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EMN European Migration Network

WHAT WERE THE NEW TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN MIGRATION AND ASYLUM ACROSS THE EU, NORWAY AND GEORGIA IN 2021?

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Introduction to the EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021

Background

The European Migration Network (EMN) Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021 provides a comprehensive overview of EU and national developments across a wide range of migration and asylum topics, including legal migration, international protection; minors and vulnerable groups; integration; citizenship and statelessness; borders, visa and Schengen governance; irregular migration including smuggling; return and readmission; human trafficking; and migration and development cooperation.

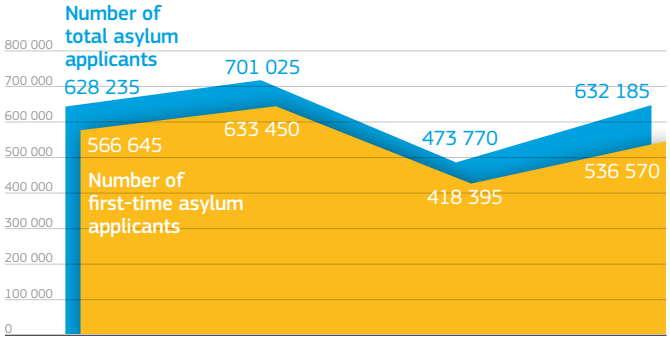
What were common trends in migration and asylum at EU and national level in 2021?

At a glance, the main drivers and findings are introduced below

Key trends and findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the migration and asylum systems of EU Member States, Norway and Georgia in 2021, albeit to a lesser extent than in the previous year. Travel restrictions and health measures continued in most Member States. As the situation in relation to the pandemic gradually improved throughout the year, 2021 saw an increase in first-time asylum applications in the EU Member States and Norway of 28.2% in comparison to 2020.1 The number of returns increased significantly, with an 80 % increase in voluntary returns and a 46 % increase in enforced returns, compared to 2020.
- Political unrest in Europe and beyond, particularly due to the Belarus border crisis and the fall of Afghan government, exerted pressure on the asylum and reception systems of several Member States, which had to deal with these sudden (in)flows.
- The EU and its Member States continued to make steady progress on long-term priorities and strategic commitments on asylum and migration. In September 2021, one year on from the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Commission published a report taking stock of progress achieved and key developments in the relevant policy areas.
- The protection of vulnerable groups remained a key focus of legislative and policy measures. The EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021–2025) and the EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling (2021-2025) aimed to bolster the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child set out measures to promote the rights of all children, including migrant children, across six thematic areas. At national level, the EU Member States and Norway introduced new measures to reduce vulnerability, particularly of unaccompanied minors reaching adulthood, and to identify and safeguard vulnerable groups, such as asylum applicants with special reception needs.
- Migration management was improved throughout 2021, with efforts to make policies and approaches more efficient and effective. Several Member States, Norway and Georgia increased their focus on innovation, simplification of processes, and digitalisation of migration management across the different migration and asylum areas.
- Attracting and retaining highly skilled and qualified workers to meet labour market needs remained a key priority. The European Commission prepared initiatives on legal migration, which were collated in the Skills and Talents Package adopted on 27 April 2022. In addition, the revised EU Blue Card Directive (Directive (EU) 2021/1883) aimed to achieve a level playing field between national and EU systems. Member States introduced a range of legislative and policy changes and strategies to fill labour shortages and increase their attractiveness to third-country workers.

Number of first-time and total asylum applicants, EU and Norway



Source: Eurostat (migr_asyappctza and migr_pop1ctz)

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