

# Migration Update

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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. Matúš Babulík wrote up information about the parliamentary election in Croatia. Erik Swärdh prepared the Judicial Observatory. Théo Larue supplied an information item. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at [vn@martenscentre.eu](mailto:vn@martenscentre.eu).

- [According](#) to Frontex, between January and November 2023, the following nationalities were most frequently detected **illegally crossing** the EU's external border: Syria: 100,962 (28%), Guinea 19,928 (6%), unspecified sub-Saharan nationals 18,143 (5%) and Côte d'Ivoire 17,165 (5%). The overall increase in the 2023 total was driven by African nationalities, which accounted for almost half of all migrant detections, overtaking Asian migrants.

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## LABOUR IMMIGRATION

According to an [article](#) by A. Vračič and V. Tcherneva that covers non-EU immigration to the Balkans;

- in 2023, nearly 15,000 Nepali workers immigrated to **Croatia**, compared to just 4 in 2017. In 2024, the number of registered foreign workers could reach almost **200,000** with estimates suggesting that by 2030, every fourth worker in Croatia could be a foreigner.
- In 2024, the **Romanian** government raised the annual work permit quota by 40 per cent to **140,000**. In both Romania and **Bulgaria**, a significant percentage of immigrants work in industries that often face labour shortages such as agriculture, construction, healthcare, hospitality, and technology.
- In 2023, **Montenegro** issued 27,700 work permits for foreigners, nearly double the 2016 figure.
- In **Serbia**, the number of foreign workers that came in the first half of 2023 rivalled the total figure for 2022.
- **‘Emigration rates** remain high due to a vicious cycle where poor economic conditions are exacerbated by governments’ failure to implement policies aimed at improving these circumstances and enticing people back home. This then further worsens labour force shortages and the capacity of public services, while leaving small labour markets lacking investment in industries that could spur growth and draw people back’.

The **Italian** government [is](#) planning to issue **425,000 work permits** between 2023 and 2025.

The EU [has](#) made it easier for **Indian nationals** to obtain visas to travel to the bloc. The decision was taken on April 18, because of ‘strengthened relations under the EU-India common agenda on migration and mobility’.

A joint investigation led by Lighthouse Reports with the *FT*, *El País* and *Unbias the News* [shows](#) that most European countries are failing to provide good job opportunities for highly educated migrants, at a potentially significant cost to their labour forces and economies. The findings, which are based on data from the **EU’s labour force survey between 2017 and 2022**, show that nearly half of all migrants with degrees work in roles they are overqualified for, compared with less than a third of natives. Despite widespread demand for highly skilled migrant labour, **migrants with degrees are also unemployed at nearly double the rate of natives**. A note on methodology is [here](#).

## NEW PACT

On 10 April, the plenary of the European Parliament [voted](#) in favour of **10 pieces of legislation** that form the core of the ‘New Pact’ asylum reform package.

The laws approved as provisional agreements are as follows:

- Asylum and Migration Management Regulation
- Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation
- Screening Regulation

- Screening Regulation under the centralised system for the identification of Member States holding conviction information on third-country nationals and stateless persons
- Asylum Procedures Regulation
- Return border Procedure Regulation
- Eurodac Regulation
- Qualification Regulation
- EU Resettlement Framework
- Reception Conditions Directive

A break-down of individual MEP votes is [here](#). The legend to the votes is [here](#). With important exceptions, the set of 10 laws was passed with the support of EPP, Renew and S&D. The ECR Group (itself divided) voted in favour of some bills but against others.

[According to](#) Politico, the NGOs concerned include the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (an alliance of 122 NGOs), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These organisations variously called the pact “cruel” and a “disaster,” saying it would lead to more suffering and less protection of asylum seekers. [...] However, [...] 22 civil society organisations, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Danish Refugee Council and Oxfam, said in a statement that while the pact globally was likely to reduce migrants’ access to protection in Europe, it also “has the potential to bring about a more coordinated, predictable and protection-centred approach to EU resettlement.”

## CYPRUS-LEBANON

A rapid recent increases in migrant numbers from Lebanon [prompted](#) Cyprus to declare a "**state of serious crisis**", president Nikos Christodoulides said on 3 April.

- Cyprus wants EU **aid to Lebanon to be contingent** upon stopping the migrant outflow. The EU has provided €2.6bn in development and humanitarian assistance to Lebanon since 2011.
- 350 Frontex and Europol staff are currently deployed on the ground at the Cypriot frontier.
- IM Constantinos Ioannou [said](#) while the island was expanding its capacity to host refugees, with the help of EU funds, it also wanted Brussels to consider **declaring parts of war-ravaged Syria safe for repatriation**. The IM [visited](#) Denmark, Czechia and Greece to drum up support for a push to get the EU to declare parts of Syria as safe.
- In addition to Syrians, thousands of **Israelis** flocked to the island within weeks of the 7 October Hamas assault that triggered Israel’s retaliatory attack on Gaza.

Al Jazeera [reported](#) on 14 April that Cyprus **suspended the processing** of asylum applications from Syrians. More than 1,000 people arrived in Cyprus on boats from Lebanon in the first two weeks of April. In practice, the measure means asylum seekers will be confined to two reception camps offering food and shelter, with no other benefit. Those who choose to leave those facilities will automatically forfeit any kind of benefit and will not be allowed to work.

In **Lebanon**, Syrians in the northern towns of Kfeifan, Kouba, and Boustane al-Aassi were notified that they [must evacuate their homes](#) within two days. State Security patrols began implementing the 17 April decision by North Lebanon's governor that **Syrians who do not meet the "legal" conditions for displacement, work, or residence** in Lebanon will be expelled from their homes, according to a statement from the General Directorate of State Security... This decision was allegedly in response to an escalation of "security incidents involving Syrian refugees in some areas in the North," but also comes amid rising vigilante violence against Syrians and calls by politicians for their immediate repatriation, despite the serious risks to doing so. Patrols have begun going door-to-door to inspect residents' papers. The North Lebanon Governorate did not specify where the displaced Syrian population is meant to go following their eviction.

- According to the authorities, around 1.5 million Syrians reside in Lebanon, making it the country with the highest refugee population per capita globally. Approximately 800,000 are registered with the UN, although the exact figure remains uncertain.

## EU-TÜRKIYE

[According to](#) a report by the **European Court of Auditors**,

- 'Despite recent improvements, the EU's multibillion-euro funding for refugees in Türkiye could have achieved greater **value for money and shown more impact**, according to a report by the European Court of Auditors. Although the €6 billion Facility for Refugees in Turkey has addressed the needs of refugees and their Turkish host communities, the funded projects are behind schedule, and it is uncertain whether they will be sustained once EU support runs out.
- The sustainability of EU interventions and Türkiye's co-ownership are of paramount importance, so the Commission is working on handing over projects to the Turkish authorities. However, it has only managed to ensure the sustainability of infrastructure projects such as schools and hospitals, but not of socio-economic support (i.e., jobs), while its flagship education and health projects are not sure to continue without EU support. The EU executive also tried to improve the operating environment for international NGOs, but the national authorities' lack of political will dampens the impact of its efforts.'

## FINLAND-RUSSIA

The Finnish government [decided](#) that all land crossing points between Finland and Russia **would remain closed**. 'In addition, the border crossing points for maritime traffic at Haapasaari, the port of Nuijamaa and Santio will be closed to leisure boating as of 15 April... The decision will remain in force until further notice, but no longer than is necessary. By closing border crossing points for maritime traffic to leisure boating, the Government is preparing for the possibility that instrumentalised migration could expand to maritime traffic as spring progresses. This would be dangerous to people seeking to enter Finland and would burden maritime search and rescue. As of 15 April 2024, it will only be possible to submit **applications for international protection** at other [maritime traffic] border crossing points and at border crossing points for air traffic.'

- An **act on measures to combat instrumentalised migration** is being drafted. The act would lay down provisions on the conditions under which the government could decide to restrict the reception of applications for international protection in a limited area on Finland's national border and in its immediate vicinity.

## ITALY-LIBYA

An Italian court [acquitted](#) all crew members of an NGO rescue boat who had been accused of aiding and abetting illegal migration. The verdict, after seven years of proceedings, followed a surprise turn of events in February when prosecutors in Trapani unexpectedly requested the charges be dropped owing to a lack of evidence. The *Luventa*, a rescue vessel operated by the **German NGO Jugend Rettet**, is believed to have saved 14,000 people during its time in the central Mediterranean. Its crews would find distressed vessels and pass those saved on to European military ships or the Italian coastguard.

## HUNGARY

The European Commission has [decided](#) to send a letter of formal notice to Hungary for failing to comply with the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in case C-823/21 Commission v. Hungary. In its ruling of 22 June 2023, the Court found that Hungary had failed to fulfil its obligations under EU asylum rules. In particular, the Court concluded that Hungary violated Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection.

## EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

On 28 March, the "[judges](#) on the European Court of Human Rights announced new guidelines on the **contentious interim orders** that have, among other things, frustrated the UK government's Rwanda deportation scheme for clandestine migrants. The move, which **toughens the criteria for** issuing these 'Rule 39' orders, was greeted in Downing Street as proof that the court recognises the toxicity of the migration issue." The new rules are [here](#).

## UK-RWANDA-IRELAND

On 22 April, the UK Parliament [passed](#) a **Safety of Rwanda Act**.

- 'The internationally binding **Treaty** between the UK and Rwanda addresses the Supreme Court's findings on the partnership last year, introducing measures that **make clear Rwanda will not return anyone to an unsafe country**. The Treaty works hand in hand with the Safety of Rwanda Act, which has now received Royal Assent, and confirms that Rwanda is safe for the purposes of relocating people.
- Home Secretary James Cleverly and Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs... Vincent Biruta signed the Treaty during a ceremony in Kigali in December 2023. On 25 April the [UK] government completed ratification... This allows for the final phase of operational planning to get flights off the ground to Rwanda, to begin.'

[According to](#) the new law, 'It is recognised that— (a) the Parliament of the United Kingdom is sovereign, and (b) the validity of an Act is **unaffected by international**

**law**.... Every decision-maker must conclusively treat the Republic of Rwanda as a safe country’.

The home secretary, James Cleverly, [said](#) it was a “landmark moment in our plan to stop the boats”.

On 29 April, The Guardian [revealed](#) that on the same day ‘the Home Office [would] **launch a major operation to detain asylum seekers across the UK, weeks earlier than expected**, in preparation for their deportation to Rwanda. Officials plan to hold asylum seekers who turn up for routine meetings at immigration service offices or bail appointments and will also pick people up nationwide in a surprise two-week exercise. Detainees will be immediately transferred to detention centres, which have already been prepared for the operation, and held until they are put on planes to Rwanda. Some will be put on the first flight due to take off this summer.’

As the Safety of Rwanda bill was being ratified in the UK Parliament, Ireland’s Minister for Justice Helen McEntee [claimed](#) that the number of **asylum seekers crossing from Northern Ireland into the State is now “higher than 80 per cent”**.

- On 22 March, Ireland’s High Court [ruled](#) that ‘Ireland’s designation of the UK as a “safe third country” to which asylum seekers can be returned for processing **is unlawful** as a matter of EU law’ because of the planned UK-Rwanda scheme.
- Ireland’s Justice Minister McEntee subsequently [stated](#) “I will seek government approval for the legislation to be rapidly drafted so that **the UK can again be designated as a safe country for returns**. “My department has been working on this as a priority since last month’s High Court judgment, and I intend that returns to the UK will recommence once the law is enacted.”
- In response, a UK government source [said](#) the UK “won’t accept any asylum returns from the EU via Ireland until the EU accepts that we can send them back to France.” UK PM Sunak [stated](#) that “**The deterrent is... already having an impact**, because people are worried about coming here and that demonstrates exactly what I’m saying: if people come to our country illegally, but know that they won’t be able to stay, they’re much less likely to come.”

The number of arrivals on small boats from France to the UK is [7,167 so far this year](#), which is higher compared to the same period the year before.

## NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

### Croatia

Croatia held an early parliamentary election on 17 April. Migration was amply present in the parties’ manifestos. The governing **Croatian Democratic Union** (HDZ; EPP) [called](#) for investment in border protection to combat illegal migration. The party also wanted to strengthen migration cooperation with third countries. It voiced support for the adoption of the Migration and Asylum Pact. [According](#) to the **Social Democratic Party of Croatia** (SDP; S&D) the Dublin system is not functional. The party asked for more personnel and material resources for better border control and for stricter sanctions against human traffickers. It also advocated for a common EU response, including humanitarian and economic assistance in the

migrants' countries of origin, and for ensuring the full integration of migrants into society. **We Can!** (Možemo!; Greens) political party in its manifesto [focused](#) on safe legal migration pathways, a humane asylum system and the integration of foreign workers. The right-wing **Bridge** (Most; unaffiliated) expressed a [hard](#) stance, calling for strict border protection, including by deploying the army at critical border points and a stop to accepting asylum requests. The Bridge also emphasises the harmonisation of the visa regime, especially with neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina. The nationalist **Homeland Movement** (DP; unaffiliated) [considered](#) the current migration to be an "invasion" and a threat to Croatian security from which the country needed to be protected. The election results are [here](#).

## JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

### **Luxembourg court ruled that a recognised unaccompanied minor refugee has the right to family reunification in Austria.**

This [ruling](#) concerned a Syrian unaccompanied minor refugee, who had been in Austria since 2015, and his family's application for family reunification in Austria. According to the CJEU's [press release](#), the family that resided in Syria, applied for family reunification after the minor refugee was granted refugee status. The whole family requested to move to Austria as the sister of the minor refugee had a serious illness. The Austrian authorities rejected by the Austrian authorities as the minor refugee had become an adult during the family reunification process. The family challenged the decision at the Administrative Court of Vienna which requested the case to be reviewed by the CJEU. The Court of Vienna also requested whether the sister to the minor refugee had the right of residence if the parents caring for her were granted this right, [Der Standard](#) wrote.

According to an [abstract](#) of the ruling, a member state cannot require that an unaccompanied minor refugee or parents must have, in order to be able to benefit from the right to family reunification within the meaning of Article 7(1) of Directive 2003/86, the following: accommodation, sickness insurance and stable, regular and sufficient resources. This notwithstanding whether the application for family reunification has been submitted within three months of the grant of refugee status. The Court concluded that it is difficult and almost impossible for the minor refugee to meet these conditions. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for the parents to meet them before even having joined the minor refugee in Austria.

Considering the illness the sister of the minor refugee had, the CJEU noted in its [press release](#) the girl was permanently dependent on the assistance of her parents, meaning that they cannot leave her alone in Syria. In addition, if the girl had not been approved for family reunification, the minor refugee would be deprived of his right to family reunification. The Court also noted, among other things, that the right to family reunification cannot depend on how rapidly or slowly the application for international protection is processed.



To sum up, an EU member state must agree to family reunification if the asylum applicant was a minor and present on the EU territory when the application procedure began.

## **MARTENS CENTRE PRODUCTION**

V. Novotný, 'The New Pact and the Differing Positions of Central and East European Member States', in L. Teodorescu, T. Leeb and A. Ostlender (eds.), *Migration and Asylum – Towards a Joint European Response. Next Steps in Implementing the New Pact*, [Istituto Luigi Sturzo and Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung](#), April 2024.

V. Novotný and K. Welle (eds.) *The 7Ds – Demography in Depth*, [Martens Centre](#), April 2024.

P. de Beer, 'Labour migration as a solution to an ageing population?', [European View](#), Spring 2024.

L. Jansen, L. Bernstein and S. Van Hecke, 'Navigating brain drain in the Western Balkans', [European View](#), Spring 2024

## **SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS**

M. Wagner, A. Desmond and A. Kraler, *EU Policy Framework on Irregular Migrants, MIrreM (ICMPD) and University for Continuing Education Krems*, March 2024

M. Hendow and A. Qaisrani *Comparing national laws and policies addressing irregular migrants*, [ICMPD](#), April 2024

M. A. Clemens, *The effect of lawful crossing on unlawful crossing at the US southwest border*, [Peterson Institute for International Economics](#), April 2024

J. Carling, J. Hagen-Zanker and Z. Weisner, *New insights on the causes of migration*, [Mignex](#), April 2024