

Please cite as: EUAA, '2.1. A new era for Europe’s migration and asylum management' in *Asylum Report 2025*, June 2025.

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Section 2.1. Reforming the Common European Asylum System: An ongoing process

Four years after it was proposed by the European Commission as a comprehensive framework for managing migration and asylum in Europe, the Pact on Migration and Asylum was adopted by the European Parliament on 10 April 2024 and by the Council on 14 May 2024.6 In an environment of shifting migration patterns, evolving needs and political discourse centred on migration in EU+ countries, the Pact aims to establish a common approach to migration and asylum based on the principles of solidarity, fair sharing of responsibility and respect for fundamental rights. The legislative instruments of the Pact, most of which become applicable by mid-2026, operationalise the four fundamental components of Europe’s migration and asylum policy:

- **Secure external borders** by robust screening whereby those not fulfilling the conditions to enter the EU are registered and subject to identification, security and health and vulnerability checks. Asylum applicants who are unlikely to need protection, mislead the authorities or present a security risk are subject to a mandatory asylum border procedure, while efficient returns, coupled with reintegration support, will apply for those who do not qualify for protection. In this area, the Pact offers solutions for situations of crisis and migrant instrumentalisation through rapid measures, operational support and funding.7
- **Fast and efficient procedures** by streamlining procedural rules and harmonising criteria for international protection and reception standards. While emphasis is placed on strengthening safeguards to ensure respect for fundamental rights, clear obligations are set out for applicants to cooperate with authorities and consequences of non-compliance are defined.8
- **Effective system of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility** to ensure that EU countries under migratory pressure receive support from other EU countries, and financial and operational support from EU funding and EU Agencies. The criteria to determine the country responsible for assessing an asylum application are clarified, and additional

safeguards have been put in place to discourage secondary movements of asylum applicants.[9]

- **Embedding migration in international partnerships** based on an understanding that migration is a complex phenomenon with broader implications, thus requiring collaborative, multi-stakeholder efforts. This includes cooperation with a number of actors at a global level to prevent irregular departures and loss of life along migration routes; fight migrant smuggling; and reinforce cooperation with returns and readmissions. The Pact promotes legal pathways to migration in the EU.[10]

Following the successful closure of the legislative process, the next stage of the reform entails turning the complex set of legislative acts into an operational reality by the end of a 2-year transitional period, in June 2026. With support from the European Commission and relevant EU Agencies, Member States need to put in place the necessary legal, administrative and practical arrangements for the application of the Pact provisions. To guide this work, the European Commission issued the CIP for the Pact on Migration and Asylum in July 2024, setting specific milestones to be achieved by a foreseen timeline. The CIP was developed through close collaboration with Member States and EU Agencies, and consultations with civil society organisations and UNHCR. The CIP grouped together the legal, technical and operational work that Member States need to carry out into ten building blocks.

In addition to the CIP, the European Commission, with input from EU Agencies, conducted a needs assessment for each Member State to identify existing resources and areas where adaptations to national asylum and reception systems are required. The European Commission also launched a new Technical Support Instrument through which Member States could receive tailor-made expertise to identify the reforms needed. Nine Member States submitted requests and received support with the preparation of their National Implementation Plan in such areas as asylum procedures, screening, migration management, resettlement, integration, the external dimension of migration and the strategic use of EU funds.[11]

Drawing from the needs assessment and the guidance provided in the CIP, EU+ countries needed to develop their individual National Implementation Plans by the end of 2024. They established working groups and task forces to coordinate efforts and identify gaps for the implementation of the Pact. They brought together all authorities foreseen to be involved in the implementation of the Pact to provide input, cross-fertilise ideas and develop action plans for the way ahead. The focus of working groups typically corresponded to the building blocks of the CIP. When applicable, regional administrations were also involved in the process, especially for areas under their jurisdiction, such as social affairs, education and integration. Consultations with civil society organisations on the development of National Implementation Plans were uneven, with a minority of Member States actively reaching out to elicit input, while others had limited or no consultations even though some organisations are subcontracted to deliver services in asylum and reception.

Preparing for the implementation of the Pact has been a particularly resource-intensive process for Member States. A reform of such scale and complexity, implemented within tight timelines, required the allocation of extensive financial, administrative and human resources, which has challenged the capacity of many Member States, especially while they maintained business

continuity in processing a constantly high inflow of applications. For several countries, introducing the necessary arrangements for screening, which needed to be built from scratch, is the most common challenge, in addition to adapting technical capabilities to the new large IT systems to support the new Eurodac. During this process, EU Agencies played a pivotal role by sharing resources and expertise. For example, the EUAA through its dedicated Pact Programme provided support in a number of ways. Table 1 presents an overview of the EUAA activities for each of the building blocks defined in the CIP.

Table 1. EUAA support in the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum

Building Block	EUAA support
A common migration and asylum information system: Eurodac	• Develop information material on Eurodac. • Draft a practical guide on the use of Eurodac.
A new system to manage migration flows at the EU's external borders	• Develop guidance on alternatives to detention. • Produce convergence reports to support Member States in determining which nationalities will fall under the border procedures. • Update existing training modules and guidelines for personnel in the context of border procedures.
Rethinking reception	• Develop a standard information template and guidance on alternatives to detention. • Update existing guidance documents, tools and training material. • Revise the EUAA standards and indicators for reception and vulnerability.
Fair, efficient and convergent asylum procedures	• Establish a network of responsible national authorities and update all information, training material, guidance documents and indicators that should be considered during the decision-making process (including for courts and tribunals). • Continue to provide country of origin information (COI) and country guidance to all national administrative and judicial authorities. • Adjust existing databases, such as the Early Warning and Preparedness System, to the new frameworks. • Provide the European Commission with information and analysis of safe country concepts.
Efficient and fair return procedures	-not involved-

Building Block	EUAA support
A fair and efficient system: Making the new responsibility rules work	• Work with the European Commission to organise meetings of the Dublin expert group. • Develop a template for family-related cases and guidelines for tracing and identification of family members. • Assist in the production of comprehensive information material and provide guidance on conducting personal interviews by videoconference. • Adjust the functioning and scope of the EUAA network of Dublin units and update guidelines supporting the application of the new responsibility rules.
Making solidarity work	• In cooperation with the European Commission, provide the tools to identify and match the persons to be relocated with the contributing Member State. • Along with other Agencies, gather data and provide input to the European Commission for the European Annual Asylum and Migration Report. • Prepare templates and operating procedures for solidarity pledges and contributions. • Organise with the European Commission’s expert meetings for the exchange of expertise and to facilitate the correct application of the new system.
Preparedness, contingency planning and crisis response	• Develop a template for national contingency plans on reception and asylum. • Provide support to Member States in developing and reviewing their contingency plans, when requested by Member States.
New safeguards for applicants and vulnerable persons; increased monitoring of fundamental rights	• Provide guidance on alternatives to detention and a template for information provision. • Revise the EUAA Guidance on Vulnerability - Standards and Indicators to reflect the new legislation. • Update training modules relating to vulnerability and the protection of minors. • Provide operational support for legal counselling when requested by Member States.
Resettlement, inclusion and integration	• Facilitate the exchange of good practices in the context of the EUAA Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network. • Develop adapted information material and guidelines supporting the application of the new rules. • Provide operational support to Member States in the implementation of the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework.

As the Pact becomes applicable, the EUAA is also tasked with monitoring the operational and technical application of the EU asylum acquis by Member States. This new responsibility under the EUAA Regulation aims to prevent or identify possible shortcomings in asylum and reception systems, assess national capacity and preparedness to manage situations of disproportionate pressure, and contribute to the improvement of the functioning of CEAS.

Since the presentation of the Pact proposals in 2020, a number of stakeholders have expressed concerns about certain provisions included in its legal instruments. With the adoption of the Pact and the preparations for its implementation throughout 2024, such voices underlined again aspects that they viewed with reservations, including what was seen as expanding the circumstances to process applications through special procedures, with shorter timelines and fewer guarantees;12 the mandatory application of the border procedure on nationality-based criteria, thus possibly undermining individual assessments;13 the possibility for a temporary suspension or derogation from the EU asylum acquis which may lead to a parallel asylum system with fewer guarantees and more risks to fundamental rights;14 expanding the circumstances under which applicants' freedom of movement is restricted;15 and, in regard to a key premise of the Screening Regulation, third-country nationals are not considered to have officially entered the territory of a Member State if they arrive through irregular routes.16 These reactions drew attention to areas where EU institutions and Member States must ensure the provision of adequate resources to duly guarantee the effective application of procedural safeguards and full adherence of the fundamental rights of people seeking protection in the EU. 17

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