

EMN BELGIUM PRESIDENCY HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

The Operationalisation and Implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum

25-26 June 2024

CONFERENCE REPORT

The High-Level Conference on 'The Operationalisation and Implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum' took place in Brussels from 25-26 June 2024. This event was organised jointly by the EMN Belgium, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), the Belgian Immigration Office, and the Federal Migration Centre (Myria). The conference was set against the backdrop of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), during which the Pact was adopted and published on 14 May 2024.

The conference served as a platform to present the Pact and outline subsequent steps for its implementation. It offered a thorough examination of the Pact from diverse viewpoints, primarily emphasising its operationalisation and implementation. The event brought together high-level representatives from EU institutions, the Member States, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

INTRODUCTION TO THE PACT

Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, opened the Conference with a video message welcoming participants to exchange ideas and best practices. She emphasised the urgency of fully operationalising the Pact by June 2026 and the need for high ambition and collaboration. The Commissioner assured that Member States would receive full support from the European Commission for the Pact's implementation. Nicole de Moor, State Secretary for Asylum and Migration in the Belgian Federal Government, welcomed the participants, emphasising the Conference as a platform for outreach, mutual learning, and stakeholder engagement. Reflecting on the past decade, she noted the challenges regarding collective resilience and adaptability. She praised the Pact as a landmark achievement, providing a new

framework for managing migration, ensuring quality procedures, and sharing responsibilities among EU Member States. She underscored that the Pact is not only a legislative milestone but also a testament to the commitment to solidarity, efficiency, and human rights.

The first **high-level panel** was comprised of political leaders and representatives from the European Commission, European Parliament, EU agencies, and international organisations. Moderated by Hanne Beirens, Director of the Migration Policy Institute Europe, the panel included Nicole de Moor, State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, Belgian Federal Government; Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, European Commission; Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Chair of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE), European Parliament; and Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano, Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform (a.i.), International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The high-level speakers discussed key elements of the Pact, emphasising its crucial role in transitioning from a fragmented, ad-hoc approach to an enhanced migration management system throughout Europe. They provided insights into the extensive political negotiations and compromises that shaped the Pact, underscoring a robust political commitment to its implementation. They emphasised the strong political will to address any shortcomings that may still exist through collaboration with various stakeholders, and acknowledged the need for continuous adaptation to ensure effective policy outcomes.

Following the high-level panel, Michael Shotter, Director for Migration and Asylum, DG HOME, European Commission presented **the Common Implementation Plan**, adopted on 12 June 2024. This plan marks the beginning of the implementation process, providing a structured approach for EU Member States to adopt their National Implementation Plans by 12 December 2024. It outlines critical milestones to enable Member States to establish legal frameworks and operational capabilities necessary to implement new legislation by mid-2026, with support from the EU Agencies.

The Common Implementation Plan is structured around ten building blocks: (i) a common migration and asylum information system (Eurodac), (ii) A new system to manage migration flows at the EU external borders, (iii) rethinking reception, (iv) ensuring fair, efficient and convergent asylum procedures, (v) efficient and fair return procedures, (vi) making the new responsibility rules work, (vii) making solidarity work, (viii) enhancing preparedness, contingency planning and crisis response, (ix) introducing new safeguards for asylum applicants and vulnerable individuals and increased monitoring of fundamental rights, and (x) promoting resettlement, inclusion, and integration efforts. The presentation can be accessed on the [EMN Belgium Presidency Conference webpage](#) for more detailed information.

Following the general introduction of the Pact and the Common Implementation Plan, the conference elaborated on four specific building blocks (vii, ii, viii, and ix). The interconnectedness among all building blocks was repeatedly highlighted.

SOLIDARITY

Building block number 7, 'Making solidarity work,' focuses on establishing a permanent, legally-binding and flexible solidarity mechanism across all EU Member States. The new

solidarity mechanism addresses imbalances in the Dublin system and ensures that no Member State is left alone when under pressure.

Moderated by Andrew Geddes, Director, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and the Spanish Government discussed the practical implementation of this solidarity mechanism.

The discussion highlighted the shift from ad-hoc and voluntary solidarity initiatives to a structured, legally-binding but flexible framework. Speakers emphasised the necessity for shared responsibilities and the sustained evolution of solidarity mechanisms amid challenging conditions, stressing the crucial role of political, legal, and financial support to ensure effective implementation.

Further topics included the active engagement of civil society organisations, the protection of the right to seek asylum, and the integration of a fundamental rights monitoring system within the national asylum systems as outlined by the Pact. Panellists also emphasised the need to foster communication and trust among EU Member States, whether in the role of beneficiaries of or contributors to solidarity efforts. This collaborative approach is essential for successfully implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum and more broadly for effectively addressing migration challenges across Europe.

BORDERS

Building block 2, 'A new system to manage migration flows at the EU external borders', focuses on making screening and the border procedures for asylum and return work together in a seamless and coherent process, ensuring strong individual safeguards and rigorous decision-making, in full respect of all guarantees and the persons' rights. Given that the processes related to border management are newly codified under the Pact, the conference focused on clarifying their systems, procedures, multi-actor collaborations, and structures.

Moderated by Ralph Genetzke, Head of Mission, Brussels Office, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), representatives from the European Commission, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Romania, Frontex, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), and UNHCR discussed different actors' challenges, opportunities, and roles in operationalising screening and the new border procedures.

Discussions centred on implementing a new system at the external borders and touched upon links to other building blocks' components, such as the common migration and asylum information system (Eurodac). The necessity of an efficient and functional IT system for the border procedures was underscored, highlighting the importance of interoperability among EU institutions, agencies, and Member States.

Discussions emphasised the importance of checks and balances to ensure robust decision-making, evidence-based policy formulation, compliance with data protection regulations, and upholding human rights. The conference delved into matters concerning the use of detention and its impact on individuals. While procedural safeguards concern all migrants, a specific focus was placed on children, victims of trafficking and other vulnerable groups. Questions regarding

the treatment of undocumented migrants, a group particularly susceptible to exploitation, were also addressed.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE

The new migration management approach emphasises the importance of preparedness, contingency planning, and resilience. These essential considerations, cut across all building blocks, with a specific focus in **Building Block 8, 'Preparedness, Contingency Planning, and Crisis Response.'** This building block covers measures to strengthen preparedness and contingency plans, enhance resilience to evolving migratory situations, mitigate crisis risks, and enable a prompt, efficient, and coordinated response during migration crises.

Moderated by Jean-Louis De Brouwer, Director of the European Affairs Programme at the Egmont Institute, the panel included representatives from the European Commission, EUAA, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) in the Netherlands, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Italian Red Cross. They underscored the need for coordinated efforts between EU agencies and national, regional and local authorities, stressing the importance of Member States developing comprehensive contingency plans and allocating necessary resources for their implementation.

Comprehensive contingency plans, supported by essential resources, were highlighted as crucial for effective preparedness. The need for adequate resources, including human resources, staff training, funding, and infrastructure, was underlined in this regard. This ensures that each EU Member State is well-equipped with the necessary capacity and expertise to address emerging needs within their specific contexts.

Member States, the European Commission, EU Agencies, international organisations, and CSOs were set to play significant roles in this collaborative effort. CSOs' willingness to collaborate was evident throughout the conference, and their consultation process was highlighted as an essential aspect that needs to be addressed and identified.

MULTI-ACTOR ENGAGEMENT TO STRENGTHEN SAFEGUARDS IN THE PACT

Discussions further centred on **Building Block 9, 'New safeguards for applicants for international protection and vulnerable persons, and increased monitoring of fundamental rights'.** These safeguards and guarantees are designed to uphold human dignity and ensure a genuine and effective right to asylum, particularly for the most vulnerable, while providing access to effective remedies. They are crucial for protecting fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter and maintaining procedural integrity across all building blocks.

The session, moderated by Esther Pozo Vera, Head of Unit, Asylum, DG HOME, European Commission, included representatives from the Council of Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Zeuxis Non-Profit Organisation, and the Spanish Red Cross. It focused on protecting the rights of asylum seekers and implementing robust mechanisms for effective remedies and vulnerability assessments across EU Member States.

Concrete initiatives highlighted by CSOs demonstrated their commitment to providing information, offering assistance, and proactively addressing vulnerabilities in Greece and Spain.

FRA detailed their guidance for monitoring mechanisms to align with new fundamental rights mandates, ensuring independent safeguards, promoting cooperation, and facilitating comprehensive reporting, particularly in the screening phase and asylum border procedures.

The panel discussions underscored the importance of sustaining partnerships between CSOs and state authorities, emphasising the necessity for long-term funding to support independent CSO initiatives. Key challenges related to fundamental rights included detention practices, alternatives to detention, capacity-building to identify and address vulnerabilities, and ensuring access to remedies, appeals processes, and legal counsel despite resource constraints.

CONCLUSIONS

The conference convened 400 representatives from key institutions and organisations, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU Agencies, Council of Europe, national governments, UNHCR, IOM, Migration Policy Centre, ICMPD, ECRE, Red Cross, universities, and numerous CSOs, all of which contributed actively to its success.

It provided insights on the implementation of the Pact, the key milestones during the transition period, and the roles of different stakeholders. The conference offered the opportunity for exchange among participants and highlighted the potential of cooperation in implementing the Pact.

Stakeholders expressed confidence in overcoming acknowledged challenges through collaborative, adaptive strategies and sustained political commitment, aiming to establish a fair, efficient migration and asylum system that upholds human dignity and rights and promotes solidarity and shared responsibility among EU Member States.

While this report offers insights into the EMN Conference during Belgium's Council Presidency, it acknowledges its limitation in fully capturing the event's atmosphere, inspiration, innovative ideas, and networking opportunities. The active engagement of participants, both onsite in Brussels and online, enriched the conference's impact. Sincere gratitude is extended to each participant for their valuable contributions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Please visit the [EMN Belgium Presidency Conference](#) webpage for additional information on the conference, including the agenda, recordings, and PowerPoint presentations.
- The [European Commission's Pact on Migration and Asylum webpage](#) also contains additional information, e.g., the Pact's pillars, timeline and main achievements, and common implementation plan.
- Please visit the [EMN webpage](#) for more information on the European Migration Network, its events, publications, and other activities.