

Migration Update

August-September 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. These news summaries are not subject to a formal editorial process. Rainer Münz and Claudia Masi contributed news items. Gabriella Ventaloro covered Sweden's election. Should you have any questions or comments, please contact Vít Novotný at vn@martenscentre.eu.

- [According to](#) a brief by the Cato Institute, data from the State Department through February 2026 show that the Trump administration has **cut legal immigration by nationals of 45 majority-Muslim countries by 96 percent** since December 2024. *Monthly immigrant visa issuances and permanent lawful refugee admissions fell from 21,096 in December 2024 to 808 in February 2026.*

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MOROCCO-SPAIN

According to [one observer](#), the Ceuta border breach on 30 and 31 July was the largest single-surge border violation in EU history. And, with the vast majority

immediately returned from Ceuta to Morocco, it was followed by the largest single mass return in EU history.

According to [one count](#), local authorities recorded 80,000 entering Ceuta and 75,000 returning by 6 August. “The influx has led to a humanitarian emergency of enormous proportions”.

Origins of the crisis

‘The Moroccan Ministry of the Interior [officially confirmed](#) the existence of an **online campaign encouraging people** to attempt to reach Ceuta. According to the ministry, the campaign falsely claimed that the border was open, that anyone who reached Ceuta would be allowed to remain, that those who swam across would face no legal consequences, and that entry was easy. Someone wanted to destabilize the country, the elections are coming with Islamists in full force, Morocco just signed numerous partnerships with US, Morocco just launched a pipeline that will help Spain get rid of Russian gas, is negotiating a peace deal with Algeria, and is finally solving the Western Sahara issue. Morocco also doesn't benefit from this since the country is already under pressure with Sahel migration.’

Moroccan authorities likely **facilitated** the breach of the Ceuta border on 30 and 31 July. [According to](#) the *NYT*, Moroccan police officers tried to prevent black people from sub-Saharan Africa from crossing the border, even as they encouraged Moroccans to head for Ceuta. “Only Moroccans could enter,” said Kamal Omar, 24, one of the arrivals to Ceuta who said he fled war-torn Sudan three years ago. “When they saw a Black man, they hit him.” Videos have been widely circulated on social media [showing](#) Moroccan gendarmes overseeing truckloads of migrants being dumped toward the sea.

Initial Spanish response

[According to](#) the *NYT*, ‘rather than welcome the migrants, Mr. Sánchez had called in the military. Most of the arrivals this past week were given **no access to food, water or accommodation**. Soldiers in Ceuta used loudspeakers to blast messages in Arabic telling the migrants to leave. Some police officers occasionally slapped barefoot stragglers on the backs of their legs with truncheons to keep them moving back to the border.’

The vast majority of migrants who breached the Ceuta border [returned to Morocco](#) by the morning of 1 August. ‘Unlike Moroccans who had joined the exodus to Ceuta on a last-minute whim, some of the sub-Saharan migrants are from war-torn regions and had journeyed for months to get to Europe. “They genuinely have the right to request international protection”, according to a local activist.

[According to](#) the *NYT*, many of those migrants described their return **as anything but voluntary**. Many said they had expected a warmer welcome and job opportunities in Spain, and instead had found hunger, thirst, exhaustion and uncompromising police officers, who chased them from the centre of Ceuta's streets into the long parade back toward the border.

Stranded migrants, minors and asylum seekers

An unknown number of migrants refused to return to Morocco. Ceuta's government [estimated](#) that, of 13,000 migrants in the city on **11 September**, about 10,000 were from the 30–31 July crossing.

[According to](#) Ceuta's president speaking on 6 August, "the occupancy rate of Ceuta's reception centres **for minors** was 2,600 per cent above its critical capacity." Ceuta has been calling for some of the minors to be transferred to the mainland – a standard procedure.

The Spanish authorities [were preparing](#) a transfer of some 500 underage female migrants to the Iberian Peninsula. Child welfare and human rights organisations working on the ground [maintained](#) that more than 2,000 were sleeping rough. The plan was based on the Royal Decree-Law providing for the 'mandatory and solidarity-based' reception of minors, distributed amongst Spain's various autonomous communities.

The process [was](#) 'marked by the slow identification process and the uncertainty surrounding the immediate future of these children and adolescents, whether they will be returned to their families in their countries of origin or transferred to the Spanish mainland.'

The putative transfer to other parts of Spain 'has **not received** the support of Brussels, which has declared itself in favour of returning unaccompanied minors from Ceuta to their countries of origin on the African continent. "The priority now is for the Spanish and Moroccan authorities to maintain control of the situation and ensure the swift return of all those who are in Ceuta illegally", said European Commission spokesperson Markus Lammert at a press conference on 18 August. He clarified that these returns were covered by European legislation and governed by the [2008] Return Directive, adding that they would soon be covered by the EU Return Regulation [2026].

[Most](#) of Spain's autonomous communities, governed primarily by the People's Party or in coalition with Vox, refused to accept new unaccompanied minors, arguing that their reception centres were already at capacity. They insisted that all migrants must return to their countries of origin. In addition, 'the Catalan separatists of Junts...[are threatening](#) Pedro Sánchez with withholding any parliamentary support if they are required to participate in this redistribution of minors.'

Speaking on 22 September, a government minister [stated](#) that in a few days, the first files for **family reunification** will be ready, and it will be at that point that the Spanish authorities will see the response from the neighbouring country. "It's not usually the case that we get a smooth response from Morocco, and this...is a problem when it comes to carrying out family reunification for minors." However, the minister believed that "the majority want to stay in Spain. **And they will stay.**"

[According to](#) *Tribune de Genève*, by 16 September, more than **1,800 migrants have applied for international protection**. Some 90 police officers were tasked with assessing their situations. 'At the start of the crisis, interviews took place at the

premises of the Ceuta Police Headquarters. With the opening of the new centre, all preliminary procedures, as well as referrals to the relevant asylum or deportation services, are now centralised in a single location: an industrial warehouse in the Tarajal area, close to the border. “We have fifteen areas of focus and plan to add five more,” the minister [for territorial policy, Ángel Víctor Torres] stated...’

Some migrant women and migrant children were [subject](#) to [sexual harassment](#) and [rape](#). Among the suspected attackers [were](#) four Moroccans, three Spaniards and a Belgian. The [deportation](#) of another man who broke into a private home and climbed into the bed of a local woman in his underpants was also ordered on a charge of breaking and entering. Scenes of violence and disorder became commonplace in the exclave.

Exchange of views, and EU measures

[In a letter](#) to the presidents of the Commission and Council and the Irish presidency, **22 EU leaders** (France, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal did not sign), claimed that a recent ruling of the Spanish Supreme Court has been used to trigger this attack and abuse [of] our migration and asylum system [thus echoing earlier statements of PM Sánchez]. The letter asked the Irish presidency to, among other measures, ensure ‘rapid mobilisation of available EU instruments and the necessary support to Spain to restore effective control of the Union’s external border’. Furthermore, the signatories reserved the right to ‘take any necessary measures... and address risks arising from secondary movements, including **through reinforcing or reintroducing temporary internal border controls**.’

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [welcomed](#) the letter, saying the bloc needed “a lessons learned process to improve our European resilience,” while adding that “**not a single person reached mainland Spain** or the rest of the EU” during the influx. Previously, von der Leyen [called](#) the scenes in Ceuta “unacceptable” and blamed human traffickers.

In response to the letter of 22, **PM Sánchez** [stated](#) that in less than 48 hours “Spain succeeded in fully restoring control over the border” and “returning virtually all of the migrants who crossed irregularly”, as well preventing onward movements from Ceuta to continental Europe. The letter acknowledged the support of some EU governments while decrying the fact that others “have chosen to attack Spain and to call for its temporary exclusion from the Schengen Area.... Spain is, according to Frontex, one of the least porous external borders of the EU, with a number of irregular entries that is half that recorded, for example, in Italy.”

In a subsequent letter to Sánchez, **von der Leyen** [praised](#) Spain’s handling of the influx of migrants from Morocco into its North African exclave. She also praised the “swift handling” of returns by Spanish and Moroccan authorities, saying they had “successfully prevent[ed] illegal movement onwards to mainland Spain and Europe.” Morocco, she said, remained an “important strategic partner” in combating migrant smuggling and irregular migration. The EU should work with Rabat and Madrid to improve early-warning systems around Ceuta and Melilla, as well as technical and financial support for Morocco.

An [emergency meeting](#) of the ministers of the interior on 4 August ‘**sought to draw a line under five days of bitter recriminations**’ over the arrival of 72,000 migrants in Ceuta, closing ranks behind Spain and accusing smugglers and foreign actors of exploiting the crisis to divide the bloc’...Following the meeting, ‘ministers praised Spain’s response, stressed that the passport-free Schengen zone had never been at risk and called for tighter coordination among capitals during future migration emergencies.’ Commissioner ‘Brunner declined to speculate about whether Morocco had played a role in the influx. The question is sensitive because Spain relies heavily on Rabat to police departures toward Ceuta.’

EU assistance and Spain’s situation of interest to national security

Ursula von der Leyen [tasked](#) two commissioners to support controlling the situation: Magnus Brunner, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, who “is ready to travel to critical points” and “will work on additional operational support to Spain, including through Frontex;” and the Commissioner for the Mediterranean and Demography, Dubravka Šuica, who ‘is in contact with her Moroccan counterpart.’

On 24 August, the Spanish government [applied](#) for emergency financial aid from the EU, ‘to [help increase](#) reception capacity in Ceuta and strengthen the security infrastructure at the enclave’s border with Morocco. A few days after that, it also requested support from three EU agencies’, [including](#) Frontex. On 1 September, the government [stated](#) it would allocate €309 million to support the economy and strengthen security, services and reception facilities in Ceuta.

On 25 August 2026, the government declared Ceuta a “situation of interest to national security” by Royal Decree 681/2026. It [was published](#) in the official gazette and took effect on 26 August.

Schengen

[Italy, Finland, Czechia and Denmark](#) called for Spain to be suspended from Schengen on 30 July. On the same day, Italy said it [was introducing](#) border checks for air arrivals from Spain. After Spain [retaliated](#) with the same measure vis-a-vis Italy on 7 August, both countries [continued prolonging](#) the same policy into at least the first days of October.

UKRAINIANS

Returns to Ukraine

[According to](#) the IOM, between February 2022 and June 2026, **1.5 million** Ukrainians [voluntarily] **returned from abroad**. 1.1 million reached their habitual place of residence and some 400 thousand returned to Ukraine but remained internally displaced.

Temporary protection and military service

A provision of the [Council decision from 15 July](#) on limiting temporary protection to those not eligible for military service in Ukraine [came into effect on 4 August](#). On the same day, the Czech interior ministry [announced](#) that ‘for applications submitted as of tomorrow, temporary protection will no longer be granted to individuals who fail to provide evidence of having fulfilled their military obligations in Ukraine. “Our

government has long been advocating stricter conditions for temporary protection, and I am pleased that we have managed to reach a consensus across member states. This decision will reduce the number of new arrivals by tens of per cent. As a result, the pressure on our resources will also be reduced, providing relief for the Czech health and social care systems,” said IM Lubomír Metnar (PřE)... This does not apply to persons who already have temporary protection on the date of the decision and who continue to hold temporary protection in Czechia without interruption after that date.’

- According [official figures](#), there are currently almost 213,000 women and more than 182,000 men in Czechia with temporary protection, across all age groups. Around a fifth of them are children and young people under the age of 18, whilst senior citizens account for roughly five per cent. Among adults aged 18 to 64, there are around 160,000 women and 132,000 men.

NEW PACT

‘The European Union Agency for Asylum [has initiated](#) the first... cycle under its new monitoring mechanism. The first three country monitoring exercises will be carried out in **Slovakia, Malta and Bulgaria**. The monitoring methodology, as well as its subsequent implementation, have been agreed and will be done in collaboration among the Agency and the EU member states.’

ENTRY-EXIT SYSTEM

Delays at the external border due to the introduction of the EES continue. According to one Ukrainian passenger cited by DW’s [Brussel Calling](#) podcast, the wait for the taking of fingerprints and photos during a bus journey at the Ukraine-Slovakia border was 9 hours. It was 44 hours following arrival by plane from the UK to Venice.

The European Commission [stated](#) that since its launch on 10 April, ‘the system has registered over **150 million entries and exits**. The EES helps border officers and law enforcement authorities to spot security risks and support the fight against serious crimes and terrorism.’

NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Sweden

Sweden held its parliamentary election on 13 September 2026. The **Social Democratic Party** (S; PES) [advocated](#) a strict and long-term sustainable migration policy combined with investments to strengthen integration. The Party wanted to set requirements for language, work and participation to break exclusion, stop economic crime and ensure that no vulnerable areas remain in Sweden. The **Moderates** (M, EPP) [called](#) for a continuation of restrictive immigration policy, where who comes to Sweden must be met with clear expectations, receive support to learn the language, get a job, and become part of the Swedish community. The **Sweden Democrats** (SD, ECR) [highlighted](#) the need to preserve the Swedish cultural heritage and identity, tightening the requirements for citizenship, strengthening the position of the Swedish language, as well as counteracting Islamism. The **Left Party** (L, European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet) condemned the existing national

migration policy and called for the protection of the right to citizenship without language requirements. It also [emphasised](#) that labour immigration has benefited Sweden, bringing needed skills and helping address shortages, and that a fair system is required to prevent exploitation and protect wages. The **Centre Party** (C, ALDE) [campaigned](#) for a faster integration and an end to the deportations of skilled workers. The **Christian Democrats** (KD, EPP) [proposed](#) to stop the teenage deportations, meaning that anyone under 21 who previously received a residence permit as a child because of family ties would still be eligible to keep their residence permit. See the results [here](#).

JUDICIAL OBSERVATORY

Spain's Supreme Court confirms that the law does not permit the "immediate pushbacks" of migrants attempting to swim ashore in Ceuta and Melilla

In its [judgement of](#) 8 July, the Spanish Supreme Court confirmed that Immigration Act (Organic Law 4/2000) does not permit a refusal of entry at the border – also known as “an immediate return” – to migrants intercepted on the high seas who are attempting to swim into the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. The Chamber interpreted the Tenth Additional Provision of the Immigration Act, taking into account two judgments handed down by the Constitutional Court on this matter. That provision stipulates that foreign nationals detected at the border line of the territorial demarcation of Ceuta or Melilla, whilst attempting to breach border barriers to cross the border irregularly, **may be turned back in order to prevent their illegal entry into Spain**. In the judges' view, the special regime for Ceuta and Melilla – specifically the policy of turning people back at the border – is not generally provided for in the aforementioned provision for all foreign nationals attempting to cross the border irregularly, whether by land or sea, as in this case, **“but only for those who attempt to do so by breaching established border barriers, such as fences”**. The Chamber pointed out that “such containment measures cannot be equated with technological border control devices – such as drones, thermal cameras or sensors – which, in principle (and unless proven otherwise), do not fulfil a material containment function, but rather one of surveillance, detection and alert, enabling the detection of the presence of persons, but do not physically prevent the crossing of the border, nor do they detain those who attempt to do so”. However, “given that the Tenth Additional Provision refers to border containment measures and not exclusively to land-based containment measures, nor, specifically, to fences, “nothing would prevent the aforementioned Tenth Additional Provision from applying to those seeking to cross the border irregularly by bypassing such maritime containment measures, **should such measures be established at sea to protect the border line**”. Spanish authorities must initiate standard immigration proceedings for every migrant intercepted at sea.

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