

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001640/26
to the Commission
Alice Kuhnke (Verts/ALE)
(22 April 2026)**

Subject: Recent investigations revealing coercive practices in EU-funded 'voluntary return' programmes

In April 2025, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner, in a response to a question from Parliament, reiterated the position taken by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) against the promotion of large-scale voluntary repatriation to Syria ⁽¹⁾.

In June 2025, the Council published its Conclusions on Syria ⁽²⁾, which reasserted the UNHCR's position that the situation in Syria does not allow for large-scale repatriations.

Meanwhile, according to Eurostat ⁽³⁾, Cyprus has conducted some 2 285 assisted voluntary returns to Syria. According to a media report ⁽⁴⁾, Cyprus's programme has received some EUR 17.7 million in funding from the Commission's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). According to the same report, the programme relies on coercion and deceit to pressure individuals into returning.

Given the above:

1. Does the Commission find that its funding of Cyprus's assisted voluntary returns programme contradicts its position — and the position of the Council — on large-scale repatriations to Syria?
2. If yes, can the Commission explain what measures it plans to take to prevent the continued use of funding under AMIF to enable large-scale repatriations from Cyprus to Syria?

Submitted: 22.4.2026

**Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission
(27 July 2026)**

The EU is working with the Syrian authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to ensure that the conditions are conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable returns to Syria.

The EU will continue to support the transitional authorities in building administrative capacity to ensure an inclusive transition that allows for the necessary conditions to be in place for Syrians to be able to return home.

No EU funding is being used to support forced returns from Cyprus to Syria. EU funds through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund are used to support voluntary returns.

Cyprus, also with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) assistance, provides return counselling to illegally staying third-country nationals, including Syrians, to facilitate their informed choice when deciding whether to return voluntarily. Cyprus is also using the European Reintegration Programme run by Frontex to support effective reintegration of Syrian who return voluntarily.

The use of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund ⁽¹⁾ for assisted voluntary returns is subject to the applicable legal requirements, including returns to be carried out in a safe, dignified manner that respects fundamental rights in accordance with EU law ⁽²⁾.

In the Annual Performance Report, Member States are requested to provide information on the fulfilment of the applicable enabling conditions and their application throughout the programming period, in particular compliance with fundamental rights.

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-10-2024-002899-ASW_EN.html.

² <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10688-2025-INIT/en/pdf>.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIRTN1__custom_18277491/default/table.

⁴ <https://www.newarab.com/investigations/eu-deports-syrians-under-guise-voluntary-returns>.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, OJ L 251, 15.7.2021, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, OJ L 348, 24.12.2008, p. 98.