

Professional Card in Belgium

A practical starting map for non-EU nationals considering self-employment in Flanders or Brussels-Capital

Build the route around a real business.

A clear introduction to the professional-card landscape before you invest in an application, company setup or professional support.

Inside this guide

- What the professional-card route is really about
- What makes a business case credible
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General educational information only. Not legal advice, an individual eligibility assessment, or a guarantee of a professional-card, residence or other outcome.

What this guide is for

This guide is for **non-EU nationals** who are considering self-employment as a way to build an independent professional life in Belgium.

You may be living abroad and exploring a move. You may already be in Belgium, have lost a job, be approaching the end of a student status, or be considering a move from employment into independent work. You may want to work as a consultant, sole trader, founder, director, manager, working shareholder or business partner.

This guide explains the landscape before you invest in an application, company setup, legal support or a business plan. It does not tell you whether you personally qualify. It does not provide legal advice, assess your residence position or guarantee a professional-card, residence or other outcome. Those questions depend on individual facts.

ANKA covers self-employment routes connected to **Flanders and Brussels-Capital** only. Wallonia is outside the scope of this guide.

1. Start with the right understanding

For a non-exempt non-EU national, a professional card is generally the authorisation needed to perform an approved self-employed activity in Belgium. It matters. But it is not the entire journey.

A professional card does not automatically create a company, resolve every residence question, replace tax or social-security registrations, or make a weak business commercially viable. It authorises a specific self-employed activity when the competent regional authority accepts the case.

Your starting situation + the relevant region + a credible business activity = a professional-card route worth building.

Self-employment can be a meaningful route for someone who does not want their future in Belgium to depend on finding an employer. But it has to be built around an activity that stands on its own feet.

2. A professional card is a business case, not a pile of documents

A strong application is not created by adding more documents to a folder. Documents can support a case. They cannot create one.

Authorities need to understand what you plan to do, why it makes sense, why you are credible in that role and how the activity can operate realistically. The central question is not only: “Do you want to become self-employed?” It is:

“Is this a real, credible and economically coherent self-employed activity?”

A credible case normally has five connected parts.

1. A clear activity

You need to be able to explain exactly what you will offer. “Consulting” is not yet an activity. It is a label. A clear activity explains the service, product or trade; the customer; the problem or need being addressed; the way the work will be delivered; and the role you will personally perform.

For example, “business consultant” tells the reader almost nothing. A clearer description explains the type of businesses served, the problem addressed, the specific service offered and why that service is needed.

2. A real customer and market logic

A business exists because someone is prepared to pay for something useful. You should be able to show, at a basic level, who the likely customers are, why they would need your offer, what alternatives already exist, why they would choose you and how you expect to reach them.

This does not require pretending that you have every customer already signed. It does require more than saying, “There is demand.”

3. A reason to believe you can deliver it

Your experience, expertise, qualifications, professional history and intended role should connect to the proposed activity. The question is not whether you have the most impressive CV in the room. It is whether there is a credible link between your background and the business you plan to operate.

4. Basic commercial feasibility

The financial part does not need fake certainty. It does need realism. A serious starting case can explain how the business will make money, what customers may pay, how many customers or sales may be needed, the main costs, the delivery capacity and how the activity could remain viable while it is growing.

A spreadsheet full of optimistic numbers is not a financial plan. The numbers must make sense with the offer, the customer, the market and the way the activity will actually operate.

5. Evidence that tells one coherent story

Your business description, experience, market notes, financial assumptions and supporting documents should reinforce each other. If one part says you will target high-end corporate clients, another part assumes low prices, and the supporting evidence shows no experience in the proposed work, the story becomes weak.

Consistency is not glamorous. It is one of the things that makes a business case believable.

3. What the professional-card route is not

A company is not a business case

Registering a company, obtaining a VAT number or opening a business bank account can be part of setting up an activity. None of those actions proves that the activity itself is credible or approved. Do not spend money setting up structures before you understand what those structures need to support.

One client is not automatically a viable business

A potential client, letter of intent or service contract can be helpful evidence. It is not automatically proof of a commercially viable independent activity. The overall arrangement still needs to make sense: what is being offered, how is the activity independent, is there a clear commercial role, and does the activity make sense beyond one employer-like relationship?

A vague idea is not improved by giving it a business-plan cover page

Start smaller and more honestly: what do I offer, to whom, why would they choose it, how will I deliver it, why am I credible in this role, and how does it generate income? If those answers are weak, a longer document will not solve the problem.

Legal support and business-case building are not the same thing

A lawyer can advise on legal position, procedure, legal risk and rights. That may be essential. But a legal professional is not automatically the person who builds the offer, validates market logic, develops commercial positioning or turns financial assumptions into a credible business case.

The reverse is also true: a business-case specialist should not pretend to provide legal advice. Many people need both forms of support. The important thing is to know which problem you are trying to solve.

4. Flanders and Brussels-Capital: choose the real operating region

Professional-card decisions are regional. This is not one identical system for all of Belgium. This guide covers Flanders and Brussels-Capital only.

Flanders	For activity genuinely established in the Flemish Region.
Brussels-Capital	For activity genuinely established in the Brussels-Capital Region.

The relevant region should reflect where and how the activity will genuinely operate. It should not be selected simply because it appears more convenient, more familiar or easier on paper. The region can affect the authority, route, assessment framework and practical requirements.

ANKA's paid Eligibility & Route Tool helps users identify the route questions that apply to their own starting position. This free guide does not make that determination.

5. Independent work needs to look independent

Self-employment does not mean opening a consumer-facing shop or employing staff. A self-employed activity can involve consulting, specialist services, subcontracting, trade, an online business, work with business clients or work through a company. The key issue is whether the activity is genuinely independent.

In broad terms, an independent activity has its own commercial logic:

- you offer goods or services through your own professional or commercial arrangement;
- you carry responsibility for organising and delivering the work;
- you invoice for the service or activity;
- you carry some commercial responsibility and risk; and
- you are not simply functioning as an employee under another organisation's authority and control.

The label used in a contract is not enough. Calling someone a freelancer does not automatically make the relationship independent.

Where the planned work is closely connected to a former employer, a single client, an employment history or an unclear work arrangement, get qualified legal advice before relying on a self-employment route.

6. What to prepare before you spend money

You do not need a completed application dossier before you begin. You do need a working file with the information that will let you make better decisions.

- a short description of the activity and your intended role;
- notes on likely customers and the problem your offer solves;
- a first view of the alternatives already available;
- early thinking on pricing, likely revenue, main costs and delivery capacity;
- evidence of relevant professional experience, qualifications, portfolio work or expertise;
- a clear note of whether the activity is intended for Flanders or Brussels-Capital; and
- a list of questions you cannot yet answer.

A useful starting point is not pretending to know everything. It is knowing what needs clarification before you commit time or money.

7. When to seek legal clarification

This guide gives general business and route information. It does not replace advice based on your personal legal position. Seek qualified legal advice where, for example, there is:

- an uncertain, expiring, disputed or otherwise complex residence position;
- a possible exemption that you cannot confirm;
- a previous refusal, appeal or active procedure;
- a regulated profession, licence or qualification-recognition issue;
- an unclear employment, dismissal or work-authorisation question; or
- a proposed arrangement that may not be genuinely independent.

A good legal adviser should help you understand the legal side. A strong business case still needs to be built separately.

8. Where ANKA can help

ANKA Transformation House helps people bring clarity and practical structure to the self-employment route in Belgium. The free resources help you understand the landscape and organise your thinking.

The paid **Professional Card Eligibility & Route Tool** will assess your own starting situation through structured questions. It will help identify route questions, gaps and points requiring further clarification. It is not a legal opinion or an approval prediction.

Future ANKA business-case tools will help people develop a clearer offer, stronger unique value proposition, market and customer logic, credible financial assumptions, evidence that supports the activity, and a business case that is coherent from beginning to end.

The aim is not to sell a dream or scare people away.

It is to help people understand whether there is a serious path worth building - and what that path needs in order to become credible.

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