

# European Agenda on Migration: Still fragile situation gives no cause for complacency

While joint EU efforts have continued to show results, the situation remains fragile due to ongoing migratory pressure, as evidenced by newly increased arrivals along the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean routes. This requires the EU as a whole to show the necessary vigilance and preparedness to respond to any seasonal peaks or shifts in pressure, including from one route to another. Today's report identifies where the current response needs to be strengthened: plugging persistent gaps in assets for the European Border and Coast Guard; improving returns; boost resettlement; and better protecting migrants along the routes.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"This report confirms that we can only manage migration in a comprehensive way, through mutually reinforcing actions that are based on responsibility and solidarity. A reformed Common European Asylum System is a central part of this approach and together with the EU's long term budget the EU will be ready to deal with any future migratory crisis. This reform cannot wait and I hope the European Council will be able to reach a deal in June."*

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"In the last years important progress has been made both within the EU and with our partner countries. However, the situation is still fragile and our work is far from over. This is why I call on Member States to urgently send border guards and equipment for the European Border and Coast Guard operations, but also to follow through on their commitment to reach an agreement on our asylum reform in June. We are once again reminded that we have absolutely no time to waste."*

## Arrivals along the three main routes

During the first months of 2018, the downward trend of 2017 has continued in the **Central Mediterranean** with arrival figures around 77% lower than those recorded in the same period in 2017.

While still drastically lower than before the EU-Turkey Statement, **arrivals from Turkey** have seen a significant increase since March 2018 both to the Greek islands (9,349 since the beginning of 2018) and via the land border (6,108 so far in 2018 – nine times more than during the same period in 2017). While the situation has overall stabilised along the **Western Balkan route**, increased movements through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been reported in recent months.

Arrivals on the **Western Mediterranean** route continued to show an upward trend

with around 6.623 arrivals in Spain since January 2018 (22 % higher than in the first months of 2017).

### Managing the EU's external borders

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency is presently supporting national border guards with around 1,350 deployed experts along all migratory routes. In view of the increased migratory pressure, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency stands ready to **reinforce its presence on the land border between Greece and Turkey**. The Agency has also offered to triple its operational deployments at the Greek land borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, work is advancing to conclude agreements with Western Balkan countries that will allow the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to assist them directly in managing their borders when needed.

However, there are **persistent and significant gaps** in personnel and equipment for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – to the point that less than half of the current operational needs can be met. Member States must **urgently step up their deployment** if the Agency is to sustain ongoing operations or be in a position to engage in new ones.

The Commission's proposal for the **next long-term budget** significantly reinforces the funds dedicated to external border management, including additional resources to strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard with an envisaged standing corps of 10,000.

### Protecting migrants along the route

The EU is continuing its work to address root causes of migration while protecting migrants along the route and offering alternatives to irregular migration:

- **Voluntary returns from Libya:** With EU support, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has assisted more than 6,185 people in voluntarily returning home from Libya in 2018 alone. The AU–EU–UN Taskforce continues to work with the Libyan authorities to stop the systematic detention of migrants, including children. So far this year, over 1,000 refugees have been released from detention thanks to these efforts.
- **Emergency evacuations:** 1,152 people have been evacuated from Libya to Niger through the Emergency Transit Mechanism for further resettlement to Europe. 108 of them have already been resettled to France, Sweden and Switzerland. Referrals by the UNHCR should now be accelerated to speed up transfers to EU Member States. The EU supports this effort with €20 million.
- **Tackling migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks:** Cooperation is being enhanced with partners in the Sahel, in line with the [Declaration](#) adopted in Niamey in March.
- **Addressing root causes:** The EU Trust Fund for Africa has proved its worth, with 147 programmes, for a total amount of €2.59 billion so far, funding crucial initiatives such as voluntary returns from Libya.

However, a significant funding gap of around €1.2 billion risks crippling these efforts if not addressed together by the EU and Member States.

The Commission is also proposing today a [revision of the legislation on Immigration Liaison Officers](#) deployed by EU Member States to non-EU countries to help intensify the EU dimension of coordination with crucial partners.

### Conditions in Greece

Conditions in Greece remain a **serious concern** with heavy pressure on the islands and the slow pace of asylum procedures hampering returns to Turkey. The Commission has called on Greece to improve conditions on the islands with EU support; urgently accelerate the pace of returns; and finalise their **contingency plan** for increased arrivals.

### Return and readmission

More work is needed to increase return of those migrants who have no right to stay in the EU as **only 36.6%** of return orders in 2017 were actually carried out. The **European Border and Coast Guard Agency** helped organise 111 return operations in 2018 but Member States should make much greater use of the Agency's boosted mandate on returns. Significant progress is being made in improving **cooperation on return with countries of origin**, with several practical arrangements concluded over the past months and further negotiations on-going. To further improve the monitoring of returns and other relevant migration statistics, the [Commission is also proposing today to increase Eurostat's frequency of data publications](#).

### Resettlement

Under the Commission's **new resettlement scheme**, 20 Member States have pledged more than 50,000 places, out of which 4,252 transfers have already taken place. The Commission is calling on Member States to carry out **50% of the pledged resettlements by October 2018**.

### Next steps

To sustain the EU's comprehensive approach on migration and ensure Europe is equipped to deal with any future crisis, Member States should now:

- Fill gaps in border guards and equipment for the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency**;
- Fill the €1.2 billion gap in funding for the **EU Trust Fund for Africa**;
- Improve **conditions in Greece** and accelerate returns to Turkey;
- **Significantly step up returns** and make use of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's mandate to assist with returns;
- **Accelerate resettlement** efforts under the new scheme for priority countries, in particular as concerns the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Niger, as well as under the EU-Turkey Statement;
- Swiftly reach an agreement on the **reform of the Common European Asylum System**, to ensure the EU is prepared to deal with any future crises.

## Background

On 13 May 2015, the European Commission proposed a far-reaching strategy, through the [European Agenda on Migration](#), to tackle the immediate challenges of the ongoing crisis, as well as to 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.

Today's Communication presents the developments since March 2018 and reports on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and the Commission's political roadmap towards a comprehensive migration agreement [presented in December 2017](#).

## For More Information

[Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[Statistical Annexes](#)

[Factsheet – Migration Management – EU Crisis Management tools](#)

[Factsheet – Central Mediterranean Route: Protecting migrants and managing irregular flows](#)

Proposal for a [Regulation on the creation of a European Network of immigration liaison officers](#)