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4.16.1 Impediments to reaching national resettlement quotas in 2020



Due to the suspension of operations between March and July 2020, the number of refugees effectively resettled in EU+ countries during the year was inevitably reduced. In 2020, about 10,640 persons arrived in the EU+ in the context of resettlement, 58% fewer than in 2019. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic halted the upward trend in the number of resettled persons that had been taking place over the previous six years. The only exception was Denmark, which had not received any resettled person in 2019 and received 30 in 2020.

Sweden was the main receiving country for resettled third-country nationals, accounting for one-third of all persons resettled in EU+ countries in 2020. Nonetheless, this represented a 28% decrease when compared to 2019. Sweden had initially pledged 5,000 places, but about 1,400 refugees could not be effectively resettled during the year.[1250]

Other top receiving countries in 2020 included Germany (with 1,685 resettled refugees, representing a 66% decrease compared to 2019), Norway (1,525, -45%) and France (1,340, -76%). After having started face-to-face interviews, Germany suspended its missions to Egypt and Niger and its planned face-to-face interviews in Jordan, Niger and Kenya. However, remote interviews were conducted in Lebanon in the summer of 2020. Its quota for 2020 was to resettle 5,500 refugees, but by the end of the year, the arrival of about 3,815 refugees was still pending.

While resettlement operations slowed down in Finland, authorities continued to process emergency and urgent cases based on dossiers. It carried out pre-departure hybrid and virtual courses for all accepted resettlement cases to Finland, combined with face-to-face orientation for Syrian refugees in Turkey.[1251] By the end of 2020, Finland had resettled 660 refugees.

In France, on the other hand, operations came to a complete halt from mid-March to July 2020 while efforts were focused on issuing decisions to approve or reject applications submitted in the previous year and at the beginning of 2020. The transfer of refugees resumed as of August 2020, and physical missions started again in October 2020 to various first asylum countries. While France had announced a quota of 5,000 resettled refugees for 2020, the country could only resettle 1,340 refugees.[1252]

The Netherlands conducted remote pre-departure orientation with selected refugees in Lebanon and Turkey and made some decisions on a dossier basis. However, 1,075 places were not covered

from the country's 2020 pledge for 1,500 refugees. This represented a 77% decrease compared to 2019. Other notable decreases, in relative terms, occurred in Ireland (195 resettled refugees, -75%) and Italy (350, -74%). By the end of 2020, most countries had not met their national quotas and had to request a transfer to the following year.

When initial pledges could not be met, the European Commission announced a mechanism to transfer quotas to 2021. Thus, a new procedure was established through AMIF funds by which countries could carry over the pending quota that could be fulfilled by the end of 2021. In the national guidelines for the reception of resettled refugees in 2021, the French authorities announced the extension of their 2020 pledge to be progressively achieved during 2021, in combination with possible additional quotas for the year, depending on state of the pandemic.[1253]

Resumption of operations

In the summer of 2020 when COVID-19 measures were gradually eased, selection missions resumed and approved cases pending a transfer started arriving. In this context, 363 refugees arrived in Spain, mostly between September and December 2020. In October 2020, 14 refugees from Niger who were already selected at the end of 2019 finally arrived in Luxembourg.[1254] In the same month, a total of 152 Syrian refugees from Lebanon were transferred to the Netherlands, accounting for 58% of the annual total of resettled Syrians received by the Netherlands.[1255]

Remote interviews were carried out to process cases which were referred by UNHCR. For example, in the summer of 2020, Germany started a remote interview pilot project in Lebanon, interviewing more than 800 people via Webex with the support of IOM and UNHCR. Similarly, the integration and security authorities of Finland carried out telephone interviews and videoconferences using Webex, Polycom and MS Teams.

In August 2020, Switzerland carried out its first remote mission with the support of the EASO Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) in Turkey and in collaboration with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMO), in which 13 online interviews were carried out over 4 days.[1256]

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