



**COUNTRY GUIDE**  
**EA INTERNATIONAL - BRUSSELS**

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### THE LEGAL MARKET

Brussels lies at the heart of Europe and is a vibrant, enchanting and cultural city that mixes new and old with ease. Home to the European Union, the European parliament and NATO, Brussels has long been considered the unofficial capital of Europe. Its status as a thriving hub of international law and politics ensures the strong presence of international law firms. Key areas of demand in the Brussels legal market are EU/competition law, where the work tends to include a variety of competition, anti-trust, cartel, 'whistleblower' cases and merger matters. Some of the most renowned practices in Brussels are the Competition/Anti Trust groups of many of the UK based firms. Freshfields, Linklaters, Clifford Chance and Slaughter and May have particularly outstanding practices in these areas. Of the US firms in the city, Clearly Gottlieb is considered to be premier, while Latham & Watkins, Sidley Austin and Skadden are strong. Lawyers from Australia and New Zealand have successfully relocated to Brussels, however language skills, academic achievement, and experience within a top tier practice are crucial factors. Although English is widely spoken, the official languages in Brussels are French and Dutch (Flemish). At a minimum, candidates should be fluent in both English and French before considering a move. Experience in cartel work and general merger matters is also important and in the overall scheme of things it is an excellent place for a competition lawyer to take his or her career.

### SALARIES AND TAXES

Although salaries in Brussels are lower than in London or Paris, the average worker in Brussels has greater purchasing power than their English or French counterparts (see below). While top tier international firms do try to remunerate on a comparable basis with London, this has been difficult to sustain of late with recent salary increases in London. Typically, as in Paris, lawyers are remunerated on a self-employed basis. Lawyers submit invoices to their employer at the end of each month, at a rate previously determined. Tax in Belgium is high. At a salary greater than €4 540, expect to pay up to 50% tax. Basic guide to salaries with leading UK and US firm in Brussels is as follows:

**Newly Qualified** - €80,000

**1 PQE** - €90,000

**2 PQE** - €100,000

**3 PQE** - €110,000

**4 PQE** - €115,000

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### **COST OF LIVING**

Brussels provides a considerably lower cost of living than that in London and other European cities. It has been applauded as the least expensive capital in Western Europe (excluding recent member states from the EU) and in the same survey was ranked 4th among European capitals in terms of quality of life. Transport, food and other items are consistently considered cheaper in Brussels than in Europe's other major business centres. In particular, rents in the city are comparatively cheap; even in the areas where expatriates tend to live, prices are reasonable and the quality of housing stock is very high. Leases tend to extend to three years or more. Food and other necessities are also competitively priced in the Brussels Capital Region, as are restaurants. The cost of public transport is almost half London prices; even a trip to and from the airport is cheap and fast.

### **VISAS AND WORK PERMITS**

Application for a work permit for a foreigner must be filed by the Belgian employer with the local regional employment office where the employer is established. A work permit for employment in the Brussels-Capital Region has to be obtained from the Brussels Regional Employment Office (ACTIRIS).

### **LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE**

Brussels is at the crossroad of two cultures, combining the sleek features of a major business centre with the style and attraction of a tourist hotspot. People from dozens of cultures speak a plethora of languages, creating a culturally diverse and cosmopolitan city and a vibrant expat community. Expats working in Brussels will be relieved to find that the actual act of doing business is fairly laid-back and Belgians are not averse to a midday glass of wine or two. With over 100 museums, a multitude of theatres and grand opera houses, and some of the finest restaurants in Europe, it is a highly sought after destination. Finally, due to its central location, there are many opportunities to travel throughout Europe.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND USEFUL LINKS:**

<http://www.investinbrussels.com/start.aspx>

<http://www.visitbelgium.com/>

<http://www.brusselsinternational.be/wabxlint/splash.jsp>

<http://www.belgiumthelaceto.be/>

**For more information on living and working in Brussels contact one of our international experts on +61 2 9266 2900 or Email at [ea@ea-int.com](mailto:ea@ea-int.com) or visit our website: [www.ea-int.com](http://www.ea-int.com).**