



## Joint press release: Strengthening cooperation in the fight against migrant smuggling: the European Union and Niger launch operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling

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Today, the European Union and Niger are strengthening their cooperation with the launch of an **operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling**. Joint efforts under this partnership will help to save lives, disrupt the business model used by criminal networks, prevent migrants from becoming victims of violence and exploitation and protect their fundamental rights.

As highlighted in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, combatting migrant smuggling is a shared challenge that requires robust cooperation and coordination with key partner countries along migration routes, in line with the EU's overarching approach to migration. Located at the heart of the Sahel, Niger has for decades been at the crossroads of migration flows to North and West Africa and to the EU, as well as a destination country for migrants. The country has made considerable efforts to tackle migrant smuggling, helping to evacuate individuals affected from Libya and ensuring a dignified return home for irregular migrants. **Niger and the European Union have worked together as trusted partners** in the Sahel region and have been involved in several joint initiatives addressing wider migration and security issues, including the challenges of irregular migration, and focusing in particular on efforts to tackle criminal groups operating in the region in the pursuit of profit.

Now, the constructive cooperation between Niger and the European Union and the strong mutual commitment to stepping up joint efforts to address migration and security risks and the consequences of irregular migration are **moving up a gear, from both an operational and a political point of view**. The operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling is a response to shared needs and sets out to achieve common objectives, based on the renewed EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling (2021-2025).

Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva **Johansson**, said: *'We are taking a crucial step in efforts to combat migrant smuggling and are making progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Niger has long been a key partner in terms of addressing security challenges and managing migration and I am delighted that today we are jointly launching an operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling in order to consolidate and ramp up our efforts. Together, we will do all we can to save migrants' lives and prevent violations of their rights, strengthen the management and security of borders, dismantle the criminal networks that are responsible for smuggling and offer genuine economic alternatives to people seeking a better life in Niger.'*

Niger's Minister for the Interior, Hamadou Adamou Souley, said: *'Implementing this operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling aligns perfectly with the actions and activities under programmes II and III of the action plan set out in our National Migration Policy. This will allow us to work together to better protect migrants, secure our borders and achieve our ultimate aim, which is to improve living conditions for migrants and their host communities.'*

### Content of the operational partnership to tackle migrant smuggling

Part of the EU's wider efforts with Niger on migration, the Operational Partnership comprises a number of actions that could be expanded to ensure that the Partnership can adapt as the context surrounding migration and the phenomenon itself evolve.

This will boost the success of the **Joint Investigation Team (JIT)** in Niger, where, with EU funding, officers from services in EU Member States and Niger are working side by side to disrupt the business model of people smugglers and criminal networks. Since 2017, over 700 criminals have been arrested and over 400 judicial proceedings have been launched. The Operational Partnership will maximise the impact of the JIT and strengthen links with other operational activities in the region to address migrant smuggling.

New **information and awareness-raising campaigns** will also be launched, explaining the risks of

irregular migration and migrant smuggling, as well as setting out possible alternatives. By challenging the narratives put forward by people smugglers, the campaigns set out to inform migrants and influence their decisions to migrate.

**The working arrangement between Frontex and Niger**, currently under discussion, will support the Nigerien authorities with regard to integrated border management by strengthening risk management and assessment capabilities with a view to facilitating legitimate border crossings and tackling irregular migration and cross-border crime.

**The European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel Niger** has been working with partners in Niger for nearly ten years to tackle terrorism, organised crime and criminal people-smuggling networks operating in the region. This work is part of the European Union's commitment to security and defence efforts in the Sahel region under the responsibility of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep **Borrell**. The signing of a **working arrangement between Frontex and the EUCAP Sahel Niger** will support the joint commitment by the European Union and Niger to improve border-management structures in Niger and crack down on people traffickers and smugglers and those who seek to profit from the distress of migrant men, women and children. The working arrangement will facilitate and enhance efforts to exchange information, offer targeted training activities, share best practices and advise the Nigerien authorities.

The Coordination Platform on Migration, which is part of the office of Niger's Minister for the Interior, working in close cooperation with the EU Delegation to Niger, will operate as a **coordination and monitoring mechanism** for implementing the Operational Partnership to ensure consistency across activities and coordination of stakeholders, in line with Niger's National Migration Policy (2020-2035), the European Union's overarching approach to migration and its work with partner countries under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The Operational Partnership will work in tandem with the **two Team Europe initiatives on the Central Mediterranean route and the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean route**. Projects carried out under these two initiatives will help to implement the Operational Partnership and strengthen efforts by the European Union and the Member States to tackle irregular migration and forced displacement. At the same time, EU support under the NDICI - Global Europe instrument in terms of human development, governance and sustainable and inclusive economic growth, including through EUR 195 million in budget support, will help Niger in its efforts to implement key reforms and address security and socio-economic challenges as well as challenges related to migration management. The Operational Partnership will be complemented by projects seeking to **promote economic development and improve the availability of and access to high-quality public social services** for communities in Niger, particularly in the Agadez region.

#### **For more information**

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