



PRESS RELEASE

Flanders allows foreign diamond polishers and sorters, strengthening the competitiveness of the Antwerp diamond sector

More efficient procedure will help companies address the shortage of polishers and sorters more quickly.

Antwerp, 28 November 2025. The Council of Ministers of the Flemish Government decided today, on the proposal of Minister of Work Zuhal Demir, that foreign workers may be employed for the shortage occupations of diamond polishers and diamond sorters. The decision is an important boost for the Antwerp diamond sector, which faces a structural shortage of these specialised profiles. They are scarcely available on the local labour market, yet essential to keeping Antwerp competitive as an international diamond trading centre. The measure will enter into force on 1 January 2026.

Access to foreign specialists through a simplified procedure

By adding diamond polishers and sorters to the list of 'medium-skilled occupations for which there is a structural shortage of workers', employers will now gain faster access to skilled professionals from abroad. They can apply for a combined work and residence permit ('single permit') without first having to demonstrate that there is a shortage on the local labour market. The mandatory labour market test is waived, making the procedure significantly simpler and more efficient.

Competitive diamond sector

For the Antwerp diamond sector, which strongly advocated for this measure, the decision is particularly important. "To remain competitive as a diamond trading centre, our companies must be able to hire diamond polishers and sorters from outside Europe quickly and easily, and this decision now makes that possible," says Karen Rentmeesters, CEO of the Antwerp diamond federation AWDC. Antwerp plays a key global role in the sale of rough diamonds sourced directly from mines through international tenders. To make these diamonds ready for sale, the rough stones must

first be carefully sorted by colour, quality and size — an expertise in which Antwerp has excelled for decades. Without specialised diamond sorters, that position is under pressure.

In addition, the recent U.S. zero tariff on diamonds polished in Antwerp offers significant opportunities. “Companies want to have their rough stones polished here to benefit from that zero tariff — but to offer them that possibility, we naturally need enough polishers,” Rentmeesters explains. Measures such as this also enhance the competitiveness of our diamond companies. They create a more attractive business climate, increasing the likelihood that companies and trade flows choose Antwerp.

AWDC grateful for recognition

“As a sector federation, we are very grateful to the Minister for her recognition of diamond sorters and polishers as niche shortage occupations and for acknowledging that these profiles are not available on the local labour market. In doing so, she underscores both the economic importance of our sector and the need to continue supporting it,” Rentmeesters concludes.