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Migration management: Update on progress made on the Pilot Projects for asylum and return procedures and new financial support for Bulgaria and Romania

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Today, the Commission welcomes progress made over the past three months since the start of the Pilot Projects in Bulgaria and Romania. The Pilot Projects were launched in March 2023 for 6 months building on good practices and experience in Bulgaria and Romania in the areas of asylum,

returns, border management and international cooperation. This was a direct follow-up to President **von der Leyen's** letter of 26 January 2023 and the European Council conclusions of 9 February, and the EU Western Balkans Action Plan from December 2022.

Operational update

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been taking operational steps with the Commission's support to improve the accelerated asylum procedures and has designated a safe countries of origin list, in line with the EU rules. To streamline the implementation of the asylum and return procedures, Bulgaria is exploring the possibility of issuing a negative decision on international protection jointly with a return decision. The authorities are working on the digitalisation of the asylum and return systems, with the support of the EU Agencies and Commission services.

Bulgaria has also strengthened the cooperation with the European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) in the areas of asylum and reception. A revision of the EUAA Operating Plan for Bulgaria is foreseen to be concluded this summer. Bulgaria has also stepped up the cooperation with Frontex. This includes a

Roadmap to make use of the Agency's full capacity for border management and returns with additional resources, such as standing corps and technical equipment. Frontex has already provided additional support to Bulgaria through return counsellors and interpreters. Bulgaria and Frontex will also sign a Joint Action Plan on Return.

Bulgaria has also strengthened the cooperation with Europol to counter-smuggling networks and to limit the secondary movements within the EU. Bulgaria already set up a national mechanism for information sharing and will establish shortly an Operational Task Force for countering migrant smuggling.

Romania

Romania amended the national asylum legislation in May 2023 to allow for the participation of EUAA experts in the registration and assessment of asylum applications. An Operational Plan had been signed between the EUAA and Romania in December 2022, enhancing the capacity for reception and for processing asylum applications.

Since April 2023, EUAA has deployed eleven interpreters to Timișoara's asylum regional centre. Four additional EUAA experts will be deployed to support the authorities with the

processing of the applications.

As regards returns, Romania changed its legislation in May 2023 to allow for the issuing of a negative decision on international protection together with a return decision. This amendment supports a more efficient return process, preventing absconding and secondary movements. Progress was also made as regards the update of the national return case management IT system and its closer alignment with Frontex IT systems to allow for more accurate analysis and statistical information. In May 2023 Romania joined the Frontex Joint Reintegration Services programme, which provides reintegration support for returns. Romania has been also liaising bilaterally with Member States through the High-Level Network on Returns and with Frontex on good practices on returns, notably return counselling.

When it comes to border management and international cooperation, Romania continued managing its external borders with Serbia successfully. This is based on activities for prevention of irregular migration with the Serbian authorities, implemented by the common patrol protocol. Bringing the cooperation with Frontex even closer, Romanian authorities will host and use the first Frontex Mobile Surveillance Vehicles at

Romanian - Serbian border section of the Terra 2023 operational area.

Romania is further cooperating with EU Agencies on joint investigations of organised crime. This includes participating in the European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats (EMPACT) and its operational action plan to fight against criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling.

EU's financial support to reinforce EU external border management

The Commission is providing new financial support to Romania and Bulgaria for the implementation of these Pilot Projects. Bulgaria will receive EUR 45 million and Romania EUR 10,8 million. The funds will be added to the national programmes under the Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI) home affairs funding.

In addition, the Commission will launch calls open to **all Member States for the development of electronic surveillance systems** at land external borders (EUR 140 million) and to **support reception and asylum systems** of Member States under pressure (EUR 120 million) with particular attention to reception of unaccompanied minors and

reception capacity at the border. The financial support is part of 2023-2025 Thematic Facility Work Programmes and comes from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Instrument for Financial Support for BMVI.

Next steps

The full roll-out of the Pilot Projects is foreseen by September 2023.

Steering Committee meetings with the Commission, EU Agencies, Bulgarian and Romanian authorities take place on a monthly basis. The goal is to ensure coordinated actions on the ground and exchange of information between all stakeholders. So far, two Steering meetings have been held for each project.

The Commission will continue to support Bulgaria and Romania in the common efforts at EU level to manage external borders and to address migratory challenges.

Background

Two Pilot Projects in [Romania](#) and [Bulgaria](#) were set up on 17 and 20 March 2023 for a duration of six months, to contribute to an improved and more sustainable European migration

management. The projects are implemented with strong operational, technical and financial support of the Commission and the EU agencies (EUAA, Europol and Frontex).

Ensuring effective management of the EU's external borders is a key priority for which the Commission has allocated to the Member States EUR 4,3 billion (BMVI), alongside EUR 6,3 billion for migration management (AMIF) under the current Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

For More Information

The European Commission [launched a pilot project with Bulgaria](#) and [Annex](#)

The European Commission [launched a pilot project with Romania](#) and [Annex](#)

[Home Affairs Funding](#)

[New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#)

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