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#### NOTE

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From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP)
Subject:	Operationalisation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum: cooperation of the EU and its Member States with priority third countries in view of the upcoming first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy - Discussion paper

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Delegations will find in annex a background note prepared by ICMPD with a view to the meeting of the EMWP on 26 March.

Based on this note, the Presidency invites delegations to consider the following questions for discussion:

1. How can we ensure efficient coordination of cooperation by the Member States and Commission with third countries, avoiding duplication of activities with some countries and a lack of sufficient engagement with others?
2. Which specific formats and instruments should be prioritised to establish or reinforce strategic and comprehensive partnerships with key third countries, considering both existing and potential innovative approaches?

3. Which other measures could be considered to expand the Toolbox, in the area of the external dimension, that would provide additional support to Member States in addressing current migration challenges?
  4. Which key elements and priorities are being considered by Member States in their national strategies regarding the external dimension and which of these could be included in the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, particularly when building partnerships with countries along migratory routes?
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**Operationalisation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum: cooperation of the EU and its Member States with priority third countries in view of the upcoming first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy<sup>1</sup>**

Brussels, 26 March 2025

Cooperation with partner countries is an integral element of the European Union's (EU) 'comprehensive approach' to asylum and migration management.<sup>2</sup> The Pact on Migration and Asylum (hereinafter, 'the Pact'), adopted in May 2024, primarily focuses on the internal dimension; however, it also carries significant implications for the external dimension. Securing close collaboration with countries of origin and transit will be instrumental for the successful implementation of its reform agenda.

The Pact establishes a four-pillar framework: secure external borders, efficient asylum procedures, a solidarity mechanism, and integration of migration into international partnerships. The Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR) codifies this 'comprehensive approach', which intertwines internal reforms – such as streamlined asylum procedures and the solidarity mechanism – with external actions targeting migratory routes and deepening cooperation with third countries. Central to this process is the alignment of EU Member States' efforts with the Pact's legislative framework, particularly through the common implementation plan (CIP) and national implementation plans (NIPs), which aim to harmonise migration policies by mid-2026.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was produced by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) upon request from Poland and in support of its Presidency of the Council of the EU. It does not claim to be exhaustive in its information provision or analysis; it is intended primarily to inform a targeted discussion at the meeting of the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP) on challenges and opportunities concerning the external components of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

<sup>2</sup> While the EU's approach towards cooperation with third countries has continuously evolved since the 1999 Tampere Programme, the notion of a 'comprehensive approach' to migration has become more prominent recently, including mentions in the February 2023 and December 2023 European Council conclusions, and eventually found its legal basis in Article 3 of the AMMR.

## Operationalising the external dimension

A cornerstone of operationalising the external dimension of the Pact is deepening cooperation with priority third countries along key migratory routes. Tailored partnerships are needed to address the root causes of irregular migration, enhance border security and anti-smuggling, tackle instrumentalisation, stabilise the situation of refugees in host countries and facilitate returns. As the EU prepares to unveil its first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy under the AMMR, these partnerships are poised to play a pivotal role in balancing responsibility-sharing among EU Member States while embedding migration management within the Union's broader external relations.

In shaping the external dimension of the Pact, the following AMMR articles have to be considered, and a clear concept for their translation into practice has to be developed.

- Article 5 of the AMMR sets out key elements of the external dimension, including promoting legal migration and pathways to protection, supporting partner countries hosting large numbers of migrants and refugees, preventing irregular migration, and combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. It also emphasises enhancing return, readmission and reintegration, as well as the full implementation of the common visa policy. This entails addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, such as poverty, conflict, and climate change.
- Article 6(3) of the AMMR outlines the instruments encompassed in the 'Permanent EU Migration Support Toolbox'. The Toolbox includes measures to support Member States in fulfilling their obligations under the AMMR, notably by facilitating return and reintegration activities, strengthening actions and cross-sectoral activities in the external dimension of migration, enhancing diplomatic and political outreach, coordinating communication strategies, supporting human rights-based migration policies in third countries, and promoting legal migration and well-managed mobility.

- Article 7 of the AMMR requires Member States to develop national strategies, taking into account the comprehensive approach to asylum and migration management and based on the agreed template.<sup>3</sup> To alleviate migratory pressure on the Union, these national strategies should include actions implemented both domestically and in cooperation with partner countries along relevant migratory routes to the EU.

In addition, the Asylum Procedure Regulation (APR) mandates the Commission to conduct a review of the safe third country concept (STCC) by June 2025, in line with Article 77 of the APR. Beyond this review, the APR introduces the possibility of adopting EU-wide lists of safe third countries (Article 60) and safe countries of origin (Article 62), without prejudice to the right of EU Member States to adopt national lists. Any use of the STCC will require, by its nature, cooperation with third countries.

Moreover, the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation (Resettlement Regulation) aims to enhance resettlement and humanitarian admission and contribute to strengthening the Union's partnerships with third countries in regions to which a large number of persons in need of international protection have been displaced, to demonstrate global solidarity and contribute to improving the protection space in such third countries.

Finally, Talent Partnerships are part of the comprehensive partnerships between the EU and partner countries and aim at boosting international labour mobility and skills and talent development in partner countries in a mutually beneficial way.

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Implementing Decision laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council, as regards the template to be used by Member States to ensure that their national asylum and migration management strategies are comparable on specific core elements, agreed by the AMMR Committee on 13 February 2025.

Building on Member States' national strategies and relevant analyses from EU bodies, the Commission will draw up the first five-year European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy by 12 December 2025.

## Fostering partnerships

For the external dimension of the Pact to be effective, the EU must build partnerships with countries along key migratory routes, making the ‘whole-of-route approach’ a reality. The Commission has presented and continues to implement EU action plans for the Western Balkans, Central Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean and Atlantic, and Eastern Mediterranean routes. These action plans outline operational measures, with an emphasis on stepping up the prevention of irregular migration and enhancing the management of flows in cooperation with key countries of origin and transit.

In ongoing migration dialogues, the EU and partner countries consistently highlight the need for comprehensive partnerships that balance efforts to address irregular migration with legal migration opportunities, the promotion of people-to-people contacts and collaboration on socio-economic growth.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, when partnerships address the interests of both parties and are focused on the long-term converging of priorities, they are likely to be more accepted and sustainable than single-issue partnerships.<sup>5</sup> These migration partnerships should feed into our overarching EU partnerships with these countries to ensure good synergy and consistency with our overall engagement. The scope of these comprehensive partnerships should be tailor-made, addressing priorities across various policy areas – including investment, trade, security and migration policy – in countries of origin and transit. Beyond policy alignment, however, the success of these partnerships depends on trust and mutual understanding between the EU and its partners. As the Pact is primarily viewed by non-accession third countries as an internal EU reform, its external implications require the EU to invest in strong migration diplomacy, strategic communication, and proactive engagement to clarify its impact on partner countries and ensure their meaningful involvement.

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<sup>4</sup> Outcome document of the Joint High-Level Meeting of the Khartoum Process and Rabat Process hosted in Lisbon, 16-17 October 2024.

<sup>5</sup> The EU’s Talent Partnerships are a good example of mutually beneficial initiatives that promote socio-economic development and skills mobility in partner countries while responding to EU labour market needs. Furthermore, harnessing diaspora engagement has untapped potential when it comes to fostering strategic partnerships with third countries, supporting Talent Partnerships and the facilitation of labour migration pathways, facilitating trade and investment opportunities, but also safeguarding democratic transformation and countering misinformation. ECDPM, EUDiF and MPF (2021), [Implementation of the Talent Partnerships: What potential role for the diaspora?](#).

## **Trust-building through migration diplomacy**

For partnerships to deliver the desired outcomes, trust-building is fundamental and focusing first on areas of common interest can pave the way for discussions on more controversial issues. Trust takes time, and partners often underestimate the need to genuinely listen to, understand and follow up on each other's perspectives. Equally important, cooperation must take place on an equal footing – characterised by joint leadership and shared ownership and responsibility. Regular exchanges and open dialogue are essential to creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding, ensuring that cooperation is built on credible offers and realistic expectations from all sides.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the engagement of Member States under the new Resettlement Regulation will play a crucial role to help strengthen the Union's partnership with third countries, with the objective of showing solidarity with countries in regions to which a large number of persons in need of international protection have been displaced by helping to alleviate the pressure on those countries. This will not only foster those countries' capacity to improve reception and international protection conditions, but also contribute to reducing irregular and dangerous onward movements of third-country nationals and stateless persons in need of international protection.

This new instrument offers a structured resettlement system providing a common approach to safe and legal arrival to the Union for persons in need of international protection. The first Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan, to be adopted this year, will detail the EU resettlement and humanitarian admission efforts to be implemented in 2026-2027, while fully respecting Member States' concrete indications with regard to their commitments.

## **The role of established dialogue platforms**

Existing initiatives – such as the Budapest, Prague, Rabat, and Khartoum Processes, as well as EUROMED Migration and the Joint Valletta Action Plan follow-up – have been widely valued for facilitating open dialogue and have been instrumental in fostering mutual trust over the years. These frameworks have provided structured spaces for engagement, allowing the gradual alignment of priorities and the identification of areas for deeper cooperation. Their proven role in facilitating open dialogue should be leveraged in implementing the external dimension of the Pact, ensuring that migration partnerships are embedded in broader policy cooperation, including investment, trade, and security.

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<sup>6</sup> [Takeaways from the Vienna Migration Conference 2024](#), held on 22-23 October 2024.

These platforms can be leveraged to discuss the challenges and opportunities the Pact presents for the EU's strategic migration partners. Discussions at Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs) of the Processes highlighted the strong engagement of partner countries regarding how the Pact affects their relations with the EU. However, this level of interest varies across regions. The Processes have also revealed that several partner countries lack sufficient knowledge of the Pact and its implications, making it difficult for them to understand EU Member States' positions, priorities, and expectations regarding partnerships.

As the EU advances the implementation of the Pact, deepening engagement with partner countries will be essential to strengthening migration governance both internally and externally. By harnessing existing frameworks, enhancing communication, and aligning shared interests, the EU and its partners can turn dialogue into concrete action. A comprehensive approach – balancing internal reforms with strategic partnerships – will be key to fostering a more sustainable and cooperative international migration framework.