

**Follow-up to the fifteen action points set out in January 2023**

President's letter	State of play October 2023
<p>1. <b>Strengthening key external borders through targeted Union measures</b>, combining Frontex deployments of personnel and equipment, mobilisation of EU funds to support Member States in reinforcing border control capabilities, means of surveillance and equipment and bilateral funding (including through the voluntary solidarity mechanism). The Bulgaria-Türkiye border to be a priority, open to the involvement of other interested Member States.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frontex is further developing and rolling out the <b>prioritisation of deployments</b>. Priorities for 2024 and 2025 to be presented to the Management Board on 22-23 November 2023.</li> <li>• <b>EUR 200 million BMVI specific action call for equipment</b>: funding allocated to Member States, who are now purchasing and procuring equipment.</li> <li>• <b>Assessment of applications</b> for the BMVI call for projects to support electronic surveillance systems (e-surveillance) in Member States at the external border (EUR 140 million) to be finalised by the end of October.</li> <li>• Following the invitation to Bulgaria and Romania to strengthen border capabilities, Romania will develop a <b>motion detection system</b> and purchase portable cameras for <b>the land border with Serbia</b> (EU contribution EUR 10.2 million). Bulgaria will <b>expand the surveillance system along the Bulgaria-Türkiye border</b>, purchasing patrol cars and deploying additional staff (EU contribution EUR 45 million).</li> </ul>
<p>2. <b>Reinforced border management in partner countries</b>: Reinforced regional cooperation in the Mediterranean to <b>strengthen coordination of search and rescue capacities and border surveillance at sea and land borders of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya</b>. Increased support for equipment and training will be provided. This will complement continued support to UNHCR and IOM to assist these countries to build their capacity for asylum and reception of those in need of international protection. Work with North African countries and IOM to return people with no right to stay.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Search and Rescue</b>: In 2023, there have been three meetings of the Search and Rescue Contact Group. Pilot initiative to improve situational awareness on SAR situations at sea launched by Frontex and Italy in September 2023, information shared regularly with all Contact Group members. The October meeting discussed the terms of reference for a European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) study on main safety aspects relevant for SAR operations, as well as recent SAR trends, fundamental rights, and research &amp; innovation projects relevant for SAR.</li> <li>• <b>Tunisia</b>: In line with the conclusions of the June European Council, the MoU was signed on 16 July. Focus on five pillars: macro-economic stability, economy and trade, green energy, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility. The MoU is under implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ EU/Tunisian working groups operationalizing all five pillars of the MoU including on migration (entry controls, border management, legal migration, returns and reintegration from Tunisia, returns from the EU, the nexus migration/development and anti-smuggling).</li> <li>○ The Commission provided operational assistance worth EUR 67 million (delivery by end of 2023) for refitting of search and rescue vessels, vehicles and other equipment for the Tunisian coast guard and navy, protection of migrants in Tunisia and returns and reintegration from Tunisia to countries of origin. Contracts with UNHCR on protection (EUR 8 million in Tunisia) and with IOM on voluntary returns to countries of origin</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>(EUR 13 million for Tunisia) were signed on 27 September; 2 scanners and fuel to support anti-smuggling operations delivered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tunisia familiarisation visit to Frontex took place on 13-14 September.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Egypt:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Call for tender for Search and Rescue boats was completed in June for accelerated delivery of 3 boats. The first boat will be completed in December for swift delivery after testing by the Egyptian authorities.</li> <li>○ Phase II of border management project (EUR 87 million) to be contracted in the coming months</li> <li>○ Frontex to explore Egyptian interest for a Working Arrangement, following Egypt's familiarisation visit to Frontex headquarters on 2-4 October 2023.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Libya:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Five Search and Rescue vessels have been handed over to the Libyan Coast Guard (one on 6 February, two on 22 June and two on 2 August).</li> <li>○ by 21 September 2023, more than 10 900 individuals reported as rescued or intercepted by the Libyan authorities in more than 100 operations (UNHCR data). Of those disembarked, the largest groups were from Bangladesh, Egypt, and Syria, while the nationality of the vast majority remained unrecorded.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>North Macedonia:</b> deployment EBCG Standing corps continues along the country's southern border.</li> <li>● <b>Montenegro:</b> Following signature on 16 May 2023 the status agreement is provisionally applicable since July, pending the European Parliament's consent and the adoption of the Council Decision. The operational plan is being amended in order to allow extended activities.</li> <li>● <b>Albania:</b> Following signature on 15 September 2023, Albanian Parliament's consent for provisional application of the agreement is needed. The conclusion of the agreement is subject to the European Parliament's consent and the adoption of the Council Decision.</li> <li>● <b>Serbia:</b> Second round of negotiation held on 14 September 2023 and technical discussion held on 10 October.</li> <li>● <b>Bosnia Herzegovina:</b> During the Berlin Process Home Affairs Ministerial on 14 September 2023. BiH committed to appoint a chief negotiator and finalise the negotiations by end 2023.</li> </ul>

<p>3. <b>Achieving 100% registration of irregular arrivals of third country nationals at external borders</b> through an assessment by the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, of the state of registration, identifying key measures to reach that objective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission presented a gap analysis at the Schengen Council on 9 March 2023.</li> <li>• <b>Eurodac Contact Group</b> on 19 July 2023 provided an overview of Member States' practice on Eurodac registrations.</li> <li>• Meetings were held (14, 19 and 25 September) between the Commission's <b>Schengen Coordinator</b> and countries affected by secondary movements on the Western Balkan route addressing Eurodac registrations.</li> </ul>
<p>4. The Commission will work with Member States and agencies to <b>develop a common EU situational awareness and improve early warning</b> and operational response, by combining information from sources to include intelligence services and an accelerated deployment of the European border surveillance system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ISAA weekly reports</b> provide the situational picture on the main routes, asylum applications, smuggling and secondary movements. <b>Monthly ISAA reports</b> provide comprehensive data and an overview of key trends and developments.</li> <li>• <b>Weekly Blueprint meetings</b> focus on the main migratory routes, on the eastern border and on Ukraine. Reports on new migratory trends and specific countries/regions according to need.</li> </ul>
<p>5. <b>Pilot scheme</b>, in the first half of 2023, with interested Member States and in cooperation with partners, e.g. along the Western Balkan route, <b>to apply an accelerated border procedure</b> to cover screening (identification), fast asylum procedure (safe third country/first country of asylum, safe country of origin, and security grounds) and immediate return. This would be supported by Frontex, the EU Asylum Agency and Europol.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>Steering Committees</b> after the completion of the initial 6 months of the pilot projects took place in Bulgaria and Romania on 20 and 22 September 2023.</li> <li>• A <b>report</b> summarising the progress made under each of the two pilot projects over the past 6 months was presented on 19 October at the JHA Council. The pilot projects with Bulgaria and Romania were extended to continue the close cooperation between the Bulgarian and Romanian authorities, the Commission and the EU Agencies. The extension will allow monitoring of implementation of recent legislative changes, and further test the possibility to replicate good practices identified.</li> </ul>
<p>6. <b>Mutual recognition of return decisions and expedited return procedures</b>: a recommendation by Spring 2023 to use a new feature in the Schengen Information System to identify where someone has already received a return decision by a Member State and to recognise that</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the Commission Recommendation on the mutual recognition of return decisions and expediting returns of 14 March 2023, there was an increased use of the <b>SIS return alerts</b> by Member States, with over 200 000 new alerts on return introduced by Member States in 6 months.</li> <li>• The <b>Return Coordinator</b> is working to further practical implementation of mutual recognition of return decisions bilaterally with Member States. A dedicated discussion took</li> </ul>

<p>decision, and to make full use of the existing legal framework to expedite returns.</p>	<p>place in the High-Level Network on Returns on 4-5 October.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extraordinary meeting of the High-Level Network on Returns held by the Return Coordinator on 20 October to address the situation of third country nationals staying illegally in the EU and posing a threat to public policy, public order or national security.</li> <li>• As requested by Member States, further technical discussions on specific legal points on mutual recognition of return decisions will take place notably in the Contact Group on the Return Directive.</li> </ul>
<p>7. The EU should have <b>common lists of Safe Third Countries and Safe Countries of Origin</b>. The Commission and the EU Asylum Agency will support the co-legislators to establish such lists. In the meantime, to support Member States in using existing options on safe third countries and safe countries of origin more efficiently, the EU Asylum Agency will conduct a mapping of the state of play and provide guidance to increase the use of these principles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interinstitutional trilogue negotiations on the <b>Asylum Procedure Regulation</b> are ongoing.</li> <li>• EUAA <b>guidance document on the practical use of safe country concepts</b> will be submitted for adoption to the Management Board of EUAA on 28-29 November 2023.</li> </ul>
<p>8. The EU Asylum Agency will develop an overview by mid-2023 and report regularly on the <b>reception conditions</b> for asylum seekers, including on detention, in all Member States. The Commission and the Agency will also provide technical assistance to Member States to ensure compliance with reception standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EUAA's <b>analysis of reception conditions</b> in Member States should be completed by the EUAA by 15 November.</li> <li>• <b>Assessment of applications</b> for the call for projects to <b>support reception capacity for unaccompanied minors</b> (EUR 70 million) and <b>reception capacity near the external border</b> (EUR 50 million) to be finalised by end of October.</li> </ul>

<p>9. To ensure <b>implementation of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism</b>, participating Member States – based on the improvements identified by the Commission – should agree on a significant simplification of the existing relocation processes in the first quarter of 2023 and accelerate pledging, including alternatives to relocation such as financial contributions. The Commission will use the Solidarity Platform to coordinate the matching of pledges with the needs of Member States.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 12 October 2023, a total of 3 156 <b>transfers</b> had taken place to Germany, France, Finland, Norway, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Ireland from Cyprus. Italy, Greece, Spain, Malta. Belgium and Iceland are planning first transfers shortly.</li> <li>• Five projects have been or are being implemented through <b>financial contributions</b>: Voluntary Returns (for CY by CZ); Safe areas for unaccompanied minors on the islands (for EL by NL, CH, CZ); project in Tunisia focusing on voluntary return and reintegration (for IT by CZ); creation and operation of an accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (for CY by CZ, possibly also IE to join); cultural/linguistic mediation (for IT by CH).</li> </ul>
<p>10. Work on the <b>full implementation of the Dublin Roadmap</b>, with the support of the EU Asylum Agency, will be taken forward as a priority to address bottlenecks in the implementation of Dublin transfers. The Commission will monitor this work closely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dublin Contact Committee</b> on 16 March 2023 took stock of the Roadmap’s implementation.</li> <li>• The Commission conducted <b>bilateral meetings</b> with all concerned Member States until the end of May to identify and resolve gaps in the implementation of the Dublin system.</li> <li>• The Dublin Contact Committee meeting on 15 September 2023 was dedicated to the implementation of recent CJEU case law.</li> <li>• The Commission Staff Working Document <b>Enhancing the effectiveness of the Dublin III Regulation</b>, along with the compilation of the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union regarding the interpretation of the Dublin III Regulation to ensure a swifter application of the Dublin rules in the Member States, is under preparation.</li> </ul>
<p>11. Central to the EU’s work of deepening overall relations with key partners such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Nigeria is to put in place specific initiatives on migration management, in particular <b>to improve returns and readmission</b>, including by increasing returns from the third countries along the route, <b>and to prevent departures</b>. These will include ambitious legal migration pathways, such as Talent Partnerships, <b>boosting international</b></p>	<p><b>TALENT PARTNERSHIPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roundtables on the launch of Talent Partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh were held before the summer. Programmes and roadmaps for their implementation are under preparation and discussion with partners.</li> <li>• Support from NDICI-Global Europe of EUR 3 million each for Talent Partnerships with Bangladesh and Pakistan received support at the relevant committee and will be adopted in the coming months. For North African partners, contracts under the new phase of THAMM to support Talent Partnerships are currently under negotiation (EUR 18 million), to be contracted by end November 2023. Further support will come from projects (EUR 18 million under AMIF) being implemented for Tunisia and evaluated for Egypt and Pakistan.</li> </ul>

<p><b>mobility and the development of skills</b> in a mutually beneficial way.</p>	<p><b>RETURNS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2023 so far (8 October) 215 <b>Frontex-supported return operations</b> including Egypt (8), Bangladesh (1 Frontex-led operation), Pakistan (11), Nigeria (14) and Tunisia (61), the Gambia (1).</li> <li>• From January to August 2023: Assisted Voluntary Return for 7 136 migrants from North Africa to third countries implemented by IOM within the Migrant Protection Return and Reintegration North Africa programme.</li> <li>• Recent top-up on 27 September of ongoing regional programme on <b>Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration North Africa</b> of EUR 21 million with IOM (EUR 13 million Tunisia, EUR 8 million Egypt).</li> <li>• <b>Serbia:</b> deepening cooperation with Frontex on returns, paving the way to deployments of Frontex (Q1 2024 tbc) and Dutch (by December 2023 tbc) return experts to Serbia.</li> <li>• <b>Bosnia Herzegovina:</b> 120 returns with IPA support by end September: 54 voluntary returns and 66 non-voluntary returns, of which IOM is providing reintegration assistance to 38 migrants. Nationalities include Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Morocco, Nepal, Somalia, Turkey and Vietnam.</li> <li>• Discussion on targeted joint return actions at the <b>High-level network for Return</b> chaired by the Return Coordinator on 4 and 5 October.</li> <li>• Preparations ongoing for a <b>Frontex-led Joint Return Operation</b> to Nigeria for around 50 returnees from different EU MS (late November tbc).</li> </ul> <p><b>OUTREACH &amp; PROGRAMMING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VP Schinas has travelled to Ivory Coast, Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania and Gambia seeking deeper cooperation notably on returns in September/October 2023.</li> <li>• <b>Bangladesh:</b> Contracting of the sustainable reintegration programme finalised in July (EUR 20 million) and support for Talent Partnership (EUR 3 million) confirmed. EUR 9 million regional programme on fighting human trafficking and smuggling of migrants in South Asia presented at NDICI Committee of 26 September.</li> <li>• <b>Pakistan:</b> 13th EU-Pakistan Joint Commission on 24 June held an in-depth exchange concerning migration, notably the Joint Readmission Agreement and the Talent Partnership,</li> </ul>
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	<p>and potential cooperation on smuggling. Also in June, migrant rights were discussed in 13<sup>th</sup> EU-Pakistan Subgroup on Democracy Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. Latest workshop on readmission held on 4 July. Financial support for Talent Partnership (EUR 3 million) confirmed; sustainable reintegration programme (EUR 7 million) presented NDICI committee in September. EUR 9 million regional programme on improving migration management in Silk Route countries contracted with ICMPD and UNODC, EUR 40 million programme in support to skills development expected to be contracted in 2023. The EU-funded EASTEAMS project to counter migrant smuggling started implementation on 1 September 2023 (EUR 1.7 through the Internal Security Fund).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Morocco:</b> Outreach underway to reschedule a technical meeting on readmission between the EU and Morocco. Implementation of EUR 152 million migration budget support is ongoing (first EUR 35 million disbursement made in Q1 2023).</li> <li>• <b>Tunisia:</b> Exchanges between President von der Leyen, Commissioners Johansson and Varhelyi with their counterparts throughout September. See point 2 above.</li> <li>• <b>Egypt:</b> During UNGA Commissioner Johansson and EG MFA Shoukry confirmed interest in a comprehensive partnership on migration, including anti-smuggling and promoting legal pathways. 4th EU-Egypt High Level Dialogue on Migration and 2<sup>nd</sup> SOM on Security and Law Enforcement to be held in November 2023.</li> <li>• <b>Nigeria:</b> 5-6 October Senior Officials Meeting and 19-20 October Ministerial in Abuja</li> </ul>
<p>12. The Commission will launch <b>new anti-smuggling operational partnerships</b> with Tunisia and Egypt in 2023, building on those in place with Morocco, Niger, and the Western Balkans, with the support of Europol and Eurojust. Regional initiatives should include <b>joint operational teams</b> with prosecutors and law enforcement authorities of Member States and partners. The Commission will also advance Frontex Status agreements with Mauritania and Senegal.</p>	<p><b>International Conference on strengthening international cooperation on countering migrant smuggling</b> to be held in Brussels on 28 November 2023</p> <p><b>Anti-smuggling Western Balkans</b> regional programme: 48-month project started on 1 June 2023. Appraisal mission in June on needs; first operational workshop confirming participation of Member States, took place 3-5 October. First priority activities will include an operational visit to the Bihać province of Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the increase of crossings through the green border, to discuss further support to the Bosnian border police.</p> <p><b>Anti-smuggling/border management</b> regional programme for <b>North of Africa:</b> Tunisia window discussed with Member States and UNODC on 18 September, to be contracted before the end of the year. Egypt window (approximately EUR 20 million) under discussion with Egypt’s Ministry of the Interior including on equipment required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ASOP Morocco:</b> Operationalisation of the ASOP ongoing: regular meetings at technical</li> </ul>

	<p>level, anti-smuggling programme targeting Morocco is planned for 2024, Frontex and Europol cooperation ongoing with possible launch of negotiation on a working arrangement by early 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ASOP Tunisia:</b> Three mentorship pairs on migrant smuggling TU with Member States (AT, ES, IT) to start cooperation in the framework of Euromed Police, in the last quarter of 2023 (implemented by CEPOL with Europol).</li> <li>• <b>ASOP Egypt:</b> Discussion with Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs including on the involvement of CEPOL, Europol and Frontex to be held during 4<sup>th</sup> Dialogue on Migration and 2<sup>nd</sup> SOM on Security (November 2023)</li> <li>• <b>ASOP Niger:</b> activities on hold.</li> <li>• <b>Two new regional information campaigns were launched:</b> one covering Tunisia, Niger, Nigeria targeting the Central Mediterranean Route, started on 1 May 2023, and the other covering Tunisia, Morocco, started on 1 June 2023.</li> </ul>
<p>13. The Commission will complete work in the first half of 2023 on a targeted toolbox of measures to ensure that <b>transport operators</b> do not facilitate irregular migration, including through targeted outreach to transport operators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toolbox presented by the Commission on 6 June 2023.</li> <li>• Outreach to <b>Pakistan</b> (civil aviation authority and Federal Investigation Agency) in July 2023 following the shipwreck of Pylos, and continuing follow-up.</li> <li>• Continued engagement with <b>Türkiye</b> with a view to identifying additional actions and furthering operational cooperation. High Level Dialogue on Migration and Security planned for 23 November.</li> <li>• The proposal to revise the <b>Visa Suspension Mechanism</b> adopted on 18 October 2023 addresses challenges for a functioning visa-free policy including lack of visa policy alignment.</li> </ul>
<p>14. The Commission will work with Member States to ensure a targeted use of <b>resettlement and complementary pathways</b> along the main migratory routes and provide new funding to expand safe and legal avenues for protection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the 2023 pledge is ongoing (as of August 2023: 4 800 resettlements and almost 3 000 humanitarian admissions).</li> </ul>
<p>15. To attract skilled workers to the EU, particularly in new technologies, and to facilitate the recruitment process including</p>	<p>Adoption of the <b>Talent Mobility</b> package is planned for 15 November:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication on maximising the potential of talent mobility as part of the European Year of</li> </ul>



<p>through easier recognition of skills and qualifications, the <b>Commission will present new initiatives by the end of 2023</b>, and it will develop a new online platform to support employers in finding talent that matches labour market need</p>	<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commission recommendation on recognition of qualifications of third country nationals</li><li>• Proposal for a regulation establishing an EU Talent Pool</li><li>• Proposal for a Council recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’ updating and repealing the Council recommendation 2011 ‘Youth on the Move’</li></ul>
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