



# Join the Right Communities

ExpatsatHome Essential Guide

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## Join the Right Communities: Your Guide to Finding Your People in Brussels

Welcome to Day 10! Moving to a new city is an incredible adventure, but it can also be lonely at first. You're surrounded by people, but you haven't found **your people** yet. Building a community—a network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances—is one of the most important things you can do to feel truly at home in Brussels.

This guide provides a comprehensive roadmap to building that network. We'll explore different types of communities, from expat groups that offer instant support to local clubs that provide deeper integration. We'll give you practical steps, resources, and insider tips to help you navigate this journey with confidence.

### The Expat Bubble vs. True Integration

When you first arrive, it's natural to gravitate towards other expats. They speak your language, understand your challenges, and can offer immediate advice. This is what's known as the "expat bubble."

#### What is the Expat Bubble?

The **expat bubble** refers to a social circle composed almost exclusively of other international residents. While it's a valuable support system, staying only within this bubble can prevent you from fully experiencing Belgian culture and forming lasting connections with locals.

The goal isn't to avoid the bubble entirely—it's a wonderful resource! The goal is to use it as a starting point and then consciously step outside of it to build a richer, more diverse community that includes both expats and locals. This guide will show you how.

### Starting Point: Expat & International Groups

Expat groups are the perfect place to start. They are designed for newcomers and are full of people in the exact same situation as you. They provide an instant support system for navigating the practicalities of life in Brussels.

#### Why start here?

- **Shared Experience:** Everyone is navigating a new country.
- **Low Pressure:** Events are specifically designed for newcomers to mingle.
- **English is the Norm:** Language is rarely a barrier.

#### How to get started:

1. **Identify Platforms:** The most popular platforms for these groups are Meetup.com and Facebook. InterNations is another major player, often requiring a membership for premium events.
2. **Search for Key Groups:** Look for terms like “expats in Brussels,” “new in town,” or “international community.”
3. **Join & Observe:** Join a few groups that seem active. Look at their past and upcoming events to get a feel for their vibe.
4. **Attend an Event:** Take the leap and sign up for an event. A “New in Town” social or a casual coffee meetup is a great first step.

| Group Name                        | Description & Where to Find   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Open Expat Meetup Brussels</b> | The largest and one of the most active groups. They host regular “New in Town” events every few weeks, making it perfect for arrivals. They also run a weekly French Language Meetup for intermediate speakers to practice in a social setting. <b>[VERIFIED 2026]</b><br><b>Find them on: Meetup.com</b> |
| <b>InterNations</b>               | A global platform with a very active Brussels community. They organize a wide range of events, from professional networking and large parties to smaller interest-based groups (e.g., dining, hiking, nightlife). Some events are for premium members only.<br><b>Find them on: InterNations.org</b>      |
| <b>Expat Republic Brussels</b>    | Another popular community known for its social events and creating a friendly atmosphere for expats to connect. They often host after-work drinks and weekend gatherings. <b>[VERIFIED 2026]</b><br><b>Find them on: Meetup.com &amp; Facebook</b>  |
| <b>JUST A NIGHT</b>               | Primarily focused on nightlife and larger social gatherings. If you’re looking to meet people in a lively, party-like atmosphere, this is a great option.<br><b>Find them on: Meetup.com</b>  |

## Beyond the Bubble: Joining Local Clubs & ASBLs

To truly integrate and feel connected to Belgian life, you need to meet Belgians. The best way to do this is by joining local clubs and associations centered around your hobbies and interests. In Belgium, these are often structured as non-profit organizations, known as an **asbl** (in French) or **vzw** (in Dutch).

### Why join a local club?

- **Authentic Connections:** Meet locals who share your passions.
- **Language Practice:** Immerse yourself in French or Dutch in a natural, low-stress environment.
- **Cultural Insight:** Gain a deeper understanding of local life and customs.

### How to find them:

1. **Identify Your Hobby:** What do you love to do? Hiking, photography, board games, pottery, choir, running?
2. **Use the Right Search Terms:** Search online for [Your Hobby] + club + Bruxelles or [Your Hobby] + asbl + Bruxelles.
3. **Check Municipal Websites:** The website for your local commune (e.g., Ixelles, Uccle, Saint-Gilles) often has a directory of registered clubs and associations. The main Brussels city website (brussels.be) also has a sports and culture section.

4. **Reach Out:** Don't be shy! Send an email expressing your interest. Introduce yourself and ask if you can join for a trial session (**séance d'essai**).

### Spotlight: English-Speaking Sports Clubs

Sports are a massive part of Belgian culture and a fantastic way to build camaraderie. While joining a fully local team is a great goal, several clubs were founded by expats and operate in English, offering a perfect bridge between the expat and local worlds.

| Club Name & Sport  | Description   |
|--|---|
| <b>Brussels Big Brackets (Cycling)</b>                       | The largest cycling club in the region, welcoming both recreational riders and competitive racers. Membership often includes affiliation with the Belgian cycling federation, offering benefits like insurance and discounts. |
| <b>FC Irlande &amp; Royal Brussels British FC (Football)</b> | Two of the most established expat football clubs. They have multiple men's and women's teams with players from dozens of nationalities. They are known for their strong sense of community and social events off the pitch.   |
| <b>Badminton Bxl (Badminton)</b>                             | An informal, pay-per-session group that is perfect for expats who want to play without committing to a full-year membership. It's a great way to bypass the administrative hurdles of some local clubs.                       |
| <b>Ixelles Air Raiders (Ultimate Frisbee)</b>                | Belgium's oldest ultimate frisbee club offers a very welcoming environment for all skill levels. The first few sessions are typically free, allowing you to try it out before committing to a yearly fee.                     |
| <b>Brussels Sports Association (For Children)</b>            | A volunteer-run non-profit offering soccer, basketball, and baseball in English for children aged 4-13. An excellent way for expat families to connect.   |

## Giving Back: Connecting Through Volunteering

Volunteering is a powerful way to build deep, meaningful connections. It allows you to contribute to your new home, meet people who share your values, and work together towards a common goal.

### Why volunteer?

- **Purpose-Driven Connections:** Meet people based on shared values, not just circumstances.
- **Contribute to Your Community:** Play an active role in the city you now call home.
- **Develop New Skills:** Gain valuable experience and practice your language skills in a practical setting.

### How to find opportunities:

- **Start with Key Organizations:** Check the websites of well-established, English-friendly organizations.
- **Use Volunteer Platforms:** Websites like Worldpackers, Workaway, and GoAbroad often list opportunities in Belgium.
- **EU-Specific Portal:** The European Youth Portal is an excellent resource for EU-funded volunteering programs.

### Recommended Volunteering Organizations

- **Serve the City Brussels:** A highly recommended organization for English speakers. They run a variety of flexible projects, from helping the homeless to environmental initiatives. You can easily sign up for shifts online via their ServeNow platform. **[VERIFIED 2026]**
- **The Red Cross (Croix-Rouge / Rode Kruis):** Often needs volunteers at shelters and for community support programs across the city.

### ⚠ **Important: Critical Information for Benefit Recipients**

If you receive unemployment benefits, early retirement payments, or time credit allowances in Belgium, you **must** obtain permission from the National Employment Office (ONEM/RVA) **before** you begin any volunteer work. You need to submit a C45B form. Volunteering without this permission can result in the loss of your benefits. **[VERIFIED 2026]**

## Building Your Professional Network

Your professional life is a key part of your identity, and building a network in your field is just as important as building a social one.

### Why build a professional network?

- **Career Opportunities:** Learn about the local job market and unadvertised opportunities.
- **Peer Support:** Connect with people who understand the specifics of your industry in Belgium.
- **Skill Development:** Join groups focused on developing professional skills.

### Where to look:

- **Meetup.com:** Beyond social groups, you'll find active communities for tech, marketing, entrepreneurship, and more.
- **Toastmasters International:** If you want to improve your public speaking and leadership skills, Brussels has numerous active and very international Toastmasters clubs. It's a fantastic and supportive environment for professional growth. **[VERIFIED 2026]**
- **LinkedIn Groups:** Search for professional associations and groups related to your field in Brussels or Belgium.
- **Eventbrite:** A good source for finding industry-specific conferences, workshops, and networking events.

## Your Community Action Plan: The First 90 Days

Building a community takes time and consistent effort. Here is a sample plan to guide you.

### Month 1: Lay the Foundation

- **Goal:** Get comfortable and make initial connections.
- **Actions:**
  - Join 2-3 broad expat groups online (Meetup, Facebook).
  - Attend at least one "New in Town" or general social event.
  - Introduce yourself to your neighbours.
  - Have a coffee or lunch with at least one person you meet at an event.

### Month 2: Explore Your Interests

- **Goal:** Step outside the main expat bubble.
- **Actions:**
  - Make a list of your top 3 hobbies.
  - Research local clubs (**asbl**) for one of those hobbies.

- Send an inquiry email to that club to ask about joining or a trial session.
- Attend a professional meetup or a Toastmasters meeting.

### Month 3: Deepen Your Roots

- **Goal:** Build consistency and local connections.
- **Actions:**
  - Attend your chosen local hobby club meeting for the first time.
  - Sign up for a one-off volunteering shift with an organization like Serve the City Brussels.
  - Follow up with people you've met. Suggest a specific activity (e.g., "Let's check out this market," "Want to go for a run in the park?").
  - Continue attending a mix of expat and local events.

## Checklist: Building Your Brussels Community

- ☐ Research and join at least two general expat groups online.
- ☐ Attend your first "New in Town" social event.
- ☐ Make a list of your personal hobbies and interests.
- ☐ Search online for a local club (**asbl**) related to one of your hobbies.
- ☐ Send an inquiry email to a local club.
- ☐ Explore volunteering opportunities with Serve the City Brussels.
- ☐ (If applicable) Understand and submit the C45B form to ONEM before volunteering.
- ☐ Find and attend one professional networking event or skills group meeting.
- ☐ Exchange contact information with someone new.
- ☐ Initiate a one-on-one coffee or activity with a new acquaintance.
- ☐ Visit a local community center (**maison de quartier** or **gemeenschapscentrum**) to see their schedule of activities.

## Key Vocabulary for Joining Groups

| English                        | French / Dutch                    | Context & Meaning   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Non-profit organization</b> | <b>ASBL / VZW</b>                 | The legal structure for most clubs and associations in Belgium. Short for <b>Association Sans But Lucratif / Vereniging Zonder Winstoogmerk</b> . |
| <b>Membership fee</b>          | <b>Cotisation / Lidgeld</b>       | The annual or monthly fee required to be a member of a club.  |
| <b>Volunteer</b>               | <b>Bénévole / Vrijwilliger</b>    | Someone who gives their time freely to an organization.   |
| <b>Trial session</b>           | <b>Séance d'essai / Proefles</b>  | A free or low-cost introductory session to let you try a club's activity before joining.  |
| <b>Registration</b>            | <b>Inscription / Inschrijving</b> | The process of formally signing up to become a member.  |
| <b>Schedule / Timetable</b>    | <b>Horaire / Lesrooster</b>       | The list of times and dates for a club's activities or meetings.  |

## Insider Tips for Success

### 💡 **Tip: Be Patient and Persistent**

Building a real, meaningful community doesn't happen overnight. There will be times you feel lonely—that's normal. Keep putting yourself out there. Consistency is more important than intensity.

### **Celebrate the Small Wins**

A friendly chat with a barista, a shared laugh with a colleague, the first time you navigate a conversation in French at a club meeting—these are all victories! Acknowledge your progress.

### **Use “Bridge” Communities**

English-speaking sports clubs or international groups like Toastmasters are fantastic “bridges.” They allow you to meet a mix of long-term expats and internationally-minded Belgians in a comfortable, English-friendly setting.

### **Be the Initiator**

Don't wait for others to invite you. If you connect with someone, be the one to say, “It was great talking to you. Would you like to get a coffee next week?” People are often just as nervous as you are.

### **Explore Your Local Commune**

Your local community center (**maison de quartier** or **gemeenschapscentrum**) is a hidden gem. They offer low-cost classes, workshops, and events for residents. It's a fantastic way to meet people who live right in your neighbourhood.

You are building a new life here, and that is an amazing thing. Every small step you take to connect with others is a step towards making Brussels truly feel like home. You've got this!