

# European Agenda on Migration: Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos on consolidating the progress made

Dear all,

Today we present the consolidated progress that we have been making in managing migration on all fronts. The total number of arrivals along the main migratory routes has gone down by 63% compared to last year, and we are trying to gradually exit the crisis mode.

This does not mean that we should become complacent or that our work is over. The fact that migration flows have gone down should not make us forget that migrants are stranded in a terrible situation in Libya.

I fully share the concerns that are being documented about Libya. This is precisely why the EU is acting on all fronts. Our main priority is and remains to save lives and ensure the human and dignified treatment of all migrants, regardless of their status.

Right now, thousands of migrants in Libya are being provided with medical assistance and basic support by international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR, thanks to our €90 million under the EU Africa Trust Fund.

At the same time, we are working with Libya and neighbouring countries to avoid that migrants are stranded in Libya in the first place. To those persons who are in need of protection, we want to offer support and help to get resettled. I welcome the fact that the first group of 25 of the most vulnerable persons needing protection were evacuated from Libya to Niger last weekend, awaiting their further resettlement.

Now that the flows have gone down, we must all urgently invest more in legal pathways. This is why I am pleased to have received more than 34,400 resettlement pledges in response to my call last month from many Member States, and I urge the others to follow soon.

On top of this commitment, over 25,700 persons have been resettled to the EU since 2015. At the same time, to those who don't need protection, we want to offer help to return home, particularly if they are stranded in Libya.

So far, over 15,000 migrants, including over 10,000 from Libya, have already benefitted from assisted voluntary return, thanks to our support and in cooperation with IOM.

Projects are in development to step up the work with Libya's neighbours to help more migrants return home from Libya, in a safe and orderly way. We also want to further crack down on the criminal groups that exploit the vulnerability of these desperate people.

For example, we already have clear results through our cooperation and support to Niger: over 100 suspected traffickers and smugglers have been arrested already in the first half of 2017.

We now want to expand this model to other countries. Apart from all our political and operational efforts, our financial commitments must continue too.

Two years after its launch, the EU Trust Fund for Africa is supporting economic development and migration management in countries facing crises of different natures, with programmes worth almost €2 billion having been approved so far.

In Turkey, the EU is well on track to contract the €3 billion under the Facility for Refugees by the end of 2017. One million of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees are now receiving monthly electronic cash transfers and almost two million will soon be able to benefit from healthcare.

Through all our actions, it is very clear: Europe is not a fortress and we remain a safe haven for those in need of protection. But to ensure that we can continue to live up to our standards, we can only provide protection to those who need it. Those who have no right to stay must be returned. Return rates at EU level however remain unsatisfactory still, in particular also under the EU-Turkey Statement.

This brings me to another example where we cannot become complacent: Greece. I take this opportunity to express our deep condolences for the tragic losses in West Attica due to the floods caused by the extreme weather conditions. Our thoughts are with families of the victims and of course with all those people who are still battling an uneven fight against this unprecedented natural and human disaster.

Right now, at the same time, Greece is facing another situation of severe overcrowding on most of the islands. But we cannot have a repetition of last year. The EU is supporting Greece financially and operationally to expand adequate reception capacity on the islands.

Greece should also speed up its asylum and return procedures, and further cooperate with local authorities to expand reception facilities. The European Commission is offering and will continue to offer its full support.

Finally, I want to say a word on relocation. Member States have continued showing solidarity towards Italy and Greece with over 31,500 persons relocated so far. Right now, around 800 eligible persons in Greece and 3,000 in Italy are left to be relocated, and we urge Member States to fulfil their legal obligations as soon as possible.

As I have said before, this solidarity cannot stop and should continue beyond the current schemes.

Now that the situation is gradually more stable, the time has come to move forward and structurally improve our migration and asylum systems, for the future. The comprehensive reform of our asylum system and Dublin are

essential.

I also welcome Member States' willingness to engage with us on developing specific labour migration pilot projects with key countries.

If anything is clear, it is that we are not closing our doors. But we want well-managed, orderly, safe and fair migration.

Thank you.