

Brussels, 21 October 2025

Dear colleagues,

*Migration patterns are constantly shifting. Whereas illegal border crossings into the EU show a steady decrease – with overall figures having declined 23% this year following a 37% drop last year – the accumulated pressures towards Europe over the years have put a strain on Member States' resources. Pressures differ from place to place, but the effects are shared: schools, housing and local services are affected. Citizens therefore expect a system that is fair and well managed.*

*To that end, having a robust legal framework that is applied in a balanced way across the EU is essential. With a view to the entry into application of the **Pact on Migration and Asylum** in June 2026, we will have a system in place that is fair, and which safeguards against abuse, allowing us to meet the challenges related to illegal migration. We will soon kick start the first annual migration management cycle. Intensified efforts at political and technical levels are needed to make sure that all the building blocks of the Pact are in place on time and to allow for confidence to be built around the new system. The provision of effective support to Member States under pressure and the implementation of the solidarity mechanism need to go hand-in-hand with responsibility-related measures: this symmetry is crucial for the successful implementation of the Pact.*

*We are continuing our legislative work to complement the Pact. The proposal for a **common European system for return** puts a strong emphasis on efficiency and simplification of procedures, including an EU-wide recognition of return decisions, provides for stricter rules to manage absconding and security cases, and it also provides a legal basis for the possible use of return hubs. We need to advance quickly and reach an agreement that delivers tangible results, allowing us to do better in ensuring the fast, effective and dignified return of those with no right to stay in the EU in line with our values and international law. Furthermore, progress on the review of the safe third country concept and the Union list of safe countries of origin would help reduce the overall pressure on our asylum systems and complement the functioning of the Pact on Migration and Asylum.*

*We are keeping up our joint efforts with partners and are ready to strengthen and broaden them further. With the **Pact for the Mediterranean**, adopted by the Commission and the High Representative on 16 October, we set out a partnership based on co-ownership, co-creation and joint responsibility, based on three intertwined pillars: (i) people as driving forces for change, connections and innovations; (ii) stronger, more sustainable, integrated economies; and (iii) security, preparedness and migration management. On migration, the Pact promotes a comprehensive, partnership-based and whole-of-route approach that furthers stability, offers real opportunities, and ensures cooperation on effective and rights-based migration governance between the EU and partners along the route.*

*The **strategic and comprehensive partnerships** we have launched since 2023 with Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan have proven highly valuable, deepening our cooperation with these countries in areas of border management, prevention of irregular departures, fight against migrant smuggling, returns and reintegration. We have also strengthened protection in these partner countries, as well as legal migration pathways, and are tackling the root causes of illegal migration, implementing these partnerships with due respect of human rights. A significant package of **EUR 675 million for North Africa** will be adopted soon to support effective migration management for 2025-2027 in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Algeria. It will focus on enhancing border management, preventing illegal migration and fighting smuggling, boosting skills and talent mobility, helping partner countries build their asylum capacity, delivering services for vulnerable migrants, as well as voluntary returns and reintegration.*

*On the **Central Mediterranean route**, flows remain stable, but we can observe certain fluctuations since the beginning of the year with an increase of around 3%. **Libya** remains the most important country of departure on the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes. Given the political and security situation in the country, we need to maintain close cooperation and continue providing operational support to Libyan authorities, particularly for search and rescue operations. But we also need to strengthen monitoring tools and engage with all relevant actors, including with international organisations on the ground. Engagement continues at the technical level with the competent authorities in the West and East of the country, and last week's technical mission paves the way for further operational cooperation. We should collectively pursue a strengthening of border management, fighting migrant smuggling, addressing the use and abuse of work visas for onward movements to the EU, as well as ensuring protection and voluntary returns from Libya to countries of origin.*

*The implementation of all pillars of the Memorandum of Understanding with **Tunisia** is ongoing, with a continuous dialogue with authorities in a Team Europe spirit. An Association Council is scheduled to take place on 28 October in Brussels. EU support focuses on border management, fighting migrant smuggling, as well as protection and assisted voluntary returns. In 2025, IOM facilitated the **voluntary return** of over 7 000 migrants from Tunisia to their countries of origin. Assisted voluntary returns from North*

*African countries to countries of origin have also grown significantly through EU-funded operations, with over 22 000 returns so far this year.*

*Work is progressing steadily on the operationalisation of the migration and mobility pillar of the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership with **Egypt**. This year marks a pivotal moment in our partnership, with the first-ever EU-Egypt Summit taking place this week on 22 October, where the impact of regional developments on migration and security aspects will be high on the agenda.*

***Morocco** is a key strategic partner and a comprehensive partnership to further deepen our relations is under discussion. As regards migration, the aim is to further enhance legal migration, combat migrant smuggling and support returns. This partnership will add to our longstanding cooperation with Morocco, already yielding positive results in the areas of border management, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking. On the Western Mediterranean/Atlantic route, we are progressing on a new partnership with **Senegal**, and we continue implementing the Migration Partnership with **Mauritania** which, in complementarity with Member States' bilateral efforts, has shown positive results. Negotiations on working arrangements between Frontex and the Senegalese border management authorities, as well as with the Mauritanian border management authorities, are advancing.*

*The **Western Balkans route** saw a further drop in illegal border crossings, 47% less this year than in the first nine months of 2024 and over 90% decrease in the past three years. Such a sustained decreasing trend is the result of our cooperation with partners in the region and the support of EU agencies. For instance, operational cooperation with law enforcement authorities from Member States and Europol led to the successful dismantling of a human trafficking network between Albania, Croatia and Colombia. Our cooperation also contributes to the gradual integration of the candidate countries into the EU migration management architecture. For this purpose, visa alignment remains important.*

*Following the High-Level Dialogue with **Türkiye** in July, we are strengthening our engagement on migration and security matters, whilst advocating for the full and effective implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and the EU-Turkey readmission agreement towards all Member States. In recent years, around EUR 393 million have been invested to support Türkiye's efforts to strengthen border management at its Eastern and Southeastern borders. We are also increasingly engaging on counter-smuggling, including through cooperation between Türkiye, Europol and Frontex.*

***Syria** still faces significant political, security, humanitarian and developmental challenges. The EU supports a peaceful and inclusive Syrian led transition, as well as socio-economic recovery efforts to prevent the resurgence of violence. It is necessary to create the conditions for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, in cooperation with UNHCR. We are working with UNHCR to facilitate voluntary returns for those who wish to return and to support early recovery.*

*The number of returns to Syria has increased and we are ready to intensify our efforts even further. To this end, the first cross-border programme for EUR 80 million will support durable solutions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including facilitating safe, voluntary and dignified returns. In September, we adopted a special measure of another EUR 80 million to Jordan to provide social assistance and services to Syrian refugees and to contribute to sustainable skills development, to expand access to more durable solutions, including voluntary return. Similarly, we are working with the Turkish authorities to facilitate voluntary returns. Since June, the Frontex European Reintegration Programme is also available in Syria to support Member States in providing post-arrival and reintegration assistance for voluntary returns.*

*The Commission is working to ensure **EU-level coordination as regards the situation of Afghans**. In February, the Commission carried out a technical mission to Afghanistan to explore the possible organisation of return operations. Since then, there has been extensive engagement with Member States including in the High-Level Network on Return. Discussions are ongoing on how Member States can enable the appropriate consular services and issue travel documents for potential returnees. Voluntary returns can also be supported through the EU Reintegration Programme of Frontex. At technical level, the Commission is ready to continue its work and together with Frontex, the European External Action Service and interested Member States it can support the organisation of a joint technical mission to Afghanistan, as appropriate.*

*The **smuggling of migrants** remains a grave concern, with criminal networks having links to other serious criminal offences, such as money laundering, corruption and trafficking in drugs. We must take the strongest possible action to reinforce our capacities for law enforcement and border management. Law enforcement authorities need to have the powers, information and tools necessary to clamp down on illicit financial flows. To this end, I welcome the agreement reached on the proposal to enhance police cooperation and to strengthen Europol, providing it with resources to step up prevention, detection, and investigation of smuggling operations. It is important that the European Parliament and Council also make progress on the proposed Directive to counter the facilitation of migrant smuggling to further enhance our legal framework.*

***Smuggling operations are increasingly run online**. There is a widespread misuse of digital technologies and online platforms by criminal networks to facilitate migrant smuggling. We need to intensify work with digital platforms and tech providers to put an end to the online organisation and advertisement of smuggling activities. A comprehensive response is needed, including building capacities of national authorities in this field and developing operational tools in addressing these challenges. We can work together with UNODC in key regions to implement a global drive against the online dimension of migrant smuggling and tackling illicit financial flows. We should therefore explore the possibility of leveraging financial intelligence and information-sharing to identify criminal actors and to increase law enforcement and judicial cooperation, including through joint investigations.*

*Smugglers' illicit businesses cannot be allowed to thrive. Drawing on the G7 Leaders' statement in June, I believe that we should work in coordination, and within the context of our Common Foreign and Security Policy, towards having a system of **sanctions against migrant smuggling networks and people smugglers** in the EU. This would allow us to disrupt their supply chains, freeze their assets and deprive them of profits, and restrict their travel movement, thereby significantly disrupting their business model. We are committed to supporting Member States in countering State-sponsored smuggling and counteract hybrid threats, including by reinforcing their border control capabilities and aerial surveillance systems. The second **Global Alliance Conference** on 10 December will be an opportunity to showcase our work and further structure our cooperation with partner countries along the migratory routes.*

*To tackle the challenges posed by smuggling of migrants and illegal migration in a credible way, it is important to provide **legal alternatives**, including through the development of Talent Partnerships. It is also in our interest to attracting talent and the right skills for our labour market. Work has already intensified under the Union of Skills and, while respecting Member States' competences, we should make it our priority to ensure that students, researchers and highly qualified professionals have fast and effective pathways to the EU. 'Choose Europe for Science' is an initiative already bearing fruit. EUR 22.5 million are earmarked to support an upcoming pilot scheme aimed at making European research careers more appealing, by providing longer-term professional perspectives and good working conditions. The negotiations on the EU Talent Pool are progressing well and a final agreement should be reached soon.*

*We are now also closer to launching the **first pilot European Legal Gateway Office in India**, a one-stop-hub focusing on the ICT sector. The EU-India Strategic Agenda we presented on 17 September includes actions to expand mobility, to strengthen economies, tourism, and people-to-people ties. Alongside the trade and investment framework that the Free Trade Agreement is expected to create, we are also working on a voluntary framework of cooperation to boost mobility and support skills development.*

*Our forthcoming summits with CELAC, the African Union and the Western Balkans all offer us opportunities to further enhance our cooperation and dialogue on both migration and broader police and judicial cooperation.*

*Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the launch of the **Entry/Exit System**, which started operating on 12 October. The system is being gradually introduced at our external borders, with full implementation expected by 10 April 2026. In the second half of 2026, travellers from visa-exempt countries arriving for a short stay will also be required to hold a valid ETIAS travel authorisation, which will be accessible through an online application process. We are putting in place one of the most modern and advanced border management systems worldwide, which will significantly contribute to enhancing border security and preventing illegal migration.*

*By taking a comprehensive approach to migration management and addressing migration as a common challenge requiring a common EU response, we have shifted the dynamic and significantly advanced in our work. The coming months will be about completing our legal framework, while maintaining agility, learning quickly from experience and being ready to find new ways and apply new ideas.*

*Looking forward to our discussions this week.*

*Yours sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ursula v. d. L.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

*Ursula von der Leyen*