



CROSS-NATIONAL MIGRATION POLICY REPORT

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Editors' Foreword

Migration remains one of the most defining and divisive issues facing the European Union. While member states continue to grapple with the political, humanitarian, and logistical dimensions of migration, the newly adopted EU Migration Pact marks a turning point, or at least in intent, for how the Union collectively addresses movement across its borders. Yet, the true test lies in its implementation, particularly in how national governments interpret, adapt, or resist the Pact's principles and obligations.

This special issue describes the fundamental characteristics of the new Migration Pact and then brings together a set of country-focused analyses that explore the current state of migration in Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Lithuania, and France. These five countries, diverse in geography, political orientation, and migratory pressures, offer a cross-section of the EU's fragmented migration landscape. From frontline Mediterranean states like Malta and Portugal, to transit or destination countries like France, and states with more securitised migration postures such as Hungary and Lithuania, each contribution offers an in-depth examination of how migration is experienced and governed on the ground.

Each article is structured around four critical pillars. First, authors provide a snapshot of their country's migration context, detailing major trends, recent surges or shifts, and the socio-political atmosphere surrounding the issue. Second, they delve into national policy frameworks, critically analysing how governments have responded to migration pressures and the initial reception of the EU Migration Pact. Third, contributors evaluate whether the Pact stands to alleviate or aggravate existing challenges in their country, paying special attention to concerns such as border management, asylum processing, integration, and responsibility-sharing. Finally, each piece offers a set of recommendations aimed at promoting migration governance that is not only efficient but also anchored in human dignity and the respect of fundamental rights.

What emerges is a comparative portrait that is as illuminating as it is urgent. Our aim is to not only spark a conversation, but to lay the groundwork for a forward-looking, pragmatic, and humane migration policy within the European Union. The insights contained in this special issue could, and should, serve as a foundation for a consolidated policy framework, one that acknowledges both national specificities and our shared responsibilities.

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Note that the information, views and opinions set out in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the editors, of the European Student ThinkTank, and of their affiliated-entities or institutions

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Introduction

The EU Migration Pact: What's Changing and What Comes Next?

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Abstract

The Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted by the European Parliament in April 2024, represents a significant milestone in the European Union's efforts to reform its migration and asylum policies.

After more than three years of negotiations, the legislative package seeks to address persistent weaknesses in a system that has long struggled with humanitarian crises, uneven burdens among member states, and structural inefficiencies.

The Pact introduces new mechanisms intended to balance solidarity and responsibility-sharing, while also raising debates about potential consequences for human rights protection and practical implementation.

A comparative perspective on its reception and expected impact across member states reveals both opportunities for greater coordination and the risk of deepening political divides.

By examining national approaches, the broader implications of the Pact for the future of European integration, migration governance, and the EU's credibility in managing migration challenges can be better understood.

Keywords

EU Migration Pact; Asylum Policy; European Union; Migration Governance; Human Rights; Comparative Analysis; EST Special Issue

Introduction

In April 2024, the European Parliament approved the long-awaited Pact on Migration and Asylum: an ambitious legislative package that promises to reshape the European Union's migration policy framework. Taking more than three years in the making, this development seeks to respond to a fragmented and often dysfunctional system that has struggled to cope with both humanitarian emergencies and long-term structural challenges. While the Pact has been welcomed by some as a long-overdue compromise, others view it with scepticism, pointing to its potential human rights implications and implementation difficulties.

This article introduces the EST Special Issue dedicated to the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Drawing on a comparative country-by-country approach, the Special Issue brings together EST Ambassadors from across Europe to examine the Pact's national implications. Their contributions will reflect on domestic migration contexts, institutional responses, projected impacts, and actionable policy recommendations. The following overview provides essential background to the Pact itself, outlining its objectives, core reforms, timeline, political reception, and the wider debates it has sparked across the European Union.

Context and Origins of the Pact

The Pact on Migration and Asylum was first proposed by the European Commission on the 23rd of September 2020. It emerged from the realisation that the European Union's Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was unprepared to manage the volume, complexity, and political significance of migration flows that intensified following the 2015 refugee crisis. The failure of the Dublin III Regulation, which disproportionately placed responsibility for asylum applications on border states such as Greece, Italy, and Spain, exposed deep divisions among Member States. Attempts at reform repeatedly came to a standstill, with previous proposals failing to reconcile the interests of states advocating for burden-sharing and those focused primarily on border security.

Against this backdrop, the Commission introduced a comprehensive package that aimed to restore trust among Member States while preserving the right to asylum and reinforcing external borders. The Pact envisioned a "fresh start" by building a common framework grounded in responsibility and solidarity. Yet, this vision has remained contentious, particularly concerning the balance between migration control and human rights protection.

Core Features and Legislative Reforms

At the heart of the Pact lie several key legislative reforms intended to standardise and accelerate asylum procedures, improve border management, and facilitate returns. Among the most significant changes is the introduction of a mandatory pre-entry screening process at all external borders. This screening includes identity verification, health and security checks, and fingerprinting, and must be completed within seven days. Applicants whose cases are deemed unlikely to succeed, based on country-of-origin benchmarks, may be channelled into a fast-track border asylum procedure, which must conclude within 12 weeks.

Another central element of the Pact is the attempt to codify and institutionalise a model of "flexible solidarity." In practice, all Member States are required to contribute to migration pressures and they may choose the form their solidarity takes: either by relocating asylum seekers from frontline states (covering the costs of return operations for individuals with no legal right to stay) or providing operational support such as personnel, equipment or expertise through EU agencies like Frontex or EUAA. While this mechanism aims to accommodate divergent national preferences, critics argue that it risks turning solidarity into a transactional affair, rather than a shared responsibility grounded in the principle of sincere cooperation under EU law.

The Pact also places a strong emphasis on returns and readmissions, encouraging Member States to strengthen partnerships with third countries. For example, the EU has recently advanced readmission efforts with Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt through the "whole-of-route" action plans, which combine return operations with broader initiatives such as development aid, employment programmes and border-management support.

These partnerships are tailored to each country's specific migration context. New incentives are also proposed to secure cooperation on return operations, such as leveraging visa and trade policies. In parallel, the Pact introduces emergency protocols, known as the Crisis Regulation, which allow for temporary derogations and adjusted obligations in the event of sudden or large-scale arrivals.

Timeline and Political Milestones

The political trajectory of the Pact reflects both the urgency and the difficulty of reforming EU migration governance. Following the initial proposal in September 2020, negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council of the EU continued for over three years. A political agreement was eventually reached in December 2023, after intense deliberations, particularly on the issues of border procedures and solidarity mechanisms.

In April 2024, the European Parliament voted in favour of the final package. The Pact was published in the Official Journal shortly thereafter, officially entering into force on the 11th of June 2024. A transitional period of two years has been established, during which Member States are expected to transpose and operationalise the new rules. Most measures will become fully applicable by June 2026.

This timeline marks a critical juncture in the EU's migration policy. As Commissioner Ylva Johansson remarked during the final plenary vote, this is a "now-or-never moment" for the Union. The challenge now lies in turning political consensus into practical action that fully respects and protects human rights.

Reactions and Criticism

The Pact has received a mixed reception across the EU's political and institutional landscape. Supporters, particularly among centrist and centre-right parties, have praised the Pact as a pragmatic compromise that breaks years of legislative deadlock. They highlight its capacity to reinforce border control, streamline asylum procedures, and offer legal certainty to both migrants and national authorities. Furthermore, proponents argue that by offering Member States flexibility in how they contribute to solidarity, the Pact may secure broader and more consistent participation than previous redistribution schemes.

However, the Pact has also attracted substantial criticism from human rights organisations, legal scholars, and members of the European Parliament. One major concern relates to the acceleration of asylum procedures at the border, which may result in inadequate assessments of protection needs and limited access to legal assistance. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), among others, have expressed alarm that the Pact could lead to greater detention, pushbacks, and violations of the principle of non-refoulement.

Further criticism has been directed at the Pact's flexible solidarity mechanism, which, while politically pragmatic, may allow wealthier Member States to sidestep responsibility by opting to provide financial support rather than relocating asylum seekers. This approach risks reinforcing the existing imbalance in responsibility-sharing, continuing to place disproportionate pressure on frontline countries without addressing the structural causes of that inequality. Moreover, the Pact's emphasis on cooperation with third countries (some of which have been criticised for their human rights practices) raises serious ethical and legal concerns regarding the externalisation of migration management.

Conclusion

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum represents a landmark attempt to reset Europe's migration framework after years of impasse. While it introduces clearer rules, faster procedures, and shared responsibilities, its success will depend not only on technical implementation, but on how faithfully its principles are upheld in practice. Much will hinge on whether Member States embrace cooperation over convenience, and whether migrants' rights are treated as central rather than conditional. As the Pact enters its rollout phase, its true test lies in assessing not only its effectiveness, but also its distributive impact and ethical implications.

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Hungary

SPECIAL ISSUE: Hungary

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Abstract

Hungary's approach to migration management has changed dramatically after the 2015 migratory crisis. Once a predominantly transit country, Hungary has now adopted a security-driven and discriminatory stance, emphasising border control over integration.

Additionally, it should be mentioned that this transition occurred despite continuous demographic decline and ongoing manpower shortages in important industries such as healthcare and construction.

The purpose of the current research is to critically assess Hungary's migratory environment, policy responses to both national and EU efforts, and the prospective influence of the 2024 EU Migratory and Asylum Pact. The article goes on to investigate whether the Pact is consistent with Hungary's present framework, as well as its potential implications on vulnerable groups and Hungary's involvement in larger EU migration policy.

The analysis argues that Hungary's present stance not only restricts refugee integration and labour market participation but also undermines collective EU efforts by opposing solidarity measures.

Drawing on recent policy changes, court rulings, and foreign evaluations, this paper closes with concrete recommendations for Hungary to start bridging the gap between its domestic policies and EU expectations while also better addressing its own labour and humanitarian concerns.

Keywords

Hungary, refugee crisis, border control, security, NGO restrictions, European Court of Justice, anti-migration rhetoric

National Migration Context

Hungary's migration landscape changed dramatically after the 2015 refugee crisis. Once a primarily transit country, Hungary has now shifted toward a securitised, border-focused approach (Segarra, 2023).

Despite the drop in arrivals, migration continues to dominate domestic politics (Meral and Kumar, 2025). Asylum applications surged from 42,777 in 2014 to 177,135 in 2015, with the majority of individuals in question being only in transit (Gyollai, 2018).

Despite humanitarian needs resulting from conflicts like the war in Ukraine, the number of applications in 2022 has fallen below 500 (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). By 2017, over 600,000 Hungarians lived in other EU states thanks to better economic opportunities (Bujor, 2024). In contrast, only about 6% of Hungary's 2022 population was foreign-born, one of the lowest shares in the EU with the general population declining from 9.8 to 9.6 million between 2011 and 2022 (ibid.). Moreover, there are nearly 200,000 unfilled jobs, particularly in healthcare, construction, and agriculture (Hungary: Employment of Migrants, 2025). In spite of this, the nation still has tight laws governing the integration of refugees and long-term labour migration.

Between 2016 and 2018, Hungary dismantled key parts of its asylum infrastructure, including the closure of its largest camps, while in 2020 the European Court of Justice ruled the resulting transit zone system to be unlawful (Segarra, 2023). Through campaigns like 'Stop Brussels' (2015) and 'Stop Soros' (2017), the Fidesz government used anti-migration rhetoric to reinforce its political control, portraying migrants and aid organisations as threats to Hungarian identity (ibid.). Hungary implemented legislation declaring unauthorised border crossings illegal in 2015 and built a 175-kilometer barrier along its Southern border (Gyollai, 2018). By 2017, the '8-km rule' enabled immediate returns of undocumented migrants found near the Serbian border which was later extended nationwide, leading to over 20,000 pushbacks without access to asylum that year (ibid.).

Hungary hosted many Ukrainian refugees after the 2022 Russian invasion due to its location (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). Unlike earlier arrivals from Syria or Afghanistan, Ukrainians were offered temporary protection and facilitated entry, highlighting the selective nature of Hungary's migration policy (Liboreiro, 2024). This approach was reinforced when Hungary voted against the EU Migration Pact in May 2024.

National Policy Overview & Reaction to the EU Migration Pact

Since 2015, securitisation, migrant discouragement, and legal centralisation have defined Hungary's immigration policy (Segarra, 2023). This shift was enacted through legal reforms such as Act LXXX of 2007 on Asylum, Act II of 2007 on the Entry and Stay of Third Country Nationals, as well as several revisions made in 2015 in response to the migration crisis (Gyollai, 2018). These include the Border Fence Act of 2015, the implementation of the "8-km rule," and the "Stop Soros" law of 2017, which made aiding unauthorised migrants illegal (ibid.). In 2020, the EU Court of Justice declared these areas to be illegal because they constituted actual imprisonment without adequate protections (JUDGMENT OF THE COURT, 2020).

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party, the Hungarian government has continuously framed migration as a danger to national security and identity (Meral and Kumar, 2025). Public campaigns like 'Stop Soros' portrayed EU migration efforts as threats to sovereignty and linked migrants to crime and terrorism (ibid.). The government has opposed multiculturalism while favouring ethnic kin migration, such as for ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring states. Similarly, the Orbán cabinet has sabotaged almost any collaboration with non-governmental organisations, particularly those providing legal or humanitarian assistance to migrants, on the grounds that they compromise national security (Bujor, 2024). In transit zones, vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children over 14, have been subjected to circumstances equivalent to detention (Segarra 2024).

One of the most outspoken opponents of the 2024 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum has been Hungary (Liboreiro, 2024). The Pact aims to create a more balanced asylum system through flexible solidarity and streamlined procedures (Pact on migration and asylum, 2024). The only two states that voted against the Pact's approval in May 2024 were Poland and Hungary, rejecting even its optional solidarity clauses (Liboreiro, 2024). Despite EU institutions' claims to the contrary, government representatives in Hungary have criticised the Pact as an undercover effort to enforce refugee quotas. Rather than participate in relocation, Hungary has promoted an externalisation approach, favouring processing outside EU territory (ibid.).

Impact Assessment

It is undeniable that the core principles of the EU Migration Pact are significantly in conflict with Hungary's highly securitised and centralised migration system. As such, Hungary's representation of migration primarily as a security concern contradicts the Pact's encouragement of collaboration and shared responsibility among member states.

The structure of the EU Migration Pact could, however, assist Hungary with their labour market challenges. According to Hungarian data, there were more than 200,000 open positions as of 2022, with the greatest shortages being in skilled manual manufacturing, machine operators, and caretakers (Hungary: Employment of Migrants, 2025). The Pact's provisions on structured labour migration should help reduce this bottleneck, but Hungary has mostly disregarded them in favour of short-term guest worker programs that offer little rights and no road to proper integration (Liboreiro, 2024). Hungary's laws focus on pushbacks and extraterritorial processing, clashing with the Pact's emphasis on access and safeguards (JUDGMENT OF THE COURT, 2020). While the Pact promotes early identification and protection for vulnerable individuals, Hungary's approach has lacked such institutional guarantees.

The country lacks a functioning integration system and an active vulnerability assessment framework, while continually seeking automatic pushbacks of all third-country citizens detected on its territory – a practice strongly denounced by human rights organisations and the European Commission (Segarra 2024). Regarding the 2021 pushbacks, affected individuals were left without access to interpreters or legal advice, including for pregnant women and the elderly (ibid.). Between 2016 and 2020, many incidents of children under the age of five being held in transit zones with no medical or psychological support were documented, which is a clear breach of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Meral and Kumar, 2025).

Rather than enhancing collaboration, Hungary's determination threatens to undermine collective EU asylum governance (Liboreiro, 2024). This approach weakens efforts to develop predictable and shared accountability systems among member nations. The lack of consensus additionally hinders return coordination and data exchange, which are critical components of the Pact. By opting out of EU structures, Hungary contributes to a fragmented system that encourages secondary movements, a critical issue the Pact aims to solve.

Actionable Policy Recommendations

Hungary's current approach has led to major gaps, particularly in humanitarian protection and long-term labour planning.

First and foremost, Hungary should re-establish secure and accessible asylum pathways. The existing

consulate-only application system makes access to international protection nearly impossible, especially for individuals fleeing violence or persecution who are unable to negotiate (Segarra 2024; Gyollai, 2018). To comply with both the Geneva Convention and European human rights legislation, territorial asylum access must be reintroduced, supported by early vulnerability assessments and due process safeguards (Judgment of the court, 2020). In combination, the government should exit its extended state of emergency that has previously been implemented due to mass migration, allowing blatant deviations from international rules since 2015 without democratic review (Gyollai, 2018). Returning to uniform legal frameworks will improve legal clarity and institutional accountability.

On a practical level, Hungary could improve the openness and effectiveness of its migration system through the implementation of an automated case-tracking tool. This would make it simpler for both authorities and applicants to track the status of individual cases, avoiding the impression that the system is unclear or unpredictable. A better-managed procedure could help restore public confidence in the system itself, while a further step would involve re-establishing some form of organised assistance for those receiving protection. There are currently no national initiatives to help refugees learn Hungarian, find accommodation or integrate into the labour market (Gyollai, 2018). This is a wasted opportunity, especially because Hungary has one of the most severe labour shortages in the EU. If migrants were given the tools they required to prosper, many might help fill key shortages in industries.

Furthermore, Hungary could improve its protection of vulnerable individuals through the establishment of clear processes doubled by qualified staff and access to essential services. While Hungary has been strongly opposed to refugee relocation procedures, there are still possibilities for it to participate in the EU-wide initiatives without compromising its position (Liboreiro, 2024). For example, the Pact permits nations to participate by providing return sponsorships or border operational help; these adaptable alternatives could enable Hungary to keep participating in the EU's migration management while not accepting additional asylum applicants.

Finally, the government should take steps to reduce public anxiety about migration by replacing fear-based messaging with fact-based public communication. One alternative is to fund local public education campaigns that demonstrate how legal migration may benefit communities, particularly in areas experiencing population decrease. Transparency in how EU funds are spent on migration may also assist to reduce concerns about abuse. Involving local governments, companies, and civil society in policy development would not only improve their effectiveness, but would also anchor them in local reality. The opportunities that these reforms could bring Hungary include preserving the country's interests while fulfilling its duties as an EU member state.

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Malta

SPECIAL ISSUE: Malta

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Abstract

Malta, located in the central Mediterranean, faces migration pressures that strain its limited resources. Undocumented migrants and asylum seekers arrive regularly, challenging the country's capacity to provide protection, legal assistance, and integration.

This article examines Malta's migration management in the context of national policies and the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024). While the Pact offers mechanisms for solidarity and support, its voluntary nature limits effectiveness. Challenges also include accelerated border procedures, detention practices, and cooperation with third countries with poor human rights records.

The analysis stresses the need for binding solidarity, investment in reception and integration, transparent oversight, and constructive public discourse. Malta's situation reflects wider EU tensions between migration control, human rights, and shared responsibility, highlighting the importance of policies that balance efficiency with dignity and inclusion.

Keywords

Malta, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, EU Migration Pact, reception systems

Malta and Migration: Navigating Pressure, Responsibility, and the EU Pact.

Malta, a small island nation at the crossroads of Europe and North Africa, continues to experience migration pressures that far exceed what might be expected given its size. Its location in the central Mediterranean makes it one of the first EU territories reached by people fleeing violence, persecution, or economic hardship across North Africa and beyond.

Finding the most sustainable way to deal with undocumented migration is not an easy task, and the introduction of the new EU Pact on Migration presents both challenges and opportunities in this regard.

Focusing on the situation of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in Malta, we shall critically examine the extent to which the Pact offers solutions to the persistent struggles of migration dynamics in the heart of the Mediterranean and where it seemingly falls short.

Malta's National Migration Context

While absolute numbers of arrivals may seem modest compared to larger EU countries, the impact on Malta is significant. In 2022, 973 applications were lodged for international protection, with there being 444 sea arrivals to the country, a sharp decline from earlier years (European Council on Refugees and Exile, 2023).

However, this drop doesn't necessarily reflect a decrease in people trying to cross the Mediterranean. Rather, it points to the Maltese government's intensified cooperation with the Libyan coast guard and its growing reliance on aerial surveillance to redirect boats elsewhere, a strategy that has sparked serious concern from rights groups (Amnesty International, 2022). Within this context, it is important to distinguish between undocumented migrants and asylum seekers: undocumented migrants are individuals residing in Malta without proper authorisation or legal documentation, while asylum seekers are those who have applied for international protection based on a well-founded fear of persecution and are awaiting a decision on their claim. (Amnesty International, 2025)

Malta's key challenges lie in managing these migration flows with very limited resources and respecting due process and the human rights of those arriving. The strain is felt across the entire system from reception and detention to integration and community relations.

In a country with a total population just above half a million, even a few hundred new arrivals can stretch existing infrastructure (IMF, 2025). Tensions sometimes rise within local communities, particularly when concerns about housing, employment, or public safety intersect with misinformation or fear-driven narratives around migration.

At the same time, Malta's population is changing. Over 28% of residents are now foreign nationals (NSO Malta, 2024), a figure that includes not just asylum seekers and refugees, but also EU workers, students, and long-term residents. This shift is reshaping the social fabric of the country, creating both opportunities for diversity and inclusion, and pressures around cohesion and equity.

Malta's National Policy Overview & Reaction to the EU Migration Pact

Malta's migration policy is defined by a mix of national laws and EU directives, with the Refugees Act (Chapter 420 of the Laws of Malta) at its core. In practice, however, implementation has often been criticised for being overly focused on deterrence. Automatic detention remains common, and access to legal assistance and dignified reception conditions continues to be a challenge, particularly for vulnerable individuals (Jesuit Refugee Service Malta, 2021).

The political climate around migration is deeply complex. Successive Maltese governments have argued, not without reason, that the EU's current system to deal with undocumented migrants is unfair to frontline states. They have repeatedly called for solidarity and shared responsibility. Senior government officials have labelled the situation as unsustainable, especially for smaller countries, and that therefore, Malta cannot be left alone to try to "overcome a crisis which is not [her] making." (Muscat, 2018).

Malta's response to the European Commission's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024) has therefore been one of cautious optimism. There's an openness to a more harmonised EU approach, particularly if it brings more predictability and support. At the same time, there's frustration that key elements, especially the solidarity mechanism, remain largely voluntary. Malta, along with Italy and Greece, has argued that unless relocation is mandatory, the new Pact may fall short of real change (Vella, 2020).

Public opinion on migration in Malta is mixed and often polarised. Civil society organisations, church groups, and youth networks frequently advocate for fair and humane treatment of migrants (Geopolitics, 2025). But in parts of the media and political discourse, migration is sometimes portrayed as a threat to identity or security. This has created an environment where decisions can be shaped by short term political concerns or public pressure rather than evidence or rights-based commitments.

An example of which includes potentially dangerous discourse as to the efficacy and relevance of long-standing human rights instruments, particularly the European Convention on Human Rights to deal with the issues posed by migration, subverting the foundational human rights principles in favour of political expediency. (Klesper, 2025).

Impact Assessment

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024) brings some promising changes but it also raises important questions, especially for a country like Malta. On the positive side, the Pact acknowledges the need for greater solidarity and introduces a mechanism through which member states can choose how to contribute: by relocating asylum seekers, supporting returns, or providing financial assistance. This is a step forward from earlier approaches that relied mostly on ad hoc cooperation. However, the fact that relocation remains optional is a major concern. While the Pact argues that States may be required to participate in relocation efforts if the situation warrants it, this may not be sufficient at addressing the core issues at the heart of this matter. Malta has long argued that meaningful solidarity can't be left to good will alone (Balzan, 2023). If wealthier or less exposed member states can choose not to host asylum seekers, the fundamental imbalance in the EU system will persist. In such a case, frontline states like Malta will continue to bear a disproportionate burden.

There are also concerns about the Pact's focus on speeding up border procedures and expanding detention and return mechanisms. While efficiency is important, the risk is that fast-tracking may compromise quality and fairness in asylum assessments. Malta already struggles with capacity in this area, and accelerated procedures could make it harder to identify people with complex needs — such as survivors of trauma or unaccompanied minors (Jesuit Refugee Service Malta, 2021).

Another potentially troubling aspect is the Pact's push for more external cooperation with third countries. Malta's involvement in redirecting boats to Libya, despite well-documented abuses in Libyan detention centres, is already a source of legal and ethical concern (Human Rights Watch, 2023). While it is important to build relationships and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries to prevent, inter alia, irregular departures and smuggling, a future where more responsibility is outsourced to countries with poor human rights records could not only harm migrants but also undermine the EU's legal commitments.

Observations and Recommendations

If the EU Migration Pact is going to work for Malta and, more broadly, for the values the EU claims to uphold, then several key considerations must be kept in mind.

Firstly, solidarity needs to be binding. Malta and other frontline states cannot rely on promises of "voluntary" assistance. A fair and enforceable relocation system should be established, ensuring that all EU countries contribute in proportion to their capacities and circumstances.

Secondly, we must acknowledge that reception and integration systems need investment, and that EU funds in this regard must be well-targeted and tied to accountability. We also consider the need for independent oversight bodies to assess detention conditions, pushback practices, and asylum decisions. Malta has made some progress, but more transparency and rights-based oversight are critical to rebuilding trust.

Perhaps most importantly, public discourse around migration must shift. Migration is too often used as a political football. A more constructive public conversation, rooted in facts and humanity, is needed. This includes challenging misinformation, promoting migrant voices, and celebrating the contributions migrants make to Maltese society, all the while respecting their autonomy and dignity. This especially applies in relation to the most vulnerable amongst the migrant community including children and those with disabilities or trauma.

Malta's migration story is emblematic of the wider European struggle: how to balance control and compassion, sovereignty and solidarity. The country has genuine constraints, and its calls for fairer responsibility-sharing are justified. But addressing migration challenges must go beyond securing borders, it must also involve protecting rights, fostering inclusion, and investing in long-term solutions.

The New EU Pact offers some tools to get there, but its success will depend on implementation. For Malta, the road ahead requires a firm commitment to a migration policy that is not only effective but also just and which places human dignity and respect at the centre.

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Portugal

SPECIAL ISSUE: Portugal

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Abstract

Portugal has recently shifted from being a country of emigration to a growing destination for immigrants from former colonies and countries such as India, Ukraine, and Romania. This influx has supported economic growth and demographic renewal but has also created challenges in integration, social cohesion, and institutional capacity. Public discourse around migration remains polarized, reflecting both benefits and societal tensions associated with rising immigrant populations.

This article examines Portugal's migration framework, including the Aliens Act (2007), Asylum Law (2008), and the 2024 Migration Action Plan, while assessing the potential impact of the EU Migration Pact. While the Pact offers improved coordination, faster asylum procedures, and shared responsibility, careful implementation is required to ensure integration, institutional effectiveness, and respect for fundamental rights. Strengthening institutions, streamlining regularization, and promoting inclusive programs are essential for sustainable, rights-based migration management in Portugal.

Keywords

Portugal, immigrant integration, asylum law, Migration Action Plan, EU Migration Pact

Introduction

Despite Portugal's historical identity as a country of emigration, with several communities established around the globe, in recent years it has also become a destination for immigrants from different parts of the world. Incoming flows of immigrants from former colonies, and other countries such as India or Ukraine, have led to different policy implementations and provoked a notable impact in Portuguese society, particularly in regards to its demographic and economic landscape. Furthermore, these recent trends have also posed new challenges for national governments when formulating and assessing migrations policies.

This report aims to provide an overview of the situation in Portugal regarding migration, outlining the national context and relevant policy framework, assessing the impact of the EU Migration Pact, and presenting recommendations in light of the recent trends and developments.

Diving into Portugal's Current Migration Landscape

Over the past years, Portugal has become a growing destination for international immigration from several parts of the world. Some factors behind these recent trends are the existing job opportunities and the country's high quality of life (The Portugal News, 2025). Portugal has witnessed significant demographic changes, particularly in the foreign-born population, which now represents approximately 15% of the total – a figure that has quadrupled from 2017 to 2024 (The Portugal News, 2025). This has been a consistent growth, with a notable boom from 2022 to 2023 (AIMA, 2023). The country has seen a notable influx of immigrants from its former colonies, like Angola, Brazil, and Cape Verde – countries that are part of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (also known as CPLP). There are also several other immigrants from different parts of the world, such as India, Pakistan, Romania, Ukraine, etc. (AIMA, 2023).

According to several studies and statistics, the socio-economic impact of immigration in Portugal has been largely positive. Immigrants have contributed to demographic renewal, in a country that faces risks in this matter, given the number of Portuguese nationals that emigrate and its aging population (Pereira, 2024). Furthermore, immigrants have also contributed to the economic growth of the country, by filling labor shortages in various sectors such as agriculture and restaurants, and with contributions to social security.

Nevertheless, Portugal faces several challenges regarding the topic of migration. For instance, given the steady rise in immigrant population, it becomes important to discuss how to address integration and social cohesion, as several of these individuals come from different backgrounds and have different cultural perspectives. Furthermore, the high fluxes have put a heavy burden on the state's institutions, resulting in administrative and bureaucratic pressures (Global Citizens Solutions, 2024). Regarding the labour market, while immigrants are able to find employment in specific sectors as the ones mentioned before, challenges remain in fully integrating them across the country's overall job opportunities.

Finally, much like in other EU states, there has been a rise in negative public perception and discourse towards immigrants. This has been particularly motivated by the rise of the far-right party, Chega!, that has pushed for an anti-immigration narrative in the political climate and that is often described as xenophobic (Kassam, 20223).

The Portuguese Migration Framework and Impact of the EU Migration Pact

Portugal's current migration framework is built upon a range of national laws, institutional reforms, and policy initiatives designed to align with domestic priorities and EU directives. The primary legal framework is the Portuguese Aliens Act of 2007, which is responsible for regulating the legal framework of entry, stay, exit and removal of foreigners from the national territory, and has been subject to several amendments over the years (European Commission, 2025). Another important framework is the Asylum Law of 2008, which is responsible for harmonising national procedures in accordance with EU directives on asylum, and has been also subject to changes (European Commission, 2025).

A key government body in this framework is the Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum (AIMA), crucial for streamlining the management of migration and asylum processes. This government body followed after the dissolution of the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) in October 2023, amidst a controversial situation (Campos, 2025).

In June 2024, the Portuguese government presented the Migration Action Plan, a strategy made up of 41 measures that aims to reorganise institutions, promote humanist integration, attract foreign talent and regularise immigration (European Commission, 2024).

Over the years, the country has been known for having one of Europe's most open immigration regimes. However, the newly elected government seems to be aiming at tightening these policies, in order to address concerns about the "excessive abuse" of Portugal's welcoming immigration policies such as immigrants in illegal situations (ETIAS, 2025).

While the current government is still in its early months, it is important to acknowledge that previous administrations made an effort to be actively involved in the development and implementation of the EU Migration Pact, reflecting a commitment to a coordinated European approach to migration and asylum issues. However, migration is becoming an increasingly polarising subject in Portuguese society, with many debates over whether stricter migration policies are necessary and to what extent migrants are beneficial or not for the country (ETIAS, 2025).

The potential of the EU Migration Pact for Portugal

As an EU member state that has shown clear alignment with EU directives and regulations across multiple policy areas, it is expected that the Portuguese government will seek to align with the EU Migration Pact. Nevertheless, we must assess what this means.

On one hand, the Pact's focuses on better coordination, faster asylum procedures, and shared responsibility, which fits well with Portugal's recent reforms. This would, in theory, help with administrative backlogs and bring more order to the system. It can also be an opportunity to attract EU investment, as there is a considerably big migrant community within the country, which would help Portugal's development.

On the other hand, one of the primary concerns of the Pact seems to be stricter border control, especially considering the cases of countries such as Greece and Italy, where some immigrants come through illegal means. In the case of Portugal, the priority investment should be guided more towards resources for integration and inclusion. But as the current government seems to take initiative towards illegal situations, this could turn in their favor. The Pact ought to be implemented with caution and flexibility, especially considering that it shouldn't damage the progress already achieved in the field of migration policy.

Taking action in reinforcing migration policies

Now that we have an understanding of the situation in Portugal, we ought to think about future policy implementations that would prove beneficial to address the current landscape. As such, here follows a layout of recommendations for policy implementation.

First and foremost, there must be proper institutional reinforcement at the national and local level, as this is something lacking in Portugal. In order to properly implement the ideas behind the Migration Pact, and ensure positive outcomes, national institutions should have at their disposal all the means, personnel and resources necessary for taking action. As such, this should be a principal area of investment.

Moreover, there should be a focus on the discourse around migration. This could be done by enhancing integration and regularisation programs.

In order to do so, there should be a focus on developing comprehensive integration frameworks that include language training, cultural orientation, streamline regularisation processes, by simplifying and accelerating the processes for regularising the status of migrants, and also the promotion of social cohesion initiatives, as a way to foster social cohesion and interaction between migrant and host communities.

Finally, it could be beneficial to create an independent EU Monitoring and Solidarity Mechanism for overseeing the implementation of the Pact. To strengthen cooperation and accountability, this body would assess compliance with security and border control measures, as well as oversee protection of fundamental rights. This would emphasise that solidarity is not only about relocation or funding, but also about respecting shared European values. Furthermore, it would enable a fair and transparent approach at the EU level.

Conclusion

In summary, we can understand that Portugal is undergoing profound migration-driven demographic and societal shifts since recent times. These trends are expected to continue, influenced by global geopolitical shifts and economic conditions.

Although recent years have seen a notable increase in migration flows into the country, the new Government seems to be taking new measures, in order to tighten immigration policies. This has resulted in a polarised discourse in Portuguese society, where narratives around immigration oscillate between its perceived benefits and challenges.

The EU Migration Pact represents a significant effort to create a unified approach to immigration and asylum across the EU, and as such, could prove to be important to address the challenges associated with immigration in Portugal.

It is then paramount to understand how the existing challenges can be addressed and to assess the country's approach to migration,, as its ability to integrate and manage this growing immigrant population will be crucial for its future development.

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Lithuania

SPECIAL ISSUE: Lithuania

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Abstract

Lithuania has recently transitioned from a country of emigration to a destination for immigrants, driven by labor shortages, geopolitical events, and global migration trends. Between 2019 and 2022, incoming migration surpassed departures, with significant flows from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Migration governance has been shaped by security concerns, emergency measures, and restrictive border practices, including pushbacks, which have raised human rights concerns.

This article examines Lithuania's national migration policies, including the Lithuania 2050 strategic integration plan, amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners, and border management reforms, alongside the implications of the EU Migration Pact. While the Pact offers mechanisms for shared responsibility, faster asylum procedures, and enhanced integration, challenges remain in ensuring compliance with EU law and international human rights standards. Policy recommendations emphasize institutional strengthening, inclusive integration programs, adherence to non-refoulement, and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable migrants.

Keywords

Lithuania, border management, pushbacks, Lithuania 2050 integration, EU Migration Pact

National Migration Context

In recent years, due to the changes in global political climate, growing labour shortages, and other socioeconomic factors, Lithuania has experienced a significant shift in its migration landscape. Although it has been a country of emigration for a long time, over the years from 2019 to 2022, the number of residents migrating to Lithuania surpassed those of leaving the country (International Migration – Oficialiosios Statistikos Portalas, n.d.).

In 2022 alone, Lithuania received 11,000 new immigrants on a long-term or permanent basis, which represented a rise of 80% more than in 2021. These included 41% labour migrants, 50% family members, 4% benefitting from free mobility, and 3% humanitarian migrants (International Migration Outlook 2024: Lithuania, 2024). Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia were the leading nationalities of new arrivals, while Ukraine showed the most significant increase by 55,000 individuals. Despite this upward trend, by the end of 2024, the number of foreigners residing in Lithuania slightly declined for the first time since 2016 due to the changes in migration policy priorities and stricter control (Latest Migration Yearbook – Key Statistics, 2025).

Migration governance in Lithuania has also been shaped by security concerns and geopolitical events. Following Russia's war on Ukraine, Lithuania declared a state of emergency from February 2022 to May 2023 (LRT, 2023). During this time, emergency measures affecting migration management included improving border security to reduce irregular entries, tightening visa requirements for Russian and Belarusian nationals, and placing restrictions on the admission of Russian nationals into Lithuania. Following the termination of the state of emergency, legislative measures were enacted to preserve some of the emergency provisions.

Policy Overview & Reaction to the Migration Pact

Lithuania has adopted a strategic plan to improve migrant integration with two specific thematic focuses: sociocultural integration and mental health support (Lietuva 2050, 2025). The plan, titled 'Lithuania 2050', includes 40 hours of training on local culture, values, laws, and social services to support faster adaptation by newcomers. A mental health care framework is being developed around the MHPSS (mental health and psychosocial support) pyramid, offering support ranging from basic emotional care to specialised therapy (Lithuania: Strategic Plan on Integration, 2025).

To address labour shortages and manage the migration process more efficiently, Lithuania has approved major reforms. Notably, two law amendments were prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and approved by the Government in January 2023. The Draft Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Legal Status of Foreigners and Draft Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the State Border and its Protection aimed at bringing conformity with the Asylum Procedures Directive (2013/32/EU) and Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU). Moreover, Lithuania now allows applicants to apply for temporary residence permits from abroad through external service providers, removing the need for Schengen or national visas. Though this reform aims to reduce administrative burdens, many applicants still face difficulties due to the lengthy process.

According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), though the amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners were intended to ensure compliance with EU law and European Court of Justice rulings, these efforts may be undermined by the proposed changes to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the State Border and its Protection. The current practices on the border of Lithuania include harsh push-backs, and the amendments are likely to put persons in need of international protection at risk of being refused entry at the border (Observations from UNHCR on Lithuanian Law Proposals – UNHCR Nordic and Baltic Countries, 2023).

In 2021, the Belarusian regime under President Lukashenko began actively attracting migrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, encouraging and even forcing them to cross the borders into the European Union. This put pressure on the neighbouring countries like Lithuania, and it was widely interpreted as retaliation for EU sanctions imposed following Belarus's fraudulent 2020 presidential elections (Mentzelopoulou, 2022). Although Belarus has denied the allegations, Lithuania's border service released several videos that showed how Belarusian officers armed with shields and riot gear appeared to have forcibly pushed migrants across the border into Lithuanian territory (Lithuania Says Belarus Officers Illegally Pushed Migrants over Border, 2021). This narrative has strongly influenced Lithuania's approach to migration policy and has been used as a basis to justify restrictive measures against individuals coming from countries other than Ukraine.

In May 2024, the EU Council approved the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and under the new 'solidarity mechanism', all EU member states are required to share responsibility for asylum seekers, particularly supporting those countries experiencing high levels of arrivals. Annual quotas would be established, followed by obligatory re-allocation of asylum seekers to other EU member states.

The clause has been described as "compulsory solidarity" because sharing the burden of immigration would be mandatory rather than voluntary. To offer flexibility, the regulation allows member states to opt out of accepting asylum seekers by paying €20,000 for each individual they decline to host. For Lithuania, this would mean admitting approximately 158 migrants per year or paying around €3.16 million annually.

Based on the poll commissioned by LRT and conducted by Baltic Surveys, 39 percent of respondents said they would agree to accept the migrants, while 34 percent would prefer to pay the financial contribution instead. The remaining 27 percent had no opinion (LRT.lt & BNS, 2024). The pact provides for stronger integration mechanisms, fast and efficient procedures, and secure external borders, aligning with the Lithuania 2050 Strategy Plan. Nonetheless, 'stronger return mechanisms' aimed at expediting the deportation of rejected asylum seekers raise concerns about possible breach of human rights, as such mechanisms must be implemented with careful oversight and a commitment to international law.

Impact Assessment

The EU Migration Pact comes with opportunities and challenges for Lithuania's migration management. On one hand, more efficient procedures, better integration systems, and the solidary mechanism could help regulate migration flows in a more structured way. Stronger return mechanisms and border protection are in line with Lithuania's longstanding emphasis on security and border control, especially in light of the instrumentalisation of migrants from Belarus.

However, tensions remain between the Pact's provisions and Lithuania's current migration practices. In particular, the use of restrictive border practices such as pushbacks raised concerns among international observers, such as the UNHCR, for incompatibility with EU asylum law and basic human rights standards.

For vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, pregnant women, or unaccompanied minors, the impact of the Pact is significant. In combination with Lithuania 2050's strategic focus on improving mental health and sociocultural integration, it has the potential to provide the necessary help and reduce the arbitrary treatment. However, the risk remains that the restrictive and unfavourable practices towards migrants from non-European backgrounds could lead to unequal treatment and breach the EU migration laws.

Policy Recommendations

To address these issues and align Lithuania's migration system with the EU framework, several actionable policy recommendations can be made.

First, Lithuania should continue investing in digitalisation and human resources in its management systems to improve efficiency, data accuracy, and responsiveness to surges of migration. Strengthening the MIGRIS platform and harmonising it with EU systems could strengthen interagency coordination and reduce bureaucratic delays.

Second, inclusive long-term integration programs should be introduced, particularly for displaced refugees and labour migrants, including free Lithuanian language courses. More funding should be directed to municipalities and civil society actors to support the integration of displaced persons into their new communities.

Third, due to the divided public opinion and the harmful narrative regarding migrants, political leaders must use informed and inclusive choice of words to counteract misinformation and xenophobic language. More emphasis should be put on the economic contributions of migrants, especially highlighting Lithuania's ageing population and labour shortages. This approach could reshape public opinion and build support for more inclusive migration policies.

Fourth, Lithuania should enforce the guidelines of the UNHCR, mainly reinforcement of its commitment to international human rights standards, particularly to the principle of non-refoulement. This principle prohibits the return of individuals to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. It is non-derogable, even during emergencies or situations involving instrumentalisation of migration. Therefore, Lithuania must guarantee access to asylum procedures for all people present at its borders, including those in the so-called "border zone." In this regard, Lithuania should reconsider the amended 'fiction of non-entry' under Article 4(13) of the State Border Law, which legally treats refugees located in the border zone as though they have not entered Lithuanian territory. As emphasised by UNHCR and established in international and EU law, jurisdiction, thus legal responsibility, extends to any area under state control, including border regions. Denying access to asylum procedures through this legal fiction violates international law and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

And finally, while the draft amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners rightly remove irregular border crossing as a ground for detention (in line with CJEU case C-72/22 PPU). Lithuania should also revise emergency provisions that permit the prolonged confinement of asylum seekers. The current framework allows for up to six months in closed accommodation without freedom of movement, which raises serious concerns regarding the compliance with basic human rights standards. Alternative reception models should be prioritised.

Conclusion

Lithuania now stands at an important moment in the national migration policy trajectory, and it should balance its obligations as an EU member state with international human rights obligations and national security concerns. As mentioned, the EU Migration Pact presents both opportunities and challenges. It offers mechanisms that will streamline the asylum processes and improve the integration of migrants effectively. Though Lithuanian public opinion is divided, by aligning its policies with international legal standards, it can provide effective solutions to the people in need while also upholding a more inclusive future.

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France

SPECIAL ISSUE: France

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Abstract

France's migration landscape has evolved significantly, with increasing arrivals from Africa, Ukraine, and other regions, contributing to population growth and labor market support.

In 2023, 347,000 immigrants arrived, with a growing share holding higher education degrees.

Challenges persist in integration, housing, employment, and access to public services, particularly in metropolitan areas.

This article examines France's migration policies, including the 2024 immigration law, the ANEF digital system, and targeted residence permits for labor and healthcare sectors, alongside its engagement with the EU Migration Pact.

While the Pact offers mechanisms for shared responsibility, enhanced border control, and streamlined asylum procedures, careful implementation is needed to protect vulnerable populations. Recommendations emphasize administrative efficiency, protection of rights, integration programs, and fostering evidence-based public discourse to balance security, economic needs, and humanitarian obligations.

Keywords

France, ANEF digital system, 2024 immigration law, EU Migration Pact, asylum management

National Migration Context

Undeniably, the national migration scene of France is dynamic and diverse. It is characterised by evolving trends, significant challenges, and ongoing policy adjustments. In the past few years, there has been a noticeable increase in immigration in France. With 347,000 arrivals in 2023, up from 234,000 in 2006 (Pariset and Tanneau , 2025), the global economy, geopolitical and health factors have played a determining role when considering the increase of the past decade. The demographic landscape of immigration to France has undergone a significant transformation, marked by a notable diversification in the origins of new arrivals. Data indicates a shift away from European source countries. In 2006, 44% of new immigrants were born in Europe, a figure that decreased to 28% by 2023. Concurrently, Africa has emerged as the predominant continent of origin, representing 45% of immigrants arriving in France in 2023. This trend is accompanied by an increase in the educational attainment of immigrants: in 2023, 52% of new arrivals aged 25 or over held a higher education degree, a rise from 41% in 2006 (Pariset and Tanneau ,2025).

The European Union is advancing with the full implementation of two key digital systems by 2025: the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) (European Commission, 2025). The EES is designed to digitally record the entry and exit of non-EU citizens crossing Schengen Area borders. Concurrently, ETIAS will necessitate pre-travel authorization for visa-exempt nationals intending to enter the Schengen zone. Both systems are poised to significantly impact border security and overall migration management across the EU (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2025).

Immigration continues to play a vital role in addressing France's demographic challenges, particularly in mitigating population aging. Immigrants contribute a younger workforce, which is crucial for sectors experiencing labour shortages. This demographic input is essential for sustaining France's economic competitiveness (Papon, 2024). Nevertheless, the integration of new arrivals presents ongoing challenges, particularly concerning social cohesion and the equitable distribution of resources, issues that are often more pronounced in densely populated urban areas (Nanga, 2023).

France, in alignment with other member states, maintains its commitment to providing temporary protection to a substantial number of individuals displaced from Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict. As of 2024, approximately 57,870 non-EU citizens who had fled the war were under temporary protection status in France (UNHCR, n.d.).

The French government, under former Prime Minister Michel Barnier and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, maintained a firm stance on migration: controlling flows and improving legal integration. Their emphasis was on selective immigration to meet economic needs and firm action against irregular migration, including discussions around expedited deportations (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024).

France and the EU Migration Pact

France's engagement with the EU Migration Pact is a critical aspect of its broader migration strategy, reflecting a consistent, albeit demanding, support for a unified European approach. Paris has long advocated for a more robust common asylum and immigration policy, stressing the need for a balanced framework encompassing both responsibility and solidarity among member states.

The French government's stance on the Pact can be characterised as critically supportive, with a strong emphasis on effective implementation and a desire for even stricter measures. France actively lobbied during the Pact's negotiations for provisions that would enhance control, including pushing for the potential detention of migrant children at borders (Maggiore et al., 2024). This highlights a national priority to curb irregular migration and strengthen external EU frontiers.

Following the Pact's adoption, the French government, under former Prime Minister Michel Barnier and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, has been vocal about the need for its "unwavering and full implementation" (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024). They have publicly expressed a desire for the Pact to be "completed by giving Frontex its prime role as the EU's border guards back", signalling an ambition for even more stringent border management (Wallace, 2024). This includes discussions about potentially renegotiating parts of the Pact and forming alliances with other EU countries that share a similar desire for a tougher response to immigration (Wallace, 2024).

From France's perspective, the Pact's potential benefits include a framework for shared responsibility and enhanced external border control, aligning with its national policy objectives. It hopes the Pact will help reduce secondary movements of asylum seekers and improve the efficiency of returns. While France champions stronger migratory controls, a critical examination reveals potential complexities within

the EU Migration Pact's mechanisms.

Specifically, the Pact's accelerated border procedures and the concept of "fiction of non-entry" raise significant concerns regarding the protection of vulnerable populations (Guild & Apatzidou, 2024). These provisions carry the risk of leading to increased detention, and potentially limiting access to comprehensive asylum procedures. Such outcomes could pose a considerable challenge to France's own legal and ethical standards, even as the nation supports a more stringent approach to migration.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Pact's solidarity mechanism remains a point of potential contention. Its inherent flexibility, allowing for financial contributions rather than direct relocation of migrants, means France will be closely scrutinizing whether it genuinely translates into equitable burden-sharing across the EU. In essence, while the Pact aligns with France's overarching desire for tighter controls, its true impact will ultimately depend on its implementation and the balance between enhanced security measures and the fundamental rights of migrants.

Enhancing Migration Management

Nationally, France must prioritize the streamlining of administrative procedures for legal migration, particularly within the digital ANEF system, to mitigate delays and alleviate precarity for foreign nationals. Investing in better-resourced prefectures and fostering clearer communication channels are crucial for improved efficiency (Nanga, 2023). At the EU level, France should advocate for the swift and consistent implementation of the EU Migration Pact's operational aspects, focusing on shared data systems and harmonized screening procedures at external borders to ensure genuine responsibility-sharing among member states.

France has a responsibility to reinforce its mechanisms for identifying and protecting vulnerable migrants, especially within any accelerated procedures stemming from national laws or the EU Pact. This entails guaranteeing access to legal aid, establishing independent monitoring of detention facilities, and implementing specific safeguards for children. Prioritizing investments in reception capacities, particularly for asylum seekers, is essential to reduce homelessness and ensure access to vital services, thereby affirming a commitment to human dignity beyond mere border control (Forum réfugiés, 2025).

France should continue to champion a more equitable and effective solidarity mechanism within the EU Pact. This involves advocating for mandatory relocation as a primary option, rather than exclusive reliance on financial contributions, to genuinely alleviate pressure on frontline states and foster collective burden-sharing. Collaborative initiatives for dignified returns to countries of origin, grounded in comprehensive readmission agreements and respect for human rights, are also indispensable components.

To bridge the divide between public anxieties and humanitarian imperatives, France must invest in fostering an evidence-based public discourse on migration. Highlighting the tangible economic contributions of immigrants and showcasing successful integration stories can effectively counter negative narratives. Simultaneously, strengthening integration programs, with a focus on language acquisition, employment pathways, and civic education, remains paramount. This comprehensive approach demonstrates that effective migration management and adherence to humanitarian standards are not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent pillars of a sustainable and humane migration policy.

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