



**INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAM 2026**

BELGIUM
WALLONIA

ABOUT THE SVI



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The “Service Volontaire International” (SVI) is a non-profit, non-religious, non-political association founded and run by volunteers, with origins in France, Belgium, and Vietnam. SVI has received official recognition as a youth organization from the Belgian Ministry of Youth and is accredited by the European Commission to facilitate and coordinate Erasmus+ and European Voluntary Service (EVS) programs.

SVI actively participates in international exchange programs in over 80 countries, including Belgium.

Our primary focus is to prepare, deploy, and host volunteers who aspire to participate in international projects or work camps organized by local non-profit associations.



Background

SVI was founded in 2009 by former volunteers and aid workers. SVI is the Belgian independent branch of the Vietnamese NGO SJ Vietnam, which was established in 2004 in Hanoi with the support of both United Nations Volunteers and the Belgian Development Cooperation. Pierre De Hanscutter, co-founder of SJ Vietnam and founder of SVI, was working within these organizations at the time. In 2013, the French branch of our organization was established by former volunteers.

Our main activities

SVI is actively engaged in international exchanges with both the North and South. Its primary objective is to prepare, send, and welcome young volunteers within the framework of international projects organized by local non-profit associations.

Our public

We are a youth organization, primarily targeting individuals between 18 and 35 years old. However, many of our European partners offer volunteering opportunities from the age of 16. Our offerings include individual projects as well as group experiences, accommodating youth movements, school groups, and families.

Our mission is to make volunteering accessible to everyone. That's why we collaborate extensively with Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps to reach a broader audience, especially aiming to provide young people with limited financial, social, or cultural resources the chance to participate in this enriching experience. Through these efforts, we aspire to contribute to the development of responsible, critical, and supportive citizens.

Every year, nearly 1,000 young Belgians engage in volunteering projects, and approximately a hundred volunteers from around the world come to Belgium to share in this unique experience.

Missions and values

The organization primarily focuses on fostering intercultural exchanges among young people aged 16 to 30 worldwide, providing them with opportunities to participate in volunteering projects regardless of their age, gender, or skills. In essence, SVI's main objective is to make international volunteering accessible to a wide range of young individuals. Through these efforts, SVI aims to inspire young people to actively engage with and contribute to the societies they are part of, empowering them to become ethically and socially conscious global citizens who are critical and empathetic. Consequently, SVI promotes not only solidarity but also active citizenship. The ultimate goal of SVI is to raise awareness among young people about the challenges of our globalized society and help them comprehend the significance of solidarity, diversity, and development within such a society.

SVI firmly believes that young people should be the primary beneficiaries of opportunities like international volunteering, as they represent the future and will play a pivotal role in shaping tomorrow's society. SVI also holds the conviction that volunteering should not be a means to profit but rather a way to support local associations, enhance one's ability to adapt to foreign cultures, step out of one's comfort zone, and gain insights into both others and oneself. Furthermore, SVI believes that everyone can contribute to a project, regardless of whether they come from the North or the South, and that cultural exchanges can occur in both directions, fostering mutual learning and understanding.

What does volunteer mean for us?

First, voluntary work should be distinguished from humanitarian work. Volunteers sent to international work camps typically do not require specific skills other than their motivation (and sometimes a basic knowledge of English, as it is the primary language spoken in most work camps). Humanitarian actions, on the other hand, are carried out by professionals such as doctors or teachers in crisis situations.

Secondly, SVI actively opposes what is often referred to as “humanitarian tourism” or “voluntourism”. SVI firmly believes that volunteering and tourism are distinct activities. Voluntourism is a form of alternative tourism that combines tourism with volunteering in developing countries. People engage in voluntourism by going on holiday and simultaneously volunteering for a charitable cause during their stay, usually at a significant cost (prices can range from €700 to over €2,000, excluding transportation). SVI finds this morally unacceptable, as it often fails to provide financial support to local host organizations. Additionally, companies in this sector sometimes pose as non-profit associations and organize voluntary projects based on their clients' desires, without considering the actual needs of local communities.

Thirdly, from SVI's perspective, volunteering is not about “saving” the countries of the Global South or imposing one's culture on less fortunate countries. It is not a mere vacation; rather, it is about providing both financial and human support to local organizations and communities. Volunteering is not primarily about enhancing one's CV, although it can be a valuable asset for one's future professional life. It represents a personal commitment that involves learning and adapting to another culture, language, and country, as well as embracing different customs and perspectives. This experience ultimately fosters the development of critical thinking and open-mindedness. It is an opportunity for individuals to actively engage and contribute to positive change. Engaging in international volunteering involves

sharing one's knowledge, skills, and experiences, while also cultivating qualities such as responsibility and organization. It fosters the development of trust and respect for others. International volunteering encourages individuals to question what they can learn from people, cultures, and countries different from their own. This process promotes mutual understanding and learning. Consequently, through volunteering, one can undergo a transformative journey, gaining a deeper understanding of oneself and the world we inhabit. In summary, volunteering is not solely about a “project”; it also entails learning to coexist with individuals who possess different habits and lifestyles.

Team organization

Since the establishment of SVI, Pierre De Hanscutter had been the sole full-time member for several years. However, in April 2015, two additional staff members were hired to support him in ensuring the smooth operation of SVI. Currently, the team of SVI is composed of nine workers at the Belgian office, including the director. In addition to the team, trainees and volunteers are brought on board each year, aligning with SVI's philosophy: its activities should be led by and for young people, granting them the opportunity to contribute to success, regardless of their backgrounds, beliefs, or gender.

SVI comprises several distinct departments, with each team member, whether working full-time or part-time, playing a crucial role within the organization and working toward common objectives. The various departments include coordination (overseeing outgoing volunteers and groups heading to Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, and Oceania. As well as incoming volunteers and groups coming to Belgium); communication (both external and internal); human resources; administrative services; legal services; accounting; translation; partnerships (with non-profit and for-profit organizations); education and training sessions; IT; community outreach; funding; and EU affairs.

ABOUT OUR BELGIAN PROJECTS

Volunteers interested in taking part in a project in Belgium will have the option to select from short-term or long-term projects.

Our local partners, who have pledged their commitment to SVI, are dedicated to welcoming young individuals from across the globe to our projects. We conduct regular meetings with these partners to enhance awareness and provide information to the teams responsible for hosting volunteers, ensuring they are well prepared for the challenges and obstacles that may arise during the course of the project.



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ABOUT OUR BELGIAN PROJECTS

How to apply for a project in Belgium?

1- One of the volunteers would like to participate in a volunteering project offered by SVI: what steps should they take?

At SVI, we firmly believe that volunteering should be a well-prepared experience. Therefore, it is crucial that any young person interested in participating in such an endeavor goes through a sending association.

Sending associations play a vital role in supporting volunteers. The coordinators within these associations assist young individuals in selecting the right project

and are at the forefront of preparing them for this experience. It is important to note that it is mandatory for volunteers to have a sending association. Volunteers that do not have a sending association yet can find one using these volunteers networks:

<https://www.informa-giovani.net/en/chi-siamo/ignet-network-europeo/membri/>

<https://ccivs.org/>

<https://nvda-asia.org/>

<https://www.icye.org/>

On the other hand, SVI assumes the role of a coordinating association. We act as the bridge between the sending association, the volunteer, and our local partners. We ensure that our local partners align with our philosophy regarding the hosting of volunteers and serve as the primary point of contact in case of issues, facilitating communication among all parties.

We strongly recommend beginning this process at least two months in advance to allow for all necessary preparations, including preparations for departure within the sending association, as well as handling administrative formalities before arrival (such as insurance, passports, visas, etc.). SVI also provides support for visa applications and issues invitation letters when necessary.

Therefore, prospective volunteers must go through

their respective sending associations. Our coordinator for projects in Belgium will then send an application form that can be completed by the volunteer.

2- What skills will he/she need to demonstrate in order to gain access?

Volunteering involves participating in a project where motivation is the primary criterion. We are not engaged in humanitarian projects that demand specific expertise; instead, we encourage voluntary participation with the objective of contributing to a project and fostering cross-cultural encounters.

That's why, in the application form, we request that volunteers provide a clear explanation of their motivations.

3- How long will he/she have to wait after sending the application?

Our policy is to request a response from our partners within 10 days of us sending the application. If the partner does not reply within this timeframe, we invite the volunteer to consider selecting another project. Additionally, we consistently emphasize the importance of a prompt response to our partners, stressing the need to accommodate the needs and expectations of young people.

4- What are the steps to follow after sending this form?

When we receive a positive response from our partner, we arrange a video call involving the volunteer, the partner, and our incoming coordinator.

The purpose of this video call is to clarify the project details, discuss each party's expectations, and assess whether it is a suitable match for everyone involved.

The final decision will not be made during this video call; instead, both the partner and the volunteer will communicate it a few days later.

If both parties confirm their commitment to the project, we can then proceed with the confirmation procedures.

It is important to note that booking a plane ticket should not occur until after the confirmation has been received following the video call.

5- The project is confirmed: what comes next?

Once confirmed, SVI will send a series of documents to be completed by both the volunteer and the host association.

The volunteer may be required to provide SVI with these documents:

- Confirmation of flight tickets.
- Copy of passport and visa.
- Proof of insurance coverage.
- Certificate of good conduct.
- Certificate of good health.

All of these documents must be submitted prior to the volunteer's arrival at the project.

Our short-term projects

In Belgium, volunteers have the opportunity to participate in various well-known festivals, including music festivals, street art festivals, and fantasy film festivals. For these work camps, we are seeking 5 to 10 volunteers, depending on the demand from our partners. These volunteers will play a key role in festival activities, such as assembly and dismantling, waste management, ticket distribution, and more. In return for their contributions, they will have the chance to enjoy the festival.

It is important to note that this is not a free ticket to attend the festival but an opportunity to actively engage in a meaningful project. Volunteers should expect to take on responsibilities as assigned.

At SVI, we value diversity in all its forms, including gender equality and cultural diversity. We believe that such projects promote intercultural exchange, and therefore, we strive to ensure that volunteers on the same project come from as many nationalities as possible.

Each group of volunteers will have a designated meeting point predetermined by the project coordinator or a team leader. This team leader actively participates in the pre-arranged Skype

sessions and plays a crucial role in facilitating communication throughout the project.

Preparations are made ahead of the project to enable volunteers to establish communication channels with each other and with the team leader. These channels may include social networks, WhatsApp, and other means of communication.

The team leader will actively participate in the project as a fellow volunteer while also assuming the role of ensuring a harmonious group dynamic and providing guidance on project activities. Additionally, the team leader will serve as the liaison between the group and the incoming coordinator, facilitating the prompt relay of any challenges or issues that may arise.

Our long-term projects

Upon arrival, each volunteer will receive a warm welcome from either an SVI member, who will accompany them to their volunteering project, or a representative of the local association. In cases where the incoming project coordinator cannot be present upon arrival, a meeting will be scheduled in the following days for the volunteer to meet with them.

Our partners are committed to providing the best possible welcome to our volunteers, ensuring they are in an optimal environment to commence their projects.

For volunteers planning to stay in Belgium for more than a month, participation in one of our required preparation weekends is mandatory. These weekends provide an excellent opportunity to familiarize themselves with the SVI team and connect with young Belgians who are also embarking on their volunteering journey.

Furthermore, we regularly extend invitations to our international volunteers to engage in various aspects of SVI association life, including our dinners, social gatherings with local youth, and events organized by SVI volunteers.

Volunteers are an integral part of our association, and they are encouraged to actively participate in all our activities.

Important things to know

1- Visa

European citizens only require a national identity card or a passport for entry into Belgium.

Non-European citizens may need a visa. The visa application must be submitted to the embassy or Belgian consulate in your country of residence.

If your country of residence does not have an embassy or Belgian consulate, please get in touch with the nearest Belgian Embassy, typically located in a neighboring country.

The visa application process can occasionally be time-consuming. Therefore, it is advisable to apply for a visa at least four weeks before your planned departure. Visa info: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/venir-en-belgique/visa-pour-la-belgique>

If you need an invitation letter:

The sending association must contact us so that we can send them a letter of invitation on behalf of the volunteer.

Please note that Belgium does not issue volunteer visas, so volunteers from countries outside the EU can only apply for a tourist visa for a maximum of three months, as SVI cannot issue work visas.

To issue a letter of invitation, we require the following information:

- Last name.
- First name.
- Date and place of birth.
- Address.
- Passport number, including date of issuance and expiration
- Nationality.
- Project start and end dates.

Volunteers can get extra info at

<https://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs>

2- Health

You need health insurance to cover your entire trip to Belgium (typically, the host has insurance to cover your work-related activities). Your sending association may assist you in finding suitable insurance. While no vaccines are required, if you plan to engage in physical work, we recommend getting vaccinated against tetanus and hepatitis. It's essential to visit your dentist before leaving home.

Ensure that you bring all the necessary medications with you, as it can be complicated to purchase them in Belgium without the required documentation. Additionally, the medication you need may have a different name in Belgium compared to your home country.

European volunteers should ensure their European Health Insurance Card is up to date, and it can be obtained for free!

3- How to prepare your luggage

It is essential that you pack all your belongings in a backpack rather than any other type of suitcase, as it can become very uncomfortable to transport after a long journey.

Belgium's geographical location gives it a typical temperate oceanic climate, which, of course, contributes to its reputation as a rainy country. However, let's not exaggerate! Generally speaking, there are no significant temperature variations between the South and the North of Belgium. That being said, the southern part may experience slightly colder winters (so don't forget your mittens for the entire country), while the northern part, particularly along the coast, can be a bit warmer during the summer. In fact, during the summer, you can even take a dip in the North Sea, so remember to bring your swimsuit along.

You would better not forget some useful things when you are thinking about traveling to Belgium:

- Sleeping bag, bedsheet, pillow, and mat (if specified in your project's information sheet), as well as towels.
- A tent (if specified in your project's information sheet).
- Sunscreen and a hat
- Clothing and footwear suitable for varying weather conditions (even in summer) and outdoor activities.
- Your mobile phone (if you plan to stay for an extended period, it's convenient to purchase a Belgian SIM card).
- Personal items representing your home country
- (Posters, music, postcards, maps, videos, and food) and things from your family.
- Pocket money.
- If possible, pack only ONE bag to maximize space in your dormitory; backpacks are highly recommended!

To find affordable flight tickets, we have compiled a list of budget-friendly airline companies. You can access this list at <https://travel.servicevolontaire.org>

4- Emergency phone numbers

If you encounter any trouble related to your volunteering project, call the SVI:

- Emergency phone number: 0044560158080
- Office phone number: +32 2 888 67 13

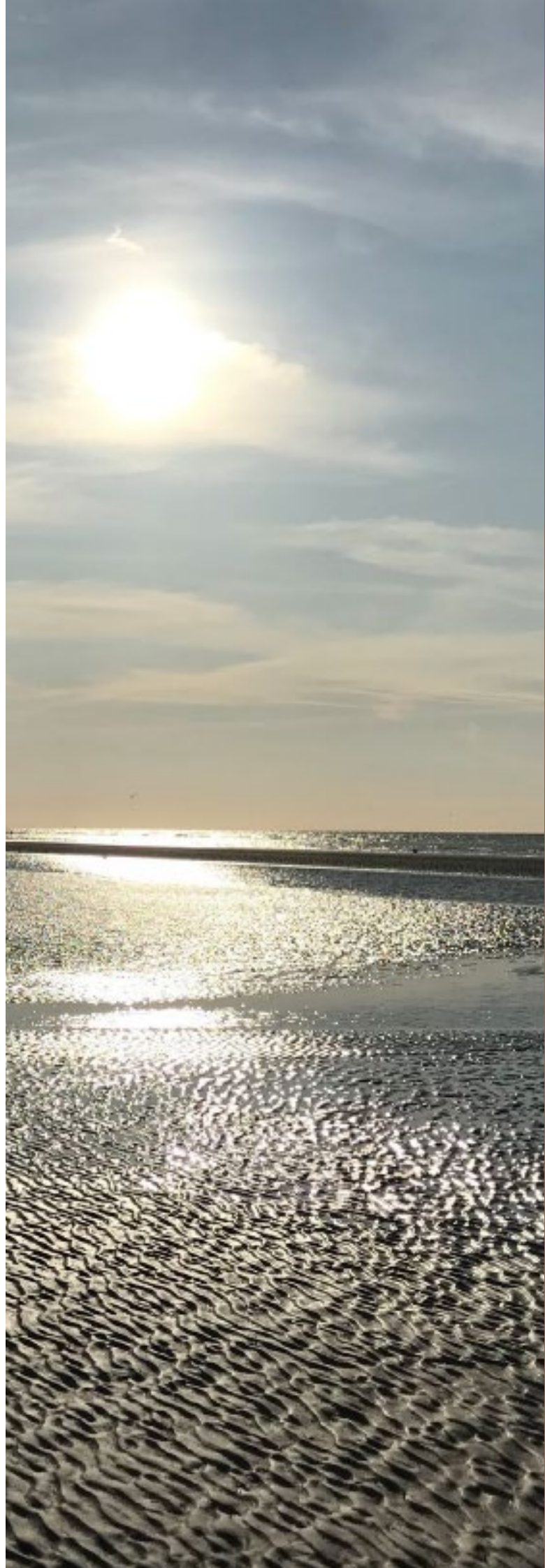
Office from Monday to Friday between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Director: **Pierre de Hanscutter**

5- Covid

You can access essential information regarding the situation in Belgium via this link:

www.info-coronavirus.be



ABOUT BELGIUM



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While Belgium may be small, it holds a significant place on the international stage and consistently ranks among the world's top places to live. The multicultural diversity of Belgium lends its capital, Brussels, a vibrant atmosphere, with a wide range of global services and amenities available to ease the transition for even the newest expatriates.

At first glance, Belgium boasts numerous top attractions. It is the headquarters of the European Union (EU), situated within a short distance of several international capitals, and is home to three official languages (French, Dutch, and German), along with a substantial international community. Beyond its global presence, Belgium is renowned for its delectable fries, iconic character Tintin, exquisite chocolates, and a rich variety of beers. For expatriates eager to embrace Belgian culture, relocating to Belgium promises a plethora of new experiences.

Belgium is renowned as one of the finest places to live

Belgium has something for everyone. If you are a fan of the beach and cycling, the allure of our coastline will be irresistible!

Our historic cities, renowned for their art and culture, will captivate you, whether you have a penchant for history, architecture, or culture. Belgians are true connoisseurs of gastronomy, and they take great pleasure in sharing their culinary delights, including beer, cheese, chocolate, pralines, chicons, Flemish carbonades, speculoos, and, of course, our famous French fries.

Moreover, Belgium is a hub of entertainment: our cultural scene is vibrant, offering a plethora of exhibitions, concerts, festivals, theatre performances, and dance shows. Moreover, when the night falls, the festive spirit comes alive

Cost of living

The healthcare system in Belgium is of exceptional quality, known for its high standard of medical care.

Medical care is readily accessible, and supported by extensive university hospitals. Additionally, it is often more cost-effective compared to the United States. Belgium's shorter waiting times have made it a prime destination for medical tourism.

Furthermore, the cost of living is relatively affordable. Brussels, a favored destination for numerous expats, offers lower living costs compared to other Western European capitals like London, Copenhagen, Vienna, and Zurich, as highlighted by Mercer's Cost of Living rankings.

The cost of living in Brussels is **19% cheaper** than in Paris.

The cost of living in Brussels is **35% cheaper** than in Amsterdam.

The cost of living in Brussels is **26% cheaper** than in Washington.

The cost of living in Brussels is **33% cheaper** than in Sydney.

The cost of living in Brussels is **35% more expensive** than in Prague.

The cost of living in Brussels is **148% more expensive** than in Buenos Aires.

The cost of living in Brussels is **52% more expensive** than in Mexico City.

The cost of living in Brussels is **12% more expensive** than in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The cost of living in Brussels is **5% more expensive** than in Madrid.

In addition to this, Belgium features an efficient public transportation system with a seamlessly integrated network of buses, metros, and trams. This system makes it convenient to embark on weekend getaways within Belgium (some weekend destinations even offer a 50 percent discount) or to easily visit neighboring countries.

Public Transportation Costs in Belgium

Most Belgian cities are well connected by public transport. In major cities, a transport pass for the month costs around €45–€55. These passes can be used on every mode of public transportation. A single fare usually costs around €2–€3.

Taxi rates start at around €4 in Brussels. In general, it costs two euros to buy a 1 km taxi ride in Belgium. As this is an average, it can go as low as 1.66 € and

as high as 2.78 € depending on the time of year. This price for one km in TAXI is higher than the cost in France (by 15%). In other major cities, the starting rate varies but the rate per kilometer is generally in the same range.

The journey between Zaventem airport and the center of Brussels costs around €40–€50. However, we encourage you to take the train and public transport.

Dining Out Costs in Belgium

Belgium, particularly its capital city of Brussels, is renowned for its culinary excellence. Brussels has earned comparisons with cities like New York, Hong Kong, and Paris due to its exceptional dining experiences, offering a wide range of high-quality cuisine. However, it's important to note that fine dining in Brussels can be relatively expensive. Nonetheless, there are plenty of more affordable options available, ensuring that food enthusiasts can indulge without restrictions. Budget-friendly meals for one person typically cost between €10 and €15, while a half-liter of commercial beer is priced at approximately €4.

Emergency

Take note of these essential emergency numbers in case you find yourself in a crisis in Belgium, along with a list of Belgian helplines for support and information.

For residents in Belgium, it's crucial to familiarize themselves with Belgian emergency numbers in advance. Belgium provides a variety of important emergency numbers and helpful helplines, depending on the nature of the emergency or crisis. Below is a list of the most critical Belgian emergency numbers to keep handy.

Additionally, here are emergency phrases and medical terms in both French and Dutch:

- **Accident:** Accident / Ongeluk.
- **Emergency:** Urgence / Spoedgeval.
- **Ambulance:** Ambulance / Ziekenwagen.
- **Doctor:** Médecin / Arts.
- **Police:** Police / Politie

- **Very sick:** Très malade / Heel ziek.
- **I need an ambulance:** J'ai besoin d'une ambulance / Ik heb een ziekenwagen nodig.
- **I need a doctor:** Il me faut un médecin / Ik heb een doctor nodig.
- **I need the police:** J'ai besoin de la police / Ik heb de politie nodig.

Emergency phone number

Call: 112

This emergency number is accessible free of charge throughout the European Union (EU), as well as in select other countries like Israel, Norway, and Russia. It should only be dialed in genuine emergency situations. You can also use 112 to report serious accidents, instances where someone needs to be extricated from a vehicle, situations involving dangerous large animals like horses or snakes, or to request assistance in clearing roads following a storm. One distinctive advantage of the 112 number is that it can be dialed from any type of telephone, including mobile phones without a SIM card.

Operators in Belgium are typically fluent in English, French, Dutch, and occasionally German. When calling, be prepared to provide precise details about the location, address, and information regarding the accident and any injured individuals. Do not disconnect the call until you have received assistance.

Phone numbers commencing with **0800** are also toll-free.

Lost or Stolen Belgian IDs, Passports, and Residence Permits

To report lost or stolen documents, contact the government service **DocStop at | Call 00800 2123.**

2123 | Available 24/7