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

Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration

1. INTRODUCTION

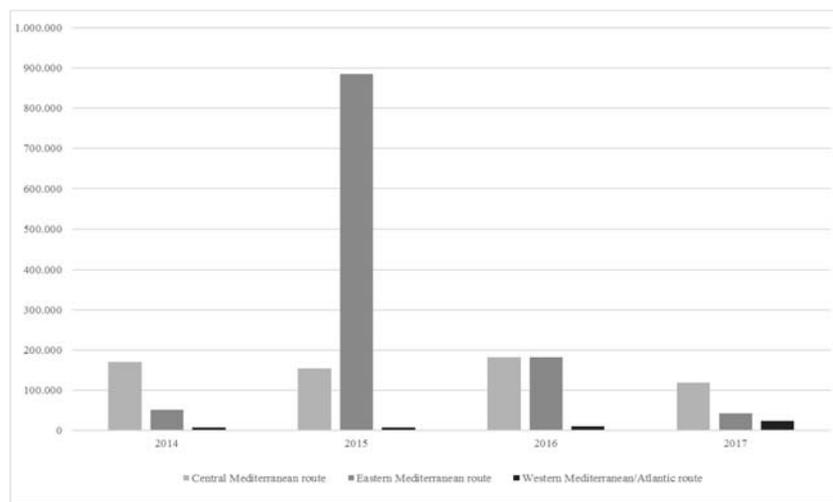
This report provides an overview of progress and developments on all work strands of the European Agenda on Migration since the Commission's last report in March 2018.¹ It also takes stock of progress made in line with the Commission's roadmap presented to the EU Leaders' Meeting in December 2017.² This illustrates the comprehensive nature of the work and the need to maintain the intensity of the EU's efforts across the board.

It also identifies concrete key actions necessary to ensure the continued effectiveness of the EU response. This includes the need for additional financial investment jointly from the Member States and the EU to support the EU action on the external dimension of migration.

This report demonstrates the need for continued action to address the challenge of migration and identifies where current action is insufficient and additional efforts are required. As set out in previous reports, the current situation confirms that the drivers behind migratory pressure on Europe are structural. Protracted conflicts such as the one in Syria are unlikely to reduce. Climate change is creating new reasons pushing people to move. Demography points to a long-term trend of growing populations in the EU's neighbourhood.³ This makes it all the more essential that the EU equips itself with the tools to be equal to the situation.

2. SITUATION ALONG THE MAIN MIGRATION ROUTES

The first months of 2018 have seen increasing pressure on certain routes and some sudden, and sometimes steep, increases in specific locations. Whilst the pressure remains high, the downward trend of 2017 has continued in the Central Mediterranean for the first three months of 2018. Experience suggests that improved weather conditions in summer lead to an increased likelihood of sudden rises and that particular attention is needed on routes which have shown varied patterns over recent years. Experience also shows that there are shifts from one route to the other and that vigilance and coordination are needed across the board.



Irregular border crossings on the main migratory routes – 2014-2017

¹ COM(2018) 250 final of 14.03.2018.

² COM(2017) 820 final of 7.12.2017.

³ See, for example two publications from the European Commission Joint Research Centre: *Demographic and Human Capital Scenarios for the 21st Century: 2018 assessment for 201 countries*, and *Many more to come? Migration from and within Africa* (Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018).

Eastern Mediterranean route

On the Eastern Mediterranean route, following the peak in arrivals over summer 2017, arrivals have again significantly increased since March 2018, – even if overall movements remain limited compared to the period before the activation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. In the 18 weeks to 6 May, there have been 9 349 recorded arrivals in the **Greek islands**, compared to 5 582 over the same period in 2017.⁴ The three main nationalities have remained the same as 2017, with Syrians making up 41%, Iraqis 23% and Afghans 11% so far in 2018.⁵ As regards arrivals by sea, Lesbos was the island which saw most arrivals (58 % of total sea arrivals), followed by Samos.⁶ In 2018 until 6 May, 19 fatalities and missing persons were recorded in the Aegean Sea, continuing the reduction seen in 2017.⁷

While crossings from Turkey to Italy, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania have recently been limited, there has been a significant increase in irregular crossings from Turkey into **Greece via the land border**. The rising trend of increased irregular migratory pressure at this border already emerged in the last months of 2017, and has persisted. During the first months of 2018, illegal border crossings increased more than nine times compared to the same period in 2017: 6 108 illegal border crossings were recorded as of 6 May. The initial increase on this route consisted predominantly of Turkish nationals (close to 50%), but since March 2018 the top nationalities have been Syrian (48%), followed by Turkish (18%) and Iraqi (15%). The percentage of Turkish nationals at this border in the course of 2017 was 39.6%.⁸

Western Balkans route

The concerted action to address irregular transit via the central Western Balkan corridor has put the focus on possible alternative routes. Increased movements have been reported during the first quarter of 2018 through Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the Croatian border and onwards to Slovenia. In addition, there is evidence of migrants present in Serbia joining this route to avoid enhanced controls at Serbia's borders with Croatia, Hungary and Romania. For the first quarter of the year, Bosnia and Herzegovina reported 533 illegal border crossing detections into their country; the main nationalities were Syrians, Libyans, Pakistanis and Afghans.

The phenomenon of Iranian nationals trying to illegally enter the EU has continued, albeit at a stable level. Serbia reported over 11 305 Iranian citizens entering its territory since the lifting of visa restrictions in September 2017 and 9 052 exits registered, with less than 30 submitting asylum claims. There are reports that Iranians are seeking to come to Central and Western Europe via Greece, using falsified documents. The launch of direct flights from Teheran to Belgrade in March 2018 may intensify the need to monitor these developments.

Central Mediterranean route

To 6 May, 2018 had seen 9 567 arrivals, around 77% fewer than those recorded in the same period in 2017. However, there have been some sharp increases in recent weeks, with 2 072 persons arriving in the last two weeks of April and the first week of May. There is also a notable shift in the main nationalities on this route compared to 2017. The main nationalities

⁴ Data from the Hellenic Police.

⁵ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

⁶ Data from the Hellenic Police.

⁷ Source: IOM's Missing migrants project (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>).

⁸ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

in 2018 are Tunisian (20%), Eritrean (19%), and Nigerian (7%), whilst the main nationalities in 2017 were Nigerian, Guinean and Ivorian.⁹

A significant number of boats towards Italy depart from Tunisia, representing 22% of departures coming in 2018 until 26 April (the vast majority of arrivals from Tunisia are Tunisian citizens).

The trend of fewer migrant deaths along this route has continued. At sea, there have been 358 fatalities and missing persons recorded to 6 May this year. EU operations in support to the Italian Coast Guard have rescued almost 290 000 migrants since 1 February 2016. Thanks to EU action, the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard to rescue migrants in Libyan territorial waters has also improved, and the International Organisation for Migration estimates that the Libyan authorities have rescued 4 964 migrants in the first four months of 2018.¹⁰ In the first quarter of 2018, 2 963 migrants were rescued by the International Organisation for Migration in the desert in Niger.

Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route

Arrivals on the Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route continue to show an upward trend, which is also reflected in the number of fatalities and missing persons (with 217 recorded to 6 May this year). The total number of arrivals to Spain (via the Western Mediterranean route, the Atlantic route and via Ceuta and Melilla) in 2018 up to 29 April is 6 623, which is 22% higher than the same period in 2017 (5 429).¹¹ The main nationalities of arrivals on this route in 2018 are Moroccan (17%), Guinean (14%), Malian (10%), Ivorian (7%), and Gambian (6%).

Asylum

Despite arrivals below the 2015 peak, a significant caseload of pending asylum application remains, putting pressure on national asylum systems. The EU continues to support Member States to address this situation. The number of asylum applications lodged within the EU in 2017 (685 000, including 160 000 lodged by children¹²) was 43% lower than in 2016. As for 2018, there have been 186 522 applications for international protection lodged in the EU Member States as of 29 April, including 5 257 unaccompanied minors.¹³

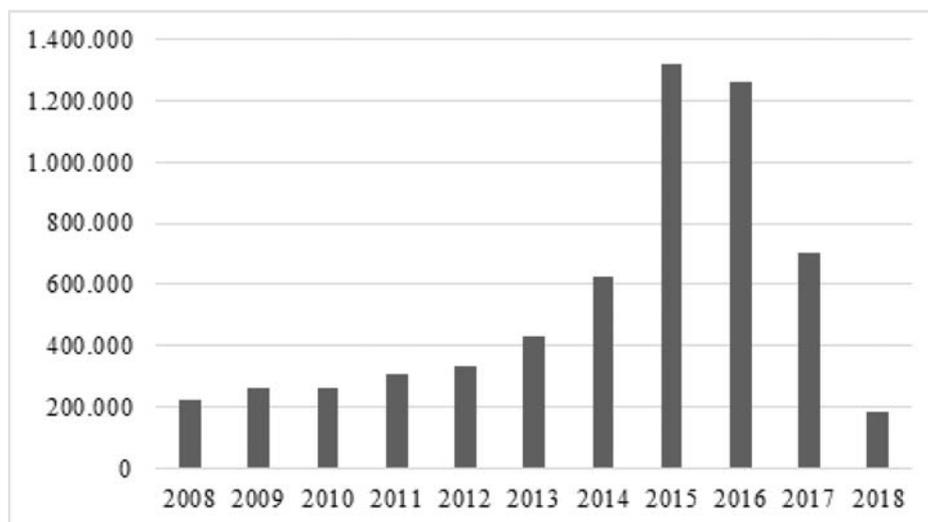
⁹ Data from the Italian Ministry of Interior.

¹⁰ Data from IOM covering 1 January - 31 March 2018.
https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/libya_sr_20180301-31.pdf

¹¹ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, covering Western Mediterranean arrivals by sea.

¹² Data from the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF.

¹³ Data provided by the European Asylum Support Office.



Number of asylum applications in the EU, 2008 until first quarter of 2018

A large share of the total number of asylum applications is concentrated in only a few Member States. In 2015, the three Member States with most asylum application received 62% of the EU total (this compares to 76% in 2016 and 64% in 2017).

The main nationalities of asylum applicants in the EU have changed since 2015. Whilst Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq have remained among the top five since 2015, Kosovo and Albania were replaced in 2016 by Pakistan and Nigeria. The top nationality in terms of the number of asylum applications is Syria. The average recognition rate for Syrians has remained stable, from 97% in 2015 to 94% in 2017.

In 2017, the overall recognition rate for first instance decisions in the EU was 46% (compared to 61% in 2016 and 52% in 2015). As well as Syria, Eritrea (92%) and Somalia (69%) both had high recognition rates. The lowest recognition rates have tended to concern nationalities from the Western Balkans.

Protection of children in migration

According to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, in 2017, 32 963 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom 60% were unaccompanied or separated children. Arrivals of children overall in 2017 decreased by 67% compared to 2016, yet the proportion of children arriving unaccompanied or separated has increased from 34% in 2016 to 60% in 2017.¹⁴ The implementation of the Communication on the Protection of the Children in Migration¹⁵ needs to be stepped up by Member States, especially as regards improving reception conditions and ensuring access to services, preventing child disappearances, and reducing delays in the procedures concerning children, especially family reunification, and overall, achieving a more robust implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child in all decisions affecting children. The Commission informed on progress made in the implementation of the Communication and the challenges ahead at the plenary debate of the European Parliament on 2 May 2018.

¹⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63435>.

¹⁵ COM(2017) 211 final of 12.4.2017.

3. EU SUPPORT TO MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

EU support to the refugee and migration crisis has been sustained and intense. It has been most effective when at its most collective. The direct support and financial backing of the EU and its agencies has been most effective when working together with expertise and resources on the ground from Member States. The Commission's proposed revision of the legislation on **Immigration Liaison Officers**¹⁶ will also contribute to intensifying the coordination required and to improve the effectiveness of common EU action. The steps set out below illustrate how it is essential that the intensity of support is maintained and coordination stepped up still further.

Today, the Commission is also adopting a proposal¹⁷ for a Revision of the **Visa Information System** legal framework, which will increase the security of borders and within the EU, by enhancing checks in visa processing using interoperability and addressing remaining information gaps. The Commission continues to monitor irregular migration challenges in visa-free countries and is taking proactive measures where needed.

Eastern Mediterranean route - Support to Greece and Bulgaria

A key element in the EU's support to Greece remains the **hotspot** approach. Support for additional reception capacity has continued. Total reception capacity has slightly increased (from 6 292 to 6 338 places),¹⁸ thanks to the additional places created in the Kos hotspot. Pre-removal capacity has been maintained at 710 places, with over 200 detainees kept in these centres.

However, reception conditions remain a serious concern. By 6 May, the total number of migrants present in the 5 Eastern Aegean islands was 16 565, leading to continuing severe overcrowding. As a result, the authorities in Lesvos have used tents both inside and outside the hotspot area to accommodate additional arrivals and there is heavy pressure on infrastructure, medical services, and waste management: tensions among communities and between migrants and parts of the local population have increased. To address some of the most pressing needs on the islands, the Greek authorities are investing EUR 3 million on waste and water management, as well as taking forward EU-funded projects to improve infrastructure (EUR 15 million) and the provision of services and non-food items (EUR 63 million).

A particular problem is providing adequate shelter for unaccompanied minors, both on the islands and the mainland. More than 2 000 minors (including separated children) are now on the waiting list for shelter, including minors residing in the hotspots or those who are under protective custody. A call for proposals is underway and offers were received for 1 785 accommodation places. A number of contracts have been signed by the Greek authorities, but further efforts are needed by all partners, including municipalities and NGOs, to put a sustainable national system in place. This would be complemented by new legislation on foster care, which would also cover migrant unaccompanied minors, and is currently before the Greek Parliament. Child Protection Officers have been recruited, trained and deployed at the hotspots.

¹⁶ COM(2018) 303 final of 16.05.2018.

¹⁷ COM(2018) 302 final of 16.05.2018.

¹⁸ Data from the Greek Ministry of Interior, National Coordination Centre for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (NCCBCIA-ESKESMA).

With these needs mirrored by the major pressure following arrivals on the land border, the Greek authorities are now elaborating a contingency plan to cope with the likelihood of increased arrivals as summer approaches. This plan should be used as a basis for developing a comprehensive strategy for a sustainable national reception system based on current and projected flows, numbers of potential beneficiaries of international protection, accelerated processing of asylum claims, and increased returns.

The EU continues to provide substantial **financial support to Greece** to address migration-related challenges, with the Financial Plan 2018 currently under implementation to take forward the national programmes amounting to EUR 561 million. In addition, the Emergency Support Instrument is working with humanitarian partners to help refugees to lead more secure and normal lives and to better integrate into the local economy and society. It currently provides over 24 500 rental accommodation places and provides monthly cash assistance to empower refugees to meet their basic needs and create a basic social safety net for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, as well as helping the local economy. Almost 45 000 people are currently benefitting from this scheme.

EU agencies have continued their essential work in supporting the Greek authorities. As of 30 April, 63 national experts, supported by 27 interim staff and 85 framework interpreters, were deployed by the European Asylum Support Office in Greece. As of 7 May, 13 Europol guest officers and two Europol staff were deployed to five locations in Greece, performing secondary security checks. Europol's work will also be developed through an Action Plan implementing recommendations from a recent evaluation. As for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the total numbers deployed as of 14 May were 573. This support continues to fall short of need and the uncertainties about Member States's replacement of rotated officers creates a long-term instability in the help which the EU is able to provide.

The increased pressure on the land border between Greece and Turkey has pointed to a need for intensified support at the border. In addition to the existing cooperation between Turkey and Greece, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency stands ready to reinforce its presence and step up joint operations. This would of course require additional engagement by Member States.

The major programme of support to **Bulgaria** continues, with a further EUR 13 million being made available as a top-up for 2018, in addition to EUR 97.2 million in the national programmes and the EUR 172 million provided in emergency assistance since the beginning of 2015. The implementation of some of the grants under the emergency assistance for extensive equipment for border control has been slow due to delays in tendering, but the funds under the national programmes are being implemented at a good pace. Also in Bulgaria, gaps remain in the deployment of European Border and Coast Guard Agency staff: the current number of experts is 130, which is 57 short of the defined needs.

The EU-Turkey Statement

The EU-Turkey Statement remains of paramount importance in reducing irregular and dangerous crossings to the Greek islands, in saving lives at sea, and in promoting the resettlement of Syrians in need of international protection. Its continued success depends on engagement and sustained effort of all parties involved. It is crucial that Turkey continues its intensive law enforcement efforts to dismantle smuggling networks and to stop irregular crossings to Greece, both to the mainland and to the islands, and that it continues to cooperate

on returns and readmission from Greece, either through the EU-Turkey Statement or through the Greece-Turkey bilateral protocol.

Turkey has made outstanding efforts to provide shelter and support to more than 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees, and the EU has demonstrated its commitment to support Turkey in this challenge. The **Facility for Refugees in Turkey** continues to support the needs of refugees and host communities in Turkey, in close cooperation with the Turkish authorities.¹⁹ It has proved to be one of the swiftest and most effective EU support mechanisms, with disbursements reaching EUR 1.9 billion. The Facility is helping over 1.3 million refugees, through monthly cash transfers and supports education and healthcare for hundreds of thousands of people. The mobilisation of the second tranche of EUR 3 billion is now under way. Swift implementation will ensure a seamless follow up of successful Facility interventions funded under the first tranche, in particular additional funding for support to education, which needs to be in place before the start of the new school year.

The slow pace of the examination of asylum applications in Greece continues to hold back **returns to Turkey** under the Statement. The risk of possible increasing arrivals in the summer makes it all the more important that this is urgently addressed by the Greek authorities. The EU continues to support the Greek Asylum Service and the Appeal Committees.²⁰

In parallel, the general **geographical restriction** applying to asylum seekers present on the Aegean islands was annulled by a ruling of the Greek Council of State in April. The Court concluded that the restriction lacked the necessary legal reasoning and acknowledged that the restriction creates a considerable burden on the islands. The Greek authorities reacted promptly to the judgment and the Greek Asylum Service issued a new Decision which according to the Greek authorities addresses the concerns of the Council of State. Greece also tabled new legislation which aims to complete the transposition of the Reception Conditions Directive, providing a stronger legal basis to this new Decision. The new law is now being finalised for adoption by the Greek Parliament.

Pending the effective implementation by Turkey of the third country national clause of the **EU-Turkey readmission agreement**, Turkey and Greece are encouraged to ensure the effective application of the relevant provisions of the Greek-Turkey bilateral readmission agreement for those arrivals not covered by the EU-Turkey Statement.

Support in Syria and its neighbours remains a high priority. Over EUR 1 billion has been allocated by the EU to Jordan and Lebanon since the beginning of the crisis, to support the most vulnerable through humanitarian funding and to provide education and healthcare and help the livelihoods of refugees and host communities. Support to Lebanon was also backed up in two international conferences at ministerial level covering security and investment.²¹ The Brussels II conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region co-chaired by the EU and the United Nations in April 2018 reconfirmed the EU's support for a political solution in Syria and its commitment to address the substantial needs, with the confirmation of EUR 560 million for 2018 and the allocation of an additional EUR 560 million for 2019. In total,

¹⁹ Full details can be obtained from the online projects table https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility_table.pdf.

²⁰ 57 national experts from Member States are deployed to the European Asylum Support Office to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in Greece.

²¹ These took place on 15 March 2018 in Rome (support to Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces) and on 6 April 2018 in Paris (support to investment and economic reforms).

the conference mobilised EUR 6.2 billion of grants by the international community to 2020, with three quarters coming from the EU and its Member States.

Western Balkans route

The Commission is currently finalising its internal procedures to sign an agreement with Albania, initialled already in February 2018, that will enable the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to provide assistance in the field of external border management as well as to swiftly deploy operational teams on Albanian territory in case of a sudden shift in migratory flows. On 30 April, agreement was reached at technical level on a similar arrangement with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Negotiations are currently ongoing with Serbia and the Commission has proposed to start negotiations on such agreements with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The European Migrant Smuggling Centre of Europol has continued to support operational cooperation to address migrant smuggling through the Western Balkan route. In the first quarter of 2018, Europol organised 11 operational meetings focusing on the Western Balkans and has managed 28 priority cases. 7 common action days resulting in successful arrests of smugglers were also organised in the Western Balkan countries. Europol has continued to monitor an increasing trend of smuggling migrants in lorries and large vehicles. The countries of the region have strengthened their border control and surveillance capacities, shifting patrols to targeted border sections.

In parallel, the EU continues to provide support to countries on the Western Balkan route by focusing on improving reception conditions and capacity for migrants and refugees and building capacities to strengthen migration management systems. The regular bi-weekly videoconferences with the participation of the Commission, Member States, EU Agencies, and Western Balkan partners have continued in order to facilitate cooperation and information sharing on the migratory situation along the Western Balkan route. The Commission's annual Enlargement Package adopted on 17 April 2018 emphasised the need for the countries to strengthen efforts in order to effectively address challenges related to migration.²²

Next steps:

- The Greek authorities should improve conditions in the hotspots, addressing in particular the needs of vulnerable groups and unaccompanied minors;
- The Greek authorities should urgently accelerate the implementation of returns to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement;
- The Greek authorities should urgently finalise their contingency plan to cope with higher arrivals in the islands and via the land border;
- Reinforce cooperation with Turkey to prevent current and emerging land and sea routes for irregular migration in line with the EU-Turkey Statement;
- Reinforce cooperation between Greece and Turkey on returns and readmissions from Greece through the EU-Turkey Statement as well as through the Greece-Turkey bilateral protocol;
- Member States should ensure the necessary expert support to the work of EU Agencies in Greece and Bulgaria;

²² See COM(2018) 450 final of 17.4.2018 and individual country reports. The Flagship initiative 2 ("Reinforcing engagement on security and migration") of the Strategy for the Western Balkans (COM(2018) 65 final of 6.2.2018) confirmed the commitment to continue cooperation and information sharing along the route. It will serve as a basis for the specific actions that the EU will take over the next years to support the countries of the region.

- Agreements between the European Union and Western Balkans partners on operational support provided by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency should be swiftly concluded.

Central Mediterranean route

- Support to Italy

The EU continues its support to Italy for the implementation of the **hotspot approach**. Activities in the hotspot of Taranto have been temporarily suspended to perform maintenance works and refurbishments are also limiting activities in the hotspot of Lampedusa. In parallel, Italian authorities confirmed their commitment to open three additional hotspot locations in Calabria and in Sicily later this year. A revision of hotspot standard operating procedures is underway.

EU agencies are taking measures to adapt their staffing levels and the focus of their activities in Italy in line with current needs. As of 30 April, the European Asylum Support Office deployed 38 national experts in Italy, supported by 54 interim staff and 98 cultural mediators. 428 European Border and Coast Guard experts are supporting the work with newly-arrived migrants. As of 7 May 2018, a total of 15 Europol guest officers and three Europol staff were deployed to five locations in Italy, performing secondary security checks. Italy has also increased detention capacity, with the Potenza detention centre reaching full capacity of 96 places.

The EU continues to provide substantial **financial assistance** to Italy. The Italian authorities have started implementation of actions under the financial envelope allocated to Italy in November, in the area of medical assistance, inter-cultural mediation, equipment for screening of migrants in the hotspots and operations for maritime border surveillance and search and rescue. In follow-up to the letter to Prime Minister Gentiloni of 25 July 2017, the Commission and the Italian Ministry of Interior have continued discussions to design actions to be funded under emergency assistance aimed at supporting integration at local level, protect victims of trafficking in human beings, and enhance the effectiveness of asylum and return procedures. The emergency assistance provided to Italy complements over EUR 654 million in EU support to Italy's national programmes.²³

Joint Operation Themis has continued, supporting Italy to address irregular immigration across the Central Mediterranean, save lives at sea and to prevent and detect cross-border crime. Its operational area now covers the Adriatic Sea and its law enforcement component, in particular as regards the fight against terrorism and foreign fighters, has been enhanced. Currently, with contributions from 27 Member States, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency supports Italy with 428 border guards and crew members, two aircraft, a helicopter, one offshore patrol vessel, seven coastal patrol vessels, four coastal patrol boats, and 14 mobile offices.

²³ For the period 2014-2020, this amounts to EUR 387.7 million under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, including EUR 43.6 million for relocation/resettlement, and EUR 266 million under the Internal Security Fund, of which EUR 201.5 million for Borders and Visa and EUR 64.5 million for Police.

Next steps:

- Italy to open three additional hotspot locations as planned;
- Italy to increase detention capacity further;
- Finalisation of new phase of emergency funding with the Italian authorities;
- Member States to step up contributions to EU agencies (staffing levels and operational support) in Italy in line with needs;
- Italy to continue implementation of all actions identified in the Action Plan of 4 July 2017.

- *Libya and the region, and countries along the route*

The EU continues its work to improve the appalling **conditions** faced by many migrants and refugees in Libya and to tackle smuggling of migrants. EU-funded programmes are working to address immediate needs of migrants and refugees, help migrants return home or find a safe pathway for those in need of protection to Europe through resettlement, and work for the long term to stabilise communities.

To date, with EU support, the International Organisation for Migration has provided almost 41 000 migrants with blankets, mattresses and hygiene kits at disembarkation points, in detention centres and in host communities in Libya. Medical assistance has been provided to more than 14 500 vulnerable migrants. Over 950 migrants have also been assisted through the Migration Resource and Response Mechanism in place in the South of Libya. There has also been specific help from United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF to provide winter clothing in detention centres, as well as the bare necessities for survival and a decent living, including recreation and educational activities. A joint effort is also under way to advocate for children's release and find alternatives to detention.²⁴ The UN Development Programme has also set up an Entrepreneurship Campus to try to help young entrepreneurs.²⁵

The EU has continued supporting Libyan municipalities across the country, working on the rehabilitation of key infrastructure to enable access to basic services to local populations and migrants alike. Discussions are ongoing between the EU and the implementing partners (Italian Cooperation, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF) to operationalise a new EUR 50 million programme in support of municipalities, adopted in March 2018. This will boost the capacity of Libyan municipalities to deliver basic services such as health, education, sanitation, and water.

As of 4 May, 1 006 refugees and asylum-seekers had been released from detention following UN Refugee Agency UNHCR's interventions in 2018, an acceleration from the total of 1 428 in 2017. The Agency has undertaken 486 monitoring visits to detention centres so far in 2018. EU support has also enabled UN refugee Agency UNHCR to conduct 15 216 medical consultations for refugees and asylum seekers – while advocating for their release.

With EU support, the International Organisation for Migration continues its programme for assisted voluntary returns and in 2018 until 24 April, 6 185 persons have returned safely home. During the evacuation phase between 28 November 2017 and 1 March 2018, a total of 15 391 persons voluntarily returned home.²⁶ The target set by the Commission in December²⁷

²⁴ <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/invisible-child-migrants-libya/>

²⁵ More information is available at <http://tec.ly/>.

²⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/40705/joint-au-eu-un-taskforce-assists-16000-people_en

²⁷ COM(2017) 820 final of 7.12.2017.

has therefore been met. Reintegration support is being provided for a total of 27 138 people returned since May 2017.

The EU has been working closely with Member States and the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR to ensure that as many vulnerable people in need of international protection as possible are evacuated from Libya to Niger, and then swiftly resettled. After a temporary suspension of evacuations in early March due to the concerns of the Nigerien government that onward departures to other countries were not keeping up with the pace of arrivals into Niger, the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR on 10 May resumed the **Emergency Transit Mechanism**, airlifting 132 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers.²⁸ Out of the 1 152 persons evacuated from Libya to Niger, the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR has as of 13 May submitted 475 persons for resettlement²⁹ and out of these, 108 have already departed from Niger.³⁰ A further 71 have been accepted by the resettling states and are awaiting departure.³¹ This means that resettling states have already resettled around 38% of all persons submitted. Although additional pledges for resettlement from Niger are still needed, the number of pledges available for resettlement from Niger is not the limiting factor as 2 681 pledges have been made.³² It is important that referrals by the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR are accelerated, so that pledges can be materialised and persons evacuated from Libya resettled as soon as possible by the resettling Member States.³³ The EU fully supports these efforts, and will supplement the the existing financial support to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR of EUR 20 million. Member States who have not reserved a part of their resettlement pledge for Niger are invited to do so and those who are already resettling should continue making sure that transfers happen swiftly upon referrals. The UNHCR should be encouraged to focus its resettlement referrals in Niger primarily on the persons evacuated from Libya.

After the trilateral high level African Union-EU-United Nations mission³⁴ to Tripoli in February, the Commission has engaged with the Libyan authorities to ensure delivery on the commitments taken. These include the importance of facilitating the humanitarian evacuation operation by waiving exit visas; allowing the UN refugee Agency UNHCR to fully implement its mandate beyond the limitations imposed on nationalities; improving access to and the conditions of migrants and refugees in detention centres; moving towards the closure of the detention centres in their current form; and considering alternatives to the criminalisation of irregular migrants; ensuring full registration and tracing of all migrants disembarked.

The EU's efforts to support the two **Libyan Coast Guards** have continued. EUNAVFORMED Operation Sophia has so far trained some 191 personnel of the Libyan Navy Coast Guard, including 5 patrol boat crews, under a combination of sea and shore based training. Training is ongoing in Greece for 22 Libyan personnel and a further module is scheduled in Spain for 34 candidates at the beginning of July 2018. The first monitoring

²⁸ Since the start of the evacuations from Libya in late 2017, a total of 1 474 persons have been evacuated to Niger (1 152); Italy (312), and the Emergency Transit Centre in Romania (10).

²⁹ To France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and Canada.

³⁰ To France, Sweden, and Switzerland.

³¹ In addition, France has also resettled 97 refugees who were already registered in Niger and 42 persons have been resettled from Libya directly to France, Sweden and the Netherlands.

³² EU and non-EU resettlement States (France, Canada, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, UK) have made 2 680 pledges so far for resettlement from Niger (for evacuees from Libya as well as refugees already registered in Niger).

³³ A field mission in Niger in the framework of the Core Group on enhanced resettlement along the Central Mediterranean, with participation of a number of resettling states and the European Commission, took place from 9-11 April to further step up work in this area.

³⁴ The African Union-EU-United Nations Task Force was set up in the margin of the fifth African Union-European Union summit which took place on 29-30 November 2017 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

report in March highlighted that capacity and professionalism are progressing but that effective monitoring could further benefit from a continued presence of EUNAVFORMED personnel in the operation centres of the Libyan Navy Coast Guard.

The setting up of a secure communication network in the Mediterranean to exchange information on irregular migration by sea is now reaching the final stage, and the Seahorse Mediterranean network should be operational in the second half of 2018.

A pilot project to strengthen cooperation between EU agencies and EUNAVFORMED Operation Sophia, working directly together as a Crime Information Cell on the Operation Sophia flagship, was endorsed by Ministers during the Justice and Home Affairs Council of March 2018. The Cell should start operating as soon as possible. The EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya is looking into increasing the capacity to field up to 17 staff in Tripoli on a permanent or rotational basis by May 2018, building on the deeper engagement possible with the Libyan authorities since the "light presence" in place since December 2017.

- *Funding*

The **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** continues to play a critical role in the EU's work. As of 8 May 2018, 147 programmes have been agreed for a total amount of around EUR 2 593.4 million divided between the three windows: Sahel/Lake Chad EUR 1293 million (79 programmes), Horn of Africa EUR 820.3 million (50 programmes), North of Africa EUR 335 million (14 programmes). This amount also includes 4 cross-window programmes (EUR 145.1 million). A total of 235 contracts with implementers have been signed so far for a total of amount of EUR 1611.2 million, and total disbursements amount to EUR 650 million.

Resources currently allocated to the EU Trust Fund for Africa amount to EUR 3.39 billion including more than EUR 2.98 billion from the European Development Fund and the EU budget. In total, EU Member States and other donors (Switzerland and Norway) have contributed EUR 413.8 million, of which EUR 378 million have been paid so far. Main donors remain Germany (EUR 157.5 million) and Italy (EUR 104 million). The contribution of Member States to the North Africa window of the EU Trust Fund was of particular importance in being able to deliver a new approach with Libya: European Council discussions triggered Member States pledges of EUR 178.6 million, mainly to replenish the North Africa window.

Nevertheless, a significant funding gap is likely to occur already in 2018. This was discussed at the Strategic Board meeting of 24 April 2018. The pipeline for the three windows, which includes essential actions such as continuing the work in Libya, and maintaining the pace of assisted voluntary returns and evacuations, is estimated at around EUR 2 billion. While remaining resources can cover some priorities, a total funding gap of around 1.2 billion has been identified for the three windows, if the current level of ambition is to be maintained. For North Africa, the priorities will continue contributing to an effective migration management, including the protection of vulnerable migrants, voluntary return, community stabilisation, integrated border management and support to labour migration. Activities in the Horn of Africa and Sahel and Lake Chad areas have direct impact on the effectiveness of the EU action in North Africa and are necessary to ensure that the EU approach is truly comprehensive. Member States have acknowledged the value of the pipeline, and agreed to further prioritise actions in the following areas: return and reintegration, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, secure documents and civil registry, addressing trafficking in

human beings, essential stabilisation efforts in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, and support for migration dialogues. At the same time, the Board agreed that the Trust Fund should continue its operations beyond 2018 and that for that to happen it was necessary to replenish its resources.

Under the first pillar of the **External Investment Plan**, the European Fund for Sustainable Development guarantee, a total of 12 eligible financial institutions have proposed more than 46 investment programmes under the five investment windows for which guarantee funds of EUR 1.5 billion are available. Proposals received amount to a combined value of over EUR 3.5 billion for the five windows.³⁵ First Commission decisions approving programmes are expected early summer. Blending operations under the Investment Plan's Africa and Neighbourhood Investment Platforms are under way.

- *Countries along the route*

Cooperation has intensified with a number of partners in Africa. Despite political upheavals, work with the **Ethiopian** authorities on the five pillars of the Valletta Declaration has continued smoothly. The dialogue on migration and cooperation with **Guinea** and **The Gambia** maintains a steady progress, with a successful European Border and Coast Guard Agency seminar on best practices for the organisation of return-related activities in March. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the dialogue on migration was relaunched. Discussions with **Nigeria** on a migration and mobility package continue, covering growth and investments, border management and digital identification, smuggling, trafficking in human beings, as well as reintegration and readmission.

As well as ongoing operational cooperation, additional support to **Niger** would focus on action to address emerging migratory routes near the Nigerian border and reinforced economic substitution programmes. In March 2018, Niger hosted a ministerial conference involving all key players to discuss and promote cooperation against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.³⁶ Niger, Chad, Libya and Sudan also reached a new agreement to establish cooperation to secure common borders and combat organised crime.

Work to tackle smuggling networks in the **Horn of Africa** has also been stepped up, with the further development of the EU Trust Fund-supported Regional Operational Centre for the Khartoum Process, aimed at enhancing joint investigations among countries. The Better Migration Management Programme in the Horn of Africa has seen more than 400 government officials trained in migration and border management, and around 150 government and non-government stakeholders trained on migrant rights.

Migration was included on the agenda of the EU-**Egypt** Stability Cluster that took place on 15 March in Cairo. This followed up on the first meeting of the EU-Egypt Migration Dialogue in December 2017 and took stock of progress in the different areas of EU-Egypt bilateral cooperation on migration. Increased cooperation with EU agencies was also discussed.

³⁵ The majority of proposals (EUR 2.5 billion) for the micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises window (15 proposals) and the sustainable energy and connectivity window (15 proposals). In addition, proposals for over EUR 1 billion were received for the three other windows: sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurs and agribusiness, sustainable cities, and digital for development.

³⁶ The Conference adopted a Declaration: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-2067_en.htm.

Western Mediterranean route

Morocco continues its efforts to prevent irregular migration by cooperating on border surveillance, in particular with Spain. Technical contacts are ongoing with a view to designing an assistance package to strengthen border management capacity and relaunching negotiations on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements. A budget support programme to Morocco's migration policies (EUR 35 million) was signed by the Commission and Morocco in December 2017. On 2 May in Marrakesh, the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Rabat process reaffirmed the commitment through a jointly Adopted Action Plan to continue cooperation on addressing root causes of migration, fighting smuggling, and strengthening return and readmission.³⁷

After a 43% increase between 2016 and 2017, the number of **Algerian** nationals arriving irregularly in Europe has dropped in the first quarter of 2018, compared to the same period in 2017.³⁸ Algeria also remains a country of transit for irregular migrants attempting to reach Morocco and Libya, and the Algerian authorities report increased arrivals from Sub-Saharan countries into Algeria. While the EU and Algeria agreed on improving the exchange of information on illegal arrivals, on legal mobility possibilities and on return, this has not yet been translated into concrete cooperation.

Next steps:

- The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and Member States to continue efforts towards increased evacuation and resettlement through the Emergency Transit Mechanism by increasing referrals and accelerating resettlements;
- Continue work with the African Union - EU - United Nations Task Force to help people to leave Libya and with the Libyan authorities towards ending the systematic detention of migrants;
- Step up cooperation with Sahel countries on the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in line with the Declaration adopted in Niamey in March;
- Continue strengthening migration dialogues with countries of origin, linking all pillars of the Valletta Action Plan.

4. RETURN AND READMISSION

Statistics on returns in 2017 indicate that compared to 2016 (493 785 return decisions), the number of issued return decisions in the EU in 2017 has increased by 4% (516 115 decisions in 2017). This increase can be largely attributed to the fact that a large number of asylum (appeal) procedures – including many initiated during the time of mass influx into the EU – are coming to an end, in many cases concluding with a negative decision. There is a consistent increase in the number of return decisions issued by the Member States that were most concerned by the influx, in particular, Germany and Greece.

However, the increase in the number of return decisions is not matched by a similar increase in the number of actually implemented returns. On the contrary, the information provided by the Member States to EUROSTAT clearly indicates that the number of implemented returns in 2017 decreased by almost 20%: from 226 150 in 2016 to 188 920 in 2017. This translates

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/20180503_declaration-and-action-plan-marrakesh_en.pdf

³⁸ Algerian nationals use both the Central (1 980 arrivals in 2017, 114 in the first quarter of 2018) and the Western Mediterranean route (3 687 arrivals in 2017 and 125 in the first quarter of 2018).

into a considerable decrease in the rate of return³⁹ throughout the EU from 45.8% in 2016 to merely 36.6% in 2017.

This negative trend is partially explained by the fact that the stock of potential returnees from countries in the Western Balkans has significantly decreased. Cooperation with these countries on readmission of their own nationals has been excellent over the last two years, facilitated by effective EU readmission agreements. The result is that a previously accumulated backlog in returns to these countries was cleared in 2015 and 2016, which in turn increased the EU average return rate.

However, even if data regarding Western Balkans countries are removed from the overall 2017 return data, there is still a decrease in the return rate from 34.5 % in 2016 to 29.2% in 2017. This may be explained by a proportional increase in the number of return decisions for nationals of less cooperative countries of origin of irregular migrations to the EU not being matched by effective returns. It clearly underlines the need for an extra effort in Member States to ensure that return decisions are effectively implemented, using the work under the Partnership Framework as a springboard and the European Border and Coast Guard as a key tool to operationalise returns.

While securing third countries' cooperation on readmission of own nationals remains a challenge for the EU, 2017 has seen significant progress with several new practical arrangements concluded. The target set in the Commission roadmap of December 2017 to reach agreement with three partner countries on arrangements for return and readmission has been achieved.⁴⁰ The Commission's proposed revision of the legislation on Immigration Liaison Officers will help to also intensify the coordination required in this area.⁴¹

As part of its proposal to amend the Visa Code⁴², the Commission has proposed to strengthen the use of visa policy as a tool to achieve progress in cooperation on return and readmission with non-EU countries. Stricter conditions will be established for processing visa applications for nationals of non-EU countries that do not cooperate satisfactorily on return and readmission.

However, a significant increase in the number of returns depends first and foremost on Member States' engagement in this cooperation and the use of these instruments to their full potential. So far, there are significant variations in this respect: while some Member States are using the existing instruments in a pro-active and effective manner and consequently start seeing results, others are yet to integrate the new procedures in their workflow and have not started implementation. The Commission and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency offer specific support to Member States to make effective use of these new arrangements, for example by organising information seminars with third countries on the new procedures. Some specific actions, like the establishment of electronic platforms (Pakistan) or the update of existing ones (Sri Lanka), or of procedures for the verification of nationality with electronic means (Bangladesh), should yield significant results in the long term.

³⁹ The return rate is the ratio between the number of persons issued with a return decision and the number of persons effectively returned (irrespective of whether the return is voluntary or forced).

⁴⁰ Cooperation on migration with Asian countries continues to show a positive trend. A series of important meetings have taken place with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Concrete results include an electronic platform for processing readmission applications with Pakistan and return operations under the Standard Operating Procedures with Bangladesh. Dialogues are under way to establish a similar level of cooperation with countries including Tunisia and Nigeria.

⁴¹ COM(2018) 303 final of 16.5.2018.

⁴² COM(2018) 252 final of 14.3.2018.

A growing number of return operations have been supported operationally by the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency**: 111 operations have been organised or coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2018 to the end of April, compared to 39 for the same period in 2016 and 108 in 2017.⁴³ Nevertheless, Member States need to take better advantage of the Agency's new and expanded mandate on return. Member States must also ensure that the increasing needs are adequately matched by the available capacity to execute returns, to ensure physical availability of returnees, and to use as swift and efficient return procedures.

As a follow-up to its commitment⁴⁴ to foster clarity around possible risks of criminalisation for those providing genuine humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress, on 3 May the Commission organised a first exchange of views with the main NGOs involved and the Fundamental Rights Agency, in order to have a common understanding of the state of play and exchange on possible ways forward.

Key to the effectiveness of the monitoring of returns is more detailed, frequent and timely statistics on asylum and managed migration, including on return and readmission. Such statistics would contribute to a more comprehensive and regular overview of the situation in the asylum and managed migration area. On this basis, as announced in the progress report of November 2017,⁴⁵ the Commission is proposing to address the most urgent gaps with an amendment to the legislation on statistics on migration and international protection⁴⁶. In order to improve still further the cooperation on returns, all the incentives and leverages of our internal and external policies have to be used.

Next steps:

- Full use by Member States of the recently established arrangements on return and readmission, stepping up the number of readmission applications to the countries concerned;
- Full use by Member States of the possibilities offered by the European Border and Coast Guard on return operations, to back up a more determined effort in Member States to ensure that return decisions are effectively applied;
- European Parliament and Council to continue their efforts towards swift progress on the Commission's proposal of 14 March to amend the Visa Code;
- Swift implementation of new rules improving the provision of statistical information on asylum and managed migration, including on return and readmission.

5. REINFORCED EXTERNAL BORDER MANAGEMENT

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency continues to support Member States through joint operations across the main migratory routes in the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, with the deployment of more than 1 300 border guard officers and other staff. The Agency has offered to triple its operational deployments at the Greek land borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

⁴³ Data available in *Frontex Application Return*.

⁴⁴ SWD(2017) 117 final of 22.3.2017 and COM(2017) 558 final of 27.9.2017.

⁴⁵ COM(2017) 669 final of 15.11.2017.

⁴⁶ COM(2018) 307 of 16.05.2018.

Serious gaps in pledges were identified for 2018 operational activities. Despite two open calls launched on 19 January 2018 and 23 March 2018, there were no significant improvements. All the pledges made until the end of April 2018 would only cover 49% of the identified operational needs for experts and 44% of technical assets for activities at land borders in the period May-June 2018. For sea border operations, 85 % of experts could be provided but only 51% of technical assets.

These considerable shortages risk continuing to severely limit the implementation of the activities planned until December 2018. On 17 April 2018, the Agency held a high-level meeting with Member States and the Commission to improve the annual pledging process for 2019 by bringing more flexibility and transparency and through advancing the launch of the pledging exercise to allow for possible adjustments and other mitigating measures (such as the use of own technical capacities).

By 30 April 2018, the total number of "nominated" border guards available for deployments from the Rapid Reaction Pool is 1 482, representing 99% of the Pool. Only two Member States have not yet nominated border guards. The serious gaps in the European Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool has not been addressed by the Member States since the last report.

On 2 May 2018, the Commission has adopted its proposal for the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. This foresees significant resources to support the future development of the European Border and Coast Guard, including the creation of a standing corps of 10 000 border guards at the disposal of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, so that it can become fully effective in supporting a secure EU external border.

Next Steps:

- Member States to swiftly and fully follow up the recommendations made within the Vulnerability Assessments exercise of 2017;
- Member States without delay to fill the pledging gaps for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency operational activities planned for 2018 at the EU external borders;
- The European Border and Coast Guard Agency to establish in the coming months a technical and operational strategy for European Integrated Border Management and Member States to ensure the corresponding national strategies are in place.

6. RELOCATION, RESETTLEMENT, VISA AND LEGAL PATHWAYS

By the end of March 2018, all eligible applicants had been relocated from Greece to other Member States, in total 21 999 persons, including 546 unaccompanied minors to 24 countries.⁴⁷ From Italy, as of 7 May 2018, 12 691 people have been relocated (including 256 unaccompanied minors), with 31 applicants (including 26 unaccompanied minors) already accepted for relocation, waiting to be transferred. Four relocation requests for unaccompanied minors have been sent by Italy and have not yet been answered.⁴⁸ Relocation has been a success, with overall 96% of eligible persons having been relocated.

⁴⁷ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Latvia, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

⁴⁸ A request was sent to Portugal.

In September 2017, given the continuing migratory pressure on Greece and Italy, the Commission called on all Member States to consider continuing relocations on a voluntary basis, beyond the emergency relocation schemes, and committed to provide necessary financial support. The Commission encourages all Member States to engage with Greece and Italy and to make use of this option as appropriate.

The first EU **resettlement** scheme of July 2015⁴⁹ has ended. The total number of people resettled under all EU resettlement schemes since this time, including Syrians resettled from Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement, is 32 207. Member States' resettlement efforts are now focused on delivering on the pledges made under the new EU scheme. With the recent decision of the German government to pledge 10 200 new resettlement places, 20 Member States⁵⁰ have pledged more than 50 000 resettlement places, making it the largest collective commitment of the EU and its Member States on resettlement to date.⁵¹ The scheme is supported by EUR 500 million from the EU budget, and 10 Member States⁵² have already resettled 4 252 persons under this new EU resettlement scheme. This represents significant progress, with 2 397 persons have been resettled since the March progress report.

This includes people resettled after evacuation from Libya to Niger and resettlement of Syrians from Turkey under the EU Turkey Statement.⁵³ Resettlement from Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement is at a slower pace compared to the record number of Syrians resettled in the summer of 2017. Only seven Member States have contributed to resettlement from Turkey so far this year and no additional Member State has contributed since the last progress report. Since the March progress report, 837 Syrians have been resettled, taking the total, since the Statement, to 13 313.

The Commission calls on Member States to implement 50% of the pledges under the new EU scheme by October, the target set in the Commission's roadmap of December 2017. Steady resettlement for all priority regions should take place together with an urgent focus on the resettlement of persons evacuated from Libya to Niger via the Emergency Transit Mechanism.

In addition, the Commission is completing a study on the feasibility and added value of **sponsorship schemes** as a possible pathway to safe channels for admission to the EU, in order to explore possible support to Member States in further developing alternative legal pathways for protection. The study is expected to be finalised by July 2018.

The Commission has continued to support Member States to develop **legal migration pilot projects** with selected African countries. On 16 April, a call for proposals was launched under the Mobility Partnership Facility.⁵⁴ This call comes in addition to a EUR 15 million regional programme to support legal migration in the North of Africa region to be adopted under the EU Trust Fund for Africa during the next North of Africa window Operational Committee meeting.

⁴⁹ Council conclusions ("on resettling through multilateral and national schemes 20 000 persons in clear need of international protection") of 20.7.2015, document 11130/15.

⁵⁰ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

⁵¹ The Recommendation, C(2017) 6504 of 27.9.2017, called for at least 50 000 persons in need of international protection to be resettled by 31 October 2019.

⁵² Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden.

⁵³ Member States have so far resettled from over 25 third countries. The highest number of resettlements so far took place from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Uganda, Chad, and Niger.

⁵⁴ <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/multi-thematic-programmes/mobility-partnership-facility-mpf/pilot-projects-on-legal-migration-call-for-proposals-application-package/>

The first quarter of 2018 saw the start of the implementation of the Partnership (signed in December 2017) between the Commission and the economic and social partners to promote refugees' **integration** in the labour market. This included exchanges involving economic and social partners with relevant groups such as the Public Employment Service network, the European Integration Network and the European Social Fund Committee. A stocktaking exercise to measure the progress achieved will take place during the second half of 2018.

Efforts to promote the integration of third country nationals are all the more relevant in the light of the results of a Special Eurobarometer on Integration⁵⁵ (conducted at the end of October 2017). It shows that a large majority of Europeans (69%) see integration as "a necessary investment in the long-run for their country". Four respondents out of five (and a majority in all Member States) see an important role for the EU in integration of immigrants, with a particular added value for sharing best practices among Member States, promoting cooperation between all actors involved and providing them with financial support. Successfully integrating the large numbers of recognised refugees and asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of their application will require appropriate investment in the years to come.

Next steps:

- Member States should reply to all outstanding relocation requests submitted by Italy and swiftly transfer all remaining eligible applicants, with absolute priority to minors;
- Member States to consider relocation on a voluntary basis from Italy and Greece;
- Member States to swiftly resettle from priority regions, in particular persons evacuated from Libya to Niger;
- Member States to make concrete offers in view of starting discussions with selected third countries for the pilot projects on legal migration.

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This report shows that the progress made over the last year has broadly been maintained, with the range of measures put in place continuing to produce their effects. However, experience shows that migratory flows are subject to strong and sudden variations. Furthermore, the underlying structural migratory pressures from neighbouring regions towards the EU remain strong. The situation therefore remains fragile and gives no cause for complacency. The EU needs to show the necessary vigilance and preparedness to respond to any seasonal peaks or shifts in pressure, including from one route to another.

In this perspective, this report has identified areas where the current response needs to be strengthened. In particular, the Commission notes once again the need for Member States to implement the pledges they have made to support the essential work of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency at the external border. The report also highlights the challenge faced in increasing the effective rate of return. There are also areas where it is crucial to intensify efforts to consolidate progress made so far: the protection of migrants and the fight against smuggling in Libya and along the Central Mediterranean route, resettlement and implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. In this regard, the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey have proven to be swift and effective tools but their continued success will require an adequate level of funding also from Member States. The EU

⁵⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/special/surveyky/2169>

speaking with one voice in international fora remains key to achieving effective results and to support existing regional, continental and global dialogues on migration. The Commission also underlines the importance of continued regular and effective coordination of migration management, both within the EU Institutions and with Member States and partner countries.

This progress report again underlines the importance of the EU's comprehensive approach to migration management. The European Agenda on Migration rests on a set of mutually reinforcing objectives which together offer a stable long-term answer to the migration challenge. The reformed Common European Asylum System is a central part of this approach, and the importance of swiftly reaching an agreement on the reform cannot be overestimated. Together with the important focus on migration and border management in the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework,⁵⁶ the reformed Common European Asylum System is essential to ensure that the EU is well prepared to deal with any future migratory crises.

The upcoming European Council in June will hold a discussion on reaching an agreement on internal and external migration policy, to which the Commission will contribute.

⁵⁶ A Modern Budget for a Union that Protects, Empowers and Defends - The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027. COM(2018) 321 final of 2.5.2018.