

Profile of the municipality of Oostkamp 2022



**Searching for an
international partner**





Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| International partnership | 4 |
| Focus of the twinning arrangement: social angle | 4 |
| Win-win | 4 |
| European fraternization | 5 |
| SDG | 5 |
| Fair Trade | 5 |
| Short presentation of the Municipality of Oostkamp | 7 |
| Belgium | 7 |
| Municipality of Oostkamp | 9 |
| Rural characteristics | 9 |
| Demographics | 9 |
| Local government | 9 |
| Municipal organisation | 10 |
| More about Oostkamp | 10 |
| Social fabric | 12 |
| Children and young people | 12 |
| Adults | 13 |
| Work | 13 |
| Leisure time | 14 |
| Family | 14 |
| Senior citizens | 14 |
| Is your city or municipality the right partner for us? | 16 |
| Colophon | 16 |

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International partnership

In an ever shrinking world, global challenges are increasingly having a greater local impact. In every major theme such as the climate, economy or migration, we notice that there is a global fabric that firmly holds everything together. Working together is more important than ever. The perspective of a local government is broader than its actual territory, region or even country.

A twinning arrangement is a unique form of international partnership in which the exchange of experiences and ability of local governments to support each other play a central role. This collaboration is primarily focused on a colleague-to-colleague approach and on learning from and exchanging experiences with each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect with a view to strengthening each other. Similar organisations often have the same challenges and responsibilities.

A twinning arrangement is not a project, but rather it is a process in which the partners get to know each other and attempt to create a sustainable relationship over the long term.

We would also like to broaden our perspective in Oostkamp and work together with an international partner to create new insights, raise awareness among residents about global themes and make a contribution to the international fabric of our global society.

Focus of the twinning arrangement: social angle

The Municipality of Oostkamp would like to approach its future twinning arrangement from a social angle. We mean above all: dealing with people.

- How are we connected?
- How do we meet each other?
- How do we care for each other?
- How do we create commitment?

Oostkamp is a municipality with a strong social fabric. Under the twinning arrangement, the many associations and organisations that comprise Oostkamp's networks will meet and exchange experiences with an international partner with a healthy dose of enthusiasm and curiosity. This mainly includes schools, and sports, youth and cultural associations and welfare organisations, but we do not want to restrict ourselves to these actors.

Win-win

The partners will each make efforts and enjoy the benefits of the collaboration according to their own abilities.

Through the twinning arrangement, we want to offer our residents the opportunity to have contact with others and to realise that there are international challenges that we all have to tackle together. These contacts will also make it easier to empathise with the situation, social environment and lives of others.

By establishing a twinning arrangement, we will get municipalities engaged with establishing relationships that can serve as stepping stones for other organisations or associations. This includes school exchanges, fraternization between associations, international social contacts for the disabled, and so forth.

European fraternization

Oostkamp already has several existing international partnerships. For instance, at the end of last century, several twinning arrangements were established with the German cities of Bad Nauheim and Bad Langensalza and the French city of Chaumont. As a result of this, a network of cultural and sporting activities has been set up. Local artists have gained the opportunity to exhibit their works in the partner municipality, choirs have put on musical performances together, and international youth football tournaments have been organised.

SDG

The Municipality of Oostkamp is dedicated to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations at a local level. The twinning arrangement will not only allow Oostkamp to implement SDG 17 (partnerships), but it will also make a further contribution to other SDGs through exchanges and learning, with a particular focus on the social sustainability pillar in both municipalities.



Fair Trade

Fair trade is another internationally relevant theme. Oostkamp is dedicated to fair prices for producers in the North and the South. Short supply chains, where the links between the producer and customer are kept as short as possible, are an important element, and are also good for the climate. Oostkamp has also been an official Fair Trade Municipality since 2007.



Short presentation of the Municipality of Oostkamp

In order to build a partnership, it is important to get to know each other. To further explain the 'social fabric' theme, it is useful to gain some context.

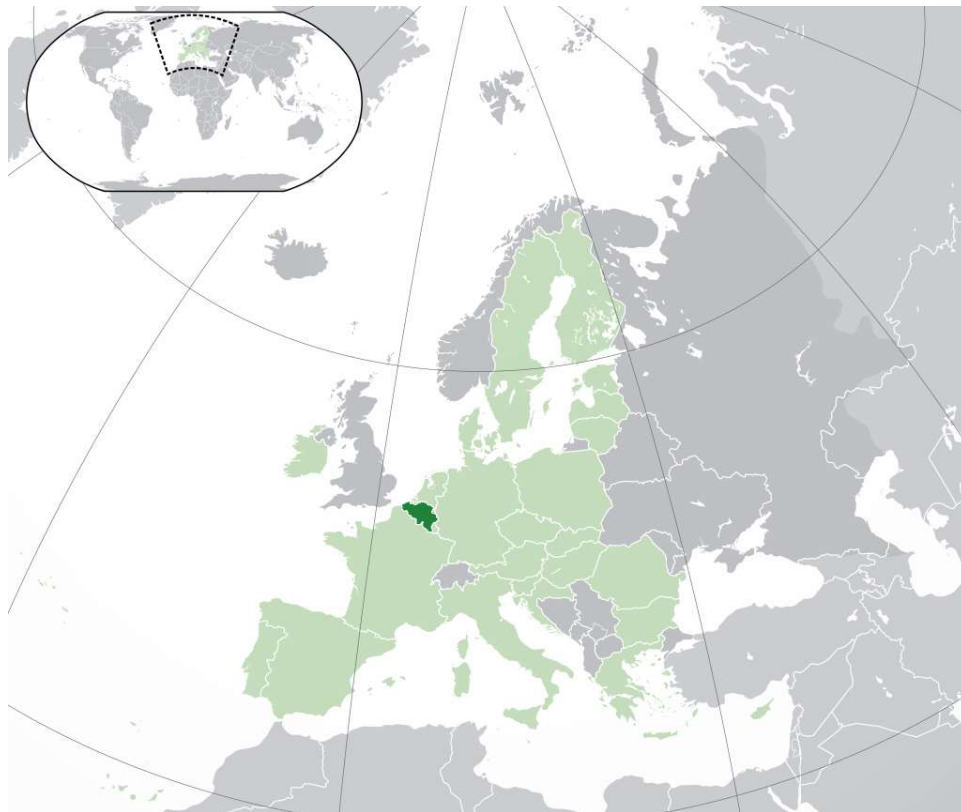
Below is a short presentation about the Municipality of Oostkamp, starting with the country in which Oostkamp is located.

Belgium

The Kingdom of Belgium is a country located in Western Europe. Its neighbouring countries are the Netherlands, France, Germany and Luxembourg. Belgium has a coastline of 66 km on the North Sea. Great Britain is on the other side of this coastline. Belgium is a member of the European Union (countries shown in green).

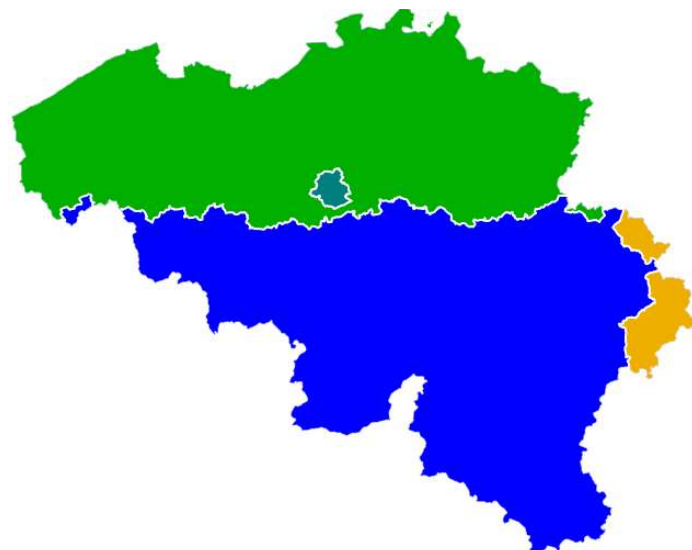
Belgium has a relatively flat landscape. Its highest point is 'Signal de Botrange' with an elevation of 694 m. Belgium is located near to the Atlantic Ocean and it has a temperate maritime climate, with relatively mild winters and pleasant summers. The lowest average temperature in winter is around 5°C in January, and the highest average temperature in summer is around 23°C in July.

The country has an area of 30,528 km² and a population of around 11.4 million inhabitants, which makes Belgium one of Europe's most densely populated regions (374 inhabitants/km²).



Flemish people make up the largest part of the population (60%). They live in the north of the country and speak Dutch. The Walloons live in the south of the country and speak French.

Brussels is the centrally-located capital city and is bilingual. Furthermore, there is a small German-speaking community in the east of the country (0.7%). Many Belgians also speak English in addition to the official languages.



| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
|  | Dutch |
|  | French |
|  | German |
|  | Dutch-French (Brussels, capital city) |

Belgium is a decentralised federal state. In addition to a national government, there are various other lower tiers of government that each have their own powers. Every so many years, there are democratic elections for the representatives of certain administrative levels. All Belgians aged over 18 can vote.

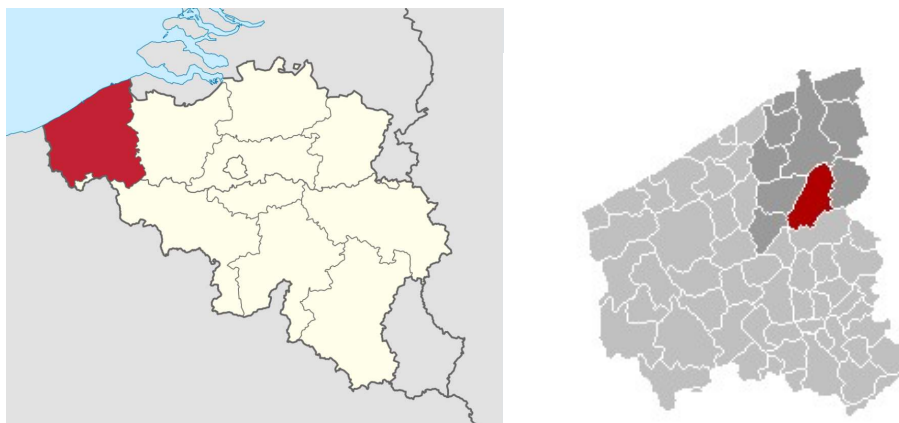
The table below provides an overview of the various institutions at each level

| Level | Institutions | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| European | European Union | | |
| National | Federal government | | |
| Communities | Flemish Community | French Community | German-speaking Community |
| Regions | Flanders | Brussels | Wallonia |
| Provinces | 5 Flemish provinces | | 5 Walloon provinces |
| Local (cities and municipalities) | 300 Flemish cities and municipalities | 19 municipalities in Brussels | 262 Walloon cities and municipalities |



Municipality of Oostkamp

Oostkamp is located to the south of Bruges, the capital of the Province of West Flanders which is the most western province of Belgium and borders on the North Sea.



Rural characteristics

Oostkamp has an area of 79.65 km² and is characterised by a mixture of urban and rural areas.

Although Belgium and West Flanders rank very low in terms of forested areas, Oostkamp is one of the regions with the most forests in the Province of West Flanders.

Demographics

Oostkamp has 24.000 inhabitants which makes it a medium-sized municipality in Belgium. The municipality is divided into a number of sub-municipalities: Oostkamp, Ruddervoorde, Waardamme and Hertsberge.

Approximately 20% of the population is younger than 18 and approximately 20% is older than 65. Just like the rest of the country, the number of people over 65 is rising rapidly.

Oostkamp has a population density of almost 300 inhabitants per km² which is below the average for Belgium and Flanders.

In Oostkamp, 3.3% of the population has a different nationality, which is lower than the average for Belgium and Flanders.

Local government

Every 6 years, residents vote in the municipal elections. Residents can vote for various political parties and for candidates from those parties. Jan de Keyser has been the Mayor of Oostkamp since 2017. The next municipal elections will be held in October 2024.

The municipal council is the highest body in the municipality. It has 27 elected officials from different political parties who meet each month.

The Municipal Executive has 7 members who are elected by the municipal council. The members meet each week and are responsible for the daily administration and each of them have a number of responsibilities.



At the start of each term of government, a policy plan is drawn up. This creates a framework for work to be carried out. It sets the direction that the municipality will take over the coming 6 years.

In 2016, residents were asked what they thought the municipality should look like in the year 2030. This led to a long-term vision. Each decision is tested against this. The key words in the Oostkamp2030 vision are **dedication**, **solidarity** and **accessibility**.

Municipal organisation

The local government is supported by various teams of municipal personnel. Oostkamp has approximately 216 employees. Half of these employees are office workers. The other half are responsible for the installation and maintenance of infrastructure (public domain, roads, buildings).

The General Manager, Jan Compennol, is the head of our organisation. He is supported by the management team, consisting of key figures within the organisation. Together they lead the organisation that implements the policy plan.

There are various teams with different tasks. Certain teams work on themes such as public space, individual welfare services, permits, leisure, etc. Other teams support the organisation with themes such as HR and finances, communication, ICT, etc.

The provision of services to the residents of Oostkamp comes first and foremost. Residents can contact one of the local counters of the OostCampus municipal service centre whenever they need to contact the municipality.

More about Oostkamp

- ➔ We inform residents about a variety of topics in our magazine 'de Merel' (the blackbird). This magazine is delivered to all residents each month.
- ➔ We also organise resident meetings, consultation meetings, info markets and opportunities for participation to get residents involved with policy.
- ➔ The Facebook group #8020 brings together all the great things about Oostkamp. On the [Facebook page #8020](#), named after our postcode, we share everything that links Oostkamp residents to one other.
- ➔ You can also follow the ins and outs of the municipality on the [municipality's Facebook page](#).



- We also email a newsletter each week to anyone who has signed up for this. Furthermore, at various points in the year we send out newsletters for the business community and newsletters that deal with global themes.
- Oostkamp was voted as the most attractive municipality of Flanders in 2017 by a major newspaper¹. The focus of the survey was on accessibility and services provided to residents.

¹ <https://www.oostkamp.be/nieuwsdetail/4060/oostkamp-is-de-vijfsterengemeente-in-vlaanderen>

Social fabric

In order to outline the social fabric of Oostkamp, we will look at the life of an average person who lives in Oostkamp. Various organisations are involved at different stages along the way. Tasks are sometimes reserved for the local government, but the local government also often assumes a supervisory role. With the twinning arrangement, we want to focus on the understanding of the social fabric and exchange of organisations that are active within that social fabric.

Children and young people

In 99% of cases, women **give birth** in hospital. Only a small minority of women opt for home birth. Oostkamp does not have its own hospital, so women have to go to the nearby cities of Torhout or Bruges.

In many cases, both parents work. They are able to get paid leave to care for their new-born child. During the first few months, the child is raised at home, but the parents often return to work after 3-4 months and the baby then goes to a **nursery** or is cared for by a childminder.

Once the child reaches 2.5 years of age, he/she can go to school. Children attend infant school until the age of 6. From that age, children move to junior school and **education is compulsory** until the age of 18. Children are legally required to attend school until they are adults.

- The school system is often organised from Monday to Friday, between 8.30 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Oostkamp has 8 infant and junior schools for children aged 3-12, and 1 middle school for young people aged 12-15. The system is used by more than 2.000 children in total.
- Older children attend school in Bruges or Torhout.



Children do hobbies after school. They learn to play music, play sports and do other activities, and in this way develop further social contacts and skills outside of the classroom. One characteristic of the school and leisure time network is that everything is organised by associations and organisations. At the weekend in particular, hobbies are key activities.

Oostkamp has approximately **300 associations**. These are mostly sporting associations, however, many associations also engage with culture, youths, the family, the elderly, welfare, and much more. The Municipality of Oostkamp supports these associations and acts as a sounding board for participation.



After basic education in junior school, children choose the field that they will specialise in during **middle school** from the ages of 12-18. There are a wide range of fields, from general fields to technical or professional fields that should prepare young people for their next phase in their training.

Children and young people with difficulties or disabilities can rely on a specialised network that provides specialised care and education. These networks and the school system are heavily subsidised by the government in order to keep costs as low as possible for parents.

Adults

You are considered an adult from the age of 18. At this age, you will have completed your time in middle school. Anyone who chose general subjects often continues studying at a university of applied sciences or university. Anyone who chose a profession can immediately look for a suitable job.

Work

Oostkamp is an attractive municipality in which to work. It is a dynamic, **business-friendly municipality**, with an above-average percentage of people whose main form of income is from self-employment. The municipality is extremely **easy to reach** due to its location near to the important E40 and E403 motorways, and its railway connection and waterway.

People can work for themselves on a self-employed basis, or they can be employed as manual or office workers by a self-employed person, company or the government or local government. In the municipality itself, there are more than 2,500 employment opportunities for both employed persons and self-employed persons in an part-time capacity.

First and foremost, we have to work to meet our needs and those of our partner and children, where relevant. If you do not have work, you do not have an income. However, there is a safety net to help people find a job and/or provide them with a basic income. People in a situation of poverty can turn to the municipality's social services who will try to support them in various ways and help get them back on the right track.

Even after completing school, we place an importance on learning with the motto 'lifelong learning'. New skills and competencies create greater wellbeing and ensure that people have greater agility in both their employment and leisure time. **Adult education** centres play an important role here.

Leisure time

People often go out together in their leisure time. People find that taking part in an activity or having a pleasant chat with someone else on their own initiative is a good way to expand and maintain their social network. In Oostkamp, you can find 75 restaurant and catering businesses that play a role in this.

Friendships are important for mental wellbeing and for further stimulating encounters in the future. Adults who have spent a long time as a member of an association usually remain loyal to that association and take on further responsibilities on a voluntary basis.

There are also various meeting places in Oostkamp where people are welcome to go for a chat and for all kinds of activities. **Local service centres and 'Welzijnsschakels'** (volunteer groups working to combat poverty and social exclusion) provide tailored care, transport or social advice. Municipal initiatives such as **street ambassadors** create a greater feeling of solidarity. These volunteers especially are local points of contact, acting at neighbourhood or street levels and they are an important link between residents and the municipality.



Family

Many people juggle work and leisure activities with family life. The majority of families consist of 2 adults and several children who live together in a house.

In some cases, the house is rented, and in other cases owned by the family (often purchased with money borrowed from a bank and which they repay each month). In order to sustain your family, you can shop in Oostkamp at over 400 businesses for a wide range of goods and services.

Income is naturally also very important in order to give children every opportunity in terms of education, leisure activities, social networks, etc.

Senior citizens

When people reach the age of 67 or when they have worked for 42 years, they usually retire. This means that they no longer need to work and can receive an allowance from the government.

These senior citizens are often still active. Their children have already left home and often already have their own family. This means that many senior citizens look for active, meaningful ways to spend time. This is why senior citizen associations are also very popular.

These associations enable senior citizens to meet each other in an active way. Not only do senior citizens often take part in association life, but they also play an active role in numerous organisations and associations as volunteers. It is an informal way to stay active and healthy. To stay mentally fresh, there are also a variety of training courses.

Family life continues to be central. The role that senior citizens play as grandparents cannot be underestimated – senior citizens often take care of their grandchildren.

Unfortunately, people of all ages always face the risk of illnesses and accidents. To be able to provide all possible support to people over the course of their lives, healthcare is organised in various ways. There is a local network of general practitioners, pharmacies, home nursing and transport for the sick which means that people who need help are assisted in the best way possible. In addition to the organised system, family members often assume caring duties. The government also supports this type of care.

Senior citizens who have greater difficulties living at home alone receive support from services that deliver meals to their homes, clean and provide transport, for instance. If a person living alone is no longer able to cope, there are residential and care centres where the elderly are cared for in a warm and humane way during the later stage of their lives.



All of the systems such as unemployment benefit, pension payments, sickness benefit, affordable education and much, much more are only possible because the taxes levied in Belgium on labour, consumption and capital are relatively high. These taxes are used for things such as financing social security, expanding infrastructure, and maintaining the level of services.

Is your city or municipality the right partner for us?

If this document has sparked your interest and you would like to consider in more depth how residents can connect with each other, how we can create commitment and how local



government can enable people to care for each other, then you are the partner we are looking for.

The theme of 'social fabric' is sufficiently broad for us to implement this together. We are looking to exchange new ideas and other input in the partnership.

Please get in touch and tell us who you are and why you are interested in working with us. In particular, tell us:

- How your administration views international partnership
- Why you would like to work with us and what your administration expects from the collaboration
- Ideas for exchanges
- How the social fabric is made up where you are
- How your administration is put together and how it implements policy
- Appetite to work together

In order to maximise the possibilities for reciprocal communication it would be useful to have a contact person within the local government who speaks English/French.

Colophon

Photography: Koen Mutton, Vincent Willems, Geert Stubbe, Robbe Dierckx, Saskia Haché.