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## This Guide

Working abroad sounds to many people like an adventure.

However, without thorough preparation, starting with a successful application, it is bound to fail. Therefore, Expertise in Labour Mobility (ELM) has prepared a set of country guides describing the main routes to employment in over 40 countries. Are you interested in working in Australia, Spain or Japan? Has your partner accepted a job in Hungary, Switzerland, or the United Arab Emirates?

Are you looking for an internship possibility in France, Singapore or the United States of America? The Looking for work in... guides from ELM will help you with accurate information and practical tips on working cultures and differences in job hunting in over 40 countries.

As an extra addition to the series – following many requests - ELM introduced a new guide: 'Looking for work in International Organisations' which explains how to successfully look for work in for instance the institutes of the European Commission, UN institutions, and NGO's.

This guide contains information on Belgium. It tells you how to apply for a job in Belgium and depicts aspects of cultural distinctiveness you will come across when looking for a job in Belgium. Do not underestimate those national differences. What is common in one country might be very unusual in another. To find a job abroad you need to be aware that national differences manifest themselves not only in different languages, but also in different recruitment practices.

Thus, looking for work in another country involves more than writing your CV/resume in another language.

No matter the country that you are looking for work in, the key focus of your CV should be to persuade the employer to invite you for a job interview. Accordingly, your CV should be regarded as a marketing tool, adapted to the market in which you intend to use it. The information in this guide, will help you to adapt your application for the Belgian job market. However, make sure your application remains a reflection of your personality. Working abroad is one thing, but having a job that does not suit you will definitely cause homesickness!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nannette Ripmeester', with a horizontal line underneath.

Nannette Ripmeester, MA  
Managing Director  
Expertise in Labour Mobility





## Country Profile

The constitutional Monarchy of Belgium is a comparatively small state in North-western Europe with a territory of about 30,528 square kilometres (11,787 square miles), being home to some 10,584,534 inhabitants.

The country shares borders with the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg and Germany. The North Sea fringes the west side of the country with 67 km (41.5 mi) of coastline. Flat coastal plains dominate the vegetation in the north, whereas the country's centre is hilly. An area of highlands and forest can be found in the southeast. Brussel is the federal capital of Belgium and home of approximately 1,080,790 people (2008 est.). Other major cities in Belgium are Antwerp, Bruges, Charleroi, Ghent and Liège.

Since 1993, Belgium is a federal state, subdivided into 'gemeenschappen' and 'gewesten' (communities and regions). The official three communities each have their own language and consist mainly

of the Flemish- (i.e. a non-standardized dialect of Dutch) speaking, the French-speaking and the German-speaking population. The communities are regionally separated from one another and divided into 4 language areas defined in 1962-63.

Belgium furthermore comprises three partly self-governed regions. The Flemish district (58% of the population) encompasses the north of the country. It incorporates the provinces West-Flanders, East-Flanders, Limburg, Antwerp and Flemish-Brabant. The Walloon district (31.7 % of the population) in the south, where predominantly French is spoken, consists of the provinces Hainaut, Namur, Liège, Luxembourg and Brabant Walloon. Finally, located the right in centre of the state, there is the bilingual region of Brussels, where both – French and Flemish – receive official status. The autonomy of the three regions, however, is limited to legislation concerning local policies like for instance education and culture, employment, housing, energy, environment etc. The federal state continues to cover the issues that have an impact on all Belgian citizens, such as the country's foreign policy. Yet, it is important to realise that Belgium is a diversified country, in which the Flemings strive towards independence. One important reason for the Flemish initiative is the fact that today the region of Flanders is considerably wealthier than most parts of Wallonia. Always keep in mind that there are regional differences, and that in fact the people – although being Belgian – preserve a distinctive Walloon or Flemish identity.

## Climate

Belgium has a temperate, maritime climate. The weather is seasonal with cold temperatures in winter (January 0°C/32°F) and rather mild temperatures in summer (July 22°C/71°F). Snow is likely during winter. Also fog and drizzle are common, particularly in spring and fall. April and November are considered months with heavy rain.

## Population

Belgium has 10,584,534 (2008 est.) inhabitants, of which 58% is Flemish and 31.7% Walloon. Approximately 11% of the population are foreign-born people. Among other reasons, this rather high percentage is due to the large proportion of international professionals working and living in Brussels.

## History

The Kingdom of Belgium derives its name from the name of its earliest inhabitants, the Belgae, an ancient Celtic tribe. From the 1st century B.C. onwards, the territory known as Belgium today has been invaded and occupied many times over. It was turned into a Roman province by the Roman army until due to the increased immigration of Germanic Frankish tribes throughout the 5th century the land was brought under the rule of the Merovingian Kingdom evolving into the Carolingian Empire under Charlemagne around 800. After Charlemagne's death the Empire was divided

again, small feudal principalities began to emerge, many of which rejoined as the Burgundian Netherlands in the 14th and 15th century.

During the 14th century, Belgium enjoyed a golden age of wealth and artistry under the French Duke of Burgundy. This was a prosperous time for cloth-trading Flemish towns like Ypres, Bruges, and Ghent. Whereas due to British competition, Bruges as Belgium's economic centre began to decline, the city of Antwerp evolved quickly, hosting the largest and most important port in Europe. This Golden Age ended in the mid-15th century, when the Low Countries (present-day Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) became occupied by Spain. A period of resistance against Catholic Spanish rule began. King Philip II of Spain sent in the Inquisition to enforce Catholicism. Thousands were imprisoned or executed before full-scale war erupted in 1568.

After an 80 years' struggle over independence, eventually, Holland along with its allied provinces succeeded in overthrowing the Spanish. Belgium and Luxembourg, however, resided under Spanish rule.

During the French Revolution, Belgian territory was invaded and annexed by the First French Republic. The French occupation lasted until Napoleon's defeat by British and Prussian troops at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. Aiming at restructuring Europe, the foundation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, was agreed upon in the same year on the Congress of Vienna. Subsequently,

both, Belgium and Luxembourg, became adjoined to the new Kingdom under the House of Orange-Nassau. From antiquity onwards the territory and its people faced conflicts and warfare many times over. It became a stage of the Franco-Spanish and the Franco-Austrian wars, and the battle at Waterloo. Until the Belgian uprising against the Dutch rule and the dynasty of Orange in 1830, the country stood to witness so many conflicts between the European forces that it was referred to as the Battlefield of Europe.

The Belgian Revolution in 1830, however, eventually led to the establishment of an independent, Catholic, and politically neutral state. Driving force behind the rebellion were the Catholic clergy, who refused to accept a Protestant King. One year after the revolutionary events, the provisional government installed Leopold I from the German house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha as constitutional monarch of Belgium's parliamentary democracy.

Belgium eagerly engaged in the Industrial Revolution through which the country generated wealth but also developed an increased demand for raw materials and natural resources it went to import via its African territory. The Berlin Conference of 1885 had previously dedicated the Congo Free State to King Leopold II as his private possession. In 1908, it was ceded to Belgium as a colony, henceforth called the Belgian Congo. Belgian control of the Congolese population was savage, particularly under Leopold II. Only in 1960