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From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Reinforcing the EU's migration situational awareness and early warning capabilities, including during crisis situations - Exchange of views

INTRODUCTION

Irregular migration is driven by a complex interplay of push and pull factors, often exacerbated by disinformation or misinformation and the rapid congregation of individuals through social media. The spread of false or misleading information, amplified by algorithms and automated accounts, poses a growing threat to security and stability. Understanding these triggers, whether seasonal patterns, new smuggling *modi operandi*, geopolitical developments, misinformation or disinformation online, is essential for the detection of emerging trends before they translate into large-scale movements and for the preparation of appropriate operational and political responses.

While significant progress has been made in recent years, further action is needed to ensure that our systems can anticipate sudden movements, identify potential risks at an early stage and enable timely and informed action.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: ENHANCING CAPABILITIES

In recent years, the Commission and EU JHA agencies have **invested in enhancing data collection and analysis**, leading to improved capabilities for informed decision-making regarding migration. The analysis produced by EU agencies such as Frontex, the EUAA or Europol relies on data provided by Member States and on an expanding volume of data retrieved from centralised systems and open-source intelligence (OSINT). Each agency collects data, consults with Member State experts and produces analytical reports or forecasting assessments. While some data gaps remain in terms of completeness, quality or timeliness of specific datasets, information is generally available to assess relevant trends.

The agency-specific situational awareness assessments feed into the Commission's **Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint network**¹ which integrates border, asylum and smuggling aspects. Over recent years, the Blueprint network has established itself as a valuable forum for regular exchanges and technical coordination between experts from Member States, institutions and agencies, also incorporating information from other entities such as UNHCR and IOM regarding countries of transit. This leads to comprehensive overviews, such as the Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) Trend Assessments (monthly), the ISAA Early Indicators Reports (weekly), regular Blueprint Network reports, quarterly forecasting assessments on all migratory routes, and deep dives on specific routes or countries.

The role of social media in triggering or exacerbating migratory movements indicates that the EU should increase **social media monitoring as an early-warning tool**. As an immediate step, the EU may leverage existing legal frameworks and commitments applying to social media platforms. In response to the situation in Ceuta, the Commission has already opened discussions with major internet platforms in relation to their commitments under the Digital Services Act. Certain platforms seem to have activated crisis protocols and specific cooperation mechanisms with fact-checkers on a voluntary basis.

¹ Established in 2020 by the Commission through Recommendation C(2020) 6469 (Council doc. ST 11700/20).

Looking ahead, **there could be a role for EU agencies in developing social media monitoring capacities**, for example with regard to aggregate trends and narratives, the online activities of suspected migrant-smuggling networks and the processing of personal data for law enforcement purposes.

Frontex, for example, provides surveillance tools and intelligence products to Member States' border control authorities, ranging from the monitoring of suspicious vessels through EUROSUR's Fusion Services to the analysis of migrants' interviews, that feed into its risk-analysis reports. Frontex could increase its social media monitoring activities, but this would require relevant tools, legislative changes including data protection rules and adequate staff to increase its coverage of irregular migration with an in-house structure comparable to Europol's Internet Referral Unit².

The mandates of JHA agencies could be amended to provide an explicit and sufficiently circumscribed legal basis for the different types of social media monitoring related to migration and migrant smuggling. This would establish a predictable framework defining the agencies' roles, the purposes and limitations for which monitoring may be conducted, as well as data protection and fundamental rights safeguards governing the processing and use of personal data. The revision of Frontex's and Europol's mandates provides an opportunity to clarify their respective roles in this area.

CRISIS SITUATIONS: FROM PREPAREDNESS TO MOBILISATION

Effective crisis management requires moving beyond a reactive approach towards greater preparedness, anticipation and rapid action when needed. Past experiences demonstrate the EU's ability to identify and respond to emerging trends, including arrivals via Belarus, departures from Lebanon or departures from Mauritania and Senegal as well as Tunisia and Libya (including to Crete). Nevertheless, mechanisms at EU level could be further strengthened.

² Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU), has the mandate (i) to flag terrorist and violent extremist content refer to Online Service Providers (OSPs) and support Member States in Internet investigations and share this with relevant partners; and (ii) to contribute to the disruption of illegal immigrant smuggling networks, by detecting and requesting removal of internet content used by traffickers to attract migrants and refugees, upon Member States requests.

In the case of Ceuta in July 2026, increasing irregular arrivals had been identified in the trend analysis at the beginning of the year. In June, information from the Blueprint Network also highlighted the continued presence of potential migrants in Morocco and the possibility that smuggling networks could exploit national decisions in Spain as a pull factor. The subsequent rapid surge of migrants around 30-31 July, reportedly facilitated by a social-media campaign, illustrates the difficulty of capturing short-term triggers and translating them rapidly enough into operational activity.

Trend analysis and forecasting remain essential for understanding structural drivers and preparing for migration developments over the medium to long term, but they are not necessarily sufficient on their own to provide an adequate response to sudden and rapidly evolving events. **This calls for a distinct crisis-mode approach to situational awareness, building on the structures and tools already in place.**

The challenge in pre-crisis times is to ensure that existing monitoring can be rapidly intensified and escalated as a situation begins to deteriorate.

Greater emphasis could be placed on specifying indicators, thresholds and the corresponding actions within national contingency plans for border management, returns and asylum³. Triggers and thresholds should be clearly defined and the indicators precisely described to allow a swift response. It is crucial that the national contingency and preparedness units or teams receive the required information in a timely manner, so they can determine whether a plan needs to be activated.

³ Article 7 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 obliges Member States to submit, every five years, contingency plans on asylum as part of their national migration and asylum management strategies. The contingency plan for borders and returns is required under the European integrated border management framework established by Article 8(6) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896. Both should be consistent and complementary.

This also points to a **different mode of operation during times of crisis**. In more regular situations, detailed trend analysis, forecasting and risk assessment can appropriately remain within specialised analytical structures and expert networks, where data can be assessed in detail. **In times of crisis, however, developments need to be continuously assessed and translated into timely, actionable analysis, highlighting changes in the trajectory of the crisis, potential escalation and their implications, and channelled rapidly to the level at which decisions can be taken.**

The regular forecasting products of the Blueprint Network could, for example, provide the basis for a **more systematic follow-up of developments already identified as requiring closer monitoring**, ensuring that relevant assessments are proactively brought to the appropriate level when further attention or action at Union level may be warranted. National contingency plans should specify the threshold at which Member States and the EU institutions are notified of the activation of the contingency plan and may be called to take part in the response.

The objective should not be to transfer complex datasets directly to political decision-makers, but to ensure that experts can translate them into clear assessments. To devise options for action, the **Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR)** has a particular role to play as the appropriate mechanism for bringing together information from different policy areas and ensuring that it reaches the appropriate strategic and political level. The IPCR is specifically designed to support rapid and coordinated decision-making in major and complex crises. It provides a range of tools to facilitate timely information-sharing and situational awareness, including the IPCR web platform for secure information exchange, analytical reporting and 24/7 contact points. Member States, institutions and agencies are encouraged to include the IPCR web platform as the channel to quickly share relevant information in a crisis situation. The IPCR should be in a position to receive, discuss, process, and disseminate rapid “flash” reporting when developments require immediate attention in response to crises. The IPCR should continue to play a key role in migration-related crises, supporting a broader and more integrated picture through relevant reports, particularly when situations evolve rapidly and require timely anticipation and decision-making.

To ensure good quality reporting and decision making in times of crisis, both EU-level actors and Member States must share relevant information in a complete and timely manner. Only then can operational intelligence from EU Agencies and Member States be translated into timely and effective responses on the ground.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

To reinforce the situational awareness and early warning capabilities in the field of migration, including during crisis situations, Ministers are invited to provide guidance as follows:

- 1) Which actions should be taken, and which capabilities should be further developed, to improve early warning and situational awareness allowing for a swift and coordinated response, especially for those emerging trends or crisis situations with potential EU-wide relevance?
 - 2) Should EU agencies be mandated to develop social media monitoring capabilities to have better insights into the intentions of various actors involved in migratory flows?
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