

## EU ACTION PLAN FOR THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND ATLANTIC ROUTES

In the context of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU will continue to promote sustainable and structural solutions to our common migration challenges, based on a comprehensive, whole-of-route approach, and including renewed action on the external dimension of migration.

In 2018, irregular arrivals to the EU via the Western Mediterranean route increased significantly. As of 2019, while irregular arrivals saw a decrease on the Western Mediterranean route, they saw an important increase on the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, particularly in 2020 and 2021<sup>1</sup> and with considerable decrease in 2022 (by 31%, compared to 2021) and in 2023 so far.

Building on already positive relations, the EU has been strengthening its partnership with key countries of origin and transit along the route, in full coordination with its Member States in Team Europe approach. Measures undertaken by the EU, Member States and the EU's partners have contributed to the important decrease of irregular arrivals. Nonetheless, migratory flows remain sustained. This calls for continuous vigilance and concrete operational responses, anchored on the current effective cooperation.

The Commission is presenting this Action Plan in line with the European Council Conclusions of 9 February 2023 and in view of the upcoming Justice and Home Affairs Council on 8-9 June and the European Council on 29-30 June.

### I. Strengthen cooperation with partner countries

*Coupled with intensified political dialogue and outreach, the EU continues to strengthen the strategic, policy-driven programming and implementation of its external funding to address migratory challenges, prevent irregular migration and save lives along all migratory routes, in cooperation with partner countries and international organisations, and in alignment with the Rabat Process priorities<sup>2</sup>. This support is and will continue to be provided according to concrete needs on the ground, through NDICI-Global Europe, Justice and Home Affairs Funds and Member States' resources through regional or multi-country programmes on migration-related support to partners in North and West Africa, alongside bilateral EU programmes with individual countries, including to tackle the root causes of irregular migration. In this context, the EU will step up work to:*

1. **Identify short-term operational priorities and coordination measures among EU and Member States** to address migration with a whole-of-route approach, building on existing cooperation, including in the context of the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) for the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean routes, and in line with partner countries' expressed interests.

***Prevent irregular migration by combatting smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings***

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<sup>1</sup> Over 56 000 detections registered in 2018 on the Western Mediterranean route. In 2019 there were 25 576 arrivals on the Western Route and 2 718 arrivals on the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands. In 2020 there were 24 087 arrivals on the Atlantic route (+786% compared to 2019) and 22 351 arrivals in 2021 (+722% compared to 2019). Source: Frontex.

<sup>2</sup> The Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) is a regional migration dialogue bringing together national authorities from African and EU Member States around migration and development issues. [Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development - Rabat Process \(rabat-process.org\)](https://www.rabat-process.org/)

2. **Implement the Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnership (ASOP) with Morocco** by, among others: (a) supporting Morocco's efforts to fight against the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking in human beings through targeted financial assistance, budget support operations and capacity building mainly funded under NDICI-Global Europe, in close cooperation with Member States and relevant EU Agencies; (b) continuing to promote the structured cooperation between Morocco and Europol aimed at the conclusion of a Working Arrangement, as well as enhanced cooperation with CEPOL; (c) implementing awareness-raising and information campaigns on the risks related to irregular migration and legal pathways in Morocco.
3. In addition, **adopt and kick off the implementation of a regional programme<sup>3</sup>** funded under NDICI-Global Europe **to fight against the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking in human beings** including Morocco, in close cooperation with Member States and relevant EU Agencies, and with a view to increase the number of networks dismantled and smugglers convicted. The programme will make additional resources available that will contribute to achieving the objectives of the ASOP.
4. **Consolidate counter-smuggling activities with partner countries along the whole route**, while sustaining efforts to fight trafficking in human beings notably by: (a) consolidating and enhancing synergies to the extent possible, within and between the existing Common Operational Partnership (COPs) and Joint Investigation Team projects with Mauritania, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Niger, as well as facilitating their cooperation with Morocco; (b) scaling up support to awareness raising and information campaigns in relevant countries on the risks related to irregular migration, including trafficking in human beings and on available legal pathways; (c) promoting strengthened operational cooperation between the EU Member States and partner countries in the route on investigations targeting migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) and its operational action plans (OAPs).

#### ***Border management***

5. **Cooperate with Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia, strengthening their capacities to develop national and jointly targeted actions to prevent irregular migration**, support more effective border and migration management and reinforce search and rescue capacity, in full respect of fundamental rights and international obligations. This will be done in the context of EU funds, for example through EU-funded budget support operations and equipment delivery funded under NDICI-Global Europe, and could potentially be done also in the context of specific financial contributions by Member States under the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism.
6. **Foster increased bilateral cooperation between Frontex and Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal**, notably by implementing the Frontex-Morocco 2023 roadmap and pursuing the negotiation of working arrangements and/or Status Agreements, building on and complementing ongoing cooperation between EU Member States and these partners.

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<sup>3</sup> Covering Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.

### ***Return, readmission and reintegration***

7. **Enhance the ongoing engagement to improve practical cooperation on readmission** and the full implementation of readmission arrangements while, where possible, seeking opportunities to follow up on existing mandates for readmission agreements. Assess the possibility of supporting the readmission process via the development of Readmission Case Management Systems with relevant partners in the region.
8. **Support protection and voluntary return operations** benefiting migrants stranded in transit and destination countries in North Africa (notably Morocco and Algeria) and the Sahel countries (notably Mauritania), in line with the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration, notably by scaling up financial support to key partner countries in this context, including the existing regional voluntary return and reintegration programme for North Africa funded under NDICI-Global Europe.
9. **Enhance the sustainable reintegration of returnees in their countries of origin**, including by ensuring coordination and complementarity of reintegration and socio-economic support for returnees that are assisted by the EU, the Member States, Frontex, international organisations and private actors. In addition, support the strengthening of national systems, notably in The Gambia, Senegal and Ivory Coast, to ensure **effective referral mechanisms** for returnees' economic, social and psycho-social reintegration.

### ***Protection and legal pathways***

10. **Foster the quick and effective implementation of protection mechanisms in partner countries**, including through the Regional Development and Protection Programme in North Africa and Mauritania, to strengthen the capacity of national institutions for registration, refugee status determination as well as direct assistance and integration of migrants and persons of concern.
11. **Promote and support legal pathways to protection in the EU** through resettlement, as well as humanitarian admission and complementary pathway programmes in refugee-hosting countries along the route, in close cooperation with EU Member States and UNHCR.

### ***Labour migration and Talent Partnerships***

12. **Advance on the operationalisation of the Talent Partnership with Morocco**, in cooperation with interested EU Member States, to promote international labour mobility and support skills development (including vocational education and training) in a mutually beneficial way, while mitigating the risks of brain drain. The first follow-up meeting will be dedicated to a deeper analysis of the matrix of sectors and occupations identified by the EU; the ultimate objective being that of preparing the ground for concrete labour mobilities for specific sectors/professions.
13. **Assess the feasibility of launching Talent Partnerships with Nigeria and Senegal**, based on strong and continuous cooperation on all aspects of migration management, on existing pilot projects and ongoing cooperation on Vocational Education and Training (VET), and on the participation of EU and Member States' private sector. In addition, further support the

implementation of legal migration and mobility projects between partner countries along the route and the EU and among themselves, including through the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, the EU's programme encouraging international learning mobility across the African continent.

14. Encourage the contribution of the diaspora of third country nationals' to the development of their countries of origin, notably by fostering their involvement in legal migration/mobility schemes projects in order to promote the transfer of skills and the creation of wealth and jobs in those partner countries.

## II. **Ensure more effective border management, search and rescue and return procedures, as well as smoother and faster voluntary solidarity**

*Reinforcing effective border management and returns from the EU to partner countries is essential to reduce irregular flows and to build a functioning migration management system. In addition, cooperation and solidarity among Member States, as well as with other relevant stakeholders, is key to prevent fatalities at sea, maintain safety of navigation and find sustainable solutions to current challenges. Member States need to address bottlenecks identified so far in all these areas, while enhancing flexibility and streamlining processes. In this context, the EU will step up work to:*

15. Identify, through a Frontex **targeted assessment of the situation in the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean**, to be carried out in close cooperation with concerned Member States, needs for reinforced support to partner countries on the route through possible joint operations, aerial and maritime surveillance, capacity building, as well as with improved situational awareness for Member States at the external borders.
16. **Enhance returns from EU Member States to partner countries**, as well as the sustainable reintegration of returnees, notably by setting up targeted return operations from the EU including with Frontex' support (return counselling, support with identification and travel document issuance, coordination of return flights, etc.) and making full use of the Frontex Joint Reintegration services and other available reintegration support. Return operations should also be supported by the deployment of EURLOs/EMLOs to priority partner countries. These efforts could be reinforced by enhanced cooperation on returns between Member States, including with the support of the EU Return Coordinator and within the framework of the High-Level Network for Return.
17. Explore the mutually beneficial benefits that could stem from **linking up the reintegration of voluntary returnees with Member States/European companies' investments** in countries of origin and transit, notably when it comes to fostering job creation and skills development.
18. **Achieve more efficient and quicker relocations** under the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism, with the support of the Commission and the EUAA. The EUAA operational plan could be amended swiftly to strengthen this support. Pledging States are also encouraged to be flexible enough to alleviate the pressure on the reception system in Member States of first entry in line with the objectives and spirit of the Solidarity Declaration.

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The EU and the Member States will need to work jointly to achieve the goals set in this Action Plan and to ensure its effective implementation. Reporting and monitoring through the existing Commission and Council mechanisms will be essential.