

Please cite as: EUAA, '3.1.2.2. Impact of the increase in applications for international protection' in *Asylum Report 2024*, Ιούνιος 2024.

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As in 2022, many EU+ countries received an increased number of asylum applications. This led to countries taking measures to try to decrease the numbers and to adjust or speed up asylum procedures to better manage the situation. However, some countries continued to face challenges which included delayed registration processes which sometimes impacted other aspects of the asylum procedure, such as access to material reception conditions (*see Section 3.6.2*) or the appointment of a legal guardian for unaccompanied minors (*see Section 4.6.2*).

In the Netherlands, there was a backlog of asylum seekers awaiting identification and registration. To address the situation, additional staff were deployed for identification and registration processes and reception arrangements were adjusted to accommodate more applicants.301The Expo Hall in Assen, which was previously used as an emergency shelter, was converted into a waiting area for newly-arrived asylum seekers in Ter Apel until October 2023 (*see Section 3.6.1.2*).302The Dutch authorities also made adjustments to the application process for family members arriving in the Netherlands through family reunification with a beneficiary of international protection, with reunified family members required to register at Zevenaar and no longer in Ter Apel.

Issues relating to delays in accessing the asylum procedure were noted in Belgium, where the first instance Tribunal of Brussels ruled in several cases that the Belgian state violated its obligation to effectively ensure the right of a third-country national to present an application for international protection as soon as they express the wish to do so. The tribunal ordered the authorities to ensure access for asylum applicants to present and register their application without any delay, subject to financial penalties.

In Germany, authorities agreed to start implementing plans to limit the timeframe within which asylum applications are submitted. Both the federal government and Länder governments agreed on the necessity of early registration and prompt forwarding of applications to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). According to this new approach, future applications for international protection would have to be filed within 2 weeks and a BAMF personal interview must be held within 4 weeks.303

A new asylum and immigration law was discussed in France throughout 2023, with several proposals suggesting changes and adjustments for a more efficient registration process. The law

was promulgated at the beginning of 2024.304

UNHCR considered it a good practice in Greece that all new arrivals at off-border locations were transferred to the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Malakasa. Civil society organisations continued to state that asylum seekers were prohibited from direct access to the Asylum Service to register a claim as they must first report to the RIC and the Greek authorities did not consider the registration of appointments through their online platform as constituting a 'making' of an application.305Administrative Courts of First Instance in Athens again confirmed that the submission of a request to register an asylum application on the online platform operated by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum establishes a person's status as an asylum seeker, despite the contrary practice that the ministry continued to apply.306

The Spanish Ombudsperson's report highlighted that accessing the asylum procedure had become more difficult due to the increase in applications, with waiting times lasting months for registration and additional months for formalisation in many provinces. This particularly affected people with special needs and sea arrivals transferred from the Canary Islands to the mainland. Changes were introduced to stop the buying and selling of appointments for registration, but the Ombudsperson observed that these measures led to unequal access across the provinces.307 Civil society organisations observed that appointments were still sold on an online platform at the end of 2023.308

In Italy, barriers in accessing the asylum procedure were noted in various regions of the country, while national courts in several cities continued to instruct authorities to formalise applications for international protection.309Italian authorities noted that this happened against the background of a significant increase in the number of registered applications for international protection (+63% compared to 2022, *see Section 3.1.3*) and competent authorities were working with all available resources. Courts in Rome, Milan and Naples scrutinised the adequacy of the booking system to access the asylum procedure. Immigration Offices in different locations continued to request additional administrative documents for the registration of an application, such as proof of domicile and proof of parental tie in the case of families, a practice that reportedly impacts timely access to the procedure.310Italian authorities underlined that such practices were condemned by courts in a small number of cases compared to the high number of registrations in 2023 (136,000, *see Section 3.1.3*).

The European Commission welcomed the progress made since March 2023 when the pilot projects for asylum and return procedures were started in Bulgaria and Romania. Through the project, the EUAA assisted with the registration of asylum applications in Romania.311

In May 2023, the Romanian authorities approved legislative changes through an Emergency Ordinance to better manage irregular migration and reduce secondary movements. The changes limited a foreigner's right to remain in Romania until the asylum procedure is completed, compared to past legislation allowing 15 days after the completion of the regular procedure.312

In Czechia, a new information system *IS AZYL III* was developed to manage the registration of applications for international protection and related information. The main users of the system are the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of the Interior, the police, the courts and other relevant stakeholders.313

- 301Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers | Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers. (2023, May 24). *Nachtopvang aanmeldcentrum Ter Apel loopt vol [Night shelter registration center Ter Apel is full]*;

- 302Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers | Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers. (2023, June 29). *Expohal Assen in gebruik genomen als wachtkamer voor Ter Apel [Expohal Assen in gebruik genomen als wachtkamer voor Ter Apel [Expohal Assen used as a waiting room for Ter Apel]*. https://www.coa.nl/nl/nieuws/expohal-assen-gebruik-genomen-als-wachtkamer-voor-ter-apel
- 303Bundesregierung | Federal Government. (2023, May 10). *Beschluss Gemeinsame Flüchtlingspolitik von Bund und Ländern: Unterstützung der Kommunen, gesteuerter Zugang, beschleunigte Verfahren, verbesserte Rückführung [Resolution of the Federal Government and federal states on a common policy on refugees: Support of municipalities, accelerating procedures and improving returns]*.

- 304Ministry of the Interior | Ministère de l'Intérieur. (2023). *Loi du 26 janvier 2024 pour contrôler l'immigration, améliorer l'intégration, measures immédiates amd orientations pour notre politique migratoire [Presentation: Law to control immigration, improve integration, urgent measures and guidance for our migration policy]*.

- 305Refugee Support Aegean. (2023, July 24). *The state of the Greek asylum system, twelve years since M.S.S: A glance at compliance with the landmark 2011 European Court of Human Rights judgment*.

- 306Greek Council for Refugees | Ελληνικό Συμβούλιο για τους Πρόσφυγες. (2023, March 21). *Εκ νέου παράνομη η κράτηση αιτούντων άσυλο, στους οποίους το Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου δεν αναγνωρίζει την ιδιότητα του αιτούντος [Detention of asylum seekers whose status as an applicant is not recognized by the Department of Immigration & Asylum again illegal]*.

- 307Defensor del Pueblo | Spanish Ombudsman. (2024, March 22). *Informe anual 2023 [2023 Annual Report].*

- 308European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2024). Input to the Asylum Report 2024.

- 309Italy, Civil Court [Tribunali], Applicant v Ministry of Interior, R.G. 23491/2022 , 8 March 2023;

- 310Italy, Civil Court [Tribunali], Applicant v Ministry of the Interior (Ministero dell'Interno), R.G. 5346/2023, 28 February 2023.

- 311European Commission. (2023, June 7). *Migration management: Update on progress made on the Pilot Projects for asylum and return procedures and new financial support for Bulgaria and Romania* [Press release].

- 312Romanian Government | Guvernul României. (2023, May 17). *Informaţie de presă privind actele normative aprobate în cadrul ședinței Guvernului României din 17 mai 2023 [Press information regarding the normative acts approved during the meeting of the Romanian Government on May 17, 2023]* [Press release]. https://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/sedinte-guvern/informatie-de-presa-privind-actele-normative-aprobate-in-cadrul-edintei-guvernului-romaniei-din-17-mai-2023#null
- 313Ministry of the Interior | Ministerstva vnitra. (2023, February 20). *Ministerstvo vnitra vytvořilo nový informační systém mezinárodní ochrany IS AZYL III [The Ministry of the Interior created a new information system for international protection IS AZYL III]*.

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