The renewed EU action plan against migrant smuggling (2021-2025)\(^1\) identifies the need to develop tailor-made Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnerships with key partner countries of origin and transit. The Partnership with Niger responds to this need.

The excellent existing cooperation in combating migrant smuggling has been mutually beneficial for the EU and Niger. The Joint Investigation Team project has for example led to the arrest of more than 700 criminals and the opening of more than 400 judicial cases since 2017. Niger is also part of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, which contributes to reducing cross-border crime, including migrant smuggling. Main nationalities of arrivals to the EU via the Central Mediterranean route no longer corresponds to those transiting through Niger.

The EUR 195 million in budget support under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe - will support key reforms, including stabilisation, public finance management, education, private sector development, management of migration and forced displacement. It is important to promote economic development and alternative livelihoods for people, notably to prevent, smuggling. Projects in the Tillabéri region - the so-called three-border area between Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali - support stabilisation and security, state presence, economic resilience of local communities, internally displaced people and refugees, while those in the Maradi, Agadez and Niamey regions strengthen education and training, especially for women and youth, and develop alternative economic opportunities.

EU-funded projects are subject to regular monitoring, risk-based audit visits, and desk reviews, as well as regular dialogue with implementing partners and authorities to ensure smooth implementation of operations.

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\(^1\) COM(2021)591 final.