

The EU Migration Pact: A Fragile Compromise or a Sustainable Solution?

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Introduction

Tension within the European Union (EU) and its member states has long revolved around the issue of migration. The topic of migration is seen to expose the deep divisions between solidarity and national sovereignty, specifically how asylum seekers should be shared across member states. Since the 2015 migration crisis, the EU has been struggling to reform its asylum system, leading to nearly a decade of political deadlock.¹ However, after receiving backlash on the dispersion of migration among EU member states, the EU finally adopted the Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2024, set to roll into force in June of 2026.² This pact was an extensive reform that was intended to create a more efficient and unified system for managing migration. While some EU policymakers have labelled the pact as a historic breakthrough, its effectiveness remains largely uncertain.³ Hence, although the EU Migration Pact represents a significant step towards an institutional unification, its reliance on voluntary solidarity, multiple controversial border procedures, and uncertain implementation undermine its ability to deliver a sustainable and evenly spread migration system.

Background

The EU Migration pact was created as a result of the failures of the Dublin system. The Dublin system was the prior framework utilized to determine which member states were held responsible for examining and holding an asylum applicant. Within this system, the burden of responsibility was usually placed upon the first EU country of entry. As a result, this placed significant pressure on frontline states such as Italy and Greece.⁴ The 2015 migration crisis portrayed the extent of these structural weaknesses, as asylum applications and arrivals were unevenly distributed across member states. Furthermore, this led to political fragmentation and repeated disputes among EU countries. The new pact aimed to address those issues “by

¹ Simon Usherwood, “What Are the EU’s New Migration Rules, and Why Did They Take So Long to Pass?,” *Global Policy Journal*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/19/04/2024/what-are-eus-new-migration-rules-and-why-did-they-take-so-long-pass>

² Simon Usherwood, “What Are the EU’s New Migration Rules, and Why Did They Take So Long to Pass?,” *Global Policy Journal*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/19/04/2024/what-are-eus-new-migration-rules-and-why-did-they-take-so-long-pass>

³ European Commission, “Pact on Migration and Asylum,” Migration and Home Affairs, accessed May 2, 2026, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

⁴ Council of the European Union, “A New Asylum and Migration Management Regulation,” accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/asylum-migration-management>

regulating, harmonizing, and coordinating Member States' management of irregular arrivals."⁵ The EU Migration Pact was created as a new era of guidelines and migration policies. However, it was quickly evident that the Pact showed little improvement to the previous Dublin system as it continued to place disproportionate responsibility on frontline states.

Following years of extensive negotiation, the pact was adopted in May of 2024, and introduced a large set of reforms that were designed to improve border management, enhance the failed burden-sharing mechanisms, and accelerate asylum procedures."⁶ Furthermore, its core objectives were "achieving more secure European borders, faster and more efficient procedures, and increased solidarity between member states."⁷ The solidarity measure that was introduced established a new "burden sharing" norm rather than continuing to place the burden of holding asylums on front line states that were already reaching their maximum holding capacity.⁸ A core value of the pact is therefore the introduction of a "mandatory but flexible solidarity mechanism".⁹ In theory, this means that EU countries are expected to help states facing pressure, but given flexibility in choosing how to support them. Moreover, EU countries were given three options in order to support the program; "accept the relocated asylum seekers, offer operational support, or provide financial contributions".¹⁰ It also established mandatory border screening procedures. This required migrants to "go through checks such as identity, health, and security before entering the EU asylum system."¹¹ This system tried to balance two competing goals of the EU: creating a more unified EU migration system, while trying to respect member states' reluctance to surrender control over national migration policy. Therefore, while these reforms aimed to create a more structured and cooperative system, they also revealed the political compromises necessary to secure agreement among a deeply divided EU.

⁵ Sergio Carrera et al., *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Context, Challenges, and Limitations* (Real Instituto Elcano, 2024), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/>

⁶ Council of the European Union, "The Council Adopts the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum," May 14, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/14/the-council-adopts-the-eu-s-pact-on-migration-and-asylum/>

⁷ International Rescue Committee, "What Is the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum?" 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/what-eu-pact-migration-and-asylum>

⁸ European Union, "EU Asylum and Migration Policy: New Solidarity Mechanism," EUR-Lex, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

⁹ European Union, "EU Asylum and Migration Policy: New Solidarity Mechanism," EUR-Lex, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

¹⁰ European Union, "EU Asylum and Migration Policy: New Solidarity Mechanism," EUR-Lex, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

¹¹ European Commission, "Screening of Third-Country Nationals at the External Borders," 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

Analysis

3.1 Strengths

One of the primary strongholds is the pact's ability to push through years of institutional paralysis. After almost a decade of infighting and disagreements, the EU successfully adopted a comprehensive reform framework. This is significant as state politics across the EU had been trending to the right in migration policy, displaying a step away from cooperation and liberalism. By reaching this agreement, it highlights the ability for member states to still unify under European unity, even on highly divisive issues. This marked what many considered to be a historic event in the sphere of EU domestic policy. Additionally, the pact aims to "manage arrivals in an orderly way" and ensure "fair burden sharing between member states".¹² This section targets the previous unfair distribution of immigration responsibility across the EU.¹³

From a political perspective, it displays a pragmatic compromise. Rather than forcing unified compliance, it gives states more sovereignty by allowing flexibility in how they contribute to the program. This reflects a wider shift towards "flexible solidarity," which was designed to accept differing national preferences while requiring a minimum level of cooperation.¹⁴ Furthermore, the roll out of standardized procedures across the EU could increase efficiency and potentially reduce the inconsistencies in asylum decision-making. By increasing screening time and processing mechanisms, the pact aims to reduce backlogs and discourage irregular migration by accelerating returns for migrants not eligible for protection.¹⁵

3.2 Weaknesses

However, it is important to analyze the weaknesses of the pact to provide an insightful evaluation, starting with the dependence on flexible solidarity. In theory, flexible solidarity is a formally mandatory mechanism. Instead, it allows member states to refuse relocating migrants by opting to provide financial or operational support, creating a system in which solidarity is optional in practice.

¹² Council of the European Union, "EU Migration and Asylum Reform Pact," 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-asylum-reform-pact/>

¹³ Council of the European Union, "EU Migration and Asylum Reform Pact," 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-asylum-reform-pact/>

¹⁴ Alberto-Horst Neidhardt, "The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Limits of Flexible Solidarity," The Loop (European Consortium for Political Research), 2024, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/>

¹⁵ European Commission, "Pact on Migration and Asylum: Managing Migration in an Effective and Humane Way," 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

This principle has been criticized for working against the main goal of equitable burden sharing. Neidhardt discusses that the solidarity mechanism “lacks the predictability” necessary to function as a reliable system.¹⁶ This highlights the continued neglect of frontline states. States like Italy, Greece, and even Croatia cannot depend on consistent relocation if other member states are allowed to subsidize with operational or financial support. Additionally, a variety of sources suggest that the pact continues to place “disproportionate responsibilities on member states at the EU’s external borders”.¹⁷

As a result, it raises an important question: can a system based on only voluntary contribution really resolve structural inequalities within the EU? This remains uncertain. The pact enforces political feasibility over enforceability which risks the repetition of several imbalances that caused the Dublin system to fail. To expand, it may be a short-term win for the EU. However, it may prove to have many of the same issues the Dublin system had as well in the long-term.

Moving onto the most critical issue facing the pact: implementation. Even though legislation was adopted, its success depends solely on effective execution at the national level. The pact creates an intricate governance system involving multiple EU institutions and national authorities.¹⁸ Enforcing these actors to cooperate will require a large administrative push and political will. This will prove difficult in the current political climate of the EU, where domestic politics are displaying an increasing “anti-migration” tone.¹⁹

Moreover, the pact’s slow implementation timeline, which only begins fully rolling out in 2026, shows that the impact will not be immediate.²⁰ The continued delay increases the chance that political priorities on a national level may shift even further to the right, undermining the reform before it is fully operational.

¹⁶ Alberto-Horst Neidhardt, “The EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Limits of Flexible Solidarity,” The Loop (European Consortium for Political Research), 2024, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/>

¹⁷ European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), “First Annual Migration Management Cycle Shows Continued Pressure on External Border States,” 2024, <https://ecre.org/>

¹⁸ European Commission, “Implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum,” 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

¹⁹ Molly O’Neal, “Understanding Europe’s Turn on Migration,” *Brookings Institution*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/understanding-europes-turn-on-migration/>

²⁰ European Commission, “Pact on Migration and Asylum: Timeline and Implementation,” 2024, <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/>

Policy Evaluation and Recommendations

4.1 Policy Evaluation

To conclude the analysis, the EU Migration Pact displays a relative improvement over the Dublin system, as it establishes a more mainstream framework for managing migration. Furthermore, the pact adds a new layer of shared responsibility allowing for further burden sharing techniques. Although, it continues to fall short of providing a feasible solution in the long-term. The effectiveness of the pact is limited by structural weaknesses in the design such as the lack of enforceable solidarity and the unfair spread of responsibilities among its member states.²¹ Therefore, it improves overall coordination, but fails to relieve frontline states of the continued burden of mass immigration.

4.1 Recommendations

To improve effectiveness, a range of reforms should be considered. The EU should start with a shift toward mandatory relocation quotas. This would ensure a more equitable spread of migrants across member states by requiring each country to share asylum seekers proportionate to their accommodation capabilities.²² The second reform should be a stronger enforcement mechanism to guarantee the compliance of member states and prevent selective implementation. With no clear consequences, many northern and eastern member states have no incentive to house asylum seekers as it would only increase economic and social hardship. Through established repercussions, states would be more inclined to relieve frontline states and spread the share of immigrants. Third, there is a necessity for asylum seekers to have certain safeguards especially within border procedures that will ensure efficiency does not compromise fairness.

Lastly, the EU needs to invest in a long-term integration policy that addresses the root causes of migration through external partnerships. These external partnerships should not solely pass the

²¹ Sergio Carrera et al., *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Context, Challenges, and Limitations* (Real Instituto Elcano, 2024), <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/>

²² European Parliament Think Tank, "Implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum," 2025, <https://epthinktank.eu/>

responsibility of border control to non-EU states. This is important to emphasize given the EU's recent "return hubs," which allow member states to make arrangements with third countries to host rejected asylum seekers until deportation.²³ While this does have the potential to reduce irregular migration, it allows the EU to neglect responsibility rather than focusing on the root cause of immigration. Hence, the EU should focus on legal migration pathways that reduce the risk of human rights abuses.²⁴ Without these measures, the pact risks becoming a short-term political compromise rather than a long-term policy framework.

Conclusion

The EU Migration pact is an important step towards European integration. It displays the willingness of member states to come together and tackle a pressing issue dating back to the formation of the EU. However, the success of the pact is far from becoming a reality. With the rightward shift in politics from many member states, the EU is prioritizing political compromise over structural reform.²⁵

Overall, the pact exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of the European Union. This includes the ability to reach an agreement, but these decisions are often plagued with bureaucracy and low ambition. Whether it can evolve into a sustainable migration system will depend on the EU's ability to move beyond compromises and move to deeper integration and enforcement.

²³ European Commission, "Migration: Commission Proposes New European Approach to Returns," March 11, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/migration-commission-proposes-new-european-approach-returns-2025-03-11_en.

²⁴ European Commission, "Migration," International Partnerships, accessed May 2, 2026, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-forced-displacement/migration_en

²⁵ The Guardian, "EU Asylum and Migration Pact Has Passed Despite Far-Right and Left Objections," April 10, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/>

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<https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/19/04/2024/what-are-eus-new-migration-rules-and-why-did-they-take-so-long-pass>.