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European Union

Anti-migration measures: the EU Pact worsens an already hostile reality for exiles

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Last June, a new European Pact on Migration and Asylum came into force. It has been heavily criticised by asylum advocacy groups, which denounce it as a serious attack on both people and the right to move freely.

The shift is clear: rather than improving the protection of human rights and access to a fair examination of claims for protection, the new regulation aims to identify as early as possible applications that can be handled by other states, outsource asylum management, and increase controls in order to carry out deportations more rapidly.

The Schengen Area in crisis

This pact follows years of negotiations within the EU and represents an attempt to resolve the crisis of the Schengen Area. When it was established in the 1980s, Schengen sought to create a European area of free movement by removing internal borders, thereby meeting employers' need for a mobile workforce. As a result, Europe's external borders became the gateway into this area, especially as the determination to close access has become increasingly apparent, leading many to speak of a "Fortress Europe."

The agency responsible for managing these borders is Frontex. It has repeatedly been criticised in recent years for violations of fundamental rights, yet states, including Switzerland, continue to fund it. Its budget has risen from €6 million in 2005 to €1.2 billion in 2026. In the Balkans, Frontex has been accused of illegally pushing people back across borders. In the Mediterranean, the agency is accused of passively standing by while boat engines are destroyed and people are abandoned at sea. In Switzerland and elsewhere, Frontex organises "special flights" to forcibly deport migrants, who are restrained and handcuffed, with little regard for their physical or mental health.

Within Europe, asylum applications were previously managed under the Dublin Regulation and are now governed by the Pact. The logic remains the same: a system of arbitrary allocation of people in exile. Based on the Eurodac database, which records asylum seekers' fingerprints and identities, the system stipulates that a protection claim may be processed in only one country. If a person is registered in several states, they may be returned under the Dublin system to the first country of entry. The ways in which someone becomes registered in Eurodac are often opaque: through an asylum application, but also during hospitalisation, police arrest, transport checks, and other situations. As a result, migratory journeys can lead to family separation: spouses registered in different countries, or newly adult children unable to reunite with their families because they were "Dublin-registered" in another European country.

Another pitfall of this arrangement is that countries on Europe's southern and external borders naturally receive far more arrivals than others. At the same time, many states, including Switzerland, have for years refused to accept asylum applications through their embassies, forcing people to undertake dangerous migration routes and present themselves in person, often illegally, to apply for asylum. Countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain and the Balkan states struggle to provide dignified reception conditions while also bearing the burden of Dublin returns from other European countries. This situation became so severe that Dublin transfers to Greece were suspended following a 2011 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. Since June 2024, however, several countries, including Switzerland, have sought to revive such return practices.

Europe claims that stricter borders are intended to prevent irregular entry. In reality, the main consequence is to increase the very irregularity being condemned while making journeys more dangerous, exposing people to greater

violence and reducing protection of their fundamental rights.

Violence, deaths and dehumanisation

Preventing migration flows is unrealistic, regardless of the methods used: outsourcing agreements (such as with Turkey), detention sites (such as the hotspots on the Greek island of Lesbos), pushbacks (illegal refusal to accept people who had come to seek asylum in Europe, conducted by national police forces and Frontex), and other measures. But the increased repression and the measures to control migrants have a direct and undeniable consequence: to significantly heighten the risks faced by those on the move.

Between January and June 2026, at least 865 people died or went missing in the Mediterranean. This was the deadliest six-month period of the last decade, during which more than 34,000 deaths have been recorded. Crossings of the English Channel have not been as deadly, but fatalities remain frequent. In recent weeks, numerous makeshift boats have sunk in the waters between France and England. The Balkan routes are no safer.

These policies of sealing off Europe, rooted in neo-colonial relationships with countries around the Mediterranean, provoke legitimate reactions. The events that took place during the summer of 2026 in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, located on Moroccan territory, are a direct consequence of Europe's anti-asylum regime.

Two dynamics appear to have converged, leading nearly 60,000 people to cross the enclave's border within a matter of hours. First, people fleeing poverty in their regions of origin, seeking a better life in Europe, probably received false information that the border would be open that day. Second, a spontaneous mass mobilisation developed against colonial-era borders that divide a country marked by severe income inequality and rising unemployment. The announcement of a possible crossing created a momentum that spread rapidly. Were governments of the Global South manipulating events in response to the latest decisions aiming to externalise the EU's borders? Quite possibly, and such tactics would not be unprecedented, as illustrated by the Belarus-Poland border situation in 2021.

The attention focused on a handful of lives struggling to survive ultimately benefits the far right, which readily speaks of a "migration crisis" based on reception difficulties that it has itself helped create. This narrative is reinforced by mainstream media, which all too rarely highlight the exploitation of highly vulnerable workers, for example in Europe's tomato and strawberry plantations.

Against asylum and migration: the European Pact takes effect

The European Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into force on 12 June 2026. This reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) consists of a set of regulations restructuring asylum procedures, controls at external borders, the Eurodac database, Dublin system rules, and solidarity mechanisms between member states.

Three major developments stand out: accelerated border procedures, increased externalisation of refugee protection, and reinforcement of a European deportation regime. In practice, people are confined at Europe's external borders in large centres where they undergo screening procedures designed to rapidly categorise whether their applications are likely to be accepted or rejected. This restricts access to ordinary asylum procedures for many individuals, particularly the most vulnerable. It represents a further step away from individual examination of claims and towards the administrative management and selective filtering of migration flows.

A list of "safe third countries", whether countries of origin or transit countries, will allow Europe to declare itself not

responsible for processing many claims for protection and instead simply summarily send people to those countries. Furthermore, the externalisation of deportations and asylum processing is facilitated by this reform, as illustrated by projects such as Italy's project with Albania or the United Kingdom's plans for Rwanda.

This European reform closely resembles the revision of Switzerland's asylum law implemented in 2019, which established federal asylum centres where applicants are concentrated upon arrival and where those who can quickly be expelled under Dublin procedures are identified. Declining to examine applications, declaring oneself "not competent," closing files without reviewing them, and expel the claimants: Switzerland excels at this approach. The central mechanism for accelerating removals is isolation, confinement and control.

As a result, the very meaning of asylum is eroded, since the right to explain one's need for protection effectively disappears, regardless of the consequences for those concerned.

Distress and resistance

In a capitalist world, population movements - a timeless reality - increasingly become mechanisms of survival. They are also the result of, and perhaps more troubling for capitalist technocrats, proof of the ongoing plundering of the Global South's resources, the exploitation of bodies, the consequences of (neo)colonialisation and the beginnings of climate catastrophe. On the one hand, the northern powers and their allies pursue imperialist policies that extract wealth from southern countries, exploit poor workers, commit ecocide and fuel conflicts around the globe, all in the name of sacrosanct profit. On the other hand, they destroy the lives of people who legitimately flee this chaos.

In our own countries, we are witnessing a growing drift towards authoritarianism and the political right, accompanied by a steady deterioration in migrants' rights over the past fifty years. At the same time, the neoliberal economic context has produced repeated budget cuts and a search for ever-cheaper ways to outsource dealing with applications for asylum to reliable countries, reducing even more the scope for meaningful social action

Since 12 June, organisations working on the ground across Europe have observed a further hardening of attitudes and of the policies which flow from that. These restrictive and criminalising measures cause irreversible harm. Long periods of uncertainty and pressure generate such severe psychological distress that medical emergencies and even acts of self-harm occur regularly.

In this context, hope comes from grassroots struggles. Across Europe, individuals and groups continue to resist and attempt to disrupt migration policies that crush lives, through both small and large acts of solidarity. Their voices are numerous and impossible to silence. They challenge the status quo, even if never enough, and they persist. In Switzerland, a major mobilisation is planned for 26 September in the capital: the demonstration "No borders between us", organised by the association Solidarity Without Borders. Let us be thousands! We will not give up.

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*Translated by **International Viewpoint**.*

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