



Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Visit to Brussels

(28-29 January 2026)

Report



Prepared by the OSCE PA International Secretariat

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Cover photo: Delegation of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration with European Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner

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1. Executive Summary

From 28-29 January 2026, a delegation of seven members¹ of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, led by Chair Farah Karimi (Netherlands), and joined by Secretary General Roberto Montella, travelled to Brussels to get a deeper understanding of European migration policy reforms. The main focus of the visit was to learn more about the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The delegation was also briefed on other developments including in the area of returns as well as the new Pact for the Mediterranean.

The delegation met with a wide range of stakeholders in Brussels, including representatives of the European Commission, Frontex, international organizations, as well as think-tanks.

The discussions focused on the implications of implementation of the Migration Pact on EU Member States as well as those who are not part of the EU, especially in relation to countries of origin and transit. The delegation was particularly interested in the new procedures to be implemented at the EU's's external borders. The need for strong human rights guarantees was stressed, and the role of the European Commission, Frontex, international organizations and civil society in safeguarding fundamental rights was also discussed. The members of the delegation also shared experiences of their own countries in managing migration and exchanged views with the interlocutors on how parliamentarians can contribute to an effective, co-ordinated and human-rights compliant implementation of the Migration Pact. The need to step up the fight against migrant smugglers and traffickers was another recurrent topic.

This is the fourth time that the Committee has travelled to Brussels for migration policy dialogues. This visit was part of a series of online and in-person briefings with the aim to learn more about the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and its implementation – one of three priority topics which the Committee has chosen to focus on for the coming year.

¹ The following members Committee participated in the visit: Chair Farah Karimi (Netherlands); Vice-Chairs Alessandro Alfieri (Italy) and Kemal Çelik (Türkiye); and members Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus); Artemi Vicent Rallo (Spain); Özgül Saki (Türkiye); and Angelos Syrigos (Greece). The final programme and list of participants is in Annex III.

2. Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner and DG-HOME Representatives

Magnus Brunner, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, opened the meeting by underlining that the European Union is facing challenging times. He provided a brief update on EU migration policy reforms, emphasizing that the Commission had delivered considerably over the past year. Focussing on implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (hereafter 'Migration Pact'), he highlighted the progress



achieved thus far, expressing his confidence that, despite divergences between EU Member States on how to manage migration, implementation was on the right track. The EU was trying to gain back control of migration management through the Pact, the Safe Third Country concept and the recast Return Regulation. The new Entry/Exit System,² which digitally records the entries and exits of non-EU nationals into the EU, is a particularly useful tool as, for the first time, the EU will know who is entering and who is leaving. Since its activation, there have been over 23 million registered movements and around 12,000 entry refusals. The Commissioner also presented the main elements of the EU's five-year Asylum and Migration Management Strategy³, which will act as a guiding framework for the Union's political objectives on asylum and migration.

The delegation enquired about the European Commission's role in enforcing human rights safeguards under the Migration Pact. Commissioner Brunner stressed that human rights were non-negotiable and that the Commission will do everything possible to ensure that fundamental human rights are upheld during implementation. He underlined the critical role of international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who are partners in the EU's efforts to reform migration management. The expansion of the 'safe third country' concept under the Migration Pact is another key measure, developed in consultation with UNHCR and IOM with the objective to enable closer co-

² The Entry/Exit System (EES) was introduced on 12 October 2025. It is designed to track the movements of non-EU travellers across Europe, requiring visitors to register passport information and biometrics, including a facial scan and fingerprints, at kiosks at airports, stations and ports on their first visit to the EU. On subsequent visits to the EU, travellers must verify their details again at the kiosks before travel.

³ European Commission, European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy (Com(2026) 45 final, Brussels, 29 January 2026), at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-asylum-and-migration-management-strategy_en.

operation between the EU and countries of origin and transit while maintaining safeguards under international law. He underlined the importance of differentiating between illegal migration, legal migration, and asylum seekers in need of protection, as each category requires a different response. He also stressed the need to fight migrant smuggling and trafficking and the need for legal pathways for the migrants needed for EU labour markets.

Deputy Director-General Johannes Luchner of the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME) highlighted one important innovation which is that EU Member States are obliged to set up an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure that fundamental rights are upheld as the measures foreseen by the Migration Pact are implemented. Furthermore, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) deploys Fundamental Rights Officers who are under the obligation to report violations of fundamental rights by Frontex officers on the ground. DDG Luchner also underlined that it was standard practice for civil society organizations to be included in national dialogues with EU Member States. While expressing his confidence in the monitoring system, he acknowledged that the Commission does not have the power to investigate violations and must therefore work with national authorities. He also drew attention to the fact that families, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups were exempt from the new border procedures and that separate procedures would apply to them.



DDG Luchner predicted that the Migration Pact will have a very significant impact on non-EU Member States, and underlined that successful implementation will rely to a great extent on closer co-operation with countries of origin and transit. Faster border procedures and the adoption of an EU-wide list of safe countries of origin⁴ should enable faster processing of asylum applications.

The biggest impact will be on applicants from countries with a recognition rate below 20 per cent. At the same time, he emphasized that applications will still be assessed individually.

The 'Solidarity Pool'⁵ was also discussed, with DDG Luchner describing it as an improvement on the unsuccessful quota system introduced following the 2015 European migration crisis, when frontline Mediterranean countries bore the responsibility for most irregular arrivals. Under the new system established by the EU Migration Pact, access to support from the Solidarity Pool is determined by the

⁴ See Annex I.

⁵ See Annex I.

migratory situation in individual EU Member States. Countries experiencing significant migratory pressure can therefore receive greater financial and operational assistance. In this context, four Mediterranean countries – Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain – were identified as facing “heightened migratory pressure” for the coming cycle starting in June 2026 and are thus eligible to benefit from the solidarity measures.⁶

Overall, DDG Luchner noted, irregular migration numbers have been decreasing across the Mediterranean, and the EU is not facing an immediate migration crisis. The only exception to this downward trend has been increased arrivals along the Eastern Libyan route, which the Commission is attempting to address. In reply to a question by one delegation member regarding EU relations with Libya, DDG Luchner explained that the EU will engage in dialogue as necessary in order to manage migration, including with the unrecognized Eastern Libyan regime. However, co-operation with the Eastern regime is largely on a technical level, focusing on reducing migrant smuggling. The EU also co-operates on migration with non-EU countries such as Türkiye, Egypt, and the Gulf States, and engages in technical level talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Mauro Gagliardi, a member of Commissioner Brunner’s Cabinet elaborated on the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, outlining its three key objectives: preventing irregular migration and smuggling networks; protecting people fleeing war and persecution while preventing abuse of the asylum system; and promoting the attraction of ‘talent’ to strengthen the EU’s economic competitiveness. The Commission places a strong emphasis on ‘migration diplomacy’, he emphasized, entering into agreements that ensure effective and rights-based co-operation on migration. The management of migration, he emphasized, needs to start where the routes start, in line with the ‘whole-of-route’ approach.

Concerns were also raised about the instrumentalization of migrants and the EU’s response. The Commission representatives explained that there are different approaches to tackling this issue, including through the suspension of visa agreements as well as sanctions. Some members also raised concerns regarding the perception and treatment of irregular migrants within the EU. The Commission representatives acknowledged differences of approach between EU Member States but also emphasized that the decision of Spain for example to regularize the situation of undocumented migrants has implications for the entire Schengen area. People who have no right to stay in the EU must leave, it was reiterated; return orders should be issued at the same time as an asylum decision. In her

concluding remarks, the Chair urged the Commission to adopt a more humane discourse and approach to migration policy.

3. DG-MENA

The delegation also met with Tena Misetic, Head of Cabinet of the Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Suica, as well as representatives of the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG-MENA). Ms. Misetic presented the main objectives of the Pact for the Mediterranean⁷, describing it as a change of approach in EU foreign policy, where the EU and their partners are together at the table. It is a regional tool structured around three pillars: people; stronger, more sustainable and integrated economies; and security, preparedness and whole-of-route migration management. She emphasised that the Pact for the Mediterranean is conceived as a live document, allowing for updates and adjustments as political and operational realities evolve. A new Directorate-General (DG-MENA) and Commissioner for the Mediterranean were created in order to have an EU structure explicitly dedicated to partnerships with countries in the MENA region. This framework allows for more tailored engagement with individual countries and a better response to the different challenges they face. Ms. Misetic highlighted ongoing dialogue with both Libyan authorities to address the increase in irregular departures, migrant smuggling, human rights issues, and to support Search and Rescue operations.



Francisco Joaquin Gaztelu Mezquiriz, director of the North Africa portfolio within DG-MENA, presented the Pact for the Mediterranean as an opportunity to be more action oriented. He discussed the various levels of co-operation between the EU and the ten partner countries⁸, with an overall emphasis on a comprehensive approach to migration, focusing on both reducing

⁷ See: European Commission, Press Release “Pact for the Mediterranean – One Sea, One Pact, One Future – a shared ambition for the region” (16 October 2025), at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_2384.

⁸ There are ten southern Mediterranean partners: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. “The designation of Palestine shall not be construed as a recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.” This is the European Commission’s stance on its partnerships for the Pact.

irregular migration and increasing legal pathways to attract skilled workers whilst preventing 'brain drain'.

Progress and challenges in several partner countries, including Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, were discussed. The recent adoption of an asylum law in Egypt was highlighted as an important step despite shortcomings as it is the first of its kind in the region. Challenges in establishing a functioning protection and returns system in Tunisia were also touched upon. Tunisia also needs to re-start the registration of new asylum applicants, the Commission representative noted. As regards Morocco, its strategy on migration and asylum is only half implemented. Returns from Morocco to countries of origin were described as functioning relatively well, while voluntary return programmes have been less effective.

Mr. Gaztelu also touched upon EU assistance to Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye which consists of support in providing protection to refugees in the region. Mr. Gaztelu viewed the EU's strategy toward Türkiye as well considered, though constrained by decreasing budgets and the need for innovative solutions. Co-operation with Sub-Saharan African countries, including Senegal, was also discussed, which consists of linking migration management with economic development and investment, including through the Global Gateway initiative.

The delegation also discussed the relationship between the EU and Syria. One member urged the EU to stop supporting the current Syrian government, given the past of its current leader and its approach towards women's rights. Mr. Gaztelu reiterated that the EU's support towards the Syrian government is conditional, and seeks to encourage development in a sustainable way. Furthermore, the EU is not actively promoting returns to Syria and currently only supporting voluntary returns, working together with IOM, UNHCR, and ILO to develop strategies for sustainable integration. The representatives of DG-MENA also underlined the importance of providing economic aid to the poorest communities who are most prone to being sources of irregular migration.

The discussion also touched upon demographic trends and labour migration. DG-MENA representatives noted that Europe faces declining population growth, while many neighbouring regions have young and rapidly growing populations. In response, the EU is seeking to expand legal migration pathways, including talent partnerships with countries such as Morocco and Egypt, while ensuring that such initiatives do not contribute to 'brain drain'.

While the delegation expressed appreciation for the 'whole-of-route' approach, they expressed concerns about the heavy cuts which humanitarian organizations

See https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/joint-communication-pact-mediterranean_en for more.

such as UNHCR are experiencing. Ms. Misetic replied that the EU alone will not be able to fill these gaps, and that support will be provided based on EU priorities.

The rhetoric surrounding migration was also brought up, with one parliamentarian viewing the political discourse as largely focused on preventing people from reaching Europe. In the long term, migrants may choose other destinations to go instead of Europe. This will have a negative impact on the EU which needs labour. Irregular migrants already present in the EU are also a source of talent, even if they might have experienced trauma along their journey to the EU, it was emphasized. Mr. Gaztelu acknowledged that the EU's framing has become rather negative and thanked the delegation members for their inspiring comments. He also acknowledged that resettlement numbers needed to be increased. Mr. Raul Hernandez Sagrera, Member of Cabinet of the Commissioner for the Mediterranean, also referred to the EU's visa strategy which, he underlined, was human and people-centred. The EU, he emphasized, currently hosts 7 million refugees; one out of five persons under protection are in the EU.

4. Frontex

The delegation also visited Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which is responsible for managing Europe's external borders together with EU Member States. Co-ordinating Liaison Officer Anca Pristavu presented key facts about Frontex and its mission. She underlined that Frontex is the biggest EU agency with over 1,200 staff and 2,700 border officers, and is still growing, with its Standing Corps planned to



reach 10,000 officers by 2027. Aside from managing Europe's borders, it is also involved in fighting cross-border-crime, managing returns, and search and rescue operations. One of the main topics raised was that of accountability. Ms. Pristavu emphasized that Frontex does not take sides but rather serves on behalf of Europe and that it carries out its activities with full accountability.

Senior Fundamental Rights Monitor Jagoda Walorek presented the role of Frontex's fundamental rights officers (FROs). There are currently 70 FROs and one in Brussels. Their role is twofold: to monitor; and to provide advice. Monitoring involves observing the conduct of Frontex officers through various tools and their compliance with the relevant fundamental rights standards. If these rules are not respected, e.g. if migrants are mistreated, pushed back or have their asylum application unrightfully rejected (so-called 'serious incidents'), the fundamental

rights office presents recommendations to the Agency and informs the Executive Director who decides what action to undertake. Frontex also has the authority to investigate. Every year, there are on average 90 'serious incidents'.

Representatives of Frontex also outlined their role in the implementation of the EU's Migration Pact, noting that their work focuses primarily on two key building blocks of the Pact: screening and border returns procedures. During the screening process, Frontex supports Member States in carrying out various checks, identifying individuals' countries of origin, and referring them to the appropriate procedures. The agency has been testing the new screening procedures in Lampedusa, Italy, a key arrival point for migrants travelling from North Africa, as well as in Romania, in order to see how much time is actually needed to complete the procedures. With regard to returns, Frontex is developing new digital tools to assist EU Member States in identifying vulnerabilities and is also exploring alternatives to detention. The officers involved will also receive training on the different components of the Pact, including fundamental rights safeguards.

In response to questions from the delegation regarding national monitoring mechanisms, the representatives shared that EU Member States are busy establishing these. As regards returns, Frontex representatives clarified that Frontex can be involved throughout the return process, from co-ordinating the logistics of a return operation at the request of Member States to accompanying returnees to the relevant third country. Members of the delegation further enquired about various how operational and legal responsibilities compare to those of EU Member States. One member asked about the extent of Frontex's executive powers and what Frontex's position is when a Member State takes a decision on returns that is against EU law. The Frontex representatives underlined that Member States decide on the measures to take concerning large migration flows. Overall, their message to parliamentarians was that Frontex is a community of persons with a variety of skills dedicated to better protect borders and at the disposal of Member States 24/7 and that it was looking forward to a "new reality" after the Pact comes into application in June 2026.

5. UN Agencies

a. UNHCR



The discussions at UNHCR focussed on key concerns in relation to the EU Pact and legal aid for refugees. UNHCR Representative to the EU Jean-Nicolas Beuze underlined that European migration policy has been largely driven by short-term political rhetoric. He also emphasized that three quarters of displaced persons are actually outside of Europe. Mr. Beuze noted that progress was being made in preparing for implementation

of the Migration Pact but that it was proceeding at different speeds across Member States. UNHCR is concerned that the new border procedures and policy decisions in various instances may lead to de facto detention. While UNHCR advocates the use of alternatives to detention, and for asylum applicants to remain free until a decision has been made, it appears that Member States are engaged in building new administrative detention centres at airports and other locations. He also underlined that blocking people from entering the EU is not a solution and that this makes them more vulnerable to trafficking. The focus needs to be on protection and on prioritising the fundamental rights safeguards. He also called for an increased investment in, and access to, legal aid, as this is both crucial for the migrants in their application process as well as for countries to sustainably speed up the asylum processing system (a well-prepared asylum application is less likely to go through appeals). However, so far there is no evidence of increased investment by Member States in their legal system and in training of lawyers.

Three essential developments were outlined by Mr. Beuze. The first one concerns the 'safe third country' concept. While UNHCR has no objections to the concept in itself, Mr. Beuze raised questions about how safe it actually is to send people to these countries. UNHCR opposes the idea of "blanket" returns to third countries, emphasizing that everyone should have access to a fair and efficient asylum procedure. Second, he outlined avenues to make returns more effective. Indeed, in UNHCR's opinion, the discourse has been too focused on forced returns. Rather, EU Member States should prioritize voluntary returns, as they allow for a more sustainable and dignified returns process. While UNHCR is not against forced returns per se, he underlined, the threat of such returns makes people go under the radar. Third, the proposed 'return hubs' in third countries are a feasible option only if return to the country of origin is not possible. He also stressed that people in such return hubs should have access to basic services. Overall, the Pact can be

a tool to improve migration management in Europe. However, the necessary human rights safeguards need to be in place for it to succeed.

The members of the delegation raised questions regarding bilateral agreements on regional processing centres, such as the Italy-Albania Memorandum. Mr. Beuze explained that such deals are generally more costly and also risk not having the same European law standards upheld, stressing that alternatives to detention are cheaper. Members also enquired about the role of UNHCR in implementation of the EU Migration Pact. Mr. Beuze noted that while UNHCR works together with origin countries together with the EU, conflict resolution is not part of their mandate. This is where parliamentarians can help. UNHCR consistently needs to do more with less due to large funding cuts including by various EU countries. Another limitation is that funds are increasingly earmarked to specific causes which undermines UNHCR's ability to respond flexibly and effectively to crises.

The issue of trafficking and the involvement of states in trafficking were also touched upon. UNHCR also underlined that trafficked persons should not be punished. Labour mobility is critical for the survival of European economies, he underlined. However, there seems to be no willingness on the part of EU Member States to join their efforts in a co-ordinated scheme to attract talent.

b. IOM Global Office



Lukas Gehrke, director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Global Office in Brussels, gave an overview of the Organization's role with regard to the EU Migration Pact, highlighting a number of aspects that require more attention.

IOM's perspective is that the adoption of the Pact marked a watershed moment, the result of a compromise on the difficult topic of migration management and that it is better than no agreement at all. As the IOM Brussels Office is also a sub-regional

office, Director Gehrke and his colleagues also discussed in deeper detail engagement at the Member State level. Several have reached out to IOM for assistance in developing their National Implementation Plans for the Migration Pact. For example, Finland and Sweden have piloted the use of AI to enable asylum officers to make a more informed decision. IOM also collaborates with EU agencies such as the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and other UN bodies to strengthen inter-operability, improve decision-making tools, and help authorities better identify and assist vulnerable migrants. IOM supports Member

States with resettlement (from third countries to the EU) as well as with relocations (within the EU) as part of the new permanent solidarity mechanism.

A key theme of the discussion was the preparedness for the implementation of the EU Migration Pact. The IOM representatives noted that progress varies across Member States and that the system functions like a puzzle: delays in one area (e.g. screening procedures, IT systems, or infrastructure) can affect the whole process. Preparations for implementing the Eurodac system⁹ were cited as an example where delays may affect other aspects of Pact implementation. IOM representatives agreed that there is always space for more attention to respect for fundamental rights in connection with implementation of the new border procedures, e.g. with regards to the rights of persons in vulnerable situations.

IOM does not expect that implementation will be perfect but rather that it will be a gradual process. Operational complexity, potential capacity gaps at the national level, and the involvement of many actors (EU agencies, national authorities, and international organizations) were highlighted as major challenges.

The return system was identified as one of the most vulnerable elements. Currently, about 25 per cent of return decisions in the EU are effectively implemented, and this rate varies widely depending on countries of origin. The new Return Regulation will mean more return decisions and will put greater pressure on the return system. This could have a knock-on effect on detention. While EU agencies such as Frontex can provide operational support, responsibility for returns remains with Member States. Mr. Gehrke emphasized that voluntary returns are generally more sustainable and often constitute the majority of returns, but they require proper counselling, clear legal procedures, and co-operation from countries of origin. Without effective return mechanisms, migrants may remain in prolonged legal limbo, which creates political, legal, and humanitarian challenges.

The discussion also touched on broader geopolitical and policy issues. Migration pressures remain linked to conflicts and instability in regions such as Sudan, Libya, and Afghanistan, meaning arrivals in Türkiye and other countries could increase again in the future. Mr. Gehrke stressed the importance of external partnerships, legal migration pathways, and reintegration programs to make migration governance more effective. Members of the delegation inquired about funding and donor dynamics: while changes in U.S. funding affected some operations, EU-funded projects are largely untouched. IOM also shared that its operational, project-based model allows it to adapt relatively well to shifting political priorities. In conclusion, Director Gehrke cautioned against the risks which failure of the Pact could bring.

⁹ See Annex I for more information on Eurodac.

6. International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

ICMPD director Ralph Genetzke outlined the main goals of this international organization,¹⁰ and gave a brief overview of operational regions and co-operation framework. ICMPD Member States, he underlined, are responsible for developing migration policy, while ICMPD only gets involved in implementation. ICMPD receives significant funding from the European Commission. Projects are also funded by States requesting support. Thus, unlike other international organizations, ICMPD has not been suffering as much from budget cuts.



Senior Policy and Liaison Officer Sarah Schlaeger viewed the creation of the EU Migration Pact in itself as a substantial achievement, given EU Member States' diverging opinions on migration policy. She noted that the success of the Pact depends on how EU Member States implement its various 'building blocks', as well as complementary files, such as the Return Regulation, whose approval from the European Parliament is still pending. Mr. Genetzke added that

European countries have taken Pact implementation seriously, with some using this as an opportunity to reform their national systems. In the Return Regulation, EU Member States have also reached consensus on innovative solutions to reduce irregular migration.

Mr. Genetzke outlined a number of challenges, especially pertaining to the judiciary aspect not being fully implemented, questions surrounding monitoring of fundamental rights, and training frontline states to be ready to handle the new measures foreseen by the Pact. Some participants noted that certain countries, such as The Netherlands, have used it as a pretext to introduce tougher elements into national legislation. Ms. Schlaeger reiterated that it remains to be seen how the European Commission will enforce its oversight on the Member States.

¹⁰ The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an international organisation, with 21 Member States, supporting governments in establishing robust, rights-based migration management systems in more than 90 countries worldwide.

7. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe

The delegation also visited a leading Brussels think-tank, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe. The delegation exchanged views with Director Camille Le Coz and staff on obstacles to the Pact's implementation. Concerns regarding solidarity between EU Member States were shared, as well as implementation of the new border procedures given the tight deadlines to ensure everything is in place. Moreover, they noted that asylum courts are likely to face increased caseloads and tighter deadlines under the EU Pact, raising questions about access to justice and procedural safeguards.



The delegation also enquired about the Solidarity Pool, as questions remain regarding the nature of support for the different tiers of migratory pressure that countries face. The Pool's calculation was described as a mix of political and objective determination, where data from the previous year is used to determine the countries' migratory categories.

Secondary movements were another topic of interest. Ms. Le Coz explained that the emphasis will be much heavier on returns to third countries, as an attempt to reduce secondary movements between Member States and to address shortcomings of the Dublin system according to which asylum seekers should be returned to the country of first entry. The discussion expanded to the greater question of solidarity between Member States, with Ms. Le Coz sharing concerns that the lessons from past challenges had not been learned.

The sustainability of the new migration system was also discussed, as certain members of the delegation voiced their concerns about the Pact's screening procedures creating de facto detention centres. MPI Deputy Director Jasmijn Slootjes pointed out that various European countries are already facing visa backlogs, potentially exacerbating these pressures. In addition, legal talent pathways matching skills to the country that requires them have proven costly, further emphasizing the potential gaps in long-term sustainability of the Pact.

It was also noted that controversial innovative solutions, such as the EU-Tunisia agreement, were being increasingly put forth by the EU to address migration crises. Such deals outside traditional frameworks raise concerns of lack of transparency and accountability.

8. Debrief

During the debrief, the members of the delegation shared their perspectives on the Pact and its implementation. One member emphasized that all significant projects encounter challenges, that the Migration Pact is a step in the right direction that the Commission seems to have learned the lessons from the past. Another member focussed on the need to respect the human rights of people on the move and called for highlighting the risks associated with implementation of the Pact, e.g. concerning fundamental rights of vulnerable persons at the borders of the EU. The critical role of the external borders in ensuring the security of the EU was also noted. The example of Türkiye, which is hosting millions of refugees and rather than pushing them back, has sought to ensure their integration in the labour market, was again raised. The members agreed that it was important to raise awareness within the OSCE PA about the Pact and other EU migration policy reforms.

The Chair thanked the Members for sharing their viewpoints and expressed appreciation for the two MPs from Türkiye for joining this visit and for reflecting the OSCE's broader geographic perspectives and concluded by emphasizing the importance of democratic oversight by parliamentarians during implementation of the EU's Migration Pact.

Annex I – Background on EU Migration Policy Reform

EU Migration Policy - 2015 to now

Between 2015 and 2016 a large influx of refugees and migrants reached Europe, with approximately 1.2 million arrivals recorded across the EU. This sparked a major policy and political crisis within the European Union, with EU Member States and the European Commission at odds over the most effective way to manage the situation. The crisis placed disproportionate pressure on frontline EU Member States, and triggered deep disagreements over responsibility-sharing and solidarity within the EU. More broadly, this crisis emphasized the weaknesses of the existing European migration and protection system, and increased the salience of migration management across European politics.

Over the years various measures have been taken to manage migration effectively in Europe. In 2015, emergency measures included temporary relocation schemes, dedicated reception centres ('hotspots'), and giving Frontex an expanded mandate. However, attempts to structurally reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) were repeatedly stalled by EU Member States who disagreed on how to manage the migration influx in a solidary manner.

One of the most significant measures was the March 2016 of the EU-Turkey Statement. Under this agreement, for every Syrian returned, another Syrian refugee was to be resettled from Türkiye to the EU, and all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Türkiye to the Greek islands and whose applications for asylum were declared inadmissible were to be returned to Türkiye. In exchange, Türkiye received financial aid to improve reception conditions and advanced visa liberalization. The EU-Turkey Statement was widely viewed as a possible blueprint for subsequent EU migration policy. Over the following years, the EU focused on preventing irregular migration by cooperating with third countries, entering agreements with countries such as Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan and the Western Balkans. These external cooperation strategies have prompted concerns among human rights groups such as UNHCR, particularly regarding access to international protection and the adequacy of human rights safeguards.

Other developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the instrumentalization of migration at the EU's eastern borders, and the mass displacement caused by the war in Ukraine, further tested European asylum structures. These crises highlighted the EU's reliance on ad hoc and differentiated responses, most notably the swift activation of the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees, and the need for a more unified and effective European migration and asylum system.

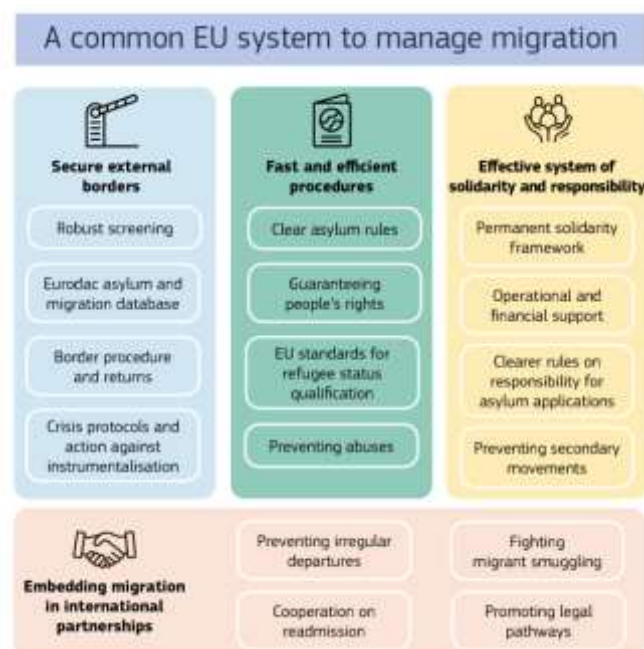
In 2020, the European Commission, under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen, started drafting a new migration agreement as a tool to streamline migration and asylum policy among EU Member States and to overcome longstanding political deadlock. After a long period of negotiation, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum was finalized in 2024. The new framework is due to enter into application in June 2026, marking the most substantial reform of EU migration and asylum policy since 2015.

EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

Background

In May 2024, after three years of hard and complex negotiations, the European Parliament and the European Council formally adopted the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum as part of efforts to address the challenges related to migration. The Pact consists of a new set of rules managing migration and establishing a common asylum system at EU level. It entered into force on 11 June 2024 and will enter into application after two years, as of 12 June 2026, so that EU Member States have time to introduce the required changes to national legislation.

The Pact builds on earlier reform initiatives in the field of migration, consolidating and revising them into a comprehensive framework that strengthens and aligns EU policies on migration, asylum, border management, and integration. It seeks to establish a sustainable, long-term approach to migration management, granting Member States flexibility to respond to their particular challenges while ensuring safeguards for the protection of those in need. It consists of 4 pillars: secure external borders, fast and efficient procedures, effective solidarity and responsibility, and embedding migration in international partnerships.



Implementation

Common implementation plan

The Pact consists of 10 comprehensive legislative acts and it is being grouped together through a Common Implementation Plan (CIP). To facilitate the implementation of these texts, the CIP breaks the various legal acts and actions required into 10 'building blocks' (see Figure 1). It focuses on the fundamental aspects that EU Member States need to consider when developing their National Implementation Plans and that need to be in

place at EU and national levels to ensure that the Pact becomes operational by mid-2026. It provides the framework for a joint work programme for the period 2024-2026, including the legal and operational deliverables, the structures for discussion, and relevant operational and financial support. These building blocks are interdependent and all need to be implemented for the system to work successfully. The first building block, Eurodac, is explained in more detail below.



Figure 1: Ten building blocks of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. *Source: European Commission*

National implementation plans

Member States were tasked with creating National Implementation Plans, which are country-specific roadmaps detailing how Member States will adapt laws, structures and other measures for the Pact's full application in June 2026. EU agencies will primarily provide general support, including training sessions, tools, guidance and direct operational support to all Member States.

Recent developments

Implementation of the Pact is now the central focus of EU migration policy, moving from legislative agreement to practical roll-out. Recent developments include the Commission's adoption of the five-year European Migration and Asylum Strategy in January 2026,¹¹ with three main objectives: "preventing illegal migration and breaking the business of criminal smuggling networks; protecting people fleeing war and persecution, while preventing abuse of the asylum system; and attracting talent to the EU to boost the competitiveness of the EU's economy." An annual Solidarity Pool for 2026 was also agreed in

¹¹ European Commission, "Commission presents a five-year strategy on migration" (29 January 2026). https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-five-year-strategy-migration-2026-01-29_en

December 2025, a key part of the Pact to support Member States facing migratory pressure through relocations, financial support or alternative measures.

Solidarity Mechanism

The 'Solidarity Pool' is part of the new EU solidarity mechanism for allocating solidarity contributions to Member States that are under migratory pressure. Solidarity contributions include relocations, financial contributions, and other forms of support. The minimum threshold for relocations, at EU level, is set at 30,000 applicants for international protection and the minimum financial contribution is €600 million. The solidarity contribution of each Member State is based on their population size and GDP. These two figures were ultimately reduced to 21,000 relocations or equivalent solidarity contributions, corresponding to up to € 420 million in financial support.¹²

In the first Annual Asylum and Migration Report¹³, the following countries were found to be "at risk of migratory pressure": Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland and Finland. These countries can benefit from the solidarity measures of the solidarity pool.

Moreover, six Member States – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia and Poland – were deemed to face a "significant migratory situation due to the cumulative migratory pressure of the previous years". They have therefore indicated their wish to see their solidarity contributions for the first solidarity pool fully or partially reduced, have had their pledges adjusted in light of this significant migratory situation.

Thirdly, twelve Member States were considered to be at risk of migratory pressure and will therefore have priority access to the EU Migration Support Toolbox which includes assistance by EU agencies and support from EU funds: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and Finland.

Eurodac¹⁴

Eurodac – the European asylum dactyloscopy database – is a biometric database, established in 2000 and revised in 2013, in which EU Member States are required to enter the fingerprint data of asylum-seekers in order to identify where they entered the EU in order to facilitate application of the Dublin Regulation.

Proposals to recast the Eurodac regulation were put forth as part of the reform of the common European asylum system in 2016 and as part of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2020. On 20 December 2023, political agreement was reached on a recast

¹² Council of the EU, Press Release, "Migration and asylum: Member States agree on solidarity pool" (8 December 2025), at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/12/08/migration-and-asylum-member-states-agree-on-solidarity-pool/>.

¹³ See: European Commission, European Annual Asylum and Migration Report (Brussels, 11 November 2025, COM(2025) 795 final).

¹⁴ See: European Parliament, Briefing - Recast Eurodac Regulation, 6 June 2024, at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)589808](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2016)589808).

Eurodac regulation which will apply from 12 June 2026. Major changes include the obligation to store data on names, nationalities, place and date of birth, and travel document information. For asylum-seekers, the asylum application number and the Member State responsible under the Dublin Regulation would also be stored. The new proposal introduces a requirement also to collect and store data on third-country nationals or stateless persons who have been found irregularly on EU territory. Partial access could be granted to the authorities of third countries on certain conditions. The fingerprinting age has also been lowered from 14 to 6 years. Facial images will also be stored in addition to fingerprints as a result of difficulties encountered in collecting fingerprints. Inter-operability between EU information systems (e.g. Entry/Exit System) means that these systems could be used to supplement each other to help with the correct identification of persons.

One of the main concerns surrounding the Eurodac database is data protection. Concerns regarding access to Eurodac by law enforcement agencies as well as the use of coercion to obtain fingerprints have also been raised.

List of Safe Countries of Origin and Revised Safe Third Country Concept

In February 2026, the European Council formally adopted the first EU-wide list of safe countries of origin as well as a revision of the safe third country concept. The **EU-wide list of safe countries of origin** is intended to help Member States deal more efficiently with applications for international protection lodged by nationals of Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Kosovo, India, Morocco and Tunisia. EU accession candidate countries will also be considered safe countries of origin unless relevant circumstances, such as indiscriminate violence in the context of an armed conflict, if their citizens have EU-wide asylum recognition rate of above 20%, or economic sanctions due to actions affecting fundamental rights and freedoms indicate otherwise.

The **revised safe third country concept** seeks to give Member States more flexibility for rejecting asylum applications as inadmissible. EU countries will be able to apply the safe third country concept with respect to an asylum applicant who is not a national of a certain country – and therefore declare their application inadmissible – where one of three conditions is met:

- the existence of a connection between the applicant and the third country, such as the presence of members of their family in the country, the previous presence in the country of the applicant, or if there are linguistic, cultural or similar links;
- the applicant has transited through the third country on the way to the EU and they could have requested effective protection there;
- an agreement or arrangement exists with the third country at a bilateral, multilateral or EU level for the admission of asylum seekers, with the exception of unaccompanied minors.

Under the new rules, it will be up to the individual applicant to prove that this provision should not apply in their case because of a well-founded fear of persecution or the risk of serious harm if sent back to their country. The Commission will monitor the situation in the

countries on the list of safe countries of origin and in the candidate countries and react if circumstances change. It could temporarily decide that a country is not safe or propose its permanent removal from the list. Member states will be able to designate additional safe countries of origin at national level.

Pact for the Mediterranean

The Pact for the Mediterranean was adopted on 16 October 2025 and is envisioned by the European Commission as a flagship initiative to reshape EU relations with its southern Mediterranean neighbours, emphasizing co-ownership, co-creation and joint responsibility. Based on these principles, the goal of the Pact is to ensure a paradigm shift by achieving deeper integration within the Common Mediterranean Space. The Pact is based on three interconnected pillars: people; sustainable and integrated economies; security, preparedness, and migration management.

The implementation and monitoring of the Pact for the Mediterranean will be carried out through a two-layer framework, at the EU level and the Euro-Mediterranean level, with the initial action plan expected to be presented by March 2026 by the Commission and the EEAS at the joint senior officials' level.

Return Regulation

At the end of 2025, EU Member States agreed upon a new 'Regulation establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union', referred to as the return regulation,¹⁵ often described as the "missing piece" of migration management. It will replace inter alia the 2008 Return Directive (Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals).

According to EU statistics, only around 20 per cent of irregular migrants return to their home country once having been issued a return decision.¹⁶ Thus, the EU and Member States sought to find a streamlined strategy to enforce and improve returns through this new law. The new regulation imposes strict obligations on returnees, as those who do not cooperate could potentially face various punitive measures, from refused work permits to imprisonment. In addition, it facilitates Member State co-operation through the mutual recognition of return decisions, allowing one Member State to enforce another's return order. To facilitate this, the regulation would also create a European Return Order, allowing easier recognition as Member States will possess the necessary information to recognize another Member State's return decision.

¹⁵ Regulation establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union. See: European Council, "Council clinches deal on EU law about returns of illegally staying third-country nationals," Press Release (8 December 2025), at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/12/08/council-clinches-deal-on-eu-law-about-returns-of-illegally-staying-third-country-nationals/> (accessed 24 March 2026).

¹⁶ European Commission, "An effective, firm and fair EU return and readmission policy" (n.d.). https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/effective-firm-and-fair-eu-return-and-readmission-policy_en

The regulation also states that a “country of return” may be a third country that has an agreement with the EU or a Member State to accept individuals without the right to remain in the EU. Such agreements can only be concluded with countries that respect international human rights standards, including the principle of non-refoulement. Within this framework, ‘return hubs’ could serve either as temporary centres for onward return to the country of origin or, in some cases, as the final destination. This new regulation will still need to be negotiated with the European Parliament before being approved into law.

Annex II – Current migration data

Recent data show that irregular border crossings into the EU have decreased compared with previous years. According to Frontex data, in 2025, around 178,000 irregular crossings were detected, a 26% decrease compared with 2024 and the lowest level since 2021 (see Figure 1).¹⁷ According to UNHCR, sea arrivals have also fallen: approximately 155,000 people reached Europe by sea in 2025, compared with nearly 200,000 in 2024.¹⁸ Despite this decline, the Mediterranean remains the main entry route into the EU.

Detections of illegal border-crossing at the EU's external borders.
Source: Frontex data

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% change over 2024
Central Mediterranean	67 724	105 561	162 714	66 855	66 328	-1%
Eastern Mediterranean	22 793	38 690	61 092	69 954	51 399	-27%
Western African Route	22 351	15 463	39 673	46 820	17 280	-63%
Western Balkan Route	61 735	144 197	99 041	21 637	12 528	-42%
Eastern Borders Route	8 160	6 373	5 824	17 059	10 846	-37%
Western Mediterranean	18 466	15 134	16 877	17 026	19 403	+14%
Total EU – Detections	202 322	326 335	380 227	239 351	177 784	-26%

Figure 2: Irregular arrivals to the EU 2021-2025. Source: Frontex

In the third quarter of 2025, 115,440 non-EU citizens were ordered to leave an EU country, and 34,155 people were returned to third countries following an order to leave (see Figure 2). Compared with the third quarter of 2024, the number of non-EU citizens ordered to leave went up by 2.7 per cent, and the number of people returned to third countries increased by 14.6 per cent. In comparison with the previous quarter, the number of orders to leave decreased by 0.9 per cent, while the number of returns to third countries increased by 5.0 per cent.

¹⁷ Frontex, “Migratory Routes” (n.d.) <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/what-we-do/monitoring-and-risk-analysis/migratory-routes/migratory-routes/>

¹⁸ UNHCR Operational Data Portal, “Europe Sea Arrivals” (8 March 2026). <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals>

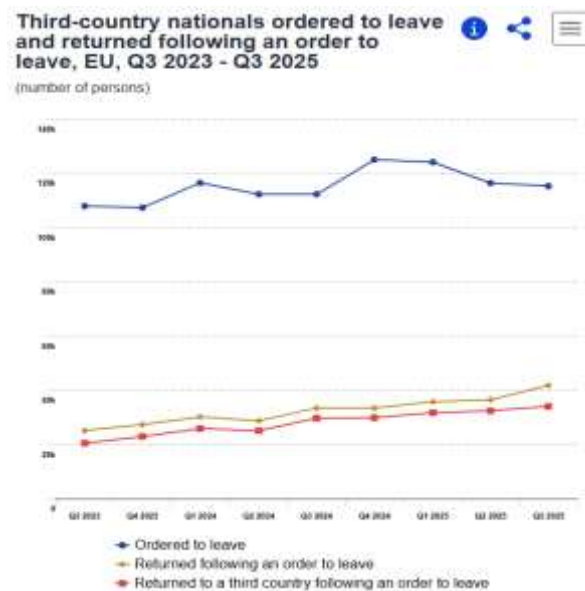


Figure 3: Third-country nationals ordered to leave and returned following an order to leave (2023-2025). Source: Eurostat

Annex III - Programme and Participants

OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Visit to Brussels

(Wednesday, 28-Thursday, 29 January 2026)

Final Programme

Wednesday, 28 January 2026

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 10:00-11:00 | <p>UNHCR Representation for EU Affairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Jean-Nicolas BEUZE, UNHCR Representative to the EU• Ms. Cecilie Becker-Chr. SAENZ GUERRERO, Senior Policy Officer, Policy and Legal Support Unit, UNHCR's Representation for EU Affairs• Ms. Yasmine ROCKENFELLER, Chief of Global Issues |
| 11:30-12:30 | <p>International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) - Brussels Mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Ralph GENETZKE, Director• Ms. Sarah SCHLAEGER, Senior Lead of the Policy and Liaison unit |
| 14:00-15:30 | <p>European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) – Brussels Liaison Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Jagoda Walorek, Senior Fundamental Rights Monitor, Fundamental Rights Office• Ms. Anca Cristina PRISTAVU, Coordinating Liaison Officer, EU Policies Sector• Ms. Monica LANDEIRO RODRIGUES (remote connection) |
| 16:00-17:00 | <p>European Commission - Office of the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Magnus BRUNNER, Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration• Mr. Johannes LUCHNER, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME)• Mr. Mauro GAGLIARDI, Member of Magnus Brunner's cabinet |

Thursday, 29 January 2026

10:00-11:30

European Commission – Cabinet of the Commissioner for the Mediterranean and Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG-MENA)

- Ms. Tena MISETIC, Head of Cabinet of the Commissioner for the Mediterranean Ms. Dubravka Suica
- Mr. Raul HERNANDEZ SAGRERA, Member of Cabinet
- Mr. Francisco GAZTELU, Director, North Africa (MENA A), DG-MENA

12:30-13:30

Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe

- Ms. Camille LE COZ, Director
- Ms. Jasmijn SLOOTJES, Deputy Director
- Ms. Maria Belen ZANZUCHI, Policy Analyst
- Mr. Bertrand STEINER, Research Assistant

14:15-15:00

IOM Global Office Brussels

- Mr. Lukas GEHRKE, Director
- Ms. Aspasia PAPADOPOULOU, IOM Head of Global Programme Support Unit
- Ms. Maria VOICA

Debrief and end of programme

Participants

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration:

1. Ms. Farah KARIMI (MP, Netherlands), Chair
2. Mr. Alessandro ALFIERI (MP, Italy), Vice-Chair
3. Mr. Kemal ÇELİK (MP, Türkiye), Vice-Chair
4. Mr. Kyriakos HADJIYIANNI (MP, Cyprus), Vice-President of the OSCE PA
5. Mr. Artemi Vicent RALLO (MP, Spain)
6. Ms. Özgül SAKI (MP, Türkiye)
7. Mr. Angelos SYRIGOS (MP, Greece)

Staff of Delegations:

8. Ms. Ecem DANIK GOKCE, Secretary of the Turkish Delegation
9. Ms. Dilek DEMIRKOL, Turkish interpreter

OSCE PA International Secretariat:

10. Mr. Roberto MONTELLA, Secretary General of the OSCE PA
11. Ms. Farimah DAFTARY, Senior Advisor
12. Mr. Jonathan BROUWER, Research Assistant

Annex IV - Press Release

[European migration management in focus during OSCE PA Migration Committee visit to Brussels](#)

BRUSSELS, 30 January 2026 – A seven-member delegation of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, led by Chair Farah Karimi (Netherlands) and joined by Secretary General Roberto Montella, concluded a two-day visit to Brussels yesterday with the aim to learn more about recent developments in European migration policy reform, focusing on implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and its expected impact on EU Member States as well as non-EU countries.

During the briefings, the interlocutors at the Commission outlined the key achievements in preparing for Pact implementation, including the designation of the EU Member States which are under migratory pressure and agreement on the ‘Solidarity Pool’ for 2026 consisting of support measures for these countries. Recurring topics included safeguards within the Pact to ensure compliance with human rights standards and the need to step up the fight against migrant smugglers and traffickers.

The new Return Regulation and rules for determining which ‘Safe Third Countries’ to which asylum seekers may be sent back were also high on the agenda, with steps towards laying the regulatory foundations for ‘return hubs’ in third countries being the subject of further discussions.

The Committee also had the opportunity to hear more about the new Pact for the Mediterranean launched last November which seeks to promote migration management as part of comprehensive efforts to create a connected, prosperous, resilient and secure common Mediterranean space from North Africa to the Middle East. The importance of strengthening partnerships with countries of origin and transit beyond the EU, as part of a whole-of-route approach was also emphasized.

Chair Karimi acknowledged the complexity and difficulty of the task of managing migration in these challenging times. At the same time, she stressed the key importance of enforcing the safeguards to ensure respect for the human rights of people on the move.

“What this visit made clear was the enormous complexity of the legislation, interdependencies in implementation at the technical, operational and political levels. Preparations within EU Member States are moving at different speeds. It therefore remains to be seen how successful the application of the Pact will be from June 2026 onwards,” Karimi stated. “Countries at the external borders of the EU have a huge task at hand in implementing the new border procedures in full respect of the human rights of migrants and refugees and international law.”

She added that it is essential to also have independent monitoring mechanisms at the national level and that respect for the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum seekers should be at the heart of any effective and sustainable migration framework.

Chair Karimi also stressed the importance of rigorous and honest implementation of the permanent solidarity mechanism and the Union resettlement regulation.

The Committee will continue to follow implementation of the EU Migration Pact as well as EU efforts to step up the fight against human smuggling as part of its new long-term

migration management strategy as this is a key component of effective and sustainable migration policies.

From 28-29 January, the OSCE PA delegation met with key stakeholders at the European Commission, including Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner, and colleagues at the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG-HOME), the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG-MENA), and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). The delegation also engaged in policy discussions with UNHCR, IOM, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI).

This is the fourth time that the Committee has travelled to Brussels for migration policy dialogues. This latest visit is part of its initiative to focus on implementation of the EU Migration Pact; the practical steps which need to be taken by EU Member States to ensure effective, timely and coherent implementation from June 2026 onwards; and how parliamentarians can contribute to this process.

The Committee will report on its visit to the OSCE PA Standing Committee in Vienna in February 2026.

Alongside Chair Karimi and Secretary General Montella, the delegation included Vice-Chairs Kemal Çelik (Türkiye) and Alessandro Alfieri (Italy); and members Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus); Artemi Vicent Rallo (Spain); Özgül Saki (Türkiye); and Angelos Syrigos (Greece).