

The end of the asylum procedure

During the entire period that his application is being examined, an asylum seeker has the right to stay at the reception structure. If a person is granted the refugee status, Belgium offers him protection and he receives a residence permit. The refugee will then have to find his own housing and may ask the municipality for financial support. This also applies for people who have been regularised or who are granted subsidiary protection.

If his asylum application is refused, and all possible appeals have failed, the asylum seeker receives an order to leave the territory. Some people leave Belgium under their own initiative, others are repatriated. Fedasil has a programme to support returns to the country of origin. If a person decides to return voluntarily, Fedasil helps him to prepare the journey. In addition to a relocation allowance, candidates wishing to return may apply for reintegration support. With the additional support, people may, for example, set up a small business or complete a training course in their country of origin.

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The reception of asylum seekers in Belgium

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RECEPTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

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Asylum in Belgium

Asylum is a competence of the federal government. All foreigners arriving in Belgium can apply for asylum. Applications are generally submitted at the Aliens Office (Brussels). The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) is in charge of examining the asylum applications.

The Geneva Convention (1951) defines the conditions which must be satisfied to grant the refugee status. By signing this convention, Belgium undertook to protect refugees on its territory. The CGRS may grant, refuse or withdraw the refugee status. Asylum seekers recognised as being refugees receive a resident's permit for an unlimited period. Since 2006, in addition to the refugee status, there is also the status of 'subsidiary protection'. This status may be granted to asylum seekers who do not meet the criteria of the refugee status, but who would be in real danger if they should return to their country of origin.

Material assistance

While their application is being examined, asylum seekers receive material assistance. This involves accommodation in a reception structure for asylum seekers (in a collective centre or individual housing). Asylum seekers do not receive financial support.

Fedasil

Fedasil is the federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers in Belgium. It coordinates the reception and guidance of asylum seekers, either directly or together with partners.

After having submitted their application to the Aliens Office, asylum seekers go to Fedasil's dispatching service, located in the same building. Fedasil then allocates them a reception place. Asylum seekers are not obliged to stay in the reception structure allocated to them, but the majority of them do so.

Housing for asylum seekers

In principle, an asylum seeker starts by staying in a reception centre. There are about sixty reception centres in Belgium, spread around the country. They are managed by Fedasil, the Red Cross of Belgium or a different partner.

Next, depending on the number of available places, an asylum seeker can ask to be directed to an individual housing, better suited to his personal situation. This reception is organised by the social service of the municipality ('local reception initiatives') or by an NGO. Reception centres and individual housing together form a reception network managed by Fedasil and offering more than 23 500 reception places.



The functioning of a reception centre

The centres are 'open' locations: the residents are free to come and go as they wish. The reception centre is in charge of basic needs (accommodation, food, clothing), but also offers social, legal, medical and psychological support.

Community life is the main feature of a reception centre. The centre has many communal spaces (refectory, bathrooms, rest rooms). Families stay in a separate room, whereas single people have to share a room. General house rules help to organise this cohabitation.

To offer asylum seekers a meaningful way of passing their time as they wait for a decision, staff and volunteers organise several activities and courses at the reception centre. Every week, asylum seekers receive pocket money and by carrying out day tasks (meal distribution, cleaning of common areas, etc), they can earn some extra money. Six months after submitting their asylum application, and under certain conditions, asylum seekers may apply for a work permit.

Minors

Teenagers and children who have arrived in Belgium with their parents, stay with their family. One third of the residents in the reception structures are under the age of 18. As all minors in Belgium, they are obliged to attend school. Young people who have arrived without their parents, are entitled to specific reception and support.

