

### LOCATION

Country: Belgium

Town: Mons

Info to consider:

- You will require a Belgian ID card. Once posted to Belgium, always travel with your Belgian ID card (speak to DET). Belgian law requires that everyone carry official identification at all times.
- The Belgian Government only recognizes foreign national (non-EU countries) children younger than 18 as dependents. Children 18 and older not enrolled full-time in school in Belgium may not reside at the post or stay in the country longer than 90 days in a 180 day period.
- Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)
- Family (non-dependents) can visit and stay 90 days **without a visa** (Schengen Area).

### POPULATION

Size: Mons – 95,000; Belgium – 11.3 million

**Ethnicity:** 92% of the population has Belgian citizenship, and 6% other EU. Belgium is home to two main linguistic groups: the Dutch-speaking, mostly Flemish community, which constitutes about 59% of the population, and the French-speaking, mostly Walloon population, which comprises 41% of all Belgians.

### LANGUAGE(S)

**Official language:** Belgium's official languages are French, Dutch, and German (which highly depends on the region/or province where you live). Official services are provided mainly in these three languages.

**Prevalence of French or English speaking:** French in the economy. The working language at SHAPE is English.

### COST OF LIVING

Exchange rate to consider: Euro

### QUALITY OF LIFE

**Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:**

- Winter temperatures rarely drop below zero and averages around 4 degrees Celsius. The average high summer temperatures are in the low 20s.

**Laws and culture:**

- Alcohol inexpensive. Beer plays a large role in Belgian culture.
- Drinking age 16 (wine/beer) and 18 (hard liquor).
- A Canadian driver's licence and an IDP are no longer valid once you have obtained residence status in Belgium. Before it expires, you may exchange your Canadian driver's licence for a Belgian licence if it was issued by Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario or Quebec.
- You must be at least 18 years of age to drive a car in Belgium.
- If you are a Canadian citizen, but also a citizen of Belgium, consular services may be limited.
- Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05%. Convicted offenders can expect heavy fines, and your driver's licence may be confiscated immediately.

**Safety and security:**

- While it is a safe city, look out for pickpockets as in any European city.
- There is a threat of terrorism in Europe. Terrorists have carried out attacks in several European cities. Further attacks in Europe are likely.

**Level of isolation:**

- There are 50-60 Canadian families in this location.

## HOUSING

- Availability can vary from houses, bungalows, semi-detached or detached, apartments, old farmhouses either renovated, new construction or everything in between.
- Basements are not dry-heated or equipped with air exchangers. Storing items in these types of basements/caves can damage your belongings.
- Spaces are smaller than what a Canadian standard house would offer.
- Canadians are not allowed to rent on base, they have to rent in Mons.
- Finding appropriate housing can be challenging depending on the family size (harder to find when you have more than two children).

## EMPLOYMENT

**Are there employment opportunities for spouses?** Due to tax and legal implications, spousal employment in Belgium is not a realistic option.

- Language abilities in French would be a condition for employment.
- There are very limited employment opportunities available through CFMWS, families should plan to be single-income for the duration of the posting.

**Op tempo:** The op tempo will vary greatly depending on the position. TD is possible.

## HEALTH CARE

**Access:** High-quality medical facilities are widely available.

- There is a Healthcare Clinic located on the base that treats member and their families. Services offered include pharmacy, immunization clinic, x-ray department, and laboratory.
- Health Services in Mons are provided in French, so it may take longer to find an English-speaking specialist.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP

**Special needs:**

- Yes, supports are available but are very limited depending on the language required (English/French), area of specialization, and degree of support needed.
- It is highly advised that the family consult with Medical Screening Officer in Canada and/or the Canadian Element to ensure that the required services are readily available in either English or French before accepting a posting.

**Consideration for pregnancy/birthing:**

- Health care for pregnancy and birthing is available in Mons.

**Dental:**

- Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay upfront, and you can then claim your expenses.

## SCHOOLING

- Schooling is typically through SHAPE International School - US Elementary Section for SK, SHAPE International School - US Elementary Section for grades 1-8, SHAPE International School - US Secondary Section for grades 9-12, École Internationale du SHAPE – Section kindergarten for grades JK and SK, SHAPE International School - Canadian Section for grades 1-8, or École Internationale du SHAPE – Section international for grades 1-12.
- Belgian schools are closed Wednesday afternoons.

**Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:**

- Curriculum varies depending on the choice of school.
- Some schools will offer Canadian history or geography as they are based on the Ontario curriculum.

**Resources for special needs children:**

- Access to special needs services depends on the choice of school, language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed, it may be very limited.
- Consult with CEM and the school before any commitments.

## CHILDCARE

- Largely available in town, but no guarantee staff will speak English.

## TRANSPORTATION

- Airports: Brussels Airport (BRU)
- Very good train system. Good biking to work and walking everywhere.

## RESOURCES AND AMENITIES

Is there a Military Family Services centre available in that location?

- Yes, under MFS(E) Casteau/SHAPE.

Psychosocial/mental health resources:

- Not at the post, and the MFS(E) SW is for dependents only. The CAF SW/Mental Health Team for members and families is in Geilenkirchen, Germany. The chaplain is at SHAPE, Belgium.

Communications (e.g. quality of Internet connection):

- Good, reliable, and widely offered.

## ACTIVITIES

Access to sports or other leisure activities:

- Access to NATO Base Leisure Center
- Wide variety, although English might be limited

Availability of playgrounds: Yes

## RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are common-law relationships recognized? Yes

Are same sex-couples recognized? Yes

Medications that are illegal in the country:

- Cannabis is illegal

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- European Commission Country Reports (2022)  
[https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports_en)
- Canadian Travel Advisories  
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- CIA World Factbooks (One pager from the US)  
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belgium>
- Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-belgium>
- Consumer Price Index (CPI)  
<https://data.imf.org/?sk=4FFB52B2-3653-409A-B471-D47B46D904B5>

For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below

- MFS(E) Social Worker Andrea Liss: [liss.andrea@cfmws.com](mailto:liss.andrea@cfmws.com)
- CAF Social Worker: [GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca](mailto:GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca)
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