



# AccessAble Brussels

Guide for newcomers with disabilities







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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the institutions of the European Union! We are happy that you are starting a career or a traineeship with us and look forward to your unique contribution to the advancement of our common European project.



The European Union has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its institutions embrace the Convention's objectives. This guide is a small but significant step towards making full participation of people with disabilities in our societies a reality, since diversity and inclusiveness belong to our core values.

The guide aims to help you with your new start and make it as smooth as possible. We want to do this by providing you with pointers so that you can make the best possible choices in terms of accommodation, transport, and leisure activities. Your success is our success!

## Recognition of Disability

Currently, there is no mutual recognition of disability among EU Member States. If you envisage staying in Brussels for a long time (over one year) we advise you to apply for the recognition of your disability in Belgium. This will enable you to take advantage of certain allowances and benefits. The same applies to your family members with a disability. Your own institution's HR Services as well as the [Paymaster's Office](#) (PMO) at the European Commission are there to support you through this rather lengthy process.

If you are coming to Brussels only for a limited period of time, the procedure for the official recognition of disability in Belgium is not worth considering since it takes about one year.



## Reasonable accommodation at the workplace

In case you require any special arrangements in order to feel comfortable at work, each institution offers reasonable accommodation<sup>1</sup> measures so that you can enjoy the full benefits of employment.

<sup>1</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which applies to the EU institutions, states that persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others. To facilitate access to work, the employer must provide 'reasonable accommodations' to persons with disabilities who request them, unless this would impose a disproportionate burden (e.g. unreasonable costs, negative impact on safety of staff members, etc.) on the employer.

# AT YOUR SERVICE

Each institution of the European Union has a service that can help you get settled once you have arrived in Brussels. Regardless of whether it is a welcome office and/or HR services, they are there to provide more information on the special set-up of your institution and to direct you towards the right addresses in Belgium for questions related to your particular needs.

## European Parliament

[disability-info@ep.europa.eu](mailto:disability-info@ep.europa.eu)

## Council of the European Union

Trainee Office: [stages@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:stages@consilium.europa.eu)

Social Service: [service.social@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:service.social@consilium.europa.eu)

Equal Opportunities Office: [egalite-des-chances@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:egalite-des-chances@consilium.europa.eu)

## European Commission

Email: [HR-HANDICAP-DISABILITY@ec.europa.eu](mailto:HR-HANDICAP-DISABILITY@ec.europa.eu) / Tel. (+32) 02 29 71233

Email: [HR-DIVERSITY@ec.europa.eu](mailto:HR-DIVERSITY@ec.europa.eu)

## European External Action Service

[disability-support@eeas.europa.eu](mailto:disability-support@eeas.europa.eu)

## European Economic and Social Committee

Social Service: [svcmédicosocialcese@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:svcmédicosocialcese@eesc.europa.eu)

Equal Opportunities Office: [egalitedeschances@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:egalitedeschances@eesc.europa.eu)

## European Committee of the Regions

Welfare Officer/Social Assistant: [social-service-CoR@cor.europa.eu](mailto:social-service-CoR@cor.europa.eu)

Equal Opportunities Office: [equal-opportunities@cor.europa.eu](mailto:equal-opportunities@cor.europa.eu)

# ACCOMMODATION

If your disability has been recognised by the Belgian authorities, during your search for accessible accommodation you can refer to the National Association for the Accommodation of People with Disability [Association Nationale pour le Logement des Handicapés](#) (ANLH) - available only in French - which enjoys support from the Brussels-Capital Region.

If you are a trainee or if you are just about to start your probationary period as an official, we have collected some useful addresses for you: just contact your institution's relevant service that will provide you with a copy of that list, from which you can start your search.





# TRANSPORT



Brussels has an extensive public transport network (metro, buses and trams) operated by the [Brussels Inter-Municipal Transport Company](#) (STIB/MIVB). It is a long way from being fully accessible, even though the authorities are continuously working on improving it.

To compensate for this shortcoming STIB/MIVB offers [adapted vehicles](#). If your disability has been recognised in Belgium you can use their services. Other not-for-profit organisations offering adapted transport are:

- [Transport et Vie](#) (site available in French only)
- [ContrePied](#) (site available in French only)
- [ASTA](#) (site available in French only)

There are a number of private taxi companies with adapted vehicles that can help you organise your daily commute to work. For more information please consult [Brussels Mobility](#).

If you decide to live on the outskirts or outside Brussels, bear in mind that the [Belgian Railways](#) (SNCB/NMBS) also offer assistance to people with reduced mobility.

Buses are also an option, linking Brussels with locations in Flanders and Wallonia. If you live in Flanders, the main bus operator is [De Lijn](#) (sites available in Dutch, French and English). If you live in Wallonia, the main bus operator is [TEC](#) (site available in French only).

## DAILY LIFE AND LEISURE

The most important thing to know on arriving in Brussels is that there are people here to help you! For any question regarding your new start here - whichever institution you will work for - feel free to get in touch with the friendly staff at the [Expat Welcome Desk](#). They will answer your questions and provide you with guidance about virtually any aspect of your new life, ranging from legal advice to practical tips.

Brussels is a vibrant city, as you might expect, with something for everybody. Restaurants, cafés, cinemas, theatres, shops, parks, sport centres: there are countless accessible places ready for you to explore and enjoy!

To find them, your best bet is [Brussels for All](#), a guidebook specifically for travellers with reduced mobility.



Another source of information is the official Brussels tourism site, which has a useful section on [accessible venues](#).

You may also be interested in the [EU Disability Card](#), which entitles you to certain benefits in theatres, cinemas and tourist attractions.

# DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS



## OUTSIDE THE EU INSTITUTIONS

Whatever your disability, you can almost certainly find an organisation in Brussels which represents it and defends your specific interests. Rather than list them all, we refer you to two umbrella organisations whose membership includes many disability-specific organisations.

**European Disability Forum:** The EDF groups together national disability councils and over 20 European organisations representing specific disabilities. It is a lobby organisation in daily contact with the EU institutions on all policies and matters concerning people with disabilities.

**Belgian Disability Forum:** The BDF comprises 18 Belgian organisations representing people with disabilities. It is a member of the EDF. The BDF represents the interests of various disability groups at national level. It is a public meeting place for open discussions and sharing of information, advocacy, knowledge and experience.

## INSIDE THE EU INSTITUTIONS

There are also several groups within the EU institutions which uphold the rights of staff members with disabilities:

**EC Disability Support Group:** This group is for staff members at the **European Commission** who have a family member (e.g. child) with a disability. Staff members of the other EU institutions are welcome to join.

You can contact us at: [EC-disability-support-group@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EC-disability-support-group@ec.europa.eu)

**ASDEC:** Association of Staff with a Disability in the **European Commission**

You can contact us at: [EC-staff-disability-asdec@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EC-staff-disability-asdec@ec.europa.eu)

**EP Disability Support Group:** This group is for staff members at the **European Parliament** who have a disability or who have a family member (e.g. child) with a disability. Staff members of the **other EU institutions** are welcome to join.

You can contact us at: [disability-support@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:disability-support@europarl.europa.eu)



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