

# 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. Tim Beyer-Helm, Andris Petersons and Claudia Masi submitted news items for this issue. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at [vn@martenscentre.eu](mailto:vn@martenscentre.eu).

- In the year 2023, **2.7m new asylum applications** were lodged in OECD countries, more than the nearly 1.7m a year during the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, [according to](#) *The Economist*, citing OECD data.

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## EU POPULATION

On 1 January 2025, the EU population [was estimated](#) at 450.4 million inhabitants, **1 million more than the previous year**. This was the fourth consecutive year in which the EU population grew, following a decrease in 2021 caused by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The observed population growth can be largely attributed to the **increased migratory movements** post-COVID-19. Since 2012, the negative natural change (more deaths than births) in EU population has been outnumbered by the positive net migration.

## EU BUDGET

On 16 July, the European Commission [presented](#) its proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2028 to 2034.

- ‘The Commission is proposing **€81 billion** in the area of Home Affairs to make Europe safer and more secure, to equip the EU with stronger external borders and to implement a fair and firm migration management system. This **triples funding** compared to the previous budget period.’ See details [here](#).
- Among the budget proposals is a new **€200.3 billion Global Europe** instrument... ‘While [this represents](#) a 75% increase compared to current levels [of external funding], the increase is significantly less generous than it appears once inflation is factored in... The most significant change is the removal of all spending targets (for instance, 30% for climate, 10% for migration and 20% of official development assistance for human development), according to the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). [A suspension clause](#) [Article 12(3) of the [Global Europe proposal](#)] grants the Commission the power to suspend support if a country fails to readmit its nationals. ‘This marks a significant hardening of conditionality, shifting from a general imitative approach to a clear mechanism of negative leverage tied to readmission cooperation’.

## SCHENGEN

From 7 July, Poland [introduced](#) **temporary controls on its borders with Germany and Lithuania**. According to PM Donald Tusk (EPP) ‘Germany was sending irregular migrants to Poland’ and, with regard to Lithuania, that ‘Poland had “a lot of effort, money, sweat and, unfortunately, some blood, to make the eastern border with Belarus airtight.”’ Polish media reported [that](#) Germany returned around 1,000 migrants to Poland between May and mid-June, **a figure not significantly different from previous years**.

Groups of [‘citizen patrols’](#) have gathered on the Polish side of the border with Germany to demonstrate against the returns of migrants. Germany sends back to Poland migrants [‘under a combination](#) of EU regulations, bilateral agreements with Poland, and border checks that were reinstated in 2023. Many of those sent back are Ukrainians. Others are non-Europeans, often from Asia and Africa, who have either claimed asylum in Poland – and therefore must remain there while their applications are processed – or have simply passed through it after entering the EU irregularly.... Some migrants who irregularly enter Latvia and Lithuania across the border from Belarus subsequently make their way west through Poland.’ The Polish

ministry of the interior [commented](#) that “We are mostly dealing with foreigners who were in Poland (most of them legally) and who then attempt to enter Germany but are denied entry due to border controls.”

On 4 July, Polish Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz (EPP) [rejected](#) a proposal by the German IM Alexander Dobrindt (EPP) for joint border controls. “On the German side, there are German patrols; on the Polish side, there will be Polish ones. The minister from Germany will not tell us what to do in Poland. With sympathy, with respect, but we will protect Polish borders [ourselves].”

Lithuania ‘responded to the situation by calling for closer cooperation between the two countries, but stressed that it would not implement its own controls along its shared border with Poland. Lithuania's FM Kęstutis Budrys (ind.) [said](#) that the country “has no plans to reintroduce border controls”.

## FAMILY MIGRATION

**Belgium** has [decided](#) to restrict the conditions of access to family reunification for migrants. Under the new guidelines, refugees will only have six months to submit their application to bring in one or more family members. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, those who do not have refugee status, will have to wait two years before they can submit their application.

Afghan migrants [have brought](#) as many as 22 family members **to the UK** after relatives previously rejected for asylum were allowed in following a military data breach.

## LIBYA-TUNISIA-EU

Between 1 January and 30 July 2025, **36,545 migrants** [landed](#) in Italy after they had crossed the Mediterranean. This represents a small increase when compared to the same period of 2024 (33,035) and large decrease when compared to the same period of 2023 (88,464).

Euractiv.com [reported](#) on 2 July that a spike of arrivals from Libya to.. the shores of Crete and Gavdos... prompted ‘Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen to dispatch her migration commissioner to the region... Diplomatic sources in Athens have attributed Libya’s recent migration pressure to a **Greek government** decision to publish a call for tenders for exploration and exploitation licenses for offshore blocks south of Crete...’

“Russia’s role in Libya continues to expand, using it as the central node in its African strategy,” [warned](#) one EU diplomat... The diplomat added that a politically connected smuggling network in Libya was supporting Russia’s strategic efforts, helping Moscow to circumvent sanctions and to weaponize migration... “I don’t see the Russians taking over” the migrant smuggling business, said [one observer] but “I see the Russians telling the people: Now I’m the new ruler and you just follow my orders.” The authorities in the east [control most migration routes](#) out of Libya.

On 8 July, ‘EU Migration Commissioner Magnus Brunner [was ejected from Benghazi](#) as “persona non grata”... over an apparent breakdown in diplomatic

protocol. He had been leading a delegation of senior EU representatives... [This] unfolded when the EU party visited the UN-recognized government in Tripoli, in western Libya, then arrived in Benghazi in the east, which is controlled by Russia-aligned warlord Khalifa Haftar.' 'The immediate expulsion [also applied](#) to Matteo Piantedosi, Italy's minister of interior, and a delegation of Greek and Maltese officials.'

[Greece](#) will **stop processing asylum applications** from people coming from North Africa for three months after a rise in arrivals, PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on 9 July. Sea arrivals from northeastern Libya of migrants trying to cross to Europe through Crete [have reached](#) 8,000 migrants since the start of 2025. That compares with around 5,000 in the whole of 2004 for entire Greek southern coast. "With legislation that will be submitted to the parliament tomorrow, Greece will suspend the examination of asylum applications, initially for three months, for those arriving in Greece from North Africa by sea."

## BELARUS-EU

*Der Bild* [described](#) the current situation on the Belarus border. The migrants' route takes them via Moscow (Russia), Doha (Qatar), Istanbul (Türkiye) and **Benghazi (Libya)** to Minsk. From there, Lukashenko has them transported to the border. In buses – with tools in their luggage to sabotage the border guards. Currently, **78 passenger planes fly from Turkey to Belarus every week** – in April, there were only 20. 'Almost every person in the groups arriving at the EU's external borders can speak Russian.' Many of the migrants are extremely aggressive, and attacks on officials are on the rise. The majority are young men between the ages of 25 and 40. This year so far, 20,583 illegal entries from Belarus into the EU have already been prevented [the article does not mention the number of successful entries].

## FRANCE-UK

French authorities began **slashing the boats carrying migrants** from the French shore across the Channel to the UK. Now, under pressure from UK authorities, France's government is preparing to [give an even freer hand to police patrols](#) that in the first week of July, were twice filmed slashing boats carrying men, women and children. The UK is also pushing France to go further and let officers intervene against boats in deeper waters, a change the government in Paris is considering.

Nearly 20,000 people [arrived](#) in the UK in the first half of this year by crossing the English Channel in small boats — up 48 percent on the first six months of 2024 and the [highest number](#) for the first six months of a year so far.

On 10 July, the French and UK governments [agreed](#) a '**new pilot scheme** [that] will see small boat arrivals being returned to France, with an equal number of migrants then being able to come to the UK from France through a new legal route – fully documented and subject to strict security checks. The pilot agreement is intended to prevent illegal migrant journeys across Europe to the UK and prevent dangerous small boat crossings, helping to undermine the business model of organised gangs profiting from people's misery by showing others these journeys could result in them being returned back to France – ultimately saving lives. Both countries are working

to implement the pilot in the coming weeks, and, once in force, migrants who cross the Channel by small boat can be detained and removed.'

- [According to](#) French President Macron, 'the scheme had yet to be ratified by the EU.'
- UK PM Keir Starmer 'said the pilot "one in, one out" scheme would have a "deterrent effect" beyond the numbers actually returned.
- Officials have refused to confirm the precise number likely to be returned but the French initially anticipate up to 50 a week, equivalent to 2,600 in a year, or one in 17 of the 44,000 who have crossed since Labour won the election.
- Starmer pledged that numbers would grow if the trial was successful in breaking the people smugglers' business model by showing migrants that they were likely to be returned if they entered the UK illegally...
- Under the deal, migrants arriving from France on small boats will be **denied asylum and detained under powers that enable their claims to be declared inadmissible** because they have arrived from a "safe" country. They will then be returned to France "as soon as possible".
- In return, a similar number of migrants of any nationality in France will be **allowed to claim asylum in the UK via an online platform**. The system will not only prioritise asylum seekers with family connections in the UK but also those from countries which have the highest number of Channel crossings and highest success rates in asylum claims. These currently include Eritreans, Afghans and Iranians.'

## RETURNS

**Algeria** continues to [refuse to readmit](#) its nationals from **France** even though these individuals have criminal records, including some suspected of Islamist tendencies. The Algerian authorities are citing the lack of consular documents as the reason. In response, IM Bruno Retailleau (EPP) [took](#) a series of measures targeting senior Algerian officials... The aim of these measures is to try to force the Algerian government to take back its nationals who are illegally present on French territory.

## RUSSIANS

In 2024, the EU increased the number of visas issued to Russian citizens. [According to EU Observer](#), citing European Commission statistics, consulates of the member states issued **552,630 new Schengen visas in 2024**, some nine percent more than in 2023.

- Italy issued 152,254 visas, almost 19,000 more than in 2023.
- France issued 123,890 visas in 2024, 25,000 more than in 2023
- Spain issued 111,537, 15,000 more than in 2023.

This brings the total number of Schengen visas issued to Russian citizens close to the year 2022, when 681,000 visas were issued. The figures cover 'work and study visas as well as tourism, the bulk of the mass-scale visits were pleasure trips.'

## SYRIANS

**Asylum applications** from Syrians in the EU [fell](#) from roughly 16,000 in October 2024 to 3,100 in May 2025. 'In Germany, a destination popular with Syrian



applicants, overall asylum claims in May dropped by about half to 9,900, from 18,700 filed the same month last year.... For the past decade, Syrians had been the largest group of asylum seekers in the EU, plus Norway and Switzerland, “but at the beginning of 2025 this trend reversed with Syrian applications dropping sharply”, an EUAA report said.

**Denmark** is currently [paying](#) Syrian families with Danish residency €70,000-€80,000 to repatriate. Some 800-900 families have opted into the scheme, which is open to other nationalities but mainly used by Syrians.

## AFGHANS

As part of a collective repatriation, Germany [deported](#) 81 Afghan nationals to their country of origin. These are Afghan men who are required to leave the country and have a criminal record. This [is](#) the second deportation flight from Germany to Afghanistan since the takeover of the Taliban in 2021

## EXTERNAL BORDERS

On 18 July, the Council [adopted](#) an EU law that will make it possible to start the new **Entry/Exit digital border management system** (EES) in a gradual way over a period of six months. The EES will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of controls at the EU’s external borders. The new system will digitally record entries and exits, data from the passport, fingerprints, and facial images of non-EU nationals travelling for short stays in an EU member state.

- The new rules enable those member states who wish to implement the EES gradually over a 180 days period to do so, while making it possible for others to start operating the system fully from day one.
- EU countries should all reach full registration, including biometric data, of all individuals in the EES by the end of the six months period.
- The EES will start operating progressively at a date to be determined by the European Commission.

## THE US

### Illegal migrants

The Trump administration has [declared](#) that immigrants who arrived in the US illegally are no longer eligible for a bond hearing as they fight deportation proceedings in court. In a memo, the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, told officers that such immigrants should be **detained** “for the duration of their removal proceedings,” which can take months or years. Lawyers say the policy **will apply to millions of immigrants** who crossed the US-Mexico border over the past few decades, including under the Biden administration. The provision is based on a section of immigration law that says unauthorized immigrants “shall be detained” after their arrest, but that has historically applied to those who recently crossed the border and not longtime residents.

### Deportations

On 7 July, 8 men deported from the US in May and held under guard for weeks at an American military base in **Djibouti** while their legal challenges played out in court

[reached](#) the Trump administration's intended destination, war-torn **South Sudan**, a country the State Department advises against travel to due to "crime, kidnapping, and armed conflict."

The Trump administration [deported](#) five immigrants described as "depraved monsters" to the tiny African kingdom of **Eswatini**, after the Supreme Court lifted restrictions on banishing people to third countries. The five men — from Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen and Laos — were "so uniquely barbaric that their home countries refused to take them back", Washington said.

Confrontations erupted between protesters and federal officials carrying out raids on farms employing illegal workers, [such as](#) on 10 July on a Southern California farm, with authorities throwing canisters that sprayed what looked like smoke into the air to disperse the crowd.

Deportation flights from the remote Everglades immigration lockup known as **Alligator Alcatraz** [have begun](#) and are expected to increase soon, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said on 25 July. The first flights operated by the Department of Homeland Security have transferred about 100 detainees from the immigration detention centre to other countries. Two or three flights have already departed, but officials **didn't say where those flights headed**.

The US [is deporting](#) people **more slowly** than during the Obama administration. Between February and June, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials removed 84,473 people — a rate of roughly **16,900 people per month**. In fiscal year 2016, ICE removed 240,255 people from the country, a rate of more than **20,000 people per month**. In fiscal year 2012 — the peak year for deportations under Obama — the agency removed an average of roughly 34,000 people per month.

## CLIMATE MIGRATION

According to Fareed Zakaria's email newsletter, [quoting Nikkei Asia](#), many citizens of **Tuvalu** are "now hoping to acquire the world's **first climate migration visa** that will allow 280 Tuvaluans to move every year to Australia, where they will have the right to live, study, and work without restrictions. The inaugural ballot opened on 16 June and closes 18 July. The most recent available official data show that as of 11 July a total of 5,157 applications had been submitted, accounting for nearly half of the small Pacific island nation's population of 11,000."

## JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

### Italy's Constitutional Court rules that detention of NGO rescue ships is constitutional

On 8 July, Italy's Constitutional Court [ruled](#) that the administrative detention of NGO rescue ships under the Italian government's [decree](#) of 2023 does not violate the country's constitution. The decision reaffirmed the legality of measures imposed by Giorgia Meloni's government to regulate migrant rescue operations in the Mediterranean. The case was brought by *SOS Méditerranée* after its vessel, the *Ocean Viking*, was detained in early 2024 for allegedly failing to follow orders from



Italian authorities. The Ocean Viking had carried out three separate rescue operations in international waters off the Libyan coast, saving 261 people. Under the Italian government's decree, the ship was expected to perform only one rescue before heading directly to the assigned port. While the Court reaffirmed that saving lives at sea is a duty, it rejected claims that the decree allowing the detention of the NGO ship violates the constitution. In its decision, the Court stated that the rules clearly define what is lawful and unlawful, preventing arbitrary enforcement. The detention of ships is considered a punitive measure, but one that is neither disproportionate nor unreasonable. See the ruling [here](#).

## **MARTENS CENTRE PRODUCTION**

V. Novotný, *EU Development Aid and Migration: Clearing up Misconceptions*, [Martens Centre](#), July 2025

## **SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS**

European Migration Network, *European Migration Network Asylum and Migration Overview (AMO) 2024*, [EMN](#), July 2024

UNHCR, *Forecasting refugee return to Ukraine amid ongoing war and uncertainty*, [UNHCR](#), July 2024