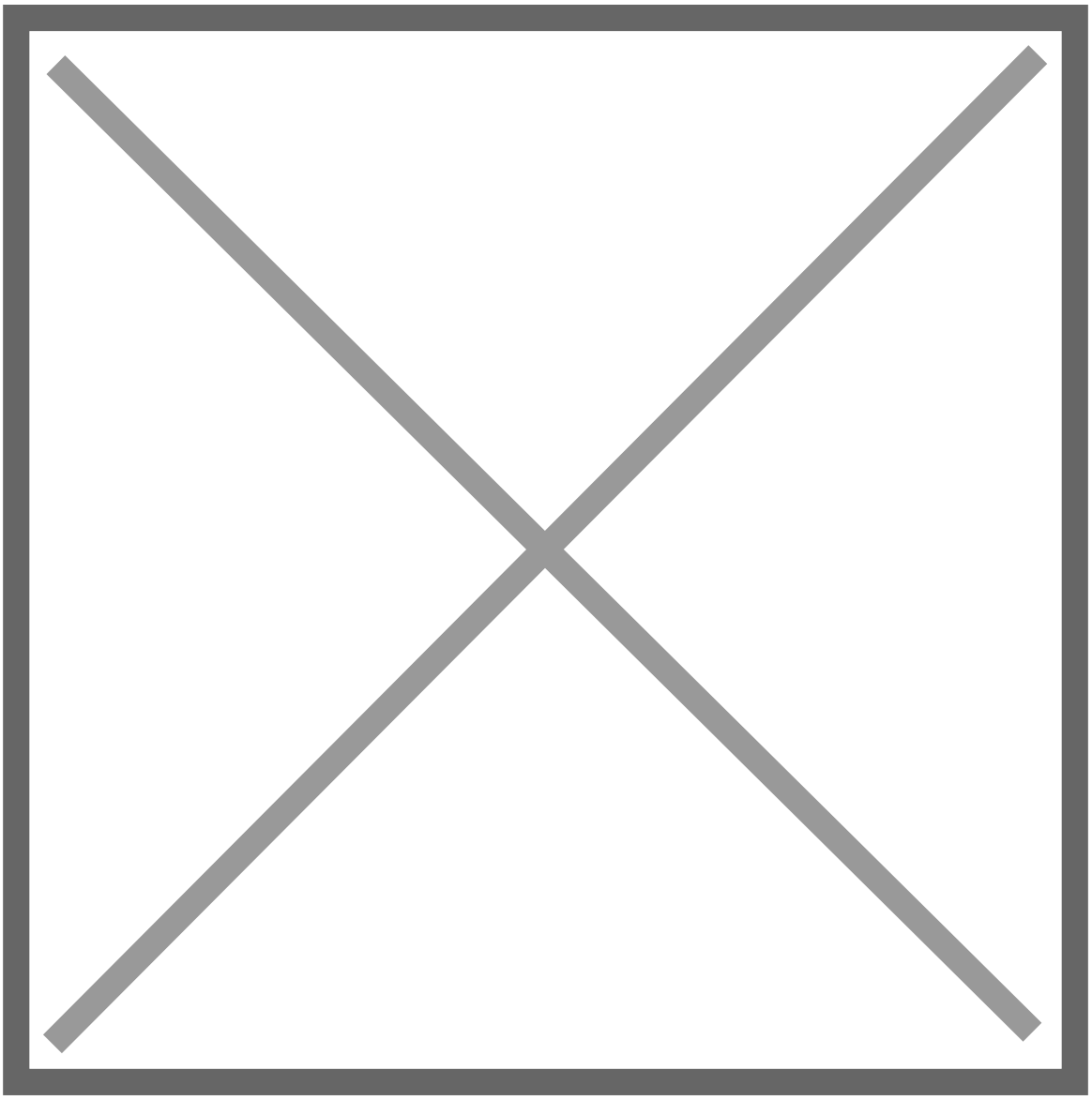
Please cite as: EUAA, 'Section 4.7 Reception of applicants for international protection' in *EASO Asylum Report 2021*, January 2022.

Section 4.7 Reception of applicants for international protection

The recast Reception Conditions Directive sets the standards for the conditions which must be met during the reception phase of an asylum procedure and aims t ensure that rights and obligations are harmonised across all Member States. The reception of applicants for international protection encompasses rules on material reception conditions, financial allowance, freedom of movement, access to health care, education for children, access t the labour market, language instruction and socio-cultural orientation. The directive applies to all applicants throughout the whole asylum procedure and for all types of procedures until they are allowed to remain on the territory.

The recast Reception Conditions Directive describes the conditions and processes under which applicants need to be informed about reception benefits and duties. The directive also outlines th circumstances when Member States may reduce or exceptionally withdraw material reception conditions. Member States must have appropriate guidance, monitoring and controls to ensure th the EU standards are upheld. They also need to provide suitable staff training and allocate sufficient resources. Member States are required as well to take into account the specific situatio of vulnerable applicants *(see Section 5)*. Furthermore, the directive lists the criteria, guarantees and conditions for the detention of applicants *(see Section 4.8)*. The standards in the directive, however, can be imposed differently in national laws, and thus, variations exist in reception conditions across countries.

COVID-19

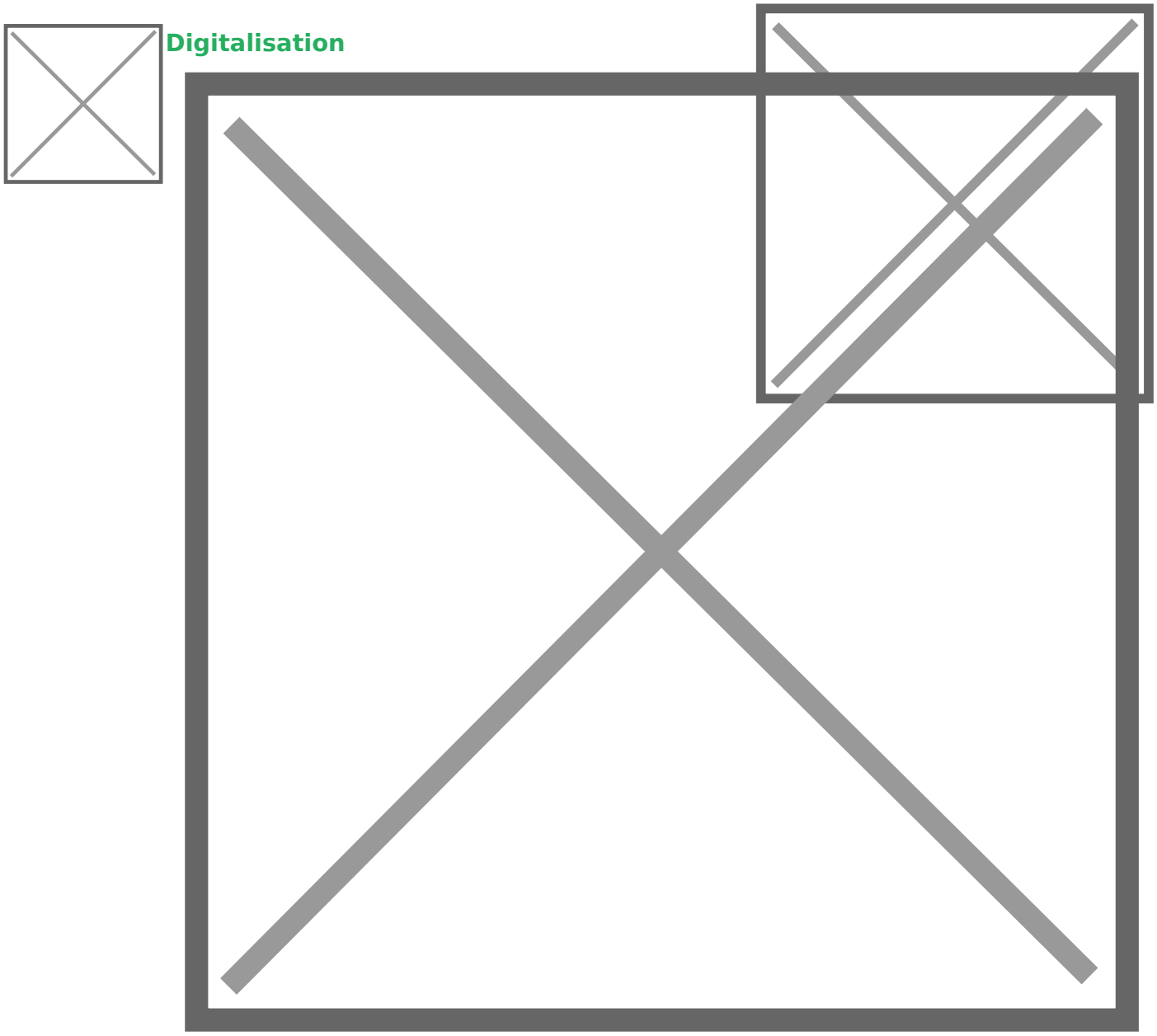


Policy-makers and reception facility managers had to quickly adapt the organisation and infrastructure of reception to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Newly-arrived applicants often had to quarantine for a certain period of time or take tests. Transfers from one centre to another were typically halted during the spring, meaning for example that applicants were not able to move forward to the next phase of reception, which could potentially have a negative impact – especially for applicants with special needs who were not matched with the facility and services best suited to their profile.

Requirements for physical distancing demanded more space and re-organisation, decreasing the maximum occupancy rate of centres. Common spaces and processes need to be re-organised as well, for example the distribution of meals and financial allowances. Where the number of applicants and occupancy remained low, this challenge could be addressed more promptly. In other countries, where reception facilities were almost full even before the pandemic, the requirements for extra space put a further strain on reception authorities, management and reception staff. A few new initiatives were launched as solutions, for example by having applicants stay outside of reception centres.

In addition, the freedom of movement of applicants and the possibility to receive visitors were

limited, preventing social contact in and outside of the reception centres, either due to general confinement measures or to specific measures for certain centres *(see Section 4.7)*. Applicants were more likely to feel anxious and helpless, while support services were often reduced to maintain physical distancing or moved online. Staff were often present in reduced numbers due to shift work or isolation measures, adding further challenges to ensure adequate support services in a period when demand was exceptionally high. The pandemic prompted improvements to be made to strengthen the provision of health care for applicants and reinforce cooperation with health care professionals. Ensuring children's education was an overall priority, but the IT infrastructure was sometimes lacking and children could not make use of study rooms or lacked space for concentration and study.

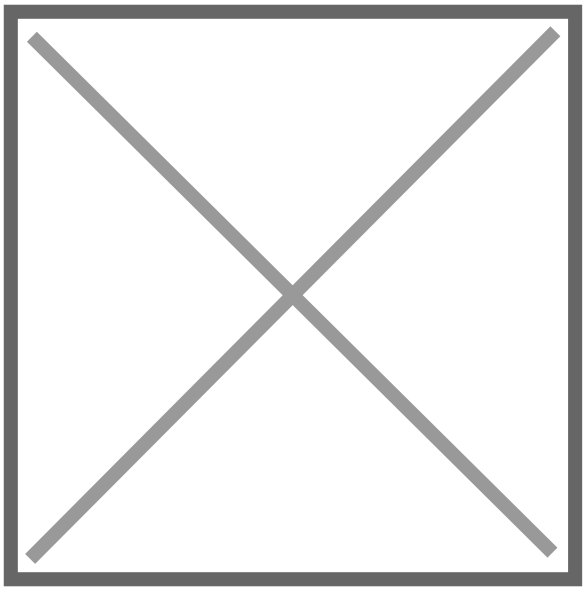


Digitalisation

Digitalisation has been of particular interest for reception authorities to facilitate administration, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. The rollout of reception management systems continued in 2020. These systems include a comprehensive overview of an applicant's file, including any special needs, and they allow to better assign individual applicants to the most suitable place or to plan for specific support. They also often comprise of an entry-exit system, increasing security

within reception facilities. At the same time, these systems potentially raise issues of data protection and have been found to be vulnerable for data leaks. New mobile applications specifically for asylum applicants provide information on house rules and available support services *(see Section 4.9)*.

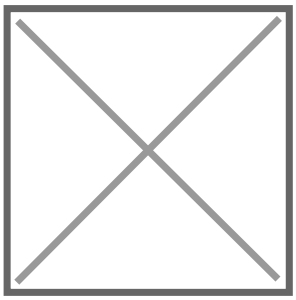
The pandemic uncovered some of the issues and weaknesses with connectivity and hardware, and reception centres started to improve wifi connections and invest in more computers and laptops. This was especially important for ensuring online education. However, whenever possible, support services quickly shifted back to in-person meetings, with adapted spaces and other preventive measures, and they are likely to remain mainly offline, as reception staff are well aware of the importance of physical presence in providing guidance, care and realistic perspectives for applicants for international protection.



In 2020, trends identified in earlier years continued, with some countries embarking on significant reforms within their reception system, including institutional re-organisation. The increased centralisation and coordination of the initial reception phase continued, and more countries moved towards the establishment of arrival centres, gathering all stakeholders of the asylum and reception process in one place.

The number of overstayers – recognised beneficiaries of international protection or former applicants – also persisted in several EU Member States, their extended stay often leading to tensions. The issue of disruptive applicants remained high on the political agenda in the Netherlands, but policy changes and case law from other countries showed that this specific challenge continued to concern other national authorities. In previous years, focus was on the rapid inclusion of applicants in employment-related training and skills assessment and development; and while this seemed to remain the main guiding principle for Member States, reduced services risked that these programmes would be less effective. Finally, some of the most worrying concerns expressed by UNHCR and civil society organisations for specific countries and situations seemed to have intensified, as this section outlines.

In its Pact on Migration and Asylum, the European Commission maintained its proposal for a new Reception Conditions Directive *(see Section 2).* However, its other proposals also impacted the area of reception. Academia and civil society organisations highlighted potential contradictions with the new Screening Regulation, as the new Reception Conditions Directive would apply only after screening has ended, but the directive itself states that material reception conditions should be provided to applicants from the moment they make an application.[519]



[519] Slingenberg, L. (2021, April 12). Political Compromise on a Recast Asylum Reception Conditions Directive: Dignity Without Autonomy? *European Union Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy*. https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/political-compromise-on-a-recast-asylum-reception-conditions-directive-dignity-without-autonomy/; European Council on Refugees and Exiles et al. (2020, October 6). *Joint Statement: The Pact on Migration and Asylum: to provide a fresh start and avoid past mistakes, risky elements need to be addressed and positive aspects need to be expanded*. https://www.ecre.org/the-pact-on-migration-and-asylum-to-provide-a-fresh-start-and-avoid-past-mistakes-risky-elements-need-to-be-addressed-and-positive-aspects-need-to-be-expanded/





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