

Migration Update

August-September 2025



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

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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. Oleksandra Antypenko covered the Norwegian and Moldovan elections. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at vn@martenscentre.eu.

- Immigration to the EU has declined, according to newly [issued](#) immigration flow data for 2024. In that year, the proximate number for total immigration (the number of first residence permits for stays longer than 12 months for family migration, education and employment plus first asylum applications plus [new instances](#) of temporary protection) was **3,533,000**, as opposed to **4,103,000** in 2023. The biggest decreases occurred on temporary protection and asylum.

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ASYLUM

[According to](#) the EUAA, by the end of June, EU+ countries received 399,000 asylum applications, **a 23 % decrease year-over-year**. A two-thirds drop in Syrian applications meant that Germany was no longer the main receiving EU+ country, with both France and Spain receiving more applications. Most applications continued to be lodged by citizenships with low recognition rates in the EU+. **Venezuelans** [with a very low recognition rate for asylum but with an extremely high recognition rate for a Spanish humanitarian status and arriving in Schengen visa-free] became the largest nationality group to apply for asylum in the first half of 2025.

As of 4 August, **Belgium** [began refusing](#) asylum to people who have applied for international protection in another EU member state as a way to end 'asylum shopping'.

UKRAINIANS

On 16 September, the 'Council agreed on a [common framework](#) for displaced Ukrainians to ensure a sustainable return and reintegration into Ukraine, when conditions allow, as well as a gradual transition to other residence statuses for those eligible. With this **recommendation** the EU is preparing for a coordinated approach for when conditions in Ukraine are conducive to phasing out the temporary protection status. The recommendation also contains measures to ensure information provision to displaced persons and measures to ensure coordination, monitoring and exchange of information among member states and Ukraine....

- Member states are called upon to offer displaced Ukrainians national residence permits, issued for instance on grounds related to employment, training, education or family grounds, if the persons meet certain conditions.
- People enjoying temporary protection should also be allowed to apply for statuses under EU law, for instance related to highly qualified employment. It is not possible to hold statuses under EU law simultaneously with benefitting from temporary protection.'

EU temporary protection is currently set to [expire in March 2027](#).

On 31 July 2025, **4.34 million non-EU citizens** who fled Ukraine as a consequence of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine [had](#) temporary protection status in the EU. The EU countries hosting the highest number of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine were Germany (1,203,715 people; 27.7% of the EU total), Poland (993,665; 22.9%) and Czechia (380,680; 8.8%).

In August, Poland's president Karol Nawrocki [ECR] [vetoed](#) a bill that '[would have extended](#) the Polish incarnation of temporary protection beyond September'. The government [led by EPP] subsequently prepared a new bill which [deprives](#) Ukrainian children **whose parents do not work or of social benefits**. 'The President has finally forced this government to limit benefits for Ukrainian citizens, especially those who do not work in Poland, who sometimes do not even reside here (...) This is also a clear message to all Ukrainian citizens that if they want to be here, if they want to

stay in our country and if they want to receive benefits, they must work, they must reside here,' according to the head of the President's Office... "This is the last bill that President Nawrocki is signing concerning this form of assistance to Ukrainian citizens. President Nawrocki will not sign any other bills. We must return to normal conditions, i.e., treating Ukrainian citizens residing in the territory of the Republic of Poland in the same way as all other foreigners.' Most Ukrainian refugees living in Poland are likely to stay there even if Ukraine reaches a ceasefire deal with Russia, meaning they will continue [to prop up the Polish economy](#), where the public finances remain a key concern, according to Fitch Ratings.

So far out of 80 thousand applicants, [only 15 thousand](#) have fulfilled the conditions for a special **long-term residence permit in Czechia**. The rest did not reach the threshold for a minimum annual income, CZK 440,000 (EUR 16,440). This is [less than 4 per cent](#) of the total of 391 thousand Ukrainians who have found refuge in the country since 2022. The rest remain temporarily protected. 'Although many Czechs look down on workers from Ukraine, economists and employers agree: they are absolutely essential to the domestic economy. And not only in construction, but also in agriculture and industry', [according to](#) Denik.cz.

LABOUR IMMIGRATION

In a [joint communication](#), the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy outlined a '**New Strategic EU-India Agenda**'. As part of the strategy, the EU was 'collaborating with India to launch the first pilot European Legal Gateway Office in India, a one-stop hub to provide information and support the movement of workers to the EU, starting with the ICT sector. The Commission is coordinating with member states and industry to ensure a swift, market-aligned launch. The initiative tackles operational barriers, responds to strong demand, and may expand to digital skills in AI, data, quantum, and supercomputing.

- In 2023, 825,000 Indian citizens lived in the EU, the **largest group receiving EU Blue Cards and intra-corporate transfer permits**. Indians are also a major group of students, researchers, and Erasmus Mundus scholars. Travel has become easier, with nearly one million Schengen visas issued in India in 2024, many as multiple-entry short-stay visas.'

The Flemish government [is introducing](#) stricter labour migration policies aimed at reducing the number of non-EU workers, particularly those with low qualifications. Employment minister Zuhal Demir announced that employers will be required to prioritise **hiring from within Flanders** before recruiting from outside the EU. While high-skilled migrants will still be welcomed, with faster administrative processing for non-EU work permit applications, the new policy will specifically exclude low-skilled non-EU workers from roles such as cleaners, fast-food staff, and dishwashers. EU workers and seasonal agricultural labourers will remain exempt.

EMIGRATION

[According to](#) data from the Federal Statistical Office presented by *Die Welt*, almost 270,000 people with **German passports** emigrated abroad in 2024. Considering all German citizens who returned, the net emigration balance was still negative at minus

80,000. Since records began in 1954, the situation has only been worse in two other years: 2016 and 2020.

ITALY-ALBANIA

Following a judicial challenge to the Italy-Albania scheme (see below in Judicial Observatory), Italian PM Giorgia Meloni (ECR) [‘vowed’](#) to fight to get the centres in Albania working as they were intended, which she believes will deter people from undertaking the dangerous Mediterranean crossing. While awaiting the ECJ ruling, Rome had been using the Albanian centres to house dozens of migrants whose asylum claims have already been rejected **and who have been ordered to be repatriated** to their home countries.’

ALGERIA-EU

As part of a prolonged diplomatic crisis, on 22 July the French IM Bruno Retailleau (EPP) announced a series of measures [‘targeting’ senior Algerian officials](#) – politicians, influential economic or military figures – their movements and their assets, who have recently ‘denigrated’ France. The ministry put in place measures to **tighten controls on applications for residence permits and citizenship**. Hindered in their travel to France, these blacklisted Algerians have until now been able to pass through another country to enter the Schengen area. From early September, this becomes more difficult as France has invoked Article 22 of the Community Visa Code. According to this article, a member state ‘may require the central authorities of other member states... to consult its own central authorities when examining applications submitted by nationals of certain third countries or by certain categories of such nationals’.

REPATRIATIONS

Migrants in **Greece** with rejected asylum claims will be [required to wear ankle monitors](#) as part of planned measures to speed up deportations. Migration Minister Thanos Plevris said the measure is set to be implemented before the end of the year under reforms that would criminalize noncompliance with deportation orders. ‘Plevris [told Parliament](#) on 2 September that the law was “the strictest returns policy in the whole EU” and claimed there was “a lot of interest from European countries, especially EU members, to adopt this law as a law that will force an illegal migrant to return”. Since 2015, Greece has been the **arrival point of 46 percent of more than 2.8 million undocumented people** entering Europe, according to UNHCR.’ According to one critic, “In a lot of ways, Greece is a place that has tested things out before they became EU law, and if they worked well, they were carried over into [EU] directives.”

Austria has so far only [deported](#) two people to Syria since the fall of the Assad regime... The first deportation in July 2025 was **the first-ever from an EU member state to Syria since the war had started in 2011**. In mid-September, a second man was deported directly to the Syrian capital of Damascus. (See also the Judicial Observatory below).

THE UK

The UK [is estimated](#) to have recorded a population growth of more than three-quarters of a million in the year to June 2024. This is the second-largest annual increase since the late 1940s... **Net international migration...** accounted for **98% of the UK's overall population growth**, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Almost one million National Health Service 'free passes' **in the UK** have been given out to asylum seekers in the last five years. The HC2 certificates give low-income residents the right to services not afforded to most of the public, including free prescriptions, dental care, eye tests, wigs, and discounts for glasses, contact lenses, and travelling to and from appointments. New data [reveal](#) that 920,199 (**59 per cent**) of the 1.56 million issued across the UK in the last five years were awarded to **asylum seekers**.

AFRICA

[According to](#) the Institute for Security Studies, the Magafe, a Libyan-based criminal group, is **kidnapping and trafficking** refugees from Kenyan refugee camps. 'The trans-Saharan human trafficking syndicate deceives **young Somali refugees** with false promises of relocation to Europe. The dangerous journeys that ensue often result in severe abuse and sometimes death.... The syndicates use social media platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok for recruitment. Both platforms' broad reach among youth populations and the privacy of WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption make them ideal recruiting tools.'

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan [faces](#) one of the largest return movements in recent history. Since September 2023, more than **4 million Afghans have returned** from Iran and Pakistan, with over 1.5 million returning in 2025 alone. A further 1 million Afghans are expected to return from Pakistan following the Pakistan government's decision not to extend the stay of Afghan nationals.

In August, Pakistani police [reportedly](#) arrested hundreds of **Afghans in Pakistan** slated for resettlement to Germany, deporting some to Afghanistan. This follows suspension of a German government programme that provided refuge to people deemed particularly vulnerable under Taliban rule. German IM Alexander Dobrindt [said](#) he was not planning to accelerate resettlements as 'individual procedures cannot be completed in a few days or weeks'.

THE US

After more than 50 years of rapid growth, US immigrant population is now in decline, [according to Pew](#). In January 2025, 53.3 million immigrants lived in the US – the largest number ever recorded. In the ensuing months, however, more immigrants left the country or were deported than arrived. By June, the country's foreign-born population had **shrunk by more than a million people**, marking its first decline since the 1960s.

More than **1.2 million immigrants disappeared from the labour force** between January and July, [according to](#) preliminary Census Bureau data analysed by the Pew Research Center. That includes people who are in the country illegally as well as legal residents. Immigrants make up almost 20% of the US workforce.

The US State Department has [revoked](#) more than **6,000 international student visas** because of violations of US law and overstay. The agency said the "vast majority" of the violations were assault, driving under the influence, burglary and "support for terrorism".

'The Trump administration is [planning to vet](#) all **55 million foreigners** who currently hold visas for travel to the US, a significant expansion of ongoing efforts to clamp down on alleged abuses of the legal immigration system... "We are gathering more information than ever," said a senior State Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to brief the media. The official admitted it was likely that **social media vetting** would add more time to the review process.'

Rwanda has become the third African nation to [enter into a deal with the Trump administration](#) to accept **migrants deported by the US**. The Rwandan government said it has agreed to accept up to 250 deportees from the US for resettlement but didn't immediately give any more details, including when they would arrive or what Rwanda got, if anything, out of the deal. The US has already deported eight men it said were dangerous criminals who were in the US illegally to **South Sudan** and another five to **Eswatini**.

US authorities [arrested](#) 475 workers, including **hundreds of South Korean nationals**, at a Hyundai electric-car battery factory in the state of Georgia on 4 September, in the biggest immigration raid of Donald Trump's administration. The South Korean government [said](#) it would transport the Korean nationals home.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 'has long had a corps of about 6,000 officers trained in arresting, detaining and deporting immigrants. But flush with cash from President Trump's "One Big, Beautiful Bill," the agency [is attempting](#) to **recruit and train an additional 10,000**. The White House has imposed steep expectations on ICE to conduct 3,000 arrests a day and a million deportations by Trump's first year in office, a pace that is roughly double what the agency is currently on track to achieve.'

When President Trump took office this year, the US already commanded the largest **immigrant detention** system in the world, with the capacity to hold close to 50,000 migrants. Now, his administration set a goal of doubling it [...] By January, ICE will have the [capacity to hold more than 107,000 people](#), internal agency documents show.

US immigration authorities [have deported](#) dozens of **Russian asylum seekers** to Moscow, including a serviceman wanted for desertion who has since been detained... At least two deportation flights operated by ICE departed from the agency's major detention hub in Alexandria, Louisiana and landed in **Cairo, Egypt**, where the asylum seekers were transferred to flights bound for Moscow with the

cooperation of Egyptian and Russian authorities, according to interviews with passengers and human rights campaigners. More than 8,300 Russian nationals have applied for asylum in the US since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio [said](#) the US has begun revoking the visas of individuals found celebrating the killing of the conservative activist Charlie Kirk. "America will not host foreigners who celebrate the death of our fellow citizens," Rubio wrote on X.

President Trump [announced](#) a move to dramatically reshape the nation's immigration system, attaching **hefty new fees to H-1B visas** and rolling out a "**gold card**" for those willing to pay \$1 million to secure US residency. A new \$100,000 fee for H-1B visa applications is intended to crack down on a system the Trump administration says has been used by tech companies to avoid hiring American workers. Officials clarified that the new fee for H-1B visas in the US that went into effect on 28 September was a [one-time fee](#). [India was](#) by far the largest beneficiary of H-1B visas in 2024, accounting for 71% of approved beneficiaries, while China was a distant second at 11.7%.

GLOBAL

There were a record 304 million global migrants as of mid-2024, representing about 3.7 percent of the world's 8.2 billion people, according to the UN Population Division's most recent estimates, [presented by the MPI](#). The 2024 international migrant population was nearly four times the 77.1 million in 1960. International migrants' **share of the global population represented a slight rise** from 3.5 percent in 2020 and 2.6 percent in 1960.

JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

The European Court of Justice rules that the designation of a 'safe country of origin' must be amenable to judicial review

On 1 August, the ECJ [delivered](#) a judgement in joined Cases C-758/24 | [Alace] and C-759/24 | [Canpelli]. According to the court's press release, 'a third-country national may have his or her application for international protection rejected under an accelerated border procedure when his or her country of origin is designated as 'safe' by a member state. The Court makes clear that that designation may be made by a legislative act, provided that that act can be **subject to effective judicial review** as regards compliance with the material criteria laid down by EU law. The sources of information on which that designation is based must be accessible to the applicant and to the national court or tribunal. However, a member state may not include a country in the list of safe countries of origin **if that country does not offer adequate protection to its entire population...** Under Directive 2013/32/EU, member states may apply border asylum procedures where those applications are made by nationals of countries considered to offer adequate protection.' In Italy, that designation of third countries as 'safe countries of origin' has been effected, since October 2024, by a legislative act. Under that act, Bangladesh is considered in Italy to be such a 'safe country of origin'. Two Bangladeshi nationals, rescued at sea by the Italian authorities, were taken to a detention centre in Albania under the Italy-

Albania Protocol in October 2024. There, Italian authorities rejected their application as unfounded, on the ground that their country of origin is considered 'safe'. The Rome District Court referred the matter to the ECJ. 16 EU governments had [intervened](#) in support of Italy. [According to](#) one commentator, the New Pact on Asylum, to be implemented in 2026, may make Italy's actions legal. The full ruling is [here](#).

The European Court of Human Rights allows the deportation of a Syrian man 'Austria will be allowed to deport a 19-year-old Syrian after the ECtHR lifted an injunction.' According to the Court's [statement](#), 'the case concerns a Syrian national, who alleges that, if sent back to Syria, he would face a real and imminent risk of a violation of his rights under Article 2 (right to life) and Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment) owing to the volatile security and humanitarian situation there.' The Court previously applied an interim measure, ordering that the applicant should not be removed to Syria, pending reception of additional information. 'Based on the information received, on 23 September 2025 the Court decided not to extend the interim measure ... on the ground that it had not been shown, considering the current general security situation in Syria and the individual circumstances of the case that if removed, the applicant would face a real and imminent risk of irreparable harm... The applicant, A.F., a Syrian national, is currently detained pending his removal from Austria. He is a Sunni Muslim from the Hasaka governorate of Syria. Having fled the war in Syria in 2022, A.F. arrived in Austria in October 2022, where he applied for international protection. These proceedings were twice discontinued due to the applicant's unknown whereabouts. In 2024 his request was dismissed, and he was issued a return decision. After criminal convictions in 2024 and 2025 for shoplifting and unarmed robbery, and having served his prison sentence, the applicant was taken into detention pending removal.'

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Norway

A parliamentary election was held in Norway on 8 September 2025. Immigration and asylum policy featured prominently in the campaign. **The Labour Party (Ap, PES)** [emphasised](#) the value of international cooperation and the country's humanitarian obligations. It supported refugee resettlement and proposed a solidarity fund within the development budget to assist displaced people and host countries. **The Progress Party (FrP, NI)** campaigned for zero net immigration from ["high-risk countries,"](#) prioritisation of Christian refugees, and offshore asylum centres. It also proposed stricter rules on awarding citizenship and family reunification. See the party programme [here](#). **The Conservative Party (H, EPP)** [opposed](#) increasing Norway's share of asylum responsibilities and emphasised helping those with genuine protection needs. It criticised the lack of a binding international system for migrant distribution. **The Socialist Left Party (SV, EL)** opposed the creation of [offshore asylum centres](#) and advocated for inclusive integration policies, with a focus on protecting vulnerable groups. **The Red Party (R, EL)** [called](#) for stronger legal protections for asylum seekers and community-based integration solutions. It

criticised the current asylum system as overly strict and lacking in dignity. **The Green Party (MDG, Greens)** [supported](#) climate-related asylum protections and temporary work permits for asylum seekers. It also emphasised rights for LGBTQ+ refugees and opposed returns to unsafe countries. **The Centre Party (Sp, ALDE)** [called](#) for a controlled, fair, and inclusive immigration policy that contributes to societal development without placing undue pressure on welfare systems or the labour market. See the election results [here](#).

Moldova

Moldova held its parliamentary election on 28 September 2025. **The Party of Action and Solidarity** (PAS, EPP) emphasised a humanitarian and EU-aligned approach to migration, particularly in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The party's leadership reaffirmed its commitment to integrating Ukrainian refugees into Moldovan society, ensuring access to education, healthcare, and employment. "We will certainly continue to stand by the refugees and make the best decisions for the benefit of all," [stated](#) PAS president Igor Grosu. See the full programme [here](#). The **Patriotic Electoral Bloc (BEP)**, composed of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), the Heart of Moldova Party (PRIM) and the Future of Moldova Party (PVM), adopted a non-committal stance on migration. BEP leader Igor Dodon has [accused](#) the government of contributing to an influx of migrants. **Our Party (PN)** [emphasised](#) prioritising the needs of Moldovan citizens and ensuring that any support for refugees does not disadvantage local communities. Party leader Renato Usatîi also [proposed](#) launching a national program to bring Moldovan doctors back home, aiming to stop the emigration of medical professionals. **The Alternative Bloc (BA)** adopted a "citizen-first" approach. At the bloc's launch, Ion Ceban [stated](#): "We know there is a war and aggression against Ukraine. Our focus must be on the needs of the people, our citizens." The election results are [here](#).

MARTENS CENTRE PRODUCTION

R. Münz and J. Yaryyeva, *African Migrants in Europe*, [Martens Centre](#), September 2025

SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

A. E. Minko, *On Shifting Sands in Africa's Sahel Region: Tensions between Security and Free Movement*, [Migration Policy Institute](#), August 2025

A. Kustov, *Why Skilled Migration Is Popular*, [Popular by Design](#), 18 August 2025

A. Kustov, *Do People Like Refugees more than Economic Immigrants?*, [Popular by Design](#), 17 September 2025

S. Fratzke and M. Benton, *Mending, Not Ending, the Refugee Convention Could Save the Protection System and Restore Public Trust*, [Migration Policy Institute](#), September 2025

J. Reynolds, *The Politicisation of Human Rights. The Case of the ECHR*, [MCC Brussels](#), 24 September 2025

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