

# QUARTERLY REPORT

## April - June 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), a service in collaboration with the Brussels Bar Association, Startpunt provides information 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 in Belgium.

### KEY NUMBERS



Startpunt gave advice and referral to legal assistance and social services to around **4025** people at the **registration centre** and around **1001** persons at the **Cube**



The **Legal Helpdesk** received a total of **694 visits**: **420** first-time visits, **274** came to follow up on their case



At the **stage of the interview** with the IO, **53%** of people Startpunt talked to had **access to a lawyer**. **53%** of applicants coming to the **LHD** got **access to legal assistance within the first month of their application**



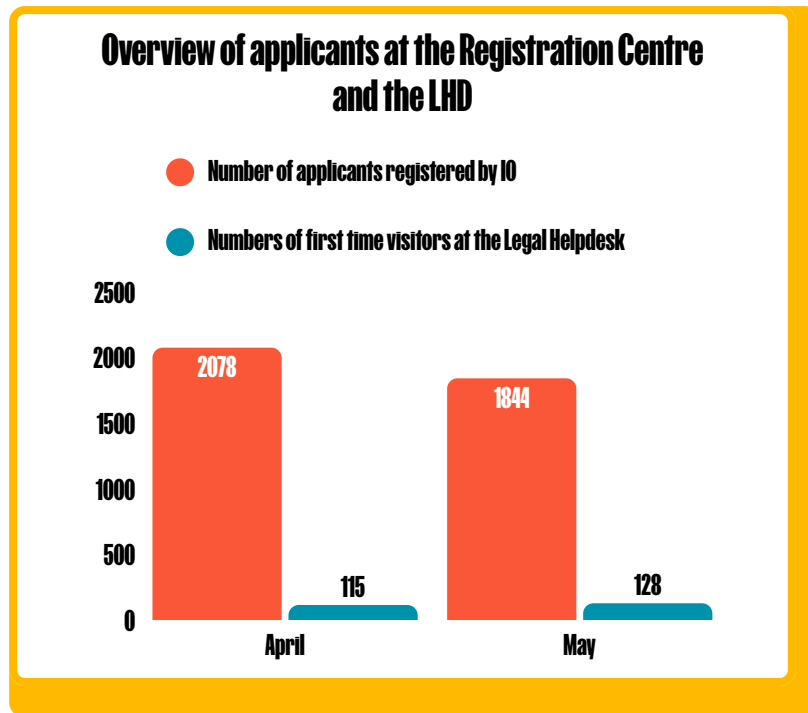
Of the 245 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the LHD**, **77% were homeless**  
Of the 976 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the IO**, **18% were homeless**



Top 3 nationalities of **visitors at the LHD**: **28%** Afghans; **6%** Palestinians; **5%** DRC  
Top 3 nationalities of **applicants for IP (data: CGRS)**: **11%** Afghans; **10%** Palestinians; **8%** DRC



**32 volunteers** joined the Startpunt activities speaking **21 languages**: **French, Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Tigrinya, Ahmaric, Arabic, Turkish, Dutch, Russian, Ukrainian, Chechen, Punjab, Somali, Hindi, Italian, Spanish, Albanian, Portuguese and German.**



**6% of the number of applicants who filed an asylum request found their way to the LHD**

## OBSERVATIONS AT THE REGISTRATION CENTRE

Throughout the second quarter of the year, Startpunt observed a **slight increase** in the number of people queuing in the morning to register for international protection compared to the first quarter. Most registrations took place on Mondays, with the highest number—**234** applicants—recorded on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June. Even though there was a relative increase of the number of registrations in the second 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 confirmed by the official statistics of the Immigration Office and CGRS: in April and May, a total of 3922 people applied for asylum compared to the total of 5391 applicants of April and May 2025. This represents a **27%** decrease in the span of a year.

**Accessibility** and **visibility** remained problematic at the Registration Centre during the second quarter. Although the registration system had stabilised and metal barriers were consistently in place, applicants continued to face confusion about where and how to queue. These visibility and **space constraints** contributed to crowding near the entrance, parallel queues, and applicants standing on or near the bike lane. This created **safety hazards** for both applicants and staff, especially when cyclists and scooter users passed at speed through an already congested area.

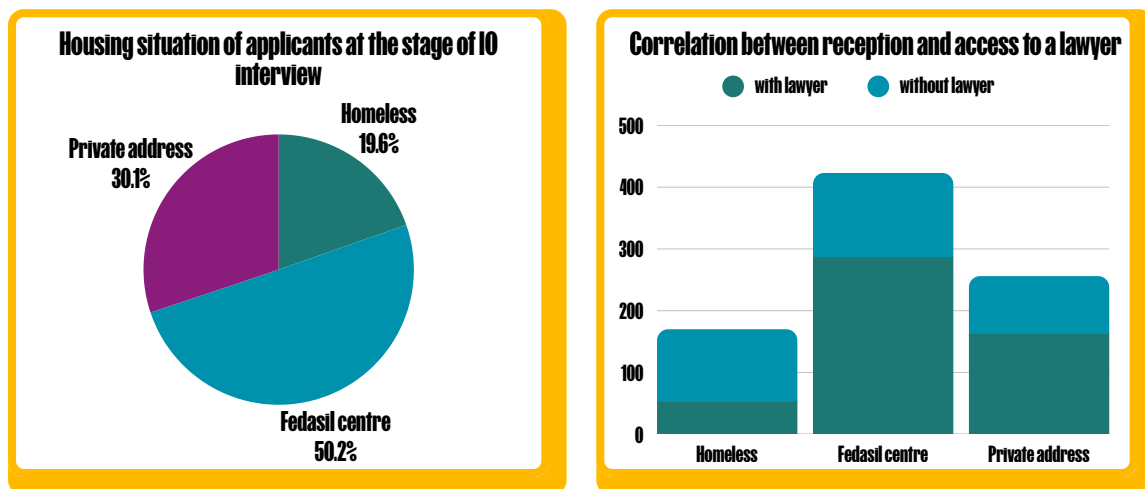
Startpunt also **noticed**, although not all that often, **police presence** at the Registration Centre. The police would usually come, ask IBZ for numbers of applicants and then leave.

## OBSERVATIONS AT PACHECO 44

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 (**52 referrals**), 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.

In total, the team recorded the data of **1001** applicants (which include single men, women, and families). Of those cases, **462** were for the first interview, **102** were for the interview for the subsequent procedure, **169** were Dublin cases, **16** were application after a “broken Dublin”, **73** cases were recorded for M-status interviews, **8** interviews for Temporary Protection, and **15** ICAM coaching appointments.



At the stage of the interview with the IO, **29%** 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 (**17%** of the total), access to a lawyer remained limited, with only **5% 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 other basic services.

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**The new entrance area remained confusing and chaotic during the second quarter.** Applicants often struggled to identify the correct entrance and as a result, many people continued to gather around the Pacheco 44 sliding doors, creating uncertainty, tension with staff, and safety concerns.

The lack of a designated waiting area further contributed to the disorder. Applicants frequently waited in the street or near the parking entrance, where ongoing construction works, heavy machinery, noise, and limited space made the **area unpleasant and insecure**. These conditions also made it more difficult for staff to communicate clearly with applicants.

**Accessibility** also remained limited. Although people with strollers or mobility difficulties were allowed to use the Pacheco 44 staff entrance, the arrangement appeared informal and depended largely on **Startpunt staff redirecting applicants to the appropriate access point**.

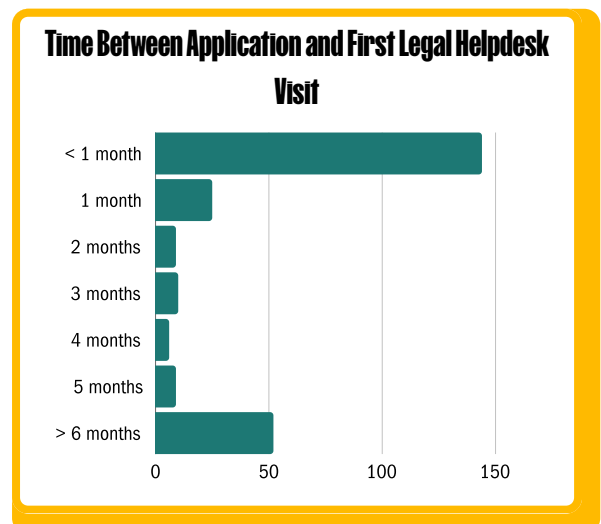
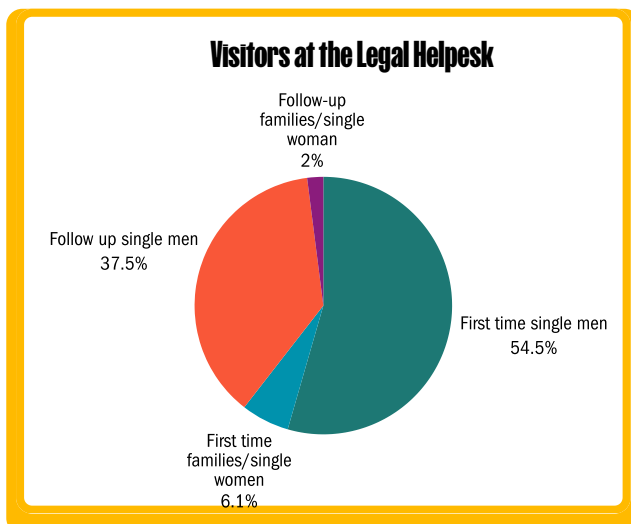


### TRENDS AT THE LEGAL HELPDESK

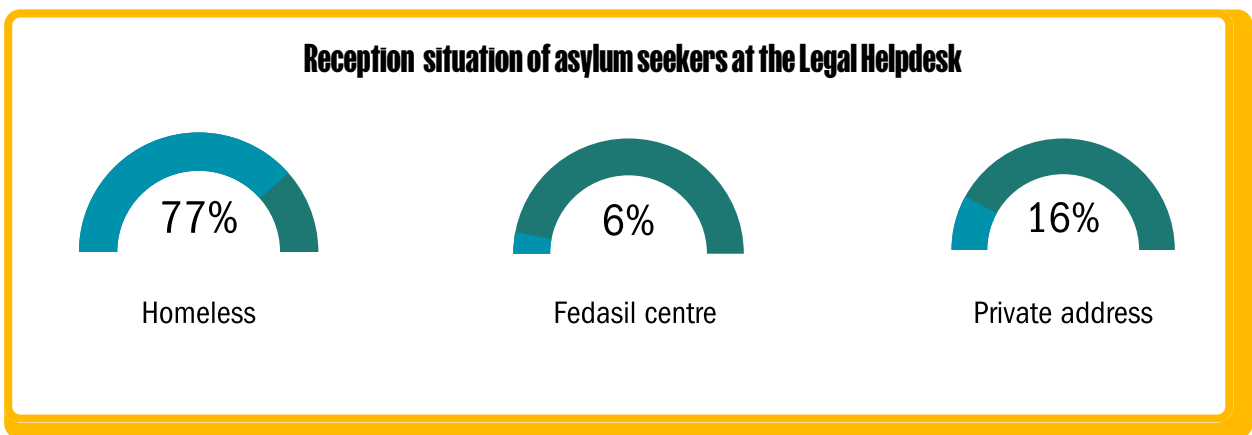
Between April and June, the Legal Helpdesk saw a **significant decrease** in visitors compared with the same period in 2025. Startpunt believes this decline may be linked to several factors, with the main factor being the overall decrease in applications at the Immigration Office. The team continues to make sustained efforts to reach more people. During this period, the Legal Helpdesk welcomed an average of **21 visitors** per shift, with the highest number recorded on Friday 26th June (**48 visitors**).

Legal Helpdesk – 2nd Quarter 2026					
Month	First time		Follow-up		Total
	Single men	Families & women	Single men	Families & women	
April	102	13	73	1	189
May	113	15	87	9	224
June	163	14	100	4	281
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>694</b>

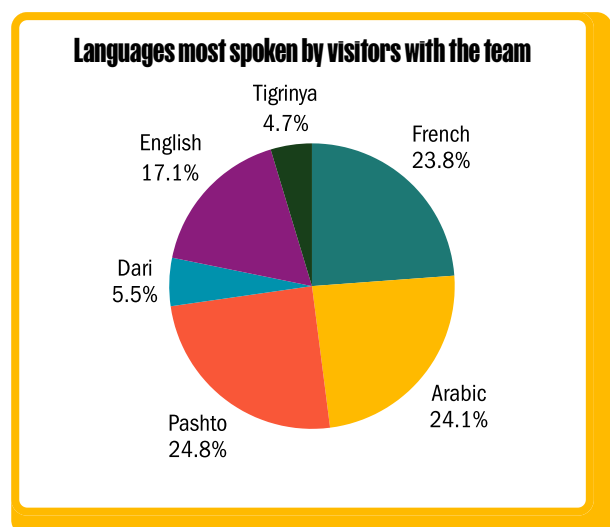
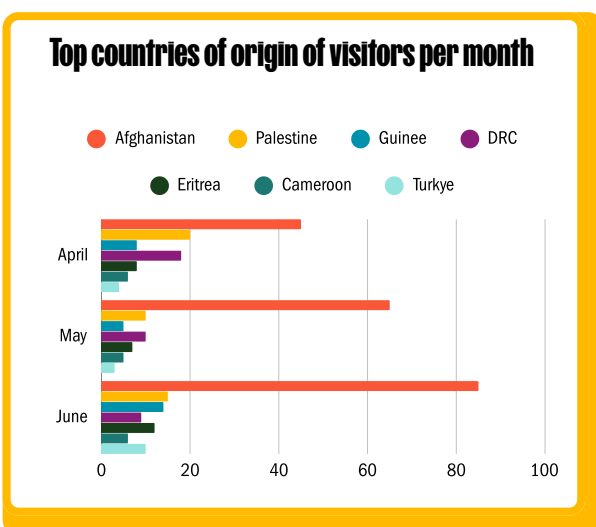
The team reached the greatest share of people **within the first month after their registration**, ensuring timely access to legal advice and a lawyer.



Throughout the second 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 temporary shelter solutions.



Startpunt continued to support applicants in accessing **homelessness accommodation** through **Samusocial**, while also increasingly relying on alternative short-term emergency accommodation. Nonetheless, **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.



### M-STATUS

Despite the Constitutional Court of 26 February 2026 ruling that suspended the application of 2025 legislation that limited reception for beneficiaries of protection in other EU member states (so-called “M-status” applicants), M-status applicants **remain subject to measures excluding them from reception.**

In a first period after the ruling, the Minister of Asylum and Migration announced that she would continue to refuse shelter to applicants with an M-status stating that the Aliens Act provides for another legal basis to continue treating these applications as “subsequent applications” and refusing reception to the applicants involved. Several NGO’s, including Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, lodged an appeal at the Council of State requesting for the suspension in extreme urgency of this instruction, arguing that the legal basis the Minister refers to is exactly the one that had been questioned by the Constitutional Court. On 27 March 2026, the Council of State suspended the instruction. After this suspension and increasing political pressure, the Minister withdrew her instruction.

In May, however, it was announced that **an accelerated procedure** would be applied to M-status applicants staying in reception centres. Their complete asylum procedure was announced to be completed within 2 weeks after their asylum application. This raised serious concerns regarding their access to legal aid, since it is extremely difficult to assign a lawyer who can prepare and assist these applicants in a timely manner.

On 19 June 2026, right after the EU Pact on Asylum and Migration entered into force, the minister issued a new instruction excluding all M-status applicants from reception, stating that the new Pact rules would allow for such an exclusion. However, this precise question is still pending before the European Court of Justice, upon preliminary request of the Constitutional Court in its 26 February ruling. Several NGO’s, including Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, have again appealed this decision in extreme urgency before the Council of State. A ruling is expected in the first week of July.

For more information on this and other legal and policy matters, subscribe to **Vluchtelingenwerk’s Newsletter [here](#).**



## Towards a period of uncertainty:

On 12 June, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into application, marking a major turning point in the way asylum, reception, responsibility-sharing and return procedures will be organised across the European Union. Presented as a framework to create more harmonised, faster and more predictable procedures, the Pact is composed of a broad package of legislative instruments that reshape the entire asylum process. In practice, the Pact introduces several structural changes that are likely to affect applicants from the very first moment of contact with the asylum system:

- **Screening Regulation:** introduces mandatory external and on the territory screening for third-country nationals who arrive without required entry documents or are apprehended after entering the territory. Screening may last up to seven days at the external border and includes identification, security, health and vulnerability checks.
- **Asylum and Migration Management Regulation:** replaces and expands the Dublin regulation by setting new rules on responsibility for asylum applications, while also introducing a solidarity mechanism between Member States.
- **Eurodac Regulation:** expands the collection, retention and use of biometric and personal data, including for children from the age of six. The database will play a stronger role in identifying applicants, tracking movements between EU+ countries and supporting responsibility and return procedures.
- **Asylum Procedures Regulation:** further standardises asylum procedures, including accelerated, subsequent and border procedures, and reinforces the consequences of non-compliance, including the possibility of implicit withdrawal.
- **Reception Conditions Directive:** reshapes reception standards and introduces additional grounds that may affect access to material assistance, including in situations where applicants are considered not to cooperate with the procedure.
- **Return Border Procedure Regulation:** establishes a specific return procedure for applicants whose claims are rejected in the border procedure, strengthening the link between asylum decisions and return measures.

Finally, the Pact also introduces a new crisis framework:

- **Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation:** allows Member States facing a crisis situation, particularly at the external borders, to request support and derogate from certain ordinary rules, including by extending deadlines or departing from ordinary procedural standards.



Although the Pact formally strengthens some safeguards, including the right to information and legal counselling, its overall balance also shifts significant responsibility onto applicants. The new framework places strong emphasis on a broad **duty of cooperation**: applicants are expected to remain available, provide information quickly, comply with procedural steps and follow instructions from the authorities. When these obligations are not met, the consequences may be severe, including the implicit withdrawal of the application, the closure of the file, or restrictions on material reception conditions. This is particularly concerning for families, children and people in vulnerable situations. A missed appointment, a misunderstanding, a lack of access to information, language barriers, homelessness or the absence of legal assistance may now carry **disproportionate consequences**. In other words, procedural complexity risks being translated into personal responsibility, even where applicants are not realistically in a position to understand or comply with all requirements. Moreover, we fear that more people will receive negative decisions based on 'technical' reasons such as lack of cooperation, non-admissibility, safe third country, and etc. The result will be that less people will be effectively heard on the merits of their protection claim, and will end up in never-ending Dublin and admissibility procedures.

This uncertainty is not theoretical. Over the last few months, the team has already encountered applicants facing increasingly complex procedures, including accelerated procedures and Dublin-related cases. In response, the team has developed practical information materials to help people better understand their rights, obligations and possible next steps during a period of rapid legal and institutional change. **Timely information provision and orientation towards legal aid provided at the LHD therefore becomes even more crucial**

The coming months will also place significant pressure on key institutions. The Commissary-General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) will have to adapt its decision-making and procedural organisation within a short timeframe; Fedasil will continue to face pressure from people in need of shelter; and the Immigration Office will need to expand and adjust registration, interview and vulnerability assessment practices. **For applicants and civil society organisations, the main challenge will be to navigate a system that is becoming more technical, more demanding and less forgiving, while ensuring that people do not fall through the gaps created by implementation delays, unclear procedures or lack of access to support.**