



Council of the  
European Union

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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council  
Subject: Migration: EU cooperation with third countries

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Focus on North Africa

In 2018, around 150 000 irregular arrivals were registered at the EU external borders, a 25% decrease compared to 2017, and the lowest level in 5 years. Between 2017 and 2018, the greatest recorded increase of irregular arrivals to the EU - 131% - was observed on the Western Mediterranean route. On the Central Mediterranean route, arrivals decreased by 80%, while on the Eastern Mediterranean route they rose by 22%.

EU efforts have focused on saving lives, combatting irregular migration and strengthening cooperation with countries of origin and transit, particularly with Turkey and (North) African countries, as part of a broader partnership. High-level EU and Member States' bilateral contacts have intensified and EU funding of migration management programmes has increased. There has also been a major EU effort in terms of addressing the root causes of migration in countries of origin – notably through the EU Trust Fund for Africa – and in developing new tools to promote readmission. This work has been consistently more effective when well coordinated between the EU and Member States.

Libya has been a beneficiary of EU support, cooperation and assistance on a massive scale. The Libyan Coast Guard has increased significantly its presence and activity at sea<sup>1</sup>. However, the current Libyan Search and Rescue Region (SRR) is beyond the operational capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard.<sup>2</sup> EU assistance is focusing via the planned establishment of a fully-fledged Maritime Rescue Coordination Center to enhance the coordination role of the Libyan Coast Guard, in addition to the training, capacity building and provision of equipment delivered by the EU. The EU's assistance has focused on capacity building in the areas of SAR and enhanced border management as one of many strands set out in the Central Mediterranean Implementation Plan. EU assistance to improve migrant conditions on land has also been and still is impressive, but the impact has been limited due to the difficult political and security situation in the country. The assistance provided by the EU and key Member States, first and foremost Italy, has helped Libya to have a major impact in preventing dangerous departures

In view of the progress achieved in Libya and taking into account the constant irregular migration from Africa to Europe, the EU should provide - on a much larger scale and over a longer period - targeted assistance based on a thorough overview of capacities and gaps. This should be done in close consultation and coordination with the relevant third country partners:

**Morocco** is geographically the closest North African partner to the EU; therefore, adequate investment in migration management is crucial. EU ongoing cooperation with Morocco is worth EUR 232 million, which includes a specific package adopted in 2018 to support Morocco on border management (EUR 140 mil). Moreover, Morocco is a key beneficiary of the pilot projects for legal migration, aiming at enhancing the legal routes for labour migration to the EU. Tunisia and Egypt are also beneficiaries. The EU has increased its assistance towards Morocco and has made it clear that it wishes to further develop relations with Morocco, in close coordination with Spain, in order to form a deeper and more ambitious partnership where mobility and migration will play an important part.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the Libyan Coast Guard has provided for the rescue of about 15, 000 migrants. In 2019, already 639 migrants have been rescued/intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard.

<sup>2</sup> The declared purpose of having an SRR is to clearly define who has primary responsibility for coordinating responses to distress situations and to enable rapid distribution of distress alerts to the proper Rescue Centers.

For the above considerations to materialise, the EU and its Member States would need to focus high-level diplomatic efforts in a coordinated manner. A comprehensive approach in the spirit of a genuine partnership on equal footing is needed to ensure political buy-in and ownership from all actors and levels concerned. Regarding funding, current programmes are financed mostly by the European Neighbourhood Instrument and the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) contributes also with funding to migration related activities by Member States and International Organisations in Africa. Given the increased challenges, Member States are encouraged to contribute to the replenishment of the North Africa window of the Trust Fund, which will enable further implementation of the objectives set out in relation to the North African countries and ensure more long-term and structured assistance, not dependent on fluctuating flows. Furthermore, the next MFF should continue providing for significant funds in a way allowing for fast and flexible disbursement.

In view of the above considerations:

- 1. Do ministers agree that in addition to the current efforts towards Libya, we should treat Morocco and Tunisia as priority countries and develop with them long term, comprehensive assistance programmes?*
- 2. What measures should be put in place in order to strengthen coordination and ensure funding by the EU?*
- 3. What would Member States be able and willing to contribute to the overall engagement with partner countries in order to improve cooperation on all priority aspects?*