Addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action

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PURPOSE: to present of a joint communication from the EU External Action Service addressing the refugee crisis in Europe.

BACKGROUND: the European Union (EU) is facing the largest refugee crisis since the end of World War II. It is a crisis of unprecedented magnitude that largely originates from conflicts and persecutions in Europe's wider neighbourhood. The violent conflicts in **Syria and Iraq** or instability and poverty in parts of Africa have forced millions of women, men and children to flee their homeland in search of protection and a decent life, including to the EU.

The EU is stepping up its response to this crisis based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility and in full respect of its values and international obligations. Since the beginning of 2015, the EU has reoriented and mobilised all its external action instruments to respond to the refugee crisis with three objectives: (i) saving lives; (ii) ensuring protection of those in need and (iii) managing borders and mobility.

In 2015, the numbers of those crossing into the European Union through what is called the Eastern Mediterranean route amount to 182,740, an enormous increase in comparison to 2014. There is an exponential increase in the number of persons seeking international protection, notably from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Irregular migrants using the Central Mediterranean route come mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa, and they often also come from conflict areas: approximately 20% are from Eritrea, 12% from Somalia, still, 10% are from Syria.

While European citizens may perceive the current migratory pressure as dramatic, the **European Union is by no means the most affected region in the world**. More than 85% of these persons live in developing countries (in particular in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey).

This shows that the current migration and refugee crisis is not only, nor principally, a European problem. It is a major international challenge. The European Union is at the forefront of international efforts aimed at addressing conflicts and instability and supporting affected populations.

It is for this reason that the External Action Service has proposed a framework for action to address the refugee crisis in Europe and offer a European response.

CONTENT: in the face of the current crisis, precedence is being given to actions that have greater immediate impact on migration flows. At the same time, long-term engagement on these matters is necessary to address root causes. The European Union aims to **strengthen political dialogue, cooperation, exchange of knowledge and experience** with partner countries, civil society organisations and local authorities, in order to support human mobility as a positive element of human development. Cooperation with a rights-based approach encompassing human rights will contribute to address challenges, including South-South migration, and the situation of vulnerable migrants.

The present Communication – part of a broader package of proposals adopted by the European Commission – describes the external action by the European Union to **address the refugee crisis**.

It builds upon a triple response solid structure as follows:

1) Key financial instruments are being mobilised: with a budget allocation of EUR 96.8 billion for the 2014-2020 period, European Union external cooperation, including development cooperation worldwide, plays an important role in addressing poverty, insecurity, inequality or unemployment. In the context of the current crisis and in addition to the Syria Trust Fund, the **European Commission is also proposing to EU Member States a new European Emergency Trust Fund** for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. Trust Funds enable the EU, its Member States and contributing donors to respond to different dimensions of emergency situations by intervening jointly, flexibly and quickly, in response to changing needs. The proposed Trust Fund will support stability, promote resilience, economic development, security, and migration management.

2) Cooperation in readmission and return of irregular migrants: at present, percentages of return in EU Member States are relatively low. In 2014, less than 40% of the irregular migrants that were ordered to leave the EU departed effectively. The EU action plan on return, adopted in parallel to this Communication, addresses this area of policy.

3) Fighting organised crime responsible for migrant smuggling and human trafficking: the EU is a key actor when it comes to improving partner countries' capacities on border management, and on implementing voluntary return and reintegration, taking an integrated approach which ensures borders are secure but at the same time allows swift movements of legitimate flows of people and goods. The European agenda on migration sets out a number of initiatives to strengthen EU instruments available to address smuggling networks, notably an EU action plan against migrant smuggling.

Other initiatives include the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali.

The communication presented the state of play regarding the each of the zones affected with migration flows (in particular, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, the Western Balkans and in areas of sub-Saharan).

Conclusions and way forward: in order to address the refugee crisis and manage challenges and opportunities jointly, the ability of the European Union to engage with partners in third countries will be key. The EU-Africa Migration, Mobility and Employment Partnership, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership, or the ACP-EU migration dialogue are instrumental in this regard.

Several of the challenges outlined in this Communication can and are being addressed through political and diplomatic efforts:

- renewed efforts are being devoted to address the root causes of this crisis, namely the war in Syria and Iraq. The High Representative is pursuing high-level dialogues on these issues, as requested by the European Council, leveraging the European Union's support to countries and regions and building on already existing partnerships;
- cooperation with countries of origin and transit is being conducted at bilateral level using all existing frameworks in particular those provided by mobility partnerships, the common agenda on migration and mobility or readmission agreements;
- engagement on other issues, including trade and development, will also be seized to discuss cooperation in the field of migration.

EU Delegations will also intensify contacts with local authorities. Delegations in key countries of transit and origin are being reinforced through the deployment of European Migration Liaison Officer (EULMOs), as foreseen in the European Agenda on Migration.

In addition, the European Union is organising two high-level conferences: (i) the Valletta Summit on Migration (11-12 November 2015) will discuss, inter alia, development benefits of migration, root causes, legal migration and mobility, international protection and asylum, prevention and fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking of human beings, and cooperation on return and readmission; (ii) the high-level Conference on Eastern Mediterranean/Western Balkans route (autumn 2015).

The communication concludes that comprehensively addressing these will require an approach that encompasses **short- and long-term efforts** based on instruments at the Union's disposal, from diplomacy to financial assistance.