



Questions & Answers: Migration on the Central Mediterranean route

Brussels, 25 January 2017

What has the Commission adopted today?

The European Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President presented today a number of additional measures to strengthen the work along the Central Mediterranean migration route, including with and around Libya. With the high number of lives lost at sea and along the Central Mediterranean migration route, the question of managing flows and saving lives remains a top priority for the European Union. The Joint Communication presented today outlines possible short and medium term actions to address migration in relation to the Central Mediterranean in a comprehensive way.

What are the main actions proposed?

While the EU continues its support to bring about political stability, the Communication proposes a set of concrete operational actions to help address the situation along the Central Mediterranean migration route. The success of these actions requires close cooperation with the relevant partners in North Africa and concerted efforts by EU institutions, Member States, as well as cooperation with International Organisations like the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Some of the proposed actions can only be successfully implemented if the situation on the ground allows for it. They should be seen as complementary to the substantial amount of initiatives already being implemented by the EU and its Member States, notably under the [European Agenda on Migration](#) and the [Migration Partnership Framework](#). The proposed actions include:

- **Reducing the number of crossings and saving lives at sea**

- Expand the training programmes for the Libyan Coast Guard through an immediate €1 million addition to the Seahorse programme and a grant of €2.2 million under the Regional Development and Protection Programme in North Africa;
- Ensure sustainable sources of funding to cover various training needs in a complimentary manner in the future;
- Assist the Libyan authorities in establishing a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre and improving operational cooperation with Member States;
- Support the provision to the Libyan Coast Guard of additional patrolling assets and ensure their maintenance.

- **Stepping up the fight against smugglers and traffickers**

- Ensure that the Seahorse Mediterranean Network is operational by spring 2017, thus allowing greater exchange of information and operational coordination between the Libyan Coast Guard and participating Member States;
- Encourage the participation of Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt in the Seahorse Mediterranean Network;
- Target supplies of smugglers by pooling intelligence between Member States, EUNAVFOR MED Sophia, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Europol, Interpol, and partners in the region, in particular by using the Eurosur Fusion services.

- **Protecting migrants, increasing resettlement and promoting assisted voluntary returns**

- Engage with the Libyan authorities to ensure that the conditions in centres for migrants are improved, with a particular attention to vulnerable persons and minors. Step up cooperation with IOM and UNHCR in this respect;
- Step up work and engagement with Libyan municipalities to promote alternative livelihoods and support the resilience of local communities hosting migrants;
- Support capacity building in migration management for the Libyan authorities;
- Support in cooperation with Libyan authorities, international organisations, such as UNHCR, in addressing the situation of the persons in need of international protection;

- Support IOM in its work to improve the situation of migrants in Libya and to implement a project for assisted voluntary return from Libya, considering its further expansion beyond the initial target of 5,000 migrants.
- **Managing migrant flows through the southern Libyan border**
- Deploy the full range of EU missions and projects to support the Libyan authorities in border management and migrant protection in Southern Libya;
- Promote border cooperation, dialogue and exchange of information between Libya and its southern neighbours, including using the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community to full potential;
- Building on existing cooperation with Niger under the Migration Partnership Framework, take further action to address the northwards migration pressure, tackle smuggling and promote assisted voluntary returns.
- **Increased cooperation with Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria**
- Deepen dialogue and operational cooperation on migration flows management with Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria;
- Enhance practical cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, including on returns.
- **Stepping up funding**
- Mobilise €200 million for the North Africa window of the EU Trust Fund for Africa for projects in 2017, with a priority focus on migration-related projects concerning Libya;
- Match the EU contribution to the North Africa window of the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

Why is the EU focusing on Libya?

The Central Mediterranean route has become the dominant route for migrants and refugees to reach Europe. Over 180,000 people were detected on the Central Mediterranean route in 2016, the vast majority of them reaching the continent via Italy. Almost 90% of those on the route depart from Libya, whose unstable political and economic situation provides the opportunity for smugglers to expand their activities.

Smugglers and traffickers themselves contribute to the instability in the country by their actions and human rights abuses, increasing the vulnerability of migrants. Finding a lasting solution to Libya's governance and security challenges continues to be a key priority for the European Union, its Member States and international partners, as it is a prerequisite for sustainably managing the current situation. Thus, it has to be taken into account that some of the proposed actions highlighted in the Communication can only be successful if the situation on the ground allows for it.

What will you do to support the Libyan coastguard and save lives at sea?

Since the start of this decade, over 13,000 irregular migrants have lost their lives trying to cross the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. The EU and its Member States have made major efforts to reduce the risk of loss of lives. Search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean have been set up and have been gradually extended to new areas. In 2015 and 2016, the EU has saved over 400,000 lives.

The Libyan Coast Guard should play a central role in managing the situation. Therefore building its capacity is a priority, both in terms of capabilities and equipment needs.

To this end, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission are closely coordinating their respective actions with those of EU Member States and other actors, in order to ensure coherence in the provision of support. While the EU budget cannot finance Operation Sophia directly, it can fund the training of the Libyan Coast Guard.

Through the Seahorse programme, the EU is aiming to strengthen Libyan border surveillance and expand the training offered to the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy. The programme will be reinforced with an additional **€1 million** to further strengthen its training component.

This will be further complemented by a new programme of support to the Libyan Coast Guard, financed by a **€2.2 million** grant agreement with the Italian Ministry of Interior.

This support will include cooperation with the IOM for support to sea rescue, as well as with the UNHCR for capacity-building of the Libyan authorities and assistance to migrants and refugees present in or disembarked in Libya.

A new programme under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, worth **€20 million**, will focus on the reception of migrants upon disembarkation and improving the living standards in centres where migrants are

received.

In the context of the European Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan, the Commission will also support the Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum in 2017, with a grant of **€80,000**, that will help the Libyan Coast Guard to develop mutual knowledge, share experience and best practices, as well as to identify areas for further cooperation with Coast Guard Functions in Member States and in other third countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

How will you step up the fight against smugglers and traffickers?

A first priority is to make the Seahorse Mediterranean Network, which aims at strengthening and coordinating border surveillance systems, fully operational by spring 2017. Italy, Malta, Greece, Cyprus, France, Spain and Portugal have all already connected their Eurosur national coordination centres for border surveillance to the Seahorse Mediterranean Network. Work is now underway to ensure that the Libyan Coast Guard has the equipment it needs to connect with Member States, so that all will be able to inform each other about incidents in near-real time, and coordinate their patrolling activities.

On the high seas, EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia's capacity to disrupt the activities of human smugglers and traffickers is already being enhanced through training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy in coordination with Commission programmes and Member States' efforts. Today's Communication stresses the need to further enhance information sharing and gathering and ensure continued availability of assets.

Finally, existing socio-economic support for municipalities along the migratory route could be reinforced, providing alternative livelihoods for those involved in smuggling and trafficking.

These actions are complementary to the ongoing initiatives under the [Migration Partnership Framework](#) and the [EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling](#).

What do you intend to do to improve migration management in Libya?

To improve the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya, and address the challenges of irregular migration to and from Libya, more needs to be done in complementarity with EU Member States national initiatives and in close cooperation with the UNHCR and IOM.

Conditions in the centres where migrants are held are unacceptable and fall short of international human rights standards.

The Commission and High Representative/Vice-President will engage with the Libyan authorities and with the concerned international organisations to address these issues, and will step up targeted funding if appropriate.

In addition to [programmes already in place](#), Commission services and EEAS propose to:

- continue systematic engagement with the Libyan authorities, with a focus on border management, countering irregular migration and addressing the needs of migrants in Libya, particularly those in detention centres, ensuring that conditions meet international humanitarian and human rights standards. Human rights and the proper handling of migrants is an important element of the trainings provided by EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia to the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, as well as EUBAM Libya;
- build on current Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) engagement to foster security and stability in Libya – in particular through civilian CSDP actions under EUBAM Libya to provide advice to Libyan authorities on border management and organised crime;
- explore with the UNHCR the feasibility of practical steps to implement the resettlement of those in need of international protection from Libya towards EU Member States and other international partners;
- reinforce the pilot initiative launched aiming at community stabilisation in areas affected by internal displacement and transit of migrants, including the creation of job opportunities for persons in need of protection, also with a view to facilitate their acceptance by hosting communities;
- enhance ongoing assisted voluntary returns from Libya towards countries of origin, if the situation on the ground allows for it.

How do the assisted voluntary returns from Libya work?

Many migrants may have incentives to return to their country of origin, if their plans to find a job in Libya or hopes to travel to Europe are not materialising. In those cases, assisted voluntary return can be an option.

As part of the EU's comprehensive approach, efforts in cooperation with international partners will be stepped up, in particular with the IOM, with a view to addressing the humanitarian situation of migrants in Libya.

The core objective of such cooperation is to offer an alternative return opportunity for migrants, many of whom live in miserable conditions. In this regard, a €20 million action was adopted in December 2016 under the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The project focuses on support to migrants at disembarkation points and in centres, as well as scaling up humanitarian repatriation to countries of origin and reintegration.

What are you going to do to address the situation on Libya's southern border?

Given that the majority of migrants in Libya are third-country nationals, with the largest share originating from sub-Saharan African countries, an effective approach also has to take into account actions south of Libya. The work taken forward with Niger under the Partnership Framework shows how effective cooperation can have an impact on the flows towards the Mediterranean. In Niger, the EU's engagement includes a permanent presence of EUCAP SAHEL Niger in Agadez. Concrete steps in the region could include further outreach to the communities and migrants with information and awareness-raising, as well as the extension of assisted voluntary return and reintegration measures from locations beyond Agadez and Niamey. Efforts to strengthen Niger's control of the Niger-Libya border, control the flow of migrants and potentially assist with voluntary returns, need to take account of the potential impacts on communities in Northern Niger that are economically sustained by migrant smuggling, to ensure adequate alternative livelihoods and access to viable and legal markets to replace migrant smuggling.

In the longer term, it could be also explored whether a civilian CSDP mission could support Libyan border management agencies, including in the South, building on efforts currently made through EUBAM Libya. This could be combined with actions by the European Border and Coast Guard to improve monitoring and information flow. The HRVP started a dialogue with Libya and its southern neighbours which will continue to be developed.

How are you stepping up cooperation with Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria?

In taking joint actions with Libya, the risk that other routes could develop in neighbouring countries needs to be minimised by deepening dialogue and cooperation on migration within the region.

The Commission and European External Action Service propose to deepen dialogue and cooperation with Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. Further assistance to these countries to develop their own functioning asylum systems and support to those in need of international protection would be needed. Cooperation with the UN and IOM in these countries should also be strengthened, including with their possible participation in regional programmes such as the Seahorse Mediterranean network.

A first step will be the deployment of European Migration Liaison Officers to the EU Delegations in Tunisia and Egypt.

In **Tunisia**, the integrated framework provided by the Mobility partnership concluded in 2014, has reinforced dialogue and brought better management of operational and financial support. The relations in this area will now be taken to a new level. A €23 million security sector reform project includes a component providing capacity building support in the area of border management.

As regards **Egypt**, the formal EU-Egypt dialogue has been revived under the revised European Neighbourhood Policy and the draft EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities, including a dedicated chapter on strengthening cooperation on migration and mobility.

The EU-**Algeria** draft partnership priorities include closer cooperation on migration and mobility-related issues, while discussions are ongoing with the Algerian authorities for a first project to be funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

For more information:

[Communication: Migration on the Central Mediterranean route. Managing flows, saving lives](#)

[Annex to the Communication](#)

[Press release: Managing migration along the Central Mediterranean Route – Commission contributes to Malta discussion](#)

[Factsheet: EU-Libya relations](#)

[Timeline European Agenda on Migration](#)

[Factsheet: Migration Partnership Framework](#)

[EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sofia](#)

[EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya \(EUBAM\)](#)

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