The House of Representatives
Election

The House of Representatives consists of 150 deputies who are directly elected in one vote from 11 electoral constituencies for a period of five years unless the House is dissolved before the end of this period.

Eleven constituencies

The law sets the electoral constituencies. They coincide with the provinces, except in Brussels-Capital. The number of seats in each electoral constituency is proportional to the population in the constituency concerned.

Who can vote?

Electoral law stipulates that all Belgians aged 18 or over, whether male or female, are entitled to vote. Voting in the federal elections is compulsory.

Who can be elected?

The Constitution stipulates the following conditions for being able to be elected to the House (conditions of eligibility: art. 64 of the Constitution)
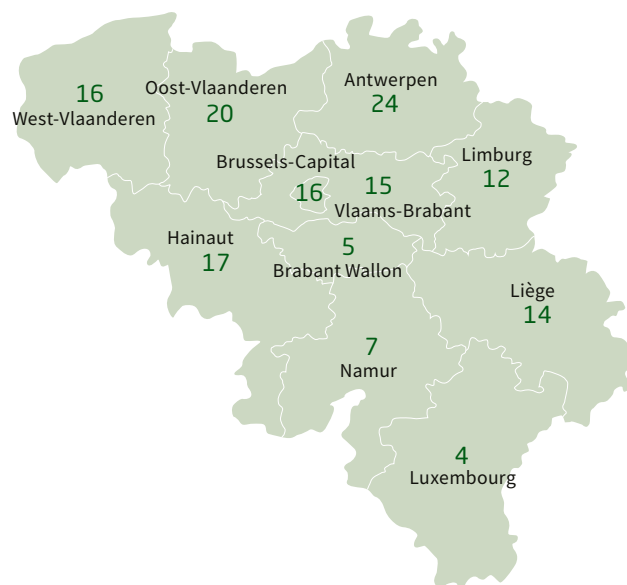To be eligible, one must
- be Belgian,
- enjoy civil and political rights,
- have completed the age of eighteen,
- be legally resident in Belgium.

No other condition of eligibility can be required (thus no knowledge of other official languages than the mothertongue is required).

How are the seats distributed?

The seats are distributed in proportion to the total number of validly cast votes (party list votes and named candidate votes) to the party list of candidates that achieved at least 5% of the total number of validly cast votes in the electoral district.[1] The seats are thus distributed proportionally (provided by the law - Art. 62 of the Constitution).
The distribution of seats requires several steps.

West-Vlaanderen 16 — **Oost-Vlaanderen** 20 — **Antwerpen** 24 — **Limburg** 12 — **Brussels-Capital** 16 — **Vlaams-Brabant** 15 — **Hainaut** 17 — **Brabant Wallon** 5 — **Liège** 14 — **Namur** 7 — **Luxembourg** 4

» 11 Electoral constituencies:

Antwerpen : 24
Oost-Vlaanderen : 20
Hainaut : 17
West-Vlaanderen : 16
Vlaams-Brabant : 15
Brussels-Capital : 16
Liège : 14
Limburg : 12
Namur : 7
Brabant Wallon : 5
Luxembourg : 4

» Determining the electoral figure

First of all, the electoral figure of each list has to be determined. This is the total number of validly cast votes allocated to a list, either as a list vote or as a vote for one or several individual candidates on this list (named votes).

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(1)   The calculation method for the application of the proportional representation system was developed by the Belgian lawyer, Victor D'Hondt (1841-1901). The D'Hondt system is also used in many other countries.

» Determining the electoral divisor

This is the minimum number of valid votes required to obtain a seat. The procedure, known as the D'Hondt system, works as follows :

- The electoral quotients are determined by dividing the electoral figure of each list by 1, 2, 3, etc.
- Electoral quotients are then arranged from the highest to the lowest down to the point where the number of quotients equals the number of seats to be allocated.
- The last quotient allowing a list to win a seat is called electoral divisor.

» Determining the number of seats allocated to a list

To determine the number of seats won, the electoral figure of each list is divided by the electoral divisor. In case of two identical quotients, the list with the higher electoral figure has priority.

Example:

The following example illustrates the application of this procedure in an election involving 4 parties competing for 7 seats.

	List A	List B	List C	List D
Electoral figure	**48 000**	**136 000**	**88 000**	**140 000**
Divided by 1	48 000 (6)	136 000 (2)	88 000 (3)	140 000 (1)
Divided by 2	24 000	68 000 (5)	44 000	70 000 (4)
Divided by 3	16 000	45 333	29 333	46 667 (7)
Divided by 4	12 000	34 000	22 000	35 000
Divided by …				

Conclusion: List D won 3 seats, list B 2 seats, lists A and C both 1 seat.

» Allocation of seats

When one knows how many seats the party lists have in each electoral constituency, the seats must be allocated to the individual candidates. This operation is done as follows:
The eligibility figure is determined for each list that has won some seats. This figure is obtained by dividing the electoral figure (the number of votes obtained by a list) by the number of seats acquired plus one (Electoral Code - art. 172).
The candidate who reaches the eligibility figure is elected. Are taken into account: the number of named votes obtained by each candidate and half of the list votes.
The list votes are added to the named votes obtained by the first candidate until this person obtains the eligibility figure. If any list votes remain, they are added to the named votes obtained by the second candidate, and so on until half of the list votes have been used.

The following example illustrates how this operation is done.

List D, which has 5 candidates, won 3 seats.
Named votes: 100.000 – List votes: 40.000
Electoral figure: 100.000 + 40.000 = 140.000
Eligibility figure: 140.000 : 4 = 35.000
Half of the 40.000 list votes allocated to the individual candidates: 20.000

	Named votes	Division of list votes	Total	(1)
Candidate 1	32 000	3 000	35 000	Y
Candidate 2	19 000	16 000	35 000	Y
Candidate 3	11 000	1 000	12 000	N
Candidate 4	36 000		36 000	Y
Candidate 5	2 000		2 000	N
Total	**100 000**	**20 000**		

(1) Y = elected   N = not elected

Meeting of the House after the elections

The Constitution stipulates that the decree announcing the dissolution of the previous House includes the calling of elections within forty days and the meeting of the new House within two months (within three months in the event of adoption of a declaration of revision of the Constitution (Art. 46 of the Constitution).

Verification of credentials

This is the examination by which the new House verifies whether the members satisfy the conditions of eligibility and whether the election was conducted properly.
In practice this verification is done as follows: during the first meeting of the House after the elections, six committees are set up, each with seven members drawn by lots. Each committee examines the election reports from a certain number of electoral constituencies and draws up a statement. The conclusions of each committee are voted in the plenary meeting.

Taking the oath

Before entering into office, the members take the following oath: "I swear to observe the Constitution."
Many MPs choose to take the oath in two or three national languages. For those elected from the Brussels-Capital constituency, the language they use first determines which language group they belong to.