



EU: Fortress Europe Migration Plan endangers basic human rights

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Abstract: The European Union finds itself at a crucial moment, navigating the complex issue of migration. This blog explores recent proposals from Brussels, in which the appeal for stricter borders threatens fundamental human rights principles and long-term societal cohesion.

In 2024, [911,960](#) first-time asylum applicants (non-EU citizens) applied for international protection in EU countries, a decrease of 13.1 percent compared to 2023 (1.05m). First-time applicants made up of the 996,815 total recorded in 2024. While the multifaceted challenges of managing migration flows are undeniable, the path forward must be guided by firm respect for human dignity and an honest evaluation of the failures of fear-based approaches. of the 996,815 total recorded in 2024. While the multifaceted challenges of managing migration flows are undeniable, the path forward must be guided by firm respect for human dignity and an honest evaluation of the failures of fear-based approaches.

The European Commission's new approach

Given that return rates across the EU currently stand at only 20 percent and fragmentation of various national systems leads to potential abuse, in March 2025, the

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European Commission unveiled its latest proposals for a 'new [European approach to returns](#)', supposedly in light of the need for a '[modern, simpler, and more effective](#) legal framework'. Positioned as a pragmatic effort to increase efficiency and restructure deportation processes, the plan has ignited significant controversy and raised substantial alarm bells among human rights advocates and civil society organisations. The issue's core lies in the potential for several deeply problematic consequences. First, opponents argue that the proposals could lead to extended and potentially [indefinite detention periods](#) for individuals awaiting deportation. This raises deep concerns about the violation of fundamental rights to liberty and due process, potentially subjecting vulnerable individuals to inhumane and degrading treatment. The risk of arbitrary detention, without adequate judicial oversight, is a clear and present danger. Moreover, the psychological impact of prolonged detention on individuals who may have already experienced trauma and persecution cannot be ignored.

The Commission is ultimately advocating for stricter enforcement of deportation orders, which could translate into a more [aggressive and potentially inhumane](#) approach to removals. This amplified emphasis on enforcement risks prioritising numbers over individual circumstances, potentially leading to the separation of families, the deportation of individuals with legitimate protection claims, and the return of people to dangerous or unstable environments.

Several human rights organisations have warned that elements of the proposal risk paving the way for so-called '[ICE-style](#)' enforcement practices – a reference used by human rights groups in relation to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement model, which has been widely criticised for home raids, expansive data-sharing and aggressive removal operations that undermine due process and foster a climate of fear within migrant communities. A group of UN human rights experts has likewise [cautioned](#) that aspects of the proposed framework may be incompatible with international human rights obligations, warning against narratives that portray migrants primarily as security threats rather than as rights holders.

The decision of the EU to actively explore and, in some cases, pursue the [establishment of deportation centres](#) in countries outside of the Union's borders raises profound ethical and legal questions about accountability, transparency and the potential for human rights abuses in these facilities. Physical and legal distance from EU oversight mechanisms risks weakening procedural safeguards and effective access to asylum. The ongoing [expansion](#) of 'safe country of origin' listings and broader reliance on inadmissibility procedures further intensifies concerns regarding access to protection and meaningful judicial review.

These measures, while presented as a necessary response to manage irregular migration, carry a significant risk of undermining the EU's long-standing commitment to international human rights law and the values enshrined in [Article 2](#) of the Treaty on European Union, including respect for human dignity, human rights and the rule of law. . The plan has already encountered substantial resistance and opposition from socialist, green, and liberal parties within the European Parliament, highlighting the deep [divisions and ethical dilemmas](#) surrounding the issue.

Exclusionary policies: a demonstrable failure

Across the European continent, right-wing political movements are skilfully capitalising on public anxieties surrounding migration, often constructing and perpetuating a narrative of fear, division and exclusion. These groups frequently advocate for heavy border controls, uncompromising deportation policies, and a forceful rejection of multiculturalism and the integration of newcomers. They often exploit social and economic anxieties, scapegoating migrants for complex problems that require nuanced solutions.

However, the effectiveness of these hardline approaches remains highly questionable, often contradicted by factual outcomes. The [highly publicised](#) example of the Italy-Albania agreement serves as a plain and simple reminder of the inherent hazards of outsourcing migration management and the recklessness of prioritising propaganda over practical solutions.

The agreement, supposedly intended to process asylum claims in Albania, has been hit by logistical nightmares, fundamental legal uncertainties and well-founded human rights concerns. Its implementation has been repeatedly delayed, and its long-term viability remains deeply doubtful, representing an [undeniable and embarrassing failure](#) for the Italian government, a significant waste of taxpayer resources and a blatant illustration of the dangers of prioritising symbolism over substance. The collapse of this initiative serves as a cautionary tale for other EU member states considering similar approaches.

More broadly, the implementation of the [EU Pact's solidarity mechanism](#) has already revealed structural tensions. Several Member States have signalled reluctance to participate fully, even as irregular arrivals have declined, illustrating the fragility of enforcement-centred cooperation models.

Vital contribution to European society

It is essential to move beyond narratives that assess migrants primarily in terms of their economic utility. Migrants are first and foremost rights-bearing individuals, entitled to dignity, protection and equal treatment irrespective of their perceived contribution to labour markets or demographic balances. While migrants often contribute significantly to European societies – economically, socially and culturally – their fundamental rights cannot and must not be contingent upon their usefulness.

In the face of Europe's ageing population and [demographic challenges](#), inclusive policies may also bring long-term societal benefits. However, migration governance must remain grounded in equality before the law, non-discrimination and the intrinsic worth of every person, rather than in conditional acceptance based on economic demand. In contrast to deterrence-focused approaches, Spain has recently advanced a [large-scale regularisation initiative](#) framed around integration, social cohesion and respect for fundamental rights, while distancing itself from offshore processing models.

Need for a human rights-based approach

Instead of relying primarily on enforcement measures and the externalisation of responsibility, the EU must adopt a comprehensive and genuinely human rights-based approach to migration governance. This includes fair and efficient asylum procedures, meaningful access to legal remedies, and robust safeguards against refoulement. It is also crucial not to lose sight of the immense human cost associated with restrictive migration policies. The Mediterranean Sea continues to serve as a deadly route for countless individuals attempting to reach European shores in search of safety and dignity. In 2024, the International Organization for Migration documented that [more than 9,000](#) migrants died or went missing worldwide, with a disproportionate number of these tragedies occurring [in the Mediterranean](#). Moreover, credible reports of asylum seekers [being forcibly expelled](#) at EU borders further underscore the critical need for enhanced accountability, independent monitoring, and rigorous oversight of border management practices. These harrowing statistics serve as a constant and urgent reminder of the devastating consequences of prioritising border control over the preservation of human life.

Choice between fear and hope

The European Union now faces a defining choice. It can continue down a path characterised by enforcement, externalisation and the gradual erosion of procedural safeguards, reinforcing a climate of suspicion and exclusion. Alternatively, it can embrace an approach that places human dignity, equality before the law and genuine international cooperation at its core.

Civil society organisations and NGOs (e.g. [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#)), human rights defenders and members of the European Parliament have already expressed concern about the direction of current proposals. Advocacy, strategic litigation and sustained political engagement remain essential tools to ensure that migration governance in Europe remains anchored in international human rights law.

Ultimately, the debate should not revolve around whether migrants are economically useful or politically convenient, but on whether the European Union is willing to uphold its foundational commitment to human dignity and the universality of rights, and to translate that commitment into concrete policies that expand safe and legal pathways, safeguard family reunification, ensure humanitarian admission, and address the root causes of displacement, including conflict, poverty and climate change.