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2.6 External dimension and third country support

Throughout 2019, the EU continued its cooperation with external partners to manage migratory pressures through a comprehensive approach rooted in multilateralism. The aims of activities implemented under the external dimension of the EU migration policy included preventing irregular migration; enhancing cooperation with third countries on returns and readmission; addressing the root causes of migration by improving opportunities in countries of origin and increasing investments in partner countries; and ensuring legal pathways to Europe for those in need of international protection.

Since 2015, EUR 9 billion have been allocated to these ends. Key initiatives include the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the EU Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.[163] Support to Afghanistan, Libya, Morocco, Syria and its neighbouring countries, and Turkey were presented in previous sections. Highlights of the progress achieved to date in working with third countries include:[164]

***Addressing root causes of migration*:** Initiatives in this area focused on creating economic and employment opportunities, enhancing local governance, providing support in the areas of health and education, and improving overall migration management. Programmes were implemented in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa and the 'EU Neighbourhood' through the External Investment Plan. Particular attention is placed on creating opportunities for displaced persons hosted in these areas to prevent further mobility.

***Combating smuggling networks*:** In 2019, efforts in this area have been carried out through the implementation of the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling and the complementary set of operational measures, with Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre serving as a hub to coordinate action. Initiatives to address migrant smuggling included cross-border anti-smuggling operations; information and awareness-raising campaigns engaging migrant communities; and law enforcement cooperation with partner countries to dismantle smuggling networks.

***Facilitating returns and readmission*:** The 23 readmission agreements and arrangements between the EU and partner countries have improved operational flows in returning migrants to countries of origin. However, results have been poor on the number of persons actually returned. Improving the implementation of return agreements in practice is needed, including using broad policy leverage, such as restrictive visa measures for third countries not cooperating

in readmissions. The full operationalisation of the mandate of Frontex will also assist in rendering the EU return policy more effective.

***Working with partner countries toward border management*:** Progress was noted on the conclusion of status agreements with Western Balkan countries, enabling the deployment of teams with executive powers on the borders with the EU. The agreements have been signed with Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. In May 2019, the agreement with Albania entered into force, placing Frontex teams on Albania's border with Greece. The ratification process with Montenegro was completed in May 2020 and the agreement is set to enter into force on 1 July 2020. The Council decision on the conclusion of the status agreement with Serbia was adopted on 25 May 2020, but ratification by Serbia is still needed before the agreement can enter into force. The agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina and with North Macedonia are close to being finalised.

***EU support for protection abroad*:** Providing assistance in protecting refugees and migrants abroad has been a key theme in the external dimension of EU's migration policy. EU support in this area comprises humanitarian aid, emergency relief and development programmes. In 2019, the EU continued to provide support to displaced Venezuelans, both within Venezuela and in host countries, as well as to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

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[163] European Commission. (2019). Support and solidarity for migration and border management under the EU budget. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_19_6077

[164] European Commission. (2019). COM(2019) 481 Final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20191016_com-2019-481-report_en.pdf

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