QUARTERLY REPORT

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2026

VLUCHTELINGENWERK STARTPUNT

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.





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KEY NUMBERS

Startpunt gave advice and referral to legal assistance and social services to around **3660** people at the **registration centre** and around **898** persons at the **Cube**

The **Legal Helpdesk** received a total of **980 visits: 774** first-time visits, **206** came to follow up on their case

At the **stage of the interview** with the IO, **17%** of people Startpunt talked to had **access to a lawyer. 60%** of applicants coming to the **LHD** got **access to legal assistance within the first month of their application**

Of the 227 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the LHD, 73% were homeless**
Of the 777 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at Cube, 19% were homeless**

Top 3 nationalities of **visitors at the LHD: 23% Afghans**; **12% Eritreans**; **8% Palestinians**
Top 3 nationalities of **applicants for IP (data: CGRS): 44% Afghans**; **38% Palestinians**; **28% Eritreans**

29 volunteers joined the Startpunt activities speaking **18 languages: English, French, Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, Dutch, German, Tigrinya, Ahmaric, Russian, Ukrainian, Chechen, Somali, Portuguese.**

9% of the number of applicants who filed an asylum request found their way to the LHD.

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OBSERVATIONS AT THE REGISTRATION CENTRE

Throughout the third quarter of the year, Startpunt continued to observe **a relative decrease** in the number of people queuing in the morning to register for international protection. Most registrations took place on Mondays, with the highest number—**205 applicants**—recorded on Monday 24th August. This **downward trend** is confirmed by the official statistics of the Immigration Office and CGRS: between July and September 2025, a total of 9061 people applied for asylum compared to the total of 6232 applicants during the same period in 2026. This represents a **31%** decrease in the span of a year.[1]

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. This, which is usually caused by insufficient unclear signage, was made worse by an increasing presence of **construction work**. The presence of heavy machinery and ongoing construction activity not only produced inconsistencies in queue management and the organization of applicant flows, but it often also resulted in very concerning **safety hazards** for both applicants and Startpunt staff. These conditions further contributed to the registration centre's already unwelcoming environment.

The only silver lining was, surprisingly, the **bike lane** which no longer posed a safety risk to applicants or staff as the distance between the lane and the applicants' entrance has been widened, likely as a temporary measure during the ongoing construction work.





[1] See ASYLUM STATISTICS: SEPTEMBER 2026.

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OBSERVATIONS AT PACHECO 44

While it has passed enough time for the entrance area to be more recognisable and less confusing, challenges related to accessibility and safety at the Immigration Office, Pacheco 44, continued throughout this quarter. More specifically, main concerns involved **unclear access arrangements** and **insufficient guidance** for applicants. While access to the Immigration Office remained appointment-based, with the gate generally opening around **8:15**, a tendency to u**nclear opening times, temporary closures and unannounced delays**, often caused unnecessary stress to applicants. For instance, in several occasions, shortly after opening, the automatic door would suddenly close without any notice, leaving applicants with early interviews concerned about arriving on time.

ARRESTS

Another worrying trend that Startpunt witnessed at Pacheco 44 was an **increasing police presence**. Throughout the quarter, the volunteers heard of and witnessed arrests of people that were there to attend their interview. While it is too early to assume a correlation between implementation of the EU Pact and a rise in AMMR detentions, it would not be untrue to say that they accounted for the majority of arrests. However, there does seem to be no distinguishing factor, as applicants with M-status and other procedures were also targeted. Although we do not have sufficient information, this is an issue that is worth continuing to monitor, which is why Startpunt has been working closely with the **Move Coalition**.

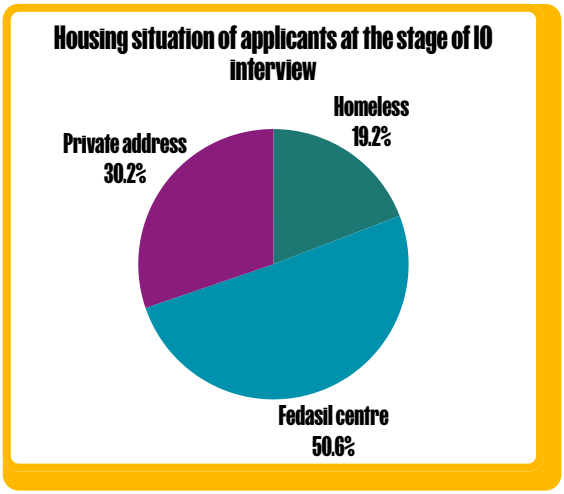


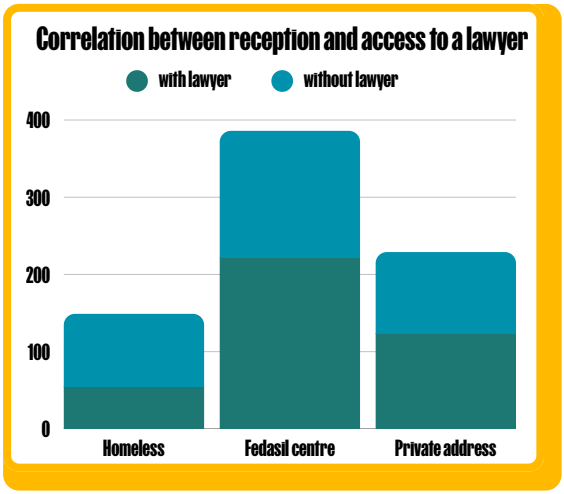
KEY NUMBERS

In total, the team recorded the data of **865** applicants which include single men, women, and families. Of those cases, **364** were for the first interview. Most people Startpunt meets at the Cube continue to be applicants attending their first asylum interview. Since the EU Asylum and Migration Pact entered into force in June 2026, Startpunt has observed a rapid increase in applicants in the accelerated procedure whose interviews take place very shortly after they apply for asylum. On several occasions, volunteers met applicants who had registered for asylum just one or two days earlier. This raises serious concerns about their right to legal counselling, as none had been able to consult a legal advisor before their first interview.

Another notable figure is that **211** cases fell under **AMMR** (previously **Dublin**), confirming the emphasis recently put on preventing secondary movements.

Other procedures included 59 applicants undergoing a subsequent procedure, 31 attending interviews after Belgium assumed responsibility for their asylum applications following an AMMR procedure, 64 cases involving M-status interviews, and 17 involving ICAM coaching appointments. Finally, 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, with more than **64 cases** where applicants had been incorrectly directed to Pacheco 44. In line with trends observed in previous months, the number of applicants attending Temporary Protection interviews further decreased.





At the stage of the interview with the IO, only **26%** 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 **6% of homeless applicants having legal assistance**. In this context, Startpunt refers 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.

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TRENDS AT THE LEGAL HELPDESK

Between July and September, the number of visitors at the Legal Helpdesk showed **a significant increase** compared to the number of visitors of the previous quarters. Startpunt attributes this to the implementation of the EU Pact, which has led to increasingly complex and urgent cases, and to the closure of several homelessness shelters in Brussels, leaving more people on the streets in need of assistance.

During this quarter, providing timely, high-quality legal assistance was often challenging due to reduced team capacity, difficulties faced by Bar associations' legal aid offices in assigning lawyers within the very short deadlines imposed by the new legislation, and, more broadly, disruptions caused by the summer holidays.

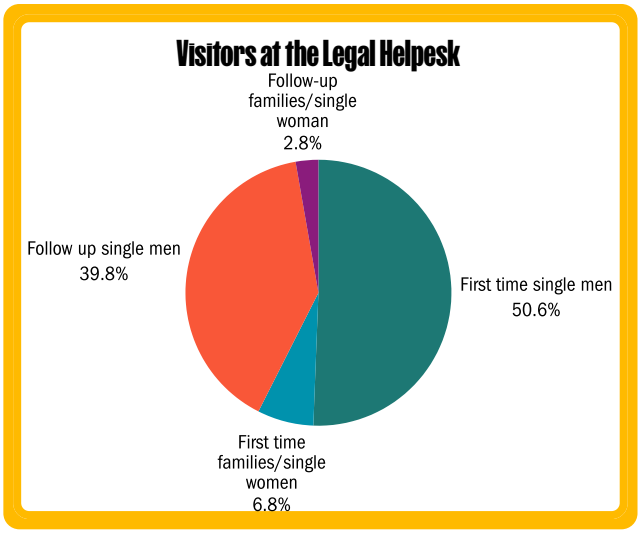
Overall, the team reached 980 applicants, 286 more than the previous quarter. During this period, the Legal Helpdesk welcomed an average of **25 visitors** per shift, with the highest number recorded on Wednesday 26th August (**38 visitors**).

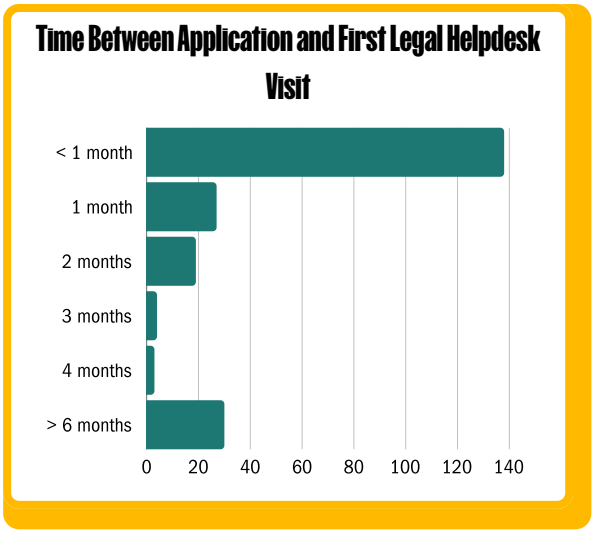
Legal Helpdesk – 3rd Quarter 2026					
Month	**First time**		**Follow-up**		**Total**
	Single men	Families & women	Single men	Families & women	
July	199	26	131	10	**366**
August	162	23	129	8	**322**
September	135	18	130	9	**292**
Total	**496**	**67**	**390**	**27**	**980**

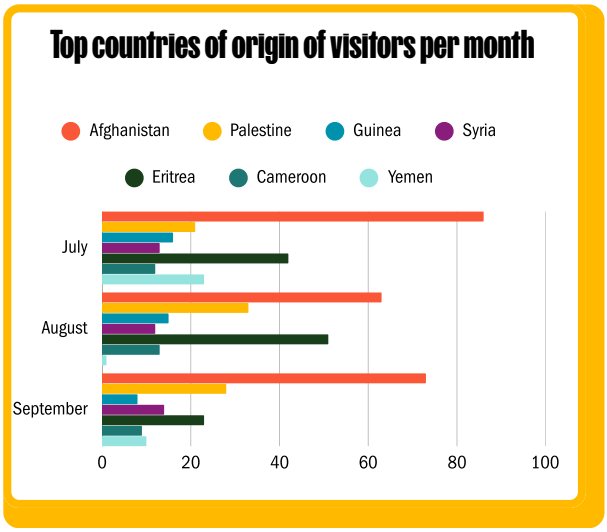
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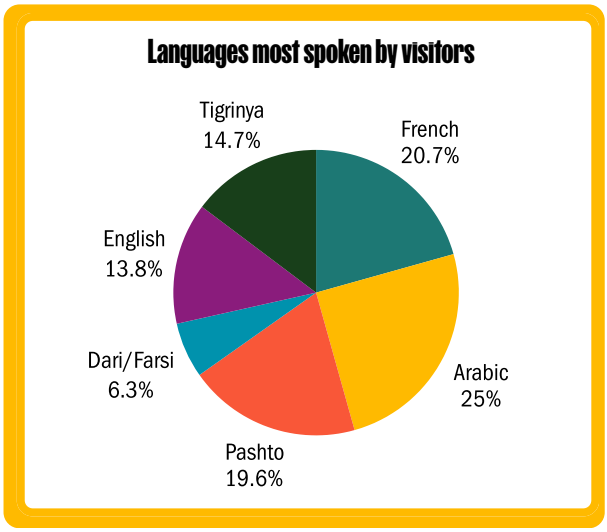
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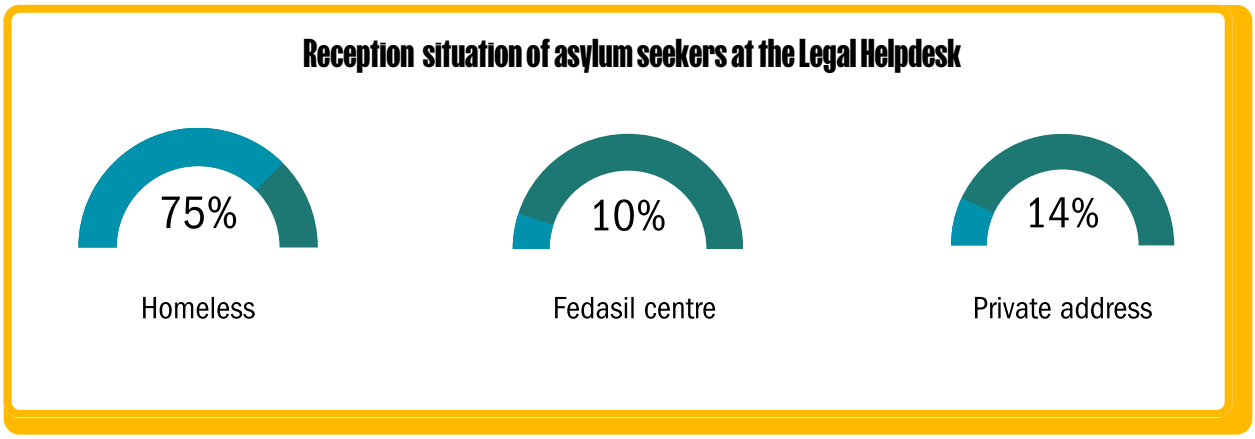
Notwithstanding the difficulties, the team managed to reach the greatest share of people **within the first month after their registration**, ensuring timely access to legal advice and a lawyer. This was furthermore important during this quarter as, following the EU PACT implementation, timely access to legal assistance was imperative for procedures with very short deadlines. The team repeatedly had to find solutions for people in accelerated or AMMR procedures with only a few days remaining in the 10-day period to appeal a final decision. By the end of the quarter, such cases were treated as routine rather than urgent.











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 previous quarters, **access to the reception network remained limited**, with waiting times for a place in a Fedasil centre stabilising at approximately **three and a half week** from the date of application. As a result, Startpunt continued to encounter a significant number of applicants in a **homeless condition,** and regularly redirected them to emergency and temporary shelter solutions. **This, unfortunately, was not limited solely to single men, as has generally been the case, but also extended to many families with children and individuals with severe vulnerabilities.**

Startpunt continued to help applicants access emergency accommodation through Samusocial or other short-term options, but often could not secure even temporary shelter. Following implementation of the EU Pact, more categories of applicants were excluded from asylum reception. Meanwhile, the minister's decision to end funding for homelessness accommodation led to the closure of some Brussels shelters. As a result, **Startpunt repeatedly found no accommodation options, leaving vulnerable families without shelter.** The situation was worse in July, when Samusocial had to turn away **four out of five** families seeking shelter.[2]

Startpunt is deeply concerned about how the approaching winter will affect the many applicants still without adequate shelter.



[2] No reception place for 4 out of 5 families at Brussels homeless organisation