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4.9.1.1. New initiatives by national authorities

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Online resources

icon for online resources in information provision

In 2022, national authorities continuously updated their websites to ensure that asylum applicants had access to detailed and up-to-date information. They re-designed already-existing information systems, while others relocated websites, developed new websites and produced leaflets to make it easier and faster for applicants to obtain information.

In Finland, the Finnish Immigration Service created a new homepage where applicants have quick access to key information on the asylum procedure and trending topics.759 In the Netherlands, the style and layout of the IND website underwent a complete transformation to improve the user experience.760 Similarly, in Iceland, the Directorate of Immigration moved its website to the public service portal in order to improve accessibility, and the content of the site was reviewed and partially rewritten to enhance services for website visitors. A new online chat feature was also developed to address inquiries about the directorate's services.761

In France, OFPRA launched a new website to improve access to information and provide translations of content in languages frequently spoken by applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. A new section is dedicated to asylum professionals who work with applicants for international protection. The website is currently available in English and French. 762

In Latvia, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs developed new leaflets that explain requesting asylum and receiving protection,763 what happens after applying for asylum, including the outcome of the personal interview,764 and details on accommodation, detention and family reunification.765

Additionally, steps were taken to ensure applicants were informed of the status of their application. This is important for applicants with pending cases, since a lack of clarity may result in absconding and secondary movements, not to mention having an emotional and mental impact on the applicant. For applicants waiting on a decision on international protection, the Office for Foreigners in Poland set up an SMS notification system.766 At five stages in the

procedure, information was provided on the following topics: registration of the application and case number, the summons to the hearing along with the date and time of the scheduled hearing, completion of the collection of evidence and the opportunity to comment on the case and review of the case files before issuing a decision, issuing a decision in the case, and transferring the case files to the Council for Refugees, in the event of an appeal.767

In-person and offline services

information provision in person and online

Projects in 2022 also focused on services and information provision through offline environments and live platforms, which foster human interaction and immediate replies to queries. For example, the Migration Agency in Sweden expanded its services in 11 new locations, where employees informed applicants about procedures and regulations, and supported them in navigating the agency's website.768

To enhance the quality of information supplied and make migration services more convenient, the Panevėžys branch of the Migration Department in Lithuania provided services to clients in new facilities.769 The Office for Foreigners in Poland further organised information sessions on Saturdays, including details on the procedure, how to view case files, deliver letters and summons, and submit statements.770

Several countries set up hotlines to provide information on the asylum procedure in a practical manner. The Office for Foreigners in Poland established a new hotline number for applicants,771 the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in Latvia piloted a hotline,772 and the Spanish National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) established an on-call service, which is accessible around the clock, to provide information and support on asylum matters.773

National authorities have an obligation to provide information to potential applicants in detention facilities, at border crossing points and in reception facilities. During monitoring visits by the European Network of NHRIs, the Polish NHRI was observed disseminating multilingual pamphlets on international protection procedures at border guard stations, guarded centres and during field interventions.774

The Dutch Research and Documentation Centre published a report on information provision by the COA at reception centres. Although initial information provided to applicants upon their arrival at the facility received positive feedback, applicants found that the current automated method does not foster interaction and they prefer group meetings to share information. The report also revealed that it was difficult to understand the information by applicants who do not speak English or have a low level of education.775 It recommended to tailor information for certain groups, such as those who are illiterate. It also suggested to use digital tools, such as social media channels and WhatsApp groups, to disseminate information, while staff members should build rapport and trust with applicants.776

Assisted voluntary returns

Section 2.5 facilitating returns

Some national authorities launched new or continued with initiatives to inform third-country nationals about the possibility of support for assisted voluntary returns to the home country. In Austria and Cyprus the campaigns were targeted at Indian nationals through the homepages of the authorities.777

Continuing from 2021, the Norwegian UDI provided grants to organisations to inform individuals without a legal residence about assisted returns. The funding was available to non-profit, voluntary organisations, individuals and businesses and targeted people who were not residing in reception centres.778

In Malta, the Voluntary Return Unit offered a free counselling session to third-country nationals who may benefit from voluntary return assistance.779 In Poland, a newly-established hotline provided information on assisted voluntary returns.780

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