

Outsourcing borders

Monitoring EU externalisation policy

Bulletin 14
3 March 2026

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

Audre Lorde

Contents

Border management.....	2
Deportation and readmission.....	4
Migration partnerships.....	8
Other.....	11
Updates to the document archive.....	12
About this bulletin.....	13

Border management

European Commission to guide the Council of Europe's 'Political Declaration' on migration

A [summary of discussions](#) (pdf) at the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) meeting of 4 February shows the Commission's plan to represent the EU in forthcoming negotiations for a "[Political Declaration on migration issues](#)" from the Council of Europe.

While the technical details of the Commission's involvement in drafting the declaration are hardly interesting, the note offers a suggestion of what to expect in the declaration itself (in the words of the discussion summary):

- expulsions of foreign nationals convicted of serious crimes
- mass arrivals of migrants
- instrumentalisation
- decision-making in migration cases
- 'innovative solutions' (such as the recent '[place of safety](#)' discussions)

An [accompanying note](#) (pdf) goes into more details of the technical process. The full declaration is expected to be adopted around mid-May 2026.

Presidency compromise draft on EU Digital Travel application

On 1 October 2025, the then-Danish presidency of the Council of the EU circulated its latest [compromise proposal](#) (pdf) for the EU Digital Travel application legislation. The majority of the amendments appear to be fine-tuning without substantive changes. The full draft with all amendments tracked is [on the Statewatch site](#).

Regarding digital border systems, *Statewatch* has also published:

- [a presentation](#) (pdf) from the Council to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 1 September 2025, with an update on automated border checks under the Entry/Exit System
- [a presentation](#) (pdf) from the EU's IT department eu-LISA to the WPF meeting on 7 October 2025 on "Digital border solutions regulated by the EU: status, timelines and interdependencies"

The Future of Europol: member states look to greater data sharing

Ahead of an [expected review of Europol's mandate](#), the Cypriot presidency has produced a paper on the future of the agency, to inform ongoing discussions in the Council. [The document](#) (pdf), circulated on 12 February 2026 suggests discussions focus on four key themes:

- Data processing and information exchange
- Cooperation with other EU agencies, bodies and third parties
- Dealing with hybrid threats (*in this context, this refers more to such threats as sabotage, information manipulation and election interference rather than migration instrumentalisation*)
- Governance

Overall, the document shows an appetite for Europol to serve more as a “**central hub for the exchange and analysis of information**”, particularly regarding cross-border threats. There also appears to be appetite for “enhancing Europol's capabilities to cooperate with the private sector”, with financial institutions cited as an example.

While the Future of Europol document does not invoke migration specifically, the upcoming mandate review will likely affect migration policing, particularly in light of the [ProtectEU internal security strategy](#). The matter is to be discussed further at the [JHA Council meeting on 5 March 2026](#).

A clearer picture of EU-Ukraine Frontex discussions

A redacted document published in the [previous Outsourcing Borders bulletin](#) showed that the Ukraine and EU have begun negotiations on a potential Frontex status agreement and potential deployment of Frontex officers in Ukraine.

The [full document](#) (pdf) has now been obtained by *Statewatch*. It reveals that technical discussions began between Ukraine and the Commission in April 2023, and Ukrainian border guards' military obligations are a main driver of the interest in Frontex deployment. The Commission is reported to have underlined that actual deployment of Frontex staff is contingent on assessments of the security situation. The unredacted note also reveals that the formal request for negotiations on a status agreement came from the Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs on 25 July 2025.

The note concludes by urging caution on when to submit a formal recommendation for a Council decision, and invites member states to comment on how they feel about a Frontex-Ukraine agreement. Notably, a question to member states which had been deleted, asks:

“For Member States preferring to defer the initiation of negotiations, what would need to happen for you to support authorising negotiation?”

Deportation and readmission

In this edition of *Outsourcing Borders*, several documents, initially censored by the Council but obtained in full by *Staterwatch*, go into more detail on [the expected overhaul](#) of the mandate of the EU's border agency Frontex.



The future of Frontex: member state priorities

[A note](#) (pdf) from the Danish presidency to the permanent member state representatives (COREPER) on 12 December summarises the conclusions of discussions held with Council preparatory bodies on member state priorities for Frontex.

The note lists three “guiding principles” that member states broadly agreed on for the Frontex overhaul. These principles are (using the note’s wording):

- The starting point should be the operational needs of Member States.
- The focus should remain on the agency’s core functions relating to external borders and return.
- **Cooperation with third countries is a key issue to address, including a Frontex role in returns from third countries to other third countries.**

Key take-aways from the discussion summaries include:

- Member states are reported to have various concerns about increasing Frontex staffing (see below);
- **There is broad support for expanding Frontex activities in, and between, third countries, including route-based deportations and ‘return hubs’;**
- Member states support loosening the rules around Frontex status agreements to allow **more flexible deployment in third countries** (the note also suggests that ‘successful’ short-term deployments could pave the way for full status agreements);
- There is clear appetite for Frontex to be involved in pre-departure checks in third countries, for people travelling to the Schengen zone;
- Some member states support greater Frontex involvement in reacting to the ‘instrumentalisation’ of irregular migration, as well as drone disturbances and undersea sabotage. Other member states though are reported to be wary of this (the note does not specify which ones);
- Member states are divided on whether and how Frontex governance and oversight needs to be improved (see below);

The future of Frontex: the standing corps

A note from the Danish presidency to a 2 December meeting of the Working Party on Frontiers addresses the ‘standing corps’ – Frontex’s uniformed force. The force’s headcount is expected to triple to 30,000 officers in the period ending 2029, and be equipped with more surveillance and patrolling equipment.

[The presidency document](#) (pdf) mostly invites member states to comment on what they want from Frontex and how they envision an expanded force complementing their own national border forces.

The COREPER note mentioned above observes that most member states “**do not perceive at this stage an added value or operational need for any significant enlargement of the standing corps**”. The note goes into further depth on concerns member states have with the standing corps discussion, and shows that member states are interested in **Frontex using more digital- and AI-based tools**.

The future of Frontex: governance and oversight

A [similar document](#) (pdf) to the same working committee addresses Frontex governance. With it is expected that Frontex will be given more responsibilities – including a more active hand in deportations outside of the EU – the presidency apparently feels that its governance structure needs to be re-thought:

*“Given its current workload and possible new responsibilities of the Agency, the Presidency would like to discuss with delegations whether there is a need for **modifications to the internal governance of the Agency, for instance with regard to return.**”* (This passage was censored by the Council)

To that end, the paper explores Frontex governance under three themes:

- External oversight, Management Board, and operational planning
- Fundamental rights
- European Integrated Border Management

The COREPER note mentioned above reports, in a passage initially deleted by the Council, that member states are divided on what level of overhaul is needed, **particularly with regards to external oversight** and concerning Article 46 of the Frontex regulation, which covers situations where **fundamental rights violations may require a Frontex operation be suspended, terminated or not embarked upon at all**.

An in-depth analysis of the Frontex overhaul by researcher Marloes Streppel is [available on the Statewatch site](#).

Self-deportation – just a matter of incentives

The new Cypriot presidency has taken on increasing ‘voluntary’ returns as one of its key priorities. To that end, a preliminary [discussion paper](#) (pdf) from the presidency to delegates circulated on 12 February 2026 explores ways to increase incentives for people to self-deport.

After broadly laying out the background of recent deportation efforts, and the EU’s persistently low return rate (the note also mentions the rather fanciful concept of irregular migrants ‘reintegration support shopping’ between member states), the paper goes on to various recommendations. These include:

- De-linking reintegration support from deportation orders, meaning people could be incentivised to leave before an order is given;
- Making reintegration support **‘degressive’**, meaning that **the longer people go without self-deporting, the less nominal support they will be offered**;
- **An increasing role for Frontex in coordinating mass voluntary returns**;
- Increased inter-agency cooperation to address inefficiencies and limit the possibility of absconsion;
- **Strengthening forced deportation capacities and other pre-deportation enforcement measures**, in order to make ‘voluntary’ returns seem more appealing (*“voluntary return is most effective when integrated into a broader framework that also includes robust and effective measures to enforce return decisions, as a genuine alternative”*);
- Increased use of EU-wide digital border systems and databases

Voluntary returns are expected to be discussed further at the meeting of the Schengen Council on 5 March 2026.

Member states discussed forced returns to Syria

[A note](#) (pdf) from the Danish presidency of the Council to member states on 6 October 2025 explores the issue of people returning, or being forced to return, to Syria since the fall of the Assad regime.

While no longer hugely relevant six months on, it is worth noting that among the discussion points are the observation that **while intentions to return to Syria increased after the fall of Assad, they subsequently declined given the security situation**. The note also shows clearly **that member states were pushing for forced deportations of Syrians by this point in 2025**.



Member states continue to discuss Ukrainian returns

A [note](#) (pdf) from the Danish presidency to the meeting of the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) on [26 November 2025](#) shows continued discussion about what to do with the millions of Ukrainian recipients of temporary protection in Europe when the programme ends in 2027.

The note, a follow-up to [the Council's recommendations](#) on the matter, mostly concerns itself with member states offering other residence statuses to Ukrainian citizens living on their territory, and issues regarding people with special needs. It does, however, also make reference to ongoing efforts to plan for coordinated 'voluntary' return programmes for those Ukrainian citizens who are not offered an alternate status when temporary protection ends.

Migration partnerships



A grand new vision for outsourced border control in the Mediterranean

Ahead of a meeting of the Council of the EU's Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on [5 February, 2026](#), the Cypriot Presidency of the Council circulated a discussion paper on ways to increase border externalisation efforts through the new Pact for the Mediterranean.

The [presidency note](#) (pdf), sub-headed 'initiatives and actions in the area of border security', broadly invites delegations to brainstorm ways the new Pact can be used to increase the EU's control around the Mediterranean. It also suggest some of its own, including:

- **“Common patrolling” of non-EU territorial waters in the Med, as well as “joint activities” in intercepting migrants.** The paper notes the need to pursue Frontex status agreements to facilitate such cooperation.
- **Exporting the EU's border practices via training and information sharing.** The paper references some “misalignment of priorities” among potential partner countries, which in context seems to suggest those countries need to be pushed into following the EU's lead.
- **Funding for equipment and facilities.** The EU is already [funding a new Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in the East of Libya](#), and this Presidency paper suggests that may only be the beginning. It outlines a comprehensive approach to equipping partner countries with the tools they need to prevent people arriving in Europe, including **“the digitalisation of border management processes”**.

[Another note from the Presidency](#) (pdf) sent on 12 February advocates the development of a forum for **internal security dialogues with Mediterranean ‘partners’, with the goal of greater trans-national cooperation on irregular migration control**. This plan, building on existing cooperation, would incorporate greater Europol and Frontex involvement in Mediterranean countries and potentially see the EU funding build-up of those countries' law enforcement-related capacities.

A “renewed approach” to migration control in the Sahel

A report, produced by the Commission and the European External Action Service and circulated 21 October 2025 to the EU’s Political and Security Committee of member state foreign affairs delegates, sums up the EU’s ambitions in re-engaging with Sahel countries on migration control.

The report, titled "[A renewed EU Approach to the Sahel](#)" (pdf), notes the various reasons that EU-Sahel cooperation has declined in recent years and clearly states the EU’s ambitions to reestablish that cooperation:

In this strategic region (the Sahel), the EU should not only aim for short-term leverage but also to sustain efforts for long-term investment and presence, aligned with the Global Gateway strategy, countering geopolitical rivals and scaling up constructive relations to re-establish the EU as a partner of choice for the Sahel, especially amongst the youth who represent a vast majority of the population.

The report features migration as a prominent concern and advocates re-engagement on border control measures, particularly via the ‘Team Europe Initiatives’ and incorporating ‘whole-of-route’ approaches.

Apparently very anxious that Sahel countries would rather partner with non-EU states (perhaps with Russian ‘instrumentalisation’ in mind), the report seems to be advocating a diplomatic ‘full court press’. It recommends offering partnership across the board, from human rights to investment and job creation, counter-terrorism and public outreach campaigns. It also emphasises that the EU must “adapt” to the priorities of each individual country.

The report also notes that a lot of money will likely be needed to foster cooperation:

“Financial tools and all instruments should be tailored to allow for greater flexibility and quick action”.

Action files: updates to EU migration management and spending in Iraq and Bangladesh

At a [17 October 2025](#) meeting of the EU Council's Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM) working party, member state delegations discussed updates to the 'action files' for Bangladesh and Iraq.

These 'action files' sum up the EU's activities and ambitions for border externalisation and other related projects in partner countries. Such efforts include, among others, "use of visa leverage to improve readmission cooperation", combatting "migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings" and increasing deportations.

That Iraq and Bangladesh were discussed is notable given that both were described as having improved their cooperation with the EU on deportations, in a recent [document obtained by Statewatch](#).

The full, though redacted, action files for [Iraq](#) (pdf) and [Bangladesh](#) (pdf) are available on the *Statewatch* site, [along with analysis](#) by researcher Cezary Dziółko.

Action files have also been published for [Afghanistan](#) (pdf), [Egypt](#) (pdf) and [Tunisia](#) (pdf). Analysis of these will be published on the *Statewatch* site in coming weeks.

Other



EU and Moroccan delegates discussed migration

The foreign affairs chiefs of the EU and Morocco, Kaja Kallas and Nasser Bourita, along with their teams, met in Brussels on 29 January for the [fifteenth meeting](#) of the Association Council. Mediterranean commissioner Dubravka Šuica was also present at the meeting, where migration was on the discussion agenda.



ICMPD to run the EU's European Legal Gateway Office in India

An event in New Delhi on February 19 inaugurated the launch of a new 'European Legal Gateway Office' in India, to be run in part by the International Centre for Migration Policy development. The office will nominally provide support regular labour migration between the EU and India, focussed on information and technology workers.

The ICMPD has also produced, along with the Rabat process, a handbook on '[sustainable reintegration](#)'.



EuroParl discussions on externalisation and migration funding

On 24 February, the European Parliament's subcommittee on human rights saw [presentations](#) on the human rights consequences of the EU's border externalisation regime from Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Michael O'Flaherty, as well as the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer Jonas Grimheden, and Samira Bouslama, Senior Human Rights Officer at the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

In his introductory remarks, O'Flaherty stated clearly what is already well known:

"Where externalisation initiatives have been implemented, serious human rights violations have been documented systematically"

Also on [24 February](#), the EuroParl's Development committee discussed a draft opinion on "Establishing the Union support for asylum, migration and integration for the period from 2028 to 2034."



Council questioned over plans to share biometric data with the US

MEP Raquel García Hermida-Van Der Walle (Renew) has written to the Council demanding information about why the Council has [acquiesced to US demands](#) for direct access to personal data stored in EU member state databases. More information on this plan is [on the Statewatch site](#).

Updates to the document archive

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



[Operational Coordination Mechanism on the External Dimension of Migration \(MOCADDEM\)](#)

[Action File - Bangladesh](#) (WK 13003/2025, LIMITE, 10 October 2025, pdf)

[Action file – Iraq](#) (WK 13004/2025, LIMITE, 14 October 2025, pdf)

[Action file – Egypt](#) (WK 11275/2025, LIMITE, 22 September 2025, pdf)

[Action file – Afghanistan](#) (WK 11276/2025, LIMITE, 22 September 2025, pdf)

[Action file – Tunisia](#) (WK 11277/2025 INIT, LIMITE, 22 September 2025)

[Working Party on Frontiers](#)

[The future of Frontex: The standing corps – composition and tasks](#): Presidency note to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 2 December (15798/25, LIMITE, 25 November 2025, pdf)

[The future of Frontex: Governance and oversight](#): Presidency note to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 2 December (15799/25, LIMITE, 25 November 2025, pdf)

[Entry/Exit System Automated border control systems](#): presentation from the Council to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 1 September 2025 (WK 10823/2025, LIMITE, 2 September 2025, pdf)

[Digital border solutions regulated by the EU: status, timelines and interdependencies](#): Council presentation to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting of 7 October 2025 (WK 13215/2025, LIMITE, 8 October 2025, pdf)

[European Union Support to Ukraine’s Border Management Authorities](#): Commission paper to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting 5 November 2025 (14396/25, LIMITE, 30 October 2025, pdf)

[Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum \(SCIFA\)](#)

[Follow-up on Council recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine: transition to other legal residence statuses](#): Discussion paper circulated to SCIFA committee (15457/25, LIMITE, 12 November 2025, pdf)

Other documents

[Pact for the Mediterranean: initiatives and actions in the area of border security](#): Presidency discussion paper circulated to the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting of 5 February 2026 (5533/26 LIMITE, 28 January 2026, pdf)

[The future of Frontex](#): presidency paper to the Permanent Representatives Committee (16714/25, LIMITE, 12 December 2025, pdf)

[Outcome of Proceedings of the JHA Counsellors](#) (4 February 2026): Council note to delegations (6048/26, LIMITE, 5 February 2026, pdf)

[Council of Europe's recommendation on migrant smuggling – Commission's intention to participate in the negotiations on behalf of the Union](#): Commission note to delegations (16592/25, LIMITE, 10 December 2025, pdf)

[External dimension of migration – returns to Syria](#): Presidency discussion paper to permanent representatives (13243/25, LIMITE, 6 October 2025, pdf)

[Regional dialogue on internal security with the Mediterranean](#): Presidency note to delegations (5559/26, LIMITE, 12 February 2026, pdf)

[Joint EEAS-Commission paper "A renewed EU Approach to the Sahel"](#): Report from the European External Action Service to Political and Security Committee (14296/25, LIMITE, 21 October 2025, pdf)

["EU Digital Travel application" - Presidency compromise proposal](#): Presidency paper to the Working Party on Frontiers meeting 7 October 2025 (WK 12500/2025, LIMITE, 1 October 2025, pdf)

[The future of Europol](#): Presidency paper to delegations (5563/26, LIMITE, 12 February 2026, pdf)

[Implementation of the Schengen Council cycle priorities: incentivising voluntary returns](#): Presidency paper to delegations (6200/26, LIMITE, 12 February 2026, 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.

Written and researched by Statewatch and researcher Cezary Dziółko

Outsourcing borders: Monitoring EU externalisation policy
Bulletin 14, 3 February 2026