EMN
European Migration Network

News flash: 32nd EMN Bulletin

October 2020

Welcome to the EMN Bulletin news flash, our selection of the key developments in the areas of migration and asylum from July to September 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

EMN-OECD: collaboration continues

The EMN has been organising – jointly with the [OECD](#) – a series of webinars on the impact of COVID-19 in various migration areas. The webinars serve to launch five EMN OECD Informs on the same topics. Three webinars have already taken place since July 2020, and two more will be organised in November and December. For more information, visit the [EMN events page](#)

Recent EMN publications

- EMN Study:**[Pathways to Citizenship in the EU](#)** (PDF, 5.9 MB)

- 1st EMN OECD Inform: **EU and OECD Member States responses to managing residence permits and migrant unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic** (PDF, 408 KB)

- 2nd EMN OECD Inform: **Impact of COVID-19 on international students in EU and OECD Member States** (PDF, 435 KB)

News from the EU

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum: The Pact, released on 23 September 2020, puts forward a new EU-wide framework for fair, efficient and sustainable migration management, with an emphasis on a predictable and reliable migration management system. The focus is on better and faster procedures, firm and fair rules on intra-EU solidarity and a strong external dimension based on enhanced cooperation with third countries. The Pact also sets out to promote the successful integration of refugees and the safe return of those with no right to stay.

The EU-Belarus agreements: Agreements on the following issues entered into force on 1 July 2020: the visa facilitation agreement allows Belarusian citizens to obtain easier short-term visas for entry into the EU, while the readmission agreement aims to establish procedures for the safe and orderly return of persons who are irregularly present in the EU or Belarus, in full respect of their rights under international law.

Migration management in Greece: New Emergency Support was announced by the Commission on 24 July 2020. In this framework, € 17 million were made available to support the implementation of the 'Voluntary Relocation from Greece' project, which started in April and should be completed by the end of October 2020. On 23 September 2020, following the fire that devastated the Moria facility on the islands of Lesvos, the Commission announced the establishment of a taskforce to improve the situation on the island in a durable way.

Integration: An EU-wide public consultation was launched on 22 July 2020 to gather views on potential EU-level actions to promote the integration and social inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background. A call for applications was also launched, aimed at setting up an Expert Group on the views of migrants. To enhance the integration of migrants into the labour market, the Commission, trade unions, chambers of commerce and employers' organisations renewed their cooperation on 7 September 2020.

News from EU Member States

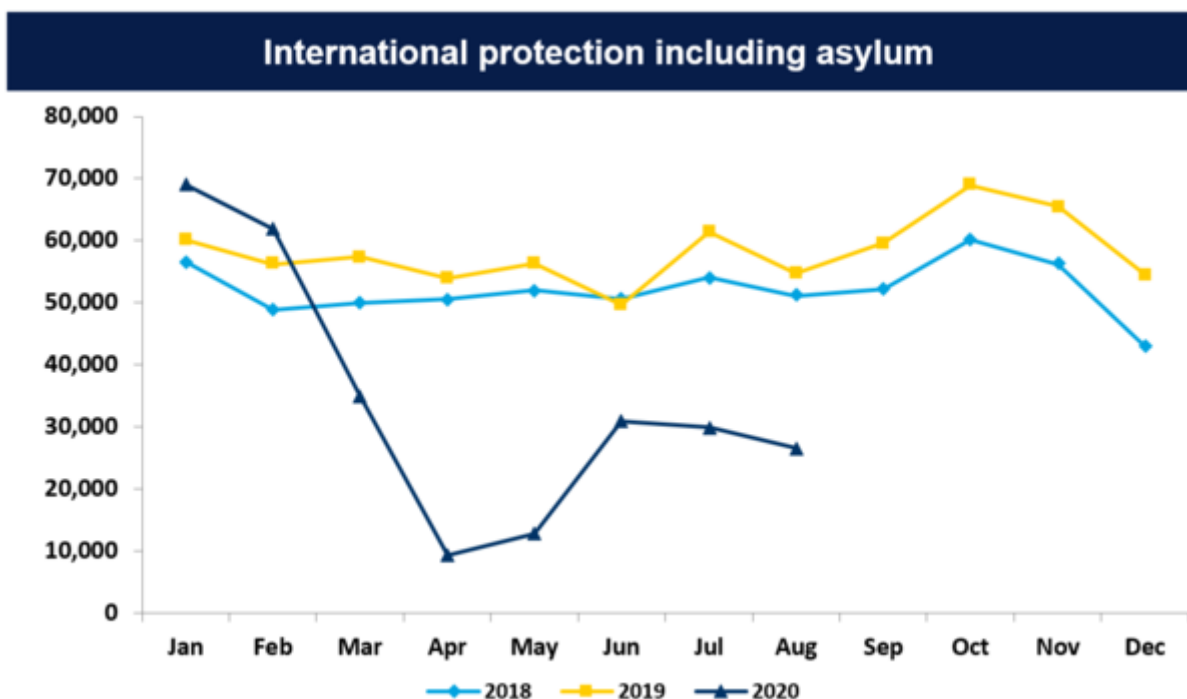## General policy developments

EU Member States have continued to adapt measures and regulations to the COVID-19 situation, with implications for migration policy including amendments related to immigration laws and practices. These implications – relaxing or enforcing travel restrictions, resuming return or transfer operations – vary across different countries, depending also on the country of origin of incoming travellers. Countries have also put in place infection prevention measures, such as testing in reception and accommodation centres and during landing procedures.

The political situation in **Belarus** triggered various discussions and measures. For instance, **Lithuania** lifted travel restrictions for Belarusian nationals seeking entry on

humanitarian grounds, and **Poland** established solidarity measures for Belarusian entrepreneurs who want to relocate their companies.

Legislative changes included amendments to asylum and immigration laws in **Cyprus**, notably shortening the period for submitting an appeal for international protection, and in **the Netherlands**, removing entitlement to compensation should the asylum decision be late. Recent developments also include a new act on the processing of personal data in immigration administration (**Finland**), on the regulations of posting of workers (**Poland**) and law amendments providing an opportunity for those in illegal employment to regularise their status in specific sectors (**Italy**). In **Malta**, an amendment to the legislation on refugees was approved. A legislative proposal is being discussed in the **Belgian** Parliament to prohibit the detention of minors. Measures were also reported in several countries in view of the **UK**'s withdrawal from the EU.

Amongst the priorities set by **Dutch** Government for 2021 are reinforcing border controls, stimulating high-skilled migration and implementing the Common European Asylum System, as well as returning illegally-staying migrants and tackling nuisance and crime among asylum seekers. In **France,** a new minister responsible for citizenship, and in particular asylum and integration, was appointed and, in **Estonia**, the first Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration took office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Source: Eurostat

According to Eurostat, the number of first-time asylum applicants in the EU-27 decreased by 68 %, compared with the same quarter of 2019, and 69 % compared with the first quarter of 2020. The top 3 nationalities were Syrians, Afghans and Venezuelans.

Greece welcomed on 30 September 2020 the relocation of 139 asylum seekers from Greece to **Germany**. This was the 16th relocation flight organised under the EU programme implemented by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF in cooperation with the

Government of Greece. In 2020 so far, a total of 1 066 asylum seekers have been relocated to **Belgium**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany, Ireland**, **Luxembourg** and **Portugal**. Recently Member States have hosted or are preparing to welcome asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children, from the Moria refugee camp in Greece, and offered emergency assistance in response to the devastation of the camp.

During the reporting period, Portugal committed to accepting 1 729 persons from Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. In **Italy**, relocation procedures were resumed on 25 June. Italy also created a task force to reduce the impact of migratory pressures on Sicily; about 3 500 migrants have been transferred from Sicily to other regions. Greece reported good results in reducing the backlog of pending asylum claims at the first instance. On another note, **Dutch** authorities resumed Dublin transfers in July, starting to gradually transfer asylum seekers back to the Member State responsible for processing the application.

Unaccompanied minors and vulnerable groups

Initiatives to improve conditions for vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers were taken in many Member States. A total of 841 children applying for international protection were enrolled at schools in **Poland** and 78 in **Bulgaria**, with special support provided. With EU funding, **Finland** applied a new method for psychosocial support to families with children in reception centres.

Ireland relaxed certain eligibility requirements for international protection applicants applying for student grants. **Spain** set conditions for extending the legal residence of minors who can't to return to their countries due to the pandemic and established residence and work permit procedures for young third-country nationals working in agriculture. **Austria** decided not to accept unaccompanied minors from **Greece** on the grounds that the country has accepted a very high number of refugees compared to other EU Member States. Such decision sparked criticism both nationally and internationally.

Legal migration and integration

COVID-19 measures related to lifting of border traffic restrictions, among other categories: third-country national family members of EU citizens in **Luxembourg**, high-level athletes and business persons entering **the Netherlands,** performers, athletes and foreign delegations arriving in **Estonia** and berry pickers entering **Finland**. However, many EU Member States still maintain and, in some cases, prolong the temporary restrictions. There have also been legislative and regulatory amendments related to the pandemic, ranging from extending application and registration periods to automatically extending immigration permissions.

In **Italy**, new quotas for training were published and additional quotas for residence permits were allocated. **Spain** set up a procedure to facilitate family reunification for third-country national parents of minor EU citizens.

The trend of digitalisation continued. In France, many asylum applications must now be made electronically, in **Ireland** the Atypical Working Scheme was moved online, in **Greece** many administrative actions can now be done remotely,and in **Malta**, the reception of single-permit applications from foreign workers resumed online.

Recent developments in the area of integration include: the launch of the National Integration Fund 2020 in **Ireland** and raising the age limit for child welfare after-care

to 25 years in **Finland**. In **Croatia**, a new Action Plan for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection is being drafted, and in **Lithuania**, a project was launched to strengthen the provision of integration services. Access to language and culture courses were a point of focus in several countries.

Return

Member States resumed repatriations for voluntary returns. For instance, **Cyprus** returned 282 Georgian nationals in cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). **Italy** has conducted 710 repatriations after the national lockdown, and the **Netherlands** participated in a first return flight since implementing the COVID-19 measures, in collaboration with **Belgium**, **Germany**, **France** and the IOM, with 50 Iraqi migrants on board. **Croatian** police officers participated in a meeting organised by Frontex in connection with establishing identity and obtaining travel documents for citizens of Afghanistan.

Addressing human trafficking

Awareness-raising activities about trafficking in human beings were conducted in **Croatia**, **Hungary, Poland** and **Portugal**. **Finland** reported that victims of human trafficking were being referred to the national assistance system more efficiently than before.

Bulgarian and **Moldovan** authorities exchanged information and coordinated action on an investigation of a cross border organised crime group, while **Italian** authorities liaised with their **Algerian** counterparts on more structured forms of police cooperation to prevent crime and terrorism, including the trafficking in persons and migrants.

A delegation from the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) of the Council of Europe (COE) visited **Malta** in the framework of the third evaluation on the implementation of the COE convention in the field of trafficking in persons.

Management of EU external borders

In **Greece**, the Rapid Border Intervention at the maritime domain ended on 6 September 2020. The intervention, launched in March in cooperation with Frontex reportedly led to a 89 % decrease in the number of arrivals from Turkey compared to the same period in 2019.

Malta reported 463 irregular arrivals between 16 March and 2 August. In a meeting in Tripoli on 6 August, **Malta**, **Libya** and **Turkey** agreed to set up a joint working team to coordinate efforts on projects to tackle migrant smuggling and irregular migration.