

Migration Update

March 2025



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

Migration Update March 2025

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. Tim Beyer-Helm submitted news items. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at vn@martenscentre.eu.

- In 2024, over 900,000 **first-time asylum applicants** applied for international protection in EU countries, **down by 13%** compared with 2023. Syrian, Venezuelan and Afghan were the top citizenships of asylum seekers in the EU in 2024. Germany, Spain, Italy and France were the main countries of destination for first-time asylum applicants in 2024. All this according to [data](#) released by Eurostat. 90% of Venezuelans registered in Spain.

Contents

NEW PACT	2
ASYLUM	2
FAMILY REUNIFICATION	3
UKRAINIANS.....	3
SYRIANS	4
POLAND-LATVIA-BELARUS.....	4
UK	5
EU-BANGLADESH.....	5
UK-RWANDA.....	5
THE US.....	5
GLOBAL.....	6
IOM AND UNHCR	7
JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY	7
CJEU rules that a person who is waiting for temporary protection in one member state cannot be denied a residence permit attached to temporary protection in another member state.....	7
Greece’s administrative court annuls designation of Türkiye as safe for refugees of five countries.....	7
MARTENS CENTRE PRODUCTION	8
SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS	8

NEW PACT

In a letter to the member states, European Commission President von der Leyen [announced](#) an additional **€3 billion in EU funding** for the implementation of the Pact for the years 2025 to 2027, including support for member states hosting Ukrainians under temporary protection. An additional €1.6 billion from the mid-term review of member states' programmes will also address urgent needs and complement the Pact's funding, which will require adjustments in national budgets, the letter added.

The European Commission 'has hardened its official line' on **Poland** and committed to [launching legal action](#) against the country if it fails, as it has openly threatened, to comply with the Pact on Migration and Asylum. "If EU legislation is violated, it is the prerogative of the Commission to open an infringement process," the chief spokesperson said, noting that this would only happen if "the worst" - meaning non-compliance - came to pass.

On 12 March, the European Commission [proposed](#) 'to establish a **Common European System for Returns**... Called for by the European Council in October 2024, the new legal framework for returns constitutes a key piece to complement the Pact on Migration and Asylum ...'

The proposal includes:

- common procedures for the issuance of return decisions and a European Return Order
- mutual recognition of return decisions
- clear rules on forced return, while incentivising voluntary return: Forced returns will be mandatory in certain circumstances
- explicit obligations for returnees cooperate with national authorities throughout the entire return procedure... Incentives to cooperate will be strengthened, including support for voluntary return.
- stricter rules to limit abuse and manage absconding: ...The new rules set out clear conditions for detention if there is a risk of absconding as well as alternatives to detention. Detention may go up to 24 months, compared to 18 months currently. In addition, the suspensive effect of return decisions will no longer be automatic, unless there are issues related to non-refoulement.
- specific rules for people posing a security risk
- readmission as part of the return process
- return hubs... This proposal introduces the legal possibility to return individuals who are illegally staying in the EU and have received a final return decision, to a third country based on an agreement or arrangement concluded bilaterally or at EU level.

[Here](#) is the Proposal for a **Regulation**, establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, and repealing Directive 2008/115/EC... Council Directive 2001/40/EC and Council Decision 2004/191/EC.

ASYLUM

On 18 March, the **Spanish** government [approved](#) a reform of the Law on Foreigners that will allow the **distribution of nearly 6,000 unaccompanied immigrant minors**

in Spain's 17 regions after reaching an agreement with the Catalan separatist JxCat party. The Spanish executive aims to alleviate the migratory pressure affecting the **Canary Islands**, which suffers from constant waves of migrants making the dangerous crossing by sea in fragile boats from West African countries. It also aims to alleviate the migratory pressure on **Ceuta and Melilla**, the two Spanish enclaves in northern Africa. The distribution of immigrant minors among Spain's 17 autonomous communities will be based on population (number of inhabitants in each region), level of migratory pressure and local unemployment figures, among other criteria. Catalonia will take in only between 20 and 30 minors. In 2024, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior [reported](#) a record-high number of irregular arrivals in the Canary Islands. The countries of origin included Mali, Senegal, and Morocco.

Poland's PM Donald Tusk [indicated](#) that his country will **no longer comply** with the **Dublin Regulation**. "We know very well there is an agreement on so-called readmission between Poland and Germany... In addition, there is the so-called Dublin [system], i.e., the treaty obligations of European countries that, if someone registers as an asylum seeker then travels to another country, that other country has the right to turn them back....I informed my German partners...[that], because of the migration pressure, because of how many refugees we have from Ukraine, because we have this problem on the eastern border, Poland will not implement these points of the treaty... We will not accept migrants from other European countries."

On 26 March, Polish President Andrzej Duda [signed](#) into law a bill that will allow **Poland's government to suspend the right to claim asylum** for people who enter the country as part of the 'instrumentalisation of migration', as has been happening on the border with Belarus. An interior ministry regulation is required to define the area in which suspension will apply and how long it will apply for (up to 60 days, after which it can only be renewed with the approval of parliament). 'Exceptions have been carved out for unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, and the elderly.' The following day, 27 March, the government [adopted](#) a decision to trigger the new legislation. The decision into force on the day of its announcement.

- [According to](#) a Commission spokesman, "it is crucial to recall the current context. There are hybrid threats arising from the weaponisation of migration by Russia." The Commission says it's too early to tell if the law abides by EU law, noting they are in contact with Polish authorities to assess its provisions.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

On 12 March, the new Austrian government [ordered](#) an **immediate halt** to family reunifications **for asylum claimants** as it seeks to address widespread concern about immigration that has stoked support for the far-right. Invoking EU emergency provisions relating to national security, the three-party coalition of ÖVP (EPP), SPÖ (PES) and NEOS (ALDE) said it was temporarily freezing all follow-on rights for family members of people granted asylum in Austria.

UKRAINIANS

Ukrainians [pay](#) more into the **Polish state budget** in taxes than they receive in benefits, a report by Poland's National Development Bank has concluded. The

research also indicated that Ukrainians – who number around 1.5 million, making them by far Poland’s largest immigrant group – contribute between 0.5% and 2.4% to Poland’s annual GDP growth. According to the report, since 2013 the Polish labour market has been experiencing an almost continuous decline in unemployment. The lack of personnel is becoming an increasingly important barrier to growth.

SYRIANS

[According to](#) the IOM, since January 2024 a total of **571,388 individuals have returned to Syria from abroad**, of whom 259,745 returned to the country after November 2024. About 76 per cent of arrivals from abroad returned to their place of origin, while others returned to another location likely due to significant damage and security concerns in their place of origin. Fifty percent of Syrians returning from outside the country came from **Lebanon**, 22 per cent from **Türkiye** and 13 per cent from **Iraq**.

The Lebanese FM Joe Rajji [said](#) that the return of ‘Syrian refugees [residing in **Lebanon**] is now imperative... Prolonging their displacement goes against any political logic and only worsens their tragedy.’ Citing a UNHCR survey, Rajji emphasised that about 355,000 Syrians ‘would be ready to return from Lebanon over the next 12 months, provided they receive financial and material support.’

POLAND-LATVIA-BELARUS

Poland [has increased](#) the number of troops on the border with Belarus to **11 thousand**. “We have achieved 98 percent efficiency in [detections], which means that 98 attempts to illegally cross the border were prevented thanks to the resolute position of our soldiers, the Border Guard and the police,” PM Donald Tusk said. **Belarus continues** to encourage migrants to cross the Polish border. Between 14 and 16 March, some 280 attempts to cross were made, ‘almost all of them thwarted. Testimonies are emerging of sexual violence against women and girls attempting to enter Poland from Belarus.

Latvia's government [announced](#) that it will strengthen border controls with Russia and Belarus once again, citing security concerns over an influx of migrants orchestrated by Russia. Entry at checkpoints will be restricted to motor vehicles only. Sixty Frontex officers were deployed at the Latvian border on February 19 this year. Frontex has also brought off-road patrol vehicles to help strengthen their border patrols and deploy border surveillance techniques.

[According to](#) Frontex, most of the **border crossers** from the east to the EU ‘are a mix of nationalities from Russia, Sudan and Ukraine... **Fewer than 1,000** irregular crossings were detected in the first two months of this year. (One person may be detected multiple times.) That figure spans the entire **6,000km long land border** between Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the EU member states — Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, as well as Norway. For its part, the Polish border guard on X said more than 2,200 attempts were made from Belarus so far this year up until 21 March.’

UK

The [UK government](#) is rolling out '**Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)** for the millions of visitors who pass through the UK border every year. From [5 March], eligible Europeans can apply for an ETA and will need one to travel to the UK from Wednesday 2 April 2025. This expansion follows the successful rollout of ETAs to all eligible non-European nationals last year, which includes visitors from the USA, Canada and Australia who now need an ETA to travel. Almost 1.1 million visitors have been issued with ETAs and will benefit from smoother, easier travel to the UK for short trips in the future.'

EU-BANGLADESH

The Commission [allocated](#) €76 million in EU humanitarian to address the needs of people affected by the main crises in South and Southeast Asia. Out of this amount, €32.3 million will support **Rohingya refugees** living in Bangladesh.

UK-RWANDA

Rwanda [is asking](#) the UK for a 50 million-pound (\$63.62 million) payment over a cancelled asylum deal, a source close to the government in Kigali said, after London **paused some bilateral aid** to the African country over the war in Congo.

THE US

US Border Patrol [arrested](#) **8,300 migrants at the southern border** in February, the lowest monthly level on record. Border Patrol's monthly enforcement statistics go back to 2000. Migrant arrests are often used as a proxy to estimate illegal crossings. The February arrest total was a steep drop from the 141,000 migrants picked up in February 2024 and down from 29,000 in January, according to U.S. government figures.

Trump **deported** 37,660 people during his first month in office..., **far less than the monthly average of 57,000 removals** and returns in the last full year of Biden's administration. The figures include both ICE "removals" and more informal U.S. Customs and Border Protection "returns" to Mexico.

On 15 March, a federal judge barred President Donald Trump from using a wartime powers act to deport alleged [Venezuelan](#) gang members without a hearing, ordering the administration to turn around any planes that had already taken off after the Alien Enemies Act quietly went into effect. Trump signed a proclamation on 14 March to deploy the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 for the first time since World War II to **swiftly remove Venezuelans** allegedly involved in the transnational gang known as Tren de Aragua. White House claimed immigration officials had "arrested nearly 300 Tren de Aragua terrorists" over the weekend and sent them to **El Salvador**.

- Flight records [reviewed](#) by The *Washington Post* show that three flights bound for El Salvador arrived **after** a judge barred deportations. The White House press secretary also [asserted](#) in a statement that the federal courts "have no jurisdiction" over the president's conduct of foreign affairs or his power to expel foreign enemies.

- [According to *El País*](#), the flight, which arrived in El Salvador on 15 March with 261 people on board, is the first in a deal brokered by presidents Bukele and Trump, and about which almost nothing is known. The only public information available so far is that the Salvadoran president offered to turn a facility called the Terrorism Confinement Center into an extension of the US prison system in exchange for a payment of \$20,000 per individual per year. According to the Salvadoran president, the government will earn around \$6 million a year from the first shipment of deportees alone.

Roughly one-third of US adults (32%) say all immigrants living in the country illegally should be deported, while 16% say none should be deported. **About half (51%) say at least some should face deportation.** This is according to a [Pew Research](#) survey just published.

The Trump administration is [ending legal status](#) for more than 500,000 migrants from **Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela**, according to a notice posted by the Department of Homeland Security. DHS said it would be rescinding “categorical parole programmes for inadmissible aliens” from the listed countries and their immediate family members. Migrants in the programmes have been told they have to leave the country by April 24.

According to [one observer](#), Trump has ‘declared war on immigration attorneys’.

Based on interviews, Reuters [reported](#) that ‘federal agents who usually hunt down child abusers are now cracking down on immigrants who live in the US illegally. Homeland Security investigators who specialise in money laundering are raiding restaurants and other small businesses looking for immigrants who aren’t authorised to work.... Federal prosecutors, who typically handle a variety of crimes, have been inundated with immigration cases.’

The Trump administration [shut down three watchdog agencies](#) in the Department of Homeland Security on Friday, gutting the offices responsible for conducting oversight of the implementation of immigration policies.

Germany, Denmark, and Finland have [warned their citizens](#) that the US may **deny entry to transgender and nonbinary tourists** since the US Electronic System for Travel Authorization used by Europeans for visa-free travel doesn’t allow foreign visitors to select anything other than “male” or “female.” Germany and Denmark both allow their citizens to designate “X” as their gender on passports.

The US Green Card lottery programme [continues operating](#).

GLOBAL

At least 8,938 people [died on migration routes](#) worldwide in 2024, making it the deadliest year on record, according to new data collected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The 2024 toll continues a five-year trend of more deaths each year and last year’s toll tops the previous record in 2023, when 8,747 migrant deaths were recorded.

IOM AND UNHCR

The IOM [is implementing](#) essential structural adjustments at its Geneva headquarters and globally to align with the unavoidable financial realities following an unprecedented **30 per cent reduction in estimated donor funding for the year**, including a major decrease in US-funded projects worldwide. The reduction in funding has severe impacts on vulnerable migrant communities, exacerbating humanitarian crises and undermining vital support systems for displaced populations. Further, this adjustment includes scaling back or ending projects affecting over 6,000 staff members worldwide and implementing a structural realignment at headquarters, reducing headquarters staffing by approximately 20 per cent (more than 250 staff).

Filippo Grandi, head of UNHCR [warned staff](#) that he is preparing to implement a “significant reduction in the size of our workforce,” noting that there is “important work that we simply cannot afford to continue.” The 75-year-old UNHCR is contemplating cuts of as many as 5,000 to 6,000 workers, according to a separate UN official.

JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

CJEU rules that a person who is waiting for temporary protection in one member state cannot be denied a residence permit attached to temporary protection in another member state

According to the EU Law Analysis blog, on 27 February 2025 the Court of Justice delivered its judgment in [Case C-753/23](#).... The judgment concerns Article 8(1) of the Temporary Protection Directive, which requires member states to provide temporary protection beneficiaries with residence permits. The Court held that a person eligible for temporary protection who has applied for temporary protection and a residence permit in one member state but has not yet received it, cannot be denied a residence permit attached to a temporary protection status in another member state solely on that basis. Moreover, the Court reaffirmed in this case the right to appeal a decision on the inadmissibility of an application for a residence permit linked to temporary protection status.

Greece’s administrative court annuls designation of Türkiye as safe for refugees of five countries

Greece’s top administrative court has [annulled](#) a joint ministerial decision characterising Türkiye as a ‘safe country’ for refugee applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. On 27 February 2025, the [Plenary Session of the Council of State](#) met in conference on five cases related to (a) the establishment of a national list of safe third countries that includes Türkiye as a safe third country for applicants for international protection whose country of origin is **Syria, Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia**; and b) decisions of the Independent Appeal Authorities rejecting as inadmissible applications for international protection on the basis of the designation of Türkiye as a safe third country.

The Court held, by a majority, that from the information in the file accompanying the joint decision of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Immigration and Asylum 538595/12.12.2023 "Determination of third countries designated as safe and establishment of a national list as provided for in Article 91 of Law No. 4939/2022, it does not appear from the recommendation of the Commander of the Asylum Service that the criteria set out in Article 91 were duly assessed for the designation of Türkiye as a safe third country for the aforementioned categories of foreigners." The recommendations [were] limited to a list of the texts of the international sources taken into account, without specifically assessing the information contained in the sources in relation to the criteria laid down in the law, in order to substantiate the existence of the legal conditions for designation. The Court therefore held that the above **Joint Ministerial Decision should be annulled** in so far as it concerns the designation of Türkiye as a safe third country for applicants for international protection whose country of origin is Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia.

Furthermore, the Court unanimously held that the individual decisions of the Independent Appeals Committees rejecting the applications for international protection of the applicants, who are foreign nationals of **Afghan nationality**, on the ground that they entered Greece from Türkiye, which is a safe third country, should be annulled. That is because, since it is apparent from the information on the file that Türkiye has generally suspended the readmission of applicants for international protection to its territory since March 2020, the competent Greek authorities... **cannot reject applications for international protection as inadmissible** on the basis of Article 33(1)(b) of the ECHR and article 2(c) of Directive 2013/32/EU (asylum procedures) and the corresponding provision of national law on the ground that Türkiye is a safe third country.

[According to EU Observer](#), 'up until last week, Greece would simply reject any asylum application from those five countries on the premise that Turkey is safe for their return. The court's decision to bin a Greek ministerial decision characterising Turkey as a safe country for refugees now means Greece has to look at each claim individually.'

MARTENS CENTRE PRODUCTION

Migration and Asylum in the EU: Challenges and Solutions - [Thinking Talks](#) Ep. 20 with Lena Düpont MEP, 26 March 2025.

SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

Kamalov E., Nugumanova K. and Sergeeva I. (2025). *On the Move: Mobility, Integration, and Dynamics of Russian Emigration in 2022-2024*, [OutRush](#), February 2025