

Outsourcing borders

Monitoring EU externalisation policy

Bulletin 16
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“l’Afrique merite mieux”

Ivorian man, in conversation

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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

Preparing for the Pact: Presidency urges member states to make sure they can keep asylum seekers where they are

Two documents outline the EU's desire that under the incoming Pact on Migration and Asylum, irregular migrants are effectively kept in one place, to prevent secondary movement and to make sure they are on-hand for removal at any time.

The first, a [presidency discussion document](#) (pdf) emphasises the need to make sure member states' asylum reception capacities are sufficient ahead of the implementation of the Pact. In particular, the paper impresses on delegates the need to ensure sufficient capacity to keep asylum seekers where they are:

“Preparedness is essential not only to uphold humanitarian and legal obligations but also to maintain public confidence in asylum systems and to contribute to preventing secondary movements which can partly be driven by disparities in reception conditions”

This paper also discusses the various efforts around Europe to prepare for the new Pact, and invites delegates to comment on their own reception, contingency planning and monitoring capacities.

The [second discussion paper](#) (pdf) focusses on keeping irregular migrants physically available during the asylum procedure and for deportation once they become subject to [the return border procedure](#).

The paper urges member states to transpose the relevant EU legislations into their own law, making particular mention of those covering detention grounds. (Statewatch [has previously analysed](#) the relevant Union-level proposals regarding expanded detention powers).

It also reminds member states of the **need to make sure their courts are equipped to quickly process review of deportation orders, “particularly in order to respect the strict timelines for judicial review”**.

The note also reminds member states of the existence of a policy “toolbox” for keeping people to hand during asylum and deportation procedures, including measures for **restrictions of freedom of movement, alternatives to detention and detention**.

It also suggests ways to review and tweak the new asylum and return systems once they are underway and mentions individual member states' border procedure pilot projects (though it does not say which states).

Preparing for the Pact: Screening and unaccompanied minor procedures

Two further discussion documents addressed to the Asylum Working Party explore the new screening procedures under the Pact, as well as age assessment and processing of unaccompanied minors.

The [discussion document regarding screening](#) (pdf) sets out timelines and general procedures, including ID verification and registration in the Eurodac system (**at which point someone may be deemed automatically ineligible for asylum**), as well as health and other checks.

The [discussion document regarding age assessments and unaccompanied minors](#) (pdf) describes an undefined ‘multidisciplinary assessment’ to be carried out in the first instance, **followed by a medical examination if doubt remains**. While reminding delegates that the subject should be ‘presumed a child’ during the process, the document’s language appears to leave room **for potential children to be detained during the age assessment process**.

Artificial Intelligence and EU border control: *here we go*

Another [discussion document](#) (pdf), addressed to the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA), explores the various ways AI can be used in a border context:

“AI technologies have the potential to significantly enhance the ability of authorities to manage growing operational demands, improve situational awareness, and strengthen efficiency and consistency of administrative processes”

The document describes **existing member state efforts to explore the use of AI in a border context**, including:

- “improving the quality of consistency and timeliness of decision-making”;
- processing data-sets and predicting migration trends;
- verification of ID and travel documents and detecting irregularities; and
- information extraction and qualitative case-file analysis to inform decision-making.

It also suggests other areas AI could be used, including:

- counter-smuggling activities;
- search and rescue;
- ‘streamlining’ border processes;
- risk analysis and oversight of external borders;
- interpretation, translation and transcription in asylum processes; and
- collecting information related to countries of origin.

Frontex updates on border control status, touts its own ‘added value’

The 2025 ‘Frontex Vulnerability Assessment’, obtained by *Statewatch*, gives member states updates on the overall status of border control capacities around the EU. In the introduction, and throughout the report itself, the agency takes pains to remind member states of its own value, particularly regarding the possible advent of further ‘[hybrid threat](#)’ situations, and of its potential as a steward of greater intelligence sharing between member states and itself.

[A full analysis of the Frontex document](#) is on the *Statewatch* site.

EU presents long-awaited ‘first-ever’ Visa Strategy

In a [presentation](#) (pdf) to the Visa Working Party meeting of 3 March 2026, the Commission explores the details of its new Visa Strategy. There are little surprises regarding how the EU plans to use its visa regime to garner greater cooperation on migration with third countries. The presentation does, however, lay out some of the explicit benchmarks that may be used in assessing whether a country is sufficiently cooperative, confirming that the EU intends to use the visa mechanism for far more than just deportations. These benchmarks include: “visa refusal rate, unfounded asylum applications, return rate, and practical cooperation on return and readmission, **as well as security-linked criteria including cybersecurity and cooperation on counterterrorism, anti-smuggling, and fighting organised crime.**”

The presentation also notes the development of Global Europe Regulation Article 12.3 – allowing for external financial spending to be suspended in cases of ‘non-cooperation’ – as well as amendments to trade policy in order to strengthen the overall strategy.

It also notes that visa measures could be used against countries exhibiting ‘hostility’ to the EU, **particularly in a ‘hybrid threats’ scenario.**

EUAA updates on asylum digitalisation, unaccompanied minors and age assessments under the new Pact

A [series of presentations](#) (pdf) from the EUAA updates delegates on the digitalisation of asylum procedures (described as “uneven” and “fragmented”), as well as the procedures for unaccompanied minors and age assessments under the new pact. There are a lot of technical details regarding the system, though it is of little interest from an externalisation perspective.

Presentation on internal security strategy hints at further intensifying of border control

A [presentation](#) (pdf) from DG Home to delegates at the working party dealing with hybrid threats lays out how it sees the “EU security landscape”. While not broadly addressing migration *per se*, the vision outlined hints at the direction policymakers may be going regarding the need for militarised or otherwise more intense control over EU territories. Noting the “blurred lines between hybrid threats and open warfare” as well as a terrorist threat level which “continues to be high”, the strategy document outlines a number of measures to keep up with the threat, including new forms of security governance, greater intelligence sharing, integrated threat analysis and strengthened security capacities “tightening the net” on organised crime.

Notably, the strategy presentation **makes explicit reference to “strengthening Frontex” in this context and the expected increase of the standing corps.**

A [similar note](#) (pdf) regarding drone and counter-drone security similarly references the need to “support Frontex”, in the context of responding to drone threats.

Deportation and readmission



The future of Frontex: a “comprehensive strategy” for deportations

In the context of the [expected Frontex mandate renewal](#), a document circulated by the Cypriot presidency in February 2026 invites delegates to discuss their thoughts on Frontex becoming more involved in deportations to, and between, non-EU countries.

Referencing the expected passage of the EU’s deportation regulation, [the presidency paper](#) (pdf) makes it clear it hopes the role of Frontex will be expanded to “match the ambition of increased and more efficient” deportations.

Most notable in this document is **the assertion that member states agree that Frontex should be given a role in deportations between third countries and to ‘return hubs’:**

“Stronger Frontex support in this area could help reduce migratory pressure on the EU, strengthen the capacity of third countries in key critical tasks such as identification, and make Frontex a more attractive partner for third countries that are themselves struggling with illegal transit migration”

The presidency leaves open the details of how exactly Frontex will be involved, from training and oversight to conducting deportations themselves. It also discusses the need for more deportation-trained members of the standing corps, in light of an expected increase in deportations from the EU.

It concludes by inviting delegates in the Integration, Migration and Expulsion working party to consider what they want, making particular note of the potential for Frontex operations **in key transit countries.**

Migration partnerships



ICMPD checks in about what it's doing in Turkey

A [presentation](#) (pdf) from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, one of the EU's key externalisation implementing partners, sums up some of its work in Turkey.

The presentation describes one of ICMPD's programmes in Turkey, [ENHANCER and ENHANCER PRO](#), which purports to be a programme for the "Enhancement of Entrepreneurship Capacities for Further Sustainable Socio-Economic Integration". The presentation includes a map of where in Turkey the two sides of the programme are active.

More broadly, the presentation re-confirms that the ICMPD is involved – to some extent - in virtually all aspects of migration control in Turkey. The intro page of the presentation defines governance priorities in Turkey as: *Prevention of Irregular Migration Starting from Source Countries, Effective Border Management, Reinforced Migration Enforcement within the Country, Prevention of Irregular Exits from Turkey, and A Functioning Return System.*

In particular, the presentation notes, among other areas, the "contribution of the representation of ICMPD" in an *"Effective Border Surveillance System Along the Eastern and Southeastern Border"* and notes a future plan for similar representation along western borders. The presentation also includes the observation: *"Turkey does not want to be positioned as a transit or destination country for irregular migrants"*.



Enhanced migration cooperation with Lebanon and Libya

A presidency [discussion paper on Libya and Lebanon](#) (pdf), presented to the SCIFA committee, invites delegates to think about how the EU may "**move towards a more structured framework for engagement**" with both countries on migration control:

*"these countries play a crucial role in preventing third-country nationals from departing irregularly and reaching the EU (...) **A comprehensive framework of cooperation and assistance could have added value in this case**"*

The document presents information on the migratory situation in both countries. This includes several hundred million euros provided to Lebanon in recent years, and mentions **that Frontex is negotiating a working arrangement with Lebanon**. It also presents analysis of the expected future security and migration situations in both countries and invites delegates to consider how migration cooperation could be extended and formalised.

Though the document acknowledges the *"highly challenging environment for refugees and migrants"* in Libya, and makes reference to the need for *"recognition only of the government in Tripoli"* amid engagement with Eastern Libyan forces, it makes no mention of the EU's existing support to Libyan coastal authorities and militias, support which significantly contributes to that *"highly challenging environment"*.

The 'right to leave' in an era of externalisation

A new book '[Protecting the Right to Leave in an Era of Externalised Migration Control](#)', by researcher and adviser Dr Emilie McDonnell, explores how state externalisation projects are denying people the right to leave their countries around the world.

Dr McDonnell provided *Statewatch* with an excerpt:

“Externalisation has become contemporary refugee policy, no longer exceptional, and the containment of migrants embedded in the global regime.

“Imagine a young Sudanese man desperate to escape the conflict and rampant abuses in Sudan. As a national of an unstable, refugee-producing country, he is unlikely to be granted a visa. Moreover, embassies are closed, he has no passport, and airlines will not board undocumented travellers. He plans to flee to Egypt, but the authorities have tightened their entry requirements. Denied safe and legal routes, he crosses into Chad and then endures a dangerous journey through the inhospitable desert into Libya, where he is met with violence, abuse and exploitation.

“With few alternatives, he boards an overcrowded, unseaworthy boat to cross the Mediterranean towards Italy. The boat may capsize or be pulled back by the Libyan Coast Guard, aided by Frontex, which shared the boat’s location with the Libyans. The man and others on board are taken to an EU-funded detention centre in Libya. Meanwhile, IOM is supporting Libyan border authorities to enhance their capacities.

“This example represents only a snapshot of the myriad possible restrictions on movement a migrant will encounter throughout their journey, imposed by State and non-state actors, from the point of departure and well before reaching their potential destination. **The result is a global web of externalisation that has especially harmful effects in collectively containing migrants worldwide.** Prima facie, externalisation measures may interfere with and violate the right to leave.”

Updates to the document archive

The [Outsourcing Borders document archive](#) hosts key documents from the Council of the EU and the European Commission. The full archive is available on the *Statewatch* site.



External Aspects of Asylum and Migration Working Party (EMWP)

Update on the state of play of external cooperation in the field of migration policy: Commission document to meeting of 29 January 2026 (16925/25, LIMITE, 21 January 2026, pdf)

Working Party on Frontiers

Frontex Vulnerability Assessments of European border control 2025. Presented to meeting of 5 February 2026 (5224/26, see also ADD 1 and ADD 2, RESTRICTED, 26 January 2026, all pdfs)

Cross-border workers: Letter from Croatian delegation to Working Party on Frontiers, meeting of 5 February 2026 (5614/26, LIMITE, 26 January 2026, pdf)

Visa Working Party

EU Visa Strategy: Presentation from DG Home to meeting of 3 March 2026 (3513/2026, LIMITE, 4 March 2026, pdf)

Asylum Working Party

Presentations by Frontex and EUAA on development of the asylum screening toolbox: presented to meeting of 3 March 2026, (3201/2026, LIMITE, 4 March 2026, pdf)

Presentations by EUAA on digitalisation of the asylum system, unaccompanied minors and 'age assessment and representation under the Pact': presented to meeting of 3 March 2026, (3561/2026, LIMITE, 4 March 2026, pdf)

Enhancing reception capacity: preparedness and contingency planning for asylum systems in the EU: Presidency presentation to meeting of 10 February 2026 (5566, LIMITE, 4 February 2026, pdf)

Screening as the first step of the asylum procedure: Presidency discussion paper presented to meeting of 3 March 2026 (6602/26, LIMITE, 24 February 2026, pdf)

Age assessment and representation of unaccompanied minors under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Presidency discussion paper presented to meeting of 3 March 2026 (6603/26, LIMITE, 24 February 2026, pdf)

Operational Coordination Mechanism on the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM)

The representation of ICMPD in Turkey: Presentation by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development to meeting of 26 March 2026 (4683/2026, LIMITE, 26 March 2026, pdf)

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Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum

Border procedure: Preventing unauthorised entry into the EU territory and unauthorised movements during the border procedure: Presidency discussion paper (5735/26, LIMITE, 3 February 2026, pdf)

EU engagement and support provision to countries of transit: Lebanon and Libya (External dimension of migration): Presidency discussion paper (5736/26, LIMITE, 6 February 2026, pdf)

Artificial Intelligence in Migration, Asylum and Border Management: Presidency discussion paper (7052/26, LIMITE, 13 March 2026, pdf)

Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion

The future of Frontex: comprehensive strategy for returns, readmission, and enhanced third country cooperation: Presidency discussion paper (6316/26, LIMITE, 27 February 2026, pdf)

Other documents

Presidency flash note on EU-US data exchange negotiations: to delegates of JHA Counsellors (IXIM) meeting of 3 March 2026 (3277/2026, LIMITE, 27 February 2026, pdf)

ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy: Presentation by the European Commission to the 31 March meeting of the Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats (4935/2026, LIMITE, 31 March 2026, pdf)

EU Action Plan on Drone and Counter-drone Security: Commission presentation to 26 March 2026 meeting of the Horizontal Working Party on Cyber Issues (4684/2026, LIMITE, 26 March 2026, pdf)

Proposal for “EU Digital Travel application” - Three column table: Presidency draft (3948/2026, LIMITE, 12 March 2026, pdf)

Presidency flash note on EU Digital Travel Application: note to JHA Counsellors (Frontiers) meeting of 17 March 2026 (3961/2026, LIMITE, 16 March 2026, pdf)

About this bulletin

This project, carried out by *Statewatch* and *migration-control.info* and funded by *Brot für die Welt*, *Misereor* 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.