

Annual report

of the Brussels Commissioner for
Europe and International Organisations

20
24

Foreword

We publish this tenth activity report of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations at a moment when our Region is facing an unprecedented political situation. As a result, and to my great surprise, I therefore address you once again.

This is yet another opportunity to remind those negotiating the future majority agreement in Brussels just how important our missions are for the Region. My office welcomes the world to Brussels with dignity, ensuring the positive image of our Region. Moreover, we invest in maintaining and developing a key sector of our economy, which is a motor of our collective wealth, our jobs, our pluralistic culture, our diversity...

The actions implemented by my team help to anchor the major international institutions and organisations here in Belgium and Brussels. At the same time, we welcome thousands of world citizens, reinforcing their feeling that they are at home in Brussels. This is what we work for every day.

As you read this report, you will see that the CEIO is consulted on an almost daily basis by these varied organisations, whether public or non-governmental. We guide them towards possible solutions for the many challenges which they encounter in the course of their activities: planning permission, environmental permits, development of public spaces, security around their sites, mobility, reception of their employees, etc. It is therefore essential to consider the CEIO as an active and reactive tool, integral to our Region's institutional cooperation strategy.

Indeed, the CEIO is indispensable to the development of our Region in many respects, and I am sure that many others are equally aware of this. It is true that we have been operating with limited resources for some time now, despite the increasing weight and complexity of our missions. However, we are confident that in the future we will have the resources needed to carry out our missions effectively, as we have always done, and to represent our Region with dignity in this very special domain!

I hope you enjoy reading these pages.



Alain HUTCHINSON
*Brussels Commissioner for Europe
and International Organisations*

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SECTION 1

A HOST REGION
POLICY

1. The mission of the CEIO

The presence of numerous EU institutions and international organisations is part of what makes Brussels such a special place. This international governance sector, as well as the thousands of people who work in it, make a meaningful contribution to the social and economic dynamism of the Region. Our role as “capital of Europe” give Brussels a prestigious place on the world stage.

However, this unique situation also brings its own challenges. How can Brussels make it easy for the EU institutions and international organisations based here to do their best work? How can we welcome workers from around the world who move to Brussels for jobs in policy and governance? How can we ensure that this international presence in Brussels brings benefits for the whole Region and all of its residents?

The “host region policy” is an attempt to answer those questions and resolve those challenges. It can be seen as a hospitality policy for the supranational and intergovernmental organisations which have their headquarters or representation in the Brussels-Capital Region, including diplomatic missions and regional or local representations. The Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations is appointed and mandated by the regional Government with a mission to drive and implement this policy. He represents the Government and coordinates the host region 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.

UNDERPIN THE
STRUCTURAL RELATIONS

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

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 on both international organisations and the Brussels urban landscape.

ACT AS SINGLE
POINT OF CONTACT

for all European institutions and international organisations through the Institutional Liaison Unit.

WELCOME THE INTERN-
ATIONAL COMMUNITY

through the tailored 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 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 on matters of global significance take place, both on a multilateral and on a bilateral diplomatic level.

The international players



Employment

The international presence generates up to 23.2% of regional employment. There are around **52 000 direct jobs** in the EU institutions and international organisations:

- 40 514 European Union staff
- 7 111 diplomatic personnel
- 3 329 intergovernmental staff
- 639 European schools staff

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

There are also thousands of jobs in the wider European and international governance sector, including:

- Between **10 000** and **14 000** lobbyist jobs
- **730** accredited international journalists
- **8000** international trainees
- **19 780** international students

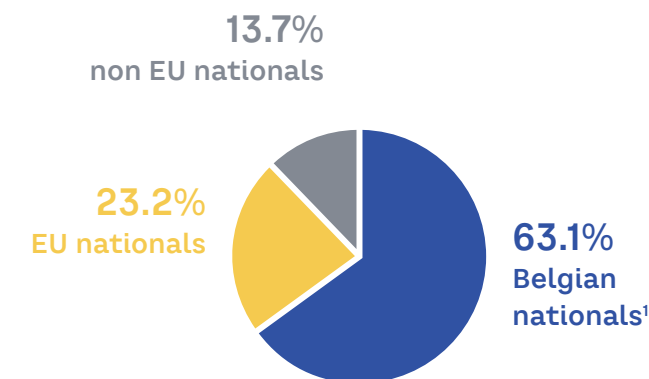


Population

The impact of the international role of Brussels is more evident than ever in the composition of its population:

- 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 1 January 2023, Brussels had a population of **1 241 175 habitants** residents, of which:



¹ Including Belgian nationals with dual nationality

TOP 5 FOREIGN NATIONALITIES IN BRUSSELS IN 2023

FRANCE
ROMANIA
ITALY
MOROCCO
SPAIN

French, Romanian and Italian citizens alone make up over 10% of the population!

Our publication *Brussels, International Capital – the figures 2020* explores the impact of the international presence in Brussels, with key data and analysis.



3 Pursuing an effective host region policy

The scale of this international presence and its impact show that the host region policy is not an isolated mission, divorced and distant from the many issues facing regional policymakers. Indeed, our work to enhance 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.

Year after year, this broadly shared objective strengthens the position of Brussels on the European and international scene. This is a service-oriented region, mindful of the wellbeing of its inhabitants, where people, businesses and institutions can prosper and develop with ease.

The Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations structures its work around two main pillars: institutional liaison and support for individuals through our Expat Welcome Desk. Both aspects play a vital role in implementing the host region policy, developing a strong network and a positive image among our counterparts and contacts. Through this dual approach, we are able to fulfil and reinforce the host region policy for international institutions and their staff, a responsibility which is incumbent on Belgium in general and the Brussels-Capital Region specifically.

These two pillars are explored in more detail in the following chapters. However, we can already highlight three transversal actions which illuminate our constant ambition to enhance the host region policy.

Connecting with a new cohort of EU leaders

Following the European elections of June 2024, new faces hold many senior positions in the EU institutions. Good contacts in the EU ecosystem are fundamental to our work, so this is a vital moment for our mission. We made sure to follow all appointments, activate existing contacts for introductions, and reach out to the new figures working on issues of relevance for the host region policy. This positions us for a smooth continuation of our work in 2025, and a rapid renewal of cooperation once a new regional government is in place.

A special moment in this process was our participation in the Welcome Village for new and returning Members of the European Parliament. Our team was present in both Brussels and Strasbourg, presenting the services of the Expat Welcome Desk and sharing information about the Brussels-Capital Region.

Reinforced cooperation with Brussels partners

The host region policy is inherently transversal, touching on many regional competencies and demanding close collaboration with partners at local, regional and federal level. To be truly effective, we must ensure that all relevant actors understand the objectives and methods of the host region policy. However, closer cooperation also allows us to be more efficient in a difficult budgetary context.

In 2024, we enthusiastically participated in the Optiris process to explore and activate synergies within the external affairs cluster, alongside Brussels International, visit.brussels and hub.brussels. Indeed, we already collaborate closely on issues like the European Quarter, welcoming international associations, and the promotion of Brussels as a unique center of governance and diplomacy.

Brussels – a visionary capital for Europe



The Expat Welcome Desk team welcoming MEPs after the EU elections, 18 June 2024

Our Region's role as de facto capital of Europe raises questions beyond the purely practical or economic. This special status has complex consequences for the city, its inhabitants and its identity. Meanwhile, as the seat of the EU institutions, Brussels also holds a special place in the collective imagination of Europeans. These are important issues for politics and society in Brussels, and participating in these debates is part of the host region policy.

In May 2024, we co-organised the event *Brussels – a visionary capital for Europe* with the Brussels Studies Institute. Our Commissioner Alain Hutchinson was one of the expert speakers sharing his thoughts with a crowded room at the House of European History.



The Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson during our panel discussion "Brussels – a visionary capital for Europe?", 22 May 2024



The Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new European Commission conference centre, 24 October 2024



4. The team and the governing bodies of CEOI

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



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
- Chloé DENIS
- Daan FONCK
- Evelyne HUYTEBROECK
- Julien JOST
- Aurélie MAHOUX
- Rebecca OVERLOOP
- Alexandra PHILIPPE
- Lesia RADELICKI
- Stefan VANDENHENDE
- Laurent VAN DER ELST
- Alain VERHEULPEN

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. The CEOI is regularly invited to present and discuss its work before this Committee.

SECTION 2

INSTITUTIONAL
LIAISON

1 ■ Role of the institutional
liaison unit

1.1 Introduction

Strengthening the international and European prestige of the Brussels-Capital Region is a crucial objective. The regional authorities strive to see Brussels join the top league of great international metropolises, while maintaining its human scale and a robust, inclusive socioeconomic fabric. This objective is not just a simple slogan, but the launchpad for ambitious policies which respond to various challenges.

Day after day, this dynamic consolidates our role on the European and international scenes while ensuring that the Region remains focused on delivering services. Brussels both prioritises the wellbeing of its inhabitants and fosters an environment where individuals, businesses and institutions can prosper with ease.

Of course, this mindset infuses all the actions undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO). We work constantly to strengthen the political and diplomatic visibility of the Region towards its international and EU partners, aligning our activities with **the host region policy** so that Brussels can fulfil its welcoming role effectively.



1.2 Mission

The Institutional Liaison Unit **acts as a link** between the Brussels public authorities and the European and international institutions, specifically on issues related to their presence in the Region. This role touches on many domains of regional policy, including urban development, architectural heritage, the environment, mobility, tourist flows and the management of public spaces (in terms of safety as well as conviviality).

Working as a **one-stop-shop and front-line contact**, we are able to understand and respond to the expectations of all the organisations based in Brussels. Our mandate as a **single point of contact (SPOC)** for all questions and dossiers that fall under regional competence makes life easier for these organisations. We enable **bespoke solutions and constructive dialogue**, which foster improvement in quality of life for the individuals and institutions on the Brussels territory. These include the European institutions, which have thousands of staff and numerous buildings, and international organisations, embassies and diplomatic missions – as well as smaller regional and local representations.

What is more, we make sure that our measures and actions are in line with the overall strategy of **projecting a positive image of the Region** and consolidating its position as an **international metropolis**.



The Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson at "EQ Connect", 18 June 2024

1.3 Assets of the International Liaison Unit

Expertise and networks

- Deep understanding of Belgian, European and international governance systems
- Role as a trustworthy mediator and competent go-between
- Expertise in various fields such as urban planning, mobility, security and the environment
- Confirmed experience in project management and the facilitation of concertation processes
- Close relationships with relevant political and institutional actors, both in the Belgian ecosystem and in the international organisations
- A dynamic, multilingual team, focussed on service and results

A broad network of contacts, including

- Brussels and Belgian ministers, along with their cabinets
- Public administrations and agencies
- The Brussels Parliament
- The Mayors and Aldermen 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

REINFORCED COORDINATION FOR AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE HOST REGION POLICY

Hosting the EU and international organisations requires political and administrative actions at all levels of competence in Belgium's complex governance architecture. What is more, our structures are not always legible for the European and international partners requiring answers and support. In order to guarantee coherence in our responses and projects, the federal government and the authorities of the Brussels-Capital Region have worked to establish clear frameworks for coordination.

The **cooperation platform 'Europe in Brussels'**, first launched in 2023, is a cornerstone of this approach. This platform is jointly chaired by the strategy unit of the Prime Minister's office and the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations. It gathers relevant ministerial cabinets at Brussels and federal levels to share updates and coordinate actions on dossiers relevant to the presence of the international and European organisations.

In March 2024, we held the fourth meeting of the 'Europe in Brussels' platform to address issues of mutual interest, such as security in the European Quarter, long-term prospects for new European schools and cooperation on projects related to the real estate portfolios of the EU institutions. The format has now clearly shown its worth, and we plan to relaunch the platform once the new federal and regional governments are in place.



The Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson meets the Mayor of Strasbourg, Jeanne Barseghian, 23 March 2024

POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The CEOI maintains a rich network of political contacts and undertakes constant dialogue with our various stakeholders in the Brussels administrations and the EU and international organisations. This work ranges from phone calls with cabinet members to sit-down meetings with senior political and administrative leaders.

In most years we also arrange a more formal moment of political dialogue: our annual summit for the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region and the highest representatives of the EU institutions. We discuss the ongoing projects and requests of the European institutions, as well as major redevelopment works planned by the Brussels-Capital Region. The summit has become a moment of friendly debate, building connections and strengthening the institutions' roots in Brussels.

2024 brought numerous elections and renewals of leadership, making it impractical to organise our traditional summit. Nevertheless, our work in institutional liaison never ceased; dialogue and coordination continued at all times. In fact, these moments of turnover are vital for our mission. We made sure to follow all appointments, activate existing contacts for introductions, and reach out to the new figures working on issues of relevance for the host region policy. This positions us for a smooth continuation of our work in 2025, and a rapid renewal of cooperation once a new regional government is in place.

WORKGROUPS

To address certain issues in a profound way, we have established working groups made up of experts. These groups are activated and coordinated by the Institutional Liaison Unit, which gathers the key contacts and **maintains a constructive dialogue between the stakeholders.**

PERSONALISED ASSISTANCE

The Institutional Liaison Unit is called upon throughout the year by a growing number of interlocutors from both international organisations and regional authorities. We provide tailored guidance and support discussions with the relevant bodies.



DIALOGUE ON FUTURE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The CEIO follows many dossiers related to urban issues, particularly those concerning the **development of the European Quarter**. We maintain a dialogue with all stakeholders, including the Region, the communes with institutions on their territory and the federal Government. A permanent connection with the federal level is also maintained through the Europe in Brussels platform. Maintaining this dialogue is essential for the **harmonious development** of the European Quarter and the Region.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE NETWORK

We are a major actor in the collection, publication and dissemination of **quality information** related to all kinds of issues.



The Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson at the Working Group on security in the European Quarter, 14 May 2024

3 Issues addressed in 2024

In any given year, the Institutional Liaison Unit of the CEIO deals with all kinds of issues related to the host region policy. These cover many policy areas, involve varying constellations of stakeholders, and can result in projects of considerable scope. In 2024, the most striking examples include the following.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE EU HEADQUARTERS CITIES

It is a strategic priority to maintain a constructive dialogue between Brussels and the two other primary seats of the EU institutions: Strasbourg and Luxembourg. Our aim is to:

- Foster a better understanding of the issues at stake in hosting European institutions;
- Explore how the connections between these three cities can be improved;
- Highlight the vital anchoring of the European Parliament in these three sites, in line with the treaties, and thereby avoid controversies and fruitless competition.

In March 2024, our Commissioner for Europe and the International Organisations, Alain Hutchinson, undertook a mission to Strasbourg at the invitation of the city’s mayor, Jeanne Barseghian. After attending the reopening of Strasbourg’s *Lieu d’Europe* information centre, we witnessed the inauguration of a tram painted to promote participation in the European elections. The visit was a successful opportunity to reinforce the links and good relations between our two host cities.

SECURITY

Part of our mission is to help guarantee a safe and secure environment in public spaces and around the international and European institutions. In 2023, the government of the Brussels Region therefore mandated the CEOI to set up a new platform for security cooperation.

In May 2024, the first meeting of this new working group took place at the offices of the CEOI, co-chaired by our Commissioner for Europe and the regional security agency safe.brussels. This working group gathered regional, federal and municipal authorities and the police for a frank and detailed discussion with representatives of all the major European Union institutions. Our aim is to reinforce existing measures and take the necessary steps to improve safety in the European Quarter, covering aspects such as the protection of buildings, traffic and parking.



THE EUROPEAN QUARTER: MONITORING OF MAJOR URBAN PROJECTS

Schuman roundabout – monitoring and information sharing on the multi-phase works

The CEIO continued its work to share information with all relevant actors in the European Quarter, especially the European institutions, but also embassies, permanent and regional representations. This close contact offered all stakeholders the information they need in order to carry out their missions in a situation which unavoidably leads to access restrictions, although we try to limit them as much as possible. With this in mind, the CEIO noted and considered the numerous remarks and observations concerning their safety and accessibility requirements (summits, meetings, deliveries, security, etc.). The CEIO continuously passed these remarks on to Beliris, the federal body responsible for the works.

In 2024, the works increased in complexity, with multiple phases running at the same time. We notably had to share information about works on the Avenue de le Joyeuse Entrée and the Petite Rue de la Loi, while also preparing for the phase in front of the European Council, which is to be launched in 2025.

Implementation of the shared vision for the European Quarter and the City Forward project

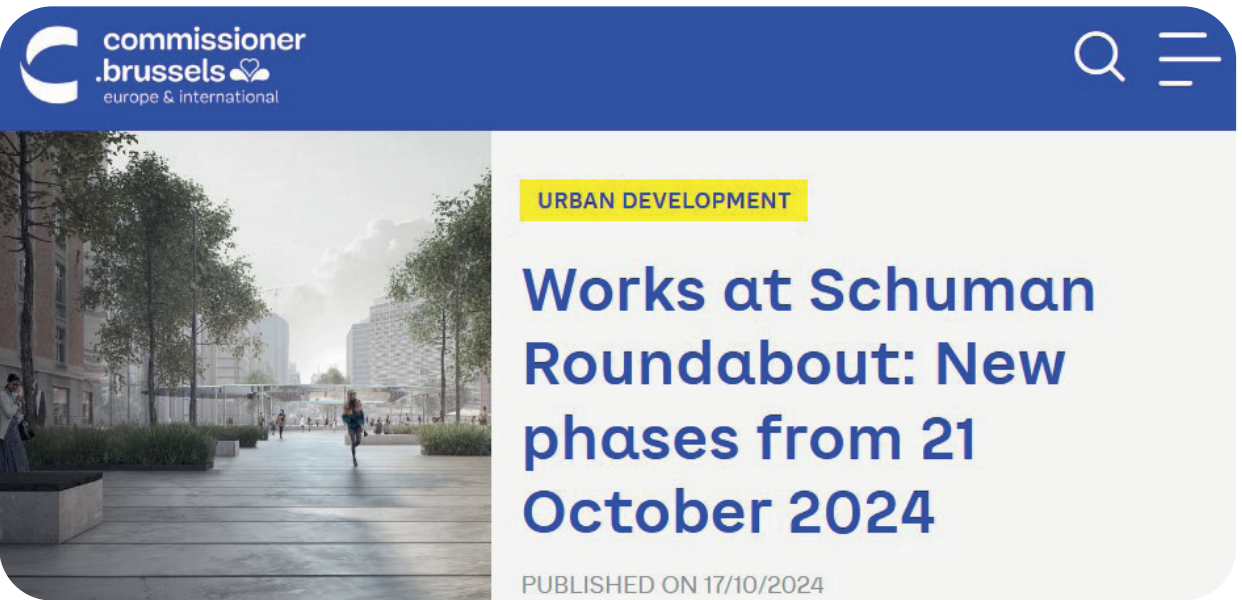
Through its role as a leading intermediary, the CEIO has made sure that the European institutions take part in the discussions on the territorial development of the European Quarter initiated by the regional Government in 2022 through perspective.brussels. This includes participating in political and administrative discussions around the City Forward project, a public-private partnership through which 21 buildings of the European Commission are being redeveloped as a mix of offices, housing and community facilities. In 2024, the transfer of ownership was finalised and plans for the first parts of the development were launched.

Other urban planning dossiers

The CEIO has been involved in other projects relating to this emblematic district, such as the ongoing explorations of the possibility to build a **pedestrian-cyclist bridge between Schuman and the Solidarność Esplanade of the European Parliament**. In 2024, the federal agency Beliris launched a call for tenders to select a partner to carry out a feasibility study on the project.

We are also supporting the European Parliament as it prepares to launch a **renovation of the Paul-Henri Spaak (PHS) building**, which houses the **hemicycle of the European Parliament**. The CEIO is acting as a facilitator between the European Parliament and the implicated Belgian and Brussels administrations, so that the building can be renovated as quickly as possible and without a long closure.

Finally, we were pleased to see the **REALEX** project reach the construction stage. The site on Rue de la Loi will house **the European Commission's new conference centre**, alongside mixed-use office facilities, shops, and a public mini-park. The CEOI was actively involved throughout the planning and permitting process, and our Commissioner Alain Hutchinson attended the groundbreaking ceremony on behalf of the Brussels-Capital Region.



A news article on our website commissioner.brussels



Groundbreaking ceremony for the new European Commission conference centre, 24 October 2024



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 to raise awareness among European and international institutions and to persuade them to undertake more ambitious environmental measures. What is more, the CEIO has provided technical support to promote the installation of photovoltaic panels, bicycle parking facilities and electric charging points at various sites of the international institutions.

TOURISM, IMAGE, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS

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 and the international congress industry. The CEIO is therefore working within its powers to promote this key sector in Brussels. The CEIO is committed to promoting this important sector for Brussels, usually at the request of or in collaboration with visit.brussels. Our joint European Quarter Networking events, aimed at all institutional, cultural, tourism and commercial players in the European Quarter, are a good example. We are also an active partner in EUQB, the new collective brand for the European Quarter, and the regional citymarketing project “Dare to be Brussels”.

European Quarter Networking Events

In 2024, together with visit.brussels we co-organised two networking events, gathering institutional, cultural, tourist and commercial players in the European Quarter. The aim of these meetings was to raise awareness and foster collaboration around initiatives that can increase the attractiveness of the European quarter for tourists, business and culture.

At these events, the CEIO and other actors share information about the European Quarter’s diverse offer to all institutional, cultural and tourist partners. The aim is to reinforce, create and launch projects that will contribute to the development of tourism in the European Quarter.



"EQ Connect" meeting, 18 June 2024



The Artists’ Parliament

The Artists’ Parliament is a public space exhibition project to mark the rotating presidencies of the Council of the European Union, built on a cooperation between the CEIO and the European Parliament. In January 2024, we celebrated the inauguration of the Belgian contribution to the initiative, in honour of the Belgian EU presidency. Brussels-based artists Ann Veronica Janssens and Michel François created the remarkable work "L'Aire d'un Souffle", and the launch attracted press interest and a sizeable crowd.



The inauguration of the work "L'Aire d'un Souffle", 10 January 2024

New websites for the CEOI and the Brussels Capital Region

In 2024 the CEOI was proud to launch its new website, with an improved interface and navigation. The website allows us to better promote our activities and events, while offering richer information about our work in institutional liaison.

Meanwhile, the Brussels-Capital Region is transferring to a new trilingual online platform at be.brussels. The CEOI is an active participant in two “families”, both the general pages on “About the Region” and the thematic chapter “Europe and International”. This project requires a great deal of coordination and planning, as we move towards a more cohesive and streamlined web strategy for all Brussels residents. Drafting, translating and managing our content is a major new task for the CEOI’s comms capacity. However, it will not be possible to consider closing the CEOI website until the entire of be.brussels is available in high-quality English with information adapted to a non-Belgian audience.



Homepage of our site commissioner.brussels

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 within a clear legal structure. As a result, they can sometimes face 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 Minister or 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.

A host region policy

Institutional liaison

Expat Welcome Desk

SECTION 3

EXPAT WELCOME DESK

The Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) is an integral part of the host region 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 : expat@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
- 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

- | | |
|--|---|
| <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 • Regional 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 (<i>Syndicat des Locataires</i>) • The regional tourism agency (visit.brussels) • The regional entrepreneurship agency (hub.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 – Office 00H160

3 TEAM MEMBERS

- **Amélie BOVY**, Senior Legal Adviser at the head office
- **Isabel RIOJA LAFOREST**, Assistant at the head office
- **Anaïs JOUZDANI**, Junior Legal Adviser at the European Parliament

Our office in the European Parliament, 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 GATHERS its key contacts at frequent working meetings on the different issues encountered by European officials during their move to and stay in Brussels.

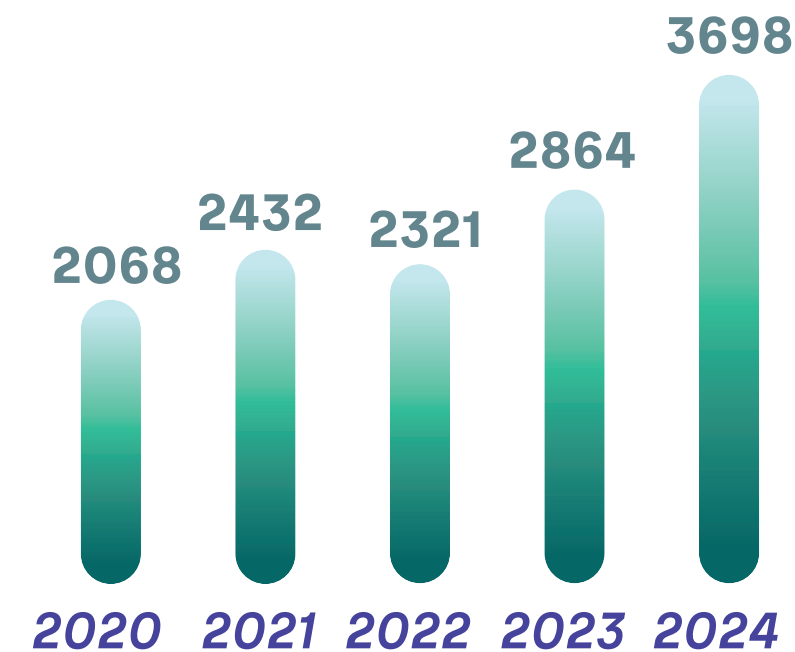
EWD RAISES AWARENESS by informing local, regional, and federal authorities of any problems or inconsistencies in administrative procedures that affect European officials and seeks to resolve them.

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. Anyone who is given the necessary and timely assistance during their time in Brussels will be an excellent ambassador for our Region abroad.

2. Enquiries dealt with in 2024

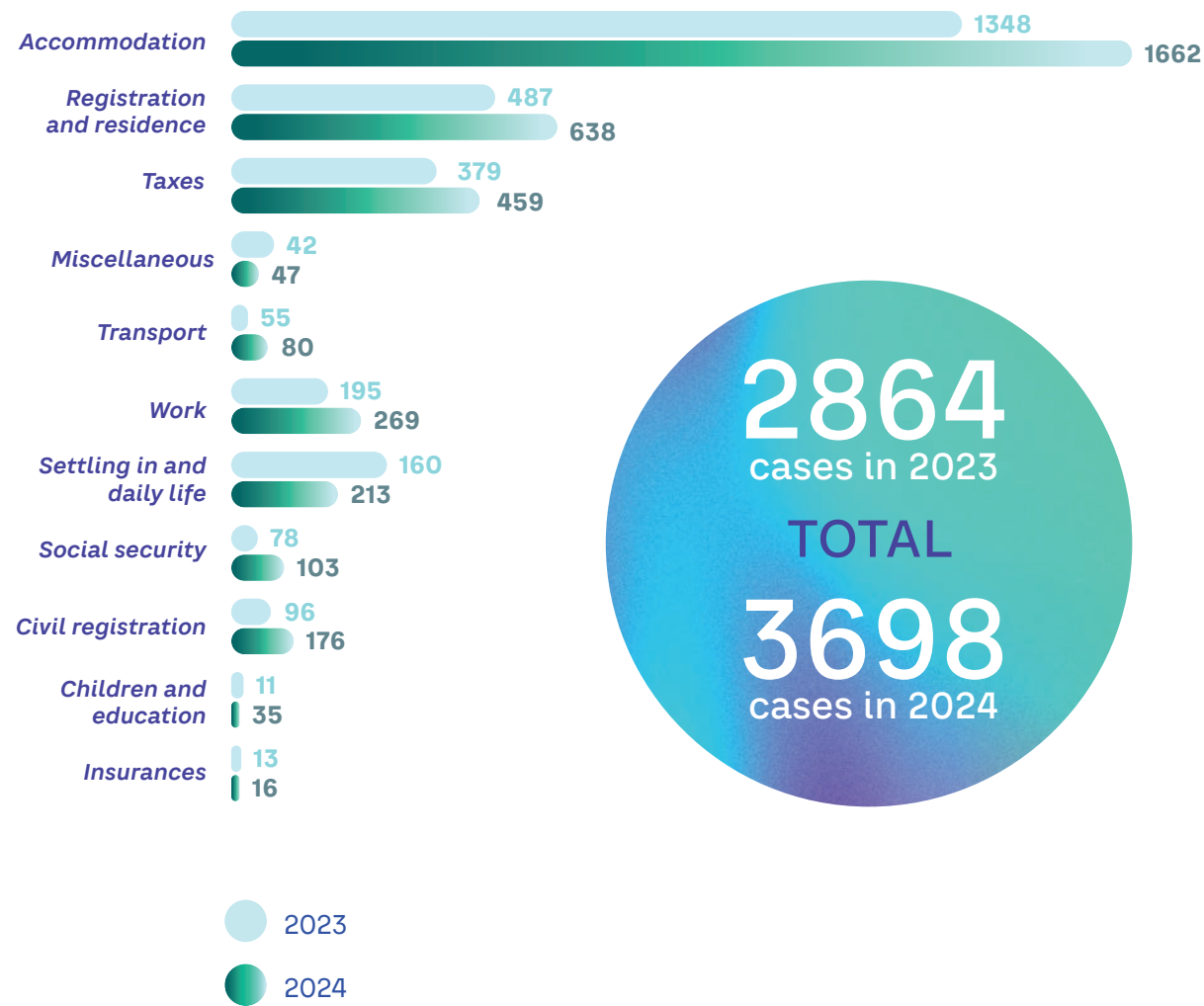
Total cases handled by the Expat Welcome Desk:



Compared to 2022, when we processed 2321 files, we have seen a 60% increase in the number of cases handled by the EWD! The top three subjects remain constant and relate to questions about rental contracts, residence permits and taxes. We can also see that the number of questions about civil registration is increasing, due to the many requests for information about acquiring Belgian nationality, a subject that is of great concern to expats.



Number of EWD cases by topic, over two years (2023 and 2024):



3 Meetings and partnerships

3.1 Meeting with Municipal Secretaries

On 23 May 2024, the CEO gathered the top managers of the administrations of the 19 Brussels municipalities. Chaired by the Commissioner at our offices, this meeting provided an opportunity to remind attendees of our missions, and to address specific points affecting the international community, such as municipal elections, the importance of English in certain administrative procedures, and the need to strengthen our cooperation with population services in the 19 municipalities.

3.2 Partnerships

Throughout 2024, the EWD was contacted by several partners to establish durable cooperation arrangements and create "tailor-made" presentations for specific events and target groups:



A presentation to the representations of the Spanish regions, 14 May 2024

- **The Spanish Representation Offices and the Permanent Representation of Spain to the European Union.** The EWD gave a presentation in English and Spanish on the following topics: rental agreements, registration at the municipality, access to the health insurance system, and taxes.
- **hub.brussels.** The EWD gave a presentation for a delegation of Indian investors on the topic of the professional card and the single permit. We also gave a presentation to foreign delegates and diplomatic trainees to present our services.
- **NATO.** We participated in the "Welcome Back to NATO HQ" day with a stand to present our services to new NATO officials and their families.



3.3 Welcoming Members of the European Parliament

Following the 2024 European elections, the CEIO participated in welcoming all Members of the European Parliament. Our team operated a stand in the "MEP Village" set up for that purpose at the European Parliament during June and July. We met a large number of MEPs and their assistants and responded to questions about settling in Brussels. We distributed a range of practical and useful brochures to newcomers.

Furthermore, in cooperation with Brussels International, we provided all newly elected MEPs with Welcome Packs containing a welcome letter, an art book about Brussels, and a large speculoos from Dandoy.

We received very positive feedback on these initiatives, which helped project a positive image of the Brussels-Capital Region to this important target group.



The Expat Welcome Desk team welcoming MEPs after the EU elections, 18 June 2024

4. Projects

4.1 Elections 2024 – Outreach campaigns to boost turnout among International Brusselers

2024 was a big year for elections in Brussels and Belgium. The regional, federal and European parliaments were chosen on Sunday 9 June, with municipal elections following on Sunday 13 October. Some non-Belgians were able to cast a vote:

- EU citizens living in Belgium have the right to vote in both the European and municipal elections.
- Non-EU citizens living in Belgium for at least 5 years have the right to vote in municipal elections.
- For the first time ever, 16 and 17 year olds were able to vote in the European elections in Belgium. This right applies to young residents whether they are Belgians or EU citizens.

However, unlike Belgian citizens, eligible non-Belgians must actively sign up to the electoral list. Deadlines fall several months before the day of the election. As in earlier election years, the Expat Welcome Desk undertook a series of outreach activities to share this information with our target audiences and encourage them to use their electoral rights.

For the EU elections, this meant publishing information through our website, newsletter and social media. We also worked with the EU institutions to share information with their staff, and organised an internal webinar for workers at the European Commission.



For the municipal elections, the organisation of which is a regional competence, we were much more active.

Our actions included:

- Publishing neutral and credible information in English, with articles and an FAQ on our website.
- Sending dedicated newsletters via the visit.brussels expat list and to our own Brussels Voice community.
- Producing an outreach toolkit with materials in English: graphics, a postcard, a poster and QR codes.
- Working with local press and media to provide clear information and persuasive reasons to vote.
- Organising our own events, such as a webinar on 28 May.
- Participating in the events of other stakeholders as an expert speaker on registration, proxy voting, electoral lists, etc. This included information sessions at the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.
- Offering personalised support through the Expat Welcome Desk for any International Brusseler with an individual question.
- Liaising between public authorities and civil society players selected in the call for projects launched by the regional authorities: organising coordination workshops; relaying technical questions to the Belgian Interior Ministry; encouraging municipalities to actively promote electoral participation; offering logistical support for a civil society action day.

The results of the campaign present a mixed picture. The total number of non-Belgian people who signed up in the Brussels Region exceeded 50 000 for the first time, and the sign-up rate for EU nationals increased from 16.75% in 2018 to 17.09% in 2024. However, the registration rate for non-EU nationals fell from 19.27% in 2018 to 13.25% in 2024, and the combined rate decreased slightly from 17% to 16.2%. These ambivalent results show that the Expat Welcome Desk and its partners had some impact in boosting turnout at the core of our target audience. However, the Region and its municipalities will need to be more proactive in the future, if we want to achieve strong electoral participation among International Brusselers of all origins.



A look back at the awareness campaign for the local elections, which ran from April to July 2024



4.2 A strong finish for the second cycle of Brussels Voice

Brussels Voice is our democratic participation platform for International Brusselers. It offers a new democratic space to the 1 in 3 residents who are not Belgian, and therefore cannot vote in the regional elections. 2023 saw a second cycle of Brussels Voice, a partnership with the regional Parliament through which participants developed 15 high-quality proposals for mobility policy in the Region.

In April 2024, the Mobility Committee of the Brussels Parliament discussed these proposals with the Region's Minister for Mobility. During a full hour of parliamentary debate, both the minister and the members of the Committee engaged thoughtfully with the ideas and concerns of International Brusselers.



Participants in Brussels Voice 23 at the debate on their proposals in the Mobility Committee of the Brussels Parliament, 2 April 2024

With several participants watching in person, and others following the livestream or recording, we witnessed as the proposals were assessed by elected politicians with real legislative power.

- The Minister gave a detailed report, situating the proposals in the broader debates around mobility policy in Brussels.
- Some proposals are in line with existing projects in the Brussels-Capital Region. For example, one member of the Committee welcomed International Brusselers' support for plans to strengthen the cycling network.
- Others proposals met with approval from the Members of Parliament, who pushed the Minister to move ahead. For example, the President of the Committee asked for updates on plans for an international bus station.
- In other cases, members of the Committee were sceptical about the proposals – but they gave considered reasons for this. For example, one member cautioned that using tax subsidies to support the purchase of electric cars could benefit richer residents more than families with limited income.

This event closed the current cycle of Brussels Voice, and the multiple elections of 2024 made this an untimely moment for a new project. However, the success of the entire process shows once again that International Brusselers want a say on regional policy, even if they cannot vote in regional elections. What is more, they really have ideas to share. We can only hope that they will have further opportunities to speak up in the future.

The Brussels Voice website tells the story of the project and shares the outputs of the first two cycles: www.brusselsvoice.commissioner.brussels



5. Seminars

Depending on the questions we receive, the EWD organises seminars in English on various subjects for specific groups. These seminars are led by specialists invited 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, but since the Covid-19 pandemic they regularly take place as video conferences (via the Webex platform).

In the year 2024 we organised the following seminars:

22/02/2024

Diploma recognition to find a job 31 participants

26/03/2024

Mediating our disputes: a practical guide 36 participants

23/04/2024

Cross-border teleworking 30 participants

28/05/2024

Why and how to vote in the municipal elections? 26 participants

21/06/2024

Filling your Belgian tax return 121 participants

14/10/2024

How to become Self-employed in Belgium 80 participants

21/11/2024

Relocating to Belgium with your family 30 participants

12/12/2024

How to acquire Belgian citizenship 106 participants



Seminar on relocating to Belgium with your family, 24 November 2024



6. Information sessions

Throughout the year, the EWD takes part in information sessions organised for the international community with interactive presentations for each target group.

Welcome for official trainees from the European institutions
Often in collaboration with visit.brussels.

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

Stand at NATO during the *Welcome Back Event* for new agents

Presentation at hub.brussels for a delegation of Indian investors

Presentation for the Spanish Representation Offices and the Permanent Representation of Spain to the European Union

Presentation at hub.brussels for delegates abroad and diplomatic trainees



"Spouses Day" info session at the European Commission, 13 March 2024

Welcome session for Schuman trainees at the European Parliament, 2 October 2024

Conclusion

Various partners such as [visit.brussels](#), [hub.brussels](#) and [perspective.brussels](#) have been working together with the CEIO in recent years, gradually turning the European Quarter into a better mix of living and working spaces, with an image campaign, a distinct identity, new signage, and greening initiatives. We will continue these efforts in the coming years. However, our mission as a host city and the capital of Europe extends much further, so we must not rest on our laurels. The competition from other cities that are home to EU institutions, such as Strasbourg and Luxembourg, remains a real challenge.

In 2024, two major European institutions launched major and important renovation projects: the European Parliament, strong opposition from Strasbourg notwithstanding, is to renew its Hemicycle, and the Council will renovate the iconic Justus Lipsius building. These are enormous projects, which also require professional advice and guidance from us as the Brussels government. Ensuring security around the redesigned Schuman Square will also present a major challenge for the Region in general and for the Brussels Commissioner for Europe in particular.

These projects will take many years to complete, but they are crucial for the continued presence of European institutions in Brussels. Cooperation with the federal government is of the utmost importance in this context. We therefore urge the new Brussels government to push ahead with the strategic action plan to consolidate the European presence in Brussels, which was rolled out in 2023 in cooperation with the services of the Prime Minister. The regional and federal levels are inextricably linked in these matters.

Furthermore, providing a quality welcome for all the people who work in and around these European and international institutions remains a key focus of our activity. Owing to their role in shaping opinions, which must not be underestimated, as well as their extensive networks, they broadly communicate their experiences in Brussels. More specifically,

offering international civil servants special identity cards with a microchip is a crucial project to enable them to access platforms such as [Itsme](#) and websites such as [MyHealth](#), [MyMinfin](#), and [MyPension](#).

We would ask anyone who doubts our status as the capital of Europe to consider the enormous impact of internationalisation on our local economy. We therefore call for a thorough quantitative research study to update the existing data on spending by international organisations and their staff, and to map out the extent of their contribution to the local economy.

As the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations, we have spent the past 10 years contributing to the story of our Region as the Capital of Europe. We intend to continue to do so in the future. We are proud of this status, just as other metropolitan regions like The Hague or Strasbourg, and we will continue our efforts so that every Brussels resident can cherish it as well.



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