



Global Employer Services Immigration

Belgian Integration Rules Update

Integration requirements for foreign nationals living in Belgium were recently clarified. Since 26 January 2017, a new condition for long stays in Belgium entered into force. The implementation of this residence condition means that third-country nationals applying for a long stay in Belgium must prove their willingness to integrate Belgian society.

Basic rule

The rules entail that upon application for or renewal of a Belgian residence permit, foreign nationals sign a statement to confirm and prove that they have knowledge of Belgian fundamental values and norms and are thus willing to integrate. Integration efforts can be demonstrated by following an integration course, by having knowledge of one of the three official languages, being professionally active, etc. Authorities will monitor these efforts and will exercise controls during the four years following the first validity period of the first Belgian residence permit/eID card.

Proving integration efforts is a *conditio sine qua non* for the approval of the foreigner's Belgian residency. Insufficient efforts may lead to the residence request's refusal.

Exemptions

The rule is only applicable to third-country nationals and more specifically, only applies to adults.

EU nationals and their family members (amongst other categories) are exempt from this obligation.

What does this mean in practice?

The new integration rules will have quite an impact on the residence application and extension process for non-EU highly skilled workers and their family members in Belgium. In practice, a non-EU worker's integration effort can be proven by providing (e.g.) a copy of the employment contract or recent pay slip. The non-EU worker's family members should provide the Ministry with (e.g.) registrations to integration courses, language courses, volunteer work, etc. The fact that most non-EU workers and their family members only reside in Belgium on a temporary basis is also taken into account by authorities when evaluating integration efforts.

As the practice around these new integration rules is still in development, and as said rules are yet to be applied by all the different authorities, more news on the wider implementation will follow.

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