Managing migration: new initiatives to strengthen European integrated border management and expedite returns

Strasbourg, 14 March 2023

Today, the Commission adopted a Communication which presents the strategic framework for European integrated border management (EIBM) for 5 years and a Recommendation to Member States on the mutual recognition of return decisions and expedite returns. In its extraordinary meeting on 9 February 2023, the European Council reiterated the importance of ensuring effective control of the EU's external land and sea borders as part of a comprehensive approach to migration. Ahead of the next European Council meeting that will take stock on the situation, the Commission delivers through these initiatives on some of the key actions set out in President von der Leyen’s letter and in the European Council Conclusions of 9 February.

Effective European integrated border management

With this Communication, the Commission sets out the first-ever multiannual strategic policy cycle on European integrated border management for the next 5 years.

This is the result of an extensive consultation process between institutions, leading to a shared vision on external border management. It provides a coordinated framework for national authorities managing the border, as well as for over 120,000 officers of national border authorities and Frontex, steering their daily work. The key priorities of the Strategy have 15 essential components, such as:

- **Border control, supported through large scale IT and inter-agency cooperation** to enhance migration governance and crisis preparedness. This will be ensured by using state-of-the-art infrastructure and effective surveillance, such as cameras and drones; coherent and comprehensive national and situational pictures, an efficient implementation of the European Border Surveillance system (EUROSUR) and sound risk analysis. EU information systems to manage external borders (Schengen Information System, Entry-Exit System, Visa Information System and European Travel Information and Authorisation System) and their interoperability will facilitate border crossings. Increased cooperation among all authorities at national and EU level is key to better understand, detect, and respond to the challenges at EU external borders.

- **Search and rescue** is a key component of the European integrated border management. As a priority, the need for coordination is a priority between flag and coastal states, as well as the need to develop best practices on timely and full information sharing.

- **A common EU system for returns**: better coordination between national authorities and European agencies is a core component on enhancing returns. Member States can make full use of the support available from Frontex for all phases of the return process. The Return Coordinator supported by the High-Level Network for Returns will coordinate the implementation of the operational strategy for more effective returns.

- **Cooperation with third countries** should be intensified to contribute to building third countries' operational capacities in the areas of border control, risk analysis, return and readmission, and anti-smuggling. In this respect, the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood will be granted a special focus, alongside third countries from and through which the main migratory routes go to the EU. This contributes to the development of mutual and comprehensive migration partnerships with countries of origin and transit.

- **Full respect of fundamental rights**: the protection of the EU's borders must be done in full respect of fundamental rights. The actions of EU and national actors should be carried out in full compliance with EU law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and with international law, including through effective monitoring mechanisms.

Strengthening cooperation on mutual recognition of return decisions and expediting returns

An effective EU system for returns is a central part of a well-functioning migration and asylum system, and of the comprehensive approach outlined in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. It
can also have a deterrent effect on unsafe and irregular migration, helping prevent the exploitation of migrants by breaking the business model of criminal smuggling networks and promoting safe legal pathways.

With today’s Recommendation, the Commission provides guidance on the implementation of the mutual recognition of return decisions closing a loophole in the return acquis. It also updates previous guidance provided by the Commission in 2017 on returns and supports Member States in facilitating and accelerating returns.

Building blocks include:

- **Mutual recognition of return decisions**: With the upgraded Schengen Information System which came into force on 7 March, Member States can now have immediate alerts on a return decision for a third country national issued by another Member State. This allows mutual recognition of return decisions within the EU and the swift execution of returns from anywhere in Europe. Frontex will be ready to support Member States carrying out returns.

- **More efficient returns**: Member States can establish closer links between authorities managing asylum and returns. They are invited to do this through an IT return case management system based on the model developed by Frontex, aligned with the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard. This will ensure timely access to information on third country nationals subject to a return decision. The Recommendation also offers guidance on preventing the risk of absconding and on alternative measures to detention, which needs to remain a measure of last resort.

- **Incentives for voluntary return**: It is necessary to provide information on return early in the process, including during the asylum process. Member States should set up return and reintegration counselling structures to promote voluntary return. For third-country nationals enrolled in these programmes, voluntary returns can be encouraged by not issuing entry bans.

**Next steps**

On the EIBM, Frontex has 6 months to translate this strategic direction into an operational and technical strategy. Member States have 12 months to update their national strategies.

The Commission will work closely to support Member States in the operational implementation of these actions. An evaluation of the EIBM strategic policy is foreseen in 4 years from now to define a new multi-annual policy cycle in 2027. The Commission will also carry out an evaluation of the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard this year.

On returns, to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation, Member States will report annually to the Commission, including on the number of mutually recognised return decisions of other Member States.

Dedicated funding will be provided under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and Border Management and Visa Instrument, in particular for mutual recognition of return decisions and to better equip border and coast guards for an effective protection of the external borders. Additional support will be given for the implementation of the Recommendation on returns, together with operational and technical support from our Agencies.

**Background**

The EIBM Communication is an obligation under the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Regulation. It builds on the policy document adopted by the Commission on 24 May 2022, on which both the Council and the European Parliament provided input. This comprehensive strategy shares a common vision, across EU institutions, outlining our work at the external borders. The Strategic Risk Analysis provided by Frontex was also reflected into the priorities and guidelines of this Communication. It is accompanied by two Annexes, each containing key actions.

The Recommendation on returns upgrades the 2017 Recommendation on making return procedures more effective and complements the Operational strategy for more effective returns, from January 2023.

**For more information**

Communication establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management + Annex I and Annex II

Commission Recommendation on mutual recognition of return decisions and expediting returns when implementing the Directive 2008/115/EC

EU Action Plan for the Central Mediterranean
Quotes:

Strong external borders are an essential part of our comprehensive approach to migration and asylum, and the cornerstone of our Security Union. With today's first-ever multiannual European Integrated Border Management Strategy, we make sure that all Member States' and Frontex activities – from border surveillance to anti-smuggling to returns – are guided by the same set of common principles and produce results on the ground. Together with our recommendations for improving the efficiency and mutual recognition of return decisions, we are creating much more than an operational framework. We are building step-by-step a common EU culture of migration management.

Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life - 14/03/2023

These proposals are about continuing to develop migration and asylum management that is fully functioning. The European Integrated Border Management Strategy and the Recommendation on mutual recognition of returns decisions and expediting returns will help achieve that functionality. Using inter-agency and technological tools allows us to manage our shared external border and to track and expedite returns decisions more accurately. This will give more credibility on returns rates. That way we can build trust to deliver on all aspects of migration management, including sustainable legal pathways.

Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs - 14/03/2023

Press contacts:

- Anitta HIPPER (+32 2 298 56 91)
- Fiorella BELCIU (+32 2 299 37 34)
- Andrea MASINI (+32 2 299 15 19)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email