

# Annual report

of the Brussels Commissioner for  
Europe and International Organisations

20  
23

# 2014

## A UNIQUE MISSION IN THE CAPITAL OF EUROPE

Brussels is the seat of the EU institutions and home to an unrivalled international affairs sector. We have a pivotal position in both European and international governance. This special role creates more than 1 in 5 jobs in the Brussels-Capital Region, and generates almost a quarter of the Region's economic activity. More than one in three of Brussels' residents is a citizen of a country other than Belgium.

The Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations ([commissioner.brussels](http://commissioner.brussels)) acts as a go-between linking regional authorities with the international organisations based here. We also support International Brusselers with their many administrative questions through our Expat Welcome Desk.

# 2024

10 years  
of impact

## **FIVE BOLD PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HOST REGION POLICY**

1

Recognise the transversal nature of the host region policy, which is of absolute strategic importance for Brussels. This is not about European or international policy, but about how we welcome and anchor our vital international sector here in Brussels. The Brussels Commissioner and his/her team should serve as an expert observatory on the international sector in all its aspects: urbanism, population, mobility, security, etc. Our mission is to get the right people around the table and foster a healthy environment for cooperation.

- > We have developed **a true host region policy** and demonstrated how vital the European and international sector is for Brussels, its citizens and its economy.
- > We have hosted **10 summits** gathering ministers from the Brussels-Capital Region Government and the heads of the main EU institutions. The summit builds connections and strengthens the institutions' roots in Brussels, while tackling the long-term issues related to their presence in the Region.
- > We have **flourished in our mandate as Single Point of Contact (SPOC)** for everyone involved in managing the presence of the EU institutions and international organisations in Brussels. We have built a formidable network on both the Belgian and international side, and we have restored trust in the relationship.
- > We have created **the Europe in Brussels platform with the Belgian federal government**, coordinating our respective responsibilities and ensuring that European and international organisations get a coherent response to their questions.
- > We have engaged the EU institutions in the **broad-based vision to rethink the EU Quarter of Brussels**. We are true partners on questions ranging from mobility and real estate to the works at Schuman Roundabout and the launch of the EUQB brand.

# 2

Assign the Commissioner and his/her office the financial and human resources required to successfully implement this ambitious mandate. It is time to make the international sector the priority it deserves to be.

Give the regional authorities a stronger and more visible presence in the European Quarter. The beautiful building which houses commissioner.brussels has the potential to serve as a representation of the Region towards to the EU institutions. Brussels can make so much more of its unique role as capital of Europe, for the benefit of everyone who lives here.

# 3

- > Our **Expat Welcome Desk has responded to over 20 000 questions**. The service has become a knowledge centre and a trusted source of advice for International Brusselers.
- > We have **organised 3 courses for staff of the 19 Brussels municipalities** highlighting the specific rules and issues relevant to the International Brusselers who move here for work.
- > We guided the international community of Brussels through **the Covid-19 pandemic**, explaining the local rules and access to vaccines or healthcare.
- > We kept **UK citizens informed during the Brexit negotiations**, then implemented a research and awareness-raising project through the EU's Brexit Adjustment Reserve.
- > We have run **4 campaigns encouraging International Brusselers to vote** in municipal and European elections, and we launched the Brussels Voice democratic participation platform.

# 4

Support regional and municipal authorities – and their staff – to become agents of welcome for the Region's cosmopolitan population. If one in three Brusselers is not a Belgian, we need to rethink our public-facing services and institutions around this new reality.

Anchor International Brusselers as a community in our Region. Keep offering them the chance to get involved in local democratic life through voting and other routes to participation, and push for the ultimate ambition to offer all residents the right to vote in regional elections.

# 5

**10** years  
of impact



**FIVE BOLD PROPOSALS  
FOR THE FUTURE OF  
THE HOST REGION POLICY**



# Foreword

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Developing a host region policy for Brussels is a major challenge. It means offering a warm welcome to the numerous international organisations, European institutions, and everything that accompanies them – first and foremost the vibrant “expat” community. Yet, we have always insisted on one fundamental point, supported with evidence and data: hosting this European and international affairs sector is a real blessing for our Region and its citizens.

Nevertheless, no man is a prophet in his own land! And sadly this old adage still applies when I see some of our political, administrative and civic leaders cling to their belief that the international presence in Brussels actually harms our wellbeing. They claim that it undermines our already divided culture, or that it has a toxic effect on the real estate market, or that it creates difficulties in mobility, city planning, and who knows what other areas.

So, it is with a slightly bitter aftertaste that I write this foreword to our 2023 annual report.

What is exciting, however, is that beyond these sad facts, I can see deeds and mindsets changing on both sides.

The citizens of Brussels, and above all the younger generations, are now happy to see their city and Region open up as a gateway to the world. Many other European cities envy us this multicultural and colourful adventure. After all, the activity generated by the international “bubble” accounts for a quarter of employment and wealth in our Region. The wider Brussels economy can also rejoice at the spillover effects in tourism, construction, culture, services of all kinds...

As for the European institutions and international organisations, they have also learnt to be citizens of Brussels. They increasingly take account of their local surroundings and neighbourhoods, rather than acting as if they live on an island with no regard for the world outside their windows.

Today, it is fair to say that they have become full partners in the development of our city, participating in its evolution and often leading the way when it comes to mobility. They have understood that the vast amount of space they occupy in the heart of Brussels requires them to consider the best way of organising the area and, above all, the place of our citizens in the city, whether they are workers, residents or tourists.

And so, after all, I can close this foreword with a note of optimism and a great deal of enthusiasm! I am convinced that the future political leaders of our country, our Region and our municipalities will do everything in their power to continue the mission that the Brussels Government entrusted to me ten years ago. I also trust that they will devote the necessary resources to strengthen and develop our Commissioner's office and thereby unlock the potential of this asset for such an important aspect of our Region's future.



**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” gives 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 INTERNATIONAL 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
- 7111 diplomatic personnel
- 3329 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

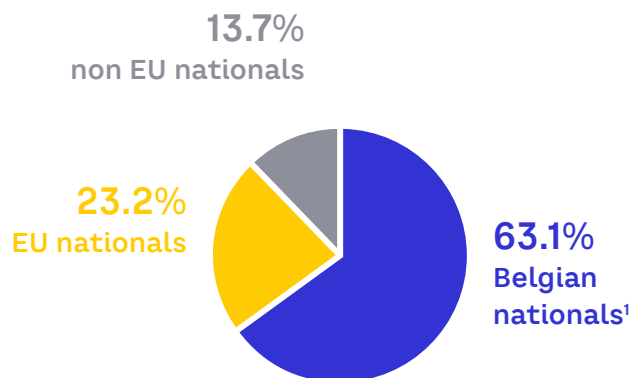


## Population

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:



<sup>1</sup> 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. More than a mere slogan, this broadly shared objective translates into strong and ambitious policies and concrete measures which meet the challenges at hand.

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

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





Workshop for host cities at the Brussels Urban Summit, 13 June 2023



Training for municipal staff at the European Parliament, 12 June 2023



European Commissioner Johannes Hahn during the Brussels-EU summit at the Brussels Parliament, 7 November 2023



# 4. The team and the governing bodies

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

**Alain HUTCHINSON**  
*Commissioner*



**Karin IMPENS**  
*Director*



## Expat Welcome Desk



**Amélie BOVY**  
*Senior Legal Adviser*



**Isabel RIOJA LAFOREST**  
*Adviser*



**Anaïs JOUZDANI**  
*Junior Legal Adviser*

## Institutional Liaison Unit



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

## Communication



**Natacha BRIEVEN**  
*Office Manager*



**Bryn WATKINS**  
*Communications and Project Manager*

## Reception



**Laurent GILARDENGI**  
*Reception Desk Assistant*



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

### General Assembly

- Alain HUTCHINSON, President
- Thomas ALLEGAERT
- Stefan VANDENHENDE
- Evelyne HUYTEBROECK
- Julien JOST
- Aurélie MAHOUX
- Joël MATTHIEU
- Rebecca OVERLOOP
- Alexandra PHILIPPE
- Lesia RADELICKI
- Laurent VAN DER ELST
- Alain VERHEULPEN

### Board

- Alain HUTCHINSON, President
- Thomas ALLEGAERT
- Stefan VANDENHENDE
- Evelyne HUYTEBROECK
- Julien JOST
- Aurélie MAHOUX
- Joël MATTHIEU
- Alexandra PHILIPPE
- Lesia RADELICKI
- 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. In accordance with the CEIO's statutes, the 2022 annual report was presented to the European Affairs Committee of the Brussels Parliament on 2 October 2023.



Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson at the Brussels Parliament for a Brussels Voice event, 14 October 2023





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 (BCR) is a crucial ambition. The regional authorities strive to see Brussels join the top league of great international metropolises while maintaining its human scale and a socioeconomic fabric that is both robust and equitable. 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 well-being 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**.



Encounters during the workshop for host cities at the Brussels Urban Summit, 13 June 2023

## 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, safety 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

In order to reinforce the presence of the European and international institutions in Brussels, and to foster their long-term settlement, cooperation has been established between the various authorities, including the federal government and the authorities of the Brussels-Capital Region.

This initiative continued to bear fruit in 2023, as we co-organised several meetings of the **cooperation platform Europe in Brussels**. This platform is jointly chaired by the strategy unit of the Prime Minister's office and the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations. The numerous questions which are successfully addressed through this platform show that the Belgian and Brussels authorities share the ambition to provide solutions and quality responses for the issues facing our city. The objective of this platform in 2023 and the years ahead is fundamental, as it offers an opportunity to enhance Brussels' position on the European and international scene.

This project underlines once again the vital and multi-faceted role of the CEIO's Institutional Liaison Unit, especially when it comes to building an image which reinforces our policies for hosting international institutions in Belgium, and in the Brussels-Capital Region in particular.





Brussels-EU summit at the Brussels Parliament, 7 November 2023

## POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Alongside the numerous political contacts and dialogues which we maintain with our various stakeholders, the CEIO organises a **political summit** every year, bringing together the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region and the highest representatives of the European institutions. These meetings are a chance to discuss the projects planned by the European institutions in Brussels, as well as the major redevelopment works foreseen by the Brussels-Capital Region, especially in the European Quarter. The **decisions** taken and the **guiding principles** established during these summits guide many of the CEIO's activities in the weeks that follow, such as setting up workgroups or launching new cooperation arrangements between the EU institutions and regional and local administrations.

The **10th meeting between the Brussels Government and the European institutions** was held on 7 November 2023 at the Brussels Parliament. Participants discussed measures taken or to be taken to increase the attractiveness and livability of the European Quarter for all its users – both individual citizens and institutions.



## 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.

# 3 Issues addressed in 2023

The CEIO deals with a number of issues throughout the year, some of which result in projects of considerable scope in terms of resources deployed as well as time spent. In addition to the emblematic creation of the Europe in Brussels platform previously described, whose agenda is filled with issues specific to the presence of the European and international institutions in Brussels (security, European schools, the Belgian Presidency of the EU, etc.) the most striking examples are the following.

## 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 late 2023, the government of the Brussels Region therefore mandated the CEIO to set up a new platform for security cooperation. This platform gathers regional, federal and municipal authorities, the police and the European Union institutions. Its 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. In December, we launched the necessary networking in order to bring together the key players who work on security-related issues and who will be part of the platform.

## EUROPEAN SCHOOLS TASKFORCE

At the last meeting of the European Schools taskforce, the Prime Minister's office had mentioned the importance for Belgium and the European institutions of being able to look towards 'hybrid' schools in the future. In order to be able to draw up the blueprint of this formula and to identify the issues and challenges involved, the CEIO was asked to set up an exploratory technical workgroup to study the possibility of opening a 'hybrid/mixed' European School in the European Quarter. To this end, the Commissioner contacted the various stakeholders on federal, community, regional and municipal level on several occasions. Various possible avenues are being explored and will be presented to the Prime Minister's office in 2024 via the Europe in Brussels platform.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE THREE EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS CITIES BRUSSELS-STRASBOURG-LUXEMBOURG



Brussels Commissioner Alain Hutchinson meets the Mayor of Strasbourg, Jeanne Barseghian, 26 October 2022

Having visited Strasbourg and Luxembourg to initiate a constructive dialogue by and between these three headquarters cities, the CEIO held joint meetings to maintain and strengthen these ties. With these informal discussions, the CEIO aims 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.

## THE CHALLENGES OF CITIES HOSTING INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS – BRUSSELS URBAN SUMMIT

The Brussels Urban Summit gathered more than 300 cities from around the world with more than 1000 politicians, experts and civil society representatives. Participants had an opportunity to exchange views and set priorities for the sustainable, affordable and liveable cities of the future.

The Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations also organised a workshop during this international conference specifically focused on the issues affecting cities which host international organisations. With the agenda of this workshop the CEIO aimed to find new paths, so we gathered host cities to highlight the challenges and opportunities they face.

Delegations from Strasbourg, Vienna, Geneva, The Hague, Montevideo and Montreal responded enthusiastically to the invitation and participated in the roundtable discussion. The discussions provided an opportunity to exchange best practices and gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by international host cities and urban centres when it comes to issues like welcome policy and quality of life, not to mention socio-economic, environmental and planning issues. Being a host city for international organisations comes with a range of constraints which need to be managed as efficiently as possible, taking into account the sometimes divergent interests of international activities and the daily lives of local and international citizens. The biggest challenges in this coexistence involve the implementation of complex urban policies on land use planning, accessible housing, management of public spaces, security and mobility. Policymakers must reconcile the often legitimate demands of international organisations with the daily lives of local residents. As a major



international capital and seat of a large number of supranational and intergovernmental organisations, Brussels was keen to share its experience in this field with colleagues from other European and international host cities and explore avenues for future cooperation.

With this reflection exercise, we not only wanted to build a bridge among host cities with similar interests to those of the Brussels Region, but also to broaden our knowledge and look for synergies where possible.

## THE EUROPEAN QUARTER: MONITORING OF MAJOR URBAN PROJECTS

### Schuman Roundabout – monitoring and information sharing on the works

The CEIO continued its work to share information by regularly gathering all the European institutions (the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Council, etc.), embassies, permanent and regional representations in the European Quarter to discuss the planned works. 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 body responsible for the works.



Information session about the works on Schuman Roundabout at the Press Club Brussels-Europe

### Follow-up on the European Commission's buildings policy and the CityForward project

As the European Commission seeks to reduce and reorganise its office space in order to make it more sustainable, a huge real estate operation is coming up. As many as 21 existing buildings will be transferred at once to the Belgian state, backed by Cityforward, a property fund established by SFPI, the Federal Holding



and Investment Company, with Whitewood as private partner. These buildings will be put back on the market for renovation, redevelopment and reprogramming. More than 300 000 m<sup>2</sup> are involved, so with a substantial impact! The entire operation is carried out in collaboration with the Brussels Region and the municipalities concerned, and the intention is to allocate around 30% of the redevelopment to uses other than offices, such as housing and amenities. CityForward is a game changer in the European district to – finally – take a big step forward in terms of functional mix and thus turn it into a real city district.

### Implementation of the shared vision for the European Quarter

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](https://perspective.brussels).

### Other urban planning dossiers

The CEIO has been involved in other projects relating to this emblematic district, such as the **pedestrian-cyclist bridge between Schuman and the Solidarność Esplanade of the European Parliament**, which is intended to link these two hubs of the European Quarter. We assessed the needs of the various institutions and user groups, which we passed on to the Brussels authorities. The project is now taking shape with the feasibility study included in the *Beliris Addendum n°15 of 2023*. Beliris is the federal programme that oversees the implementation of projects to develop Brussels as a national and international capital.

The CEIO is also following the plans for 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.





The CEIO has also been involved in other issues related to spatial planning and urban development throughout Brussels. For example, we are supporting projects to make the area around NATO safer for cyclists and pedestrians, with the support of Bruxelles Mobilité.

## 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 AND CULTURE

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

### European Quarter Networking Events

In 2023, 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.

### The CEIO as a facilitator of culture

The CEIO and the European Parliament signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the intention to exhibit landmark contemporary art on the Solidarność Esplanade. Under the banner The Artists' Parliament, a series of six-monthly exhibitions will showcase an artist from the member state holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU. The year 2023 was dominated by the preparation and organisation of the Belgian contribution to the initiative, in anticipation of the Belgian EU presidency in 2024. Brussels-based artists Ann Veronica Janssens and Michel François were selected by the curators to create the remarkable work *L'Aire d'un Souffle*.



The first work of The Artists' Parliament: *L'Aire d'un Souffle* by Ann Veronica Janssens and Michel François on the Esplanade Solidarność

## EUQB: a new brand to celebrate, unite and promote the European Quarter

Brussels stands tall on the European and international stage thanks to the hundreds of European and international organisations with headquarters or representations here. The beating heart of the Brussels international sector is undeniably the European Quarter – the area of town around the key EU institutions.

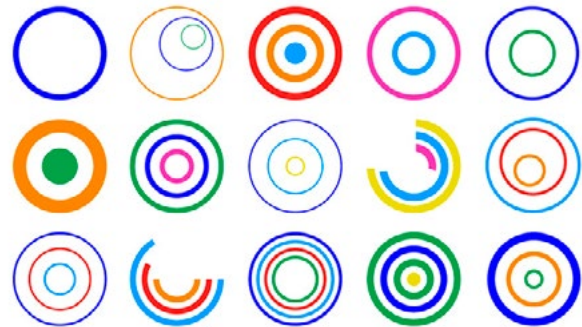
This district is mainly known for offices, workers and meetings, but this negative image contrasts sharply with the aspiration of the Region and the European institutions to capitalise on the potential of this district by improving its image and quality of life. As presented above, there is an ambitious new urban vision for the district. And the development of cultural and tourist institutions with an international influence is bearing fruit: the European Quarter is already one of the most important tourist destinations in the Brussels-Capital Region.

This transformation requires a tailored image and a promotion strategy that activates all the stakeholders who make the European Quarter what it is. The CEIO has been supporting this development for many years. Alongside other regional actors such as visit.brussels, we set out a strategy to develop the European Quarter as a "cultural hub" and promote it in terms of its European DNA.

In 2023, we launched the new brand for the neighbourhood. European Quarter Brussels (EUQB) aims to support the transformation in the image of the area with vibrant colours, an eye-catching logo and, above all, a more positive story. The linguistic brand promotes a new narrative for the district: the European Quarter embodies Europe on a human scale in all its diversity, welcoming all Brusselers and other visitors. Meanwhile, visual guidelines and brand elements define colours, logos and other visual aspects of the brand.

The toolkit offers the visual and narrative elements of the brand: [www.euqbbrand.brussels](http://www.euqbbrand.brussels)

The CEIO was part of the core working group which developed the brand, but we also acted as a relay with other actors. For example, we invited the European institutions to meetings so we could get their feedback and encourage them to engage with the brand rollout. We also hosted sessions with the municipalities on



Elements from the EUQB brand and photos of the launch at commissioner.brussels, 8 November 2023



whose territory the European Quarter sits. This multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach is vital to making this a brand for all actors in the neighbourhood, from huge institutions to small businesses. Getting everyone involved will be vital to making the brand a coherent face for the district.

The CEIO was also at the forefront as the brand was launched. On 9 November, we were proud to host the formal launch of the brand – organised by visit.brussels – in our offices. Journalists, policymakers and institutions gathered to see the brand implemented across various materials and to learn about plans for the rollout.

### **Perfectly imperfect: Branding the Brussels-Capital Region on the international stage**

Since the Brussels Government approved its note on the regional city marketing policy in May 2021, the CEIO has been an active member of the workgroup chaired and coordinated by visit.brussels. The project has developed an integrated city marketing policy built around a collective brand toolkit, which all public and private stakeholders can use to promote the Region internationally.

The brand, which was launched in 2023, is anchored in Brussels' ironic self-deprecation and raucous diversity, and supported by a sharp and witty visual line. It tells a welcoming story underpinned by the new slogans "Perfectly imperfect" and "In Brussels, we dare you to be yourself."

The toolkit offers the visual and narrative elements of the brand: [www.internationalbrand.brussels](http://www.internationalbrand.brussels)

2023 was also the moment to start implementing the brand. The CEIO worked with the brand consultants to develop new texts presenting the Expat Welcome Desk in line with the overall narrative.



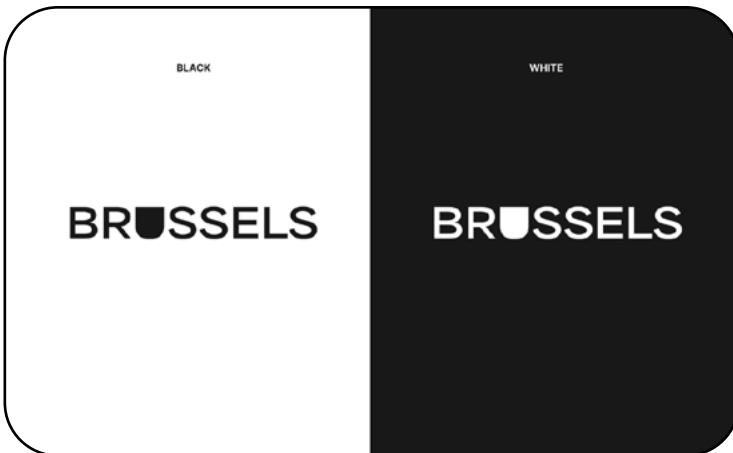


You didn't come all this way to be someone else. You came to Brussels to be yourself.

Brussels' decision-makers understand how to lead and they know how to live.

We're the capital of European connections to places and people. And we're its capital of conviviality.

Brussels is businesslike. And we're bons vivants.



A host region policy

Institutional liaison

Expat Welcome Desk



## 4 Regional and local representations

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

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

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

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

# 5. Conclusion

Since its inception in 2014, the CEIO has grown to become a key player in the implementation of a genuine host region policy. On a daily basis, the Institutional Liaison Unit strives to ensure that Brussels provides the best possible welcome for international organisations and European institutions. This major challenge goes hand in hand with the socio-economic and financial importance of the international affairs sector for our region and its citizens.

This international sector accounts for a quarter of employment in Brussels and makes a significant contribution – almost 25% – to the prosperity of our Region in sectors as varied as the services industry, retail, hospitality, tourism, construction and even culture.

We have also worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone, whether a resident or a visitor, can see our Region as an open door to the world, rich in its multicultural diversity.

Through our action, we have also helped to establish a new dynamic that is enabling European institutions and international organisations to adopt a more socially responsible approach by integrating local issues into their policies. As such, they have become active and key partners in the development of certain areas of our Region. The CEIO's Institutional Liaison Unit has undeniably played a key role in this evolution, facilitating dialogue and collaboration between the Belgian, Brussels and international authorities.

Against a backdrop of optimism and enthusiasm for the work we have accomplished, this chapter ends with the wish that future Brussels government will continue to support our mission. To this end, we remain determined to work alongside the Brussels and federal authorities to strengthen our host region policy and defend the international status of the "Brussels Metropolis", thereby guaranteeing the harmonious and sustainable development of the European Quarter and all the sites where the international institutions are based. Our commitment to making Brussels a destination of choice for international organisations, thus contributing to the Region's prosperity and international standing, remains the core of our work.





**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 : [info@commissioner.brussels](mailto:info@commissioner.brussels)
- > Via our website : [www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels)
- > By appointment



## Our target audience

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

## Our privileged contacts

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

## Our expertise

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

## Our multilingual team



### 2 OFFICES

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

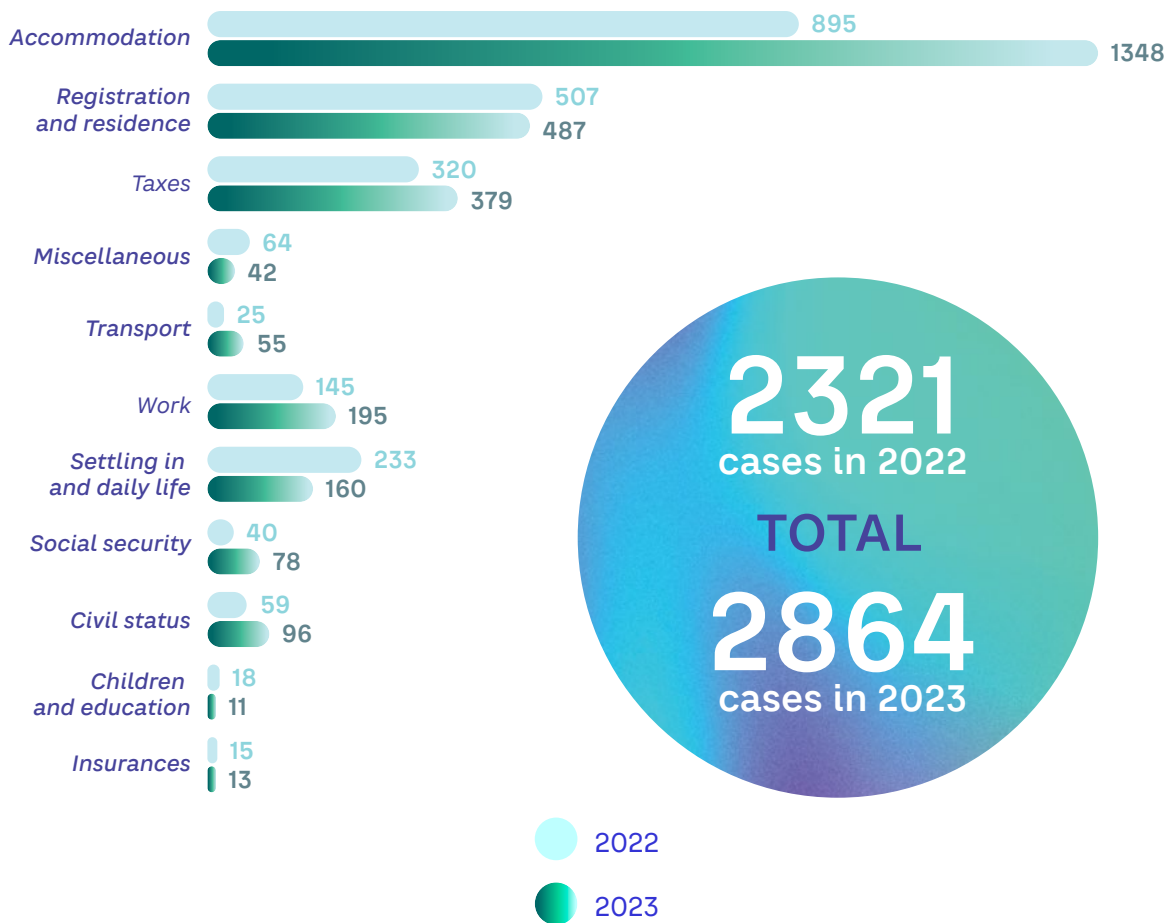
**EWD CONVEYS A POSITIVE IMAGE** of Brussels by providing a high quality, tailor-made welcome to the growing international community. Anyone who is given the necessary and timely assistance during their time in Brussels will be an excellent ambassador for our Region abroad.



# 2. Enquiries dealt with in 2023

## 2.1 Statistics

Number of EWD cases by type, over two years (2022 and 2023) :

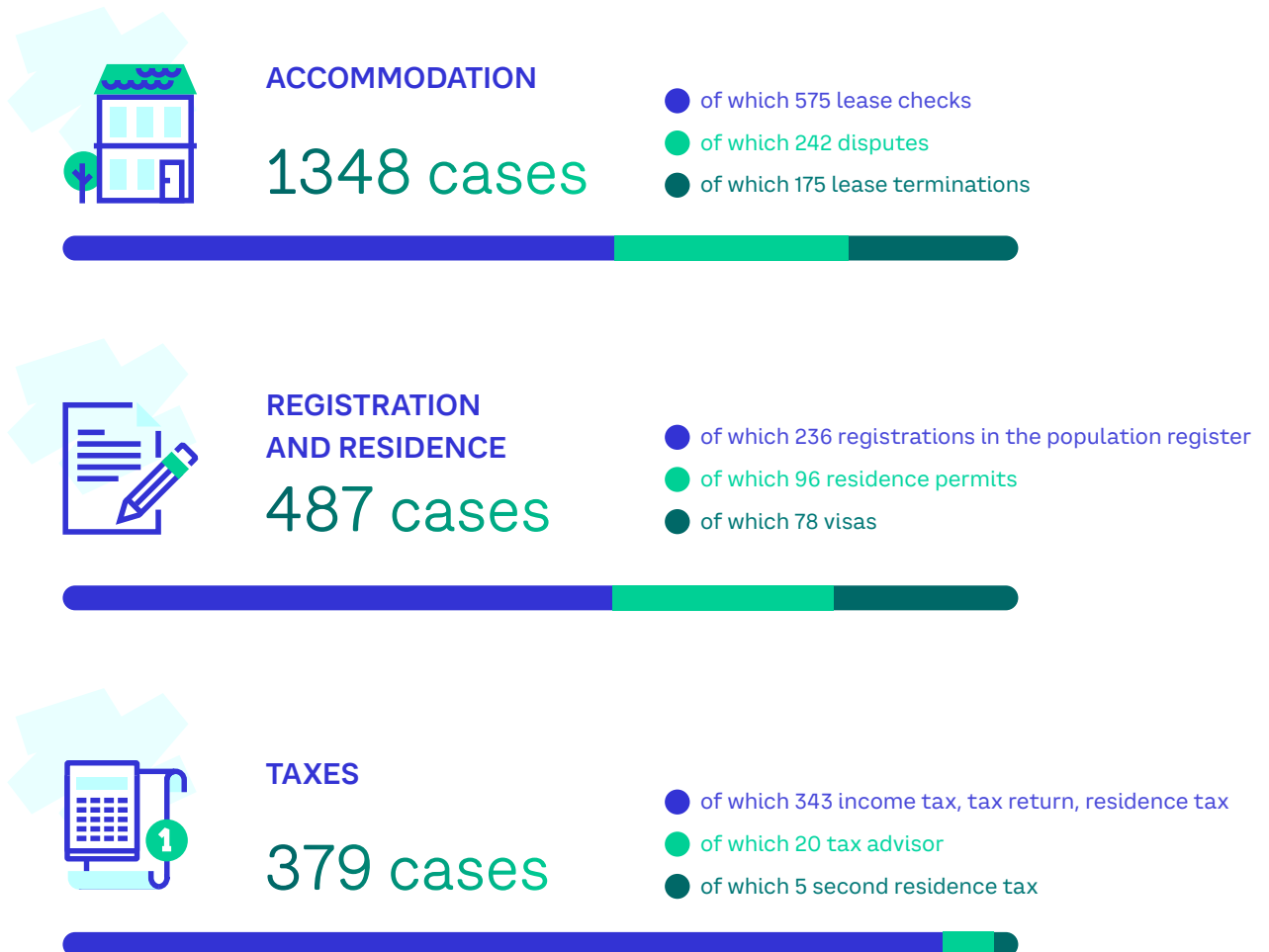


In 2023, we have seen a major increase in the number of files of around 25%! This is primarily due to the EWD's active participation in a research and awareness-raising project financed through the EU's Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR – see below). The various activities carried out during the year for British citizens were a great success, with the result that many UK nationals discovered the EWD's services and used them alongside the information sessions organised as part of the BAR project.

We would also like to highlight the important communications work undertaken by our new communications project manager Bryn Watkins, who joined the CEIO this year, not only around the BAR project but also around the Brussels Voice project. The impact of this extensive communications work has been considerable, as new people have been able to find out about and contact the Expat Welcome Desk.

The housing category is still growing steadily and takes up most of the time of our EWD team. We receive ever more requests to read lease contracts and we notice that many short-term leases (for trainees in particular) or leases for house-shares do not comply with the Housing Code. We also dedicate a lot of time to dealing with tenants' questions about problems with their landlords concerning the amount of rental charges, indexation, the rental guarantee or the non-reaction of the landlord in case of problems with the premises.

## 2.2 Top questions dealt with in 2023



# 3 Meetings and other challenges

## 3.1 Special identity cards soon to be fitted with an electronic chip

Granted on the basis of the Royal Decree of 30 October 1991 to diplomats and employees of international and European institutions, the Special Identity Card (SIC) has the advantage of being issued directly by the protocol department of the embassy or institution for which the person concerned works. This means that the individual does not have to go to the municipality and deal with what can at times be complex municipal administrative procedures.

Apart from the "symbolic" aspect that it may have for some, it would appear that the disadvantages of the SIC outweigh the advantages. The recent pandemic crisis has indisputably highlighted the limitations of the SIC.

- The SIC does not have an electronic chip, thereby preventing access to the various online platforms of the Belgian administrative authorities (MaSante, MyTax, MyMinfin, MyRent, Irisbox, etc.).
- The SIC does not mention the national register number of its holder, which caused huge problems during the vaccination campaign. People are sometimes unaware that they have such a number and often do not know how to obtain it.
- The SIC is not recognised as a legal residence permit to obtain Belgian nationality, despite some case law to the contrary (*decision of the Court of Cassation of 7 December 2020*).

For all these reasons, the European institutions have asked the competent Belgian authorities to fit the SIC with an electronic chip so that all their employees can obtain a residence permit that is as functional and practical to use as that issued by the municipalities.

At the level of the Protocol Department of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, the plan to introduce a smart card SIC was initiated in 2022 as part of the global "E-Protocol". The project is still underway at this time.



## 3.2 Training day for civil registry and population officers from the 19 municipalities

On 12 June 2023, a new training course was held at the European Parliament for civil registry and population service staff from the 19 Brussels municipalities and the personnel departments of the European institutions.

As in the past, the aims of this training course were:

- To enable municipal civil servants to deepen and update their knowledge of administrative problems specific to European nationals;
- To showcase the work of local civil servants, in particular by welcoming them to the European Parliament, a symbolic site of the European Union;
- To enable local civil servants to meet their colleagues from other local authorities and the heads of the personnel departments of the various European institutions, with whom they are often in contact by telephone.

In other words, the CEIO's aim with this initiative is not only to improve the image of Brussels and its municipalities among Europeans, but also to improve the image of the European Union among municipal civil servants.

Around a hundred people took part in this one-day training course.

The training was aimed primarily at managers in the civil registry, population and foreign affairs departments. It is essential that the training reaches the right people so that they can pass on the information to their staff. A syllabus containing the presentations of all the speakers was distributed to the participants. Around twenty European officials responsible for the personnel departments of the various European institutions also took part in the training course.

The topics covered gave rise to a great deal of interaction with the participants, both local authority officials and European personnel department officials. This made it possible to highlight the problems encountered on the ground by officials dealing with the registration of international civil servants and to propose some solutions.





Training for municipal staff at the European Parliament, 12 June 2023

A host region policy

Institutional liaison

Expat Welcome Desk



## Programme

**9.00** Introduction by **Alain HUTCHINSON** - Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations

**9.15** The staff of the European institutions in Belgium: situation and legal status

- **Jens SCHROEDER** – Head of Unit, Front Office, European Parliament
- **Felipe MORENO** – Head of Unit, Staff Support Service, European Commission
- **Salvatore MORELLO** – Head of Staff Support Service, Council of the EU

**9.35** Registration of international civil servants on special residence permits

- **Vincent REMY** – Deputy Head of Protocol, Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs
- **Derya AYDIN and Antoine VANVECKHOVEN** – Protocole Directorate (P1 - Privileges et Immunities), Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs

**10.10** Acquisition of Belgian nationality for EU civil servants

- **Céline VERBROUCK** – Lawyer, Altea

**10.45** Residency for European civil servants under general law and family reunification for European civil servants

- **Chantal GODIN** – EU Citizens Desk, Foreigners' Office
- **Magali MORIAU** – Family Reunification Desk, Foreigners' Office

**11.25** European Elections: opening the vote to 16 year olds

- **Pierre-Yves VOISIN** – Deputy Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Belgium

**11.40** Municipal elections 2024: registration of EU citizens

- **Christine PELFRENE** – Director, Citizens Affairs Department, Ville de Bruxelles, and President of the Intermunicipal Working Group

**12.00** Presentation of the project on foreign residents' user experience with the administrations of the Brussels-Capital Region

- **Stéphanie DHEUR** – Project Manager, easy.brussels

## 3.3 Taxation of bursaries awarded to trainees in the European institutions

According to the Individual Income Tax Service of the Belgian federal government, the traineeship agreement implies the performance of paid work in a relationship of subordination, constituting an employment contract. Consequently the allowances granted as part of the Schuman scholarship do indeed represent taxable remuneration within the meaning of article 30, 1°, and 31, paragraph 2, 1°, of the 1992 Income Tax Code.

Trainees must therefore currently declare their Schuman scholarships on this basis.

What is more, Schuman bursaries are higher than the minimum taxable income as a result of the prorating mechanism in force since 2018 and inserted into article 174/1 of the 1992 Income Tax Code (CIR 92). The amount of the basic tax-exempt portion is prorated over time and trainees must declare in their tax return how many months they have been in Belgium. As they will only be in Belgium for a few months, they cannot benefit from the full €9270 tax-free allowance (for the year 2023), which is only valid for a full year. This explains why trainees may be taxed a certain amount, depending on their date of arrival.

For the European institutions, this taxation raises questions because, in their view, trainee bursaries do not represent true remuneration:

- The purpose of the allowance paid to a trainee is to cover living expenses during their stay in Belgium. It is not a salary and the amount of the allowance does not even reach the minimum amount of a monthly salary in Belgium.
- The traineeship is not a real job, since its purpose is to allow the trainee to learn. In addition, some trainees remain students in their country of origin.
- The traineeship is limited to 6 months and therefore limited in time.
- This legislation penalises younger people and trainees who cannot benefit from any financial aid.

With the support of the CEIO, the European institutions and the Federal Public Service for Finance held a meeting at the end of November in the Cabinet of Minister Van Peteghem to analyse the situation. One option that emerged was that part of the trainee's grant should be considered the employer's own costs, in particular the share of accommodation costs. This issue will be followed up in 2024.



# 4. Projects

## 4.1 Brussels is still your home! Our Brexit Adjustment Reserve project draws to a close

With the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR), the EU helps its Member States to mitigate the detrimental economic and social fallout of the the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union. Part of the budget is dedicated to actions intended to make citizens aware of the new challenges they face. Against this backdrop, the CEIO, and in particular its Expat Welcome Desk, launched a two-year project to inform and support British nationals living in the Brussels Region.

Brussels has a sizeable British expatriate community, which contributes significantly to the economic prosperity and intellectual capital of the Region. During the post-referendum negotiations, these residents found themselves in legal limbo, but the Withdrawal Agreement now guarantees their rights to stay and work. Administrative challenges and confusion in exercising these rights persist, however, and the new status has sometimes had complex consequences. British nationals who moved to Brussels after the end of the transition period, or who are now considering doing so, are now subject to the conditions applicable to any third-country national.

Given its mission to advise and guide expatriates in their daily administrative challenges, the EWD has received many questions and requests for support from the British community since the Brexit referendum. The team has become a real centre of expertise on this matter. The CEIO was therefore the ideal regional stakeholder to implement a BAR project devised to gauge the impact and mitigate the consequences of Brexit on British nationals in Brussels. Our ultimate goal is to help this community maintain sustainable roots and to put an end to a "Brexodus" that would harm the economic and social fabric of our cosmopolitan Region.







Closing event at commissioner.brussels, 29 November 2023

## The 5 pillars of our Brexit project

- Individual support:** The Expat Welcome Desk answers all kinds of individual questions from British nationals. We handled more than 250 cases during the two years of the project.
- Creation of an online Brexit Helpdesk:** We published a new section of our website setting out all the administrative information that British nationals in Brussels need to be aware of.
- Webinars and newsletters:** We published and distributed 12 editions of our newsletter The Brexit Brief, aiming to enrich and promote the information in the helpdesk. We also organised a series of eight thematic webinars where participants could discuss their questions with legal experts. These activities reached several thousand readers and participants.
- Brexit Impact Scan:** This report summarises and presents the main findings of the project: survey results, demographic data and a legal analysis of the post-Brexit situation. The results show that the situation of British nationals in Brussels is complex and precarious, but they also show that the feared "Brexodus" has not materialised. In fact, more than 2500 British citizens living in Brussels have become Belgian since the referendum. It also seems that the Brexit has strengthened the roots of the British community in Brussels. The report attracted considerable interest from the press.
- Closing event:** A face-to-face conference and debate in our offices served as both the project's closing event and the launch of the *Brexit Impact Scan* report. We welcomed a packed room (around 60 people) for a warm evening of presentations and discussions. Among the speakers was His Excellency Martin Shearman, UK Ambassador to Belgium.



## 4.2 Brussels Voice 23 – a successful second chapter for this new democratic space

Brussels is a unique democratic melting pot. Home to the EU institutions and their staff, it is in fact a magnet for migrants from all around the world. The Brussels-Capital Region is also experimenting with new approaches to democracy: the regional Parliament runs world-first Deliberative Committees putting politicians and citizens around the same table to debate and draft recommendations. Nevertheless, non-Belgian residents still cannot vote in regional elections. This leaves one third of the population without a clear voice in the regional policies which manage everything from transport to housing, from employment to urban planning.

In the government agreement, the Brussels-Capital Region committed itself to establishing a democratic participation platform to give a voice to Brussels residents with a non-Belgian citizenship. The CEIO therefore launched Brussels Voice in 2021 in order to address this democratic deficit and give International Brusselers the chance to speak up. In the first cycle, some 1500 online and face-to-face participants created the *Manifesto of the International Brusseler* and its 22 proposals. In 2023, we collated and published detailed replies to that initial set of ideas from members of the regional government.

The success of the first cycle created the momentum for a second. For this new project, commissioner.brussels worked hand in hand with the Brussels Parliament. A recruitment campaign in summer 2023 gathered almost 600 applications, from which 45 non-Belgians were randomly selected to create a new panel of International Brusselers. When asked which policy area they most wanted to work on, the applicants selected mobility. During three multilingual workshops, the panel then shared their frustrations, interviewed experts, and imagined the future of mobility and transport in Brussels.





Workshops at commissioner.brussels and deliberative session at the Brussels Parliament, October and November 2023

The panel developed 15 strategic priorities, which were the starting point for a day of deliberative sessions at the Brussels Parliament on Saturday 14 October. At Parliament, citizens worked with members of parliament and representatives of the political groups to develop 15 recommendations grouped around 5 topics:

1. Accessibility of the city for all
2. Environment and climate
3. Connections between transport inside and outside the Brussels-Capital Region
4. Safety
5. Urban Planning

The results reveal an international community that is generally supportive of the Region's ambitions to make green mobility the key to an accessible city of livable communities. However, the participants were critical of the institutional barriers to more integrated mobility systems – especially when it comes to better public transport connections with the periphery as an alternative to commuting by car. They also expressed concerns about safety on the roads and security in public transport spaces, particularly for vulnerable travelers. Finally, the recommendations call for a dedicated international bus/coach station.

The CEIO developed and implemented the bespoke methodology of Brussels Voice 23 alongside the Brussels Parliament and professional facilitators. The process puts us on the map as an innovative actor in the vibrant democratic participation scene of Europe's hyperdiverse capital. The Brussels Voice website tells the story of the project and shares the outputs of the first two cycles:

[www.brusselsvoice.commissioner.brussels](http://www.brusselsvoice.commissioner.brussels)



# 5. 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, but since the Covid-19 pandemic they regularly take place as video conferences (via the Webex platform).

## 8 webinars for UK citizens as part of our Brexit Adjustment Reserve project:

24/01/2023

*You've got your M-Card. What next?* 60 participants

16/02/2023

*Moving to Belgium after Brexit* 28 participants

27/03/2023

*Travel, work and retire in other EU countries* 37 participants

22/05/2023

*Can I acquire Belgian nationality? And what about my children?* 49 participants

22/06/2023

*Can I bring my family to live with me in Belgium?* 11 participants

21/09/2023

*What do I need to know about tax?* 53 participants

17/10/2023

*How do I apply for Belgian nationality?* 46 participants

14/11/2023

*What do I need to know about pensions & social security?* 30 participants



## 3 additional webinars for our entire audience:

09/03/2023

*Lease contracts in Belgium : All you need to know* 58 participants

08/06/2023

*Filing your Belgian tax return?* 137 participants

30/10/2023

*Soft landing in Belgium: the education system* 66 participants



# 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](https://www.visit.brussels).*

09/01/2023

### Welcome to students from the University of Kent

*This will be the last welcome given that the University is due to close its Brussels campus in 2024*

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

27/09/2023

Spouses Day at the European Commission (27/04/2023), for the spouses of new European civil servants.

10/10/2023

Presentation at the Irish Embassy: Living in Brussels

10/2023

Presentation of the EWD's services at the Career Day organised by the Council of the EU

22/06/2023

Stand at the Hotel Plaza during the Business Day event organised by hub.Brussels for the economic and commercial attachés of the Brussels-Capital Region

10/10/2023

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

# Conclusion

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Across the decades, the presence of the European institutions and international organisations has become an ever more important source of employment and revenue for the Brussels-Capital Region. The direct and indirect economic spillovers are huge: more than 52 000 direct jobs, tens of thousands of indirect jobs, and an impressive value added which is estimated at over 20% of the regional economy.

This concentration of major international public institutions is an opportunity envied by many other cities and regions, but they are not here by chance. Brussels offers all the key factors to encourage the establishment of international organisations, such as the presence of other supranational and intergovernmental bodies and the opportunity to collaborate with them. Brussels also offers high-quality office space and housing, a robust international education system, a generally positive quality of life, and an effective and responsive welcome policy.

After 10 years of intensive work at the service of international organisations and the Brussels Government, the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and his office now make a major contribution to Brussels' solid reputation as a host region. We do this via our Institutional Liaison Unit and our Expat Welcome Desk, the latter providing personalised administrative support for the international community.

As we approach the end of the current legislature, we call for Brussels to push ahead with the host region policy which we launched 10 years ago for the institutions already present in our Region or planning to settle here. Now more than ever, we need a vision in which the unique international role of Brussels is a priority and a point of close coordination between the Region and the federal Government. We are therefore appealing for a clear mandate from the next Brussels Government so that the Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations can strengthen its activities even further.

As a model organisation for other governance hub cities, we have set the bar high. We intend to maintain this high standard in the years ahead, as the challenges remain significant and our Region has a duty to be even more vigilant in the face of competition from other city-regions. To do this, we must at the very least safeguard the budgetary footing of our organisation, which has succeeded, with a team of just eight people, in opening up new avenues in our relations with the European and international institutions.

Finally, the Brussels-Capital Region is strongly linked to developments in Europe and the world because of its international status and its very diverse population. As convinced Europeans, we therefore feel it necessary to warn against declining support for European integration and growing criticism of global and international cooperation. It is thanks to the stability and freedom which the European project offers its citizens in a world full of tensions and conflicts, that we can face up to the many challenges of our time.

We would like to thank the government, and in particular the Minister-President and the Secretary of State for European and International Relations, for their support.



**Karin IMPENS**  
*Director*

**Alain HUTCHINSON**  
*Brussels Commissioner for Europe  
and International Organisations*

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



This report is published by:



Avenue d'Auderghem 63 Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

T.:+32 (0)2 430 66 00

[info@commissioner.brussels](mailto:info@commissioner.brussels) - [www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels)

Responsible editor: Alain HUTCHINSON, Avenue d'Auderghem 63 Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

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