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Executive summary

In 2014, detections of illegal border-crossing reached a new record, with more than 280 000 detections. The unprecedented number of migrants crossing illegally the external borders has roots in the fighting in Syria that has resulted in the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. Indeed, most of the detections at the borders concerned migrants from Syria, who later applied for asylum within the EU.

The record number of migrants detected at the external borders of the EU had several implications for border-control authorities and EU internal security:

- 1) Most of these detections were reported as part of search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean area. In 2014, border-control authorities saved the lives of thousands of people. However, facilitators increasingly utilised unsafe boats, with the inevitable result that migrants' lives were put at risk.
- 2) The very high demand for illegal crossing to the EU, fuelled by the record number of successful entries, also led to a new *modus operandi*. Since September 2014, the use of large cargo ships to transport migrants directly from the Turkish coast near Mersin to Italy has been reported. This is a multi-million-euro business for organised crime groups (OCG), which is likely to be replicated in other departure countries. Another

worrying trend has been the increasing number of deliberate attempts to involve merchant ships in rescuing migrants. This has prompted the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to voice the concerns of the shipping industry over its involvement in rescuing irregular migrants.

- 3) With record numbers of migrants crossing the border illegally, resources are devoted to their immediate care, rather than screening and obtaining information on their basic characteristics such as nationality. After they are rescued, they continue their journey to other Member States and not knowing who is travelling within the EU is a vulnerability for EU internal security.

The profile of detected irregular migrants remained relatively unchanged compared to 2013, being mostly adult males. However, the proportion of women (11%) and children (15%) reflects the fact that many migrants move to the EU with the intention of claiming asylum, thereby escaping violence in their own country.

Most migrants were detected in the Central Mediterranean area, where detections totalled over 170 000. On the Eastern Mediterranean route detections totalled over 50 800. Towards the end of 2014, detections sharply increased at the Hungarian land border with Serbia, making the Western Bal-



kan route (with 43 357 detections) the third most important irregular migration route towards the EU.

Detections of clandestine entry in vehicles increased strongly from 599 in 2013 to 3 052 in 2014. This rise was due to a tenfold increase in detections reported from the Bulgarian BCPs along the land border with Turkey.

In 2014, there were just over 9 400 detections of document fraud cases on entry to the EU/Schengen area from third countries, which represented a slight decrease compared to the previous year. By contrast, cases reported on intra-EU Schengen movements showed a marked increase from 7 867 in 2013 to 9 968 in 2014 (+27%). Thus, for the first time, there were more fraudulent documents detected on intra-EU/Schengen movements than during border checks on passengers arriving from third countries. This is partly due to the large number of migrants undertaking secondary movements within the EU, often with fraudulent documents obtained in the country of their entry into the EU.

The facilitation of illegal migration remains a significant threat to the EU external borders. Detections of facilitators rose from 7 252 in 2013 to 10 234 in 2014. The increase was mostly due to higher numbers reported in Spain, Italy and Bulgaria.

Member States reported more than 114 000 refusals of entry issued at the external borders of the EU, a decrease of 11% compared to 2013. The decrease is the consequence of the record high of 2013, when an exceptionally large number of Russians of Chechen origin were refused entry because they lacked a valid visa.

In 2014, there were 441 780 detections of illegal stay in the EU, which represents an increase compared to the year before. Most of the increase was due to a higher number

of detected Syrians and Eritreans who later applied for asylum.

A total of 252 003 third-country nationals were subject to an obligation to leave the EU as a result of an administrative or judicial decision, which was a 12% increase compared to 2013.

In 2014, there were 161 309 third-country nationals effectively returned to countries outside the EU, which was broadly similar to the numbers returned in 2013. The UK was the Member State that conducted the largest number of returns (36 313), with steady trends to India and Pakistan. Greece reported an increase in effective returns, mostly of Albanians.

As regards the wider geopolitical context, two issues clearly stand out: the conflict in Syria and the continued volatility in North African countries, notably Libya, from where migrants often depart in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. The large number of displaced Syrians in the Middle East and North Africa suggests that Syria will likely remain the top country of origin for irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the EU for some time to come. In Libya, migrants are in an extremely vulnerable situation, especially those in areas affected by the fighting. Migrants in Libya also face arbitrary detention and very poor conditions of detention, marked by overcrowding, poor sanitation and exploitation.

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine will continue to be an important factor affecting population movements. However, so far it has not resulted in marked changes in illegal migration movements towards the EU. The main development along the eastern land border has been the reduction in the number of regular passengers from the Russian Federation to the EU due to the economic downturn.

Looking ahead, the likelihood of a large number of illegal border-crossings to the EU is high and so is the probability of a large number of migrants needing assistance in terms of search and rescue operations (but also the provision of international protection), in particular in the southern section of the external border, on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Central Mediterranean routes. Many migrants who cross illegally and apply for asylum are not detained and thus continue making their journey within the EU.

Most risks associated with document fraud were assessed as high. Indeed, document fraudsters not only undermine border security but also the internal security of the EU.

These risks are common to nearly all Member States, as they are associated with passenger flows and border checks, which are a specific expertise of border-control authorities. Most cases of fraud are expected to involve EU travel documents and there are indications of a shift away from the use of passports towards less sophisticated documents such as ID cards and residence permits.

Overall, there is an underlying threat of terrorism-related travel movements especially due to the appeal of the Syrian conflict to both idealist and radicalised youths. The conflict in Syria has attracted hundreds of foreign fighters, including EU citizens, dual-nationality holders and other third-country nationals.