



## MEET THE BRUSSELS EXPAT



**Interpreter  
Milota Hudecová-  
Westerbeek on  
life and linguistics  
in the capital of  
Europe**

**I**work as an interpreter for the European Parliament. I'm from Slovakia; my mother is Czech and my father is Slovak, and I interpret from English, German, Spanish, Dutch and Czech into Slovak and sometimes from Slovak into English.

When I first came to Brussels in September 2011, I was young and single. Then I met my husband here and we have two children now, aged one and three. It can be stressful with a full-time job. We live close to Maelbeek, near Square Marie-Louise, which means we can easily walk to work. I go to Strasbourg with the Parliament every month. Interpreters from bigger booths,

bigger languages with a lot of MEPs, they go on missions all the time, but in my unit we don't travel so much. My husband is Dutch; he's a translator for the European Council and he used to be a freelance interpreter, so we understand the difficulties of each other's jobs. We each speak our own languages to the children, it's normal here to grow up speaking lots of languages.

I studied languages and have a degree in interpretation. Other interpreters might have a background as economists, for example, or lawyers, and they tend to have a European master's in conference interpreting. You have to work in a team and help your colleagues. We work in short blocks of time, usually taking it in turns to do 20-minute slots, because it requires a lot of concentration.

Some meetings are more technical than others. Often you get hearings with experts giving presentations and they whizz through them, and that can be challenging when their language is very specific. You have a mute button, in case you need to speak to your colleagues to check a word or a number or a name. But it's very rare that there's something you really can't decipher.

We have all kinds of personalities in this job. There are some interpreters who go on missions to interpret for a particular person; that suits someone who is confident, who likes to be in the spotlight. Sometimes when I'm working I feel like I'm performing, but I prefer not to think of people listening to me as that can be distracting. I focus on speaking as if to nobody, then I'm really calm and can focus on the job.