Please cite as: EUAA, '2.4 Temporary arrangements for disembarkation and relocation' in *Asylum Report 2020*, January 2022.

2.4 Temporary arrangements for disembarkation and relocation

The arrival of migrants and refugees rescued in the Mediterranean Sea continued in 2019, underlining the need for a more systematic and coordinated EU approach on first reception, registration and relocation due to ad hoc disembarkations. Throughout the year, multilateral discussions took place on temporary arrangements.

A new security decree adopted by the Council of Ministers in Italy in June 2019 (IT LEG 01), according to which boats suspected of facilitating irregular migration may be refused entry into Italian ports, slowed down search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean and gave new impetus to the discussion on a more structured temporary solution.[146] The Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union included in its programme a suggestion to establish a temporary relocation mechanism for migrants rescued at sea,[147] and the issue was also a priority in the Ministerial Meeting on Migration, held in Malta in September 2019.

During the Ministerial Meeting, which gathered a number of Member States, the Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, NGOs in Malta issued a joint statement underlining that the existing ad hoc system of negotiating relocations on a ship-by-ship basis was not sustainable. They urged for a system based on the principles enshrined in CEAS, including registration and protection of asylum seekers, appropriate provision of information, restoration of family ties, and identification of and support to vulnerable persons.[148] A Joint Declaration of Intent was concluded at the meeting by France, Germany, Italy and Malta for a structured, temporary emergency procedure to manage ad hoc disembarkations and relocation arrangements.[149]

The Joint Declaration marked the commitment of participating countries to develop a predictable and efficient temporary solidarity mechanism which includes:

> The participation of Member States on a voluntary basis, taking into account their reception capacity and existing caseload of applications for international protection;
> Relocation within four weeks after disembarkation, coordinated by the Commission with the support of EU agencies like EASO, using a fast-track system based on pre-declared pledges before the disembarkation;
> Effective and quick return of migrants not eligible for international protection;
> Provision of necessary financial, technical and operational assistance to all Member States involved;
> Requirement of all vessels involved in rescue operations to comply with instructions given by the competent Rescue Coordination Centre;
> Continued efforts for the sustainable reform of CEAS;
> Greater cooperation with countries of origin and transit to deter illegal migration and enhance incentives for return;
> Enhanced EU-led aerial surveillance to ensure early detection and minimise the risk of loss of life at sea;
> Enhanced capacities of coast guards of third countries in the southern Mediterranean; and
> Fostering cooperation with UNHCR and the IOM to support disembarkation modalities.

The Joint Declaration was presented at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in October 2019 and the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum meeting in November 2019, where divisions persisted between those in favour of mandatory relocation involving all Member States and those arguing for a more flexible approach to solidarity. The European Commission launched a process to develop Standard Operating Procedures based on the declaration, which led to a common understanding among participating Member States and is currently applied.[150]

UNHCR, international organisations and civil society organisations, have expressed concerns about the possible detrimental consequences that the absence of a sustainable mechanism may have for the dignity, physical integrity and fundamental rights of migrants. They urge for a predictable mechanism for the timely, effective and safe disembarkation and relocation of migrants rescued at sea.[151], [152], [153], [154]

In its recommendations to the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council, UNHCR reiterated the call for practical and reliable arrangements among Member States to share responsibility for the disembarkation of people rescued in the Mediterranean Sea.[155]

---

146 See also: Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo - VIS. (2020). *Input to "EASO Asylum Report 2020: Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union"* . /sites/default/files/easo-annual-report-2019-VIS-Volontariato-Internazionale-per-lo-Sviluppo-contribution.pdf

147 Finland's Presidency of the European Union. (2019). *Sustainable Europe—Sustainable Future: Finland's Presidency Programme; Presidency of the Council of the European Union 1 July – 31 December 2019* . https://eu2019.fi/documents/11707387/14346258/EU2019FI-EU-puheenjohtajakauden-ohjelma-en.pdf/3556b7f1-16df-148c-6f59-2b2816611b36/EU2019FI-EU-puheenjohtajakauden-ohjelma-en.pdf.pdf

148 Aditus, African Media Association, Blue Door English, Integra Foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service (Malta), Malta Emigrants' Commission, Migrant Women Association (Malta), Moviment Graffitti, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Education, SOS Malta and Syrian Solidarity in Malta. (2019, September 23). *NGO Statement on the European Meeting of 23 September* . https://aditus.org.mt/ngo-statement-on-the-european-meeting-of-23-september/

149 Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security. (2019, September 23). *Malta Ministerial Meeting on*

Migration – A further step towards solidarity. https://www.gov.mt:443/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2019/September/23/pr191984.aspx

150 European Commission. (2019). *COM(2019) 481 Final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration*. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20191016_com-2019-481-report_en.pdf

151 FRA. (2020). *Fundamental Rights Report - 2020*. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/fundamental-rights-report-2020

152 Danish Refugee Council et al. (2019). *Joint letter calling on Nordic and Baltic involvement in European disembarkation and relocation arrangements*. https://drc.ngo/media/5488605/joint-letter-on-nordic-and-baltic-support-for-european-disembarkation-and-relocation-arrangements.pdf

153 Aditus, African Media Association, Blue Door English, Integra Foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service (Malta), Malta Emigrants' Commission, Migrant Women Association (Malta), Moviment Graffitti, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Education, SOS Malta and Syrian Solidarity in Malta. (2019, September 23). *NGO Statement on the European Meeting of 23 September*. https://aditus.org.mt/ngo-statement-on-the-european-meeting-of-23-september/

154 UNHCR. (2019). *Desperate Journeys. Refugee and Migrant Children arriving in Europe and how to Strengthen their Protection. January to September 2019*. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71703

155 UNHCR. (2019). *UNHCR's Recommendations for the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU)*. https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ce656077.htmlGB62Y%3D&reserved=0

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu