



Country guide for new EPIET/EUPHEM fellows

Sciensano, Brussels

Belgium

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Source:

<http://epitalumni.net/activities/countries-guide/>

Please note: This is a living document. If you find any information to be incorrect or out of date, or there is anything you wish to add, please amend the guide (and date it accordingly) and send the new version to your cohort representative for uploading onto the EAN country guides website. Thank you.

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EARLY ON AND GETTING STARTED

1. Registration in Belgium

Residence permit/card (if needed) & Visa (if needed)

As an EU-citizen, you have the right to live in any EU country if you work there. During the first 3 months of your stay, your host country cannot require you to register your residence. You can do so if you wish. After 3 months, your host country may require you to register your residence with local authorities, to show that you're working there and obtain a document confirming your right to stay.

Source: https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/residence-rights/index_en.htm

Registration, incl. social security number/ID/Person number

In Belgium you have to register in the commune (municipality) where you are going to live and the whole procedure takes around three months.

Initially you present at the commune and explain your case, then they will tell you the documents you need to bring in order to open a file and after that you will need to present a couple of other times, to confirm the registration and have your Belgian ID.

2. Finding accommodation

Areas to live

Most well-known areas are the city centre, Ixelles, Saint Gillis, Etterbeek and Schaerbeek. It depends a lot on where you want to live, almost all the city is OK if you visit and like the area.

Type of housing

It will depend on your needs and availability. Most probably you will find an apartment in Brussels, and it can be shared or not based on how much you want to spend. A room can go from 5-700 euro, a studio around 800. An apartment ranges 800-1500 depending on the size and the location. The prices fluctuate based on the type of housing and area of the city.

Terms – when looking for a flat

The terms and conditions of every place depend a lot from the renter and your requests. You can have a yearly contract or ask directly for the two years.

Best website is <https://www.immoweb.be/en/> .

Necessary documents to get accommodation – contract

For your work contract you will need only your ID or passport, while for the apartment contract you will need the ID/passport and a bank account, which can also be in your country of origin.

Amenities: Internet, Telephone, Television, Gas, Electricity, Water, Heating

Biggest internet providers are: Proximus, Base, Telenet and Voo. They also provide mobile sim cards, as well as the company Viking. Have a look at their rates online since they keep changing.

For Telenet, Proximus I know that you can create a new account with your original EU national ID, you don't need to wait for your Belgian ID to be ready (which was the case with earlier fellows). Be aware

that in the Eurostation office building there is no coverage for several mobile phone companies, so I needed to change mine from Telenet to Proximus, which provides connection there too. If you prefer to choose a different company and experience that you need your Belgian ID card first, until then you can use prepaid cards.

The house services will depend a lot on the house you will get. For further information ask the landlord/landlady.

Furniture and household goods

For affordable furniture, there is Ikea and also local second-hand shops. For the latter, please google for further information on <https://www.2ememain.be/>. Vintered, Facebook marketplace are also good options.

Useful websites

Housing

Best website is <https://www.immoweb.be/en/> .

Also check Facebook groups like Bruxelles: Loc&Coloc, BXL à louer-de bouches à oreilles

3. Reimbursement of expenses

4. Finances

Bank account

You can open a bank account in the bank you prefer. I had an account at KBC (Zsofi), I did the paperwork in English and found the mobile app handy. I would recommend the ING bank because they have all the services and paper work also in English (Ana).

BNP Paribas Fortis also has an expat department and I have had good experiences here (Natalie).

Other banks: Belfius, Beobank (easy for expats).

Taxes

You have to declare your income to the Belgian tax department.

5. Administration

Contract

P&O@sciensano.be

Salary corrections

You can check your salary correction with the ECDC Fellowship Office. As an indication, check the 2016 correction factor here, around page 16:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/6939681/7070380/5189298_annual_report.pdf

Pension (public/private)

Public pension, no action to be undertaken by fellow

6. Insurance

Health insurance ~ mutuelle

Recommendations/suggestions

There are a lot to choose from. I have an account at Partenamut (Zsofi). The cost is 12.5 euros a month. Besides reimbursement of certain proportion of health care costs, it offers reimbursement on others things as well until a certain extent (e.g. vaccines, sport activities, dietary, allergy treatments ...etc). Sciensano also offers hospital insurance for free for employees, which I also took. Complementary insurance is available too, check with the institute on arrival.

Travel clinics/where to get vaccinations

CHU Hospital St Pierre in Brussels <https://www.stpierre-bru.be/fr/services-medicaux/maladies-infectieuses-2/travel-and-vaccine-clinic/en-bref-333>

Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp

Travel insurance

Information about ECDC Travel Insurance

ECDC travel insurance is provided by Cigna International Health Services. All staff and sponsored meeting delegates travelling on behalf of ECDC are covered by this insurance. The insurance takes effect as from the time one leaves their home/office for the meeting/mission and ends upon return to home/office. Times outside this period, including durations with private deviations, are not covered.

Coverage includes, among others, medical expenses as well as costs for repatriation in case of personal accident and/or serious illness, theft, riots etc. For medical expenses, travel insurance is a complimentary insurance. Any costs or damages that are not covered by the primary insurance (private, national or corporate) will be supplemented by the travel insurance upon a written declaration that such expense had not been covered.

Please note that the ECDC Travel Insurance is only a "top-up" insurance and everyone is expected to have a travel insurance (professional or private) already.

It is recommended to always bring your European Health Insurance Card when travelling in Europe.

Source: ECDC EVA

Travel health insurance

Extra insurance can be taken, like EuropAssistance, Partena, Ethias...

Accident insurance

Extra insurance can be taken, like EuropAssistance, Partena, Ethias...

Liability insurance

Extra insurance can be taken, like EuropAssistance, Partena, Ethias...

A previous fellow had it at her bank (BNP Paribas Fortis, about 8 Euros per month).

Expat insurance

Not needed as far as I know

7. Leaving the country

Suggested removal companies

This depends a lot on your country of origin/destination.

Places to deregister from

Unregister at commune (municipality).

AT WORK

8. The institute Sciensano

Getting to & from the City/Institute

The main building of the institute is situated in Ixelles municipality (this is the place where you have to go to pick up your computer and receive the first briefing). The EPIET fellow is based in the Epidemiology of Infectious Diseases department, which is located next to the station Gare du Midi (Eurostation, Rue Ernest Blerot 1, 1070 Anderlecht). The EUPHEM site is in Uccle (Rue Engelhard 642., 1180) . The way of how to get to the institute will depend on where you will be based and where you live. Public transport is quite good in Brussels, all areas are reachable either by train, metro, tram and bus. Biking is also a popular option as sometimes it is even faster to get anywhere this way.

Your office space

Normally office spaces are shared with other colleagues. Offices might go from 2 up to 7 people working in the same area. It will depend on where you will be placed.

Access card

You will be given an access card for the building of the department on your first day of work.

Laptop and mobile

You receive a laptop from the institute at your arrival, but there is no mobile phone included.

Remote Access

VPN connection is provided for your work computer when you receive your laptop: ICT office sets it up. It's possible to work from home currently 2-3 days a week. You can also access your email remotely on a computer or on your phone via Office 365.

Holidays

If you have never worked in Belgium, you are not entitled to paid leave your first year of working. If you have worked in the EU before, you can apply for European leave (you need to request it from P&O office). You get up to a maximum of 20 days, 5 days after every 3 months (the first 3 months you don't have holidays).

This is valid only for the first year. Your second year of work you will have 26 days of holiday a year.

Public Holidays

The institute celebrates all national public holidays. For specific information check <https://www.propay.be/en/news/public-holidays-in-2024/>.

Working Time

Normal working hours go between 9 and 17. You can come in between 9:00 and 9:30, and upon agreement with your supervisor there might be some flexibility according to the needs. (Because of family duties I was coming between 8 and 16h, it was agreed by my supervisor without any problem [Zsofi]).

Lunch

All Sciensano employees have a Pluxee (former Sodexo) card which allows them to pay for food and grocery. The amount received is about 6 euros per working day. For the EPIET fellow there are plenty of options around the station where you can buy food for lunch. One of them is a big cantine (Restaurant Horta) across the street in the railway station building, where a variety of meals is offered every day. Otherwise, you can also bring your lunch and eat it in the lunch area (it's equipped with microwaves to warm your food). At the EUPHEM site in Ukkel there is no canteen nor places around where to buy food, but you can order sandwiches to be delivered.

LIVING IN Belgium

9. Culture (dos and don'ts)

Brussels is a very international and multicultural city. People are normally open minded and I am not aware of special things you should not do. If you appreciate beer, fries and chocolate, you will be more than fine ☺ In order to have other advice, please have a look at:

- <https://expatsinbrussels.be/en>
- <https://www.expatica.com/be/about/basics/an-introduction-to-living-in-belgium-469849/>

10. Public transport

The Institute will provide you for free a public transport card, and you can use it for the whole city of Brussels, or if you leave outside the city, also to commute from your place to work.

Normally the card takes 1 month to be ready after your arrival, and meanwhile you can pay the weekly ticket and keep the receipts, which will be reimbursed. You will need to provide a picture of you to use for the card.

11. Cycling in the city

In most of the areas in town you can cycle, either with your own bike or a rented one. There is a city bike rent system, Villo, where for 1,5 euro you can use the Villo bikes for 24 hours. (first 30 mins. are free afterwards it has increasing tariffs by hours) They also have different subscription options. For further information have a look here: <https://www.villo.be/en/offers/groups>

There are other brands too including e-bikes and scooters.

12. Language schools

Every semester internal courses are offered by the Sciensano institute to learn either French or Dutch and they are for free. You can choose from face to face courses and online courses. The start or not of

a course normally depends on the number of enrolled people.

Outside courses could be:

- French: <https://www.alliancefr.be/en/>
- Dutch: <https://www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be/en/learn-practise>

For further information have a look online.

13. Recreational Activities, sports, worth visiting, meeting people

Have a look at the following websites:

- <https://visit.brussels/en>
- <https://agenda.brussels/en>
- <https://www.brussels.be/>
- <https://www.brusselslife.be/en>
- <https://www.quefaire.be/region-de-bruxelles>

Facebook has also good expat groups where you can meet people or parental groups where you can ask for any kind of info.

14. Supermarkets

As in every big city in Brussels there are a lot of supermarkets around, and the best one will depend on the area you will live in. The most famous ones are probably Carrefour and Delhaize.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

15. Moving in with a family

Registration to **schools** is done usually earlier in the year than you receive the news that you had been accepted as a fellow. So I advise you to get into contact with a school you prefer. Public kindergarten starts from 2,5 years (kindergarten is called school here: école maternelle). From the age of 5, it is mandatory to go to school. Public schools are free.

There is a **family allowance** of approx. 160 euros per month, you need to apply for "allocations familiales" at private providers (i.e. Parentia, Famiwal) or state-run provider Famiris .

Kindergarten official hours were from 8.25 - 15.30 for us, but they operate with optional extra hours surveillance (garderie) so that your child can be supervised until 18.30 for an extra very small fee. Wednesdays are historically short days, official hours end around 11/12h but garderie is provided in most of the places.

School calendar is different in the Flemish institutes than the French-speaking schools, meaning school holidays are scheduled at a different time.

You have a free choice of **paediatricians**, there is no such system that your child is required to be followed by the same doctor. On <https://www.doctoranytime.be/en> you can book appointments online at any available doctor based on your preferences.

The parent's mutuelle covers the child too, you need to have it mandatorily and it makes the health system available for your child too. If using primary or specialist care, you have to pay at each visit, and depending on the type of the service, you get reimbursed partially (for example a paediatrician visit

costs 60 euros, you get reimbursed 30 euros, other adult specialist care 70-80 euros). The reimbursement varies depending on the doctor's contract if he is "conventionné" or "non-conventionné".

CONTACT

16.Key contacts at your institute

Contact point: Amber.Litzroth@sciensano.be

HR: P&O@sciensano.be

Finance: P&O@sciensano.be

17.Contact information of current and previous fellows

Feel free to contact the current fellows. They have lots of additional information that they are happy to share with you.

Name	Cohort	Email	Nationality, moved from/to	Moved with partner/family
Ana Hoxha	2018	Ana.hoxha489@gmail.com	Italian, moved from Italy to Belgium	No
Natalie Fischer	2019	Natalie.Fischer211@gmail.com	German, moved from the US to Belgium	With partner
Valeska Laisnez	2021	Valeska.laisnez@sciensano.be	Belgian (MS track fellow)	NA
Zsofia Bognar	2022	dr.bognar.zsofia@gmail.com	Hungarian, moved from Hungary to Belgium	moved with family
Elena Portell Buj	2023	elenapb_92@hotmail.com	Spanish, moved from Spain to Belgium	No