU on 03.03.2020 at the BIP

This consultation aims to better align the missions and actions of these organisations and administrations, particularly with regard to the Region's growing international role. These sessions of the regional stakeholders in foreign policy put the CEIO's work more prominently on the partners' radar with:

- the participation of the CEIO in the Brussels chapter of the diplomatic days for young trainee diplomats hosted by hub.brussels on 24 January 2020
- the participation of the CEIO in the European Correspondents' meeting organised by Brussels International on 11 February 2020
- its participation in the regional Brexit Task Force on citizens' rights
- the CEIO's association with the "Brussels House" project, a pilot project developed by hub.brussels with visit.brussels aiming at opening a common showcase of the Region in Milan and Berlin (meetings on 24 July and 21 October 2020).

The CEIO also facilitated meetings:

- in view of the European Multilingualism Day, the European Parliament met with the cabinet of Minister Gatz, competent for multilingualism in the Brussels Region, on 5 and 12 March 2020
- In preparation for the European institutions' role in Bright Brussels, the CEIO coordinated two meetings on 9 July and 8 October 2020

On 2 March 2020, a meeting took place with the Director General of the Local Authorities Administration "local.brussels" on the theme of the participation of EU citizens in local elections.

As in previous years, regular consultations were held with the Inter-ministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (HNP) on several issues.

Also, the CEIO welcomed the new Belgian Permanent Representative to the European Union, Ambassador Vandevorde, on 11 September 2020.

4 The CEIO as a key player in bid books

In 2020, the Brussels-Capital Region was associated by the federal government in preparing the bid book for the European Cybersecurity Competence Center - ECCC. Meetings were held on 18 and 26 June and 7 and 14 July 2020.

At the instigation of the cabinet of the State Secretary for European and International Relations, several flexible and attractive locations for the ECCC were proposed. With support from the regional development agency citydev. brussels, a selection of potential sites was identified, each of which offering the highest service level and meeting the Centre's criteria in terms of size and meeting facilities, but also for the technical infrastructure needed for its activities.

Among other things, they were able to provide, at short notice, adequate office accommodation with the required logistics and space for offices, meeting rooms and off-site archiving, high-performance telecommunications and data storage networks, as well as the appropriate physical and IT security standards to ensure a smooth

and timely setup. The CEIO's Expat Welcome Desk was proposed as staff support service, being an exceptional asset for an international host city, and one that has been highlighted in all of Belgium's recent official bid books for attracting European and international organisations.

BELGIUM: TICKING ALL THE BOXES

BID FOR THE EUROPEAN CYBERSECURITY INDUSTRIAL, TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH COMPETENCE CENTRE



5 The CEIO as a knowledge centre

To conduct an effective host city policy, it is essential to be well informed about host city policies elsewhere. Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to undertake any study visits in 2020. Nonetheless, we continued to closely monitor our position compared to other host cities. Host cities often face common challenges, and different approaches abroad can be a source of inspiration for our city-region.

The cost of living can be a key factor in the choice of where to establish an international institution. For example, the costs of living influence the salaries of EU officials. The salaries of EU staff working in countries other than Belgium or Luxembourg are subject to a correction mechanism related to the cost of living in the city where they work. This 'correction coefficient' accounts for differences between the cost of living in the different EU locations and in Brussels and Luxembourg, factoring them into the salaries of EU staff. Since living in Bucharest, for example, a candidate city for the ECCC, is less expensive than in Brussels and most certainly in Luxembourg, the staff of an agency based there will be paid a lower salary due to the correction coefficient. This may save an agency a considerable part of its budget. We noted that the position of Brussels has changed compared to that of Luxembourg due to an increasing difference in the cost of living. Whereas Luxembourg was once cheaper than Brussels, the cost of living there is now 10 to 15% more expensive. The main factor explaining this difference is housing. All these aspects weigh in the balance when bids are assessed.

The Region's international image as the 'capital of Europe' is obviously tied to its relationship with Strasbourg, which does not enjoy the same 'institutional capital' as Brussels. Strasbourg's political play against Brussels during the pandemic was very impressive. It launched a full-scale attack on Brussels through the French Secretary of State for European Affairs, the mayor, and the Grand Est region, when the plenary sessions of the European Parliament were canceled during the March and September confinements due to the pandemic, thereby reviving for the umpteenth time the discussion on the French EU-seat. In the face of this weakened position of the European Parliament's seat in Strasbourg, the reaction of the French Secretary of State for European Affairs was virulent and resulted in a full-scale political offensive against Brussels.

Strasbourg has also voiced its strong opposition to the rebuilding or renovation of the Paul-Henri Spaak building in Brussels, where the plenary parliamentary sessions are held, and actively campaigns against the European Parliament's plans on this issue. However, Belgium and the Brussels region guard against getting dragged into this debate, which is primarily played out in the press.

6 □ Communication

The CEIO/EWD team has built up years of expertise on Brussels and is embedded in a wide network of institutional and administrative partners at all levels. But the potential of the EWD is still partly under-exploited due to insufficient awareness of its actions among its target group. To increase visibility, the Expat Welcome Desk should work to become the unique reference for expatriates in Brussels in all matters concerning their professional, administrative, cultural and recreational life in our capital. In this perspective, the CEIO started a reflection in 2020 on the conversion of the EWD into a virtual one-stop shop and digital guide to help international citizens find their way around the Brussels' and Belgian administrative landscape.

Although there was no communications officer in the team and no significant media budget, the year 2020 saw the conception and launch of a first and modest communication campaign on Facebook to raise awareness for the EWD's work, with the help of the KWIN communications agency, selected through a tender procedure. We used Facebook targeting and Google Ads to create animated advertisements that ran from September to December 2020.



Work also progressed on the translation of the website into French and Dutch, the main challenge being to communicate briefly and concisely on often quite complex subjects.

In 2020, work also started on the creation of a communication path to provide a more interactive communication tool with international residents of Brussels via an online participation platform. The platform will enable dialogue with the international community in a context of community development and greater participation.

However, this does not mean that the existing communication mix is abandoned, with its monthly input in the visit.brussels newsletter for the international community, printed information such as the "10 steps" brochure for people moving to Brussels, and the CEIO's general introduction folder.

And finally, given the Covid19 pandemic, the official launch of the CEIO publication "Brussels - International Capital: the figures 2020" was limited to a press release published on 23 June 2020. This document remains one of our flagship publications on the Region's international dimension. It shows how the presence of international institutions has made Brussels a global pole of attraction and the major impact this has on the Brussels economy and employment.

7 Perspectives for 2021

According to the External Relations policy paper (2019-2024) of the Brussels' Regional Government, expatriates and other foreign workers are the best ambassadors of our Region abroad. They should return to their home countries with a sentiment about Brussels as a warm, welcoming, and open region. The high-quality administrative support we offer them can certainly contribute to this, but we must do more to promote the integration of the international community than just help them with the many formalities involved in their stay as a foreign worker. Therefore, the CEIO will focus on bridging the gap with Brussels' international residents in 2021 through a project to accompany and support this momentum in a harmonious and comprehensive participatory process.

8 The team and the governing bodies of CEIO

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

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Commissioner

Management

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Expat Welcome Desk

Amélie BOVY
Senior Legal Adviser

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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	Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alain HUTCHINSON, President • Daan FONCK • Linde HAVEN • Evelyne HUYTEBROECK • Julien JOST • Aurélie MAHOUX • Jeremy ONKELINX • Rebecca OVERLOOP • Alexandra PHILIPPE • Frédérick PIRARD • Lesia RADELICKI • Laurent VAN DER ELST 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alain HUTCHINSON, President • Daan FONCK • Linde HAVEN • 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 statutes of the CEIO, the 2019 annual report was presented to the European Affairs Committee of the Brussels Parliament on 14 September 2020.



Institutional liaison



1 The function of institutional liaison

1.1 Context

The Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) recognises the **growing importance of the presence of European and international institutions**, particularly their influence on the regional economy, the creation of employment, professional and leisure tourism, the attractiveness of the Region, international recognition of the city and the cultural richness of its increasingly-diverse residents.

To find the right balance in a mixed living environment and guarantee the quality of life for its inhabitants, the **BCR assists and works with this international presence through the Institutional Liaison desk** of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO). Particular attention is paid to the consequences of this presence on the dynamics of the territory, in terms of the environment, town planning, architectural heritage, mobility, tourism, as well as the development of public spaces (both their security and their conviviality).

In these areas, the CEIO is the **single point of contact** for all organisations that have set up in Brussels. This includes the European institutions, which have thousands of employees and dozens of buildings concentrated in a few sites in Brussels, international organisations, embassies and diplomatic missions, and regional and local representations spread across the whole Region.

The objective is to break with the past – when the establishment of international organisations' headquarters followed top-down, real-estate driven planning approaches, causing traumatism not yet disappeared in certain neighbourhoods – and move to a **strategy** which takes account of the needs of the different parties involved, including local residents, employees, commuters, cultural operators, tourists, shops, and new businesses developing in the area.

1.2 Mission

The Institutional Liaison desk fulfils the **role of intermediary** between the Brussels public authorities and European and international organisations for every aspect relating to their presence in the Brussels region. Specifically, this means that we act as a **single point of contact** for all requests that fall within the competences of regional authorities, notably relating to town planning, security, mobility, environment, and the development of public space. In a wider perspective, our objective is to project a **positive image** of the Region, position the city-region as an **international capital** and thereby contest with international competition.

1.3 Strengths

Our expertise

- Knowledge of the Belgian, European and international institutional system and context;
- Expertise in the fields of town planning, mobility, security and the environment;
- Project management and consultation methods;
- Privileged contacts with Belgian ministerial cabinets and administrations, and international organisations;
- Dynamic multilingual, multi-skilled team.

Our most important contacts

- Brussels Ministers;
- Regional administrations and agencies;
- Brussels Parliament;
- Mayors and Aldermen in Brussels communes;
- Town planning and mobility services of Brussels municipalities;
- Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (ICZ/CIPS) and federal ministry offices and administrations;
- Political and administrative heads in EU institutions and international organisations;
- Embassies and diplomatic missions;
- Regional and local representations.

2. Method

A POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Once a year, the CEIO organises a **political summit** meeting that brings together the Brussels government (BCRG) and representatives of the European institutions at the highest level (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, European Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, European External Action Service). These meetings provide an opportunity to **review** the various projects planned by the European institutions in Brussels as well as large development projects that the BCR has undertaken to complete, particularly in the European quarter. The **decisions** taken and the **directions** agreed during these meetings form the basis of the CEIO's daily work: setting up working groups, define new areas of collaboration between the EU institutions and regional and local administrations, and exchange information in order to find solutions to challenges when dealing with the planning of public space. Since the end of 2017, the **minutes** of this meeting (written in three languages: EN, FR, NL) are systematically added to the agenda of the BCR government.

The 7th edition of the meeting between the Brussels Government and the European institutions took place on 3 March 2020 in the offices of the regional government (located in the BIP-building), with attendance in person. The participants debated issues such as the redevelopment of the Rond-Point Schuman and the various mobility projects planned in the European institutions' district. At the end of the meeting, the institutions discussed the early measures taken to tackle the emergence of the pandemic, obviously without expecting that the respective professional schedules and priorities would be substantially revised a few days later.



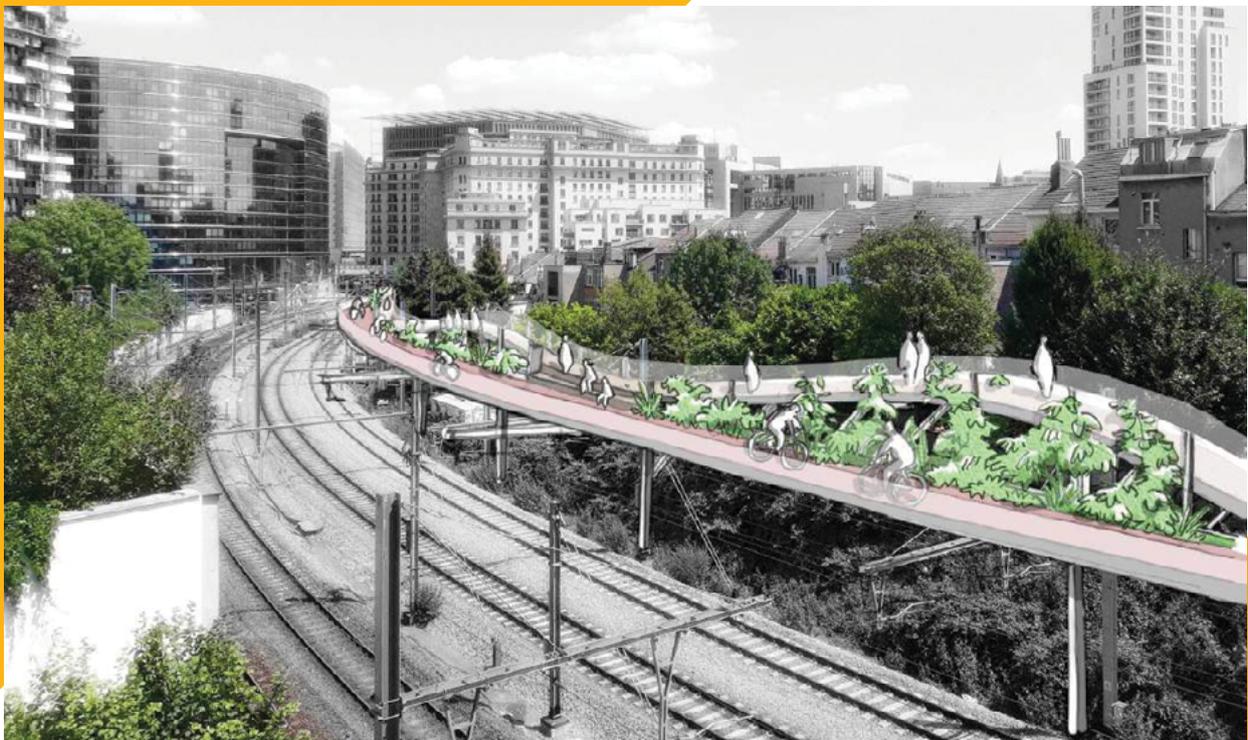
High level meeting BCRG-EU on 03.03.2020 at the BIP

WORKING GROUPS

In order to treat specific questions as effectively as possible, the Institutional Liaison desk of the CEIO organises and coordinates working groups. These working groups enable key persons to **meet** on technical issues, **conduct regular and constructive dialogue**, and **build mutual confidence** amongst all those involved. Working groups are set up based on decisions taken in the BCRG-EU Summits.

During 2020, the following working groups convened:

- The **working group "Tourism"** with visit.brussels, aimed at promoting the appeal of the European quarter and the synergy of the visitor services of the different EU institutions. This forum, active since 2015, discusses new cooperation projects and allows partners to share information. For example, the Europe Day event and Fête de l'Iris show increasing cooperation, by sharing and exchanging promotional platforms such as press support, shuttle services, placing EU displays at the Fête de l'Iris, etc. This cooperation has proven to have a positive impact. In the pre-Covid period, the European Quarter (including the Cinquantenaire Park) had become the most visited area in the Brussels Region (cf. the tourist barometer for museums and attractions - visit.brussels). In 2020, most of the projects were suspended and several EU institutions introduced digital initiatives for their visitors.
- The **working group on the "Luxembourg-Schuman connection"**, to prepare the prospects for constructing a cyclo-pedestrian route between the two poles of the district.



AD HOC ASSISTANCE

The Institutional Liaison desk receives a certain number of *ad hoc* requests from international organisations on a variety of subjects (road works obstructing passage, malfunction of public equipment, poor maintenance of parks or public spaces, etc.). **Assisting** them in their dealings with local and regional authorities and helping all parties involved to **reach agreement** is an essential part of the desk's daily work.

DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Institutional Liaison desk pays particular attention to the **development of the European quarter** and stays in contact on this subject with all levels of authority involved in each project, notably the Region, the municipalities most concerned by the presence of institutions on their territory (City of Brussels, Ixelles, Etterbeek and Saint-Josse) and the federal government. In this respect, permanent contact is maintained with the Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (CIPS/ICZ) concerning building projects and mobility issues.

It is essential that this dialogue is maintained in order to ensure the quality of urban space in the future and thereby ensure the harmonious development of the European quarter, the Region and its inhabitants.



PERMANENT EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

An integral part of the desk's activities is to **listen** to and understand all entities that operate in the European quarter, **stimulate new areas of cooperation** between Brussels and international authorities, and particularly, **encourage the exchange of information** in order to overcome specific issues relating to the development of public space.

3 Issues dealt with in 2020

Throughout the year, the CEIO followed up on major projects and resolved a range of concrete issues.

Some of these projects are quite extensive, both in terms of resources deployed and time committed.

Their main thematic areas are as follows:

HANDICAP AND PRM ACCESSIBILITY

The Human Resources Managers of the EU institutions approached the Brussels Region via the CEIO about the difficulties experienced by their employees, collaborators and visitors with disabilities and/or reduced mobility in reaching their offices and, more generally, the area around the buildings of the EU institutions.

In addition, the EU institutions noted that lack of information is causing additional problems for persons with disabilities arriving in Belgium. Staff (trainees or employees on fixed-term contracts) of the institutions who move to Belgium for a short period of time do not have their disability status automatically recognised in Belgium (even when certified in their country of origin). The recognition process can take a long time, usually up to 6 months, sometimes even longer than the expected employment experience in Brussels.

The absence of automatic recognition generates many problems: in general, all public or semi-public assistance to persons with disabilities delivered on the Belgian territory requires a recognition document. Hence, it appears that for this reason, persons with disabilities or reduced mobility have declined a work experience in Brussels (trainee or short-term contract) at a European institution.

The CEIO hosted an informal meeting on 27 February to review the issue. Participants included the key administrations in charge of the issues raised: the Federal Health administration, the regional administration for Mobility, the regional public transport company, and the regional Community administrations (Cocom) managing personal services.

Even if for some issues (such as access to a database of available adapted housing) a solution could not yet be found, the meeting did allow some matters to progress (negotiation on the tactile tiles between the European institutions and the regional administration) and others to be resolved (the federal ministry granting the possibility of a procedure reducing process-time for requests from potential non-Belgian short-term employees or trainees).

THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S HEMICYCLE

Early 2020, the administration of the European Parliament informed the Brussels Region of its intention to initiate an international architectural competition for the structurally deficient hemicycle building of the European Parliament. The competition called upon bidding consortiums to submit projects involving either demolition-reconstruction projects or renovation of the existing building, rating these according to a series of circular economy criteria and environmental requirements.

Since the start of the procedure, the CEIO worked with the European Parliament administration to facilitate the completion of the competition's bid book and its compliance with Brussels' urban planning standards. It coordinated the preparatory exchanges with the regional and local authorities and participated in the jury that assessed the submitted projects (representing the regional government alongside the urban planning administration). The Master Architect ('Bouwmeester') of the Brussels Region was invited among the appointed experts for the competition jury.

With the other regional representatives, the Commissioner for Europe ensured that the elements proposed by the architecture companies were well incorporated into the urban and heritage context of the European Quarter.

The jury's selection of projects was then forwarded to the Bureau of the European Parliament, which will decide on the next stage of the project.



SECURITY

Since the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, the regional administration has witnessed a significant increase in requests for street furniture and measures (road closures, suppression of parking spaces, camera surveillance, etc.) to secure sites considered to be under threat. Most of these sites being headquarters of international organisations, European institutions and diplomatic missions, the CEIO has been called upon to bring stakeholders to the table and accompany the discussions.

The escalating number of requests rapidly led to certain observations: the regional administration lacks guidelines for assessing the relevance of these measures in terms of site planning, there should be adequate parameters to establish the probability of threats to the sites, and the current case-by-case analysis should be replaced by a district wide approach, since the majority of the "high risk" sites are within the European quarter's perimeter.

The Guide for the integration of security devices in the public space in the Brussels-Capital Region, drafted by the regional agency perspective.brussels, is the major orientation tool when making choices in specific security scenarios and clearly states the "security by design" approach adopted by the Brussels Region.

Meanwhile, the CEIO regularly contributes to discussions on regional administration Brussels Prevention and Security (BPS) issues relating to international organisations and participates in the meetings of the "Security Technical Committee".

This shows how the Brussels-Capital Region increasingly positions itself as a reflection, testing and steering centre for matters concerning the introduction of the safety aspect in the design of public spaces as part of spatial planning and urban policies.

ENVIRONMENT

The CEIO worked closely with the Cabinet of the Minister of the Environment and the regional administration to assist stakeholders during the examination of the **environmental permit applications for the buildings of the European Parliament**, in order to regularise the existing situation.

In addition, the CEIO is regularly consulted on many aspects of the **management and maintenance of green areas** such as the Parc Léopold and the Parc du Cinquantenaire. Be it organising events, ensuring the quality of the facilities or making access easier for visitors, the CEIO has brought the relevant parties together on every occasion.

TOURISM, IMAGE AND CULTURE

European Quarter Networking Events

The European Quarter Networking Events & Lunches intended for all stakeholders in the European Quarter have continued in 2020. On 13 February 2020, the CEIO hosted a live session for the last time. The meetings on 25 June and 18 September 2020 were held online.

The European Quarter Networking Events & Lunches are major networking events for the European Quarter. The purpose of this initiative is to monitor, improve and structure the Quarter's territorial marketing process. In this regard, these events are communication and networking tools for all stakeholders involved in the European Quarter with their initiatives and projects. They are also intended to provide objective information on the EU's Brussels visitor offer to all the institutional, cultural and



tourist partners and to encourage valuable contacts by creating networks, partnerships and tangible projects among the partners, especially in terms of interactive communication. This should lead to new projects that contribute to the development of tourism in the European Quarter.

The meetings in 2020 had to be adapted to the health requirements and were held by videoconference, focusing on the devastating impact of the pandemic on the attractiveness of tourism, the economic climate and the cultural life of the European Quarter.

A branding project for the European Quarter

This initiative was launched in 2019 and implemented in 2020. It aimed to exploit Brussels' unique asset compared to other European capitals, i.e. the presence of the EU, by strategically embedding it in the area with the prime objective to promote the European Quarter. To achieve agreement among all stakeholders, including not just the European institutions, but also local authorities, retailers, museums and other cultural players, we opted for the technique of co-creation and territorial marketing, with guidance from a specialised communications agency.

Several workshops were conducted (on 13 January and 10 February 2020), the technical committee charged with steering the process met on 16 August, 3 September and 14 December 2020, and a proposal for a European Quarter brand was launched on 11 May 2020. These workshops produced a strategy document intended to be the basis for further action, including a prestigious event and the implementation of the brand. The Covid crisis, however, compelled the initiators of this project to temporarily suspend the strategy, with a view to restarting it in 2021. This is particularly necessary as the European district is one of the areas most affected by the pandemic in the Brussels Region.

4 Regional and local representations

Brussels is the **international capital for regional and local lobbying**. It has become the norm for regions in EU member states to establish a representation to the EU in Brussels.

However, these regional offices do not have official status and do not generally function under any legal form. They therefore often face **administrative problems** when setting up. To remedy these problems, the region introduced **regional certification** in 1994. Although this does not give delegations official status, it does nevertheless indicate that the office in question is recognised by the BCR as an organisation representing an intra-national collectivity. In practice, the regional certificate often helps the representations to overcome practical issues. Every two year it is accorded to **240 regional and local entities** and is signed by the regional State Secretary in charge of European and International Relations, with the CEIO carrying out all the administrative work.

Regional representations have been created with very **specific objectives**, such as to obtain European funds, influence European policy, boost the geo-political visibility of their territory, as well as to join networks and the international community within the EU sphere. They are therefore seen as partners within the European political community with their core activities being the **collection, processing and filtering of information on EU policies and institutional developments of interest to their region**.

The BCR does not have this type of representation to defend its interests with the EU, the Brussels delegation to the EU being integrated in the Permanent Representation of Belgium and its activity being aligned to the one of this latter.



A delegation from Tokyo Metropolitan Government visiting CEIO

5 Conclusion

Since its inception, the CEIO occupies a key role, in particular by building a strong image as a solid interface and quality go-between among its counterparts, that allows Belgium in general and the Brussels-Capital Region in particular to fulfil and strengthen the hospitality policies towards international institutions. This key aspect of the host policy conducted by the CEIO deserves greater attention. This might be achieved by boosting the coordination processes between the various policy levels. The creation of dialogue and coordination mechanisms in which the CEIO plays a leading role would indeed help to make Belgium an even more attractive location for international organisations. The CEIO's skills and the successful contacts it has established with its Belgian and international partners over the past years should be valorised and build upon within any existing or future body when building tomorrow's host nation policy.



Official meeting with European Commissioner Johannes Hahn on 28.09.2020



Expatriate Welcome Desk



The 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).



1

MISSION

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**
- > Via our website: **www.commissioner.brussels**
- > By appointment



Our target audience

- Staff of European institutions: officials, parliamentary assistants, seconded national experts, contracted staff and trainees
- MEP's
- 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

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Brussels Ministry of Economy and Employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 contact 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 – Office 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.



Expat Welcome Desk Antenna at 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.

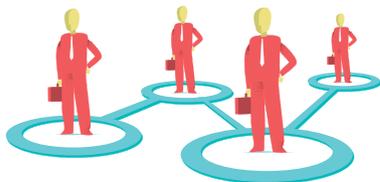
EWD ADVISES by examining each case on an individual basis, offering personalised advice and providing genuine consultancy work.

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.).



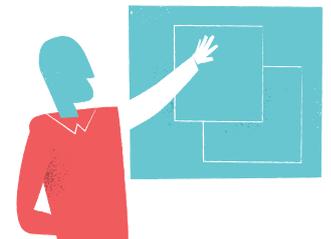
EWD ORGANISES seminars throughout the year for its audiences (officials and interns in European institutions and international organisations, spouses of European officials, diplomats, etc.).

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.



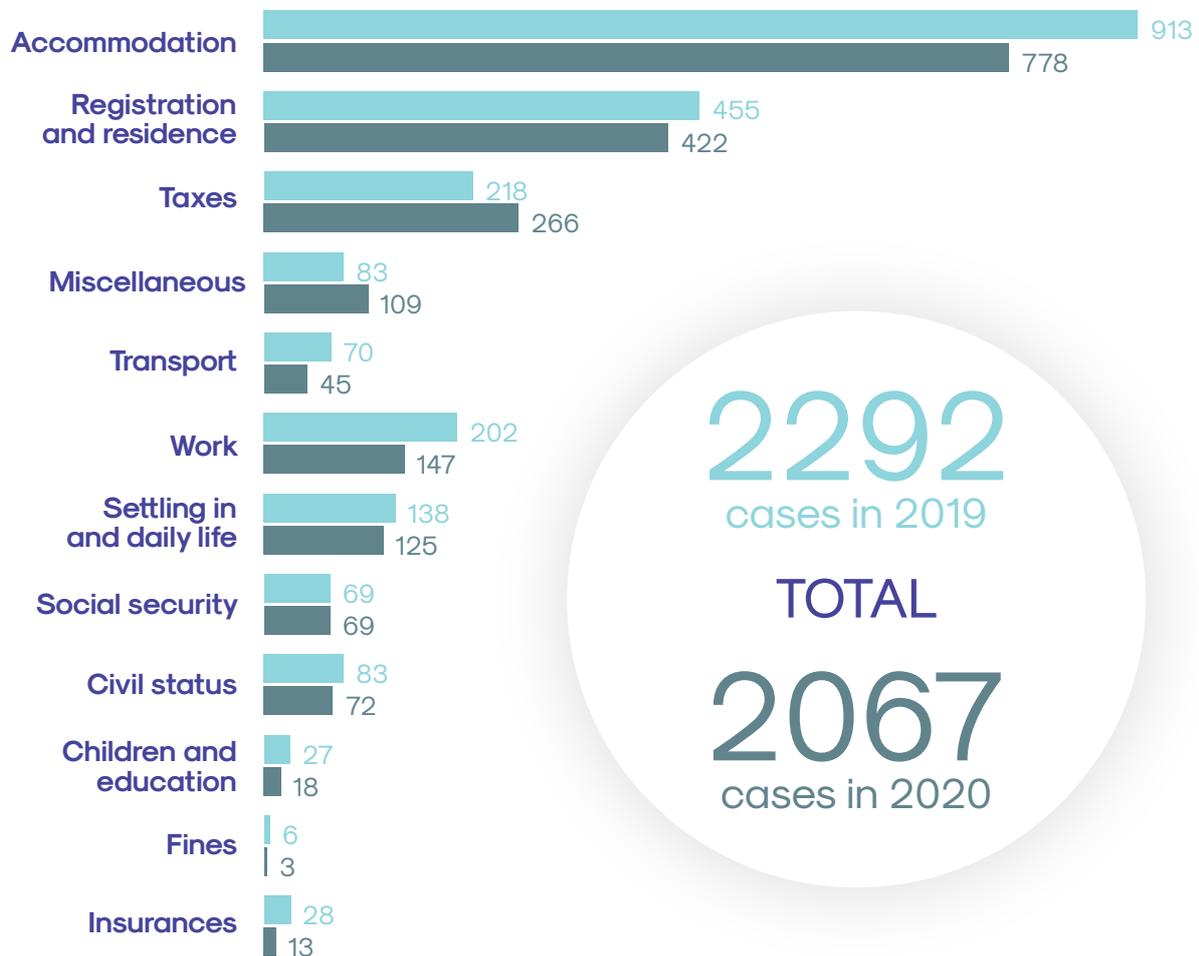
EWD CONVEYS A POSITIVE IMAGE of Brussels by providing a high quality, tailor-made welcome to the growing international community in Brussels. Anyone who is given the necessary and timely assistance during their time in Brussels will be an excellent ambassador for our Region abroad



2. Cases taken up in 2020

2.1 Statistics

Number of EWD cases by type, over two years (2019 and 2020):



A slight reduction can be seen in the number cases treated in 2020, probably linked to the closure of our European Parliament antenna from March 2020 due to the Covid-19 measures. Located within the EP, this office welcomes members of the European Parliament and its staff on a daily basis (with or without appointment) in order to help them with their administrative procedures in Brussels.

2.2 Testimonials



TOMMI (FINLAND)

“A very BIG thank you for having taken the time to meet with our new S&D trainees in September! Meeting with the Expat Welcome Desk is an important part of our introduction week. The first days and weeks are very important and create the basis of a successful traineeship – in this aspect, your input was especially valuable. We look forward to continue to cooperate with you.”



UNA (CROATIA)

“I wanted to inform you that the landlord refused my application and the agency returned my deposit. Thank you very much for your support and it was crucial for me understanding better Belgium Law on renting and tenant rights. Please, continue doing a good job and I am happy staying in touch and meeting you in person for ‘Thank You’ once the covid-19 measures are loosened.”



MANUEL (SPAIN)

“I am stagiaire at the Commission coming to live to Brussels as of September. I’m from Valencia (Spain). First of all, thank you very much for your web page! The information you provide there is being really useful and making my life easier for all necessary arrangements to start living in Brussels :-)”



VICTOR (MEXICO)

“Ever since I arrived in Brussels for a traineeship in 2016, the Expat Welcome Desk has met each of my queries with a prompt response, sound advice, and a broad smile. As a non-EU citizen, their guidance has been particularly important each time I have had to apply for a work permit, making the process smoother and facilitating communication between all the relevant parties. This has allowed me to make informed decisions and continue to grow professionally in Brussels. I can only commend the Expat Welcome Desk for the great job that its dedicated and infinitely patient team does every day!”

3 □ Meetings and issues

3.1 Recruitment of non-EU citizens who are "habitual residents" by international organisations

On 15 September 2020, a meeting was held at the CIPS with the aim of developing a smoother process to allow international organisations to recruit, as international civil servants, non-European citizens who are registered as "habitual residents" in Belgium without the need to submit individual work permit applications. The participants in this meeting were the Protocol Directorate, the Immigration Office, the Regional Public Services for Employment at Brussels and Walloon levels, and the CEIO.

These non-EU citizens already live on Belgian soil and are in possession of a residence permit from the municipality, but this is often linked to an individual application from a Belgian employer. As these individuals have been registered with the municipality for over 6 months, they cannot therefore benefit from the special identity card which would be issued by the Foreign Affairs Protocol service in the context of a post with an international organisation. By way of reminder, the Protocol service carries out the registration of international civil servants from international organisations by issuing them with a special residence permit in cases where they are recruited directly from their country of origin.

According to the Brussels Regional Employment Service, it would not be straightforward to relax the new rules put in place in 2019 and the only solution for an international organisation wishing to hire a non-EU citizen classified as a "habitual resident" is to submit an individual work permit application. The regional administration stressed, however, that an individual work permit application for an international civil servant post would never be rejected by them and that such applications would be fast-tracked.

The Protocol service is offering to play the role of intermediary to lighten the workload for the international organisations and to submit civil servants' individual applications on their behalf. Details of the specific process will be issued to all international organisations by the Protocol service once this has been finalised.

3.2 Taxation of grants awarded to trainees at the European institutions



During June 2020, several trainees contacted the CEIO's Expat Welcome Desk after having received notices of assessment from the Federal Public Service Finance indicating a sum due (varying from €250 to €1250), as a result of them having declared their training grant for the months spent as trainees within a European institution. These trainees were very surprised as although they knew that they had to declare these sums in their tax returns by attaching the training agreement, they were not expecting to be taxed on them, as this had always been the case for their predecessors.

This problem had never arisen before and the CEIO therefore raised this matter with the FPS Finance.

The Income Tax Department confirmed that the training agreement amounted to the performance of paid work within a hierarchical relationship constituting an employment contract and that therefore the payments made within the framework of the Schuman grant did indeed represent taxable earnings within the sense of article 30, 1°, and 31, para. 2, 1° of the 1992 Income Tax Code

On this basis, trainees are therefore currently required to declare their Schuman grants.

The Schuman Grants are higher than the minimum taxable income threshold following a new application mechanism introduced in 2018, namely a pro rata mechanism inserted into article 174/1 of the 1992 Income Tax Code (CIR 92) by the framework legislation of 25 December 2017. The amount of the portion exempted from taxable income is now calculated prorata temporis. The trainee must declare for how many months they have been in Belgium and if they have only been in the country for a few months, they cannot therefore benefit from the +/- €7500 non-taxable portion, only valid in the case of a full year employment. This explains why trainees may now be taxed a certain amount depending on their date of arrival.

This new process is applicable only from the 2018 tax year, which is why the issue of the tax regime for Schuman grants awarded to trainees by EU institutions has not previously arisen.

3.3 Application of the new Brussels child benefit scheme for children from the international community

Since 01.01.2020 in Brussels region, entitlement to child benefit payments is now granted based on legal domicile or the child's residence (article 4 of the decree of 25 April 2019 regulating the payment of child benefit). Entitlement to child benefit is therefore automatic in relation to any child residing legally within the Brussels Region, irrespective of the parent's work activity (as was previously the case). Consequently, the new regulations should also benefit the children of civil servants and officials from the European Union who live in Brussels.

The new regulations for Brussels do however stipulate a non-aggregation rule that fixes the principle of the subsidiarity of the right to child benefit in Brussels in relation to entitlement to foreign child benefit or provided for by the statutes of international institutions. In other words, the Brussels regime will pay the difference between the prioritised amount due from a foreign scheme or from an international institution, and the amount of the child benefit applicable in Brussels (if the latter is higher). However, to comply with European Court of Justice case law, the amounts of child benefit fixed by the Brussels regime are due as a priority in the case of employed professional activity of the European civil servant parent or of the spouse of the latter, within Belgium (see article 27 of the aforementioned decree).



3.4 The consequences of Brexit for the "citizens' rights" aspect

The United Kingdom left the EU on 1 February 2020 after the ratification of the withdrawal agreement and entered a transition period that ended on 31 December 2020, during the course of which the trade and cooperation agreement between the United Kingdom and the EU was finalised. During this transition period, the CEIO was faced with numerous questions from British citizens wishing to know if they could continue to reside in Belgium and with what type of residence card, whether they could continue to work without having to obtain work permits, and whether their family could still join them easily. Responses to all of these questions were provided by November 2020.

British citizens who were already residing in Belgium prior to 01.01.2021 do not need to undertake any procedure. Currently, they still have an E or E+ card. The Immigration Office will contact them in order to issue them with another residence permit, namely an M card. By the end of 2021 at the latest, all British citizens residing in Belgium will need to have this new residency document. This also means that these British citizens can continue to work here without applying for an individual permit.



Clear and reassuring information was also provided by the Foreign Affairs' Protocol Service to European civil servants holding a special identity card who will be protected by the withdrawal agreement. The right to obtain and hold a special residence permit is not linked to the holder's nationality but rather to their post or to their status as a family member. As long as an individual is employed by an international organisation, a consulate or a diplomatic mission, this person, together with their family members, will be entitled to a special residence permit for the duration of their post, whether the United Kingdom is an EU member or not.



Holders of special residence permits may however prefer to give up their special card and register under common law as beneficiaries of the withdrawal agreement.

Consequently, employees of international organisations who are residing in Belgium with a special residence permit at the end of the transition phase will be covered by the withdrawal agreement and will be able to register with their municipality as beneficiaries at any time (including after the transition phase), subject to certain conditions.

The main conditions are that a potential beneficiary must ensure the cancellation of their special residence permit before registering as a beneficiary of the withdrawal agreement with the municipality, and that said registration as a beneficiary must take place within the three months following the cancellation of the special residence permit. It is also important to note that after having held a type P or type S special residence permit for five years, British citizens benefiting from the withdrawal agreement are entitled to an M card granting them permanent residency.

As for questions linked to obtaining Belgian nationality, they were slightly lower in number this year but they continue to concern British citizens, who see this as a way of ensuring that their rights in Belgium are maintained in terms of both residency and work.

4 Seminars

Depending on the demand 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.



09/09/2020
Webinar "Life in times of Covid-19: measures trainees (Council of the EU) in Brussels need to know"
65 PARTICIPANTS

14/01/2020
"How to navigate and understand the Belgian School System in Brussels"
55 PARTICIPANTS



04/06/2020
Webinar "Filling your Belgian income tax return"
110 PARTICIPANTS

20/10/2020
Webinar "Networking Meetings of Diplomatic Liaison Personnel in Brussels"
24 PARTICIPANTS

27/10/2020
Webinar "Social security consequences of cross border employment in the EU"
61 PARTICIPANTS

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 and administrative matters by the EWD). Welcome packs containing our brochure “*Settle down guide*” are also distributed by visit.brussels. 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 European institutions trainees



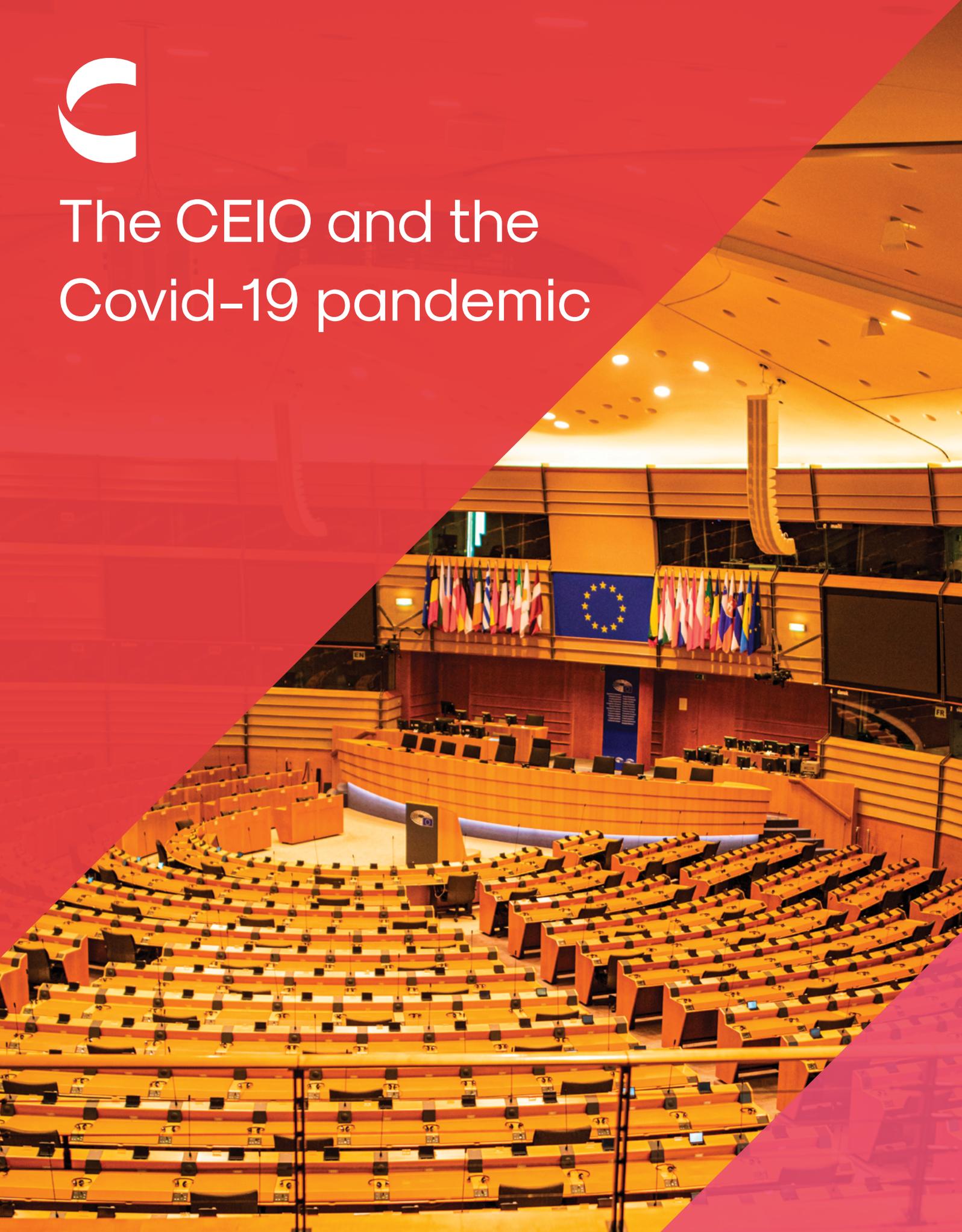
Welcome for trainees of the Council of the European Union, 03.02.2020

08/01/2020 & 23/09/2020
**Welcome for students
from the *University of Kent***

23/09/2020
**Expat information web fair organised
by The Bulletin and ING**



The CEIO and the Covid-19 pandemic



1 □ A seat policy in time of pandemic



Cooperation between the European institutions and the Brussels authorities was considerably intensified in 2020. The Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) definitely had a key role in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and proved to be a real foothold for the Brussels administrations and Government and the international institutions on the regional territory.

For example, the Secretaries-General of the European institutions and the European Schools received several letters from the Commissioner's office regarding Covid measures. In parallel, Commissioner Hutchinson hosted two meetings between the Secretaries General of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council and the virologist Yves Van Laethem, the Belgian inter-federal spokesperson on the pandemic.

In this respect, it is also important to highlight the solidarity of the European Parliament with the Region when it was struck hard by the pandemic. The EP made its under-used infrastructure and services available to its various host cities during the crisis. In Brussels, the EP made its chauffeurs available to transport doctors and nurses overnight. The institutions' restaurants in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg prepared two thousand meals a day for distribution to the homeless by social organisations and in the building on Square De Meeûs, a shelter was set up to accommodate around 100 vulnerable women for several months.

2 The Expat Welcome Desk facing Covid-19

Housing and lease issues

As of mid-March 2020, when the containment started, the EWD was primarily called upon for issues relating to leases. Certain focus groups, such as trainees from the EU institutions, found themselves in a delicate situation as their traineeship was abruptly interrupted and they wanted to join their family in the home country as soon as possible. In this situation they would like to break their lease early and lose as little money as possible.

Overall, expat tenants contacted us to see if rents could be reduced or suspended during the containment, or how they could arrange a move in this complicated period.



Renewal of Single and Residence Permits

Non-European nationals who obtained a single permit last year through a Belgian employer also called on our services to renew their single permit. It took some time for the Brussels Economy and Employment service to get organised and set up a solution allowing people to send their documents by e-mail via a general address, which eventually proved to be very effective.

Several non-EU citizens have also contacted us about the possibility of extending their visa or residence permit, as they were stranded in Belgium because airports were blocked or borders in their home countries remained closed. The Foreigners' Office posted on its website a series of instructions, also in English, on the procedure to follow for visa extension.

Travelling during the pandemic

We received many questions related to the entry and exit of the territory during the lockdown by people living in Belgium but needing to travel for professional reasons. In some cases, there were also questions about family members who wanted to return to Belgium to be with their relatives. Regulations were not always quite clear and therefore often open to interpretation, which did not make our task any easier. We should also mention that the Protocol Office provided good communication to the public of the International Organisations through numerous verbal notes published on its website. Although non-essential travel to and from Belgium was prohibited, the Vienna Convention and seat agreements allowed for the application of flexibilities in favour of staff members of diplomatic missions or consular posts and employees of international organisations.



Testing and Quarantine

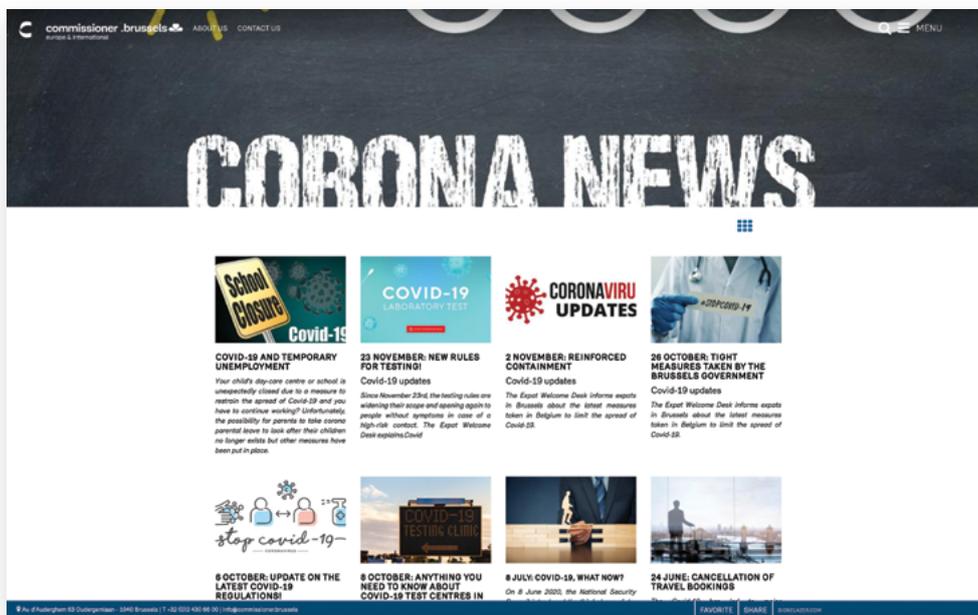
There were numerous questions about testing and quarantine compliance due to the constant changes and developments in the health situation. This was a complex issue and the rules changed too often for expats to take in. Therefore, the EWD regularly communicated on this theme to its audience, as explained below in the communication chapter. Work-related quarantine exemption issues were also of considerable concern to the public of the European Parliament, especially the many MEPs.



3 The CEIO communication on Covid-19 measures

Articles from the Expat Welcome Desk

The trilingual articles (EN, FR, NL) from the Expat Welcome Desk were delivered through the visit.brussels newsletter "be.expat be.brussels" and HTML-mailings to our address database. The CEIO has been in constant touch with every European institution to share as widely as possible some of these articles with their staff via the intranets.



Posts on Facebook, LinkedIn and the CEIO website

From the first day of the containment, all these articles have also been immediately posted on Facebook and on the website. A dedicated "coronanews" webpage was created on the CEIO website, listing the latest measures in the response to the pandemic. It is also worth mentioning that the English version of our "coronanews" webpage has been acknowledged as the English language information source for Brussels by the regional health authority, COCOM, on its website Coronavirus.brussels.

4. Monitoring by the CEIO

The issue of whether expats left Brussels during the pandemic is often raised. The impact of the pandemic on the European Quarter was extremely high during the first nine months of the pandemic. The CEIO therefore closely monitors this situation and the signs which initially seemed to indicate this trend. Obviously, it is difficult to know exactly how many expats left Brussels in 2020. It is clear that some of them (especially the young, the single, the unattached), began to question their stay in Brussels and to feel vulnerable during the first strict lockdown in March 2020. With almost all jobs now teleworkable, many of these professionals no longer need to be physically present in Brussels. Telework is proving to be a very flexible concept. Moreover, Brussels is not the only place where highly skilled foreign workers have left (temporarily), often for quieter places. In several major cities around the world, it was observed that some of the expatriates preferred to leave the host country during the pandemic and return to their home country, as in London, Amsterdam, New-York and Singapore. Overall, however, there is little evidence that international workers - and certainly families - have left the Brussels Region in significant numbers due to the coronavirus epidemic.

In addition, the health crisis made it harder for newcomers to settle in the Brussels Region, as it became much more difficult to fulfil the necessary administrative requirements and to find housing during the pandemic. Everything had to be done virtually at some point. Moreover, the Corona measures were constantly changing, which made moving very difficult. The Expat Welcome Desk provided assistance to the relatively few newcomers moving to the Region during the pandemic.



5 The CEIO and the start of vaccination for international staff



In view of the vaccination campaign to be implemented from January 2021, the CEIO took part in an initial information meeting hosted by the Prime Minister's office for the European institutions on 4 December 2020. The meeting was attended by the head of the European Parliament's Medical Service, the representative of European Commissioner Hahn, responsible for seat policy, the Secretary-General of the Council and the Director-General of the European External Action Service. This meeting aimed to inform

the European institutions about the implementation of the vaccination strategy in Belgium, a dynamic strategy in line with the other EU Member States and the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The objective is to administer the vaccines to the population in stages, on a voluntary basis and free of charge, once these are available in early January 2021. During this first dialogue session, the European institutions were unanimous in pointing out that they did not seek any preferential treatment and that they would vaccinate their staff according to the same calendar as that for the Belgian population. Since the Belgian and Brussels authorities do not have access to the medical and health data for staff of the European and international institutions, a scheme should be set up with these institutions to include them in the phased vaccination scheme. European and international officials do not generally have an electronic medical file as Belgians do, but they and their family members are covered by the internal system of the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme of the EU (JSIS). Consequently, there are no data at the Belgian health insurance administration to identify a European official as a high-risk patient.

Therefore, each of the institutions was asked to assess internally the number of staff members meeting the definition of "vulnerable persons" and suffering from certain specific medical conditions in view of phase 1B (people over 65 years old and high-risk patients), and to make these data available to the Belgian authorities before the end of December. Three European institutions pointed to their intention to organise in-house vaccination centres for their staff: the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU. Therefore, contacts have been made with the regional health administration COCOM to accredit these vaccination centres in 2021.

On this occasion, it became clear that several administrative problems remained for the vaccination of European and international officials, and more particularly for holders of special or protocol identity cards (SIC). Vaccination works on the basis of the national identity number (NISS), but special identity cards are not chipped and do not mention the NISS number. In addition, many European officials are not aware that they have a NISS number. Therefore, the Belgian and Brussels authorities must, in conjunction with the European and international institutions, develop a system by 2021 that allows these employees to be integrated administratively into the Belgian vaccination system and to have access to Vaccinnet.

6 □ Perspectives for 2021

It goes without saying that lessons will be learned from this crisis, both in the Brussels Region and in the European institutions and international organisations. From now on, European staff will no doubt work more from home with more digital meetings, which will have a major impact on the European Quarter.

With the European Quarter being deserted for much of 2020, the Brussels' population seems to be realizing the importance of the European institutions to their city. Typically, the relationship between the two is rather tenuous. For many, this office district lacks soul and people stay in their own bubble.

One of the major challenges for our policymakers will therefore be to make the European quarter, possibly the area most affected by the pandemic, a neighbourhood that Brussels and EU citizens enjoy living in. This should be matched by greater efforts on the part of the EU institutions to be more open and accessible. The European Parliament has taken a pioneering role in this process by expanding its public range in recent years. The EP campus has become one of Brussels' most important tourist attractions, with the Parliamentarium, the House of European History and the newly renovated Wiertz Garden. And there are plans to turn the Solvay Library in Parc Léopold into a major European library, accessible to all citizens. With [visit.brussels](#) and regional economy actor [hub.brussels](#), the CEIO will do everything possible to reverse the image and boost the economic revival of the district, especially for hotels and restaurants.

Conclusion

We submit this annual report at a point in time when we can begin to look forward after a very difficult year, in which the need for our federating role was tangible all the time but we also often came up against its limits. We will have to come to better agreements with our institutional counterparts and especially with the federal level to develop an even more efficient seat policy.

A strong and coordinated seat policy had already been recommended at Belgian level during the governmental negotiations which led to the formation of the new federal government in September 2020. In these discussions, the Brussels Region insisted on the definition of a host nation policy strategy for the capital of Belgium and the EU that is supported both by the federal and regional authorities. This strategy would need to adopt clear and coherent positions with regard to the institutions present on our territory, as well as defending with a united voice the international status of Brussels and the numerous advantages the region can offer in terms of accommodating new institutions.

This common position needs to be achieved via much closer coordination between the federal and regional governments, at both political and operational levels. The Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) urges that the first concrete steps to this end be taken in 2021.

Furthermore, we also need to continue the internal process of reflection on our role as a host region, given that Brussels is going to have to tackle major social challenges over the coming years and the coronavirus pandemic struck hardest in the EU-quarter. Achieving environmental goals and the sustainable use of available space are a *conditio sine qua non* for the further greening of our region and its economy. This process will also have an impact on the international institutions based on our soil and we expect these bodies to set an example and to play a leading role. From the Brussels authorities, meanwhile, we expect coherent and transparent regulations, along with policies which reflect and take into account all aspects of the region's growing internationalisation.

We at the CEIO look to the future with confidence, as we know we can rely on the support of our political decision-makers. We thank the Minister-President and the Secretary of State for European and International Relations of the Brussels-Capital Region for their support for our missions and projects. And finally, we would like to thank our team for its tireless efforts during a year when it has experienced unprecedented demand for its services.



Karin IMPENS
Deputy Director



Alain HUTCHINSON
Commissioner



#stayhome
#staysafe



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



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BRUSSELS, YOUR HOST REGION!

