Reception - Belgium

Reception system

Overview

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Relevant EU legislation

Belgium is bound by the recast Reception Conditions Directive and has transposed its provisions through the Law of 21 November 2017 amending the Aliens Act.

National legislation

Law of 15 December 1980 on the entry, residence, settlement and removal of foreign nationals | Loi du 15 décembre 1980 sur l'accès au territoire, le séjour, l'établissement et l'éloignement des étrangers, Aliens Act

Royal Decree of 8 October 1981 on the entry, residence, settlement and removal of foreign nationals | Arrêté royal du 8 octobre 1981 sur l'accès au territoire, le séjour, l'établissement et l'éloignement des étrangers, Aliens Decree

Law of 12 January 2007 on the reception of asylum applicants and certain other categories of foreigners | Loi du 12 janvier 2007 sur l'accueil des demandeurs d'asile et de certaines autres catégories d'étrangers, Reception Act

Royal Decree of 16 April 2024 on the granting of material assistance to applicants for international protection receiving professional income and other categories of income | Arrêté royal du 16 avril 2024 relatif à l'octroi de l'aide matérielle aux demandeurs de protection internationale bénéficiant de revenus professionnels et autres catégories de revenus, Royal Decree on material reception conditions for employed applicants

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Royal Decree of 9 April 2007 determining manifestly unnecessary medical assistance and care which is not provided to the recipient of the reception and the daily medical assistance and care provided to the recipient of the reception | Arrêté royal du 9 avril 2007 déterminant l'aide et les soins médicaux manifestement non nécessaires qui ne sont pas assurés au bénéficiaire de l'accueil et l'aide et les soins médicaux relevant de la vie quotidienne qui sont assurés au bénéficiaire de l'accueil, Royal Decree on medical assistance for beneficiaries of reception

Royal Decree of 25 April 2007 determining the modalities for assessing the individual situation of the beneficiary of reception | Arrêté royal du 25 avril 2007 déterminant les modalités de l'évaluation de la situation individuelle du bénéficiaire de l'accueil, Royal Decree on the assessment of reception needs

Royal Decree of 9 April 2007 determining the regime and operating rules applicable to orientation and observation centres for unaccompanied foreign minors | Arrêté royal du 9 Avril 2007 déterminant le régime et les règles de fonctionnement applicables aux centres d'observation et d'orientation pour les mineurs étrangers non accompagnés, Royal Decree on OOC

Royal Decree of 2 September 2018 determining the regime and operating rules for reception facilities and the modalities for room supervision | Arrêté royal du 2 septembre 2018 déterminant le régime et les règles de fonctionnement applicables aux structures d'accueil et les modalités de contrôle des chambres, Royal Decree on reception facillities

Competent authority and stakeholders

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Authority responsible for reception	Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) | L'Agence fédérale pour l'accueil des demandeurs d'asile | Federaal agentschap voor de opvang van asielzoekers. Fedasil is a public interest organisation, under the responsibility of Minister of Migration and Asylum Policy since February 2025. Main areas of competence: According to Article 56 of the Reception Act, Fedasil is responsible for the reception of applicants for international protection and other target groups. It guarantees high-quality reception and conformity within the different reception structures. Additionally, Fedasil coordinates various voluntary return programmes. Fedasil is operational since 2002.
Other actors involved	Some collective reception centres are managed by partner organisations, such as the Belgian Red Cross (both the Flemish and the French-speaking bodies), Caritas or the Samusocial. The local Public Centres of Social Welfare of the municipalities (PCSWs) are in charge of the daily management of Local Reception Initiatives (LIRs). A few NGOs run facilities adapted to special reception needs.

Organisational aspects

The management of reception is split between the central and local level.

The reception network has about 100 collective centres (107 on 12 November 2024). Fedasil has 43 reception centres under its management. The other 64

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reception centres are managed by partner organisations (NGOs and private operators), which are contracted by Fedasil. They sign a contract that is typically applicable for several years or for an unlimited time. The contract is validated every year, and it can be amended whenever necessary to create additional reception places.

At the local level, there are individual accommodation facilities (local reception initiatives (LRI), *initiatives locales d'accueil* (ILA), *lokaal opvanginitiatief* (LOI)) which consist of individual or small-scale facilities distributed at the local level, managed either by the Public Centres of Social Welfare of the municipalities ((PCSW), *Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn* (OCMW), *Centre public d'action sociale* (CPA)) or by NGOs under the supervision of Fedasil.

Allocation of applicants to geographical areas within the territory

All applicants are in principle entitled to move freely within the territory of the country. Applicants may, if they wish, request to be accommodated. They are then assigned to a reception structure and are thus assigned a particular place of residence. Reception Act, Article 11(3) notes that Fedasil needs to assign a reception centre which is adapted to the profile of the applicant, within the limit of the available places: family status and composition, health, knowledge of one of the official languages of the country. It pays particular attention to the situation of vulnerable applicants. Fedasil takes into account the occupancy rate of the reception centres and the balanced distribution among municipalities for assigning applicants to LRIs.

Staff and training

Fedasil staff have access to a wide range of training opportunities to further develop their professional skills:

- Fedasil's own offer, with around 100 courses, ranging from legal training to self-defense, or from leadership skills to medical topics (see attached document for a full visual overview).
- The federal offer by BOSA (cross-cutting training provided by the federal administration).
- The possibility to request educational leave.

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To this end, Fedasil has an online learning platform where staff can register autonomously, subject to their supervisor's approval.

In addition, the Agency also makes use of the training curriculum developed by the EUAA. This is often done through train-the-trainer modules, in which Fedasil nominates a pool of internal trainers to be trained by EUAA, who in turn pass on the knowledge to colleagues in Belgium. Another way in which the EUAA curriculum is used is through participation in e-learnings or webinars.

A special focus is placed on trainings related to vulnerabilities: for example, courses on female genital mutilation, illiteracy, dealing with suicide, LGBT applicants, residents with psychological issues, and more. These are offered alongside a general introductory module on vulnerabilities.

Reception phases

Reception phases in principle correspond to the type of reception facility to which applicants are assigned. Applicants are first assigned to a collective reception centre. In exceptional cases, applicants are first accommodated in emergency structures for a reasonable period and for as short as possible when there is a mass influx and the usual reception capacity is full.

Applicants are entitled to reception from the moment they make an application. Registration of the application for international protection takes places in Belliard Street since October 2024.

Applicants receive a proof of asylum application (Annex 26 or Annex 26quinquies) when lodging the application with the Immigration Office. Due to the current pressure on the reception system, the applicant may or may not receive direct access to the reception network. This is the case for single men with no major vulnerability.

Applicants who do not receive direct access to the reception network are informed by immigration authorities of the need to register in one of Fedasil's waiting lists. They can be invited to receive a place on a later date, in which case they are asked to present themselves at the Arrival Centre. Applicants who receive direct access to the reception network are asked to present themselves at the Arrival Centre, where Fedasil will allocated them to a reception place. Applicants are transferred to the reception part of the Arrival Centre or another reception centre in the first phase.

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Fedasil provides the bus or train ticket and the itinerary to the allocated reception facility and applicants must reach the accommodation on their own with public transport within 1 day – otherwise their place is lost and they must start the procedure again.

Applicants are entitled to material reception until they are granted a legal stay for more than 3 months.

Legislation was amended in 2024 on the effects of a negative decision. Article 6(1) of the Reception Act explicitly states that the person must leave the reception facility within 30 days of the notification of the final negative decision on the application for international protection. Prior to this, the applicant would be expected to leave reception “until the deadline on the order to leave the territory is expired and there is no possibility for suspensive appeal”. Thus, the law now provides a shorter and clearer timeframe when reception ends. The modification of the law legalises open return places and Dublin places, justifying these designations and the specific pathway for residents within the reception network.

However, based on Article 7 of the Reception Act, Fedasil may prolong the provision of material reception in the case of a negative decision when:

- The rejected applicant has a family member or is under the guardianship of a person who is still entitled to reception;
- The rejected applicant requested a prolongation for the delay on the order to leave the territory to be able to finish the school year (maximum 3 months before the end of the school year);
- The rejected applicant is 7-months pregnant or more;
- The rejected applicant requested a prolongation for the delay on the order to leave the territory as he/she is not able to return to the country of origin due to circumstances beyond his/her will;
- The rejected applicant is a parent to a child with Belgian nationality and requests a residence permit on this basis;
- The rejected applicant requests a residence permit for certified medical reasons and he/she is not able to leave the reception facility;
- In particular circumstances related to the respect of human dignity.

Contingency planning

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Belgium has a buffer policy in place. Buffer places are unused places that can be operationalised on short notice and paid at a reduced rate by the Belgian state (this increases to the standard tariff, if they become operational). They are used if there is an influx of arrivals and to avoid opening new centres or allow for enough time to open a new centre. Buffer places are ideally located within the existing reception centres, but they can also be in other buildings (government institution, NGOs, private owners, private operators, etc.). They are in collective reception centres as a main rule, but exceptionally individual buffer places may also be created if the need arises. Buffer places exist also for applicants with specific reception needs.

Fedasil has contracts with partner organisations or agreements with private or other government institutions in order to create buffer places. A new buffer site cannot be created without a reception partner: it must be clear in advance which reception partner is responsible for running the site. Fedasil aims to have a balanced distribution among reception partners and an equal distribution geographically. The operating partners are in discussion with the relevant local authorities to anticipate and discuss the eventual activation.

Buffer places are typically activated or deactivated within 2 weeks to 3 months. The maximum time foreseen for activation is 2 months and for deactivation 3 months.

Emergency places are opened up exceptionally and temporarily, only when no buffer places are available.

Due to the ongoing reception crisis, all buffer and emergency places are currently operational.

Facilities

Overview of different types of reception facilities according to national classification

Emergency structures: Reception Act, Article 18 clarifies that applicants may be accommodated in emergency structures “only for a reasonable period for as short as possible” when there is a mass influx of arrivals and the usual reception capacity is full.

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Applicants receive social support services in this case, but their basic needs must be met, the level of which is defined based on an individual evaluation of the specific needs matching the applicants' profile.

Applicants receive the necessary social and medical support provided by a mobile team operating on-site. The Agency ensures that individuals referred to these emergency facilities possess a sufficient degree of autonomy—both in terms of daily functioning and medical condition. As a result, vulnerable groups—such as pregnant women beyond 27 weeks, individuals with psychiatric disorders, those requiring dialysis, cancer patients, and others with similar vulnerabilities—are automatically excluded from this structure.

This includes all necessary support: meals, accommodation, access to sanitary facilities and medical support.

Reception centres (*centres d'accueil, opvangcentra*):

Collective accommodation for beneficiaries of reception. Applicants are first temporarily accommodated in a first-phase accommodation, which is the short period just after submitting a request for international protection, during which Fedasil looks for the most suitable reception place for the applicant for international protection. First-phase reception is provided at the arrival centre. As a result of the saturation of the reception network, additional first-phase places have been created in centres of Fedasil and partners. The first-phase reception of unaccompanied minors is organised in observation and orientation centres (OOC) of Fedasil and with partners.

Subsequently the second-phase reception starts. Overall, the reception network has about 100 collective centres. The remaining centres are managed by partner organisations contracted by Fedasil. Some have specific places for unaccompanied minors or medically vulnerable people. Some centres are exclusively for unaccompanied foreign minors. Since summer 2023, Fedasil has had a dedicated centre in Alveringem for refugees accommodated under the resettlement programme in Belgium.

Individual: Local reception initiatives (LRI) (initiatives locales d'accueil (ILA), lokale opvang initiatieven (LOI)) are distributed at the local level, managed either by the Public Centres of Social Welfare of the municipalities (PCSW) (Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn (OCMW), Centre public d'action sociale (CPAS)), the Communities (French and Dutch) or by NGOs (Caritas, Ciré), under the overall supervision of Fedasil.

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Fedasil supervises the organisation of individual or small-scale reception facilities. Applicants with corresponding special reception needs are in principle directly assigned to individual or small-scale reception facilities, while other applicants may be transferred to these facilities if they belong to a nationality with high recognition rate (80%) or if they have obtained a residence status.

Premises at the border

Name of the reception facility	Transit centre (*centre de transit / transitcentrum*). Closed centres for illegal migrants may also be used (*centre fermé pour étrangers illégaux/gesloten centrum voor illegalen*).
Access description	Closed
Management	Immigration Office
Type of applicants accommodated	Applicants in the framework of the border procedure, amongst others.
Number of centres	6 closed centres, including 1 transit centre. 3 additional centres were planned to open (500 places).

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Capacity	1) Transit Centre Caricole – max. capacity: 114 2) Repatriation Centre 127bis – max. capacity: 120 3) Centre for Illegal Migrants Brugge – max. capacity: 112 4) Centre for Illegal Migrants Merkplas – max. capacity: 196 5) Centre for Illegal Migrants Vottem – max. capacity: 119 6) Centre for Illegal Migrants Holsbeek – max. capacity: 28 Planned detention centres: 7) Closed Departure Centre Steenokkerzeel – capacity: 50 8) Centre for Illegal Migrants Jumet – capacity: 180 + 20 buffer 9) Centre for Illegal Migrants Jabbeke – capacity : 112 (replacement of existing centre Brugge)
Location of the centres within the country	Caricole Transit Centre and Repatriation Centre 127 bis in Steenokkerzeel, near the Brussels international airport. Closed centres in Bruges, Merksplas, Vottem and Holsbeek. Two additional closed centres are planned to open in Jumet (Charleroi) and Steenokkerzeel. The closed centre in Jabbeke replaces the existing centre in Bruges.

Initial reception centres

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Name of the reception facility	Arrival centre - the Immigration Office decided to temporarily move the registration desk from the arrival centre to Belliard Street awaiting for a more suitable solution.
Regime	Open
Management	Fedasil and partners
Type of applicants accommodated	All applicants
Number of centres	12
Capacity	2811 (as of 20 August 2025)
Location of the centres within the country	Petit Château, Bordet, Woluwé-Saint-Lambert, Jabbeke, Bordet Anderlecht, COO Auderghem, COO Neder-Over-Hembeek, COO Woluwé-Saint-Pierre, COO Steenokkerzeel, COO Overijse, Sungy,

Collective accommodation centres

Name of the reception facility	Reception centre (*centre d'accueil / opvangcentrum*) (Note: Time-out and Alverigem already calculated here)
Regime	Open
Management	Fedasil and partners
Type of applicants accommodated	All applicants, as well as unaccompanied minors who have not applied for international protection. Click here for updates on statistics on the profile of residents in general.
Number of centres	About 100. Click here for any eventual changes in the number after validation

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Capacity	Overall, 35,210 places (total), but 27,007 collective centres. 9912 managed by Fedasil (+1.611 places in the first phase and 400 open return places) 8,782 managed by the Red Cross 6.357 managed by Rode Kruis 1,778 managed by other partner organisations 1,266 managed by private contractors These numbers reflect the capacity as of 20 August 2025. Information related to capacity is regularly updated on Fedasil's website.
Location of the centres within the country	Fedasil aims for geographically-balanced distribution. Click here for the current number and location of the reception centres.

Individual accommodation centres (such as private houses, flats, hotels)

Name of the reception facility	Local reception initiative (LRI) (*initiative locales d'accueil (ILA), lokaal opvanginitiatief (LOI)*) Individual houses managed by NGOs.
Regime	Open
Management	Fedasil and partners
Type of applicants accommodated	All applicants who have requested a transfer and belong to a nationality with a recognition rate above 80% or who have already obtained a residence status. Applicants with corresponding special reception needs should be directly assigned to a place in an LRI, when places allow.
Number of centres	Variable
Capacity	As of 20 August 2025: Overall, 4.476 places 4,560 places managed by CPAS 622 places managed by partner organisations. Click here for the current number of available places by type of reception, under the heading "Le réseau d'accueil".

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Location of the centres within the country	Fedasil aims to create LRI places in a geographically-balanced manner.

Temporary solutions when housing capacities is temporarily exhausted

Name of the reception facility	Emergency structures (*centre d'hébergement d'urgence / noodopvangcentrum)*
Regime	Open
Management	Fedasil and partners
Type of applicants accommodated	Families with a sufficient level of autonomy, both in terms of daily functioning and medical needs (vulnerable groups automatically excluded from this type of structure)
Number of centres	5
Capacity	448
Location of the centres within the country	Brussels

Reception facilities for applicants with special needs

Fedasil takes into account special reception needs and vulnerabilities when allocating reception places. There are special structures (typically within collective reception centres) for families with children and persons with physical disabilities.

There is a special reception trajectory for unaccompanied minors who spend 2-4 weeks in an Observation et Orientation Centre (COO) (*Centre d'Observation et Orientation et d'Observation / Observatie-en Oriëntatiecentrum*). They are then transferred to an adapted reception facility: federal reception centre, reception centre operated by a Fedasil partner or – for minors younger than 15 years and the particularly vulnerable – a special accommodation managed by communities in collaboration with and co-financed by Fedasil.

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There are special reception facilities for underage pregnant girls and single mothers (Fedasil centre in Rixensart). Furthermore, unaccompanied minors with behavioural issues or with a risk of behavioural issues are transferred to a special facility implementing the time-out trajectory. In this trajectory, the emphasis is on prevention rather than restoration.

The Fedasil reception centre in Saint-Trond implements an urgent time-out trajectory for unaccompanied minors who need to be immediately managed for being involved in a serious incident. The maximum length of the urgent time-out is 6 days. Different types of educative time-outs are implemented in the Fedasil reception centres in Saint-Trond and in Sugny (target group: young people aged 18-21) and in partner-run programmes in Bruxelles, Liege and Courtrai. The Fedasil centres offer programmes where, due to the problematic behaviour of the unaccompanied minors, the child or their assigned support person could benefit from a break of the usual environment. The programmes implement by Synergie 14 in Brussels and SAM in Liege are open to all minors who seek calm. The Oranjehuis in Courtrai implements a 2-week long time-out aiming to repair the links between the unaccompanied minor and their social environment.

Minors who have not made an application for international protection are specifically accommodated in the Fedasil centre in Sugny in the first phase, but any COO should be able to accommodate them if needed. After the first-phase reception, they move onto the second phase when they are ready. Florennes centre (second phase) has started a separate project for nomadic unaccompanied minors.

Samusocial and Belrefugees are also run two centres for young people in transit, where young people can stay for 3 months before having to notify to the Guardianship Service.

Outside of the Fedasil-run reception network, there are specialised centres for victims of trafficking and persons with mental health issues (Centres of Pag-Asa in Brussels, Sürya in Liège and Payoke in Antwerp).

Within collective reception facilities and LRIs, there are special places for single women and persons with medical issues.

Material reception conditions provided in kind and cash

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Definition of material reception conditions

The Reception Act, Article 2(6) defines material aid (*aide matérielle, materiële hulp*) as aid granted by Fedasil or its partner organisation within a reception centre, comprising of accommodation, meals, clothing, medical, social and psychological support, the provision of daily allowance, including access to legal aid, access to services (i.e. interpretation and training) and access to a voluntary return programme.

The Reception Act, Article 3 underlines that all applicants have the right to reception to lead a life with dignity.

The Executive Committee of Fedasil adopted minimal standards for reception in March 2018, including specific standards for vulnerable persons. The Quality Unit of Fedasil elaborated these standards based on EU and national legislation and on national practices, in cooperation with relevant partners. The minimal standards are shared with the Belgian reception network, while the technical specifications for reception structures - based on these standards - are publicly available.

Material reception conditions provided in kind

Type and purpose	Accommodation, meals, clothing, medical, social and psychological support, legal aid, interpretation, training.

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Duration and recurrence	The provision of material reception conditions in kind starts and ends in principle at the same as reception overall (organisation of reception/reception phases). However, material reception conditions may be reduced or withdrawn, temporarily or definitively, with the exception of medical support, as foreseen in the Reception Act, Articles 24 and 25. While their asylum application is still in process, asylum seekers are always entitled to medical and psychological support offered by Fedasil, even if they are not staying in the reception network. Applicants receive an arrival kit in the arrival centre, covering their basic needs for the first few days of stay. They receive another kit when they arrive to the assigned reception facility. **Meals:** Residents are entitled to meals three times per day – either prepared for them or they must be given the means to be able to prepare these meals. **Medical, social and psychological support:** Residents are assigned a social worker, who helps them in the different administrative procedures and provides social orientation, as necessary. Residents also receive support to have access to the necessary levels of healthcare, including psychological support, beyond the obligatory medical screenings. (For more information, please see the relevant heading under Rights during reception.)

Financial allowances and vouchers

Type and purpose	Daily allowance
Duration and recurrence	The provision of material reception conditions in kind starts and ends in principle the same as reception overall (organisation of reception/ reception phases). The amount is paid weekly.

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Type and purpose	Daily allowance
Calculation and amount	The amount of daily allowance is fixed by legislation (Royal Decree of 1 April 2007 on daily allowance, as foreseen by Article 62(2bis) of the Programme-Law of 19 July 2001) and it is calculated per person. The amount is paid to the entitled person or to the designated head of the family. The amount of the daily allowance can be increased with a fixed amount when the beneficiary of reception undertakes community services in the reception centre. Fedasil or its partner is responsible for the organisation of these types of community services. Each reception centre defines in advance this fixed amount depending on the types of service and this list must be approved by Fedasil (Reception Act, Article 34). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fedasil introduced a new measure offering daily expenses (meal vouchers system) when asylum seekers voluntarily left the reception network when they had a possibility to stay in an accommodation outside of the reception network. This measure is still applicable, given the saturation of the network. This scheme applies to applicants for international protection with a pending procedure, who have been staying in a collective reception centre for at least one month and who have the possibility of staying elsewhere. They can receive meal vouchers every two weeks until the end of their right to material aid or until their reintegration into the reception network. The scheme also applies to residents who obtain a residence permit for more than three months (international protection, regularisation, or family reunification). Instead of staying in a Local Reception Initiative during the transition period of two months, they can receive meal vouchers.

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Type and purpose	Daily allowance
Applicants granted allowance	All applicants who stay in the reception network are entitled to the daily allowance (similarly to material reception conditions in general), with the exception of applicants with sufficient means (organisation of reception/reception phases). The daily allowance (and material reception conditions in general) may be reduced or withdrawn following a decision to impose sanctions taken by the host organisation.
Modalities of provision	Bank card.

Material reception conditions for vulnerable persons

Similar to the approach of the recast Reception Conditions Directive, Belgian law does not provide for a fixed definition of vulnerable groups, rather it puts forward a non-exhaustive list of different vulnerable categories. Following the amendment of the Reception Act, all groups mentioned in the recast Reception Conditions Directive are now explicitly included in domestic law as well. To the already-listed persons (e.g. minors, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, victims of trafficking in human beings, victims of violence or abuse and the elderly), the following are also added: persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have undergone rape or other serious forms of mental, physical or sexual violence, for example victims of female genital mutilation.

All applicants are screened during the registration procedure in the arrival centre. The procedure is spread over several days to enable an improved screening of special needs of applicants, better preparation of reception, better information-sharing with the applicants and better coordination of the activities of the Immigration Office and Fedasil.

Reception Act, Article 22 foresees that within 30 days from the designation of the compulsory place of reception the individual situation of the beneficiary of the reception is examined to determine whether the applicant’s specific needs are met. The examination of the individual situation of the beneficiary of the reception relates to the non-detectable a priori signs of a possible vulnerability such as that present in people who have suffered torture or other forms serious

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psychological, physical or sexual violence.

Following this initial evaluation, regular evaluations should take place, at least every six months, to ascertain whether the reception conditions continue to meet the individual medical, social and psychological needs of the beneficiary.

The ex-post examination is regulated by Royal Decree of 25 April 2007 determining the modalities for assessing the individual situation of the beneficiary of reception. The assessment is carried out by the reference social worker, who interviews the beneficiary of reception. The final evaluation report is validated by the person responsible for the social service within the reception structure or the head of the reception structure.

This mechanism allows for the transfer of the beneficiary to a more suitable reception structure to meet the beneficiary's needs after the initial designation of a reception place and at a later stage.

This mechanism is highly challenging in practice. The arrival centre was first established during a crisis and continues to face high influxes, making it difficult to organise thorough assessments of potential vulnerabilities upon arrival in the first phase and before a transfer to the second phase of reception. Even when such assessments do take place in the first phase, there is a lack of (especially suitable) reception structures/places to meet the identified needs.

Rights and obligations during reception

Provision of information and counselling

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Modalities of information provision on benefits and obligations related to reception conditions	Reception Act, Article 14 underlines that Fedasil gives an information brochure about the applicants' rights and obligations as described in the Reception Act (or in the Organic Law on the Public Centres of Social Welfare) if possible, in a language the applicant understands, including also the contacts of the competent authorities and the contacts of associations providing medical, social and legal assistance. The applicant also receives more detailed information on the house rules of the reception facility when they arrive to the assigned reception centre.
Provision of legal assistance on the reception conditions available	Reception Act, Article 33 clarifies that Fedasil or its partner organisation is responsible to guarantee effective access to first- and second-line legal aid, as described under Second instance determination, including legal assistance on the reception conditions.
House rules	The Ministerial Decree of 21 September 2018 to Establish the House Rules for Reception Facilities includes a first part, applicable for all reception structures, while its last chapter lists the headings for issues to be regulated individually at the level of the reception structures.

Freedom of movement within the territory

Assignment of a particular area of residence to applicants	All applicants are in principle entitled to move freely within the territory of the country. If they have chosen to apply for a place in the reception system. They are designated a specific reception centre – thus, assigned a particular place of residence. Applicants can choose to stay outside the reception network with friends, family, etc., in which case they will only receive medical assistance from Fedasil.

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Reporting obligations	Applicants are required to be habitually present in the reception facility. They are allowed to spend the night at another place, but they must inform the facility's management and they must specify how they can be reached, if necessary. Applicants risk losing their assigned place after spending 3 nights away without prior notice or after spending a total of 10 nights away in a period of 30 days. If an applicant is de-registered from the reception facility, they can request again a place at Fedasil's dispatching unit (Arrival Centre).

Employment and vocational training

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Time limit to access the labour market	4 months after lodging an asylum application, if a negative first instance decision has not been received from the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) (Royal Decree of 8 October 1981, Articles 74 and 75). Since 1 July 2024, adult applicants staying in a reception centre and earning income from work will be required to contribute to the cost of their reception. This contribution system is called 'Cumul' (See more: Section 7.2) In order to fill gaps in the labour market, shortages caused by the pandemic, applicants in Belgium were exceptionally exempted from the 4-month waiting period until 30 June 2020. The measures applied to applicants who registered an application before 18 March 2020. Applicants also needed to ensure that they could obtain accommodation with the employer in order to limit commuting to work. In view of the continuing shortage of workers in some sectors due to the closing of the borders, this measure was resumed from December 2020 until 30 June 2021. The condition was, however, that the application for international protection was registered on 8 December 2020 at the latest. And as before, this derogation could only be used if the employer takes responsibility for the accommodation of the asylum seeker. The measure was resumed from 1 April to 30 June 2022, but only for persons working in healthcare or education.

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Criteria to access the labour market	As of 1 January 2019, applicants do not need to obtain a separate work permit. The right to work is indicated directly on the temporary residence permit (*attestation d'immatriculation*). The *attestation d'immatriculation* is issued by the local authority of the municipality (municipal Civil Affairs Department) where the applicant for international resides, on behalf of the Immigration Office (Federal Public Service Home Affairs). Municipalities can charge an administrative cost for the issuance of the certificate (usually between EUR 0- 10). The extension of the attestation is free. Applicants have access to the labour market under the same conditions as nationals after this initial waiting period, as long as they have their valid *attestation d'immatriculation/immatriculatie* attest stamped 'unrestricted access to the labor market' and as long as they have not received a negative decision on their procedure. Belgium does not apply the labour market test. The employer has the responsibility to check that the attestation d'immatriculation/immatriculatie attest is valid and that the person can work. The expiry date should be checked regularly, not only when entering employment but also regularly during the term of the employment contract.

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Employment support for applicants	Applicants with the right to work may register as unemployed under some conditions (the same right as nationals) at the local social security organisation (CAPAC) (*Institution publique de sécurité social (HVW), Openbare instelling van sociale zekerheid*) and are entitled to employment training and work placement offered through the regionally competent organisations (le FOREM - Emploi Formation Wallonie, IB.F.F.P. - Bruxelles Formation, Actiris, VDAB – Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, ADG - Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens).
Adults' access to vocational training	Applicants can access the mainstream employment training and work placement offers only when they obtain the right to access the labour market and are registered with the regional public service for employment. However, Reception Act, Article 35 underlines that Fedasil and partner organisations (themselves or through other service providers) can propose classes and training to applicants.
Access to tertiary education	Applicants have access to tertiary education legally on the same conditions as nationals (fulfilling all the entry requirements, payment of fees). Several universities offer preparatory programs for applicants for international protection.

Healthcare

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Medical screening	In the arrival centre, applicants undergo a first medical screening to identify any physical or mental problems, illnesses, infections and diseases, receive the required vaccinations and undergo a TBC scan. This medical screening aims also to identify whether the individuals require urgent medical care and to assess whether these medical indications have an impact on the allocation of a reception centre. The medical follow-up is then handed over to the assigned reception centre. An assessment of needs and whether the place is suitable is carried out every six months.
Level of healthcare	The Reception Act, Articles 23-29 regulate the medical care provided to applicants. Applicants have access to healthcare as listed by the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (INAMI/RIZIV). The Royal Decree of 9 April 2009 on Medical Assistance allows for divergence in some cases: while some listed interventions may not be delivered to applicants, other non-listed interventions are included. Fedasil manages medical coverage for asylum applicants who reside in or outside of reception centres. Medical care is delivered by Fedasil or its reception partners, such as the Croix Rouge de Belgique / *Rode Kruis Vlaanderen* (based on a convention established by Fedasil as described in the Reception Law, Article 62). The organisation of healthcare and which authority pays for it depend on the reception facility in which the asylum applicant is accommodated.

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Access to healthcare	**Asylum applicants residing in local reception initiatives:** Healthcare is managed by the Public Social Welfare Centres in the municipalities, an informal agreement was set in 2002 between Fedasil and the Public Social Welfare Centres that the latter manages healthcare for asylum applicants in local reception initiatives (Reception Law, Article 64). Each organisation running a local reception initiative is responsible for setting up its own procedure for access to medical care. Some partners work with contracted doctors, while others leave the choice of care provider up to the individuals. **Asylum seekers in collective reception centres:** Primary and some secondary healthcare is organised and coordinated by the medical service of the centre during weekdays, usually managed by salaried nurses and internal or external generalist practitioners. Psychologists can do consultations in the reception centres or in their own practice. Fedasil can enter into agreements with local general practitioners. External generalist practitioners (GPs) are paid on a fee-for-service basis according to the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI) nomenclature. Internal general practitioners are paid a fixed monthly salary. A payment per session is offered for psychologists, with different tariffs depending on the type of session (group therapy or individual therapy). If needed, the medical team at the centre may refer the applicant to an external specialist or hospital. All secondary healthcare is provided through external providers, primarily via the public health system. Caregivers must respect the official rates set by the public health authorities at all times. The person will receive a *requisitorium* (commitment for payment) from the reception centre to present to the care provider. Medical bills covered by the *requisitorium* must in principle be returned to the issuing centre for payment. **Asylum applicants who live outside of the reception centre:** According to information provided by Belgium to the EMN Ad Hoc Query 2025.1: Provision of healthcare services for applications for international protection, before seeking medical

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Education for minors

Time-limit for accessing the education system: Minors are enrolled in the education system as soon as possible. Fedasil treats school enrolment as a priority. Children can start to attend school within a few days, although Belgium currently faces persistent challenges in ensuring access to education for minors as a result of capacity shortages.

At the moment, progress on education for unaccompanied minors is slow. They are subject to compulsory education from day one in Belgium but are not taught in the OOC by trained staff who follow learning objectives (with a few exceptions, the very youngest, they are not enrolled in school). Discussions with communities (competent for education) are ongoing to better the situation.

Organisation of classes: Education for minors is organised within the state education system, in the framework of the mainstream school infrastructure. Children typically go to an ordinary class in a school near the reception centre – if possible, after having spent a short period in a preparatory class.

Preparatory classes: Minor applicants typically attend preparatory classes at first. These classes are regulated at the community level and are bound by slightly different rules in the Flemish and in the Walloon communities.

The Flemish community provides reception classes (*onthaalklas*) for children between 5-18 years. Children in primary education (*basisonderwijs*, from 5-12 years) have an explicit right to receive support to learn Dutch and to integrate in the class. Individual schools have a wide degree of autonomy on implementing this obligation: within the mainstream class, extra catch-up education on the top of mainstream classes, a combination of the two or separate intensive language classes (*taalbad*). The support may last for 1-2 years and may eventually be followed up with another year. Children in secondary school need to first complete a reception year (OKAN), before they transfer to mainstream classes. They continue be supported there by a follow-up coach.

The Walloon community organises bridging classes (*classes passarelles*, DASPA). Children between 2.5-18 years may attend these classes, where they usually spend a period ranging from 1 week to 12 months. Children may remain in bridging classes for a maximum of 18 months. The classes are organised within the mainstream school infrastructure.

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Additional targeted support designed for minor applicants for accessing the education system: A social worker helps parents with the school registration process, in the framework of the social support outlined in the Reception Act.

Practical barriers in accessing education: Children are not enrolled in school while residing in the Observation and Orientation Center (OOC). They do receive lessons from the staff in the reception centre, but these staff members are usually not trained for this and do not follow the official educational objectives. Discussions with the federated entities (Communities) (who are responsible for education) are currently ongoing to structurally embed education in the OOC.

Unaccompanied minors – transition into adulthood: According to the EMN Ad-hoc query on transition to adulthood, Belgium has no national strategy that supports the transition into adulthood specifically for unaccompanied minors. The regional departments of the Flemish and French communities which are competent for youth care have developed strategies (FR/NL) to enhance a more progressive transition by ensuring continuity of support after unaccompanied minors reach the age of majority.

There is a structured reception pathway for unaccompanied minors consisting of three stages/phases in which they are gradually guided to become more independent. Fedasil is currently working on the implementation of a strategy supporting the transition which aims to extend this ‘stages approach’ to the 18-21 age group. They offer continuing support, also based on the degree of autonomy, in their transition to adulthood. The project aims to support young people aged 18 to 21 in their search for employment, pursuit of further education or transition to adult care.

All unaccompanied minors staying in Belgium have access to material reception conditions until the age of 18, when this right is no longer guaranteed, depending on the residence procedure. Unaccompanied minors who applied for asylum but do not have yet a decision will move to a reception facility for adults when turning 18. Their guardian is then no longer responsible for them. Once they obtain a positive decision, they must leave the reception facility within 2 months. Social aid can be provided by the Public Centres for Social Welfare (CPAS/OCMW) if needed, e.g. financial support.

Unaccompanied minors whose application was rejected must leave the reception facility when reaching the age of 18. Each unaccompanied minor is informed individually, by the social counsellor and with their respective legal guardian,

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about their subsequent legal options, such as the appeal procedure against the return decision, a new residence procedure or voluntary return.

If they stay in a reception facility and receive a return decision before the age of majority, and opt for voluntary return, they still have the right to stay in the reception facility during the preparation period for voluntary return. This right is also extended and retained if they turn 18 during this preparation period.

Socio-cultural orientation and language learning

Access to socio-cultural orientation	Reception Act, Articles 31 and 33 outline the details of the individualised social support provided to applicants, but it does not explicitly mention access to and support for socio-cultural orientation. Integration policy in Belgium falls under the competence of four federated entities: the Flemish Community, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, and the German-speaking Community. Each entity has distinct legislation, policies and practice with regards to the integration of third-country nationals, and by extension their monitoring. Applicants are not obliged to follow the integration programme in any of these federated entities. They may do so on a voluntary basis and depending on the number of places available in the Walloon Region and in the German-speaking community. However, they do not have access to the integration programme in the Flemish Community and in the Brussels-Capital Region.

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Language classes	Reception Act, Article 35 underlines that Fedasil and the partner organisations (themselves or through other service providers) need to propose classes and training to applicants. This is mainly implemented through the organisation of language classes, in which civil society organisations and adult education centres are particularly active. In the Flemish Community, Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering organises intake interview to direct the person to the most suitable language centre. Applicants for international protection have a reduction on the enrolment fee for language courses. At the level of regional legislation, all communities oblige certain groups of third-country nationals in general to take part in mandatory language classes. Applicants are not obliged to follow the language classes in Belgium, in any federated entity. The access to language classes is proposed within or outside the reception structure (collective or individual) and stated in the minimum reception standards established by Fedasil.

Sufficient means

Arrangement of private accommodation

Applicants may, if they wish, request to be accommodated. They are assigned to a specific reception centre, where they are entitled to material reception conditions. Applicants can refuse the dispatched place and opt for private accommodation independently, but then they are only entitled to medical care and legal aid, and they do not receive additional cash benefits to compensate for the rent. However, they can request another place later on at the dispatching unit of the Arrival Centre.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fedasil introduced a new measure offering daily expenses (meal vouchers system) when asylum seekers voluntarily left the reception network when they had a possibility to stay in an accommodation outside of the reception network. This measure is still applicable, given the saturation of the network. This scheme applies to applicants for international protection with a pending procedure, who have been staying in a collective

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reception centre for at least one month and who have the possibility of staying elsewhere. They can receive meal vouchers every two weeks until the end of their right to material aid or until their reintegration into the reception network. The scheme also applies to residents who obtain a residence permit for more than three months (international protection, regularisation, or family reunification). Instead of staying in a Local Reception Initiative during the transition period of two months, they can receive meal vouchers

Contribution to reception and healthcare costs

Reception Act, Article 35/1 clarifies that applicants with gainful employment are obliged to contribute to the costs of the material reception conditions. Applicants remain under the duty to report about their financial situation and eventual income also after registration and they are under the duty to report any relevant changes later on as well. Fedasil in the arrival centre, and later Fedasil or its partner organisations in the assigned accommodation, inform those registered within the reception system about this specific duty, as well as about the right to access the labour market after 4 months, and applicants are requested to report monthly about their financial situation. This reporting forms the basis for calculating their contribution.

Royal Decree of 12 January 2011 detailed the modalities of contribution, however it was scarcely implemented. In May 2024, a new Royal Decree which details the groups of residents and modalities of contribution to the reception costs was adopted. It establishes structural cooperation between Fedasil and social security to exchange information. As a result of this obligation, an amendment to Article 35/1 and a new Article 35/3 were introduced in the Reception Act. Article 35/3 refers to what data can be collected to monitor the employment income of people accommodated in a collective or individual reception structure, and the manner in which data can be collected and processed. Specific reference is made to the retention period by each specific type of data.

The following groups of residents are required to contribute:

- Salaried workers;
- Self-employed workers;
- Applicants for international protection receiving unemployment benefits.

Residents are expected to contribute in a progressive manner, the percentage of contribution increasing by salary segments. Residents who spontaneously

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declare their income benefit from a progressive contribution rate based on net income, while those identified during Fedasil's periodic verification contribute 50% of their gross income. This system incentivises spontaneous declarations. Residents who refuse to contribute may face penalties, including exclusion from the reception network. Additionally, applicants with stable, high-paying jobs may be asked to leave the reception network.

Young asylum-seeking adults carrying out student work are explicitly excluded from this obligation, (Royal Decree on material reception conditions for employed applicants, Article 4(3)).

Seizure of assets: Belgian legislation does not allow for the seizure of assets to contribute to the costs of material reception conditions.

Sufficient means test

Reception Act, Article 35/2 underlines that an applicant with sufficient financial resources is not entitled to material reception conditions, with the exception of medical care. Sufficient means are defined as equal to or above the minimum social welfare allowance (*revenu d'intégration sociale*): EUR 858.97 per month (EUR 10,307.64/year) for a person cohabiting with their partner, EUR 1,288.46 per month (15,461.52/year) for a single person and EUR 1,741.29 per month (18,454.82/year) for a person responsible for a family. (amounts valid as of 1 May 2024).

Applicants are under the duty to report about their financial situation and eventual income at the moment of registration. However, when registering, the Immigration Office does not systematically ask questions relevant to the applicants' financial sources. Fedasil does not have the means to verify it either.

Fedasil also has the possibility to withdraw material reception conditions when a resident finds gainful employment or other categories of revenue and comply cumulatively with two conditions (Royal Decree on material reception conditions for employed applicants, Article 9):

the resident has a fixed-term employment contract for 6 months or more; and

they receive a salary higher than the minimum social welfare allowance.

Royal Decree on material reception conditions for employed applicants, Article 3 specifies that a salary comprises a wide concept, namely either remuneration as

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a result of professional activity, all type of revenue (including movable property) in the context of an independent professional activity, or unemployment benefit granted to applicants for international protection. The amount of remuneration that is considered to be received is on a monthly basis.

The decision to withdraw reception must be made as soon as the applicant receives two months of salary. From the day the decision is taken, the applicant continues to benefit from material reception conditions for 2 more months. Applicants remain under the obligation to contribute to the costs of the material reception conditions in the meantime.

Fedasil may in any case make an exception from this rule and maintain for the resident the assigned place, notably when the family, social, medical or the state of the procedure to request international protection so justify.

Sanction regimes, reduction or withdrawal of material reception conditions

Circumstances for reducing or withdrawing material reception conditions

Reception Act, Article 4 lists the circumstances when material reception conditions can be reduced or withdrawn:

- the applicant rejects the assigned reception place, does not use it, abandons it without informing Fedasil or does not obtain the necessary authorisation to temporarily leave the place;
- the applicant does not respect their reporting obligation, does not reply to information requests or does not appear at the personal interview;
- the applicant presents a subsequent application, until the application is considered admissible;
- the applicant benefits from international protection in another Member State of the European Union;
- the applicant did not declare his income from work or did not pay the requested contribution; as a sanction for serious breaches of the house rules of the reception structure: this is only applied as a last resort sanction, as explained under the following heading.

Possible sanctions and procedure

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Type of applicable sanction measures: Reception Act, Article 45 provides an exhaustive list of sanctions which may be applied. A sanction is imposed by taking into account the nature, importance and circumstances of the offense.

1. Formal warning, noted also in the applicant's social file;
2. Temporary exclusion from activities organised by the reception structure;
3. Temporary exclusion from the possibility to undertake community services;
4. Restriction in accessing certain services;
5. Obligation to undertake tasks of general interest, where non-compliance or insufficient accomplishment of the task may be considered as a new offence;
6. Temporary withdrawal or reduction of the daily allowance for a maximum of 4 weeks;
7. Immediate transfer to another reception structure;
8. Temporary reduction of material reception conditions for a maximum of 1 month: this sanction may only be applied for very serious breaches of the house rules of the reception structure, putting in danger the staff or other residents, or threatening the security and public order within the structure.

Definitive withdrawal of material reception conditions was only applied for cases of serious physical or sexual violence. Otherwise, a temporary reduction of material reception conditions must precede it. Following the CJEU judgment in Haqbin, this sanction can no longer be applied.

Sanction procedures: The manager or the deputy of the reception structure may decide on the sanction. The Director General of Fedasil must confirm within 3 working days the temporary reduction or the definitive withdrawal of the material reception conditions, otherwise the sanction is lifted.

The decision must be objective, impartial and include its reasons. The authority who imposed the sanction may reduce or lift the sanction during its implementation. The implementation of the sanction cannot in principle lead to a complete elimination of material reception conditions or to a decreased access to healthcare.

Special rules apply to the temporary reduction or definitive withdrawal of material reception conditions. The resident risking such a sanction must be heard before the decision is taken. Reception is limited to accessing healthcare after the decision.

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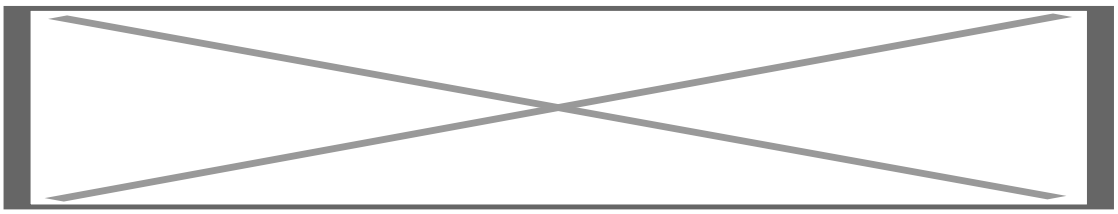

Review of the sanction decision

The possibilities for an appeal differ according to the sanction applied:

For sanctions 1-3: The resident can appeal to the director or the deputy of the reception structure. If the complaint is not treated within 7 days, the resident can send a written complaint (in one of the national languages or English) to the Director General of Fedasil or to the designated person from the partner organisation, who must reply within 30 days.

For sanctions 4-7: The resident can address an appeal in written (in one of the national languages or English) through post within 5 working days from the notification of the sanction to the Director General of Fedasil, the designated person from the partner organisation or the Council of Social Aid (when residing in LRI). The resident must provide a copy to the reception structure. The responsible authority confirms, revokes or reviews the decision within 30 days from the reception of the appeal. It may also suspend the implementation of the sanction and organise a hearing. The decision includes its reasons. The applicant may further appeal to the locally-competent labour court within 3 months from the notification of the appeal decision (or the expiry of the appeal decision deadline), when the decision is confirmed, reviewed or there is no decision within the foreseen deadline.

For sanctions 8-9: When the resident establishes that, due to the sanction a dignified standard of living cannot be assured to them, they can introduce a request to Fedasil for a remedy of this situation. Fedasil decides within 5 days of the request.

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