

# Migration Update

February 2025



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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. Alessandro de Cicco and Gabriele Scalise prepared the material on the German election campaign. Scalise also researched the rulings by Italian courts on the Italy-Albania scheme. Tim Beyer-Helm submitted news items. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at [vn@martenscentre.eu](mailto:vn@martenscentre.eu).

- [According to](#) the OID, the annual number of new residence permits granted in **France** has almost **tripled** since the end of the 1990s. 4 million residence permits are currently valid. This number is 70% higher than in 2007. The ‘first generation’ immigrant population has increased by 40% since 2006, reaching 7.3 million in 2023. The main country of origin remains Algeria. Algerians also [represent](#) the largest contingent of illegal immigrants on French territory.

### Contents

|  |   |
|--|---|
| ITALY-ALBANIA .....  | 2 |
| NEW PACT .....   | 2 |
| SYRIANS .....  | 3 |
| GAZANS .....   | 3 |
| EU-LIBYA.....  | 3 |
| BORDERS .....  | 4 |
| UKRAINIANS.....  | 4 |
| MARRIAGE MIGRATION.....  | 5 |
| ASYLUM, RECEPTION AND THE DUBLIN SYSTEM.....   | 5 |
| REPATRIATIONS.....   | 5 |
| SCHENGEN .....   | 6 |
| USA.....   | 6 |
| NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.....  | 8 |
| Germany.....   | 8 |
| JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY .....   | 9 |
| CJEU: EU law does not preclude beneficiaries of international protection from having to pass a civic integration examination ..... | 9 |
| SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS .....   | 9 |

## ITALY-ALBANIA

On 19 December 2024, Italy's **Supreme Court of Cassation** [ruled](#) that the government has 'the power to define a Safe Country of Origin list for international asylum seekers [...] selecting whether to add or not a specific country to the list, fulfilling the legislator's requirements.

On 30 December 2024, the same Court of Cassation [clarified](#) the powers available to Italian judges when it comes to halting accelerated asylum procedures. The Supreme Court ruled that judges have access to two **legal options to halt accelerated asylum procedures**. The first one is to prove that a country designated by the government as safe, in fact, engages in evident, endemic, and decisive persecution. The second one is to prove that a country, despite being generally safe for most of its citizens, is not safe for the specific asylum seeker, either due to personal political persecution or a risk to their life. The Supreme Court also said that a European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling is needed.

The Italian authorities resumed sending asylum seekers to Albania on 26 January, taking 49 people to an Albanian processing centre. Six people, two adults adjudged vulnerable and four minors, were taken back to Italy. ANSA [reported](#) on 30 January that following videoconference hearings with the Asylum Commission, the asylum applications of all the remaining 43 were found to be 'manifestly unfounded'. However, an appeals court in Rome on 31 January [did not confirm](#) the detention of the migrants and [ordered](#) the entire group, composed of citizens of **Egypt and Bangladesh**, to be **transferred to Italy**. It appears that the transfer to Italy [took place](#) on 6 February. Almost half of the migrants transferred from Albania to Italy subsequently [filed](#) an appeal against the rejection of their asylum requests. The latest ruling marked the third time judges have ordered that migrants be transferred to Italy since a first group was taken to Albania in October 2024. The judges had decided to refer the matter to the ECJ.

[According to](#) PM Meloni, the Italian executive "continues to believe that it is obviously necessary, now urgent, to **revise the 2008 Return Directive**, the concept of safe third country. I think it is important to anticipate the entry into force of what is provided for in the new immigration and asylum pact on the definition of safe country of origin also to provide some clarity on a very controversial issue and the subject of judicial measures that appear to disregard what was established by law by the Italian Parliament... Even the argument of the supremacy of European legislation over Italian legislation, on the basis of which the disapplication of the Italian rule on safe countries would be justified, appears fragile, given that, for example, the largest European country, Germany, repatriates Afghan migrants to Afghanistan without this being deemed by the German judges to be in conflict with European legislation."

European Commission [said](#) it was backing Italy in its quest for innovative solutions.

## NEW PACT

[According to](#) *EU Observer*, three countries have not submitted their implementation plans to the European Commission on enacting the New Pact legislation: **Hungary, Ireland and Poland**. 'Ireland's delay is reportedly linked to a new government

formation... Poland has sent the European Commission a 'note on implementation', which has yet to be shared with civil society dealing with migration in the country. 'Putting together these plans is a complex matter and in many cases member states have thorough internal procedures that need to be followed,' said a European Commission spokesperson, noting that 24 member states have submitted their plans.'

## SYRIANS

[According to](#) Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, some **250,000 Syrians have returned** to their home country since the toppling of the Assad regime. Another 600,000 internally displaced have also gone home.

According to **Cyprus** authorities, "hundreds" of Syrian asylum seekers have recently [withdrawn their applications](#) for asylum in order to return home. However, [according to](#) a joint investigation by the NGO Statewatch and the New Arab and UntoldMag news agencies, the Ministry of the Interior has been "using coercion and deceit to pressure individuals into voluntary returns, at the expense of the country's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights".

[According to](#) the **Austrian** Ministry of the Interior, the number of asylum applications from Syrians has decreased since the overthrow of Assad regime. Separately, the government **intiated the cancellation** of around 2,400 asylum applications. New applications are still being launched. The government registers such applications but does not process them. Almost 80 Syrians have left Austria voluntarily. In addition, the Federal Care and Support Agency (BBU) has held around 440 counselling sessions with Syrians to help them organise their return. If they leave voluntarily, Syrians receive up to 1,000 euros and their protection status is revoked.

## GAZANS

Jordanian King Abdullah II and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi have [rejected](#) Trump's plans to forcibly relocate an estimated 1.9 million Palestinians from Gaza into neighbouring Jordan and Egypt so the US can take over and "own" the territory. Abdullah stated that Jordan is immediately prepared to take **in 2,000 children** who are sick with cancer and other illnesses.

[According to](#) *The Telegraph*, Palestinian migrants have been granted the right to live in the **UK** after applying through a scheme meant for Ukrainian refugees. A family of six seeking to flee Gaza have been allowed to join their brother in Britain after an immigration judge ruled that the Home Office's rejection of their application breached their human rights. The family had made their application through the Ukraine Family Scheme.

## EU-LIBYA

Libyan authorities [have](#) launched a criminal investigation into the Zuwara branch of the Coast Guard, with four of its members detained over allegations of planning to **smuggle 37 migrants** across the Mediterranean.

A man who says he is a victim and witness of the abuse allegedly committed by **Libyan general Osama al-Masri** has filed a [criminal complaint](#) at the Rome prosecutor's office. The complainant alleges that Italian government ministers aided and abetted the suspected war criminal, who is accused of abuse of migrants too. The complaint alleges that Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, Justice Minister Carlo Nordio and IM Matteo Piantedosi aided and abetted the suspected war criminal, wanted by the ICC, who was first arrested in Italy in mid-January, and later sent back to Libya on an Italian plane.

## BORDERS

[According to](#) a report by 9 NGOs, 'illegal pushbacks have become the norm at Europe's borders. In 2024, people were pushed back at least 120,457 times without access to asylum procedures, often with violence. This is the conclusion of a new report by 9 leading human rights organisations working on pushbacks. Pushbacks are a clear violation of European and international law, yet they have become standard practice—with deadly consequences.' The report singles out Bulgaria, Greece and Poland for the highest number of alleged pushbacks and violence at the border.

## UKRAINIANS

**Czechia** [introduced](#) a legal amendment regarding the temporary protection of Ukrainian refugees. The amendment introduces a special long-term residence permit. Persons who are economically self-sufficient, independent of the benefit system and have stayed in Czechia [at least two years](#), will later be able to obtain a regular residence status under the standard regime. The special permit is valid for 5 years. However, the temporary protection status will continue to apply to Ukrainian refugees who do not fulfil the required conditions for obtaining it or who do not express any interest in obtaining it. [According to](#) some observers, only a small fraction of the refugees will be able to fulfil the conditions for long-term residence.

In a scheme that opened on 4 February, Ukrainians already living in **the UK** [can apply](#) for an extension four weeks before their documents expire, granting them a **further 18 months**. This will affect Ukrainians who have arrived in the country since war broke out on emergency three-year visa schemes that will begin to run out in the coming months. Women and children account for more than three-quarters of arrivals. The government has reduced routes for new Ukrainian arrivals to the UK, tightening the eligibility criteria for Britons wishing to host and scrapping the scheme that allowed Ukrainians to join their family members in the UK.

**SURVEY:** More than **85 % of respondents** [believe](#) that the payment of the '800+' benefit to Ukrainian citizens should be **conditional** on living, working and paying taxes in **Poland**, according to a poll by United Surveys for Wirtualna Polska. Only 8.4 per cent of respondents are opposed and 5.7 per cent have no opinion on the issue. [The 800+ benefit in Poland, officially known as the Family 800+ programme, provides 800 złoty (approximately €190) per month per child to eligible families, including Ukrainian refugees.]

SURVEY: [According to](#) a population survey by the STEM company, more than half of the respondents in **Czechia** are in favour of providing support to Ukrainian refugees. The level of support has barely moved since September 2023. 84% thought Ukrainians can stay in the country in the long term, providing they work, learn Czech and respect the law. 54% agreed with the statement that the state should ensure that no more Ukrainians arrive.

## MARRIAGE MIGRATION

Marriages of convenience remain a gateway to obtaining a residence permit in Belgium. In 2024, Belgium's Foreigners' Office [opened](#) 10,128 files concerning potential sham marriages or fraudulent cohabitations. This is slightly more than in 2023.

## ASYLUM, RECEPTION AND THE DUBLIN SYSTEM

The German federal government alone [spends](#) 30 billion euros a year on benefits for refugees and asylum seekers—more than **half the country's defence budget**.

The German authorities [are preparing](#) to open a new “departure centre” on the border with **Poland** that will speed up the return of asylum seekers who have submitted claims for international protection in other EU member states but then moved to Germany.

- Under the so-called **Dublin Regulation**, the EU member state in which an asylum seeker submits their claim for international protection is responsible for processing the case. If the person in question moves in the meantime to another member state, they can be sent back to the country of arrival.
- German newspaper *Bild* reported that the federal government in Berlin and the authorities in the state of Brandenburg, would sign an agreement on establishing a new, so-called “**Dublin centre**” in the town of Eisenhüttenstadt.
- Data from Poland's border guard show that, in the first nine months of 2024 – when the current government was in power – 570 people were returned from Germany to Poland under Dublin procedures. In 2023 – when PiS was in power – 900 such transfers took place across the whole year.

## REPATRIATIONS

### Germany-Afghanistan

[According to](#) *F.A.Z.*, the Taliban had recently shown openness to cooperation on deportations. In return, however, the Islamists want a **consular mission in Germany**. On 15 February, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the deportation of a 24-year-old Afghan man who had driven a car into a trade union demonstration in Munich in which two died and at least 40 were injured. The perpetrator will be returned to his country of origin after serving his sentence.

### France-Algeria

[According to](#) *Le Figaro*, the case of the 37-year-old **Algerian perpetrator** of a knife attack in Mulhouse on 22 February, which left one dead and seven injured, has rekindled diplomatic tensions between Paris and Algiers. Algerian authorities had

**refused ten times** to take back their national before he carried out his act. A senior member of the French border police stated: "The more serious the criminal record of the person to be deported, the less willing the Algerian authorities are to take them back. They are even more intransigent if the person has ties in France." Another prefect was astonished to note that "the Algerian authorities are sometimes more fussy than the French administrative judge about the administrative and family situation of deportable individuals." The national airline Air Algérie has added new administrative demands on the deportation of Algerian nationals. It "requires consular passes even when the individuals scheduled for departure are in possession of valid identity papers", according to French IM Bruno Retailleau. France doesn't manage to deport even some convicted terrorists.

At the end of February, French PM François Bayrou [gave](#) the government in Algiers six weeks to agree to the return to its soil of a list of nationals who Paris wishes to expel. Otherwise, the 1968 agreements facilitating trade between the two countries would lapse. The agreement provides for travel and residence facilities for nationals of both countries.

## SCHENGEN

SURVEY: [According to](#) a poll run by the SW Research agency for the Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita*, 62 % of respondents agreed with the statement that the **EU should reintroduce border controls between** Schengen countries to stop the influx of immigrants. 23% respondents answered 'no' and 15% did not have an opinion.

## USA

### Enforcement

Federal border authorities [deputised](#) Texas National Guard soldiers to arrest and detain immigrants. US Customs and Border Protection acting commissioner Pete Flores and the Texas military department reached an unprecedented agreement last week **allowing some soldiers to perform "the duties and functions of an immigration officer,"** under the supervision of federal authorities while waiving any additional training requirements.

On 6 February, the Trump administration [filed](#) a federal lawsuit against Illinois, Chicago and Cook County, **claiming local laws designed to protect immigrants violate the constitution.** The lawsuit declares a "national crisis" of illegal immigration and asserts a need to enforce federal immigration laws. "This action seeks to put an end to one state's efforts to impede the federal government from doing that," the government writes in the suit.

### Statistics

[According to](#) the WSJ, 'illegal **border crossings plummeted** in the first weeks of the Trump administration, accelerating a trend that started under former President Joe Biden. The Border Patrol made roughly 29,000 arrests in January, according to newly released government data, down from about 47,000 in December. Border Patrol officials have said that the administration's new policy of **completely ignoring**

**asylum claims**—the legality of which is being challenged in court—has meant that migrants, no matter their circumstance, can be quickly deported back to Mexico or loaded onto removal flights.

[According to](#) the MPI, **Mexican** authorities have **apprehended** more migrants every month than their US counterparts at the border since May 2024, with a fraction of the resources and institutional capacity. The current priority for the Mexican government is protecting the rights of the estimated 5.5 million Mexican unauthorised immigrants in the US who may be subject to repatriation under new US policies.

The US [encountered](#) 107,297 inadmissible aliens at **Canadian border** ports of entry in fiscal year 2022, with that number rising to **175,208 in fiscal year 2024**.

‘Organised Canadian and foreign smuggling syndicates have a thriving business in taking people from Canada’s major cities, where they arrive by air, down to the U.S. border over land.’

## Deportations

Mega shelters for deportees set up by the **Mexican** government along the border sit [mostly empty](#), one month after President Donald Trump threatened “mass deportations” on day 1 of his administration. So far, about 2,000 Mexican migrants have set foot in government-operated shelters, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum recently said. Overall, more than 13,455 migrants have been deported to Mexico, according to Sheinbaum. Among them are also 2,970 migrants from countries other than Mexico, including Cuba and Venezuela, Mexican officials say. U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement has long told Congress it **doesn’t have enough funding** to detain all the undocumented immigrants that Trump has promised to arrest.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio [said](#) on 3 February that **El Salvador’s** president has offered to accept deportees from the US of any nationality, including violent American criminals now imprisoned in the US. President Nayib Bukele “has agreed to the most unprecedented, extraordinary, extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world,” Rubio said after meeting with Bukele. Bukele confirmed the offer, saying El Salvador has “offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system.” He said his country would accept **only “convicted criminals”** and would **charge a fee** that “would be relatively low for the US but significant for us, making our entire prison system sustainable.”

**Panama is allowing** US-funded flights of third-country deportees, carrying migrants detained by Panamanian authorities after illegally crossing the Darien Gap from Colombia. The US has provided Panama with financial assistance to the tune of almost \$2.7 million in flights and tickets since an agreement was signed to fund them. The State Department says such deportations send a message of deterrence.

On 10 February, two **Venezuelan** planes [returned home](#) with about 190 Venezuelans deported from the US, signalling a possible thaw in relations between two longtime diplomatic adversaries. Deportation flights from the US to Venezuela have been halted for years except for a brief period in October 2023 during the Biden



administration. Venezuelans began showing up at the US border with Mexico in large numbers in 2021 and are currently one of the largest nationalities entering illegally, making Venezuela's refusal to take them back a major challenge for the US.

**Costa Rica** [was](#) another Central American country to collaborate on repatriating deported migrants from the US since President Donald Trump assumed office. "The process will be completely financed" by the US government under the supervision of the International Organization for Migration. Costa Rica has agreed to receive 200 migrants from countries such as **Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and India**. Migrants deported from the US could be held in Costa Rica for up to six weeks before being sent to their home countries, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves [said](#).

The US also [began using Guantanamo Bay](#) as a "temporary measure" to secure Venezuelans "until they can be transported to their country of origin or other appropriate destination." The first transfer operation on 20 February repatriated 177 Venezuelans via a handoff in Honduras.

One observer [argued](#) that when it comes to securing deportees on US soil, the Trump administration is simply **enforcing the existing law**, unlike the previous administrations. [The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 contains some rather harsh measures on smuggling, transporting, and harbouring illegal migrants.]

## NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

### Germany

An early parliamentary election took place in Germany on 23 February. "Anyone entering Germany from an EU or Schengen Area state who wants to apply for asylum with us is [obviously] not in danger. They will be turned back." In its election programme, the **Christian Democratic Union** (CDU, EPP) advocated for stopping illegal immigration and improving border security, while also [proposing](#) the implementation of Germany's asylum protection in designated safe third countries. CDU aimed to return to the essence of the Geneva Refugee Convention and to work at the EU level to abolish the subsidiary protection status. CDU's proposal for stricter standards regarding financial benefits, and the suspension of family reunions for people receiving subsidiary protection, sought to 'switch off' the pull factors for migration. *See also the CDU / CSU common platform [here](#).*

The **Alternative for Germany** (AfD, ESN) urged 'remigration'. The relevant measures include deportations of irregular migrants and foreign criminals, incentives for voluntary return, and the establishment of detention centres at the country's borders. According to its [programme](#), the party intended also to abolish migration and refugee laws at the UN level, state funding for NGOs. It also wanted to put in place restrictions on work permits for asylum seekers.

The **Social Democratic Party** (SPD, PES) [advocated](#) for what it called "a modern immigration system", with faster asylum procedures and a focus on labour integration programmes. The SPD supported family reunions for the recipients of subsidiary protection. Furthermore, the party said it valued both the obligation to

rescue migrants at sea and the need for clear agreements with countries of origin, fostering regional stability and development of the countries of origin. The **Alliance 90/The Greens** (Greens) in its [programme](#) categorically excluded deportations to conflict or crisis areas, as well as outsourcing asylum procedures to third countries. The programme emphasised Germany's international obligations and humanitarian aid provided in the country, with a strong emphasis on family reunions and social integration. **The Left** (PEL) demanded in its [manifesto](#) that unrestricted work permits are granted to all refugees upon their arrival in Germany. The party also proposed a decentralised, nationwide redistribution of refugees, to which accommodation and free language courses are offered. In addition, the party called for the dissolution of Frontex and the termination of pushbacks. **The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance** (BSW, NI) advocated for ending uncontrolled immigration, stopping the recruitment of skilled workers and speeding up deportations. In its [programme](#), the BSW regarded the EU's asylum law as "dysfunctional" and suggested handling asylum procedures in safe third countries. The Alliance emphasised that people coming from safe third countries should not enjoy the right of residency and should not have access to social benefits. The **Free Democratic Party** (FDP, ALDE) wanted to centralise responsibility for deportations of irregular migrants at the federal level to ensure efficient return processes. Additionally, as stated in the electoral [manifesto](#), FDP supported the designation of more safe countries of origin, the suspension of family reunification for subsidiary protection applicants, and the strengthening of Frontex. Please see the election result [here](#).

## JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

### **CJEU: EU law does not preclude beneficiaries of international protection from having to pass a civic integration examination**

The CJEU [issued](#) a ruling on civic integration on 4 February. The summary of the ruling is as follows: 'Netherlands legislation lays down, particularly for beneficiaries of international protection, an obligation to pass, within a certain period, a civic integration examination. In the event of failure, a fine may be imposed. The Court emphasises the importance of acquiring knowledge, linguistic in particular, for the integration of those persons and notes that the member states have, under certain conditions, the possibility of making participation in civic integration programmes, and the passing of the related examinations, compulsory. However, the personal and highly variable circumstances in which beneficiaries of international protection find themselves must be taken into account. A fine may be imposed only in exceptional cases, such as those demonstrating a proven and persistent lack of willingness to integrate. In addition, making the beneficiary of international protection bear, in principle, the full costs of the courses and examinations of the integration programme constitutes an unreasonable burden.' The full ruling is [here](#).

## SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

A. Nowrasteh and J. Famularo, *Immigrant and Native Consumption of Means-Tested Welfare and Entitlement Benefits in 2022*, [Cato Institute](#), February 2025

J-V. Alipour, J.A.H. Adema, *Steigert Migration die Kriminalität? Ein datenbasierter Blick* [Does migration increase crime? A data-based examination], [Ifo Institute](#), February 2025

D. Hiebert, *Understanding the Impact of Immigration on Demography: A Canadian Case Study*, [Migration Policy Institute](#), February 2025