



EMN OECD Umbrella Inform

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the mobility of third-country nationals in the EU

Presentation on key findings

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. External and Internal Border Closures
3. Residence permits and entry conditions – administrative approaches
4. Supports to mitigate the effects of the pandemic for migrants
5. International students
6. International protection
7. Voluntary and forced return

Introduction

- Series of Informs produced by the EMN between July 2020 and January 2021 in collaboration with the OECD on the impact of COVID-19 in different aspects of migration and asylum.
- This Umbrella Inform provides an update as at 31 December 2020 and combines information provided by EMN National Contact Points (NCPs), OECD, FRONTEX and EASO.
- The following thematic areas are covered:
 - Residence permits, entry conditions, unemployment and labour market needs;
 - International protection;
 - International students;
 - Voluntary and forced return.



External and Internal Border Closures

- EU decided to closed the external borders of the Schengen area on 17/03/2020
 - Some MS decided to temporarily reintroduce border control at internal borders (art. 25 and 28 of the Schengen Borders Code)
 - There were 123 notifications between 11 March and 30 December 2020
 - This created a significant disruption of free movement of persons in the Schengen area
- This situation stranded TCNs with expired residence permits or travellers whose visas/right to stay expired (overstayers)

External and internal border closures

- All MS reported restrictions at borders with exceptions for certain nationalities and categories of TCNs
 - Border closed with exemptions
 - Border open with restrictions and exceptions to the restrictions
- Quarantine period upon arrival
- Testing → approach was not uniform
 - PCR was mostly accepted;
 - Others were also used (i.e. Transcription Mean Amplification(TMA), molecular tests, rapid antigen test).



Residence permits and entry conditions – administrative approaches

- Theme One: “business as usual to the extent possible”
 - Travel restrictions impacted on consular services and visa processing. Some MS reported continued or limited resumption of consular services as the year progressed, often focused on priority categories.
 - Restrictions on in-person immigration services were also introduced on the territory of the Member States. However, offices were either not closed or open to the maximum extent possible (e.g. reduced opening hours, by appointment, use of sanitary protocols, encouraging customers to use other channels of communication)
- Theme two: Use of technology and remote working methods
 - Restrictions on in-person immigration services were introduced.
 - To ensure continuity, services were maintained using post, electronic tools or online systems.
 - Procedures were continuously adapted throughout 2020 to adapt to new working conditions, using new and pre-existing systems.



Supports to mitigate the effects of the pandemic for migrants

- Measures adopted to avoid migrants already on the territory of EU Member States falling into irregular situations included:
 - Automatic extensions of residence permits and visas;
 - Tolerated stays;
 - Suspension/extension of procedural deadlines.
- Mainstream support measures which were available to unemployed individuals and employers were also applicable to migrants in most EU countries
- Most MS did not change underlying rules of income requirements for granting family reunification -> margin of discretion was applied widely
- Covid-19 related healthcare was available to all migrants regardless of their migration status



Meeting labour market needs

- Most MS reported that labour market demand in key sectors (health, agriculture & transport) was satisfied during 2020.
 - Sectors that depend on migrants:
 - Certain measures (i.e. regularisations, exemptions for essential workers/seasonal workers from entry bans, removal of work permit requirement for certain categories of medical staff)
 - Shortages of medical staff -> MS prioritised applications from the healthcare sector
 - Some MS noted that their demand for TCN labour was satisfied -> not at the same level as before the pandemic
 - Other MS noted that they met labour demand with their own workforce
- No specific contingency measures for seasonal workers or other categories of essential workers foreseen for 2021 (except quotas) -> other MS do not need seasonal workers



Meeting labour market needs

- Too early to determine the long-term impact of the labour market policies. However, it is foreseen:
- High level of unemployment/increase in number of registered job vacancies
 - However, not all MS have seen high levels of unemployment to date
- Cessation of short-term work schemes -> impact on the labour market



International students

- International students were generally subject to the same travel restrictions as other third-country nationals
 - Substantial decreases in number of new international students by the end of 2020 in some Member States (compared to previous years)
- Various measures adopted to mitigate negative impacts:
 - Online and fast-track procedures for issuance of visa or residence permits
 - Extension of enrolment deadline
 - Postponement of studies to the following year for those students unable to travel
- Physical presence on campuses discouraged in many EU countries
 - Those international students admitted to the territory prior to the pandemic but subsequently returned home, were often allowed to continue their studies online from abroad.
- To mitigate negative financial impact on international students, many Member States provided state-funded social security or implemented other measures (e.g. scholarships, increase of max. working hours) or allowed them to work on seasonal occupations.



International protection

- Physical distancing and sanitary measures pose a particular challenge for reception system
 - Operationalisation of emergency shelters or isolation areas has been crucial
 - MS continue not only to provide reception conditions but educational activities, information sharing and counselling were provided through e-tools
- New (digital) tools and processes were widely adopted in asylum and reception systems -> 'new normal'.
- New challenges have emerged in guaranteeing an effective and fair asylum procedure for both first instance applications and appeals
 - quality of remote interviews and processes
 - Data protection concerns
 - Access to and skills needed to use electronic tools by applicants.



Voluntary and forced return

- Travel restrictions impacted on both the number of return decisions and on the implementation of return decisions in Member States.
 - Forced return was heavily impacted and had not reached pre-pandemic levels by December 2020
 - Difficulties in organising return flights to third countries due to disruption of air travel -> even if some restrictions were lifted
- Almost half of the Member States implemented contingency measures in order to avoid absconding
- Several MS continue to reduce capacity of its detention facilities and prioritise alternatives to detention where possible.
- Over half of MS provided return counselling and other pre-departure services -> moved to online communication formats and developed online pre-registration activities to allow individuals to access Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) procedures.



Thank you!

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