



Diplomacy in the Foreground. The New EU Migration Policy Framework

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The migration, asylum and visa strategies, presented at the end of January this year by the European Commission, set the framework for EU migration policy for the coming years. According to both documents' assumptions, migration diplomacy is intended to support the Union's security and global competitiveness priorities. The planned reforms aim to eliminate abuses of the asylum and visa system and to attract skilled workers and investment to the EU. The implementation of the strategy will be challenged by both instability in Europe's neighbourhood and the persistent reluctance of member states to accept migrants.

Despite the curbing of irregular migration to the EU (in 2025, the total number of such border crossings amounted to 178,000, which was the lowest figure since 2021), conflicts in Europe's neighbourhood, and attempts by hostile regimes to destabilise the EU using migration flows, mean that migration remains one of the key security challenges.

At the same time, in the face of a growing demographic crisis (according to Eurostat data, the EU population is expected to decrease from 450 million to 447.9 million by 2050 and to 419.5 million by 2100, with forecasts varying by country) and increasing global economic competition, controlled migration is seen by entrepreneurs as a remedy for the problems of the European labour market. In 2024, through a unified administrative procedure for permits, more than 4.6 million non-EU citizens obtained the right to both reside and work in the EU, representing an increase of 13.6% compared to 2023.

However, the social perception of migrants in Europe is deteriorating. In a 2024 Eurobarometer survey, only 46% of Europeans viewed the influx of non-EU foreigners positively, while 50% viewed it negatively. In the 2024 Ipsos survey for UNHCR, 61% of Europeans agreed with the statement that most foreigners who want to enter their countries are not refugees, but are arriving for economic reasons (for work or to access social benefits).

Instruments of migration diplomacy. Migration diplomacy is intended to be the response to the threat of irregular migration. Although the Commission has emphasised that it should promote not only the interests of the Union but also European values, the strategy openly supports the use of leverage on third countries by member states and EU institutions, both to manage migration flows outside the territory of the Union (externalisation) and to increase the number of returns of migrants who arrived illegally. EU migration diplomacy is supposed to be assertive and utilise a wide range of mechanisms and incentives, as well as connections with other policies (including trade policy).

Last year, the Commission [proposed changes in the law](#) aimed at making it easier for Member States to cooperate with third countries in the field of migration. These included a new common European return system allowing the establishment of partnerships to create centres in third countries for persons who are staying illegally in the EU and have received a return decision, as well as a proposal to amend the definition of a safe third country, which is intended to facilitate deportation. In addition, the Commission is continuing legislative work on the directive on combating the facilitation of illegal entry into the EU, transit through its territory, and residence on it, and is also developing a new sanctions regime against smugglers and human traffickers.

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Visas are also expected to become an important tool of migration diplomacy, aimed at increasing the security and global competitiveness of the EU. The Commission is proposing a wider use of visa restrictions against countries that engage in hostile actions towards the EU or refuse to cooperate in the fields of return and readmission. At the same time, it seeks to facilitate access to the European labour market for highly skilled workers. A complement to this strategy is the Commission's recommendation on attracting talent for innovation. It promotes the use of accelerated procedures and simplified processes for obtaining long-term visas and residence permits by students, researchers, highly skilled and skilled workers, start-up founders, and innovative entrepreneurs. Additionally, it encourages cooperation with third countries through initiatives such as Talent Partnerships—IT platforms that enable the matching of EU employers with interested candidates from outside the EU in specific sectors.

Modernisation and system hardening. The digitisation of the EU's systems, aimed at strengthening its security, was initiated by EU institutions many years ago but has experienced significant delays. The Commission plans to fully implement (by April 2026) the electronic system for collecting biometric data of foreigners arriving in the EU for short stays – the Entry/Exit System (EES), which was launched at EU borders in October last year – and then inaugurate the new European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) for visa-exempt travellers (by the end of 2026). The goal is for all information systems used for border protection and migration management to become interoperable by the end of 2028 (in addition to EES and ETIAS, this includes systems already in operation: the Schengen Information System, the Visa Information System, the Eurodac fingerprint database for asylum seekers, as well as the European Criminal Records Information System which is currently being implemented). In addition, the Commission wants to create an artificial intelligence forum for migration to explore the potential use of AI in asylum, migration, and border management matters.

The Commission also plans to strengthen institutional support for the EU's migration policy. In the new multiannual EU budget, funding for the eu-LISA agency, responsible for digitising and managing IT systems, is expected to increase. One of the proposals is a reform of Frontex, which will include, among other things, expanding the agency's cooperation capabilities with third countries and establishing a Visa Support Office for member states within its framework.

At the same time, the Commission hopes that [the migration pact](#) will be implemented according to plan. It assumes that

from June this year, member states will monitor all people entering the Union illegally and apply [the new border procedure at external borders](#). A specially appointed EU Solidarity Coordinator will assist countries in implementing the new mechanism for solidarity and the distribution of responsibility for asylum seekers. During the first year of operation of the mechanism, several countries, including Poland, have secured exemptions from contributions to the solidarity pool.

Conclusions. The priorities of the migration and asylum strategy, as well as the visa strategy, are an attempt to find a balance between the expectations of the populations of member states regarding the limitation of irregular migration and the needs of the European economy, which is facing increasingly strong global competition and a demographic crisis. Migration diplomacy, previously used on a limited scale (including in EU development aid), is intended to become a key pillar of migration policy. Moreover, the priority of controlling migration processes will be integrated into other EU policies and become an important component of the global community strategy. This assumption has already been visible in other strategic documents recently presented by the Commission, as well as in initiatives undertaken by member states, including the new pact for the Mediterranean and the [multiannual financial framework project](#) for 2028–2034.

The general direction taken in both strategies enjoys the approval of the societies of the member states and policymakers. However, enhancing the openness of the EU to economic immigration requires consistently reinforcing a positive image of migrants, countering misinformation about them, and combating anti-immigrant narratives promoted by populists.

Even beyond the increasing financial demands of the EU's migration diplomacy and the removal of identified legal barriers, challenges to its effectiveness remain due to the instability in the countries of origin of migrants and in Europe's neighbourhood, as well as the ongoing rise of Russian and Chinese influence in Global South countries. These conditions have limited the results of the EU's cooperation to date in the field of migration.

Shifting the focus to the external dimension of migration management does not mean that the Commission is abandoning its plans to implement the migration pact. The persistent reluctance of many member states, including Poland, regarding its key assumptions (primarily the relocation of asylum seekers from member states under the greatest migration pressure) and the numerous exemptions from its provisions prevent the unambiguous prediction of success for this element of the migration strategy.