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Section 2.4 External borders
In 2022, the EU’s external borders continued experiencing increased pressure, with arrivals sharply rising for a second year in a row. According to preliminary data collected by Frontex, 330,000 irregular border crossings were detected at the EU’s external border, representing an increase of 64% compared 2021 (with approximately 200,000 detections). 151These numbers do not include persons displaced from Ukraine, who are recorded separately.

The **Western Balkan route** was the most frequently used with 145,600 detections, accounting for 45% of all irregular entries in 2022. The high flow on this route may be a result of movements by migrants already present in the region, as well as people arriving to Serbia by air due to visa-free arrangements.152

The number of detections also increased on the **Central Mediterranean route** (over 100,000), rising by more than one-half compared to the year before. On the **Eastern Mediterranean route**, the number of irregular entries almost doubled compared to 2021, yet remained lower than one-half of the number in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Western Mediterranean route** (14,582) and the **Western African route** (15,462) experienced decreases in the number of detections of irregular border crossings compared to the previous year.153 On the **Eastern land borders**, following the peak of the instrumentalisation crisis in 2021, the situation appeared stable in 2022 with a significantly lower number of irregular border crossings. This route appears to have shifted, with many third-country nationals arriving in Belarus after travelling legally to Russia.154

To address the situation at the external borders, the European Commission continued to provide support to frontline Member States by offering financial assistance and operational responses in coordination with EU agencies, international organisations and other relevant stakeholders. Assistance was provided in managing arrivals; setting up adequate reception structures;

implementing relocations; ensuring efficient asylum and return procedures; improving border management; protecting unaccompanied minors and other groups with vulnerabilities; and implementing integration policies for legally-residing, third-country nationals.155 The Task Force on Migration Management, established originally to support Greek authorities in improving reception conditions on the Greek islands, also provided assistance to Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Spain and Member States bordering Belarus and Ukraine.

Greece

greece flag small

With assistance from the European Commission and EU agencies, more efficient asylum procedures have been implemented in Greece, which led to the reduction of the backlog of applications in 2022.156 Progress was made on the construction of new reception facilities on the Greek islands, with centres established on Kos, Leros and Samos. Support from the European Commission has catalysed the improvement of reception conditions on the Greek islands and the mainland, including shelter, hygiene, access to health and education for children. Through the voluntary relocation scheme, introduced in 2020, more than 5,000 unaccompanied minors, vulnerable applicants and beneficiaries of protection were relocated by October 2022 to 16 European countries which participate in the scheme.157

Cyprus

cyprus flag small

With Cyprus currently receiving the highest number of applicants for protection per capita, the European Commission and EU agencies have stepped in to provide direct support. In February 2022, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, and the Cypriot Minister of the Interior, Nicos Nouris, signed a memorandum of understanding and a detailed action plan to enhance migration management in Cyprus.158 The specific objectives of the action plan include: enhancing first reception capacities, improving the level of material reception conditions for asylum applicants, supporting timely and effective asylum and return procedures, and establishing and implementing an integration strategy.159 The implementation of the action plan is supported by the EUAA, Frontex and Europol.Funding for Cyprus under the 2021-2027 Home Affairs Funds is also channelled toward the construction of a new open reception centre and pre-departure detention centre, with safe zones for vulnerable people, recreational and common areas, and medical and quarantine areas.160 The European Commission, Frontex and the Cypriot authorities have set up a tripartite working group on the return of rejected applicants, resulting in a steady increase in returns.161

Italy

italy flag small

The European Commission, together with Italian authorities, coordinates the work of EU agencies on the ground in Italy, including through the EU Regional Task Force in Catania. The

European Commission is also working with Italian authorities in addressing flows from Libya and along the Central Mediterranean route.162

Spain

spain flag small

Support to Spain focuses on reforming the national reception system to increase capacity in addressing migratory pressure. EU funding has also supported the reform of the Spanish Asylum Office, which included recruiting additional case officers.163

As part of the overall support to Member States experiencing pressure, in August 2022, the European Commission awarded EUR 171 million for projects to support the reception, asylum and return systems in Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy and Poland, through a competitive call under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The support to Cyprus would fund the construction of an accommodation and pre-departure centre in the Menoyia area in Larnaka. Support for Spain would reinforce the capacity of the reception system in Ceuta and on the Canary Islands. In Italy, the focus would be on strengthening the capacity of the reception system from arrival to all phases of reception, and to protect and care for the most vulnerable refugee children and women. For Greece, funding will be channelled to international organisations working on improving the quality of assistance for asylum seekers in the reception system, for vulnerable individuals in particular and school-aged refugee children to access education. Funding for Poland was channelled to the IOM for projects meant to foster a rights-based and protection-sensitive approach to the provision of direct assistance and improving return procedures. 164

Section 2.4.1. Central Mediterranean

2.4.1. Action plans for the Central Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes

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Section 2.4.2. Search and research activities

2.4.2. Search and rescue activities

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Section 2.4.3. Voluntary solidarity mechanism

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