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Lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the provision of legal assistance in asylum and other related procedures in 2021, including during the return of former applicants, family reunification and issuing residence permits after recognition. When personal contact between legal aid providers and clients was not possible, consultations were organised by email or phone. Remote provision of services, however, also entailed risks for the quality of services and confidentiality. It also made trust-building more difficult and complicated practical matters, such as the sharing of documents between aid providers.

Some EU+ countries extended the provision of legal assistance or adopted guidelines to ensure an effective legal assistance at first instance, with a focus on the role of lawyers during the personal interview. Legislative amendments clarified the scope of legal assistance, while other changes aimed to align state payments to legal representatives.

Along with difficulties in accessing the asylum procedure, some applicants lacked or had insufficient legal information and assistance at the European borders. In addition, civil society organisations raised concerns on legal aid for asylum applicants placed in detention.

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