

## Outsourcing borders

### Monitoring EU externalisation policy

Bulletin 15  
7 April 2026

*“Please note that we also strive to accommodate your colleagues and collaborators at Statewatch who, in the meantime, have submitted other requests for public access (...) as part of a **systematic monitoring of virtually all documents** relating to the Council’s working groups in the field of international migration”*

*General secretariat for communications, Council of the European Union*

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## Thematic and regional developments

Official EU documents summarised here, and those published with previous editions of the bulletin, are contained in our [document archive](#).

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## Border management

### Sketches of future Frontex governance structure

A presentation to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 2 December 2025 explores the governance and oversight of Frontex, ahead of its expected mandate review which has been explored [in previous bulletins](#) and analysis [on the Statewatch site](#).

The [presentation](#) (pdf) outlines various aspects of the envisioned future governance. Despite myriad incidents of reported abuse and misconduct of Frontex officers in recent years, the presentation implores that any new structure “maintain operational agility” and “avoid unnecessary layers”.

Some allusion is made, however, to the potential need to amend the Frontex regulation to deal with serious incidents ([Article 46 specifically](#)).

### Presidency note outlines EU agencies’ role in external migration control

A letter from the then-Danish presidency of the Council of the EU to the 5 December 2025 meeting of the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration observes that the EU agencies typically involved with domestic migration control have increased their hand in external control. [The letter](#) (pdf) outlines the role of each agency and how their role in external control could be expanded.

A full analysis of the document will soon be on the *Statewatch* site.

### Commission opens door for expanded use of Article 25a sanctions

In its [communication to the European Parliament on EU Visa Policy strategy](#), the Commission appears to have listened to those member states keen to use Article 25a visa sanctions more widely in pursuit of deportation cooperation.

*“As part of the planned legislative revision of the Visa Code, the Commission will propose a **more strategic and agile mechanism for implementing Article 25a**”*

Alongside proposing to make it easier to deploy Article 25a in the case of non-cooperation on deportations and making sanctions more severe, the Commission **also suggests using Article 25a as leverage in other related domains, “including fighting illegal migration and migrant smuggling”**.

## Deportation and readmission

### EU and Nigeria sign long-awaited deportation arrangement

On 23 March the EU and Nigeria signed a long-negotiated agreement to facilitate greater deportation cooperation between the two. Talks had been ongoing for years, with the EU identifying an agreement with Nigeria as one of its top priorities. An investment package of €290m was apparently also part of the deal.

## Migration partnerships

### ‘Mention human rights more’, Presidency tells external working party

A letter from the then-Danish presidency to delegates in the MOCADDEM working party follows up on previous discussions on embedding a ‘human-rights based approach’ (HRBA) into external migration cooperation, a concept explored [in a previous bulletin](#).

This [follow-up letter](#) (pdf), dated 21 November 2025, bemoans that this human-rights based approach is not mentioned more in MOCADDEM country files and annexes on ‘common messaging’ to use in dealing with partner country authorities.

Improbably, the letter suggests that “upholding and respecting human rights **through the very mention of an HRBA**” is an idea worth taking seriously. It goes on to suggest adding boilerplate language to the action files in that vein.

A notable highlight is on Libya, where the suggested language reads:

*“The EU will continue to support the Libyan authorities to ensure respect of human rights of all migrants. Vulnerable groups require particular attention.”*

### Negotiating a ‘fair price’ for migration partnerships

[Writing for the Oxford Border Criminologies Blog](#), Nicola Palmer, Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Criminology at the University of Cape Town, has analysed the latest legal dispute between Rwanda and the UK after the latter’s scrapping of the ‘return-hub’-adjacent scheme in 2024.

Palmer re-orientates the typical view of such externalisation deals, which is to say a focus on what the Global North partner wants, by placing in focus the incentives and desires of Rwanda regarding this deal. In light of the likely establishment of similar deals in the near future, Palmer’s article is instructive for thinking about how potential partners will view their role in them and the benefits they expect.

## Updated Action Files

*In recent weeks Statewatch has received various country and migration route action files presented to meetings of the MOCADDEM working party. These 'action files' sum up the EU's activities and future ambitions for border externalisation and other related projects in partner countries (though one notes the stark absence of 'human-rights based approaches' in these files).*



### [Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Routes Action File \(pdf\)](#)

Updates from the [previous version of this file](#) include:

- The inclusion of Morocco in an anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking project **under the EU's external funding instrument (NDICI), worth €15m**. Other related projects on the Atlantic route are mentioned, involving other West African countries, including [NETCOP III](#) (a joint operational and investigative project, see below) and [Seahorse A](#) (a counter-migration project first launched in 2013, see below)
- Preparations for [NETCOP III](#), **worth €8m via the NDICI**, are reported to have been underway for continued operational and investigative cooperation (COPs) with Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Guinea. The project was expected to be signed end 2025 or early 2026
- Seahorse A, **worth €3m via the same instrument**, also reported to be under preparation, covering anti-migration measures in Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia. The new project was expected to be signed first quarter of 2026
- The **€70m project** "[Managing migration better in West Africa](#)" includes a sub-project to complement the above two, covering Ghana, Mauritania, Nigeria, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad. **Combined, these three projects total €30m for anti-migration projects in West Africa**
- Actions are reported to be ongoing in relation to Common Operational Partnership projects and the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, **worth €12m via the EU Internal Security Fund (ISF)**
- 'Awareness-raising' programmes are ongoing in Niger, Nigeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, and The Gambia, financed by EU Home Affairs Funds
- A top-up of **€56m is to support the ongoing voluntary returns programme MPRR North of Africa. 45,694 people are reported to have been returned from North Africa to their country of origin January 2023 to February 2025 (see the action file for a breakdown of returnee origin)**
- Under the €333.8m voluntary returns programme for Sub-saharan Africa, MPRR-SSA, 37,709 people were returned from Niger August 2022 to August 2025. This programme contract was to end December 2025. Between August 2022 and August 2025, over 106,404

people are reported to have received ‘post-arrival’ assistance under MPRR-SSA, and 91,617 ‘integration assistance’

-Under the ‘Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation’ adopted as part of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Commission reportedly adopted a proposal for the [2026-2027 Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan](#) in November 2025

**-€25m from the NDICI-funded “[Unleashing the potential of youth in West Africa](#)” is to go to facilitating diaspora investment in green energy around West Africa**, in particular Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mali and The Gambia

*Regarding specific countries:*

-In **The Gambia**, a **€3m project** via the external instrument was ‘validated’ in May 2024 to support Gambian authorities in counter-migration operations

-In **Mauritania**, a **€2m COP project** was to be signed in December 2025. **Mauritania is also reported to have adopted standard national search and rescue operational procedures** in December 2025. Negotiations for a **Frontex-Mauritania status agreement** are ongoing

-In **Côte d’Ivoire**, two new COP phases are being developed, to be financed by the ISF and NDICI

-In **Morocco**, **€128m of the total €152m** migration support package had been disbursed. **A border management project financed via the EU Trust fund for Africa worth €44m** and led by the Spanish development agency [FIAP](#) was reported to be wrapping up end of 2025

-In **Senegal**, a project on document fraud that was previously reported to be in development with Frontex and Civipol now includes FIAP and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. A Frontex technical mission to Senegal is reported to have taken place in February 2025

## [Egypt Action File \(pdf\)](#)

Largely taking place within the framework of the [Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership](#) signed with Egypt, as well as the Team Europe Initiatives programme, notable actions in this file include:

-A project entitled “Protection and Resilience of Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants in Vulnerable Situations Phase 1” was run through 2022 and 2023, **totalling €28m**

**-€110m has gone to strengthening the operational capacity of the Egyptian navy and border guard since 2022.** The programme includes training, surveillance equipment and the provision of three search and rescue vessels. **Provision of a larger, 50-foot vessel with ‘increased off-shore capacities’ is planned**

-Approval of a **€10m top-up for the anti-smuggling programme [PACSOM](#)** was expected end of 2025

-Numerous projects are outlined under the heading “establishing a single, sustainable national asylum system”

-Considerable activity is reported on increasing deportations to Egypt, including at least **€12m for return and reintegration projects**

-A **€20m project for anti-smuggling/trafficking** is mentioned within the context of ongoing border management cooperation, as well as **€75m for ‘tackling root causes’-related projects within the 2024 NDICI-funded Annual Action Plan**

-Working Arrangements with Europol and Eurojust signed in April 2025. **An agreement between Egypt and Europol on the exchange of personal data is reportedly in the works** (an [agreement on non-personal data](#) already exists)

-Deployment of a European Migration Liaison Officer in 2024

*Individual member state-funded projects:*

**-Austria:** €45,000 ‘information campaign’ for tackling root causes, ended December 2022

**-Germany** is reported to have set up and run a “centre for migration and development” in Cairo, with no funding amount specified

**-Italy:** **€1.4m “Aware migrants” information campaign**, which also included Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia, ended 2022

**-The Netherlands:** **€35m under the ‘PROSPECTS’ partnership**, 2020-2023. The second stage of this programme appears to run until 2027, though it is not clear Egypt is still involved. The Netherlands also provided just over **€2m** to Egypt under the IOM counter-smuggling [COMPASS partnership](#) in 2021 and 2022, with a budget expected for 2023

**-Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Romania** are also reported to have contributed to various migration-related programmes, with no funding amounts listed

## **Mauritania Action File (pdf)**

*Mauritania is seen by many in the EU as a 'key partner' within the externalisation framework and is, according to sources, being considered as a potential partner for a return hubs pilot. Taking place in the context of the [migration partnership between the EU and Mauritania](#), notable actions in this file include:*

- A first formal migration dialogue under the migration partnership took place January 21 2025
- “Nearly all components” of the **€210m under the migration partnership** are reported as being implemented. This includes funding for “border surveillance, counter-smuggling and -trafficking, search and rescue, budgetary support and support for Malian refugees. **€100m** of this funding is described as being for simple ‘budget support’
- Various other migration-related programmes are described, totalling at least **€39m**
- Additionally, there is reference to a **€10.5m** programme via NDICI for general border control. This programme appears to have subsumed another **€6.4m** programme for land and sea border management. **A further €25m agreement for land and sea borders was signed with Civipol in August 2024, with €2m via HOME funds for post-disembarkation needs**
- There is also a Spanish-led “Migration Intelligence Services Partnership to foster EuroAfrica Cooperation (MISPEAC) on anti-migrant smuggling” worth **€1.7m**, and a **€60m** programme for “addressing the challenges of migration, refugees and host communities” is reported as being implemented
- Under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, **a tender for counter-migration information campaigns was launched end of 2024, with a total budget of €10m**
- Phase III of the [GAR-SI project](#) (Rapid Action Groups for monitoring and intervention in the Sahel) intended to **create 160 police security forces to monitor Mauritania’s borders with Senegal and Mali**. There are various other seemingly related projects led by Spain and other member states totalling **over €20m**

*Individual member state-funded projects:*

- Germany: €7m towards "ProEmploi"** project for vocational training, with the EU contributing **€8m**. Germany also contributed **€21.5m for another vocational training programme "Strengthening TVET"**, as well as **€5m for development of the mining sector and €8m for "ProNexus"** for socio-economic inclusion of refugees
- Mauritania receives some of the **€4m from Denmark for a mobility project** related to the EU-ECOWAS "Free Mobility and Migration in West Africa (FMM II)" programme
- Additionally, **Spain** has provided funds of under a million for various projects, **Italy** has contributed **€4.9m** and **Sweden €1.5m out of a total €4.5m spent in the region**

## **Afghanistan Action File (pdf)**

*The EU's engagement with the Taliban in Afghanistan has recently been in the spotlight, with EU officials having travelled to Kabul and Taliban authorities reportedly intending to travel to Brussels, both visits focussed on deportations to Afghanistan. This document does not mention those negotiations, and given the EU does not formally recognise the Taliban as Afghanistan's government, this action file largely concerns itself with engagement with Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Notable information includes:*

-The last coordination meeting for Afghanistan under the Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) was held 17 March 2025

-Total funding for the TEI from the 13 member states involved amounts to around **€1.1 billion**

-The Commission has provided around **€900m** for refugee support in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia

## **Tunisia Action File (pdf)**

*In the context of the 2023 EU-Tunisia [Memorandum of Understanding](#), notable items in this file include:*

**-€105m earmarked for border management, counter-migration and deportations in 2023, with a further €40m earmarked for the same in 2024**

**-€18m “Fight smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons in Tunisia” programme** put into action at the beginning of 2025, covering various aspects of counter-migration activity

-Tunisia was covered in two counter-migration information campaigns, along with other countries, from mid-2023

-There has been significant support for Tunisia's search and rescue operations since 2021, including **€100m in financial support, training and the provision of at least one vessel as well as spare parts for dozens of others**. Tunisia has also been involved in various Frontex-led training drills

-The IOM facilitated the return of more than 6,800 people from Tunisia in 2024, more than double the number for 2023. At the time this document was produced, over 4,100 people had been returned in 2025

-The '[Tounesna](#)' [deportation programme](#) is ongoing, with Tunisia one of seven 'priority countries' identified by the [High Level Network for returns](#)

## Other



### Far-right German MEP questions Commission over Return Hubs

German MEP Mary Khan, AfD and ESN group, [has written to ask the Commission](#) for clarity on the state of return hubs negotiations. Noting that Uganda is reportedly on the short-list, Khan expresses concern that countries so geographically distant are too logistically difficult to act as return hubs, urging instead the Commission prioritise countries in North Africa. She also asks for further details on the Commission's role in return hubs planning, seeks assurances that return hubs will be run 'efficiently' and enquires over the state of talks with Uganda. (It was previously understood that the Netherlands in particular was in talks with Uganda, though this has potentially stalled since the election of a new Prime Minister).

Another MEP, Romanian Ștefan Mușoiu with the Social Democratic Party and S&D group, [has also written to the Commission](#) to ask what preparations are being made to deal with a potential increase in 'migratory pressure' as a result of the current conflict in the Middle East.



### Frontex touts its 'added value' at annual event in Warsaw

[On 26 March Frontex hosted](#) "more than 100 operational planners" from the EU and abroad, for the 2026 Annual Operations Planning Event. The event, aside from showcasing Frontex plans to hold joint operations with each member state every year, appears to have been an opportunity for Frontex to sell its 'added value' to member states ahead of the expected mandate overhaul later in the year:

*"Key strategic goals also included strengthening the Standing Corps and creating a Quick Reaction Force that would provide both Frontex and EU Member States with the operational flexibility needed to face border challenges wherever and whenever they arise"*

This, in light of some member states' apparent [reluctance to have Frontex officers be more active on their territories](#), suggests the agency is keen to sell itself a bigger role ahead of the review. The agency [also reported](#) a 52% drop in irregular border crossings in the first 2 months of 2026.



### Europol announces launch of new migrant smuggling department

On 24 March Europol announced it had created a new "European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling" which it says will be at "the centre of Europe's response" to irregular migration. The new department apparently builds on the pre-existing "European Migrant Smuggling Centre" by integrating more member state data into its systems. Home Affairs Commissioner Brunner said the new department will strengthen cross-border cooperation, "**across the EU and beyond**".

## Updates to the document archive

The [Outsourcing Borders document archive](#) hosts key documents from the Council of the EU and the European Commission.



### Operational Coordination Mechanism on the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM)

[Presentation of the priorities of the incoming Cyprus Presidency](#): presentation to MOCADDEM meeting of 28 November 2025 (16232/2025, LIMITE, 2 December 2025, pdf)

[Follow-up to previous discussions on a Human rights-based approach to migration cooperation](#): letter from Presidency to meeting of 28 November 2025 (15856/2025, LIMITE, 21 November 2025, pdf)

[Action file to follow up on the EU Action Plan for the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes](#): prepared for meeting of 28 November 2025 (15855/2025, LIMITE, 20 November 2025, pdf)

[Action file – Mauritania](#): prepared for meeting of 28 November 2025 (15854/2025, LIMITE, 20 November 2025, pdf)

## About this bulletin

This project, carried out by *Statewatch* and *migration-control.info* and funded by *Brot für die Welt*, *Misereor*, *medico international* and *Pro Asyl*, aims to make the EU's externalisation policies, plans and practices public. In doing so it seeks to highlight their impact on the rights of people on the move, as well as democratic standards, transparency and accountability. It addresses a lack of public information by publishing relevant EU documents, in this phase primarily those produced or discussed by the Council of the EU. It also tackles the overflow of information that results from a variety of EU institutions, working groups and national governments involved in the externalisation agenda by summarising thematic and regional developments, and by analysing key issues in depth.