

Monthly data collection on the migration situation in the EU

April 2017 highlights

1-31 March 2017

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Since November 2016, FRA's monthly reports highlight key developments in 14 Member States: Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. This month's highlights are published alongside full country reports. No focus section is being published this month.

New arrivals

External land and sea borders

Arrivals to Italy further increased in March, by more than one third to more than [11,000 people](#), mostly coming from Guinea, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia and Senegal. Some 200 people were estimated to have [died](#); several corpses were found and one severely malnourished man died on board a rescue vessel.

Between 1 January and 21 March 2017, some 3,370 people arrived by sea to Greece. The average number of daily arrivals increased during the week of 13-19 March in comparison with previous weeks, from about 30 to about 80, owing to an improvement in weather conditions.

Arrivals in Hungary decreased significantly. The police returned 350 people apprehended within eight kilometres of the Serbian side of the border fence and apprehended some 190 people within the territory, compared with some 1,050 and 320, respectively, in February. Furthermore, the number of people prevented from climbing over the fence decreased from about 2,180 in February to approximately 650 in March, as Hungary installed 'smart fence' technology, including speakers that play a message in multiple languages warning people of the consequences of irregular border fence crossings.

Fewer than 250 people, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, were apprehended at the borders and within the territory of Bulgaria, marking a slight increase.

Some 1,000 people [arrived](#) in Spain by sea and about 50 people were confirmed to have died on the western Mediterranean route between January and March 2017. Arrivals by small boat [increased by 62 %](#) during the first quarter of 2017 compared with the same period in 2016.

During March 2017, about 1,670 individuals were relocated from Greece to other Member States. Some 910 were male and some 760 were female. The majority of people were relocated to Germany (about 250 people), France (about 170 people) or Switzerland (some 70 people).

Relocations to Spain had reached about 880 by mid-March; fewer than ten relocated children arrived in March.

Internal borders and airports

Arrivals to Austria decreased to some 2,220 in March, mainly coming from Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.

At least 100 people, mainly from Syria and Morocco, entered Denmark irregularly.

More than 300 irregular migrants arrived in Slovakia, most of them Ukrainian citizens, marking a significant increase on previous months.

Arrivals to Sweden have remained below 2,000 asylum seekers per month, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, including some 700 children.

Criminal proceedings

The [Public Prosecutor](#) in Italy decided not to investigate NGO staff or private individuals steering boats for search-and-rescue, considering that they are not facilitators; however, a fact-finding investigation into some NGO funding and sources of information was launched.

Italian police [arrested](#) three French activists in Ventimiglia for providing food to irregular migrants in breach of an order by the mayor.

Between January and March 2017, Hungary initiated criminal proceedings against 20 people accused of human smuggling. According to the [Criminal Code](#), such activities are punishable even if no profit is sought or made, and thus the definition of smuggling may include the activities of volunteers helping refugees.

In Bulgaria, the police rescued 11 adults and 16 children from a burning truck; criminal proceedings for human smuggling were opened against the adults. A group of about 30 Iraqis, including one child, were [sentenced](#) to imprisonment, in most cases suspended, and fines for irregular border crossing.

The [Malmö District Court](#) (case number B 2249-16) sentenced three staff members of a TV channel for human smuggling. For the recording of a documentary, the team had helped a Syrian child to reach Sweden from Athens. Although the court recognised the humanitarian motivation, it did not consider the case to fall within with the exception for humanitarian aid provided for by the law. According to the police, most cases of human smuggling concern asylum seekers already residing in Sweden picking up family members from Germany.

In France, several demonstrations in support of asylum seekers and migrants took place. A new group, [Offenders Together](#) (*Délinquants solidaires*), was created with the aim of denouncing the increase in questioning, arrests and prosecutions of people who act in various ways to assist migrants.

Initial registration and asylum processing

At the border

Some 8,000 people are waiting in Serbia to enter Hungary. Hungary continues to admit only five people per working day for each of two transit zones, despite a new law requiring asylum applications to be made from the transit zones. The slow admission procedure results in extremely long waiting times of up to one year for admission to a transit zone. Several [reports](#) were published on brutality towards asylum seekers along the southern borders of Hungary, including severe police violence, which remains largely uninvestigated.

NGOs from Poland [report](#) that border guards in Brest/Terespol and Medyka systematically refuse entry to individuals who plan to apply for international

protection. Asylum applicants from Tajikistan and Chechnya often try to submit asylum applications 30 times or more, while only two to three families a day have their applications registered at the border crossing. The Border Guard justify such refusals by invoking the absence of a valid entry visa or other documents enabling the bearer to stay legally in Poland.

Asylum

Asylum applications in Italy increased by more than 60 % in the first three months of 2017 compared with the same period in 2016, according to the [National Commission for the Right to Asylum of the Ministry of Interior](#); more than half (54 %) of the applications lodged in 2017 were rejected; some 119,500 applications were still pending.

Asylum applications in Hungary decreased further to some 320 (compared with about 430 in February), including only some 20 people who applied while in police custody within the territory (compared with 120 in February). Applicants are mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Algeria. Some 390 decisions were negative in March.

Asylum applications in Bulgaria increased to some 530, including nearly 100 from children.

Asylum applications in Germany [continued to decrease](#), to some 16,570 in February. Around 39 % of all applicants were children; 17 % were younger than 4 years old. Applications came primarily from Syrian, Iraqi, Eritrean and Afghan citizens. Some 334,000 applications were still pending in March.

The [figures](#) of the Office for Migration and Refugees for February show that the proportion of people receiving only subsidiary protection decreased to 19 %; it had been 41 % in September 2016. The proportion of people whose removal was suspended had increased to 6 % of asylum decisions issued; in August 2016, it had been 2.3 %).

A [university study](#) showed considerable and increasing differences among German federal states in recognition rates between 2010 and 2015, particularly in relation to applicants from Iraq and Afghanistan; moreover, a low recognition rate in a federal state was found to correlate to a high number of hate crime attacks during the preceding year.

Some 3,430 [new asylum applicants](#) arrived and applied for asylum in the Netherlands in February 2017.

In France, there has been a rise of 15 % in requests for asylum in recent months, compared with the same period last year, according to La Cimade.

About 15,760 people applied for asylum in Spain in 2016, including nearly 1,800 children, 1,530 of them being under 14 years of age. The number of first-time applications is far below the average for EU Member States (335 applications per million inhabitants). A [question](#) raised in the Senate indicated that sub-Saharan African asylum applicants are not able to register their asylum applications at the offices established at the city borders of Ceuta and Melilla.

While the number of asylum applications remained low in Denmark during March, at some 170, unaccompanied children continue to account for a large proportion of them, at nearly 30 %.

[Concerns were expressed](#) in relation to the legal protection of asylum seekers in Finland. Time pressure, the lack of experience of many asylum officers and lawyers, insufficient legal guidance provided to asylum seekers and efforts towards efficiency are said to jeopardise the fair assessment of asylum claims.

Around 10 % of asylum applicants in Austria are unaccompanied children.

In Sweden, many asylum seekers are frustrated with the [temporary restrictions](#) on obtaining a residence permit and on family reunification, introduced in July 2016.

Asylum case officers in Austria continue to increasingly call into question the authenticity of documents from Syria and the authenticity of marriages, according to NGOs.

Return

The majority of individuals returned from Greece in March in the context of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVVR) programmes were from Pakistan, Iraq or Algeria. During the same month, the Hellenic Police conducted approximately 600 forced returns. The majority of returnees originated from Albania (about 490 people) or Pakistan (about 30 people).

Italy returned more than [70 Nigerian citizens](#) in March, following instructions to intensify checks to identify Nigerian migrants living irregularly in Italy (as reported in FRA's February report).

A young Afghan man apprehended while trying to cross the border to France in Ventimiglia, Italy, [attempted suicide](#) as he was about to be transferred to Taranto.

Hungary returned some 50 people to Ukraine, Serbia, Georgia and Kosovo.

Bulgaria returned about 80 % of some 500 people who had participated in a riot in November 2016 at the registration centre in Harmanli to other countries.

A Jewish Afghan citizen in Pinneberg, Germany, resorted to seeking [refuge in a synagogue](#) because he was to be deported despite the vulnerabilities resulting from his minority background.

Austria increased the number of people it returned to Afghanistan.

In the Netherlands, a large number of people are categorised as having [returned to their country without supervision](#). According to the National Support Point for Undocumented Migrants the majority of them are likely to be staying irregularly in the Netherlands or to have moved to other countries in Europe; they are therefore in a vulnerable position and [more likely](#) to become victims of human trafficking. Forced return following detention has increased, from 59 % to 70 % in 2016.

In France, various associations highlighted the frequency of the use of deprivation of liberty for undocumented foreigners during return procedures, with this being "systematic" in certain towns. Furthermore, according to Anafé, at airports certain people are returned very quickly after their arrival by plane, sometimes without being informed of their rights. On 23 March, Anafé published

an [official statement](#) in which it denounced the treatment of a family at the airport of Roissy Charles de Gaulle, which ended with the hospitalisation of a one-year-old child.

Reception conditions

Hotspots and immigration detention

The Italian Ministry of the Interior [announced](#) the opening of additional hotspots by June 2017 in Messina and Palermo (Sicily), Corigliano Calabro, Crotona and Reggio Calabria, as well as the creation of a mobile hotspot in Sardinia.

In Brindisi, Italy, a [transgender woman](#) from Brazil was placed in a pre-removal detention facility for men, based on the gender to her assigned at birth. In the facility, her hormone therapy was stopped for more than a month. The same woman was later held again in a pre-removal facility in Caltanissetta.

Some 120 people were detained in Hungary before their removal and more than 60 during asylum procedures.

Construction works to turn the reception centre in Pastrogor, Bulgaria, into a closed facility continued. A sector of the pre-removal detention facility in Busmantsi was transformed into a closed facility for asylum seekers who have committed certain offences.

Immigration detention centres (CIEs) in Spain continue to be [criticised](#) for their penitentiary-style regimes and deficiencies in identifying children and victims of human trafficking. More than [70 % of foreigners entering the CIEs are released](#) into a limbo situation, as removal frequently turns out to be impossible following the maximum detention period.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, foreigners – including families with children and victims of torture – who have successfully applied for international protection at the border crossings in Poland are often placed in detention centres for at least 60 days. The courts justify detention by citing numerous refusals of entry, the need to gather additional information, the risk of absconding and the lack of a permanent address.

Safety and material conditions

On the Greek islands, sexual and gender-based violence remains a critical issue due to the lack of basic standards in reception and identification centres (RICs), particularly in Lesbos (RIC Moria) and Samos (RIC Vathy).

Two [reception hubs](#) will be established near Rome, Italy, hosting up to 400 asylum seekers each.

In Hungary, asylum seekers are accommodated in containers in the transit zones, which they may not leave until a decision on their claim is made, except through a one-way exit to Serbia. The capacity of open reception facilities in Hungary has been further reduced; they were hosting only about 69 refugees and asylum seekers at the end of March. The Körmend open refugee camp had closed.

Reception centres (CETIs) in Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, remained [overcrowded](#), filled to more than twice their capacity.

Since the dismantling of the informal camps in Calais, France, at the end of 2016, many migrants have returned there in the hope of being able to go to the United Kingdom. The Public Defender of Rights estimates their number at between 250 and 400, including more than 100 children. These migrants live in hiding from the police, in the cold and in destitution in the absence of reception facilities.

Healthcare and basic services

Mental health care is insufficient in Greece, particularly on the Greek islands. On Lesbos, the percentage of patients with anxiety and depression has increased by a factor of 2.5 and the percentage of those with post-traumatic stress disorder has increased threefold, according to [Médecins Sans Frontières](#); on Samos and Chios mental health among asylum seekers has deteriorated and attempts at self-harm and suicide have escalated.

A representative [study](#) on the situation of refugee women in Germany identified a lack of privacy and deficient sanitary conditions as key concerns; more than one third of the women interviewed complained about a lack of medical care; fewer than 10 % of those who had asked for psychological treatment had received it.

The Administrative Court of Lille, France, suspended several decisions by the mayor of Calais prohibiting the distribution of food to migrants; however, the court [refused](#) to order the Calais council to open a distribution centre for meals and to provide the material resources for the operation of a meal distribution service for the benefit of people of French or foreign nationality without a fixed abode.

In Guyana, France, according to several [associations](#), for technical reasons asylum requests can no longer be registered, which creates major difficulties for applicants in accessing healthcare, as they cannot prove their administrative status.

In January, the [Public Defender of Rights](#) in France raised the difficulties that migrants face in accessing healthcare, caused by illegal practices by doctors who refuse to see members of vulnerable groups.

Vulnerable people

The Italian Refugee Council launched a [monitoring tool](#), including a survey, to assess responses to the needs of survivors of torture and violence; the tool is aimed at lawyers, legal counsellors, social workers, doctors and other stakeholders.

To qualify for state funding in Germany, welfare organisations have to include the identification of vulnerable people among their tasks; however, there are no harmonised standards or procedures at national level.

In France, [half of applicants for asylum remain without accommodation](#) as a result of the priority rules that have been set. Owing to an inability to meet their needs, men, women and children, many of whom are unaccompanied, are left in

the street, according to the [NGO Le Gisti](#), without access to information on their rights.

The police in Finland report cases of self-harm among asylum seekers, especially those facing negative asylum decisions.

Child protection

Identification

Arrivals in Italy by unaccompanied children increased to nearly 2,300 between 1 January and 22 March; fewer than 400 had arrived by the end of February.

Unaccompanied children in Sweden are increasingly anxious about the results of age assessments and their chances of staying in Sweden when they turn 18. Reports of deteriorating mental health and suicide attempts among unaccompanied children reflect this. Several NGOs, as well as the [Parliamentary Ombudsman](#), have criticised the motivation behind and process involved in the age assessments. In an [internal quality control report](#), the Swedish Migration Agency found that age had been insufficiently investigated in 60 % of all cases; in 43 %, applicants were not clearly informed that the agency had not been able to confirm their age during the asylum interview. From March, the National Board of Forensic Medicine will arrange medical age assessments, which in some cases had been [postponed](#) pending the start of the new process.

In its annual [report](#), the Swedish Ombudsman for Children criticised the absence of child-specific forms of persecution as a ground for asylum and the weak phrasing of the child's right to be heard in the Aliens Act; furthermore, the Ombudsman pointed out that there were no special units assessing the needs of unaccompanied children upon arrival.

According to the Human Rights League, in the Slovakian detention centre at Medveďov there was a problem with the age assessment of young men detained by the police. Although the men claimed that they were minors, the police did not initiate an age assessment and treated them as adults.

According to a [response](#) to a parliamentary question, Germany rejected 620 unaccompanied children at the border in 2016 for failing to meet the entry requirements; among them were 275 Afghan, 58 Syrian, 39 Eritrean and 36 Iraqi unaccompanied children.

According to NGOs in Poland, the best interests of the child are not taken into account in detention decisions. The system for appointing a guardian for unaccompanied children does not work properly; it can take from three to six months for a guardian to be appointed.

Accommodation and family reunification

Unaccompanied children living in Como, northern Italy, [do not receive adequate assistance](#). Those who live in the government encampment are accommodated together with unrelated families, including adults; legal counselling and a guardian are made available to them only if they apply for asylum.

The capacity to accommodate unaccompanied children is still insufficient in Greece. On 17 March 2017, there were 891 children on the waiting list to be referred to the National Centre for Social Solidarity for accommodation.

In accordance with the new law in Hungary, children over the age of 14 are transferred to the transit zones, where they must stay until their asylum claim is decided.

The Hungarian [SOS Children's Village Foundation](#) has been trying to find volunteers willing to accommodate refugee children.

The number of unaccompanied children in basic care facilities in Austria has gradually decreased to some 4,250.

The provincial authorities in Lower Austria have taken over responsibility for legal counselling of unaccompanied children; the counsellors reportedly do not always file appeals when they are requested to do so by the children, and do not always hand over decisions to the children.

In Finland, transfers of unaccompanied children to another municipality or another part of the country were [reported](#) to have a negative impact on the well-being and integration of the children. The number of places allocated to unaccompanied children in municipalities was reported to be insufficient, which has led to delays in placements.

A [report](#) by NGOs and a judicial clinic described the situation of the more than 540 unaccompanied children staying in Melilla, Spain, including some 100 sleeping in the streets. Many are not registered and have no access to child protection, education or healthcare services.

In Spain, the [book](#) *My name is Adou* was published; it is the story of an eight-year-old boy whose father resorted to smugglers following the death of the grandmother who had been looking after the child in Côte d'Ivoire, as his request for family reunification was refused due to a minor discrepancy in the required income.

A 16-year-old child from Mali committed suicide in France by throwing himself out of the window of reception accommodation for unaccompanied children; according to his friends, he did so because he feared that a police patrol would find him and deport him on the grounds that his status as a child was contested.

Owing to financial considerations, 17-year-old asylum seekers are to be accommodated in adult facilities in Denmark. Four children's centres will be [closed](#).

Families with children have increasingly been arriving in the municipality of Vesthimmerland, Denmark, following restrictions on family reunification throughout Europe.

Reception centres for families are often not suitable for children in Sweden, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare. Mental health problems, also among parents, make the children even more vulnerable. Relocations to other municipalities often take place at short notice and without preparation, causing anxiety among the children.

A government [report](#) on the situation of unaccompanied children in Germany highlights the lack of trained staff and adequate accommodation facilities in

some municipalities; many children are affected by extreme stress; the time taken to appoint a guardian ranges from a few days to several weeks. Federal states, municipalities and welfare organisations call for social systems to be interlinked, to improve access to education and training, healthcare and psychosocial care, which would require increased cooperation between immigration and youth welfare authorities, and more training for social workers and guardians.

Research in the Netherlands showed that the physical and mental health of so-called rooted children [was at risk](#) when children and their families were returned after a long asylum procedure (more than five years). In addition to developing physical and mental problems, [these children](#) lack knowledge of the language of their country of origin, have no social connections, have no plans for the future, live in poverty and, because of their 'otherness' in behaviour, are considered outsiders by the local community.

Children in families may spend several months or even years in refugee accommodation centres in Germany that are often not safe and inadequate for children; only 29 % of children in reception centres attend regular schools, according to a [Unicef study](#).

Asylum-seeking children in Slovakia lack quality education. This is mostly due to the language barrier and teachers being ill prepared to teach refugee children. The employees of reception centres also lack the financial sources to provide leisure activities for children.

Unaccompanied children are no longer granted a temporary residence permit under the special regulation for unaccompanied children in Denmark, according to NGOs. They therefore live in asylum centres until they are old enough to undergo an asylum procedure. The children's centres are not necessarily equipped to meet the needs of children who are in the asylum system for a number of years.

Legal, social and policy responses

Legal changes

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) [stopped](#) the transfer of eight teenagers and a pregnant woman from a refugee camp near Budapest to the transit zone along the Hungarian-Serbian border, in line with the new law. The court asked the authorities which services were in place in the transit zones to meet special needs, particularly of children, and if asylum seekers were granted access to education and medical services in the transit zones.

The ECtHR [ruled](#) that Hungary violated the European Convention on Human Rights by detaining two asylum seekers in the transit zone in the autumn of 2015 and returning them to Serbia, putting them at risk of facing inhumane treatment in refugee centres in Greece. The court ordered Hungary to pay each of the appellants around €18,700 in compensation, in addition to legal fees.

In accordance with a [new law](#) further extending its border control policy, Hungary is accepting asylum applications only from the transit zones, requiring the police to collect and take all asylum applicants (including those who did not enter through Serbia) to the Serbian side of the border fences, where they have

to wait in one of the two transit zones until they can apply for asylum. This includes children in families as well as unaccompanied children who are over 14 years old. The timeframe for appealing against a negative asylum decision has been reduced from seven to three calendar days. If the applicant does not cooperate with the authorities, the applicant is returned to Serbia without having the opportunity to appeal. In case of a negative decision, the asylum seeker has to reimburse the cost of their detention. NGOs have strongly criticised the law for practically preventing access to asylum in Hungary and urged the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in Hungary in a public [letter](#) to consult the Constitutional Court on the automatic detention of all asylum seekers.

EASO will provide rapporteurs in support of the Appeal Committees in Greece, which, depending on the way it is implemented, could raise questions under the right to an effective remedy.

The Italian Senate approved the law decree accelerating asylum procedures and restricting appeal options; the Chamber of Deputies is expected to approve the law in April. The Association for Legal Studies on Immigration [criticised](#) the decree for failing to address migration flows comprehensively, including through legal migration. The National Association of Judges also [criticised](#) the reform for possibly infringing the right to effective remedy and contributing to an excessive backlog of cases before the Court of Cassation. Several NGOs also [expressed](#) their criticism for the emergency solutions, as opposed to longer term measures, provided for by the legal changes.

The Italian Parliament approved the [law](#) on unaccompanied children, introducing a national protocol for age assessment, a two-tier reception system with arrival and secondary reception centres, foster care as a priority over reception centres, consolidated safeguards concerning education and healthcare, and the right for children to be heard in judicial proceedings affecting them.

The Bulgarian interim government [repealed](#) the [regulation](#) on integration agreements, considering that it had failed to provide clear criteria for the social and cultural integration of people granted asylum or international protection and that it had caused problems in the localities where mayors had to implement integration measures in the face of negative public attitudes. The Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Labour and Social Policy will draft a new regulation by 7 April 2017.

Austria proposed a new [Integration Act](#), obliging asylum seekers to complete several integration activities, such as courses on the German language and Austrian values, and providing for penalties, such as a reduction in benefits, in case of non-compliance. The act also foresees integration monitoring by the Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and prohibits full-face veiling. The supplementary [Integration Year Act](#) obliges people granted international protection and asylum seekers with a high probability of recognition to take part in charitable activities with a view to facilitating their integration into the labour market.

In Germany, several organisations criticised the [draft bill](#) to accelerate returns: the proposed restrictions, including the possible extension of pre-removal detention, are not justified; extending the duration of stays in reception centres would be an obstacle to integration and education; and youth services need

urgent training if they are to be made responsible for asylum applications for unaccompanied children.

In the Netherlands, a draft bill of the Return and Immigration Detention Act is under [review](#), in particular with regard to the provision that detention of aliens must be used only as a means of last resort.

Poland presented [amendments](#) to the Act on granting international protection to foreigners. As a result of these amendments, in certain cases, asylum applications at border crossing points will be examined within border procedures, which means that the procedure should be completed within 28 days and a negative decision cannot be suspended. Nearly all applicants will be detained for up to 12 months. Another draft [amendment](#) to the regulation on detention centres for foreigners would allow for the possibility of accommodating foreigners in containers.

The parliament in Slovakia agreed to an [amendment](#) to the Law on residence of foreigners allowing families with children in detention to access mental health and social services and establishing that children have a right to meals five times a day and access to outdoor space three times a day. Age assessment for unaccompanied children will be obligatory only in cases where there "is a suspicion that a person is an adult", rather than, as previously required, "when it was not 'obvious' that he/she was a minor". The Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and National Minorities [recommended](#) the establishment of a working group on alternatives to detention for families with children.

In Finland, changes in legislation and practice have recently taken place in relation to the availability of legal aid and appeal times.

The amendment of the Finnish [Aliens Act](#) (*ulkomaalaislaki/utlänningslag*) to include 'designated residence' (*lapsen asumisvelvollisuus/boendeskyldighet för barn*) as an alternative to detention for children aged 15 to 17 and with an enforceable expulsion order entered into force on 1 February 2017. The introduction of designated residence has been [criticised](#) for not creating a real alternative to detention for children, instead expanding the use of interim measures.

In Sweden, the Migration Court of Appeal (case number UM911-16) [confirmed](#) the right to subsidiary protection of an Afghan child, considering the extent of violence and abuse, the overall situation in the country and the lack of family, other networks and local knowledge of the country, concluding that these factors created an individual and specific risk to the child.

Policy responses

In Greece, the Minister of Migration Policy [announced](#) that the money provided through IOM AVRRE programmes will be increased from €500 to €1,000 for those who do not appeal their first instance negative decisions and depart voluntarily through the programmes.

The [EU-Northern Africa Contact Group](#) met for the first time in Rome, Italy, including officials from the ministries of the interior of Algeria, Libya and Tunisia; the group aims to monitor migration flows and coordinate their interventions.

Concerns have been raised in Denmark in relation to Dublin transfers to Hungary. The Danish Refugee Council is currently awaiting a decision by the Refugee Appeals Board (*Flygtningenævnet*) concerning conditions in Hungary, especially in terms of detaining asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers in the detention facility at Békéscsaba, Hungary, started a hunger strike in response to the new law on the extended border control policy.

In Bulgaria, procurement procedures for €160 million in EU funding for dealing with the migration situation and border management were launched.

Austria promoted voluntary return through a [website](#) and advertisements displayed in public places in Vienna. There are plans for the distribution of information materials in basic care centres.

The [government programme 2017-2018](#) adopted in Austria includes measures on 'security and integration' and the establishment of return centres.

The German police plan to [extend](#) border patrols, currently restricted to within 30 kilometres of the border area, beginning patrols on the main traffic routes.

The police practice in Region South, Sweden, of demanding information from the municipal social services on the whereabouts of rejected asylum seekers will be extended to all regions.

In the Netherlands, the law granting a permit to children who have stayed in the country for a long period of time due to protracted procedures, is applied in an increasingly restrictive manner. The State Secretary for Security and Justice [rejected](#) a [motion](#) by MEPs to reconsider the very strict interpretation of the requirement of "cooperation in return procedures", which is a criterion for granting such permits. NGOs, media and MEPs have [criticised](#) the [increasingly restrictive](#) implementation of the regulation for interfering with the child's best interests and right to development.

Responses by civil society and local and political actors

Several demonstrations took place in cities throughout Germany (Berlin, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Bremen) against deportations in general and to Afghanistan particularly and against the EU-Turkey agreement on the occasion of its one-year anniversary. At the same time, many [rallies against refugees](#) took place, with criminal incidents such as hate speech, Nazi salutes and attacks on pro-refugee demonstrators, the press or the police.

Similarly, on 18 March 2017, [protests](#) took place throughout Greece against the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, with the biggest one taking place in Athens.

In Rome, Italy, demonstrations took place against negotiations between the EU and third countries to tackle irregular migration.

On 30 March 2017, the Greek Council for Refugees held a [press conference](#) in light of the announcement of the ECtHR ruling on the case *Chowdury and others v. Greece*. The court ordered Greece to pay €588,000 in compensation to a group of irregular migrant workers from Bangladesh, exploited in the agriculture sector.

According to [a survey](#) by the National Centre for Social Research in Greece, 65 % of participants think that migrants have a negative effect on Greece's economy, 59 % consider that migrants are taking jobs from Greek citizens and 59 % consider that migrants' use of health and welfare services is greater than their contribution in taxes.

The Prefecture of Brescia, Italy, [refused](#) access to the reception system to rejected asylum applicants whose appeals were still pending.

In a village near Harmanli, Bulgaria, over the past year, a school principal has been helping Syrian children who had not been accepted at other schools to integrate through cultural exchange activities; this has [reportedly](#) led to a much greater level of tolerance throughout the village.

Public discourse in Austria has been growing increasingly insensitive to restrictive measures, and NGOs have noticed an overall erosion of fundamental rights awareness.

In Spain, hundreds of people [demonstrated](#) in support of refugees and against restrictive EU policies in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, Seville and a number of other cities.

The Danish Minister for Immigration and Integration (*Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeren*) was heavily [criticised](#) in March 2017 for publishing a picture of a birthday cake with the number 50 on it on Facebook with the following text: "Today I got the 50th amendment to tighten immigration controls ratified. This needs celebrating."

Several actors in Sweden consider that the public debate on migration and asylum has becoming ever more polarised and aggressive, although the number of arrivals has been decreasing.

In Poland, according to [NGOs](#), the media automatically portrays foreigners in a negative way and government representatives present a negative attitude to migrants and refugees.

There have been several expressions of hostility against asylum seekers and migrants of Muslim origin by politicians in Slovakia. One of the opposition political parties wants to ban by law the construction of mosques in Slovakia. Prime Minister Robert Fico defended the unwillingness of Slovakia to accept more asylum seekers. In his view, the arrival of asylum seekers threatens the cultural identity of Slovakia. The Slovak National Party proposed a ban on burqas.

Hate speech and violent crime

In Italy, the NGO Lunaria published a [report](#) on 210 cases of violence against asylum seekers monitored by the association during 2016.

Several racist, xenophobic and related incidents against migrants and asylum seekers have taken place in Austria since January, resulting in material damage and disturbance. Some 40 % of people with a migrant background, including migrants and refugees, in the region of Styria reported having been verbally attacked because of their skin colour, religion or origin, according to a [survey](#).

The Catholic Church [withdrew](#) a priest from the small town of Belene, Bulgaria, because he had received threats for accommodating a Syrian refugee family despite local protests allegedly instigated by a municipal councillor representing a populist party.

Several violent attacks against asylum seekers and reception and accommodation facilities were [reported](#) in Germany.

In January and February, 49 proceedings were initiated by the police in relation to online hate speech in Poland.

The Slovak NGO Humanitarian Council reported that it had been attacked more often recently for providing integration services to asylum seekers residing in refugee centres, as well as for working with refugees.

In the Netherlands, on 29 March 2017 the Dutch Reporting Point for Discrimination on the Internet published its [report](#) on online hate speech in 2016. Of the incidents of online hate speech that were reported on the grounds of race, 22 % were registered as hate speech against asylum seekers and refugees (70 out of a total of 305 incidents). An additional 4 % (equal to 12 incidents) were directed at migrants in general.

In February 2017, four Danish boys attacked a 16-year-old Afghan boy and tried to [burn him alive](#). The four boys were arrested. Charges of attempted homicide were later dropped, but the defence expects that they will be charged with severe violence instead. According to local police, the crime was not a hate crime motivated by the ethnic origin of the boy. The boy's family, however, claimed that their son had been the victim of racist attacks for some time.

In February 2017, the Danish Institute for Human Rights published the report [Hate speech in the public online debate](#), which shows that hate speech is most common in connection with news posts on topics concerning religious belief, refugees, migration, asylum and equality. Almost every third comment in debates on these topics was hateful.

Arson attacks against accommodation centres in Sweden have decreased significantly.

Some confrontations between asylum seekers and counter-demonstrators were reported to have taken place at demonstrations in central Helsinki, Finland, since February. Several reports of crimes, including assaults, have been registered. In late March, an attempt was made to set fire to a tent while 12 pro-migration demonstrators were inside it.

New [online police officers](#) were recruited to police departments in Finland, and a new police unit was established in Helsinki to work on online hate speech.

In Spain, some [extreme right groups](#) have increased their activities. According to a [report](#), incidents of online hate speech have increased considerably in Spain. A Facebook group is being [investigated](#) for inciting hatred against unaccompanied children in Melilla. Between January and March, several racist and xenophobic incidents, including attacks and insults, were [reported](#).

Stakeholders interviewed in April 2017

Country	Stakeholders interviewed
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department II/2, Operational Affairs; Department III/5; Department III/9 (<i>Bundesministerium für Inneres/Abteilung II/2 Einsatzangelegenheiten; Abteilung III/5 Asyl und Fremdenwesen; Abteilung III/9 Grundversorgung und Bundesbetreuung</i>); • Federal Agency for State Protection and Counter Terrorism (<i>Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung – BVT</i>); • Federal Criminal Police Office (<i>Bundeskriminalamt</i>); • Antidiscrimination Office Styria (<i>Antidiskriminierungsstelle Steiermark</i>); • Austrian Red Cross (<i>Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz</i>); • Caritas Styria (<i>Caritas Steiermark</i>); • Caritas Vienna (<i>Caritas Wien</i>).
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General Border Police (MoI – DGBP) (<i>Министерство на вътрешните работи, Главна дирекция „Гранична полиция“, МВР – ГДГП</i>); • State Agency for Refugees (SAR) (<i>Държавна агенция за бежанците, ДАБ</i>); • Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) (<i>Български червен кръст, БЧК</i>); • Refugee Support Group (RSG).
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danish Ministry of Justice (<i>Justitsministeriet</i>); • Danish Immigration Service (<i>Udlændingestyrelsen</i>); • Danish Red Cross (<i>Røde Kors</i>); • Danish Refugee Council (<i>Dansk Flygtningehjælp</i>); • SOS Against Racism (<i>SOS mod Racisme</i>).
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amnesty Finland; • National Police Board (<i>Poliisihallitus/Polisstyrelsen</i>); • Finnish League for Human Rights (<i>Ihmisoikeusliitto/Förbundet för Mänskliga Rättigheter</i>); • Finnish Ombudsman for Children (<i>Lapsiasiavaltuutettu/Barnombudsmannen</i>); • Refugee Advice Centre (<i>Pakolaisneuvonta/Flyktingrådgivningen</i>); • Central Union for Child Welfare (<i>Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto/Centralförbundet för Barnskydd</i>).
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Office for Immigration and Integration (<i>Office français de l’immigration et de l’intégration – OFII</i>); • Border police at the airports of Roissy Charles de Gaulle and Le Bourget (<i>Police aux frontières des aéroports de Roissy Charles de Gaulle et du Bourget</i>); • Public Defender of Rights (<i>Le Défenseur des droits</i>) (national independent administrative authority for the promotion and protection of human rights); • National Consultative Committee on Human Rights (<i>Commission nationale consultative des droits de l’homme</i>) (national independent administrative authority for the promotion and protection of human rights); • Service centre for migrants in Calais (<i>Plateforme de service aux migrants à Calais</i>);

Country	Stakeholders interviewed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • La Cimade (<i>Comité inter mouvements auprès des évacués</i>); • Immigrant Information and Support Group (<i>Le Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés</i>); • Anafé (<i>Association nationale d'assistance aux frontières pour les étrangers</i>); • Human Rights League (<i>Ligue des droits de l'homme</i>); • France Land of Asylum (<i>France Terre d'Asile</i>); • The voice of the child (<i>La voix de l'enfant</i>); • Catholic Relief (<i>Secours catholiques</i>).
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (<i>Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend</i>); • Federal Ministry of the Interior (<i>Bundesministerium des Inneren</i>); • Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (<i>Bundesfachverband Unbegleitete Minderjährige Flüchtlinge</i>); • Jesuit Refugee Service (<i>Jesuiten Flüchtlingsdienst</i>); • Federal Police (<i>Bundespolizei</i>); • German Red Cross (<i>Deutsches Rotes Kreuz</i>); • German Caritas Association (<i>Deutscher Caritasverband</i>).
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum Service Greece (<i>Υπηρεσία Ασύλου</i>); • UNHCR Greece (<i>Υπατη Αρχή του ΟΗΕ για τους Πρόσφυγες, γραφείο Ελλάδας</i>); • Médecins Sans Frontières (<i>Γιατροί χωρίς Σύνορα</i>); • Medecins du Monde (<i>Γιατροί του Κόσμου</i>); • International Organization for Migration (<i>Διεθνής Οργανισμός Μετανάστευσης – IOM</i>); • National Centre for Social Solidarity (<i>Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης</i>).
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of the Interior; • Ministry of Human Capacities; • Immigration and Asylum Office; • National Police Headquarters; • General Attorney's Office; • County Court of Szeged (<i>Szegedi Törvényszék</i>); • MigSzol; • MigSzol Szeged; • Hungarian Association for Migrants; • UNHCR.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of the Interior; • Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (<i>Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione – ASGI</i>); • Italian Refugee Council (<i>Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati</i>); • Doctors Without Borders Italy (<i>Medici Senza Frontiere Italia</i>); • Save the Children Italia Onlus; • UNHCR; • Italian Red Cross (<i>Croce Rossa Italiana</i>); • Jesuit Refugee Service Centro Astalli; • Community of Sant'Egidio (<i>Comunità di Sant'Egidio</i>);

Country	Stakeholders interviewed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melting Pot Europa; • Borderline Sicilia.
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry for Security and Justice: central information point, providing information on behalf of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, the Immigration Police, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (all members of the so-called 'Alien Chain'); • MiND, the Dutch Reporting Point for Discrimination on the Internet; • National Support Point for Undocumented Migrants (<i>Stichting LOS</i>); • National Police Asylum Taskforce.
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association for Legal Intervention (<i>Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej – SIP</i>); • The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (<i>Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka – HFHR</i>); • UNHCR; • HateStop (<i>Stowarzyszenie Projekt: Polska</i>); • Ministry of the Interior and Administration (<i>Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji</i>); • Ombudsman for Children (<i>Rzecznik Praw Dziecka</i>); • Border Guard (<i>Straż Graniczna</i>); • Head of the Office for Foreigners (<i>Szef Urzędu do spraw Cudzoziemców</i>).
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic; • Office of Border and Alien Police of the Police Presidium; • Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; • refugee centres in Humenné and Opatovská Nová Ves; • Marginal; • Human Rights League; • Islamic Foundation; • Slovak Humanitarian Council; • International Organization of Migration (IOM), Bratislava.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum and Refuge Office of the Ministry of the Interior (<i>Oficina de Asilo y Refugio del Ministerio del Interior</i>); • Jesuit Migrant Service (<i>Servicio Jesuita Migrantes – SJM</i>); • Spanish Committee of UNHCR (<i>Comité español de la Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados – ACNUR</i>); • Spanish Refugee Aid Commission (<i>Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado – CEAR</i>); • Acoge; • Accem; • Oxfam Intermón; • Save the Children.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish Migration Agency (<i>Migrationsverket</i>); • Swedish Police Authority (<i>Polismyndigheten</i>); • National Board of Health and Welfare (<i>Socialstyrelsen</i>); • Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (<i>Sveriges kommuner och landsting</i>); • Swedish Red Cross (<i>Röda korset</i>);

Country	Stakeholders interviewed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Save the Children Sweden (<i>Rädda Barnen</i>);• Amnesty International Sweden.