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Continuing a trend from past years, some EU+ countries introduced practices to distinguish at the earliest possible time between those in need and those not in need of protection, with the latter being directed to return procedures. For example, to relieve the workload in asylum proceedings and pressure in reception, the so-called 24-hour procedure in Switzerland, which had been tested on a small scale since 2023, was generally introduced in 2024 for applicants from the Maghreb states. The aim of the procedure is to very quickly process asylum applications that have low chances of success.99

Other initiatives brought together competent authorities in one location to facilitate coordination among authorities and decrease processing times. The 'France Asile' territorial hubs, introduced by the 2024 law on controlling immigration and improving integration, will bring together the authority responsible for registration (prefectures), the authority responsible for the lodging of applications (Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons, OFPRA) and the authority responsible for granting material reception conditions (OFII) in order to complete these steps on the same day. Pilot sites will be implemented as of 2025.100

In Spain, building on the experience of a one-stop model for people coming from Ukraine, the model is being tested for applicants for international protection.101 EU+ countries also introduced additional obligations for applicants to collaborate with authorities in sharing as much information and as early as possible about their age, identity, nationality and countries of residence or transit.102 In recent years, the introduction of digital innovations in registering and lodging applications also aimed to address this dual goal of gathering more information from applicants and decreasing processing times,103 and for example, in 2024, the Irish International Protection Office (IPO) introduced a new digital application procedure for all applicants.104

Despite efforts by national authorities, throughout 2024 delays were reported in a number of countries in accessing the asylum procedure, with applicants on certain occasions waiting for months to obtain an appointment to formalise their application.105 This occurred, for example, in Spain in the Canary Islands;106 in Greece due to interruptions in the provision of interpretation services;107 and in Italy at police headquarters, particularly in large cities like Rome, Milan and Florence.108 In addition, the Barajas airport in Spain experienced some

saturation periods in 2024 due to a high number of applicants.109

With stricter border control regimes at the EU's external borders, the automatic detention of migrants who crossed the border irregularly became a more frequent occurrence. Civil society organisations voiced concerns that these practices inhibited or delayed effective access to the asylum procedure.110 Within their role to guide the correct implementation of asylum law, courts often stepped in to review these practices and deemed the detention unlawful.111

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