



January-March 2024

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NEWS FROM THE EU

General developments

The European Parliament and the Council adopted the legislative files under **the new Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which have been published in the [Official Journal](#) on 22 May 2024. There will be a two-year transition phase between the entry into force of the Pact in June 2024 and the date of application in mid-2026. The [EMN Belgian Presidency High-Level Conference](#) taking place on 25-26 June 2024 will focus on the operationalisation and implementation of the Pact. In March, the President of the European Commission provided an [overview of accomplishments](#) in the area of migration, security and borders over the past five years. This included the EU Security Union Strategy 2020-2025 and enlargement of the Schengen area.

On legal migration, the revised Single Permit was adopted on 24 April (Directive (EU) 2024/1233). The revised Directive will contribute to streamlining the single permit procedure (work and residence authorisation) and strengthen the protection of non-EU workers against exploitation.

Two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, [the EU reaffirmed its solidarity towards Ukraine](#) and the more than 4 million people living under temporary protection in the EU. UNHCR published its

[Regional Refugee Response Plan for 2024](#), outlining four strategic objectives and focusing on the Ukraine situation in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and the Slovak Republic. Following the Council of the EU's agreement to extend temporary protection until 4 March 2025, most EU Member States have started to take necessary steps at national level in this regard (for example to renew residence permits).

On 21 March, the European Council [adopted conclusions](#) on Ukraine, security and defence, Middle East, enlargement and reforms, migration, preparedness and crisis response, and the European Semester.

Updates on applications for international protection and relocation. As of February, over 4 000 applicants for international protection had been relocated from EU Member States (EU MS) most affected by migratory challenges to other European countries and several projects are being financially supported under the EU [Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism](#). This development marks the completion of half of the pledged relocations.

The EUAA [reported](#) that approximately 94 000 applications for international protection had been lodged in the EU+ in January which was in line with projections.

The EU's external dimension. As of 1 January, [Kosovo](#) passport holders were allowed to travel to the EU without a visa (for up to 90 days within any 180-day period). EU citizens can also travel to Kosovo without a visa. The EU announced support for a project worth € 6.4 million to strengthen border and migration management in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

Schengen. On 30 December 2023, the Council took the decision on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area: as of 31 March, [Bulgaria and Romania](#) fully apply the Schengen *acquis* and checks on persons at internal air and sea borders have been lifted. The Council agreed that a further decision should be taken to establish an appropriate date for the lifting of checks at internal land borders, which are currently maintained between the land borders of Romania and Bulgaria and other Schengen Member.

On 6 February, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a [political agreement](#) on new rules for the Schengen Borders Code. In December 2021, the European Commission proposed to update and revise the Schengen Borders Code with the aim to ensure the proper functioning of the Schengen area, both at the external and internal borders. The new rules strengthen EU coordination in managing cross-border health and security threats, including the instrumentalisation of migrants, and clarifies the existing framework for the reintroduction and prolongation of internal border controls.

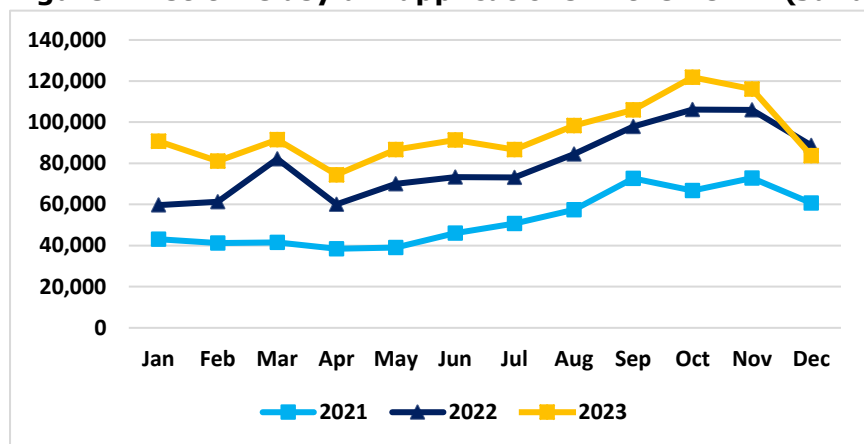
A number of people and entities associated with the Syrian regime were [added to the EU sanctions list](#) due to their involvement in trafficking in human beings. This step was prompted by a joint initiative by the Netherlands, Germany, France and Sweden.

Initiatives to support and protect vulnerable groups. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) launched new language versions of the EU Charter trainer's [manual](#), showing its commitment to reach a wider audience. The Council of Europe and FRA wrote a [joint note regarding children in migration](#) and the legal safeguards that apply to them at the EU's external borders, highlighting their vulnerability, specific needs, and right to special protection. The EUAA adopted a new [Strategy on Vulnerability](#) that provides an overarching framework and guidance for asylum and reception practitioners.

The European Parliament and the Council reached [agreement](#) to strengthen rules against trafficking in human beings. [Data](#) from Eurostat shows an increase of trafficking in human beings in 2022.

CJEU preliminary ruling on family reunification

On 30 January, the [CJEU ruled](#) once again that an unaccompanied minor refugee has the right to family reunification with their parents even if they have reached the age of majority during the family reunification procedure. The Court also clarified that Article 10(3) of the Family Reunification Directive must be interpreted as requiring the issuance of a residence permit for the purpose of family reunification for the adult sibling of an unaccompanied minor refugee, who is not able to provide for themselves and is totally dependent on the assistance of the parents, in cases where the refusal for their residence permit would determine that the unaccompanied minor refugee is deprived of their right to family reunification with their parents.

Figure: First-time asylum applications in the EU-27 (January-December 2023)

Source: Eurostat [[migr_asyappctzm](#)], first-time asylum applicants, extracted on 7 May 2024.

NEWS FROM EMN MEMBER AND OBSERVER COUNTRIES

1. General developments

Cyprus

Bill approved to establish a Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection

29 February marked an important milestone in migration and asylum in Cyprus. The House of Representatives [unanimously approved the bill](#) for the establishment of a Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection, expected to be the foundation for more effective migration management.

Estonia

Marriage equality established in Estonia affecting legislation concerning migration

From January onwards, [marriage equality](#) was established in Estonia. Marriages can now be contracted between two adults regardless of their gender. Consequently, the definitions of family members of third-country nationals were expanded in relevant legislation to include same-sex spouses and registered partners, as well as the child of a registered partner.

France

New immigration law adopted

[New legislation to control immigration and improve integration](#) was adopted in January. Some provisions are immediately applicable, others will apply after implementing measures have been established. The law includes measures concerning: exceptional regularisation of undocumented workers in shortage occupations, the "talent" residence permit for foreign doctors, measures on integration and asylum, and facilitated expulsion in case of serious offences.

Ireland

Changes to income and accommodation supports for arrivals from Ukraine

As of 14 March, newly arriving beneficiaries of temporary protection (BoTP) who seek state [accommodation](#) in Ireland will now be provided accommodation in arrival centres for a maximum of 90 days, after which residents must source their own accommodation. During this period, they will also receive reduced income support in the form of a weekly allowance.

Italy

Adoption of the Italy-Africa Strategic Plan

On 11 January, measures adopted in accordance with the ['Italy-Africa Strategic Plan: Mattei Plan'](#) were converted into law. The Plan pursues a new partnership between Italy and the States of the African Continent, aiming *inter alia* to prevent irregular migration and manage legal migratory flows.

Luxembourg

EMN Luxembourg inform "Guardianship of Unaccompanied Minors"

In February, EMN Luxembourg published the inform “[Guardianship of Unaccompanied Minors](#)”, developed at the request of the Ombudsman for Children and Youth in Luxembourg (OKaJu). The Ad Hoc Query received inputs from 23 EMN Member Countries as the basis for the publication.

Poland

Poland's migration strategy for 2025-2030

Work has begun at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration to develop a comprehensive, responsible and secure [migration strategy for Poland for 2025-2030](#). The strategy will be adopted before Poland assumes the Presidency at the Council of the EU in 2025.

Slovenia

New Government Strategy on Migration

On 28 March, the new [Government Strategy on Migration](#) was adopted.

Georgia

New governmental programme approved

On 8 February, a new governmental programme was approved “[For building a European State](#)” that includes migration management related provisions, particularly on enhancing the border management system, refining asylum legislation and the regularisation of labour migration.

Republic of Serbia

Migration Profile of Republic of Serbia for 2023 published

The [13th Migration profile of the Republic of Serbia](#) - a general overview of statistics on migration and asylum was published and includes an extensive description of the EMN and Serbia's joining as an EMN Observer Country.

2. Legal migration

Austria

Exemption from the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals

In [January](#) and [February](#) the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals was amended, excluding further groups of persons from the scope of the Act. Foreign nationals with a residence permit who have completed training in a social care profession in Austria and are authorised to practice the profession are now exempted as well as citizens of the USA under certain conditions.

Finland

Permit processing time reduced by half – automation speeds up decisions

Development measures by the employment and economic development services (TE services), the Finnish Immigration Service and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment reduced the [processing time of residence permits](#) for employed persons to an average of 41 days as of February from the previous year's figure of 77 days.

France

Updates to list of shortage occupations

To facilitate hiring for agricultural employers, [a decree dated 1 March](#) included all agricultural professions in the list of shortage occupations for all metropolitan regions. Henceforth, work permits cannot be denied based on employment availability.

Regularisation of undocumented workers in shortage occupations

A new immigration law allows [undocumented workers in high-demand sectors to get temporary work or residence permits without employer sponsorship](#), if they can show 12 months of work in the last 24 months, three years of residence in France, and proof of integration. Prefects have discretion in granting these permits. This measure will last until the end of 2026.

Germany

Migration agreement between Germany and Colombia

In February, Germany and Colombia [agreed](#) to cooperate closely on migration management. The aim is to strengthen legal migration and reduce irregular migration. A joint steering group was agreed.

Greece

New migration code

On 31 March, the [new Migration Code](#) entered into force and a [Joint Ministerial Decision](#) determined the supporting documents required for granting and renewal of residence permits. A [Decision](#) was issued on the Commencement of Operation of Asylum Units for Vulnerable Groups in Attica and Thessaloniki.

Ireland

Expansion of the employment permit system announced

The announced [changes](#) cross many employment sectors and include amendments to roles eligible for employment permits as well as a roadmap for increasing the minimum salary thresholds for employment permits. The salary threshold roadmap commenced on a phased basis in 2024.

Latvia

Attraction of foreign labour

On 30 January, [amendments](#) to the Regulations Regarding the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner, and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means, were adopted. In all sectors of the economy, the minimum amount of financial resources required for third-country employees is now set at the average salary of the sector or concluded with the general agreement of the sector.

Lithuania

Labour immigration control is strengthened in Lithuania

The Minister of the Interior [signed an Order](#) amending the Description of the Procedure for Issuing Temporary Residence Permits to Foreigners. It provides stricter rules regulating foreign nationals' employment procedures and establishes a procedure for renewing temporary residence permits for foreigners who received temporary protection in Lithuania.

Luxembourg

The average gross annual salary for highly qualified workers was set

The [Ministerial Regulation](#) of 15 March set the average gross annual salary for a highly qualified worker in accordance with the Immigration Law at $\text{€ } 58\,968 \times 1.5 = \text{€ } 88\,452$. For jobs in professions, for which a particular need for workers from third countries was noted by the Government, the minimum remuneration threshold was set at $\text{€ } 58\,968 \times 1.2 = \text{€ } 70\,762$.

Sweden

Inter-agency initiative to attract and retain international expertise

The Swedish Government has allocated 25 million SEK (approximately € 2.16 million) in 2024 to [strengthen coordination between government agencies](#), including the Swedish Migration Agency, to attract and retain international expertise and encourage growth for Swedish companies.

3. International protection including asylum

Austria

Tuition fee exemptions for Ukrainian nationals

On 23 January, an [amendment](#) to the Tuition Fee Regulation came into effect, exempting students with Ukrainian citizenship from the tuition fee for the summer semester 2024.

Belgium

Fast-tracked international protection application procedures for certain nationalities

Since 1 February [applications from nationalities with a low chance of obtaining international protection](#), such as Congolese, Moldovans and Georgians, have been processed in a fast-track procedure.

France

Implementation of "France Asylum" territorial hubs

A new immigration law introduces ["France asile"](#) hubs after establishing three pilot sites. The hubs will replace one-stop shops for asylum seekers, streamlining registration, rights establishment by the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII), and asylum application submission to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) in one location.

Ireland

New measures to expedite international protection application processing announced

As of 31 January, Algeria and Botswana are to be considered designated safe countries of origin for the purpose of making a claim for international protection in Ireland. In addition, an [expedited process was introduced](#) for applications by people who have been granted protection in another EU MS.

New accommodation strategy announced for international protection applicants

The new strategy provides a short-term [response to the current homelessness crisis](#) as well as a longer term revised accommodation model to increase Ireland's annual reception capacity to approximately 14 000-16 000 people per year. The strategy also plans a move away from the use of commercial properties to more state owned reception facilities.

Italy

Resettlement, evacuations and humanitarian corridors

Resettlement from Iran continued in the reporting period with the arrival of 11 Afghan nationals as part of the [protocols](#) signed with some civil society organisations for the creation of humanitarian corridors. Particularly noteworthy was the arrival of 51 people from Lebanon and 97 from Libya, the first operation since the protocol was signed on 20 December.

Lithuania

The European Commission allocated almost € 10 million to strengthen Lithuania's refugee reception system

The project proposed by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour with its implementing partners will [upgrade the infrastructure](#) for the accommodation of asylum seekers in the Refugee Reception Centre and facilities of the State Border Guard Service. Furthermore, additional investments will be made to renovate the Kybartai Foreigners Registration Centre.

Netherlands

Termination of temporary protection for third-country nationals from Ukraine

On 4 March, the temporary protection of third-country nationals with a temporary Ukrainian residence permit [ended](#) after a verdict of the Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Dutch Council of State on 17 January. Consequently, this group of third-country nationals had 28 days from 5 March to prepare their departure from the Netherlands. Third-country nationals in the procedure for asylum or a regular residence permit for work or study did not receive a return decision.

Remigration policy for third-country nationals extended until 4 March

Until 4 March, the remigration policy of the Repatriation and Departure Service [assisted](#) third-country nationals who had a Ukrainian temporary residence permit in their departure from the Netherlands. This policy, including financial support under strict restrictions, was extended until the application of the TPD for these third-country nationals had ended.

Extension of the legal decision period for Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) extended for 2024

On 1 January, the nine-month extension of the legal decision period for asylum applications, already applied in 2023, also [went into force](#) for the year 2024 due to the continued large number of asylum applications. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) has therefore 15 instead of the usual six months to decide on applications filed in 2024.

Introduction of the Municipal Task Enabling Asylum Reception Facilities Act

On 31 January, this Act [went into force](#). It aims to provide enough reception facilities and to balance the distribution of asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

Poland

Temporary protection extended and special measures established to prevent irregularisation

Temporary protection was extended until 30 June 2024 and a [set of special measures](#) established to prevent Ukrainian citizens legally residing in Poland and not covered by the TPD from falling into an irregular residence situation and to support the legalisation of their stay.

Sweden

New procedure for notifying decisions to applicants for international protection

[Applicants can now be notified via post](#) instead of a personal notification meeting. As more applicants will be reached, more decisions will enter into force (requiring the applicant to be formally notified).

Republic of Serbia

Issuance of travel documents to refugees

After completing the legal framework and the Rulebook on the form and content of travel documents for refugees, the Ministry of Interior began [issuing travel documents](#) to refugees from 1 February. This continues harmonisation with EU standards and a fulfilment of obligations in the Refugee Convention and Protocol.

4. Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

Italy

New Regulation on unaccompanied foreign minors

The [Regulation](#) on the tasks of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy concerning unaccompanied foreign minors came into force on 15 March. It regulates the Minors Information System, family investigations, the Ministry decision on the social and civic integration process for the issuance of a residence permit upon reaching the age of majority, integration measures and solidarity programmes for temporary reception.

5. Integration and inclusion

Finland

Civic orientation to be offered to immigrants in many languages

From 2025, municipalities will be required to offer [multilingual civic orientation](#) courses. Multilingual civic orientation provides immigrants with information on Finnish society, living and working in Finland, and the rights and obligations of an individual. The orientation will take place in the immigrant's mother tongue or in a language that they know well.

France

French proficiency level raised for first-time applicants of multi-year residence permits

Under the new immigration law, first-time applicants for multi-year residence permits must demonstrate French [proficiency at level A2](#). Previously, permits were granted for attending French language classes, without proficiency requirements. Additionally, the minimum language levels required for residence permits and citizenship will be raised to B1 and B2, respectively.

Germany

New Act on the Modernisation of Citizenship Law

The act [intends to make Germany more attractive](#) for highly qualified skilled workers and create opportunities for well-integrated people. The [law](#) enters into force on 26 June.

Ireland

Research finds attitudes towards immigration and refugees remain largely positive in Ireland despite some recent declines

[ESRI research](#) found that attitudes in Ireland towards refugees and immigration remain largely positive. However, some attitudes had become less positive in the last six months of 2023 in particular, and attitudes are positive towards some groups more than others.

Poland

New structures within the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy

[The Department of Social Integration](#) was established at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and is responsible for determining the directions and implementation of tasks in the field of integration of foreigners in Poland (i.e. in the social, cultural, linguistic or educational dimension), preparing standards in this respect and monitoring the implemented solutions.

Slovenia

Adoption of a new Decree on assistance for the integration of third-country nationals

On 28 March, a new [Decree](#) on the integration of third-country nationals was adopted, defining the scope of Slovenian language courses at the subsistence level. Family members of third-country

nationals issued a temporary residence permit for the purpose of family reunification are entitled to 180 hours' free attendance, and 60 hours more if they do not achieve the expected learning results.

Georgia

Multistakeholder cooperation launched to support refugee children in Georgia

On 26 March, a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) was signed between the National Centre for Teacher Professional Development and donor organisations – UNHCR Georgia, World Vision Georgia Foundation and Gudavadze Patarkatsishvili Foundation – to support Georgian language learning for asylum-seeker and refugee school children in public schools. A new project supporting the inclusion of refugee schoolchildren in state language education was launched, including learning resources.

6. Border management and irregular migration

Austria

Extension of temporary border controls at the internal borders

The Minister of the Interior amended two regulations on internal border controls, extending them with the [Slovak Republic](#) until 2 June 2024 and with the [Czech Republic](#) until 16 April.

Finland

Interoperability within border and visa policies to detect multiple identities

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs' interoperability project (UMPIO) coordinates data related to internal security, border security and migration management in the EU information systems for security. The [project](#) is developing a detector for the Visa Information System to check identity, travel document and biometric data to identify individuals who are registered in several EU information systems.

Finland's eastern border to remain closed

The Government decided that the border crossing points on the land border between Finland and Russia [would remain closed](#) until further notice. It will also not be possible to submit applications for international protection at any border crossing points on the land border between Finland and Russia.

Ireland

Change in visa requirements for nationals of Dominica, Honduras and Vanuatu

The [introduction of a visa requirement](#) for these groups is part of an ongoing process to bring Ireland into closer alignment with the visa regime in the United Kingdom and the Schengen area.

Italy

Bilateral agreement with Tunisia

On 5 March, the implementation of the [Memorandum of Cooperation in the management of migration flows between Italy and Tunisia](#) commenced. It defines cooperation between the agencies of the countries' respective Foreign Ministries to bring 12 000 Tunisian workers to Italy over three years.

Italy-Albania Protocol

On 14 February, the decree ratifying and executing the [Italy-Albania protocol](#) for the strengthening of cooperation in migration matters was approved. Albania granted Italy two areas on its territory to set up facilities for border procedures or for the return of migrants.

Latvia

Enhanced surveillance at the border with Belarus will continue

On 12 March, the Cabinet of Ministers re-announced the six-month enhanced border surveillance regime, starting from 13 March in municipalities at the Belarussian border. The [order](#) was issued to ensure the inviolability of the state border and in view of increasing irregular crossing attempts.

On 4 March, an [order of the Cabinet of Ministers](#) entered into force, extending the period of restrictions on Russian citizens' entry into Latvia, due to the continued security threat of the Russian Federation.

Lithuania

Closing of border crossing points Lavoriškės and Raigardas

The Lithuanian Government approved the proposal of the National Security Commission to [terminate the movement of goods, transport, and persons](#) across the Lithuanian-Belarusian border at the

Lavoriškės and Raigardas border crossing points and put restrictions in place at the Medininkai and Šalčininkai border crossing points from 1 March.

Poland

Internal border controls with the Slovak Republic lifted

On 2 March, [internal border controls](#) with the Slovak Republic were lifted as the situation was stable.

Construction of an electronic barrier on the border with Belarus agreed

The Border Guard signed an [agreement](#) to construct an electronic barrier on the Bug, Świsłocz and Istoczanka rivers. The Ministry of the Interior and Administration will co-finance it from EU funds.

7. Trafficking in human beings

Austria

New National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings

On 13 March, the seventh [National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking \(2024–2027\)](#) was adopted by the Austrian council of ministers with a total of 103 actions.

Finland

Foreign Ministry suspends reception of berry pickers' visa applications from Thailand

A thorough assessment of the conditions for issuing Schengen visas was carried out after allegations about serious crimes in the 2023 harvest season. The risk of exploitation and trafficking of human beings must be taken into account when visa applications are considered and [Schengen visas will not be issued](#) to wild-berry pickers from Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar for the 2024 harvest season.

Government to tackle labour exploitation with a broad action plan

A [new action plan](#) will tackle labour exploitation with legislative reforms and increased cooperation between the authorities. The action plan has five main objectives, with a total of 33 measures, to be launched in different ministries and their administrative branches according to an agreed timeline.

Luxembourg

Fourth report on trafficking in human beings in Luxembourg presented

On 29 February, the Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CCDH), as national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings, presented its fourth [report](#) covering 2021-2022. It determines trends in matters of trafficking in human beings and assesses the results of the actions undertaken to fight it.

Georgia

Working group on awareness raising activities established

Within the Council on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings an [inter-agency working group](#) on awareness raising activities was established. In the first quarter of 2024 the working group designed a joint calendar of awareness raising activities on trafficking in human beings for 2024.

8. Return and readmission

Belgium

New legislation and monitoring to safeguard the rights of people who have been detained

The House of Representatives [approved](#) a draft law creating a prevention mechanism to safeguard the rights of people detained in prisons, closed centres and police stations. The mechanism will be overseen by the Federal Institute for Human Rights, the Central Prison Monitoring Council, the Federal Migration Centre Myria, and the Standing Police Monitoring Committee. They will regularly visit places of deprivation of liberty, publish reports based on their visits, and make recommendations.

France

Increased possibilities of expulsion for foreign nationals posing a serious threat to public order

The new immigration law simplifies the [expulsion process for foreign nationals who pose a serious threat to public order](#), permits the expulsion of long-term residents convicted of serious crimes, grants judges broader authority to impose re-entry bans, and eliminates protections for certain irregular foreign nationals against expulsion decisions.

Germany

New law aims to speed up return process

A [new bill](#) to improve returns was approved in February that will make it easier to return individuals to their home countries if they do not have any prospects of remaining permanently in Germany.

Republic of Serbia

Programme for the fight against trafficking in human beings

The [Programme](#) for the period 2024-2029 and an Implementation Action Plan for 2024 – 2026 were adopted.

9. Migration and development

Czech Republic

Czech Government approves two financial donations to IOM

On 6 March, the Czech Government [approved two donations](#) of € 1 million to IOM from the Ministry of Interior's external dimension programme. The first supports safe areas for unaccompanied migrant children in Greece, the second assisted voluntary returns of migrants in Tunisia to countries of origin.

10. EU legislation transposition

Italy

Blue Card Directive (Directive 2021/1883/EU): new memorandum

With the [memorandum](#) of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies of 28 March, clarifications were given for the implementation of the Blue Card Directive.

Latvia

Seasonal Workers Directive (Directive 2014/36/EU): amendments to visa regulations

On 16 January, the Cabinet of Ministers [approved amendments to Visa Regulations](#) to transpose it into national law. When issuing a visa to a seasonal worker, the visa-issuing authority must now inform them in writing about their rights and obligations in connection with entry, stay and employment in Latvia. On 5 March, [additional amendments](#) were adopted, further transposing the Directive. When inviting a seasonal worker, the employer should provide a certificate that the seasonal worker's place of residence will comply with requirements.

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