

European Neighbourhood Policy Southern Neighbourhood – migration issues

SUMMARY

The Valletta Summit held in November 2015 was the venue for more than 60 countries to come together with the European Union and African Union institutions, as well as regional and international organisations involved, to address the current migration crisis. The summit was called for in April 2015 by the European Council, when European Union leaders held a special meeting on the migration situation in the Mediterranean, recognising the need to deepen dialogue and partnership with the African countries. The April European Council tasked the European Commission with proposing measures for immediate action, as well as policy options for the medium and longer term. To this end, on 13 May, the Commission presented its proposal for a European Agenda on Migration, which was followed on 27 May by the implementation plan for the first measures. More than 3 600 people have so far been declared missing in the Mediterranean sea in 2015. The grim death toll in the Mediterranean has provoked an urgent call for action as 2015 has been the deadliest year so far for migrants trying to get to Europe. The reasons for this significant increase in migration flows include, amongst others: war, political repression, and economic crisis. Libya has become a popular starting point for many journeys, with human traffickers and smugglers exploiting the country's power vacuum and increasing lawlessness. On 13 April 2015, a conference of foreign ministers from the European Union and the southern shores of the Mediterranean took place in Barcelona to discuss the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). At centre stage of the agenda was stronger cooperation in the fight against Jihadist terrorism and irregular immigration. To this end, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker tasked the Commission to come up with a proposal for a reviewed ENP, which was published on 18 November 2015.



In this briefing:

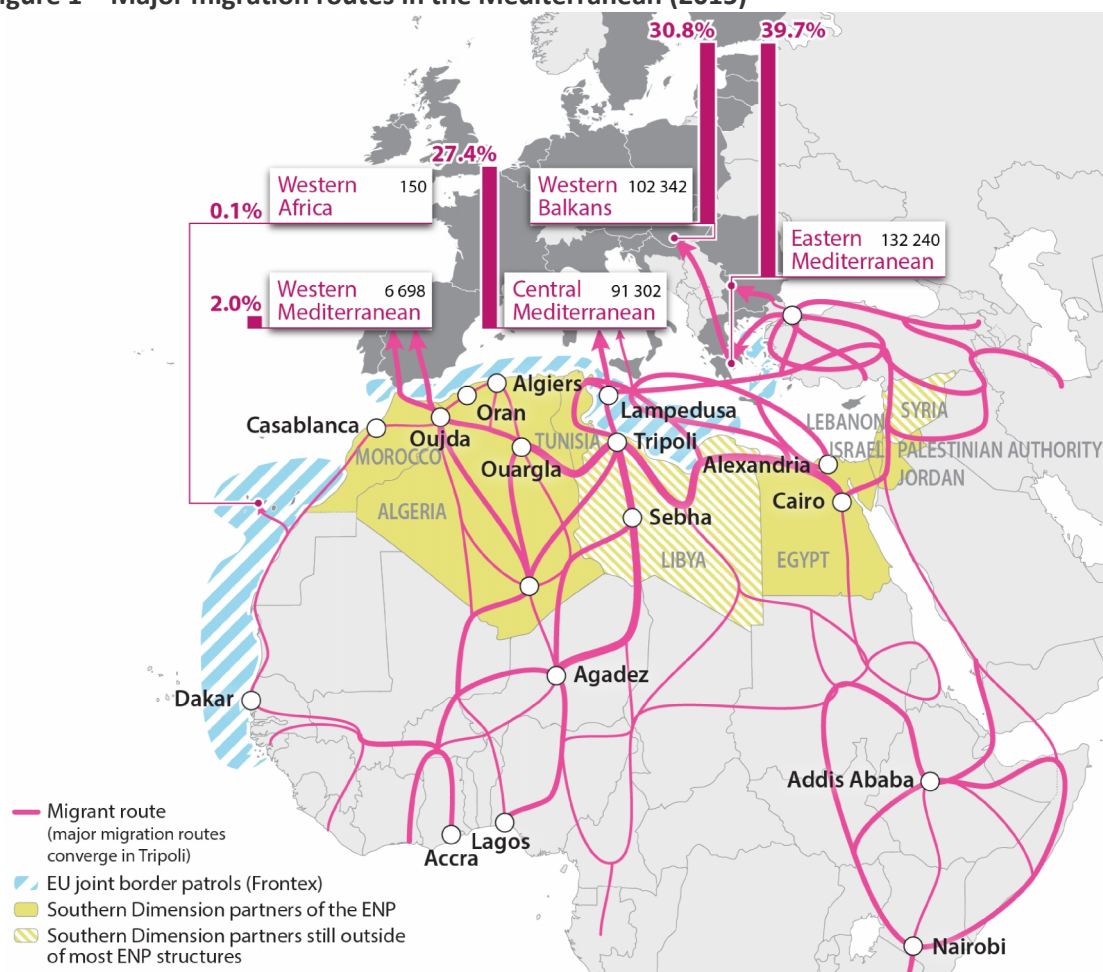
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Issue

The [meeting](#) in the Maltese capital, Valletta, on 11 and 12 November was planned in the wake of the death of about 800 persons in a migrant boat sinking off Libya on 20 April 2015, just a few days after the informal ministerial meeting in Barcelona convened on 13 April to discuss migration and security challenges being faced by the Southern Neighbours, who are partners of the [European Neighbourhood Policy \(ENP\)](#). The European Neighbourhood is at a crossroads. The challenges faced by partner countries are becoming more and more diverse. The EU has kept up its engagement with its partners, and the ENP, with all its policy instruments, remains the framework within which the EU works with its Southern Neighbours.

The Southern Neighbours of the ENP are facing a crisis situation. Many thousands of migrants have risked their lives this year, fleeing conflict and instability in Africa and the Middle East, in small, often decrepit vessels in an attempt to reach European territories. The number of fatalities has risen dramatically in a matter of months. More than [3 600 lives](#) have been lost in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015. The majority of migrants [head for Italy](#), prompting a crisis that the country's navy, coast guard and beleaguered immigration facilities are struggling to handle. Libya has become a major crossing point for many journeys, with people traffickers exploiting the country's power vacuum and increasing lawlessness.

Figure 1 – Major migration routes in the Mediterranean (2015)



Data Source: [Frontex](#), Map Source: [i-Map 2015](#)

The map in Figure 1 omits the Eastern Borders route and the Circular route between Albania and Greece. Therefore, the figures given reflect only the routes displayed on this map.

The EU has been actively supporting diplomatic initiatives to find political solutions since the beginning of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. In this context the Commission and the EU High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, have set out the policy framework for a [regional strategy](#), including the fight against ISIL/Da'esh earlier this year, comprising financial commitments of €1 billion. [More than 4 million Syrians](#) have fled their country, in addition to the 7.6 million internally displaced and more than 230 000 killed. The vast majority of Syrian refugees are in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, but numbers keep growing and there has been a sharp increase in both internal displacement and in direct flows to the EU, in particular Greece as well as Italy.

On 13 April 2015, the informal ministerial [meeting with Southern ENP partners on the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy](#), held in Barcelona at the headquarters of the [Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean](#), was attended by the foreign ministers of EU countries, as well as Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and EU HR/VP Federica Mogherini. The objective of the conference was to deepen Euro-Mediterranean cooperation to confront joint challenges which call for collective responsibility for action to be undertaken, such as migration and security threats, by promoting bilateral and regional cooperation. In order to address the migration and refugee crisis and manage challenges and opportunities jointly, the ability of the EU to engage with partners in third countries, particularly in the Southern Neighbourhood, is key. To this end, a review of the ENP took place. Following an in-depth public [consultation](#), a [communication](#) was published on 18 November 2015 for the future implementation of the reviewed ENP.

The institutional framework of EU relations with Southern Neighbours

The southern dimension of the ENP: the Barcelona Process and its revitalisation

[Migration policy](#) is not only about the internal dimension, but inherently also contains a strong external component. The EU has ongoing partnerships and cooperation with countries where migrants originate or transit. The [Barcelona Process](#) was initiated in 1995, with the [Barcelona Conference](#), which undertook to enhance an area of peace and stability. The bilateral track of the Barcelona Process is governed by a series of [Association Agreements](#) signed with Mediterranean Partners. Although every Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement signed by the EU and its Mediterranean partners is agreed on a bilateral basis, there are certain common aspects to all of them: political dialogue, respect for human rights and democracy, establishment of WTO-compatible free trade over a transitional period of up to 12 years, provisions relating to intellectual property, services, public procurement, competition rules, state aids and monopolies, economic cooperation in a wide range of sectors, cooperation relating to social affairs and migration (including [re-admission](#) of irregular immigrants) and cultural cooperation. However, the Barcelona process was hobbled by [Arab-Israeli](#) tensions. Moreover, the Barcelona process – due in part to its inherently bilateral nature that means the united EU negotiates with each Arab state individually – has created an artificial obstacle preventing the Arab states from acting as a regional economic bloc and this has had an impact on EU-Arab dialogue.

With the introduction of the ENP in 2004,¹ the Barcelona Process essentially became the multilateral forum for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners, while complementary bilateral relations are mainly managed under the ENP and through Association Agreements to be signed with each partner country. The ENP southern dimension countries which are partners of the EU include: Algeria, Egypt,

Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Tunisia. The ENP involves a set of [bilateral Action Plans](#) outlining a set of goals and priorities common to the EU and its neighbourhood, including in the field of mobility. The [Euro-Mediterranean Partnership](#) (EUROMED) (the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, formerly known as the Barcelona Process, re-launched in Paris in July 2008) is the southern regional branch of ENP. A new impetus was given to the EUROMED Partnership through the [Union for the Mediterranean](#) (UfM) launched in Paris on 13 July 2008. The UfM works in parallel to the European Neighbourhood Policy and aims to promote stability and prosperity throughout the Mediterranean region, including with countries outside the ENP. The informal ministerial meeting of 13 April 2015 thus attempted to revitalise the Barcelona Process.

On 5 June 2015, the Prime Minister of Spain, Mariano Rajoy, met the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, and [renewed their commitment](#) to building a strong and united Euro-Mediterranean space and to maintaining an ambitious relationship between Africa and Europe. They reiterated the need to strengthen Arab Maghreb Union to bring about stability in the Mediterranean and have pledged to boost EU-UMA (Arab Maghreb Union) dialogue, as well as the [5+5 initiative](#). The 5+5 Dialogue was launched in 1983 by France, but took shape in July 1990. The aim was to promote cooperation between the countries bordering the western Mediterranean, including France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, later joined by Malta (the 5 from the north) and Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia (the 5 from the south).

The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility

The [Global Approach to Migration and Mobility](#) (GAMM) – launched in 2005 and renewed in 2011 – is the overarching framework of EU external migration and asylum policy. The framework [defines](#) how the EU conducts its policy dialogues and cooperation with non-EU countries, based on clearly defined priorities, and is embedded in the EU's overall external action, including development cooperation. Within the framework of the GAMM, migration issues are part of overall political and economic relations with a series of key partners and countries of origin and transit.

GAMM calls for both bilateral and regional dialogues. In the Southern Neighbourhood, migration is also a major priority in a series of regional initiatives, such as the [EU-Africa Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment](#), the [Rabat process](#) with west African countries, as well as the '[Khartoum process](#)' with eastern African countries. In recent years, the EU has also signed [mobility partnerships](#) with several countries in its immediate and wider neighbourhood. These offer a comprehensive framework for bilateral cooperation between the EU and its partner countries, based on mutual commitments and project initiatives covering mobility, migration and asylum issues, within the global approach. GAMM also includes actions on human rights. The [new Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan](#), particularly in its action 24, calls for EU diplomacy to enhance human rights safeguards in all migration and mobility dialogues, and to assess policy ex-ante using human rights impact assessments.

In addition, the EU also offers financial and structural support to countries in conflict and with high numbers of displaced persons and refugees. Most recently, the [EU's response to the Syria](#) crisis has mobilised almost [€3 billion](#) in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance for Syrians since the start of the conflict. Approximately [€872 million](#) has been mobilised by the European Commission to help respond to needs within Syria and neighbouring countries hosting large numbers

of refugees (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq). More than half of the EU's humanitarian funding for the Syrian crisis addresses the needs of refugees. In December 2014, the Commission adopted a [€180 million package](#) to help deal with the impact of the Syrian crisis inside the country as well as in Lebanon and Jordan.

The [tragic incidents](#) which took place off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2013, when over 300 migrants lost their lives, led to the reinvigoration of debate on saving lives at sea. A few weeks after this incident, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council released statements on the need to prevent these tragedies from happening again. The Justice and Home Affairs Council proposed the setting-up of the [Task Force Mediterranean](#) to identify solutions to avoid such tragedies by better managing migration flows, and preventing deaths at sea. A year later, on 27 May 2014, the Commission issued a [communication](#) on the work of the Task Force. [Frontex's Joint Operation Triton](#) was launched on 1 November 2014, at the request of the Italian authorities to provide support in the central Mediterranean. Since then, over 19 500 lives have been saved, and the operation has been [extended](#) in the first instance until December 2015. Thanks to [increased assets](#), Frontex will be [extending](#) Joint Operation Triton into 2016 with a greater focus on saving lives.

The specific issues with Libya

The conflict and absence of state structures has turned Libya into a major crossing point for Sub-Saharan Africans into Europe, and primarily Italy. In the absence of a [national unity government](#) to talk with, as well as the lack of an Association Agreement with the EU, [Libya](#) remains outside most of the structures of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It is, for the moment, not possible to advance towards an operational partnership with Libya to establish cooperation on border controls and migration.

Libya is however eligible for funding under the new [European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument](#) (ENPI) and ENPI's regional programmes, in addition to thematic assistance programmes – for example, on human rights or migration. Following the [popular uprising in Libya](#) in February 2011 and the Gaddafi regime's attempts to suppress the protests, the EU took [a number of steps](#) to respond to the growing crisis. The [EU's total programme in Libya](#) now stands at €130 million (2014-2020), and focuses on public administration, security, democratic transition, civil society, health, vocational training and education. This is in addition to the €80.5 million disbursed for humanitarian assistance during the 2011 revolution to meet basic needs, treat the injured, assist refugees, and prevent human rights abuses, as well as support demining. This assistance was channelled through humanitarian partners with an established ground presence in Libya, the most effective way of helping those in need. Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi on 20 October 2011, European efforts have focused on 'institution building'.

From 2013 on, the [Libyan civil war](#) has resulted in a significant increase in the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Libya on makeshift boats organised by traffickers. A sustainable solution requires a holistic approach to the Libyan crisis. The response of many European policy-makers to date has been to focus on border control. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission, [EUBAM Libya](#), was established in May 2013 to support the Libyan authorities in improving and developing their capacity to enhance the security of their land, sea and air borders in the short term, and to develop a broader Integrated Border Management strategy in the long term.

Libya is currently divided between two governments and two parliaments: one internationally recognised, with limited control over its ministries of state, sitting in [Tobruk, in the House of Representatives](#) (HoR); and, a self-appointed, [Islamist-backed government in Tripoli](#), which controls several key institutions in Tripoli, where government agencies are located. Competing parliaments are [likely to accelerate Libya's fragmentation](#) into regional zones of governance. The Tobruk HoR was [invalidated](#) by the Tripoli-based Supreme Court on 6 November 2014, leaving Libya with no parliament or government able to claim national legitimacy, and reducing the prospect of a negotiated peace to the current conflict. The division in governance will cause delays to new legislation, contract approvals, and economic decision-making, and increases the likelihood of a de facto partition of Libya between east and west. This division is mirrored in a military conflict, with [Zintan](#) and allied tribes taking up positions against the Misratan-led '[Libya Dawn](#)' militia coalition in the west, and Islamist militias fighting General Haftar's nationalist '[Operation Dignity](#)' campaign in the east. The alliances formed by both sides increase the risk of fighting spreading to the southern oilfields in the Murzuq basin, and splits within the Islamist coalition make further fighting likely in Tripoli and Misrata. The domination of the former [General National Congress](#) by the [Misrata-allied Islamist bloc](#), and of the new parliament by eastern and central tribes, has exacerbated existing tribal and regional splits in Libya. This could encourage local and regional groups to take on the burden of self-governance, and defend their autonomy by force in the continued absence of a credible national authority. Despite the shared threat faced by both rival governments from a growing ISIL/Da'esh presence, the reliance of both governments on proxy forces to maintain law and order leaves the civilian authorities impotent in the face of unfolding events, thus increasing the risk that members of the public will take matters into their own hands. This occurred in [Gharghour \(Tripoli\) in early November 2013](#), when several dozen civilians were shot and killed while protesting outside an inner-city militia base.

The United Nations, with declared European support, has been working to encourage a national unity government, but this will not be successful unless two conditions are met: firstly, all factions must be on an equal footing. As long as the government in Tobruk enjoys [international recognition](#), it has no incentive to share power. Moreover, this recognition has come without the Tobruk government taking on the [responsibilities](#) of actually ruling the country. Secondly, [Europe's regional allies](#), with Egypt first and foremost, have to choose between the two sides of their current policy: paying lip service to 'dialogue', while in fact [providing weapons and political support](#) to Tobruk; this has only further decreased this government's interest in power sharing. EU Member States have [no contact](#) with the Libyan authorities in charge of coastguard operations or internal security, because the administration in Tripoli is [not recognised internationally](#) as the country's legitimate government. A national unity government in charge of state agencies (including borders, visas, and the treasury) could provide the beginnings of a solution. However, the deteriorating security situation in Tripoli since July 2014 has led to the temporary relocation of staff from the EU Delegation and EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Tunis and Brussels. The EU is actively supporting the UN-led dialogue between Libyan parties in order to reach a peaceful settlement, and stands ready to support a future government and national unity. In the meantime the Commission is providing humanitarian and development assistance to the vulnerable migrant population stranded in Libya.

The ENP's southern dimension provides a framework, however further work needs to be done, particularly to address the remaining gaps (such as the case of Libya). The current migration challenges have been a trigger for the reforms under consideration for the ENP. The 13 April 2015 conference in Barcelona sought to change the EU's [neighbourhood policy](#), both in the Middle East and the south to make it more effective, with the possibility of including local alliances to confront the advance of ISIL/Da'esh, against which the EU does not intend to intervene [on the ground](#), given the likely high cost in terms of human lives and finances. The [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) has been a crucial aspect of EU foreign policy since its 2004 launch. It addresses issues of strategic importance, such as security, stability, justice, freedom and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood, by aiming to foster sustainable and resilient economies and free and inclusive societies. A number of events have put focus on [Europe's political realities](#) in the region: millions of people fled Syria and the [Assad regime](#) and [atrocities and human rights](#) violations perpetrated by [ISIS/Da'esh](#), [Jabhat al-Nusra](#) and other terrorist groups in the region, and remain in [dire need](#) of assistance. Renewed [hostilities in Gaza](#) shattered livelihoods and devastated already fragile infrastructure. [Libya's statehood](#) remains at risk, and the absence of functioning public authorities, the increase of violence and the lack of control of migratory flows to and from the country create favourable conditions for [criminal networks](#) engaged in irregular migration and trafficking of human beings to Europe. Poverty in the neighbourhood is on the rise, affecting children in particular, as well as other [vulnerable groups in society](#). [Over 20 times](#) more migrants drowned crossing the Mediterranean in the first half of 2015 than during the same period in 2014.²

Specific EU actions in response to the current migration crisis in the Mediterranean

The informal ministerial meeting with southern ENP partners on the future of ENP of 13 April 2015

In the context of the current migration and security developments faced by the EU and its Southern Neighbours, [substantive consultations with partner countries](#) took place on 13 April during the Barcelona informal ministerial meeting of the EU and Foreign Ministers of Southern ENP countries. Given the significant events in the Neighbourhood region since the ENP's [last review](#) in 2011, it was deemed essential to undertake a fundamental revision of the principles on which the policy is based, as well as its scope and how instruments should be used. The [communication](#) of 18 November 2015 on the implementation of the reviewed ENP outlines the four priorities that the ENP will now follow: differentiation; focus; flexibility; ownership and visibility. Five areas where both sides share common interests have also been identified: trade and economic development; connectivity; security; governance; migration and mobility. The aim is to bring about, particularly in the Southern Dimension of the ENP, peace, stability and prosperity following the various uprisings since 2011 in the region.

The Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council held on 20 April 2015

On 20 April 2015, during a joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council meeting, the Commission presented a [10-point action plan](#) in response to the crisis situation in the Mediterranean. The plan received the full backing of Foreign and Interior Ministers. Migration and the crisis in Libya were at the core of the discussion, as well as common action on migration and human trafficking. As the spokesperson of the EEAS declared in a statement on the murder of Ethiopian Christians by ISIL/Da'esh in Libya: 'The EU supports the ongoing UN-led talks on Libya in Morocco and calls on all parties to cease

violence. Only a political agreement can bring sustainable peace in Libya and help the country to effectively fight against ISIL/Da'esh and terrorist organisations that are destabilising the country'. Ministers agreed to reinforce the fight against trafficking of human beings, to strengthen EU action to save lives at sea, as well as enhance support for countries on the front line, with a view to sharing the resettlement of refugees. EU diplomacy will also focus on the root causes of migration, including conflicts, poverty and human rights violations.

The European Council of 23 April 2015

The European Council President, in coordination with the Commission, the HR/VP and the Latvian Presidency, convened an [extraordinary European Council meeting](#) in Brussels, on 23 April 2015. The 10-point action plan was discussed by the Heads of State or Government during this meeting. As the situation in the Mediterranean [concerns not only](#) the countries in the EU's southern neighbourhood, but all of Europe, it was widely felt by those present that the European Union as a whole has a moral and humanitarian obligation to act. EU leaders [agreed to strengthen efforts in four areas](#):

- **Strengthen EU presence in the Mediterranean Sea** by tripling the financial resources of [Triton](#) and [Poseidon](#), the two border missions;
- **Fighting the traffickers, people-smugglers and their business model.** HR/VP Federica Mogherini was tasked to prepare a [CSDP operation](#) to identify, capture and destroy smugglers' vessels before they can be used.³ The Council established an EU naval operation to disrupt the business model of human smugglers in the Mediterranean, EUNAVFOR Med, as part of the comprehensive EU response to the migration challenge. On 18 May the Council approved the Crisis Management Concept establishing **EUNAVFOR MED**, the EU's military operation in the southern central Mediterranean. This reached [Full Operational Capability](#) on 28 July. Naval and air assets have been deployed and logistically supported in the area of operation, and the headquarters manned with command and control functions activated. The EUNAVFOR MED operation was renamed '[Sophia](#)', after the name given to a baby born on a ship of the operation which rescued her mother on 22 August 2015 off the coast of Libya;
- **Prevent irregular migration flows**, largely through better cooperation with countries of origin and transit, particularly with Libya's neighbours. The European Council also agreed to propose a summit on the topic with the African Union and other key countries (since held in Malta in November). Reinforcing EU political cooperation with African partners at all levels to tackle the cause of irregular immigration and combat trafficking of human beings was considered fundamental;
- **Foster an increased internal solidarity and responsibility.** [This would be done by](#): the rapid and full transposition and effective implementation of the Common European Asylum System by all participating Member States, to ensure common European standards under existing legislation; increase emergency aid to frontline Member States and consider options for organising emergency relocation between all Member States on a voluntary basis; deploy European Asylum Support Office (EASO) teams in frontline Member States for joint processing of asylum applications, including registration and finger-printing; and setting up a first voluntary pilot project on resettlement across the EU, offering places to persons qualifying for protection.

A European Agenda on Migration

On 13 May 2015, the Commission presented a ['European Agenda on Migration'](#) with both internal and external policy measures. A common element of the proposals is the deployment of a CSDP operation targeting vessels used in human trafficking and smuggling.

The four pillars of the European Agenda for Migration are:

- **Reducing the incentives for irregular migration**, notably by seconding European migration liaison officers to EU Delegations in key third countries; amending the legal basis for [Frontex](#), measures aiming to transform people-smuggling into a high-risk, low-return criminal activity; and addressing the root causes through development cooperation and humanitarian assistance;
- **Border management – saving lives and securing external borders**, by strengthening the role and capacity of Frontex; third countries' border-management capacities; pooling certain coast-guard functions at EU level;
- **Europe's duty to protect: a strong common asylum policy** ensuring full and coherent implementation of the [Common European Asylum System](#), by promoting systematic identification and fingerprinting, and strengthening the Safe Country of Origin provisions of the [Asylum Procedure Directive](#); evaluating and possibly revising the [Dublin Regulation](#) in 2016;
- **A new policy on legal migration**: maintaining a Europe in demographic decline as an attractive destination for migrants, notably by modernising and overhauling the Blue Card scheme, by reprioritising integration policies, and by maximising the benefits of migration policy to individuals and countries of origin, including by facilitating cheaper, faster and safer remittance transfers.⁴

The European Parliament

On 29 April 2015, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a [resolution](#) on the latest tragedies in the Mediterranean, calling for the strongest possible criminal sanctions against human trafficking and smuggling, while ensuring that individuals who come to the aid of vessels in peril are not prosecuted. Respect of international law with regard to saving lives at sea; ensuring the protection of refugees; and addressing the root causes of violence and under-development in the countries are crucial. An ambitious European Agenda for Migration was called for. On 20 May 2015, MEPs [discussed](#) during the plenary session the Commission's plans to tackle the large numbers of migrants seeking to reach the EU. On 10 September 2015 the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on migration in Europe. It welcomed the relocation and resettlement initiatives, and the Commission's operational support to 'Hotspots'. It called for rapid and full transposition and effective implementation of the Common European Asylum System, and recalled that legal entry to the EU for those in need of protection was very limited. To this end it called upon the EU and Member States to create **humanitarian corridors** and **humanitarian visas**, as well as a compulsory resettlement programme; enhanced family reunification; private sponsorship schemes and flexible visa arrangements, including for study and work; and, amendments to the Visa Code to include more specific common provisions on humanitarian visas.

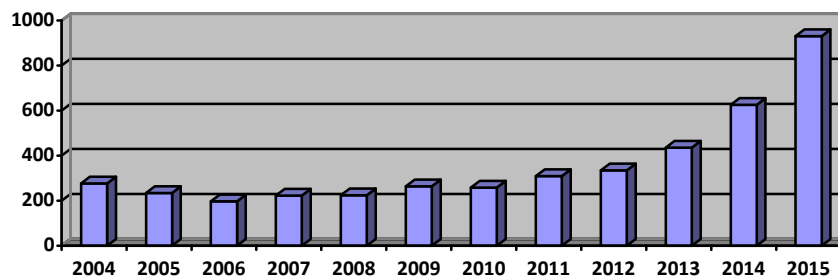
The United Nations' position on the EU's actions

According to the [1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees](#), a refugee is defined as that person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail

himself of the protection of that country.' Article 33 of the Convention states: 'No Contracting State shall expel or return (*'refouler'*) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.' This provision enshrines the [principle](#) of *non-refoulement*.⁵ [During mass movements](#) of persons (usually as a result of conflicts or generalised violence as opposed to individual persecution), there is not – and never will be – capacity to conduct individual asylum interviews for everyone who has crossed the border. Nor is it usually necessary, since in such circumstances it is generally evident why they have fled. As a result, such groups are often [declared](#) 'prima facie' refugees. On 13 May 2015, [UNHCR applauded](#) EU proposals for dealing with refugees and migrants arriving in Europe via the Mediterranean. [Speaking](#) to the European Parliament in Brussels on 27 May 2015 during the [plenary session](#), UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said that 'Europe has an important role to play and a collective responsibility to act. Saving lives should be the top priority'. He concluded by [stating](#): 'Successful burden-sharing can enable the EU to address the dramatically increasing flows of people while setting the example for other regions of the world facing similar challenges'.

Stemming the flow of arrivals from the Mediterranean by relying on fences and closed doors will, [according to the UNHCR](#), only serve to displace the challenge. [The UNHCR calls](#) for a more robust search-and-rescue operation and enhanced legal avenues such as resettlement programmes, humanitarian visas, and enhanced family reunification measures. The EU will also have to deal with [the government in Tripoli](#), which it does not recognise, but which controls the ports of departure. A strategy to [open transit camps in North Africa](#) and elsewhere, and reduce opportunities for [smugglers](#) to make financial gains is under way.

Figure 2 – Asylum applications in EU Member States (in thousands)⁶



Data Source: [Eurostat](#); [EPThinktank](#).

Implementing the EU's response

The Council continues to closely monitor implementation of the measures which are part of the EU's response to the migration crisis. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker [has placed responsibility](#) for the [implementation](#) of the EU Migration Agenda with First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, HR/VP Federica Mogherini and Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos.

On 25 June 2015, the [Foreign Affairs Council agreed](#) to strengthen migration dialogues with partner countries and regions, and to improve the operational approach. It was [concluded](#) that 'a true partnership between European and African countries, working together to tackle illegal migration in an integrated way, is essential'. On 20 July 2015, the [Foreign Affairs Council](#) re-affirmed that the Council supports an active,

comprehensive and geographically balanced EU external migration policy and adopted a new [Action Plan](#) on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2015-2019.

Emergency Relocation Measures

On 20 July 2015, [the Justice and Home Affairs Council](#) agreed on a draft decision establishing a **temporary and exceptional relocation mechanism** from Italy and Greece to other Member States of persons in clear need of international protection. On 9 September 2015, the Commission proposed [a new set of measures](#). Building upon the [European Agenda on Migration](#) from May, a comprehensive package of proposals was put forward to help address the refugee crisis that EU Member States and neighbouring countries are facing. These measures will alleviate pressure from Member States most affected – notably **Greece, Italy and Hungary** – by proposing to **relocate 120 000 people in clear need of international protection** to other EU Member States. This number is on top of the 40 000 from the Commission's May proposal. A [common European list of safe countries of origin](#) enabling a swifter processing of asylum applications and a **€1.8 billion Trust Fund** were proposed to help tackle the root causes of migration in Africa. The **'external dimension' of the refugee crisis was also addressed**. On 14 September 2015, the [Justice and Home Affairs Council](#) formally adopted [Decision \(EU\) 2015/1523](#) for the relocation of 40 000 refugees from Italy and Greece. This Decision established provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece. On 22 September 2015, the [Justice and Home Affairs Council](#) adopted [Decision \(EU\) 2015/1601](#) establishing a temporary and exceptional relocation mechanism over two years from the frontline Member States, Italy and Greece, to other Member States. It will apply to 120 000 persons in clear need of international protection.

On 12 October 2015, the [Foreign Affairs Council](#) reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive and balanced external migration and asylum policy for the EU, and confirmed its full commitment to human rights, including to the situation of women and girls as well as other vulnerable persons and groups. The importance of close cooperation with first countries of asylum, countries of origin and transit to jointly address this common challenge was also underlined. The Council also considered it essential to step up EU-Turkey cooperation on support for refugees and migration as part of a comprehensive agenda based on mutual commitments.⁷ On 9 November 2015 the [Justice and Home Affairs Council](#) adopted conclusions on [measures](#) to handle the refugee and migration crisis. These conclusions focus in particular on the speeding up of the ongoing relocation process; strengthening the EU's external borders; fighting human trafficking and smuggling; return and readmission.

The outcome of the Valletta Summit of 11 and 12 November 2015

At the [Valletta Summit](#) the EU and its African partners adopted a [political declaration](#) to forge stronger partnerships on migration at country and regional level, in the spirit of partnership, ownership and shared responsibility. The **€1.8 billion Trust Fund** to help tackle the root causes for migration in Africa was set up. The [Action Plan](#) adopted at the summit outlines the means to provide assistance to partner countries to address the root causes of migration, to strengthen cooperation on fighting irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling, and to boost the development benefits of migration. The action plan includes [16 flagship initiatives](#) in five different sections to be implemented by 2016. The existing mechanisms of the Rabat Process and the Khartoum Process will be used to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan: a) assistance to

partner countries in their fight against smugglers; b) strengthened cooperation on an effective return policy; c) better targeting of development cooperation and enhancing investments in Africa to address the root causes of migration, as well as providing economic and social opportunities.

Further reading

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Piotr Bąkowski, Eva-Maria Poptcheva and Detelin Ivanov, [EU migratory challenge Possible responses to the refugee crisis](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2015.

Elspeth Guild, Cathryn Costello, Madeline Garlick, Violeta Moreno-Lax, [The 2015 Refugee Crisis in the European Union](#), CEPS Briefing, September 2015.

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Endnotes

¹ See also: [La Politique européenne de Voisinage](#), P. Perchoc, EPRS, European Parliament, October 2015.

² [Irregular immigration in the EU: Facts and Figures](#), G. Sabbati and E.-M. Poptcheva, EPRS, European Parliament, April 2015.

³ Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778 of 18 May 2015 on a [European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean](#) (EUNAVFOR MED) (CFSP) 2015/778.

⁴ [EU mounts new maritime operation to tackle Mediterranean people traffickers](#), C.-C. Cîrlig, EPRS, European Parliament, June 2015.

⁵ [Refugee status under international law](#), I. Zamfir, EPRS, European Parliament, September 2015.

⁶ [Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2014](#), European Asylum Support Office (EASO), July 2015.

⁷ On 29 November 2015, the [EU and Turkey struck a deal](#) complementing other EU measures under way, whereby EU leaders agreed to give significant political and financial incentives to Turkey in exchange for its cooperation in stemming the flow of refugees from the Middle East to Europe. The deal includes an initial payment of €3 billion from the EU to improve conditions for Syrian refugees currently in Turkey, an agreement to loosen visa restrictions on Turks traveling in Europe, and a promise from Brussels to 'speed up the tempo' of negotiations on Ankara's bid to join the EU.

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eprs@ep.europa.eu

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