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The reorganisation and adaptation of reception systems remained at the forefront in national strategies to ensure fast and sufficient responses to changes in migratory flows. In 2021, reception authorities reached out increasingly to local authorities to address together some of the challenges related to the reception of applicants for international protection. Digitalising reception procedures focused on simplifying workflows.

Despite these efforts and with the significant increase in the number of applicants in 2021, reception systems in many EU+ countries were under strain. In some cases, this resulted in high occupancy rates in facilities and services had to be quickly adapted to respond to the needs of all applicants.

In countries where the pressure on reception systems was building up already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the new arrivals led to the saturation of the system. In these cases, reception authorities responded by opening new, typically temporary, places, while examining longer-term structural solutions, such as creating more permanent accommodation places and helping recognised beneficiaries of international protection move on quicker from reception facilities.

The persisting COVID-19 context continued to add to existing and new challenges, as requirements for physical distancing, quarantine and isolation continued to demand more space. Reception staff addressed situations when infections were reported, and they were actively engaged in the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out for applicants throughout 2021. As COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, the number of support activities in reception facilities grew in 2021.

The quality of reception remained an overall concern in many EU+ countries, as UNHCR and civil society organisations continued to report on sub-standard accommodation and support. In addition, courts were called on to deliberate on the adequacy of reception conditions in some EU+ countries in the framework of the Dublin III Regulation.

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