



Refugee crisis: Commission reviews 2015 actions and sets 2016 priorities

Brussels, 13 January 2016

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At their weekly meeting today, the College of Commissioners discussed the refugee crisis, looking at the measures taken in 2015 and the initiatives to be presented in spring 2016. In the past year an unprecedented rise in the number of people seeking international protection in Europe proved a major test for the Common European Asylum System and the Schengen area. The European Commission took swiftly measures to respond to the crisis, and continues to work with Member States and third country partners to manage the flow of people, protect Europe's borders, and address the root causes of these migratory pressures. 2016 will be another important year for progress towards an asylum system based on solidarity and fair sharing of responsibilities.

European Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"We can only get out of this crisis together. 2016 must see clear and tangible results in regaining control of irregular flows and of our borders, starting with the next weeks and months. For this to happen, the EU as a whole must step up its efforts; the proposals the Commission has put on the table must be adopted and the approaches that were agreed in 2015 fully implemented. We need to make sure hotspots are fully operational and that people who arrive are properly registered and fingerprinted, also tackling secondary movements. We must get the relocation scheme off the ground and return those who have no right to stay. We should also cooperate better with third countries to address root causes and stem the flow, as well as improve return and readmission. In 2016 we need to return to Schengen's normal functioning, and to do that we must ensure that Member States do not feel the need to introduce or prolong internal border controls. The Commission will do everything that is necessary for this to happen. In addition, we will come up with forward-looking thinking and bold steps to make sure our asylum system is future proof and to help manage migratory flows in a sustainable way."*

European Commissioner Dimitris **Avramopoulos** added: *"We are at a crossroads in 2016. The decisions and actions we take together will define the future of our Union – because it is precisely what defines us as a Union that is at stake. On the one hand we need to urgently deliver on hotspots, relocation, returns, European Border Guards and a normalisation of Schengen. On the other hand, we must be bold and look ahead. That is why the Commission is already working hard to prepare a revision of the Dublin System, a permanent resettlement scheme and a comprehensive package on legal migration and integration. We cannot lose sight of the bigger picture."*

Main actions in 2015

A European Agenda on Migration

The Juncker Commission identified migration as one of our ten political priorities prior to taking office in November 2014. We took immediate action in 2015 to tackle the most urgent challenge and save lives at sea, while at the same time defining a comprehensive strategy to manage migration better in all its aspects.

On 13 May, the Commission presented its European Agenda on Migration to respond to the crisis. Two weeks later, on 27 May, the Commission presented the first implementation package of the Agenda, including proposals for the relocation of 40,000 persons from Greece and Italy, resettlement of 20,000 persons from outside the EU, an EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling and a tripling of the budget and assets used in search and rescue operations at sea. Guidelines on fingerprinting were also tabled in order to help the Member States with migrant registration.

A second implementation package was presented by the European Commission on 9 September. The package included proposals for the relocation of an additional 120,000 asylum seekers from Member States under particular pressure, a permanent crisis relocation mechanism, a European List of safe countries of origin, an Action Plan on Return and a Return Handbook, and a proposal for setting up a Trust Fund for Africa with a total budget of €1.8 billion euro. In September, the implementation of the hotspot approach started in Greece and Italy, with the support of the Commission, Frontex and EASO agencies. In October the first relocations began to take place, though much work is still needed to reach the agreed targets.

Budgetary measures

In terms of budgetary support, the Commission has already proposed amendments to its 2015 and 2016 budgets, boosting the resources devoted to the refugee crisis by €1.7 billion. This means that the Commission will spend close to €10 billion on the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. In an accelerated procedure, both the European Parliament and Member States in the Council gave their approval to the Commission's amended budget. Member States have committed to deploy national spending to match EU funding for the UNHCR, World Food Programme and other relevant organisations (€500 million), the EU Regional Trust Fund for Syria (€500 million) and the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (€1.8 billion).

Managing migratory flows

In an effort to better manage migratory flows and stem the arrivals in Europe, the Commission has taken a number of measures with third country partners.

As the situation became critical on the Western Balkans route, President Juncker called a Leaders' meeting on 25 October for countries along the route. A 17-point Action Plan was agreed on this occasion and weekly video-conferences are being held by the Commission and participating States to ensure effective follow-up (11 video-conferences have taken place so far).

We agreed a Joint Action Plan with Turkey on 15 October, which was activated by the EU-Turkey Summit on 29 November. The Action Plan is part of a comprehensive cooperation agenda based on shared responsibility, mutual commitments and delivery. On 24 November, the Commission proposed a Refugee Facility for Turkey to coordinate a total EU contribution of €3 billion for support to Syrians under temporary protection and host communities in Turkey. On the 15 December, the Commission proposed a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme with Turkey for persons displaced by the conflict in Syria.

On 12 November, the Valetta Summit on Migration gathered Heads of State and Government from the EU and Africa to strengthen cooperation and address the root causes of the crisis. As a result, a list of concrete actions will be implemented by the end of 2016. At the same meeting, the EU Trust Fund for Africa was officially launched, with a total contribution from EU financial resources of €1.8 billion.

Borders package

On 15 December, the Commission presented a "Borders Package" consisting of an important set of measures to secure the EU's external borders, manage migration more effectively and protect the internal freedom of movement within the Schengen area. The Commission proposed to establish a European Border and Coast Guard – reinforcing the mandate of Frontex. The Package also included proposals for a European travel document for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals and a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme with Turkey for persons displaced by the conflict in Syria.

The way forward in 2016

2016 will be dedicated to delivering clear and tangible results and implementing the agreed measures, but also continuing to shape our future policies, including by adopting the Commission's announced proposals as soon as possible. Collective European action is needed.

The European Union must step up efforts in 2016 in the following fields:

- On relocation: only 272 people have been relocated out of the 160,000 agreed in September by the Council. In order to deliver on relocation, both frontline Member States and Member States where persons in need should be relocated must quickly implement the two relocation decisions, notably by notifying and increasing places immediately available for relocation and receiving relocated persons;
- On resettlement: based on the information received from Member States and Associated States 5,331 persons were due to be resettled under the scheme in 2015. At the end of last year, the Commission has received confirmation that only 779 had been effectively resettled. A total of 22,504 people are due to be resettled by the end of 2017;
- On hotspots: Out of 5 hotspot areas identified in Greece, only 1 is fully operational (Lesvos). Out of the 6 hotspot areas identified in Italy, 2 are operational so far (Lampedusa and Trapani). Fully operational hotspots are necessary to carry out relocation;
- On return: Europe needs to increase the rate of return of persons who do not have the right to stay in Europe to their countries of origin, by implementing the Return Action Plan and moving forward on readmission agreements and negotiations;
- On Schengen: the priority for 2016 should be to return to the normal functioning of Schengen by ensuring that Member States do not need to exceptionally introduce or prolong internal border controls;

- On the European Border and Coast Guard, the Parliament and Council need to rapidly conclude negotiations, as committed by the December European Council.

The College also discussed further initiatives needed in the context of the current crisis. The events of last year have shown that the **Dublin System** is unsustainable in its current form. As announced last September, the Commission will set out a reform of the Dublin System, with proposals due by March, as part of its work towards a single asylum system. To reduce the reliance on irregular routes going forward, the Commission is also preparing a package of **measures on legal migration**, including a reform of the Blue Card Directive. Measures on integration will also be proposed.

By the end of 2016 the Commission will present a further package on **migrant smuggling**. The Commission's recommendation for a **voluntary humanitarian admission scheme with Turkey** should be complemented with actions on the ground as well as a more structured framework for resettlement. In March, the Commission will put forward a proposal to ensure a collective European approach in the future.

The **external dimension** should focus on cooperation with third countries on tackling the root causes, and notably on stemming irregular flows to Europe and returning those with no right to international protection. Partnerships and cooperation with key countries of origin, transit and destination will continue to be a focus, for example through the Khartoum and Rabat processes, the Africa-EU Migration and mobility dialogue, the Budapest Process and the Prague Process.

Future financial needs will be assessed in the context of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework.

For more information

[European Agenda on Migration](#)

[1st Implementation Package of the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[2nd Implementation Package of the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[3rd Implementation Package of the European Agenda on Migration \(Borders Package\)](#)

[European Agenda on Migration – Press material](#)

[European Agenda on Migration – Legislative documents](#)

[Agreement on EU budget for 2016 bringing total funding to address the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 to close to €10 billion](#)

[Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route](#)

[Updated State of play on measures to address the refugee crisis](#)

[FACTSHEET: A European Agenda on Migration - State of Play: January 2016](#)

[PRESENTATION: Managing the Refugee Crisis – State of Play and Future Actions](#)

IP/16/65

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