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The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a significant impact on the functioning of national asylum systems in 2021. The Commission provided guidance and practical support to Member States to minimise the impact of the pandemic. Equipped with the experience of the previous year and the use of digital innovations introduced in 2020, Member States managed to ensure continuity in other areas of the asylum procedure. Overall, the COVID-19 experience highlighted the need for modern coherent approaches in migration management.135

Throughout 2021, questions linked to the area of migration and asylum remained high on the EU's policy agenda. Presenting the EU legislative priorities for 2021 and the Joint Conclusions on Policy Objectives and Priorities for 2020-2024, in December 2020, the Council of the EU, the European Commission and the European Parliament declared their determination to work toward achieving agreement on the Pact on Migration and Asylum, to ensure migration is addressed in a comprehensive way and external borders are effectively controlled.136 In July 2021, the Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement over the budgetary priorities of the EU's asylum, migration and integration policies for the next 7 years.

It was agreed that the new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) will be allocated to strengthen common asylum policy; develop legal migration in line with the economic and social needs of Member States; support third-country nationals to effectively integrate and be socially included; support the fight against irregular migration; and ensure that those without a right to stay in the EU are returned and readmitted in an effective, safe and dignified way. The co-legislators agreed that most of the funds (63.5%) should be allocated to programmes that are jointly managed by the EU and Member States, while the remaining 36.5% will be directly managed by the EU. The latter will be dedicated to emergency assistance, resettlement and humanitarian admissions from non-EU countries and the relocation of asylum seekers and refugees to other EU Member States "as part of solidarity efforts".137

In her State of the Union address in September 2021, the President of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen presented the key initiatives that the Commission intends to undertake in the coming year. Making reference to the situation at the EU's borders with Belarus, she underlined that it is important to establish new ways to respond to such challenges through a

common migration management system. She emphasised that every country has a stake in building a European migration system and she expressed her conviction that, despite the slow pace of progress in adopting the Pact on Migration and Asylum, common ground is not so far away.138

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2.2.1. Presidencies of the Council of the European Union

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2.2.2. EU’s external borders and migration routes: Support to frontline Member States in response to the instrumentalisation of migration

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