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Report on the evaluation of the European Migration Network 2018-2021

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Report on the evaluation of the European Migration Network 2018-2021

{SWD(2026) 173 final}

1. CONTEXT

The European Migration Network (hereafter “EMN”) is an EU-funded network, established by Council Decision 2008/381/EC¹ and amended by Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council², with the aim of collecting and sharing information on migration and asylum between Union institutions and Member States’ authorities and institutions as a response to the needs of policy makers and other stakeholders in those areas.

The EMN also aims to support the development of practical cooperation in the field of migration and asylum between the Union and selected third countries, including the exchange of good practice and information, through the conclusion of administrative arrangements.

In accordance with Article 13 of the Council Decision 2008/381/EC, the Commission presents to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, a report on the development of the EMN, based on an external and independent evaluation. This evaluation assesses the four-year period from 2018 to 2021³. The period 2018 to 2021 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and related mobility restrictions, which affected migration and asylum dynamics and created rapidly evolving operational and information needs. In parallel, the Commission proposed the New Pact on Migration and Asylum in September 2020, which set the main EU policy reform. The Commission proposal on the New Pact was an important element driving the EMN activities and outputs after the proposal was made. In terms of the geographical scope, the report covers all Member States except for Denmark, given it does not participate in the Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing the EMN which was proposed as a measure under Article 66 TEC (now under Title V of Part Three of the TFEU), and in accordance with the Protocol on the Position of Denmark. , The evaluation also covers Georgia, Moldova and Norway that are participating in the EMN as observers.

The evaluation focuses on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value of the EMN. It also considers whether the EMN mandate is up-to-date and if it matches the objectives for which it was set up, as well as the effectiveness of the changes to the scope of activities. It also reviews the working practices of the EMN and the EMN Service Provider, including information flow, and provides lessons learnt and recommendations to better respond to the challenges posed to EMN by a constantly changing environment.

An independent evaluation study of the EMN, completed in 2024, was carried out by a private consortium on behalf of the Commission to support and inform the evaluation. Evidence was gathered from the following sources:

¹ Council Decision of 14 May 2008 establishing a European Migration Network (2008/381/EC), OJ L 131 of 21.5.2008, p. 7.

² Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, amending Council Decision 2008/381/EC and repealing Decisions No 573/2007/EC and No 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2007/435/EC, OJ L 150, 20.5.2014, p. 168.

³ Due to the timeframes of the EMN work programmes (2017-2018, 2019-2020, 2021-2022), the evaluation has also partly assessed data of the work programme 2021-2022, where specific data for 2021 has been inaccessible.

- an online survey of the 29 National Contact Points (NCPs) and 555 National Migration Network members;
- 3 strategic interviews with Commission services and other EU-level stakeholders;
- 33 targeted and 10 flash interviews with the various stakeholders;
- 6 case studies, combining document review with 6 group interviews with NCPs and 5 focus groups with members of national migration networks;
- a workshop with 24 NCP coordinators;
- desk research.

The main body of evidence consisted of survey respondents' replies. Desk resources provided relevant data and factual evidence on the functioning of the EMN including its structure, governance, activities and products. Field research activities helped gather qualitative insights on how and why specific results had been achieved and identified lessons learnt. Annual EMN Status Reports⁴ were useful as they present a detailed overview of the activities EMN has undertaken in a given year. The reliability and validity of results was ensured by applying a systematic triangulation of the data and information collected through both desk and field sources.

This report is submitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and is accompanied by a Staff Working Document presenting the outcome of the evaluation.

2. KEY FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

In terms of **effectiveness**, the evaluation found that the EMN key programming documents respect and reflect the objectives of its legal basis. This is confirmed by the stakeholders who overwhelmingly perceived that EMN actions and activities between 2018 and 2021 have duly reflected the objectives laid out in its mandate.

The EMN provided support to EU policymakers in the field of migration and asylum, which was used to respond to EU policy priorities, and to design and implement new policy initiatives. At national level, it helped increase knowledge and improve national policy-making in the field of migration and asylum. The information produced by the EMN was widely considered to be accessible, comparable, easily readable, objective, reliable and regularly updated. In addition to its high quality, the information produced by the EMN was considered by the stakeholders to be policy relevant and to meet their needs both at the EU and national level.

A significant improvement in access to the information produced by the EMN came with the transfer of the EMN Information Exchange System (IES) to a new platform, which helped improve its performance⁵.

⁴ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-publications/emn-status-reports_en.

⁵ A major overhaul of the IES was carried out in 2024, beyond the time frame of this evaluation.

The EMN engaged with international organisations for the preparation of products and events: four informs⁶ on the impact of COVID-19 were developed in cooperation with the OECD in 2020 and one in 2021, in collaboration with the European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and Frontex⁷. Moreover, in 2021, a EMN conference was jointly organised by the NCP Finland in collaboration with the OECD and the Council of Europe.

The EMN contributed to fostering the sharing of good practice by continuing its role as a facilitator in enabling access to the good practices identified in Member States and exchanging information on migration practices of the Member States.

An important development in external relations was the EMN engagement with third countries during the evaluation period. In 2021, Georgia and Moldova joined the EMN as observers⁸ while Armenia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine expressed an interest in joining the EMN⁹. The Commission, assisted by the cooperation with Third Countries Working Group (CTC WG), launched preliminary exchanges with these countries¹⁰.

When the evaluation looked at providing information to the general public, it identified a need for further strengthening of the role that NCPs played in mobilising national partners to promote EMN activities, including better coordination with policymakers. The evaluation confirmed that increasing efforts to enhance the provision of information to the general public, including the production of material that could be adapted to specific national needs, were having an impact in 2021¹¹.

In terms of **efficiency**, the EMN was considered financially sustainable and cost-effective, and the funding from the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) was considered adequate, while the EMN's implementation costs were proportionate to the benefits. NCPs reported that the most resource intensive elements tended to be organising national events, participating in EMN meetings, and contributing to EMN products such as ARMs and studies. Stakeholders noted that, while the annual grant cycle involved several administrative steps and budget allocation may in practice materialise after the start of implementation, NCPs have generally been able to proceed with planned activities and deliver outputs as foreseen. In addition, streamlining measures introduced in 2018 to give NCPs greater autonomy for small budget adjustments without prior approval supported smoother implementation and contributed to overall efficiency. The EMN funding proved to be pivotal towards ensuring the results and benefits achieved by the Network were achievable and sustainable.

⁶ EMN informs provide policy makers with key findings and messages on a specific topic. Information presented is based on results from information gathered and analysed by the EMN, for example from reports and studies, or from ad-hoc queries.

⁷ European Commission (2020), EMN Status Report 2020. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/00_eu_emn_status_report_2020_en.pdf.

⁸ Status Report 2021. Available at: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/EMN%20status%20report%202021%20final.pdf>.

⁹ Status Report 2021. Available at: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/EMN%20status%20report%202021%20final.pdf>.

¹⁰ 27th Steering Board meeting.

¹¹ The 2021-2025 EMN communication strategy and its impacts fall outside the timeframe of this evaluation.

On governance, the evaluation confirmed that the various components of the EMN worked in accordance with the EMN legal basis throughout the analysed period, including attendance at Steering Board meetings and performing their role in compliance with Council Decision 2008/381/EC. Given the high number of topics arising due to COVID-19 as a key factor affecting the EU migration and asylum system, two additional Steering Board meetings were organised in 2021. The EMN governance provided substantial strategic and political guidance to the Network, which was considered a significant improvement on the situation found by the previous evaluation in 2015. However, it was also identified that scientific experts were not yet involved in assisting the Steering Board, as required in Article 4 of the Council Decision 2008/381/EC, not marking any progress on that issue since the 2015 evaluation.

The composition of the NCPs was in line with Council Decision 2008/381/EC and the evaluation confirmed that they performed their tasks in accordance with the provisions of this Decision.

The contribution of the EMN Service Provider to the operation of the EMN was found to be efficient and supportive, although a need for further improvement in the timeliness of submitting documents, including meeting minutes, was identified.

Overall, the evaluation confirmed the appropriateness of the EMN internal structure, which allowed it to efficiently manage its activities, as well as a good level of awareness of the internal distribution of roles and responsibilities.

The evaluation found the activity of the EMN to be **coherent** with the European policy on migration and asylum, including the Pact on Migration and Asylum and other selected key migration policy initiatives. The EMN deliverables to support policy-making and to inform the general public were consistent with the Commission's objective to ensure fair and efficient asylum, return and integration policies, as well as better management of EU external borders. The EMN's contribution to facilitating practical cooperation and the exchange of good practices represented an important tool for a more coordinated application of the existing EU *acquis*. It was helpful in promoting efforts to harmonise implementation of the common standards governing asylum procedures, reception conditions and the recognition of third-country nationals applying for international protection. The common understanding of migration-related issues, as promoted by the EMN, supported the introduction of a new solidarity mechanism in addressing a situation of migratory pressure. The collection and exchange of reliable and up-to-date information supported the development of better crisis preparedness and responses, as well as the development of new legal pathways in the field of migration and asylum.

The EMN collected and provided information relevant to the EU Blue Card Directive¹². Annual reports on migration and asylum (ARMs) and country factsheets reported annually – and bulletins on a quarterly basis – the national measures implemented by the Member States to regulate entry and residence of third-country nationals. This was fully consistent with the Directive, which lays down the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for

¹² Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC, OJ L 382, 28.10.2021, p. 1

the purpose of highly qualified employment in the Member States. Moreover, the EMN's support for the development of enhanced migration indicators, also in collaboration with relevant EU bodies, proved to be consistent with that Directive.

The EMN objectives and activities were also found to be consistent with those of the EU action plan against migrant smuggling¹³. Both initiatives envisaged the collection of information on migrant smuggling, assistance to vulnerable migrants as well as stronger cooperation with third countries to counter irregular migration. In this regard, between 2018 and 2021, the EMN ARMs and country factsheets included an overview of the latest national policy developments on the fight against migrant smuggling. The EMN and the EU action plan supported cooperation with third countries and relevant EU agencies and the production of objective, up-to-date, reliable, relevant, and comparable information.

At the national level, Member States adopted policy developments in all policy areas covered by the EMN between 2018 and 2021¹⁴.

The analysis of the cooperation between the EMN and the relevant agencies (the EUAA, Frontex and FRA) showed a high degree of coherence and consistency in objectives and activities. The legal bases of both the EMN and the agencies include specific provisions aimed at avoiding overlaps, while still improving mutual synergies. In addition, representatives from the agencies were regularly invited to EMN meetings to foster collaboration and avoid duplication of work.

The EU added value of the EMN was reconfirmed in the course of the evaluation, which proved that many achievements brought by the EMN could not have been produced without its work and support, in particular in the exchange of good practices and reinforcing stable, practical cooperation among the Member States, as well as addressing the information needs of national policymakers.

The stakeholders reaffirmed that the EMN had brought remarkable added value, including direct support for enhanced cooperation both within the Union and beyond. The stable nature of the EMN and its broad reach to a wide range of stakeholders in both government and non-government sectors created an environment in which relationships were built and mutual trust among actors in the field of migration and asylum could develop, both among and within the Member States. Developing stable relationships with national actors was key to getting access to hard data and ensuring the production of up-to-date and comprehensive information.

The evaluation also confirmed that the information produced by the EMN was very good in terms of quality, comprehensiveness and relevance when compared to other sources available at the national level. No other network nor organisation at the EU level was capable of offering the same structured procedures and quality standards for information collection and sharing, as well as of ensuring communication and exchanges of data among all the EMN members. The

¹³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015 - 2020), COM(2015) 285 final.

¹⁴ Legal migration, international protection, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups, integration and inclusion, citizenship and statelessness, borders, visas and Schengen, illegal migration including migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings, return and readmission, and migration and development cooperation.

EMN was seen by most stakeholders as a ‘one-stop-shop’ for migration-related information not available elsewhere. The evaluation also revealed that if the EMN were to be discontinued, it would have been difficult to ensure a stable provision of its activities and deliverables at a comparable level.

The **relevance** of the EMN was confirmed by the high level of alignment between the scope of the EMN deliverables, conferences and events on the one hand, and the challenges and priorities in the field of migration and asylum in the EU on the other. While the EMN main objectives remained unchanged during the evaluation period, the specific objectives listed in its work programmes evolved, with an increasing focus on new technologies and enhanced cooperation with third countries. This evolving focus reflected the emerging challenges and policy developments that have shaped the EU migration and asylum landscape over the years.

Alignment between the focus of the EMN products and the priority topics proposed by Member States was confirmed in the evaluation. Although the EMN was found fit for purpose as regards the needs of national policymakers, only partial alignment with the needs of the general public was confirmed¹⁵.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The evaluation confirmed that between 2018 and 2021 the EMN performance was in line with its mandate and supported achieving its objectives. The implementation of the EMN activities proved to be cost-effective, including for high value activities (national events and participating in EMN meetings).

The EMN’s increasing **effectiveness** was also confirmed in focusing on activities enhancing its visibility (through its online presence, publications and events). Further strengthening of that role was found necessary in order to better mobilise national partners to promote EMN activities.

Analysing **efficiency** of the EMN in the evaluation posed a challenge due to methodological constraints regarding availability of financial data given the timing gap between the years assessed and the evidence-collection period, as well as the lack of data for the specific period of 2018-2021, given the non-alignment of the evaluation period with the EMN Work Programmes. This was mitigated by basing the analysis on budgetary allocations and by including available financial data from the years 2017 and 2022. Despite the limitations, the evaluation confirmed that the funding from AMIF was largely sufficient to cover the operation of the EMN and proportionate to the various activities carried out by the EMN. It was also found that the architecture of the EMN governance was adequate for the purpose of implementing the various activities according to the Work Programmes in the period under evaluation. Also, the EMN Service Provider played an important part in ensuring smooth operation of the Network.

At the EU level, a high level of **coherence** between EMN activities and key EU priorities in the field of migration and asylum was confirmed in the evaluation. The objectives of the EMN

¹⁵ To address that shortcoming, the EMN 2021-2025 Communication Plan provided for a number of improvements.

were found to be aligned with the selected relevant initiatives taken in the EU during the evaluation period, namely the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the revised EU Blue Card Directive, and the EU action plan against migrant smuggling. These initiatives were highlighted due to their direct relevance to the EMN's analytical and information exchange activities. International frameworks assessed have been limited by the EMN's mandate, as to migration-related activities within EU Member States and EMN observer countries. The EMN's comprehensive approach to migration was also found to be consistently in line with the specific scope of action of each of these initiatives. The uniqueness of EMN products lies in the broad spectrum of topics covered in its deliverables as well as in the capacity to collect data and information directly by the Member States, which translated into higher reliability and comparability. Finally, enhanced cooperation between the EMN and the representatives at the EU level served to ensure that the common purposes did not cause any duplication of efforts.

At the national level, a high level of consistency between topics covered by EMN outputs and Member States' policy developments between 2018 and 2021 was also identified. This was primarily the result of the EMN consultative selection process of topics to be prioritised in its products, which required several rounds of consultations between the Commission and the Member States both in the Steering Board and the NCPs, which helped to respond to the needs of various stakeholders at the national level. The consultative process, a distinctive feature of the Network, had its weakness in the time-consuming reiterated rounds of consultation. Yet, the perceived cost of consultation rounds was found to be outweighed by the benefits of the process and the consensus reached.

The evaluation also found that the responsiveness of the EMN to the needs of the general public remained an area requiring further improvement. The information produced by the EMN was at times of a technical nature and therefore not adequately tailored to the needs of the general public. Room for improvement was also identified in how EMN results are shared. Despite achieving increased visibility for the EMN at the EU level, information-sharing activities at the national level, including communication with the media, proved to be somewhat limited both in numbers and outreach, and communication of EMN activities remained mainly limited to the circle of policymakers. In order to address this, in 2021 the EMN took several actions aimed at enhancing the communication and publication of its activities and results among the wider public. The effects of these efforts will be analysed during the next evaluation of the EMN.

The evaluation confirmed that the EMN brought remarkable **EU added value**. Fostering the exchange and provision of high-quality and comparative information and good practice in the field of migration and asylum as well as enhancing practical cooperation in migration policy between the Member States, the EU and international organisations, and among national actors could not have been achieved at a comparable level without the activities of the Network. In addition, EMN products contributed to a common understanding of key migration-related features among policymakers in EU Member States.

If the EMN had been discontinued, it would have been difficult to ensure the continuation of its activities, especially the existence of National Migration Networks, the exchange of information with third countries, and the production of national reports on migration and asylum in all the Member States. In this context, the legal base of the EMN was found to be

adequate, as it provided sufficient mandate which was matched by commensurate resources to attain the EMN's objectives.

The evaluation identified five areas where further focus would be needed in the future to enhance the operation of the EMN both at the EU and at the national level. **The five lessons learnt** are:

- maintaining full consistency between the evolving EU policy priorities and the EMN activities defined in the work programmes;
- ensuring that the Joint Research Centre (JRC) is regularly involved in the Steering Board and NCP meetings;
- ensuring that a section on national good practices is included in the EMN ARMs and studies;
- developing guidelines on the production of national migration statistics in collaboration with Eurostat;
- drafting a strategy on how to establish and manage the National Migration Networks.

Overall, the evaluation recognised **the positive contribution** of the European Migration Network to the policy needs and objectives of EU migration policy. In all the five criteria evaluated, the EMN was consistently found to score well, being effective in carrying out relevant activities, providing a solid EU added value, making good and efficient use of the available resources and in a coherent manner within the framework it operates. Amendments revising the Council Decision 2008/381/EC have not been proposed by the evaluation.