

ALIGNING OR FRAGMENTING? THE FUTURE OF EURO-MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE UNDER THE EU PACT(S)

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Executive Summary

The Euro-Mediterranean region is entering a critical phase in the governance of migration and mobility. In recent years, migration has become a central issue influencing political debates, regional cooperation, and institutional agendas in both European and Southern Mediterranean contexts. The adoption of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, alongside the Pact for the Mediterranean, represents a renewed effort by the European Union (EU) and its partners to reorganise migration governance within a broader framework of regional cooperation. These initiatives aim to establish a more structured and strategic approach to managing mobility across the Mediterranean by addressing a complex array of interconnected policy domains. Key aims include strengthening border management mechanisms, reforming asylum procedures, expanding legal mobility pathways, responding to labour-market demands in ageing European societies, and enhancing development cooperation and regional stability across the Mediterranean basin. By integrating these dimensions within a unified policy architecture, the new Pact(s) framework aspires to move beyond crisis-driven responses and toward a more coordinated and forward-looking governance model.

Despite these ambitions, significant questions persist regarding the capacity of the Pact(s) to achieve meaningful policy coherence across the Euro-Mediterranean region. Migration governance in this context has historically been marked by competing priorities, asymmetric partnerships, and fragmented institutional arrangements.

Security-oriented approaches to migration management have often coexisted with economic and demographic realities that necessitate more flexible mobility frameworks. Furthermore, cooperation between European and Southern Mediterranean actors has frequently been influenced by divergent interests, uneven capacities, and shifting political dynamics.

Given this context, a central question is whether the emerging Pact(s) architecture can effectively align these competing dimensions or whether it risks perpetuating existing fragmentation within the regional governance landscape. Although the new frameworks emphasise partnership, shared responsibility, and policy coordination, their implementation may continue to generate tensions between security imperatives, labour mobility needs, and broader demographic transformations affecting both sides of the Mediterranean.

This study examines the debate through a collaborative analytical framework that synthesises complementary perspectives organised around several thematic pillars. By integrating insights from migration policy analysis, demographic trends, labour-market dynamics, and regional cooperation mechanisms, the analysis assesses whether the current Pact(s) architecture fosters coherent, sustainable, and mutually beneficial governance in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Additionally, it explores the extent to which these initiatives can bridge the gap between policy ambitions and the structural realities shaping migration across the Mediterranean.

Within this background, the objective of this study is to examine the structural governance trajectories emerging from the policy trade-offs embedded in the recent EU migration frameworks. Specifically, it investigates whether the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum together with the Pact for the Mediterranean create conditions for long-term policy alignment across the Euro-Mediterranean region or whether they risk institutionalising persistent contradictions between security-driven migration management,

labour mobility needs, and demographic sustainability. By analysing how these competing priorities are embedded within the new governance architecture, the study seeks to assess whether the Pact(s) framework promotes coherent and mutually beneficial cooperation or reproduces structural tensions within regional migration governance.

Consequently, the study is guided by two central research questions. First, what structural governance trajectories emerge from the policy trade-offs embedded in the current migration frameworks? Second, do the EU Pact(s) on migration create conditions for long-term Euro-Mediterranean policy alignment, or do they instead institutionalise structural contradictions between security-oriented migration management, labour mobility needs, and demographic sustainability? Together, these questions aim to assess whether the emerging governance architecture fosters coherent regional cooperation or reinforces existing tensions within Euro-Mediterranean migration governance.

To address these questions, the four chapters of this joint study offer complementary perspectives that collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. **Chapter 1 - Mobility, Security, and Demographic Needs: Scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean Migration Governance after the EU Pact** explores the "governance paradox" in Euro-Mediterranean migration, highlighting the fundamental tension between the EU's demographic ageing and structural labour shortages, and its increasingly securitised, deterrence-focused migration policies. By utilising a forward-looking, scenario-building methodology, the author outlines four potential governance trajectories for the 2025-2035 period under the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact and the Mediterranean Pact. These scenarios range from an economically pragmatic "Integrated Selective Governance" and a highly restrictive "Transactional Externalised Security Regime", to a reactive "Fragmented Multi-Layered Governance" and an ideal "Human Rights-Centred Regional Partnership". Ultimately, the study asserts that the future of regional mobility relies on political choices rather than technical capacities, advocating for a vital shift toward sustainable, predictable, and rights-based cooperation.

Chapter 2 - Restrictive Externalisation under the Pact: Italy, Spain and the Way Ahead investigates the increasingly restrictive nature of migration governance externalisation (MGE) under the new EU Pact, which now expands externalisation into the domains of international protection and returns. The authors evaluate the significant risks of this approach, including the erosion of human rights safeguards, negative externalities for partner countries, and a shift from responsibility-sharing to responsibility-shifting among member states. Through a comparative analysis of Italy, which strongly pursues extraterritorial asylum processing like the Albania deal, and Spain, which balances containment with expanded legal mobility and regularisation pathways, the chapter illustrates the divergent implementation strategies of frontline states. The study concludes with policy recommendations urging the EU to prioritise viability, independent rights monitoring, and genuine long-term cooperation frameworks over short-term deterrence bargains.

Chapter 3 - EU-Maghreb Talent Partnerships: A Precarious Relationship or a Way towards Rights-Based Migration? questions whether these legal mobility frameworks offer a genuine "win-win" rights-based approach or if they simply reproduce and formalise labour precarity by focusing on the EU-Maghreb Talent Partnerships. By examining partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, the author analyses the tensions between fulfilling EU domestic labour shortages and the structural realities of North African labour markets. The research highlights that without recognising workers as agents, aligning mutually beneficial priority sectors, and decoupling mobility from strict return and readmission conditionalities, these

programmes risk funnelling migrants into segmented, precarious jobs. Consequently, the chapter warns that these partnerships may lead to brain drain or brain waste instead of sustainable brain circulation, emphasising the need to centre worker voices and ensure robust labour rights protections throughout the migratory cycle.

Chapter 4 - Shared Prosperity for All Generations? Reviewing the Pacts through an Intergenerational Fairness Lens critically reviews the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Pact for the Mediterranean, and the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy through the lens of intergenerational and intersectional justice. The author argues that current Euro-Mediterranean frameworks adopt a utilitarian approach, utilising migration primarily as a tool to address the EU's demographic ageing and welfare sustainability while externalising the costs to Southern and Eastern neighbours. The study highlights that the purported goal of "shared prosperity" is applied selectively and conditionally, often neglecting the socioeconomic realities, colonial legacies, and structural barriers faced by non-EU citizens. To achieve true intergenerational fairness, the chapter recommends reallocating social investments, embedding human rights anti-discrimination measures, and establishing binding representation channels for civil society and migrant organisations on both shores.

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