COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL

MANAGING MIGRATION IN ALL ITS ASPECTS: PROGRESS UNDER THE EUROPEAN AGENDA ON MIGRATION

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" […] Member States have not yet found the right balance between the responsibility each must assume on its own territory; and the solidarity all must show if we are to get back to a Schengen area without internal borders. I am and will remain strictly opposed to internal borders. Where borders have been reinstated, they must be removed. Failure to do so would amount to an unacceptable step back for the Europe of today and tomorrow.

The Commission and several Council presidencies have put numerous compromise solutions on the table. I call on the Council Presidency to now make the decisive step to broker a sustainable solution on a balanced migration reform.

We cannot continue to squabble to find ad-hoc solutions each time a new ship arrives. Temporary solidarity is not good enough. We need lasting solidarity - today and forever more."

Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the European Union 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges of the refugee and migration crisis required a determined and comprehensive response from the EU: saving lives, reducing the number of irregular arrivals, developing new tools to deliver together on challenges both inside and outside the EU. The same will be true as we build a future-proof system for the coming years. In the European Agenda on Migration,[1] the Commission set out the key steps. As a result, the EU is now better equipped than ever before. However, this does not mean that our work is over. The crisis exposed weaknesses – the current EU asylum rules meant varying treatment of asylum seekers across the EU and encouraged movements from one Member State to another. Arrivals are now at a lower level than before the crisis but structural migration pressure remains strong: we have a window of opportunity to fix the weaknesses, and build a system that can withstand future crises. This means moving from *ad hoc* responses to durable solutions. This means proactive measures, to disrupt smugglers' business models, to secure our external borders, to make key processes like asylum and return work well, to enhance legal pathways and to address the underlying reasons for migration.

The crisis confirmed that all EU action is interconnected – all the pieces have to fit together for the system as a whole to function. This Communication looks at the three core components of the comprehensive approach to migration management:

- action with partners outside the Union;
- action at our external borders;
- action inside the Union.

Externally we need to continue working with partners: to tackle the root causes of irregular migration; to cooperate on improved migration management and combatting migrant smuggling; to ensure that people who have no right to stay in the EU can be returned; to show that there are alternatives to irregular migration in the form of legal pathways; and to address the specific needs of those displaced by conflict and persecution. A strong external border needs to deliver a consistent, reliable level of control and security through a high level of coordination and constant monitoring to identify and address weaknesses. These goals then need to be complemented by a coherent and humane approach inside the Union, with Member States' asylum and return procedures working to reinforce each other, with a determined effort against criminal networks, and with a fair and consistent EU framework based on solidarity and responsibility.

This Communication sets out where we stand and the next steps for these interlinked objectives. These work streams should be equal to the long-term challenge of managing the migration trends of the future. There is action that we can and should take now. Different EU tools which have delivered real results in the Central Mediterranean could be rolled out on other routes. Putting the next stage of the European Border and Coast Guard in place would bring about a step change in the readiness of our border capabilities. Adopting measures now to tackle the most obvious shortcomings in our asylum, reception and return systems would bring immediate benefits in terms of our ability to deliver effectively.

Time and again, the EU has proven to be able to meet new migration challenges as they have arisen. But we have not yet built a sustainable system capable of preventing and mitigating future challenges. It is time we switched from being reactive to being proactive. Whenever we have worked together, we have obtained results. This should be at the forefront of our minds as we work for a future where the EU and its Member States deliver the solidarity and consistency Europeans deserve.
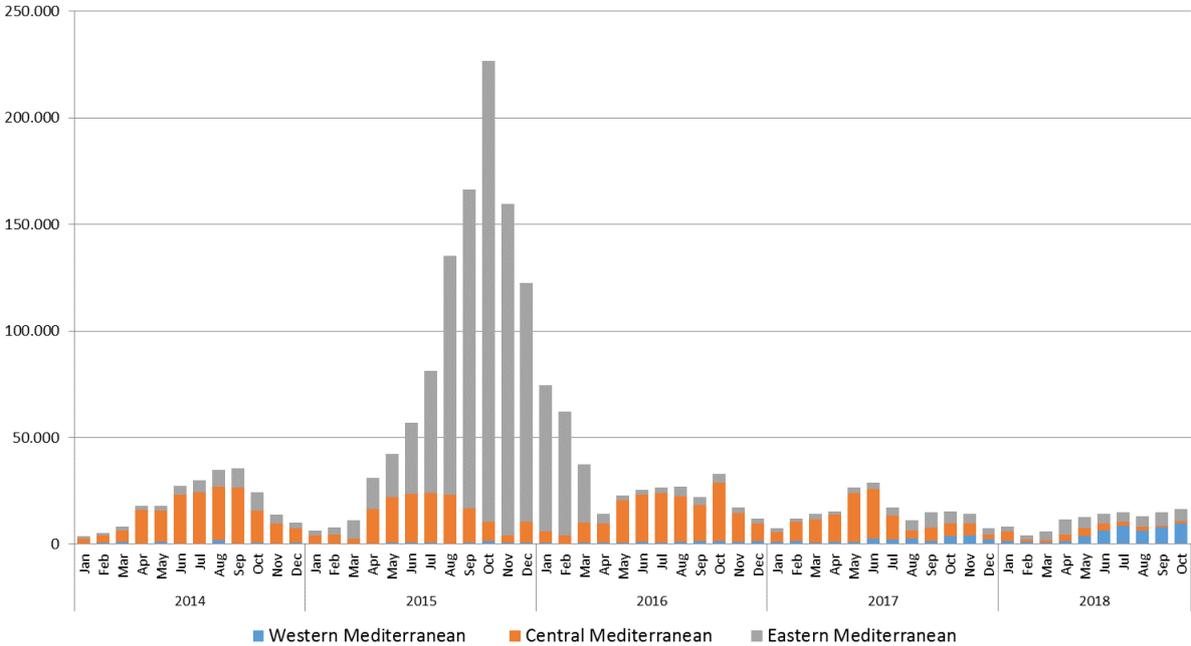
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[1] COM(2015) 240 final of 13.5.2015.

The evolving nature of migration and asylum challenges

The European Union's action on saving lives at sea has been resolute. Humanitarian concerns have been at the forefront of EU action since the start of the crisis. The four EU operations now operating in the Mediterranean[2] have helped rescue over 690 000 people at sea since 2015, out of which more than 300 000 were rescued with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's direct support to Member States, and another 45 000 by Operation Sophia.[3] This work, alongside reductions in the migration flows, led to a substantial reduction in the number of deaths at sea. However, over 2 100 people have lost their lives in 2018 while crossing the Mediterranean.[4]

Following the peak in arrivals to the EU in 2015, flows are now below pre-crisis levels. So far in 2018, the number of irregular border crossings into the EU via the main migratory routes is 30% lower than in 2017, with a total of some 116 000 crossings in the first ten months of the year.[5]

Number of irregular border crossings into the EU 2014-2018

On the Eastern Mediterranean route, the EU-Turkey Statement led to an immediate drop in arrivals, by 97% to an average of under 100 per day. Since spring 2017, there has been a limited but notable increase, and a 30% increase from Turkey in 2018 when compared to the same period in 2017. Crossings nevertheless remain at around 90% less than at the peak in 2015. The Central Mediterranean route – the primary entry point to Europe at the start of the crisis in 2014 – has seen a significant sustained reduction since summer 2017, with around 23 000 people crossing so far this year. The largest number of arrivals this year has been recorded on the Western Mediterranean route, with over 57 000 irregular arrivals so far in
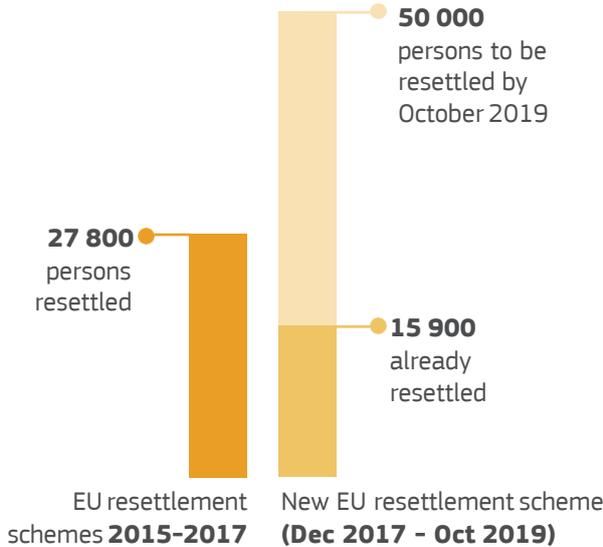
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[2] Operations Poseidon, Themis and Indalo (operations of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency with Greece, Italy, and Spain respectively), and Common Security and Defence Policy Operation Sophia.

[3] Discussions are ongoing in Council on the renewal of the mandate of EUNAVFORMED Operation Sophia.

[4] Figures recorded for 2018 to November: http://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean. This reflects a shift by smugglers to less seaworthy boats, a business model which the EU is working to combat.

[5] Source for irregular arrivals European Border and Coast Guard Agency unless otherwise stated.

2018, a 126% increase on 2017.[6] This trend started to become apparent in the second half of 2017. Other significant trends – such as a major increase of irregular arrivals at the Greek-Turkish land border[7] and a convergence of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina[8] – show the continued need for an approach covering all routes.[9]

In view of the Union's policy to favour regular over irregular migration, it is important to note an increase in the number of people arriving via legal migration channels.

Resettlement has eased some of the pressure on EU Member States at the external border and offered a safe and legal pathway to those in need of international protection. Since 2015, two successful *EU resettlement programmes* have helped almost 44 000 of the most vulnerable to find shelter in the EU.[10] The Commission launched an initiative in September 2017[11], which led Member States to make the largest collective commitment on resettlement yet seen, with 15 900 of the 50 000 resettlement places agreed already filled.

The reduction in arrivals has meant that the number of asylum applications is down from the 2015 peak, and corresponds to pre-crisis figures for 2014. So far in 2018, 558 098 applications have been lodged in Member States and Schengen associated countries,[12] representing a 10% decrease compared to 2017. However, the backlog of claims since the peak of the crisis continues to put considerable strain on national asylum systems.

50 000 persons to be resettled by October 2019

27 800 persons resettled

15 900 already resettled

EU resettlement schemes **2015-2017**

New EU resettlement scheme **(Dec 2017 – Oct 2019)**

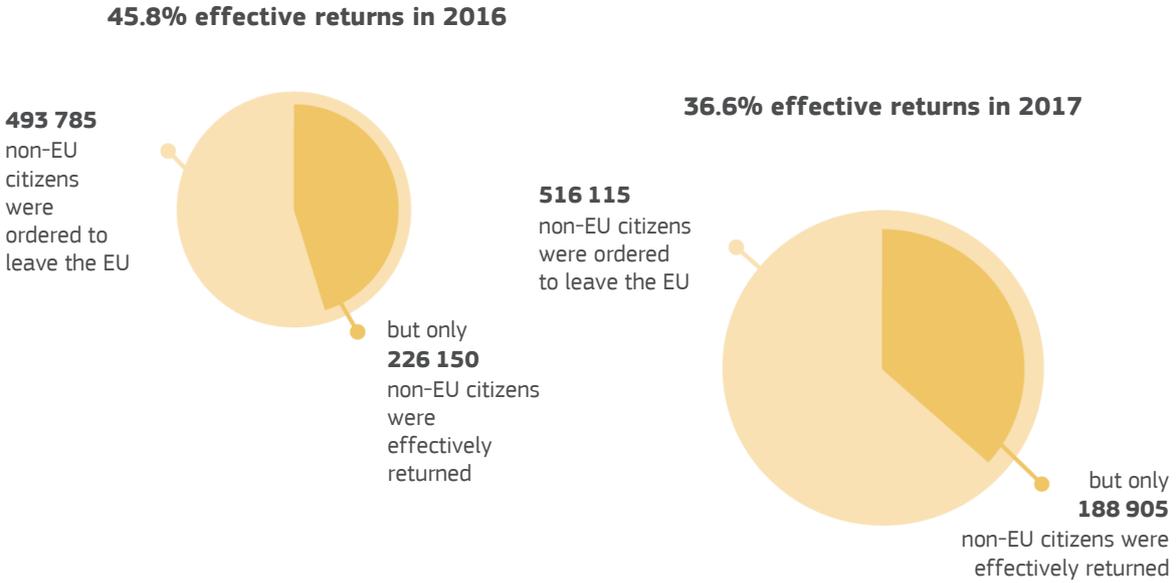The distribution of asylum applications between Member States remains unbalanced. In 2018 so far and for the sixth consecutive year, Germany has received the highest absolute number of applications, more than 130 000, followed by France with over 116 000, together amounting to 44% of all applications. Greece, Spain and Italy jointly accounted for nearly 30% of all applications.

As regards returns, in 2015-2017, over 692 000 illegally staying third-country nationals were returned. To date in 2018, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency has supported 288 return operations by charter flights, involving over 10 000 returnees (as well as almost 1 000 returned by commercial flights with Agency support). However, despite these efforts, the

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[6] Figures to 25 November 2018, data from the Spanish Ministry of Interior. These figures include the Atlantic route, Ceuta and Melilla.

[7] According to the Hellenic Police, irregular arrivals by land reached 14 053 by the end of October 2018, compared to 4 464 registered in the first ten months in 2017.

[8] A sub-route leading from Greece through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently emerged, with an estimated 6 000 migrants present now in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[9] While in 2017 the top nationalities of irregular arrivals in the EU were Nigerians, Guineans and Ivorians, in 2018 so far the main nationalities have been Syrians, Moroccans, Iraqis, Afghanis and Guineans. These variations reflect the changes on the three major routes. Another change has been an increased proportion in arrivals of Turkish and Tunisian nationals: almost half the total irregular arrivals at the Greek land border in 2018 have been Turkish nationals, and the number of Tunisian nationals has risen to represent 24% of the arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route.

[10] Source: Member States reporting to the Commission.

[11] C(2017) 6504 final of 27.9.2017.

[12] Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. Figures to 25 November 2018.

effectiveness of return measures continues to fall short, with an average return rate of under 40% over the past three years.

Return rate of illegally staying third-country nationals[13]

45.8% effective returns in 2016

493 785 non-EU citizens were ordered to leave the EU

but only **226 150** non-EU citizens were effectively returned

36.6% effective returns in 2017

516 115 non-EU citizens were ordered to leave the EU

but only **188 905** non-EU citizens were effectively returned

Whilst the decreasing trend, shown in the above graphs, in part reflects the fact that there were fewer return decisions applying to the Western Balkans – where readmission agreements work well – it also shows the need to work both inside the EU and with our partners to address the consistently low rate of effective returns for nationals of countries in both Africa and Asia.

The importance of Schengen

The Schengen area is the largest free travel area in the world. It allows more than 400 million EU citizens, as well as visitors, to move freely, and goods and services to flow unhindered. It is a key tool for delivering the freedoms of the EU, for the internal market to prosper, and for police and judicial cooperation to help make us more secure. It benefits people's lives and their livelihoods, our economy and our society.

- Recent figures show that almost 1.9 million people in Europe now work in a Schengen country other than where they live, and estimates suggest that some 3.5 million people cross internal borders every day.[14]
- Schengen has a huge economic impact, with at least 62 million cross-border goods movements within the Schengen area each year and 24 million business trips taking place every year. Just one hour of additional waiting time could easily cost EUR 3 billion per year.[15] The estimated costs of non-Schengen linked with the reintroduction of border controls range between EUR 0.05 billion and EUR 20 billion in one-off costs. The extra annual operating costs could amount to between EUR 2 billion and EUR 4 billion.[16] [17]

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[13] Data extracted from EUROSTAT database.
[14] COM(2016) 120 final of 4.3.2016, with updated figures for cross-border workers for 2017.
[15] The economic impact of suspending Schengen, European Parliament research Service, March 2016 with updated figures for cross-border transport operations.
[16] The Cost of Non-Schengen: Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs aspects, European Parliament research Service, September 2016.
[17] For example, the approximate costs for the express parcels industry alone could be more than EUR 80 million a year.

These stark facts and the appreciation of the freedom to cross borders for personal and leisure reasons translate into strong public support for Schengen. A recent Eurobarometer confirmed that a large majority, some two thirds of people polled, saw the Schengen Area as one of the EU's main achievements, with three quarters agreeing with its importance for business.[18]

An effective migration and border management policy is essential to maintain these benefits. The migration and refugee crisis and the heightened terrorist activity over the last years led to a number of Schengen States[19] imposing temporary internal border controls. The Commission has taken a number of key steps to address the challenges confronting the Schengen area with the aim of returning to a normally functioning of Schengen as soon as possible. In March 2016, the Commission issued a Communication *Back to Schengen – a Roadmap* where it set out an action plan aimed at stabilising the situation based on progress in strengthening the external border through the European Border and Coast Guard and through sustained implementation of the EU-Turkey statement.[20]

In May 2017, when the situation had become more stable and in a further effort to encourage a phasing out of internal border controls, the Commission presented a Recommendation[21] inviting Member States to use internal border controls only as a measure of last resort and recommending alternative measures such as enhanced proportionate police checks and police cooperation in the Schengen area. In September 2017, it adopted a further Recommendation encouraging Member States introducing internal border controls to enhance cooperation with neighbouring Member States, to foster mutual trust and minimise inconvenience.[22] At the same time, the Commission also adopted a proposal to amend the relevant rules in the Schengen Borders Code to update it in the light of current challenges in particular as regards terrorist threats.[23] It is essential that the European Parliament and the Council now find a way through to adopt the proposed amendment of the Schengen Borders Code.

In the light of the efforts made to improve the management of our external borders and the resulting reduction of irregular arrivals, the Commission believes that the time has come to lift the temporary reintroduction of internal borders controls set in place by Member States since 2015.

2. WORKING WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS ON MIGRATION

External aspects of the EU's migration policy are central to the European Agenda on Migration as a whole. Migration management at the borders and inside the EU depends on a strong external engagement. Long-term partnerships with third countries of origin, transit and destination are key to facilitating return and reintegration, to assisting refugees and stranded

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[18] Special Eurobarometer 474.
[19] Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway reintroduced internal border controls in late 2015 due to the migration crisis and subsequent secondary movements. Between May 2016 and November 2017, internal border controls in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway were reintroduced as part of the special procedure of Article 29 of the Schengen Borders Code to address the serious threat to public policy or internal security related first to deficiencies in external border control in Greece and subsequently to the secondary movements of irregular migrants. Since November 2017 and until May 2019 (until February 2019 for Sweden), internal border controls are carried out under Article 25 of the Code ("foreseeable events"). In addition, France reintroduced internal border controls in November 2015, citing in particular terrorist threats.
[20] COM(2016) 120 final of 4.3.2016.
[21] C(2017) 3349 final of 12.5.2017.
[22] C(2017) 6560 final of 27.9.2017.
[23] COM(2017) 571 final of 27.9.2017.

migrants, to cooperating on the fight against human trafficking networks, and to addressing the root causes of irregular migration.

Tailor-made cooperation with African partners as well as key countries in Asia, as developed through the Partnership Framework, has been at the heart of the progress made so far.[24] The pillars of this approach are that migration is a key priority in our relationship with third countries; that EU and Member States' efforts are closely coordinated; and that all relevant EU policies and tools are used to reinforce the partnership.

The experience of the past three years has shown that the best results come through an integrated approach along a migratory route as a whole. Along the *Central Mediterranean route* this has brought tangible results: reducing irregular flows by some 80%, helping over 40 000 persons to return home voluntarily mostly from Libya and Niger in the past two years[25]; and offering evacuation and resettlement to nearly 2 500 vulnerable persons in need of international protection.[26] This has been possible due to an integrated set of actions: tackling irregular flows from Niger and from the Libyan coast:[27] targeting smugglers and traffickers, developing economic alternatives for local communities, and helping stranded migrants. Policy integration has been backed by a coordinated approach among all players, starting from EU Member States in both Libya and Niger, but also through reinforced cooperation with the United Nations and the African Union in the AU-EU-UN Task Force.

This is also part of a broader and increasingly deeper partnership with countries in Africa. Since the Valletta summit in 2015[28], progress has been supported by a set of innovative funding instruments. The *EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa* is a flexible and innovative funding vehicle drawing on both EU and Member State funds.[29] It targets action under the different areas identified at the Valletta summit, addressing the root causes of irregular migration and acting as a tool to put practical cooperation in place.

How the EU Trust Fund for Africa is delivering
More than EUR 4 billion has been mobilised under the Trust Fund so far for action along the key African migratory routes, for example:

- Working with United Nations agencies, the Trust Fund has brought major help to the most vulnerable. Since 2017, 61 300 refugees and vulnerable migrants in Libya have received direct assistance (non-food items and hygiene kits), 89 700 persons have received medical assistance and 14 600 children have received learning supplies. Libyan communities have also received significant help, including equipment providing essential services to over 1.2 million people.
- Many projects are reducing incentives to irregular migration by creating employment an economic opportunities in key areas of origin. A new programme with The Gambia

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[24] COM(2016) 385 final of 7.6.2016.

[25] Working with the International Organisation for Migration, 17 226 people have returned home from Niger, and 18 329 people directly from Libya since May 2017. EU funding also supports reintegration after people return.

[26] The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR has so far submitted a total of 3 434 persons for resettlement from Niger to EU and non-EU States, and 1 174 have already departed on resettlement. In addition, 312 persons were evacuated directly from Libya to Italy and 95 to Romania.

[27] EU support has also so far given training to 238 Libyan Coast Guards. UN Refugee Agency UNHCR estimates that since the beginning of 2018, the Libyan Coast Guard has rescued or intercepted 14 795 migrants (figures to 30 November 2018).

[28] African and European Leaders met in Valletta in November 2015 and agreed a new approach to cooperation on migration.

[29] The EU emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (the "EU Trust Fund for Africa"); Commission Decision C(2015)7293 final.

focuses on youth, targeting returning migrants amongst the 25 000 beneficiaries, promoting attractive employment and income opportunities.

- Other initiatives are aiming to tackle smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, empowering migrants by giving them more rights and more protection, and to make migration easier and safer. The EUR 46 million Better Migration Management programme in the Horn of Africa has already assisted as of September 2018 almost 11 000 migrants and forcibly displaced people, and has trained nearly 1 600 persons on migration management.

The work on root causes of irregular migration has also been reinforced by the ***European External Investment Plan***. The Plan is already mobilising financing for partner countries. In July 2018 a first set of 12 guarantee tools was approved for around EUR 800 million, covering areas including entrepreneurship, green electricity and broadband access. This combines with some EUR 2 billion in blending operations covering core areas such as energy and connectivity, cities, agriculture, and environment.[30]

An integrated approach has also delivered remarkable results on the Eastern Mediterranean route with ***Turkey***. Joint work through the EU-Turkey Statement has allowed us to help refugees hosted by Turkey, undermine the business model of smugglers, and build cooperation between the authorities responsible for migration management. The July 2018 agreement on the financing of a second EUR 3 billion tranche of funding for the Facility for Refugees in Turkey by the EU and Member States showed the EU's continued commitment to the Statement and to supporting refugees in Turkey, helping to maintain an effective management of migration on the Eastern Mediterranean route. Full implementation of the Statement remains essential to EU migration policy.

Facility for Refugees in Turkey

The Facility has made a major contribution to covering the needs of the 3.9 million refugees hosted by Turkey. It focuses on humanitarian assistance, education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support – all targeted on improving the living conditions of Syrian refugees and their host communities. The EUR 3 billion funding for 2016-2017 have been fully allocated and contracted, with 72 projects rolled out and some EUR 2 billion disbursed. From the second tranche, agreed this summer for 2018-2019, EUR 550 million has been allocated so far.[31]

Millions of refugees have been helped by the Facility:

- over 1.4 million refugees receive the Emergency Social Safety Net to cover basic needs; over 340 000 children and their families are supported to help school attendance and Turkish language teachers are employed to teach over 430 000 children;
- 125 solid structure schools and 50 prefabricated schools are being set up;
- almost 50 000 students receive back-up and catch-up training or are participating in other accelerated learning programmes;
- over 4.7 million primary healthcare consultations were delivered to refugees and over 450 000 refugee infants vaccinated; almost 1 million ante-natal control consultations have been provided to pregnant refugee women and 139 migrant health centres are now operational, employing almost 1 500 Facility-trained and Facility-funded Syrian staff.

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[30] The Commission has also proposed a wider Africa–Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs whose impact on the African economy will also have a positive effect in terms of addressing root causes. See COM(2018) 643 final of 12.9.2018.

[31] This includes EUR 100 million from the modified special measure on education which is now being finalised.

These examples indicate that through integrated, "whole of the route" approaches, major progress has been achieved by the EU and Member States. Our priority should be to deepen and extend this approach. Starting from the **Western Mediterranean** route, where work has been intensified with Morocco to develop a new broad-based platform for cooperation, and new initiatives are under way with Mauritania. Elsewhere, the dialogue with Egypt and Tunisia is being strengthened and work developed with key partners such as Ethiopia. The needs of Syrians must also remain a major priority in terms of support for countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

More broadly, the EU should continue its active engagement in fora such as the Valletta process – supporting the linked Rabat and Khartoum processes but also further stepping up dialogue with an increasingly engaged African Union. With the UN Global Compact on Migration, the EU should also use the global dynamic to continue promoting a comprehensive approach towards migration, based on mutual responsibilities and partnership.

Return and readmission

The low rates of return confirm the urgent need to work in both our internal and external policy on migration to improve the working of return and readmission. This requires a combined responsibility of Member States, the EU and third countries.

First, Member States should better implement current rules, and tackle loopholes from their national systems which delay effective return. Secondly, the proposal to revise the Return Directive should be swiftly adopted as it would bring further improvements: quicker procedures, a better link with asylum systems, and action against absconding and unauthorised secondary movements would all mean that return decisions stand a much better chance of turning into effective returns.[32] The same is valid for the proposed changes to the European Border and Coast Guard that would also add major support from the EU level.[33]

The other side of the coin is to deepen work on readmission. Although readmission is a sensitive political topic in many countries of origin, a cooperative approach has helped operationalise third countries' obligations on readmission. Together with Member States, priorities were set, looking at the number of potential returnees but also at where a common EU approach offered the most added value over bilateral tracks. This was taken forward in different ways, through negotiating formal readmission agreements, detailed operational arrangements, and practical problem solving. With six readmission arrangements[34] agreed since 2016, the EU now has 23 readmission agreements and arrangements in place.
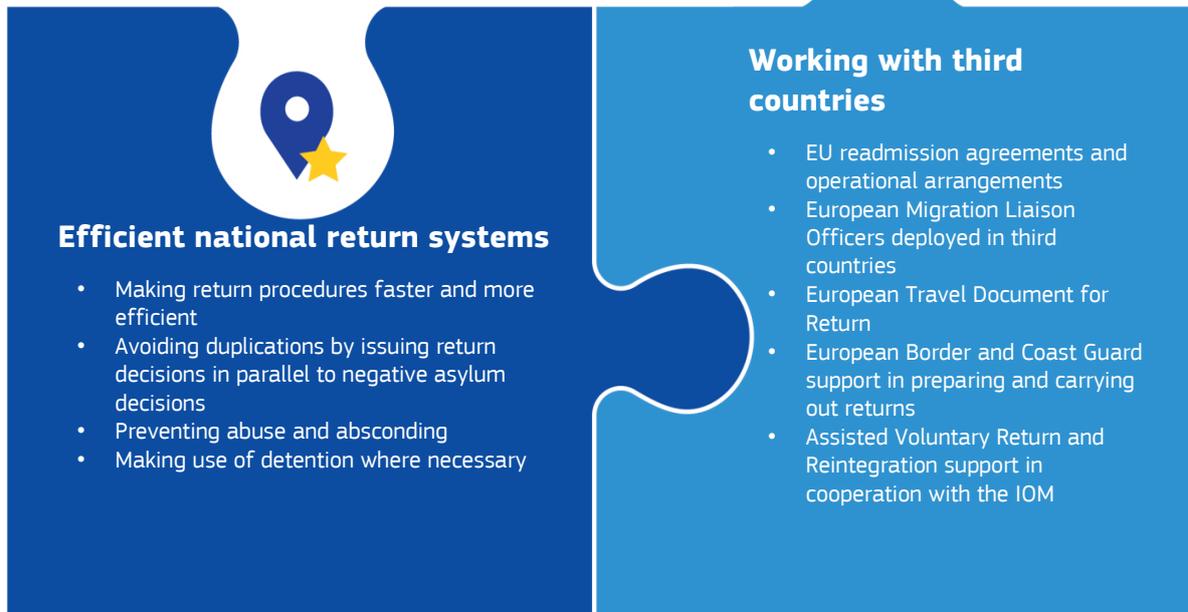
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[32] COM(2018) 634 final of 12.9.2018.
[33] COM(2018) 631 final of 12.9.2018.
[34] Afghanistan, Guinea, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire.

Improving returns

For returns to be effective, internal and external measures have to go hand in hand. All the pieces have to fit together: EU tools and support can help Member States streamline return procedures at the national level and the EU and its Member States can use their collective leverage to improve third country cooperation on readmission.

Efficient national return systems

- Making return procedures faster and more efficient
- Avoiding duplications by issuing return decisions in parallel to negative asylum decisions
- Preventing abuse and absconding
- Making use of detention where necessary

Working with third countries

- EU readmission agreements and operational arrangements
- European Migration Liaison Officers deployed in third countries
- European Travel Document for Return
- European Border and Coast Guard support in preparing and carrying out returns
- Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration support in cooperation with the IOM

Practical cooperation with third countries has been deepened through a comprehensive set of tools and networks for effective implementation of readmission. Regular meetings with partners help to monitor progress and discuss obstacles. Information technology systems are in place to improve case management, Migration Liaison Officers from the EU and from Member States deployed on the ground act as key contacts with third countries' authorities, while third countries' liaison officers in key EU Member States can help with the identification of potential returnees. EU funds have been mobilised to help build partners' capacity to implement arrangements effectively, as well as work on reintegration of returnees, to prevent repeated departures. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has significantly increased its capacity to coordinate and organise return operations in close cooperation with third countries. Major efficiency gains can also be achieved by harmonising practices on assisted voluntary return, reintegration and on return counselling.

The next step is to use these tools to their full potential. This is where the combination of effective return procedures inside the Member States, facilitation at EU level and the cooperation with third countries is of critical importance. Negotiations for further readmission agreements are currently under way with Nigeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and China. This should be complemented with discussions to agree further readmission arrangements with partners in Sub-Saharan Africa, finding solutions that cater for all needs and using all leverages and tools.

EU action against migrant smuggling

Organised criminal networks responsible for migrant smuggling have been key enablers for irregular migration. The EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling set out a comprehensive

approach, and provides the right framework to focus the work.[35] This will be the core tool to the call of the October 2018 European Council conclusions to step up the work against smuggling.

The Action Plan covers work both inside the EU and with our partners. Work with partners focuses on developing anti-migrant smuggling capacity, through resources, technical expertise and operational assistance. Work on prevention is also key, promoting alternative income streams to those exposed to smuggling networks, countering smuggling networks' disinformation, and providing potential migrants with reliable and objective information. Over EUR 23 million have been devoted to information and awareness raising since 2015.[36] Further projects will also engage diaspora communities in the work of providing counter-narratives.

To target the criminal networks, a range of initiatives are under way on information exchange between Member States, EU Agencies, Common Security and Defence Policy Missions, international organisations, and third countries. Joint Investigation Teams provide on-the-spot operational cooperation. For example, the EU is supporting a team in Niger made up of investigators from Niger, France and Spain – resulting in 211 arrests.[37] This approach will soon be replicated in other countries of origin and transit. The European Migration Liaison Officers deployed by the Commission in 13 priority partner countries also play a key role in improved communication; and the network of EU and national Immigration Liaison Officers would be given further tools through the Commission's recent proposal in this area. An innovative approach has been taken by Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean, with a Crime Information Cell which enables direct exchange of information between Operation Sophia, Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Operation Sophia has directly apprehended 151 suspected smugglers and traffickers and has removed 551 vessels from the criminal organisations. Also in Libya innovative sanctions adopted at the UN level have been instrumental to the targeting of individual smugglers and traffickers, making sanctions an area to further explore to address impunity and enhance deterrence.

Europol's role is critical in the fight against migrant smuggling. Since 2016, its European Migrant Smuggling Centre has helped Member States to target complex and sophisticated criminal networks. It supports operations on the ground and offers expertise, coordination, tailored analytical support and cross-checking against Europol databases. Its Information Clearing House builds a global intelligence picture using expertise from EU military operations, law enforcement authorities, EU agencies and international organisations. As highlighted by the European Council, disrupting smugglers' online communications can be of particular value. The number of referrals of online content by Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit to internet service providers has increased by more than 35% since last year, and the success rate of removal has reached 98%. The Commission is looking at how to maximise synergies with work against other types of crime and how to enhance cooperation with private companies, as well as training national investigators and the social media industry to facilitate referrals.

Enhancing legal pathways

Building credibility to work with partners for a comprehensive migration policy also means providing legal pathways into the EU. Last year's successful call for Member States to pledge 50 000 resettlement places ensures that persons in need of protection can find safety in

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[35] COM(2015) 285 final of 27.5.2015.

[36] Projects are ongoing in Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Tunisia, Mali, Guinea Conakry, The Gambia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and the Horn of Africa.

[37] The arrests have led to 151 charges for crimes related to migrant smuggling and human trafficking as well as 17 international and 12 national crime networks dismantled.

Europe. But legal migration pathways are not just about protection. The number of first residence permits granted to legally residing third-country nationals in the EU grew from 2.6 million in 2015 to more than 3 million in 2017, with a particular increase in work-related residence permits. However, more needs to be done to provide opportunities for students and professionals, especially the highly skilled. In September, the Commission underlined the importance of a strategic and proactive EU policy on legal migration, both to show that there are alternatives to irregular migration, and to contribute to a more competitive EU economy.[38] An ambitious reformed Blue Card for highly skilled third country nationals is an essential component and the Commission calls on the Council to swiftly agree on a position which brings real added value compared with the current Blue Card, in line with the objectives set in the Commission's proposal.

In addition, work has continued to advance on the launch of pilot projects on legal migration, with financial support planned of around EUR 20 million.[39] Several pilot projects are in preparation and should start shortly: two evaluations have recently been finalised, with other projects being developed by Member States. A project under the Trust Fund on labour mobility with Northern African countries is near to finalisation, and the Commission has launched a further call for projects under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

Funding

Deepening long-term partnerships requires investment and sustainable resources. This will mean a reinforcement of the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Resources available today fall short of the pipeline envisaged for 2019 by some EUR 500 million. With 89% of the Trust Fund resources so far supplied by EU funds, it will be essential that Member States are ready to step up their funding for the rest of this financing period – in line with the European Council conclusions in June, calling for replenishment of the Trust Fund. For several programmes, close cooperation with Member States from design to implementation has allowed for clear synergies between their contributions and those of the EU budget, and the Commission would welcome further cooperation with Member States on programmes responding to the strategic objectives of the Trust Fund.

Funding external aspects of migration
The Commission's proposals under the next Multiannual Financial Framework include a major boost to ***funding on the external aspects of migration***. Firstly, there will be increased scope for internal programmes to support action outside the EU. In total, the new funds proposed will amount to almost EUR 35 billion over 2021-27. A substantial share will be drawn on to support the continuum in internal and external action in areas like return, readmission and reintegration; or in operational cooperation with third country partners. Secondly, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, proposed to amount to almost EUR 90 billion, will play a key role in EU action to respond to challenges, needs and opportunities related to migration. An unprecedented spending target of 10% has been proposed, which would cover both the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, and support to migration management and governance. Whereas in the past, the EU had to constantly leverage funding and address gaps within the strict limits of the budget, having a large, single instrument with appropriate flexibility will mean that the EU will be more able to direct funds when and where they are needed.

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[38] COM(2018) 635 final of 12.9.2018.
[39] The idea of pilots on legal migration was launched by the Commission in September 2017. The objective is to further strengthen the comprehensive EU approach on migration, in order to replace irregular migratory flows with safe, orderly and well managed legal migration pathways, and to incentivise cooperation on issues such as prevention of irregular migration, readmission and return of irregular migrants.

3. STRONGER BORDER MANAGEMENT

Strong and reliable protection of the external borders is a precondition for an area of free movement without internal border controls. It provides confidence in common security and in ensuring that those entering the EU have the right to do so. This is a shared task between the Member States, who have to ensure the management of their external borders both in their own interests and in the common interest of all, with the help of the European Border and Coast Guard. Border management also has direct implications for the effective operation of internal rules such as asylum and return, and for our relations with third countries.

Since 2015, the EU and the Member States have also been engaged in unprecedented coordination on the EU's sea borders to save lives at sea, strengthen border control and disrupt the business model of traffickers and migrant smugglers. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency coordinated with the most affected Member States the joint operations in the Aegean Sea, the Central Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean, all of which supported strengthened border surveillance, increased ability to save lives at sea, and help in improved registration and identification. These operations relied on a combination of support from Member States coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, providing border guards, vessels, aircraft and other resources.

Building on the foundations of Frontex, the ***European Border and Coast Guard Agency*** was set up in 2016 and represented a step forward, with a number of innovations to support Member States in controlling external borders and carrying out returns. The Agency currently has some 1 100 border guards deployed, complementing existing national capacities at the external border. Despite the changes, a number of shortcomings were identified which restrict the EU's collective ability to protect the external borders, now and in the future. This includes the voluntary nature of Member State contributions (staff and equipment), leading to persistent gaps in pledges and impeding the effectiveness of joint operations today.[40] It has also not been possible to draw upon the rapid reaction pool of 1 500 border guards, with strict conditions for deployment.

Responding to the European Council conclusions from June 2018, in September 2018 the Commission proposed to further consolidate the European Border and Coast Guard to equip the Agency for more reliable and constant support capability. The Commission's proposal maintains the primary responsibility of Member States for the protection of the external borders, but will give the Agency the tools to back this up with a standing corps of 10 000 European border guards. The corps represents 8.7 % of the 115 000 national border guards in the EU.[41] Its gradual but swift establishment would provide an immediate boost to the EU's collective ability to protect the external borders and effectively carry out returns from the EU.

The standing corps will offer a permanent but flexible solution to address the existing gaps in the Agency's operations and guarantee the EU's readiness to face any future crisis. The Agency's statutory staff and Member States' officers on long term secondment will act as the main building blocks for the Agency's operational support, while the staff provided by Member States' short-term deployments will be on standby and will be deployed only when there is an actual need, in particular for emergency situations.

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[40] For example, throughout 2018, there has been a continuous shortfall in guest officers for the European Border and Coast Guard Operations on the Greek borders with Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania.

[41] This figure does not take into account return experts at the national level since their overall number is unknown.

The standing corps of 10 000 border guards

The 10 000 standing corps was carefully designed – including its size and composition – to be able to address Member States' current and future needs. It has been calculated taking the following factors into account:

- **The experience of the migration crisis**: the arrangements in place could not respond adequately once the number of arrivals rose beyond 100 000-200 000 per year.[42]
- **The crippling problem of persisting personnel and equipment gaps**: during the migration crisis the European Border and Coast Guard had to increase its deployments across Europe five times. The 2018 annual pledging exercise still covered only 49% of the Agency's needs at land borders and the needs identified for 2019 are still not secured.[43]
- **The new and reinforced tasks assigned to the Agency**: specific needs flow from equipping the ability of the Agency to carry out its tasks:

  o **Deployments in third countries** require new resources. By way of example, new status agreements with five Western Balkans countries could be expected to lead to the deployment of at least 200-250 team members and a mission to support partners in sub-Saharan Africa could require deployment of 50-70 operational staff[44] at once, overall approximately 250 officers during the year on a rotating basis.
  o The Agency's **enhanced mandate on returns** would be able to support around 50 000 returns per year but would need to be backed up with a 2.5 fold increase in return experts consisting of at least 1 400-1 500 staff members.
  o The maintenance and operation of **air, sea and land assets** to address persistent gaps in the pooling of equipment would require some 800-1 000 staff members as technical crew.
  o The Agency's role in the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System** will require a central unit with 250 staff members.

The standing corps has been carefully designed to combine officers mandatorily contributed by Member States, and the Agency's own staff, trained to carry border management and return tasks.

In recent years, the EU has been developing large-scale centralised Information Technology systems for collecting, processing and sharing information relevant to border management, migration and security in line with data protection requirements. The EU is now either in the final stages of agreement or implementation has started.

Making the most of information systems at our borders

The EU is now finalising a set of measures that together will provide a more secure, more efficient and more modern border management system. When the different systems are brought together in a way that is interoperable, the benefits will be even stronger. This will cover key processes before travel and at the border:

- For visa-free travellers a pre-travel screening for security and migration risks will take place through the **European Travel Authorisation and Information System**. Authorisation delivered by this system will be needed alongside a valid travel document before entry into the EU.

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[42] Four scenarios, of varying intensity and defined on the basis of the past ten years' experience, were looked at in detail to analyse the needs of the standing corps.

[43] See for example Annex 3 of the Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration, COM(2018) 301 final of 16.5.2018.

[44] Based on the size of average civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions in Africa.

- For visa-required travellers, the **Visa Information System**, collecting data and decisions relating to application for short-stay visas to the Schengen area will be further improved based on the Commission's proposal. It aims at more thorough background checks on visa applicants; close security information gaps through better information exchange between Member States; and ensuring full interoperability with other EU-wide databases.
- Both visa-free and visa-required travellers will be checked in the recently reinforced **Schengen Information System** before being allowed to travel to Europe. It will also help to better monitor travellers crossing the external borders, and to better use tools such as fingerprints to identify who is entering the Schengen area.
- All non-EU citizens travelling for a short stay in the Schengen area (a maximum of 90 days in any 180 day period) will be covered by the **Entry-Exit System**. This will register the name, travel document and biometrics as well as the date and place of entry and exit – helping bona fide travellers, rendering any attempts to enter the Schengen area with false documents more difficult, and assisting to identify visa over-stayers.
- The redesigned **Eurodac** database would no longer be limited to asylum applicants, but will also store data on non-EU nationals found irregularly staying in the EU. The data retention period for irregular migrants apprehended at the external borders will be extended beyond the current 18 months to 5 years.

The **interoperability framework** will make it easier for border guards and police officers to have complete, reliable and accurate information, and to detect people who are possibly hiding criminal or terrorist activities behind false identities. It provides a targeted and intelligent way to use existing data to the best possible effect, without creating new databases or changing the access rights for existing information systems. In this way it will be possible to carry out a simultaneous search of multiple EU information systems – in line with the users' access rights – to cross-check biometric data, and to receive alerts when multiple or fraudulent identities are detected.

Another important step forward would come with the next Multiannual Financial Framework. This will step up support for the European integrated border management and the common visa policy, such as helping national authorities to put key Information Technology systems in place. It is now crucial that the negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council start as soon as possible and that the high level of ambition in the Commission's proposals is maintained.

EU financial support for the external border
The Commission's proposals under the next Multiannual Financial Framework foresee a major boost to the support provided for the external border, an almost fourfold increase from the current financing period, to reach EUR 21 billion over 2021-2027. Support for EU agencies, in particular the European Border and Coast Guard, will constitute a key component. There would also be EUR 8 billion provided for a new Border Management and Visa Instrument. This will reinforce support to Member States to build their border management capacity through national programmes, as well as helping the development of the common visa policy and integrated border management, and be specifically designed to be responsive to changing needs.

4. INTERNAL ACTION IN THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The 2015 migration and refugee crisis exposed the limitations of our asylum system. It put our innate sense of fairness and solidarity to the test. The experience this summer, with ships carrying migrants on board and seeking a port for disembarkation, showed that when there is a coordinated effort on a European scale, this can bring effective solutions from which we can

draw inspiration. However, it also demonstrated that a future-proof policy requires a more predictable, cooperative and sustainable approach.

There is a clear consensus that the Schengen area without internal border control must be preserved – and this needs to be built on the foundations of a well-functioning Common European Asylum System. Applicants should not have a free choice as to the Member State in which they apply for international protection. There is also consensus that the current Dublin system needs substantial reform. The Commission is convinced that such a reform must entail stronger guarantees that each Member State will deal with the applications they are responsible for, and a structured, predictable mechanism for solidarity to ensure that no Member State bears a disproportionate burden.

Support from the EU today

Building a future-proof asylum system needs to go hand in hand with supporting immediate needs. EU operational and financial support has been instrumental in helping Member States to address the migration challenge since 2015. This support has had a direct impact on the ground. The hotspot approach helps Member States under the most pressure at the external border. What was initially intended to be a crisis support mechanism has proven to be a durable and effective channel for EU solidarity, with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the European Asylum Support Office, Europol and Eurojust all drawn upon to bring practical results in terms of processing newly arrived migrants (consistent identification, registration and fingerprinting), building the intelligence needed to dismantle migrant smuggling networks, and helping the day-to-day needs of Member State authorities. Much of the EU's efforts have also been devoted to improving living conditions for migrants, which often remain difficult.

More broadly, EU support has helped Member States to fulfil obligations in terms of ensuring access to protection for those in need, of providing decent conditions for those in need, and of returning those that do not have a right to stay. Through EU agencies and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, as well as the cohesion policy funds,[45] the EU has supported improved reception capacities, brought asylum procedures in line with EU standards, increased the effectiveness of return programmes and helped the integration of refugees and legally staying migrants at local and regional levels, in line with the Action Plan on Integration of third-country nationals.[46] A structured programme for relocation of people in need of international protection was put in place and alleviated a portion of the pressure faced by Italy and Greece. Such measures all show how a flexible and results-orientated approach by the EU has shown that solidarity can be made to work in practice.

The situation in Greece
The hotspot approach in Greece has been crucial in helping to stabilise the situation on the Greek islands, in the face of continuous migratory pressure and a low number of returns. Action has focused on improving living conditions – with better infrastructure (electricity, water, sewage), qualified personnel for medical and psycho-social services, and a particular focus on protecting the vulnerable and enhancing child protection. This has also been complemented by more reception capacity in the mainland, as well as by legislation on a national guardianship system for minors. Legislation further streamlining the asylum procedure has been welcome but the Greek authorities need to ensure full implementation.

However, the situation in Greece should be further improved. Improvements in conditions have not kept pace with needs on the islands. The Greek authorities need to do more to |

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[45] European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.
[46] COM(2016) 377 final of 7.6.2016.

respond swiftly as needs arise, as is the case today on Samos. More efforts should be made, with a particular focus on:

- **improved reception conditions** in view of the winter season, including for unaccompanied minors. Adequate provision of doctors is an urgent necessity for both initial screening and the vulnerability assessment.
- **accelerated processing of asylum applications** at both first and second instance. This needs an adequate number of staff at every stage of the process, both to reduce the backlog of old cases and to process new cases in a timely way.
- **increased returns**, with the capacity to allow more systematic use of detention where appropriate and tracking the location of potential returnees.

To address these challenges, Greece should urgently put in place a national strategy ensuring an adequate asylum and reception system, including contingency planning to increase resilience to future emergencies, and clear and effective coordination mechanisms. The Commission will continue to provide full support, in cooperation with EU agencies and international organisations, including through permanent presence in all hotspot islands and in Athens. Member States should ensure that the Agencies have sufficient experts at their disposal.

EU support included unprecedented financial support to partners from the EU budget – not only national authorities but international organisations and non-governmental organisations as well. Support to the Greek authorities has totalled over EUR 525 million in emergency assistance since the beginning of 2015, on top of the EUR 561 million from the EU budget already allocated under national programmes for 2014-2020. Italy has been supported with EUR 219 million in emergency assistance and EUR 654 million of EU funding already allocated under the national programmes. This support has been used across the full range of activities, such as interpretation, medical support and the identification of vulnerable migrants at arrival, as well as border controls, for example through naval helicopters and the purchase of key equipment. The exceptional circumstances also triggered the creation of a new Emergency Support Instrument offering a swift and targeted response to major crises. This instrument can help Member States cope with large numbers of refugees, with humanitarian funding channelled to United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations and other international organisations in close coordination and consultation with Member States. The full funding allocation under the Emergency Support Instrument has now been contracted and stands at almost EUR 645 million.

Progress with reforming the asylum acquis

In 2016, the Commission put forward seven proposals reforming the Common European Asylum System. Today, balanced political agreements are within reach on five of them, and another could soon follow, bringing us very close to the finish line. Further details on these proposals can be found in the Annex.

What the proposals close to agreement would change

- The **Qualification Regulation**[47] will ensure greater convergence of recognition rates across the EU, guarantee the rights of recognised refugees and discourage secondary movements.
- The **Reception Conditions Directive**[48] will ensure asylum seekers are received in consistent and decent conditions throughout the EU. It will help prevent secondary movements by clarifying the rights and obligations of asylum seekers.

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[47] COM(2016) 466 of 13.7.2016.
[48] COM(2016) 465 of 13.7.2016.

- The **European Asylum Agency Regulation**[49] will ensure that a reinforced EU Asylum Agency can step up its help to Member States through rapid and full support. It will improve the efficiency of the asylum procedure, allowing for swifter procedures to identify those in need of protection and those who are not, including at the borders. It will also ensure common guarantees for asylum seekers – together with stricter rules to prevent abuse.
- The **Eurodac Regulation**[50] will expand the EU's identification database, helping authorities track secondary movements, tackle irregular migration and help to identify those without the right to stay in the EU.
- The **Union Resettlement Framework Regulation**[51] will help reduce irregular migration by ensuring safe and legal alternatives. It will replace the current ad-hoc schemes and set EU-wide two-year plans for resettling genuine refugees. By contributing collectively to global resettlement efforts, the EU will strengthen its partnership and solidarity with third countries hosting large numbers of persons in need of international protection.

Each of these instruments, even on its own, would add up to a major advance for our migration management. They are a useful stepping stone to agreement on the complete reform of the Common European Asylum System and their adoption should not be delayed. There is **no technical or legal impediment to adopting one or several of these proposals separately** from the others even though they are part of a broader reform. Indeed, after more than two years of discussion it is vital for the EU to now demonstrate to its citizens its capacity to make progress, even if step by step, before the European elections. The European Parliament and the Council should now take the last steps to transform the broad agreement already found on each of these proposals into final adoption.

As regards the Asylum Procedure Regulation, the Commission welcomes the fact that the European Parliament has already agreed its negotiating mandate. The Council is close to finding a common ground on this proposal. It is now crucial that negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council start in order to reach an agreement as soon as possible. The revised Regulation will streamline the asylum procedure, make it more efficient and ensure common guarantees for asylum seekers – together with stricter rules to prevent abuse. A common asylum procedure is one of the cornerstones of an effective and fair asylum system, making a real difference on the ground.

Time to progress on the Dublin Regulation

A key component of a stable and future-proof asylum system is a fair and sustainable mechanism for determining the responsibility of a Member State for examining an asylum application. With this objective in mind, the Commission in May 2016 adopted a proposal for the reform of the Dublin Regulation. The proposal aimed at making the system fairer and more effective by integrating a mechanism into the Dublin rules under which applicants could be allocated from over-burdened Member States according to the level of migratory pressure.

On the basis of the Commission's proposal, the European Parliament adopted its position in November 2017, taking that fairness mechanism a step further by transforming it into a compulsory system of allocation that would apply generally regardless of the migratory pressure. In the meantime, successive Presidencies of the Council, including the current Austrian Presidency with its work on the notion of "mandatory solidarity", have worked towards shaping a solidarity mechanism, balanced by a responsibility component. A lot of

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[49]   COM(2016) 271 of 4.5.2016, and modified legislative proposal COM(2018) 633 of 12.9.2018.
[50]   COM(2016) 272 of 4.5.2016.
[51]   COM(2016) 468 of 13.7.2016.

ground work has been done in the Council on the broad contours of a solidarity mechanism including financial and material support to Member States under pressure and those taking part in solidarity efforts, as well as priority access to the support from the concerned EU agencies. However, more than two years after the Commission put its proposal on the table, Member States' divergent positions continue to persist and have prevented the Council from adopting a mandate to start negotiations with the European Parliament, despite the priority status given to the file by the co-legislators. This calls for continued commitment by the Council to find a way forward, so that the reform of the Dublin Regulation can be completed in co-decision with the European Parliament as soon as possible, based on a spirit of compromise from all sides.

In line with the June 2018 European Council conclusions, further work on the Dublin Regulation should focus on finding a balanced compromise based on responsibility and solidarity, taking into account the persons disembarked following search and rescue operations. The Commission is committed to working towards a compromise which brings genuine added value compared to the current Dublin Regulation and which concretises the direct assurance of relief to Member States under pressure, balanced with the effective exercise of responsibility. These two complementary concepts of solidarity and responsibility should be geared to operate in a preventive manner. In particular, solidarity should be organised in such a way so as to ensure the widest possible basket of contributions from Member States reflecting the comprehensive nature of the migration challenge. Member States should therefore contribute in each of the three different components of the comprehensive approach: the external dimension, the external borders and the internal dimension. The preventive and comprehensive nature of such an approach should ensure that the number of irregular arrivals remains low in a sustained manner.

Member States would be expected to pledge on a voluntary basis for contributions under each of these three components. This approach would be founded in the first place on each Member State demonstrating its willingness to strengthen the existing system by identifying the assistance and support that it can provide. Cooperative coordination mechanisms could then adjust and tailor contributions more appropriately to the needs on the ground. This framework would need also to be backed up by a means of ensuring that solidarity results in an effective balance between the different elements of the system, in particular, as regards the internal dimension, by means of allocation including of persons arriving or disembarked at the external borders. For times of particular pressure, a safety net must be built into the system, ensuring that in the absence of sufficient voluntary pledges by the Member States, real support can be guaranteed to the Member State concerned and in a fair manner between each Member State.

A mechanism of solidarity goes hand in hand with one of responsibility, ensuring a well-functioning asylum system in all Member States and across the Union at all times. An important shortcoming of the current Dublin system is the fact that responsibility lapses after a short period of time, incentivising asylum seekers to abscond. Addressing this issue remains key to prevent abuse and secondary movements. It is necessary that Member States process asylum applications rapidly and ensure the quality of the decisions made so that those in need of international protection obtain it without delay. At the same time, Member States should address irregular migration and continue working to put an end to the business model of smugglers. To this end, there is a need to deal swiftly with the applications of those who are not entitled to international protection so that they can then be returned quickly. All this requires reliance on efficient asylum and return processes, including through the option of using controlled centres.

Drawing upon the ideas set out above, and in light of the experience with *ad hoc* solutions over the summer, temporary arrangements of genuine solidarity and responsibility could be

put in place. These arrangements, which would be limited in time and would serve as a bridge until the new Dublin Regulation becomes applicable, could be used to anticipate the core elements of the future system. All Member States should be encouraged to participate in these shared efforts given that the experience from the summer shows that a critical mass of Member States is needed for such arrangements to be effective. These temporary arrangements could mean that already now the EU is better equipped to offer solidarity in response to any temporary peaks of arrivals and in a way that ensures the effective prevention of secondary movements. Their introduction should not serve to delay the adoption of the Dublin Regulation, which must be concluded as soon as possible as part of the wider migration and asylum reform. Full EU support for the temporary arrangements through the Agencies and the financial programmes would be available for Member States upon their request.

The Commission remains committed to engaging with both the European Parliament and the Council on all elements of the reform of the Dublin Regulation, with the objective of establishing a system that will guarantee a Europe without internal borders grounded on the principles of solidarity and responsibility.

Ambitious funding to respond to the migration challenges and accompany the reform

For the proposed reform to bring the expected results, Member States will require significant financial support. The proposals for the Asylum and Migration Fund will provide support for strengthening the Common European Asylum System, including improving the processing of asylum applications to make them quicker and of higher quality. It can be used for early integration support for third-country nationals, including language and civic orientation courses. It can help return systems and effective return, both voluntary and forced. Within these objectives, the Funds would provide top-ups to support resettlement, relocation and transfers. It is now crucial that the negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council start as soon as possible and that the high level of ambition in the Commission's proposals is maintained.

EU financial support for Migration and Asylum
The Commission's proposals under the next Multiannual Financial Framework have responded to the experience of recent years and propose a major increase in support for Asylum and Migration policy, with a two and a half fold increase to the current period, to reach EUR 10.4 billion over 2021-2027. Together with the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument covering the external dimension of migration, the new Asylum and Migration Fund will provide an indispensable tool to deliver a robust, realistic and fair EU migration policy. It will offer support to Member States' needs in the areas of asylum, integration and return, as well as supporting common needs in areas including returns and migration management, both inside and outside the EU. On integration, the Fund will also support actions in fostering the integration needs of migrants and complementing employment and social integration actions supported via cohesion policy funds.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Over the past four years the Union and its Member States have established a comprehensive approach for addressing migration-related challenges. This approach covers all aspects – deepening cooperation with partners outside the EU, strengthening the external border, and putting the right systems in place inside the EU to deliver a migration, asylum, border and security policy equal to the needs. This approach has delivered tangible results, on which we need to build a future-proof framework of solidarity and responsibility. It is time to move

away from temporary internal border controls and *ad hoc* migration management, towards sustainable solutions.

This needs concrete action on the following next steps:

- The European Parliament and the Council should adopt before the European Parliamentary elections the **five legislative proposals on the reform of the Common European Asylum System** on which agreement is within close reach.[52]
- The Council should adopt its negotiating position on the **Asylum Procedure Regulation** by the end of the year and start negotiations with the European Parliament.
- The Council should find a way forward on the **Dublin Regulation** by identifying the core elements of a solidarity and responsibility mechanism so that the reform can be completed in co-decision with the European Parliament as soon as possible.
- The European Parliament and the Council should adopt their positions as soon as possible on the **European Border and Coast Guard proposal**, as well as the revised **Return Directive,** so that they are adopted before the European Parliamentary elections.
- The **full restoration of Schengen** as an area without temporary internal border controls.
- Take forward an integrated approach for action at all stages of the migratory route along the **Western Mediterranean** route in line with the strengthening already being carried out along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes.
- Conclude ongoing **readmission** negotiations and develop new arrangements with partners in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia while ensuring effective implementation of existing agreements and arrangements.
- The **EU Trust Fund for Africa** should continue to be replenished.
- The European Parliament and the Council should agree on a reform of the **EU Blue Card Directive** before the European Parliamentary elections.
- The European Parliament and the Council should **ensure sustained funding for the next financial period** through the swift adoption of the proposals on the Asylum and Migration Fund and the Border Management Fund, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

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[52] The proposals for the Qualification Regulation, the Reception Conditions Directive, the European Union Asylum Agency Regulation, the Eurodac Regulation, and the Union Resettlement Framework Regulation.