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EU+ countries continued to improve the efficiency of the asylum procedure at first instance through the digitalisation of particular steps. Calls for further digitalisation and improvement of first instance processes were also made in some EU+ countries.

In Belgium, a legal amendment was published on 9 September 2022 which explicitly allowed the CGRS to organise interviews through videoconference for applicants for international protection. Based on this, video interviews resumed in closed centres with the use of Microsoft Teams, which did not allow a third party to be included remotely, so lawyers needed to go in person to the closed centre. The project for video interviews with applicants in open centres was put on hold.482

Concerned about the secure use of specific software, the Belgian CALL ruled that more information was needed on the reliability of Microsoft Teams and its compliance with data protection. This judgment was based on a case in which the personal interview took place by videoconference during the first instance procedure.

The digitalisation strategy for the Belgian asylum system was translated into a comprehensive Enterprise Architecture, which includes the Belgian Immigration Office, the CGRS and CALL. The aim is to deliver a new environment by the end of 2024.

In Croatia, the independent mechanism for the supervision of police officers in the field of irregular migration and international protection adopted the first annual report covering June 2021-June 2022. For asylum, the recommendations of the report include the improvement of the system of tracking cases by consolidating information in one place.483

Estonia launched an updated version of the register of granting international protection (RAKS2) in February 2022, including new features that allow the inclusion of data on court procedures and an automated process for receiving country of origin information.

In May 2022, France extended to its entire territory the electronic communication of the various documents related to the processing of asylum applications between OFPRA and asylum applicants, which was already applied in Brittany and Nouvelle-Aquitaine. It thus provided asylum applicants with a digital space to access letters from OFPRA, particularly the invitation to the personal interview and the notification of the asylum decision. This electronic

communication system does not apply to applicants under the Dublin procedure, unaccompanied minors and applicants claiming to be vulnerable.

BAMF in Germany developed a new digital tool, “Assistance System for Hearings” (ASA), which can provide support during interviews and contribute to the quality assurance of the interview. The tool provides information on the most important countries of origin in a digital format for case officers, allowing them to have easier access to country-specific information. The tool also includes a date and currency converter, records open tasks and deadlines, checks the interview data for completeness, supports a comparison of the facts presented with the guidelines on the country of origin, and enables the writing of the interview report through speech recognition.484

The Netherlands launched a portal for asylum lawyers in June 2022, developed in close cooperation with lawyers. The systems allow them to rapidly check the status of a case, easily upload documents and safely exchange data.485

In Sweden, Asylum Seeker (LMA)-cards were digitalised to include a QR code for the validity period, and a case-handling system was further developed for increased usability.486

In January 2022, ECRE published a comparative report which provides an overview of the use of digital tools and remote working modalities in 23 European countries. It presents the risks and benefits of the use of digital tools in asylum processes and highlights several fundamental guarantees and procedural safeguards which must continue to apply to ensure that they do not infringe on existing EU asylum *acquis*.487

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