

Operational conclusion of the 4th Steering Committee Meeting with Bulgaria on the joint migration management Pilot Project

The fourth meeting of the Steering Committee on the Pilot Project took place on 02 August 2023 and served: (i) to provide an update on border management, asylum and return procedures in Bulgaria, and (ii) to discuss the progress achieved in the context of key activities of the joint Pilot Project.

The Commission and Bulgaria underlined the progress made since the last meeting, including preparations for a final report on the Pilot Project and a technical mission to Bulgaria in August.

The Bulgarian authorities emphasised the close exchange with COM and agencies and provided a detailed update on **border management and screening**, including related to the situational picture at the Bulgaria - Türkiye border and the support provided by EU Agencies, particularly by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA). In this context, BG informed about the new Operating Plan with EUAA signed on 1 July and the priority of digitalizing the asylum and return systems with the valuable technical expertise of the agency.

BG informed about developments on the implementation of **asylum procedures**, following the adoption of circular instructions on the implementation of the accelerated procedures. COM reiterated that EUAA country guidance as well as further support regarding implementation of Safe Countries of Origin lists are available from the Agency side.

On **return** related activities, BG outlined that useful exchanges on best practices, as well as logistic arrangements for trainings on return counselling have been undertaken with the facilitation of Frontex on the basis of the Action Plan on Returns. A further point of discussion was a targeted assisted voluntary return project.

On **border management and international cooperation** related aspects, BG informed about the efforts to achieve further progress in the context of third country cooperation in voluntary and forced returns. BG updated on **anti-smuggling efforts** in the region and mentioned the valuable support provided by Europol in this regard.

Lastly, COM and BG exchanged on funding related questions and available instruments.

On **next steps**, COM and BG expressed their strong commitment to continue the effective coordination and work on the Pilot Project by scheduling technical and formal exchanges for the forthcoming period.