

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE: PROTECTING MIGRANTS AND MANAGING IRREGULAR FLOWS



"We managed to get more control over the Central Mediterranean route with arrivals in August down by 81% compared to the same month last year. In doing so, we have drastically reduced the loss of life in the Mediterranean."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union Address, 13 September 2017

Saving lives, protecting migrants, fight traffickers and replacing irregular migration with organised, legal and safe pathways are the core objectives of the EU's migration policy along the Central Mediterranean route. Over the past few years, in the face of an ever-increasing death toll at sea, the Juncker Commission, together with the High Representative and EU Member States, has made enormous efforts to better manage the flows and put an end to the cruel smuggling and trafficking business. Cooperation with partner countries is essential to this end and has been taken to an unprecedented level through the [Partnership Framework on Migration](#). Since summer 2017, both deaths at sea and irregular arrivals in Italy have decreased. The way forward must build on these steps by further enhancing cooperation with our partners in Africa, cutting off the smugglers, fighting the root causes of irregular migration, helping stranded migrants return home and ensuring the most vulnerable can come to Europe safely.

SAVING LIVES – AT SEA AND IN THE DESERT



The EU's first and foremost priority is saving lives. Over **170,000 migrants** have been rescued in the Central Mediterranean **since 2015** thanks to the efforts of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Operation Sophia. Additionally, Operation Sophia, the Italian Coastguard and Operation Seahorse started training the Libyan Coast Guard to make sure it can carry out rescue operations in Libyan territorial waters, where the most lives are lost. Through the Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Niger and Mali and the EU Trust Fund for Africa, the EU supports search and rescue missions in the desert: so far over 1,100 migrants have been rescued in the Sahara in Niger this year by Nigerien authorities and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

PROVIDING PROTECTION FOR MIGRANTS

Improving the situation of migrants and refugees along the migratory routes is a top priority for the EU, which is working with the IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF to provide humanitarian assistance, medical support and the possibility for migrants to voluntarily return to their home countries. In Libya, EU support focuses in particular on improving conditions in detention centres and disembarkation points and on establishing a resettlement mechanism to allow people in need of protection to reach Europe through a safe pathway.



So far, more than 15,000 migrants, including over 10,000 from Libya, and also from Mali, Niger and Mauritania have benefitted from the **Assisted Voluntary Return** programme run by the IOM and supported by the EU.

FIGHTING SMUGGLERS AND TRAFFICKERS

Criminal networks are taking advantage of people's despair along the migratory routes. To break their business model, the EU and its Member States launched Operation Sophia in 2015. The Operation has so far helped to apprehend more than 119 suspected smugglers. To prevent migrants from being stranded in Libya, the EU is fighting smuggling activities further upstream along the route by providing capacity building, training and advice to local security forces through the CSDP missions EUCAP Sahel Niger and Mali. In Niger, the EU and Niger set up a Joint Investigation Team which is arresting smugglers, bringing them before the courts and seizing vehicles.

On a regional scale, High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini has announced €50 million in support from the EU to the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the EU Training Mission in Mali has provided expertise, training and advice for the establishment of the Joint Force. The G5 Sahel Joint Force aims at tackling common security challenges, including organised crime and the trafficking of arms, drugs and human beings.

Cooperation with Niger

Through the EU Trust Fund for Africa, operational and judicial capabilities of the Nigerien police and the Joint Investigation Team are being strengthened to fight traffickers and smugglers. After six months of work, **101 persons** have been arrested and brought to court and **66 vehicles** have been seized. Economic alternatives to smuggling are offered as well as income support to local communities in northern Niger.



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INCREASING COOPERATION ON RETURN

Returning those who are not fleeing war or persecution and who do not have the right to stay in the EU, in full respect of fundamental rights, is an essential part of the EU's migration policy. To increase return rates and improve the cooperation of

First half of 2017	
Nigeria	21.5%
Guinea	28.5%
Bangladesh	17%
Ivory Coast	28%
Mali	30%

Asylum Recognition Rates of top 5 nationalities arriving to Europe via the Central Mediterranean Route

our partner countries on readmission, the EU is collectively working on concluding readmission agreements or practical arrangements that can achieve concrete results. While some have already been achieved, others are in the making. The EU will continue pursuing this approach using all necessary incentives, leverages and tools.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE LEGAL PATHWAYS TO EUROPE

While irregular migration must be reduced, safe and legal pathways to Europe through resettlement should become the preferred method of arrival for persons in need of international protection. In September 2017, the Commission launched a new resettlement scheme with at least 50,000 additional places for vulnerable refugees from Turkey, the Middle East and Africa. The new initiative builds on the success of the EU's ongoing resettlement schemes which are being implemented in cooperation with the UNHCR and through which over 25,700 vulnerable persons have been brought safely to Europe.

The Commission has set aside **€500 million** to support Member States' resettlement efforts in the next two years. So far, **16 Member States** have pledged more than **34,400 places** under the new scheme.

LONG-TERM SUPPORT: TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AT HOME

In Africa, the EU is cooperating with countries of origin and transit to give people opportunities and fight poverty, climate change, political instability and violence – among the root causes of irregular migration. The **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa**, worth €3.1 billion, supports initiatives that boost economic development, improve migration management and increase stability in countries of origin, for example by improving good governance, helping create jobs and providing vocational training. The North Africa window of the Trust Fund contributes in particular to community stabilisation. Creating employment opportunities, fostering a more robust development path and supporting local authorities to restore essential service delivery will be crucial to improve the resilience of both migrant and local population, notably in Libya and to prevent additional irregular migration flows originating from countries in the region, such as Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt.

In addition, the **External Investment Plan** for Africa and the EU Neighbourhood is expected to trigger public and private investment volumes of up to €44 billion with an initial EU investment of €4.1 billion.