

State of the Union 2017 – Commission presents next steps towards a stronger, more effective and fairer EU migration and asylum policy



On 13 September, in his annual [State of the Union address](#), President Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *“In spite of the debate and controversy around this topic, we have managed to make solid progress (...) We now need to redouble our efforts. Before the end of the month, the Commission will present a new set of proposals with an emphasis on returns, solidarity with Africa and opening legal pathways.”*

The Commission is today reviewing progress on the 2015 **European Agenda on Migration** and setting out the next steps to put in place the missing elements of a stronger, fairer and more effective EU migration and asylum policy. Building on the progress achieved so far, the Commission is today presenting a series of new initiatives in key areas: **a new resettlement scheme for at least 50,000 refugees**, pilot projects for **legal migration** which the Commission can help finance and coordinate, and new measures to make the EU’s **return policy** more effective. The Commission also calls on Member States to urgently make progress on the **reform of the Common European Asylum System** and make further efforts to work with countries of origin and transit of migration, in particular by **providing additional contributions to the EU Trust Fund for Africa**.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *“Our joint efforts to respond to the migration and refugee crisis have led to tangible results, with irregular arrivals significantly down in both the Eastern and the Central Mediterranean. However, we’re not there yet, so we must stay the course and further consolidate our comprehensive migration approach by putting in place the remaining building blocks.”*

High Representative/ Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** said: *“Over the last two years, we finally built an EU policy on migration, which is starting to deliver. It is about managing one of the most complex, structural phenomena of our times, not a temporary emergency. Our cooperation with our partners in Africa, but also with the UN, has started to bear fruits by ensuring a better protection of migrants, making traffickers and smugglers’ business less profitable, and offering alternatives and legal avenues. We will keep working on the same track: We’ll only succeed by working in a united and consistent manner.”*

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *“Now is the moment to take the next steps to achieve a fair, robust and realistic EU migration policy. This means continuing to show*

solidarity with the most affected Member States, but also finding quickly the right compromise on the reform of the Common European Asylum system. It also means improving returns and today we propose to create a true operational EU return hub within the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. And we need to open real alternatives to taking perilous irregular journeys. Investing in more legal pathways, both for protection but also for study or work, is therefore essential. "

The **Mid-term review** of the European Agenda on Migration shows the positive impact of EU migration management over the past two years on reducing the incentives for irregular migration, strengthening the protection of our external borders, upholding our duty to assist refugees and enhancing legal pathways to Europe. Building on these results, it is now essential to maintain the current efforts, step up the work towards more stable and structural solutions and remain ready to respond to unforeseen situations, as the migratory pressure on Europe remains high. That is why the Commission proposes to take **the following next steps**:

Continuing to ensure solidarity

With **over 29,000 persons relocated so far**, the first ever large-scale EU-coordinated relocation mechanism has contributed to significantly reducing the pressure on the asylum systems of Italy and Greece. The immediate priority is now to ensure that all the remaining eligible persons who have arrived to Greece and Italy until September 26 are relocated swiftly. In total, around 37,000 people are expected to be effectively relocated under the scheme.

The migratory pressure on Italy and Greece however continues to remain high, due to the accumulated backlog from the arrivals in 2016 and first half of 2017. The Commission stands ready to provide **financial support to Member States** who sustain their relocation efforts beyond the current schemes. The assistance provided by EASO and other EU agencies to Italy and Greece should also continue and, when needed, be further reinforced.

At the same time, we cannot continue to rely on ad hoc measures. That is why the Commission calls on the co-legislators to make use of the current window of opportunity and achieve decisive progress on the reform of the Common European Asylum System and especially the Dublin Regulation.

Enhancing legal pathways: at least 50,000 new resettlement places

The Commission is recommending a **new EU resettlement scheme** to bring at least 50,000 of the most vulnerable persons in need of international protection to Europe over the next two years. This is part of the Commission's efforts to **provide viable safe and legal alternatives** for those who risk their lives at the hands of criminal smuggling networks. The new scheme will be in place until October 2019 and will build on the current successful resettlement schemes which, having **provided new homes to over 23,000 persons** in the EU, are now coming to an end.

The Commission has set aside **€500 million to support Member States'**

resettlement efforts. Whilst resettlement from Turkey and the Middle East must continue, increased focus should be put on resettling vulnerable persons from North Africa and the Horn of Africa; notably Libya, Egypt, Niger, Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia. This will contribute to further stabilising migration flows along the Central Mediterranean route and notably support the UNHCR in establishing an **emergency evacuation mechanism from Libya**. Today's recommendation follows up and complements the resettlement pledging exercise launched on 4 July 2017 which has so far resulted in 14,000 pledges by 11 Member States. It will serve to bridge the period until the new permanent EU Resettlement Framework, proposed by the Commission in July 2016, is adopted.

In addition, the Commission encourages Member States to set up **private sponsorship schemes** allowing private groups or civil society organisations to organise and finance resettlements in accordance with national legislation. To this effect, the Commission has invited **EASO to coordinate a pilot project** on private sponsorship schemes with interested Member States.

To turn irregular flows into needs-based economic migration to EU Member States, the Commission is proposing to coordinate and financially support **pilot projects for legal migration** with third countries. They should focus initially on countries which have shown political engagement in finding joint solutions to tackle irregular migration and readmission of irregular migrants. The European Parliament and the Council should also swiftly come to an agreement and adopt the Commission proposal for a **revised EU Blue Card** which will improve the EU's ability to attract and retain highly skilled workers and ensure that Member States can rely on the work force they need, when they need it.

The **EU's common visa policy** is also an essential instrument for mobility, notably facilitating tourism and business, but also a key tool to prevent security risks or risks of irregular migration. The Commission will assess whether the current visa policy still matches present and future challenges, and will reflect on the need to modernise it.

A more effective EU policy on return

With return rates remaining unsatisfactory (around 36% in 2014-2015) and an estimated 1.5 million people to be returned from EU Member States in the near future, the Commission proposes to step up return efforts on all fronts. The **Return Department** will be significantly reinforced within the European Border and Coast Guard to ensure the Agency can implement a truly proactive return management approach and drive and coordinate the EU-wide management of returns.

Member States need to further **streamline their return policies** in line with the 2017 Commission Recommendation and the Renewed Action Plan on Returns and in close cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. To this effect, the Commission is today publishing a **revised Return Handbook** that integrates all these recommendations to national authorities on returns. Member States at the external borders can, where appropriate, use the **hotspot approach** to ensure that return operations can be managed swiftly, in particular in situations of significant arrival surges.

To increase cooperation on readmission by countries of origin, **all incentives and leverages available** at EU and national level must be applied.

External dimension: Moving forward under the Partnership Framework

Significant results have been achieved in jointly managing migration flows with countries of origin and transit since the establishment of the Partnership Framework for Migration one year ago. While the progress made needs to be sustained, more work is needed on a number of key issues. This includes further **strengthening the EU Trust Fund for Africa and in particular its North Africa window** through additional Member State funding.

With arrivals and the number of deaths at sea down, the joint work along the **Central Mediterranean route** needs to be continued. Work which needs to be further stepped up includes improving the situation of stranded migrants in Libya in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM, in particular in detention centres, the promotion of socio-economic opportunities for local communities, stepping up work on assisted voluntary returns and strengthening the capacity of the Libyan authorities to control the southern borders. In addition, work must be continued along **other migratory routes**, especially in view of the increasing interconnectivity of such routes.

The EU and Member States must also work closely together to achieve an ambitious **UN Global Compact** for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the development of the Global Compact for Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework with pilot countries.

Background

Upon taking office, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker entrusted a Commissioner with special responsibility for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, to work together with the other Commissioners, under the coordination of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, on a new policy on migration as one of the [10 priorities of the Political Guidelines](#) of the Juncker Commission.

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 serves as a mid-term review of what has been achieved so far in delivering the European Agenda on Migration. It also sets out new initiatives from the Commission to address key areas, and identifies where further efforts are needed in the coming months.

For More Information

[Communication on the delivery of the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[Recommendation on ensuring effective legal pathways to Europe](#)

[Recommendation establishing a common Return Handbook](#)

[Annex](#)

[Factsheet](#): Towards and efficient and credible EU return policy

[Factsheet](#): Opening legal pathways to Europe

[Factsheet](#): Relocation – sharing responsibility: September 2017

[Press release](#): European Agenda on Migration: Good progress in managing migration flows needs to be sustained

[The European Agenda on Migration](#)