

IBZ In brief

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Chairwoman of the Executive Committee: Isabelle Mazzara

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Introduction

Security, crisis management, theft and fire prevention, the organization of elections, managing the National Registry, identity cards, managing migratory flows... These are just some of the missions of our Federal Public Service (FPS) Home Affairs. This brochure sheds some light on our many and varied fields of activity.

The various missions of the FPS Home Affairs are carried out by 5 Directorates-General (DG): Civil security, Security & Prevention, Crisis Centre, Institutions and Population, and the Immigration Office.

In addition to these 5 DGs, there are the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) and the Aliens Litigation Council (CCE): two independent bodies closely linked to asylum policy and for whom staff is made available by the Minister for Security and the Interior.

The staff of the central service for German translation also report to our FPS. The same applies to the employees of provincial governors in charge of federal responsibilities.

Since April 2014, Isabelle Mazzara, President of the Executive Committee, has been the director of our department. She supervises operations, and ensures the coordination of our FPS. She is assisted by the strategic support unit which advises her on all cases and projects in our department.

The internal support service reports directly to the President. It comprises 5 specific services: the Legal service, the Information and Communication service, the Social service, the Internal service for prevention and protection at work, and the International Unit. The Information security and internal control unit also falls directly under the authority of the President of the Executive Committee.

Finally, the Home Affairs department also has three supervisory departments: Staff and Organization (P&O), Budget and Management Control (B&CG) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Taking into account the social context, our department is more than ever confronted by significant challenges: developing anti-terrorist measures, taking initiatives against radicalization and managing the refugee crisis, etc. Together with our national and international partners, we work hard to keep our citizens as safe as possible.

Civil security

The main mission of the Directorate General for Civil Security is to protect people in the event of accidents or disasters. Examples include fires, explosions, floods, landslides, road and rail accidents, airplane crashes, pollution, chemical or nuclear contamination, earthquakes, etc. These duties are carried out by the operational units of the Civil Protection, the emergency call centres and Fire services.

Just under 20,000 people work tirelessly to guarantee the safety of the public and the emergency services:

- 150 employees within the Central Support Directorate situated in Brussels;
- 450 professional members of staff and 400 volunteers of the Civil Protection;
- 650 operators and calltakers in the 112 and 101 emergency call centres;
- 12,000 volunteer firefighters and 6,000 professionals in the 34 emergency zones and the
- Brussels Fire Service. The staff of the Fire services work directly for the zones.

The optimal operation and safety of the Civil Protection, the emergency call centres and the Fire services is our primary concern:

- our engineers and experts give particular consideration to purchasing state-of-the-art equipment for the emergency services. They continually analyse and test innovative techniques and new equipment which can be used by the emergency services;
- in consultation with all partners, we draw up the status, and the rules of organisation and operation of the Fire service and Civil Protection service;
- during their visits to the Fire services, our inspectors ensure compliance with regulations and provide useful advice for better operation;
- experts from the Knowledge Centre for Civil Security (KCCE) develop standard operating procedures and training based on needs in the field.

Civil Protection

Our Civil Protection assists the public and the other emergency services in minor and major disasters in Belgium and abroad. It is always on stand-by to:

- clean up and intervene in the event of major chemical or nuclear contamination;
- look for survivors under rubble following explosions or earthquakes;
- reinforce the Fire service, the police or the medical services with specialised teams and heavy or specific equipment.

Emergency call centres

The operators and calltakers of the emergency call centres respond to calls from citizens in distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They alert the Fire service, medical service and/or the police and provide them with the information necessary for a rapid and effective response. Each year, they handle more than six million calls to the emergency numbers 112 and 101.

There are two main emergency numbers in Belgium:

- 112 for the Fire service and ambulances;
- 101 for the police.

Fire services

The Belgian fire services are organised into 34 emergency zones, in addition to the Brussels Fire Service. The public can count on around 6,000 professional firefighters and 12,000 volunteers. Naturally, the primary mission of the Fire services is firefighting. However, they also intervene:

- as an ambulance service in emergencies;
- in the event of road accidents, to free people trapped in vehicles;
- to clear public roads after serious accidents;
- in the event of floods, explosions, landslides, etc;
- in the event of minor everyday issues, such as people stuck in elevators, etc.

Security and Prevention

Our Directorate-General for Security and Prevention works towards a safer society. This is the guiding principle of our missions. In order to achieve this, our staff:

- works intensively with all partners involved in security;
- ensures compliance with a range of specific laws, and imposes administrative penalties in the event of violations;
- make maximum use of prevention and encourage citizens to take initiatives themselves to increase their safety.

We support cities and municipalities in developing their local security and prevention policies. In addition, we advise the Minister for Home Affairs on federal security and prevention policy. We draw up action plans and participate in international working groups on local security.

We focus on assessing the actions carried out at local level and subsidised by the federal government in order to improve public security, as well as the development and support of initiatives that are part of an integral and integrated approach to tackle radicalism, theft, violence, disturbances, etc.

Citizen participation and public and private collaborative arrangements are encouraged, given that they increase awareness and resilience with regards to certain crime phenomena.

Our Directorate General oversees the private security sector through strict regulation, in order to protect the privacy and fundamental rights of citizens as much as possible. In addition, we are

responsible for issuing permits and authorisations, as well as identity cards. Where necessary, we draw up reports if violations are identified, and impose administrative penalties.

Our Directorate General is also responsible for coordinating security policy at football matches, primarily in the higher divisions. Preventive actions, awareness-raising and respect for the 'football law' are therefore essential.

Support for the various local police bodies is also part of our responsibilities. In addition, we provide specific administrative supervision over decisions taken by local administrative authorities on police matters.

Our Directorate General also ensures neutral and high-quality handling of cases as regards managing the civil liability of the police. It also follows the legislation and regulations pertaining to cameras and municipal administrative sanctions. (SAC).

Finally, we also coordinate and enforce basic regulations for fire safety in buildings. We also raise awareness among citizens in terms of fire prevention.

Crisis Centre

Public security is the main priority of the Crisis Centre in managing emergencies and incidents. Of course, we are not only active in a crisis: our staff continually monitors current events.

Based on various sources of information, the Crisis Centre draws up various situation reports every day, which we send to the different target groups. We provide weather forecasts, water level reports, threat assessments, security measures, etc. to the strategic and operational services.

Our assistance ranges from committing resources and people to political decision-making. In addition, our permanent staff also have procedures and databases for actions in the event of various risks (information plans, alert plans, etc.).

In addition to crisis management coordination, the Crisis Centre is also responsible for emergency planning. We are always taking new initiatives to ensure public safety in the event of emergencies. We take account of the rapid changes taking place within society. Emergency plans are regularly tested to examine them in practice and master the procedures.

The preparation of major events, demonstrations and visits by VIPs is meticulously examined in advance in terms of security. Based on this security analysis, we take the necessary measures which we communicate to the competent police services.

Digital mapping, videoconferencing, emergency electricity supply, etc. The infrastructure of the Crisis Centre can always be rapidly deployed to support crisis management. Alerting the public is also one of our responsibilities. The network of sirens installed near 'Seveso' companies and nuclear sites makes it possible to alert the public. Another possibility is the BE-Alert tool which makes it possible to warn citizens more quickly and clearly via mobile phones.

Following a European directive, passenger data from cross-border flights have recently been recorded and analysed by the Crisis Centre. This is an additional service making it possible to increase security in our society.

Institutions and Population

Our Directorate General for Institutions and Population carries out a diverse range of missions that have a significant impact on the public. For example, we safeguard the democratic rights of citizens and their identities.

Through the municipalities, we produce and distribute electronic identity cards (eID), the foreign national card and the Kids-ID, the European identity and travel document for children under 12.

Thanks to the eID card, citizens can prove their identity online. The eID card also gives access to various online services and applications, both in the public and private sectors. For example, citizens can affix a valid electronic signature to documents. Many Belgians fill out their tax return online. A large number of certificates from the National Registry can also be requested using the eID card via the 'Mon Dossier' (My Account) application. As such, citizens no longer have to go to the municipal administration to obtain certificates; they can download them onto their computer. All electronic identity cards are secured using the latest technology.

In the event of loss or theft of cards, citizens can contact the DOCSTOP service, our helpdesk which is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The lost or stolen identity document is then blocked, thereby avoiding any risk of fraudulent use.

We also manage the National Registry, the central database which records the population data of any person registered in a Belgian municipality, or Belgians residing abroad who have been registered in the population registers kept in consular or diplomatic posts. The National Registry facilitates the sharing of authentic identification data of natural persons between the various Public Services which have access to these data. The Crossroads Bank for Social Security, the CPAS, the municipalities and the various Federal Public Services, including Foreign Affairs, Justice and Finance, are some examples.

For citizens, elections are the perfect opportunity to participate in political life. Our Directorate organises Federal, Regional and European elections. We ensure the smooth implementation of this major undertaking, while respecting democracy: we are responsible for adapting electoral legislation as regards the collection of votes and the dissemination and publication of results.

The Protocol Department is also part of the Directorate for Institutions and Population. This department is responsible inter alia for national ceremonies and celebrations including Belgium's national holiday, Royal weddings and State funerals.

Immigration Office

Our Directorate-General Immigration Office is the competent body for access to the territory, residence, settlement and expulsion of foreign nationals.

Specifically, we ensure that the entry and residence of foreign nationals in Belgium proceeds in accordance with the prevailing rules. Foreign nationals wishing to come to Belgium to stay or settle here (whether as a tourist, student, worker, for a family visit or as part of a family reunion), must obtain authorisation from us.

We then give instructions so that a visa or a residence permit is granted to the foreign national in question.

If foreign nationals no longer have a right of residence, we take measures to deport them. These measures may sometimes be taken through coercion. Persons in an irregular situation may be placed in a secure centre with a view to their expulsion from the territory. We currently manage five secure centres: the centres for illegal immigrants in Merksplas, Bruges and Vottem, the repatriation centre 127 bis and the Caricole transit centre in Steenokkerzeel.

Moreover, as regards asylum, we are responsible for registering asylum applications (registration, fingerprinting, choice of language, etc.). We are also responsible for determining whether Belgium is the Member State of the European Union responsible for examining such applications under the Dublin agreements.

We are committed to the fight against illegal immigration and support the Federal Police in controlling the Schengen borders. In addition, we collect and analyse all information relating to fraud, the trafficking and smuggling of human beings, or sham marriages and cohabitation.

Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons

The Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA) is the main asylum body in Belgium. It is run by a Commissioner General, assisted by two deputy Commissioners. They work in complete independence and are impartial.

The Commissioner General and his or her staff grant protection to foreign nationals who have a well-founded fear of persecution within the meaning of the Geneva Convention (refugee status) or who run a genuine risk of suffering serious harm if they return to their country of origin (subsidiary protection).

The Commissioner General may therefore grant or refuse international protection under the Geneva Convention, and by the definition of subsidiary protection. The CGRA is also competent for revoking refugee status or subsidiary protection status, and issuing civil-status documents to recognised refugees and stateless persons.

The CGRA currently has over 500 staff, most of whom are responsible for making decisions in asylum cases.

Each asylum application is examined on an individual basis, and each applicant is interviewed by a protection officer specialised in a given geographical region of the world. The protection officer of the CGRA evaluates the asylum claimant's story in the light of the objective situation of their country of origin, and drafts a proposal for a decision. This is checked by a supervisor before being submitted to the Commissioner General for signature.

In order to assess asylum applications in full knowledge of the facts, the CGRA has an important documentation and research centre, CEDOCA. This support service is made up of around 30 researchers specialised by region. These researchers are responsible for collecting and analysing information on asylum seekers' countries of origin. All the information is gathered in an efficient documentary intranet and made available to protection officers.

The website of the CGRA (www.cgra.be), which is available in three languages, is a reference for objective and current information on the current asylum procedure in Belgium, the operation and policy pursued by the CGRA. Every day, this site is consulted by hundreds of asylum seekers, recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, lawyers, guardians, asylum professionals,

journalists, members of the academic world and members of the public. It is also a valuable source of information for colleagues from other European asylum bodies.

Aliens Litigation Council

The Aliens Litigation Council (CCE) is an administrative court composed of judges who rule independently on appeals brought before it.

There are 2 types of procedure before the CCE. The first is litigation. The Aliens Litigation Council rules on appeals lodged against decisions of the General Commissioner for Refugees and Stateless Persons.

The second procedure is the annulment procedure. This enables an appeal to be lodged with the CCE against decisions taken by the Immigration Office in relation to access to the territory, residence, settlement and expulsion of foreign nationals. This includes, for example, an appeal against a refusal of an application for family reunification, an application for a student visa, etc.

The procedure before the CCE is written. However, the parties may still make oral submissions at the hearing. The judge conducts the hearing and is assisted by a clerk. All parties must be present. At the end of the hearing, the judge deliberates and issues a judgement. The only possible appeal against this ruling is an appeal in cassation, lodged with the Council of State.

The CCE publishes its main judgements on its website (www.rvv-cce.be). By making its case law public, it falls under a wider European and international context.

Federal Services to Governors

In their capacity as federal government commissioners in the provinces, governors are assigned missions to ensure the implementation and application of federal regulations. This is a highly varied range of duties, particularly in the following areas:

- Civil security and emergency plans
- Police security and public order
- Specific administrative supervision of the functioning of the local police
- Legislation on weapons
- Fire services
- Handling disaster cases

In addition, the provincial governors are responsible for the political preparation of the tasks entrusted to them. The provincial governors are also commissioners of the governments of the Regions and Communities. With a view to the implementation of its federal missions, the FPS Home Affairs makes public officials available to the governors.

The Brussels-Capital administrative district consists of a senior official and a deputy governor. The deputy governor is appointed and dismissed by the Brussels government.

Perfectly bilingual, the deputy governor is responsible for ensuring the application of laws and regulations relating to the use of languages in administrative matters in the municipalities of the Brussels-Capital administrative district. His or her status is identical to that of the provincial governor.

As Commissioner of the Flemish and Federal governments, the deputy governor of Flemish Brabant ensures the correct application of the law on the use of languages in administrative matters in the municipalities of the Brussels periphery.

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