

The Home Affairs and Immigration ministers of the 27 Member States of the EU met in Luxembourg on the 1st of October 2026 (1). At the initiative of Germany, Italy, Greece, or Denmark, they want to further strengthen "Fortress Europe" with a legislative arsenal that strongly discourages migrants without residence permits or valid visas (papers issued by official bodies), who are wrongly called irregular migrants. We can talk about illegal immigration, without authorization from the countries. No human being is illegal. The measures put forward are still the same as they were three years ago - installation of centers in third countries, questioning of the right to asylum in exceptional cases, rewriting of the pact on migration and asylum. No novelty in the suggested "ideas" which seem very repetitive.

The latest data published by the Frontex agency and shared with Home Affairs Commissioner Magnus Brunner are not alarming. Since 2024, irregular entries into Europe have collapsed by 55% (75,000 between January and August 2026). Asylum applications, which had peaked at 1.1 million in 2023 in Europe, also fell by 17% over the same period (332,000), according to the Asylum Agency. Expulsions carried out by Frontex for States that request it have increased by 10% in 2025. It is surprising that past experiences, unfortunate initiatives, have not served as lessons for European leaders; feedback (Return on experience- Retex in a military language) seems to be non-existent.

A "new" EU "Return" regulation would allow for the return of undocumented exiles and anyone denied asylum in third countries. This idea failed in the United Kingdom, where it was proposed by Boris Johnson's government with Rwanda; the same failure was faced by Italy with Albania. Yet Germany, Austria, Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands are working on return centers outside European territory to send exiles who are denied the right of asylum. Discussions are open with Rwanda and Uganda. The MEPs Tineke Strick and Anna Strolenberg, who have moved to African countries, have warned about the risk of a "legal vacuum" and serial procedures that European institutions would face when facing appeals from exiles who have rights. The flexibilities requested by countries like Poland in the face of an instrumentalization of migration by hostile countries (Russia and Belarus) are also questionable; the measures would be considered as refoulement, a practice prohibited by international law.

The "one in one out" experiment carried out by France and the United Kingdom, which began in July 2025, ended in October 2026 (2). This unprecedented agreement for the exchange of undocumented migrants was concluded between France and the United Kingdom to deter irregular crossings of the Channel, which had been steadily increasing since 2018. For each migrant who arrived in the UK on a small boat and was sent back to France, London accepted the legal reception of an exile in France. The observation is clear: the process was not dissuasive; few people were sent back to France (about 1,400) for a very expensive budget (65,323 euros per return). The British newspaper *The Guardian* also reported that about fifty people sent back to France are back on British soil.

This bilateral agreement raised many questions from associations that support the exiles. About fifteen organizations had challenged it in court, denouncing a "haggling that sacrifices access to international protection where the people concerned are treated as mere interchangeable numbers." The French Minister of the Interior, Laurent Nunez, recognized on June 15, 2026 that "France does not have to carry alone" a device that should be integrated into the framework

of an agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom. Once again, we can only deplore a "legal vacuum". With Brexit (which entered into force in December 2020), the trade and cooperation agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom does not include any provisions on asylum or immigration issues.

This "irruption of migration among the major geopolitical issues at a time of generalized destabilization of the world has a neglected consequence: the putting in second place, or even the forgetting of human beings who are its actors, often the victims" (3). We talk about "migratory flows," "waves," and "pressures." We advance figures and assess costs. The migration issue concerns 281 million people who do not live in the country where they were born (United Nations, 2020). If it is important to be able to assess the humanitarian aid to be provided to displaced persons (their number) and their needs (in terms of budget), it is also essential to be able to embody this support provided to millions of human beings who often forcibly leave their native land, because they are forced there by natural disasters (which multiply with global warming), armed conflicts (often fratricidal wars), or economic crises (no future especially for young people). In Europe, the reception of millions of Ukrainian refugees forced to leave their country because Ukraine was attacked by Russia in February 2022 is a recent and telling example.

Associations that work with exiles in France and in Europe, or European NGOs that support populations facing critical situations (war, famine, disease...) in the Global South should be the first interlocutors of the public authorities and European officials on the issue of migration. They have long-standing field experience and can document "good practices" with very specific case studies. They present a positive and constructive approach to the issue of migration in Europe. Some associations have specialized in defending the rights of exiles. In France, one can cite the Cimade or the Gisti. Since the end of the 1970s, the CIMADE (4) has become increasingly involved in the growing number of migration bills that have reduced immigrants' rights. The association entered the detention centers in 1984 to assist deported foreigners. Throughout its history, it has "remained a committed movement without being satisfied with a simple charitable stance." Other associations have more local action. They provide material assistance (meals, clothing or equipment), for example to undocumented exiles in the Calais or Dunkirk regions. The association Salam (5), which operates only with volunteers, was created when the emergency humanitarian shelter camp of Sangatte and its "jungle", another dehumanizing term, had been dismantled in 2002 (6).

A facet is less known and mediatized. The European Union through its key Erasmus + program dedicated to Lifelong learning finances pilot projects to upskill professionals who help exiles or to express a migratory experience in terms of competences(7). This approach of lifelong Education and Training contrasts with a security-based approach that has shown its limits - limited results at an exorbitant cost.

Human capital should be the first issue of the European migration strategy. A goal for the Asylum and Migration Pact - to integrate feedback from associations and NGOs (Retex) for the Border Agency (Frontex).

Dr Bénédicte Halba, présidente de l'iriv (www.iriv.net) - weblog sur la migration - <https://actions-migration.blogspot.com/> 5 October 2026

- (1) Philippe Jacqué « L'UE veut encore durcir sa politique migratoire », Le Monde, 3 octobre 2026
- (2) Véronique Chocron et Stéphanie Le Bers « Immigration : la fin d'un accord franco-britannique », Le Monde, 1^{er} octobre 2026
- (3) Philippe Bernard « L'immigration , ce n'est pas que géopolitique », Le Monde, 6 et 7 septembre 2026
- (4) The Cimade was created by a Youth Protestant movement in 1939 in times of war in Europe- <https://www.lacimade.org/nous-connaitre/histoire/>
- (5) Association Salam (Hauts de France)- <https://www.associationsalam.org/2023/07/07/proposition-salam/>
- (6) Dismantling ordered by Nicolas Sarkozy's government in 2002
- (7) Projects initiated by iriv – Migrapass, a portfolio to identify and assess migratory compétences (2010-2012)- <https://www.iriv-migrations.net/index.php?id=5> , or Diverpass, a professional support to upskill professionnals working together with exiles (2019-2021)- <https://www.diverpass.eu/blog/france/presentation> .

