



European Union facing the immigration challenge

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European Union is facing an unprecedented challenge at its borders, in terms of increased migration flows and instability in the neighboring regions, which highlighted the need for a comprehensive coherent and coordinated approach.

According to the UNHCR figures released in 2014, for the first time since the Second World War, the number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people worldwide exceeded 50 million in 2013. In Eu, the total number of asylum application was around 600.000, but they were unevenly distributed, with the 72% of applications received only in four member States (Germany, Sweden, Italy and France).

Moreover, an estimated 3,280 persons died at sea in 2014 while attempting to reach a haven in Europe, and the number of those rescued or apprehended at sea quadrupled compared with 2013.

This situation made clear that **an EU response is needed**, and European Parliament and the European Council agreed on mobilising all efforts and tools at their disposal to take immediate action.

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When in 2014 the EU reassessed its strategy and priorities for the coming years, **the new European Commission led by Junker recognised migration as one of its 10 priorities**.

Then, following the tragedies in the Mediterranean, the European Agenda for Migration presented by the Commission in May 2015 set out a comprehensive approach to migration management, combining internal and external policies, making best use of EU agencies and tools, and involving all actors: Member States, EU institutions, International Organisations, civil society, local authorities and third countries.

As stated by first Vice-President **Frans Timmermans**: *"The tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean has shocked all Europeans. Our citizens expect Member States and European institutions to act to prevent this tragedy from continuing unabated. The European Council clearly stated that we need to find European solutions, based on internal solidarity and the realisation that we have a common responsibility to create an effective migration policy. That is why the Commission proposes an agenda which reflects our common values and provides an answer to our citizens' worries about unacceptable human suffering on the one hand and inadequate application of our agreed common asylum rules on the other hand. The measures we propose will help manage migration better and thus respond to the justified expectations of citizens."*

The initiatives proposed by the Agenda on Migration are based around **4 pillars** to manage migration better in all its aspects:

- **Reducing the incentives for irregular migration**, notably by seconding European migration liaison officers to EU Delegations in key third countries; strengthening the Frontex role on return; transforming people smuggling into high risk, low return criminal activity and addressing the root causes through development cooperation and humanitarian assistance;
- **Border management – saving lives and securing external borders**, notably by strengthening the role and capacity of Frontex; helping strengthen the capacity of third countries to manage their borders; pooling further, where necessary, certain coast guard functions at EU level;
- **A strong common asylum policy**: notably by ensuring full and coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System and evaluating and possibly revising the Dublin Regulation in 2016;
- **A new policy on legal migration**, able to maintain a Europe in demographic decline as an attractive

destination for migrants, notably by revising the Blue Card scheme, by reprioritising our integration policies, and by maximising the benefits of migration policy to individuals and countries of origin.

Based on the Agenda, EU adopted a number of concrete and immediate actions in the last months.

For the first time **EU member states agreed on the adoption of two emergency schemes** to relocate 160,000 people in clear need of international protection from the Member States most affected to other EU Member States, in order to ensure a fair and balanced participation to this common effort.

Eu committed also to resettle over 22,000 people from outside of Europe, showing solidarity with our neighbours.

EU funding were mobilised in support of the most affected Member States, **allocating over €70 million in emergency funding**, on top of the €7 billion in multiannual funding allocated to Member States over the period from 2014-20 to support their efforts in the field of migration and border management

To address the emergency in the Mediterranean, **Eu tripled its presence at sea**, increasing three fold the resources and assets available for Frontex Joint Operations Poseidon and Triton, and **redoubled its efforts to tackle smugglers** and dismantle human trafficker groups. Cheap ships are now harder to come by, leading to less people putting their lives in peril in rickety, unseaworthy boats. As a result, the Central Mediterranean route has stabilised at around 115,000 arriving during the month of August, the same as last year.

As stated by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini: *“Migration is a shared responsibility of all Member States and all member States are called now to contribute to tackling this historical challenge. And this is not only a European but a global challenge: with this agenda we confirm and broaden our cooperation with the countries of origin and transit in order to save lives, clamp down on smuggling networks and protect those in need. But we all know that a real, long term response will come only from fixing the root causes; from poverty to instability caused by wars, to the crises in Libya and Syria. As the European Union, we are engaged and determined to cooperate with the international community on this.”*

In this regard, the European Union is the **number one donor in the global efforts to alleviate the Syrian refugee crisis**. Around €4 billion have been mobilised by the European Commission and Member States in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance to Syrians in their country and to refugees and their host communities in neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt. The European Commission has also allocated €1.8 billion from the EU's financial means to set up an **‘Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration in Africa’**.

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Immigration continues to be high on the political agenda of the EU, representing a “test” for the Union and its capacity to address the current challenge and find an agreement on how to move forward.

For this reason, on 23 September, the European Commission detailed another set of priority actions to implement the European Agenda on Migration to be taken within the next six months, including “both short term actions to stabilise the current situation as well as longer term measures to establish a robust system that will bear the test of time”. The list of priority actions was endorsed by the informal meeting of Heads of State and Government of 23 September. It sets out the key measures immediately required in terms of operational measures; budgetary support and implementation of EU law, including for instance the full implementation of the “hotspot approach” to assist frontline Eu member states and help them fulfill their obligations under Eu and international law. .

Central to the EU's strategy and credibility is to demonstrate that the migration system can be restored to proper functioning, in particular by using Migration Management Support Teams deployed in ‘hotspots’ to help Member States under the most intense pressure to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities.

In an Eu of 28 member States, where most internal borders have been abolished and people can move freely, is essential that they cooperate to better migration. A lot has been done, but it's clear that the current emergency, requires not only further, immediate action, but also a long-term vision. In a globalised world, migration cannot be seen as a temporary dynamic; it's time to move with more determination towards a truly common EU migration policy.

