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PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL**

**First Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the
European Agenda on Migration**

1. INTRODUCTION

External action is a crucial component of the comprehensive EU strategy to manage the migration challenge set out in the European Agenda on Migration¹. The factors driving migration flows today are here to stay. That is why the EU needs a long term response. A key step had already been taken through the Valletta Summit in November 2015. Then in June 2016, the Commission proposed a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration^{2 3}. The June 2016 European Council endorsed the Partnership Framework and called for its swift implementation, starting with a limited number of countries. In September, the Bratislava roadmap underlined that this process should "lead to reduced flows of illegal migration and increased return rates", and recalled that progress would be assessed by the European Council in December⁴.

The Partnership Framework is an ambitious and forward-looking European approach to deepening cooperation with countries of origin, transit and destination. Success will depend on a full commitment from all sides. This means a joint effort of the EU and Member States drawing on the full range of EU levers to address short-term solutions to immediate migration pressure, and to make a deeper investment in tackling the root causes of irregular migration, fostering sustainable development and stability, and opening opportunities for regular migration. This must combine with a genuine partnership with each third country, tailor-made to take specific needs and interests into account and targeted on results. In all cases, the humanitarian and human rights imperatives of EU policy need to stay at the core of the approach.

Against this background, this first Report presents the progress made and describes how the High Representative, the Commission and Member States have worked together to implement the Partnership Framework⁵.

While achieving well-managed migration is a long term endeavour, the imperative of saving lives, breaking the business model of smugglers and bringing under control irregular movement of people also requires immediate results. The first phase has inevitably put the priority on setting up the new structures and instruments needed to achieve the objectives of the Partnership Framework, but has also seen tangible results. This Report sets out the key outstanding challenges, and the next steps in the implementation of the Partnership for December and beyond⁶.

2. OPERATIONALISING THE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The compacts

¹ COM(015)240 final of 13.05.2015.

² COM(2016) 385 final of 07.06.2016.

³ In June the High Representative presented the Global Strategy, with managing migration in partnership with third countries an important aspect.

⁴ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/09/16-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmap/>

⁵ New structures have been put in place to deliver the Partnership. In the Commission, a dedicated Project Team of Commissioners has been set up under the High Representative in her role as Vice-President. The Sherpa network has been mobilised to ensure swift and direct operational cooperation with Member States' capitals. With the strong support of the Presidency of the Council of the EU through Coreper and the regular meetings of the High Level Group on Asylum and Migration, the Council has played a key coordinating role. The EU Delegations have also been fully engaged for local coordination.

⁶ See Annex.

The Partnership Framework approach means changing the way the EU, together with its Member States, manages migration relations with third countries of origin and transit. A key component in this approach is the concept of "compacts". The compacts are a political framework for continued and operational cooperation, pulling together the different work strands in order to develop a comprehensive partnership with third countries, combining the instruments, tools and leverages available to the EU and Member States to deliver clear targets and joint commitments. Formal international agreements, such as readmission agreements, can flow from the compact process. But the compacts approach avoids the risk that concrete delivery is held up by technical negotiations for a fully-fledged formal agreement. As the elements of a mutually beneficial relation on migration management are progressively identified, this mutual understanding is being operationalised into compacts, tailor-made to the specific situation of each partner country. These will then guide the sustainable delivery of the commonly agreed objectives. The December European Council will assess progress towards those compacts.

Partnership is at the heart of the concept. First, a joint approach by the EU and the Member States is central to the success of the compacts. The Partnership Framework will only be able to deliver at its full through the engagement of Member States, both in terms of political commitment – to underline the priority of this action – and practical backing – notably on readmission and return, but also in areas like legal migration. Second, a common understanding of the EU's and partner countries' interests is key. Migration management needs to reconcile the interests and priorities of both parties to deliver mutual benefit. The work of partner countries in keeping up the momentum of delivery will allow the EU to continue deepening relations and cooperation in partner countries across the full range of EU policies. All incentives should be integrated to create the necessary leverage for cooperation, standing ready to provide greater support to those partner countries which make the greatest efforts, but being ready to draw the consequences if progress falls short.

More widely, the migration challenge demands a global approach. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants⁷ underlined the need for global responsibility sharing. Continued EU leadership will be important, to show that the Partnership Framework approach and the initiatives taken serve as leading examples in the UN Summit follow-up process.

Making the new Partnership Framework work in practice – implementing a new architecture

As a first step, the EU and the Member States have worked together to detail tailor-made *approaches with the first priority countries* identified in the June Communication⁸. These packages have been given impetus through a major political and diplomatic effort by both the EU and the Member States to reach out to priority partner countries. This has been coordinated, also with the full engagement of EU Delegations and Member States' Embassies, to ensure a consistent message.

There has been a step change in the level of coordination between EU institutions and Member States, with strategic planning of high level visits to priority countries, coherent messaging through shared briefings for key opportunities such as the United Nations General Assembly, shared feedback and reporting. As a result, migration issues are now at the heart of the overall relations with the priority partners – alongside other key foreign policy issues such as security, trade and poverty reduction. The importance the EU gives to migration-related issues is now well understood by the priority countries involved.

⁷ Adopted at the UN Summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants ([refugeesmigrants.un.org/](https://www.un.org/refugeesmigrants)).

⁸ The priorities defined in June were Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia.

This external effort has to be matched by improvements of *procedures and operations inside the European Union* – for example, tackling possible obstacles at national and EU level which could hamper swift return and readmission procedures and dedicated capacity to identify and pursue migrant smuggling groups. The new mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard will present further opportunities to this effect.

A key contribution of Member States to deliver this Framework has been the recruitment of *European Migration Liaison Officers* to be posted in key third countries. They will act as crucial contact points, with the first Liaison Officers scheduled to take up their duties before the end of the year. Working with Member States' immigration liaison officers, EU agencies, competent national and regional authorities and international organisations, they will serve as crucial focal points in EU Delegations to maintain the momentum, liaise and cooperate with our partners, and support the delivery of tangible results.

The Partnership Framework approach provides a stable pathway to deliver for the long term. But these efforts have already started yielding *first results*. The Partnership Framework has created a new momentum in our dialogue with partner countries, allowing for a better understanding of EU priorities and a greater willingness to cooperate. More concrete progress has been made in the recent months than previously achieved over many years, including on return and readmission. Identification missions are being organised to unblock cases where returns were not happening⁹. Discussions on EU-wide standard operating procedures for identification and return are advancing. Readmission negotiations are about to start with important partners, after years of stalemate. Financial and technical assistance is being deployed in support of the political dialogue, with flanking measures and targeted support to ensure the resilience of communities where migration and smuggling is most prevalent and to deepen the work to address the root causes.

3. PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

3.1 *Priority countries*

Migration is now at the core of EU-Africa relations. The Valletta Summit in November 2015 was a success in bringing the interests of all together in a common agenda, with the leaders of 35 African States and of the EU Member States agreeing a shared set of principles on how to manage migration. They issued a comprehensive political declaration and committed to implement an ambitious Action Plan, agreeing to work together in a comprehensive and balanced manner with actions taking place in parallel over five action clusters¹⁰. The ability to combine broad solutions agreeable and applicable to all participating states with the option of deeper cooperation country-by-country set the scene for the Partnership Framework.

The countries identified as the first priorities for action are important countries of origin or transit of irregular migration and some are also hosting a large number of refugees and are confronted with situations of internal displacement. In addition, most face particular development and security challenges.

Niger

⁹ The Member States participating in this exercise so far are Belgium, France, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands and Spain.

¹⁰ Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; Legal migration and mobility; Protection and asylum; Prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and Return, readmission and reintegration.

Niger is a key transit country on the Central Mediterranean route for migrants from Western Africa. At the crossroads for crossing the Sahara desert, the region of Agadez is a central hub for tens of thousands of irregular migrants trying to reach the Mediterranean and Europe, mostly via Libya. These migrants face huge dangers and many die on the route. At the same time, Niger is an extremely poor country, and is exposed to serious security threats, including Boko Haram, draining its very limited budgetary resources. The activity of criminal networks engaged in smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings towards its northern borders remains a major challenge.

Niger has shown a major commitment to develop closer cooperation on migration with the EU. This work was already under way before the Partnership Framework. The visits of the High Representative/Vice-President to Niger in September 2015, followed by Commissioner Mimica in November 2015, were instrumental in launching a dialogue which has led to concrete action to curb the flow of irregular migrants through Niger. The German and French Ministers of Foreign Affairs also led a High Level Dialogue in May 2016, resulting in a joint migration declaration, and the approach was taken forward by the High Representative/Vice-President's meeting with the Niger Foreign Minister in the margins of the EU G5 Ministerial in June.

Since June 2016, the Partnership Framework has given a significant additional momentum to cooperation. Migration was a key issue during the mission of Commissioner Stylianides in July, followed up at a technical level. This has provided the momentum for the establishment of *a local coordination platform on migration* ("Cadre de Concertation"), co-chaired by the Minister of Interior and the Head of EU Delegation in Niger, which met for the first time on 6 October 2016, with the participation of senior officials from Member States. The Niger authorities have set up a dedicated agency to combat human trafficking on which EU support can focus. Migration was also a key issue during the visits of the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development in August and of the German Chancellor in October.

In close cooperation with the EU, the Niger authorities are also finalising an Action Plan to fight against smuggling, decrease irregular migration, and provide alternative economic opportunities to the communities most involved in smuggling operations. Since August the Niger government has significantly stepped up its *action against migrant smuggling*. As a result, some 47 suspected smugglers have been arrested, and are now awaiting trial, and more than 63 vehicles have been seized. The government of Niger is applying stricter measures to control irregular migrants going to Libya or Algeria without valid documentation and is undertaking awareness campaigns to discourage people from the hazardous trip to Europe. Several hundreds of irregular migrants have been returned to Agadez and been released or handed over to the International Organisation for Migration transit centre for voluntary return to their countries of origin.

On the EU side, a variety of instruments is being mobilised. The existing CSDP mission to Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) has set up *a permanent field office (Antenna) in Agadez*, deploying ten international staff, which provides specific training (including on document forgery, trafficking in human beings, and criminal investigation methods) and advice to the Niger civil security forces and prosecutors. The field office will reach full operational capability by the end of the year.

The EU has considerably stepped up its support of border management and action against criminal networks, as well as addressing the root causes of irregular migration, such as through youth job creation. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa¹¹ (the "EU Trust Fund for

¹¹ C(2015) 7293 final of 20.10.2015.

Africa") is also delivering in Niger to improve migration management, security and border management. Projects include a Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism, capacity building, and support to the local economy of Agadez, which heavily depends on income generated by the flow of transiting migrants. Member States' support has included the provision of key equipment to assist the Niger authorities.

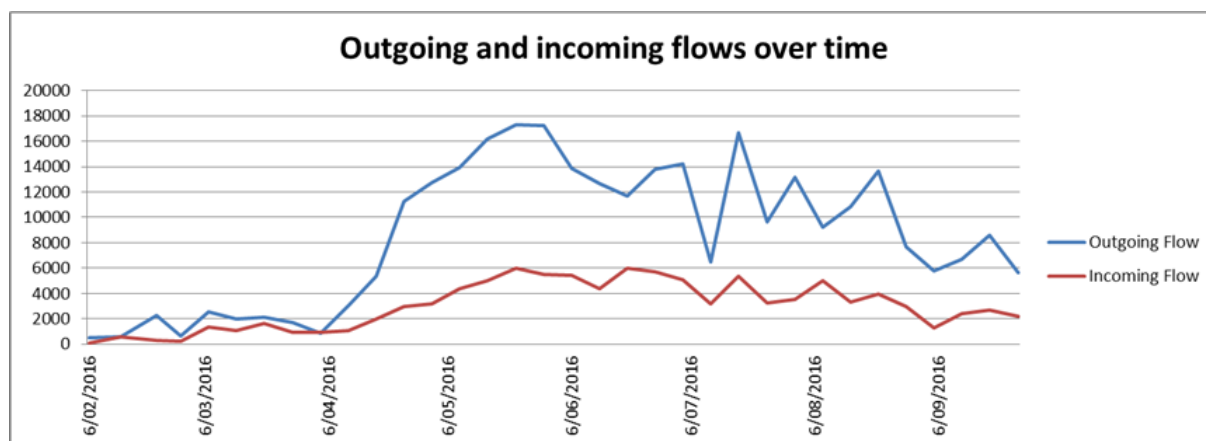


Figure: Trend in migrants leaving and entering Niger (source: International Organisation for Migration)

It is still early to assess the full impact of enhanced EU cooperation on migration with Niger since June 2016. However, efforts so far may have contributed to the noticeable decrease in the outgoing flows that has been observed by early October when the previous trend had been reversed. There has also been a significant increase in voluntary returns, from 1,721 returns in 2015 to more than 3,020 in the first 8 months of 2016. The four transit centres for migrants in Niger supported by the EU, with 1,500 places in total, have assisted over 12,000 migrants from November 2015 to July 2016.

These positive developments are taking place against the backdrop of a difficult security situation in a country plagued by extreme poverty. The EU is committed to build on this progress and continue to assist Niger in meeting the diverse set of challenges.

Key challenges and next steps

- Continued engagement through the "Cadre de Concertation" and with high level visits;
- Full operational capacity for the field office in Agadez and stronger CSDP cooperation;
- Deployment of the European Migration Liaison Officer;
- Support to communities and individuals affected by the smuggling and trafficking business by providing alternative livelihood opportunities;
- Support to the implementation of the Action Plan against smuggling in the Agadez region including for border surveillance and law enforcement cooperation;
- Continued delivery of training and equipment;
- Establishment of a dedicated office to enhance national risk analysis capacity and regional cooperation and exchange of information;
- Stepped up financial assistance for reintegration of returning migrants and host communities.

Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a rapidly growing population¹². It is also an important country of origin of irregular migration to the EU, with over 23,000 irregular border crossings in 2015 and nearly the same number (22,800) in the first eight months of 2016. The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings is a serious concern. The rate of return has been falling in recent years but at over 34% in 2015, it nevertheless reflects existing cooperation. Though it has enjoyed substantial economic growth in recent years, Nigeria faces multiple challenges, including on the security front (with the Boko Haram insurgency). It is a major hub for obtaining falsified passports and other identity documents, a major concern for both Nigeria and the EU. Nigeria is also a key country of origin of victims of trafficking. So stepping up cooperation should be a particular focus of the coming weeks.

A Common Agenda for Migration and Mobility had been signed between Nigeria and the EU in March 2015 (the first ever with a third country), providing a solid framework for enhanced cooperation. This covered issues including legal migration pathways to the EU, notably through the recognition of qualifications and circular migration, facilitation of intra-African mobility, investment in critical infrastructure and creating economic opportunities and employment in key sectors such as agriculture.

The Partnership Framework has given this cooperation new depth. Negotiations for an *EU-Nigeria Readmission Agreement* have been accelerated, with the formal adoption of the mandate for negotiations by the Council in September 2016 and the opening of negotiations planned for 25 October. Nigeria is particularly interested in simplifying cooperation on readmission by concluding an EU-wide agreement. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Italy and Germany have visited Nigeria and underlined the importance of engagement on migration. *Practical cooperation* has included the appointment of points of contact in areas including readmission and smuggling, and work to enhance best practices for joint return operations. Operational cooperation on return also progressed in the meantime, with Nigerian participation at a European Border and Coast Guard event on return and identification missions to Member States being planned for November and will need the full cooperation of Member States to succeed.

As well as ongoing cooperation under the European Development Fund, the *EU Trust Fund for Africa* has mobilised projects addressing specific migration management issues, as well as the root causes of irregular migration. A project contributing to better migration management and facilitating return and sustainable reintegration is in the pipeline.

Key challenges and next steps

- Make progress on the Readmission Agreement negotiations with a view to a swift conclusion;
- Further improve operational cooperation on return and readmission, including through identification missions;
- Strengthen the work on the fight against trafficking and smuggling;
- Increase initiatives in the field of business cooperation also with a view to addressing root causes;
- Deployment of the European Migration Liaison Officer;
- Launch an EU Cooperation Platform on migrant smuggling;
- Harness opportunities offered for legal migration channels, ERASMUS opportunities and other policies and tools.

Senegal

¹² 182 million in 2015, 400 million forecast for 2050.

Senegal is a key political partner for the EU in the West African region. It has a significant level of irregular migration to the EU (over 6,300 irregular entries in 2015), and the rate of return is insufficient (22.4% in 2015). Migration within Africa but also to the EU has a long tradition in Senegal and is economically important, with remittances amounting to roughly 10% of GDP. There are significant legal pathways already in place: in 2014, more than 220,000 Senegalese were legally residing in the EU, with an average of 15,000-20,000 new residence permits delivered each year by EU Member States to Senegalese nationals. Senegal has been a key actor in the Rabat Process and in the Valletta Summit and Action Plan, giving particular emphasis to legal migration, the fight against migrant smuggling, and the root causes of irregular migration.

With the Partnership Framework, an intensive dialogue on migration issues with Senegal is now under way. Commissioner Avramopoulos visited Dakar in July 2016 to propose developing cooperation in all aspects of migration management. This was instrumental in bringing forward *identification missions* now scheduled for the end of November. Within the overall EU approach several Member States have established or proposed the negotiation of bilateral arrangements on return and readmission. Several high level visits have taken place since July. The German General Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development travelled to Senegal in August and the French Minister of Interior visited in October. Negotiations between the European Border and Coast Guard and the Senegalese authorities on improved working arrangements on returns are well advanced. These initiatives will contribute to strengthen cooperation on migration, including on return and the delivery of travel documents.

In support of Senegalese efforts to address the root causes of irregular migration, projects for creating jobs for youth have been adopted under the *EU Trust Fund for Africa*. Senegal also benefits from a regional project supporting law enforcement entities and projects contributing to better migration management and facilitating return, to support consolidation of civil register systems and creating economic and employment opportunities in regions with a high migration potential are in the pipeline.

Key challenges and next steps

- Carry out planned identification missions in Member States;
- Cooperation on travel documents
- Strengthen bilateral cooperation opportunities within the EU framework;
- Deployment of the European Migration Liaison Officer;
- Support the further strengthening of civil registries and biometrics;
- Conclude the working arrangements with the European Border and Coast Guard;
- Harness opportunities offered for legal migration channels, ERASMUS opportunities and other policies and tools.

Mali

Mali is an important country of origin and transit. The country has a long tradition of emigration, with remittances making up to 7.7% of its GDP (2014). There are an estimated 1.5 million Malian migrants in West Africa. Malian nationals are among the most important groups of irregular migrants from West Africa entering Europe with over 6,500 irregular border crossings in 2015. The return of irregular migrants to Mali has so far fallen short, with a return rate of only 11.4% in 2015. For the past four years Mali has been faced by crisis and internal unrest due to the presence of a number of armed groups. A peace agreement was signed in June 2015. The ongoing peace process makes very little progress, generating an unstable political and security situation. The developments risk hampering the migration

management efforts. The EU and Member States provide extensive political, diplomatic and security support to stabilise the country.

The Valletta Summit and the subsequent first High Level Dialogue on Migration conducted by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the EU in April 2016 were instrumental for stepping up cooperation with Mali on the different strands of migration. Under the Partnership Framework, this work has been stepped up. Several *high level missions* to Mali have taken place, most recently by the Prime Minister of Estonia in early September, by Commissioner Mimica at the end of September and by the German Chancellor in October. Mali has appointed a focal point for migration issues, which will ensure a single contact point and coordinator for the operational dialogue on migration. *Standard Operating Procedures* are currently being finalised with the objective to improve cooperation between Malian consulates and migration authorities in Member States, as well as accelerating the procedures for identification and return. In addition, an *identification mission* will take place at the end of November. These concrete steps have kept momentum through diplomatic efforts including the visits of Commissioner Mimica in September 2016 and the German Chancellor in October.

Mali is one of the most important recipients of projects funded under the *EU Trust Fund for Africa* so far. Six projects have already been approved, including on border management. Further projects contributing to better migration management and facilitating return and sustainable reintegration, to support consolidation of civil registry systems, and creating economic and employment opportunities in regions with a high migration potential are in the pipeline.

Key challenges and next steps

- Finalise agreement on Standard Operating Procedures and start implementation;
- Carry out planned identification missions in Member States;
- Strengthen EU agencies' involvement on the ground (European Border and Coast Guard and EUROPOL);
- Deployment of the European Migration Liaison Officer;
- Harness opportunities offered for legal migration channels, ERASMUS opportunities and other policies and tools.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a key country of origin and transit of migrants from the Horn of Africa, and hosts the largest refugee community in Africa (over 730,000 refugees). Push factors for migration include food insecurity combined with a rapidly growing population, pressure on natural resources, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of governance and political freedoms. Following increased violent protests, Ethiopia declared the state of emergency for up to six months on 9 October. The EU and Member States are engaging intensively via diplomatic channels with partners in Ethiopia to assist in finding solutions to the present situation.

With a population of over 100 million, Ethiopia is also a source of irregular migrants to Europe¹³. Although only 2,700 irregular border crossings were recorded in 2015, it is estimated that the number of irregular Ethiopian migrants could be higher, as many are suspected to claim they are Eritrean (having a higher recognition rate for asylum). Remittances constitute a significant part of the Ethiopia's revenue (estimated as contributing three times more to the Ethiopian economy than development cooperation). The rate of return is very low (12.2% in 2015).

¹³ Although the bulk of Ethiopian migration is to the East (to countries such as Yemen or Saudi Arabia).

A High Level Dialogue on Migration was launched in October 2015 and a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility was signed in November 2015. As engagement stepped up, the *EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement* in June 2016 set up a sectoral dialogue on migration. Finally, Ethiopia is the future chair of the Khartoum process, taking the lead in regional efforts to tackle trafficking in human beings and smuggling of people.

Under the Partnership Framework, the emphasis has been to use this dialogue to work on specific ongoing cases of return as an example of effective partnership, and there were high level and Member State visits, notably by the Slovak Foreign Minister and by the German Chancellor in October. Diplomatic efforts will continue to further enhance cooperation on several aspects of migration and particularly on returns where cooperation has yet to bear concrete results. The Ethiopian government announcement that it had identified a majority of the cases submitted earlier this year is therefore an important first step. A contact point to cooperate with Member States in identification and return issues was appointed by the Ethiopian authorities.

The EU is providing financial support to improve the management of mixed migration flows in Ethiopia. The *EU Trust Fund for Africa* approved a number of projects, in addition to regional programmes. Preparation of projects on biometrics and on reintegration is ongoing.

Ethiopia, with the support of the EU, is making progress in supporting livelihood opportunities for refugees, notably with its announcement in September 2016 that it would provide 30,000 jobs to refugees through the creation of two industrial parks (aiming at a total of 100,000 jobs).

Key challenges and next steps

- Finalise the procedure for the pending cases;
- Set in place an agreed procedure for agreeing and implementing returns;
- Step up assistance for projects improving the livelihood and job opportunities for refugees;
- Step up assistance for the strengthening of the civil registry/identity documents;
- Deployment of the European Migration Liaison Officer;
- Harness opportunities offered for legal migration channels, ERASMUS opportunities and other policies and tools.

3.2 Jordan and Lebanon

The June Communication underlined that both Jordan and Lebanon face serious challenges in managing the impact of the Syrian crisis. Jordan hosts around 1.4 million Syrians which equates to about 20% of the population; 630,000 Syrian refugees are registered by UNHCR, of which over 70% are women and children. Lebanon is the country with the highest refugee per capita ratio in the world: it currently hosts more than 1 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR (June 2016). However, UNHCR estimates that the actual number of Syrian refugees could be as high as 1.3 million. The current situation means a heavy burden on natural resources such as water, the deterioration of relations between refugees and host communities and decreasing access to education, health services and jobs¹⁴.

The revised European Neighbourhood Policy sets a new framework to define bilateral relations with partners. These are also captured in Partnership Priorities that set the basis of the relationship with a given country, agreeing on a limited set of targeted priorities for the

¹⁴ The Commission is taking forward a Partnership on Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) in order to develop common innovative solutions for sustainable food production and water provision in the Mediterranean area.

coming years. It was agreed between the EU and Lebanon as well as Jordan that the Partnership Priorities document will have as an annex a document also described as a "*Compact*" defining the respective EU, Lebanon and Jordan commitments in facing the impact of the Syria crisis. These documents are now ready for formal approval by the respective Association Councils. The EU already has a Mobility Partnership with Jordan and is aiming to soon close the negotiations on the Mobility Partnership with Lebanon. On 8 November, negotiations will start on the EU Readmission Agreement, back to back with the Visa Facilitation Agreement negotiations.

This work was already under way by the time of the Partnership Framework Communication, the reason why it takes a different form, while already reflecting the approach. They rest heavily on priorities identified by both countries, and draw on a number of policies from different domains to further support both countries. They focus on strengthening the institutional and economic resilience of both countries while enhancing services and economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and host communities, through increased protection, access to employment, quality education and basic services. This has included an agreement with Jordan in July to simplify the rules of origin that Jordanian exporters use in their trade with the EU, making it easier to access the EU market, while helping Jordan find employment for the Syrian refugees in the country.

Priority actions will be funded through the additional EU funds pledged for Lebanon and Jordan at the London Conference¹⁵, including at least EUR 1 billion to be allocated in 2016 and 2017 and additional funds that the EU may make available in the future, in particular through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.

Key challenges and next steps

- Endorse the Compacts at the Association Councils;
- Start the negotiation on the EU-Jordan Readmission and Visa Facilitation Agreements;
- Conclude the negotiation on the EU-Lebanon Mobility Partnership.

3.3 State of play with other countries

In parallel to the intensive effort applied with the first priority countries, the Partnership Framework approach has been taken forward in a wide range of countries of high importance in the delivery of an effective migration policy. This has resulted in concrete steps towards the objectives of the Partnership Framework.

A key example has been the 'Joint Way Forward on migration issues between ***Afghanistan*** and the EU', signed on 2 October. It is a clear sign of Afghanistan's commitment to give a new priority to cooperation in this area, with a comprehensive framework which will benefit both parties and will help parties to overcome the obstacles which have hampered progress in the past. The EU looks forward to working closely with Afghanistan to ensure effective implementation.

Other cases have seen the EU stepping up contacts with partners to underline the new place of migration in external relations. Tackling persistent difficulties with implementation of the EU-***Pakistan*** Readmission Agreement has been given a new weight in the regular Joint Readmission Committee meetings and in July, a targeted Cooperation Platform was set up to address migrant smuggling. Improvements now have to be taken forward as an urgent priority. Similarly, the measures agreed with ***Bangladesh*** in April 2016 constituted an important step forward, with the commitment to develop Standard Operating Procedures on

¹⁵ At the London Conference of 4 February 2016, the EU pledged EUR 2.39 billion in support of Syria and the neighbouring countries mostly affected by the refugee crisis.

return, identification missions, information campaigns and reintegration projects. But concrete progress since then has been slow. Other countries where new processes need to be taken forward to results include *Iran*, a country of origin, transit and of destination, where a comprehensive dialogue on migration is planned. *Algeria* and *Morocco* also require particular attention.

Migration-related issues are now playing a central role in the EU's deployment of financial assistance to key partners. Although numbers remain low, there have been signs of increased migrant smuggling activity from *Egypt*¹⁶. Contacts have been stepped up, most recently with a visit by Commissioner Hahn. Funds have been directed towards projects on capacity building, supporting the vulnerable and other migration-prone groups, and common actions against smuggling, drawing on both the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis and the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Such targeting will also be a key aspect of the new relationship with *Tunisia*¹⁷, to build resilience in a fragile socio-economic and security context. Negotiations have now been launched on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with Tunisia: swift conclusion of these Agreements should be a priority.

Libya is of pivotal importance as the primary point of departure for the Central Mediterranean route. A stable and united Libyan government which could command all security forces would make the greatest contribution to managing the situation, not only at the coast but in terms of being capable of adopting a more preventative approach to managing migration in the country. Operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia has been at the forefront of Europe's response to the migration crisis in the Mediterranean.¹⁸ This is also being backed up through the EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya, with plans for a civilian capacity-building mission for crisis management, including an EU-Libya Committee on Integrated Land Border Management. There is EUR 30 million worth of ongoing and recently completed projects. These projects mainly focus on providing protection and assistance to vulnerable migrants and internally displaced persons in communities and detention centres, as well as on enhancing community stabilisation and countering migrant smuggling. Work is also ongoing to strengthen humanitarian repatriation and reintegration. At the regional level, as a follow-up to a trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Libya, Niger and Chad on border management¹⁹, a cooperation framework is being developed with EU support. It should be noted that there are increasing reports of the significant deterioration of humanitarian conditions for migrants who are stranded in Libya.

3.4 Horizontal frameworks for cooperation

The Partnership Framework approach has built on existing EU cooperation on migration and accelerated its delivery. The Valletta Action Plan sowed the seeds for enhanced migration cooperation with African countries. Tasked by the Valletta Summit, the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (the "Rabat Process") and the Khartoum Process

¹⁶ So far in 2016, some 13,000 people have been recorded as landing in Italy having left Egypt, a rise of over 25% from 2015. Migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Egypt are both Egyptians and third country nationals. Egyptians were the largest national group of migrants from Libya in August-September 2016.

¹⁷ The Communication 'Strengthening EU support for Tunisia' published in September 2016 (JOIN(2016) 47) underlines the importance of intensifying cooperation with Tunisia in the field of migration, in particular to work together to prevent irregular migration and tackle the root causes of migration. Tunisia hosts a large number of Libyan refugees.

¹⁸ Since its establishment in 2015, Operation Sophia has saved more than 21,000 lives, contributed to the rescuing of a further 35,751 migrants and has disabled 189 smuggling boats on the high seas. In June, the Foreign Affairs Council extended Operation Sophia to July 2017 and extended the mandate to include training of Libya's Coast Guard and implementation the UN arms embargo on the High Seas off the coast of Libya.

¹⁹ The High Representative/Vice-President convened this meeting of June 2016 which took place in the margins of the G5 meeting.

monitor the implementation of the Valletta Action Plan. The Rabat Process has been implementing a project promoting diaspora investment in the countries of origin of migration.

The work of the Budapest Process has also fed into the Partnership Framework. The "Silk Routes Partnership on Migration project" has led to the inauguration of two Migration Resources Centres in Pakistan. The Commission will shortly approve a new EUR 12 million EU funded "Silk Routes Facility", aiming at facilitating policy dialogues, ensuring capacity building and developing flagship initiatives on migration with Silk Routes countries.

3.5 Financial tools: The EU Trust Fund for Africa

The EU has geared up a large range of financial instruments to support the Partnership Framework, including in particular the European Development Fund²⁰, the Development Cooperation Instrument²¹, the European Neighbourhood Instrument²², and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace²³. The EU Trust Fund for Africa plays a particularly important role. It was established at the Valletta Summit to address the stability and the root causes of migration in the regions of Sahel/Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and North of Africa – covering a total of 23 countries²⁴.

The EU has set aside an overall contribution of EUR 1.8 billion for the EU Trust Fund for Africa²⁵. Since its inception less than one year ago, a total of 59 programmes worth EUR 927 million have been adopted. In less than one year, contracts have been signed in support of the actions foreseen in the Valletta Action Plan for almost EUR 400 million, and by the end of 2016, more than 90% of the funds approved the Operational Committees so far will have been contracted.

The Trust Fund approach is of particular benefit to the new Partnership Framework as a rapid and flexible tool able to be targeted precisely on migration-related goals. A total of 24 projects funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa, representing over EUR 425 million will have been launched in the five priority countries by the end of 2016. The Commission has adopted, with agreement of the Member States, a decision to increase the funding to the EU Trust Fund for Africa by a further EUR 0.5 billion from the European Development Fund reserve to finance actions of these migration partnerships.

So far, EU Member States' and other donors' contributions have only reached EUR 81.8 million. This falls short of the call in the Partnership Framework Communication for Member States to match the EU contribution.

4. EUROPEAN EXTERNAL INVESTMENT PLAN

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/funding-instruments-programming/funding-instruments/european-development-fund_en. The European Development Fund is established within the framework of an international agreement between the EU and its partner countries. This EU-ACP Partnership Agreement – also known as the 'Cotonou Agreement' – was concluded in 2000 and is revised every five years.

²¹ Regulation (EU) No 233/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation for the period 2014-2020, OJ L 77/44 15.03.2014.

²² Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, OJ L 77/27 15.03.2014.

²³ Regulation (EU) No 230/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing an instrument contributing to stability and peace, OJ L 77/1, 15.03.2014.

²⁴ Neighbouring countries of these eligible countries may also benefit from projects which have a regional dimension, given the regional and cross-border nature of the migration challenge.

²⁵ An additional EUR 100 million from the Sudan Special Measure is also to be channelled through the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

As the Commission promised in June, a new External Investment Plan was presented by the Commission in September²⁶. It is a new approach to the way the Union supports sustainable development, inclusive growth, economic and social development and regional integration outside Europe. It has a broad development focus, and at the same time specifically addresses the root causes of migration.

The External Investment Plan will boost job creation by acting as a catalyst for public and private investment to create decent and sustainable employment. It also brings new investment opportunities with real growth potential in the partner countries by providing guarantees to offset the potentially higher risks of many investments in the countries concerned. It will create more effective partnerships to bring together aid, investment, trade, domestic resource mobilisation, and good governance – complementing traditional grant support to multiply the impact on the ground by leveraging funds from the EU, donors, financial institutions and the private sector, with a possibility for Member States to contribute. It supports the UN's 2030 Agenda, and the Addis Agenda on Financing for Development.

The proposal for a Regulation on the European Fund for Sustainable Development²⁷ is now being examined by the European Parliament and the Council²⁸. Given its priority importance, the co-legislators are invited to adopt the legislative proposals by March 2017 on time for it to become operational by the EU-Africa Summit in autumn 2017.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The European Council of June called for swift implementation of the Partnership Framework. Since the June Communication, the EU has put in place a working architecture with priority countries and with Member States. Key initiatives such as the External Investment Plan and the proposal for a Union Resettlement Framework are on the table of the European Parliament and the Council. Partners have recognised that migration is now at the heart of the EU's external priorities.

This is now translating into concrete progress. The pace of progress with the five existing priority countries is different, as different as their economic, social and political context. Niger has taken action to combat migrant smuggling and set up an institutional framework for managing the migration dialogue with the EU and its Member States. Strengthened cooperation is being put in place from an operational point of view with Senegal and Mali, with identification missions agreed for the coming weeks. Standard Operating Procedures with Mali are being finalised. Negotiations on a Readmission Agreement with Nigeria will open in the coming days. For Ethiopia, concrete cooperation has started, but stronger efforts are needed. Actions with other partners countries has continued and will be further intensified in the coming months.

Continued engagement and intensified cooperation with current partner countries is of vital importance for capitalising on the progress made in this initial phase and deliver swift and measurable results by December and beyond. While the current focus will need to remain on the five priority countries, looking beyond December, the Partnership Framework could be extended to other countries, taking into account the need to mobilise adequate resources. In order to do so cooperation needs to be further strengthened while new areas need to be opened

²⁶ COM(2016) 581 final of 14.09.2016.

²⁷ COM(2016) 586 final of 14.09.2016.

²⁸ As part of the External Investment Plan package the Commission also adopted a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation No 480/2009 establishing a Guarantee Fund for external actions, and a Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council granting an EU guarantee to the European Investment Bank against losses under financing operations supporting investment projects outside the Union.

by looking at other policies and tools, including legal migration. This in turn depends on the full engagement of the EU and the Member States, to keep up the momentum of the diplomatic effort and to be ready to look more into using the full range of EU and Member States' policies to further the Partnership Framework, also in full respect of the Valletta Declaration. It also requires a determined effort inside the EU and inside Member States to amend procedures to ensure that all obstacles to delivery are removed.

With such a comprehensive and consistent engagement and in real partnership with the countries involved, the EU can put in place a migration and mobility policy which brings a lasting and deep-seated change for both our partners and in Europe itself.