

JOINT WORK PROGRAMME

Pioneer in Cross-Border Cooperation

Testing Ground for Europe



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Colophon

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INTRODUCTION

Eighty years ago, with the end of the Second World War in sight, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg decided to jointly confront the challenges of post-war reconstruction by committing to a form of cooperation that was unique in Europe at the time. In 1944, the Benelux Customs Union was thus established, which not only became the precursor to the present-day Benelux Union, but also served as inspiration for the European Union.

Today, Europe and the world are once again faced with significant challenges. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, climate change, technological shifts and the accompanying economic and social uncertainties are affecting our security, prosperity, and green transition. It is clear that these challenges can only be addressed by working together at international, European and regional level.

In this context, Benelux has an important role to play, both through political cooperation within the European Union and through cross-border collaboration to strengthen the single market and the region's competitiveness, promote a sustainable future, and ensure a safer society.

Not only do Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg share strong historical, economic and cultural ties, but they also hold a unique position in Europe, enabling them to take on a trailblazing role through the Benelux Union.

The European Union explicitly recognises the right of the three countries to continue their own regional union, insofar as their objectives are not achieved through the application of the European treaties (Art. 350 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]).

The Benelux Union remains a pioneer in cross-border cooperation, a model for regional integration, and a testing ground for European collaboration, both as a forerunner of European policy and as a complement to it. In the coming years, the Union intends to strengthen its ties with the European Union. Thanks to its unique legal instruments, the Benelux Union can often act quickly and effectively on cross-border issues and offer concrete, coherent solutions, such as addressing border obstacles reported via the Coordination Point Border Obstacles Flanders-Netherlands. In doing so, the Union sets standards that can serve as inspiration for the rest of Europe.

The legal instruments of the Benelux Union are therefore a unique asset. They can be used to enact common legislation or rules within the political areas of the Benelux countries, either preceding or supplementing European laws and regulations.

Moreover, the Benelux Union continues to be an important platform for finding innovative solutions, a source of inspiration and a driving force for regional cooperation. The Union also plans to strengthen its ties with neighbouring countries and other European regional groupings that share its values.

The Benelux House in Brussels remains the hub where officials, authorities, and experts from all levels from both the public and private sectors come together to work on projects that deliver visible and tangible added value for the citizens and businesses of the Benelux region, including civil society organisations and research institutions. To raise public awareness of the results of such collaboration, further investments will be made in public communication in the coming years.

The Joint Work Programme 2025-2028 focuses on the three central themes of the Benelux Treaty and takes into account the topics from the European Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029. This work programme outlines the course for the next four years. Based on this course, an annual work plan is developed that provides a more detailed and concrete overview of the measures in the Benelux countries.

SECURITY, MIGRATION, JUDICIAL COOPERATION AND A RESILIENT SOCIETY



A safe and stable environment forms the foundation for a well-functioning economy and a prosperous society. By collaborating in the areas of security, crisis management, migration, and judicial cooperation, complementing the existing framework within the European Union, the Benelux Union not only strengthens the resilience of its citizens, but also creates the necessary conditions for economic growth and sustainable development. This integrated approach ensures that borders remain open for the free movement of goods, people, and services, while simultaneously upholding security and stability. In the same spirit, the Benelux nations will continue to advocate for a joint approach to all forms of cross-border fraud, particularly in the fiscal and social sectors.

Cross-border security and crime control

The Benelux countries have worked successfully in recent years to strengthen cross-border police cooperation. In the coming period, the focus will be on the operationalisation of the Benelux Police Treaty and the drafting of implementation agreements arising from the so-called second tranche of the Treaty, with a view to fully implementing it. Among other benefits, this further optimisation will provide opportunities for cross-border investigations and direct consultation of data between the police databases of the Treaty parties, as well as access to population and other governmental registers available for police investigations. As a result, police and enforcement services within the Benelux countries will have additional tools available to them so as to operate effectively across borders and contribute to the tackling and detection of criminal networks.

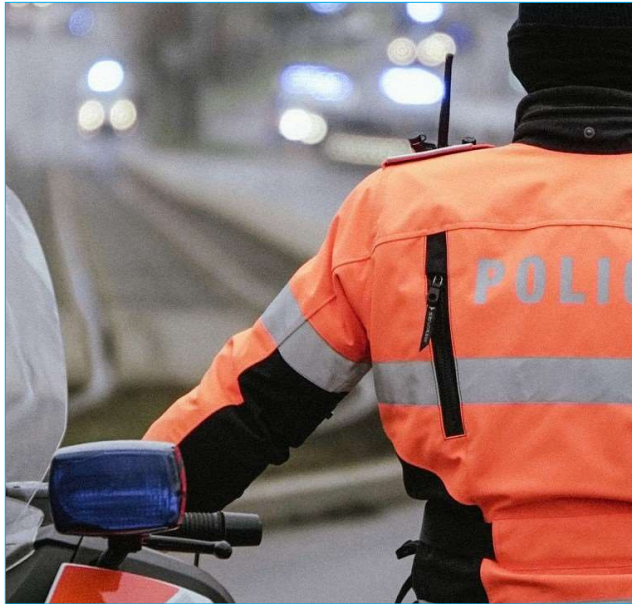
In addition, Benelux is committed to further developing an integrated approach to combating crime. This cross-border integrated approach means that the various institutions, organisations, and partners involved work together across borders, making use of each other's resources and mandates wherever possible in order to respond quickly to the various elements of this complex phenomenon. This approach facilitates the exchange of information and the coordinated deployment of resources, with the aim of strategically dismantling cross-border criminal networks. The fight against human trafficking and the smuggling of people will also remain a priority.

Finally, consideration will be given to whether and how judicial cooperation can be strengthened.

A coherent approach to migration

Migration is one of the most pressing issues in Europe. Therefore, the Benelux countries will continue their efforts towards a common and coherent approach to visa exemptions, returns, and readmissions, with the aim of enhancing cooperation with third countries, particularly regarding returns.

The Benelux countries will also pay special attention to the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which introduces a common system for managing migration flows at the EU level. In this framework, the Benelux countries will seek synergies to strengthen their cooperation and promote their shared positions at the European level.



Civil security, crisis management and a resilient society

The aforementioned geopolitical tensions and conflicts, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the increasing risks arising from climate change, call for a renewed focus on civil security and strengthening the resilience of society. To make society more resilient, the Benelux countries are working together in favour of a coordinated resilience approach. The Benelux countries are already collaborating to protect their citizens from specific threats and crisis situations, such as natural disasters and pandemics, but they will also need to anticipate new threats. There are joint efforts to manage risk and coordinate emergency measures that focus on the resilience of society. Close cooperation in this area means that the countries are better prepared for unforeseen events.

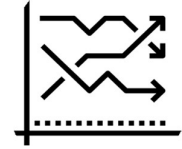
Continued efforts will be made to cooperate with like-minded countries on resilience and preparedness, including through knowledge exchanges with the Nordics, Baltics, and the United Kingdom.

To make society more resilient, the countries are also focusing on cross-border cooperation in the field of healthcare. The emphasis here is on developing a resilient cross-border collaboration, based on joint monitoring and risk management, and the establishment of strategic regional reserves. This enables the countries to respond to health crises more swiftly and effectively. The establishment of such strategic reserves should also be considered in other areas, including strategic raw materials, computer chips, and food.

Cybersecurity and digital resilience

Cyber attacks are a growing threat. The Benelux countries will intensify their cooperation in the field of cyber security in order to protect their digital infrastructures, citizens and companies. By exchanging knowledge and aligning cyber visions, the three countries will become more resilient to cyber threats, thereby enhancing the protection of citizens, businesses, and critical infrastructures. Maintaining and expanding structural cooperation at technical, operational, and policy levels is crucial, including through regular bilateral consultations, coordinated positions within EU platforms, alignment in standardisation efforts, targeted exchange of cyber threat information (MISP), and mutual support in handling incidents or inspections.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH



Economic integration, social protection, and sustainable growth are closely linked to the security and stability within the region. A strong and fair common market provides opportunities for businesses and citizens and fosters innovation and sustainability. By removing unjustified barriers and cooperating in areas such as trade, energy, social security, and technology, the Benelux countries are creating a robust economy capable of addressing the challenges of the green transition and resilient in times of geopolitical and economic uncertainty.

Strengthening the single market

The Benelux countries have long played a key role in promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, as well as strengthening the single market. The Benelux Union will identify which common orientations exist in the Benelux countries with regard to the priorities set out in the European Commission's future strategy on the single market, inspired by the reports of Letta and Draghi, which will help determine in which areas the Benelux region can play a leading role in Europe.

The goal is to further reduce or, where possible, remove barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, with a focus on harmonising regulations where appropriate, reducing administrative burdens, simplifying regulations, ensuring a level playing field, and strengthening market interconnection between the three countries. This will allow the benefits of the single market to be more widely enjoyed, particularly by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and citizens.

Supporting SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of the Benelux economy. Encouraging cross-border trade and transnational partnerships, reducing administrative burdens, and promoting investment are therefore key priorities. Wherever possible, close coordination is sought when implementing EU regulations.

The Benelux Union provides SMEs with the opportunity to fully capitalise on the opportunities offered by the shared market, with a particular focus on access to and development of talent and skills. Access to affordable energy is essential to ensure the competitiveness of SMEs. This is why Benelux is committed to ensuring a reliable and stable energy supply to lower costs so that these companies can continue to grow and innovate.

Cross-border labour mobility

The economic dynamism of the Benelux region requires a flexible, mobile, and fair labour market. The countries will continue their efforts to remove unjustified barriers to cross-border labour mobility and to promote fair labour mobility, with particular emphasis on the reciprocal recognition of professional qualifications, social security, tax matters, and the fight against social fraud and so-called social dumping, including the cross-border collection of social security debts. This makes it easier for workers to move between the countries, gives businesses access to a larger pool of qualified workers, and thereby strengthens the competitiveness of the Benelux region. The guiding principle is that the protection of workers remains guaranteed.



Preserving industry and economic prosperity

The future-proofing of industry is at the centre of cooperation in the Benelux countries. Research, innovation, and sustainable development are the keywords here. The Benelux countries are collectively working to strengthen their industrial base, with attention to technological progress, the green transition, and digitalisation, including collaboration in the field of artificial intelligence. The General Secretariat of the Benelux countries continues to closely monitor the cross-border scientific project Einstein Telescope and supports it where necessary.

Attention is also given to energy efficiency and smart manufacturing processes to make businesses more competitive and preserve jobs.

Finally, the biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors will also be strengthened through greater cooperation, particularly to accelerate development and economic growth in the Benelux countries.

Joint vision for smart and sustainable mobility

Mobility is a cornerstone of the economic and social vibrancy of the Benelux region, its neighbouring countries, and beyond. The Benelux nations are collaboratively developing a Benelux Strategic Mobility Agenda. This initiative aims to not only enhance transport networks but also foster sustainable economic growth and fortify the region's ability to address future challenges. Key priorities include expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, implementing innovative public transport solutions, and advancing intelligent logistics networks to optimise regional and urban connectivity.

Efforts will also target developing efficient, eco-friendly cross-border mobility corridors and building infrastructure that supports further electrification and the adoption of low-carbon ("blue") hydrogen in transportation, wherever technically viable and economically feasible. This approach not only facilitates more sustainable transport but also strengthens the connections between the Benelux countries and their neighbouring regions.

The Benelux countries remain committed to ensuring adequate 5G coverage in border areas and are engaged in discussions regarding the further roll-out of digital infrastructure. As self-driving vehicles become more prominent, achieving seamless cross-border 5G signal transfer is a continuing priority. Progress on the deployment of ultra-fast internet will be closely monitored

The strategic location of the main Benelux ports – such as Rotterdam, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges, Amsterdam, and North Sea Port – plays a crucial role in this mobility strategy. These ports not only act as gateways to Europe but also serve as critical nodes within the security strategies of organisations like NATO. This work programme therefore takes into account the needs of military mobility, ensuring that infrastructures are flexible, robust, and suitable for both civilian and military transport purposes.

to ensure that transport networks are seamlessly integrated with sustainable technologies as their foundation.

More sustainable and resilient logistics chains

The Benelux ports remain vital links in the European logistics chain. The Benelux countries will focus on strengthening collaboration between governments, businesses, and regulators to make logistics chains more sustainable. Investments will be made in green transport corridors, and the introduction of low-carbon hydrogen and zero-emission trucks will be encouraged as much as possible, making logistics networks more efficient and environmentally friendly. Through these efforts, the Benelux region contributes to the achievement of European climate goals and reinforces its position as a leader in sustainable mobility. Enhancing the resilience of logistics chains is also crucial, as food supplies, as well as other essential goods like medicines, rely heavily on these logistics networks.

Digital archiving

In light of rapidly evolving technologies and new European regulations on the horizon, the Benelux countries plan to assess the impact of the 2024 eIDAS 2.0 Regulation. This analysis will focus on digital archiving, the harmonisation of processes and the cultivation of new skills needed to support these changes, all with the aim of establishing a unified vision. The countries will also explore the potential of the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GREEN TRANSITION



The green transition and sustainable development are essential for a future-proof Benelux. To ensure the success of this transition, close regional cooperation in economic and infrastructural fields is necessary. A circular economy, sustainable agriculture, and energy security will underpin the single market of tomorrow while also contributing to a healthy and prosperous society. The Benelux countries are also committed to raising public awareness and promoting education on the challenges associated with transitioning to a sustainable society.

The North Sea as a green energy source and vital infrastructure

The North Sea plays a pivotal role in the Benelux energy transition. Offshore wind farms, the future integration of offshore floating solar projects, and renewable hydrogen initiatives make the North Sea a major source of renewable energy. Beyond this, the North Sea also hosts vital infrastructure such as undersea cables, which require both physical and digital protection. The Benelux nations collaborate closely to safeguard this infrastructure while at the same time promoting the further roll-out of sustainable energy projects. The Benelux Union remains dedicated to playing a key role in the North Seas Energy Cooperation partnership.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General of the Benelux Union will continue to fulfil its essential facilitating and supporting role as an independent chair of the Scheldt Council. In a unique collaboration, various interests such as agriculture, nature, seaports, energy transition, and the circular economy are brought together to advise the Flemish-Dutch Scheldt Commission (VNSC) on a joint cross-border policy and management of the Scheldt estuary.

Energy and supply security

Energy security is crucial in an increasingly interconnected world, where stable and sustainable energy sources are essential. The Benelux countries will intensify their efforts to diversify the energy supply, to reduce dependencies on non-European suppliers, and to ensure reliable and secure energy delivery.

The role of the Benelux Union in the Pentalateral Energy Forum, where it provides the secretariat and allocates projects, is a key element in achieving these goals.

Joint investments in renewable energy, cross-border energy infrastructures, and energy storage projects will contribute to a robust and sustainable energy supply for the region. There will also be a focus on the transport and storage of CO₂ through cross-border networks.



Circular economy

Transitioning to a circular economy requires a focus on reducing waste and using resources more efficiently. The Benelux cooperation is centred around fostering innovative solutions and technologies that contribute to this goal. Strengthening the circular industry not only supports environmental targets but also helps preserve economic growth. The Benelux legal framework will be reviewed to determine whether it can play a role in advancing this agenda.

Furthermore, through joint action, regulations and standards can be harmonised, thereby eliminating barriers to cross-border activities and innovations within the circular economy. This leads to more efficient use of materials and promotes a circular business model that could serve as an example for the rest of Europe. By cooperating in this area, Benelux helps build a sustainable and competitive single market, further solidifying its position as a leader in Europe's circular economy.

Resilience to natural disasters and water management

As already noted, the Benelux countries face many common challenges due to climate change. In this context, water management is a vital concern for the security and prosperity of the Benelux region. As such, work will continue on the development of a regional Water Agenda to address these issues.

Sustainable agriculture, food security and the future of the agricultural sector

Sustainable agriculture is a key component of the green transition. The Benelux countries are joining forces to make agricultural practices more sustainable. Emphasis is placed on integrating environmental protection, animal welfare, and food safety into agricultural policy, without losing sight of food security. The Benelux Union also recognises the importance of ensuring a future for farmers in the region.

Differing agricultural regulations across borders can create challenges for farmers engaged in cross-border activities. Benelux will explore how its legal framework can be used to better align regulations and resolve cross-border issues, providing farmers with greater legal certainty for a future-proof, economically viable, socially responsible sector that is in harmony with the environment.

Nature conservation and biodiversity

Benelux is committed to preserving biodiversity as part of its green transition. Cooperation efforts are focused on enhancing ecosystems and strengthening nature conservation, including cross-border green infrastructure (natural areas that extend beyond national borders) that contribute to sustainable agriculture and water management.

BENELUX+ AND BEYOND

The Benelux Union remains dedicated to fostering cooperation with border regions. For instance, cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia will be further deepened, building on the joint declarations of 2008 and 2019. Among other things, it is being analysed how North Rhine-Westphalia can also be integrated into Benelux cooperation at a more strategic level.

New opportunities for collaboration with France are also being explored, based on the 2018 memorandum of understanding and the action plan between the Benelux Union and the Hauts-de-France region, expected to be signed in 2025. This cooperation will focus on energy transition, mobility and transport, higher education, vocational training, the economy, and the sustainable management of natural resources and agriculture.

Furthermore, the Benelux Union will strengthen cooperation with the Greater Region, in line with the presidencies of the Greater Region held by Wallonia and the German-speaking Community in 2025-2026, and Luxembourg in 2027-2028, while also exploring opportunities for more intensive cooperation with Lower Saxony.

Finally, efforts will be made to strengthen ties with other regional partners, including the Nordic Council and the Baltic States.

MISSION - VISION - VALUES

MISSION

We work to strengthen the single market, promote a sustainable future, and ensure a safer society by delivering projects that create visible, tangible value for the citizens, businesses, and public institutions of the Benelux region.

VISION

The Secretariat-General serves as the core of cooperation within the Benelux Union. The Benelux Union is a pioneer in cross-border cooperation, a model for regional integration, and a testing ground for European collaboration, both as a forerunner of European policy and as a complement to it.

VALUES

We are impartial and multilingual, and we carry out our work with commitment, a focus on results, expertise, integrity, and a spirit of teamwork.

