



The level of authority closest to a citizen is the Commune. In Belgium, there are 589 of them. 262 cities and Walloon municipalities are divided into five provinces: Walloon Brabant, Hainaut, Liege, Luxembourg and Namur.

Municipal competencies deal with all collective needs of the people: maintaining public order, marital status management and register of the population, marriages, public cleanliness, CPAS that manages welfare, public works, housing, municipal education...

It is at the Municipal Administration that I ask for all the necessary documents for my procedure. In particular, it is at the Municipal Administration that I declare my residence. A police officer will be sent to my home to make sure I actually live there: on the basis of his report, the Administration will deliver me a certificate of residence. I will be asked for this document in many subsequent steps.

The Service of Foreigners handles specific questions concerning residence. It does not take a decision: he carries out the instructions of the Immigration Office.

It is particularly at the Municipal Administration where I extend or renew my residence card, declare a change of address or a change in the household composition.

When I am residing in a Commune, I can benefit from its services offered to its population.

Upon my arrival, I get therefore information about these services and the administrative branches where I can go to regularize my situation.



C.P.A.S. = Public Center of Social Action

The CPAS is a municipal service of communal solidarity funded by the tax of citizens who work. It organizes aid to persons who are present in the territory of the Commune and have material, financial, social or psychosocial difficulties. In Belgium, "everyone is entitled to welfare; it aims to enable everyone to lead life in accordance with human dignity." To get it, I must however meet a series of criteria and provide the documents I am asked for.



C.P.A.S.



When I go to the CPAS, a social worker is appointed to review my situation and open a file. Any application is subject to the decision of a Board composed of representatives elected by the population. The social worker presents my requests to it and afterwards communicates its decisions to me.

As any administrative step, it meets strict and complex rules. The first step is to check which CPAS is the appropriate one: mostly it is the CPAS of my residence, but other criteria may be taken into account.

The social worker is primarily a trustworthy and experienced person who listens to me and tries to answer my questions. It is important to really understand that it is not he who makes the decisions. He mediates between the user and decision-making authorities.





Attention, any granted aid is conditional on my residence and validity of my residence card. Therefore, I am very careful to anticipate the renewal of my documents and I warn in advance my social assistant of any move to ensure the transfer of my file to another CPAS. Any change in my situation has implications for the conditions of granted aid.

Moreover, **the granting of aid is most of the time conditioned by a series of obligations** (to train oneself, to look for a job ...). Therefore I am very attentive to fulfill these obligations and to inform my social assistant about it. Assistance from the CPAS is granted only if there is no other way to support oneself.



The social assistant makes the point with me on my situation and prepares a written report.

Applications may be:

- Request for welfare to support myself.
- Financial request for transport.
- Financial request to pay for my first rent and my rental guarantee.
- Request for an installation grant.
- Financial request for a medical bill or therapeutic monitoring.
- Request for support of schooling.

Example

I found a studio and I can move in it on the 15th of January. My rent is €450 all inclusive. My landlord asked me 2 months deposit as the rental guarantee. I still have to do some shopping before moving in, amounting to €200. I also need a bus pass to get to my training: its amount of the subscription is €20 / month.

I make to my social assistant a general request for social aid. I also ask for an advance for my first month's rent and rental guarantee (which I will pay back according to the plan proposed to me). Finally, I ask that the CPAS advance me the necessary money to hold until the 31 of January and enough to pay my pass..

The requests



An **advance** is a loan of money. It involves reimbursement.

Unlike the **non-refundable aid**, as its name suggests, that should not be reimbursed.

The social worker presents his social inquiry to the Council and communicates to me its decisions. The CPAS sends me a written confirmation by a registered letter. If I do not agree with the Council's decision, I can introduce an appeal within 30 days: in this case, I use a lawyer or a legal service, which introduce an appeal for free to the Labour Court.



However, the Council will grant this aid according to an assessment of social inquiry. If I live with someone or if someone can meet, even in part, my needs, aid can be partial or denied.



Services “ The youth Rights”

They inform young people about their rights and help them to be respected regarding school, work, welfare, youth aid and legislation on foreigners. They are mandated to fight against social exclusion and promote access to the autonomy of young people and families.

Their services are free and are held on weekday's permanence.

 www.sdj.be

Family Planning Centers and Sexual Aid and Education Centers, conjugal and for family

They greet people and inform them about pregnancy, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. They offer group activities and psychological, legal, medical and social consultations.

 www.loveattitude.be/centres-de-planning

Office of the birth and childhood

It provides for free pregnancy and child development monitoring (state of health, vaccines, food, language ...). It also organizes childcare for children: day care centers, open houses, nurseries, framed babysitting... (These services are not for free).

 www.one.be

Services for the sick

When I am unable to move around, services Meals on Wheels are organized by the CPAS, the loan of equipment (crutches, wheelchairs ...) is organized by the Red Cross or the Mutual Insurance Company.