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On-going COVID-19 measures during 2021 prompted national administrations to use digital tools in order to continue with their activities in the field of resettlement. For instance, some selection missions moved online to comply with health measures and minimise the risk of infection, while others were organised onsite when the health situation allowed it. Digital tools (such as WebEx, Microsoft Teams and Skype) were used for conducting selection interviews and related meetings. Nevertheless, moving to online settings came with many challenges, such as technical issues (poor Internet connection, inadequate sound, bad image quality and interruptions), language barriers and the risk of losing trust during the interview phase. On some occasions, online activities were considered less effective and more time-consuming than face-to-face interactions, resulting in less cases being processed per day. To overcome logistical issues related to online settings, close cooperation with national authorities of the country of first asylum, UNCHR and the IOM were established during the year.

Pre-departure and cultural orientation programmes were mostly conducted fully online or through hybrid models that combined face-to-face sessions with remote training. The Netherlands, for example, offered different modalities, including fully digital information training provided through WhatsApp. A hybrid model was also developed where a part of the family attended the physical session and other family members participated in a remote session simultaneously. France resumed the organisation of face-to-face cultural orientation sessions in early 2021, with small groups to limit the risk of COVID-19 contamination.

A pre-departure orientation programme was introduced by Slovenia in November 2021 which replaced the 3-month introductory activities post-arrival.[1305]To facilitate resettlement in Lithuania, as of April 2021 travel documents issued to refugees by the International Committee of the Red Cross were recognised as valid.[1306]

In Spain, the Supreme Court confirmed that refugees who were resettled in Spain have refugee status, while in France, the National Court of Asylum held that the admission of an asylum seeker to a resettlement programme in which UNHCR takes part in Turkey does not imply that the refugee falls under the strict mandate of the UNHCR and that, in these circumstances when the strict mandate is not confirmed, it is up to the national asylum authority to determine the

type of protection status to be given to the person (refugee status or subsidiary protection) upon arrival in France.

The modification of the Swedish Aliens Act in July 2021 stated that only resettled refugees are granted permanent residence permits immediately, while beneficiaries of international protection are granted a temporary residence permit with a validity determined by the type of protection granted *(see Section 4.14.2.3)*.1307

With severely scaled down resettlement operations in 2020, most countries were not able to fulfil their pledges for the year, resulting in a carry-over to 2021 or a readjustment of the biannual resettlement targets set by some countries (as in the case of France). In this context, in June 2021, the Danish Minister for Immigration and Integration resettled 200 Congolese and Burundian refugees living in Rwanda as part of the 2020 quota.1308 Similarly, Spain continued implementing the 2019-2020 Resettlement National Plan by taking in nearly 550 refugees from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. After extending the deadline for implementing the transfers of selected third-country nationals until 31 December 2021, Lithuania fulfilled its commitment for the year with the resettlement of 1,000 refugees.1309 Germany also transferred unused places from 2020 to 2021 and added a top-up for 2021. In total, 6,547 persons were admitted in 2020/2021 through resettlement, humanitarian admission, community sponsorship and admission programmes of the federal states.

In addition to the annual quota of 5,000 refugees for 2021, Sweden decided to additionally resettle 1,400 individuals who were selected in 2020 but could not be transferred during the year due to COVID-19 pandemic.1310 Thus, a total of 6,400 quota refugees were transferred in 2021, including Afghan nationals who were evacuated in August 2021.

Developments in Afghanistan triggered rapid evacuations of persons in need of international protection and resettlement. In Sweden, a number of amendments to the regulatory framework on resettlement were adopted on 15 August 2021 to enable greater flexibility in specific situations, such as the Afghanistan situation. According to a government decision, the requirement that a person must be in a third country to be eligible for resettlement was temporarily removed. Furthermore, a decision of 15 August 2021 by the Ministry of Justice provided flexibility for the responsible authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, to redistribute places that were available within the 5,000 quota for 2021, allowing a larger number of places for emergency cases than the 500 earmarked for that purpose. In the period August-December 2021, 1,300 Afghan nationals were granted permanent residence permits and resettled in Sweden under the resettlement framework.1311

Afghan nationals also received protection under the resettlement programme in Norway, where approximately 700 Afghans, including unaccompanied children and families, were granted protection.1312

National governments decided on their 2022 quotas based on the budgets for the new year. In Switzerland, the Federal Council approved the 2022-2023 resettlement programme in May 2021 which includes the resettlement of 1,600 refugees focusing on three to five primary host countries.1313 In Spain, the National Resettlement Programme was approved at the end of December 2021 under which 1,200 refugees will be resettled during 2022.1314Likewise,

Belgium agreed to resettle 1,250 refugees in 2022, increasing the amount progressively for 2023 (1,400 refugees) and 2024 (1,500 persons), although insufficient reception places within the Belgium reception system have halted the transfer of resettled refugees during 2021 *(see Section 4.7)*.

Due to the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, the Finnish government also increased the refugee quota by about 500 refugees, with a total of 1,500 persons to be transferred in 2022. The budget for this plan was raised to a total of EUR 1.1 million.[1315]

- [1305]Uredba o spremembah in dopolnitvah Uredbe o načinu izvedbe preselitve oseb, ki so v Republiko Slovenijo sprejete na podlagi kvote in delitve bremen med državami članicami Evropske unije [Decree amending the Decree on the method of resettlement of persons admitted to the Republic of Slovenia on the basis of a quota and burden-sharing between the Member State of the European Union]. http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=URED8338
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