



The President

Brussels, 13 October 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Our common EU approach to migration management continues to deliver substantial and consistent results. Illegal border crossings have fallen to their lowest level since 2021, down 55% over the past two years and by more than a third this year alone. Asylum applications and unauthorised onward movements are also declining and returns are increasing. We have strengthened our external borders, improved cooperation among Member States and continue to develop robust partnerships with countries of origin and transit.

Europe's capacity to manage and control illegal migration has never been stronger. It reflects not only greater preparedness on the ground, but also a renewed confidence that Europe can act effectively, responsibly and in full respect of our shared values. Our systems are sound, and our collective capacity to manage migration has clearly improved in all areas. This is a significant achievement.

At the same time, the events of this summer served as a reminder that effective migration management requires constant vigilance, as well as sustained solidarity and the capacity to adapt. The situation in Ceuta showed how quickly sudden massive arrivals can put pressure on the EU's external borders, with tragic human cost. Although decreasing across the board, pressure has persisted in several parts of Europe. From the Mediterranean; where criminal smugglers continue to exploit vulnerable people, to our Eastern borders; where geopolitical opponents still attempt to undermine our unity. Thanks to the comprehensive and resilient migration management framework that we have put in place, and to our collective work, we are effectively tackling the challenges. To remain successful, we must continue to act together.

***First**, we must put all our efforts into fully implementing the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**. The Pact is our compass, grounded in the inseparable principles of solidarity and responsibility. Member States have made significant progress. Screening of people arriving illegally and the border procedures are being carried out, the new Eurodac is being successfully implemented, and the solidarity measures under the first migration management cycle are being operationalised. At the same time, efforts need to continue to address remaining challenges, in particular the full application of the responsibility rules,*

including on transfers. This is key for a well-functioning system. Today, all Member States have the necessary administrative and reception capacity to ensure that transfers take place. Ahead of the second migration management cycle, and the upcoming Commission's assessment which underpins it, I count on your political commitment and engagement so that the fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity advance hand in hand.

We must deliver on all our commitments in a spirit of shared responsibility and close European coordination, reinforcing the integrity of the Schengen area. This also means continuing our efforts to reduce unauthorised onward movements, work towards lifting internal border controls when they are no longer justified and avoid measures that could create incentives for illegal migration. With the support of the Commission and of the EU Agencies, Member States must step up efforts and complete the work. In view of next year's review, our experience in implementing the Pact will play a key role in identifying issues that may require targeted improvements, while preserving overall balance.

***Second**, the EU must continue to strengthen the management and protection of its external borders. We will reinforce **Frontex**'s common operational capability at our borders, on returns and in times of crisis, while fully respecting Member States' responsibilities in this area. The Commission will propose that Frontex becomes a genuinely European capability with the scale, tools and agility to support Member States wherever and whenever needed. This will include a substantial increase of the standing corps with a European Border and Return Reserve, a new Quick Reaction Force for crisis deployment, and a Return Coordination Centre to accelerate and improve returns, including from third countries, an improved framework for information exchange and situational awareness, and social media monitoring.*

To strengthen the resilience and security of the EU's external borders, the Commission presented a 5-point plan to prevent, anticipate and respond to sudden, mass illegal arrivals, setting out key actions for the Commission, Member States and EU Agencies. Its implementation requires joint commitment and coordinated action. We will work on areas including a more effective monitoring, early warning mechanisms and situational awareness, both online and offline. Establishing EUROSUR Coordination Centres with partner countries will strengthen pre-frontier intelligence and risk assessment. Fighting against disinformation is crucial, and the Global Alliance Rapid Response Initiatives has proven value in recent events. We will accelerate its deployment to situations and countries where it can play a useful role to counter migrant smuggling.

***The Entry/Exit System (EES)**, the most advanced border management system in the world, is essential to tackle security risks and illegal migration. Since its launch, border authorities have registered more than 204 million entries and exits, and over 69 000 refusals of entry, including more than 1 750 individuals considered a threat to internal security. This shows the importance of registering all non-EU travellers, on both entry and exit. While progress is being made, some Member States still need to complete its implementation by the end of this year. The Commission is of course ready to continue providing support. The roll-out of the interoperability framework will continue with the launch of ETIAS next year. Moreover, to further strengthen border surveillance and our*

response to emerging threats, we are providing an additional EUR 130 million to support Member States' counter-drone capabilities, bringing our Home Affairs funding for surveillance and counter-drone technology to over EUR 500 million.

Third, the EU must be prepared for all situations and equipped with the means to respond swiftly and decisively to emerging threats and evolving challenges. In an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape, we must remain united and be agile, adapting our response to hybrid threats and unexpected events, including the instrumentalisation of migrants and weaponisation of migration. We must prevent such threats and make clear that we will never compromise the protection of our external borders: no state or non-state actor will be allowed to exploit our rules or our values to destabilise the Union. This is why the Commission will work closely with the Member States on a new **European Emergency Response Framework**, building on existing caselaw.

The Framework will complement our existing rules applicable in crises. It will provide Member States with additional flexibility in border management and standard asylum and return procedures, where immediate action is required and existing rules do not make it possible to manage the urgent situation. It will be without prejudice to national emergency legislations based on Article 72 TFEU. It will aim to promptly uphold Member States' national responses at Union level, providing coordinated Union support when faced with extraordinary threats to the integrity of the EU's external borders, especially in those cases when sudden or mass illegal arrivals create disruptive and dangerous situations for the maintenance of law, order, public safety and internal security.

Fourth, effective **returns** are central to a functioning common framework. While the overall return rate I, 32%, is increasing, with more than 60% of all returns being voluntary, it remains too low and uneven across the EU. The new Return Regulation must be implemented quickly and effectively. It will strengthen our return system, make procedures faster, and ensure common rules across Europe. It also provides the legal framework for Member States to set up return hubs in third countries, as an innovative way to tackle illegal migration, while ensuring respect for international human rights standards, and compliance with EU and international law. Some Member States are already working towards this. We also need to modernise national return systems and develop new operational tools. The upcoming proposal on the digitalisation of returns will be an important step in this direction.

A stronger common European return system will strengthen our credibility when we engage with partners on **readmission**. This is key for the successful implementation of the Pact, particularly for nationalities subject to the border procedures. While increasing our diplomatic and economic engagement with countries of origin, we must be ready to use all our tools and leverage in a strategic and coherent way. Sustained efforts on readmission through the Visa Code's Article 25a mechanism and the Visa Suspension Mechanism have delivered results. The 7th report, adopted in July and covering cooperation on readmission in 2025, continues to demonstrate the usefulness of the mechanism. We will explore ways to improve its effectiveness and its strategic nature, as part of next year's Visa Code reform.

*Fifth, our experience over recent years has shown that effective migration management in Europe starts well beyond our borders. A **robust external migration policy** must remain at the heart of our approach, building partnerships with both countries of origin and transit, based on shared interests, mutual responsibility and tangible results. Our migration diplomacy must be agile, resourceful and ambitious, adapting our instruments to different routes and circumstances and acting early as migration patterns evolve, with a whole-of-route focus. We need to be coordinated and bring together all available instruments and leverage across migration, but also trade, development, investment, visas and mobility, backed by adequate financial resources. Our cooperation should address all key migration priorities: preventing illegal migration; smuggling and trafficking; strengthening our partners' border and migration management; improving return and readmission; and expanding talent and labour mobility and safe legal pathways. Our European network of immigration liaison officers in third countries supports this work, and we will work to further strengthen its operational impact.*

*The **Eastern Corridor initiative** points the way: complementing strong bilateral partnerships with cooperation across regions and along entire migration routes, bringing together countries of origin, transit and destination around common challenges that cannot be addressed alone. It operationalises the whole-of-route approach, by fostering route-based cooperation among the EU, selected international organisations and key countries along the route from South Asia to North Africa, notably Libya, and onwards to Europe. The initiative, launched in the margins of the 81st United National General Assembly, brought together key countries and confirmed a strong basis to move forward on a 12-month pilot.*

*Built on shared opportunities, our **partnerships** must contribute to addressing the drivers of illegal migration, by boosting investments, and offering people meaningful prospects in their own countries, as well as legal channels for mobility to the EU. Deploying our humanitarian aid and development funding in an efficient nexus response on the ground can also provide sustainable solutions to the challenges of the local communities.*

*Expanding **talent and labour mobility** builds on shared opportunities, while serving the EU's economic interests. The Fair Labour Mobility package introduces new rules to facilitate the recognition of third country nationals' qualifications and helps address labour and skills shortages across the Union. Dedicated Legal Migration Gateway Offices will create structured talent pathways that benefit both the EU and our partners. Launched as a pilot in February, the European Legal Gateway Office in India is being successfully implemented and becoming a blueprint that will soon be adapted for other key partners, such as Egypt. In my State of the Union address, I also announced a new **Mediterranean Youth Skills and Jobs Initiative** to equip young people with the skills needed in today and tomorrow's labour markets. As part of the Pact for the Mediterranean and backed by EU financing, we will complement existing bilateral cooperation and investments in key sectors of the southern Mediterranean economies to provide training and job creation for the youth.*

*We will continue our engagement with **Morocco**, with a view to a future Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, while also drawing lessons from the recent events. Building on substantial EU support already in place, we will work to strengthen our cooperation on all aspects of migration and security. This includes preventing illegal departures, strengthening border management, pre-frontier intelligence exchange, reinforcing cooperation on return and readmission, combating migrant smuggling, tackling the root causes of illegal migration, and stepping up support for assisted voluntary returns from Morocco. We will continue supporting Spanish authorities to ensure the swift return to Morocco of those who entered and remain illegally in Ceuta, following Morocco's commitment to readmit all of them.*

*We are making steady progress on the commitments made at the 2025 EU-**Egypt** Leaders' Summit. The deployment of the EUR 200 million package allocated under the migration and mobility pillar of our Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership with Egypt is advancing, with a view to enhancing the country's capacity to address emerging challenges. Our cooperation on migration is delivering results, as illegal migration flows out of the country remain low, while our work on legal pathways is progressing, including preparations for a future Legal Gateway Office in Egypt. Our focus is on building a coherent and mutually beneficial framework for skills, employment and mobility, to translate this shared ambition into concrete action in the coming months, along with an effective EU-Egypt framework of cooperation on return and readmission.*

*We continue our cooperation with **Tunisia** at operational level on border management, the fight against migrant smuggling, as well as protection, labour mobility and assisted voluntary returns. IOM facilitated the voluntary return from Tunisia to countries of origin for over 8 850 migrants in 2025 and for over 4 960 so far 2026. We stand ready to sustain and, where necessary, increase support for assisted voluntary returns in response to evolving needs. We are closely monitoring the situation regarding the protection of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees, and we continue to advocate for a solution to the registration of new asylum seekers. We are also providing support aimed at strengthening social cohesion, combating racism and discrimination, and improving protection, and we consistently underline that all cooperation must respect human rights and the dignity of migrants. And we are strengthening Tunisia's search and rescue capacities, with two vessels recently delivered.*

*We will step up our dialogue and cooperation with **Algeria** on migration management, with a particular focus on scaling up voluntary returns from Algeria to countries of origin, as well as the return and readmission of Algerian nationals illegally staying in the EU. In 2025, more than 9 600 assisted voluntary returns from Algeria were supported through IOM, and over 7 350 so far this year. Following the resumption of the informal EU-Algeria Dialogue on Migration and Mobility in July 2026, and in close coordination with the Member States most concerned, we will focus on improving practical cooperation on readmission from the EU, as well as new workstreams on tackling migrant smuggling and human trafficking.*

Libya remains the top country of departure for illegal crossings to the EU. Continued EU engagement remains necessary, with the upcoming EU-Libya Technical Dialogue providing a key framework for sustained cooperation. We are providing targeted financial and operational support to strengthen border management, search and rescue and anti-smuggling capacities, and reduce illegal departures and the loss of lives at sea, alongside substantial support for the protection of refugees. This includes a EUR 25 million top-up just signed for a project that will expand such activities to the eastern regions of Libya. Together with IOM, we are supporting voluntary returns from Libya to countries of origin. From a whole-of-route perspective, we are equally focused on reducing the number of migrants arriving to Libya with the sole intention to cross illegally into the EU.

*The EU continues to assist vulnerable Sudanese populations displaced since 2023 due to the conflict in **Sudan**. Rising tensions in the Horn of Africa, including in Ethiopia, may exacerbate the conflict, with potential effects on migration flows. The EU has been taking every possible step for de-escalation. More than nine hundred thousand Sudanese have returned to their places of origin from abroad, according to IOM. Yet, millions more remain displaced within and outside Sudan. Arrivals of Sudanese to the EU have been increasing in 2026. We must continue to support the countries hosting Sudanese, offering protection and durable solutions in the host countries. In parallel, we need to step up our assistance, by providing reintegration support to internally displaced people, and to the Sudanese having decided to return in those parts of Sudan where it is already possible, as well as exploring targeted resettlement possibilities.*

*Our engagement with partners on the Atlantic route continues to deliver. There is a sharp drop in illegal arrivals thanks to the EU and Member States' bilateral cooperation with both Mauritania and Senegal. **Mauritania** is a strategic and reliable partner of the EU, preventing irregular departures, carrying out search and rescue along its coasts, and hosting more than 300 000 refugees from Mali. The Commission is working towards Mauritania's closer association with the Pact for the Mediterranean, including in the framework of triangular cooperation, in priority areas including migration and security. We continue our exchanges with **Senegal**, and we acknowledge its efforts in combating migrant smuggling and preventing irregular departures. We welcome the recent engagement of the Senegalese authorities in discussions on return and readmission, and we look forward to their political commitment translating into tangible progress, in view of the launch of a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership that will encompass migration management, investments and security cooperation.*

***Nigeria** is a key partner for the EU in West Africa and an increasingly important actor at regional and global level. Our engagement with Nigeria should be taken forward in a more strategic and comprehensive manner, building on close political dialogue and our shared interest in regional stability, economic development, and effective migration management. We are making good progress towards the conclusion of an EU Readmission Agreement with Nigeria, which will send a strong signal to the region. We are also advancing broader discussions on legal migration pathways, on strengthened action against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings and other forms of transnational organised crime.*

*We continue our support to our partners in the **Middle East**, to address migration and displacement in a coordinated regional approach supporting socio-economic recovery and reforms. The measures reinforce the EU's broader engagement with the region, including where relevant support for conditions conducive to sustainable voluntary returns and reintegration.*

*In July, the Commission adopted EUR 505 million for 2026-2027 for **Lebanon**. It is the second half of the EUR 1 billion package for 2024-2027, aimed at supporting the country's reforms, recovery and stability. The EU also supports vulnerable Lebanese and refugees on basic services and durable solutions, including voluntary returns, as well as support to Lebanon's land and sea border security, internal security, including anti-smuggling. In addition, humanitarian aid has been scaled up this year to address needs of vulnerable populations.*

*The Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership with **Jordan** is an acknowledgement of the country's pivotal role in promoting regional stability and security. Our cooperation supports durable solutions for Syrian refugees, including complementary pathways for protection and safe, dignified and sustainable returns. EUR 160 million adopted in July is supporting these objectives. As part of the Partnership, the EU and Jordan will step up their cooperation on border management, the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings.*

*We continue to support **Syria's** socio-economic recovery, and our work with the authorities and partners to help ensure that the conditions are conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable returns. As we work towards an Association Agreement with Syria, we will also address cooperation on migration management. More broadly, funding of EUR 280 million for 2026-2027 is supporting stabilisation, socio-economic development and a genuinely inclusive transition. The implementation of a EUR 175 million allocation from 2025 is supporting the deployment of the Technical Assistance Hub, in cooperation with Member States in a Team Europe approach, that will provide on-demand technical assistance and capacity building to the Syrian transitional authorities, including on migration and border management matters.*

*The EU remains actively engaged in **Afghanistan** and in the wider region, delivering targeted humanitarian support. We are monitoring developments and remain responsive to emerging protection, humanitarian, and displacement-related needs. We will continue to pursue a comprehensive and coordinated approach with Member States on the issue of returns to Afghanistan, bearing in mind the challenges arising from the acute humanitarian and human rights situation in the country.*

*Our effective cooperation with **Türkiye** continues across all areas related to migration, including border management, combating migrant smuggling and support to voluntary returns. The High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Security planned for the beginning of next year will be an opportunity to advance our cooperation further. Ongoing contracting of the EUR 1.3 billion multiannual package on refugee assistance and related support for*

2025-2027 will include support to strengthen border management at Türkiye's Eastern and Southeastern Border, and support for voluntary returns to Syria.

Dismantling migrant **smuggling** networks remains at the heart of our work. We need to target these criminals where it hurts the most. We need a revamped legal framework fit for purpose. As such, it is essential to swiftly adopt the proposed new sanctions regime which allows for asset freezes and travel bans. I also call on the European Parliament to adopt its position on the proposed Directive on migrant smuggling so that an agreement with the Council can be swiftly found. The revised Europol mandate with a stronger European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling will deepen support to Member States and reinforce cooperation with EU Agencies and international partners. Under the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling we will work towards strengthening our partners' capacities to tackle migrant smuggling, including its digital dimension, along major migration routes. We will reinforce joint investigations, information exchange and effective prosecution of criminal networks. Our priorities will be reflected in the upcoming Work Plan 2026-2028.

Our sustained efforts to fight smuggling need to continue on **the Channel route**. The EU Action Plan for the Channel route provides a structured EU-level response to prevent departures, disrupt smuggling networks and target their criminal infrastructure, as well as strengthen border management. While progress has been made with a 44% drop of illegal border crossings along this route, the pull factors and the challenges remain significant. The Plan needs to be further implemented and the contribution of the United Kingdom will be important.

We continue progressing towards a more harmonised and effective EU **visa** policy. We will soon engage with five partners in the Gulf - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia - on the basis of our new framework for visa exemptions. Our Western Balkan partners also continue to deliver: Montenegro has recently made tangible progress by abolishing the visa-free regimes and will be fully aligned with the EU visa policy in November.

The EU maintains its support and solidarity with **Ukraine** and its people. We prolonged temporary protection until 4 March 2028, while considering Ukraine's overall ability to defend itself. I encourage Member States to keep exploring opportunities for transition into longer-term resident status and for sustainable return and reintegration in Ukraine when the situation allows.

In response to the recognition of an increasing threat to our internal security, we adopted an EU-wide visa ban for former and current members of the Russian army, proposed in the 21st sanctions package. We will soon update the guidelines and list of supporting documents to offer Member States clarity and ensure a harmonised approach when assessing risks posed by Russian applicants.

The progress we have achieved on migration is significant. It is the result of our hard work, commitment and the trust we have forged as we work together in finding common European solutions. This same trust and commitment must guide our work ahead: to fully implement the Pact, continue to build strong partnerships with third countries, prevent illegal migration and further strengthen the protection and resilience of our external borders, and adapt our toolbox to new realities. To deliver on these commitments, our work must be backed by adequate funding, including through the ongoing negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

We are building a Europe that manages migration with order and dignity; that secures its borders and acts as an equal and reliable partner; and that is prepared to stand firmly united against all threats, while upholding the values on which our Union is founded. And this is the Europe we must continue to build together so that we can meet the challenges ahead.

The Annex to this letter provides a detailed overview of our achievements so far, as well as of recent work and ongoing actions.

Looking forward to our strategic discussion later this week.

Yours sincerely



Ursula von der Leyen