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4.1.2.2. Impact of increasing number of applications for international protection

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icon showing impact in increasing applications

The majority of EU+ countries were faced with an increasing number of applications for international protection. In addition, they also had to find solutions to register persons in need of temporary protection. These events led to several adjustments in registration and lodging procedures, aiming to facilitate and accelerate the process. Nonetheless, delays persisted in many countries, often delaying access to material reception conditions (*see Section 4.7*).

Due to the extraordinary and disproportionately high number of asylum applications at the border between Austria and Hungary, the police in Austria changed the registration system. Unaccompanied minors, families and other vulnerable persons continued to be handled in the regular scheme. Other applicants were registered and finger-printed at the border. In case of a Eurodac hit, these applicants were transferred to the first reception centres. For others, the Regional Police Directorates in the provinces were then responsible for conducting the first interviews. Applicants were provided with temporary accommodation during this period.290

An important improvement evolved in access to the procedure in Bulgaria for ‘self-reporting asylum seekers’ who entered Bulgaria undetected by the police. As of 2022, these third-country nationals can appear on their own directly at a reception centre of the State Agency for Refugees and apply for protection, while in the past they would be directed to the police where they would be subject to detention.291

In October 2022, France established a new branch office of the Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) in Mayotte to lodge applications for international protection.292

In November 2022, the French Council of State dismissed a request for urgent interim measures concerning 234 persons disembarked from the ship Ocean Viking in Toulon. The council judged that the disembarkation process happened according to the law, civil society organisations had access to a designated temporary waiting zone after a few hours, OFPRA swiftly conducted interviews and 66 asylum applicants were allowed to enter the French territory, and the judiciary annulled detention for the majority of people. Forum Refugiés-Cosi provided their overview of the events and noted some elements in the process which, in their view, would require more

clarity in the future, especially in the relocation of applicants to other Member States.293

In the Netherlands, authorities introduced measures to continue processing cases despite significant challenges in reception capacity. This resulted in the timely registration of applications, even though applicants had to remain in emergency or crisis reception facilities.294 Afghans arriving in the Netherlands through evacuation processes were quickly registered and given access to the asylum procedure.295 Family members joining relatives who were recognised as beneficiaries of international protection and did not require accommodation were registered (by appointment) in Zevenaar since December 2021, thus alleviating pressure on registration capacity in Ter Apel.296

In order to streamline the procedure, Slovenia adopted amendments to the rules on the procedure for foreigners who wish to apply for international protection and on the procedure for accepting applications for international protection, which came into force in October 2022. The amended rules include the obligation to inform a foreigner about the possibility of applying for international protection when there is an indication of such a need, and the written statement on the reasons for applying for international protection is no longer required in the preliminary procedure.297

On 19 January 2022, the Brussels first instance tribunal ordered the Belgian state to end the impossibility for applicants to register their application for international protection and stated that Fedasil should have foreseen appropriate structures to accommodate an increasing number of applicants *(see Section 4.7)*. Minors, families with children and particularly vulnerable applicants were given priority and allowed to enter in order to apply for asylum and receive a reception place. Many of the single men were refused access to the asylum procedure and requested to return on an unspecified date.298 At the end of 2022, civil society organisations estimated that there were 3,000 persons who had not been offered reception.299

The ECtHR indicated interim measures in five cases throughout 2022, concerning approximately 600 persons, and ordered Belgium to provide material reception conditions to these applicants. As the particular issue of delays in accessing registration was not raised, the court did not address these delays.300 By 31 January 2023, the court had taken 1,132 interim measures concerning 1,133 asylum seekers.301 In order to alleviate the pressure on the arrival centre, the registration process was reorganised and applicants were required to report again directly to the Immigration Office in the Pacheco building instead of the arrival centre.302 Efforts to recruit staff continued in general, including registration staff. While ensuring adequate reception for applicants remained a salient issue throughout 2022 and the beginning of 2023, by the end of 2022, the Immigration Office managed to register all applicants on the day of requesting international protection.

The Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) expressed alarm at the delays in accessing the asylum procedure after people declared that they are seeking international protection.303 This situation persisted for a number of months, and the Irish Refugee Council called for clarity and action on the registration of applications for international protection.304 In an effort to speed up procedures, Irish authorities, with assistance from UNHCR, took steps to shorten the initial questionnaire and simplified the language to make the process more accessible in 2021. The initial questionnaire could also be submitted electronically, and further action was being

taken to translate the document into additional languages. At the end of 2022, a new procedure was introduced to accelerate the application process. Applicants in reception complete a preliminary interview, an application for international protection and a new questionnaire with the help of interpreters and cultural mediators.305

Several Italian civil society organisations reported on persisting barriers in accessing the asylum procedure in various territories of the country.306 In some cases, it was observed that applicants had to wait several weeks before they could register their application.307 The Tribunal of Rome ordered the Questura to register the application of an applicant who was refused access to the premises and was told for several days to return the following day as the daily capacity for registrations had been reached.

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