

Mobility: Immigration alert

March 2023



Belgium

Single permit scheme and “search year” permits extended to eligible researchers

Executive summary

Effective 1 March 2023, eligible third-country nationals who seek to work as researchers must obtain a single permit to work and reside in Belgium.

Extension of single permit scheme

Single permits are available to qualifying nationals of countries located outside the EU and EEA (i.e., third-country nationals) and authorize them to work and reside in Belgium. Previously, researchers who have a [hosting agreement](#) with a recognized [research institution](#) in Belgium were not required to obtain single permits and could pursue research in Belgium using residence permits. Pursuant to the recent extension, researchers who have qualifying hosting agreements and a doctoral degree or its equivalent must now obtain single permits, which will authorize them to reside in Belgium for the duration of their validity period and undertake educational work in higher educational establishments without obtaining a separate work authorization.

Qualifying researchers who were residing in Belgium prior to 1 March 2023 must apply for a single permit prior to the expiry of their current residence permit. The Belgian authorities are expected to make a decision on single permit applications submitted by eligible researchers within 60 days of the date of their filing.

Short-term research (up to 90 days)

Effective 1 March 2023, eligible individuals who undertake research work in the Walloon region for up to 90 days must obtain a work permit. Those who undertake research work in the Flemish and Brussels regions for up to 90 days may continue to do so without obtaining any permit.

Long-term research (more than 90 days)

Eligible individuals who undertake research work anywhere in Belgium for more than 90 days must now obtain a single permit prior to travel. In these cases, the permit will initially be issued for a maximum validity of up to three years and may be renewed at the discretion of the authorities.

Researchers with intra-EU mobility rights

Eligible individuals who hold a researcher permit issued in another EU Member State can now undertake research in Belgium under the following categories:

- ▶ *Short-term mobility (up to 180 days in any 360-day period):* If the researcher has a hosting agreement with a recognized research institution in Belgium, the institution must make a notification to the Belgian Immigration Office prior to their arrival. The researcher may undertake authorized activities in Belgium once the notification is made. The notification is automatically considered approved if the

Immigration Office does not raise any objection within 30 days of receiving the request.

- ▶ *Long-term mobility (more than 180 days and up to 360 days)*: If the researcher has a hosting agreement with a recognized research institution in any EU Member State and is located outside Belgium, they must submit a single permit application for long-term mobility at least 30 days before the start of their activities in Belgium. If they are already residing in Belgium on short-term mobility authorization, they must submit a single permit application for long-term mobility at least 30 days before the expiry of their short-term mobility authorization.

“Search year” permits

Effective 1 January 2023, eligible third-country nationals who work as researchers are eligible to obtain a “search year” permit, provided they have a hosting agreement with a recognized research institution in Belgium or another EU Member State and conducted research in Belgium based on short- or long-term mobility authorization. This permit enables them to reside in Belgium for up to one year while searching for employment opportunities or setting up their own business as self-employed workers.

Holders of “search year” permits can undertake work in Belgium without any limitations in terms of salary, employer or position. After one year, they must obtain a single permit or switch to another appropriate immigration category.

Impact on employers

Employers may review the new requirements and take action to obtain adequate work authorization for impacted employees if required.

Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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