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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: Enhancing reception capacity: preparedness and contingency planning for
asylum systems in the EU
- Discussion paper

Effective reception systems are a cornerstone of a functional and humane Common European Asylum System. Adequate reception capacity ensures that applicants for international protection can access an adequate standard of living from the moment they make their application; that their fundamental rights are respected; and that reception systems are resilient in the face of sudden increases in arrivals.

In its most recent document on the state of play of the Pact (15196/25 ADD 1), annexed to the first European Annual Asylum and Migration Report, the Commission noted that “Member States are improving reception capacity, both in quantity and quality” but “challenges in national reception systems continue to persist” including in securing sufficient adequate capacities, in relation to vulnerable groups, in allocating strategic resources and in improving data reporting.

With the aim to promote a comprehensive and harmonised transposition and implementation of the Reception Conditions Directive (RCD), the Commission has convened a number of meetings of the Contact Committee on the RCD to discuss all topics covered in the RCD, in particular the novelties introduced by its 2024 Recast. The Commission shared a comprehensive ‘questions and answers’ document, a template of the explanatory document for the transposition, and developed a guidance on restrictions of movement, detention and alternatives to detention.

The Commission has also reactivated a dedicated sub-group on contingency planning within the framework of the Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint Network to intensify the technical exchanges on different aspects of contingency planning on migration, including reception.

The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has also been working on providing support and the necessary tools for enhancing Member States’ reception capacity. The updated Guidance on Reception including Standards and Indicators aligned with the new obligations set by the Pact, including the 2024 Reception Conditions Directive will be presented to the EUAA Management Board in March 2026¹. The Agency has also published a ‘Practical Guide on the Management of a Reception Centre²’ (December 2024) and is working on a forthcoming ‘Guidance on Reception Models’, to be finalised by the second quarter of 2026. Further work continues in the of the EUAA Reception Network with the aim of identifying operational challenges and sharing of good practices.

In relation to reception, preparedness to address the impact of different high-volume scenarios is an important element for Member States. To assess potential fluctuations in the arrival of TCNs and stateless persons, proper forecasting tools, foresight, and data analysis are crucial. A comprehensive situational overview is key to address volatility in numbers and effectively manage fluctuating trends. Preparedness is essential not only to uphold humanitarian and legal obligations but also to maintain public confidence in asylum systems and to contribute to preventing secondary movements which can partly be driven by disparities in reception conditions.

¹ This includes an update/revision of the [2016 Guidance on Reception Conditions: Operational Standards and Indicators](#); [2018 Guidance on Reception of Unaccompanied Children: Operational Standards and Indicators](#) as well as the [2024 Guidance on Reception: Operational Standards and Indicators](#).

² [Practical Guide on the Management of a Reception Centre | European Union Agency for Asylum](#)

As regards preparedness, almost all Member States have adopted and notified, as per Art. 32 of the 2024 RCD, their national contingency plans on reception and asylum to the EUAA, on the basis of the template developed by the EUAA and shared with all Member States. These plans need to be reviewed in cases of changed circumstances and at least every three years.

The Commission state of play on the implementation of the Pact of November 2025 confirms that while “most of the plans included detailed scenarios with clear indicators and thresholds, as well as linkages between the scenarios and response measures”, and cover the core elements of the EUAA’s template, they vary in terms of completeness and clarity. In this regard, the report highlights areas for general improvement, such as “how to strengthen the completeness and clarity of the plans”, “identifying well-formulated and measurable indicators for each scenario” and articulate in the plan the preparedness measures taken at operational level to ensure capacities can be mobilised in a flexible and efficient manner.

Reception and its preparedness constitute a key element for the successful implementation of the Pact; a particular challenge relates to the impact of factors that lie outside a Member State’s control, such as mass arrivals due to political developments in third countries. In addition, deficiencies in reception may have a chain impact on the asylum procedure: shortages of accommodation, insufficient quality of reception conditions, including health care and support services, backlogs and delays, lack of sufficient funding can significantly undermine both procedural efficiency and the quality of protection afforded to applicants. Robust contingency planning, embedded in national reception frameworks, is therefore key to ensuring flexible and adequate reception systems that can absorb pressure while respecting the rights and dignity of applicants.

Questions for Member States

To inform the discussion on enhancing reception capacity and to support the Union's preparedness and contingency planning, Member States are invited to reflect on the following main questions, with a list of key points provided to help guide their responses and clarify the elements they could consider when formulating their answers:

1. Contingency Planning and Operational Preparedness

- *What are the current status and components of your national contingency plan for reception capacity in case of sudden or disproportionate increases in arrivals?*
 - Member States are encouraged, for instance, to share whether their plan identifies specific coordination mechanisms as well as roles and responsibilities; whether there are dedicated funds in national budgets foreseen to mitigate a sudden need for upscaling reception capacity; what elements does the contingency plan cover in terms of resource allocation; whether their plan has been tested in light of possible high-pressure scenarios or whether there have been any recent considerations on possible activation of the plan.

2. Monitoring, Early Warning and Flexibility of Reception Systems

- *What systems and indicators do you have in place to monitor reception capacity utilisation and to provide early warning of saturation points? In particular,*
 - Member States are encouraged to share whether they have set specific indicators to monitor their reception capacity (and whether these are included in their contingency plan); how they ensure efficient information sharing and coordination among all concerned authorities in case of increased arrivals; as well as whether they have specific preparedness measures to respond to possible increased influxes that could lead to saturation points, incl. training of additional staff, where relevant.

3. Implementation of the Reception Conditions Directive

- *How is your Member State preparing for the transposition and implementation of the 2024 Reception Conditions Directive, particularly regarding adequate living conditions, the assessment of special reception needs and the integration support obligations? More specifically,*
 - Member States are invited to share, for example, what support or guidance (incl. from the EUAA) would be most useful and whether the EUAA's Standards and Indicators on reception are higher or lower from those in place at national level.

Member States' responses to these questions will help identify good practices, common challenges and areas where coordination - including with the EUAA and Commission support - can strengthen reception preparedness across the Union.
