

MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF EUROPEAN UNION SECURITY: INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES, 2022-2025

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Abstract

This article examines migration governance as a strategic field through which the European Union reconfigured important dimensions of its security architecture between 2022 and 2025. It argues that migration should be understood not only as a matter of mobility or humanitarian protection, but also as a strategic factor that has reshaped the institutional, legal, and security architecture of the Union. Drawing on migration studies, European integration theory, and securitisation approaches, the article examines three main dimensions: the coordinated response to the mass displacement caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, centred on temporary protection and the Strategic Compass; the changing configuration of migration routes, operational risks, and data-driven forms of monitoring, including the growing role of EU agencies; and the legal-institutional consolidation introduced by the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The analysis shows that migration has contributed to a shift from ad hoc crisis management to a more centralised, securitised, and multi-level governance framework. At the same time, it highlights a persistent tension between human security and hybrid-threat management, with important implications for solidarity, border control, and the protection of fundamental rights within the European Union. The study is carried out within the national initiative "SENREMO-The National Security of the Republic of Moldova in the Context of EU Accession" and Jean Monnet Chair "EU's role in the emerging international system".

Keywords: European Union security; migration governance; securitization; temporary protection; Pact on Migration and Asylum, hybrid threats

Introduction

After the migration crisis of 2015-2016, the European Union remained for several years in a state of limited reform capacity in the field of asylum and migration. Political deadlocks between Member States prevented the adoption of a comprehensive reform of the Common European Asylum System, despite the proposals of the Juncker Commission. However, the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022 acted as a strategic catalyst, transforming forced migration and population mobility into central factors for the EU's security, both internally (institutional resilience, pressure on asylum and social

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protection systems) and externally (the instrumentalization of flows by state and non-state actors, hybrid pressure routes).

The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (March 2022) explicitly anchored these developments in the Union's strategic culture, identifying the instrumentalization of migration at external borders as a form of hybrid threat and underlining the need to strengthen integrated border management, information exchange and societal resilience. This provides a common thread for the 2022–2025 period: migration is no longer just an object of internal policies, but also a “testing ground” for the EU's capacity to act as a security pole, in the logic of a “Security Union”.

The objective of this article is to examine how migration governance contributed to the reconfiguration of European Union security between 2022 and 2025, with particular attention to the institutional dynamics and strategic responses through which migration became embedded in the Union's evolving security architecture, based on *three sets of documents*: (1) strategic instruments and political narratives (Strategic Compass, von der Leyen Commission narrative on “managing migration responsibly”); (2) the new normative framework of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, in particular Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 on asylum and migration management; (3) the mid-term training needs assessment (EU-STNA 2022–2025), which indicates how security practices and cooperation between EU agencies are adapting to new challenges.

Theoretical-Methodological Framework: Definition, Typologies and Legal Substantiation

Analysing migration governance as a factor in the reconfiguration of European Union security requires a theoretical and methodological framework that combines migration studies, theories of European integration, and securitisation approaches. In this perspective, migration is understood not only as cross-border mobility of people, but as a set of demographics, economic, political and normative processes that reconfigure, in the long term, the institutions and security practices of the EU. In the specialized literature, migration designates the cross-border movement of people, accompanied by the intention of temporary or permanent residence, generated by a combination of “push-pull” factors (conflicts, persecutions, economic crises, demand for labour, educational opportunities, etc.). In the European context, the concept of “migration policy” is complemented by that of “migration governance”, which includes not only legal norms and EU institutions, but also implementation networks, agreements with third countries and informal practices of “remote control” of mobility¹.

Niemann et al. distinguish between the EU's “internal migration policy” (the set of rules on internal and external border control, asylum, legal immigration and return) and the EU's “external migration policy”, which aims to manage migration flows in relation to countries of origin and transit, through conditionality instruments, readmission agreements, mobility partnerships and the use of development aid for migration control purposes². The concept of “EU migration governance” thus designates the set of formal and informal

¹Sandra Lavenex, *The Europeanization of Refugee Policies: Normative Challenges and Institutional Legacies: of Common Market Studies*, “Wiley Blackwell”, Vol. 39/5, pp. 851-874, December, 2001, DOI:10.1111/1468-5965.00334, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bla/jcmkts/v39y2001i5p851-874.html> (23.11.2025)

² Arne Niemann, Natascha Zaun, *Introduction: EU external migration policy and EU migration governance: introduction. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 49/12, 2023, pp. 2965–2985, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2193710> (23.11.2025)

instruments that structure the interaction between the EU, its Member States and third countries in managing mobility, under an increasingly pronounced security agenda.

Securitisation approaches highlight the constructed nature of migration as a “threat”, but in order to be analytically meaningful, this perspective must be linked to observable policy outcomes. In the European Union context (2022–2025), the framing of migration as a security or hybrid threat is not limited to discourse, but translates into differentiated legal regimes and operational practices. For instance, the designation of certain flows as “instrumentalised” or high-risk justifies the expansion of border procedures, accelerated asylum processing, and increased use of detention or return mechanisms. Conversely, the categorisation of displaced persons from Ukraine as beneficiaries of temporary protection enabled immediate access to residence, labour markets, and social services, bypassing standard asylum procedures¹. This divergence illustrates that securitisation operates through selective policy activation, producing differentiated treatment across migrant groups depending on geopolitical context, origin, and perceived risk. In this sense, securitisation in the EU does not uniformly restrict mobility, but redistributes rights and constraints unevenly, embedding hierarchy within migration governance.

A fundamental distinction is between *forced migration*, associated with refugees and applicants for international protection (mainly regulated by asylum law and the CEAS framework) and *voluntary migration*, which includes labour migration, family reunification, migration for studies or humanitarian reasons. This distinction is found in the separation of competences in the TFEU, where art. 78 concerns a common policy on asylum and subsidiary protection, and art. 79 concerns legal immigration of third-country nationals².

The second distinction concerns the legal status of mobility: *regular migration* – carried out on the basis of legal titles (visa, residence or work permit, refugee status or subsidiary protection); *irregular migration*, entry or stay without a legal title, a category that also includes situations in which the person loses their right to stay (*overstayers*) or is rejected in asylum procedures. In his analysis of “*unwanted immigration*”, Zaun defines this central category for EU policies as flows of asylum seekers/refugees and irregular migrants, i.e. those forms of spontaneous immigration, difficult to control and over which states have limited or no legal obligations³. *Asylum seekers* who arrive spontaneously are initially treated as “irregular migrants” until they submit their application for protection, and in case of rejection they become irregular again, which explains the integrated treatment of these categories within the new Pact on Migration and Asylum.

A third distinction concerns the duration and form of mobility: *temporary or circular migration* (including seasonal workers or mobility programmes); long-term or permanent migration, which involves socio-economic integration and access to extended rights. Niemann et al. note that, despite the political discourse on the need for “legal pathways”, the EU has developed few real channels of legal migration for *non-high-skilled* categories, with the emphasis on *circular migration* and mobility partnerships, often conditional on

¹ Steven Blockmans, Crosson Macchiarini, *The EU's Strategic Compass: A Guide to Reverse Strategic Shrinkage?*, March 31, 2022, CEPS Policy Insight, March 2022, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4136255> (24.11.2025)

² Tratatul privind funcționarea Uniunii Europene (versiune consolidată). Jurnalul Oficial al Uniunii Europene, 26.10.2012, C 326/47, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF (25.11.2025)

³ Natascha Zaun, *Externally driven integration in EU migration policy: enabling integration through indifference, undermining it through conflictive politicisation*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, 2025, pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2565214> (24.11.2025)

readmission agreements¹. The literature on political and media discourse presents a discursive typology of migration, in which the same category of people can be framed either as “refugees” (victims of war), or as “economic migrants” or “irregular migrants”, with direct effects on the legitimacy of security measures and the availability of public solidarity². This dimension is crucial for understanding the mechanisms of securitisation and the way in which migration is perceived as a structural risk.

At the same time, critical scholarship on EU migration governance emphasises processes of externalisation and differentiated protection. Externalisation refers to the shifting of migration control beyond EU borders through cooperation with third countries, conditionality, and capacity-building measures, often with limited oversight of human rights standards. Differentiated protection highlights the unequal distribution of rights and access to protection based on nationality, route, and geopolitical context. Together, these perspectives challenge the assumption of a coherent and uniformly applied EU migration regime, instead pointing to a stratified system in which security considerations shape both territorial and legal boundaries of protection. In this article, migration governance is understood as a strategic field through which migratory pressures, legal responses, and institutional adaptation have contributed to the reconfiguration of the European Union’s security architecture. Building on Zaun’s analysis, migration, especially in the form of “unwanted immigration” - can be understood as a catalyst of accelerated integration when rising flows and the perception of loss of control increase its political salience within the European Union³.

The reconfiguration of European Union security through migration governance can be observed across at least three interrelated dimensions: institutional, legal-normative, and strategic-security: 1) *Institutional dimension* - strengthening the competences of EU agencies (Frontex, EUAA), alongside an expansion of their operational autonomy and influence over national decision-making. While this development enhances coordination and capacity, it also raises persistent concerns regarding accountability, transparency, and compliance with fundamental rights. The growing role of agencies in areas such as return operations, border screening, and asylum support creates a complex distribution of responsibility, in which operational practices are increasingly Europeanised, but legal accountability often remains formally national⁴. 2) *Legal-normative dimension* - moving from a fragmented framework, dominated by directives and minimum standards, to a set of directly applicable regulations, harmonising procedures, qualification criteria and solidarity mechanisms and strengthening the role of common obligations in migration control; this is the expression of deeper integration in core state powers, as conceptualised by Genschel and Jachtenfuchs⁵. 3)

¹ Arne Niemann, Natascha Zaun, *Introduction: EU external migration policy and EU migration governance: introduction*. “Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies”, Vol. 49/12, 2023, pp. 2965–2985, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2193710> (20.11.2025)

² Bastian Vollmer, *Policy Discourses on Irregular Migration in the EU - ‘Number Games’ and ‘Political Games’*. “European Journal of Migration and Law”, Vol. 13/3, 2011, pp. 317-339, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181611X587874> (28.11.2025)

³ Natascha Zaun, *Externally driven integration in EU migration policy: enabling integration through indifference, undermining it through conflictive politicisation*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, 2025, pp. 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2565214> (27.11.2025)

⁴ Evangelia Lilian Tsourdi, *The New Screening and Border Procedures: Towards a Seamless Migration Process?*, “Policy Study”. June 2024, https://d1xp398qalq39s.cloudfront.net/content/FEPS-Policy_Study_-_The_New_Screening_and_Border_Procedure_-_DP_66_9_.pdf (27.11.2025)

⁵ Philipp Genschel, Markus Jachtenfuchs, *From Market Integration to Core State Powers: The Eurozone Crisis, the Refugee Crisis and Integration Theory*, “JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies”, Vol. 56 (1), 2018, pp. 178–196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12654> (24.11.2025)

Strategic security dimension - the explicit inclusion of migration and the instrumentalisation of migratory flows in the EU's security documents (Strategic Compass, hybrid threat assessments)¹, where migration is treated as a vector of geopolitical pressure and as an element of a broader strategic competition involving state and non-state actors.

Methodologically, the article analyses this process by correlating developments in the normative framework, institutional consolidation, and discursive shifts in strategic documents and institutional assessments across the period 2022-2025. In this vein, migration is treated not merely as a security concern, but as a domain of governance that reshapes institutions, redistributes competences, and redefines the normative logic of security within the European Union. The legal framework of migration in the European Union is multi-layered and results from the interaction between primary law, the specific asylum and migration acquis, international refugee law and fundamental rights protection standards. At the level of primary law, Articles 77–80 TFEU define the shared competence of the EU in the field of external border control, asylum and immigration, within the area of freedom, security and justice, and enshrine the principle of solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility among Member States (Art. 77-80 TFEU)².

At the level of secondary legislation, the period 2022–2025 was marked by the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which substantially reforms the Common European Asylum System. Its core is represented by Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 on Asylum and Migration Management (AMMR)³, which replaces Dublin III and establishes a permanent, binding but flexible solidarity mechanism. It is complemented by Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 on the Common Asylum Procedure; Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 (Qualification Regulation)⁴, Directive (EU) 2024/1346 on reception conditions, Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 on Eurodac, as well as Regulations (EU) 2024/1349 (return procedure) and 2024/1356 (screening at external borders)⁵, which strengthen the early screening and border control component. These instruments are articulated with the previous architecture, the Schengen Borders Code, the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex) Regulation, the Return Directive 2008/115/EC and the Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55/EC, creating an integrated legal infrastructure in which migration is treated simultaneously as a matter of protection, mobility and security. From this perspective, the expansion and densification of the acquis, the strengthening of EU agencies (Frontex, EUAA) and the institutionalisation of a permanent solidarity mechanism indicate that migration governance has become a central

¹ *The Strategic Compass of the European Union*, <https://www.strategic-compass-european-union.com/> (25.11.2025)

² *Tratatul privind funcționarea Uniunii Europene (versiune consolidată)*. Jurnalul Oficial al Uniunii Europene. 26.10.2012, C 326/47, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF (28.11.2025)

³ *Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on asylum and migration management, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1147 and (EU) 2021/1060 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 604/2013*, OJ L, 2024/1351, 22.5.2024, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1351/oj> (28.11.2025)

⁴ *Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection and for the content of the protection granted, amending Council Directive 2003/109/EC and repealing Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council*. PE/70/2023/REV/1. OJ L, 2024/1347, 22.5.2024, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1347/oj> (29.11.2025)

⁵ *Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817*. PE/20/2024/REV/1. OJ L, 2024/1356, 22.5.2024, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1356/oj> (29.11.2025)

factor in the reconfiguration of European Union security: a shift from ad hoc “crisis” management to an increasingly centralised, securitised and multi-level governance of migration.

To clarify the causal relationship between migration governance and the reconfiguration of European Union security, this article identifies three main mechanisms. First, *functional spillover*, whereby increased migratory pressures necessitate enhanced coordination, leading to the expansion of EU agencies and operational capacities. Second, *legal-institutional consolidation*, through which crises create political incentives for adopting binding regulations that deepen integration in areas traditionally controlled by Member States. Third, *securitising framing*, which legitimises the use of exceptional measures and integrates migration into broader security strategies, including hybrid threat frameworks. Together, these mechanisms explain how migration governance acts not merely as a policy domain, but as a driver of structural transformation in the EU’s security architecture.

The Year 2022: Strategic Shock and Coordinated Institutional Response

The year 2022 can be interpreted as a “strategic shock” for European security, in which Russian aggression against Ukraine combined geopolitical and demographic dimensions, generating the largest influx of displaced persons on the continent since 1945. Within just a few months, millions of people arrived in EU+ states under different forms of protection, and almost one million lodged asylum applications, placing national systems under a level of pressure comparable to the peak of the 2015–2016 crisis¹. The central EU regulatory response was the activation, for the first time, of Directive 2001/55/EC on temporary protection², through Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382. This instrument established a temporary protection regime for Ukrainians, reflecting a logic of human security: it ensured rapid access to the right to residence, work, education and social services, while avoiding the blockage of asylum systems by diverting a substantial part of the flow to a special legal channel³. Thus, temporary protection functioned simultaneously as a mechanism for the protection of individuals and as an institutional valve, “relieving” pressure on the Common European Asylum System and providing a framework for rapid solidarity between Member States.

One illustrative contrast emerges when comparing the implementation of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine with the treatment of other groups arriving at the EU’s external borders during the same period. While Ukrainian nationals benefited from immediate legal status, access to labour markets, and relatively low levels of administrative filtering, reports from border regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans indicate continued use of restrictive practices for other nationalities, including informal containment, limited access to asylum procedures, or prolonged waiting times at border facilities. This empirical divergence highlights that the operationalisation of EU migration

¹ European Union Agency for Asylum, *Asylum Report 2023: Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union*, <https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2023> (27.11.2025)

² Directiva 2001/55/CE a Consiliului din 20 iulie 2001 privind standardele minime pentru acordarea protecției temporare, în cazul unui aflux masiv de persoane strămutate, și măsurile de promovare a unui echilibru între eforturile statelor membre pentru primirea acestor persoane și suportarea consecințelor acestei primiri. JO L 212, 7.8.2001, pp. 12–23, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2001/55/oj> (27.11.2025)

³ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. OJ L 71, 4.3.2022, pp. 1-6, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/382/oj (28.11.2025)

governance is not uniform, but contingent upon political prioritisation and perceived security relevance.

Strategically, 2022 also marks a “hybrid-security turn” in EU security policy, crystallised by the adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence¹, which defines Russia’s aggression as a “tectonic shift” and explicitly anchors migration and the instrumentalization of flows of people in the register of hybrid threats, alongside cyberattacks and pressures on critical infrastructure². The compass establishes a close migration-border-resilience link, advocating for more rigorous coordination between Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) instruments, asylum, return, integrated border management, and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) instruments, including through civilian missions and increased cooperation with Frontex and the EUAA.

The key message for 2022 was the shift from *ad hoc* crisis management to a set of coordinated exceptional mechanisms. On the one hand, the temporary protection regime created a framework of “automatic” solidarity, with the distribution of displaced persons based on national capacities and dedicated European funding³. On the other hand, the strengthened role of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) in the early monitoring of pressures on asylum systems and in the development of warning and risk-analysis tools reinforced the Union’s early-warning capacity. In parallel, inter-agency cooperation (EUAA, Frontex, Europol) has intensified, from operational support at the border to the exchange of information on trafficking networks and hybrid threats, illustrating a new practice of inter-agency tasking at EU level.⁴ However, this operational intensification has also been accompanied by sustained criticism from civil society and academic literature regarding the opacity of decision-making processes and the limited mechanisms for judicial and democratic oversight. In particular, the involvement of agencies such as Frontex in border management and return operations has generated debates on the attribution of responsibility in cases of alleged rights violations.

Researchers Zaun and Trauner interpret the issue of migration within the EU at this time as a “window of opportunity” for externally induced integration: the cumulative pressure of “unwanted immigration” and geopolitical shock have created strong incentives to accelerate the reform of the Common European Asylum System and to advance the New Pact on Migration and Asylum⁵. In terms of the theory of European integration, the year 2022 can be characterised as a moment of consolidation of EU-level integration in migration and

¹ *The Strategic Compass of the European Union*, <https://www.strategic-compass-european-union.com/> (29.11.2025)

² Steven Blockmans, Crosson Macchiarini, Dylan and Paikin Zachary, *The EU's Strategic Compass: A Guide to Reverse Strategic Shrinkage?*, March 31, 2022, “CEPS Policy Insight”, March 2022, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4136255> (29.11.2025)

³ *Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection*. OJ L 71, 4.3.2022, pp. 1-6. http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/382/oj (30.11.2025)

⁴ Steven Blockmans, Crosson Macchiarini, Dylan and Paikin Zachary, *The EU's Strategic Compass: A Guide to Reverse Strategic Shrinkage?*, March 31, 2022, “CEPS Policy Insight”, March 2022, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4136255> (29.11.2025)

⁵ Natascha Zaun, *Externally driven integration in EU migration policy: enabling integration through indifference, undermining it through conflictive politicisation*. “Journal of European Public Policy”, 2025, pp. 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2565214> (30.11.2025); Trauner, F., Wolff, S. *The impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on the reform of the common European asylum system*, “European Politics and Society”, Vol. 26/4, 2024, pp. 797–813 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2435401> (30.11.2025)

security as domains linked to core state powers, in which the EU more clearly assumes the functions of a security provider for its citizens and for the persons under its protection¹.

Migration in the EU's Strategic Compass (2022)

The Strategic Compass explicitly inserts migration into the “threat landscape” by including the instrumentalization of irregular migration flows in an inventory of hybrid strategies used by state and non-state actors, alongside economic coercion, cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. The Compass underlines that the “instrumentalization of irregular migration flows” is part of the “new world of threats” against which the EU must defend itself, within the framework of the Secure pillar of the Strategic Compass.² Recent doctrinal analyses interpret this formulation as an evolution of the securitisation of migration towards a framework of hybrid threats, in which migration is deliberately used to create pressure at borders and internal political tensions.

This framing has concrete policy implications. The identification of migration as a hybrid threat has facilitated the expansion of preventive and deterrence-oriented instruments, including enhanced border surveillance, cooperation with third countries to contain flows, and the prioritisation of rapid screening over full procedural guarantees in certain cases. As a result, threat construction is directly linked to a shift in the balance between protection and control, particularly for groups associated with irregular or politically sensitive routes. In terms of instruments, the Compass foresees the development of an EU Hybrid Toolbox and Hybrid Rapid Response Teams, designed as a coordinated framework that brings together preventive, cooperative, restrictive and recovery measures against hybrid campaigns. This toolbox is to provide Member States and CFSP/CSDP missions with a wide range of civilian and military instruments, allowing rapid interventions, including in situations of migratory pressure on the external border³.

Researcher García Andrade mentions that according to the Strategic Compass, migration becomes a common field of action for both Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) instruments and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, by using foreign policy missions to strengthen border control, combat migrant smuggling and increase the capacities of third states⁴. This configuration has a structural significance: the Compass aligns the internal security and external action of the EU in an integrated *migration-borders-resilience* framework. Internally, the focus is on the protection of critical infrastructure and the interoperability of information systems, as part of the same response to hybrid threats in which migration is a central vector. Externally, the CSDP is called upon to support migration management through civilian and military missions in the proximity spaces, in particular in the Mediterranean and the Sahel, which confirms the trend of “security externalisation” of

¹ Philipp Genschel, Markus Jachtenfuchs, *From Market Integration to Core State Powers: The Eurozone Crisis, the Refugee Crisis and Integration Theory*, “JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies”, Vol. 56/1, 2018, pp. 178–196 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12654> (01.12.2025)

² Mariana Gkliati, *Let's Call It What It Is: Hybrid Threats and Instrumentalization as the Evolution of Securitisation in Migration Management*, <https://www.europeanpapers.eu/europeanforum/lets-call-it-what-it-is-hybrid-threats-and-instrumentalisation> (01.12.2025)

³ Kenneth Lasoen, *Realising the EU Hybrid Toolbox: Opportunities and Pitfalls*, “Clingendael Policy Brief”, December 2022, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Policy_brief_EU_Hybrid_Toolbox.pdf (01.12.2025)

⁴ Andrade Paula García, *Tackling Migration Externally Through the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy: A Question of Legal Basis*, “European Papers-A Journal on Law and Integration”, No.2, 2023. pp. 959-984, https://www.europeanpapers.eu/system/files/pdf_version/EP_eJ_2023_2_SS2_4_Paula_Garcia_Andrade_00696.pdf (02.12.2025)

migration policies. Overall, the Strategic Compass characterises migration as a hybrid threat managed through exceptional but coordinated mechanisms, clarifying the roles of EU agencies, CSDP missions and Member States in the European security architecture.

From a critical perspective, this external dimension can also be understood as a form of migration control at a distance, whereby responsibilities for containment are partially delegated to third countries. While this may reduce immediate pressure at EU borders, it raises concerns regarding accountability, the protection of migrants' rights outside EU territory, and the long-term sustainability of such arrangements. At the level of border practices, this structural pressure translates into differentiated implementation patterns. In several Mediterranean entry points, accelerated border procedures have been applied systematically to certain nationalities, with limited access to legal assistance and compressed timelines for asylum decisions. At the same time, capacity constraints in reception systems have led to overcrowding and delays in registration, creating de facto barriers to accessing protection. These implementation gaps demonstrate that the effectiveness of the EU's governance framework is mediated by national administrative capacities and local conditions, producing uneven outcomes across the Union.

2023–2025: Data, Routes and Operational Risks of Migration Flow in the EU

In the period 2023-2025, the migration regime to the European Union is characterised by a structurally high level of asylum applications, combined with a gradual decrease in irregular crossings and a diversification of routes. According to the EUAA, the EU+ registered “around one million” asylum applications in 2024 for the third consecutive year, a decrease of around 11% compared to 2023, while around 4.4 million displaced persons from Ukraine continued to benefit from temporary protection, which maintains pressure on national asylum and reception systems and leads to a near-record number of cases pending at first instance¹.

At the external borders, estimates from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and data from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency show that irregular crossing peaked in 2023 (around 380,000 cases)², before falling by more than a third in 2024 to around 240,000³, and further falling by around a fifth in the first nine to ten months of 2025 to around 130,000-150,000 crossings⁴, indicating lower but persistent pressure on some key routes. The decline is significant on some routes, notably the Western Balkans route, while other maritime and land routes remain volatile, reflecting the ability of smuggling networks to adapt to changes in policy and control. This development is relevant for security for at least two reasons. Firstly, it shows that reinforced border control measures, cooperation with transit states and the “route-based approach” have measurable effects on the volume of irregular crossings, but without eliminating the pressures. Secondly, the numerical decrease does not necessarily mean a reduction in risks, but criminal networks are diversifying their methods, which increases the relevance of training policies and police

¹ EUAA, *Latest Asylum Trends 2024, Annual Analysis*, <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/latest-asylum-trends-2024-annual-analysis> (02.12.2025)

² FRONTEX, *Significant rise in irregular border crossings in 2023, highest since 2016*, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/significant-rise-in-irregular-border-crossings-in-2023-highest-since-2016-C0gGpm> (02.12.2025)

³ FRONTEX, *In Brief*, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/2024-in-brief/> (03.12.2025)

⁴FRONTEX, *EU external borders: irregular crossings fall 22% in the first 10 months of 2025*, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-irregular-crossings-fall-22-in-the-first-10-months-of-2025-XvrGB3> (04.12.2025)

cooperation, reflected in the EU-STNA 2022–2025¹. At the same time, Mediterranean routes remain very active, with a record level of arrivals in the Canary Islands in 2024, while the configuration of flows is changing rapidly depending on regional conflicts and visa regimes².

These aggregate trends, however, conceal a deeply asymmetric territorial distribution of pressure. Germany remains the main destination country in absolute terms, but in 2024 the Mediterranean border states - notably Cyprus and Greece - registered over 7,000 asylum applications per million inhabitants, three times the EU+ average³. MedMA analyses based on Eurostat data show that while in the first quarter of 2025 the EU-27 recorded a 23.5% decrease in the number of first-time asylum seekers compared to the same period in 2024, the MED5 group of countries (Greece, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Malta) experienced a 78% increase, with increases of over 60–90% in Spain, Greece and Italy⁴. The result is a picture in which migration pressure is not uniform, but concentrated on certain “border states” and on certain maritime or land routes, which amplifies tensions regarding responsibility and intra-EU solidarity.

From a security perspective, this combination of high volumes, volatile routes and uneven spatial pressure transforms migration into a multidimensional operational risk. Importantly, this risk-based framing is not neutral. Migrants arriving via routes associated with smuggling networks or geopolitical tensions are more likely to be channelled into accelerated border procedures or return mechanisms, while others benefit from more favourable protection regimes. This demonstrates how risk categorisation, informed by securitisation logics, produces differentiated access to rights and procedural safeguards within the EU system.

States with limited institutional capacity at the border simultaneously face overloading of reception infrastructures, difficulties in processing applications within a reasonable time and increased vulnerabilities to infiltration by organised crime networks or political exploitation of flows. The Strategic Compass explicitly qualifies the instrumentalization of migration by state and non-state actors as a form of hybrid threat, in which flows of people are manipulated to create political, economic or societal pressure on the EU and its Member States.⁵ Recent analyses of the “*militarised governance*” of migration in the Mediterranean show that the European response has often been dominated by logics of security and operational control, with increased recourse to coercive means and security cooperation with third states⁶.

The main consequence is the shift from ad hoc crisis management to a structural risk-management regime, focused on data and flexible capabilities. On the one hand, tools such as the European Union Agency for Asylum’s early warning system and new interoperable IT

¹ CEPOL, *European Union Strategic Training Needs Assessment 2022-2025. Mid-term review*, https://www.cepol.europa.eu/api/assets/media/downloads/2023/eu-stna_mid-term-review_november-2023.pdf (04.12.2025)

² MedMA, *Mediterranean Migration & Asylum Policy Hub. 2025. Asylum Data: Beyond the EU Average. Policy notes*, 24 September 2025, <https://med-ma.eu/publications/asylum-data-beyond-the-eu-average/> (04.12.2025)

³ EUAA *Asylum applications down by 23% in the first half of 2025*, <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/asylum-applications-down-23-first-half-2025> (04.12.2025)

⁴ MedMA, *Asylum Data: Beyond the EU Average. Sep 24, 2025*, <https://med-ma.eu/publications/asylum-data-beyond-the-eu-average/> (05.12.2025)

⁵ *The Strategic Compass of the European Union*, <https://www.strategic-compass-european-union.com/> (06.12.2025)

⁶ Merve Kinacioglu, *Militarized Governance of Migration in the Mediterranean*, “International Affairs”, Vol. 99 (6), 2023, pp. 2423–2443, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375521132> (06.12.2025)

architectures (reformed Eurodac, EES/ETIAS systems, data exchange via EU-LISA) allow for near real-time monitoring of arrival routes and profiles, facilitating the operational redeployment of resources and scenario planning¹. On the other hand, the “flexible solidarity” mechanisms and operational tools, rapid border intervention teams, EUAA expert deployments, Frontex’s capacity to deploy additional officers and technical means, are designed precisely to compensate for the uneven nature of migratory pressure and to reduce the room for manoeuvre of actors seeking to exploit flows. In the logic of the article, this evolution marks a decisive step towards a structured, highly technological and securitised governance of migration. However, this apparent stabilisation should be treated with caution: the routinisation of tools such as accelerated procedures, continuous monitoring, and emergency-based flexibility mechanisms suggests not only greater coordination, but also the gradual normalisation of exceptional measures within everyday governance practices.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024–2026)

The adoption in May 2024 of the legislative package of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum marks the transition from a stalled reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) to a coherent legal and institutional architecture, focused on border control, fast-track procedures and a permanent solidarity mechanism. The new rules, which entered into force on 11 June 2024, will become applicable after a two-year transition period, so that the Pact will be fully operational from 2026.² In the terms of Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, this represents the strengthening of the integration of “*core state powers*” in the field of migration and asylum - a step from market logic to the integration of control, coercion and public administration powers³.

The Pact on Migration and Asylum is part of a long process of reform of the CEAS, which began after the 2015 refugee crisis, when the European Commission’s proposals were blocked by North–South and East–West divisions around the redistribution of asylum seekers.⁴ Zaun’s analyses of “externally driven integration” shows that the deadlocks in the Council were only overcome when external pressures, in particular the instrumentalisation of migration by state and non-state actors, made the cost of inaction higher than the cost of further integration⁵. Russia’s war against Ukraine and the rapid activation of the Temporary Protection Directive created a new political configuration. Researcher Trauner demonstrates that the management of the flow of Ukrainian refugees favoured a more consensual mode of governance and allowed the Commission to link the debate on the Pact to the need for robust instruments against the “instrumentalization of migration as a hybrid threat⁶. In this context, the Pact on Migration and Asylum emerges as a result of the convergence between a security

¹ EUAA, *Latest Asylum Trends 2024-Annual Analysis*, <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/latest-asylum-trends-2024annual-analysis> (07.12.2025)

² *Pact on Migration and Asylum. A common EU system to manage migration*, https://homeaffairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en (06.12.2025)

³ Philipp Genschel, Markus Jachtenfuchs, *From Market Integration to Core State Powers: The Eurozone Crisis, the Refugee Crisis and Integration Theory*, “JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies”, Vol. 56/1, 2018, pp. 178–196, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12654> (07.12.2025)

⁴ *Idem*

⁵ Natascha Zaun, *Externally driven integration in EU migration policy: enabling integration through indifference, undermining it through conflictive politicisation*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, 2025, pp. 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2565214> (07.12.2025)

⁶ Florian Trauner, *The impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on the reform of the Common European Asylum System*. “European Politics&Society”, Vol. 26/4, 2025, pp. 797-813, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2435401> (08.12.2025)

agenda (control, prevention of secondary movements, crisis response) and the maintenance, at least at the declarative level, of protection standards for persons in need¹.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024) comprises ten legislative instruments, seven of which are essential for the governance of migration and asylum: the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR – Regulation (EU) 2024/1351), the Common Asylum Procedure Regulation (CPR – 2024/1348), the Qualification Regulation - 2024/1347, the Reception Conditions Directive (2024/1346), the new Eurodac Regulation (2024/1358), the Border Screening Regulation (2024/1356) and the Border Return Procedure Regulation (2024/1349). These acts can be analytically grouped into *four pillars*:

a) Border screening and accelerated procedures. The screening regulation introduces a standardised pre-entry stage for all third-country nationals arriving irregularly or seeking international protection at the border. Within a few days, authorities must carry out identity, security and health checks, assess vulnerabilities, and decide whether to direct the person to either the asylum procedure or the return procedure. The data collected are entered into Eurodac, which becomes an extended register of all categories of migrants, including those to be returned, interconnected with other European databases in the logic of IT interoperability. The common asylum procedure regulation consolidates the accelerated and border procedures, allowing for the rapid rejection of applications considered inadmissible (e.g. coming from “safe third countries”) and directly linking the refusal of asylum to the activation of the return procedure at the border. Critical literature draws attention to the fact that this “normalisation of the exception” risks transforming the exception to the common law of asylum into a rule for categories considered high-risk or coming from certain routes².

b) Solidarity and responsibility-sharing mechanism. The AMMR Regulation replaces the old Dublin III and establishes a “binding but flexible” solidarity mechanism. Member States will be obliged to contribute annually to a “solidarity basket”, but they can choose the form of their contribution: relocation of applicants or beneficiaries of protection, financial contributions, operational support or capacity-building measures in states under pressure. Although the mechanism aims to reduce asymmetries of pressure on states of first entry, analyses show that effective redistribution will depend on the political will of states and on how the Commission uses the new Annual Migration Management Cycle to identify “capacity gaps” and mobilise solidarity resources. In Zaun’s terms, integration is once again “externally determined”: the pressure of crises and the threat of the instrumentalization of migration by hostile actors lead states to accept a more advanced form of burden-sharing, but only as long as it remains flexible and reversible³.

c) Protection standards and reception conditions. The reform of the Qualification Regulation and the recast of the Reception Conditions Directive aim to standardise the criteria for granting refugee status and subsidiary protection, as well as the content of associated rights (access to work, education, integration). The official objective is to reduce the “attractiveness” of national differences and limit secondary mobility, but NGOs draw

¹ European Commission, *Common Implementation Plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM (2024) 251 final*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:1d7a409a-2948-11ef-929001aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF (10.12.2025)

² Vasiliki Apatzidou, *Bordering Asylum: Examining the EU’s Border Procedures under the Asylum Procedures Regulation (EU) 2024/1348*, “International Journal of Refugee Law”, Vol. 37/2, 2025, pp. 201–218, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeaf014> (12.12.2025)

³ Natascha Zaun, *Externally driven integration in EU migration policy: enabling integration through indifference, undermining it through conflictive politicisation*, “Journal of European Public Policy”, 2025, pp. 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2565214> (12.12.2025)

attention to the risk of standardisation being directed downwards, by setting a minimum acceptable level of rights, rather than by converging towards the highest existing standards.

d) Management of crisis and force majeure situations. The Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation (2024/1359) and the Border Return Procedure Regulation extend derogation and flexibility instruments in favour of the Member States. In situations classified as a “crisis” or “instrumentalization of migration”, states can extend procedural deadlines, expand the application of border procedures and resort to more intensive detention. Critical analyses highlight the risk that such instruments institutionalise a permanently exceptional governance, in tension with fundamental rights obligations. In this respect, the Pact does not simply manage crises, but institutionalises the conditions under which crisis logics can be repeatedly invoked. This blurs the boundary between normal and exceptional governance, raising the possibility that emergency measures become embedded as standard instruments of migration control.

The entry into force of the package on 11 June 2024 was followed by the adoption of a Joint Implementation Plan, which sets out the milestones and responsibilities for the transition period 2024–2026. Member States must adapt their legislation, create interoperable IT infrastructure, develop the capacities of national agencies and prepare solidarity mechanisms (relocation, financial contributions, staff reserves). The European Commission coordinates this process through the Annual Migration Management Cycle and through bilateral dialogues with the states, in a logic of structured surveillance similar to the European Semester. Early indications from the implementation phase also point to potential gaps between formal commitments and practical capacity. Member States differ significantly in their ability to operationalise screening procedures, ensure adequate reception conditions, and deploy the required administrative and technical infrastructure. This raises the possibility that, despite formal harmonisation, the Pact may reproduce existing asymmetries, with frontline states continuing to bear disproportionate operational burdens.

The 2026–2027 window is crucial because it coincides with the transition from the temporary protection regime for displaced persons from Ukraine - extended until March 2026 - to long-term solutions: integration, other forms of residence or voluntary return. In practice, states will manage simultaneously the application of new accelerated procedures and return mechanisms at the border while gradually exiting an exceptional humanitarian protection regime. This overlap tests the institutional and political capacity of the Pact to function not only as a response to crises, but as a stable system for the governance of mobilities.

From the perspective of migration governance as a factor in the reconfiguration of European Union security, the Pact produces at least *four lasting effects*: (1) *Strengthening the border control infrastructure and data interoperability*. Screening, the expansion of Eurodac and the interoperability of IT systems connect asylum policies with internal security policies (SIS, EES, ETIAS), transforming migration governance into a subsystem of data governance and hybrid risk management. (2) *Institutionalising solidarity and responsibility-sharing as a dimension of “core state power”*. The solidarity mechanism of the AMMR transfers, at least partially, the financial and political costs of asylum from border states to the entire bloc, which represents an additional step in the integration of redistributively sensitive policies. (3) *Normalising exceptional governance*. The possibility of repeatedly activating crisis regimes, accelerated procedures and returns at the border creates the risk that the logic of exception becomes structural, especially on routes considered “instrumentalised” by hostile actors. This may increase tensions between security objectives and fundamental rights commitments. (4) *Reconfiguring the role of European agencies*. Frontex and the EUAA become central pillars of the implementation of the Pact: the former through border operations and returns, the latter

through operational support in asylum procedures and vulnerability assessment. At the same time, the expanded role of agencies raises unresolved questions about legal responsibility and fundamental rights compliance. The increasing operational involvement of Frontex in border control and returns, as well as the EUAA's influence on asylum procedures, creates a hybrid system in which decision-making is formally national but substantively shaped by EU-level actors. This fragmentation complicates accountability, particularly in situations involving alleged violations of non-refoulement, access to asylum, or detention standards. As a result, the consolidation of agencies as central pillars of migration governance must be understood not only as a capacity-enhancing development, but also as a source of institutional ambiguity and normative risk.

Overall, the Pact on Migration and Asylum is not just a technical reform of the CEAS, but a structural reconfiguration of the way the European Union understands the relationship between mobility, security and solidarity. It anchors migration both in the repertoire of human security - by seeking to provide stable frameworks for protection, and in the repertoire of hybrid threat management, through screening, interoperability and crisis response tools. Depending on how it is implemented in the period 2024-2026, the Pact can strengthen both the Union's institutional resilience and the public perception of its legitimacy in managing migration.

Conclusions

The analysis of developments in the period 2022–2025 demonstrates that migration and asylum have become structurally embedded in the European Union's security architecture, no longer as episodic disruptions but as constitutive elements of governance through which institutional authority, legal competences, and strategic priorities are redefined. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine functioned as a critical juncture, accelerating integration and enabling the adoption of instruments, temporary protection, the Strategic Compass, and the Pact on Migration and Asylum, that collectively signal a transition from reactive crisis management to a more permanent, systematised framework of migration governance.

However, this transformation should not be interpreted uncritically as a linear progression toward greater coherence or effectiveness. Rather, the emerging framework reveals a set of internal tensions and unresolved contradictions that call into question both its sustainability and its normative foundations. While the article has shown that migration governance operates across institutional, legal, and strategic-security dimensions, a closer examination suggests that integration in these domains is uneven, politically contingent, and in some respects fragile.

At the institutional level, the expansion of EU agencies such as Frontex and the European Union Agency for Asylum reflects an increasing centralisation of operational capacity. Yet this shift raises important questions regarding accountability and democratic oversight. The growing reliance on technical expertise, data infrastructures, and inter-agency coordination risks depoliticising inherently political choices about admission, protection, and return, while simultaneously diffusing responsibility between EU and national levels. In this sense, the apparent strengthening of EU capacity may coexist with a dilution of clear lines of accountability.

At the legal-normative level, the move from directives to directly applicable regulations under the Pact on Migration and Asylum is often presented as evidence of deeper integration in core state powers. Nevertheless, this harmonisation may mask a downward convergence in protection standards, particularly where accelerated border procedures and

expanded use of “safe country” concepts become routinised. The increasing normalisation of derogations under crisis and instrumentalization frameworks suggests a potential reconfiguration of asylum law in which exceptional measures risk becoming standard practice. These dynamic challenges the assumption that legal integration necessarily reinforces fundamental rights.

The most significant tension emerges at the strategic level, where migration is simultaneously framed within two competing logics: human security and hybrid threat management. The rapid and generous activation of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine illustrates the EU’s capacity for solidaristic, protection-oriented responses when political consensus exists. In contrast, the consolidation of migration as a vector of hybrid threats has legitimised the expansion of surveillance, deterrence, and externalisation measures in other contexts. This selective application of protection raises critical questions about the consistency and universality of EU norms, suggesting that solidarity remains contingent on geopolitical, racialised, or strategic considerations rather than anchored in a stable normative framework.

Moreover, the increasing reliance on data-driven governance and interoperability of large-scale IT systems introduces new forms of power and potential blind spots. While these tools enhance anticipatory capacity and operational coordination, they also risk reinforcing a technocratic approach in which complex social and humanitarian phenomena are reduced to categories of risk management. Such a shift may obscure the lived realities of migrants and limit the space for rights-based or protection-centred policy alternatives.

Finally, the external dimension of EU migration governance - particularly cooperation with third countries and the externalisation of border control - remains under-theorised in terms of its long-term implications. While effective in reducing certain migratory flows, these strategies may generate dependency on fragile or authoritarian partners, displace rather than resolve migratory pressures, and expose the EU to new forms of geopolitical vulnerability. In this sense, the very instruments designed to enhance security may produce unintended forms of insecurity.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that the reconfiguration of European Union security through migration governance is not simply a story of increased capacity and coherence, but one of contested integration marked by trade-offs between efficiency, sovereignty, and normative commitments. The framework that has emerged after 2022 is robust in its institutional design and operational reach, yet its legitimacy will depend on how these tensions are managed in practice.

A more analytically grounded assessment therefore requires moving beyond the assumption that securitisation and integration are inherently stabilising. Instead, the findings of this article indicate that the sustainability of the EU’s migration-security nexus will hinge on its ability to reconcile three competing imperatives: maintaining effective control of borders and flows, ensuring meaningful access to protection and fundamental rights, and preserving political cohesion among Member States. Failure to balance these dimensions risks not only policy inefficiency but also the erosion of the EU’s normative credibility as a security and values-based actor.

In this light, migration governance should be understood not only as a tool for strengthening the European Union’s security architecture, but also as a critical site where the limits, contradictions, and future trajectory of European integration are actively negotiated.

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