

Position Paper: Belgium Needs a Faster Single Permit to Compete for International Talent and Investment

1 September 2026

AmCham Belgium regroups 400 companies, both American businesses operating in Belgium and Belgian companies with a presence in the US. As an independent organization, we do not report to either the Belgian or American governments, nor do we receive any subsidies. This independence allows us to advocate for international businesses with a clear and impartial voice. Our sole commitment is to our companies and to fostering an environment that drives growth, accelerates innovation, and ensures lasting prosperity for both Belgium and the US.

POSITION PAPER: BELGIUM NEEDS A FASTER SINGLE PERMIT TO COMPETE FOR INTERNATIONAL TALENT AND INVESTMENT

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Executive Summary

What's the issue?

American multinationals operating in Belgium need to recruit and move international talent to connect Belgian operations with global teams, access specialized skills, transfer company-specific knowledge, serve international markets, and keep strategic activities and investment in Belgium.

A Single Permit process that can take up to eight months makes it harder for companies to deploy the people they need, when they need them. Lengthy and unpredictable procedures constrain internal workforce mobility, delay hiring and projects, and can make Belgium a less attractive location for new or expanded activities

Why is this important?

These companies are Belgium's largest source of foreign investment — \$54.6 billion, supporting 122,879 direct jobs — and that presence is not guaranteed. Every month of permit delay means postponed hiring and stalled projects today, and a growing incentive to place tomorrow's roles and investment elsewhere. Countries that already process similar permits faster — the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, the Nordics — are direct competitors for that same talent and capital. Left unaddressed, this is a risk to Belgium's ability to retain and grow American investment, not just an administrative inconvenience.

What can we do about it?

Make the Single Permit process faster, more predictable and proportionate. No redesign is needed — targeted fixes within the current system would resolve most of the problem:

- parallel rather than sequential processing, with fast-track treatment for trusted employers, streamline documentation and degree-verification requirements, and possibility for earlier renewals
- more consistent rules across regions;
- enable smoother transitions between lawful immigration statuses
- proportionate integration rules for temporary postings,
- competitive and workable salary threshold

AmCham Belgium is ready to work with federal and regional authorities on implementation.

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Context

The United States is Belgium's most important source of foreign direct investment, with \$54.6 billion in direct investment, while American companies support 122,879 direct jobs across the country¹. These companies are deeply embedded in the Belgian economy and rely on access to both local and international talent to sustain their operations, develop their activities and continue investing in Belgium. International mobility is integral to their operating model and allows these companies to bring company-specific know-how, technologies, processes and experience into Belgian operations and to build the capabilities of local teams. Access to the right talent influences where they locate and expand functions, projects and investments. Lengthy and cumbersome procedures have direct consequences for workforce mobility. As multinational companies, they need to move employees between group entities, roles and locations, but delays and gaps between immigration statuses make Belgium a less attractive destination for internal mobility.

The most material obstacles are those that make the Single Permit process slow, unpredictable or unnecessarily complex. Their business consequences include delayed hiring and projects, constraints on internal workforce mobility and a weaker case for locating activities in Belgium.

1. End-to-end processing times remain the primary concern. Although regional processing times have improved, the overall procedure can still take up to eight months because the different steps are cumulative and processing at the Immigration Office (*Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken / Office des Étrangers*) can be prolonged. This is misaligned with business hiring and deployment timelines and creates uncertainty for both employers and employees.
2. Inconsistency across the regions creates additional complexity. Differences in procedures, labor-market tests, shortage-occupation rules, salary thresholds and the interpretation of salary reduce predictability for companies operating across Belgium.
3. Integration requirements can become disproportionate where they apply without sufficient regard to the nature and duration of an assignment, particularly for posted workers who are temporarily assigned to Belgium and not expected to settle here long term. The concern is not integration as such but ensuring that obligations linked to residence and work status remain proportionate and do not create unnecessary barriers to temporary international mobility.
4. High salary thresholds to obtain work permits can limit access to certain skilled profiles, particularly younger professionals, and regional differences in both thresholds and the definition of salary add further complexity. This is a relevant concern, but it is less material for our member companies than end-to-end processing time and predictability.

Recommendations

AmCham Belgium's priority is to make the Single Permit process faster, more consistent and more proportionate. The recommendations below are ordered by priority and should form the backbone of near-term reform.

¹ [AmCham Belgium Facts & Figures](#)

1. Reduce end-to-end Single Permit processing times

Reducing end-to-end processing time should be the central priority. Regional and federal authorities should move from sequential toward parallel handling of applications wherever legally and operationally possible, supported by stronger digital coordination between authorities.

Requirements should also be risk-based and proportionate: compliant employers and straightforward cases should not face the same level of scrutiny as higher-risk applications. AmCham Belgium recommends the following concrete steps:

- Create fast-track procedures for trusted employers or specific talent categories, such as researchers and talent already lawfully present in Belgium. Trusted-employer and fast-track schemes are used across the Nordics, the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands to combine faster processing for compliant employers with risk-based oversight. A Trusted Employer (or Trusted Sponsor) scheme is an immigration facilitation mechanism under which employers meeting specific compliance, reliability and governance criteria are granted a privileged status by immigration authorities. This allows such employers to benefit from reduced documentation requirements, shorter processing times, and, in some cases, presumptions of compliance with labor market or economic migration rules. The concept is used across several jurisdictions so that immigration authorities can focus scrutiny on higher-risk cases while facilitating predictable mobility for compliant employers.
- Revisit the list of required documents for employers and applicants, and test each requirement against necessity, proportionality and the policy objective pursued. Duplicative or low-value documentation — such as certain police clearance, medical or foreign social security records — should be removed or simplified where equivalent information is already available to the authorities.
- Simplify skills-matching and foreign degree recognition, particularly in sectors facing labor shortages. The recent increase in degree verification places a disproportionate burden of proof on employers.
- Facilitate changing employers, in line with the EU Blue Card scheme, and eliminate the Annex 49 requirement so employment can start immediately on arrival. At EU level, it is already established that the degree of control employers currently exercise over employees under the Single Permit scheme is not aligned with the principle of free movement of workers.
- Allow renewal applications up to six months before expiry in all regions — as is already the case in Flanders — so employees are not confined to Belgium on a temporary document while awaiting renewal.
- Reconsider recent changes to family reunification. The previous process gave foreign expats access to the fast-track family reunification procedure. The new policy creates a difference in treatment between local and posted employees that is difficult to justify, given that both categories typically show comparable income and financial stability.

2. Improve consistency across regions and keep procedures proportionate

Federal and regional authorities should align procedures and interpretations wherever possible and avoid duplicative requirements. Labor-market testing and shortage-occupation rules should be streamlined for high-demand occupations and workers with specialized skills or knowledge — in Flanders, for example, labor market testing is currently required in addition to shortage-list

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verification, which is duplicative. AmCham Belgium welcomes Flanders' more flexible approach for seasonal workers, but this does not resolve the situation for employers facing non-seasonal, structural shortages.

Regions should also seek greater consistency in salary thresholds and in the interpretation of the concept of salary. The restrictive approach to the concept of salary allows for little flexibility with employers to propose appealing salary packages, as not all components are considered for the salary threshold to be met.

Regions should also align on recognizing trusted-employer status, so that well-established, compliant employers face proportionately lighter requirements while scrutiny is concentrated on higher-risk cases. A more uniform and risk-based approach would make the framework easier to administer and give employers greater certainty.

3. Enable smoother workforce mobility and transitions between immigration statuses

Multinational companies need to move people between group entities, roles and locations at business speed, but gaps between immigration statuses make this harder than it needs to be, and Belgium is not currently a preferred destination for internal relocations as a result of how the Single Permit framework currently operates.

While the Single Permit facilitates the initial arrival of international talent, it does not currently provide a structured mechanism to preserve labor market access during a lawful transition. When employment ends for a legitimate business or market reason, the work authorization attached to the Single Permit ceases, even where the individual promptly applies for a new Single Permit or another compliant status. AmCham Belgium recommends that the federal government introduce a time-limited transition authorization within the Single Permit framework, allowing continued labor market participation for highly skilled third-country nationals who remain lawfully resident while their new status is processed.

Specific consideration should be given to international students and researchers already lawfully present in Belgium. Belgium benefits when talent educated or conducting research here can transition efficiently into employment: roughly 900 US students study in Belgium each year², yet many leave without having ever been economically active here because switching from a study to a work status is currently too slow and complex. The search year/orientation permit is a welcome instrument, but current processing times exceed three months, which can leave candidates less able to respond to normal recruitment timelines. We recommend making it easier to switch between lawful immigration statuses and meaningfully reducing processing times for the search year/orientation permit.

4. Apply integration requirements proportionately

AmCham Belgium supports measures that help people who settle in Belgium participate successfully in society. At the same time, integration obligations should reflect the purpose and expected duration of an individual's stay. Posted workers are typically assigned to Belgium temporarily by an employer established elsewhere and may have no intention of remaining after the assignment ends. Applying the full set of long-term integration obligations to such temporary postings creates administrative and financial burdens that are disproportionate to the policy objective and can discourage legitimate intra-group mobility. We recommend a targeted

² [Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange](#)

exception, or an adapted, lighter-touch regime, for temporary posted workers under the Single Permit framework, while maintaining appropriate compliance requirements.

5. Keep salary thresholds competitive and workable

AmCham Belgium welcomes the initiatives already put forward by the Walloon and Flemish governments to review salary thresholds for international talent. Thresholds should remain competitive and workable, particularly for younger professionals, while recognizing that faster and more predictable processing remains the more pressing priority for our member companies. Regional differences in thresholds, and in the treatment of remuneration components, should also be reduced where possible. The Netherlands, Ireland, and Spain provide lower salary thresholds for young graduates compared to Belgium. While France does not have a specific reduced threshold for young graduates, the minimum salary required for a highly skilled permit is nonetheless lower than the thresholds applicable in the Wallonia (for young graduates) and Brussels regions.

Conclusion

For multinational companies, international mobility is integral to doing business in Belgium: companies need to move people across borders to operate global businesses, access specialized skills, transfer knowledge and expertise, and build teams that serve international markets. Belgium's ability to provide timely and predictable access to international talent is therefore part of its overall attractiveness as a location for investment.

Belgium does not need to redesign the Single Permit framework from scratch to make meaningful progress. Targeted improvements, delivered within the existing framework, can make the system significantly faster, more predictable and more proportionate, while maintaining appropriate safeguards and compliance requirements. AmCham Belgium calls on the federal and regional authorities to focus on a limited number of priorities:

- Cut end-to-end processing times, including through parallel processing by the competent authorities and adequate resourcing of the Immigration Office.
- Introduce fast-track procedures for trusted employers and clearly defined talent categories, allowing authorities to focus resources and scrutiny where they are most needed.
- Modernize and simplify procedures, through better digital coordination, proportionate documentation requirements and earlier renewal applications;
- Improve consistency across Belgium's regions and facilitate lawful transitions between immigration statuses, providing greater predictability for employers and international employees; and
- Apply the rules proportionately, taking account of different forms and durations of international mobility, including temporary postings and salary-threshold design.

Belgium competes not only for international talent, but also for the investment, activities and jobs that depend on that talent. A faster, more predictable and proportionate Single Permit system would strengthen Belgium's competitiveness as a place for multinational companies to invest, operate and grow.

About AmCham Belgium

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