

Migration Update

December 2025 – January 2026



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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. In this issue, Oleksandra Antypenko prepared the summary for the Belarus-Libya section. These news summaries are not subject to a formal editorial process. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at vn@martenscentre.eu.

- *‘Initial consolidated figures from Frontex show detections of irregular border crossings at the EU’s external borders **fell by over one-quarter** (26%) in 2025 to almost 178,000. This is less than half the total recorded in 2023 and the lowest level since 2021... If there is no major geopolitical escalation in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood, irregular migration towards Europe across land and sea borders could continue the downward trend seen since 2023. This will depend on sustained cooperation with countries of origin and transit, and on Europe’s ability to stay ready for sudden shifts.’*

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NEW PACT

Council decisions on the annual solidarity pool for 2026

On 8 December 2025, ‘the Council [reached](#) a political agreement on the establishment of the annual solidarity pool for 2026. The solidarity needs for 2026 reflect the fact that the first annual migration management cycle will start being implemented as of 12 June 2026. The reference number for the solidarity pool 2026 is [therefore] **21,000 relocations or other solidarity efforts or EUR 420 million financial contributions**... [These figures are lower than the annual limits as identified in Article 12 of the 2024 regulation on asylum and migration management: 30,000 relocations and EUR 600 million for financial contributions.]

Based on the assessment of quantitative and qualitative criteria set out in the Pact, the European Commission has concluded [— based on the data collected between July 2024 and June 2025]—that Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain are under migratory pressure. These countries can benefit from the solidarity measures of the solidarity pool. Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia and Poland have been identified as facing a significant migratory situation due to the cumulative migratory pressure of the previous years. They have the possibility to request a full or partial deduction from their contributions to the solidarity pool.’

The Council formally [adopted](#) the **Implementing Decision** on 22 December 2025. ‘All delegations voted in favour... except for Hungary and Slovakia which voted against and Cyprus, Latvia, Portugal and Spain which abstained.... Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of this Decision and is not bound by it or subject to its application.’

According to the Implementing Decision, an indicative 42 % of the above reference numbers.... ‘shall be made available to member states identified as being under migratory pressure because of large numbers of arrivals stemming from recurring disembarkations following search and rescue [**Spain and Italy**].’

The Annex of the Implementing Decision includes a table with pledges from all EU countries [All EU members, even those under migratory pressure, were required to offer pledges]. According to this table:

Relocations

Member states pledged **8,921 places** for relocation or application of the ‘responsibility offsets’ following secondary movements of migrants. Countries pledging in this category [8 countries in total] are as follows:

Bulgaria (itself facing a significant migratory situation) 214

Cyprus 43

Germany 4,555

France 3,361

Lithuania 58

Luxembourg 15

Malta 14

Romania 661

Financial contributions and alternative solidarity measures

The total of pledged financial contributions amounts to **EUR 181,500,000**. Belgium, Estonia (itself under a significant migratory situation), Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden [15 countries in total] all pledged financial contributions.

[If the solidarity reserve [proves insufficient](#) to cover the needs of frontline states, a simple majority of member states may request a meeting of the Council to make up the shortfall.]

Countries that did not pledge any contributions

Two countries, Hungary and Slovakia, did not offer any contributions, despite not being classified as under migratory pressure or as facing a significant migratory situation.

The Commission [will assess](#) the functioning of the responsibility rules of the Pact in July 2026, and again in October 2026.

Safe countries of origin

- On 18 December 2025, the European Parliament and the Council [concluded](#) an **informal deal** for the creation of an EU-wide list of safe countries of origin (SCO) as proposed by the Commission. Asylum requests by nationals of the listed countries—**Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Kosovo, India, Morocco and Tunisia**—will be fast-tracked, with applicants having to prove that this provision should not apply to them. The designation of a third country as a SCO at EU level will be done in accordance with the conditions set out in the Asylum Procedure The list can be expanded in the future under the EU's ordinary legislative procedure.
- EU accession **candidate countries** will also be considered safe countries of origin unless relevant circumstances, such as indiscriminate violence in the context of an armed conflict, indicate otherwise. Other reasons include an EU-wide asylum recognition rate of above 20%, or economic sanctions due to actions affecting fundamental rights and freedoms.
- The Commission will monitor the situation in the countries on the list and in the candidate countries and react if circumstances change.

- Member states would still retain the possibility to **designate additional safe countries of origin** at national level, with the exception of those suspended from the list by the EU.
- According to the agreement, the designation of a third country as a safe third country or a safe country of origin at both EU and national level **may be made with exceptions for specific parts of its territory or clearly identifiable categories of persons**. These provisions could apply before the EU asylum legislation becomes applicable in June 2026. Member states would also have the possibility to begin applying accelerated border procedures for applicants whose nationality has an asylum recognition rate of under 20% as from the entry into force of the rules agreed on 18 December. The Asylum Procedure Regulation adopted in May 2024 as part of the migration and asylum pact, will apply in full from 12 June 2026.
- The agreement needs to be formally adopted by Parliament and Council before it can enter into force.

Safe third countries

- On 8 December 2025, the Parliament and Council negotiators [reached](#) an informal political agreement on updates to the 2024 Asylum Law [Asylum Procedures Regulation] regarding the conditions for applying the rules on safe third countries.
- The new rules would allow individual EU countries to apply the safe third country concept in individual cases, i.e. **declare their application inadmissible**, where one of three conditions is met: 1. There is a connection between the applicant and a third country; this connection may be considered established if members of the applicant's family are present in the third country concerned, if the applicant stayed there previously, or if there are linguistic, cultural or similar links. 2. Applicants have transited through a third country on the way to the EU, where they could have requested effective protection. 3. An agreement or arrangement exists with a third country at bilateral, multilateral or Union level for the admission of asylum seekers.
- [This legislative amendment does include a list of safe third countries. There is a political agreement on common rules for using the safe third country concept by individual EU member states, but not on an EU-wide list of safe third countries.].
- The agreement needs to be formally adopted by Parliament and Council before it can enter into force.

RESETTLEMENT

According to the [Council Implementing Decision](#) on the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan from 18 December 2025, a total of [nine member states](#) (Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and Sweden) pledged to admit 10,430 people through resettlement and humanitarian admission in 2026-2027.

- In 2024, about 14,000 people in need of international protection [were](#) resettled from non-EU countries to EU member states, 1.7% less than in 2023 and 25% less than in 2022. Syrian nationals accounted for 40% of the people resettled, while Afghan nationals accounted for 17%.

SECONDARY MOVEMENTS

[According to](#) Sabchev and Engler, **eight out of every ten refugees** who have received protection in Greece in the period 2021-2025 have subsequently applied for asylum in Germany.

REGULARISATION

On 27 January, 'the **Spanish government** [issued](#) a decree that gives hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants a path out of legal limbo.... The measure will allow undocumented people already living in Spain to apply for temporary residency permits. The Socialist-led government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez described it as crucial for Spain, where migrant labour plays a key role in agriculture, tourism and more...

- Under the decree, undocumented migrants will be eligible for temporary residence permits if they can prove that they arrived in Spain before December 2025 and that they have lived in the country for **at least five months**.'
- Spain does not publish official figures on the number of undocumented migrants living in the country, but estimates from institutions like Funcas, an economic think tank, suggest the number could be between half a million and a million. Spain's total population is almost 50 million.

LABOUR MIGRATION

On 10 December, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [announced](#), as part of the second Conference of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, the launch of a '**pilot of a Gateway Office in India**. This will offer opportunities to work in Europe legally and it could serve as a blueprint for partnerships with other countries.'

- This follows from an [agreement](#) reached in September.
- [According to](#) the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the Office is scheduled to open in 2026. 'The one-stop hub, established in close coordination with member states, aims to provide information and facilitate the movement of Indian workers to the EU, beginning with the **ICT sector**.'
- The ICMPD is currently [setting up](#) the necessary **operations in India**. According to Director General Susanne Raab, the office 'is part of a wider EU plan of having some 20 million ICT specialists by 2030, in the hopes of plugging skill gaps in European firms.'

Lithuania [expects](#) as many as 10,000 foreign nationals to take the **Lithuanian language exam** in early 2026, when new requirements for foreign workers in the service sector come into force... Under a new law, foreign nationals providing direct services must be able to serve customers in Lithuanian. According to one state official, "There are no longer any Lithuanian-speaking employees in smaller shops... In the capital of Lithuania, there are no Lithuanian-speaking people in retail chain stores. This is unacceptable."

In 2026, **Belarus** [is prepared](#) to review up to 2,300 applications for international protection. In 2024 only 61 people received refugee status. According to Belstat, the country's state press agency, 'Belarus is reluctant to grant refugee protection but remains **open to labour migrants**. The country is projected to face a record labour shortage in the coming years: between 2026 and 2030, the economy will be short more than 300,000 workers. Amid this shortage, the new state program 'Balanced Labour Market' focuses on labour migration. Authorities plan to ensure an inflow of at least 50,000 foreign workers.

VISAS

EU

On 17 November 2025, the Council '[gave](#) its final go ahead for an update of the EU's **mechanism to suspend visa-free travel** for citizens of third countries who do not require a visa when travelling to the Schengen area. The amended rules will allow the EU to react quicker and more vigorously to situations where visa-free travel is being abused or works against its interests.'

- As a new feature, 'the EU will be able to revoke a country's visa-free status if this third country lacks alignment with EU's visa policy.
- Furthermore, when a country runs an investor citizenship scheme whereby citizenship is granted to people who have no genuine link to the third country concerned the EU can stop the visa exemption of this country.
- The same will be the case when the EU's relations with a country deteriorate, for instance in the event of human rights violation....
- The new mechanism also foresees a **targeted approach to ending the visa exemption**. Whereas currently all citizens of a country are affected by the suspension of the visa-free regime... the EU could decide to target government officials and diplomats.

On 19 December, the Commission '[adopted](#) its eighth report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism, monitoring the EU's visa-free regimes. While most partner countries have taken steps to address the recommendations issued under previous Visa Suspension Mechanism reports, significant challenges persist....

- The full alignment of Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries with EU visa policy remains essential, given their close proximity to the Schengen area and the risks posed by divergent visa lists and procedures. While several **Western Balkan partners** have taken steps towards aligning their visa regimes, some have stalled or reversed progress.
- No meaningful advances were observed among Eastern Partnership countries. ...
- Unfounded asylum applications from visa-exempt nationals remain a source of concern, representing around **18% of all claims since 2015**. Applications from Kosovo and Ukraine rose in 2024, and applications for Albania, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia and Serbia, although lower than in 2023, remain significant. A high number of applications from **visa-free Latin American countries** also pose significant challenges to the EU member states' asylum systems. Visa-free partners should continue taking targeted measures to prevent misuse of the regime, including with information campaigns, exit

checks and Frontex support.... [Note: in 2025, Venezuelans [were](#) among the most frequent nationalities to apply for asylum in the EU].

- **Georgia** has violated numerous commitments undertaken during the visa liberalisation dialogue. ... The Commission has raised concerns about serious breaches of fundamental rights and freedoms in Georgia, including violations of non-discrimination principles, and has repeatedly called on the Georgian authorities to take immediate action to address these issues and implement the Commission's recommendations. Despite this, Georgia has violated numerous commitments undertaken during the visa liberalisation dialogue and failed to implement the recommendations of the Seventh Visa Suspension Mechanism report. Given the systemic and deliberate nature of this backsliding, the Commission will consider appropriate measures under the revised Visa Suspension Mechanism, which will enter into force on 30 December 2025.

In January 2026, the Commission [confirmed](#) it had launched the procedure under the new visa suspension mechanism to suspend the exemption from the visa requirement **for nationals of Georgia holding diplomatic, service and official passports**.

UK

[Angola and Namibia](#) have agreed to accept the return of illegal migrants and criminals after the British government **threatened visa penalties** for countries refusing to cooperate. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was **stripped of fast-track visa services** and preferential treatment for VIPs and decision-makers after failing to meet Britain's requirements to improve cooperation.

BELARUS-LIBYA

Tagesschau [reported](#) that German state investigators are examining a new migration corridor from Belarus Libya, where migrants are flown and then transferred by smuggling networks toward Crete. Belarus' state airline, Belavia, has significantly [increased flights](#) from Minsk to Benghazi (Benina) in eastern Libya, the reported landing point for these transfers. Frontex data [indicate](#) that in 2025 the Libya-Crete route expanded rapidly: detections rose by 260% in the first eleven months of the year (while overall irregular EU entries fell by 25% to just over 166,900). By early December 2025, approximately 17,000 migrants had arrived on Crete.

EU-SYRIA

In January, the European Commission [allocated](#) a financial support package to 'Syria of around €620 million for 2026 and 2027, which includes humanitarian aid, early recovery support and bilateral support....The EU has also mobilised more than €424 million for Syria, including a €175 million package to support Syria's socio-economic recovery and institution-building, as well as to promote transitional justice, accountability and human rights.' [According to](#) the Commission's spokesperson, "this will also help in making the **conditions more conducive to the voluntary return** of the many, many Syrians that had been forced to leave the country."

US

According to TRAC Immigration, the [total reported number of removals](#) during the Trump II administration is 290,603. This is **just 7 percent more than were removed in fiscal year 2024** during the last full year of the Biden administration.

On 2 December 2025, the Trump administration [paused](#) all immigration applications such as **requests for green cards or naturalisations for people from 19 countries** banned from travel earlier in 2025, as part of sweeping immigration changes in the wake of the shooting of two National Guard troops. The changes were outlined in a policy memo posted on the website of US Citizenship and Immigration Services... It's up to the agency's director on when to lift the pause, the memo said.

- The administration in June banned travel to the US by citizens of 12 countries and restricted access for those from 7 others, citing national security concerns. The ban applied to citizens of Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen while the restricted access applied to people from Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

On 3 December, the Trump administration [announced](#) increased vetting of applicants for H-1B visas for highly skilled workers. A government memo orders US consular officers to review resumes or LinkedIn profiles of H-1B applicants - and family members who would be traveling with them - to see if they have worked in areas that include activities **such as misinformation, disinformation, content moderation, fact-checking, compliance and online safety**, among others. "If you uncover evidence an applicant was responsible for, or complicit in, censorship or attempted censorship of protected expression in the United States, you should pursue a finding that the applicant is ineligible".

On 18 December, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem [announced](#) that the US is pausing the **diversity lottery immigrant visa programme (DV1)** — used by a Portuguese man who was suspected in the shooting at Brown University and the killing of an MIT professor.

On 14 January, the US government said it would '[suspend the processing](#) of **immigrant visas for citizens of 75 countries**, including Afghanistan, Iran, Russia and Somalia, whose nationals the Trump administration has deemed likely to require public assistance while living in the US.' 'The freeze [will remain active](#) until the US can ensure that new immigrants will **not extract wealth** from the American people.' According to Cato, 'this new ban brings the number of **banned nationalities up to 93**, 42 percent of those in the world, and the total population banned up to nearly half of those who immigrated legally from abroad in 2024... African countries are the most represented on the banned country list, with 39 affected nationalities.'

Federal immigration officers [are asserting](#) sweeping power to forcibly enter people's homes **without a judge's warrant**, according to an internal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) memo obtained by the AP, marking a sharp reversal of longstanding guidance meant to respect constitutional limits on government

searches. The memo authorises ICE officers to use force to enter a residence based solely on a more narrow administrative warrant.

JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

The CJEU rules that beneficiaries of temporary protection may also be entitled to subsidiary protection

In a [preliminary ruling](#) delivered on 20 November, the European Court of Justice clarified that the provision of temporary protection to a person displaced from Ukraine does not preclude granting subsidiary protection to the same person. As an [academic blogger](#) explained, all applicants in the case Framholm (C-195/25; a Nigerian national holding a permanent residence permit in Ukraine and his Ukrainian family members) 'had been displaced from Ukraine following the Russian invasion and were granted temporary protection in Sweden. When they applied for international protection, the [national] migration agency rejected their refugee status applications but declared their subsidiary protection claims inadmissible solely because they already held temporary protection.' In its ruling, the court argued that, among other considerations, 'temporary protection is designed to ensure immediate, time-limited protection while preserving the "effective possibility" of receiving international protection'. The judgement 'closes the door on any national attempt to use temporary protection as a barrier to subsidiary protection. The judgment also exposes a broader structural problem: the Temporary Protection Directive, drafted in 2001, simply do not reflect the legal architecture' of the [asylum legislation valid in 2025].

The CJEU holds that Frontex can be held responsible for fundamental rights violations

On 18 December 2025, in the cases of [W.S. et al vs Frontex](#) and [Hamoudi vs Frontex](#), the CJEU ruled that Frontex can, in principle, 'be held responsible' for fundamental rights violations via EU liability law. The judgements confirm that the action for damages under Art. 340, para 2, TFEU [which states that the Union must compensate for damages caused by its institutions or servants acting in their duties], must be interpreted and applied in a manner that actually allows individuals whose fundamental rights are violated to claim compensation.' In both cases, the CJEU ruled on appeal against the previous rulings of the CJEU's General Court, a lower court that handles direct challenges, such as annulment or damages, from individuals, companies, and member states against EU institutions. According to those General Court rulings, Frontex only organises and coordinates a return operation and all checks related to return decisions fall within the exclusive responsibility of member states. In contrast, in the present rulings the Grand Chamber of the CJEU 'argued... that Frontex must not be able to evade the complete system of remedies. Acknowledging that the action for damages under Art. 340 para 2 TFEU is *de facto* the only possibility to hold Frontex responsible before a court, it found that the doctrine on EU liability must be interpreted and applied in a manner that enables concerned individuals to claim compensation from Frontex.'

MARTENS CENTRE PUBLICATIONS

G. Kugler and P. Hefele, *Answering Demographic Change: Policy recommendations for national and European policymakers*, [Martens Centre](#), January 2026

SELECT EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

T. Sabchev and M. Engler (2025), 'Nudging Forward: A novel strategy of shifting responsibility for beneficiaries of international protection' [Territory, Politics, Governance](#), December, 1–17.

S. Peers, 'Asylum Pact 2.0: The EU moves towards more stringent rules on 'safe third countries' and 'safe countries of origin'', [EU Law Analysis](#), December 2025

E. Kofman et al, *Migration Decision Making and Heterogeneities, Infrastructures and Trajectories of African Migrations*, [Dynamig](#), December 2025

A. Kustov, 'The Uncomfortable Truths About Immigration. On highbrow pro-immigration misinformation & what the elites don't want you to know', [Popular by Design](#), January 2026

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