2.1. Asylum and migration on the EU policy agenda

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For yet another year, questions related to migration and asylum were high on the agenda of European policymakers. Highlighting the importance accorded to this area, in March 2025 the European Commission granted an additional EUR 3 billion to Member States to implement the Pact and provide assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine.8 In July 2025, in the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Commission tripled the funding for migration, border management and internal security to implement the Pact, improve return systems, accelerate asylum procedures, continue border control digitalisation and strengthen cooperation with third countries.9 In an exchange of views with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament (LIBE Committee), the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, Magnus Brunner, reiterated that the Commission's priorities included matters of security, border management and migration, efforts to tackle trafficking, advance border digitalisation and implement the Pact.10

In her State of the Union address in September 2025, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, emphasised the importance of effective migration management and the need to consider citizens' concerns about perceived weaknesses in the enforcement of rules.11 Informed by this address and building on President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the European Commission presented its work programme for 2026, which focuses on a more sovereign, secure and competitive EU. In the area of migration and asylum, the European Commission prioritised the implementation of the Pact and the upcoming proposals to strengthen the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex). Other initiatives included the digitalisation of the return process and the establishment of a new common European system on returns.12

The two Presidencies of the EU Council in 2025 also placed particular importance on migration. In the first half of 2025, the Polish Presidency approached the question of migration through a security lens, emphasising the need for a comprehensive response to the security implications of migration, such as its instrumentalisation by foreign countries to instigate instability in the

EU. Similarly, the Danish Presidency prioritised tackling irregular migration and ensuring effective control of the EU's external borders.13 Overall, in the programme of the 'trio Presidency', reflecting the strategic directions of the Polish, Danish and Cypriot Presidencies together for the period January 2025-June 2026, reference was made to determined action to protect and strengthen the EU's external borders through all available means and countering human trafficking, smuggling and hybrid threats, including the instrumentalisation of migration. The trio also prioritised work on increasing the effectiveness of returns, establishing comprehensive partnerships with key countries of origin and transit in mutually beneficial ways, and addressing the root causes of irregular migration.14

In its recommendations to the two 2025 Presidencies, UNHCR highlighted that an efficient and humane EU asylum system was possible, asserting that borders can be effectively controlled, while providing safety to those in danger.15 UNHCR went on to provide concrete recommendations on ensuring access to protection and the necessary safeguards for those applying, as well as for a constructive, protection-oriented EU asylum and migration policy worldwide.

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  European Commission. (12 May 2025). European Commission provides additional EUR 3 billion to support migration and asylum management.

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  European Commission. (17 July 2025). EU 2028-2034 proposed budget triples funds for migration, border management and internal security.

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  European Parliament. (13 May 2025). Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Ordinary meeting.

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  European Commission. (2025). State of the Union 2025.

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  European Commission. (21 October 2025). 2026 Commission work programme and annexes.

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  Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (2025). Programme of the Danish EU Presidency

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Council of the European Union. (11 December 2024). Taking forward the Strategic Agenda: 18-month Programme of the Council (1 January 2025-30 June 2026).

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  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (13 January 2025). UNHCR's 2025 Recommendations for the Polish and Danish Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (EU).

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