

MANIFESTO OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRUSSELER

22 policy proposals
for the Brussels-Capital Region developed by
International Brusselers through the project
Live here. Speak, hear.

April 2022

THE MANIFESTO AT A GLANCE

THE VOICES



1395 registered participants
+ **9710** votes



International Brusselers =
all residents of Brussels with
non-Belgian citizenship



1 in 3 people living in the
Brussels-Capital Region

THE METHOD

1 digital platform

9 workshops

22 PROPOSALS ON 6 TOPICS

01

ALL VOICES HEARD

How can we give International Brusselers a say in regional politics?

02

ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES

How can we best help new arrivals and non-Belgians?

03

MODERN MOBILITY

How should we create the transport of tomorrow?

04

WELCOMING PUBLIC SPACE

How do we make our streets and parks fun and safe for all?

05

A PLACE TO LIVE, A PLACE FOR LIFE

How do we ensure everyone can find a home in Brussels?

06

A CLEAN CITY

How should we manage waste and keep Brussels clean?

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FOREWORDS

Alain Hutchinson

Brussels Commissioner
for Europe and International Organisations

Brussels bubbles with diversity. **1 in 3 residents is an International Brusseler, holding the nationality of a country other than Belgium**, and this multifaceted population is both a defining hallmark and a vital strength of our Capital Region. **International Brusselers are a vital part of Brussels' social and economic fabric**, and you will find them in every sector, district and service. However, many are here because of the international sector, working in and around the European and global institutions which our city is so proud to host. I experienced the dynamism of this sector in my years as a MEP and recent research from commissioner.brussels confirms its economic importance. More than 20% of economic output and employment in the Brussels-Capital Region is generated by the international sector.

Despite their vital contribution, International Brusselers have a complex relationship with Brussels and its administration. **They build careers, homes and lives here, and engage in the city's cultural and social life**. Yet they are forced to interact with services and administration that can be hard to understand or even dysfunctional for those from outside Belgium. **At commissioner.brussels we already offer International Brusselers support through our Expat Welcome Desk**, so we see the difficulties this community can face. It was a challenging but natural next step to explore new ways to give them the voice in regional policy that they are currently denied.

Indeed, **non-Belgians cannot vote in regional elections**, so they have traditionally had few opportunities to influence the policies that impact their daily lives. The need to remedy this **democratic deficit** has been clear for some years, but there was little concrete progress. However, in recent years novel solutions for the political inclusion of disenfranchised groups have emerged, thanks to developments in **online consultation and participative approaches to democracy**. Although no substitute for electoral rights, such projects can be a complement to representative democracy and a first step to electoral participation for groups who cannot vote.

As Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations I was pleased for commissioner.brussels to take the lead in **a bold experiment in participative democracy specifically targeting International Brusselers**. The result was *Live here. Speak, hear*. Through this innovative and vibrant participation project International Brusselers have worked together to develop the proposals you will find in this manifesto. They represent **a fascinating snapshot of the worries and hopes of this diverse community** and offer creative and practical solutions. The proposals in this manifesto in no way constitute an official position or recommendation from commissioner.brussels as an institution, but we were proud to accompany International Brusselers as they created them. I now pass them on to the regional Government and Brussels Parliament for consideration and look forward to the next steps in this important process.

Pascal Smet

Brussels State Secretary for European and international relations

With over 183 nationalities Brussels is **the most cosmopolitan city of Europe**, and even ranks 2nd globally. It is a fact we politicians often use with a sense of pride, and rightfully so. Yet while the presence of **the international community undoubtedly makes a very rich cultural and economic contribution**, the mere fact that they represent over a third of our population also requires that our policies take into account their demands, their interests and their expectations.

Indeed, this unique demographic blessing is also a challenge, as it confronts us with a huge democratic deficit, with non-Belgian citizens still not having the right to vote for the regional elections. If we want International Brusselers to become true ambassadors for our city, **it is our task as politicians to make them feel at home**, in the first place by treating them in that way.

While pushing for the long-term end goal of regional voting rights, it is my ambition as State Secretary for European and international relations during my term in office to **give International Brusselers a voice so they can be heard**. It is this introspection that brought me to launch the *Live here. Speak, hear.* project, which for the first time asked the international community to present their vision and demands to the Brussels government.

This manifesto is the result of an **intensive eight-month consultation process** with Brussels' international community, which the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations undertook upon my initiative. The results show us that while **the international community is confronted with problems and challenges** that are intrinsically tied to their status as international residents, for many of the core policies that we pursue as a government their demands are just the same as their fellow Belgian neighbours.

Our project indeed shows that, on the one hand, the International Brusseler is still not treated as a true citizen: they feel unheard, and rightfully ask for **more institutionalised forms of representation** as long as the right to vote cannot be offered to them. They also want **more visible and accessible public services**, which should get rid of unnecessary bureaucratic and language barriers. Or did you really believe that they share a passion for queuing hours at the population service of their commune while not fully understanding the public servant who is saying that they did not bring the right documents ;) ?

On the other hand, **they stand with many other Brusselers in their plea for cleaner streets, safer and improved public transport, more quality green public space, or for the development of comfortable and affordable housing in multifunctional neighbourhoods**. They indeed raise both the pressure and the standard that our citizens impose on us policymakers to deliver what we have promised. In that sense we should be grateful, because this consultation can only help strengthen public support for our government's ambitions.

I am very proud of the results this project has achieved and the productive and stimulating process has convinced me of the necessity to consolidate this and give it **a permanent place in our annual policy cycle**. I hope that this manifesto will trigger a rich and insightful debate and encourage policy makers to incorporate these interests more strongly into our policies. Only in this way, can we truly live up to our ambition to be the most open and cosmopolitan city of Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Brussels is a uniquely diverse city which plays a powerful role in international governance. These two characteristics are intertwined, and many International Brusselers live in the Region because they or their relatives work at an EU or international institution, or for one of the myriad government offices, private businesses or NGOs which orbit around them. This international sector is of huge importance for Brussels, and academics estimate that it generates about 20% of the gross domestic product of the Brussels-Capital Region and 23% of its employment¹.

Although a vital pillar of social, cultural and economic life in Brussels, this community of non-Belgians cannot vote or stand as candidates for elections at the regional level. This results in a worrying democratic deficit, whereby regional policy is largely made without considering the needs and expectations of the international community. Bridging this gap was identified as a priority by the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, as reflected in the governmental declaration for the 2019-2024 legislative period². A special role was given to commissioner.brussels, which should act as a “facilitator and intermediary between the European and international institutions and organisations, their workers residing in Brussels, and the Brussels public authorities.”

From this commitment was born the democratic participation project *Live here. Speak, hear.* This initiative, which gathered and developed the policy proposals presented in this *Manifesto of the International Brusseler*, was an innovative and ambitious first step towards a Brussels where internationals are given a meaningful voice in regional policy. The project was implemented by commissioner.brussels under the leadership of Alain Hutchinson, Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations, and was sponsored by the State Secretary for European and international relations of the Brussels-Capital Region, Pascal Smet. Two neutral agents with an expertise in the organisation and facilitation of participatory processes accompanied the project³.

***Live here. Speak, hear.* ran from May to December 2021.** Various phases offered International Brusselers the opportunity to contribute through online and face-to-face activities which gradually honed the proposals in this manifesto. **The project was open to all non-Belgians living in Brussels, but outreach especially targeted Europeans living in Brussels because of links with the international sector.** This focus was in line with the mandate of commissioner.brussels and the commitments set out in the governmental declaration. **Participants were able to share their vision and ideas for Brussels** on topics selected for their relevance to the target audience and to regional policy competences. However, they were also able to raise concerns on other issues, and the final set of proposals reveals a shift in focus empowered by this approach.

Live here. Speak, hear.* aimed to open up a new democratic space where International Brusselers could raise their voice.** Through months of debate and discussion, participants have developed a set of robust policy proposals, representative of their community’s concerns and hopes for the city. It is now for the Brussels Parliament and the Regional Government to consider them carefully and implement them where possible. ***This Manifesto of the International Brusseler, which will be formally launched at the Brussel Parliament on the Day of the International Brusseler, marks the final output of the *Live here. Speak, hear.* project. However, this is just the beginning of a new era for policy dialogue between the Brussels-Capital Region and its international residents.

The manifesto is structured as follows. The next chapter presents the policy proposals in increasing levels of detail and makes up the bulk of the document. There is then an explanation of the methodology and timeline of the *Live here. Speak, hear* project, before we close with a brief conclusion highlighting the main takeaways.

1 See [Brussels, an International Capital, the figures 2020](#).

2 See [Déclaration de politique générale commune au Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale et au Collège réuni de la Commission communautaire commune \(p. 125\)](#).

3 [Möbius](#) and [CitizenLab](#)

THE POLICY PROPOSALS IN BRIEF

The policy proposals presented here are the most tangible outcome of *Live here. Speak, hear.* Thanks to a rigorous and inclusive methodology, these proposals faithfully capture the experiences and expectations of the participants. Although the initial framework for the process set out probable areas of concern to which participants were invited to respond, they also had a great deal of flexibility in the debate and were free to make any proposals they wished. The most popular proposals therefore offer a true reflection of the hopes and concerns of Brussels' international community. By the end of this journey, six policy areas emerged as the key issues for International Brusselers:

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- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | ALL VOICES HEARD | How can we ensure that International Brusselers have a meaningful say in regional politics? |
| 02 | ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES | How can we make it easier for new arrivals and non-Belgians to interact with public authorities and administration? |
| 03 | MODERN MOBILITY | How do we make getting around Brussels greener, more efficient and more accessible? |
| 04 | WELCOMING PUBLIC SPACE | How can we make our streets, squares and parks a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone? |
| 05 | A PLACE TO LIVE, A PLACE FOR LIFE | How can we make Brussels, and especially the European Quarter, a liveable, affordable and family-friendly place to call home? |
| 06 | A CLEAN CITY | How should we manage waste and keep Brussels clean? |
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Although some topics show that International Brusselers face specific challenges related to their situation, others are not much different from the issues which Belgian Brusselers would raise. Nevertheless, the unique perspective that International Brusselers bring leads to pertinent insights and creative solutions. International Brusselers have formulated policy proposals addressing each of these areas of concern. They are briefly listed here, topic by topic, then each proposal is presented in detail in the following chapter.

**We,
International
Brusselers,
call on the
Brussels-Capital
Region to ...**

ALL VOICES HEARD

... give us greater visibility in public debates and include our voice in the democratic process.

The international community makes up a substantial part of Brussels' population, and they want to be recognised as part of society. International Brusselers do not seek a separate status, but they do ask for targeted support to ensure their voices are heard as clearly as those of their Belgian neighbours. In practice, this means the right to vote in regional elections and the opportunity to contribute to policy through meaningful participatory processes.

PROPOSALS

- › **Give all internationals registered as living in Brussels the right to vote at the regional level.** This should apply to all International Brusselers, not just EU citizens, and the right to vote should also entail the right to be elected.
- › **Make it easy for International Brusselers to exercise their existing rights to vote in European and communal elections:** automatic enrolment on the electoral list when registering; training about the Belgian political system and on their rights and duties; easy access to information about elections in English.
- › **Establish a regional consultative assembly consisting of Belgians and non-Belgians** randomly selected among all Brussels residents. Seats should be allocated proportionally to the demographics of the Region, and the assembly should have a formal advisory role in regional policy making.
- › **Create a network of existing socio-cultural organisations which represent International Brusselers.** This network could be activated by the Region as a way to consult internationals, and by internationals to make requests and proposals to regional authorities.

ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES

... make it easier for us to navigate

administration and public services in Brussels.

International Brusselers are by no means the only community which faces difficulties in accessing public services or completing administrative processes. However, struggles with public administration at all levels are a recurring issue. The problem is especially acute during the vulnerable first few months in Belgium, where a new resident must register and find their feet, but International Brusselers can face difficulties for many years. Participants identified two main barriers which particularly affect this community.

- › **The linguistic barrier:** as they often do not speak much French or Dutch, International Brusselers face difficulties interacting with public servants and understanding official documentation.
- › **The bureaucratic barrier:** with 19 communes and a complex governance system, the institutional and administrative architecture of Brussels is often confusing, opaque or even unwelcoming to non-Belgians. This leads to many distressing situations, but there is particular frustration with the huge divergence in processes for registering with the communes.

The proposals in this topic offer concrete solutions to help International Brusselers overcome these difficulties, with easy access to simplified services no matter what language they speak at home.

PROPOSALS

- › **Make English an official administrative language of the Region.** This means translating all official documents in English and increasing the ability of public servants to speak the language.
- › **Provide professional interpretation services for public services.** Non-English speakers also need help to navigate Brussels' administrations.
- › **Set out, in law, a standardised registration process to be implemented in all communes.** An efficient way to define this process is to work bottom-up and involve all relevant stakeholders.
- › **Create a regional welcome package or brochure directing internationals towards useful services.** This guide should be easily available and proactively shared in the places International Brusselers first encounter when arriving in Brussels (employers, universities, communes, etc).

MODERN MOBILITY

... help everyone move around the city
with ease.

The international community is widely spread across the territory of Brussels, and many International Brusselers commute to work in focal points like the European Quarter. The Region is already implementing ambitious plans to transform urban mobility, and International Brusselers' proposals are largely in line with the overall vision. They call for action to deliver mobility that is more than a way to move around the Region, but also supports well-being, social inclusion and the environment.

PROPOSALS

- › **Reduce the number of cars on the roads.** By taking restrictive measures, supporting public transport networks and improving cooperation with the other regions of the country, Brussels can meaningfully reduce the number of cars on the road. The journeys of both residents and commuters must be considered here, and we must ensure everyone can still get from A to B.
- › **Invest in green infrastructure to protect people using non-motorised means of transport.** One of the most dangerous areas of traffic is where different types of transport meet, but strategic investment in updated infrastructure could make mobility safer for everyone.
- › **Improve mobility and access for disabled pedestrians.** Footpaths that are dirty or damaged should be repaired or cleaned more quickly.

WELCOMING PUBLIC SPACE

... manage public spaces in a more effective and pleasant way.

People who move to Brussels often say that they do not feel safe in streets and public spaces, with women especially concerned. They are also critical of a lack of comfortable and welcoming social spaces outdoors. International Brusselers have practical ideas to reimagine Brussels as a city where everyone feels safe to meet or spend time outdoors. With the vast majority of Brussels' public space currently occupied by transport, they also support efforts to give space back to residents.

PROPOSALS

- › **Set up modular and portable community gardens on slow streets.** This would make the city greener while offering new opportunities for social connection.
- › **Rethink, reclaim and reuse car-parking spaces, both at street level and underground.** A shift in land use would free up space for social and cultural facilities.
- › **Reform the police system.** Work towards more coherent and integrated management of police forces, both on the ground and online, while addressing discrimination in these services.
- › **Install smart street lighting systems,** with an efficient maintenance process. Lighting makes people feel safer at night, while smarter technology and upkeep will make it easier for the Region to maintain street lights.

A PLACE TO LIVE, A PLACE FOR LIFE

... make Brussels a city where we can all afford a comfortable home.

The housing market in Brussels is becoming increasingly inaccessible, even for people with an average wage. Rents are rising and there are concerns about the quality of accommodation. Some areas also lack family-friendly infrastructure and services, encouraging families to move to the suburbs or the “Vlaamse Rand” and thereby aggravating mobility issues. What is more, International Brusselers and especially non-EU citizens face extra challenges in accessing the rental market. Participants propose solutions which curb rents, attract families back to Brussels and simplify the process of finding a first home.

PROPOSALS

- › **Ensure rents remain at affordable levels.** A fair price would be guaranteed by better enforcement of rules and careful control of price rises.
- › **Invest in family-friendly infrastructure and services, especially in the European Quarter.** Examples include schools, modern playgrounds, libraries and pleasant paths for walking.
- › **Ease access to the rental market for newcomers.** International Brusselers want to see clearer information concerning the housing market and adapted rules on rental deposit protection.

A CLEAN CITY

... make Brussels a clean city where we all treat the environment with respect.

Cleanliness in public spaces is a vital aspect of a city that is healthy and safe. Tidy streets and parks are immediately more attractive and welcoming, a change which is not only of benefit to residents but would also improve the reputation of Brussels among those who visit for work or tourism. International Brusselers have proposals which would reduce the amount of dirt and rubbish deposited in public spaces, but they also suggest policies that would improve the way public authorities clean our streets.

PROPOSALS

- › **Promote and support neighbourhood-led stewardship of spaces.** Community building is at the core of urban cohesion and conviviality, feeding a sense of belonging and mutual respect which encourages residents to take better care of their environment
- › **Provide better information about which products can be reused or recycled.** Information and initiatives for reusing and recycling materials are currently fragmented and difficult to find.
- › **End the rubbish collection system based on residents leaving plastic bin bags in the street.** One solution would be to install larger containers, local and accessible for residents, across the city.
- › **Improve the coordination between Bruxelles Propreté and municipal street cleaning actors.** A better coordination between Bruxelles Propreté and other authorities would help prevent situations such as pavements being cleaned just before rubbish is collected.

THE FULL POLICY TOOLKIT

This chapter presents the full detail of the policy proposals developed by International Brusselers in the second and final round of face-to-face workshops. As explained in the methodology chapter, participants in these workshops based their proposals on the ideas generated on the digital platform and processed in the first round of workshops. They were supported in their reflections by policy experts and professional facilitators, but the ideas and the words are their own.

The proposals are presented here exactly as drafted in the workshops, with no editing beyond light linguistic corrections. They are therefore the purest outcome of the work International Brusselers did in the *Live here. Speak, here.* project, but they in no way constitute policy positions or demands from commissioner.brussels as an institution.

01

ALL VOICES HEARD

POLICY
PROPOSAL 1

The right to vote

To tackle the following challenge:

Systematically include internationals in democratic decision-making.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Give to all internationals - not just EU citizens - registered as living in Brussels the right to vote at the regional level. Giving them the right to vote should also imply giving them the right to be elected at the regional level.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Create mixed lists (EN-FR-NL).

We put this proposal forward because:

All residents of Brussels should be equally represented and giving internationals the right to vote would better reflect its demographic reality: a region with a high proportion of international residents.

POLICY
PROPOSAL 2

The duty to vote

To tackle the following challenge:

Increase the political participation of the international community for the elections in which they can currently take part.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

When registering in Brussels, internationals should:

- › Get automatically enrolled on a voting list;
- › Get offered training on the Belgian political system and on their rights and duties;
- › Get easy access to some documentation, translated in English, regarding the elections.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Conduct a survey on why internationals do not currently participate in mass in the local elections;
- › Discuss/act on the results of this survey;
- › Develop and offer some documentation and introductory training courses on the Belgian political system;
- › Simplify registration procedures for voting at the local elections.

We put this proposal forward because:

We believe that understanding the Belgian institutional structure will help internationals feel more responsible and engaged in the voting process. If, at the same time, we make it easier for them to actually vote, this will help their inclusion in Belgian society and reinforce democracy.

A new regional assembly of residents

To tackle the following challenge:

Strengthen consultation mechanisms at the regional level.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Set up an assembly, composed of Belgian and non-Belgian people selected by sortition among all Brussels residents (proportionally to a geographical factor), with a formal advisory role in the decision-making process of the Region.

This assembly would be competent for the same set of competences as the Region itself. Its discussions should emerge from ideas/needs expressed by the population at large in participatory surveys. Selected people would have a certain timeframe to analyse the topics at hand and formulate their recommendations. To do this, this group of people should be remunerated/compensated.

The regional government would need to take into account the recommendations made by this assembly: if they would decide not to implement its proposals, they would need to formally justify themselves.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Determine some criteria to select the members of this assembly;
- › Conduct regular surveys in the population about the topics this assembly could deal with;
- › Provide funding for this initiative in order to offer a compensation to the members of this assembly and cover all its logistical support;
- › Contact NGOs/experts for assisting this assembly in its work.

We put this proposal forward because:

There is a need to complement existing representative structures with deliberative democratic mechanisms. This will help increase the democratic legitimacy of the Region's decision-making process. This might also lead the Region to take better decisions, as informed by a large diversity of people with different perspectives and experiences. In addition, this will be a wonderful opportunity for International Brusselers and the Belgian population to meet, thereby improving integration and decreasing racial abuses.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest this alternative measure:

If not institutionalised, all kinds of consultation initiatives currently organised by the Brussels' region should at least be open to all internationals and promoted as such.

Why is it a less preferred option than the other proposal?

Because we often do not know, as participants, what the outcomes of these consultation initiatives will exactly be. Will the institution actually implement our recommendations? How will we be able to receive updates on these developments?

Because these consultation initiatives only attract those who have time and energy to spend on these activities.

A new lobbying network

To tackle the following challenge:

Make it easier for the Region to get in contact with the international community and strengthen its lobbying capacity.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Set up a coordination mechanism of existing socio-cultural networks representing International Brusselers. This network could be triggered by the Region to consult internationals, and by internationals to call on the regional authorities.

Working groups could be formed with representatives of each group on different topics. Funding and logistical support should be offered for the groups to gather and organise themselves, against which the groups should comply with certain obligations (e.g. respond to regional consultation initiative, promote inclusion, etc.).

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Map existing socio-cultural groups and their outreach;
- › Get in contact with these groups and define a framework of collaboration;
- › Establish working groups based on the Regions' priorities.

We put this proposal forward because:

With this solution, International Brusselers get to voice their concerns that are specific to their status as "foreigners". By relying on existing structures and networks, it is easier (and therefore cheaper) for the Region to trigger commitment.

ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES

POLICY PROPOSAL 5

English, a new official language within Brussels' administrations

To tackle the following challenge:

Provide all residents with administrative services in a language that they understand.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Make English an official administrative language of the region.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Translate all relevant documents into English (to do that, work collectively and on the basis of documents that have already been translated);
- › Consider languages (EN + other languages) as an official asset when hiring public servants;
- › Promote positions within public services among international residents;
- › Facilitate continuous language training for public servants (e.g. through Brulingua);
- › Extend the "language bonus" system currently in place at the police to all administrative services.

We put this proposal forward because:

English being mastered by many internationals, adding English as an official administrative language of the region is the most effective way to make sure that they can get access to essential information. Doing so triggers a sense of trust, makes them feel welcomed and helps them to avoid administrative and legal misunderstandings.

POLICY PROPOSAL 6

Free interpretation services

To tackle the following challenge:

Provide all residents with administrative services in a language that they understand.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

For all the people who do not speak/understand English, provide professional interpretation services for public services.

We put this proposal forward because:

It is important not to overlook the population unable to speak English. They, too, deserve to get access to essential information. It is not only important for them but also for the community at large (e.g. we saw, during the pandemic, that it was extremely important to be able to reach out to these people).

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest this alternative measure:

Replace professional services by a pool of volunteers able to speak different languages. When in need of a particular language asset, any administration could make use of this pool of volunteers.

Work with a professional translation software. These are increasingly cheaper, efficient and reliable.

Standardised registration procedures

To tackle the following challenge:

Simplify registration for newcomers.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Set up, in the law, a standardised registration process to be implemented in all communes.

To define this standard, we should work bottom up: build this process with the communes' staff and all other stakeholders involved (e.g. the police).

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Measure and compare the current performance of the communes in order to identify best practises and set a target to reach;
- › Launch roundtables to define a common process of registration;
- › Invest in a shared and common database system for all stakeholders involved (back-end);
- › Invest in a shared online registration service (front-end).

We put this proposal forward because:

Today, it can take months for an international resident to get registered. This is not acceptable both from the resident's side and from the communes' side (e.g. waste of time, paper, etc.). Harmonising processes based on best practises means becoming more efficient and diminishing costs in the long run.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest this alternative measure:

If not possible to change the law, incentivise communes to harmonise their practises by implementing the two first actions listed above.

More accessible information

To tackle the following challenge:

Increase visibility of (existing) services/information offered to newcomers (e.g. materials offered by commissioner.brussels).

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Create a regional welcome package/brochure redirecting internationals towards useful services. Share this guide through strategic entry points of internationals arriving in Brussels (e.g. employers, universities, the communes, etc.).

We put this proposal forward because:

Many great services and sources of information already exist but are not well-known enough among the international community. Let's promote this existing offering through the right channels.

03

MODERN MOBILITY

POLICY
PROPOSAL 9

Reduce the number of cars in the city

To tackle the following challenge:

Reduce the number of cars coming into the city from commuters.
Reduce the number of cars used by the residents of Brussels.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Set up financial disincentives for driving into the city.
Create high-quality connections between Brussels and regional networks.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Provide a subsidy for regular users of public transport and those who cycle/walk to their workplaces
- › Make parking provided by workplaces scarcer or more expensive (e.g., via a new tax on parking spaces)
- › End tax privileges for company cars
- › Set up a congestion charge (e.g., a tax to enter Brussels or per kilometre driven in the city)
- › Have one single ticket for all public transport modes
- › Set up a single source of information for transportation connections
- › Coordinate with Flanders & Wallonia to connect cycle highways with the centre of Brussels
- › Schedule more S-trains in and around Brussels
- › Finish the RER project
- › Design more car-free zones and low-traffic neighbourhoods

We put this proposal forward because:

- › It improves the quality of life
- › It would reduce pollution and noise and would improve our health
- › Increased traffic safety
- › Improve urban mobility

Interaction between different forms of transport

To tackle the following challenge:

There is a certain danger in areas where different types of transport cross each other.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

A permanent solution for unsafe crossing points between different types of transportation.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Improve the signs on the bidirectional bike lanes
- › Separation with planters
- › Separate pedestrians and bikers
- › Improve the safety of crossings

We put this proposal forward because:

It improves the image of the city, creates a positive atmosphere for bikers, pedestrians and drivers as well. Improving the quality of air and making Brussels a greener city.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest this alternative measure:

This proposal could be implemented partly or could be replaced by planting trees instead of planters.

Improved quality of pavements

To tackle the following challenge:

Accessibility for pedestrians

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Improve the quality of the pavements

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › More money for maintenance
- › More regular cleaning
- › Change cobblestones
- › Improve garbage collections

We put this proposal forward because:

To improve accessibility for everyone e.g. disabled people, family with baby carriage

WELCOMING PUBLIC SPACE

POLICY PROPOSAL 12

A green city

To tackle the following challenge:

Transform a grey city into a green and enjoyable city.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Set up modular and portable community gardens on slow streets

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Identify suitable streets/squares with locals
- › Pilot projects followed by an evaluation of the impact with the residents
- › Expand this concept to a larger set of streets
- › Set up a mechanism (in collaboration with the residents) to maintain these infra-structures
- › Organise cultural events in these new green spaces

We put this proposal forward because:

Brussels needs more green space in order to improve the quality of life of its residents and find ways to better manage heat waves. Community gardens help to connect residents. These new spaces provide space for cultural events. It could also be a good solution for restaurants to increase the size of their terrace during this pandemic time.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest this alternative measure:

- › Set up tax breaks for apartment blocks offering green rooftop space to their inhabitants.
- › Introduce requirements for existing buildings to convert flat roofs into green space.
- › Turn abandoned buildings into greenhouses open to the public.

POLICY PROPOSAL 13

Fun parks

To tackle the following challenge:

A city full of car parks but lacking space for people to meet

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Turn parking houses into cultural places (e.g., pop-up clubs)

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Identification and assessment for parking spaces
- › Consultation (multi-stakeholders) on reclaiming space

- › Pilot projects in different communes
- › Evaluation to create a Brussels regional strategy and an action plan based on evidence
- › Call for cultural projects

We put this proposal forward because:

We feel the need to rethink the way we use our public parking spaces in order to bring back some life in the city and tackle mobility issues.

POLICY
PROPOSAL 14

A safe city

To tackle the following challenge:

A feeling of insecurity in Brussels.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Restructure the police system.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Integrate IT systems & centralise information
- › Create digital reporting & tracking system
- › Address discrimination & racism in police force

POLICY
PROPOSAL 15

A bright city

To tackle the following challenge:

Dark streets are dangerous streets.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Invest in a smart street lighting system, with fast maintenance and a damage reporting mechanism.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Community consultation to identify priority areas
- › Maintenance & reporting mechanism for existing lights across Brussels
- › Roll-out of smart-lighting infrastructure across the region

We put this proposal forward because:

Lighting improves a sense of safety.

A PLACE TO LIVE, A PLACE FOR LIFE

POLICY PROPOSAL 16

Affordable housing solutions

To tackle the following challenge:

The increasing difficulty to acquire and rent quality housing at an affordable price, even for the middle class.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Cap rents at affordable levels.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Introduce legislation to freeze rents for a time-limited period
- › Develop a framework for assessing the quality of properties
- › Create a body to inspect rental accommodations and enforce housing rules
- › Develop an inventory of Brussels' housing stocks
- › Decide on a fair price for certain quality levels
- › Introduce legislation to ban rent increases with the same tenant
- › Introduce legislation to impose a maximum percentage of rent increase when the tenant changes, taking into account operating costs

We put this proposal forward because:

Even people with a decent income can no longer find affordable housing, damaging Brussels' attractiveness for newcomers. It is also quite bad in terms of mobility as people must therefore commute to work in the city.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest these alternative measures:

A time-limited tax compensation for landlords who reduce their rents (a tax incentive)

POLICY PROPOSAL 17

A European neighbourhood full of life

To tackle the following challenge:

Transform the European Quarter into a family-friendly neighbourhood.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Invest in family-friendly infrastructures and services in this area.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Set up a European school in the neighbourhood (e.g., around the Square De Meeus)
- › Build modern playgrounds
- › Open a library

- › Design enjoyable walking paths, with nice-looking signs to help you find your way across the neighbourhood.

We put this proposal forward because:

To enable EU workers to live and work in the area. In doing so, not having to commute to other communes, thereby solving some mobility issues.

POLICY
PROPOSAL 18

A housing market fair for international newcomers

To tackle the following challenge:

The difficulty for international newcomers to access Brussels' housing/rental market.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposals:

- › Expand the orange card system to enable newcomers from all over the world to set up rental deposits (blocked accounts) on arrival in Belgium.
- › Create a centralised online platform where newcomers can find information about rental regulations, ready-made contracts, an interactive map of Brussels' neighbourhoods, housing adverts, Q&As, etc. in different languages (e.g. NL, FR, EN, DE, Arabic, etc.).

A CLEAN CITY

POLICY
PROPOSAL 19

Local stewardship

To tackle the following challenge:

To increase the involvement of locals in keeping our streets clean.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Promote & support neighbourhood-led stewardship of spaces.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Create or expand funds for associations to run neighbourhood activities
- › Capacity development for associations to run welcome services & operate in consultative manner

We put this proposal forward because:

Community building is at the core of urban cohesion and conviviality. It feeds a sense of belonging and mutual care and respect which contributes to a better society for all.

POLICY
PROPOSAL 20

Inform our society on the circular economy

To tackle the following challenge:

Excessive waste generation and non-circular economy

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Provide better information about what products can be reused or recycled

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Map local initiatives in order to match demand with the supply of reused and recycled products
- › Launch an information campaign for residents

We put this proposal forward because:

Information and initiatives for reusing and recycling are currently fragmented and difficult to find.

POLICY
PROPOSAL 21

Replace the plastic garbage collection bags

To tackle the following challenge:

We use single-use plastic bags to throw away single-use plastic materials. Quite odd, no?

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

Shift from door to door collection of bags to containers on the streets.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Mapping the streets: which types of containers (above ground vs. below ground)? How many containers? Where do we place these containers?
- › Prioritising the deployment of this plan
- › Gradually adapting the range of vehicles and containers of Bruxelles Propreté
- › Transform parking spaces into garbage collection points.

We put this proposal forward because:

These bags are ugly and are an invitation to litter.

If this proposal was to be rejected, we, as International Brussels, suggest these alternative measures:

- › Change the waste management system only in some areas where the waste problem is the worst (dense multi-use areas).
- › Adapt the frequency of collection according to the area (eg. dense neighbourhoods with lots of shops would have a higher frequency compared to a less dense residential neighbourhood).

Improve the coordination between regional and municipal services

To tackle the following challenge:

We have a lot of dirty pavements due to littering.

We, as International Brusselers, suggest the following proposal:

To improve the coordination between the regional environmental services (Bruxelles Propreté) and the municipal street cleaning actors.

If our proposal was to be implemented, the following action(s) should be taken:

- › Employ more people at Bruxelles Propreté to make the connection with communes.
- › Hire more people at communes to provide local education.
- › Communes should plan so that their cleaning teams pass after Bruxelles Propreté. There is a need for a roundtable between Bruxelles Propreté, the communes and neighbourhood groups.

We put this proposal forward because:

Cleaning schedules are uncoordinated between the different levels of public service. It happens that the streets are being swept before the waste gets collected, which results in dirty streets.

METHODOLOGY

The policy proposals outlined in this *Manifesto of the International Brusseler* are the outcome of a democratic participation project which took place between May and December 2021: *Live here. Speak, hear.* Launched against the uncertain backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, this initiative was organised in a hybrid mode, combining online and on-site activities. The project's ambitious, multistage model went beyond a classic consultation and into the realm of democratic policy co-creation. Thanks to a successful outreach campaign, a large and representative cross-section of the target community registered and took part in the various phases.

Live here. Speak, hear. consisted of the four complementary phases described below. The outputs of each phase became the inputs of the next, with democratic and participative approaches to organising and filtering the ideas at every stage. This means that the final proposals drafted in small-group workshops are still consistent with the initial ambitions of the large audience of International Brusselers who participated in the online ideation.

The initial scope of *Live here. Speak, hear.*

From the onset, this project was designed to put as much control as possible in the hands of the International Brusselers who would participate. This freedom made it possible for the authentic concerns and hopes of the community to emerge in the ideas and discussions. However, it was of course necessary to set out a framework to guide the set up and promotion of the platform, and to stimulate the initial contributions.

Target audience

Participation on the digital platform and at the workshops was open to all International Brusselers: residents of Brussels with non-Belgian citizenship. This includes "New Belgians" who were born and raised outside of Belgium but had already acquired Belgian citizenship. However, in line with the general policy programme of the Brussels Regional Government for the legislature 2019-2024, [commissioner.brussels](https://www.commissioner.brussels) has a particular mandate to facilitate and mediate in relationships between regional authorities and residents who live in Brussels because they are employed by the European and international institutions. The core target was therefore non-Belgians who have lived in Brussels for at least two years because they have work or family connections with the international sector: EU institutions and other international organisations, along with the governmental, business and non-profit organisations which orbit around them. The outreach and promotion activities, including social media advertising, especially targeted this group - often called "expats". They make up the majority of participants, but the data show a satisfactory diversity of participants in terms of gender, age, employment situation and nationality, with a balanced participation of EU and non-EU citizens.

Topics

The aim was to collect workable proposals on issues which fall within regional competences, and the platform included information explaining what these are. However, since the target audience is often unaware of exactly which issues the regional authorities can act on, neither the platform nor the workshops rejected ideas which touch on competences at the communal, community or federal levels. The initial online phase especially invited ideas on topics which are known to be of particular relevance for the international community of Brussels and where the Region has meaningful competences:

- › political representation and participation of International Brusselers at the regional level
- › Brussels' welcoming policies for new arrivals
- › infrastructure in and around the European Quarter

Participants also had the opportunity to raise other concerns under the heading "What is the most urgent issue for International Brusselers?". These four topics remained the basis of the first round of workshops, but the second round and the final proposals in this manifesto are organised around six more specific policy areas, with several new topics which emerged from the open question. The European Quarter is no longer a separate topic of its own, but a potential laboratory for action and implementation of the proposals.

Milestones

This participation campaign adopted a funnel strategy. Across four phases, a initial collection of many ideas from a broad audience was aggregated, refined, eliminated and challenged to develop a limited set of robust policy proposals. The exact approach of the four phases is described in detail below.

Timeline

May - December 2021.

This period offered enough time to find and engage participants, without long periods of inactivity where their enthusiasm and interest might fade.

Gathering ideas

JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2021

Goal

Gather the ideas, concerns and demands of International Brusselers on topics of relevance for these residents.

Method

The online consultation and participation platform (*Live Here. Speak, Hear.*) was launched. The platform was accessible to our target audience after a simple registration process to collect relevant demographic data. This digital-first approach allowed a broad range of people to participate with a low threshold to entry. The platform remained active throughout the project, underpinning the first two phases and informing the public about phases 3 and 4.

Outcomes

253 submissions, most of which contained several distinct ideas about how to improve Brussels and its policies.

Number of ideas per topic

How would you give International Brusselers a voice?



How would you improve the European Quarter?



How would you welcome International Brusselers?



Your topic here: what is the most urgent issue for International Brusselers?



Voting

OCTOBER 2021

Goal

Prioritise and filter the ideas proposed in Phase 1 in a democratic and participative way.

Method

International Brusselers were invited to vote for their favourite contributions on the *Live Here. Speak, Hear.* digital platform. Participants were able to give a positive or negative vote to an idea to say that they supported it or disagreed.

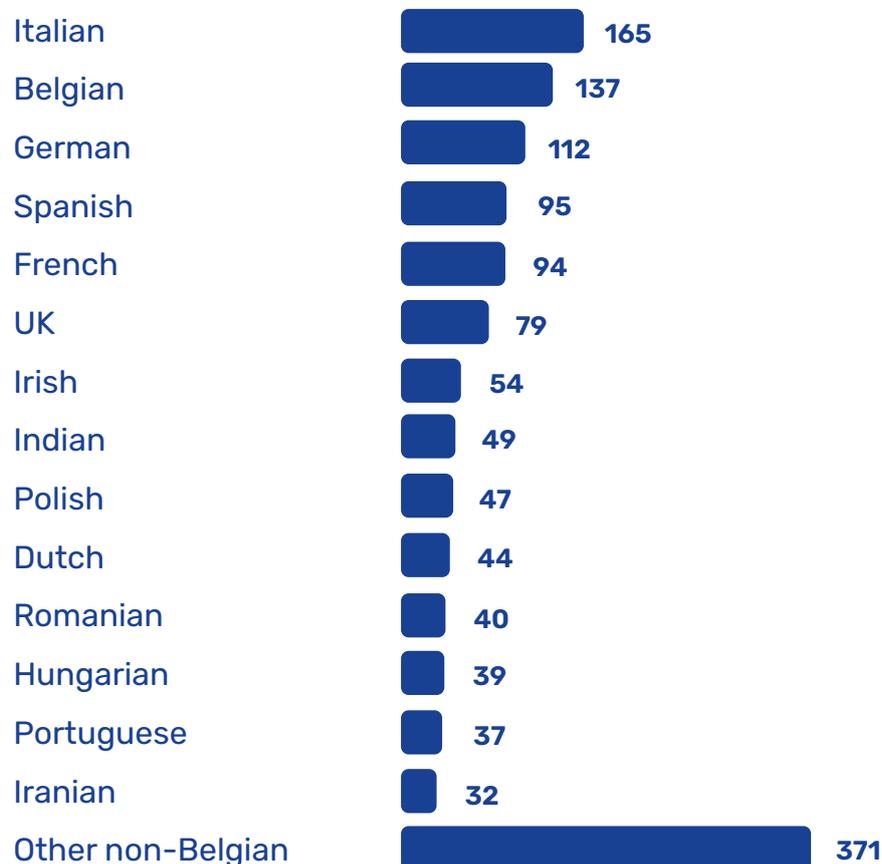
Participants

By the end of the voting phase there were 1395 people registered on the digital platform. According to CitizenLab, the platform operator, this number is in line with the average participation on this kind of participation platform (~1400 users for active platforms launched by organisations which are not municipalities).

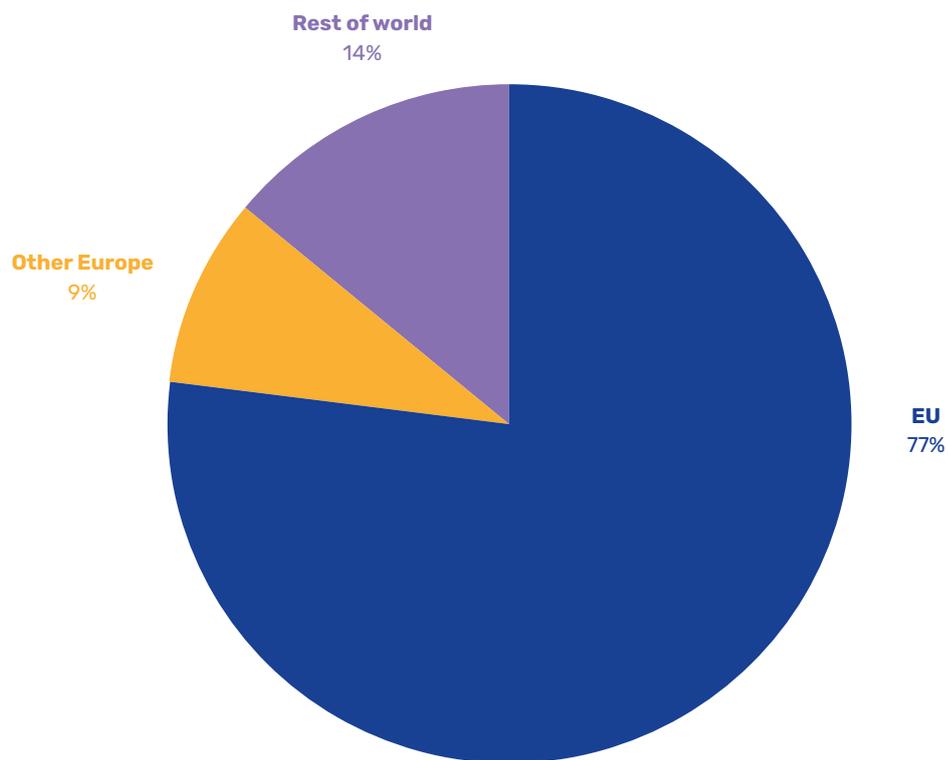
Outcomes

9710 votes. These results were used to rank the ideas and weight them for Phase 3.

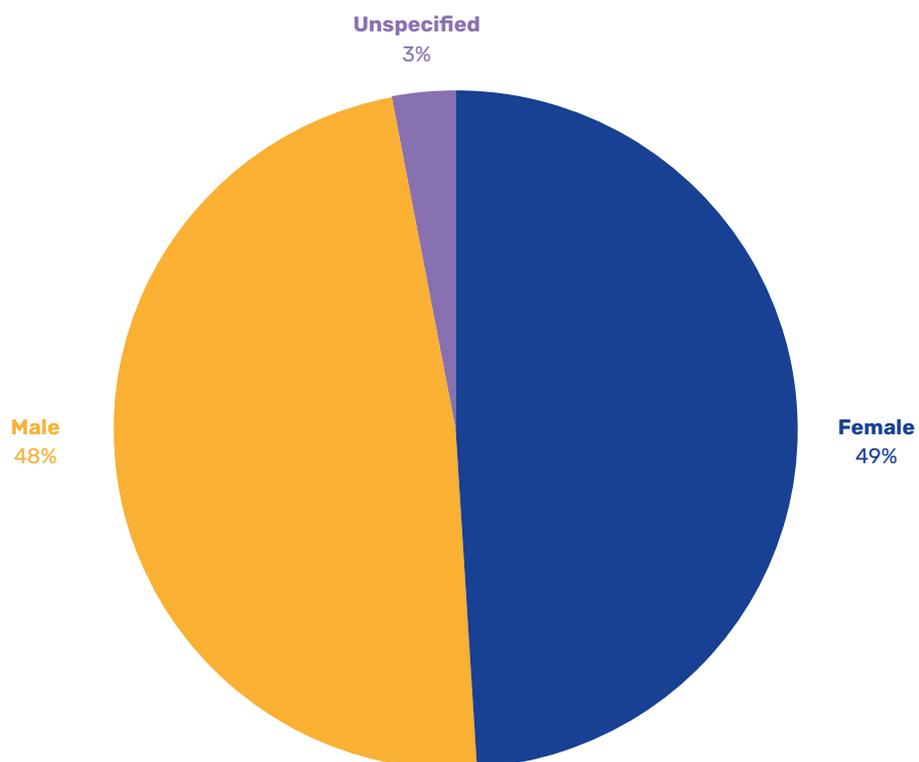
Registered participants by nationality



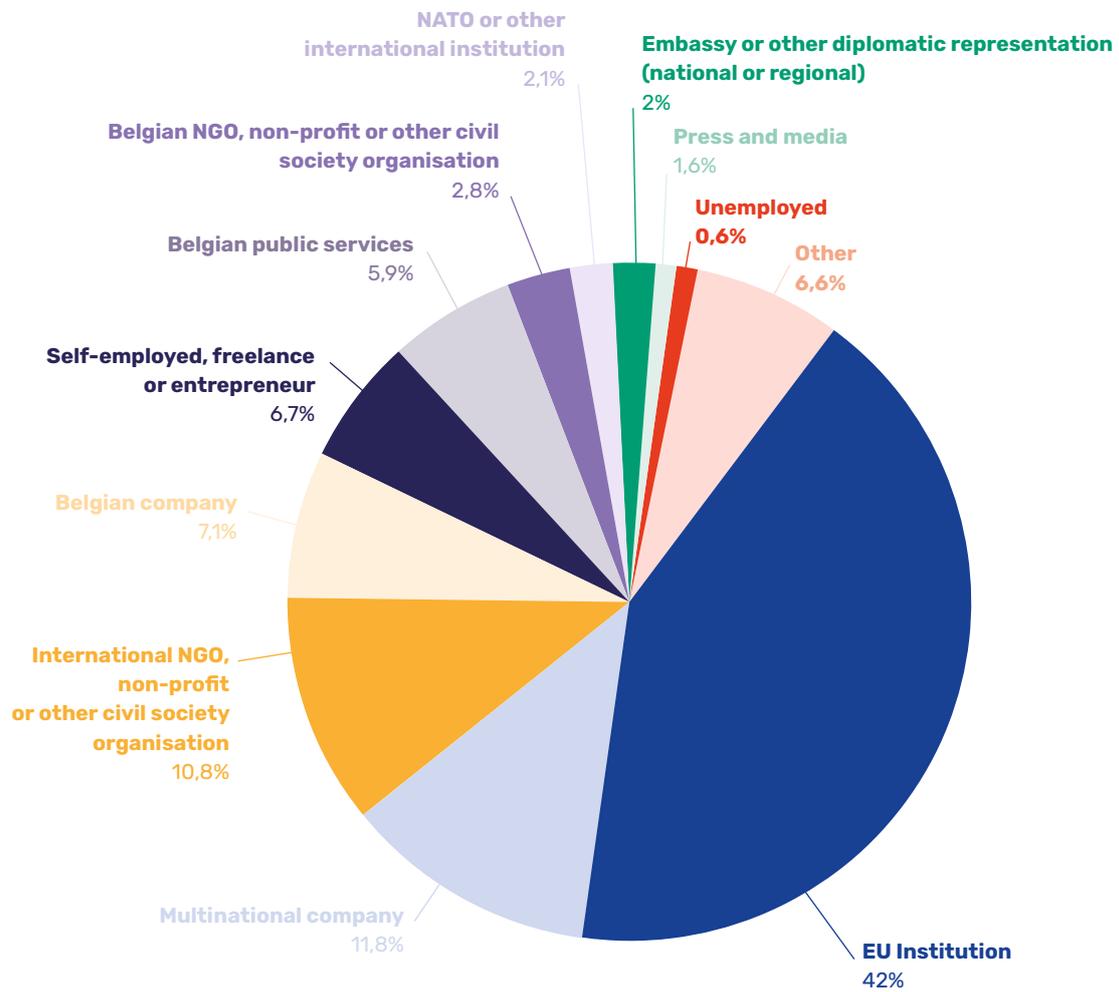
Registered participants by region



Registered participants by gender



Registered participants by employment sector (where known)



From ideas to solutions

NOVEMBER 2021

Goal

Work with International Brusselers to develop the ideas submitted on the platform into a mapping of the community's concerns and proposed solutions.

Method

Three workshops using the World Café approach, a brainstorming technique which fosters collective intelligence. Across various rounds of discussion, participants had the chance to intervene on the topics they most valued, filtering and clustering the ideas from the digital platform. Each table was moderated by an expert facilitator, who kept discussions on topic and took notes, but participants were in the lead when it came to the content.

Participants

148 people registered to attend the three sessions. This phase was built around face-to-face workshops offering structured, creative interaction, so participation was intentionally capped.

Outcomes

After three evenings of lively debate, the participants had developed 166 constructive solutions around the six themes that structure this manifesto.



From solutions to policy proposals

DECEMBER 2021

Goal

Rework the solutions developed during the previous phase into a set of realistic, concrete and consistent policy proposals.

Method

Six policy drafting workshops, with one workshop per policy topic defined during the first round of workshops. During these sessions, participants sat round the table with academic experts specialised in the issues addressed⁴. The objective of inviting these experts to the table was for the participants to anchor their drafting work into a realistic assessment of existing policy frameworks, best practices and institutional challenges. These experts were resources that participants could use to enrich their proposals, but not active controllers of the decision-making process. Participants were also guided in their reflections by worksheets which broke down various aspects of a policy proposal, such as a clear definition, a timeline of actions and potential alternatives.

Participants

45 registered participants for the six sessions. Once again, the ambition here was to work with small groups of people around tables, a setting that makes it easier to find compromises and collaborate in the writing of proposals.

Outcomes

22 policy proposals, as presented here in the Manifesto of the International Brusseler.



⁴ Pr. Dr. Eric Corijn (VUB), Dr. J-P. De Visscher (UCL), Pr. Dr. Imre Keseru (VUB), Pr. Dr. Dave Sinardet (VUB), Dr. Nele Aernouts (VUB), Dr. Andrea Bortolotti (ULB), Dr. Philippe Van Parijs (UCL).

CONCLUSIONS

The most immediate aim of *Live here. Speak, hear.* was to give International Brusselers the chance to speak up and share their vision for the Region. On this measure **we can surely be happy with the results**. The campaign reached a diverse cross-section of the community, and around 2000 people engaged with the process online and at the face-to-face workshops. The participants worked together to develop **proposals which are insightful, practical and full of hope**.

The overall message which emerges is that International Brusselers aspire to strengthen the position of Brussels as **a welcoming, liveable and green city**. While they have some specific requests related to their situation as newcomers and “foreigners”, especially regarding access to public services, most of their recommendations address challenges faced by all residents. These proposals are now ready to be assessed and implemented by the regional authorities.

In a broader view, we see that International Brusselers are not transitory outsiders, but deeply **engaged members of the Brussels urban community**. This confirmation of International Brusselers’ commitment to the Region is also a vital outcome of the project. *Live here. Speak, hear.* was an opportunity for the Brussels-Capital Region to develop new ways of engaging with the international community, and the process has shown its value. Despite their lack of voting rights, International Brusselers proved that they are interested in regional policy and wish to be heard in political debates. They have a lot to say and **their origins outside Belgium can be a major asset**, offering a fresh perspective and thoughtful reflection on the Region’s policy challenges.

Looking ahead, International Brusselers are keen to build on this engagement and take a more active position in regional policy. On the one hand, there is **a clear demand for voting rights at the regional level**, a hallmark of democratic participation. On the other hand, there is **a desire to continue with the participative approach** underlying *Live here. Speak, hear.* This first project pushed the boundaries of democratic participation with International Brusselers drafting concrete and detailed policy proposals. In the future there is scope to experiment with more sustainable approaches which maintain the ambition and broad outreach within a more stable institutional framework. At the very least, we must hope that this process has greatly strengthened awareness among Brussels policymakers that it is important to pay attention to non-Belgian residents, their concerns and their ideas.

What's coming next?

This manifesto will be launched and presented to the Brussels Parliament at the very first Day of the International Brusseler. That event will mark the end of the *Live here. Speak, hear.* project, but it is only the beginning of an exciting new chapter for International Brusselers and their Brussels Voice! The next steps are in the hands of both regional authorities and International Brusselers themselves, but there are two main avenues for action.

1. What to do with the proposals in this manifesto?

Now that International Brusselers have spoken, it is important that the Regional Government and Brussels Parliament acknowledge and respond to their ideas. Which proposals can be implemented, and when? Which cannot be applied in their current form, but reveal hopes and concerns that the Region can act on? Over to you, policymakers!

2. What is the future of democratic participation for International Brusselers?

The response to *Live here. Speak, hear.* and the engagement of the participants have shown that the international community wants a meaningful voice in regional policy. What form will this process take in the future? That's a topic for future negotiations between policymakers and International Brusselers. However, there are already some proposals and principles in this manifesto.

Of course, **no democratic process is perfect** and this participation project also faced its limitations. In terms of representivity, we must acknowledge that this document was produced and validated by only a small section of the target group, much lower than the percentage of the population who turn out to vote in (obligatory) elections. The segment of the target group reached might also not be truly representative, with factors related to free time, language and digital literacy distorting the sample. There are also some **fundamental questions to be asked about who exactly is an International Brusseler**, with a tension between a broad definition and a more narrow socio-economic profile among the actual participants. In other words, what is presented in this document does not represent the opinions of all internationals living in Brussels. It is also worth pointing out that the *Manifesto of the International Brusseler* covers various policy areas identified by the project group and the participants, but it does not address all regional competences. Likewise, the flexibility of the methodology and the fact that participants started their reflection from their own experiences and challenges means that proposals have not been budgeted and often touch on the competence of multiple institutional layers.

Nevertheless, the process itself and the proposals it has generated have created **a rich and meaningful reflection of a community so integral to Brussels** and its place in the world. They also point the way to a closer relationship between public authorities and the international community in the Region. With that in mind, it is only right to close this manifesto with a final message from the International Brusselers themselves.

We, International Brusselers, kindly ask the *Government and Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region:*

- › To acknowledge the reception of our manifesto;
 - › To carefully take note of our policy proposals;
 - › For those related to topics currently being discussed in the Government or at the Parliament, to take our recommendations into account in your debates;
 - › For those related to topics which are not currently being addressed, to urgently add these topics to your agenda;
 - › To report back to us, via commissioner.brussels.
-

**We sincerely thank you for your consideration,
The international community of Brussels**



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At the initiative of
the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region



RÉGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE
BRUSSELS HOOFDSTEDELIJK GEWEST
BRUSSELS CAPITAL-REGION

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Avenue d'Auderghem 63 Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels
T.: +32 (0)2 430 66 00
info@commissioner.brussels - www.commissioner.brussels

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