

4.2.1. Access to information

For applicants for international protection, effective access to information is a primary constituent of procedural fairness.³¹⁶ Applicants have the right to be informed so that: a) they understand the different stages of the process; b) they know their rights and obligations in each of these stages; and c) they are aware of the means available to them to exercise their rights and fulfil their duties. Accordingly, having effective access to information enables them to make informed decisions throughout the process, being aware of what consequences each decision they make entails.

In 2018, EU+ countries continued reinforcing their efforts for accurate and comprehensive information to persons seeking international protection. Furthermore, the content of information provided by EU+ authorities, broadened into rights and obligations in the content of protection as well as integration, including organisation of induction training sessions for applicants or beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary status, in the host countries.

Several EU+ countries focused their communication objectives in awareness-raising activities regarding assisted voluntary return for reject asylum seekers and third-country nationals. Many countries mobilised AMIF funding for the development and implementation of projects and campaigns aiming to assist communication between national practitioners and prospective returnees, support key aspects of the return procedure and inform about possibilities for reintegration in the return countries.

In the course of 2018, EU+ countries also updated their guidelines and instructions for practitioners, aiming at fairer and more comprehensive communication and understanding of rights and needs for different types of vulnerable groups. Access to information for unaccompanied minors continued to remain top priority across EU+ level. Fighting against smuggling and promotion of safe and legal ways to migration were among key messages of new awareness-raising initiatives, undertaken by 2 EU+ countries in 2018.

As regards communication means and methodologies used by the EU+ authorities for the effective implementation of their communication objectives, 2018 was an earmark for switching information provision into new media tools and technologies. EU+ countries used diverse sets of informative materials to reach each target audience. The most common methods included development of online websites and mobile applications, followed by leaflets and brochures translated in several different languages. Translation of information and content of communication material has been significantly improved among EU+ countries in order to reach a wider range of nationalities of applicants for international protection and migrant communities.

The following sections elaborate on the most important legislative developments, new initiatives, projects and tools, which were undertaken or developed by competent authorities in EU+ countries, including input by civil society organisations and UNHCR.



Legislative
Developments



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undertaken by
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context of protection
and integration



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in the context of
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Legislative Developments

In most of the EU+ countries there were no significant legislative developments regarding access to information during 2018. In **Greece**,³¹⁷ the amended Law 4540 approved by the Hellenic Parliament on 22 May 2018, introduced provisions for competent authorities ‘to make, accessible to applicants, information on all the documentary evidence needed for an application, along with information on entry and residence, including the rights and obligations’.³¹⁸ Amendments also include provision of information on access to social welfare scheme, access to accommodation, healthcare, citizenship, employment and integration programmes.

The legislative amendments introduced by **Switzerland** in March 2019, concerning the inclusion of the right for asylum seekers to receive free advice and legal representation in first instance procedures, were warmly welcomed by civil society organisations and UNCHR.

Initiatives undertaken by asylum authorities in EU+ countries

In 2018, significant initiatives have been introduced by EU+ countries focusing on guidance on procedural safeguards for vulnerable applicants during the asylum procedure. Many EU+ countries also developed projects, related to information provision in the content of protection and integration for beneficiaries of asylum and subsidiary protection. Most of the EU+ countries continued marking progress in implementation of several projects and initiatives, which were launched in the previous years and are related to access to information for applicants for international protection.

Germany continued the implementation of the pilot project on **procedural counselling during the first instance procedure**, which was launched and implemented by the Federal Asylum Agency (BAMF) and welfare organisations in 2017. As of autumn 2018, in total **9 BAMF field offices** included in the pilot

project, which comprises access to collective procedural information before application, as well as access to individual procedural counselling prior to application and after decision. An evaluation of the project is planned for 2019. Nearly 50 additional communication projects also initiated by **Germany** in third countries, in cooperation with NGOs and International Organisations. Projects include production of videos and radio spots that target potential migrants and refugees and aim at informing them about: risks of irregular migration, legal pathways, and voluntary and forced return. Spots also aim to inform about Germany's commitment to protect refugees and to fight against root causes of forced displacement and migration. Objectives of the campaign, also target organisations and multipliers mediating in conflicts in order to effectively disseminate messages and contribute to the fight against root causes of forced displacement and migration.

Similarly, **Estonia** deployed **advisers**, to provide procedural, legal and settlement-related counselling³¹⁹ to applicants for international protection, throughout all stages of the asylum procedure or under particular circumstances. In this regard, Estonia produced a large number of leaflets, translated into 17 languages, which are used by the advisers and distributed among applicants prior to application and upon notification of a decision.

In the course of 2018, important initiatives were undertaken by **Belgium** and **Sweden** regarding information provision to vulnerable applicants for international protection. Both countries, issued updated instructions for national practitioners in the fields of asylum and protection. They organised specialised trainings and published communication leaflets aiming at raising awareness and providing guidance on issues related to **gender-based violence, physical and sexual violence, as well as female genital mutilation and discrimination against transgender people**.

EU+ countries continued undertaking support measures related to information in the context of reception and accommodation of persons in need of international protection. In **Latvia**, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, produced an information brochure with **Guidelines for asylum seekers**³²⁰ which is translated in 10 languages. Similarly, **France**³²¹ updated the guide written by OFPRA on the right of asylum for unaccompanied minors, which was initially published in 2014.

On February 2018, **Belgium** and the **United Kingdom** agreed³²² to [further cooperate on the issue of transit migration](#), including working on an information campaign, targeting migrants, and aiming at fighting against smuggling.

Information provision in the context of protection and integration

A series of initiatives and information campaigns launched by the EU+ Countries in 2018, focusing on **rights and obligations regarding family reunification, access to social welfare scheme, access to accommodation, healthcare, citizenship, employment and integration of beneficiaries for international protection**.

In Croatia the Office of Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, launched a new edition of the **Guide for the Integration of Foreigners into Croatian Society** including, relevant information for beneficiaries for asylum and subsidiary protection. The updated guide is planned to be translated in English, French, Arabic, Farsi, Ukrainian and Urdu.

The **Czechia** introduced new services that aim to facilitate the integration and inclusion of foreign pupils into the Czech Educational System. In this regard, the **School Adaptation Coordinator Service**, provides two-week induction sessions and assists the inclusion of new foreign pupils to school environment by preventing precedents and undesirable stereotypes. The **Interpretation and Translation Service for Schools** aims at facilitating communication with foreign pupils, while familiarising them with practical information about

school policy, admission process, the education system and integration process in the host country. The **Czechia** began the elaboration of a brochure explaining the rights and obligations of beneficiaries of international protection and published a leaflet (translated into 22 languages) outlining the offer and the rules of the State Integration Programme. **Estonia** also produced leaflets, explaining rights and obligations of applicants and beneficiaries for international protection, including important information about residence permit documents and their duration. Leaflets translated in 17 linguistic versions and are expected to be used in the first half of 2019.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, in **Latvia** continued offering information and assistance for integration of third-country nationals and beneficiaries of international protection, including advice on residence permits, entry documents and different aspects related to content of protection. Similarly, in **Slovakia**, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, developed **new guidelines** for beneficiaries of international protection including relevant information about the rights and obligations of beneficiaries of international protection. The updated guidelines also include relevant information for unaccompanied minors. **Slovenia** updated the edition of the **Handbook for easier communication in healthcare**, initially launched in 2016, which is designed to facilitate communication between migrants and medical staff as regards primary healthcare. During 2018, the **UK** Home Office continued to review the information provided to beneficiaries for international protection so as to make it easier to understand and ensure smooth support in their integration.

Training initiatives in the context of information provision

Continuing training activities for protection officers, the Office of Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) in **Belgium** organised a conference on female genital mutilation with focus on medical and psychosocial aspects. In 2018, the CGRS also issued instructions for protection officers regarding the **specificity of transgender people** during the asylum procedure. The specific instructions aim to assist relevant practitioners in adapting and addressing gender identity issues, invoked by applicants during the interview process. They also aim to inform the applicants about administrative challenges that may arise in the course of the procedure along with possibilities offered by Belgium to change the reference of sex and the first name, when an applicant is recognised with refugee status. Protection officers were also trained to identify potential or gender based violence and provide information to the applicants about assistance and support they can get by Belgian competent authorities.

Norway introduced a 50-hour training course for asylum seekers, dedicated in the host country's culture and values. The course, which encompasses nine topics of a varying scope, aims to effectively communicate an individual's rights and obligations as defined by the national legislation. The training, which is provided in a language a participant understands, also emphasises the individual's day-to-day relationship to the society, interpersonal relations and social interaction.

Audio-visual communication initiatives and new media developments

In 2018 EU+ countries, enriched their communication and awareness-raising activities with audio-visual material and new information technology tools, in order to facilitate, access to information and dissemination of key messages, to applicants, beneficiaries of international protection and third-country nationals.

Greece launched a series of informative video spots on access to information and rights of applicants for international protection, which were translated in 18 languages.³²³ **Bulgaria** produced an animated film entitled The Daily Regime. Similarly, **Finland** ³²⁴ produced a series of **videos**, which are presented in reception centres as part of an induction training on Finnish society ³²⁵ and provide asylum seekers with information on basic rights, criminal law and the sanctions for crimes in the host country.

In regards to raising awareness on risks of irregular migration, **Germany** launched a campaign with video spots, which were aired during Premier League Football Games and further disseminated on African SDTV and Ethiopian TV channels. Finally, the Federal Foreign Office in Germany, completed the translation of the website content *Rumours about Germany* in Arabic, English, French, Dari, Farsi, Tigrinya and Urdu, including production and dissemination of relevant **infomercials** on web and social media.

With main aim to provide information on and support migrant integration, the Ministry of the Interior of the **Czechia** supported financially the development of a [mobile application](#) for foreign nationals called Prager, which was launched by the City of Prague in 2018. The mobile application, which is free to download and available in Czech, English, Vietnamese and Russian, provides information about life in Prague, an overview of the social and educational system, as well as contact details of institutions and organisations at local and national level. The **National Institute for Further Education** (NIDV) continued to update its web portal with practical information, methodologies, worksheets and guidelines for teaching the Czech language to foreign nationals. The information is available in English, Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Bulgarian and Arabic, including child friendly material and exercises for pupils. The website also contains an online counselling service managing questions and inquiries received by users.

Latvia introduced the use of two **infographics** in order to inform beneficiaries of international protection and third-country nationals about their rights regarding **social insurance and health care**. The infographics were translated in Latvian, Russian, English, Arabic and Dari. The State Employment Agency also launched a [web portal](#) with useful information for asylum seekers, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection status on first steps to employment, including relevant [videos](#) about the first steps of integration in Latvia.

Two mobile applications were launched by the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) of **Portugal**; ³²⁶ the first informs about the country's resettlement plan for 2018-2020, whereas the latter is designed to assist deployed practitioners on special assigned missions in Egypt and Turkey. The specific application includes information for asylum seekers during application and interview process, as well as information related to resettlement in Portugal. The **MyCNAIM** app was also launched by Portugal in June 2018. This mobile application promotes proximity between the services and the migrant communities. It provides information regarding the various services made available by ACM, as well as legal information on entering and staying in Portugal, international protection, access to nationality, housing, employment, health, education and integration. Additionally, the Portuguese Government launched the [Migrant Forum](#), an online interactive information tool, that facilitates discussion among migrants and different stakeholders.

Information needs of vulnerable persons and groups

In **Belgium**, the Immigration Office complemented the **information provision activities** for Unaccompanied Minors with tailored **pictograms**, which are explaining the course and next steps of the registration process, while information on access to procedure continued to be provided orally and in writing. Additional initiatives have been undertaken by the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), such as the development of two brochures for unaccompanied minors and parents/legal guardians of accompanied children regarding **the right to be heard**. The brochures are translated in 8 different languages and planned to be available on May 2019. The **UAM Unit** of the **General Administration of Youth Care (AGAJ)** (French Community) updated the guide with legal and practical information for field workers and guardians, including, among other topics, information on legal obligations for services concerning **respect of rights of the child**, information on travelling abroad and information on access to integration.

Within the scope of training protection officers, **Belgium**, produced information leaflets, about assistance and support for **victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage for girls and women (potentially) affected by Female Genital Mutilation**, as well as for **victims of transphobic discrimination** (transgender people).

In the course of 2018, **Sweden** also updated the information provided to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection regarding their rights and obligations specifically, about **health care, gender-based violence, physical and sexual violence and female genital mutilation**. The Swedish Migration Agency also undertook initiatives to inform about rights of asylum seeking boys and girls to **sexual education and counselling on contraception**. Finally, information has been included about the ‘**obligation to seek health care**’, if an individual believes that he or she has a venereal disease.

Provision of information to unaccompanied minors, found on the country’s territory without a legal representative, was the major focus for **Croatia** in 2018. The Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy of the Republic of Croatia, in cooperation with UNHCR, published and translated an information leaflet in languages spoken by unaccompanied minors.

Slovenia continued implementing regular trainings and workshops among practitioners involved in identification of victims and prevention of trafficking in human beings.

The **United Kingdom** issued new guidance on legal aid for unaccompanied minors, within the scope of the information provision.

In October 2018, on the occasion of **International Migrants’ Day** and as part of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), the Council of Europe launched a practical handbook for professionals with the title [*How to convey child-friendly information to children in migration*](#).

Awareness-raising activities related to assisted voluntary return and reintegration

Several EU+ countries launched pilot activities or continued projects aiming to inform rejected asylum applicants and third-country nationals on assisted voluntary return and reintegration.

In 2018, **Finland** focused on **enhancing guidance on voluntary return**, through a new operating model of VAPA project, which is ongoing since 2017. The project focuses on applicants for international protection and asylum seekers, who have received a negative decision, as well as those whose reception services have been discontinued or who have otherwise remained as irregular migrants in the country after the asylum process. The new pilot, which was launched in June 2018, examines ‘how individual counselling related to the grounds for the negative decision influences the applicant’s willingness to return to their home country voluntarily’. The project has strengthened competence in the entire reception system through visits to reception centres and the arrangement of voluntary return training for all occupational groups working with customers in reception centres. Another project called AUDA is aiming to diversify and further develop voluntary return in Finland.³²⁷ Within its various components, AUDA has also undertaken a large information campaign on voluntary return mainly in social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and sponsored displays) showcasing video interviews with Iraqi and Somali returnees.³²⁸

Luxembourg also committed in developing awareness-raising activities and policy related to assisted voluntary return amongst rejected applicants for international protection. The project plan also includes development of a personalised mechanism ³²⁹ for support to return. The project is expected to be implemented with the support of IOM.

Following the model of German arrival centres and Dutch process reception centres, on 13 November 2018, **Sweden** launched an inquiry on the reform of reception system, with main aim to accelerate the settlement or return of newly arrived asylum seekers. In view of this objective, the Swedish Migration Agency launched an awareness-raising campaign with videos, which target primarily reception officers, and their goal is to explain and facilitate returns to Afghanistan and explain the situation in the return country. The videos will be translated to Dari and Pashto, with the aim to provide information directly to returnees.

In December 2018, the **Czechia** announced a call for proposals related to a new project that focuses on awareness raising regarding Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration assistance in countries of return. **Slovakia**, in cooperation with IOM announced the development of a website, which provides information and contacts to individuals, who are interested in assisted voluntary return to their countries of origin.³³⁰

Concerns raised by civil society organizations and UNHCR

In 2018, the **Spanish Ombudsman** ³³¹ reiterated 'the need of the third-country nationals, who gain access to Spanish territory, regardless of how they may have entered, being provided with adequate information concerning the possibility of applying for international protection'. **Civil society organisations in Spain** ³³² reported shortcomings in legal assistance and guidance for asylum seekers during the lodging of applications due to lack of consistent and accurate information on access to procedure and rights of applicants. Also reported lack of information on international protection regarding **unaccompanied minors**. On this issue, UNHCR noted significant deficiencies in the provision of child-friendly information, attributed to insufficient expertise on issues of child protection among officials and practitioners in the field.³³³ Limitations in the provision of information to unaccompanied minors have also been reported by **civil society organisations in Greece** ³³⁴ which highlighted inadequate access to information throughout all stages of the asylum procedure. Lack of timely provision of information leads to ineffective legal representation.

Swedish organisations, noted the efforts of the Swedish Migration Agency on provision of information upon arrival and after a positive or negative decision has been made. However, they raised concerns that information is not always well-adjusted to vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children; the quality of assistance, by lawyers and legal guardians, varies to great extent, and stronger efforts are required to raise the standards.

The **European Network of Statelessness** reported significant lack of information and resources for all actors involved in statelessness and nationality problems in general, as well as lack of clarity among different actors about how to address statelessness in the asylum context. ³³⁵

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** (UNHCR) called Hungary ³³⁶ to withdraw a bill, which would in certain cases criminalise and severely limit the ability of civil society organisations and individuals to provide support to asylum seekers and refugees. As good practice, the Swiss UNHCR welcomed the amendments introduced by Germany, making the asylum procedure more efficient and added recommendations for further improvement in the areas: access to information, reception, airport procedure and applicants' obligations.

Initiatives undertaken by EASO

In 2018, EASO continued providing operational support to Italy, Greece and Cyprus and completed the Special Support Plan with Bulgaria. Within the scope of information provision activities, EASO produced communication material targeting applicants for international protection, including leaflets with information on the Dublin III Regulation translated in several languages.

In view of the Operating Plan signed at the end of 2017 with **Italy**, EASO launched a social media campaign informing applicants for international protection about the **Green Line** and disseminated several social media messages about the type of available information and assistance that applicants can receive by contacting the dedicated call centre.

Finally, EASO launched a new training module under the EASO Training Curriculum on **communication with migrant communities**. The specific module is designed for national practitioners and information

provision experts and is expected to be launched in 2019.

In the context of its Consultative Forum, in 2018, EASO carried out a series of activities focusing on the theme of information provision, including an evaluation survey and publication of a [briefing paper](#), which summarises the rationale and need for accurate and ‘easy-to-understand’ asylum-related information. Based on the survey results, the Paper also discusses effective dissemination strategies. As a follow-up action, EASO led a workshop during the 8th Consultative Forum Plenary on provision of information to applicants for international protection in the context of reception.

³¹⁶ The right of access to information for applicants for international protection is well established in EU legislation. Among others, the Asylum Procedures Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU) stipulates that all applicants shall be informed in a language, which they understand or are reasonably supposed to understand of the procedure to be followed and of their rights and obligations during the procedure and the possible consequences of not complying with their obligations and not cooperating with the authorities. They shall be informed of the time-frame, the means at their disposal for fulfilling the obligation to submit the elements as referred to in Article 4 of Directive 2011/95/EU (Qualification Directive), as well as of the consequences of an explicit or implicit withdrawal of the application. That information shall be given in time to enable them to exercise the rights guaranteed in this Directive and to comply with the obligations described in Article 13 (APD Recast, Article 12, Guarantees for Applicants). Similar stipulations are also made in Article 29 of Regulation 603/2013 (Eurodac Regulation), and Article 4 of Regulation 604/2013 (Dublin III Regulation).

³¹⁷ EMN, [EMN 25th Bulletin](#).

³¹⁸ EL LEG 02: L 4540/2018, Reception Act.

³¹⁹ In Estonia the particular initiative foresees, two advisers, who are settled in a detention and an accommodation centre, respectively, with main tasks to explain rights and obligations of applicants, provide information and support to applicants during all stages of the asylum procedure.

³²⁰ In the framework of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund project "Support measures for reception and accommodation of persons in need of international protection in Latvia".

³²¹ In April 2014, OFPRA published a guide on the right of asylum for unaccompanied minors in France, updated in 2018. The guide is quite comprehensive, describing the steps of the asylum procedure, the appeals and the procedure at the border.

³²² EMN, National Contact Belgium: [Belgium and the United Kingdom to further cooperate on the issue of transit migration](#).

³²³ The video spots are available [here](#), while the mobile application can be downloaded from [here](#).

³²⁴ The videos have been produced as part of the project TURVA, a joint project by the Finnish Immigration Service and the Police University College. One of the aims of the project is to advance asylum seekers' conceptions of basic and human rights and to provide them with information about Finnish society.

³²⁵ EMN, [EMN 25th Bulletin](#).

³²⁶ Portuguese High Commission for Migration (ACM), [Migrants and Refugees - ACM launches new online "support tools"](#) (in Portuguese).

³²⁷ For more information: Finnish Immigration Service, [Voluntary return supports the future of asylum seekers in their home country](#).

³²⁸ See the campaign elements at www.voluntaryreturn.fi

³²⁹ DP, LSAP and déi gréng, [Accord de coalition 2018-2023](#) (in French), p.232. The project has strengthened competence in the entire reception system through visits to reception centres and the arrangement of voluntary return training for all occupational groups working with customers in reception centres. The project was launched in April 2018 and will continue until April 2019. The project receives funding from AMIF.

³³⁰ Information provided by the IOM Office in the SR. From 2010 to 2017, returnees staying outside the facilities of the Ministry of Interior (migrants not detained by the Foreign Police) represented up to 20 % of the total number of migrants returned. In 2018, the number rose to 51%. The proportion of un-detained migrants is expected to increase after the client-oriented AVRR website is online.

³³¹ Ombudsman of Spain, [Input to the EASO Annual Report 2018](#).

³³² Fundación Cepaim, [Input to the EASO Annual Report 2018](#).

³³³ UNHCR input to the EASO Annual Report 2018; See also: UNICEF Spanish Committee, [The rights of unaccompanied children at the Southern border of Spain](#) (in Spanish), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,

[Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Spain.](#)

³³⁴ See for example: DRC in Greece, [Input to the EASO Annual Report 2018](#); AIDA, [Country Report Greece, 2018 Update](#).

³³⁵ European Network on Statelessness, [Input to the EASO Annual Report 2018](#).

³³⁶ UNHCR, [Hungary: UNHCR Dismayed over Further Border Restrictions and Draft Law Targeting NGOs Working with Asylum-Seekers and Refugees](#); UNHCR, [UNHCR Calls on Hungary to Withdraw the Draft Law on Refugees](#) (in Hungarian).

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