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EU Preparedness on future migration flows

EMN Annual Conference of Slovenia

Concept note/agenda

The organisers intend the conference to be a face-to-face event held in Ljubljana, Slovenia subject to the ability to respect Covid-19 health requirements or restrictions in place at the time. The conference venue is expected to hold up to 100 people ensuring social distancing is possible. The situation will be monitored and if a face-to-face event is deemed not possible then the conference will be switched to a fully online format.

CONCEPT

Establishing a comprehensive European approach for migration management forms one of the key elements of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union trio of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia (1 July 2020 - 31 December 2021). The need to continually improve the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of migration management systems, better forecast migration flows, and adapt to change has been the on-going focus of efforts of EU and national policymakers, also in light of continued irregular migration flows - despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this background, the EU is currently developing structured response mechanisms, including the exploration of possible tools to better forecast migration flows. New developments include both technological, in the form of artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation, and in policy, at EU and national level. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum,¹ launched in September 2020, aims to support the building of a system 'that manages and normalises migration for the long term and which is fully grounded in European values and international law'. Acknowledging that the EU must be prepared to address crisis situations with resilience and flexibility, the Pact introduces the new

¹ Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609 final, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en, last accessed on 17 June 2021.

Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint,² which will mobilise existing crisis management tools and bring together key actors³, operational and financial measures and protocols to ensure preparedness at EU and national level. Such information management and improved coordination mechanisms will serve as fundamental principles in strengthening EU migration management systems.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both the number of irregular border crossings and asylum applications lodged in EU Member States decreased in 2020 compared to previous years. However, data for the first semester of 2021 indicate that these trends are reversing, with the number of illegal border crossings reaching over 82 000 in the first seven months of 2021, 59% more than the total from a year ago.⁴ The total number of applications for international protection lodged in the EU in June 2021 were the highest since the outbreak of COVID-19 but still remained below the pre-pandemic level.⁵

In this context, this conference will focus particularly on EU preparedness in relation to asylum and irregular migration flows, bringing together relevant European and national stakeholders to discuss current developments, existing and possible future forecasting tools to predict migratory flows, as well as the role of the EU Agencies in this area.

AIMS AND OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

This conference aims to explore new concepts around migration management, gaining insights from EU Member States, EU agencies, and third-country perspectives. Keynote speakers and panellists will present a timely assessment of the latest developments on EU preparedness and understanding future migration flows in the field, including the use of AI and biometric borders. Participants will be given the opportunity to learn about innovative policies and practices in relation to asylum and irregular migration flows and will be invited to pose questions and to join in with the discussion.

The conference will take place on 5-6 October 2021 and will be covered in four panels of approximately one hour each in length. Depending on the epidemiological situation, the event will take place either as a webinar, or as a face-to-face conference. The content will remain the same irrespective of the format of the event.

Keynote speakers, including the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, and the European Commissioner for Home Affairs will open the event and set the scene. The first panel will open by locating the latest developments within the Western Balkans context. The second panel will then explore the specifics of technological innovations in the migration context, such as the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to forecast migration flows and their expected impacts on future migration management. The third panel will assess EU preparedness around the reception and

² Commission Recommendation of 23 September 2020 on an EU Mechanism for Preparedness and Management of Crises related to Migration (Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint) C(2020) 6469 final https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/commission_recommendation_on_an_eu_mechanism_for_preparedness_and_management_of_crises_related_to_migration_migration_preparedness_and_crisis_blueprint_0.pdf, last accessed 21 June 2021.

³ Key actors involved: the EU Member States, the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the European Law Enforcement Agency (EUROPOL), the European Agency for the operational management of the large-scale IT systems in the field of security and justice (eu-LISA) and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

⁴ Frontex, 'July: Increase in the Central Med and Western Balkans, News Release', 2021, <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/july-increase-in-the-central-med-and-western-balkans-IOsJpQ>, last accessed on 18 August 2021.

⁵ EASO, 'Broad increase in applications for asylum, including by Afghans', 18 August 2021, <https://easo.europa.eu/news-events/broad-increase-applications-asylum-including-afghans>, last accessed on 19 August 2021.

return of migrants and will include key actors involved with the implementation of the Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint, in the form of a facilitated discussion to gain a rounded perspective on upcoming changes. The final panel will provide an overview of new governance schemes for migration management across borders, including perspectives, policies and practices from EU and third countries, and will include perspectives on the fundamental rights impacts of these developments.

AGENDA

This agenda assumes that the conference will be hosted as a face-to-face event held on 5-6 October 2021 including a conference dinner for participants. Conference organisers will additionally provide streaming through audio-video platform for all who will not be able to attend face-to-face event held in Ljubljana. If a face-to-face event is not possible, the conference will be delivered as a one-day webinar and the conference timings will be adjusted accordingly.

Tuesday 5 October	
09.30-10.00	Registration of participants
10.00-10.05	Opening of the conference Moderator (name tbc)
10.05-10.35	Keynote speeches Mr Aleš Hojs , Minister of the Interior, Republic of Slovenia (tbc) Ms Ylva Johansson , European Commissioner for Home Affairs (tbc)
10.35-11.35	Panel 1: Migration situation in 2021 in the Western Balkans Panellists will present on current developments in migration in the Western Balkans context. Reflecting on lessons learned and recent policy developments at the national and EU level, including the EU's new Pact on Migration and Asylum, speakers will explore challenges and opportunities. Moderator (name tbc) Panellists Frontex (speaker tbd) Slovenia (Representative of Ministry of the Interior) Serbia (Representative of Ministry of the Interior) EASO (speaker tbd) Q and A
11.35-12.00	<i>Refreshment break</i>
12.00-13.15	Panel 2: Forecasting migration flows Panelists will explore the types of risk assessment and forecasting tools developed in recent years to predict migration flows, and the role of digitalisation and AI in this regard. A non-EU Member State will also be included to capture how migration flows in third countries could impact the EU in the future.

	<p>Moderator (name tbc)</p> <p>Panelists</p> <p>European Commission (Situational Awareness unit, DG HOME)</p> <p>Sweden (forecasting/preparedness tool, speaker tbd)</p> <p>Non-EU country (Egypt)</p> <p>IOM (tbd)</p> <p>Q and A</p>
13.15-14.30	<i>Lunch break</i>
14.30-15.30	<p>Panel 3: EU Preparedness around reception and return of migrants</p> <p>Panelists will discuss what developments and ambitions in the field of border management, the processing of asylum applications and reception facilities, etc. are being adopted to manage the (unplanned) arrival of asylum seekers and other migrants. How do countries and EU agencies manage the return of migrants whose asylum applications are not approved and how can cooperation be strengthened?</p> <p>Moderator (name tbc)</p> <p>Panelists</p> <p>European Commission (Irregular Migration Unit, DGHOME)</p> <p>Frontex</p> <p>EASO (tbd – presentation to complement Panel 1)</p> <p>Croatia - Representative of Ministry of Interior (tbd)</p> <p>Greece – Representative of Ministry of Interior (tbd)</p> <p>Q and A</p>
15.30-15.35	<p>Close of day one</p> <p>Moderator (name tbc)</p>
Evening	<i>Dinner for EMN NCPs</i>
Wednesday 6 October	
09.30-09.45	<p>Recap of day one</p> <p>Moderator (name tbc)</p>
09.45-10.45	<p>Panel 4: Governance schemes for migration management across borders</p> <p>This panel will entail a moderated discussion on how cooperation across borders can be made more effective and efficient. This <i>inter alia</i> includes new governance schemes, multilateral arrangements, externalisation of migration and asylum procedures and cooperation in the field of biometric borders.</p> <p>Moderator (name tbc)</p>

	<p>Panelists:</p> <p>Representative from OECD – International Migration Division (tbd)</p> <p>Australia – Representative of Department of Immigration and Border protection (tbd)</p> <p>Representative from FRA (tbd)</p> <p>Slovenia – Ministry of Interior (tbd)</p> <p>ICMPD representative (tbd)</p> <p>Q and A</p>
10.45-11.00	<p>Closing remarks:</p> <p>Magnus Ovilius, Head of Sector European Migration Network (EMN) and Chair of the EMN, DG HOME, European Commission</p>
	<p><i>Lunch and departure</i></p>
