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This section provides an overview of developments in legislation, policy, practice and case law in EU+ countries throughout 2021. Concerns about aspects of national asylum systems are included from authorities, civil society organisations, UNHCR and other international organisations.

Three horizontal topics are placed in focus, providing context for the developments which are presented in the sub-sections:

- Digitalising asylum and reception systems;
- The impact of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic on asylum and reception systems; and
- Responses by EU+ countries to the new protection needs of Afghan nationals.

The sub-sections are organised by theme, following the steps of the asylum procedure:

4.1 Access to the asylum procedure presents developments surrounding access to territory and the first steps of the asylum procedure, including making, registering and lodging an application. The information is grouped by arrival routes and geographical areas.

4.2 The Dublin procedure takes an in-depth look into the system which sets out the criteria and mechanisms to determine the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection.

4.3 Special procedures to assess protection needs presents new practices around border procedures, the safe country of origin concept, accelerated procedures, admissibility procedures and subsequent applications. Considerations around beneficiaries of international protection resubmitting an asylum application in another EU+ country are highlighted in a focus box.

4.4 Processing asylum applications at first instance addresses new approaches, measures, working methods and policies, such as prioritisation policies and changes related to the personal interview, along with legislative amendments, institutional changes, technological

developments, considerations of privacy and data protection.

4.5 Processing asylum applications at second or higher instance presents initiatives to make the procedures at second instance more efficient and details changes on the right to an effective remedy and the processing of cases lodged by specific nationalities.

4.6 Pending cases discusses the number of applications still under examination, which is a key indicator reflecting the workload experienced by national authorities and the pressure on national asylum systems, including reception systems.

4.7 Reception of applicants for international protection shows how Member States reacted to trends in international protection in terms of reception capacities and policies.

4.8 Detention provides an overview of changes in detention capacity, conditions, duration and alternatives to detention.

4.9 Access to information details new initiatives in information provision throughout the different stages of the asylum process, including on the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination campaigns, and information specifically prepared for Afghan evacuees and persons displaced from Ukraine.

4.10 Legal assistance and representation outlines changes in the provision of free legal counselling and advice to applicants.

4.11 Interpretation services presents amendments and concerns around the provision of interpretation, including institutional changes and initiatives to digitalise interpretation A box highlights the situation of interpreters from Afghanistan.

4.12 Country of origin information briefly describes research and production of information on countries of origin information.

4.13 Statelessness in the context of asylum explores the relationship between statelessness and asylum, highlighting associated challenges.

4.14 Content of protection presents initiatives taken for the integration of recognised beneficiaries of international protection based on the recast Qualification Directive.

4.15 Return of former applicants presents an overview of changes in procedures after a final negative decision on an application is taken.

4.16 Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes presents resettlement efforts taken by EU+ countries and developments in the framework of humanitarian admission programmes.

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