

Outsourcing borders

Monitoring EU externalisation policy

Bulletin 7
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“When policies persistently fail, we need to look not only at ‘what went wrong’ but also at ‘what went right’ – and at who is benefiting from the wreckage.”

Ruben Andersson and David Keen

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Thematic and regional developments

Official EU documents summarised here, and those published with previous editions of the bulletin, are contained in our [document archive](#).

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Border management

European Parliament vote clears path for negotiations on new Europol anti-migrant smuggling powers

On 20 May the European Parliament adopted its position for negotiations with the Council of the EU on rules designed to give Europol greater powers with regard to migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The Parliament is more favourable to the plans than the Council, which is [against large parts of the proposal](#). However, both the Parliament and the Council are [in favour](#) of European immigration liaison officers stationed in "third countries" increasing the amount of data shared with Europol.



EU Asylum Agency celebrates 10 years of support for creating buffer zones in the Balkans

In April, the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) [celebrated](#) a decade of EU support for "migration management" in the Western Balkans, launched in response to the large-scale arrival of refugees in 2015. The event in Brussels "celebrated the efforts towards the effective and rights-based management of migrants and persons in need of international protection in the Western Balkans."

Some of this work was on the agenda of the External Aspects of Asylum and Migration Working Party on 14 May, where officials received updates on Western Balkans states' "progress in the field of asylum and migration management."

As documented by [Border Violence Monitoring Network](#) and other organisations, violations of the rights of people crossing borders in the region have been constant since 2015, alongside harassment and arrests of individuals and organisations providing solidarity and support.



Budgets and funding

EU agrees terms of €4 billion loan to Egypt

On 19 May the European Parliament and the Council of the EU [reached agreement](#) on the terms of a €4 billion loan from the EU to Egypt. The loan is part of a [larger, €7.4 billion financial support package](#) that includes some €200 million for border and immigration control measures. The overall package was announced last year as part of the EU and Egypt upgrading their relationship to a “strategic” level.




Additional €3 billion in EU border and immigration funding announced

On 9 May the European Commission [announced](#) that it would provide an additional €3 billion for borders, immigration and support for Ukrainian refugees. It is not clear from the Commission's press release precisely how the money will be divided, but €1.2 billion of the total amount will be split between the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument. Funds from both these budgets can be distributed to non-EU states, [under certain conditions](#).

Joint Valletta Action Plan follow-up conducts latest evaluation exercise

The 2015 Valletta Summit between European and African states was a pivotal moment in the current phase of border externalisation policies. It led to new political impetus and substantial financial backing, in particular the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The "[Joint Valletta Action Plan \(JVAP\) follow-up](#)" is currently conducting a data collection exercise to "strengthen evidence-informed policy-making." Those providing the data will be states; unsurprisingly, migrants and refugees are not being asked for their views. A "[dashboard](#)" detailing projects and initiatives is forthcoming.



Deportation and readmission

'Euro-Rwanda' proposal to facilitate deportation camps in non-EU states published

On 20 May the European Commission [published a proposal](#) that would alter EU rules on the definition of a "safe third country." The proposal would make it possible for the EU to deport people to a country with which they have no connection, as long as an appropriate "agreement or arrangement" is in place. The proposal, which has to be agreed by the Council and the Parliament, is essential to the plan to create deportation camps in non-EU states.

In [a detailed analysis](#), Steve Peers concludes that "the Commission's proposal does not reproduce all the features of the UK's failed [Rwanda] policy, [but] is similar enough to raise comparable questions about its feasibility, and – if Member States also try to override court rulings about the safety of the countries concerned – its legality and morality too."

Member states could “strengthen” visa sanctions to encourage non-EU states to accept deportations

On 6 May, member state delegations in the Council's [Visa Working Party](#) held a discussion centred on the “Article 25a mechanism.” Using the mechanism, the EU can [restrict the issuance of visas](#) to nationals of states considered insufficiently cooperative with deportations from the EU. Currently this includes The Gambia (since October 2021) and Ethiopia (since June 2024).

The discussion on 6 May was designed to let delegations “share their ideas” on what to consider in a “potential review” of the mechanism, according to a [document](#) (pdf). This included questions on whether the law should be changed to allow for “more efficient operationalization” of the mechanism, and whether it should be easier for the EU to trigger.

The outcome of those discussions may feed into the Commission's forthcoming new visa policy strategy, which is due to be published in [the last quarter of this year](#).

Tunisian authorities violently coerce people into EU-funded removal schemes

In April, the Tunisian National Guard violently dismantled a number of makeshift camps that were home to refugees and migrants. They burnt down tents and displaced thousands of people.

InfoMigrants [reported](#) that a spokesman for the National Guard said the Tunisian government was working with the International Organisation for Migration and “with the countries of departure, of welcome as well as the international NGOs to ensure voluntary repatriation.”

The EU has provided hundreds of millions of euros to the Tunisian authorities for migration and border policies, including for encouraging “voluntary” returns. In March 2024, [Statewatch reported](#) that: “Direct capacity-building of national authorities to return non-Tunisian nationals to their country of origin is a novelty in the EU migration policies.”

The destruction of the camps and the pushing of people to “voluntary” returns programmes would seem to be the latest example of EU externalisation policies encouraging rights violations, [just as critics warned](#) when the EU and Tunisia signed a “memorandum of understanding” in 2023.

An [internal EU document published with this bulletin](#) (pdf) indicates that EU support for “voluntary” returns programme is set to continue: “there is a need to continue to further provide support to assisted voluntary returns hand-in-hand with sustainable reintegration,” it says. “The continuation of EU financial support for these activities, as well as sustained political engagement, are essential to build on achievements reached so far, including to intensify anti-smuggling cooperation and to further increase the return figures.”



EU cooperation with Iraq heavily focused on deportations

In February, the Commission’s DG MENA published the EU’s 2021-27 “Multiannual Indicative Programme” for Iraq. The [document](#) (pdf) sets out the EU’s funding priorities for Iraq for that period, and focuses heavily on “returns and reintegration”. The document says it is:

“...very important to support the government in managing return, readmission and sustainable socio-economic reintegration of Iraqi returnees from EU and non- EU countries. Developing cooperation in these areas would help those irregular migrants without perspectives abroad, to come back in dignity to their country and have a fresh start. It would also contribute to spreading realistic information on migration opportunities and risks, thus discouraging further irregular departures from the country. These areas of cooperation and others aimed at supporting migration management would take place in the context of the EU-Iraq Migration Dialogue.”



ICMPD organises training in Iraq on “sustainable reintegration”

As part of the Budapest Process, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has been [training officials from the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq](#) on “sustainable reintegration” of returnees. This is part of a programme funded by the Danish government. It follows the [opening in January](#) of a “Migrant Resource Centre” in the region, funded by Sweden.



Migration partnerships

Further EU support for violence and abuse in North Africa under discussion

On 14 May the [External Aspects of Asylum and Migration Working Party \(EMWP\)](#) discussed developments on the “Central Mediterranean Route.”

A [document circulated by the Polish Presidency](#) (pdf) demonstrates that EU member states are well aware of the rampant rights abuses in the region, by authorities to whom they are providing support. It refers to summary expulsions from Tunisia, after which “migrants may be sold to Libyan militias.” It also notes the Libyan Government of National Unity’s recent “inflammatory anti-migrant campaign” and forced closure of civil society organisations.

The Presidency nevertheless emphasises the need to “further cooperate with the relevant countries, including Libya and Tunisia” by finding ways to “overcome financial constraints.”

An even-starker admission of guilt is contained in a separate [document](#) (pdf) discussed by the [Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum \(SCIFA\)](#) on 10 April:

*“Italy renewed its 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Libya in February 2024. The MoU facilitates joint patrols, detention centre funding, and returns of intercepted migrants. **The EU indirectly supports these efforts through training and equipment for Libyan authorities, despite documented human rights abuses in detention centres.**” [emphasis added]*



EU and UK consider joint external migration control projects

May’s EU-UK summit was widely-reported as introducing a “reset” in EU-UK relations. Included in a new [Security and Defence Partnership](#) (pdf) was a statement that the two sides would “explore opportunities for cooperation in the external dimension of irregular migration, including addressing challenges such as transnational organised crime, trafficking of human beings and migrant smuggling.”

Two paragraphs in the [“Common Understanding”](#) (pdf) released after the summit were devoted to the same topic. The document notes that there will be “increased mutual sharing of information, country expertise and analysis enabling better coordination.” It also points to closer cooperation in “multilateral fora, processes and dialogues,” with possible UK involvement in the Khartoum and Rabat processes mentioned specifically.

Increased law enforcement cooperation was also highlighted, including “through enhanced cooperation with Europol and its European Migrant Smuggling Centre.”

It has been reported that the UK is considering “asking Kosovo to enter into an agreement for a so-called migration ‘return hub’ scheme,” a move that would likely upset EU governments. They [want to keep their own deportation camps far from EU borders](#), “to avoid causing secondary irregular migration back to the EU.”

European Union and African Union commit to “enhanced and reciprocal partnership for migration and mobility”

Ministers from the EU and AU committed to more joint work on “migration and mobility” at their third summit on 21 May, though the [statement](#) (pdf) released following the summit contains few specific details on what this will mean in practice.

It does refer to “enhancing cooperation in matters of migration in the framework of the EU-AU Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD) and in coordination with AU Migration Organs/mechanisms including the African Migration Observatory in Morocco, the African Center for the Study and research on Migration in Mali and the Continental Operational Center in Sudan.”

Other specific initiatives referred to include the “Joint Valletta Action Plan, the Rabat Process, the Khartoum Process, the Continent-to-Continent Migration and Mobility Dialogue, as well as the Rome Process, the AU Horn of Africa Initiative, and the joint AU-EU-UN Tripartite Task Force.”

Commission official on tour in Algeria and Morocco

The Commission’s Director-General for the Middle East, Stefano Sannino, visited [Algeria](#) in late April and [Morocco](#) in mid-May. There is only one direct reference to migration, in the Commission’s statement regarding the visit to Algeria. However, both mention the EU’s forthcoming “Pact for the Mediterranean,” which is expected to focus on migration amongst a range of other policy areas.

Africa Frontex Intelligence Community: documents released

Documents have been [published by Frontex](#) in response to an access request, concerning the [Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community \(AFIC\)](#). The documents, which are substantially censored, include reports from a risk analysis training course in Spain, a workshop in The Gambia and monthly reports. Though they are not recent, they provide some insight into the type of work that takes place in the framework of AFIC.

Other

How the EU coordinates the outsourcing of migration control

It is no secret that the EU is seeking greater cooperation from non-EU states in its migration control agenda. Less is known, however, about precisely how that cooperation is organised and encouraged. A document produced last year and released in response to an access to documents request from Statewatch provides some further details on the topic, pointing to avenues for advocacy, research and investigation.

Read the full article: [How the EU coordinates the outsourcing of migration control](#)



EU officials talk "asylum policy and homeland security" at European Police Congress

The director of Frontex and deputy director of Europol appeared on a panel entitled "Asylum Policy and Homeland Security" at the [European Police Congress in late May](#). The content of their speeches is currently unknown, but the title of the panel itself is indicative of the longstanding - and now accelerating - shift towards treating asylum and immigration as security issues. The use of the term "homeland security" may also raise eyebrows: it came to prominence in western politics after it was introduced in the USA after the 9/11 attacks.

UN OHCHR launches call for inputs: Externalization of Migration and the Impact on the Human Rights of Migrants

The UN's Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has released a [call for inputs on the impact of externalisation policies](#). "This report seeks to build upon the existing body of recommendations on specific measures and offer a comprehensive, cross-cutting assessment of externalization practices through the lens of human rights protection, transparency, accountability, and monitoring." The deadline for submissions is 6 June.



Updates to the document archive

The [Outsourcing Borders document archive](#) hosts key documents from the Council of the EU and the European Commission.

External Aspects of Asylum and Migration Working Party (EMWP)

- [Central Mediterranean Route – Presidency paper](#) (8073/25, LIMITE, 7 May 2025, pdf)



Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA)

- [Cooperation with third countries in the area of migration – Role of strategic and comprehensive partnerships – Discussion paper](#) (7569/25, LIMITE, 4 April 2025, pdf)



Visa Working Party

- [Presidency discussion paper on Visa Code Article 25a – forward look](#) (8330/25, LIMITE, 30 April 2025, pdf)



About this bulletin

This project, carried out by *Statewatch* and *migration-control.info* and funded by *Brot für die Welt*, *Misereor*, *medico international* and *Pro Asyl*, aims to make the EU's externalisation policies, plans and practices public. In doing so it seeks to highlight their impact on the rights of people on the move, as well as democratic standards, transparency and accountability. It addresses a lack of public information by publishing relevant EU documents, in this phase primarily those produced or discussed by the Council of the EU. It also tackles the overflow of information that results from a variety of EU institutions, working groups and national governments involved in the externalisation agenda by summarising thematic and regional developments, and by analysing key issues in depth.