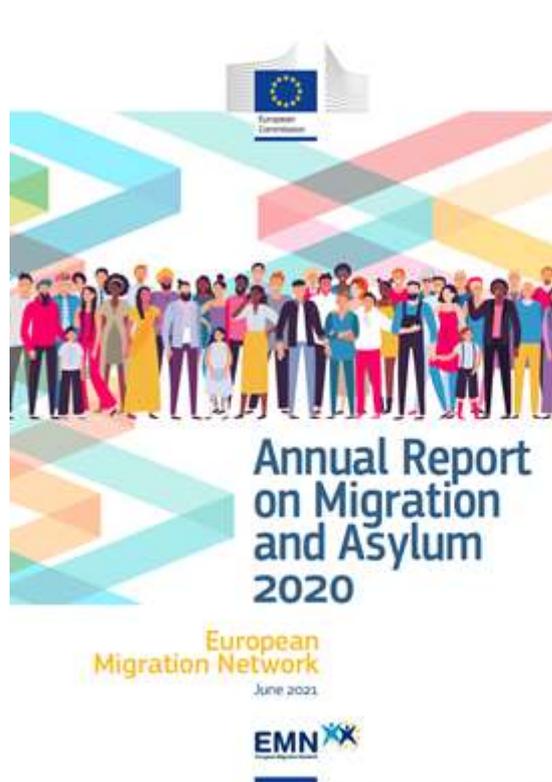


September 2021

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



Recent EMN publications and events

- On 2 June 2021, the EMN published an inform on '[Separated and missing migrants: Member States' approaches to prevent family separation and search mechanisms for missing migrants](#)', which gives a comparative overview of the policy measures and practical approaches the Member States and Norway are taking to prevent and manage the risks of third-country nationals going missing and/or becoming separated from their family members. The inform was developed in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
- On 11 June 2021, the EMN's [Annual Report on Migration and Asylum \(2020\)](#) was published. It provides an overview of the key developments and trends in

the EU Member States and Norway in 2020, including the impact of COVID-19 on migration, new electronic systems and digital tools and measures taken to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of migration management. The accompanying Statistical Annex is due to be published in the next quarter.

- On 25 June 2021, the EMN published a study entitled '[Accurate, timely, interoperable? Data management in the asylum procedure](#)', which examines how data are managed in different phases of the asylum procedure (making, registering, lodging, and examining a claim) across EU Member States and Norway.
- The EMN glossary is continuing to expand the terms and languages available to harmonise dialogue on migration and asylum issues. A [survey on the EMN glossary](#) has been launched to gather insights into its users and how it is being used to further improve its function. If you are using the EMN glossary, we welcome your feedback!
- On 30 April 2021, the EMN Conference in the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union '[Digital transformation in migration](#)' was held online from Lisbon. National EMN events were held in Croatia, France, Luxembourg and Portugal. An EMN conference in the framework of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is being planned for 5-6 October 2021.

News from the EU

Mutually beneficial migration partnerships. The agreement reached by the Council and European Parliament on the revised EU **Blue Card Directive** seeks to make new legal routes for highly skilled third-country nationals that are not only more flexible but also more inclusive of migrants seeking international protection. Under the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Commission also launched **Talent Partnerships** on 11 June 2021, a key initiative to address skill shortages in the EU as well as to strengthen mutually beneficial migration partnerships with third countries.

A more resilient Schengen. The EU adopted a new strategy for a stronger and more resilient Schengen area. The strategy has four key priorities: effective management of Europe's external borders; strengthened internal measures; improved preparedness and governance; and the enlargement of the Schengen area.

New strategies for voluntary return and against human trafficking. The Commission adopted a new **EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration** in April, to promote a common European system for voluntary returns. Stronger legal and operational frameworks for return counselling and reintegration assistance should further improve return processes and foster the sustainability and ownership of reintegration in partner countries. The **Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025** was also adopted in April. It includes specific actions to tackle trafficking holistically – from prevention mechanisms through cross-border protection of victims to prosecution and conviction of traffickers.

The European Child Guarantee, adopted on 14 June 2021, aims to prevent and combat social exclusion and child poverty. Key services that are guaranteed include childcare, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing. The EU Child Guarantee will also take into account the special needs of children in migration.

New EU Asylum Agency. An agreement was reached to establish a European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA), building on the experience of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The new agency will support the development of more efficient asylum systems. EUAA will also support better monitoring and reporting and capacity-building in non-EU countries.

News from EU Member States

General policy developments

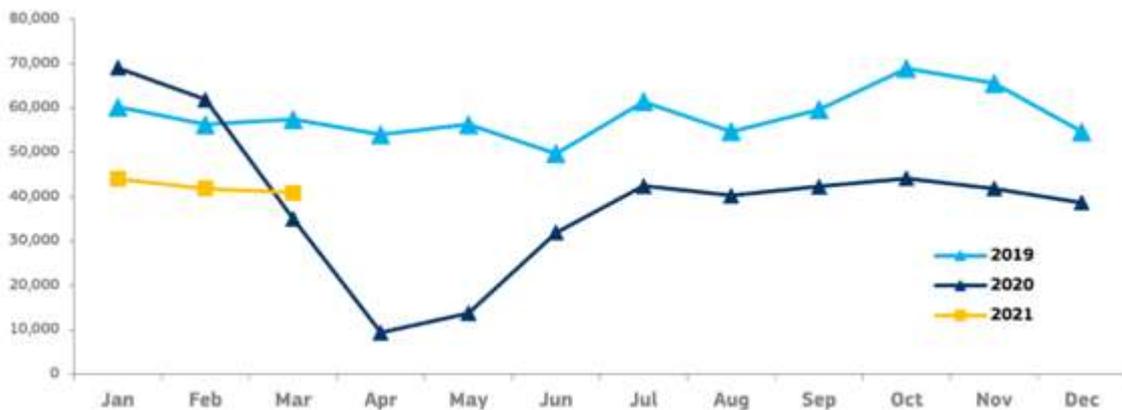
COVID-19-related travel restrictions have had an impact on all EU Member States, especially for individuals arriving from third countries or high-risk Member States.

In some cases, national authorities reviewed immigration legislation. **Belgium** and **France** made amendments to their immigration laws to better define and speed up procedures, as did **Georgia**. In **Ireland**, new hate crime legislation was approved, which will make crimes motivated by prejudice more defined and will result in stronger sentences. Subsequently, the independent Anti-Racism Committee released an interim report in April 2021 making policy recommendations for immediate actions to reduce racism.

National immigration action plans were also launched in some countries. **Estonia** approved the 'Internal security development plan 2020-2030', which includes goals for Estonian migration, citizenship and identity management policy. Outside of the EU, the **Republic of Moldova** launched the UNDP-IOM Multi-Year Roadmap for Cooperation on Migration and Sustainable Development in the Republic of Moldova.

International protection including asylum

Figure 1: Asylum applications in the EU-27, Q1 2021 (January-March)



Source: Eurostat [[migr_asyappctzm](#)], total asylum applicants, extracted on 12 July 2021.

According to Eurostat, in the first quarter of 2021, the number of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 decreased by 37 % compared with the previous quarter, and 12 % compared with the same quarter in 2020. Among the asylum applications that were lodged, the top three nationalities were Syrian, Afghan and Pakistani.

As of June 2021, **Bulgaria** and **Croatia** re-established incoming and outgoing transfers under the Dublin Regulation, which had been suspended in the previous period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Malta** updated its asylum procedure according to public health regulations and mitigation measures.

France announced that it will make 111 978 places available to asylum seekers in reception facilities as of 31 December 2021. **Luxembourg** opened two new reception centres, managed by Caritas and Red Cross Luxembourg, with 116 beds for families seeking international protection. As an act of solidarity towards **Cyprus**, **Poland** donated 80 housing units to reception centres in Cyprus.

Latvia made amendments to the Asylum Law that facilitates access to employment, healthcare and education services for asylum seekers.

The **Netherlands** is tackling a backlog in the family reunification process that arose due to COVID-19. To speed up the process, the Netherlands is collaborating with IOM in taking DNA samples for family reunification purposes.

Unaccompanied minors and vulnerable groups

Member States have increased support to key services to protect young and vulnerable migrants, including childcare, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing. During the reporting period, **France** and **Luxembourg** filed respectively legislative and ministerial orders on child protection and the evaluation of the best interests of unaccompanied minors. In **Italy**, actions were conducted to increase the number of reception places dedicated to unaccompanied foreign minors and individuals with specific health care issues such as mental illness.

Bulgaria and **Portugal**, among other Member States, have agreed to receive unaccompanied minors arriving in **Greece**. Twenty-one unaccompanied minors arrived in Bulgaria, 28 of an expected 70 unaccompanied minors have arrived in Portugal. **Finland** received 10 unaccompanied children and adolescents and has received 169 out of 175 vulnerable asylum seekers from the Mediterranean region.

Amendments to the Law on Citizenship in **Georgia** establish special grounds to grant Georgian citizenship to stateless persons in cases where the requirements for determining Georgian citizenship are not met.

Legal migration

New provisions of the Aliens Act in **Finland** will aim to prevent the exploitation of foreign labour and improve the legal status of victims of such exploitation. The legislative amendment aims to make it easier to detect cases of exploitation; to protect victims; and to help the authorities prevent recruitment by employers who have exploited their staff in the past.

Austria increased the quota for the temporary employment of foreigners in tourism, agriculture and forestry in 2021 to 3 136. Latest 2020 statistics revealed a decline in both the number of in-migrants and out-migrants, possibly due to the COVID-19-related restrictions. **Finland** introduced a new service system that will make it easier for seasonal workers to change employers while they are in Finland. The government also wants to facilitate the stay of foreign researchers, students and their families in Finland by extending residence permits and streamlining permit procedures. The proposal would grant students a residence permit for the entire duration of their

studies (instead of two years at a time) and extend the so-called job-seeking permit for researchers and graduates who have completed their studies from one to two years. The aim is to make Finland a more attractive destination for skilled labour.

New tools and permits have allowed Member States to offer improved access to employment services and national labour markets for skilled legal migrants. **Cyprus** launched an online platform for public employment services that facilitates access to the labour market, including for legally residing third-country nationals and asylum seekers. **Estonia** has also launched a new online self-service platform, for residents. **France** extended services to apply for 'talent passport' residence permits. **The Netherlands** started a pilot for a new purpose of stay to help innovative start-ups to hire foreign personnel with a special expertise. As of 1 June 2021, asylum seekers who received a residence permit in the Netherlands under a 2007 pardon scheme (RANOV) can now acquire citizenship more easily.

Integration

In **Italy**, consultations were launched for the update of the National Integration Plan, which will define the intervention strategy related to the inclusion of holders of international protection.

Efforts to integrate foreigners living and working in the Member States included skills development and training as well as targeted outreach. **Luxembourg** launched its new Communal Integration Plan. **Malta** extended the VASTE Programme until December 2022, a € 13 million project focused on enhancing and promoting the skills and abilities of the targeted audiences to have a more inclusive society. In **Croatia**, information for new inhabitants of the Danube region is now available in Arabic, English, Farsi and Urdu on an updated internet platform.

Member states also released new data and analysis on integration. An analysis published in June in **Germany** showed that while in 2009 around 18.7% of the German population had foreign roots, the proportion has now grown to 26%. In **Finland**, a report assessed that the so-called community sponsorship model could help the integration of refugees faster. **Austria** presented the Integration Report 2021 focusing on the impact of COVID-19 in the areas of labour market integration, education, youth and women.

Border management and irregular migration

Portugal initiated 117 police investigations in the field of irregular migration and has concluded 21. In May and June, **Belgium** undertook efforts to scale up border security at the port area of Zeebrugge, for example, by installing several surveillance cameras, thermal cameras and fences. In **Slovenia**, efforts have stepped up on cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism and cross-border crime in response to increased rates of illegal migration in certain areas, by establishing joint patrols at external Schengen borders together with Poland, Hungary and Estonia.

In May 2021, following the forced landing in Belarus of a civilian aircraft on an international route to **Lithuania**, the government in Lithuania banned flights to/from Lithuania if they crossed the territory of Belarus. In June 2021, Lithuania's State Border Guard Service asked Frontex for help to guard the border with Belarus; this request coincided with heightened irregular migration flows.

Return

Within COVID-19 guidelines, Member States resumed voluntary return protocols, with an emphasis on supporting the safe reintegration of returnees. **The Czech Republic** is one of six Member States assisting with reintegration in Armenia, Brazil, Ethiopia and Ukraine as part of the 'Joint Registration Services' (JRS) pilot project coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). Through the Collecting Return Operations (CRO), also coordinated by Frontex, 207 Georgian citizens were safely returned from EU Member States. IOM **Portugal** assisted with the return of 44 migrants to their country of origin, 82 % of which were from Brazil, and with the assistance of 160 participating professionals.

Addressing human trafficking

Member States launched a series of capacity-building events and partnerships to fight against trafficking in human beings. On 25 May 2021, **Portugal** held an international conference on 'Ten years on the European Anti-Trafficking Directive and the new European Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025)'.

Some Member States sought to reform the legislative framework to prevent human trafficking, by implementing temporary residence permits and planning revised referral mechanisms for human trafficking victims to come forward (Cyprus, Ireland). **Latvia** released a joint statement of commitment to work against human trafficking for labour exploitation in the Baltic Sea Region.

In **the Netherlands**, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IOM launched COMPASS, a global collaboration among 12 countries to protect migrants against human trafficking and smuggling during their journey and to support the reintegration of returnees.

In May and June, **Poland** and **Malta** held training sessions – online and in person – on topics such as identifying victims of human trafficking, trafficking in children, and more.

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