

Migration Update

November 2023



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The purpose of these news summaries is to provide a factual base for migration debates within the European centre-right. [Vít Novotný](#) is responsible for the selection of information items from the media, governments and social media. The value of these summaries is in the categorisation of information items and in listing those items that readers might have missed. Facts and opinions are conveyed as they are reported. Original comments are kept to a minimum. These news summaries are not subject to a formal editorial process. Niccolò Mazzocchetti provided material for the Judicial Observatory and the Dutch election campaign. Claudia Masi supplied an information item. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at vn@martenscentre.eu.

- According to [estimates](#) by UK's Office of National Statistics, net immigration to the country was **745,000** in the calendar year **2022, an all-time record**. "This unusually high level was driven by a combination of humanitarian schemes for Ukrainians and Hong Kongers, plus increases in international students and work visas."

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TUNISIA-ITALY

According to [official data](#), total monthly irregular arrivals in Italy in October and November 2023 were **below those same monthly figures for 2022**.

According to [Migazin.de](#), the reason for this is probably the increased frequency of patrols by the Tunisian coast guard. More than before, the boats are destroyed after being intercepted by Tunisian officials. The prices that migrants have to pay to smugglers are presumably also responsible for fewer crossings; these are said to have risen significantly in Tunisia.

As confirmed by the Commission, migration cooperation with Tunisia **continues**.

- Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** wrote in a letter to MEPs that the EU has supplied spare parts for the Tunisian coast guard that will keep “six ships operational”. Another six coast guard vessels are to be repaired by the end of the year.
- According to another letter by **von der Leyen**, the EU has recently supplied IT equipment for operations rooms, mobile radar systems and thermal imaging cameras, navigation radars and sonars.... An “additional capacity building” is to take place within the framework of existing “border management programmes” implemented by Italy and the Netherlands, among others. One of these is the EU4BorderSecurity programme, which among other things provides skills in sea rescue and has been extended for Tunisia until April 2025.
- This year, Tunisia has also sent members of its coast guards to Italy as liaison officers – apparently a first step towards the EU’s goal of “linking” MRCC’s in Libya and Tunisia with their “counterparts” in Italy and Malta.
- In September, a delegation from Tunisia visited **Frontex headquarters** in Warsaw, with the participation of the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Defence. The visit from Tunis was received by Frontex Director Hans Leijten. EU officials then gave presentations on the capabilities and capacities of the border agency, including the training department or the deportation centre set up in 2021, which relies on good cooperation with destination states of deportation flights.
- Now the EU wants to [put pressure on Tunisia](#) to **introduce visa requirements for individual West African states**. This is to affect, among others, Côte d’Ivoire, where most of the people arriving in the EU via Tunisia come from and almost all of whom arrive in Italy.

ITALY-ALBANIA

On 6 November, the governments of Italy and Albania [announced](#) an agreement on the processing of asylum claims of irregular migrants bound for Italy in two Albanian centres. “It is the first time an EU country is outsourcing its asylum procedures to a country that is not yet part of the bloc.

- The construction of the two migrant facilities — where **Italian jurisdiction** will be applied — will be entirely funded by the Italian state.... Migrants rescued at sea by the Italian coast guard would disembark in the port of Shëngjin, in northern Albania. They would first be hosted in a reception centre where they would be registered and where they could apply for asylum in Italy. An expulsion and detention facility will also be built 20km away from the coast, in the settlement of Gjadër. Albanian police guards will be in charge of patrolling both centres.

- [Italian PM] Meloni said Italy expects these centres to be fully operational by spring 2024 and to have the capacity to manage between 36,000 and 39,000 migrants per year. She added that she hoped this agreement could become a “model” for other countries to follow.
- The facilities would only host people rescued at sea by Italian law enforcement and not by vessels operated by charity groups, according to a government official. Women, children and migrants in vulnerable conditions will not be brought to Albania but will continue to be disembarked in Italy.
- More than 145,000 migrants have reached Italy’s shores from northern Africa since the beginning of 2023, compared with 88,000 people last year.
- The **European Commission** [suggested](#) the deal could prove problematic if Italy sent migrants found in EU territorial waters to a non-EU country. The Commission left open the possibility of implementing the agreement for migrants intercepted in international waters.

[Here](#) is the text of the agreement [in Albanian]. [Here](#) is a summary.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

On 1 November, **foreign nationals and sick and wounded Palestinians** began [leaving Gaza](#) through the Rafah border crossing into Egypt for the first time since the war between Hamas and Israel erupted on 7 October. At least 361 foreign and 45 sick or injured Palestinians were permitted to leave Gaza and enter Egypt on that day. The step was [welcomed](#) by the EU. After a pause, evacuations [resumed](#) on 9 November.

Despite Israeli [proposals](#), **Egypt** [reiterated](#) its refusal to admit the inhabitants of Gaza into its territory.

RUSSIA-FINLAND

On 28 November, the Finnish government [said](#) it would temporarily **close its sole remaining passenger border crossing with Russia**, Raja-Jooseppi, in the far north of Finnish Lapland. The closure would come into effect on 30 November. ‘The measure aims to defend the country from what has been described as a hybrid attack by Russia. The decision means that Finland's entire border with Russia will be closed, **with the exception of rail freight via the Vainikkala crossing in Southeastern Finland**. The Finnish government said that during the closure, applying for asylum would only be possible at **air- and maritime traffic border points**.

On 18 November, the government had [closed](#) four of the nine crossing points on its border with Russia to stem a flow of asylum seekers. Finland's president said that a rise in the number of asylum applicants arriving on the eastern border appeared to be Russian revenge for Finland's defence cooperation with the US. When migrants began appearing at border crossings further north, Finland later closed [three more checkpoints](#) — leaving only Raja-Jooseppi open, meaning seven of the eight checkpoints were shut.

- Until now, some 3,000 people used Finland's southeastern border crossings on a daily basis. PM Petteri Orpo (EPP) said he understood the closures

would make everyday life more difficult for people allowed to travel between Finland and Russia.

- Finnish and Russian border authorities have for years cooperated in stopping people without the necessary visas or passports before they could attempt to enter either of the two countries.

Around **900 people** - mostly from the Middle East and Africa - have arrived on Finland's border since August, [often on brand-new bicycles](#). Three recently-arrived Syrian migrants told [Yle](#) about how Russian authorities **facilitated their trips** to the Finnish border, including Telegram promotions, taxis and the requirement to buy a bicycle. [Frontex](#) [said](#) it planned to deploy 50 border guard officers and other staff, along with equipment such as patrol cars, to bolster Finland's border control activities.

BELARUS-POLAND-LITHUANIA

The government of Belarus set up a [website](#) to “document cases of Polish and Lithuanian crimes against refugees on the border with Belarus since mid-2021”.

CHECKS AT INTERNAL BORDERS

A number of countries in Central Europe and across Europe [continued imposing](#) systematic border checks on their internal Schengen borders. At the end of November, most inter-state borders across Central Europe were subject to systematic checks. Other borders subject to checks were: Danish borders with Germany, Norwegian ports, Swedish borders (details unclear) and all French borders.

RETURNS

Frontex [announced](#) that 28,881 illegal immigrants have been returned to their country in the first nine months of 2023, thanks to the resources it makes available to the member states, such as grouped flights. No fewer than 331,600 irregular crossings were recorded at the EU's external borders between 1 January and 31 October 2023.

NIGER

The head of Niger's military regime has [repealed](#) a **law which criminalised the smuggling of migrants** through the nation, a hub for those seeking to reach Europe via neighbouring Libya and Algeria, the government announced on 27 November. General Abdourahamane Tiani signed “an order repealing” the 2015 law “relating to the illegal trafficking of migrants”. This law “did not take into account the interests of Niger and its citizens” The new order also stipulates that convictions handed down under the 2015 law “shall be erased”.

CANADA

Immigration Minister Marc Miller [announced](#) that Canada will stick with its plan of accepting **485,000 new permanent residents** in 2024 and **500,000 in 2025**. Miller added that Canada will import another 500,000 new permanent residents in 2026, saying that the figures will allow for “sustainable population growth.”

NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The Netherlands

On 22 November, the Netherlands held an early ballot to elect the House of Representatives. Asylum and migration were central aspects of the electoral discussion. The far-right **Party for Freedom** [PVV; ID] [called for](#) an immediate halt to the acceptance of asylum seekers, also asking for the termination of the residence status of individuals granted asylum if they travel to their home countries for vacations. The **People's Party for Freedom and Democracy** [VVD; ALDE] [proposed](#) a two-tier system that distinguishes between refugees (victim of personal persecution) and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (e.g., people from war zones): changes would reduce rights of the latter in connection to family reunifications and duration of the asylum permit. (Currently, the legal framework does not allow such differentiation). VVD also advocated a general reduction of the length of asylum permits to three years. The **Christian Democratic Appeal** [CDA; EPP] [agreed](#) with introducing such a two-status system, while emphasising 'the importance of newcomers mastering the Dutch language and adhering to Western values'. The **New Social Contract** [NSC; NI] programme [stated](#) that 'the limit of the net number of immigrants should be restricted to 50,000 per year'. The **Green-Labour alliance's** [GL/PvdA; Greens/S&D] manifesto [prioritised](#) a 'human treatment' of migrants and refugees, focusing on an increase in the hourly minimum wage to 16 euros and a requirement for employers to hire 85% of their workforce as regular employees to address the problem of the foreign workers' employment. The **Farmer-Citizen Movement** [BBB; NI], the agrarian and right-wing party, in its electoral programme [stated](#) that 'BBB aims to drastically limit asylum inflows, ensure fair housing distribution, and conduct asylum procedures at the EU's external borders'. The social liberal **Democrats 66** [D66; ALDE] [advocated](#) the need to the work at the EU level for 'better agreements on a fair distribution of refugees... and ensuring that every step of the road toward asylum is humane'. Results of the general election can be found [here](#).

JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

UK Supreme Court declares government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda unlawful

On 15 December, the UK Supreme Court [delivered a series of judgements](#) concerning the previous Court of Appeal's ruling on sending irregularly arriving UK-bound asylum seekers to Rwanda to have their asylum claims processed. The [main question](#) concerned the lawfulness of the removal of any asylum seekers to Rwanda to assess their claims under the terms of the [Migration and Economic and Development Partnership](#) between the governments of Rwanda and the UK (hereinafter 'Rwanda Policy'). The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal brought by the Home Secretary and agreed on the Court of Appeal's conclusion which stated that the Rwanda Policy was unlawful.

The Supreme Court recognised that refugees could not be sent to third countries where they faced risks of ill-treatment by that country or where they could risk being sent to their country of origin. The Court stressed that the UK signed several

international treaties including the UN Refugee Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 and the European Convention on Human Rights, which protect people against non-refoulement. Then, despite recognising the ‘good faith’ of Rwanda’s government, the Court evidenced the country’s poor human rights record. However, the Court dismissed the argument that considered Rwanda Policy as unlawful based on retained EU law. The [Procedures Directive](#) (Art. 25 and 27) states that asylum seekers may only be deported to a third country if they have a relevant connection to it. The Court stated that those provisions were no longer effective in the UK.

It should be observed that the Supreme Court judgements did not declare the policy of removing asylum-seekers to a third country unlawful *per se*, but instead recognised Rwanda as not currently safe for that purpose.

SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

H. Dempster and A. Knoll, The EU’s Talent Pool is Live, But Will it Attract Skilled Non-EU Migrants?’, [Center for Global Development](#), 21 November 2023

OSCE: *Border police monitoring in South-Eastern Europe: New opportunities.* [OSCE](#), 26 October 2023 [see especially the statistical component].

P. Morland and P. Pilkington, *Migration, Stagnation, or Procreation: Quantifying the Demographic Trilemma*, [ARC Research](#), October 2023