

“WHAT IF IT WERE US?” TACKLING FORCED DISPLACEMENT TRENDS: SLOVENIA AND REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

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Background paper





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FORCED MIGRATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND REFUGEE ADMISSIONS IN EUROPE

Introduction

While freedom to move is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13), current migration flows in Europe are often contested in present day discourse. Nevertheless, “mobility is a universal feature of humanity. People have been mobile and migrating since the beginning of time, and will not stop doing so.”¹

Despite migration being a phenomenon linked with human history, higher number of arrivals of migrants and refugees to Europe has exposed many issues related to migration and integration policies, but also development cooperation policies, since political discourse on migration has often emphasized the need to “address root causes of migration”. This policy paper explores interlinkages of European Union (EU) and its Member States’ commitments in the field of migration and development policies.

International (forced) migration flows in numbers

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) data,² there have been 258 million international migrants (i.e. people who reside in a country other than their country of birth) worldwide in 2017, representing 3.4% of the world’s total population. Among them, 83,2 million³ have been living in Europe. In 2015, there have been 150.3 million migrant workers, and 4.8 million international students in 2016.⁴ In 2017, children represented 14%, and women 48.8% of the stock of international migrants. By the end of 2017, 68.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or other reasons, and 25.4 million have been registered as refugees. The number of victims of forced labour in 2016 has been estimated at 25 million. 466 billion USD of remittances (i.e. “monies earned or acquired by non-nationals that are transferred back to their country of origin”, as defined by IOM)⁵ were sent to low- and middle-income countries in 2017, representing more than three times the size of official development assistance.

In addition to international migration, migration flows take place also within states, often referred to internal migration or mobility. Focusing on international migration, “there are as many reasons to migrate internationally as there are migrants, and those reasons are often overlapping. Personal motivations, poverty, conflicts, fear of persecution,

1 Source: CONCORD Europe, 10 myths about migration and development, available at: https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/10myths_migration_development_EN_newversion.pdf.

2 Source: IOM, Global Migration Trends; accessible at: <https://www.iom.int/global-migration-trends>.

3 Source: Migration Data Portal, International migrant stocks; available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks>.

4 Source: IOM, Global Migration Trends; accessible at: <https://www.iom.int/global-migration-trends>.

5 Source: IOM, Key Migration Terms, accessible at: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

natural disasters, human rights violations, and gender discrimination are but a few factors that could play a role in the decision to migrate.”⁶

As the data indicate, it is important to distinguish between voluntary and forced migration, with IOM⁷ defining forced migration as “migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects)”. Forced migration is strongly linked to the right to asylum, and States’ obligation to ensure that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14).

According to the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data,⁸ in addition to the 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, 41.3 million people are internally displaced. Alongside 25.9 million refugees, there are 3.5 million people seeking asylum. 57% of refugees worldwide come from three countries: Syria (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), and South Sudan (2.3 million). 80% of the world’s displaced people are being hosted in countries neighboring their countries of origin (3.7 million in Turkey, 1.4 million in Pakistan, 1.2 million in Uganda, 1.1 million in Sudan). There are also an estimated 3.9 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

Migration – development – human rights

Human rights are essential to achieve sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁹ with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has been adopted in September 2015 in New York by all UN Member States as a set of global, universal goals to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. They set standards as a common denominator for ensuring human dignity and decent life, and promoting prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. The 2030 Agenda is anchored in human rights, including the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, and the Declaration on the Right to Development (para. 10). The SDGs strive towards realizing the human rights of all (preamble), and emphasize “the responsibilities of all States /.../ to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status” (para. 19).

Considering migration through the prism of human rights, the principle of non-discrimination is of crucial importance. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights¹⁰ emphasizes that “while migrants are not inherently vulnerable, they can be vulnerable to human rights violations. Migrants in an irregular situation tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and marginalization, often living and working in the shadows, afraid to complain, and denied their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

While according to CONCORD Europe,¹¹ migrants and diaspora are often not fully recognised as actors and subjects of sustainable human development, the 2030 Agenda recognizes for the first time the contribution of migration to sustainable development. Migration is a cross-cutting issue, relevant to all of the SDGs. 11 out of 17 goals contain targets and indicators that are relevant to migration or mobility, including the Agenda’s core principle to “leave no one behind” (including migrants). The SDGs’ central reference to migration is made in target 10.7 to facilitate orderly,

6 Source: CONCORD Europe, 10 myths about migration and development; available at: https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/10myths_migration_development_EN_newversion.pdf.

7 Source: IOM, Key Migration Terms; accessible at: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

8 Source: UNHCR, Figures at a Glance; accessible at: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

9 Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

10 Source: OHCHR, Migration and Human Rights, accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/MigrationAndHumanRightsindex.aspx>.

11 Source: CONCORD Europe, Deconstructing 10 myths about migration and development – publication, available at: <https://concordeurope.org/blog/2016/03/09/publication-myths-migration-development/>.

safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies, which appears under Goal 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries.¹²

Mobility has always been an integral part of human nature and has always contributed to building and nurturing the economic, social and cultural wealth of the world. Migrants contribute significantly to the development of their countries of origin, as well as their countries of destination, through the transfer of money, skills, technology, governance models, values and ideas. While public discourse in Europe often focuses on utilizing international development cooperation to curb migration flows, “development aid substantially contributes to improve livelihood options, access to education, enhances social equality and economic growth, and as such contributes to make migration a choice rather than a necessity in the long term”.¹³

Slovenia and the 2030 Agenda

According to the SDG Index,¹⁴ Slovenia ranks on the 12th position among 162 countries (compared to the 8th place among 157 countries in 2018), with best performance in eradicating extreme poverty and access to clean energy resources, and challenges in the field of measures aimed at eliminating hunger, ensuring sustainable production and consumption, as well as measures to combat the effects of climate change and conserving the sea and marine resources.¹⁵

Sustainable development is one of the stated cornerstones of Slovenian foreign policy (Declaration on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia¹⁶ adopted in 2015), recognizing Slovenia’s responsibility toward achieving the SDGs. Among priority issues of Slovenia’s foreign policy are also safe migration and fight against human trafficking. Resolution on the International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia¹⁷ (adopted in 2017) is based on the same goal of achieving sustainable development in partner countries, with the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, with a focus on good governance, equal opportunities, including gender equality, and quality education; and with fight against climate change, with an emphasis on sustainable management of natural and energy resources, as priority issues (Article 10). Both the Declaration on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia (2015) and the Resolution on the International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Slovenia (2017) recognize international development cooperation and international humanitarian aid as important instruments of Slovenian foreign policy. Slovenia has been an official development assistance donor since 2004. In 2018, funds earmarked for international development cooperation amounted to EUR 70,76 million or 0.16% of gross national income (GNI).¹⁸ 65% of Slovenian development cooperation is allocated as multilateral development aid, and 35% as bilateral aid.

While international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance are recognized as important instruments of Slovenia’s foreign policy, contributing to sustainable development and the SDGs, migration-related issues or migration – development nexus are not significantly addressed in foreign policy documents on sustainable development.

Slovenia embedded the implementation of the 2030 Agenda into the 2030 Development Strategy of Slovenia¹⁹ adopted by the Government of Slovenia in 2017. On national level, the SDGs implementation is coordinated by the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinat-

12 Source: Migration Data Portal, available at: <https://migrationdataportal.org/sdgs#0>.

13 Source: CONCORD Europe, 10 myths about migration and development, available at: https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/10myths_migration_development_EN_newversion.pdf.

14 Developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: <http://www.sdgindex.org/>.

15 Source: Vlada Republike Slovenije, Slovenija pri doseganju ciljev trajnostnega razvoja Agende 2030 tudi letos med najuspešnejšimi državami; available at: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2019-07-08-slovenija-pri-doseganju-ciljev-trajnostnega-razvoja-agende-2030-tudi-letos-med-najuspesnejsimi-drzavami/>.

16 Available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=DEKL37>.

17 Available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=RESO117>.

18 Source: Poročilo o mednarodnem razvojnem sodelovanju Republike Slovenije za leto 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZZ/Dokumenti/multilateral/razvojno-sodelovanje/Porocilo-MRS-2018.pdf>.

19 Available at: http://www.vlada.si/fileadmin/dokumenti/si/projekti/2017/srs2030/en/Slovenia_2030.pdf.

ing the external, foreign policy dimension. Slovenia's record in implementing the SDGs and targets can be monitored through annual data published by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.²⁰

Slovenia has presented its Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2017. The report acknowledges the need for Slovenia to "develop more agile and adaptable policies that consider unpredictable, faster paced, and more fundamental shifts in the world as well as addressing the challenges in Slovene society called upon the Government to develop a new approach toward planning for the future, which includes designing and implementing coherent policies for sustainable development" (ibid., 4). Slovenia announced to present its second Voluntary National Review in 2020, with the consultation process initiated at the end of 2019.

According to the Special Eurobarometer Nr. 494 (2019),²¹ 77% of Slovenes assesses the assistance to people in developing countries as important (EU28 average: 86%), while 74% agree that tackling poverty in developing countries is also in the EU's own interest (EU28 average: 79%). Almost two-thirds Slovenes (65%) agree that combating poverty in developing countries should be one of the EU's priorities (EU28 average: 70%). The share of those who believe that this should be one of the priorities of the Slovenian government has increased by nine percentage points to 51% (EU28 average: 58%), representing of the highest increases (+9 points) in any EU Member State. 62% of Slovene respondents agree that the EU should strengthen its partnership with Africa and increase its financial investment in Africa to create employment and ensure sustainable development on both continents (below the EU average of 75%). Less than two-thirds (64%) agree that providing financial assistance to developing countries is an effective way to tackle irregular migration (below the EU average of 71%). That's seven points higher than 2018, representing one of the biggest increases in any EU Member State. As the most pressing challenge for developing countries, the respondents in Slovenia most often mention peace and security (39%), though representing an 11 points decrease from 2018.

Slovenia: voluntary and forced migration flows and integration policy

On 31 December 2019, 167.438 third country nationals have been issued residence permits in Slovenia²² (with labour-, education-led immigration and family reunification as the key grounds for immigration) – whereby Slovenia's population counts for 2,067 million people. Slovenia has traditionally been only a transit country for forced migration flows. The number of asylum claims has been rising in recent years, but nevertheless, in contrast to media coverage of refugee issues, refugees represent only insignificant share of immigrants in Slovenia. While in 2015, 277 asylum claims have been lodged in Slovenia, the number of asylum claims reached 3.821 in 2019 (2016: 1.308; 2017: 1.476; 2018: 2.875), whereby the highest number of asylum claims have been lodged in 2000 – 9.244. From 1996, 915 people have been recognized the international protection status (in 2015: 46; 2016: 170; 2017: 152; 2018: 102; 2019: 85; and referring to the period of highest number of asylum claims, total of 36 international protection statuses have been recognized in 2000 and 2001). From 1995, a total of 28.093 asylum claims have been lodged in Slovenia, with 23.472 international protection procedures²³ (85,5%) terminated due to absconding).

In Slovenia, policy-making is still centralised, with line ministries responsible for coordination of certain issues. Policies regarding migration fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. In 2019, the Government adopted the Migration Strategy,²⁴ which based on inter-sectoral collaboration and addresses migration in a multifaceted, comprehensive and long-term manner and places greater emphasis on understanding all aspects of migration and improving measures to manage them. The Strategy encompasses of six horizontal pillars linked to specific aspects of migration, i.e. the international dimension of migration; economic migration as part of legal migration; international protection; integration into the society; irregular migration and return; and security component. The civil society has criticized the process of drafting the new Migration Strategy due to lacking civil society dialogue, lacking involvement of local stakeholders (and lack of the emphasis at the local-level measures since the integration of newcomers into the society takes place at the local level), academia and other relevant stakeholders, but also referring to migration

20 Available at: <https://www.stat.si/Pages/cilji>.

21 Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2252>.

22 Source: Vlada Republike Slovenije, Priseljevanje v Slovenijo; available at: <https://www.gov.si/podrocja/drzava-in-druzba/priseljevanje-v-slovenijo/>.

23 Ibid.

24 Available at: <https://www.gov.si/zbirke/projekti-in-programi/vladna-strategija-na-podrocju-migracij/>.

as a complex phenomenon, the migration strategy should also address the communication aspect with the aim of understanding the phenomenon. Since Slovenia has established the Council for the Integration of Immigrants, this forum should certainly have been consulted in drafting the document. In 2010, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities drafted the Economic Migrations Strategy for the period 2010–2020,²⁵ recognising Slovenia joining the group of countries facing labour shortage. Among Strategy goals are to provide guidelines and measures to ensure work experience of domestic workforce abroad, and to reduce brain drain by encouraging circulation of professionals.

In 2017, a new Government body, Government Office for Support and Integration of Migrants²⁶ has been established, but only asylum-seekers and international protection beneficiaries fall within their responsibilities. Other issues related to integration fall within workload of various line ministries (e.g. Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ministry of Health).

In terms of immigration to Slovenia, scope of rights entitled to migrants greatly depends on their status in Slovenia. International protection beneficiaries are entitled to the most comprehensive scope of rights, their rights are equal to rights of Slovene citizens with the exempt of some political rights. All migrants are entitled to the Initial Integration of Migrants program, with Slovene language courses and Slovene culture and state system courses.

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015²⁷, Slovenia ranks on 27th place among 44 analysed countries. The index establishes that Slovenian integration policies still create somewhat more obstacles than opportunities for immigrants to fully integrate into society. Policies on family reunification are assessed as favourable to migrants, followed by regulations on anti-discrimination and permanent residence as slightly favourable, and access to nationality somewhat favourable to migrant integration. Among shortcomings of Slovenian integration policy, the index recognises labour market mobility, education and political participation as slightly unfavourable to migrants, while access to health services is assessed as the weakest point of integration policies. Among MIPEX recommendations are for Slovenia to open up access to labour market for family migrants and introduce new measures to decrease over-qualification among migrant workers; to increase access and targeted support within the education system for all immigrant pupils, students and adults; to guarantee universal healthcare for all migrants and Slovenian citizens, and increase support measures for migrant patients; to enable dual citizenship and speed up naturalisation for migrants meeting the requirements after 5-7 years; and to increase reporting rates of discrimination cases and provide adequate victim support system. A recent study²⁸ on integration of international protection beneficiaries show that they face administrative barriers and specific challenges to access to housing and labour market.

Similarly to foreign policy, migration policies are lacking the sustainability component, including the migration – development nexus, which would also strengthen general understanding of the migration phenomenon. This often results in some concerns or tensions in local community or formal education environments, while stakeholders are not well equipped to address complex and interconnected issues.

According to the Special Eurobarometer Nr. 469 on integration of immigrants in the EU (published in April 2018),²⁹ 57% of Slovenian respondents believe they are not (well) informed or not about immigration and integration related matters (below EU28 average of 61%). More than half of Slovenes (53%) assess that media representation of immigration is objective (compared to only 39% of EU28 average). Same as the EU average, 38% of Slovenes assess that immigration to Slovenia as problem, and 23% as opportunity (EU28 average: 20%). According to the latest Standard Eurobarometer Nr. 92³⁰ (published in December 2019), more than a third of Europeans consider immigration to be

25 Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uuid=2A2BE90A-FA03-0F34-1440ED1AAC670446>.

26 Source: Vlada Republike Slovenije, O Uradu vlade za oskrbo in integracijo migrantov; available at: <https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/vladne-sluzbe/urad-vlade-za-oskrbo-in-integracijo-migrantov/o-uradu-vlade-za-oskrbo-in-integracijo-migrantov/>.

27 Available at: <http://www.mipex.eu/slovenia>.

28 Source: Wolfhardt, A., Conte, C. and Huddleston, T. (2019). The European Benchmark for Refugee Integration: A Comparative Analysis of the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism in 14 EU Countries. Brussels/Warsaw: Migration Policy Group and Institute of Public Affairs.

29 Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2169>.

30 Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2255>.

the most important issue facing the EU (34%) in first place. As key issues faced by Slovenia, Slovenian respondents listed healthcare and social protection (38%), pensions (22%), immigration (20%), economic situation (19%) and unemployment and housing (13% respectively).

Authors acknowledge that especially since 2015, the issue of refugees and mass migration has been re-actualised in European and Slovenian environment. As acknowledged by Zavrtnik (2017: 858–9), public opinion, media and politics fall within the set of factors framing different opinions during the so-called refugee/migration crisis. Even though migration has been among key global issues for the last two decades, the issue entered both Slovene and European public debates within the “another crisis” narrative. The so-called refugee crisis has followed or has been happening simultaneously with the economic crisis, which significantly affected communities outside EU borders. Collision of two significant phenomena, mass migration and recession, with numerous implications for social life, has positioned the newcomers, migrants, refugees in the most vulnerable position. At the same time, these phenomena offered a variety of issues for political instrumentalisation to various actors.

When researching Slovenian public attitude toward immigrants in the period between 2002 and 2016, Zavrtnik³¹ (2017) established that two thirds of majority population supported immigration of similar ethnic origin (mostly referring to immigrants from the former Yugoslav republics). The refugee crisis changed the ratio of 60: 40 supporting immigration of persons with different ethnic origin, to division in half (50: 50). In 2016, the share of population who believes that Slovenia “shall allow immigration only to rare individuals” has risen sharply (from 24 % to 35 %) (Zavrtnik 2017: 867). Public opinion is less supportive toward immigration of economic migrants, while more supportive toward immigration of refugees who flee from persecution in their countries of origin. Legal status (i.e. recognition of international protection) is the key feature in the attitude toward refugees. Public opinion strongly distinguishes between so-called illegal migrants and ‘real’ refugees, showing considerable sympathy for recognised refugees, while rejecting those who do not qualify for this category (Zavrtnik 2017: 881).

Qualitative analysis by Pajnik³² (2017) of journalistic commentary (editorials) that were published in the Slovenian daily newspaper Delo in the period from early August to the end of December 2015 on the topic of European migration policy (quota system, Schengen regime, bilateral agreements, visa regulations etc.), showed that articles most often referred to various mechanisms of migration policy which adopt a ‘realist’ political view, in the absence of a more informed analysis that would increase reader’s understanding of policies. The media-political parallelism, i.e. fusion of media with political agenda, is also shown by the lack of views of non-governmental sources. The legitimisation of European migration policy is largely based on narratives about Europe/EU that reflect Eurocentric views. Refugees are represented as the culprits for the collapse of Europe, and as those endangering European values; representations of Eastern Europeans as ‘other Europeans’ and of Turkey (reflecting the political ‘trading’ of refugees between the EU and Turkey) as uncivilised were also common – which is then used to legitimise strict migration regimes.

Another media analysis (Jurgele 2016: 44–5)³³ of daily newspaper Delo also showed that their coverage of refugee issues and so-called refugee crisis mainly reproduced the discourse of political elite, while journalists contributed without critical perspective to the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the survey, elite official sources appeared in 38.7 % articles, official sources in 39.9 % articles, while non-official sources only in 11.7 % articles. Hence, Delo journalists were mostly (80.3 % articles) using routine communication channels in collecting information on refugee issues, thus creating an imaginary impression of the objectivity of the communication, yet not presenting balanced opinions and positions. Critical discursive analysis showed that refugees were often represented as a threat to Slovenian citizens (number of refugees, threat to public order, ‘others’) due to the dominance of elite political resources.

A comparative study³⁴ of Central European countries’ responses to the so-called refugee crisis 2015–2016 established that while a humanitarian view prevailed in Slovenia when the influx of refugees and migrants reached the

31 Source: Zavrtnik, S., Falle Zorman, R. and Broder, Ž. (2017). Javno mnenje in migracije: mehanizmi klasifikacij in “begunska kriza”. *Theory and Practice* 54(5), 857–84.

32 Source: Pajnik, M. (2017). Medijsko-politični paralelizem: legitimizacija migracijske politike na primeru komentarja v časopisu “Delo”. *Two Homelands: migration studies* 45(2017), 169–84.

33 Source: Jurgele, M. (2016). *Medijsko poročanje o beguncih: Primer dnevnika Delo v letih 2015 in 2016*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences.

34 Source: Göbl, G., C. Kvorning Lassen, M. Lovéc, M. Nic and P. Schmidt. (2016). *Central Europe and the Refugee Question: Cooperation, not Confrontation*. ÖGfE Policy Brief 22’2016. Accessible at: <http://www.europeum.org/data/articles/oegfe-policy-brief-2016-22.pdf>.

country in summer of 2015, even with the general public and the government heavily criticising Hungary's decision to build a fence at the border, "perceptions of a chaotic "handling" of the transit from Croatia toward Austria in autumn 2015 as well as security concerns have strongly influenced public opinion. Faced with immigration pressure and criticism at home, government responded by focusing on security aspects of the issue" (Göbl et al. 2016: 2–3).

Refugee resettlement as a legal pathway to Europe

While Europe registered more than a million arrivals in 2015, the number of arrivals has been falling since 2016. According to the IOM data,³⁵ 123,920 arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers has been registered in 2019 (2018: 144,282 people; in 2017: 186,788; in 2016: 390,456). The number of asylum claims in the EU has reached a peak in 2015 with 1,321,600 asylum claims, with the number of asylum applications significantly decreasing in the next years (2016: 1,259,955 asylum claims; 2017: 705,705; and 2018: 646,060 asylum claims).³⁶ There have been 2,476,361 registered refugees in the EU in 2018.

UNHCR has been recording a growing trend in forced displacement; in 2018, the global population of forcibly displaced increased by 2.3 million people, with almost 70.8 million individuals forcibly displaced worldwide (a record high) by the end of the year due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations.³⁷

Depending on circumstances of refugees, there are various options of so-called durable solutions "that allow /refugees/ to rebuilding their lives".³⁸ voluntary repatriation, resettlement in another country or integration within the host community. "Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement."³⁹ UNHCR is mandated for the resettlement, and countries decide to take part in the programme. "In recent years, the United States has been the world's top resettlement country, with Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia and the Nordic countries also providing a sizeable number of places annually."⁴⁰ Resettlement States provide the refugee with legal and physical protection, including access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals.

By 2018, resettlement had been embedded as a policy priority at the EU level following several stand-alone joint resettlement programmes, with EU funding available for resettling Member States through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In 2015, as recent and protracted conflicts and crises around the globe caused record-high numbers of asylum-seekers and migrants to cross into Europe, the European Commission presented the European Agenda on Migration, a guiding document pointing out short- and long-term measures to collectively respond to the numerous challenges EU Member States faced. Among the immediate actions to be taken, the Agenda highlighted the proposal for an emergency temporary mechanism to distribute within the EU persons in need of international protection who claim asylum on EU territory and belong to certain nationalities (relocation), and the establishment of an EU-wide resettlement scheme for refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities to arrive from third countries.⁴¹

EU resettlement scheme was launched in July 2015 following the EU leaders' agreement the previous month to resettle 22.504 refugees in two years. Over 24 000 people have been resettled as of March 2019. The resettlement scheme for Syrian refugees in Turkey was set up following the EU-Turkey agreement of March 2016. Close to 21.000 Syrians have been resettled so far through this scheme as of March 2019. In September 2017 the Commission adopted a recommendation calling on member states to offer resettlement places for 50 000 people, to be admitted

35 Source: InfoMigrants, Migration to Europe in 2019; available at: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21811/migration-to-europe-in-2019-facts-and-figures>.

36 Source: European Union, Asylum Applications, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_en.html#filter=2018.

37 Source: UNHCR, Global trends – Forced displacement in 2018; available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>.

38 Source: UNHCR, Solutions; available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/solutions.html>.

39 Source: UNHCR, Resettlement; available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement.html>.

40 Ibid.

41 Source: The European Resettlement Network, Resettlement in Europe; available at: <https://www.resettlement.eu/page/resettlement-in-europe>.

by 31 October 2019.⁴² But “EU has delivered only three-quarters of a two-year program due to be completed by the end of October /2019/.”⁴³

In response to the increased number of refugees and migrants coming to Europe between 2015 and 2016 (the so-called refugee crisis), Slovenia has committed to relocating 218 persons from Italy and 349 persons from Greece, and to resettle 20 persons from third countries under the EU scheme for relocation and resettlement of international protection applicants and refugees.⁴⁴ On 4 August 2016, the Government adopted a decision that, based on the EU-Turkey Agreement, 60 third-country nationals in total who are eligible for refugee status may be admitted.⁴⁵ In March 2016, the Government of Slovenia established an interdepartmental working group to coordinate the implementation plan, which includes representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.⁴⁶

In total, 34 Syrian citizens were permanently resettled to Slovenia and 253 people were relocated during the project period, representing 44,6% of Slovenia’s commitment. From Italy, 81 people were relocated, of whom 77 Eritrean citizens, three Syrian citizens and one Yemeni citizen. From Greece, 172 persons were relocated, of whom 149 Syrian citizens, 17 Iraqi citizens and six stateless persons. Altogether, 234 decisions have been issued on the recognition of refugee status to relocated asylum-seekers and 11 decisions on the recognition of subsidiary protection status.⁴⁷

The Government of Slovenia committed in the Migration Strategy to promote legal and safe pathways of persons in need of protection, including through resettlement. In line with forced displacement trends, it should expand the refugee admissions (and thus strive to prevent the death toll resulting from people undertaking perilous journeys to escape unworthy living conditions), to ensure full implementation of the 2030 Agenda principle of “leaving no one behind”.

42 Source: European Council, How the EU manages migration flows; available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/managing-migration-flows/>.

43 Source: DW, EU breaks promise of safe passage for 50,000 refugees; available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-breaks-promise-of-safe-passage-for-50000-refugees/a-50803664>.

44 Source: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve (2016): Poročilo z delovnega področja migracij, mednarodne zaščite in vključevanja za leto 2015. Accessible at: http://mnz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mnz.gov.si/pageuploads/DUNZMN_2013/DUNZMN_2014/DUNZMN_2015/DUNZMN_2016/Statisticno_porocilo_-_SLO_2015_25052016.pdf.

45 Source: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve (2017): Poročilo z delovnega področja migracij, mednarodne zaščite in vključevanja za leto 2016. Accessible at: http://mnz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mnz.gov.si/pageuploads/DUNZMN_2013/DUNZMN_2014/DUNZMN_2015/DUNZMN_2016/DUNZMN_2017/Statisticno_porocilo_-_SLOVENSKO_2016.pdf.

46 Ibid.

47 Source: Annual Report of the Migration Office for 2018; available at: http://mnz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mnz.gov.si/pageuploads/DUNZMN_2013/DUNZMN_2014/DUNZMN_2015/DUNZMN_2016/DUNZMN_2017/DUNZMN_2018/Porocilo_2018_SLO.pdf.

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