

Country: ITALY

Key Policy Issues Paper*

1. Specific Issues

Common European Asylum System (CEAS)	
Key policy issue 1:	Reception capacity and conditions for asylum seekers
<p>Italy experiences serious overcrowding of its reception system. Italy's reception capacity is 7000 places, with additional places provided through Civil Protection for emergencies. Asylum seekers intake varied between 10.000 and 30.000 in the last years. The places available are therefore insufficient to cater for structural needs, and the capacity to respond to sudden peaks in asylum applications (Arab Spring) is very limited. The distribution of competencies is not totally clear and there are varying standards across Italy's asylum system, comprising the "regional" system (SPRAR) and the "national" centres (CARA), depending on the geographical location of the centre, which reveals a limited nationwide capacity to monitor and ensure standardized quality of the services provided. This is also reflected in varying screening practices and capacities to identify vulnerabilities at an early stage of the process.</p> <p>Although exposed to peaks in the influx of asylum seekers, with a very large coast line and territories prone to sudden arrivals, Italy does not have an adequate monitoring mechanism and contingency planning, to ensure that the country is ready to provide adequate assistance to asylum seekers if/when such influxes occur.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate reception conditions ensured to all asylum applicants, including under Dublin procedures. • Development of a flexible reception system, easily adaptable to situations of sudden arrivals. • Setting up of a structured screening system to allow identification of vulnerabilities at the early stages of the asylum process, including age assessment, and catering for the specific needs of these vulnerable categories. • Setting up of a system to monitor the standards and capacity (ensuring constantly updated information on the possible gaps and necessary adaptation to current or future constraints).. • Establishment of national contingency planning for possible influx of large number of asylum seekers. 	
Comments from the Member State:	

* This paper was prepared by the Commission services in the framework of the Policy Dialogue with Italy on the priorities for the two national programmes under the future Home Affairs funds - Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) and Internal Security Fund (ISF).

Key policy issue 2:	Quality of asylum decision making process / procedures and engagement in practical cooperation
<p>Italy still faces many challenges regarding the quality and speed of decision-making at administrative and judicial level. Registration of applications is often delayed, reducing access to reception conditions, asylum procedure standards at national level are not uniform, there are no uniform training standards and courses for decision makers, and central coordination by the National Commission in this regards is still quite weak. Concerns relate also to Country of Origin Information (COI) (lack of funding and no dedicated unit/system for COI information).</p> <p>Italy's participation in EASO activities is so far quite low, not using the European Asylum Curriculum or the COI Portal on a regular basis. Increased cooperation with EASO and use of such tools would surely improve the quality of its decision making process and could be supported by, for instance, translating relevant EAC modules or COI resources and disseminating them at national level. Hopefully the situation will improve now that Italy signed with EASO, on 4 June 2013, a Special Support Plan.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a national system of continuous evaluation of the asylum procedures and assistance provided to asylum seekers. • Improvement of the quality and speed of the asylum decision-making process, notably through improved training of Italian officials (decision makers, border guards, judges, etc.), reinforcement of COI capacity, and increased engagement in practical cooperation, notably with EASO. 	
Comments from the Member State:	

Integration of third country nationals (including beneficiaries of international protection)	
Key policy issue 3:	Continuing efforts towards integration of third-country nationals
<p>Integration measures are necessary due to the fact that, in general, Third Country Nationals (TCN) can be disadvantaged in terms of access to services, facilities or to the labour market, including as a result of lack of information and tools available to them and to the organisations and bodies they are in contact with.</p> <p>The unemployment rate of TCN in Italy was 14,1% in 2012, which corresponds to EU average. Between 2011 and 2012 there was a significant decrease of TCN employment in manufacturing activities, with an increase of in the tertiary sector and in the agriculture. 52% of TCN are women. Family reunification, together with high rates of employment of female TCN's in the homecare and healthcare sectors, are the main reasons for such strong increase in recent years of female TCN. The majority (54,8%) of TCN's residing in Italy belong to low educated segments of their country of origin. However, even those with high skills also often face difficulties in having their qualifications and skills recognized: as a result, the potential contribution of highly skilled TCN's to fill the skill gaps in the labour market is severely underexploited.</p> <p>Another challenge is the high number of TCNs amongst early school leavers (41%). Although this might have several reasons, early school leaving is strongly linked to social disadvantage and low education backgrounds; it is part of a process which often starts in primary education with first</p>	

experiences of failure and alienation from school.

There is also scope for improving the perception of legally residing TCN's in general, including asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

Desired outcome:

- In accordance with the European Agenda for Integration pursue the implementation of policies promoting the integration of third-country nationals, including beneficiaries of international protection.
- Facilitation of TCN access to the labour market, notably through actions such as pre-departure training in the country of origin, information on job and study opportunities, retraining courses, skills recognition and better skills matching, promotion of entrepreneurship, as well as more diversity-friendly and TCN-sensitive employment services, with particular regard to women.
- Improvement of the effectiveness of orientation mechanisms for the choice of upper secondary education by young people with TCN background, with a view to making these services more sensitive to the specificities of such component of the school population and thereby reducing the risk of indirect discrimination and early school leaving.
- While maintaining, as appropriate, a horizontal approach at the national level, particular attention should be paid to regional and local approaches, strengthening the involvement and capacities of local authorities and the cooperation between competent public bodies, NGOs and other actors.

Comments from the Member State:

Unaccompanied minors

Key policy issue 4: **Assistance to unaccompanied minors**

Italy is amongst the EU Member States receiving the highest number of unaccompanied minors (UAM). It is estimated that on 31st December 2011 the country hosted 5955 UAM.

Despite having taken several measures to address this issue, the assistance provided by Italy to UAM has still significant shortcomings in areas such as reception conditions, legal guardianship, age assessment, family tracing, education and integration.

Desired outcome:

- Improvement of reception conditions for unaccompanied minors, as well as strengthening of measures regarding legal guardianship, age assessment and family tracing. More specifically, measures should be taken to ensure appropriate care conditions in minors' centres, improve conditions of education and integration, as well as actions preparing for the moment minors reach 18, to avoid irregularity.
- Inter-institutional cooperation between the regional authorities, the Ministry of Labour, the consular authorities and NGOS and International Organisations (e.g. on family tracing), should also be reinforced.

Comments from the Member State:**Return Policy**

Key policy issue 5: **Effective return policy - Strengthening of voluntary return and establishment of an effective forced return monitoring system, improvement of return procedures and detention conditions**

Complying with fundamental rights standards and guaranteeing a dignified return procedure are core aspects of EU return policy. Voluntary return is the most humane, efficient and cost-effective method for returning irregularly staying third country nationals. Hence, the use of voluntary return should be given preference over forced return measures. Italy's return policy is still strongly focused on forced return. Renewed efforts to use voluntary return schemes should be made, including support to reintegration in countries of origin .

Italy's return procedures also have some shortcomings: for instance, it does not always provide translations of return decisions in a language the returnee is reasonably supposed to understand. There is also a need to improve conditions in Italy's detention centres.

There is also a need to strengthen its forced return monitoring system. Although Italy has formally created a monitoring body ("*Comitato per il Coordinamento e il Monitoraggio*"), its practical use does not seem satisfactory and effective enough to ensure compliance with the standards imposed by the Return Directive.

Desired outcome:

- Stronger commitment from Italy to use voluntary returns, including provision of information on the programmes and conditions of return and promotion of reintegration measures in the countries of origin.
- Improvement of return procedures and living conditions in the detention centres, in full conformity with the Return Directive.
- Ensuring efficiency and credibility of the forced return monitoring system.

Comments from the Member State:**Internal security**

Key policy issue 6: **Drug trafficking**

According to the most recent EU drug markets report, Italy remains a significant European transit and consumer point for illegal drugs. It is the only country after Turkey and the UK repeatedly reporting annual seizures in excess of a ton in the period 2001–2009, which makes it the second largest seizing country in the EU.

Heroin from Southwest Asian arrives from transit routes in the Middle East and the Balkans, while cocaine enters Italy directly from South America or through the Iberian Peninsula en route to the rest of Europe. In addition to heroin and cocaine, trafficking in synthetic drugs, hashish, and marijuana are also an issue of major concern.

Building on the successful actions Italy has taken, special attention should continue to be paid to this issue given the size of Italy's market for drugs and its high sensitivity as a country of transit and destination, and to keep pace with the increasingly sophisticated methods of drug trafficking networks.

Desired outcome:

- Increased number of seizures, prosecutions and convictions.
- Enhanced cooperation with other EU Member States and EU agencies, with increased flow of information to Europol.

Comments from the Member State:

Key policy issue 7: **Trafficking in human beings**

According to the latest (April 2013) Eurostat statistical report on trafficking in human beings (THB) covering the years 2008-2010, most victims, in absolute numbers, have been identified in Italy (2.381 in 2010). On the other hand, the number of police investigations on suspected traffickers decreased over the years, from 541 in 2008 to 360 in 2009 (no data available for 2010). Compared to other EU MS, a relatively low number (around 15%) of the traffickers have Italian citizenship. Italy reported a very low number of convictions for traffickers in human beings: 4 in 2008 and 17 in 2009 (no data for 2010).

The Commission recently held a survey within the context of the national rapporteur meeting on national policy initiatives. According to its reply, Italy has not (yet) established a national rapporteur or equivalent mechanism, has not developed a comprehensive national strategy or action plan on THB (but informed it is working on a National Action Plan) or established a national referral mechanism for the identification and referral of victims. Furthermore, Italy has not carried out regular assessments and evaluations of policy or legislation on THB, although it has evaluated specific elements with EU funding.

Building on the actions Italy has taken, special attention should continue to be paid to addressing trafficking in human beings, given its size and high sensitivity as a country both of destination and transit (due to its location) of THB.

Desired outcome:

- Increased number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions of human traffickers.
- Reduce demand in all forms of trafficking in human beings.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy or action plan, enhance the collection of data and reporting at national level.
- Enhanced cooperation and training between the different actors, including police, labour inspectors, immigration and asylum officials, border guards, trade unions, NGOs, etc.
- Develop a national referral mechanism for better identification and referral of victims of trafficking in human beings, including addressing re-integration and return of victims.
- Enhanced cooperation with other EU Member States and EU agencies, with increased flow of information to Europol.

Comments from the Member State:	
Key policy issue 8:	Lack of progress in the implementation of the CBRN Action Plan and Action Plan on the Enhancement of Security of Explosives
<p>Italy is not using the exchange information systems SCEPYLT¹ and EWS², it has a limited participation in the EBDS³, and it is not involved in the “Lead Country” initiatives⁴.</p> <p>Also, Italy has not submitted yet the updated scoreboards for the CBRN Action Plan Progress Report and, according to an assessment made by the Atlas Cooperation Network, it has insufficient CBRN response capability.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active usage of SCEPYLT and EWS as well as active participation in the EBDS community. • Involvement, as a driving force, in the “lead country” initiatives. • Ability to tackle small-scale CBRN incidents; ability to cooperate with neighbours. 	
Comments from the Member State:	

¹ SCEPYLT - Explosives Control and Protection System to Prevent and Fight against Terrorism - is aimed at facilitating approvals to transfer explosives across borders within the EU through electronically issuing transfer permits, and is based on Commission Decision 2010/347. The information system is currently used by six Member States, namely Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, France and Portugal.

² EWS - Early Warning System – has been ready for use by Member States since 2010 and is aimed at exchanging information on immediate cross-border threats related to the theft, loss or misuse of explosives, firearms and CBRN materials. One Member State and Europol are currently connected to it.

³ EBDS - European Bomb Data System – is currently accessible by 25 Member States as well as Norway (which was granted access to the system after the July 2011 attacks in Oslo) and Europol though with a varied level of activity and contributions. The system is aimed at information and intelligence exchange about technical data concerning explosives and CBRN materials as well as incidents, trends and devices. Since its launch in 2010, Europol has been managing and funding the information system.

Setting-up of the EWS and the EBDS are the first two horizontal actions of the Action Plans on the Security of Explosives.

⁴ With a view to a more active implementation of the EU CBRN Action Plan as well as the EU Action Plan on Enhancing the Security of Explosives, the European Commission has invited Member States to sign up as lead countries for actions they deem as a priority and the implementation of which they are ready to coordinate. Such lead country actions should comprise several Member States in the core group and should have an impact on a wide number of EU Member States.

Key policy issue 9:	Anti-corruption policy - Risks in the area of public procurement, notably at regional/local level
<p>Italy's public sector manages resources equal to about 55% of Italy's GDP. Infrastructure is, for its size, one of the sectors most prone to corruption, drawing the attention of organised criminal groups. Corruption returns in Italy seem to occur mostly in the post-contract award phase: recent research suggests that only 20% of the Italian public works assigned between 2000 and 2005 were completed. The Court of Auditors often noted that, although the public procurement process is in general correct, the quality of deliverables is intentionally compromised at the execution phase.</p> <p>Italian authorities are paying increased attention to this issue, having adopted new legislation such as the one on traceability of funds in public procurement, promoting new projects to trace financial transactions and prevent infiltration of mafia groups, and increasing the capacity of the Committee for Coordination of High Surveillance of Large Public Works. Further measures were included in the new anti-corruption bill (i.e. publication online by all administrations of the annual accounts and balance sheets and the broken down costs of public works and services).</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the new anti-corruption bill provisions on ensuring uniform transparency standards for public procurement, including at regional/local level. • Increased transparency and more effective checks (pre and post award) on public procurement. • Adequate training of staff, at both management/leadership and technical level on ethical and integrity aspects, as well as on identification of corruption risks and vulnerable areas. • Developed whistle-blower protection mechanisms for reporting corrupt practices, including at regional/local level. • Enhanced cooperation among local administration, external control mechanisms and law enforcement for an effective prevention and detection of corrupt practices. 	
Comments from the Member State:	
Key policy issue 10:	Develop financial investigation in all serious and organised crime cases to dismantle criminal networks, provide prosecutable evidence before the judge, develop monitoring and detection tools and trace criminal assets
<p>Italy needs to implement the new Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards. Most particularly, given penetration of the licit economy by organised crime, there is a general need to enhance financial investigation as a mean to support criminal investigation, in view of better detection and dismantlement of criminal networks beyond the sole front line offenders, in compliance with the interpretative note to FATF recommendation 30 and 5th cycle of mutual evaluation on financial crime and financial investigation final report recommendations, as well as the recommendations specifically made in the country report.</p> <p>Furthermore, as all MS will be assessed within the FATF or MONEYVAL on their compliance with the new standards, there is a need to promote relevant actions. In 7 years from now, IT should have improved detection, investigation and prosecution capabilities so as to develop, as far as possible, a systematic financial investigation in all serious and organised crime cases.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the opening of a financial investigation, as far as possible, in parallel to criminal investigations in all serious and organised crime cases, also by exploiting innovative 	

<p>investigation techniques and means.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant rise in the number of financial investigations developed and increased results.
Comments from the Member State:
<p>Key policy issue 11: Weak implementation of information exchange mechanisms</p>
<p>The exchange of information is the core mechanism of law enforcement cooperation in the EU. The so-called 'Swedish Initiative' and the 'Prüm Decision' are two key instruments in this area. Although the deadline for their implementation was 19 December 2008 and 26 August 2011 respectively, Italy has not yet fully implemented these legal acts. The Swedish Initiative has not yet been transposed into national law and, regarding the Prüm Decision, in spite of some recent progresses, Italian authorities are not yet operational in the areas of automated exchange of DNA, fingerprints and vehicle registration data.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full implementation of the Prüm Decision (2008/615/JHA) by stepping-up investments in technical equipment and training, as well as the administrative, legal and organisational requirements for the exchange of data. • Transposition of the Swedish Initiative (2006/960/JHA) into national law and integration of its provisions into the workflow processes of relevant Italian authorities. • Assessment of possibilities to establish a comprehensive and integrated national SPOC (Single Point of Contact) for international information exchange in line with EIXM⁵ recommendations.
Comments from the Member State:

Border management and Schengen governance
<p>Key policy issue 12: Border surveillance at sea / Development of EUROSUR</p>
<p>Italian maritime external borders (especially in Southern Italy) are particularly exposed to the risk of migratory flow and irregular migration. After the 2011 crisis following the Arab spring (62.682 cases of irregular migrants), the number of irregular crossings decreased dramatically in 2012 (13.261 cases) and stayed so far very limited in 2013 (1.500 cases of irregular crossing in the first quarter of 2013). However, the migratory pressure and the risk of irregular migration can be very volatile depending on the development of the international scenario, in particular on the political, social and economic situation of the Northern African countries. It is therefore essential to develop an investment plan which ensures an adequate capacity of surveillance of the external maritime borders, also considering the most advanced technology available (e.g. use of equipment to detect small boats).</p> <p>The draft Regulation establishing EUROSUR (COM(2011) 873, as modified by Council and EP) foresees surveillance of the land and sea external borders, with possibility to include also air borders and checks</p>

⁵ European Information Exchange Model, Communication COM(2012) 735 published in December 2012.

at border crossing points. Development of EUROSUR is of particular relevance for Italy, considering the geographical position of the country. A National Coordination Centre (NCC) has been established in 2011 in the Ministry of Interior and considerably upgraded in 2012 by secondment of liaison officers from State Police, *Carabinieri*, *Guardia di Finanza*, Coast Guard and Navy. Negotiations with the Customs service are on-going.

Desired outcome:

- Setting up medium/long term strategy for the management of the maritime borders.
- Structural actions to ensure the control of the sea borders and enhance the capacity to cope with possible increase in the migratory flows/crisis situation.
- Possible deployment of adequate technology to improve border management capacities.
- Further enhancing real-time exchange and cooperation of NCC with authorities not yet fully cooperating with NCC (in particular Customs), e.g. by seconding liaison officers to NCC.
- Establishment of analysis layer of national situational picture (NSP).
- Possibility to make NCC also responsible for border checks and air border surveillance.
- Streamlining and better integrating information from the existing national surveillance systems.

Comments from the Member State:

2. General issues

Internal security	
Key policy issue 13:	EU policy cycle on serious and organised crime - participation of Italy
<p>Italy has been active in the implementation of the policy cycle 2011-2013: it is a driver of 2 EMPACT⁶ projects, Western Balkans (leading 1 action) and Illegal Immigration (leading 2 actions), and is also participating in 3 other EMPACT projects, respectively West Africa, Trafficking in Human Beings and Cybercrime.</p> <p>Italy is concerned by all crime priorities⁷ based on SOCTA recommendations (Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment by Europol) for the new policy cycle 2013-2017, most particularly: illegal immigration - where IT is a destination country -, trafficking in human beings - where IT is a destination country -, MTIC fraud, counterfeit goods - where IT is a country of distribution-, poly-drug trafficking, cybercrime and money laundering.</p>	
<p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued engagement in the policy cycle 2013 -2017, especially considering that all the priorities for this policy cycle are relevant for Italy. Reinforcement of national infrastructures for data collection and analysis concerning international organised crime, as well as their transmission to Europol, which are precondition for EU Member States' participation in policy cycle. Participation in relevant policy cycle EMPACT projects. 	
<p>Comments from the Member State:</p>	
Key policy issue 14:	Improve capabilities in the fight against cybercrime at national level and contribute to improvement at EU level
<p>The Commission and the High Representative have adopted a joint European Strategy for Cyber-security aiming at a safe and resilient digital environment and effective prevention and response to cybercrime, in full respect of fundamental rights and European values. The European Cyber-security Centre (EC3) has prioritised the lack of capacity to mitigate the risks of cybercrime as the main issue of concern for EU cyber-security⁸.</p> <p>Italy, while disposing of a quite sophisticated law enforcement authority dealing with cybercrime, suffers from a lack of general resilience and weak network and information security. On cybercrime specifically, it should foster exchange of information and cooperation between the different communities involved (including the public sector, private companies, CERTs, law enforcement and academia). Furthermore, according to the most recent Cybersecurity Eurobarometer, its citizens feel</p>	

⁶ EMPACT: European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Crime Threats. There are 8 EMPACTs overall.

⁷ The new 9 priorities for the policy cycle 2013-2017 (illegal immigration, THB, cybercrime, Missing Trader Intra Community (MTIC), excise fraud, firearms, property crime, counterfeit goods, synthetic drugs production and trafficking as well as cocaine & heroin trafficking), were agreed by COSI on 17 April 2013. They are contained in the Policy Advisory Document drafted jointly by the Presidency and the Commission. They have been endorsed with the Council Conclusions by the JHA Council on 6-7 June.

⁸ Virtual Global Taskforce Environmental Scan 2012

<p>poorly informed about the dangers of cybercrime.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <p>In line with the EU Cyber-Security Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance its network and information security and improve its resilience. • Identify gaps and further strengthen its capability to investigate and combat cybercrime. • Use funding to support bodies that make the link between research/academia, CERTs, law enforcement practitioners and the private sector. • Support programmes that allow for active participation and contribution of Italy to the European Cybercrime Centre at Europol (EC3). • Foster awareness-raising and information campaigns on cybercrime.
<p>Comments from the Member State:</p>
<p>Key policy issue 15: Implementation of the EU Law Enforcement Training Scheme (LETS)</p>
<p>Although it participates regularly in training activities organised by CEPOL and EUROPOL, Italy still has to develop a curriculum on basic knowledge on EU policing issues to be implemented at national level.</p> <p>LETS is a new policy area. Italy should assess to what extent police officers are trained in strand 1 and 2, respectively: 1) basic knowledge on the EU policing context and 2) in depth knowledge on bilateral cooperation/instruments.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Improve a cross-border minded culture of law enforcement officers.
<p>Comments from the Member State:</p>
<p>Key policy issue 16: Radicalisation towards terrorism and violent extremism</p>
<p>Italy faces a general threat from terrorism. During 2008-2010, the number of terrorist incidents in the country numbered 18, which represents an average share (3.6%) of the total incidents in the EU during that period. Between 1990 and 2010, Italy had 96 victims of major extremist incidents. The vast majority of terrorist activity is linked to left-wing/anarchist groups (14 arrests and 5 completed/attempted attacks) and Al-Qaeda-inspired (13 arrests) terrorism. Italy is an active member of the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (co-leading the RAN Working Group – Voice of Victims of Terrorism) and the Policy-Planners Network.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced awareness of the phenomenon of radicalisation among frontline practitioners. • Increased know-how to prevent, recognise and tackle the phenomenon. • Encourage partnerships and platforms for knowledge and exchange of experience between practitioners, based on the experience of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). • Support initiatives challenging terrorist propaganda, including initiatives by victims of terrorism. • Support initiatives to prevent terrorist travels.

Comments from the Member State:**Border management and Schengen governance****Key policy issue 17: Use of modern technology at the border**

Italy does not seem to have any Automated Border Control (ABC) systems in place or planned. In view of facilitating travel of EU citizens and in the future also of Registered Travellers, Italy is encouraged to implement ABC systems at its busiest airports and test ABC also at the busiest sea border crossing points.

Desired outcome:

- Investment leading to use of interoperable modern technologies in line with European standards where they exist. For example ABC gates for EU citizens should also be able to be used for the future Registered Traveller Programme (RTP) component of the smart borders initiative, by implementing fingerprint readers.
- Italy is encouraged to use ABC not only at airports but also at the sea borders.

Comments from the Member State:**Information Systems****Key policy Issue 18: Implementation of Visa Information System (VIS) and increasing the 'consular coverage' in Schengen visa issuance**

VIS has been in operation since 11/10/2011; however it is necessary to ensure its full roll-out. In this context, the Commission highlights the need to ensure adequate funding for these purposes, either under relevant EU instrument or national budget.

Due to the fact that "first time applicants" shall have to appear in person either at the consulate or external service provider (ESP) in order to provide their fingerprints, Italy - even though it has a rather wide consular network in comparison to several other EU Member States - could still consider concluding representation arrangements with other MS, making more use of the various forms of consular cooperation and/or step up the cooperation with ESPs.

Desired outcome:

- Full implementation of VIS including VISMAIL available and in operation.
- VIS roll-out in consulates from the third and last set of regions.
- Preparation for the introduction of fingerprint verifications at the border.
- Efficient operations and customer-friendly service to visa applicants through increased consular cooperation by establishing Common Visa Centres (i.e. representation by/from other MS, or resource pooling with other MS, or joint cooperation with external service providers involving several MS).

Comments from the MS:	
Key policy issue 19:	Implementation of Schengen Information System II
<p>SIS II has been in operation since 9 April 2013. As the SIS II is fundamental for the functioning of the Schengen Area, maintaining it fully operational should present a core priority for all Member States, in particular by ensuring the necessary infrastructure for the system and for its operation, and allowing the evolution of the national components in line with the evolutions agreed for the central system. Equally important, the running of the SIRENE offices should also be treated as a high priority, both in terms of adequate staffing and appropriate technical support.</p> <p>As a mission critical system for the security of the Schengen area and the management of migration, SIS II is a high availability system, requiring 24/7 access for users. Therefore, it is essential that it has a full disaster recovery/business continuity plan. As of today, SIS II contains almost 48 million sensitive records, out of which more than 1 million are on identity (and related) information on persons, including witnesses in criminal procedures or persons subject to discreet checks due to the threat they represent to public or national security. Accordingly, the protection of both the persons concerned, as well as the security within the Schengen area must be adequately ensured at the national level too, including via up-to-date cyber security measures.</p> <p>Desired outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIS II available and in operation. • SIS II national system is resilient to cyber-attacks in terms of physical, computer and data security. 	
Comments from the MS:	

<p>Development of communication strategy aiming at raising general awareness on EU Home Affairs policies</p>	
<p>In view of strengthening EU policies in the area of Home Affairs, each EU Member State is invited to develop communication strategies that would allow to raise the awareness of the population in general and target groups in particular on the measures being taken at EU level.</p>	
Comments from the MS:	