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4.7.2.5. Health and promoting a healthy lifestyle

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icon for healthcare

In the first half of 2021, EU+ countries started to roll out their strategies on COVID-19 vaccinations.780 Asylum applicants in most countries followed the general priorities defined for the whole population, but there were some exceptions. Croatia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania and Switzerland introduced specific policies for the vaccination of asylum applicants, specifying that vaccines are free of charge, on a voluntary basis and by registration to receive an appointment.

AMIF-funded projects aimed to facilitate access to health care in reception centres in Bulgaria, Finland and Romania. In Bulgaria, in the framework of the project "Improving the health status of refugee and migrant children in southern and south-eastern Europe", implemented with support from Caritas and in partnership with UNICEF Bulgaria, a new mobile ambulance unit opened in the reception and registration centre in Sofia. A nurse provides health counselling and basic medical care, and an ambulance is available to transport patients to health facilities.781

In recent years, the Finnish Immigration Service has been focusing on further developing mental health services in the reception system.782 For example, the Psyyke project was implemented with AMIF funding between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2021, offering training and guidance to reception staff on mental health support in reception facilities.783 In Romania, a project was implemented by NGOs to improve access to the health system for all applicants.784

In Malta, medical doctors contracted by AWAS started operating in the first quarter of 2021. The medical service is available in the initial reception centre and the main open centres. In addition, in the first quarter of 2021, welfare officers were recruited to follow the health care of vulnerable clients in tandem with social workers.

The French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) signed a convention with the city of Marseille, a first agreement of this kind, for the municipality to provide to the medical services of OFII vaccines against measles, mumps, rubella and hepatitis B for migrants in general, including asylum applicants.785 The aim of this convention is to facilitate the access of migrants to vaccinations, since they are now able to get vaccinated free of charge at the OFII, a known interlocutor for them.

The AIDA report for Poland noted a few instances when applicants had difficulties in accessing necessary health care and were initially refused treatment.786

Law No 4825/2021 amended the provisions related to the Greek health care number (PAAYPA) to clarify some of the administrative issues related to the number's issuance. The number is automatically provided with the applicant's card, remains valid for the duration of the asylum procedure and is automatically deactivated with a final negative decision for international protection. It exceptionally remains active for unaccompanied minors until a return decision is implemented or until a minor reaches adulthood. HumanRights360 reported on some issues related to the issuance and extension of the health care number, even after the legislative amendments entered into force. The organisation observed that due COVID-19 measures in practice several applicants had challenges to access medical care and vaccinations.787

The Greek National Commission for Human Rights observed a wide gap in the provision of health and psychological services during an on-site visit in Samos at the Reception and Identification Centre of Vathy. The challenges centred around a lack of staff, lack of support from interpreters and a shortage of medication.788 The findings were echoed by the European Committee of Social Rights in the case cited above, underlining that children had insufficient access to health care on the islands.

In an effort to promote a healthy lifestyle and sports, the Finnish Immigration Service, the Football Association of Finland and the Football Players' Association of Finland were awarded a grant of EUR 50,000 from UEFA to organise football activities in reception centres. This includes a tour in reception centres entitled "Football belongs to everyone" and a training course for reception centre employees.789

In Spain, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration signed a memorandum with the Spanish Olympic Committee to promote sports in the reception system.790 An AMIF-funded project in the Netherlands promoted sports and exercise among residents. Sports equipment was purchased for facilities in different locations, COA staff received training, work instructions were developed and a special magazine was published for staff to share tips and tricks on encouraging residents to do more sports.791 In 2022, a similar project with external partners will focus on sports and exercise for young adults in reception centres.792

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