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PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL**

Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Agenda on Migration continues to provide a comprehensive framework for the EU's work on migration. Action is being taken forward on all the key work strands of the Agenda but the migratory challenge and pressure remains very high, bearing in mind the geopolitical fragility and long term demographic and socio-economic trends in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond.

This report provides an overview of progress and developments on all work strands, including the protection of children,¹ since the Commission's last report in November 2017.² It also takes stock of progress made in line with the Commission's roadmap to reach a deal by June 2018 on the comprehensive migration package presented to the EU Leaders' Meeting in December 2017.³ This illustrates the comprehensive nature of the work and the need to maintain the intensity of the EU's efforts across the board.

Finally, this report also identifies concrete key actions, which are necessary to ensure the continued effectiveness of the EU response, in particular the need for additional financial investment jointly from the Member States and the EU to support the EU action on the external dimension of migration.

2. SITUATION ALONG THE MAIN MIGRATION ROUTES

In 2017, the migratory situation became more stable, but remained challenging. With almost 205 000 irregular border crossings in 2017, there were overall 28% fewer arrivals than in 2014, the year before the crisis.⁴ Yet the situation is fragile, and work on all migratory routes is continuing in 2018 to maintain the downward trend. At the same time, pressure on national migration systems, while decreasing, remains at a high level. In 2017 685 000 asylum applications were lodged within the EU (a decrease of 43% compared to 2016), including 160 000 lodged by children,⁵ and Member States issued almost one million first instance asylum decisions.⁶

¹ COM (2017)211 final of 12.04.2017. The Commission will regularly update online an overview of progress on the implementation of the actions set out in the Communication on the protection of children in migration: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/children-migration_en.

² COM(2017) 669 final of 15.11.2017.

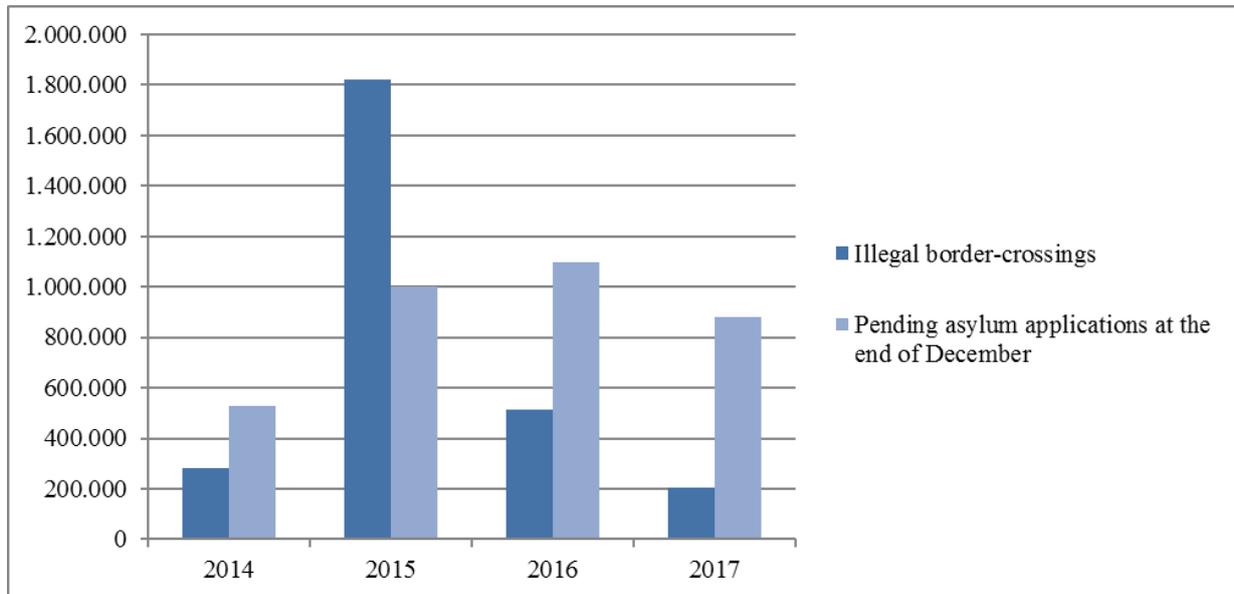
³ COM(2017) 820 final of 7.12.2017.

⁴ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

⁵ Data from the United Nations Children Emergency Fund UNICEF.

⁶ Data from the European Asylum Support Office.

Detections of illegal border crossings at the EU external border and pending asylum applications at the end of the year in EU 28 – 2014-2017



Data source: EBCGA for detections of illegal border crossings and Eurostat for pending asylum applications. Note: Data for pending asylum applications in 2017 excludes Spain and Cyprus, for which data is missing.

Eastern Mediterranean route

On the Eastern Mediterranean route, migratory movements have continued the trend seen since the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. For 2017 as a whole, 42 319 migrants arrived via the Eastern Mediterranean route, compared to 182 227 in 2016.⁷ As for 2018, by 6 March 2018, there had been 3 126 recorded arrivals in the **Greek islands**, compared to 2 689 over the same period in 2017.⁸ There has been a slight change in the relative share of the main nationalities of migrants involved. In 2017, the three main nationalities were Syrian (40%), Iraqi (19%), and Afghani (11%): to date in 2018, the shares have slightly shifted, with Syrians making up 32%, Iraqis 27% and Afghanis 13%.

While crossings from Turkey to Italy, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania have recently been very few, irregular crossings from Turkey into **Greece via the land border** have been higher in comparison to previous years. These crossings rose almost 80% in 2017 compared to 2016 to reach more than 5 500, and 2018 until 4-5 March has seen 838 detections, compared to 291 in the same period in 2017. It should be noted that the largest share of these crossings concerns Turkish nationals, representing over 50% of the crossings so far this year.

Western Balkans route

The trend of relative stability along the Western Balkans route during 2017 has been maintained into 2018. Enhanced border controls and concerted cooperation between EU Member States, EU Agencies and the Western Balkan countries has continued to make irregular transit via the Western Balkan route more difficult. However, strengthened controls on primary routes may encourage the development of new routes or diversion elsewhere. It can also lead to adaptation by smuggling networks and use of new *modi operandi* – including

⁷ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

⁸ Data from the Hellenic Police.

techniques which put migrants at greater risk in order to maintain smugglers' profit margins. This calls for continued efforts to monitor developments and to cooperate against the smugglers.

The majority of detected illegal border crossings at the EU external border were recorded at the borders with Serbia. There have also been signs of a sub-route developing through Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina towards Croatia and Slovenia. Continued monitoring is also crucial as regards the increased number of detections of Iranian nationals trying to enter the EU via the Western Balkan countries. The increased number of attempts recorded in recent months coincides with Serbia's decision of granting visa-free entry to Iranian citizens. Most attempts to enter the EU illegally were recorded while travelling by air from Belgrade, using forged or fraudulently obtained documents. Finally, migratory movements from the Western Balkans countries back towards Greece need to be closely monitored, with 2017 seeing a notable increase in detected flows from Albania to Greece, albeit at low levels overall.⁹

Central Mediterranean route

The Commission has put a strong focus on managing migratory flows along the Central Mediterranean route, building on the Partnership Framework on migration¹⁰ and the Malta Declaration.¹¹ Nevertheless, the route continues to account for the largest number of people crossing by sea to Europe, despite the significant reduction in departures from Libya from mid-July 2017. In 2017, 119 369 persons arrived to Italy along this route, a 34% decrease compared to 2016. Until 6 March 2018, 5 457 arrivals had been recorded in 2018, around 65% less than those recorded in the same period in 2017. The composition of migrants arriving on the route so far in 2018 shows a significant change: the main nationalities are Eritrean (24%), Tunisian (20%) and Nigerian (6%), compared to Nigerian (15%), Guinean (8%), and Ivorian (8%) in 2017.

There continues to be a significant increase of departures from Tunisia towards Italy, with approximately 20% of departures (all nationalities) coming from Tunisia in 2018 so far.

The trend of fewer deaths at sea in 2017 has continued into 2018. More than 286 300 migrants have been rescued since 1 February 2016 by EU operations in support to the Italian Coast Guard. The International Organisation for Migration reported that the Libyan Coast Guard has rescued more than 20 300 migrants in Libyan territorial waters in 2017 and more than 2 000 in January 2018, helped by the return of vessels by Italy after the training of crew members. But the route has remained very dangerous, especially as smugglers have been adapting their operations in ways which put migrants at greater risk. In 2017 the number of lives lost and missing persons at sea is estimated to have been 2 853, a 38% fall from 2016.¹² Search and rescue operations have also been carried out in the desert in Niger: in 2017, more than 2 000 migrants have been brought to safety, 1 100 in search and rescue operations conducted jointly with the International Organisation for Migration.

Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route

⁹ A 25% increase between January and November 2017 in comparison to the same period of 2016 (source: European Border and Coast Guard Agency).

¹⁰ COM(2016) 385 final of 7.6.2016.

¹¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/01/03-malta-declaration/>

¹² Source: IOM's Missing migrants project (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>).

The number of arrivals on the Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route started to increase in June 2017 and this trend continues. In 2017, 28 349 migrants arrived to Spain on this route, more than double the number in 2016. This has included increased attempts of land crossings to the Spanish autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, crossings by sea from Morocco and Algeria, and crossings by air from Dakar and Casablanca airports. The total number of arrivals to Spain (via the Western Mediterranean route, via the Atlantic route and via Ceuta and Melilla) in 2018 up to 4 March is 3 804, which is almost 17% higher than that of the same period in 2017 (3 260).¹³ The main nationalities of migrants registered as illegally crossing on this route in 2018 are Guinean (17%), Moroccan (17%), Malian (15%), Ivorian (13%), and Gambian (7%). The main nationalities in 2017 were Moroccan (21%); Algerian (18%); Ivorian (14%), Guinean (13%), and Gambian (11%).

3. EU SUPPORT TO MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Eastern Mediterranean route - Support to Greece and Bulgaria

A key element in the EU's support to Member States remains the **hotspot** approach. Despite progress in terms of improving conditions in the existing capacity, reception places available in hotspots in Greece remain insufficient. On 8 March, 12 926 migrants were present on the islands (of which 10 020 in the hotspots), substantially higher than the official number of places available (under 8 000). Efforts have been made to expand the capacity and to ensure that facilities are appropriately equipped for winter. 60 new housing units have been installed in Moria, providing an extra capacity of 700 places. Conditions have improved in Kos and Leros. However, the provision by local authorities of sites for additional reception and pre-removal capacity remains a major issue. The Greek authorities should also find an immediate solution to provide interpretation on the islands under the national programme.

More generally, there is a persistent lack of adequate shelters for unaccompanied minors on the islands and on the mainland. The Greek authorities should accelerate the process to set up, with EU financial support, 2 000 additional reception places for unaccompanied minors across Greece. Child protection teams have been appointed and are being trained in all the hotspots in Greece: this is part of a wider effort to prioritise the needs of children in migration following the Commission's communication of April 2017.

All these actions require continuous monitoring from the Greek authorities in order to achieve tangible and lasting results.

As of 7 March 2018, 21 847 people have been **relocated** from Greece, including 513 unaccompanied minors. In Greece there are still 149 applicants accepted for relocation but who still need to be transferred, including 32 unaccompanied minors.¹⁴

The EU continues to provide substantial **financial support to Greece** to address migration-related challenges. Since the beginning of 2015 the Commission has awarded EUR 393 million as emergency assistance, in addition to the EUR 561 million available under the national programmes for 2014-2020. In addition, the Emergency Support Instrument¹⁵ has so

¹³ Data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Figures for January and February 2018 cover arrivals via the Western Mediterranean route by sea and the Atlantic route.

¹⁴ This mainly involves Ireland (131) and Germany (18). Moreover, there are another 20 applicants for which Greek authorities are still awaiting the reply from Germany.

¹⁵ Established by Council Regulation (EU) 2016/369 of 15 March 2016 on the provision of emergency support within the Union.

far provided over EUR 440 million in 2016-2017 and an additional EUR 198 million are available for 2018. A Financial Plan for 2018 developed in December 2017 identified essential needs and will be facilitate the progressive shift from the use of emergency funding to the use of resources allocated under the national programmes for Greece.

An EU contribution of EUR 24 million to the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme implemented by the International Organisation for Migration helped 5 656 migrants return to their country of origin in 2017, including 1 683 from the islands. In 2018 up to 1 March, this helped 760 migrants return home, including 242 from the islands. Working with the UN Refugee Agency, the EU also funds a major programme to support reception capacity on the mainland, through a rental scheme which aims to be able to accommodate up to 25 000 people by mid-2018 in the mainland, in addition to the 2 000 places available in the rental accommodation scheme on the islands. This has been effectively modulated in scale to cover needs as they have arisen.

Another essential part of EU support to Greece is the work of **EU agencies**. Teams under the European Asylum Support Office support Greek authorities with the identification and registration of potential applicants for international protection, and provide key information to migrants. Experts also give advice on nationality assessment, and contribute to the detection of possible document fraud. Specific support is also being given by a team of 14 experts to the Greek Asylum Appeal Authority, to address bottlenecks and increase the efficiency of decision-making. A particular focus for 2018 will be supporting the Greek authorities in developing and implementing a Reception Monitoring System. As of 7 March, in total 72 national experts, supported by 76 interim staff and 84 interpreters, were deployed by the Office in Greece.

As of 5 March 2018, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency deployed 801 experts at the sea and land borders of Greece. This supports the authorities in implementing the hotspot approach, including the identification, registration and fingerprinting of migrants, the effective control of the external borders, addressing secondary movements and facilitating returns. The Agency also finances the deployment of 280 Greek police officers. Since September 2016, several groups of Europol experts have been deployed to Greece, performing secondary security checks. As of 5 March 2018, a total of 19 Europol guest officers and 2 Europol staff were deployed to five locations in Greece. An evaluation of the Europol Guest Officer Concept¹⁶ in late 2017 concluded that, “*Europol Guest Officers’ presence on the spot [...] is indispensable in order to perform effective secondary security checks*”. The evaluation also included a series of recommendations to further enhance the efficiency of the scheme and achieve its full potential.

The EU is also providing substantial financial assistance to **Bulgaria** in the area of migration and border management. Bulgaria's allocation under national programmes amounts to EUR 97.1 million, with a further EUR 10.5 million under the Internal Security Fund-Borders to be allocated following the mid-term review. This has been supplemented by EUR 172 million in emergency assistance since the beginning of 2015. The progress of the implementation of the national programmes is satisfactory, although the implementation of the emergency assistance could be accelerated. Due to shortfalls in Member State contributions of experts, deployments

¹⁶ The evaluation of the Europol Guest Officer Concept covering deployments in Greece and Italy was carried out by a team including representatives of Europol, Commission and several Member States (Greece and Italy by default, plus Bulgaria, France, Germany, Poland and The Netherlands). On 13 December 2017, the Europol Management Board endorsed the final evaluation report and agreed upon Europol drafting an Action Plan to address the recommendations therein suggested.

of European Border and Coast Guard Agency staff is below what is needed – for the period to 28 March 2018, the shortfall amounts to 42 experts.

The EU-Turkey Statement

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement continues to deliver concrete results in reducing irregular and dangerous crossings and in saving lives in the Aegean Sea, including through the resettlement of Syrians in need of international protection. The Turkish Border Guard continued their patrolling activities. The number of lives lost at sea has been significantly reduced, with 62 persons lost at sea in 2017, compared to 434 in 2016.¹⁷

Through the **Facility for Refugees in Turkey**, the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement has also delivered practical support to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey. The Facility has proved to be one of the swiftest and most effective EU support mechanisms. Design and implementation of projects took place in close cooperation with the Turkish authorities.¹⁸ The EUR 3 billion Facility started work in record time, and was fully contracted by the end of 2017 – implementation is under way for all of the 72 projects.¹⁹ More than EUR 1.85 billion has already been disbursed. The major success of the Facility, both as part of the overall approach of the EU-Turkey Strategy and in providing decisive support to refugees on the ground, is a good reflection of the partnership between the EU, the Member States and Turkey.

The Facility provides almost 1.2 million of the most vulnerable refugees with monthly cash transfers under the Emergency Social Safety Net. It has supported Turkish language training to 312 000 children and educational materials to 500 000 students. The funding has also provided primary health care consultations to almost 764 000 refugees and the vaccination of more than 217 000 Syrian refugee infants (see Annex 2).²⁰

Shared funding between the EU and Member States has allowed a partnership approach in the governance of the Facility. The core of this is a committee in which all Member States take part in decisions and where Turkey is present in an advisory capacity. This has proved very effective and would not be possible with exclusive EU funding. The EU Turkey Statement stipulates that "*once these resources are about to be used to the full*", the EU would "*mobilise additional funding of an additional 3 billion euro up to the end of 2018*".²¹ The continuation of this essential work means that the EU should now proceed with the next tranche of EUR 3 billion. The Commission is today adopting a Decision to that effect.²² The necessity of funding other calls on the EU budget – most immediately the other migration-related needs set out in this report – means that the maximum contribution from the EU budget is EUR 1 billion and that the remaining EUR 2 billion should continue to be financed by Member States on the same basis as the first tranche. To avoid any gaps in Facility funding, the first contracts under the next tranche would need to be signed in the summer of 2018.

¹⁷ Source: IOM's Missing migrants project (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>).

¹⁸ Full details can be obtained from the online projects table https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/facility_table.pdf.

¹⁹ For one project the countersignature is still pending.

²⁰ COM(2018) 91/3 final of 14.03.2018.

²¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/03/refugee-facility-for-turkey/>

²² C(2018) 1500 of 14.03.2018.

Another key strand of work has been the work of the Commission and EU agencies to support the Greek Asylum Service and the Appeal Committees in speeding up the examination of the asylum applications which would step up implementation of **returns to Turkey under the Statement**.²³ This has led to improvements including a major reduction in the first instance backlog in most islands, reducing the average processing time needed for asylum applications in first instance to approximately two months. However, many of the shortcomings identified in the previous reports persist.²⁴

Accelerated asylum procedures are indispensable for increasing the pace of returns to Turkey. Since March 2016, 2 164 returns have been registered²⁵ and of these, only 563 by 9 March 2018 were the result of a second instance negative judicial decision on an asylum application. It had been expected that a long-awaited ruling of the Council of State would give greater legal certainty to the work of Appeal Committees, but the output of proceedings has increased only marginally since the ruling. The Greek government is working on a review of the relevant asylum legislation in Greece, with changes under consideration that would contribute to fewer delays, align the scope for applying the suspensive effect of appeals with the requirements of EU law, and foresee tighter deadlines for bringing a case before the Administrative High Court and for examining subsequent applications. The next step would be for amendments to be submitted to the Greek Parliament.

The continued arrivals on the Aegean islands and the slow pace of returns are a source of persisting pressure on the hotspots' reception capacity. The Greek authorities have responded by carrying out transfers to the mainland of vulnerable asylum seekers. To ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the EU-Turkey Statement a more stringent approach to the identification of vulnerable asylum seekers has now been agreed; a template is being used to improve consistency in the definition of vulnerability and an operational manual is under preparation.

Resettlement from Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement continues, albeit at a slower pace, when compared to the record number of Syrians resettled in the period May-October 2017. While 16 Member States have contributed to the resettlements from Turkey under the Statement in 2017, only a few have contributed so far this year. It is essential that a sustained pace is maintained and that Member States continue to participate in the resettlement scheme. Since the November progress report, 1 122 people have been resettled, taking the total since the Statement to 12 476.²⁶ As for the **Voluntary Humanitarian Admissions Scheme**, with the Standard Operating Procedures endorsed by Member States in December 2017, it should be activated. All elements and conditions are now in place for activation, as set out in the EU-Turkey Statement. This will ensure the continuation of resettlements and provide a safe and legal alternative to irregular migration to the EU.

As regards the implementation of the **Visa Liberalisation Roadmap**, at the beginning of February, Turkey submitted to the European Commission a work plan outlining how Turkey plans to fulfil the seven outstanding visa liberalisation benchmarks.²⁷ The Commission is assessing Turkey's proposals and further consultations with the Turkish counterparts will follow.

²³ 57 national experts from Member States are deployed to EASO to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in Greece.

²⁴ See COM(2017) 470 final of 6.9.2017 and COM (2017) 669 final of 16.11.2017.

²⁵ Since 20 March 2016, there have been 1 563 returns to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement and 601 returns under the Greece-Turkey bilateral admissions protocol.

²⁶ So far, 16 EU Member States resettled Syrians from Turkey, namely Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

²⁷ See COM(2017) 470 final of 6.9.2017.

An essential complement to the EU's work with Turkey is to continue to address the situation in **Syria and other neighbours** facing the huge challenge of helping large numbers of refugees. At the Syria Conference to be hosted by the EU and the United Nations on 24-25 April 2018, the EU's intention is to match its previous efforts – in April 2017, the EU agreed to make available **EUR 560 million** for assistance and protection needs from the 2018 budget. Jordan and Lebanon continue to support livelihoods of refugees alongside their host communities, and both countries have taken important steps to open up education to all refugee children. EU support to Lebanon (EUR 334 million, with EUR 247 million contracted) and Jordan (EUR 228 million, EUR 126 million contracted) will continue, prioritising action to provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable.

Western Balkans route

While irregular border crossings on this route have stabilised at a relatively low level, a significant level of smuggling activity remains. On 12 February 2018 an agreement between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Albania was initialled, enabling the Agency to provide assistance in the field of external border management as well as to swiftly deploy teams on Albanian territory in case of a sudden shift in migratory flows. The Commission is currently negotiating similar agreements with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In addition to responding to the migrant and refugee crisis in the Western Balkans through EU funding, the Commission continues to facilitate cooperation and information sharing, including through bi-weekly videoconferences of the countries along the route, and provides significant support to improve migration management in the region. This commitment was reinforced in the recently adopted strategy for "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans".²⁸ Through the International Organisation for Migration, 53 assisted voluntary returns from Serbia took place in 2018 until 7 March, 16 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 8 from Montenegro. The European Migrant Smuggling Centre in Europol continues to support Member States' investigations. In 2017, four action days took place with Europol support, leading to 64 arrests in the Western Balkans. Eurojust supports investigations and prosecutions, as well as providing practical advice to practitioners through the Thematic Group on Illegal Immigrant Smuggling.

Next steps:

- The Greek authorities should accelerate the implementation of returns to Turkey under the Statement, notably by introducing changes to Greek legislation and finalising arrangements with the European Asylum Support Office to allow effective operations in Greece and additional support to Appeal Committees;
- The Greek authorities at all levels should work together to ensure improved reception capacity and conditions in the hotspots;
- Member States should ensure sufficient expert support to the work of EU Agencies in Greece and Bulgaria;
- Relevant Member States should reply to all outstanding requests submitted by Greece and effectively relocate all remaining eligible applicants;
- Agreements between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and non-EU countries in the Western Balkans should be swiftly concluded;

²⁸ COM(2018) 65 final of 6.2.2018.

- With all preconditions met, the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme should now be activated to resettle refugees from Turkey;
- The second tranche of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey should be mobilised with the additional budget of 3 billion euro, and the EU and Member States contributing on the same basis as the first tranche.

Central Mediterranean route

- Support to Italy

Support to the implementation of the **hotspot approach** (screening, identification, fingerprinting, registration, information, debriefing and channelling of migrants) continues. The Italian Ministry of Interior is considering opening three additional hotspots in 2018. Given the volatility of flows, it is crucial Italy opens these additional hotspots as part of contingency planning for the summer.

EU agencies continue to provide significant support. The European Asylum Support Office currently deploys 40 national experts in Italy, supported by 51 interim staff and 100 cultural mediators, helping to accelerate the formal registration of requests for international protection across the country and supporting asylum commissions. It is also supporting Italy in implementing recent legislation²⁹ strengthening the protection of migrant children. The European Border and Coast Guard experts are supporting the pre-identification, nationality assessment, screening, fingerprinting and de-briefing of arriving migrants. In addition, practical discussions are taking place between the agencies' experts to ensure that stronger links are created between decisions on asylum and return. Since February 2017, several groups of Europol experts have been deployed to Italy, performing secondary security checks. As of 5 March 2018, a total of 16 Europol's guest officers and three Europol staff were deployed to five locations in Italy.

As of 7 March 2018, 11 999 people have been **relocated** from Italy, including 174 unaccompanied minors. 224 applicants (including 48 unaccompanied minors) already accepted for relocation remain in Italy, waiting to be transferred mainly to Germany (137), the Netherlands (22), Portugal (19) Austria (15) and Croatia (14). Moreover there are 709 relocation requests (including for 106 unaccompanied minors) that have been sent by Italy – mainly to Germany (529), France (95), the Netherlands (46) and Portugal (29) – which have not yet been replied to.

The EU is providing substantial **financial assistance** to Italy in the area of migration and border management. Following the Action Plan of 4 July 2017,³⁰ the immediate additional financial support of EUR 35 million to Italy for the implementation of reforms has been surpassed, with the allocation of EUR 39.92 million emergency support by the end of 2017 for strengthening capacities in the hotspots and other areas of disembarkation of migrants. As a result, the EU support allocated to Italy so far amounts to a total of EUR 189 million.

²⁹ In particular, law 47/2017 (so called "Legge Zampa") which entered in force since May 2017 introducing holistic, multi-disciplinary and non-invasive age assessment procedures, relatively rapid roll-out of a system of voluntary representatives (several thousands of citizens have enrolled over the last months, and the Italian authorities are currently organised their training with support from EASO), and shortened the legal timeline for providing long-term accommodation.

³⁰ SEC(2017) 339 of 4.7.2017.

This emergency assistance complements the EU support to Italy's national programmes in the area of migration and home affairs, which is over EUR 650 million.³¹

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has launched a new operation, **Joint Operation Themis**, on 1 February 2018, replacing Joint Operation Triton in the Central Mediterranean, to better reflect the changing patterns of migration and prevent cross-border crime. Vessels participating in Joint Operation Themis will continue saving lives in the Central Mediterranean. They have to assist any search and rescue incidents, irrespective of the operational area, if called upon by the responsible Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

Next steps:

- Italy to open three additional hotspot locations as planned;
- Finalisation of next phase of emergency funding with the Italian authorities;
- Member States should reply to all outstanding requests submitted by Italy and swiftly transfer all remaining eligible applicants, with absolute priority to minors;
- Italy to continue implementation of all actions identified in the Action Plan of 4 July 2017.

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

The appalling conditions faced by many migrants in Libya and heavy smuggling activity has been answered by the EU with intensive work to address the immediate needs of migrants, stabilise communities, and help stranded migrants return home or find a safe pathway to Europe if in need of protection.

The number of people being helped to leave Libya has increased significantly since the joint **African Union-European Union-United Nations Task Force**³² was established and decided to increase assisted voluntary returns from Libya (via the International Organisation for Migration),³³ and to step up evacuations through an Emergency Transit Mechanism (with the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR). The targets of an additional 15 000 assisted voluntary returns by February 2018³⁴ and the evacuation of 1 300 persons by early 2018 have been met. These efforts will continue with a view to completing the evacuation of migrants and persons in need of international protection in detention and putting an end to the dire conditions in which they are held.

The success of the Emergency Transit Mechanism depends on a two stage process where in the second stage the persons in need of international protection who are evacuated from Libya are resettled from Niger. So far only 25 evacuees have been resettled. Urgent resettlement efforts from Niger are needed. Member States should continue working closely with the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and increase the pace of implementation of the pledges made, so that we can evacuate from Libya and then swiftly resettle from Niger. On its side, it is

³¹ For the period 2014-2020, this amounts to EUR 387.7 million under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, including EUR 43.6 million for relocation/resettlement, and EUR 266 million under the Internal Security Fund, of which EUR 201.5 million for Borders and Visa and EUR 64.5 million for Police.

³² The Task Force was set up in the margin of the fifth African Union-European Union (AU-EU) summit which took place on 29-30 November 2017 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

³³ In the context of Libya, IOM uses the concept of "Voluntary Humanitarian Return Assistance" to refer to Assisted Voluntary Returns given the dire situation of stranded migrants in Libya.

³⁴ There have been 19,370 assisted voluntary returns for the entire year 2017, 6,238 since the start of the evacuation phase (i.e. 28 November until 31 December 2017).

important that the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR does its utmost to step up the pace of referrals of resettlement cases to Member States.

The Task Force's work was supported by a joint follow-up mission to Tripoli in February, addressing bottlenecks such as nationality restrictions. Issues such as the need to address torture and inhuman treatment in detention centres, as well as measures towards the gradual elimination of the system of arbitrary and systematic detention of migrants, were discussed with the Libyan authorities – as well as measures against smuggling.

The **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** continues to play a critical role in the EU's work. On 26 February, it was agreed to take a further step on voluntary return and evacuation with a new EUR 115 million programme which continues the support to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration. However, at the current pace of returns from Libya, the available funding will be able to cover reintegration support for a few months only. In addition, the EUR 90 million mixed migration programme means these organisations can continue expanding their presence at disembarkation points and in detention centres in order to provide medical and direct assistance to migrants and refugees. As a result, 33 000 migrants outside and inside detention centres have benefited from direct assistance such as blankets, clothing and hygiene kits. In addition, 10 000 migrants have benefitted from medical assistance. Assistance has also been given to more than 3 500 Libyan displaced families. Medical facilities have received medical equipment,³⁵ including power generators and ambulances.³⁶ Work is also under way to assist local farmers to preserve production in affected areas, complemented by capacity building for farmers to strengthen their technical capacities and build community resilience. Additional funding has been mobilised to complement the EU Trust Fund to work with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on a programme dedicated to addressing the human rights situation of migrants in Libya. Other programmes are also coming on stream. A EUR 46.3 million programme to help border management across Libya's borders, prepared in partnership between the Commission and Italy, was contracted in December 2017 under the EU Trust Fund and implementation is starting. On 7 March, a further EU Trust Fund programme was agreed to support Libyan municipalities.³⁷ This EUR 50 million programme will improve the living conditions of vulnerable population and host communities alike by developing the capacity of Libyan municipalities to deliver basic services (health, education, sanitation, water). Activities will be tailored to the needs of local authorities and in close coordination with the Presidential Council and the Government of National Accord. This programme has been formulated in a joint effort with Italy.

The contribution of Member States to the North Africa window of the EU Trust Fund has been vital. Following discussion in the European Council, Member States pledged additional contributions of EUR 158.6 million to the Trust Fund, mainly to replenish this window. These contributions, together with additional funds made available from within the EU budget, have allowed for the continuation of key programmes into the first quarter of 2018. However, as projects are effectively implemented and reach their initial capacity, they will need to be extended – this would be true for areas like assisted voluntary return, protection, border management, and support to municipalities. Therefore, additional resources mainly from the

³⁵ IOM has supported three primary health care centres in Sabha (serving 32 000 individuals) and one in Qatroun (serving 3 500 individuals).

³⁶ UNDP has delivered a number of ambulances to the municipalities of Murzuq and Kufra and has started rehabilitation of a clinic in Benghazi.

³⁷ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5144_en.htm

Member States' budgets but also from the EU budget, will be required: the current pipeline of projects for 2018 and where successful existing projects can be expected to be extended into 2019 is EUR 390 million, and though some EUR 165 million remain in the window or has already been identified inside the EU budget or pledged by Member States, this would still leave a **funding gap of EUR 225 million**. It needs to be noted that this covers work directly relevant to Libya, but that work under the two other windows, such as on reintegration has a major impact on the effectiveness of EU action in Libya.

The EU's efforts to support the two **Libyan Coast Guards** have continued. Operation Sophia has so far trained some 201 personnel of the Libyan Navy Coast Guard, including 5 patrol boat crews, under a combination of sea and shore based training. Planning is underway to continue the shore-based element of the training throughout 2018 and to reinforce monitoring, with first reporting finalised in early March 2018. Under the Seahorse Mediterranean Network, training on search and rescue has been provided by Malta and further training will be provided by Italy. The setting up of a secure communication network in the Mediterranean to exchange information on irregular migration by sea is now reaching the final stage, and the network should be operational in the second half of 2018. The EU also supports the cooperation between the Italian Coast Guard and the Libyan Coast Guard to assess capacities in the area of search and rescue and undertake a feasibility study for the setting up of a Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

Work continues on improving information gathering and information-sharing between all EU bodies. A pilot project is being set up to help EU agencies and EUNAVFORMED Operation Sophia staff to work directly together within a Crime Information Cell to be located within the operation, in order to optimise the use of information collected by Operation Sophia for crime prevention, investigation and prosecution, in accordance with the relevant legal mandates. The EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya has established a light presence in Tripoli with five operational staff currently deployed on rotation. During 2017 it has increasingly engaged with the Libyan authorities, including assisting the Libyan authorities to develop reforms of Libya's border management. This presence will be gradually expanded as soon as security conditions permit.

The EU continues to work for an inclusive **political transition** in Libya in line with the July 2017 Council conclusions.³⁸

- *Countries along the route*

Work with countries of transit and origin on migration routes in Africa continues. In December 2017, an additional 28 programmes were agreed under the **EU Trust Fund for Africa**, totalling EUR 468.27 million. Action includes projects to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities and to create jobs – including for youth and for host communities – as well as fighting against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. The latest programmes agreed in February 2018 focus on the protection of migrants in the Sahel, supporting assisted voluntary returns from Libya, sustainable reintegration of migrants, evacuation and support to resettlement, as well as the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants in Ethiopia.

³⁸ Council conclusions on Libya of 17.7.2017 (doc. 11155/17).

Continued work through the EU Trust Fund is essential. In total, the Trust Fund has now approved 147 programmes across its three windows (the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and North Africa) for a total of more than EUR 2.5 billion, with contracts signed for just over EUR 1.5 billion. While the most urgent priority during 2017 was the North Africa window, continuing work on the other windows is also of critical importance to a comprehensive strategy. The pipeline for future actions for the **Sahel and Lake Chad window** is estimated at EUR 775 million, with EUR 201 million secured so far. The pipeline for future actions for the **Horn of Africa window** is estimated at are EUR 904 million identified in terms of projects whilst EUR 469 million³⁹ is available in terms of resources. This suggests a combined funding gap for the two windows of around EUR 1 billion for 2018-2019. Projects in the pipeline focus on support for migration dialogues, access to basic services, protection and long-term development needs of refugees, prevention of trafficking in human beings, smuggling of migrants as well as reintegration of migrants after their return. Whilst these two windows draw on the European Development Fund as well as the EU budget, this also illustrates that the pressure on migration-related funding goes across different windows of the Trust Fund, and that current available funding and EU reserves will not be sufficient to match identified needs.

In the meantime, the **External Investment Plan** and its European Fund for Sustainable Development have raised very strong interest from partner financial institutions. The response to the first invitation for Proposed Investment Programmes under the first two investment windows "Sustainable Energy and Connectivity" and "Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Financing" of the Guarantee Fund has significantly surpassed expectations. The value of the proposals received already exceeds the overall capacity of the Guarantee Fund for all five investment windows. The Guarantee Fund has also attracted interest from third parties such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which recently announced a commitment to contribute with USD 50 million. Additional contributions to the guarantee will still be needed in order to address the demand. The EU's support to blended finance operations in 2017, covering areas such as transport, energy, environment, agriculture, urban development and local enterprises, should unlock a total of around EUR 9.6 billion of public and private investment, including EUR 5.6 billion in 30 major projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. The consequence is that an increase of funding under the External Investment Plan will have to be considered: Member State contributions to this funding will be essential to keep up with the burgeoning demand.

Funding is crucial to continue having impact on the ground. For example, the EU's support to **Niger** has been central to its efforts to decrease the number of irregular migrants transiting through Agadez. The numbers have decreased from 340 per day on average in 2016 to 40-50 per day in 2017. The Joint Investigation Team to strengthen the operational and judicial capabilities of the Nigerien police is up and running. In 2017 this led to 76 charges brought to the Public Prosecutor's Office for crimes related to trafficking in human beings or migrant smuggling. This also led to the dismantling of 7 national and 12 international criminal networks and the seizure of 29 vehicles and 6 motorcycles. Support to replicate similar forms of law enforcement cooperation against migrant smuggling between EU Member States and third countries authorities is being rolled out through a dedicated call for grants addressing the North Africa region. In parallel, to provide income sources alternative to migrant smuggling, the EU is providing income support to local communities in northern Niger. Since November

³⁹ Including the resources currently available in the EUTF for Horn of Africa window as well as the potential EUR 146 million allocation in the context of the mid term review exercise for the region.

2017, the civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Mission "EUCAP Sahel Niger" has carried out regular field visits in the region to map irregular migration flows, analyse trends and routes, conduct needs assessments, implement projects, and deliver training and equipment. The mission has now been strengthened to reinforce its work against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, drugs and weapons. This work will be drawn together in a Ministerial Conference convened on 16 March by the Government of Niger, involving the Sahel countries, the EU and several Member States.

The EU, African Union and the G5 Sahel⁴⁰ hosted a high-level International Conference on security and development in the **Sahel** in Brussels on 23 February 2018, which brought together 32 Heads of State or Government from the European Union and the G5 Sahel together with the United Nations, the African Union and numerous other partners. This focused on the stability and stabilisation of the peripheral, cross-border and fragile zones of the Sahel. Following the EU's support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force, with EUR 50 million in 2017 through the African Peace Facility, a further EUR 50 million was committed by the EU at the conference in support of the work on the fight against terrorism, drugs, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. As a result of the conference, a total of EUR 414 million was pledged in support of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which will continue to receive additional support also by the three Common Security and Defence missions in the Sahel.

Work to tackle smuggling networks in the **Horn of Africa** has also been stepped up with the development continuing of the EU Trust Fund for Africa funded Regional Operational Centre for the Khartoum Process aimed at enhancing joint investigations among countries of the Horn of Africa and beyond. Work is underway to prepare infrastructure, establish the legal basis and identify staff to act as focal points and liaison officers.

The EU-**Egypt** Migration Dialogue launched in Cairo in December 2017 offers the possibility to build stronger and more strategic cooperation on migration as part of the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017-2020. One project under the EUR 60 million programme agreed in October 2017 has been signed and the European Commission is actively working to start implementation. The Egyptian authorities have also been actively engaged at technical level, and cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency is being explored.

Tunisia is currently one of the top countries of origin for arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route. Dialogue has intensified and negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission have been relaunched. Tunisia benefits from a wide range of EU bilateral and regional cooperation programmes, including actions funded by the EU Trust Fund. A cooperation platform on migrant smuggling was launched on 22 February to support enhanced cooperation with local authorities in the region.

On a **regional** level, at the end of 2017 the grant agreement for the Regional Development and Protection Programmes for North Africa was signed under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. This Programme covers Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, and includes a project implemented by the UN Refugee Agency in Libya specifically targeted on improving resettlement opportunities for vulnerable refugees.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The group of 5 Sahel countries, comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad.

⁴¹ The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund contribution for the RDPP in North Africa under the 2016 Annual Work Programme is EUR 7.5 million, of which around EUR 1.2 million is related to activities to be implemented in Libya. This follows a grant to RDPP in North Africa projects under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund Annual Work Programme 2015 of EUR 10 million.

Western Mediterranean route

Morocco is making efforts to prevent irregular migration cooperating on border surveillance, in particular with Spain. Commissioner Avramopoulos' visit to Rabat in November 2017 gave an opportunity to relaunch cooperation aiming to prepare an assistance package to strengthen border management capacity. This would build on the funding already provided by the EU to support Morocco's migration policies (EUR 35 million assigned in December 2017, with the first instalment immediately disbursed). In addition, the EU Trust Fund adopted a new programme (EUR 4.58 million) in December 2017 to reinforce the protection and resilience of migrants and refugees, displaced persons and host communities in Morocco. This programme - which is in line with Morocco's own National Strategy on Migration - will help civil society actors ensure awareness of migrants' rights and access to legal counselling and will promote the integration of migrants into Moroccan society. During the migration talks in November, Morocco also agreed to relaunch negotiations of the Readmission Agreement.

As regards **Algeria**, the number of migrants with Algerian nationality arriving irregularly in Europe has increased, though numbers remain low in absolute terms. Algeria also remains an important country of transit for irregular migrants attempting to reach Morocco and Libya and recent information points to shifting migratory routes from Mali and Niger towards Algeria. The need to step up dialogue and cooperation in migration and mobility was raised at the Association Committee of December 2017 and a fourth informal dialogue on migration between the EU and Algeria took place on 28 February. For the time being, Algeria participates in regional programmes on migration (e.g. Regional development and protection programme (RDPP) for North Africa, Euromed Migration), but cooperation with the EU has not yet translated into country-specific actions or projects funded under the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

Next steps:

- Implement all ongoing projects with Libya and ensure continuity by agreeing to their second phase when appropriate;
- Continue work with the EU-African Union-United Nations Task Force on helping people to leave Libya and with the Libyan authorities towards eliminating the systematic detention of migrants;
- The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR and Member States to continue efforts towards evacuation and resettlement through the Emergency Transit Mechanism, with Member States urgently implementing resettlements;
- Roll out the Joint Investigation Teams in other key countries;
- Strengthen effective cooperation with Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria in parallel to continued efforts to conclude arrangements on return and readmission;
- EU and Member States jointly to ensure adequate resources for the three windows of the EU Trust Fund for Africa so as to fill any emerging funding gaps.

4. RETURN AND READMISSION

The target set in the Commission roadmap of December 2017 to reach agreement with three partner countries **on arrangements for return and readmission** has been achieved. After the agreement on standard operating procedures for return reached with Bangladesh, similar arrangements have been reached with two key countries in sub-Saharan Africa and one in Eastern Africa. All these arrangements are being implemented. Technical obstacles and

relevant solutions are being identified so that practical steps such as identification missions and joint return operations can accelerate. Work is under way to conclude several further practical arrangements or fully fledged readmission agreements with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in close cooperation with Member States, and mobilising all leverages and tools as necessary.

Bilateral cooperation in this area has deepened with countries in **Asia**. Migration was discussed in the first meeting of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Committee on 8 February 2018, including the importance of a return process effectively combined with reintegration. The standard operating procedures with Bangladesh are being applied and a series of meetings following the first EU-Bangladesh Joint Working Group in December 2017 has helped to address implementation issues: the process is well on track and returns are taking place. With Pakistan, good progress has been made on establishing an electronic platform for processing readmission applications. Contacts are under way in view of preparing the possible development of migration dialogues with Iran and other key countries.

These discussions are backed up with practical support. By December 2017, all programmes supporting the **reintegration of returnees** in Afghanistan and Bangladesh under the special measure adopted by the Commission were under way. The largest support programme to Afghanistan (EUR 39 million) started at the end of 2017, including help to the development and implementation of a policy framework for returnees and Internally Displaced Persons and to provincial action plans for reintegration. By the end of February 2018, post-arrival reception assistance had been provided to 406 returnees to Afghanistan, including medical and psycho-social support, onward transportation to the final destination and temporary accommodation. Community development activities will soon follow. These measures will also be reinforced by the special measures adopted in September 2017 of EUR 196 million to support the migration dialogues with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Bangladesh to address short, medium and long-term challenges posed by protracted forced displacement and migration in Asia and the Middle East.

Negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements have also continued with **Tunisia** (second round took place on 28 November 2017, the third round is scheduled for April) and **China** (first round). During the migration talks in November 2017 Morocco also agreed to relaunch negotiations of the Readmission Agreement, on hold for the last three years. The Commission has had a mandate to negotiate a readmission agreement with **Algeria** since 2002 but negotiations have not progressed at all.

A growing number of return operations have been supported by the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency**. Since mid-October 2017, there have been 135 return operation supported by the Agency covering over 5 000 people. The main countries involved have been in the Western Balkans, as well as Tunisia, Georgia and Pakistan, while the largest number of operations have involved Germany, Italy, France, Belgium and Austria.⁴² The Agency's support to Member States' return operations will continue to be further strengthened. The Agency's work includes mapping of Member States needs and capacities on return, deploying liaison officers to Member States, and initiating return operations by the Agency itself. A high level meeting on return with Member States took place in January 2018 to encourage these options to be used to the full. In parallel the Commission has supported a dedicated Member State initiative to develop a European approach to return and reintegration through the

⁴² Reporting period 16.10.2017-07.03.2018; data from *Frontex Application Return*.

European Return and Reintegration Network, including financial support of EUR 15 million. The Network will be fully operational by the summer of 2018, led by the Netherlands with the participation of 13 other Member States and two associated countries. This work needs to continue to meet the targets under the Commission's December 2017 roadmap.

In addition, existing projects on return and reintegration such as the European Integrated Return Management Initiative and the network of European return liaison officers were recently reinforced with additional funding in order to be able to respond to higher demand. Accurate and swift statistical information can play an important role in fostering progress in the management of return and readmission. There are still important gaps and delays in the provision of such **statistics** from Member States. The Commission is considering amending the EU rules on the collection and the regularity of statistics on migration and international protection to ensure a comprehensive overview and address some of the identified gaps.

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

Next steps:

- Progress in ongoing negotiations of readmission agreements and return arrangements with partner countries;
- Full use by Member States of the recently agreed arrangements on return and readmission, stepping up the number of readmission applications to the countries concerned;
- Improve the provision of statistical information on migration and international protection;
- European Parliament and Council to move swiftly forward in the negotiations on the Commission's proposal of 14 March to amend the Visa Code.

5. REINFORCED EXTERNAL BORDER MANAGEMENT

The modernisation of external border management is part of the December 2017 roadmap. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency continues to support Member States through joint operations across the main migratory routes in the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, with the deployment of more than 1 350 border guard officers and other staff.

Serious gaps in pledges were identified for 2018 operational activities. The pledges made would only cover 49% of experts and 44% of technical assets for activities at land borders. For sea border operations, 85 % of experts could be provided but only 51% of technical assets. These considerable shortages risk to severely limit the implementation of the activities planned for 2018. The Agency will soon organise a high level meeting with Member States and the Commission to improve the pledging process.

The full permanent capacity of the mandatory **Rapid Reaction Pool** has been nearly achieved, with 27 Member States nominating their border guards, amounting to 99% of the required pool composition (1 481 out of 1 500 officers).

Regrettably, while some additional pledges were confirmed, no significant progress has been made on the **Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool**. **EU funding** remains available for equipment which should then contribute to the Agency's needs. In addition to the EUR 208 million made available in 2015 and 2017, the Commission considers further allocations of resources may be done in 2018 for Member States in this respect. However, Member States should now step up their efforts to implement the funding allocated in the past, so that these assets could make a significant contribution to addressing the existing gaps.

A key area of the Agency's work is the development of **vulnerability assessments** to identify shortcomings in Member States' border controls. So far, out of 37 recommendations made in 2017 only six have been reported as completed. Member States must implement all the recommendations addressed in 2017, and the Agency must put in place an effective monitoring mechanism to ensure their full implementation. The Agency is currently carrying out the 2018 vulnerability assessment cycle.

The European Border and Coast Guard Regulation⁴³ defines **the European Integrated Border Management** concept and requires the Agency to establish a technical and operational strategy for European Integrated Border Management. To this end, in the course of 2017⁴⁴ the Commission organised dedicated meetings with the European Parliament and the Member States; these have fed into the process of identifying the main elements for developing the European Integrated Border Management Strategy. As the next step in this process, the main elements for developing the European Integrated Border Management Strategy set out in Annex 6 should not only serve as guidance for the preparation of the technical and operational strategy of European Integrated Border Management by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and national strategies by the Member States, but also provide further input to the reflections on the possible scenarios for the future development of the European Border and Coast Guard, as set out in the Communication from the Commission on the future Multiannual Financial Framework.⁴⁵ The European Border and Coast Guard Agency should work to establish a technical and operational strategy and national authorities should now start drafting their corresponding national strategies for integrated border management.

In the last months, the EU has advanced its work on two important new **IT systems** in the area of external border management. First, in December 2017 the Entry/Exit System Regulation entered into force, and the Commission expects it to be fully operational at the end of 2020. Second, inter-institutional negotiations are well advanced to establish a European Travel Information and Authorisation System, which will enable advance security, irregular migration and public health assessments prior to visa-free travellers coming to the Schengen area. This would allow the system to be operational shortly after entry into operation of the Entry/Exit System. At the same time, the European Parliament and Council are progressing on discussions concerning the interoperability of systems for borders, migration and security.

⁴³ Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016.

⁴⁴ Third Report from The Commission To The European Parliament, The European Council And The Council on the Operationalisation Of The European Border And Coast Guard, COM(2017) 219 final of 2.5.2017.

⁴⁵ A new, modern Multiannual Financial Framework for a European Union that delivers efficiently on its priorities post-2020, COM(2018) 98 final of 14.2.2018.

Next Steps:

- Relevant Member States to swiftly and fully follow up the recommendations made within the Vulnerability Assessments 2017 exercise;
- Member States without delay to fill the pledging gaps for the operational activities planned for 2018 coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency at the EU external borders;
- On the basis of the main elements set out in Annex 6, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to establish in the coming months a technical and operational strategy for European Integrated Border Management and the Member States to ensure the corresponding national strategies are in place.

6. RELOCATION, RESETTLEMENT, AND LEGAL PATHWAYS

The **relocation** of eligible applicants by Member States has been an invaluable contribution to help those in clear need of international protection and to alleviate pressure on the asylum systems of Member States which receive many refugees. More than two years on, the EU relocation scheme has proved to be a success, helping refugees start a new life and ensuring that responsibility is better shared amongst Member States – over 96% of all eligible applicants registered for relocation by Italy and Greece have now been relocated. The Commission has reminded all Member States of their legal obligations and called on those Member States that have yet to take part in relocation to do so immediately. The Commission initiated infringement procedures in July 2016 and decided on 7 December 2017 to refer the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the Court of Justice of the EU, as the three Member States remained in breach of their legal obligations.

Resettlement allows the EU and its Member States to fulfil both the imperative to help those in need of international protection and to reduce the incentives for irregular migration. Of the 22 504 resettlements agreed in 2015,⁴⁶ over 86% had been completed by 8 December 2017 when the financial support for this scheme was set to expire. 19 432 people in need of international protection, mostly from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, but also from other third countries, were resettled to 21 Member States and four Associated States.⁴⁷

Following the Commission's Recommendation of September 2017,⁴⁸ the new scheme for at least 50 000 persons in need of international protection to be resettled by 31 October 2019, supported by EUR 500 million from the EU budget, will give a further boost to EU resettlement efforts. The response of the Member States to the Recommendation has been positive, with almost 40 000 pledges received so far from 19 Member States,⁴⁹ making it the largest collective engagement of the EU and its Member States on resettlement to date. At the moment, a particular focus should be placed on resettlement from priority regions such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and the African countries along the Central Mediterranean route. In

⁴⁶ Council conclusions ("on resettling through multilateral and national schemes 20 000 persons in clear need of international protection") of 20.7.2015, document 11130/15.

⁴⁷ Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

⁴⁸ Commission Recommendation of 27.9.2017 on enhancing legal pathways for persons in need of international protection; C(2017) 6504.

⁴⁹ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

particular, Member States have indicated over 27 000 pledges for the resettlement of Syrians from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and around 7 000 for the resettlement from countries along the Central Mediterranean route. Ten Member States already resettled 1 855 persons under this new EU resettlement scheme.⁵⁰ The Commission calls on the remaining Member States to submit their pledges in order to reach the set target of 50 000.

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

The total number of people resettled under all EU resettlement schemes since their launch, including Syrians resettled from Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement, is 29 314.

Targeted **legal migration pilot projects** are being developed by the Commission and several Member States which expressed an interest to include temporary as well as longer-term migration schemes, based on labour market needs and offers in Member States and selected third countries. The Commission calls on Member States to make concrete offers in view of starting discussions with selected third countries, with a geographical focus on African countries.

On the **EU Blue Card** proposal, efforts to find a compromise which brings real value added in meeting the shared objective of attracting highly skilled workers should continue in the European Parliament and the Council.

To further promote labour market integration, the Commission and the European Social and Economic partners signed a Partnership for **Integration**⁵¹ in December 2017. The partnership lays down the respective key principles and commitments of the Commission and the Economic and Social Partners to support and strengthen the opportunities for refugees and migrants legally residing in the EU to integrate in the labour market. Furthermore the Commission will involve the social and economic partners in the mutual learning activities in this area. As one of Commission's actions, the Partnership showcases the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals.⁵² This online skills editor is now available in all EU languages as well as in the main languages of the sending countries.⁵³ It helps to map individual's skills and skills gaps, supporting labour market guidance towards successful integration. A stocktaking exercise to measure the progress achieved will take place at the end of 2018.

On 24 January 2018, the Commission launched a "Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background"⁵⁴ to assist national and regional authorities to better use EU funds in implementing their integration policy, especially in the areas of reception, education, employment, housing, and access to public services.

Next steps:

⁵⁰ Even though not party to the new EU resettlement scheme, Norway has during the same period also resettled 714 refugees. The Norwegian national quota for 2018 consists of 2 120 places.

⁵¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5352_en.htm

⁵² The EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals is available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/#/>

⁵³ This includes Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali, Tigrinya and Turkish.

⁵⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2018/toolkit-on-the-use-of-eu-funds-for-the-integration-of-people-with-a-migrant-background.

- While completing the missing resettlement pledges to reach the target of at least 50 000 pledges under the new scheme, Member States to swiftly resettle from priority regions. The resettlement of persons evacuated from Libya to Niger is particularly urgent;
- Member States to make concrete offers in view of starting discussions with selected third countries for the pilot projects on legal migration.

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In December 2017, the Commission set out a roadmap on how to reach an agreement on a comprehensive migration package by June 2018. Building a strong and comprehensive EU asylum system remains as important as ever – one which is resilient to future crises, and where solidarity and responsibility are at its heart. This underlines the need for the reform of the Common European Asylum System to be agreed and put in place, and for momentum to be kept up in implementing the steps outlined in December.

This report illustrates the wide variety of actions supported by both the EU budget and those of the Member States' to ensure an effective implementation of all the strands of the European Agenda on Migration. This funding has been essential to bring real help to millions of refugees in Turkey, manage migration from and within Libya and work with partners worldwide on addressing the root causes of migration, combatting smuggling and trafficking and strengthening national migration management systems.

Looking forward, the wide range of actions deployed by the EU, already using to the maximum extent the flexibility of its budget, as part of its external migration policy will need to continue and require adequate funding. This should include a combination of EU budget funding and contributions from Member States' budgets; a partnership in funding is a precondition for a partnership in governance.

The Union and its Member States are now faced most urgently with the need to fund the second tranche of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, for a global amount of EUR 3 billion. The Union contribution that the Commission is today proposing of EUR 1 billion from the EU budget will already go well beyond the available margins in the external action heading of the budget. A higher contribution from the Union budget will impede the continuing ability of the Union to effectively finance other migration-related programmes, and more broadly to respond to other external policy priorities in the future. In this regard, the report highlights funding gaps on the North Africa window of the EU Trust Fund, but also for the Sahel and Lake Chad, and Horn of Africa windows which will also require further joint EU and Member States funding to be mobilised in the coming months; the need to support the work following the Syria Conference in April 2017; and the need to respond to a strong demand for guarantees under the External Investment Plan.

In conclusion, agreement on a second tranche of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey on the same basis as the first tranche will be a crucial demonstration that the Member States are working in partnership with the EU and maintain their determination to see a robust and effective EU migration policy in place.