

May 2021

Welcome to the EMN Bulletin news flash, our selection of the key developments in the areas of migration and asylum from January to March 2021. **The full PDF version of the EMN Bulletin can be found [here](#).** If you know someone who would be interested, please share this [link](#) so they can subscribe to the newsflash.

EMN news



EMN welcomes Georgia and Moldova

In March 2021, Georgia and Moldova joined the EMN as observers. The working arrangement represents an important step towards reinforced cooperation in the areas of migration and asylum. For the first time, this EMN Bulletin thus contains contributions from Georgia and Moldova.

Recent EMN publications and events

- A joint EMN OECD Inform on “[The impact of COVID-19 on forced and voluntary return procedures and policy responses](#)” (PDF, 594 KB) was published in January. This formed the last in a series of five EMN OECD Inform published, as of June 2020, focusing on the effects of the pandemic in different areas of migration.

- The EMN report [“Children in Migration”](#) (PDF, 819 KB) focuses on the implementation of the 2017 Commission Communication on the protection of children in migration at national level. The report was launched together with a webinar on [“Access to housing and education for children in migration: challenges and good practices”](#) in March.
- The EMN Glossary app is now also available in Greek. Download the app [here](#) for Android and [here](#) for iOS.

News from the EU

Integration. The overarching goal of the [Commission’s Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#) is the inclusion of migrants through education and employment and their integration in host communities. This plan includes new actions that build on the achievements of the previous action plan from 2016. The plan was presented to the European Parliament LIBE Committee on 28 January 2021.

A new [partnership on the integration of migrants](#) was launched between the EU Commission and the Committee of the Regions, to increase cooperation and support to EU cities, regions and rural areas. This partnership is a follow-up to the above-mentioned Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, which the Commission adopted in November 2020.

EU support to Greek islands. In a [blog article](#) of 24 March 2021, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, pointed out that EU contributions amounted to over a quarter of a billion euros dedicated to, among other actions, the construction of new reception centres in Greece.

New European Fund. The European Parliament and the Council have agreed on a temporary agreement on the EU Social Fund Plus (ESF+ 2021-2027), merging the ESF with several funds such as the Youth Employment Initiative, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, and the Employment and Social Innovation programme. With the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the ESF+ will be one of the main instruments financing the inclusion of migrants and refugees in Europe, focusing on access to employment.

EU Child Rights Strategy. In March 2021, the first comprehensive [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) was adopted to improve the rights of children both within the EU and across the world. The European Commission also proposed a European Child Guarantee for EU Member States.

News from EU Member States

General policy developments

The amended Council Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel was applied at various levels across Europe. Travel bans and quarantine measures affected, in particular, people arriving from third countries and high-risk EU countries. At national levels, restrictions were based on regularly updated lists of COVID-19 infection rates and related recommendations and with different exceptions, for instance, for specific categories of workers from third

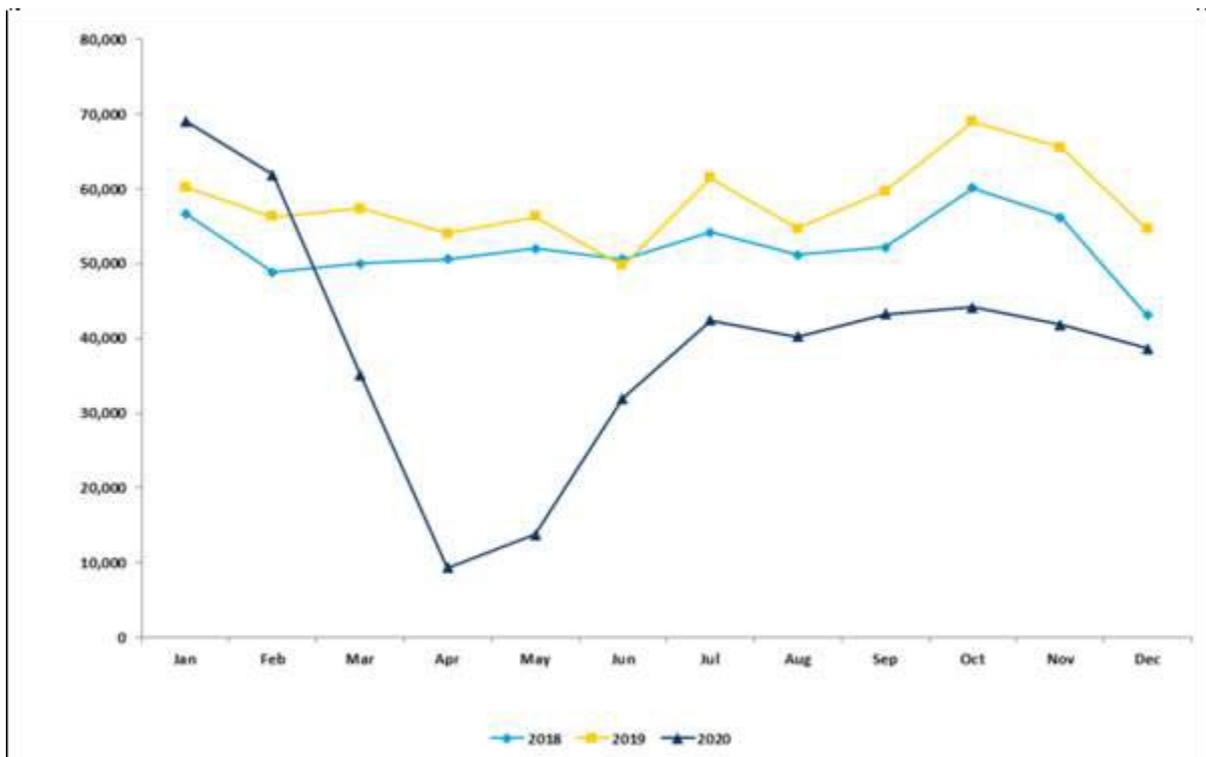
countries. EU Member States have continued to adapt measures and regulations to the pandemic situation, including amendments related to immigration laws and procedures. They have continued to adjust related policies, for instance, with extensions to the validity of residence permits to mitigate the negative impact on migrants.

Legislative changes included a decree-law on the new format for the authorisation of residence of third-country nationals in **Italy**, as well as amendments to the Law on Citizenship in **Lithuania**. The latter gives grounds for all minors who have acquired Lithuanian citizenship by birth to claim their right to dual citizenship.

In **Ireland**, a Justice Plan 2021 and a three-year Department of Justice Statement of Strategy for 2021-2023 was published with the overall goal of delivering 'a fair immigration system for a digital age'. In **Georgia**, the 2021-2030 Migration Strategy was approved and a related Action Plan for 2021 was adopted. The focus of both is on migration management, facilitation of legal migration, the fight against irregular migration, reintegration, engagement of diaspora, asylum system development and the integration of foreigners.

In January, **Malta** assumed the Chairmanship of the Steering Group of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. The year-long presidency will focus on 'Redefining migration partnerships'.

International protection including asylum and vulnerable groups



Source: Eurostat

According to Eurostat, in the fourth quarter of 2020, the number of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 decreased by 5 % compared with the previous quarter, and

38 % compared with the same quarter in 2019. Among accepted asylum applications, the top three nationalities were Syrian, Afghan and Pakistani.

During the reporting period, Member States continued to process asylum applications; nevertheless, in some cases, the process was hindered, to different degrees, by the COVID-19 situation. Resettlement and relocation in response to the devastating fires in the Moria reception camp in Greece in September 2020 were also impacted by the pandemic. In February 2021, **France** and **Sweden** announced that they will receive, respectively, 3 800 and 6 400 refugees in the framework of resettlement. In Sweden, this number includes 1 400 refugees who were selected for resettlement in 2020 but were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

National asylum processes have evolved with technology. On 22 March 2021, **Belgium** launched a new website providing information on the asylum process in Belgium. In many countries, asylum seekers were interviewed remotely. In March, the **Finnish** Immigration Service published resettlement statistics, revealing that quota refugees were interviewed remotely for the first time. In the same month, **Ireland** continued to postpone first instance interviews but proceeded with online appeal hearings where possible.

In **France**, the government issued a legal decree to create over 4 500 new accommodation places under the 2021-2023 national reception plan for asylum seekers and the integration of refugees. Similar measures, including those pertaining to the mental and physical health of asylum seekers, were proposed in **Bulgaria** and **Spain**. In January, an amendment to the Act on Health Insurance entered into force in the Slovak Republic, whereby the health insurance company is responsible for covering health care for subsidiary protection holders.

Unaccompanied minors and vulnerable groups

Efforts to formalise the legal framework for vulnerable migrants, especially unaccompanied minors, have been scaled up in many Member States. **Austria** appointed a team of experts to lead the newly established Child Welfare Commission. Their findings will contribute to protect the welfare of children throughout the asylum process. Legislation or legal guidance on migrant cases involving children was also adopted in **France, Italy** and **Sweden**, with input from local NGOs, national authorities and international agencies (i.e. UNHCR, UNICEF).

Bulgaria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and **Portugal** reaffirmed their commitment to the voluntary relocation and protection of unaccompanied minors from Greece.

These policies are also intended to be more inclusive in scope. According to a 10 February 2021 decree in **France**, migrants with disabilities may be exempt from the French-language test requirement, or qualify for an adapted test. In **the Netherlands**, the Minister for Migration drafted a plan to ensure a more secure environment for religiously converted persons and persons identifying as LGBTI.

Legal migration and integration

At the start of the year, Member States continued to face economic and social challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. According to an **Austrian** labour market analysis, migrants were more severely affected by unemployment (+2.6 percentage points) in 2020. Moreover, migrants could not access many in-person services usually available to them (e.g. education, legal support, employment).

Frontline support measures are a priority for integration policy in many Member States. In March, **Portugal** established the National List of Urgent Temporary Accommodation and opened the Migration Support Line (LAM). Between January and March, LAM received around 14 338 calls from migrants seeking assistance. EU and national funding has contributed to community-focused integration initiatives, including education and cultural mediation (**Croatia, Malta, Poland**), an integration monitoring programme (**Italy**) and a network of 140 actors promoting social inclusion (**Finland**). Under the Migration Integration Fund, **Italy** has launched around 180 projects targeting 12 834 vulnerable persons and 2 995 unaccompanied minors. Integration policy entails specific conditions for asylum seekers and refugees. By 2022, **France** plans to offer personalised support in the integration process for beneficiaries of international protection. In **Ireland**, the wait for international protection applicants to seek work has been reduced from 9 to 6 months. In **Croatia**, new legislation with changes in legal migration area entered into force.

Return

While the impact of COVID-19 cannot be overlooked, Member States have implemented, and in some cases enhanced, voluntary return protocols. In January, **Malta** set up a Returns Unit within the Ministry of Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement. In February 2021, **Belgium** announced the addition of 115 return counsellors.

During the reporting period, around 147 Georgians were repatriated from different EU Member States. As of 16 March, migrants returning to **Georgia** can benefit from a number of services within the new 2021 State Reintegration Program.

Addressing human trafficking

Prevention remained a policy focus in many Member States. **Poland** and **Portugal** launched anti-trafficking campaigns as well as training programmes. As of 1 January 2021, citizens of the EU, EEA and the Swiss Confederation entering or departing from **Poland**, in case of suspicion of trafficking in human beings, can be issued a certificate of presumption of being a victim of trafficking.

Regarding victims of human trafficking, **Finland, Italy** and **Hungary** reviewed the guidelines for granting victims of human trafficking residence permits or certificates of temporary stay.

On 21 January 2021, the **Dutch** National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings published the Human Trafficking Offenders Monitoring Report 2015-2019. Responding to the report, the government accepted all three policy recommendations and stressed the importance of an integrated and inter-ministerial approach towards trafficking in human beings.

Border management and irregular migration

Italy reported 6 669 migrants landed and registered on arrival on its coasts during the first trimester of 2021, including 934 unaccompanied minors, until 22 March. Italy also prepared to update the list of ships to be used for health care and monitoring of migrants rescued at sea. The service of health monitoring will also be extended to migrants arriving on national territory autonomously across land borders.

The Portuguese Presidency and Commissioner Johansson informed the Council that **Croatia** had successfully completed the multiannual Schengen evaluation process, which began in 2015. Other border-related news included the inauguration of new automated border control (ABC) gates in **Estonia**. The gates will increase the capacity of the border crossing points at the Tallin Airport as well as at one of the land-border crossing points and shorten the waiting times.

Spain concluded the implementation of the Canary Islands Plan responding to the irregular arrival of migrants to the Canary Islands – which constituted more than 23 000 arrivals in 2020. Currently, more than 7 000 reception places are offered on the Canary Islands, compared to less than 1 000 places available at the beginning of 2020.

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