

Belgian Chambers

Activity report

2024

Foreword	3
A strong and reliable network	4
International entrepreneurship	7
Export formalities	9
SDG Pioneer	13
Board of Directors	15

Accredited Belgian Chambers of Commerce

- Beci – Brussels Chamber of Commerce
- AKT – Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie du Brabant wallon
- AKT – Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie du Hainaut
- AKT – Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie Liège-Verviers-Namur
- AKT – Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie du Luxembourg belge
- AKT – Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie de la Wallonie Picarde
- AVED–Industrie- und Handelskammer Ostbelgien
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Antwerpen-Waasland
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Limburg
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Mechelen-Kempen
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Oost-Vlaanderen
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Vlaams-Brabant
- Voka – Kamer van Koophandel West-Vlaanderen

Accredited Belgian-Luxembourg Chambers of Commerce abroad

- Arab-Belgium-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce
- Belgian Business Chamber in Poland
- Belgian Canadian Business Chamber
- Belgian Chamber of Commerce in South Africa
- Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (BCECC)
- Belgian-Luxembourg-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce in Brazil (Belgalux)
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce for the Western US (Belwest)
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Barcelona
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Ireland
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Russia (CCBLR)
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Türkiye
- Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam
- Belgian-Luxembourg-Polish Chamber of Commerce
- Belgian Luxembourg Romanian Moldovan Chamber of Commerce
- Belgian Vietnamese Alliance
- Belgo-Chilean Chamber of Commerce
- Belgo-Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- Benelux Chamber of Commerce in China (Bencham Shanghai)
- BeNeLux Chamber of Commerce in Kazakhstan
- Chamber of Commerce Canada-Belgium-Luxembourg
- Chamber of Commerce Europe-Central America
- Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture Belgium-Luxembourg-Africa-Caribbean-Pacific
- Chamber of Commerce of Belgium and Luxembourg in Spain
- Chambre de Commerce Belge et Luxembourgeoise de Côte d’Ivoire
- Chambre de Commerce Belgo-Congolaise-Luxembourgeoise
- Chambre de Commerce Belgo-Luxembourgeoise au Maroc
- Chambre de Commerce Franco-Belgo-Luxembourgeoise
- Chile-Belgium-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce (Belgolux)
- Deutsch-Belgisch-Luxemburgische Handelskammer (debelux)
- Nederlandse Kamer van Koophandel voor België en Luxemburg / Belgisch-Luxemburgse Kamer van Koophandel in Nederland
- Pakistan-Belgium-Luxembourg Business Forum
- Portuguese-Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce

Associated Belgian-Luxembourg Chambers of Commerce abroad

- Belgian American Chamber of the South (BACoS)
- Belgian-Armenian Chamber of Commerce
- Belgian-Macedonian Business Club (BMBC)
- Belgo Peru Chamber of Commerce
- Benelux Indonesia Association

Foreword

Anyone who had hoped for calmer waters in 2024 was left disappointed. The war in Ukraine dragged on endlessly, conflicts in the Middle East resurfaced with renewed intensity, protectionism took hold across the globe, and America First became a bitter reality. Amid all this, Europe is striving to find its role. The fact that Europe was no longer the centre of the world had been clear to many regions for quite some time: Africa looks to China for its development, the US is more focused on Asia, and China is more concerned with what happens in the White House than in the Berlaymont. Even in Europe, this realisation seems to be finally catching on. In its multiannual strategy, the new Commission rightly emphasises business competitiveness: reducing administrative burdens, ensuring access to affordable energy, strengthening the internal market, and pursuing an international trade agenda that takes its own strategic interests into account. Yet these are precisely the priorities the chambers have been promoting for many years. We could take comfort in having been proven right, but that is not currently the point. More important is to get everyone moving in the same direction. When we see scepticism towards Mercosur in many member states, observe ongoing subsidy battles to attract investment, and read that most professional qualifications remain unrecognised elsewhere, it is clear a wide gulf remains between words and deeds. As chambers, we must keep pressing policymakers, perhaps even more strongly, to match their words with action and take responsibility.

We thus have a vested interest in strong chambers that understand business needs, can translate these into appropriate policy recommendations, and ensure their voice is heard by politicians. Through the alliance the Flemish Chambers established in 2004 with the then VEV, the Flemish employers’ association, companies in Flanders benefit from a strong and dependable partner: Voka. Two decades on, a similar alliance exists in Wallonia, where the five Walloon chambers and the Walloon employers’ association UWE have joined forces under the name AKT. Members of the chambers in Wallonia can



As chambers, we must keep pressing policymakers to match their words with action.

continue to rely on strong service and local roots, while knowing their interests will now be defended even more effectively at regional level through the alliance with UWE, now known as AKT for Wallonia. The Brussels and Ostbelgien chambers go even further. Both chambers opted for a full merger of the chambers and employers’ organisation in the early months of 2025. Once again with the same goal in mind: simplifying internal structures to come out stronger.

Chambers are not standing still and are constantly seeking to increase their impact. This will be the central theme throughout the jubilee year celebrating 150 years of the Federation of Belgian Chambers of Commerce. A milestone we want to celebrate with you on 25 September. Save the date!



René Branders
President

A strong and reliable network

Our members

13

Chambers of commerce in Belgium working to create an environment where free enterprise is encouraged as a source of prosperity and well-being and that supports businesses at every stage on their development path.

39

Belgian Chambers of Commerce Abroad (BLCCA) help companies internationalise and work to promote our commercial and economic relations abroad.

Our international network

ICC – World Chambers Federation

- is the voice of business on the international stage
- believes in open, fair and free trade as a basis for prosperity and peace
- unites and connects a network of 2 000 chambers of commerce around the world



Eurochambres

- unites 1700 nationale, regional and local chamber of commerce in 43 European countries
- voices the interests of more than 20 million companies to European policy-makers in Brussels



AKT – Alliantie van Waalse kamers en UWE

23 April 2024 marked an important milestone in the Walloon entrepreneurial landscape. The five chambers of commerce in Wallonia, together with the Union Wallonne des Entreprises, the Walloon employers' association, launched their alliance project at a major event. From now on, they will operate publicly under the name AKT: the Walloon chambers will add AKT to their name, and UWE will change its name to AKT for Wallonia. With this, twenty years on, the Walloon chambers follow in the footsteps of Voka. Moreover, in developing this alliance, the Walloon chambers and UWE benefited greatly from the cooperation of Voka and the Flemish chambers.



Brussels merges Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Enterprises



Brussels is going a step beyond. Beci had long been the name representing the alliance between the Brussels Chamber of Commerce and the Brussels employers' association, the Brussels Federation of Enterprises. Members approved the full merger of the two organisations on 29 December 2024. From now on, it will be known as Beci, the Brussels Chamber of Commerce.

BLCCA network broadens its scope

After expanding the bilateral chamber network in North and South America in recent years, we turned our attention to Europe in 2024. For North Macedonia, we welcomed the newly established Belgian Macedonian Business Club in Skopje. In Poland, we were joined by a major player: the Belgian Business Club in Warsaw, which currently has over 150 members and ambitious plans for growth.



Renewal of accreditation for bilateral chambers

An accreditation of a Belgian chamber abroad confirms that it adheres to the principles outlined in the accreditation programme and underscores its reliability as a partner for the Belgian and Luxembourg business communities. This accreditation must be renewed every three years. At the end of 2024, the BLCCA Steering Committee approved 36 applications submitted by the chambers; the bilateral chambers in Mexico and Argentina did not submit applications



and are no longer members of the Federation. Several chambers that had joined in recent years have had their status upgraded from associate members to fully accredited chambers: Belgalux in Brazil, Belwest in Los Angeles, BCBC in Toronto, BeNeLux Chamber in Kazakhstan and Belgolux in Chile.

BLCCA Academy

The programme included a workshop on best practices for member retention and recruitment; a speed dating session between chambers to meet new colleagues and strengthen existing ties; company visits to Agristo and LVD; a presentation on new cluster initiatives in West Flanders; and a company visit followed by dinner at the city brewery De Halve Maan. These were the elements with which the Federation, together with colleagues from Voka - KvK West-Vlaanderen, engaged the more than 50 participants of the two-day BLCCA Academy.



2024 was another excellent edition. An enjoyable atmosphere, valuable meetings, and highly engaging company visits. Sincere thanks to the organisers. Well done!

Marc Van Audekerke, debelux



My first participation was an incredibly fascinating experience! I am already looking forward to the next edition.

*Alexander Sonnevile,
Voka - KvK Oost-Vlaanderen*

Countless opportunities for learning

Several times a year, we organise training courses and workshops for the chambers' export formalities staff, ensuring they can competently issue certificates of origin and ATA Carnets. The Federation also arranges various occasions for chambers to share knowledge and learn from each other in other fields. Highlights from last year's offerings:

- Workshops focused on developing transition projects within the SDG Champion framework, organised in partnership with CIFAL Flanders
- Meet a BLCCA session with the bilateral chambers of South Africa and Pakistan
- Experience exchange with quality managers

on performance indicators and motivating colleagues for ISO

- Workshop on sustainable international business practices
- Webinar on ESG and SDGs for bilateral chambers and their members
- Online workshops on CRM with the bilateral chambers
- Workshop with GlobalSign on digital certificate solutions

International entrepreneurship

Eurochambres Congress, Antwerp

Voka - KvK Antwerpen-Waasland successfully brought over 200 participants to Antwerp for the Eurochambres Congress on 12, 13, and 14 June. Less than a week after the European elections, the congress focused heavily on the challenges facing Europe: a lack of competitiveness among our businesses and excessive regulation by European and national governments. The congress set the tone for the messages Eurochambres addressed to the newly elected European Parliament and the new Commission in the following months, centred on the four S's: simplification, scale, security, and skills.



Lunch with the president of the ICC

The guest speaker at the general meeting was Maria Fernanda Garza, President of the International Chamber of Commerce. She described how the ICC supports chambers and businesses, and presented its five priorities for the years ahead:

1. Facilitate global trade by addressing trade tensions and help SMEs make use of ICC tools
2. Promote access to justice and the rule of law, with a focus on the ICC's extensive range of alternative dispute resolution services
3. Advance climate and sustainability initiatives to promote sustainable trade and encourage policy reforms
4. Accelerate the digitisation of commercial documents
5. Strengthen multilateralism by advocating for rules-based trade and working closely with the UN and other institutions to ensure the voice of business is heard..



Customs Contact Day

After holding online customs contact days for companies in previous years, we changed our approach by inviting customs officers to an information session and networking event with the Customs Business Club at the Antwerp-Waasland Chamber. This initiative proved highly effective in acquainting companies with the duties of customs attachés and, simultaneously, in raising awareness among customs attachés of the issues confronting exporting businesses.

Bilateral chambers serving businesses

Thanks to their practical expertise and comprehensive services, the Belgian Chambers Abroad complement the networks of FIT, AWEX, and hub.brussels, and are well regarded by companies. The fourth edition of the online speed dating event between businesses and bilateral chambers once again attracted a large crowd. In total, more than 100 meetings took place, giving companies the opportunity to discuss their export questions with experts from our foreign chamber network. In addition, we were present on the exhibition floor of the Flanders International Business Convention, hosting 12 bilateral chambers on 5 and 6 November.



The European Single Market

Besides competitiveness and regulatory pressure, the European single market - or lack thereof - is also a recurring problem for entrepreneurs. This was an important reason for Eurochambres to re-examine the main obstacles companies encounter when doing business within the European Union, five years after the last survey. The results of this survey were presented at the start of the Belgian EU presidency, at the offices of Voka, in the presence of Enrico Letta.

Chambers of Commerce and students: a perfect match



During an information evening, we introduced students of international business and legal practice at Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Antwerp to the wide range of activities and services offered by the chambers of commerce. In cooperation with Voka – KvK Antwerpen-Waasland, Eurochambres, ICC Belgium, and several Belgian chambers abroad, we demonstrated to the students how chambers can assist them, both throughout their studies and later as future entrepreneurs or international company employees.

Export formalities

Certificates of origin

The Belgian Chambers of Commerce issue non-preferential certificates of origin on behalf of, and under the supervision of, the FPS Economy. These certificates can be requested by foreign customs authorities or stipulated in documentary credit arrangements. Rules of origin determine the 'nationality' of a product. The country where the product was wholly obtained or underwent its last substantial processing or working determines its origin.

100%

of COs were issued online via the DigiChambers application

363.643

certificates of origin issued by the 13 Belgian Chambers of Commerce, an increase of 1.7% compared with 2023

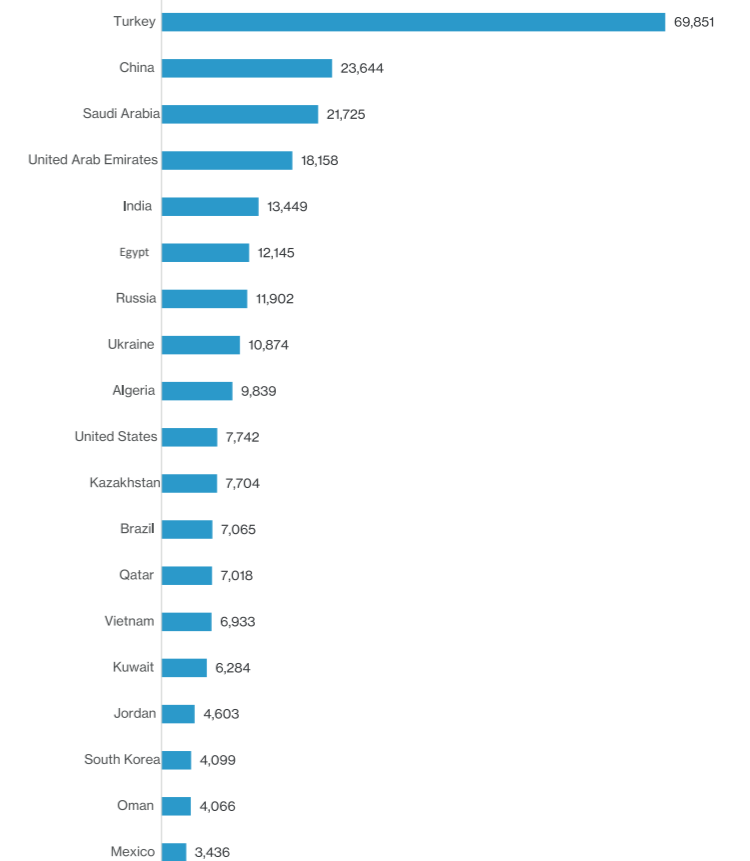
Origin determination seems simple, but in a globalised world with production chains spread across several countries, it is not always easy to determine the economic origin of a product. Therefore, not just any chamber employee can issue a certificate of origin. An employee is authorised to issue certificates after undergoing training and passing an exam. This authorisation remains valid for five years. In addition, the Federation organises regular workshops and information sessions to keep chamber staff abreast of new developments. Finally, all chambers are audited every year by the FPS Economy and the Federation, verifying that the certificates of origin issued comply with the legal provisions. Through training and audits, we aim to ensure that issuance is done uniformly across all chambers.

Destination countries

After two consecutive years of sharp decline, 2023 saw a slight increase. Measured over the last 5 years, the biggest increases are for Kazakhstan, Algeria and Brazil. However, the list of countries experiencing losses is much longer, with double-digit declines for Russia, China, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, and the US.

Caution is advised when interpreting the figures. The number of certificates of origin issued for a particular country does not necessarily reflect proportional growth or decline in trade with that country. Additional factors, including trade policy measures and changes to customs regulations, also influence the situation and, in certain cases, play a more crucial role. In general, however, a decrease or increase in certificates of origin for a specific country corresponds to a decline or growth in export figures within our bilateral trade relationship.

Countries of destination 2024

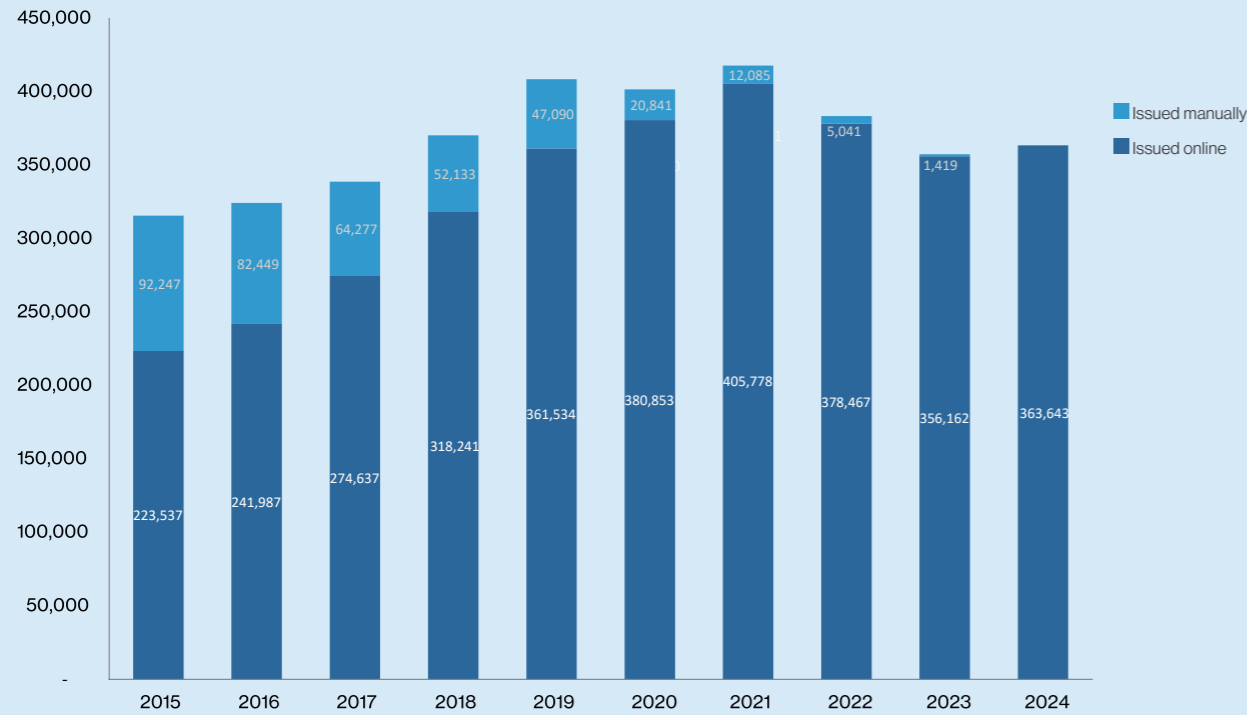


100% digitalisation

DigiChambers provides Belgian chambers with a robust online application for the submission and issuance of non-preferential certificates of origin. Use of the application has never been mandatory, but since its launch in 2009, significant efforts have been made to enhance DigiChambers' user-friendliness and to promote its benefits to users. Each year, the digitalisation rate steadily improved, finally reaching 100% fifteen years after its launch. Our commitment to investing in DigiChambers will continue in the coming years, guaranteeing Belgian exporters access to the most efficient solution for their certificate of origin needs.



Certificates of origin issued



Partnership met de FOD Economie

Under the heading 'Strengthening the competitiveness of Belgian companies in the global economy: creating the conditions for a competitive, sustainable, and balanced operation of the goods and services market in Belgium,' the Federation and the FPS Economy have collaborated for 25 years to promote the international competitiveness of Belgian companies. A central element is the ongoing pursuit of methods to streamline the application and issuance of certificates of origin for businesses. For instance, 179 companies currently benefit from deposited files, including seven new additions in 2024, along with comparable simplifications.

For the FPS Economy, the chambers of commerce also serve as a vital channel for informing companies about Belgian trade policy and for monitoring trade barriers encountered by businesses. This is accomplished through consultation meetings

with sector federations and information sessions organised for the chambers of commerce, among other measures.



The issuance of certificates of origin is subject to strict Chamber staff and an annual audit of each Chamber, the staff and an annual audit of each Chamber, the Federation and the FPS Economy ensure the proper issuance of the certificates.

ATA Carnets



2.351

carnets delivered by the 13 Belgian Chambers of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (-0.5% compared to 2023).

944

disputes on ATA Carnets handled by the Federation (of which 744 were new disputes).

€ 159 million

Merchandise value covered by ATA Carnets (-4,5% compared to 2023).

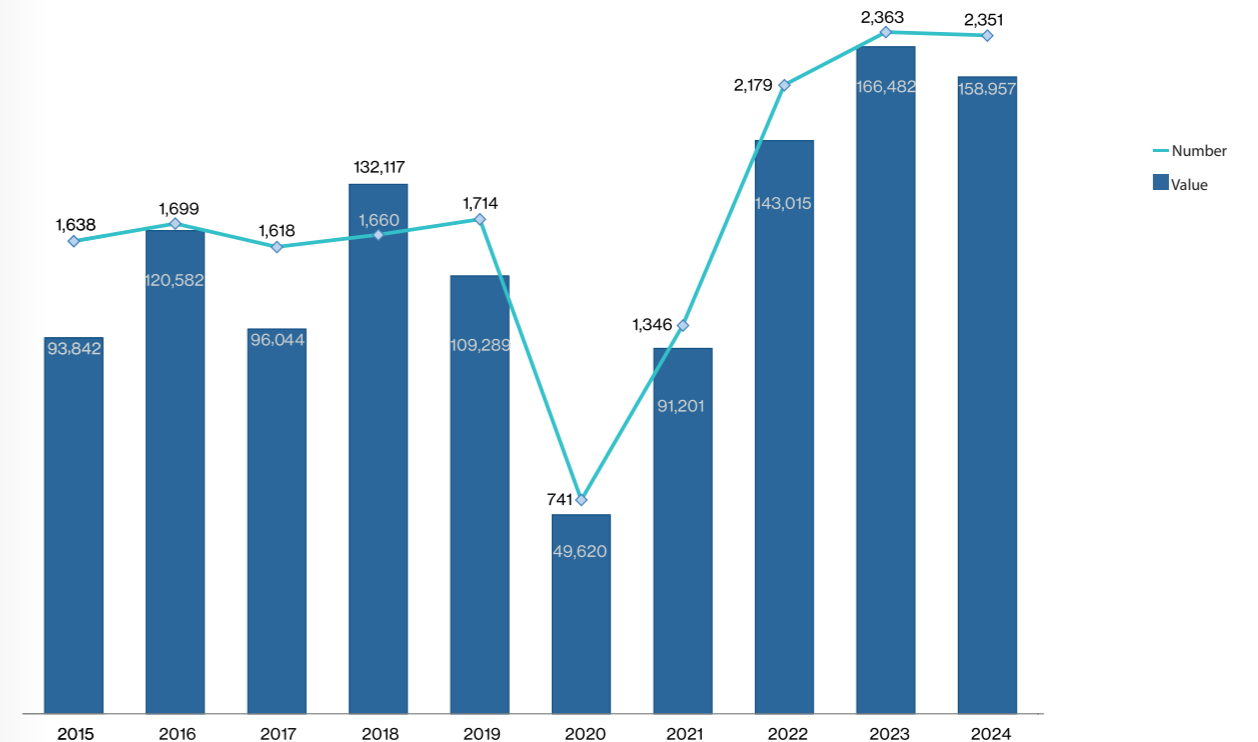
€ 479.464

import duties, VAT and fines paid by the Federation on ATA Carnets.

The ATA Carnet system was created to simplify the process of temporary imports worldwide. The carnets allow for quick and smooth temporary imports into the 82 member countries of the ATA system, without the need to pay duties and taxes. Travellers without an ATA Carnet are required to complete the separate customs formalities for each country they enter.

An ATA Carnet is valid for a maximum of one year and can be used for multiple trips. Carnets can be used by companies travelling with professional equipment for foreign projects, by businesses wishing to show trade samples or prototypes to customers, or by exporters taking part in trade fairs, salons, or exhibitions.

Value (in thousands of euro) and number of ATA Carnets issued



SDG Pioneer

Destination countries

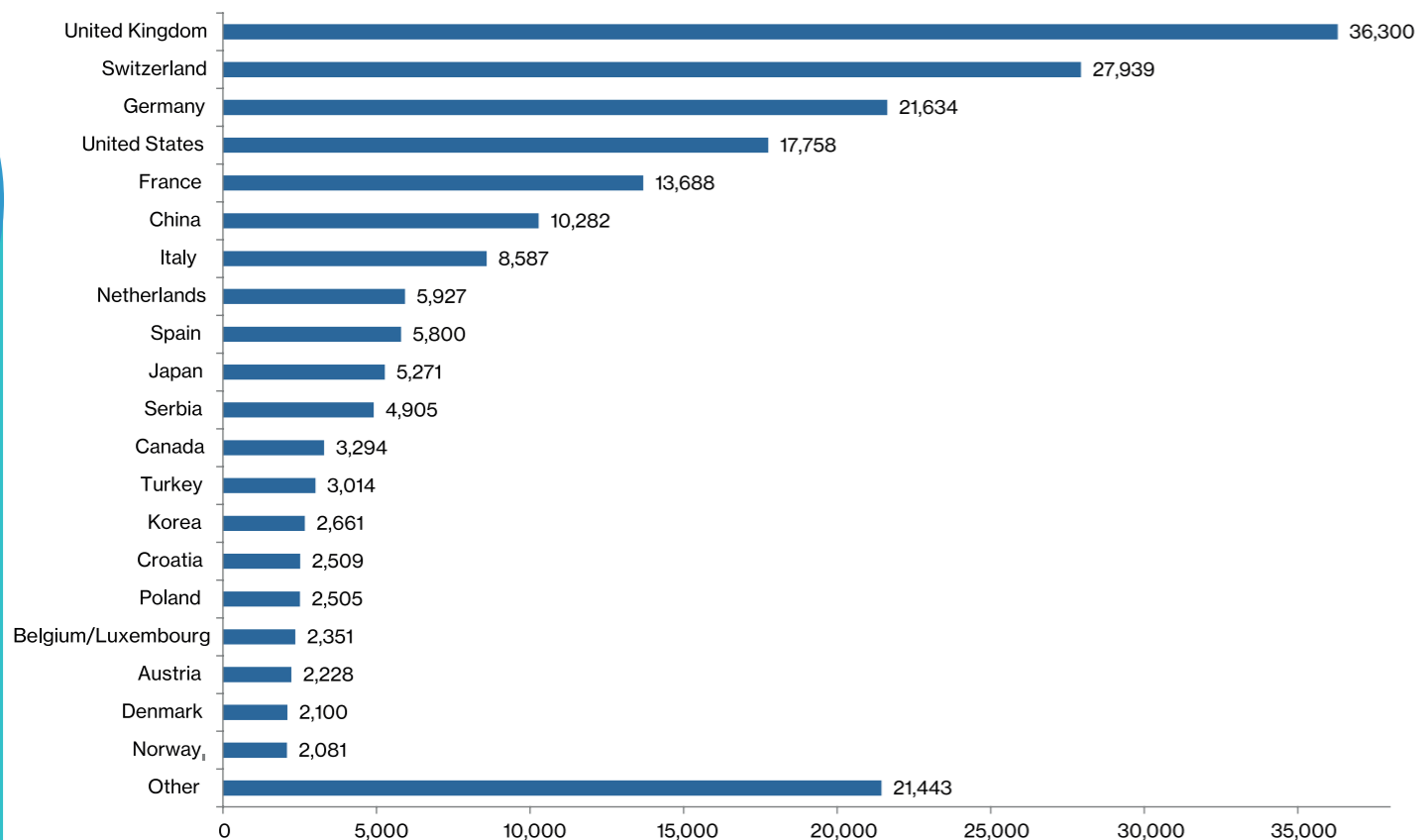
Following a sharp increase over the past two years, driven by the post-Covid recovery and Brexit, ATA Carnet issuance now seems to have stabilised at a new, higher level. About half of all carnets are issued for multiple destinations, or even for 'all destinations' within the ATA network. Among the carnets issued for a specific country, Switzerland and the UK each represented 17%. These are followed, at a considerable distance, by Morocco, the United States, and Norway.

ATA Carnets around the world

Globally, 204.224 carnets were issued in 2024, an increase of 7% compared to 2023. The increase is widespread but strongest in some Asian countries that are only now recovering from the sharp decline during Covid. Belgium and Germany are the only countries to see a decrease. Having steadily risen to 14th place in 2023, our country slipped to 17th as other countries performed strongly.

Over the longer term, Belgium's performance remains strong. Compared to the pre-Covid year 2019, the 2024 figure for Belgium was 37% higher. This remains the third-best performance among all countries, following the UK and the Netherlands

Total number of ATA Carnets issued worldwide (2024)



In 2021, we set the ambition to become an SDG Pioneer and signed up for the Voka Charter Duurzaam Ondernemen (VCDO) under the guidance of Voka - KvK Vlaams-Brabant. The 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 action plans were successfully implemented, with the bar raised higher each year. While many initiatives in the early years focused on quick wins, those for 2023-2024 centred much more on the Federation's core activities. It also addressed several SDGs that are less obvious to us. A total of 13 initiatives across 11 SDGs were successfully completed, and on 20 June we received the VCDO charter for the third consecutive year.

Having completed three successful VCDO action plans addressing all 17 SDGs, the Federation is recognised as an SDG Pioneer. Together with over 100 other companies and organisations, we were awarded the SDG Pioneer certificate on 24 November at Technopolis, presented by UNITAR, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research dedicated to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some of our actions in 2024



SDG 1 - Zero poverty

- We organised the certification day for YouthStart. Fifteen young people, after weeks of intensive coaching by YouthStart, presented their business plans to us. While we hope our feedback proved valuable, it was their enthusiasm and innovative ideas that offered us a privileged glimpse into the challenges faced by young people finding it difficult to navigate the mainstream labour market.



SDG 4 - Quality education

- In collaboration with CIFAL Flanders, we organised a training course consisting of three online workshops for Belgian chambers of commerce abroad and their members, bridging the gap between the SDGs, ESG, and sustainable business models.



SDG 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure

- DigiChambers provides an application allowing companies to request certificates of origin efficiently, with the option to integrate requests directly via their ERP systems. However, we tend to underestimate the impact of routine screen work on the chamber staff responsible for approving certificate of origin applications. Consequently, we initiated a study exploring the use of artificial intelligence to enhance support for chamber staff during the verification process.



SDG 10 - Reduced inequalities

- With the support of CIFAL Flanders, FIT has developed a manual around making international business sustainable. Through a practical workshop, we introduced the international business staff of the Flemish chambers to the various themes and tools outlined in the manual, ensuring they are well equipped to assist companies in formulating, integrating, and implementing an international sustainability strategy.



SDG 13 - Climate action

- The EU's Green Deal and sanctions against Russia have placed access to affordable, clean, and secure energy high on the agenda. In collaboration with Eurochambres, we held a workshop to present Belgium's best practices in energy transition, carbon neutrality, and CO2 emissions reduction to other European chambers.



SDG 14 - Life below water

- The Federation's impact on water pollution may be limited, but we believe it is important to contribute to a clean city environment. As part of a team-building event with Canal It Up, we explored water-related challenges in Brussels and participated in litter removal from the English Channel while kayaking..

Board of directors

President

René Branders*

Vice Presidents

Johann Leten, Gedelegeerd bestuurder Voka – KvK Limburg*
Bernard Dewit, Chairman Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce

Administrators

Belgian Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Patrice Bakeroot, Directeur Alliantie Voka vzw
Fabien Bruyneel, Directeur AKT for Wallonia
Kris Claes, Ged. bestuurder Voka – KvK Vlaams-Brabant
Joëlle Evenepoel, Secretaris-generaal Beci Brussels Chamber of Commerce
Thierry Geerts, CEO Beci Brussels Chamber of Commerce
Christophe Hay, Directeur général AKT – CCI Luxembourg belge
Volker Klinges, Directeur AVED-IHK Ostbelgien*
Tom Laveren, Algemeen directeur Voka – KvK Mechelen-Kempen*
Sylvie Lericque, Administratrice Déléguée – CCI Wallonie Picarde*
Luc Luwel, Ged. bestuurder Voka – KvK Antwerpen-Waasland*
Marie Martens, Bestuurder Beci Brussels Chamber of Commerce
Geert Moerman, Ged. bestuurder Voka – KvK Oost-Vlaanderen
Bert Mons, Ged. bestuurder Voka – KvK West-Vlaanderen
Benoit Moons, Directeur AKT – CCI Hainaut
Christophe Naa, Administrateur délégué AKT – CCI Liège-Verviers-Namur
Céline Squelart, Directrice AKT – CCI Brabant wallon*
Nadia Werkers, Admin. directeur Voka – KvK Antwerpen-Waasland

* Member of the executive committee

General Manager

Wouter Van Gulck*

Belgian-Luxembourg Chambers of Commerce abroad

Frédéric Agneessens, Chairman Chamber of Commerce Canada-Belgium-Luxembourg
Patricia De Backer, Directeur Chambre de Commerce Franco-Belgo-Luxembourgeoise
Pierre Declerck, Président Chambre de Commerce Belge et Luxembourgeoise de Côte d'Ivoire
Salma Rachhi, Directrice générale Chambre de Commerce Belgo-Luxembourgeoise au Maroc
Alain Schodts, Executive director Belgian Luxembourg Romanian Moldovan Chamber of Commerce
Tuğrul Şeremet, President Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Turkey
Chantal Sohler, Board member Portuguese-Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce
Marc Van Audekerke, Director Deutsch-Belgisch-Luxemburgische Handelskammer

Federation Team



René Branders
President



Wouter Van Gulck
General Manager



Christophe Coulie
Legal Affairs Manager



Natacha Wauters
Export Formalities Advisor



Cindy Peeters
Export Formalities Advisor



Veerle Geeraerts
Project & International Affairs Manager



Theodora Mbiye Mulomba
Communications Officer



Lieve Peeters
BLCCA Co-ordinator



Belgian Chambers

Federation of Belgian Chambers of Commerce

rue Belliard 2, floor - 1040 Brussels - Belgium

T: +32 (0)2 209 05 50 | contact@belgianchambers.be | www.belgianchambers.be



[linkedin.com/company/belgianchambers](https://www.linkedin.com/company/belgianchambers)



twitter.com/BelgianChambers



belgianchambers.be/en