



Council of the
European Union

078472/EU XXVI. GP
Eingelangt am 18/10/19

Brussels, 17 October 2019
(OR. en)

13249/19

JAI 1080
ASIM 121
FRONT 283
RELEX 938
CO EUR-PREP 34

COVER NOTE

| | |
|------------------|---|
| From: | Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director |
| date of receipt: | 17 October 2019 |
| To: | Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union |
| No. Cion doc.: | COM(2019) 481 final |
| Subject: | 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 |

Delegations will find attached document COM(2019) 481 final.

Encl.: COM(2019) 481 final



Brussels, 16.10.2019
COM(2019) 481 final

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

Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration

1. INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, the European Union faced an exceptional challenge when around two million people arrived at its shores in the space of two years, in search of refuge or a new life, often risking their lives to escape war, political oppression or poverty. Faced with the human tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean, the EU took swift and determined action to avert the loss of life at sea. However, at the time, the EU lacked a collective policy on migration management and border security.

It quickly became clear that Member States could not address the challenge of migration alone and that it was only through common European solutions that it could be addressed effectively. In May 2015, the European Commission presented a comprehensive European Agenda on Migration intended to address immediate challenges and equip the EU with the tools to better manage migration in the medium and long term in the areas of irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration. Since then, the European Agenda on Migration has guided the work of the Commission, EU agencies and Member States. This led to the development of a new EU migration infrastructure, with new laws, new systems for coordination and cooperation, and direct operational and financial support from the EU. Though there is still ground to cover, the progress made over the past few years should not be underestimated.

Key progress under the European Agenda on Migration

- **Irregular border crossings** into the EU fell to 150,000 in 2018 – the lowest figure in five years. Key to this has been innovative approaches to partnership with third countries, such as the **EU-Turkey Statement** of March 2016.
- EU action has helped to **save lives**: almost 760,000 rescues at sea and the rescue of over 23,000 migrants in the Nigerien desert since 2015.
- The EU has shown **tangible and rapid support** to Member States under most pressure:
 - **Hotspots** are now established as an operational model to quickly and efficiently bring support to key locations. Five hotspots are operational in Greece, and four in Italy;
 - **EU internal funding** for migration and borders has more than doubled since the start of the crisis to over €10 billion;
 - 34,700 people have been **relocated inside the EU** from Italy and Greece, under dedicated schemes. 1,103 people have also been relocated since summer 2018 under voluntary relocations, an exercise coordinated by the Commission since January 2019.
- The new **European Border and Coast Guard Agency** has supported Member States to protect the EU external borders, with a second phase of reform under way to boost its capacity by a standing corps of 10,000 operational staff.
- The EU has stepped up the legal pathway of **resettlement** of persons in need of international protection to Member States, with almost 63,000 people resettled since 2015.
- The EU has provided protection and support for millions of refugees in third countries:
 - The **Facility for Refugees in Turkey** is delivering on the ground: with 90 projects currently up and running in Turkey, supporting almost 1.7 million refugees on a daily basis and building new schools and hospitals;
 - The **EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis** is delivering with more than 75 projects providing health, education, livelihoods and socio-economic support to Syrian refugees, internally displaced persons and hosting communities across the region.
 - Work to help those facing appalling conditions in **Libya** has included evacuating over 4,000 people, as well as the voluntary return of over 49,000 since 2017; with the African Union-European Union-United Nations Taskforce as an innovative partnership model.

- 210 projects in 26 countries under the **EU Trust Fund for Africa** deliver concrete results, including basic support to over 5 million vulnerable people.

- Action to disrupt **smuggling** networks on all routes, including work in Niger leading to a major decrease in migrants entering Libya from the south.
- Formal readmission agreements or practical arrangements on **return and readmission** are in place with 23 countries of origin and transit, with extra support from the EU to push for effective return.

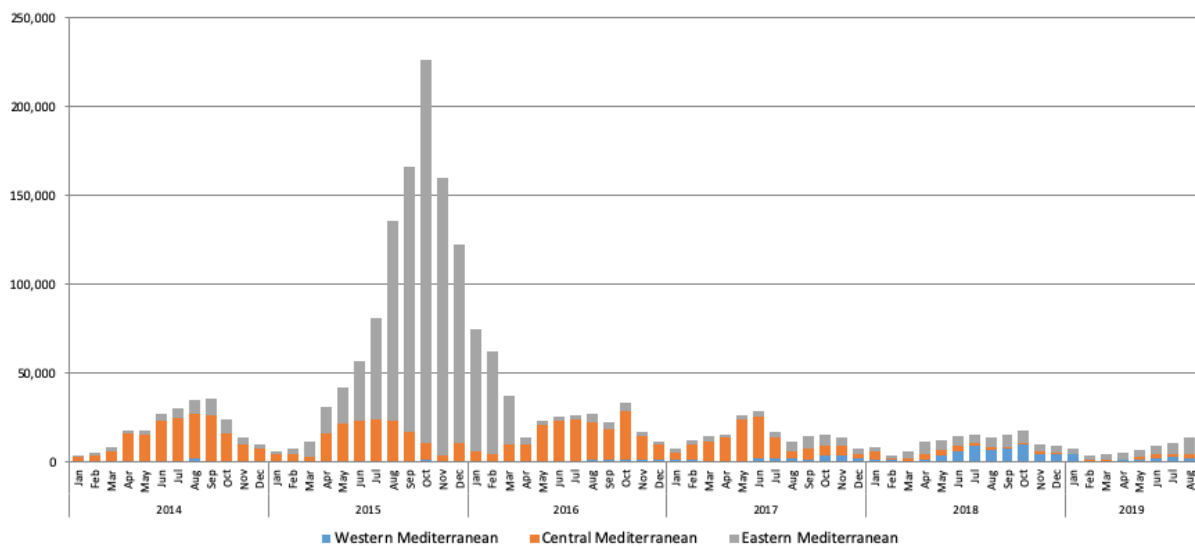
However, further work is needed. The EU has stronger systems to control its borders and can now quickly bring the necessary financial and operational support to Member States under pressure. It has new channels to support the vulnerable and provide alternative, safe and legal pathways to Europe for those in need of protection. It is cooperating more closely on migration management than ever before with partner countries outside Europe. It is on these building blocks that work must now continue to complete a sustainable system ensuring an efficient and humane migration management equal to the likely challenges of the future, not least in establishing the right framework for a Common European Asylum System that is managed responsibly and fairly. This will need further efforts across the board, and migration will remain high on the political agenda in the years to come.

This report will inform the discussions at the October 2019 European Council. It looks back at the key elements of the EU response since 2015, as well as focusing on the steps taken by the EU since the last progress report in March 2019.¹ That report identified a number of immediate key steps required for action on the Mediterranean routes in particular, as well as progress on ongoing work to consolidate the EU's toolbox on migration, borders and asylum.

2. SITUATION ALONG THE MAIN MIGRATION ROUTES

Overall, the migratory situation across all routes has returned to pre-crisis levels – with the arrivals in September 2019 around 90% lower than in September 2015. But the situation remains volatile. In the first eight months of 2019, around 70,800 irregular border crossings were detected at the EU's external borders. Moreover, as of 7 October 2019 almost 1,100 migrants have been reported dead or missing while crossing the Mediterranean.

Irregular border crossings on the three main routes



¹ COM(2019) 126 final.

Pressure on national *asylum* systems has stabilised to a monthly average of around 54,000 asylum applications in 2019 in the EU+, substantially below peak years (more than 100,000 applications were lodged per month in 2015-2016) but still higher than before the crisis.²

Eastern Mediterranean route

Recently, there has been a significant increase in arrivals to the Greek islands. From the beginning of 2019 to 6 October, more than 47,500 arrivals were recorded in **Greece** (by sea and by land), a 29% increase on the same period in 2018. Most of this increase has come through arrivals to the Aegean Islands, with an acceleration since the month of June; arrivals via the land border in 2019 are 27% lower than in the same period of 2018. The months of July, August and September 2019 had the highest monthly levels of arrivals recorded since the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect. The result has been a further deterioration of conditions on the Aegean Islands, where the situation is increasingly challenging, with as of 6 October more than 31,000 people present in hotspots designed for a maximum of around 8,000 – in spite of over 20,000 transfers to the mainland this year. In contrast, the number of people returned to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement has fallen to its lowest level since 2016. Afghans are the main nationality arriving to the Aegean islands, representing 41% of total arrivals for 2019. Turkish nationals predominate at the land border in 2019, with around three-quarters of arrivals.

Cyprus has been faced with an increase in arrivals in 2019, and currently has the highest number of arrivals per capita in the EU. As of 29 September, more than 5,700 arrivals had been reported in the government-controlled areas of Cyprus after crossing the Green Line. A much smaller number of arrivals by boat directly from Lebanon was recorded.³

Western Balkans route

After the number of irregular migrants detected on this route halved from 2017 to 2018, 2019 has seen an increase in irregular border crossings across the Western Balkan region. Between January and August, more than 6,600⁴ irregular arrivals to the EU were recorded. Afghans are the main nationality, representing over half the total. In recent months Bosnia and Herzegovina has faced weekly arrivals of up to 900 persons. Despite this increase in the numbers of irregular arrivals via the Western Balkans route, the situation remains far removed from the experience in 2015 and 2016.

Central Mediterranean route

Overall, irregular arrivals remain low on the Central Mediterranean route, despite a significant increase of arrivals to **Malta**, which has seen more than 2,800 arrivals in 2019 up to 6 October, an almost threefold increase on the same period of 2018.

Combined arrivals to Italy and Malta as of 6 October 2019 are a little under 11,000, a decrease of more than 52% compared to the same period last year. Arrivals to **Italy**, just under 8,000 as of 6 October 2019, are around two thirds lower than in the same period in 2018. Tunisia is the main country of departure towards Italy in 2019 so far, followed by Libya. The Libyan Coast Guard continues to intercept and rescue a large number of persons at sea – reporting over 7,100 in 2019 so far (the total for 2018 was around 15,000). The largest single nationality arriving in Italy in 2019 is Tunisians, with 28% of the total.

² EU+ means all 28 Member States plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

³ 71 persons as of 29 September.

⁴ <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-map/>.

Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route

While **Spain** saw the largest number of irregular arrivals to the EU in 2018, with almost 64,300 arrivals, since February 2019 monthly arrivals have been significantly reduced compared to 2018. The total number of arrivals to Spain by the beginning of October 2019 was around 23,600, a 47% decrease compared to the same period in 2018. A major factor has been the investment in EU-Morocco relations, including substantial EU financial support for border management and the fight against irregular migration. This has helped the Moroccan government to reinforce border controls and combat migrant smugglers.

So far in 2019, Morocco is the main country of origin of irregular migrants arriving in Spain, around 30% of the total, followed by Algeria, Guinea, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire. The vast majority of irregular migrants arriving in Spain departed from Morocco, although there has been a small recent rise from Algeria.

Asylum situation

In the first nine months of 2019, more than 500,000 applications were lodged in the EU+ (a slight increase compared to almost 497,000 in the same period of 2018). The main receiving countries in 2019 so far are Germany, France, Spain, Greece and the United Kingdom, representing more than 72% of the total. In 2018, the main countries of origin were Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and so far in 2019 they are Afghanistan, Syria and Venezuela. In the first half of 2019, 96,800 positive decisions were issued in the EU+.⁵ The recognition rate for first-instance decisions issued between February and July 2019 was 34%.⁶

Intrinsic to the significant number of claims are the applications lodged as a result of secondary movements, which entail that people who have been recorded in one Member State are then found making a claim in another. Although the assessment of secondary movements relies currently mainly on data that looks exclusively at applications instead of persons – and one person could have made claims in several Member States – over 280,000 of these foreign hits were registered in the Eurodac database within the first nine months of 2019. In fact, although the main countries of first entry such as Italy and Greece have the largest number of existing records, France and Germany remain the main destination countries of secondary movements with the largest number of hits registered.

3. EU SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES AND WORK ALONG THE KEY ROUTES

• Eastern Mediterranean route

The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey

Turkey is a key partner for the EU, including for the management of migration in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since March 2016, the EU-Turkey Statement has played a crucial role in ensuring that irregular migration flows in the Eastern Mediterranean are addressed effectively and jointly by the EU and Turkey. The Statement has continued to deliver concrete results in reducing irregular and dangerous crossings, and the number of lives lost in the Aegean Sea. Even if arrivals to Greece by sea and by land in the second part of 2019 have increased, they are not comparable to the number of arrivals seen in 2015. Equally important, the Statement has brought support on a major scale to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, and the safe resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to Europe.

⁵ Source: Eurostat.

⁶ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>.

Turkey is hosting the largest refugee population in the world – around 4 million people⁷ – and the EU’s assistance provides vital support to people in need via the €6 billion **Facility for Refugees in Turkey**. EU funds are currently supporting 90 ongoing projects, with 30 additional projects starting in 2020. The Facility has an innovative approach, with Member States and Turkey fully involved in the targeting of projects, and with fast-track procedures to accelerate delivery.⁸ Many projects will continue to deliver support until 2024-25. The Facility has swiftly responded to essential needs, and it is clear that many of those needs will remain in the near future.

The Facility for Refugees in Turkey: key actions under way

- Almost 1.7 million Syrians receiving support for basic daily needs;
- More than half a million refugee children supported to attend school;
- 4,500 Turkish language teachers employed to give language training to over 250,000 children;
- A vaccination programme continuing which has meant 650,000 refugee infants vaccinated so far;
- Almost 40,000 children provided with transport to get to school;
- Around 1.5 million pre-natal consultations already delivered;
- Around 8.1 million primary healthcare consultations already delivered;
- Construction of 180 schools and provision of 179 migrant health centres under way.

To date, 97% of the funds in the Facility have been allocated (allocation of the full €6 billion is expected by the end of 2019), with total disbursements so far close to €3 billion.⁹ Projects to start early in 2020 will include continued support to access to healthcare and education for refugees, infrastructure for waste and water management, and helping labour market integration and employment for refugees.

Turkey is today facing **increasing migration pressure**, as instability in the wider region remains. The number of irregular migrants apprehended by the Turkish authorities in 2019 so far is close to 270,000.¹⁰ In particular, there has been a rise in the number of Afghan nationals arriving irregularly and being apprehended in Turkey. Turkey announced in May 2019 that it intended to return around 100,000 Afghan nationals to their home country until the end of the year, and has engaged with the Afghan government to agree on the numbers and frequency of return. The challenge of hosting Syrian refugees in a situation of protracted displacement in Turkey would be a challenge to any country and deserves the necessary support.

Addressing migratory trends along the Eastern route

Since 2016, the EU has supported political dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to find durable solutions for Afghan refugees in host countries. This is complemented by financial assistance to the amount of €300 million to help Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq.¹¹ The aim is to support migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees, as well as host communities, and to help public authorities with migration management and sustainable reintegration of returnees. For example, in Afghanistan, support

⁷ According to UNHCR, Turkey hosts more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees, as well as some 360,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from countries other than Syria, mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran (<http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2544?y=2019#year>).

⁸ In its report on the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the European Court of Auditors found that, in a challenging context, the Facility rapidly mobilised funds, which were contracted up to five times faster than traditional assistance in Turkey under the Instrument for Pre-Accession.

⁹ €5.8 billion have been programmed so far (€2.23 billion in humanitarian assistance and €3.57 billion in non-humanitarian assistance), of which €4.2 billion has been contracted and €2.57 billion disbursed.

¹⁰ According to the Turkish Directorate-General for Migration Management.

¹¹ Special Measures on Migration and displacement in Asia and the Middle East adopted in 2016 and 2017.

so far has helped almost 10,000 households covering 70,000 individuals, with community development, vocational training, and boosting small enterprises. Support is also provided to Afghan nationals inside Iran and Pakistan, for example with 45,000 Afghan refugees now accessing the health insurance system in Iran.

Since the summer of 2018, the EU has extended its post-arrival assistance under the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on Migration beyond returnees from the EU to include Afghan nationals returned by Turkey. Since then, the EU has assisted more than 15,000 returnees from Turkey to Afghanistan, providing counselling, medical assistance, temporary accommodation, cash assistance and onward transportation to their final destination.

Under the Statement, Turkey is committed to prevent an increase in *irregular migration flows* on new sea or land routes, which has proved challenging, as indicated by recent increased arrivals in Greece and Cyprus, and previously at the land border with Bulgaria and Greece.

Returns of all new irregular migrants from Greece to Turkey under the Statement is a continuous challenge. Greece has managed to return only 1,908 migrants under the Statement, with the pace slowing and around 100 returns this year. This is a major obstacle to progress, also linked to the lengthy asylum procedures currently in place in Greece. The Commission is continuing its efforts to support both resettlements and an acceleration in returns. An improvement in asylum requests processing, on both the mainland and the islands, would significantly contribute to accelerating returns.

Resettlement of Syrian refugees to EU Member States under the Statement has been a clear success, with over 25,000 persons in need of international protection resettled since April 2016 to 18 Member States. These efforts should be maintained and the Commission will continue providing its support. The Commission has called for the activation of the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme¹² with Turkey, which would boost the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and further demonstrate the EU's commitment to it.

The EU-Turkey Statement also included a wide range of other key issues in EU-Turkey relations. One area which has seen further developments is *visa liberalisation*. One benchmark, related to document security, has been completed since the March report, with six now remaining out of the total of 72 benchmarks. Turkey set out in September 2019 a renewed effort to address these benchmarks. The Commission continues to encourage Turkey's efforts to complete the delivery of all the outstanding benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap as soon as possible.

The full and sustained implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement requires continuous efforts and political determination from all sides. Recent political contacts have underlined that the Commission will continue to drive this work forward and address next steps and challenges where they arise.¹³ As well as the support for the refugees in Turkey, the EU assists Turkey through regular pre-accession assistance with the aim to further increase the authorities' capacity to manage irregular migration into Turkey and onwards to the EU. This includes support for voluntary return from Turkey and reintegration programmes and integrated border management assistance. Discussions between the Commission and Turkey are now under way to agree further direct support to migration management this year.

¹² The Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme is a further resettlement scheme envisaged under the EU-Turkey Statement. The Standard Operating Procedures for the scheme were endorsed by both Turkey and the EU Member States in 2017. According to the EU-Turkey Statement, the scheme will be activated once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU end or at least have been substantially and sustainably reduced.

¹³ For example, the visit by Commissioner Avramopoulos and German Minister of the Interior Seehofer to Turkey and Greece on 3 and 4 October 2019.

The EU has been at the forefront of the humanitarian response to the needs caused by the Syria crisis, with humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region amounting to €1.6 billion between 2014 and 2019. In 2019 alone, the EU allocated €170 million to providing life-saving multi-sectoral assistance to vulnerable people inside Syria, wherever they are. In 2018, EU humanitarian assistance reached some 9 million beneficiaries inside Syria.

The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis

The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis brings together contributions from 22 Member States, Turkey and the EU budget to support to host communities, refugees and internally displaced persons in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. Since its creation in 2014, it has evolved from providing early recovery assistance addressing basic needs to supporting host countries with strengthening national systems and infrastructure, as well as the self-reliance and resilience of refugees. Programmes totalling more than €1.6 billion in over 75 projects are focused on areas including education, livelihoods, health, and socio-economic support. In June 2019, a further €100 million package was agreed focused on higher education, resilience and protection in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

A series of programmes to support refugees and host communities in *Jordan* and *Lebanon* totals almost €4 billion since the start of the Syria crisis in 2011. In 2018, results include access to basic education for almost 290,000 refugee children in Jordan and Lebanon, access to health services in Lebanon for 375,000 persons, and almost 143,000 refugees receiving monthly transfers to cover their basic needs in Jordan.

In March 2019 the EU hosted a third conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region”. The international community and refugee hosting countries reaffirmed their commitment to support the millions affected by the conflict and the countries and communities hosting them, including Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. The international community pledged more than €6.2 billion for 2019 (92% of this amount has already been contributed), and a further €2.1 billion for 2020 and beyond. More than 80% of these pledges were made by the EU and its Member States. International financial institutions and donors also announced €18.5 billion in loans for 2019 and beyond.

Support to Greece and Cyprus

Previous progress reports emphasised the urgent need for further progress in *Greece*. The increased arrivals since the summer have again underlined the need for action, most obviously in terms of improving reception conditions in the Greek islands, and substantially increasing the pace of returns from Greece under the EU-Turkey Statement. First steps have been taken with new national strategies for the reception of migrants and for unaccompanied minors, and the government has also committed to review aspects of the legal framework for asylum with the aim of faster processing and increased returns. However, the challenging conditions caused by the increase in arrivals and the onset of winter highlight the need for urgent action. The Commission and the relevant EU agencies are providing every possible support to Greece for accelerating the necessary work.

EU funding has continued to help Greece, with over €2.2 billion in support since 2015.¹⁴ This includes €8 million provided in September 2019 to two projects for the International Organisation for Migration to improve protection and reception conditions for unaccompanied minors, as well as enhancing safety in the mainland sites. During 2019, the Emergency

¹⁴ Support from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Emergency Support Instrument. The activation of the Emergency Support Instrument, which provided support to address the humanitarian needs of migrants and refugees stranded in Greece, ended in March 2019. Over three years, a total of over €643 million was provided. The funding of some activities, such as specific sites for unaccompanied minors and health care have been handed over to the Greek authorities.

Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) programme, implemented by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), continued to provide rental accommodation to over 25,000 asylum seekers and refugees, as well as monthly cash allowances to over 72,000 people. The EU has also funded the work of the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund to provide on-site support in reception facilities on the mainland.¹⁵ EU agencies play a major role, but the work of both the European Asylum Support Office and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency relies on the provision of experts from Member States. Shortfalls in the number of experts pledged has meant a persistent shortage on the ground, reducing the effectiveness of operations. In addition, the Commission is supporting a number of ongoing programmes managed by the Greek authorities that aim to bridge existing gaps in legal aid, medical care and interpretation, both on the islands and on the mainland.

EU funding to *Cyprus* since 2014 has reached almost €100 million,¹⁶ including over €4 million in emergency assistance. Member State experts are also deployed, and the increased pressure on Cyprus calls for these pledges to be increased. In cooperation with the EU, Cyprus has developed a comprehensive action plan to effectively manage migration, the implementation of which is ongoing with the financial and operational support of the Commission and the EU agencies.

The Commission continues to support activities that could lead to tangible solidarity also in the Eastern Mediterranean. Requests for assistance through relocation from Cyprus and Greece require a response from Member States in a timely manner. The Commission will continue to support these efforts as necessary, including through financial support from the EU budget that can be made available to Member States that relocate voluntarily.¹⁷

- **Western Balkans route**

Since the beginning of the crisis in 2015, more than €141 million of EU assistance has been provided in support of the Western Balkans to directly address the refugee and migration crisis.¹⁸ Support has also come in the form of expertise from EU Agencies and Member States, with a strong focus on transposing EU norms and standards into the national migration policy and legal frameworks. 48 guest border guards have been deployed in Serbia and 146 in North Macedonia. While this has helped to build stronger migration, asylum and border management systems, national administrative capacities continue to remain limited and often struggle to meet the challenge of new migratory flows.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has faced a significant increase of arrivals. Estimates suggest that since January 2018, over 45,000 refugees and migrants have entered the country. This has created a serious challenge, with some 3,300 accommodated in official centres at present. Since 2018, the Commission has been working with humanitarian partners and the authorities to cover the basic needs of refugees and migrants and to help the country strengthen its migration management capacity, allocating €34 million in additional EU funding. This is supporting temporary reception centres, and access to food, basic services and protection for the most vulnerable, with over 3,500 people benefitting.

¹⁵ Including access to healthcare and non-formal education, dedicated safe zones for unaccompanied minors, as well as training for operational staff.

¹⁶ Nearly €40 million under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (for example on reception) and nearly €52 million under the Internal Security Fund to support visa policy, border control, and police cooperation.

¹⁷ Member States of relocation could receive a lump sum of €6,000 per applicant, applying the amended Article 18 of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund Regulation 516/2014.

¹⁸ In addition, since 2007, €216.1 million has been provided to support the Western Balkans partners on migration under regular financial assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession.

As winter arrives, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina need to swiftly identify suitable accommodation facilities for the refugees and migrants stranded in the country. The EU is ready to assist in financing these additional facilities as long as they respect the internationally recognised standards, and in supporting the most affected local communities.

- **Central Mediterranean route**

Libya and the Emergency Transit Mechanisms

The situation in **Libya** remains a major concern. EU action to protect Libyan internally displaced persons, refugees and migrants has been framed by the work of the African Union-European Union-United Nations Taskforce. After violent conflict erupted in and around Tripoli in April 2019, the Taskforce contributed to speeding up the evacuation of refugees and migrants from detention centres near the frontline and where possible, to help them find safety outside Libya.

The conflict in and around Tripoli led to hundreds of civilian deaths and injuries and over 150,000 were forced from their homes. Since then, a durable ceasefire has not been secured and despite steps towards a political settlement, the situation remains volatile.

The conflict has had a particular impact on migrants and refugees, and in particular on almost 3,300 people in detention facilities in conflict-affected areas. One of these centres, the Tajoura detention centre, was hit by air strikes, causing over 50 deaths. When the 482 remaining refugees and migrants were released, they sought refuge in the **UNHCR Gathering and Departure Facility** in Tripoli. Due to the increased arrivals, the Facility exceeds its normal capacity, and transfers of substantial numbers of vulnerable persons from detention centres to the Facility have not been possible.

The EU's extensive cooperation programmes in Libya (of in total €467 million) are continuing despite the security situation, and new programmes have been adopted in July by the EU Trust Fund for Africa.¹⁹ EU **support to vulnerable persons** affected by the conflict has been accelerated. This includes direct emergency assistance as well as protection such as medical assistance or psycho-social aid, including at Libyan disembarkation points and detention centres when access is possible. Around 185,000 non-food items and hygiene kits as well as medical assistance have been provided to refugees and vulnerable migrants as emergency assistance. At the end of September, a core team of the EU integrated border management assistance mission in Libya, which had continued operations from Tunis, was also able to return to Tripoli.

Evacuation from Libya has been a crucial lifeline. Since September 2017, over 4,000 people have been evacuated, of which around 3,000 to UNHCR's EU-funded **Emergency Transit Mechanism** (ETM) in Niger. These evacuations to the ETM have also been complemented by direct evacuations to Italy (808) and to the Emergency Transit Centre in Romania (303). Of the people evacuated to Niger, 1,856 persons have been resettled so far.²⁰ The Niger facility is now being complemented by a new ETM in Rwanda, and Rwanda has so far agreed to host a maximum of 500 people at any given time. Almost 200 people have been evacuated to Rwanda in recent weeks, with more evacuations planned in the coming months. A new EU support package for the Rwanda ETM is now being finalised.

At the same time, the Niger authorities have reduced the ceiling to the operations of the ETM to its previous level, and as a result, it may not be able to take further evacuations for the rest

¹⁹ These programmes will reinforce ongoing actions to protect and assist refugees and vulnerable migrants especially in Libya, to improve the living conditions and resilience of Libyans and to foster economic opportunities, labour migration and mobility in North African countries.

²⁰ Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States have all resettled from Libya and the Emergency Transit Mechanism.

of this year. A major reason for this move is the slow pace of resettlements. It is therefore of paramount importance that Member States increase in scale and accelerate the pace of resettlements from the ETMs.

Another key measure is EU cooperation on *voluntary return*. Joint action with the International Organisation for Migration since November 2015 has substantially contributed to the return of more than 49,000 migrants from Libya,²¹ and provided post-arrival and reintegration assistance for over 76,000 returnees in their countries of origin. This work has also supported the rescue of over 23,000 migrants in the Nigerien desert.

To address these ongoing challenges the African Union-European Union-United Nations Taskforce to address the migrant and refugee situation in Libya met at political level in the margins of the UN General Assembly, and identified a number of common priorities for the next steps.²² These include support for the displaced in Libya and for the registration efforts of the International Organisation for Migration, as well as developing further evacuation options and keeping up the pressure to end the current system of arbitrary detention. Other areas included enhanced reintegration measures and communication to prevent hazardous journeys.

Support to Italy and Malta

Since 2014, *Italy* has been supported by the EU with nearly €1 billion funding for asylum, migration, security and border management.²³ The EU has allocated €0.7 million emergency assistance to the Italian Ministry of Interior and UNHCR in July 2019 to support the humanitarian evacuation of approximately 450 persons from Libya and Niger to Italy. Another recent example is a €30 million project in five Italian regions to address the exploitation of migrant labour in agriculture and to help the integration of migrants into the regular labour market. Support has also come through expertise from EU agencies and Member States with in total 144 experts deployed by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2019 and 180 by the European Asylum Support Office. This expertise remains an essential part of the EU contribution to migration management and preparedness in the Central Mediterranean and Member States need to maintain the required level of deployment.

Financial support to *Malta* has topped €105 million since 2014.²⁴ The most significant EU support to Malta has been in facilitating the relocation of disembarked migrants and refugees, and close to €0.5 million in emergency assistance has been provided to the International Organisation for Migration to help Malta with the relocation of up to 500 people.

Temporary arrangements on disembarkation

The Commission's progress report in March highlighted the need to find a more structured temporary solution on disembarkation after search and rescue operations.

Disembarkation events, including by NGO vessels, in the Central Mediterranean clearly demonstrated the need to find European solutions for a sustainable approach to migration management, based on solidarity, common responsibility and respect of fundamental rights. Upon requests from Member States, the Commission has coordinated ad hoc relocation

²¹ Total voluntary returns from Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Djibouti add up to over 61,000.

²² Joint press release at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/67915/joint-press-release-meeting-joint-au-eu-un-taskforce-address-migrant-and-refugee-situation_en.

²³ Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund, including €275 million in emergency assistance.

²⁴ This amount includes an allocation of €21 million under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and €84 million under the Internal Security Fund National Programmes for the period 2014-2020.

exercises throughout the year.²⁵ This active coordination by the Commission of post disembarkation exercises, has helped also to facilitate disembarkation. These efforts built on the solidarity efforts of the receiving Member States,²⁶ which participated voluntarily in these exercises, but also on the support of EU agencies, in particular the European Asylum Support Office, under the coordination of the Commission. EU funding has also helped support Member States with ad hoc disembarkations and the putting in place of the appropriate procedures for the processing and the relocation of migrants.

In parallel, the Commission has been actively encouraging and supporting the development of temporary arrangements for disembarkation, pending the agreement on a long term sustainable system in the reform of the European asylum system. Building on discussions held among Member States, a Council Presidency working paper was presented in June on guidelines on temporary arrangements for disembarkation. A series of discussions in Helsinki and Paris in July paved the way for a ministerial meeting in Malta on 23 September. This brought together Ministers from Italy, France, Malta and Germany in the presence of the Finnish Presidency and the Commission, and set out the contours of a predictable and structural set of arrangements. This was subsequently discussed with all Member States at the Home Affairs Council on 8 October, where the Commission encouraged as many Member States as possible to subscribe to this solidarity effort. Following constructive discussions amongst ministers, a technical discussion was organised by the Commission with those Member States participating in relocation in order to discuss existing practices and workflows applied to voluntary relocation exercises coordinated by the Commission and supported by EU agencies. The Commission remains committed to work with Member States towards a sustainable solution for disembarkation following search and rescue in the Mediterranean.

Such temporary arrangements demonstrate that Member States are willing to engage in tangible solidarity and could serve as an inspiration for addressing flows in other parts of the Mediterranean.

- **Western Mediterranean route**

Support to Morocco

Morocco has been facing heavy migration pressure in recent years, as a country of transit and also destination. To help it address the situation, the EU's cooperation portfolio on migration now amounts to €238 million, including support from the EU Trust Fund for Africa. This support, in close cooperation with Spain, has made a major contribution to the reduction in arrivals via the Western Mediterranean, addressing irregular migration and dismantling criminal networks, as well as supporting the vulnerable. The focus of EU support has been to strengthen Morocco's capacity to manage flows within and from its territory, for example through Morocco's National Strategy on Migration and Asylum, backed up with institutional support on migration management, capacity building and border management. Vulnerable migrants and refugees have been provided with protection and access to legal assistance, with a particular focus on the rights of unaccompanied minors; voluntary return and reintegration has also been funded. Morocco is also an important partner in the development of legal migration, working on pilot schemes where training of skilled labour in Morocco can be linked to labour needs in Member States. The experience of the programmes now under way

²⁵ As of 7 October, in the 14 disembarkation events coordinated by the Commission, participating Member States pledged to redistribute 1,187 migrants, of which 368 have already been relocated.

²⁶ Since 2018, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Spain, have participated in at least one of the ad hoc relocation exercises. Norway also participated.

will feed into the development of new programmes as part of a wider relationship on migration issues over the long term.

As an important step in the relaunch of relations between Morocco and the EU, the 14th EU-Morocco Association Council in June included mobility and migration as a key area for future cooperation. In addition, the improved bilateral climate has resulted in the resumption of the dialogue on migration and mobility within the framework of the Mobility Partnership. This dialogue has been backed up by a series of recent high level meetings and expert contacts in both Brussels and Morocco.

Support to Spain

Spain is one of the main beneficiaries of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund national programmes, with a total allocation of €737 million for 2014-2020. Funding priorities include the strengthening of the Asylum Office and the reception system, the integration of non-nationals, the deployment of reinforced equipment and forces at borders, and return. In addition, emergency support of more than €42 million has been awarded since 2018 to help the national authorities manage the migration flow on the Southern coast, including with new local registration centres, and the reinforcement of the Guardia Civil and the police, as well as to provide support to migrants upon their arrival. In addition, 240 experts have been deployed by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2019.

- **Addressing the root causes of irregular migration**

In the medium to long term, it is essential to work with partner countries on resilience and stability, and on creating jobs and opportunities for both migrants and refugees as well as for host communities.

In ***North Africa***, programmes have sought to develop both social infrastructure and economic opportunities. For example, two community stabilisation programmes in more than 50 municipalities in Libya have helped to improve the access of more than 1.7 million people to basic services, and helped 2,500 young entrepreneurs with job training programmes. In Tunisia, the EU has invested over €200 million in programmes supporting job creation and economic development, with over 60,000 young people benefitting from micro-credit loans to support small business development. EU support through bilateral cooperation with Morocco has reached €1 billion since 2014, supporting job creation and the business environment.²⁷

In the ***Horn of Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad***, the focus is on supporting economic and employment opportunities, as well as resilience of communities, governance and improved migration management. In the Sahel and Lake Chad window, there has been special attention for smuggling and security. In the Horn, programmes have in many cases targeted the large populations of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region; new programmes were approved in May 2019, including support to health and education in South Sudan, and support to vulnerable communities and displaced populations in Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Great Lakes region.

One example of action in Asia is additional €27 million programme to support ***Afghanistan*** to create economic opportunities in cities with a high influx of displaced people.

The EU's ***External Investment Plan*** will extend further support to livelihoods and economies in Sub-Saharan Africa and the EU Neighbourhood, thus helping also to tackle the root causes of irregular migration. To date, more than €4 billion has been approved under the Plan (€1.54

²⁷ Morocco's ranking in the World Bank's "doing business index" improved from 128th in 2010 to 60th in 2018.

billion for 28 guarantee programmes and €2.6 billion for 121 approved blending projects²⁸). The guarantees should unlock up to €17.5 billion in investment, covering areas such as access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises, energy and connectivity, cities, agriculture, and digital. Approved blending projects are expected to unlock nearly €24 billion, and by 2020 the Plan is expected to meet its objective to leverage total investments of more than €44 billion.

The EU Trust Fund for Africa

Since its establishment in 2015, the Trust Fund has supported life-saving evacuations, improved migration management, helped tackle smuggling networks and addressed the root causes of irregular migration in 26 African countries. The Fund has totalled some €4.5 billion, some €4 billion from EU funds and €528 million from Member States, Switzerland and Norway. The Trust Fund has proved to be a flexible tool which has enabled a swift response to emerging needs, with 210 programmes adopted so far.

Key actions to date supported by the Trust Fund include the following:

- Helping people to leave Libya, contributing to around 49,000 assisted voluntary returns and over 4,000 evacuations so far;
- Support to migration management efforts of Libya, Morocco and Tunisia in their efforts to deal with irregular migration, fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling;
- In The Gambia, 25,000 persons benefit from a programme focusing on areas such as social cohesion and employment in renewable energy, eco-tourism and modern farming;
- A programme in Côte d'Ivoire, under discussion with the authorities, will assist with modernising the civil registry system and will contribute to put in place a national secure civil registry system;
- In the Horn of Africa, support has focused on providing food security – with more than 300,000 people benefitting from support to maintain livestock – and help to employment, with the professional skills of over 30,000 people developed through training;
- A programme in South Sudan is providing more than 28,000 primary school teachers in almost 2,500 schools with salary supplements that encourage the teachers to remain in service and increase their attendance, thus helping to keep children in school.

The Trust Fund has therefore been able to respond to many essential needs. Funds in all three programme windows (North Africa, Horn of Africa, Sahel and Lake Chad) will start to be exhausted at the end of this year. For these crucial programmes to continue, it will therefore be essential to replenish the Trust Fund for 2020. This will necessarily include contributions from Member States and the Commission will therefore identify precise needs.

• **EU efforts assisting refugees and migrants worldwide**

Support to refugees, migrants and the internally displaced is one of the core results of the EU humanitarian and development action worldwide. These provide immediate help to the people concerned, offer solidarity with the efforts of host countries, and also bring more stability to migratory movements. As well as the work in Turkey, there are many examples worldwide where the EU is bringing urgent and direct help to refugees.

²⁸ The *guarantees* aim to leverage additional financing, in particular from the private sector, as they reduce the risk for private investment and absorb part of potential losses incurred by financiers and investors. *Blending* is the joining of grant money with other more commercial sources of financing.

The crisis in *Venezuela* has triggered a huge displacement, with over 4 million people leaving the country so far. The EU has mobilised nearly €150 million both inside and outside Venezuela. In the region, emergency relief has benefited more than 1.3 million people, with extra support to the capacities of host countries and for education. A Conference in Brussels in October 2019 will be an opportunity for the international community to bring further support to countries in the region hosting Venezuelan refugees.²⁹

The *Horn of Africa* hosts a fifth of the world's refugees and displaced populations, and has been a focus of EU support in recent years. New projects this year include support to refugees in Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, as well as over €67 million in direct humanitarian support.

August 2019 has marked the second anniversary of the massive influx of *Rohingya* refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The almost one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are entirely reliant on international assistance. Since 2017 EU funding to meet this crisis has reached almost €140 million, focused on the essential needs of refugees and their host communities, increasingly taking a development approach, and also taking into account the specific risks of natural disasters.

4. FIGHT AGAINST SMUGGLING, IMPROVING RETURN AND READMISSION

- **Fighting migrant smuggling**

The implementation of the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling and the complementary set of operational measures adopted by the Council in December 2018 have continued to have an impact against migrant smuggling both inside the EU and beyond.³⁰

Europol's *European Migrant Smuggling Centre* now provides an effective hub for action. Its main task is supporting police and border authorities to coordinate highly complex cross-border anti-smuggling operations. It was complemented in July 2019 with a Joint Liaison Task Force on Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings, so liaison officers from EU Member States can work even closer on common investigations. During the first 9 months of 2019, the Centre supported 7 Joint and Common Action Days, leading to 474 arrests, as well as 75 priority criminal cases. Common training curricula are also being developed by the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training. On 1 October 2019, the second meeting between the Commission's services and civil society organisations took place to discuss the implementation of the EU legislation on migrant smuggling on the ground.³¹

Close *cooperation with third countries* remains key to prevent migrant smuggling. One step in this respect are information and awareness raising campaigns, so far supported with over €27 million and with a new programme under way.³² Diaspora communities such as the Senegalese diaspora in several EU Member States have been engaged in this work.³³ A dedicated Working Group has been set up on information and awareness-raising campaigns under the European Migration Network, where Member States, EU institutions and International Organisations exchange best practices and ensure closer coordination.

²⁹ Jointly organised by the EU, the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration on 28-29 October.

³⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/06/migrant-smuggling-council-approves-a-set-of-measures-to-fight-smuggling-networks/>

³¹ As a follow up to the evaluation of the Facilitators Package (SWD(2017)120), the Commission committed to engage with relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the legislation, in particular as regards non criminalisation of humanitarian assistance to migrants.

³² The call for proposals can be found at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/amif-2019-ag-call-04>.

³³ Belgium, Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal.

This work is complemented by law enforcement cooperation to tackle the networks engaged in migrant smuggling through *Common Operational Partnerships*. In Niger, a Joint Investigation Team bringing together Nigerien, French and Spanish authorities has led so far to 202 judicial cases. Senegal and Guinea will shortly launch two projects, covering both migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. In Senegal, the focus is on cooperation between ministries and agencies. In Guinea, the project will also pay attention to border management and travel documents. Another key measure is EU cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. A regional programme was recently launched under the EU Trust Fund for Africa to contribute to dismantling criminal networks operating in North Africa and involved in both migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Tackling migrant smuggling is also a key part of the work of *Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations*, such as Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR Med) and the EU integrated border management assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya). The Crime Information Cell within Operation Sophia proved particularly useful in developing a joint operational awareness between the EU Agencies involved and Operation Sophia itself. While the further extension of the Operation's mandate until 31 March 2020 is to be welcomed, the ongoing temporary suspension of the deployment of its naval assets since March 2019 has affected the Operation's ability to fulfil its mandate in all its aspects. EUBAM Libya is working with Libya's judicial system and coordination mechanisms, targeting in particular the need to have control of its borders to disrupt organised criminal networks, including of migrant smugglers.

• **Return and Readmission**

According to data reported to Eurostat, 478,155 persons illegally staying in the EU were ordered to leave in 2018, and 170,380 were effectively returned to a third country. This resulted in a return rate of 36% for 2018, a slight reduction from 2017 (return rate of 37%).³⁴ ³⁵ Some countries whose nationals receive a substantial number of return decisions³⁶ have very low return rates, such as 1.7 % for Mali and 2.8% for Guinea.

More work needed on return and readmission

The 23 *readmission agreements and arrangements in force*³⁷ – supported by EU-funded case management tools, capacity building projects for third countries and exchanges of liaison officers – bring benefits in terms of a better level of cooperation and more effective operational flows, and further agreements and arrangements are being explored as part of developing relations with partners. However, results remain disappointing in terms of the number of persons returned.

Increasing returns requires additional efforts both in Member States and with third countries. In the first place, *Member States' return systems* need to be geared to ensure that those receiving return decisions are available for effective return. Key measures include actively monitoring the situation of third-country nationals during the whole return procedure and their compliance with the obligation to return, to prevent absconding and secondary movements;

³⁴ The number of returns to Western Balkan countries, who in general have very good return rates, has been decreasing in the total. The rate of return excluding the Western Balkans saw an increase, from 29 % in 2017 to 32% in 2018.

³⁵ Average return rates among Member States vary significantly. This variation does not necessarily reflect the effectiveness of return systems, but may also be due to different approaches in collecting and processing data. Aside from internal factors, the migration mix can have a significant influence given the diverse levels of cooperation also on return and readmission between third countries of origin.

³⁶ The third countries with the highest number of nationals (over 10,000 per year) who were issued a return decision remained largely the same in 2018: Morocco, Ukraine, Albania, Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Guinea, Mali, Tunisia, India and Nigeria.

³⁷ The negotiation of a 24th with Belarus has been concluded but its signature has not yet taken place.

and reinforcing help to cooperative third-country nationals willing to depart voluntarily. It also requires completion of negotiations on the recast Return Directive³⁸ which have advanced, and the Council adopted a partial general approach on 7 June 2019. The European Parliament did not adopt a position on this file during the 2014-2019 term. Pending the approval of this recast, however, Member States may already enhance their performances on return and readmission by following up on the Renewed Action Plan on Return presented by the Commission in 2017.³⁹

Then Member States should use the readmission instruments and all tools put in place to the full. The Commission will continue to support Member States in the *implementation of the return* agreements and pursue negotiations for further instruments, whenever acting at EU level brings added value to the process.

Both the negotiation and implementation of readmission instruments rely on a strong and consistent message that the EU and its Member States have the expectation of cooperation by the third country concerned. This can mean the application of more *broad policy leverage*. In this respect, the revised EU Visa Code, in force from February 2020, will be one important additional tool, providing the EU the possibility to adopt restrictive visa measures for third countries which do not cooperate sufficiently on readmission. Additional incentives and leverages should be sought also in other policy areas, on a case by case approach.

It will also be crucial to ensure full operationalisation of the *European Border and Coast Guard Agency's* expanded mandate in the area of return.⁴⁰ Along with the substantial reinforcement of the Agency, strengthening its return capacities to further increase the support to Member States activities, with a pool of monitors, escorts and return specialists, should in the coming years help to make EU return policy more effective. This will also be one of the roles of the new European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers.⁴¹

5. REINFORCED EXTERNAL BORDER MANAGEMENT

Since 2016, the Commission, together with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Member States, has continued work on the implementation of the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard in view of pursuing a *European integrated border management* as a shared responsibility between the Agency and the national authorities. One important aspect has been the new Agency's work in ensuring that Union standards for border management are guaranteed at all external borders, including through the creation of a complaints mechanism handled by an independent Fundamental Rights Officer.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency is today at the core of the EU's work to support Member States in protecting the external borders. In terms of practical response, a *rapid reaction pool* composed of 1,500 border guards and other relevant staff members was set up along with a rapid reaction equipment pool for deployment in case of an emergency at the external borders of any Member State. The Agency has also continued providing operational assistance to Member States along the main migratory routes both at external maritime and land borders, including on return. The overall deployment as of mid-October

³⁸ COM(2018) 634 final.

³⁹ COM(2017) 200 final.

⁴⁰ The mandate allows the Agency to support Member States at all stages of the return process, including for example by identifying non-EU nationals without the no right to stay, acquiring valid travel documents from third countries and providing support for voluntary departure and reintegration in the country of origin.

⁴¹ Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 which entered into force on 24 August 2019. This establishes a coordination mechanism at EU level through a Steering Board and an Information Exchange Platform. It also provides for the possibility for common actions and capacity building activities to be financed through EU funds.

2019 included close to 1,400 border guards and other experts as well as equipment.⁴² In addition, since 2016, the Agency also uses space-based observations through the Copernicus Programme to support the surveillance of EU borders.

In addition, the Agency is tasked with carrying out yearly *vulnerability assessments* to assess the capacity and readiness of the Member States to face threats and challenges at the external borders. This includes an assessment of the equipment, infrastructure, budget and financial resources of Member States as well as their contingency plans to address possible crises at the external borders. The Agency issues recommendations regarding Member States' border control capacity. To that end the Agency has completed such assessments for all Member States in three annual cycles in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and recommended concrete measures on the vulnerabilities identified in a total of 131 instances requiring the Member States concerned to take the appropriate actions such as increasing their respective capacities or adapting the deployment of human resources and equipment, as well as their use in order to mitigate those vulnerabilities. The Agency follows up closely the implementation of these recommendations.

Another key aspect of the 2016 Regulation's has been to enable processing of *personal data* collected by the Agency for the purpose of risk analysis and for transmission to the EU agencies and the Member States.⁴³ Finally, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency has also been providing support to third countries and contributing to the referral of third country nationals in need of international protection, while ensuring the internal security of the EU.

The Commission has negotiated *status agreements* with five Western Balkan countries to enable deployments with executive powers on their territory. The agreement with Albania entered into force on 1 May 2019 and teams of border guards have been deployed swiftly at the Albanian-Greek border. The agreement with Montenegro was signed on 7 October and is now subject to the European Parliament's consent. Other agreements have been initialled with North Macedonia (July 2018), Serbia (September 2018) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (January 2019) and await signature.

In March 2019, the European Parliament and the Council reached agreement on a further *strengthened and fully equipped European Border and Coast Guard*, and the new Regulation is expected to enter into force in early December 2019. Key operational new elements will be the setting up of the standing corps of *10,000 operational staff exercising executive powers*, and development of the Agency's own equipment pool. The value of the new legislation has also been underlined by the continued difficulty in securing sufficient support by Member States to the calls from the Agency for expertise to be provided to essential operations on borders including in Greece, Spain and Bulgaria. The recurring lack of sufficient pledges from Member States led to internal redeployment of human resources and technical equipment by the host Member States financed by the Agency. This may temporarily compensate for the actual gaps, but is not in line with the shared responsibility of the competent authorities of all Member States and the Agency, for an effective protection of the external borders.

The Agency will also have a stronger mandate on *returns* and will cooperate more closely with non-EU countries, including those beyond the EU's immediate neighbourhood. This reinforcement will give the Agency the right level of ambition to respond to the common challenges facing Europe in managing migration and its external borders.

⁴² Offshore patrol vessels, 18 coastal patrol vessels/boats, 5 aircraft; 4 helicopters, 103 patrol cars, 14 mobile offices and other light equipment.

⁴³ Personal data is anonymised in the final risk analysis products.

A number of *enhanced border control tools* are being taken forward following the adoption of rules on the interoperability of information systems and key new information systems.⁴⁴ This will close information gaps and blind spots by helping to detect multiple identities and counter identity fraud. The Commission is supporting Member States in implementation, aiming to ensure that full interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management is under way by the end of 2020. The swift conclusion of all linked legislation by the European Parliament and the Council will be essential to deliver an effective system closing information gaps and ensuring best use of these key tools. This includes ongoing negotiations on the Visa Information System revision, Eurodac and related amendments for the European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

6. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK, RESETTLEMENT, VISA AND LEGAL PATHWAYS

The need for a *reformed Common European Asylum System* was one of the clearest lessons of the 2015 crisis, in particular, the need to find a better way for allocating responsibility for asylum claims to the Member State of first entry in a situation of mass arrivals. Discussions around the Dublin reform, proposed in 2016 along with six other proposals⁴⁵ overhauling the asylum legislation, have explored the different ways Member States could demonstrate solidarity in case of need. There was real progress towards a preliminary agreement on five of the seven proposals. But a majority of Member States insisted on a package approach, so a way forward needs to be found on key elements of the Dublin Regulation and the Asylum Procedure Regulation. The European Parliament has adopted a full set of mandates.

Resettlement is a safe and legal alternative to irregular and dangerous journeys for refugees, and a demonstration of European solidarity with non-EU countries hosting large numbers of persons fleeing war or persecution. Until the adoption of the proposed Union Resettlement Framework, temporary schemes are in place. Since 2015, almost 63,000 refugees have been resettled. Under the ongoing EU resettlement scheme, 20 Member States have pledged to provide more than 50,000 places to those most in need. By 7 October 2019, 39,000 resettlements (78% of the total pledged) have taken place. Member States need to maintain the momentum and ensure that the remaining pledges are filled before the scheme expires at the end of the year. Member States have responded to the Commission's call to continue resettling in 2020 by already pledging around 30,000 resettlement places for 2020. This confirms Member States' continued commitment to resettlement as a safe and legal pathway into the EU.

Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan remain the three countries with the highest resettlements to Europe; efforts also focus on countries of the Central Mediterranean route, notably Egypt, Niger/Libya and Chad. Resettlements from the Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda should be a particular priority.

The newly revised *Visa Code* completes the reform of the rules on Schengen Visas, which the Commission initiated in March 2018, facilitating the process for issuing visas for bona fide

⁴⁴ Regulation (EU) 2019/817 (20.5.2019) and Regulation (EU) 2019/818 (20.5.2019). Key new systems are the EU Entry/Exit System and European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Also essential are the measures to reinforce the Schengen Information System and to extend the European Criminal Records Information System to third-country nationals.

⁴⁵ The proposals are for revision of 1) the Dublin Regulation (defining the Member State responsible for an asylum seeker), 2) the Eurodac Regulation (extending the scope of the fingerprint database of asylum seekers), 3) the EU Asylum Agency Regulation (agency delivering operational support to Member States), 4) the Asylum Procedure Regulation (replacing the current Directive and streamlining rules), 5) the Qualification Regulation (setting the criteria for obtaining refugee status), 6) the Reception Conditions Directive (guaranteeing minimal standards for hosting asylum seekers), and 7) the Resettlement Framework Regulation (a new instrument establishing a legal pathway for persons in need of protection).

travellers or short stays, whilst strengthening security standards and reducing irregular migration. This would be complemented by swift agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the Commission's proposal to upgrade the Visa Information System.⁴⁶

Legal migration policy and instruments, in particular to attract talent from outside the EU, have undergone significant developments in recent years. This has had a real impact: for example, the 2016 reform of the immigration rules for students, researchers, trainees and volunteers helped the number of third-country nationals coming to the EU to study rise from just under 200,000 in 2011 to 320,000 in 2018.⁴⁷ Regrettably, the negotiations on the proposed reform to make the EU Blue Card more attractive and enhance the EU's competitiveness have stalled. In parallel, the framework on legal migration at EU level as a whole has been assessed through a comprehensive evaluation ('fitness check').⁴⁸ The results will feed into the ongoing reflection on the next steps.

In parallel, concrete progress in this area has been ensured through the development of **legal migration pilot projects**, designed by Member States jointly with key partner countries of origin and transit, and supported by the Commission. These aim to match new skills for third-country nationals with labour market needs in the EU. Five pilot projects on legal migration are currently being implemented with EU funding, to implement circular and long-term mobility schemes for young graduates and workers from selected partner countries (Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and Tunisia). Beyond the benefits that these pilot projects can directly bring to third countries and to the migrants themselves, they can also further incentivise partner countries' engagement in effective migration management. The Commission therefore continues to encourage Member States to continue to develop pilot projects, extending the geographical focus beyond North Africa (which has been the main focus to date).

The Commission has significantly increased its support to Member States and all relevant stakeholders in the field of **integration** through funding, policy coordination and promoting exchanges of experiences and practices. Since the launch of the Action Plan on Integration in 2016, a wide range of actions has been put in place in different fields: education, labour market integration, facilitating access to basic services, and promoting participation. In the area of labour market integration, the Commission has developed a skills profiling tool for third country nationals⁴⁹ and has worked closely with social and economic partners to implement the **European Partnership for Integration** to enhance labour market integration of refugees,⁵⁰ with several actions and initiatives launched in many Member States, as well as with the private sector through the "Employers together for integration" initiative.⁵¹

The Commission has also increased its support to **local and regional authorities**, in the forefront of the integration of migrants in our communities. Eight large networks of cities and regions have recently been launched to work on integration. The Commission also joined forces with the Committee of the Regions, who launched the initiative Cities and Regions for

⁴⁶ The database containing information on visa applications and decisions will be strengthened by more effective background checks on visa applicants and by closing information gaps through better information exchange. Negotiations on the Visa Information System are advanced, with trilogues to start shortly.

⁴⁷ First permits issued for study reasons by the Member States covered under the previous Students Directive and the current Students and Researchers Directive, therefore without Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

⁴⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/fitness-check_en.

⁴⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/#/>.

⁵⁰ The Partnership was signed in December 2017 between the Commission and social and economic partners to work closely together to promote the labour market integration of refugees. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/policies/legal-migration/integration/docs/20171220_european_partnership_for_integration_en.pdf.

⁵¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/european-dialogue-skills-and-migration/integration-pact_en.

Integration of Migrants, a platform for European mayors and regional leaders to exchange positive examples. It has also stepped up support to Member States through the European Integration Network by launching three mutual assistance projects, to encourage mutual support between Member States to put in place a new integration policy or programme.

7. CONCLUSION

This report has set out the continued efforts of the EU to address the challenge of migration since the start of the crisis in 2015. Not only has the EU been able to manage flows, reduce arrivals and save lives, its comprehensive approach has put in place new tools, as well as proof of a readiness to show solidarity and responsibility while delivering practical support on the ground. The EU is continuing to bring protection to migrants and refugees, to help Member States under the most pressure, to build a strong external border, and to work in depth with partners worldwide. All this work has made the foundations of EU migration policy much stronger than when the crisis broke in 2015.

The EU has provided an indispensable added value in addressing the migration challenge. The **operational support** provided to Member States, in particular by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the European Asylum Support Office and Europol, is integral to border security and return, the management of migration and asylum, as well as to the fight against migrant smuggling. It is a tangible form of solidarity which brings together European and national efforts, building confidence and trust. It is therefore crucial that Member States do not allow for any shortage in the provision of experts to the work of the Agencies.

Funding has been one of the major tools to deliver not only EU policies, but also EU solidarity. This is also reflected in the Commission's proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. It is proposed to almost triple funding devoted to migration and border management inside the EU, and a new combined external funding instrument which targets a tenth of the spending for migration purposes, and would also include a flexible cushion to be mobilised in case of emerging needs. Sufficient EU funding will remain essential, both to meet immediate humanitarian imperatives and to build a strong migration infrastructure over the long term. As the EU moves from one multi-annual funding period to another, continuity in the delivery on the ground will also be key, so that the progress made so far is not lost, not least in the framework of crucial programmes under the Trust Funds. The replenishment of the EU Trust Fund for Africa in 2020 will therefore be key.

Yet, at the same time, lives continue to be lost at sea and *ad hoc* solutions are clearly unsustainable. The risk of extra migratory pressure remains, from both short-term instability and longer term trends such as demography and climate change. Adequate legal pathways and integration remain a challenge. Returns, readmission and reintegration of those who do not need protection also require more work. This makes it as important as ever to complete the path to a sustainable long-term EU system to better manage migration in all its aspects. This requires the work so far to be taken forward in terms of operational and financial support, completing and implementing the legislative framework, and in deepening partnerships with third countries. The way ahead, notably on the legislative reform, needs to be based on more solidarity and willingness to compromise by all.

Whilst it is crucial for **temporary arrangements on disembarkation** to be put in place with the backing of a critical mass of Member States, work also needs to speed up to secure a complete and sustainable EU **legal framework** for migration and asylum. Whilst some progress has been made, the comprehensive reform of the Common European Asylum System is still pending. A common approach to securing a fair and durable asylum system will be needed to ensure that the EU can react to future demands in a way which ensures efficiency and reflects our values.

Migration has climbed up the priorities for EU relations with our partners as it has gained in significance for EU citizens. This now needs to be fully integrated into deepening *partnerships with third countries*, to become a fully-fledged part of long-lasting relationships able to include areas like legal migration, the fight against smuggling and readmission.

In addition, a fully-functioning *Schengen* system is essential to the EU and the EU economy. We need to continue to build the strength of the system and to build trust in order to return to a Schengen area without internal borders.

The last four years of policy delivery showed that the EU was capable of responding to unforeseen circumstances, finding common solutions and working together to bring real results. Not all the work is complete. The situation remains fragile as shown by the recent increase in arrivals through the Eastern Mediterranean and renewed armed hostilities in the north-east of Syria that risk to further undermine the stability of the whole region, giving no cause for complacency. But the right basis is now in place in order to complete the work of putting in place a strong and effective European migration and asylum system, respecting solidarity and responsibility and delivering results.