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icon presenting the logo of the Council of the EU

Both Presidencies of the Council of the European Union included priorities related to migration and asylum in their programmes during 2021.

The Programme of the Portuguese Presidency of the first semester of 2021 focused on strengthening Europe's resilience and its citizens' confidence in the European social model, as well as on promoting a European Union based on shared values of solidarity, convergence and cohesion. The three major priorities of the Portuguese Presidency were to promote Europe’s recovery leveraged by climate and digital transitions; implement the Social Pillar of the EU as a key element for a fair and inclusive climate and digital transition; and strengthen Europe’s strategic autonomy keeping it open to the world. A goal after the first priority was to continue the negotiation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum as a comprehensive, integrated, Europe-wide approach to strike a balance between the prevention of irregular migration, the promotion of sustainable channels for legal migration and the integration of migrants geared to safeguarding human rights.139

In the second semester of 2021, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council focused on four priorities with the intention to facilitate the EU's recovery and reinforce its resilience, reflect on the future of Europe, strengthen the rule of law and European values, and increase security and stability in the European neighbourhood. In the area of migration and asylum, the Presidency aimed to work toward a more effective approach to dealing with illegal migration at its source; more effective protection of the EU’s external borders; a functioning asylum system; a more consistent policy of returning persons who have not been granted international protection to their country of origin; and close cooperation both with countries of origin and transit countries. The Presidency placed emphasis on working for the further harmonisation of national asylum systems and actively seeking a political consensus for the implementation of the concepts of responsibility and solidarity.140

In January 2021, UNHCR offered its recommendations to the two Presidencies of the year (Portugal and Slovenia), encouraging them to adopt an evidence-based, coherent and pragmatic approach in carrying forward discussions on the pact. UNHCR called the two Presidencies to: ensure access to the territory and fair and fast procedures; address fundamental rights

violations at the borders; enhance intra-EU solidarity and responsibility-sharing; increase access to family reunification, resettlement and complementary pathways; promote effective integration; ensure effective monitoring and contingency planning; and develop an efficient, humane and sustainable system for the return of those who are found not in need of international protection. UNHCR also encouraged the Presidencies to work toward providing more support to countries and regions which are home to the highest number of forcibly-displaced people.141 UNHCR continued with its series of recommendations to the Presidencies in 2022 as well (France and Czechia).142

- 139Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (January 2021). Priorities. https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/programme/priorities/
- 140Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (July 2021). Programme of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/i4qnfeqt/programme-sl-presidency-en.pdf
- 141United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (January 2021). UNHCR's Recommendations for the Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ff4799d4.html
- 142United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (January 2022). UNHCR's Recommendations for the French and Czech Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (EU). https://www.refworld.org/docid/61d71e864.html

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