

February 2021

Welcome to the EMN Bulletin news flash, our selection of the key developments in the areas of migration and asylum from October to December 2020. **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



On 29 October 2020, EMN Germany hosted its virtual [Annual Conference](#) in the framework of the **German Presidency of the Council of the European Union**. About 300 experts from EU institutions, Member States, international organisations, civil society and academic institutions, as well as distinguished speakers including the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, took part in the conference and discussed the challenges facing European migration policy.

During the last quarter of 2020, EMN produced two informs in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of the publication series on COVID-19-related topics. Both publications were discussed in dedicated webinars

- [Maintaining labour migration in essential sectors in times of pandemic](#) (PDF, 377KB) & [webinar](#)
- [The impact of COVID-19 on remittances in EU and OECD countries](#) (PDF, 438 KB) & [webinar](#).

A [new EMN study](#) (PDF, 1.01 MB) on attracting and protecting the rights of seasonal workers in the EU and the United Kingdom was published in December 2020.

News from the EU

New Guidance on travelling to the EU: On 28 October 2020, the Commission adopted new guidance on travellers exempted from the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU. The guidance provides a clear explanation of the term 'family member' and the scope of categories of 'essential' travellers.

Commission expert group on the views of migrants: The group, which met for the first time on 12 November 2020, was created to encourage the involvement of migrants in the development of EU migration, asylum and integration policies as well as to make policies more effective and better tailored to migrants' needs on the ground

Migration management in Greece: A new, up-to-standard reception centre has been created in Lesbos, following a joint plan between the Commission and Greek authorities. This constitutes a key step towards resolving the situation after the fires that destroyed the Moria camp in September 2020.

Integration: On 24 November 2020, the Commission presented a new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for the period 2021-2027. It is built on the principle of 'inclusive integration', which includes efforts on the part of both migrants and host communities. The main actions on the part of the EU and national governments include: inclusive education and training, improving employment opportunities and skills recognition, and facilitating access to adequate and affordable housing.

News from EU Member States

General policy developments

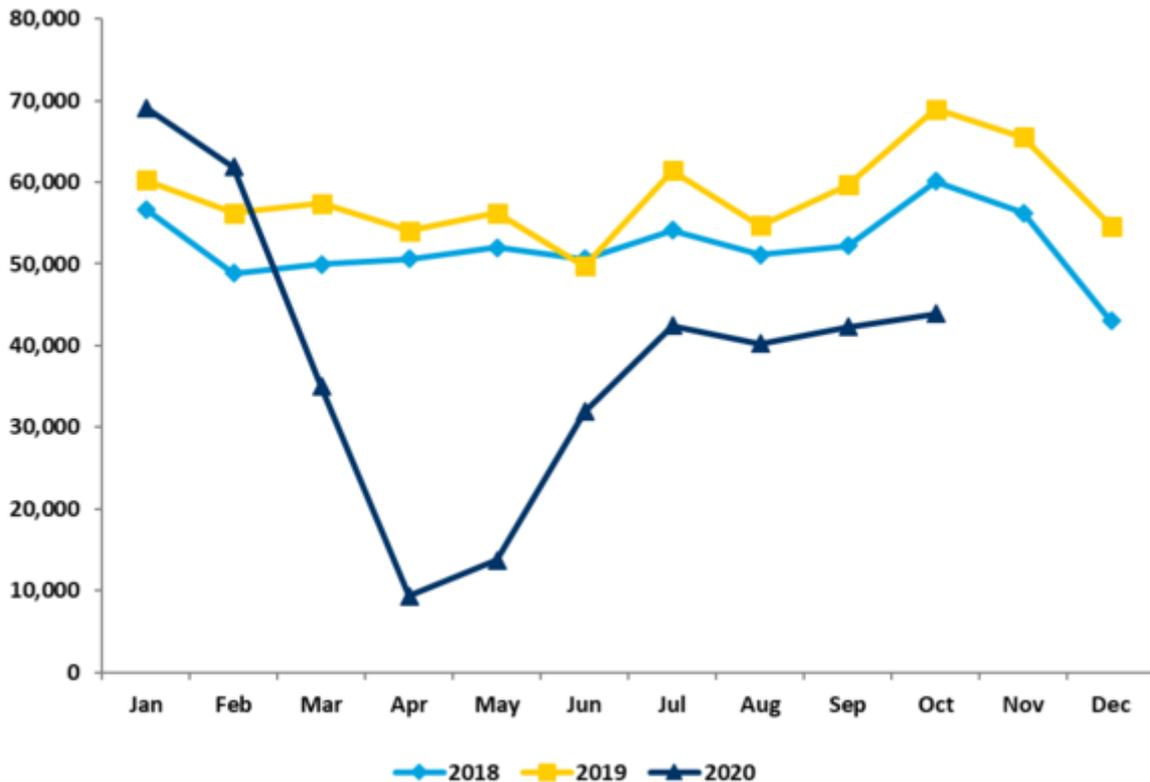
EU Member States have continued to adapt **measures and regulations to address the COVID-19 situation**, with implications for migration policy including legislative provisions, relaxing or enforcing travel restrictions and extending application periods.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union has led to law amendments, procedures and regulations regarding the residence status and rights of UK nationals and their family members residing in EU Member States.

In **Cyprus**, following recent constitutional and law amendments, a return decision can be issued, simultaneously, with a negative decision on asylum applications. This development, together with the new shorter period for submitting an appeal on negative asylum decisions, aims to significantly shorten joint asylum and return processes.

Other developments include legislative changes in **Italy**, involving extensions for special protection permit applications as well as legitimate requests to convert a residence permit into a work permit. Moreover, the reception system for applicants for international protection has been reformed and the maximum detention times in the centres have been reduced from 180 to 90 days. In **Poland**, according to the amended piece of legislation, certain categories of foreigners, such as those with 'humanitarian visas', will no longer need a work permit. According to the Migration Report 2019 published in **Germany**, humanitarian immigration has declined over the past four years, while more people are coming to Germany to study and/or work.

International protection including asylum and vulnerable groups



Source: Eurostat

According to Eurostat, the number of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 decreased by 30 %, compared with the same quarter of 2019, but increased by 132 % compared with the second quarter of 2020. The top three nationalities remained Syrians, Afghans and Venezuelans.

On 16 October 2020, a flight to **Germany** departed from **Italy** with 60 passengers seeking international protection after being rescued at sea. With this voluntary relocation procedure, based on the Malta Declaration of September 2019, 1 139 asylum seekers have already been transferred from Italy to other EU Member States. In October, **Luxembourg** welcomed a group of 14 refugees from Niger, all of whom had been evacuated from detention centres in Libya. This was part of a resettlement call launched by the Commission in 2017.

Relocations of refugees from **Greece** continued in response to the devastation of the Moria camp in September 2020. Around 50 Syrian refugees selected for relocation from Greece arrived in the **Netherlands** in December 2020. On 1 October 2020, **Ireland** announced its plan to resettle up to 50 refugees from Greece, following displacement from the Moria camp. **Bulgaria** also participated, with the arrival of a first group of 17 unaccompanied minors in November 2020.

Other trends include alignment of **Bulgarian** law on asylum and refugees with elements of European legislation and Commission recommendations. In contrast, the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union in its judgment on 16 December 2020, found that

Hungary failed to fulfil its obligations under EU law in the area of procedures for granting international protection and returning illegally staying third-country nationals.

Initiatives to improve conditions for asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants, including unaccompanied minors, were taken in many Member States. To name a few, in **Italy**, the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration initiated an annual project for the reception of 875 unaccompanied children funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), intending to enhance the unaccompanied children's integration paths and their transition to adulthood, and the **Slovak Republic** established another temporary quarantine group for unaccompanied minors. **France** and **Morocco** signed a Declaration of Intent in the field of justice concerning the care of unaccompanied minors.

Legal migration and integration

Many Member States renewed or updated their annual quotas for third-country workers. In **Lithuania**, the quotas set for 2021 foresee the employment of up to 32 200 workers. In **Czech Republic**, these annual quotas have increased by more than 30% for single permit applications for highly qualified workers from third countries. This increase aims to respond to the demands of the Czech labour market which, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, have persisted.

Renewed efforts were made to attract international students, researchers, and professionals. In the budget of state revenue and expenditure proposed for 2021, **Luxembourg** plans to attract talents with innovative tax instruments that include an 'impatriation' bonus which employers will be able to grant to their employees and, in turn, potentially to benefit from a tax exemption. In the meanwhile, as part of the 'Welcome to **France**' policy set up by the French government in autumn 2018, an online residence permit application service was created for international students, specifically for first applications and the renewal of residence permits.

Most Member States have put in place measures in regard of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. These include: rules, regulations, procedures and services for residence permit application for UK citizens as well as law amendments. These measures also aim to provide clarity to UK citizens on what actions they will need to take going forward.

Recent developments in the area of integration include the publication of the National Plan on the Integration of Migrants in **Cyprus**, the development of the Population and Cohesive Society Development Plan 2021-2030 in **Estonia**, and a public consultation in **Malta** towards a National Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia. As part of the implementation strategy of the National Integration Action Plan, a call for projects was launched in **Luxembourg** around two areas of intervention: language learning and practice, and diversity and the fight against discrimination.

Return

Cyprus' Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme was renewed until 30 June 2022. The project, with a budget of € 1.2 million, includes assistance to both voluntary returns and reintegration to the country of origin. It is co-funded by the AMIF and the Republic of Cyprus and implemented by the Cyprus office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In **Poland**, the focus was put on supporting third countries in the field of return, notably through a capacity-building project with Moldova on forced returns, and support to Azerbaijan in the creation of efficient system of readmission and reintegration of Azerbaijani returnees

Addressing human trafficking

The fight against human trafficking continued to be high on the agenda in many EU Member States. **Finland** decided to establish a team within the Helsinki Police Department responsible for investigating human trafficking offences. Looking ahead, an action plan will be finalised in early 2021 to coordinate anti-trafficking work more extensively. In **Latvia**, the national aviation industry's leading companies, the Ministry of Interior and non-governmental organisations signed a memorandum to actively cooperate in preventing trafficking in human beings. A videoconference was held between the **Italian** and Turkish Ministers of the Interior on cooperation to fight trafficking of migrants and drugs by criminal organisations and international terrorism. Awareness-raising activities about trafficking in human beings were conducted in **Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland** and **Portugal**.

Border management and irregular migration

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions on external border traffic on the EU external borders continued. This period was also marked by implementation of border management measures in **Bulgaria** with focus on the Bulgaria-Turkish border. They include an emergency action plan, a fence constructed along the border with Turkey, specialised police operations and cooperation with other countries and Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. In **Latvia**, the new Law on the State Border Guard entered into force, and in **Slovenia**, additional border surveillance capabilities were installed, with enhanced IT support.

In November, **Austria** re-introduced temporary border controls to maintain law, order and public safety. These controls, which apply to the internal borders with **Slovenia** and **Hungary**, started on 12 November 2020 and will stay in place until 11 May 2021.

On 29 November 2020, a joint declaration was issued between **France** and the United Kingdom on bilateral cooperation on combating irregular migration. In particular, measures were agreed upon to prevent the 'small boats phenomenon', transporting migrants irregularly to the United Kingdom from France, and the creation of illegal camps in the Calais area. In December, **France** and **Italy** started an experimental phase of the operational mechanism that will ensure cross-border surveillance and support the police of both countries to contrast irregular immigration.

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