

# MFS(E) SHAPE Family HHT Guide

***Welcome to SHAPE  
Casteau, Belgium***



***Helpful tips prior to and  
During your HHT***

**MFSP**  
MILITARY FAMILY  
SERVICES PROGRAM  
EUROPE



**PSFM**  
PROGRAMME DES SERVICES  
AUX FAMILLES DES MILITAIRES  
EUROPE



# MFSP

MILITARY FAMILY  
SERVICES PROGRAM  
EUROPE

## Welcome

Welcome to Belgium! This package is written with the intent to provide you with some handy information that you may use prior to and during your HHT. Basically, it contains information that is helpful when preparing to find a home in Belgium.

If you have any additional questions, remember you can always contact the MFS(E) Centre!

+ 32 (0) 6544 5962

[MFSE.SHAPE@CFMWS.COM](mailto:MFSE.SHAPE@CFMWS.COM)

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# Making a Phone Call

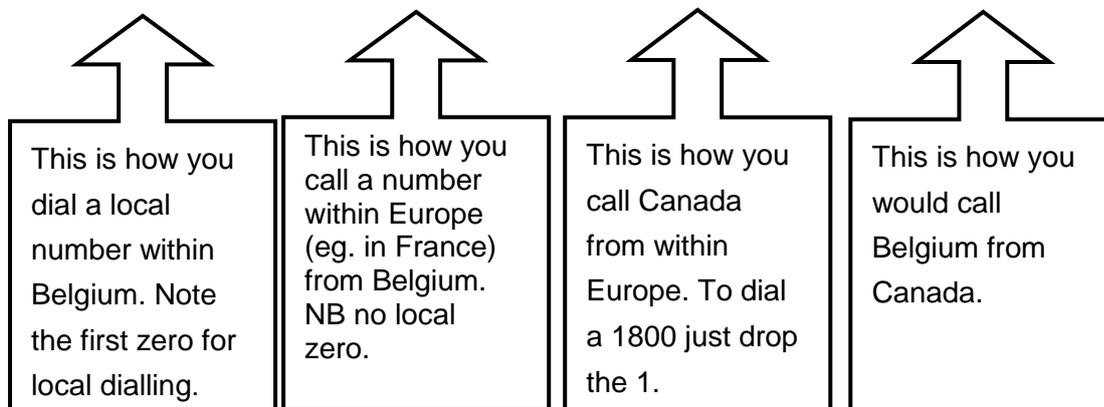
If you are not familiar with calling internationally or how European numbers are formatted, making a phone call may be challenging. Below is an explanation of the parts in a European number, examples of how phone numbers may be written, and a guide to remember how to dial them.

0032 0 6544 1234				
00	32	(0)	6544	123456
Exit code	Country code	Variable	Area Code	Phone Number
This is dialled when calling internationally. You may also see phone numbers use + to signify the exit code.	If you are calling from the same country, you do not need to include the country code.	You only include the 0 when dialling if you are calling within the same country.	The area code may be 2 to 4 digits long.	Unlike in Canada, European phone numbers do not have a standard length, so the length of the number can vary. Typically older numbers tend to be shorter.

Examples of how the above number can be written:

- +32 (0) 6544 1234
- (+32) 02454 – 1234
- 06544 1234

065.12.3456      +33.65.12.3456      001(613).123.4567      011.32.65.12.3456



# Emergency Phone Numbers

Belgium	
Emergency	112
Police Fire	100
Operator	7111

SHAPE	
Emergency SHAPE	065.44.3333
Federal Police	065.44.3334
SHAPE Police (Non-Emergency)	065.44.3353
Operator	065.44.7111
Unit Duty Personnel (Compassionate, emergencies)	0479.40.9220

## Language.

The official languages of Belgium are Dutch 59%, French 40% and German 1%.

The working Language on SHAPE is English; having said that, French is the spoken language in the Wallonia region. Statistics demonstrate that 40 percent of the residents are able to speak English, meaning that 60 percent will not be able to communicate to you in English. Time to brush up on your language skills.

Important information for the French Canadians to note. There are many dialects of French within the region such as Walloon, Picard, Champenois and Lorrain. Quebecois French is not familiar and sometimes difficult for the locals to understand. In some cases, the locals will switch to English in order to communicate. Try not to be insulted if you are not understood.

## Arriving at Brussels Airport

When you first arrive at the Brussels airport you will likely be jet lagged. Options on how to get to your hotel should be discussed with your sponsor. Be honest with your sponsor on your preference. Some people choose to take the train into Mons (preferred city when on HHT), some like to have a car service waiting for them at the airport, while others choose to rent a car right from the airport. Whichever method you choose, make sure you know your driving skills and your ability to navigate roads in Belgium. If you are taking the train or driving for the first time, it is important to note that both Flemish and French signs are used in Brussels and the surrounding area.

Example: **Bergen** is **Mons**.  
(Flemish) (French)

## Renting Vehicles

The vast majority of vehicles available for rent are standard. If you cannot drive a standard make sure to request an automatic well in advance. Note: Even if you request one, it may not be available at the time. Majority of people rent from Europcar which is located just outside the main gate (Berlin Gate) on SHAPE.

GPS's are a MUST when navigating roads in Europe. These can be signed out during your HHT from housing.

## Driving In Belgium

People have had accidents while on their HHT.

Once you are settled in to Belgium, you will have to attend a driving course on base. Belgium is notorious for their love of road signs and priority right rule. In fact, there are over 150 road signs that you will eventually learn. In the meantime, the following are the crucial signs that you need to know prior to driving.

Priority right rule means that you must yield to all traffic on your right. Even if there is not a designated sign at an intersection, you must yield to the right. Belgians are not afraid to enter an intersection without looking to their left. Defensive and cautious driving cannot be stressed enough.



Priority Road



End of Priority Road



Priority Right



Priority at the next intersection



Merging traffic from left



Merging traffic from right



Direction of priority road



Priority over oncoming vehicles (white arrow indicates priority)



Priority to oncoming vehicles (Red arrow indicates need to yield to oncoming vehicles)

## *Round-a-bouts*

Commonly found in Europe, round-a-bouts are great for keeping traffic flowing. The main rule is to yield to the cars on the LEFT. Signal when exiting.

## **Looking for a House**

During your HHT, a house finding service will be provided for you. An assigned person will take you around to show you houses.

Housing availability can vary from: houses, bungalows, semi-detached or detached or apartments. You will find a variety of houses such as old farmhouses that have been renovated, new construction and everything in between. Building standards are significantly different owing to specific climate and construction considerations. All but a few newcomers will need to compromise on their ideal accommodation.

When choosing a home, you may notice some differences compared to houses and apartments in Canada. As an example; heating is usually hot water radiators with oil furnaces vs the typical Canadian forced air heating. Below are some other differences to be aware of.

- Ovens are typically smaller in Europe so many of your pans from Canada may not fit. Some stoves are induction and require a specific cookware. When you choose a house, it is recommended that you measure your oven so that you know which pans to bring with you.
- Most walls are cinderblock with a thin layer of plaster over top. For this reason you cannot use regular nails to hang pictures like you would in Canada. Some landlords may limit the amount of pictures you hang. You may also consider leaving some large pictures back in Canada if you have any of these limitations.
- Walls cannot be washed as the paint may rub off, you can request your landlord leave some extra paint in the house so that you can paint over any stains as needed.
- Window screens are not as popular as they are in Canada, so if your house does not have screens, ask your potential landlord if it's possible for them to be installed. If screens are not provided, then there are some affordable options on the economy, so don't let this be a deterrent.
- Ask the current tenant or the landlord about their existing internet and TV service provider. Currently the options are Voo and Proximus. It is common that one service provider is more reliable than the other depending on the area.
- GSM (cellular phone) providers work well in some areas and not so well in others. Ask around what is the best provider for your home area.
- If you have school aged children. Ask about the busing system. Either check with the current renters or ask the school for further information.
- Due to the hard water and calcium build up that sometimes cause plumbing issues, it is desirable to have a water softener. If the current home does not have one, perhaps this can be requested prior to renting the home.

- It is not uncommon to arrive at a home where all light fixtures have been removed. Remember to negotiate to keep the current light fixtures in place.
- Belgium has many rainy days. Mold is worse in some homes than others. If you have sensitivity to mold, make sure to take note of anything that may be concerning you while you are looking at the home. Often these issues will not be resolved prior to you renting. So ensure you pick a home that is right for you!
- Malodorous homes are often a conversation point for all new Canadians to Belgium. It is not uncommon for homes to have a *slight to sever* sewer smell. This may be combated with septic pucks (natural biological material) to be flushed down the toilet. These are sold on the economy.
- In rural communities, it is not uncommon to have the septic grey water pumped on to the street. If you note there is a smell outdoors during a visit to one of the homes during your HHT, it is likely the smell will continue in varying degrees.
- Stairwell safety standards are absent in many homes. For instance, some homes do not have railings, other homes have varying widths and heights which often make it difficult to navigate the stairwell. Often stairways to a basement dwelling are very steep and tall people have to take care so as to not injure their head.
- Parking may be an issue. Take note of how many vehicles you can park in your lot. This will help you decide how many vehicles you choose to bring.
- Bring a Digital camera. It is very helpful to take some pictures of the houses for comparison purposes to other homes. Please note: If you decide to take pictures, make sure to have the tenant's/landlord's permission prior. Some people might not be comfortable with having their private belongings photographed.

It is helpful to bring a measuring tape with you on your HHT.

### *Good to know after the lease is signed.*

In Belgium, the division between tenant's and landlord's responsibility are different. The tenant is responsible to repair most "minor" problems. See the Housing Office for a guide of Tenant's responsibilities.

Once the lease is signed, do not expect any improvement to the house from a landlord initiative.

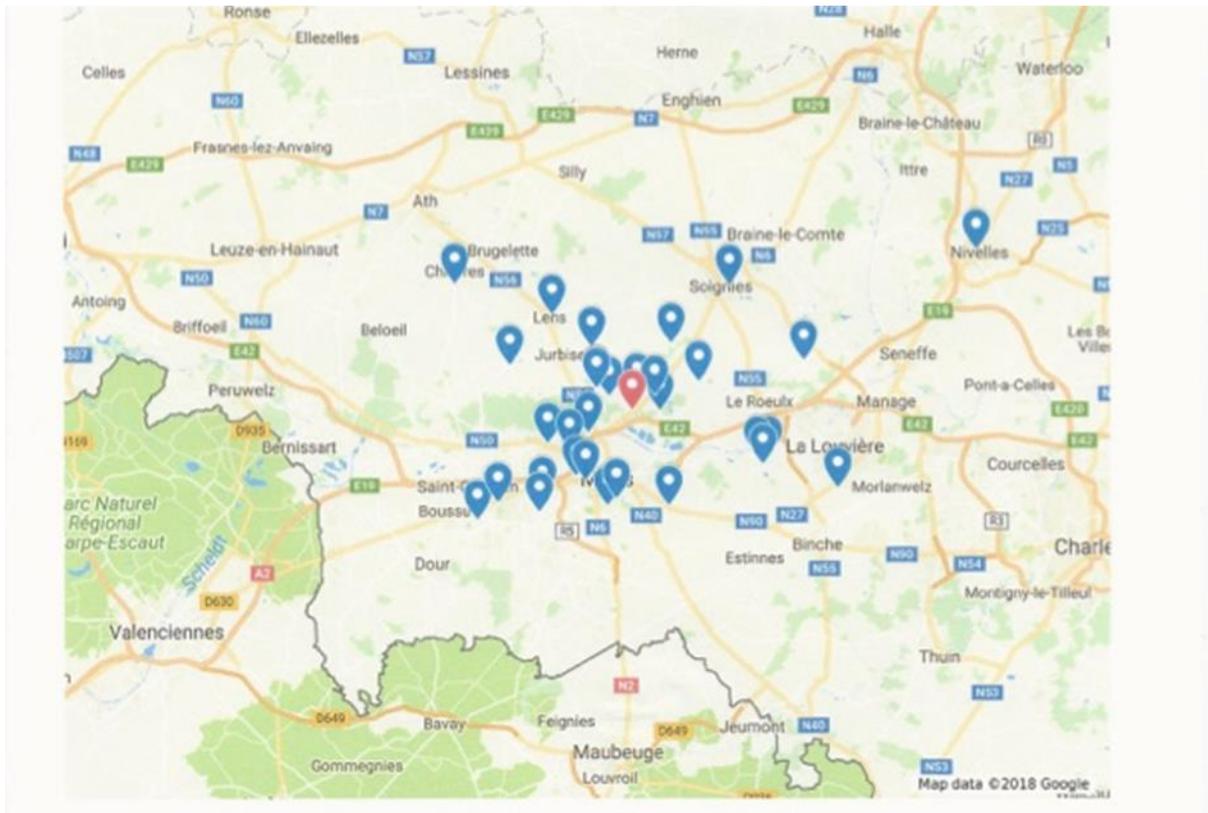
### *Banking*

ATM is located on SHAPE. No need to carry lots of cash.

## Possible places to Live

A reminder that you have to choose a home within a 30 KM radius of SHAPE. The attached map demonstrates the varying communities where previous Canadians resided.

### [Map](#)



Below is the approximate time it takes for the current resident to travel to SHAPE from their home in the morning during rush hour traffic.

Mons	15 minutes
Soignies	15 Minutes
Nivelles	30 Minutes
Mignault	25 Minutes
Lens	15 Minutes

## Electricity

Electricity in Europe differs from electricity in Canada, in that the voltage is higher and the frequency is lower. In Canada our electricity is 110V 60Hz, while in Belgium they have 220V 50Hz. Some electronics are not compatible with European power and require transformers, while others are dual voltage and only require a plug adapter.

To find out if an electronic is dual voltage, look for the electronic information on the product. This information is often found on the bottom or back of the product, or on its battery pack. If the input gives a range such as 100-240V 50-60Hz, then the product is dual voltage and works with both Canadian and European electricity. If the input does not give a range and only says 110V 60Hz, then it is not compatible with European electricity.

#### Example of Dual Voltage



If your product is dual voltage, then all you need is a plug adapter in order to use it.



Since the product is already compatible with the local electricity, all the adapter does is allow the prongs to fit the electrical outlets. If you use an adapter with a product that is not dual voltage, you will not only damage your product, but you may also cause electrical damage to the building.

## Childcare

MFSE SHAPE does not provide ongoing child care services, however, there is a children's room equipped with age appropriate toys and a fenced outdoor play area that can be used under parental supervision during the working hours of 08:30-16:00 Monday – Thursday and 08:30-15:30 on Friday.

## Tipping in Belgium

### *Restaurants*

Dining in Belgium is different than in North America. Once you are seated in the restaurant, the table is yours for the evening. They will not try to hurry your meal and rush you out to get more people in. Thus, service at times can feel very slow. Note, the server will not bring your bill until asked. Tipping is not very common in Belgium. Service workers are generally well paid and so you won't be expected to leave a gratuity. However, it is acceptable if you leave a tip for exceptional service.

### *Taxi Driver*

Tipping taxi drivers is not required or expected, but some people leave the change for their driver in order to round up to the nearest Euro. However, if the taxi driver goes out of his way to help carry bags or is especially helpful in giving directions or comes across some major obstacles in getting you to your destination, consider leaving a small tip. A few Euros is sufficient.

### *Hotel Staff*

Tipping the staff at hotels is not common because the cost of your bill will include services. However, with that said, you can leave the bellman €2 if you like. It is not customary to tip the housekeepers or the customer service workers. They are paid sufficiently and do not rely on gratuities for their income.

## What is Next

Once you have decided on a house and have an address, please return to the MFS where we will update our data base with your new information.

We will then provide you with another package; (Thriving in Guide) to help prepare you for the next phase of your move.

It is often said that information is power, however in the case of an OUTCAN move, we often get information overload. This is why we chose to break the package into three easy to read sections.

Pre-Move: **Yellow section**  
Post Move: **Blue**  
Thriving in Belgium: **Green**

You can choose how little or how much information you want to read at any given time.

Good luck and welcome to your new community at SHAPE.