

STRENGTHENING THE RESILIENCE AND SECURITY OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL BORDERS

- 5-POINT PLAN TO PREVENT, ANTICIPATE AND RESPOND TO SUDDEN, MASS ILLEGAL ARRIVALS -

CONTEXT

In recent years, Europe faced challenges that significantly tested our resilience and the security of the Union's external borders. To tackle these challenges, with the Pact on Migration and Asylum, we have developed a comprehensive and resilient framework to manage migration. Our new framework has already shown results: the number of persons detected trying to cross the EU external borders illegally has decreased to the lowest level since 2021, illegal arrivals across the Mediterranean have fallen for three years in a row, and the number of asylum applications is steadily declining. Europe's level of control over illegal migration is the highest ever.

However, this summer we have been tested again at our borders. From our Eastern borders to the shores of Crete and right across the Mediterranean. And with the crisis in Ceuta which showed how quickly sudden, massive arrivals can build at the EU's external borders. Such situations threaten our common security and unity, while also leading to an unacceptable loss of lives. The protection of all our external borders is a shared European responsibility. A common European response, united action and solidarity are essential.

It is paramount now to draw the necessary lessons to support, complement and empower Member States to anticipate and respond, with focus on how to improve our monitoring, situational awareness and early alert mechanisms, ensure more effective information sharing between national authorities, EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Agencies and the Commission, step-up cooperation with key partner countries, and implement an effective return and readmission framework.

Building on the existing structures that are already supporting the resilience to future emergencies and on the first-ever long-term European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, we must expand the existing tools and frameworks and create new ones as needed. A strong European response depends not only on robust systems, but also on mutual trust, strengthened solidarity, and on our commitment and ability to act together, swiftly and decisively.

In reply to the events in Ceuta, President von der Leyen has set out five key areas to guide EU action: preventing illegal migration by strengthening cooperation with partner countries; further strengthening our external borders; implementing early warning systems; dismantling migrant smuggling networks; and reinforcing returns.

Addressing these challenges requires a joint commitment and coordinated actions by the Member States, EU JHA Agencies, and the Commission. In view of the JHA Council of 1-2 October, the Commission is presenting this Plan with key actions for the different actors, to address existing and future challenges and increase the EU's resilience.

WAY FORWARD AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

1. Increasing cooperation with partner countries to prevent illegal migration

Strengthening cooperation with partner countries is essential to ensure a comprehensive migration management framework and reduce illegal migration flows. Such cooperation should include effective monitoring, early warning mechanisms and reliable information exchange. To this end, work should be taken forward in the following key areas:

The Commission

- **Reinforce or conclude new partnerships with key partner countries**, working in close cooperation with EU Delegations and the Member States as Team Europe, aimed at addressing root causes of illegal migration and creating meaningful opportunities for people in their home countries. To offer young people meaningful prospects and boost investment, and to scale the potential of existing Talent Partnerships, the Commission will present a Mediterranean Youth Skills and Jobs initiative. Furthermore, the Commission and the EEAS will work on new Gateway Offices to promote safe and legal mobility to the EU. In addition, such partnerships should also feature a strong crisis management dimension, and should have embedded efficient early warning mechanisms and protocols in case of increased migratory pressure, based on indicators to be developed with the partner country (e.g. sudden movements of a significant scale at the border, significant online trends inciting mass movements, etc.).
- **Develop operational plans implementing the ‘whole of route’ approach on key migratory routes to tackle illegal migration in a comprehensive manner.** Building on the work of the recently launched Eastern Corridor initiative, the Commission will establish dedicated platforms of coordination and exchange of information with all third partners along each route. It will also develop monitoring and coordination mechanisms at local, regional and whole-of-route level and dedicated task forces at Headquarters level to bring together all actors.
- **Intensify operational cooperation with key partner countries** in the areas of border management and search and rescue. This includes targeted deliveries of equipment and capacity building for national institutions in line with international human rights standards.
- **Build on the existing digital partnerships and dialogues in the East and South neighbourhood with key partner countries, starting with the countries in the Mediterranean**, to strengthen preparedness and response for online information surges related to illegal migration. Such partnerships and dialogues should include a component of continuous exchange of information, and early warning and coordinated response mechanisms.

JHA Agencies

- **Pursue negotiations of additional agreements or working arrangements between the EU JHA Agencies and partner countries on key migratory routes.** Agreements with Frontex and Europol should notably allow for the exchange of information and surveillance data, risk and threat analyses, and intelligence on migration trends and route shifts. Agreements with Eurojust should allow for the exchange of data and evidence, and to coordinate the actions of prosecutors and judges across international borders to tackle transnational crimes.
- **Establish EUROSUR Coordination Centres with partner countries** to strengthen pre-frontier intelligence exchange and risk assessment across all external borders in a more systematic manner.

Member States

- **Actively participate in the whole-of-route operational plans and incorporate respective bilateral actions.** Illegal arrivals and unauthorised onward movements are part of a continuum that requires addressing pull factors and developing smuggling trends within the Union as much as abroad.
- **Further strengthen the Team Europe engagement within the framework of migration diplomacy implementation**, including by coordinating and complementing messages and ensuring synchronised application of migration diplomacy tools at both Union and Member States level.
- **Enhance strategic discussions** on migration diplomacy in appropriate fora in the Council, such as the External Migration Working Group (EMWP) and, for more operational aspects, the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM).

2. Strengthening Europe's external borders

It is the primary responsibility of the Member States, with the support of the EU, to protect the external borders of the EU and their territorial integrity. Strengthening our external borders is critical to address and deter future crises, with the revision of the Frontex mandate serving as a key initiative to enhance overall situational awareness and operational capabilities. To this end, work should be taken forward in the following key areas:

The Commission

- **Propose to strengthen Frontex mandate**, including with a reinforced Standing Corps capable of providing agile and effective support, including in exceptional situations with immediate deployment of personnel and equipment for border protection and border management as well as closer border cooperation with partner countries. Furthermore, propose to reinforce Frontex's periodic vulnerability assessments of the EU's external borders, including sensitive segments. In particular, vulnerability assessments should include Member States' ability to deal with large-scale arrivals or large volume of return operations, and the monitoring of the quality of data fed into EUROSUR. The Agency should also have the possibility to perform vulnerability assessments in third countries, upon a request by that third country, which would lead to recommendations helping third countries improve their integrated border management and/or return frameworks.
- **Provide targeted support to Member States for reinforcing sensitive segments of the EU external borders**, where needed, including for possible physical barrier, where necessary, based on periodic vulnerability assessments conducted by Frontex (see below).
- **Work on a new European Emergency Response Framework** to protect EU borders at all times, especially in scenarios when mass movements are engineered and weaponised.
- **Provide support through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)**. Upon request from Member States, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) can make available and coordinate offers of in-kind assistance and capacities, such as medicines and shelter items.

JHA Agencies

- **Create crisis coordination cells within each JHA Agency and close coordination amongst them.** The cells would work as a single contact point in the event of crisis and would be responsible for coordinating with the relevant services within the Agency,

liaising directly with relevant Commission services and relevant national authorities, and align the operational with the political response.

- Provide support, in particular via **eu-LISA**, as regards the development, maintenance and implementation of **large-scale IT systems for border management**.

Member States

- Make **systematic use of the existing crisis management tools at EU level**. In particular, Member States should make full use of the Frontex Rapid Border Intervention (RBI) Protocol in situations of "urgent and exceptional pressure" at their external borders and allow Frontex to mobilise its own permanent or temporary support forces and specialised equipment in a very short timeframe.
- Ensure that **national contingency plans** are regularly reviewed and implemented in crisis situations, fully coordinating them with Frontex and aligning them also with the [Handbook on Contingency Planning for Border Management and Return](#).
- **Make full use of technologies for enhancing border management** through increased digitalisation of border procedures, including the full use of the Entry/Exit System that provides a comprehensive overview of who enters and leaves the EU and contributes to the security of the EU by facilitating the detection of persons considered a security threat.

3. Improving monitoring, situational awareness and early warning systems

To deter future crises, it is imperative to improve monitoring and situational awareness, both on the ground and across the online environment, and to implement effective early warning systems. To this end:

3.1. Monitoring on the ground

Member States

- **Ensure timely provision of any relevant information to EUROSUR**, using standardised digital formats, and in particular immediately report any situation that impacts external borders.
- **Provide comprehensive training** to relevant authorities on EUROSUR, including as regards the technical architecture, data entry rules, reporting formats as well as situational awareness and risk analysis.
- Implement key actions identified in the 2025 **EUROSUR Handbook** to address operational shortcomings and maximise data exchange between Member States and Frontex.

The Commission

- **External Action Service** to strengthen the foresight and alert capacity of **EU Delegations** and establish protocols/guidance to improve cooperation with the relevant Commission services, and ensure timely reporting and early warnings.
- Reinforce the system of intelligence gathering and early warnings by the **Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs)** and **European migration liaison officers (EMLOs)** deployed in third countries, including by issuing specific guidance.
- **Step up the work of StratCom** of the **External Action Service** in detecting, analysing and issuing early warnings about cross-border disinformation campaigns with an impact on illegal migration or migrant smuggling.

- **Strengthen capacities of key international organisations and partner countries** in the collection, analysis and sharing of data, that would allow to detect early warning signs.
- **The ERCC, in its function of crisis coordination hub**, can provide situational awareness and analysis, facilitate exchange of information, and the development of a common operational picture.

JHA Agencies

- Significantly **reinforce the European situational awareness picture**, including by stepping up and anticipating to 2027 the full implementation of the **EUROSUR integrated framework**, pending the upgrade of the system as part of the upcoming Frontex reform. This action should be taken forward together with Member States.
- **Enhance the work of the Frontex Operations Centre**. The Centre conducts 24/7 monitoring, with early alerts and a comprehensive and up-to-date situational picture of the external borders and the pre-frontier area. Protocols should be designed to ensure that the Centre shares relevant information with the Commission (including the ERCC) and relevant national authorities on a systematic basis (rather than on demand).
- **Develop protocols/guidance** for the systematic use of intelligence assessments from EU INTCEN, to trigger rapid alerts to the Commission and Member States on emerging trends and strengthen pre-frontier intelligence.

3.2. Online monitoring

The Commission

- **Strengthen inter-institutional reporting tools** by upgrading and streamlining the Blueprint and ISAA reports, including also input on the monitoring of the online dimension.
- **Develop an agile framework for using the tools available under the Digital Services Act (DSA) for responding to crises and incidents**. On the one hand, the framework will entail DSA protocols for incidents and crises addressing situations below the current crisis threshold under Article 36 DSA. These protocols will provide for structured and immediate cooperation and information sharing with very large online platforms, search engines and national authorities, be triggerable by the Commission, and be easily operationalized with clear steps for all stakeholders. On the other hand, the framework will also include, for the signatories of the Code of Conduct on Disinformation under the DSA, an Incidents and Crises Rapid Response System: a cooperation framework between social media platforms, fact-checkers, researchers and civil society organisations to address disinformation regarding incidents and crisis situations, including border incidents.
- Propose to reinforce the mandate of Frontex to enable it to conduct **social media monitoring** in the context of border protection in order to enhance situational awareness and operational support to Member States, to promptly submit notices to platform providers regarding illegal content and to refer specific cases to relevant national authorities to issue orders to act against illegal content and provide information.
- **Establish a structured interagency cooperation for situational awareness** between Commission services, the EU JHA Agencies, the European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency (ECAT) and strengthen information exchanges with the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO, independent network).
- **Extend the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) network to Mediterranean regions**. Expand the language and geographical coverage of EDMO —

which already extends to neighbouring countries such as Ukraine and Moldova, and will soon cover the Western Balkans — to include the Mediterranean region. The aim is to support independent monitoring and analytical capacity to counter disinformation related to illegal border crossings, and to provide situational awareness during border incidents.

- **Cooperate with third countries** by offering assistance in strengthening their capacities to detect and address the digital dimension of migrant smuggling as well as structured support and cooperation for the organisation of roundtables bringing together the relevant national authorities, large online platforms and CSOs and fact-checking organisations together, to address disinformation risks once they manifest.
- **Accelerate the deployment of the Global Alliance Rapid Response Initiatives (GARRI)** to deliver agile, context-specific responses to emerging migration trends, evolving patterns of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and rapid spread of migration-related mis- and disinformation, in coordination with EU Delegations and local partners, where needed. This information should also cover safe and regular migration pathways including for people in need of international protection, resettlement, humanitarian admission and complementary pathways for work and education.

The European Parliament and the Council

- **Swiftly agree on the proposal for a reinforced mandate of Europol.** It will expand its capacity to detect and analyse the digital dimension of serious and organised crime, by i) providing the European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling with the capacities to detect and analyse the online dimension of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, ii) strengthening Europol's open-source intelligence capabilities, iii) increasing its capacity to innovate and develop new tools and methods to make better use of open-source information. The proposed European Cybercrime Centre within Europol will have the capability to support Member States in online crisis situations.

JHA Agencies

- **Further step up social media monitoring by Europol** through the EU Internet Referral Unit in order to support Member States in disrupting smuggling networks
- **Organise by Europol Referral Action Days** to bring together digital investigators to simultaneously target social networks accounts and groups for facilitating smuggling. Cross check digital footprints against Europol's criminal databases to further support investigations by Member States.

Member States

- **Enhance reporting in the Blueprint network**, including by sharing data, alerts and input on the monitoring of the online dimension.

4. Dismantling migrant smuggling and trafficking networks

Dismantling migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks is paramount to effectively prevent and fight illegal migration. We must reinforce the existing EU toolkit on countering migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings (THB), including the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and the Europol European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling. To this aim, work should progress on the following strands:

The European Parliament and the Council

- **The Council should swiftly adopt the proposed sanctions regime**, which will allow the EU to impose asset freezes and travel bans targeting migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and other forms of organised crime.
- **The Parliament should agree on its negotiating position on the revised Facilitation Directive** as a matter of urgency, and interinstitutional negotiations should then be finalised as a priority, modernising the EU framework for tackling migrant smuggling.
- Step up the interinstitutional negotiations on the proposed **new mandate for Europol**

The Commission

- **Strengthen and further develop cooperation with the private sector**, with online platforms, including within the EU Internet Forum, financial institutions and digital payment service providers, to enhance the proactive detection of online activities related to facilitating migrant smuggling and to identify, trace and disrupt related illicit financial flows.
- **Develop specific operational** cooperation to address migrant smuggling and human trafficking with key countries along major migration routes. Building on the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling Work Plan 2026-2028, scale up route-based operational cooperation, including through Common Operational Partnerships. connecting relevant law-enforcement and judicial authorities and focusing on joint investigations, including on illicit financial flows, information exchange and effective prosecution of migrant smuggling networks,

JHA Agencies

- **Reinforce judicial cooperation and prosecution**, under the operational coordination of Eurojust, and facilitate the establishment of joint investigative teams (JITs), including with third countries, ensuring engagement from the early stages of cross-border investigations.
- Ensure that the Europol **European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling (ECAMS)** becomes a centre of specialised expertise at EU level and in its work with partner countries.

Member States

- Strengthen **operational cooperation, including through Europol**, along migratory routes at all levels, involving law enforcement, customs, border authorities, and justice systems.
- Step up **financial investigations** to trace, seize, and confiscate smuggling proceeds, including cryptocurrency, and dismantle the economic infrastructure of migrant smuggling networks.

5. Reinforcing an effective return and readmission framework

An effective migration management framework requires a real common EU system for swift returns and the development of capacities in partner countries to establish their own return frameworks. This requires the following to deliver:

The Commission

- **Enhance cooperation with third countries on readmission**, using all available tools, instruments and policies to foster better cooperation, including trade, development cooperation and visa policies, for example through the Generalised Scheme of

Preferences and the Visa Suspension Mechanism and Article 25a, which will be further strengthened in the upcoming revision of the Visa Code.

- **Follow Member States' efforts to develop bilateral return cooperation schemes** with third partners, within the context of the new Return Regulation, to increase returns and better manage migration in line with EU interests and its broader migration policy.
- **Early involvement of EU Delegations so that return cooperation can be integrated in the overall cooperation with third countries.**
- **Enhance the use of digital tools for asylum and return procedures**, starting with the upcoming Commission proposal for the digitalisation of case management for return, readmission and reintegration.
- Support the capacities of partner countries in the **development of national return and reintegration systems** and provide direct support in the conduct of assisted voluntary returns.

JHA Agencies

- **Step up the role of Frontex on returns** of third country nationals with no right to stay in the EU, including by ensuring adequate numbers of staff trained on all aspects of return, providing support on pre-return assistance (such as counselling and identification) as well as operational support (e.g. as regard flights coordination, as well as deployment of return escorts and support officers).

Member States

- **Ensure the quick and complete** implementation of the new Return Regulation and the return border procedure.
- **Make wider use of the support provided by Frontex** on all stage of return, readmission and reintegration.
- Implement actions and projects aimed at reinforcing the procedural and operational **capacity to return unaccompanied minors**, including working in cooperation with third countries for facilitating the reception of unaccompanied minors in the country of return.
- Make more systematic use of the **return and reintegration facility (RRF)** to step up reintegration efforts, in particular as regards minors, and increase the use of the **Reintegration Assistance Tool (RIAT)** to manage individual reintegration assistance. Replicate existing successful projects under the RRF focused on reintegrating unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) to other partner countries.