

# QUARTERLY REPORT

## January - March 2026

Startpunt is a field team of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen that provides **socio-legal information to applicants for international protection on their arrival in Belgium**. The team is present on a daily basis at the registration centre (Belliardstraat 68) and at the interview location of the Immigration Office (IO) (Cube - Pachecolaan 44). At the Legal Helpdesk (LHD), Startpunt, in collaboration with the Brussels Bar Association, provides information to applicants three times a week and facilitates access to legal aid. The team consists mostly of volunteers who speak a wide variety of languages. Startpunt **monitors** the situation on the ground and gathers **signals** which serve as a basis for Vluchtelingenwerk's policy work.

This report is based on observations by Startpunt and aims to highlight their work, describe the situation in the field and outline the challenges faced by applicants of international protection.

### KEY NUMBERS



Startpunt gave advice and referral to legal assistance and social services to around **3628** people at the **registration centre** and around **541** persons at the **Cube**



The **Legal Helpdesk** received a total of **701 visits**: **511** first-time visits, **190** came to follow up on their case



At the **stage of the interview** with the IO, 46% of people Startpunt talked to had **access to a lawyer**. **31%** of applicants coming to the **LHD** got **access to legal assistance within the first month of their application**



Of the 274 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the LHD**, **63% were homeless**  
Of the 541 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the IO**, **16% were homeless**

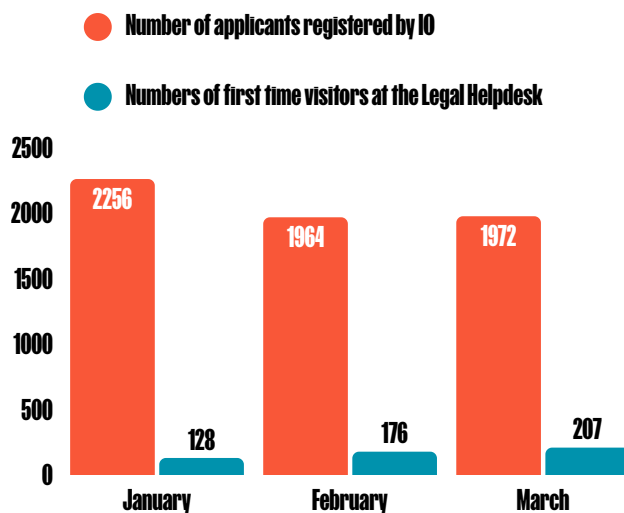


Top 3 nationalities of **visitors at the LHD**: **26%** Afghans; **8%** Palestinians; **6%** DRC  
Top 3 nationalities of **applicants for IP (data: CGRS)**: **11%** Afghans; **10%** Palestinians; **7%** DRC



**30 volunteers** joined the Startpunt activities speaking **24 languages**: **English, French, Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi, Spanish, Punjab, Italian, Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Swahili, Dutch, German, Tigrinya, Ahmaric, Russian, Ukrainian, Chechen, Somali, Portuguese, Albanian.**

### Overview of applicants at the Registration Centre and the LHD



**8% of the number of applicants who filed an asylum request found their way to the LHD**

### OBSERVATIONS AT THE REGISTRATION CENTRE

Throughout the first quarter of the year, Startpunt continued to observe **a relative decline** in the number of people queuing in the morning to register for international protection. Most registrations took place on Mondays, with the highest number—**265** applicants—recorded on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January. Even though there was a relative increase of the number of registrations in the first quarter of the year, there continues to be a steady relative decrease of asylum applications confirming the overall trend registered at the end of 2025. This **downward trend** is consistent with the official statistics published by the CGRS. CGRS data for the first quarter (January to March 2026) confirm this decrease, with a total of 6192 applications, compared to 9162 between January and March 2025. This represents a 32% decrease in the span of a year.

[1] See ASYLUM STATISTICS: OVERVIEW 2025.

### POLICE PRESENCE

Within the last quarter of this year, Startpunt **did not notice police presence** at the Registration Centre.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Despite the stabilisation of the registration system and the consistent presence of metal barriers, **confusion around where and how to queue remained a structural issue**. Applicants for international protection (IP), including both single men and families, continued to wrongly queue in the Temporary Protection (TP) line, as the **TP entrance remained the only clearly visible and illuminated access point**, especially during dark morning hours.

**Spatial constraints** continued to affect the accessibility and safety of the registration centre. Limited space for the three main queues (Temporary Protection, single men, and families) remained a structural issue, particularly on busy days, contributing to **parallel lines, crowding** near the entrance and on the bike lane.

The constant presence of metal barriers did not fully address these challenges, notably in cases of reduced entrance visibility during early morning hours. The **bike lane** continued to pose safety risks for both applicants and the team, as cyclists and scooter users generally did not reduce their speed, and applicants frequently had to stand on the bike lane due to limited space. While the entry system became more efficient and waiting times generally decreased (partly due to lower numbers of TP applicants), the **TP entrance** remained the primary point of congestion and confusion. The lack of information of entry systems also created confusion on what time people should start queuing in front of the registration office. This resulted in people unnecessarily standing in line from very early in the morning (even before 3 AM). This meant that when redirected by Startpunt in the right lines, frustrations grew since many had been standing in the cold for a long time.

### OBSERVATIONS AT PACHECO 44

In the first quarter of the year, the entrance of Cube has changed **twice**.

From **12<sup>th</sup> of January** the Immigration Office was moved to a temporary entrance in the **Interparking at Passage 44**. While there were signs put on the staff entrance of Passage 44 entrance and on the way (on fences and walls) towards the new entrance, no signs were put at the original Cube entrance. This resulted in confusion on where to access the Immigration Office until the end of January, requiring constant redirection by Startpunt.

On the **12<sup>th</sup> of March**, the Immigration Office entrance was relocated back to **Boulevard Pacheco 44**, with a new setup made by a small grey box-like structure that opens with an electronic gate, therefore not immediately recognized as an access point. Moreover, as there is no designated waiting area, applicants often wait in the street or near the parking area creating potential *safety hazards*. **Accessibility** of the new entrance is **limited**. Once the electronic gate is opened at **8:15**, the access consists only of narrow stairs with no lift available. This creates difficulties for families with small children, particularly those with strollers, requiring assistance from the Startpunt team in helping them going downstairs. Challenges were also observed for elderly applicants and people with reduced mobility.



12<sup>th</sup> January - Interparking at  
Passage 44

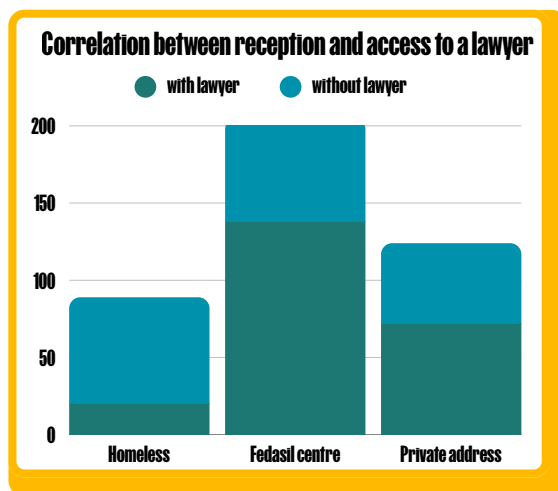
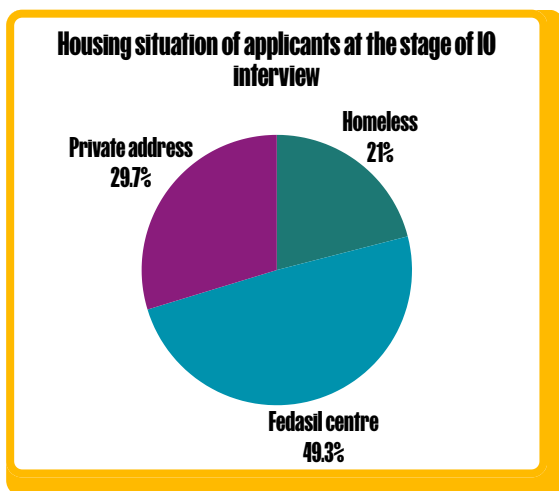


12<sup>th</sup> March - Boulevard  
Pacheco 44

In total, the team recorded the data of **541** applicants (which include single men, women, and families). Of those cases, **268** were for the first interview, **37** were for the interview for the subsequent procedure, **118** were Dublin cases, **15** cases were recorded for M-status interviews, **10** interviews for Temporary Protection, and **16** ICAM coaching appointments.

Throughout the quarter, access to the Immigration Office at the Cube remained appointment-based, with the gate generally opening around **8:15** and applicants admitted shortly before their scheduled time, while those with later appointments were required to wait outside.

Startpunt assisted people who *missed their interview* and were lacking the necessary information on how to obtain a new date. **Referrals** to the registration centre at Belliard continued to be a recurring practice, including cases where applicants had been incorrectly directed to the Cube. In line with trends observed in previous months, the number of applicants attending Temporary Protection interviews further decreased.



**32** referrals to the **Registration centre**



**3** referrals to **CGRS** for the second interview

At the stage of the interview with the IO, **25.5%** of the applicants Startpunt spoke to **had a place in a Fedasil centre and access to a lawyer**. By contrast, among applicants outside the reception network and without a private address (**16%** of the total), access to a lawyer remained limited, with only **4% of homeless applicants having legal assistance**. In this context, Startpunt refer these individuals to the **Legal Helpdesk** for the assignment of a lawyer and to other humanitarian services, such as the **Humanitarian HUB**, where they can access clothing, food, and shelter options.

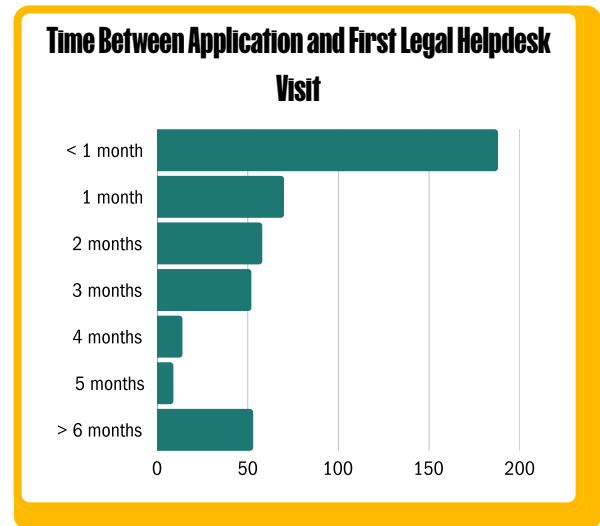
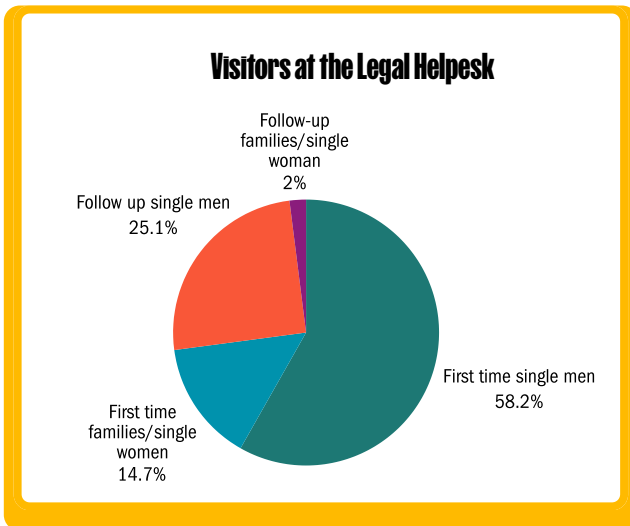
### TRENDS AT THE LEGAL HELPDESK

Between January and March, the number of visitors at the Legal Helpdesk showed a **significant decrease** compared to the number of visitors of the last quarter of 2025<sup>3</sup>. Startpunt believes this might be due to a combination of factors: general decreasing number of applications, Ramadan celebrations and weather conditions. During the last quarter, the team reached 210 less people than in the previous quarter. On average, the LHD had **21 visitors per shift**, with a peak of visitors on 18<sup>th</sup> February (**29 visitors**) and drop of visitors on 18<sup>th</sup> March (**11 visitors**).

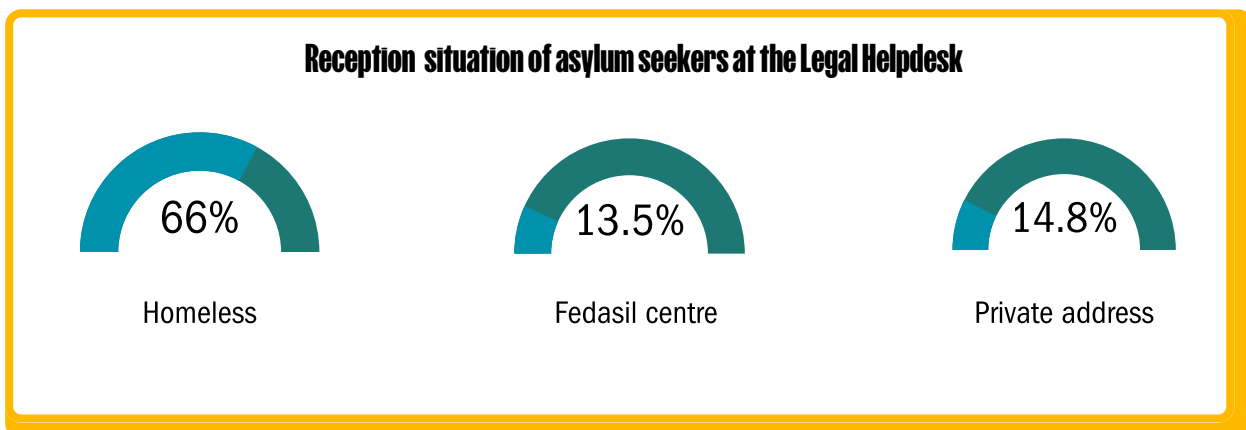
Legal Helpdesk - 1st Quarter 2026					
Month	First time		Follow-up		Total
	Single men	Families & women	Single men	Families & women	
January	115	13	87	1	216
February	152	24	69	8	253
March	141	66	20	5	232
<b>Total</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>701</b>

[3] The Legal Helpdesk was closed on 11th of February.

The team reached the greatest share of people **within the first month after their registration**, ensuring timely access to legal advice and a lawyer.



Throughout the last quarter of the year, **reception** continued to be the main challenge for the majority of applicants approaching the Legal Helpdesk. As observed in the previous quarter, **access to the reception network remained limited**, with waiting times for a place in a Fedasil centre stabilising at approximately **three and a half** from the date of application. As a result, Startpunt continued to encounter a significant number of applicants in a **homeless condition**, including **families and individuals with vulnerabilities**, and regularly redirected them to emergency and temporary shelter solutions.



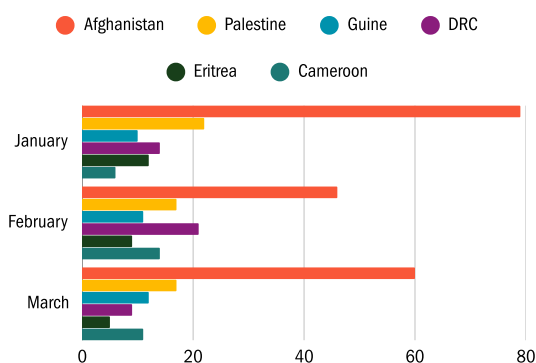
# QUARTERLY REPORT

January - March 2026

Within this context, **M-status cases** - applicants who have protection in another EU Member state -, while representing a relatively smaller proportion of the overall population encountered, were recurrently observed and remained particularly affected by **exclusion from the reception network**. These situations were generally associated with vulnerability (pregnant women, small children, people with mental illnesses), often exacerbated by unstable accommodation conditions, and in some cases linked to complex medical circumstances. Startpunt's support in such cases kept focusing on the legal dimension, ensuring that applicants were referred as quickly as possible to appropriate legal assistance in order to **appeal Fedasil decisions** related to exclusion from reception, while also supporting access to social services, in particular temporary shelter solutions.

Startpunt continued to support applicants in accessing **homelessness accommodation** through **Samusocial**, while also increasingly relying on alternative short-term options available on specific days of the week, such as Foyer Georges Motte, a temporary shelter located near the Legal Helpdesk where the team often accompanies applicants directly. Registration with Samusocial nevertheless remained challenging for individuals without a phone or SIM card, requiring additional support and follow-up from the team. **The team was not always able to find temporary solutions through homelessness accommodation**—particularly for **single men**, both first-time and subsequent applicants. It is particularly hard for subsequent applicants to access the temporary shelter network as they have already slept in multiple centres throughout their procedures. In parallel, Startpunt provided administrative assistance to applicants - mainly single men- who were not yet registered on the Fedasil reception waiting list, by carrying out the registration process directly at the Helpdesk to ensure access to the reception system.

### Top countries of origin of visitors per month



### Languages most spoken by visitors with the team

