

QUARTERLY REPORT

April - June 2025

Startpunt, as part of the Policy and Support team of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen 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 building of the Immigration Office (IO) where interviews are organised (Cube - Pachecolaan 44). At both locations the team gives advice and information on the procedure and refers to other social and legal services if needed. 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 the policy work of Vluchtelingenwerk.

This report is based on observations by Startpunt during the second quarter of this year 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 information and referral to legal assistance and social services to around **3000** people at the **registration centre**, primarily single men, and around **334** men, women and families at **CUBE**.¹



The **Legal Helpdesk** received a total of **976 visits**:
565 first time visits + 411 came to follow up on their case



At the **stage of the interview** with the IO, **61%** of people Startpunt talked to had **access to a lawyer**.
60% of applicants coming to the **LHD** got **access to a lawyer within the first month of their application**



Of the 410 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the LHD**, **68% were homeless**
Of the 230 people whose reception needs Startpunt recorded **at the IO**, **24% were homeless**



Top 3 nationalities of **visitors at the LHD**: 28.6% Afghans; 10.3% Palestinians; 9.3% Eritreans
Top 3 nationalities of **applicants for IP**: 13.6% Afghans; 12% Eritreans; 8.5% Palestinians³



32 volunteers joined the Startpunt activities speaking **20 languages** (Dari/Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi, Punjab, Spanish, Arabic, Somali, Kurdish, Turkish, Dutch, French, German, English, Tigrinya, Amharic, Bulgarian, Russian, Chechen, Italian)

[1] The recording of data at the IO at Cube only started in May and is not comprehensive.

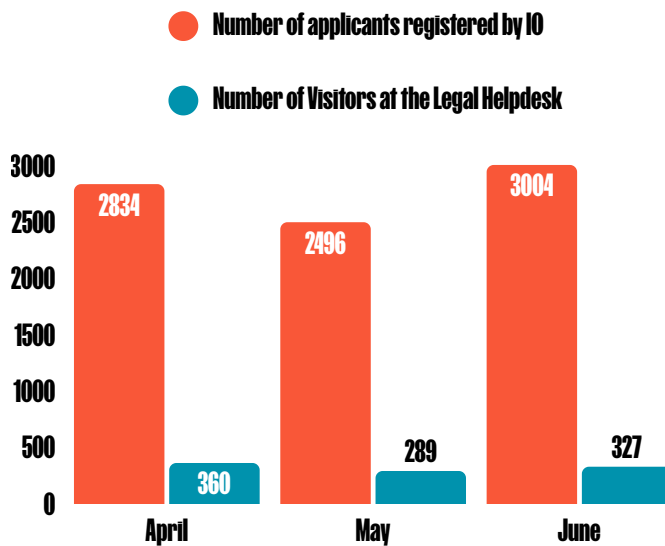
[2] As of 22 July 2025

[3] Asylum statistics June 2025 | CGVS

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Overview of numbers at the IO and the LHD



The number of visitors coming to the Legal Helpdesk mirrors the decrease and increase in number of applicants for International Protection in the second quarter of the year.

OBSERVATIONS AT THE REGISTRATION CENTRE

Over the second quarter of the year, Startpunt observed a **decline 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—301 applicants—recorded on Monday, May 5th. This decline aligns with the official statistics provided by the CGRS, showcasing a **relative decrease in the number of applications in between the first and second quarter of the year**, with 9,172 registrations between January and March and 8,334 registrations between April and June.³

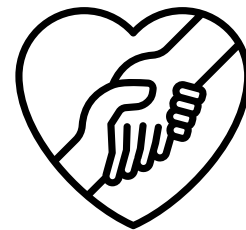
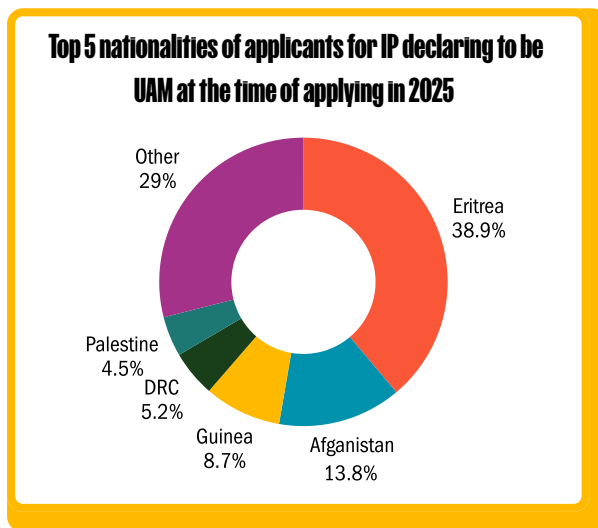
The registration office continues to **open its doors at 7:10 am**. Based on the low numbers that were already recorded in March 2025 and the small number of people arriving after 8 am, Startpunt decided to increase its outreach. Thus, instead of staying until the doors close, the team is staying until 8 am at the registration centre. With the additional capacity, **Startpunt resumed its activity at the interview site at Cube, Pachecolaan 44**. There, between 8:00 and 9:00 am, Startpunt provides information on the interview and directs people to social and legal services as well as the registration centre.

[4]Asylum statistics June 2025 | CGVS, p. 2.

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Additionally, a **continuous increase of unaccompanied minors** (UAM, under the age of 18 years) that has been observed by Startpunt directly corresponds with the applications of UAM recorded by IBZ, which has more than doubled from the beginning of the year (January: 81 (2.3% of total count), June: 219 (7.3% of total count)). In June, **more than half of UAMs were of Eritrean nationality**. Simultaneously, they are thus far the biggest group of UAM in the whole of 2025 (337 of 867).⁵



1 referral to Pagasa (an organization who supports **survivors of human trafficking**)

REGISTRATION CAPACITY

If the number of applicants exceeds the registration capacity of the IO (for which there is no officially communicated number), appointments are given, inviting applicants to come back on the same day or one of the following days. Within the second quarter, Startpunt witnessed **appointments being given on five different occasions**. These were the days with the highest numbers of applicants counted in line to register, namely the 14th of April, the 5th of May, and the 2nd, 10th, and 16th of June. On all **five days**, the number of people counted by Startpunt exceeded 225. Notably, the highest number of applicants that were admitted before appointments were given was 301. Overall, **287 appointments** were given **within the legal timeframe of 10 working days**.⁶ Thereby, the majority of the appointments (69%) invited the applicants to come back on the same day at 1 pm. Even though more appointments were given in comparison to the months before (108 in the first quarter of 2025), the practice of giving appointments beyond the legal timeframe of 10 working days has not been witnessed by Startpunt since early January this year.

[5] DEMANDEURS DE PROTECTION INTERNATIONALE - STAT VIB-DPI_FR_2025-06.pdf

[6] In accordance with Article 50, §2 of the Aliens Act a person's request to apply for international protection has to be registered within the three working days following the request. In case of a large number of people applying simultaneously rendering the three days difficult to meet in practice, the deadline of three days can be extended to ten working days.

PROCEDURES

Concerning procedures, Startpunt can report that once inside, **applicants whose Dublin decision has expired** are separated from the other cases so they can be processed faster and thus leave quicker.

From June on, Startpunt regularly witnessed the IO staff questioning **people in the family line more methodically** before allowing them to enter to ensure that people coming for **family reunification** have all the required documents with them and all the people involved in the procedure are present. Oftentimes, the concerning family does not have their papers with them, or the family member who has residency is not present. In these cases, the families wait outside and are reportedly let in later, at one of the instances when the doors are opened again - After closing at 8:45, the centre reopens hourly to check for waiting applicants, prioritising families and vulnerable individuals while asking single men to return the next day. However, Startpunt is not there to confirm this. Similarly, cases of registering children born or not born in Belgium during the ongoing procedure of the parents, both have to be present, which oftentimes is not the case. Consequently, these parents either have to come back on a later day or wait for their partner to come.

POLICE PRESENCE

Police presence continues to follow the same trend as in the first quarter of the year - **reduced presence**, which then only includes quick check-ins with the IO staff. Within the second quarter of this year, police was present four times. On one occasion, they arrived because of a medical emergency.

ACCESSIBILITY AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

Startpunt continues to observe and regularly raise several issues related to the safety and accessibility of the registration centre. Generally, the **entrance** to the registration centre is **not clearly visible**. Regularly, Startpunt observes people walking past the building, clearly looking for a sign, and who the team directs back to the entrance.

The **frequently used bike lane** next to the sidewalk, and thus to the queue, continues to pose a **safety risk** in the late morning. Applicants' awareness of the bike lane is predominantly nonexistent, and cyclists tend not to slow down.

Startpunt continues to observe that **access** for people in **wheelchairs** continues to be **granted** without problem through the wheelchair friendly entrance. At the same time, **especially single men with walking problems need to keep standing in the single men line** and cannot really sit down, except on the stone ledge right next to the entrance.

Additionally, for people standing in line, **no toilets** are provided. Access to facilities is only given once inside.

OBSERVATIONS AT THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE

BACK TO PACHECOLLAAN 44 - CUBE

Before the change in location of the registration centre in October 2024, both the registration and the interview with the IO (as part of the asylum procedure) took place at Pachecolaan 44. However, due to the location change, Startpunt had to cease its activities there, which involved advising applicants on their interviews and orienting them towards the Legal Helpdesk as well as other social services. While focusing on the activity at the registration centre the team was aware that there was a significant number of people coming to their Dublin or asylum interview unprepared, largely due to more asylum applicants being without a reception place or staying in precarious reception facilities (e.g. homelessness accommodation), where access to information on the asylum procedure is limited. This observation has led Startpunt to resume its activities at the Cube, Pachecolaan 44 from the second week of April onwards.

***“Going back to Cube feels important as the team not only provides guidance but presents a friendly face that can provide some positive energy”
Nadhem (Startpunt Volunteer)***

Due to its activities at the different locations - registration centre, interview site, and Legal Helpdesk - the Startpunt team has the unique opportunity to encounter applicants on multiple occasions, **ensuring they receive the necessary socio-legal support**, and giving information on specific procedures and the implications that they have on the rights and living situation of a person.

While the change in location of the registration centre to Belliard came with challenges, and the location continues to pose issues, including safety risks (see above), the division of the locations for registration and interviews comes with some upsides.

“Before everyone was sleeping there, there were a lot of homeless people. It was horrible to see the situation.” Nadhem (Startpunt Volunteer)

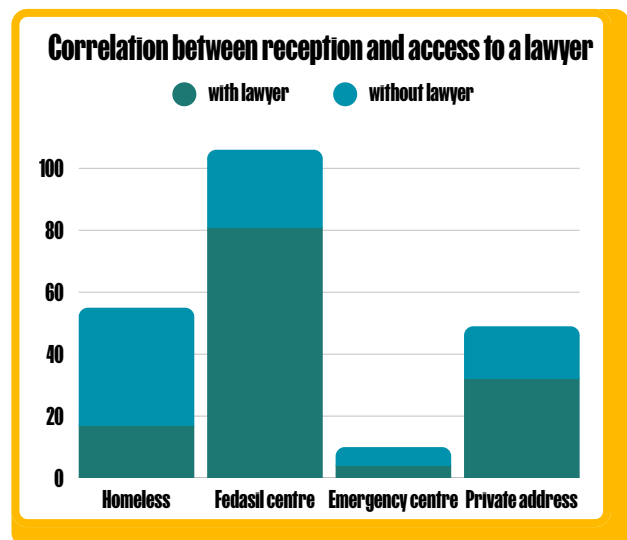
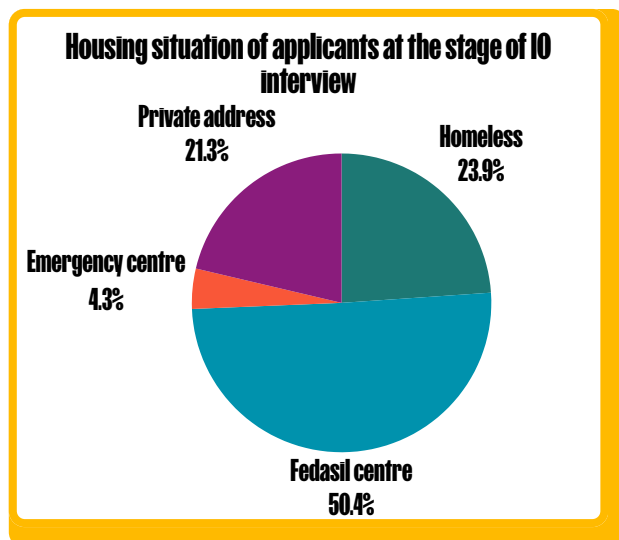
Prior, it was **not always clear whom the team needed to talk to**; there were people who wanted to register, people for the interview, homeless people, and people who were just lost. While now the team needs to regularly refer to the registration centre, having two distinctive sites means that there is no longer the need to decide who to prioritise in terms of giving information - people who register or people going for their interview. Thus, the Startpunt team can equally distribute their time and attention.

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In total, the team recorded the data of 276 cases (which include single men, women, and families). Of those cases, 180 were for the first interview, 35 for the interview for the Subsequent procedure, 52 were Dublin cases, 4 cases were recorded for M-status interviews, and 5 ICAM coaching.

Generally, the gate at Cube **opens** mostly around **8:30**, and those who have an appointment at 9am (possibly 9:30) are let in. Those with later appointments have to wait outside until approximately 30 minutes before their appointment. Regularly, Startpunt encountered people who want to extend their annexe when it has expired or correct a mistake on it, not knowing they need an appointment for it. Similarly, the team observes that many people are sent to Cube by their social assistants to register their child. In such cases, the team **redirects** people to Belliard or to the commune, depending on the situation.



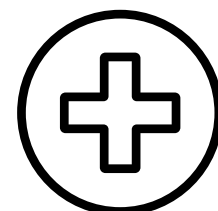
At the stage of the interview with the IO, 29% of the applicants Startpunt spoke to had a place in a Fedasil centre and access to a lawyer. However, **for those outside of the reception network** and without a private address, **access to a lawyer remains an exception** (only 30% of homeless applicants have a lawyer).



**56 referrals to the
Registration centre**



**4 referrals to CGRS
for the big interview**



**2 referrals to the
Red Cross Medical
Point**

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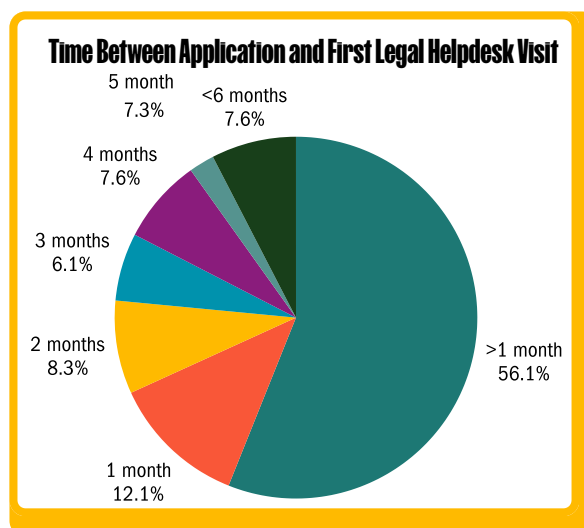
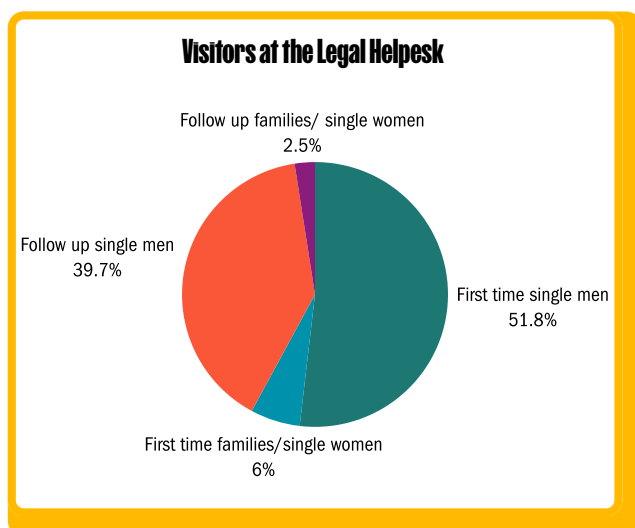
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TRENDS AT THE LEGAL HELPDESK

Between April and June the number of visitors at the Legal Helpdesk showed first an increase from the numbers of the first quarter, followed by a decrease in May and an increase again in June. On average, the LHD had **30 visitors per shift**, with a peak of 50 visitors on April 2nd.

Legal Helpdesk - 2end Quarter 2025					
Month	First time		Follow-up		Total
	Single men	Families & women	Single men	Families & women	
April	197	22	133	8	360
May	136	22	119	12	289
June	173	15	135	4	327
Total	506	59	387	24	976*

* The Legal Helpdesk was closed on the 21/04, 19/05 and 9/06

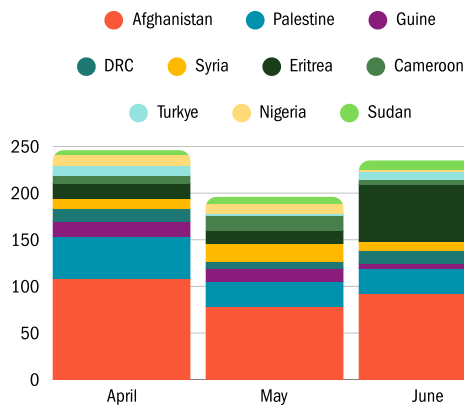


Regularly people are unaware of their (inadmissibility) decision. This includes people with lawyers and social assistance who are also unaware of the decisions leading to missed deadlines.

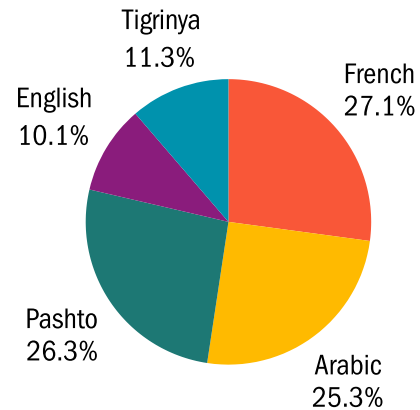
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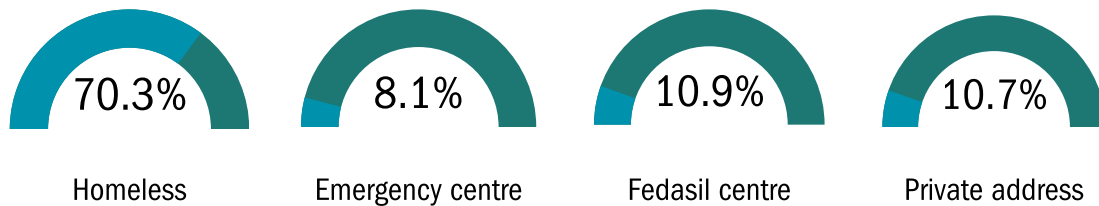
Top countries of origin of visitors per month



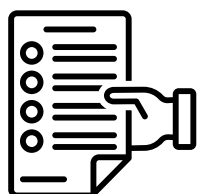
Languages most spoken by visitors with the team



Reception situation of asylum seekers at the Legal Helpdesk



Reception continues to be a problem for a majority of the applicants visiting the LHD. Within the timeframe of the second Quarter, the **waiting time for single men has reduced** from the previous 4 months to **2 months** from the day of application. Nevertheless, Startpunt continues to assist people to find temporary solutions, for instance by directing them or registering them directly with SAMU Social. However, registering with SAMU Social remains challenging for individuals who do not have a phone or SIM card. Although the official allocation of places is meant to occur at 16:00, in practice it often happens later, sometimes after 16:30. People without a phone have to wait at the helpdesk; sometimes they leave before receiving the reply, because they don't want to risk not receiving a place and want to secure other solutions before the night falls.



The team filled out around **454 request forms** for a legal aid lawyer.



6 M-status cases were counted (people who have already refugee status in another EU country)



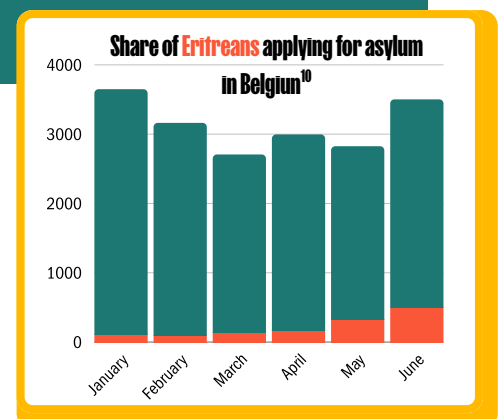
Road to Safety - Eritreans journey to Belgium

At the end of April, an increase in Eritrean nationals was observed at the registration centre, which persisted into the following months. By June, the increase in Eritreans applying for international protection also translated into the numbers at the LHD, with 61 (18.7%) applicants coming from Eritrea. During that time, Startpunt noted that a majority of Eritreans have fingerprints in Italy, and thus are in a Dublin procedure. These visitors reported that they were able to stay in the centre (if they had one) even after the negative decision had been issued. After contacting Fedasil, this trend could be confirmed. According to Fedasil, applicants with a Dublin decision to Italy continue to receive accommodation after their Dublin decision since Italy does not accept forced transfers.⁷

A great share of Eritreans coming to Belgium are minors. Most of them have come over the Mediterranean route to Europe. As of September 2025, 7,236 Eritreans have arrived over the central Mediterranean route to Europe⁸, whereby 2,213 have applied for asylum in Belgium. During the same time, the year before, only half the amount of Eritreans applied in Belgium.⁹ Rahwa, one of our Startpunt volunteers, is from Eritrea herself, and she believes that there are various interconnected reasons why young Eritreans choose to migrate to Belgium, reasons that are often highly personal.

“A significant factor might be the presence of family and friends. The established Eritrean community in Belgium acts as a crucial support network, offering a sense of familiarity, assistance with integration, and a social connection that can ease the challenges of starting a new life in a foreign country.”

Furthermore, the initial reason why the number of Eritreans fleeing their country has increased can be attributed to the deteriorating political situation in Eritrea. The ongoing state of "no war, no peace" with neighbouring Ethiopia has created a climate of instability and fear. While the indefinite military service has long been a key motivator for young people to leave, the renewed tensions and the looming threat of a potential war with Ethiopia are major catalysts. This fear is rooted in the fact that any future conflict would disproportionately affect the youth, as they would be the ones conscripted to fight. Faced with the prospect of being forced into a war, with the accompanying suffering and loss of life, many young people are taking immense risks to flee their country. The dangerous journey, including the perilous route across the Mediterranean Sea, is therefore not a choice but a last resort to escape what they see as an inevitable and devastating fate. (Rahwa)



[7] [Dublin Italy](#)

[8] [Migration flows: Eastern, Central and Western routes; Situation European Sea arrivals :Italy](#)

[9] [Les statistiques d'asile du mois de septembre 2025 | CGVS](#)

[10] [Les statistiques d'asile du mois de juin 2025 | CGVS](#)