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The excessive length of the asylum procedure was an issue which affected several Member States, caused not only by the COVID-19 restrictions but also by general inadequacies in asylum systems.

In Belgium, the Secretary of State announced the recruitment of 700 new staff for the asylum and migration services and published a vacancy in June 2021. It will also undertake an audit of the asylum services (CGRS, Immigration Office, Fedasil and CALL) with results expected in summer 2022. Both measures aim to clear the backlog in all stages of the asylum procedure.575

In Finland, the Ombudsperson analysed a complaint about delays in the processing time of an asylum application. The case was pending for 16 months in the absence of exceptional circumstances. The conclusions of the Ombudsperson highlighted that there was no justification for the excessive length of the procedure.576

In Ireland, over the course of 2021 an end-to-end review of the international protection process was completed. The review incorporated an assessment of the efficiency of processes and the experiences of those working and engaging with the processes. Key findings included challenges with communication and coordination, a lack of guidance and support for protection applications, an apparent lack of consistency in how people progress through the system (so providing clear guidance was challenging), a reliance of paper-based applications and insufficient resourcing.577

The Regional Administrative Court of Hanover in Germany held that a procedural delay of 1 year to await specific assurances from the Greek government, for an applicant who received protection in Greece, was not justified in the absence of particular difficulties to clarify the facts of the case.

In the Netherlands, the task force that managed the asylum backlog was integrated into the IND. By July 2021, the task force had examined 14,100 out of 15,350 backlog cases, focusing on applications lodged before 1 April 2020. The task force continued supporting the examination of cases lodged after 1 April 2020, as the 6-month time limit to take a decision was exceeded in 1,200 cases lodged after that date.578

In Portugal, civil society organisations observed significant delays in 2021 for cases channelled through the regular procedure after the annulment of a first instance negative decision pronounced in the accelerated procedure.579

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