**pcgn**
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

# Belgium

| Country name | Belgium |
|---|---|
| State title | Kingdom of Belgium |
| Name of citizen | Belgian |
| Official languages | Dutch (*nld*), French (*fra*), German (*deu*) [1] |
| Country name in official languages | België (*nld*)<br>Belgique (*fra*)<br>Belgien (*deu*) |
| State title in official languages | Koninkrijk België (*nld*)<br>Royaume de Belgique (*fra*)<br>Königreich Belgien (*deu*) |
| Script | Roman |
| Romanization System | Not required |
| ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3) | BE/BEL |
| Capital | Brussels (*fra*: Bruxelles; *nld*: Brussel; *deu*: Brüssel) [2] |
| Population | 11,825,551 (January 2025 est.) [3] |
| Area | 30,518 sq km [4] |

**Introduction**

Belgium is located in Western Europe, with a coastline on the North Sea and land borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Most of modern-day Belgium was part of the Spanish Netherlands, until the late 18th century, followed by a period of Austrian and then French rule. After incorporation into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, Belgium gained independence in 1830 and became a separate kingdom.

**Geographical names policy and sources**

Geographical names should be taken from official Belgian mapping and authoritative sources. All accents, diacritics, apostrophes and hyphens should be retained (see below for further details). The National Geographical Institute of Belgium (Institut Géographique National – Nationaal Geografisch Instituut, IGN-NGI) is responsible for the mapping and toponymy of Belgium. The Royal Commission for Toponymy and Dialectology (Commission Royale de Toponymie et de Dialectologie – Koninklijke Commissie voor Toponymie en Dialectologie) comprises linguists representing the Belgium's three language communities and advises on the official spelling of geographical names in Belgium.

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[1] ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

[2] For UK Government purposes, Brussels is the conventional English name of the capital and may be used in general contexts. For cartographic products, the bilingual form Bruxelles/Brussel (Brussels) may be shown.

[3] STATBEL

[4] STATBEL

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For HMG purposes, names should be taken from official Belgian sources and shown according to the local language(s) of the administrative area. The conventional English forms of well-known place names (e.g. Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges) may also be used.

In Belgium, official place names are used monolingually within each linguistic region: Dutch in Flanders, French in Wallonia, and German in the German-speaking municipalities. The Brussels-Capital Region is the only area where names are officially bilingual (Dutch and French).

The language used for place names on road signs reflects this division and depends on the region where the sign is located, not the destination itself—so a sign pointing to the same city may read *Luik* in Flanders and *Liège* in Wallonia. Local informal usage often follows the speaker's native language, and therefore many towns are commonly known by two or sometimes three different language forms. In Wallonia (French-speaking), people generally use the French forms of Flemish place names, such as *Bruges* for *Brugge* and *Anvers* for *Antwerpen*. In Flanders, speakers usually use the Dutch forms of Walloon place names, such as *Bergen* for *Mons*, *Namen* for *Namur* and *Luik* for *Liège*. Within the German-speaking community, the German forms such as *Lüttich* for *Liège* and *Brügge* for *Brugge* are used.
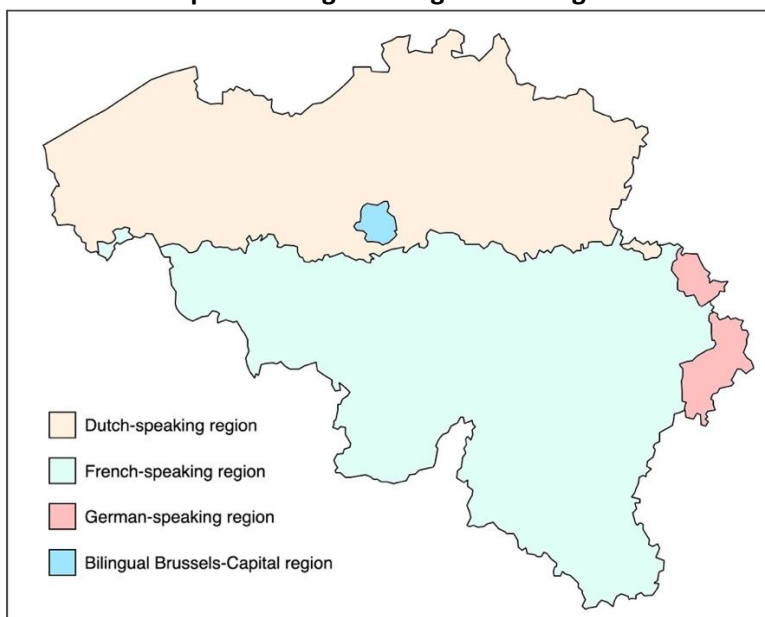
**Languages**

Belgium has three Communities: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. These Communities are responsible for cultural and language-related matters, including education and language policy within their respective language areas.

Belgium is also divided into four linguistic regions: the Dutch-speaking region (Flemish Region / Flanders), the French-speaking region (Walloon Region / Wallonia), the bilingual Brussels-Capital region and the German-speaking region (nine municipalities in eastern Wallonia).

Dutch (often called Flemish in Belgium) is the official language in the Flemish Region, French is the official language in the Walloon Region, and German is official in the nine German-speaking municipalities in eastern Wallonia. Dutch and French are co-official in the 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region.

**Map of the linguistic regions of Belgium**



Dutch-speaking region
French-speaking region
German-speaking region
Bilingual Brussels-Capital region

**Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[5]):**

The following letter-diacritic combinations may be found in geographical names in Belgium.

**Dutch** uses the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

| Character | Unicode encoding | Character | Unicode encoding |
|---|---|---|---|
| Â | 00C2 | â | 00E2 |
| Ç | 00C7 | ç | 00E7 |
| È | 00C8 | è | 00E8 |
| É | 00C9 | é | 00E9 |
| Ë | 00CB | ë | 00EB |
| IJ | 0132 | ij | 0133 |
| Ö | 00D6 | ö | 00F6 |
| Ú | 00DA | ú | 00FA |
| Ü | 00DC | ü | 00FC |
| Û | 00DB | û | 00FB |

**French** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

| Upper-case character | Unicode encoding | Lower-case character | Unicode encoding |
|---|---|---|---|
| À | 00C0 | à | 00E0 |
| Â | 00C2 | â | 00E2 |
| Ç | 00C7 | ç | 00E7 |
| È | 00C8 | è | 00E8 |
| É | 00C9 | é | 00E9 |
| Ê | 00CA | ê | 00EA |
| Ë | 00CB | ë | 00EB |
| Î | 00CE | î | 00EE |
| Ì | 00CC | ì | 00EC |
| Ï | 00CF | ï | 00EF |
| Ô | 00D4 | ô | 00F4 |
| Œ | 0152 | œ | 0153 |
| Ù | 00D9 | ù | 00F9 |
| Û | 00DB | û | 00FB |
| Ü | 00DC | ü | 00FC |
| Ÿ | 0178 | ÿ | 00FF |

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[5] See www.unicode.org

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**German** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

| Upper-case character | Unicode encoding | Lower-case character | Unicode encoding |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ä | 00C4 | ä | 00E4 |
| Ö | 00D6 | ö | 00F6 |
| - | - | ß | 00DF |
| Ü | 00DC | ü | 00FC |

## Administrative structure

At first-order administrative level (ADM1) Belgium is divided into three regions: the Flemish Region (*nld*: Vlaams Gewest, commonly referred to as Vlaanderen), the Walloon Region (*fra*: Région wallonne, commonly referred to as Wallonie) and the Brussels-Capital Region (*fra*: Région de Bruxelles-Capitale; *nld*: Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest).

The Flemish and Walloon Regions are each divided into five provinces, and these 10 provinces are further subdivided into 533 municipalities (*ned*: gemeente; *fra*: commune) at second-order level. The Brussels-Capital Region has no provinces and comprises 19 municipalities, bringing the total number of municipalities in Belgium to 552.[6]

Province names are shown below in their official local-language forms, with English conventional names in parentheses where applicable.

**Provinces of Belgium**

| Region | ISO 3166-2 Code | Province Name | ISO 3166-2 Code | Administrative Centre (PPLA) (conventional name in brackets) | Location of Centre |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vlaams Gewest (Flemish Region) | BE-VLG | Antwerpen | BE-VAN | Antwerpen (Antwerp) | 51°13'04"N 04°24'01"E |
| | | Limburg | BE-VLI | Hasselt | 50°55'48"N 05°20'15"E |
| | | Oost-Vlaanderen | BE-VOV | Gent (Ghent) | 51°03'13"N 03°43'31"E |
| | | Vlaams-Brabant | BE-VBR | Leuven | 50°53'00"N 04°42'00"E |
| | | West-Vlaanderen | BE-VWV | Brugge (Bruges) | 51°12'32"N 03°13'27"E |

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[6] These figures reflect the municipal mergers that took effect in December 2024 and January 2025. Source: STATBEL.
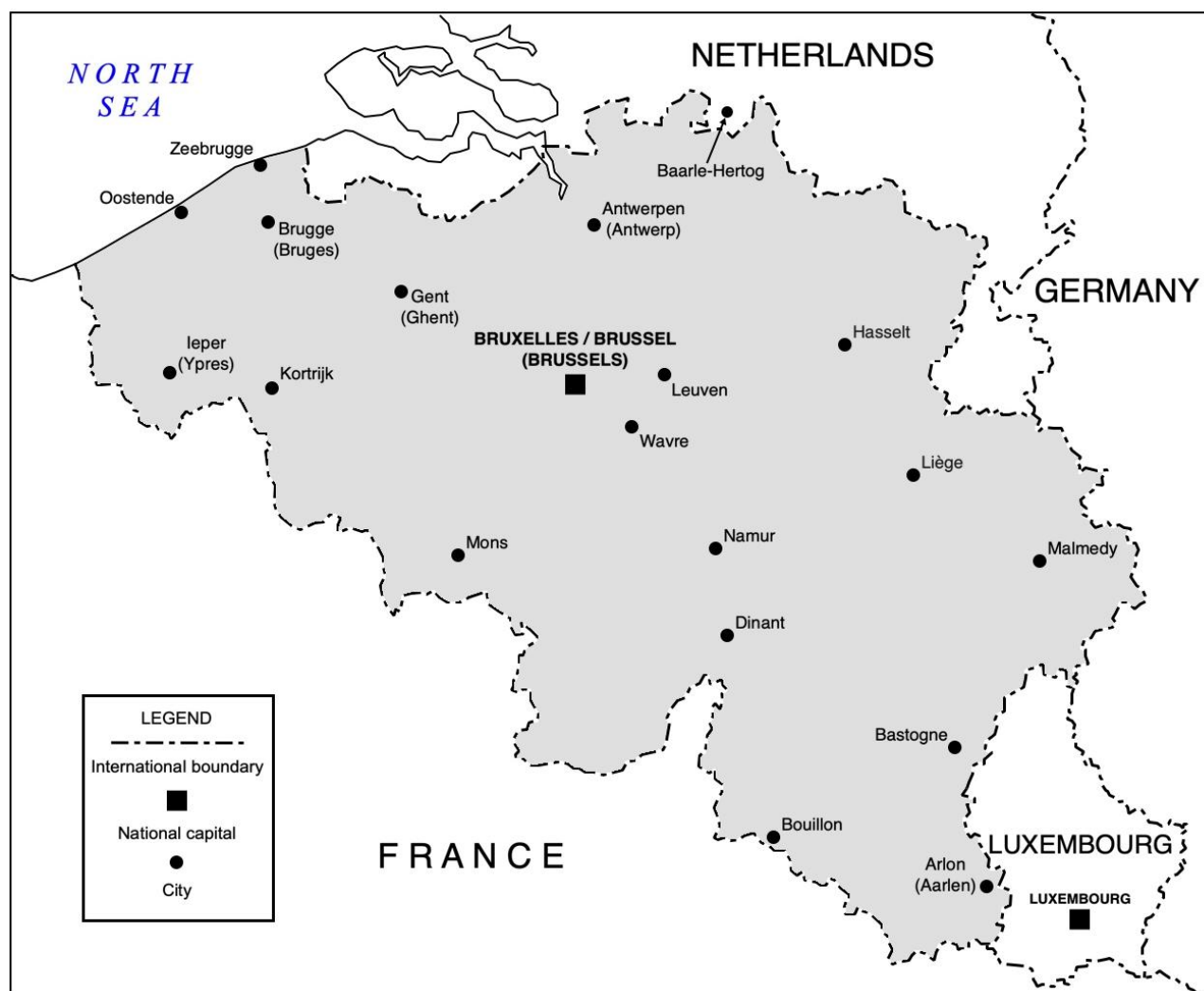
| Region | ISO 3166-2 Code | Province Name | ISO 3166-2 Code | Administrative Centre (PPLA) (conventional name in brackets) | Location of Centre |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Région wallonne (Walloon Region) | BE-WAL | Brabant wallon | BE-WBR | Wavre | 50°43'00"N 04°36'00"E |
| | | Hainaut | BE-WHT | Mons | 50°27'17"N 03°57'09"E |
| | | Liège | BE-WLG | Liège | 50°38'23"N 05°34'14"E |
| | | Luxembourg | BE-WLX | Arlon (Aarlen) | 49°41'00"N 05°49'00"E |
| | | Namur | BE-WNA | Namur | 50°28'00"N 04°52'00"E |
| Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (*fra*)/ Brussels Hoofdstedelijk (*nld*) (Brussels-Capital Region) | BE-BRU | - | - | Bruxelles / Brussel (Brussels) | 50°51'00"N 04°21'00"E |

**Enclaves/Exclaves**

The Belgian municipality of Baarle-Hertog forms a complex set of Belgian exclaves within the Netherlands. The village consists of a patchwork of Belgian and Dutch territories, with 16 Belgian exclaves within Dutch territory. (See the PCGN Netherlands Toponymic Factfile for further details).

Belgium also contains five small German enclaves: Münsterbildchen, Mützenich, Poetgener Wald, Rückschlag and Ruitzhof, all located along the border with Germany in the Liège province.

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*Map of Belgium*



*Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.*

**Other Significant Locations**

| PCGN recommended name | Alternative names | Location | Feature type |
|---|---|---|---|
| North Sea | Noord Zee (nld) Mer du Nord (fra); Nord See (deu); Nordsøen (dan); Nordsjøen (nor) | 55°20'00"N 03°00'00"E | Sea (international feature) |
| Scheldt | Escaut (fra); Schelde (nld) | 51°25'51"N 03°31'44"E | River (France; Belgium; Netherlands) |

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| PCGN recommended name | Alternative names | Location | Feature type |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meuse | Maas (nld); Meuse (fra) | 51°42'54"N 04°40'04"E | River (France; Belgium; Netherlands) |
| Ostend | Oostende (nld); Ostende (fra) | 51°13'33"N 02°55'10"E | PPL & Port |
| Zeebrugge | Zeebruges (fra) | 51°19'49"N 03°12'23"E | PPL & Port |
| Ieper (Ypres) | Ieper (nld); Ypern (deu); Ypres (fra) | 50°51'03"N 02°53'06"E | PPL |

**Useful references**

- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belgium/
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home
- National Geographical Institute of Belgium (Institut Géographique National – Nationaal Geografisch Instituut, IGN-NGI)
- NGA Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Belgium: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSSearch/GNSDocs/policies/Belgium_Country_Policy_webversion_Latest.pdf
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- STATBEL (Belgian statistical office) : https://statbel.fgov.be/en
- Toponymic guidelines for international use by map editors and other editors for Belgium (2009): https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/25th-gegn-docs/wp%20papers/wp93-tgl%20belgium-april%202009.pdf
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html

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