Please cite as: EUAA, '2.4 External dimension of EU policy' in *EASO Asylum Report 2021*, Gennaio 2022.

2.4 External dimension of EU policy

Throughout 2020, the EU continued its cooperation with external partners to manage migratory pressures through a comprehensive approach rooted in multilateralism. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum makes an explicit link between the internal and external dimensions of migration management, as close cooperation with external partners has a direct impact on the effectiveness of policies inside the EU. The external dimension of EU policy, including return, smuggling and overall funding, is necessary for the coordinated response as these aspects may have direct impact on asylum flows and the implementation of CEAS. Balanced and tailor-made partnerships can deliver mutual benefits for the economy, sustainable development, education and skills, stability and security, and relations with diasporas.[225]

- Key migration-related initiatives and funding programmes strengthening cooperation in different areas include: The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) focusing on potential candidate countries for EU membership;
- The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) focusing on neighbouring countries of the East and the South;
- The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (ETFA) involving the North of Africa, the Sahel Region, the Lake Chad area and the Horn of Africa;
- The Bêkou Trust Fund addressing existing needs in the Central African Republic in close cooperation with the national authorities;
- The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey; The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, which addresses educational, economic, social and health needs of Syrian refugees while also supporting local communities and their administrations; and
- The EU External Investment Plan, which focuses on EU neighbouring and African countries and aims at generating more investment and development.

The aims of activities implemented under the external dimension of the EU migration policy include addressing the root causes of migration; combating smuggling networks; enhancing cooperation with third countries on returns and readmission; working with partner countries toward border management; and providing support for protection abroad. Highlights of the progress in working with third countries include:

Addressing root causes of migration



Initiatives focused on reducing poverty and inequality, promoting human development, creating economic and employment opportunities, promoting democracy and enhancing local governance, calibrating peace and security, and addressing the challenges of climate change. Cooperation in education, skills and research, technology, energy and transport assist in fostering economic growth and address root causes of irregular migration overall by improving the prospects of development for millions of people. The Africa-Europe Alliance is a prime example of these initiatives.[226]

Combating smuggling networks



Over the past decade, specialised EU agencies have increasingly supported law enforcement and border and judicial authorities to address migrant smuggling.[227] In 2020, efforts continued in implementing the 2015-2020 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. The new 2020-2025 EU Security Union Strategy, adopted in July 2020, along with the Pact on Migration and Asylum aim to disrupt smuggling networks.

The new action plan aims to enhance cooperation and support law enforcement, building on the work of Europol, Frontex, the EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (Eurojust) and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training. New measures will address challenges in the areas of financial investigations, asset recovery, document fraud and new phenomena, such as digital smuggling.[xi] The new EU Action Plan stimulates cooperation between the EU and third countries through targeted counter-migrant smuggling partnerships, including support to countries of origin and transit in capacity-building, enhanced information-exchange, action on the ground, common operations and joint investigative teams. The role of existing Common Security and Defence missions are important, such as the EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUBAM Libya, as well as the role of Immigration Liaison Officers.[228]

Facilitating returns and readmission



Apart from reducing the number of irregular arrivals, a well-functioning migration management system necessitates close cooperation with countries of origin and transit toward the effective return, readmission and reintegration of persons who are not in need of protection, including voluntary return options. Overall, 24 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, as currently only about one-third of people ordered to return from EU+ countries actually leave.[229]

A common system for return was proposed in the new pact which, apart from stronger structures inside the EU, will necessitate more effective cooperation with third countries. Stricter implementation incentives have been proposed, linking the level of cooperation by third countries on readmission with visa policies. To incentivise and improve cooperation on return and readmission further, effective measures can be introduced in other policy areas of interest to third

countries.[230] Key building blocks in the return system are the 2018 proposal to recast the Return Directive and the reinforced mandate of Frontex on implementing the return of third-country nationals.

Working with partner countries toward border management



A key element to border management is supporting capacity-building in partner countries, in addition to operational support provided by EU agencies. Frontex can provide practical support through EU status agreements.

In May 2020, the Council of the European Union adopted two decisions to conclude agreements with Montenegro[231] and Serbia[232] on border management cooperation between the two countries and Frontex. The agreements allow Frontex to carry out joint operations and deploy teams in the two countries, subject to their agreement. The first such agreement was concluded with Albania in 2019. Serbia ratified the Frontex Status Agreement in February 2021. The agreement will enter into force on 1 May and operations are expected to start later in 2021. For Montenegro, it entered into force in July 2020. Similar status agreements have been initialled with North Macedonia (2018) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019), but they are still pending signature and ratification.[233]

EU support for protection abroad



Providing assistance in protecting refugees and migrants abroad has been a key theme in the external dimension of the EU's migration policy. EU support in this area comprises humanitarian aid, emergency relief and development programmes. The humanitarian evacuation of people from Libya to Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda for onward resettlement stands as an example of such initiatives.

Support has also been provided to countries and host communities affected by the conflict in Syria, including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.[234] EUR 6 billion have been allocated to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, with a focus on humanitarian assistance, education, health, municipal infrastructure and socioeconomic support. As of January 2021, more than 1.8 million refugees received support for basic daily needs; 750,000 refugee children were supported to attend school; 365 new schools were in the process of being constructed; and 177 migrant health centres were underway.[235]

In 2020, the EU continued to provide support to Venezuelan refugees. In May 2020, the EU and the Spanish
government – with the support of UNHCR and the IOM – convened an international donors conference to support Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as host countries. A total of more than EUR 2.5 billion were pledged, which will be used for immediate humanitarian assistance, medium- and longer-term development assistance and conflict prevention interventions.[236]

In March 2020, the European Commission announced a EUR 31 million humanitarian aid package to address the needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Myanmar.[237] In addition in October 2020, the EU along with the United States, the UK and UNHCR co-hosted an international donors conference, where approximately USD 600 million were pledged for humanitarian support to

Rohingya refugees.[238]

[xi]The use of modern information and communication technology can be used to facilitate migrant smuggling by advertising, organising and collecting payments online.

[225]European Commission. (2020, September 23). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM/2020/609 final* . https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM:2020:609:FIN
[226] European Commission. (2018, September 12). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Communication on a new Africa - Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking our partnership for investment and jobs to the next level, COM/2018/643 final*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0643
[227] European Parliamentary Research Service. (January 2021). *Briefing: Understanding EU action against migrant smuggling.* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/659450/EPRS_BRI(2021)659450_EN.pdf
[228] European Commission. (2020, September 23). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM/2020/609 final* . https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM:2020:609:FIN
[229] European Commission. (2020, September 23). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM/2020/609 final* . https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM:2020:609:FIN
[230] European Commission. (2020, September 23). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM/2020/609 final* . https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM:2020:609:FIN
[231] Council of the European Union. (2020, May 19). *Council Decision on the conclusion of the Status Agreement between the European Union and Montenegro on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in Montenegro* . https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6847-2019-REV-1/en/pdf
[232] Council of the European Union. (2020, May 19). *Council Decision on the conclusion of the Status Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Republic of Serbia* . https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15581-2018-REV-1/en/pdf
[233] Council of the European Union. (2020, May 26). *Border management: EU concludes agreements with Montenegro and Serbia on Frontex cooperation*. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/05/26/border-management-eu-concludes-agreements-with-montenegro-and-serbia-on-frontex-cooperation/
[234] European Commission. (2020, September 23). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum COM/2020/609 final* . https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM:2020:609:FIN
[235] European Commission. *Factsheet: The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey*. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/frit_factsheet.pdf
[236] European Commission. (2020, May 26). *EU mobilises support for Venezuelan refugees and migrants* . https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_922
[237] European Commission. (2020, March 3). *Rohingya crisis: EU allocates €31 million for Bangladesh and Myanmar* . https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_371
[238] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020, October 22). *Conference on Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response 22 October 2020: Joint Closing Announcement by Co-Hosts* . https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/10/5f915c464/conference-sustaining-support-rohingya-refugee-response-22-october-2020.html

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu