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4.9.2 Informing applicants about their rights and obligations in the context of everyday life



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries adapted their practices in managing the reception of applicants for international protection. In 2020, Romania and Sweden stood out for carrying out new initiatives for providing information as early as possible in the asylum procedure. In October 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency was instructed by the government of Sweden to prepare a one-day, compulsory civic orientation session for all asylum seekers over the age of 15, which would start in October 2021. Participants will receive information about the asylum procedure, national legislation, the organisation of society in Sweden, children's rights, democracy and Swedish norms and values. Gender equality, violence and oppression, child marriage and female genital mutilation will also be covered during the introductory session. Unaccompanied minors and children in families under the age of 15 will instead receive written information. Individual talks will be held with unaccompanied minors when they are given the written information.

To facilitate communication, the Netherlands upgraded its wifi network in several reception facilities and promoted the use MyCOA app/website to access information. Information was provided by telephone rather than face-to-face meetings, and residents in reception centres could use a toll-free number to consult with doctors. In addition, a new brochure for employers, "Newcomers on their way to work – Guide for employers", provided information to facilitate the employment of beneficiaries of international protection.[783]

Switzerland launched videos on COVID-19 preventative measures in asylum and reception centres which were made available on the SEM social media channel (YouTube).[784] In Lithuania and Switzerland, instructions about COVID-19 measures were updated regularly on boards in reception premises and made available on their official social media channels. Lithuania also introduced access to free wifi which was made available in reception premises.

Through AMIF funds, academic institutions and NGOs in Cyprus used advanced communication technologies and information management systems to collaborate with various organisations and voluntary services. Services on the Migrant Information Centre platform include the provision of information by topic, assistance to access the labour market, and assistance to cover accommodation, educational and health needs. The specific project also provides a mobile unit that

will offer psychosocial services in rural areas.[785]

Fedasil in Belgium published a new brochure on the reception of applicants for international protection.[786] In addition, the Belgian Immigration Office developed posters and pictograms to inform applicants on the COVID-19 pandemic, posted health safety instructions online and adapted its COVID-19 communication to the needs of unaccompanied minors. The International Protection Office and the Immigration Service Delivery in Ireland published guidance documents on their official websites which are targeted at asylum seekers and refugees on COVID-19 restrictions.[787] France enhanced efforts in sharing information on COVID-19 through an online platform, www.refugies.info, which is managed by the inter-ministerial delegation in charge of reception and integration of refugees (Diair), in cooperation with UNHCR and a network of NGOs.
Romania organised information sessions for applicants at regional accommodation centres for World Refugee Day to promote knowledge of and respect for cultural, ethnic, linguistic, social and democratic values.[788]

The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum launched an online helpdesk for beneficiaries of international protection.[789] UNHCR and the Red Cross set up an information point in Bulgaria for asylum seekers and refugees living in the urban area of Sofia.[790]

While EU+ countries made efforts to provide information on the rights and obligations of asylum applicants during the pandemic, civil society organisations in Slovakia[791] were vocal in calling for better COVID-19 information in the field of migrant integration.

Concerns were also raised by civil society organisations about the detention of third-country nationals upon arrival in Malta by sea. Based on documentation issued by the Superintendent of Public Health and handed to applicants, the freedom of movement of asylum seekers was restricted due to COVID-19 measures. The document does not contain information if this measure can be questioned or challenged.[792]

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