

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

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POLICY STUDY

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
AMMR	Asylum and Migration Management Regulation
ANAPEC	Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences
ANETI	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant
APR	Asylum Procedures Regulation
ARLEM	Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics
CESPI	Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale
CIDOB	Barcelona Centre for International Affairs
CoEHR	Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPRs	Centri di permanenza per i rimpatri (pre-removal detention centres)
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EC	European Commission
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ECRIS-TCN	European Criminal Records Information System for Third-Country Nationals
EES	Entry/Exit System
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
ETIAS	European Travel Information and Authorisation System
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission
EURES	European Employment Services
FIERI	Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GECCO	Gestión Colectiva de Contrataciones en Origen
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GSP	Global Skill Partnership
HCP	Haut-Commissariat au Plan
HR	Human rights
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICT	Information and communication technology
IEMed	European Institute of the Mediterranean
IGF	Intergenerational fairness
ILO	International Labour Organization
INS	Institut National de la Statistique
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISPI	Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale
IT	Information technology
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGE	Migration governance externalisation
MPF	Migration Partnership Facility
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMTPME	Observatoire Marocain de la Très Petite, Petite et Moyenne Entreprise
PALIM	Pilot Project Addressing Labour Shortages Through Innovative Labour Migration Models
SAFE	Security Action for Europe
SAPI	Sistema de Acogida de Protección Internacional
SAR	Search and rescue
SIS	Schengen Information System
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
SOIF	School of International Futures
T-MED	Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean-Tech Cooperation Initiative
TEU	Treaty on European Union
THAMM	Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa
TPs	Talent Partnerships
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
VIS	Visa Information System

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 sustain-

ability. 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 is 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.

Mobility, Security, and Demographic Needs: Scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean Migration Governance after the EU Pact

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Introduction: solving an old paradox with “new” tools

The European Union (EU) continues to address its internal migration governance crisis. Although the EU aims to develop innovative approaches following the crisis of recent years, many elements of these purportedly new solutions largely replicate previous methods, prompting a reassessment of both their effectiveness and the nature of the EU's engagement with third countries. EU-level migration discussions, despite employing new instruments and strategies, continue to conceptualise migration primarily as a risk to be managed and irregular crossings as threats to be deterred. The process of externalisation, which briefly refers to the transfer of migration control responsibilities beyond the EU's external borders through cooperation with third countries, including border management, return arrangements, and readmission policies, remains central to these efforts and significantly influences relations with Mediterranean partner countries (Lavenex, 2006; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009; Cassarino, 2018). Consequently, debate continues over whether these initiatives represent a true paradigm shift or merely the formalisation of established control and deterrence mechanisms (Santos Vara et al., 2023; García Andrade, 2023; ECRE, 2024; Peers, 2024).

This framing aligns with the securitisation literature, which characterises migration as a security issue rather than a humanitarian or socioeconomic phenomenon (Bigo, 2002; Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of restrictive, security-oriented

rhetoric, evolving demographic trends, population ageing, and labour shortages have produced a fundamental “governance paradox” - the coexistence of increasing labour demand generated by demographic ageing alongside increasingly restrictive migration governance - in contemporary EU policy debates.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted in 2024 and scheduled for implementation in 2026, exemplifies the emergence of new instruments and processes that embody this paradox (Council of the European Union, 2024; European Commission, 2024a; EPRS, 2025a). Although the pact was reportedly designed by drawing lessons from the governance crisis at the EU level regarding migration, particularly from 2025 onwards, it contains elements that may perpetuate the very paradox it seeks to address. When the Mediterranean Pact - framed around geopolitical stability, investment, and broader partnership - is considered alongside the migration and asylum pact, the paradox becomes even more pronounced (European Commission & High Representative, 2025; EPRS, 2025b). This study addresses these issues by comparing both initiatives and discussing potential scenarios for addressing existing challenges beyond the identified paradigm. In line with the purposes of this joint study, it explores how the current governance architecture could generate divergent outcomes over the next decade (2025-2035) through a scenario-based, forward-looking approach, and seeks to answer the following question: “Can European-Mediterranean migration governance, labour mobility, and demographic sustainability be reconciled with political frameworks that are becoming increasingly security-focused?”¹

¹ In this chapter, «the EU Pact» refers to the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, while «the Mediterranean Pact» refers to the Pact for the Mediterranean.

Toward a new framework for European migration governance?

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum represents the most recent major reform package in EU migration governance, building on earlier milestones such as the Temporary Protection Directive and the Return Directive. The continued retention of border policy authority by nation-states, combined with the adoption of more conservative policies by certain member states on specific issues, has increasingly hindered full integration in migration and border management (Geddes, 2021; Thielemann, 2018). In response, the European Commission has advanced an institutionalisation effort described as a “structured flexibility system” to facilitate progress in migration and asylum policy (European Commission, 2020). This approach is exemplified by the mandatory yet formally flexible solidarity mechanism within the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (Regulation [EU] 2024/1351; European Commission, 2024a). The Pact thus emerges as a compromise designed to address complex political conflicts surrounding migration and border management, both among member states and at the supranational level. Nevertheless, critics contend that this strategy results in a multi-layered and fragmented system, potentially undermining the equitable sharing of permanent responsibilities.

Within the framework established by the Commission, the Pact is organised around expedited procedures, responsibility and solidarity mechanisms, facilitation of returns, and partnerships with third countries (European Commission, 2020, 2024a). In this context, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum provides a comprehensive approach to migration governance in the

EU, structured around four main pillars (European Commission, 2020): (i) Implementing more efficient and expedited procedures at external borders; (ii) Implementing more robust and accelerated asylum and return procedures; (iii) Establishing a mandatory solidarity mechanism among member states to equitably share responsibility for managing asylum seekers; (iv) Enhancing cooperation with third countries that serve as transit or origin states to better organise migration flows. This includes addressing the root causes of migration through international partnership agreements, combating smuggling, and ensuring legal migration pathways.

All four pillars of the Pact together, particularly with the three associated instruments (the Screening Regulation, the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation, and the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation), merit examination within the context of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance. The first instrument, the Screening Regulation (Regulation [EU] 2024/1356), establishes a pre-entry screening process at the external borders of member states, operating under the legal fiction that the person has not yet entered the territory. The Asylum and Migration Management Regulation aims at establishing standards regarding “problematic solidarity” contributions and reflects the “crisis” dimension of the new model as it applies to member states. The third key instrument, the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation, enables the application of accelerated border procedures and is directly relevant in situations where neighbouring states use migration pressure for strategic purposes (Regulation [EU] 2024/1359).

Considered collectively, although the Pact was designed at the EU level, its effectiveness depends on cooperation with

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum represents the most recent major reform package in EU migration governance, building on earlier milestones such as the Temporary Protection Directive and the Return Directive.

third countries, particularly in border management, return, and readmission (European Commission, 2024a; ICMPD, 2024). As a result, the Pact includes numerous measures that deepen conditionality related to financial support, trade preferences, and visa facilitation.

Intersecting frameworks: the Migration and Asylum Pact and the Pact for the Mediterranean

As briefly explained, the developments in migration since 2015 prompted the EU to adopt a new approach to migration governance, which facilitated the creation of the new pact. Similarly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine led the EU to reassess its policies toward third countries, particularly in the Mediterranean region, thereby elevating the Mediterranean Pact's significance. The pursuit of geopolitical resilience, energy security, and strategic engagement with neighbouring countries in EU foreign policy further shaped the context for the Mediterranean Pact's emergence (European Commission & High Representative, 2025). Beyond serving as a normative text, the Pact functions as a strategic document that establishes the political framework for the Mediterranean Pact in areas such as geopolitical stability, digital cooperation, and investment (European Commission & High Representative, 2025).

The Mediterranean Pact has been presented as a renewed framework for strengthening Euro-Mediterranean cooperation through geopolitical stability, digital cooperation and investment. Nevertheless, cooperation over the past three decades has largely remained embedded in a neighbourhood-focused and security-oriented approach. As reflected in current partnerships with

Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, this pattern continues to prioritise migration control and regional stability over a rights-based approach (European Commission, 2024b; OECD, 2023). The impacts of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum in the Mediterranean region are primarily shaped by policies concerning legal migration, deportation procedures, readmissions, and visas. Forecasts indicate that reforms to the Blue Card Directive under the Pact are likely to result in at least a modest increase in the migration and retention of highly skilled workers from Mediterranean states within the EU. However, as discussed in Zarhloule's chapter on talent partnerships in this joint study, these reforms encounter complex implementation challenges.

The Pact's screening and asylum procedures are designed to facilitate the rapid rejection of asylum applications at the border and to expedite deportation. Countries in the immediate region, particularly the EU's Mediterranean neighbours, are expected to be most affected by higher return rates. However, this objective faces a significant political and legal barrier: unlike the Eastern neighbours and the Western Balkans, most Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states, except Türkiye, have not signed readmission agreements with the EU. Consequently, unless countries of origin or transit agree to accept returnees, an increase in deportation decisions is unlikely to have a practical effect (Peers, 2024).

After pacts: what has happened so far and what lies ahead?

The implementation of the New Pact's architecture occurs amid escalating geopolitical instability, pronounced demo-

Cooperation over the past three decades has largely remained embedded in a neighbourhood-focused and security-oriented approach.

graphic imbalances, and heightened domestic political polarisation across Europe (for a discussion on demographic imbalances, please see Fernández's

chapter in this joint study). In this context, governance outcomes are unlikely to follow a single linear trajectory. Within this framework, the scenario analysis offers a nuanced understanding of how institutional choices, political interpretations, implementation practices, and external developments may generate divergent futures for the Mediterranean. Conducting this analysis, however, requires a brief overview of the post-signature landscape, examining how these pacts have unfolded at both the EU level and within the Mediterranean dimension.

The Pact is scheduled to enter into force simultaneously for member states in June 2026 (European Commission, 2024a). Following its adoption in May 2024, additional developments have occurred (Pariat, 2026). The European Commission rapidly adopted new measures to reduce irregular arrivals and accelerate returns, integrating these initiatives into the five-year strategy published in January 2026, thereby shaping the overall framework of the process (COM [2026] 45 final). For instance, the New Return Procedures produced in March 2025 established faster and more effective rules, such as mutual recognition of return decisions across the EU, expedited identification and return of individuals posing security risks, and the transfer of those remaining illegally to designated "return hubs" in third countries. The Commission proposed the establishment of an EU-level list of safe countries of origin/safe third countries which permits accelerated border procedures for certain nationalities with asylum acceptance rates below

20% (European Parliament, 2026). Additionally, the European Commission proposed amendments to the Safe Third Country provisions of the Asylum Procedures Regulation (EU) 2024/1348, allowing asylum applications to be declared inadmissible where protection can be obtained in a safe non-EU country.

The Common Implementation Plan, which provides guidance to member states on implementing the Pact, was published in June 2024. As of June 2025, 25 member states had submitted their national implementation plans to the Commission. Hungary refused to submit a plan due to its objection to the Pact, while Poland maintained its opposition to the solidarity mechanism and submitted only a brief information note. The Annual Solidarity Pool, established under the solidarity mechanism of the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (Regulation [EU] 2024/1351, Articles 56-57), was established by Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/2642 on 18 December 2025 following the annual pledging exercise. Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Italy were identified as member states under migratory pressure eligible to benefit from the Pool.

This period has also witnessed significant challenges in implementing the Pact. The primary challenge concerns the characteristics of the Pact, which requires navigating complex technical, legal, and operational demands. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the cases of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, divergent positions among member states and the use of the Pact for populist rhetoric in domestic politics present substantial obstacles (Kajánek, 2022; Holányi, 2025). These factors undermine the effectiveness of common migration policies and extend beyond mere structural concerns.

Selective approaches, such as those adopted by local populations and authorities on the Aegean Islands in Greece, or France's intention to implement border procedures exclusively at major airports rather than at land or sea borders, indicate a cautious attitude toward the Pact.

Selective approaches, such as those adopted by local populations and authorities on the Aegean Islands in Greece, or France's intention to implement border procedures exclusively at major airports rather than at land or sea borders, indicate a cautious attitude toward the Pact. Additionally, as previously discussed, first-entry countries, including Italy and Spain, are reluctant to establish numerous processing centres along their coastlines. Italy is attempting to transfer capacity to Albania, while Spain is seeking to establish centres in Andalusia or the Canary Islands as discussed in Pasetti and Celoria's chapter in this joint study.

Moreover, it should be also noted that the trust between member states has been significantly eroded by the "migration crises" of the past decade. This erosion has led some states to hesitate in making commitments. For instance, the reluctance of destination countries such as France and Germany to accept the relocation quotas outlined in the Pact, intended to address the issue of "insufficient secondary movements", presents a substantial challenge (Pariat, 2026). Additionally, persistent challenges in operational infrastructure and information technology (IT), including border procedure capacity, Eurodac, and System Integration, continue to pose significant obstacles.

As noted above, the implementation of the Pact remains highly dependent on cooperation with third countries, particularly regarding return hubs, readmission and the prevention of irregular migration. This dependency represents a key uncertainty for the scenarios presented below, as changes in the political willingness or stability of partner countries could significantly affect the Pact's implementation. The scenarios presented in this chapter therefore focus on this central issue.

Theoretical and methodological basis of the scenario framework

This chapter employs a forward-looking scenario-building methodology to analyse potential trajectories of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance in the context of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the emerging Mediterranean Pact. Instead of forecasting a single, deterministic outcome, the analysis develops alternative governance pathways grounded in current structural trends, institutional developments, and political dynamics. The scenario-building approach is thus utilised not as a positivist forecasting tool, but as a strategic analytical framework to assess how varying combinations of policy choices, geopolitical shifts, demographic pressures, and governance logics could reshape the Euro-Mediterranean migration landscape over the coming decade.

We aim at contributing the expanding body of scenario-oriented research on the future of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance in the context of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the emerging Pact for the Mediterranean. It draws on recent analyses that emphasise the structural tensions among security-driven migration governance, demographic and labour market imperatives, and the fragmented nature of regional co-operation in the Mediterranean. Studies by Furness (2026) on the "mirage" of Euro-Mediterranean integration, EuroMed-Mig report on the Mediterranean implications of the EU Pact (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2021), and recent policy reflections by European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Migration Policy Group, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), and Euro-MeSCo collectively highlight a growing

trend toward selective, transactional, and differentiated cooperation, rather than comprehensive regional integration. In line with these studies and debates, this chapter also employs a scenario-based, forward-looking analytical framework to examine how current policy trajectories may influence mobility regimes, governance structures, and the interplay between security priorities, demographic trends, and rights-based approaches in the Euro-Mediterranean region over the next decade.

The methodological approach is grounded in the literature on strategic foresight and governance scenarios, particularly frameworks designed to analyse uncertainty in complex, politically contentious policy environments (Börjeson et al., 2006). Migration governance exemplifies such complexity, as it is shaped by security concerns, demographic changes, economic pressures, domestic political competition, humanitarian norms, climate-related risks, and international diplomacy (European Commission, 2024c; Fargues, 2021: 9; OECD, 2023).

As a result, linear projection models are insufficient for capturing the future structure of migration governance in the Mediterranean region. In contrast, exploratory scenario analysis facilitates the identification of multiple potential futures arising from the interplay of these structural forces. Methodologically, the scenarios presented in this chapter are conceptual analytical constructs rather than probabilistic predictions. Our objective with this methodology is not to determine which scenario will ultimately occur, but to elucidate the outcomes, contradictions, risks, and opportunities embedded in current policy trajectories. Finally, our scenarios in this chapter are not derived from a single pre-existing model. Instead, they represent original analytical syntheses that draw on multiple strands of literature, including migration governance, securitisation, externalisation, demographic governance, regional coop-

eration, and crisis management. Therefore, this section employs a methodology referred to as «literature-based scenario construction». The analysis utilises the «drivers-dynamics-outcomes» framework, in which structural drivers generate governance pressures, governance dynamics shape institutional responses, and these responses produce differentiated regional outcomes. Several key structural drivers are central to the future of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance.

The first structural driving force is the demographic asymmetry between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. As outlined in the theoretical framework and also discussed by Fernández's chapter in this joint study, Europe is experiencing accelerating demographic ageing, a shrinking labour force, and rising dependency ratios. Eurostat projections indicate that the EU's working-age population could decline by approximately 18% by 2070 (European Commission, 2024c). In contrast, countries in the Southern Mediterranean and North Africa are experiencing strong migration trends driven by population growth, labour market saturation, and a highly educated young population. This demographic imbalance results in what Fargues (2008, 2026) conceptualises as “demographic match/complementarity” - the structural fit between Europe's ageing and shrinking workforce and the younger, growing labour force of neighbouring regions, particularly the Southern Mediterranean. However, demographic complementarity alone does not automatically generate collaborative governance. Constraints related to political legitimacy, anti-immigration populism, and sovereignty concerns determine whether this complementarity can be transformed into sustainable mobility frameworks.

The second structural driving force is the securitisation of migration governance. Building on literature from the Copenhagen

Constraints related to political legitimacy, anti-immigration populism, and sovereignty concerns determine whether this complementarity can be transformed into sustainable mobility frameworks.

School and related scholarship, this section conceptualises securitisation as a logic of governance that restructures institutions, legal frameworks, technologies, and political priorities around deterrence, risk management, and border control (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2006). The evolution of EU migration policy since 2015 exemplifies this transformation. Border procedures, screening mechanisms, biometric surveillance systems, return-oriented governance, and externalised border cooperation increasingly shape the architecture of migration governance. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum further institutionalises these developments through accelerated border procedures, interoperability systems, expanded Eurodac regulations, and enhanced return mechanisms (Brouwer, 2020; Regulation [EU] 2024/1358).

The third structural driver is the externalisation of migration governance beyond the territory of the EU. This chapter conceptualises the Mediterranean as a contested governance space defined by asymmetric interdependence, geopolitical bargaining, and negotiated sovereignty, rather than solely as a migration corridor (Casarino, 2018). EU migration governance increasingly relies on external partnerships with third countries, including Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, and Türkiye. These arrangements involve various forms of border assistance, return cooperation, anti-trafficking initiatives, financial conditionality, and mobility partnerships. Nevertheless, externalisation does not equate to unilateral EU control. Partner countries maintain considerable bargaining power and may leverage migration cooperation as a geopolitical instrument, especially during periods of internal instability or diplomatic tension (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019).

Based on these drivers, this chapter incorporates a multi-level governance perspective into its methodological approach.

Migration governance is not regarded solely as a supranational EU policy area; rather, it is conceptualised as a fragmented and negotiated governance space that includes EU institutions, member states, third countries, local authorities, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employers, and migrants. This framework aligns with existing literature that characterises migration governance as a multi-level field negotiated among EU institutions, member states, local actors, international organisations, and third countries (Geddes, 2021; Börzel & Heard-Lauréote, 2009; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant because a key uncertainty influencing the future of Euro-Mediterranean governance is the degree of institutional coherence within the EU. Divergent national political priorities, electoral dynamics, and labour market needs may substantially affect the practical implementation of the Pact.

Accordingly, the four scenarios developed in this section should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive or entirely isolated futures. In practice, elements from different scenarios may coexist across various policy areas, geographical regions, or political periods. However, constructing ideal-type scenarios clarifies the analysis of competing governance logics and their probable outcomes (Van Notten et al., 2003).

Possible scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean migration governance after the Pact

As summarised in Table 1, this study outlines four scenarios for the next decade concerning the impact of the Pacts on Euro-Mediterranean migration governance:

The first scenario, Integrated Selective Governance, emerges from the interplay between demographic pragmatism and securitised mobility management. In this scenario, the EU partially expands legal migration channels through Talent Partnerships, labour agreements, and selective mobility programmes, while maintaining robust border controls and digital surveillance systems. (Selective mobility, in this study, denotes migration policies that facilitate entry for categories of migrants considered economically desirable while simultaneously restricting access for others.) Migration governance becomes more coordinated and technologically integrated, yet it also evolves into a more hierarchical and selective structure.

The second scenario, Transactional Externalised Security Regime, reflects the institutionalisation of deterrence-focused governance. In this scenario, externalisation becomes the primary organising principle of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance. Third countries are converted into buffer zones, return cooperation intensifies, and migration governance increasingly merges with internal security policies. The Mediterranean shifts toward functioning as a geopolitical border-security zone rather than a shared area of mobility.

The third scenario, Fragmented Multi-Layered Governance, illustrates governance fatigue under persistent crisis conditions. Although the common EU formally remains, implementation becomes increasingly fragmented. Member states adopt divergent migration strategies, emergency governance becomes standard practice, and ad hoc diplomacy replaces long-term strategic coordination. This scenario suggests that governance fragmentation may result not from deliberate strategic choices, but from the gradual erosion of institutional coherence during prolonged crises.

The fourth scenario, Human Rights-Centred Regional Partnership, offers a normative and collaborative alternative in which migration governance is embedded within frameworks of shared sustainability, demographic complementarity, legal mobility, and regional partnership. In this scenario, legal migration channels are institutionalised on a large scale, mobility governance is developed collaboratively with Southern Mediterranean partners, and rights monitoring mechanisms are central to governance legitimacy. Although this scenario presents significant political challenges, it offers the greatest potential for long-term sustainability and regional legitimacy.

Table 1. Scenarios for Euro-Mediterranean Migration Governance

Scenario	Core Concept / Description	Key Outcomes & Consequences	Governance Mechanisms Derived from the Pact	Main Legislative & Policy Drivers
Scenario 1: Integrated Selective Governance	Combines integrated EU-level management with selective mobility, prioritising economic pragmatism alongside robust border controls and digital surveillance.	Partially alleviates EU labour shortages and improves control of irregular migration. However, it creates mobility hierarchies by favouring highly skilled workers while excluding low-skilled migrants, and expands digital surveillance.	Relies heavily on the new Eurodac system for digital capacity, the Screening Regulation (including the 20% acceptance rate rule for rapid rejection), and border cooperation with third countries acting as transit managers.	Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 (Screening Regulation); Regulation (EU) 2024/1358 (Eurodac Regulation); Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (Asylum and Migration Management Regulation); EU Talent Pool; Talent Partnerships; Blue Card framework.

Scenario 2: Transactional Externalised Security Regime	A deterrence-focused approach where externalisation is the main principle, turning the Mediterranean into a highly securitised geopolitical border and third countries into buffer zones.	May achieve a short-term reduction in irregular crossings, but leads to increased human rights violations, stronger human trafficking networks, persistent labour shortages, and deteriorated relations with partner countries.	Driven by expedited border procedures, return centres, and readmission diplomacy. The Screening Regulation is used primarily for security screening and rapid removal rather than humanitarian protection.	Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 (Screening Regulation); Regulation (EU) 2024/1359 (Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation); Return Regulation proposal; provisions on third-country cooperation and return policy within the Pact.
Scenario 3: Fragmented Multi-Layered Governance	Characterised by crisis-driven, reactive governance due to the EU's failure to maintain a unified strategic framework, leading to fragmented implementation by member states.	Results in a transition to a permanent emergency mode, increased secondary movements, legal uncertainty, and the erosion of governance capacity through reliance on temporary ad hoc diplomacy.	Stems from implementation asymmetry where member states apply rules inconsistently. It relies heavily on the frequent activation of the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation, creating a "minimum compliance architecture".	Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (AMMR); Regulation (EU) 2024/1359 (Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation); Common Implementation Plan; National Implementation Plans.
Scenario 4: Human Rights-Centred Regional Partnership	A normative, collaborative model that treats migration as an issue of shared development, demographic sustainability, and human security based on equal partnership.	Reduces pressure from irregular migration, creates sustainable labour mobility, and enhances the EU's normative legitimacy, though it requires high political coordination and costs.	Achieved by expansively using Talent Partnerships and the EU Talent Pool for all skill levels (not just highly skilled) and implementing a genuine solidarity system involving real relocation and responsibility-sharing.	Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 (solidarity mechanism); EU Talent Pool; Talent Partnerships; legal migration provisions; Blue Card framework.

Note. Elaborated by author.

Scenario 1 - Integrated selective governance

This scenario combines an integrated EU-level management approach with a selective understanding of mobility and the EU's emerging digital border governance architecture. In this scenario, within Euro-Mediterranean relations, the EU

prioritises migration management rather than its complete prevention, emphasising selective mobility. This approach necessitates greater coordination at both the EU level and with third countries, resulting in a hierarchical, selective filtering framework for migration management.

The conceptual architecture of Scenario 1 is deeply anchored in established the-

oretical frameworks. Specifically, it draws upon the systemic dynamics of migration governance conceptualised by Geddes and Scholten (2016), alongside the structural intricacies of selective labour immigration policies articulated by Ruhs (2013). To evaluate the external dimensions of these policy designs, this scenario integrates Lavenex's (2006) external governance approach, which clarifies how the EU projects its institutional norms beyond its formal borders. Furthermore, the analysis is empirically informed by the critical scholarship on securitised mobility governance, building on the foundational contributions of Bigo (2002) and Huysmans (2006) while also engaging with more recent work on the evolving practices of migration securitisation and governance (Cusumano & Riddervold, 2023; Mouthaan, 2022; Planas Gifra, 2024; Raineri, Cusumano, & Caballero-Vélez, 2026). Together, these complementary literatures provide a robust analytical framework for deciphering the interplay between externalised control mechanisms and highly selective, market-driven labour mobility paths that define the structural parameters of this scenario.

Scenario 1 depends on several structural preconditions. Full integration of Eurodac, European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), and the Entry/Exit System (EES) is required, along with the standardisation of biometric and artificial intelligence (AI)-supported risk analysis systems, streamlined border procedures, and partial operationalisation of the solidarity pool concept. The EU Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships must be expanded, with the scale of Talent Partnership programmes increasing significantly, resulting in participant numbers rising from thousands to tens of thousands annually. The Blue Card system should be restructured to include a broader range of professions, such as semi-skilled

positions in the care and agriculture sectors, where labour demand is highest. Bilateral mobility agreements with Morocco, Tunisia, and potentially Egypt would establish structured pathways based on agreed numbers and sectors. However, as discussed comprehensively in Zarhloule's chapter of this joint study, mobility remains unequal. While the EU opens legal pathways for highly skilled labour, sector-specific temporary workers, and migrants with strategic skills, it simultaneously increases pressure on irregular mobility. As a result, the system evolves into a "selective permeable" structure rather than an "open" one.

In this model, the Mediterranean region does not fully transform into a unified mobility area. Instead, it functions as a zone characterised by filtered mobility, regulated movement, and strategic labour allocation. Countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Türkiye are incorporated as sources of labour, partners in transit management, and collaborators in readmission processes. Labour shortages in Europe are partially alleviated in high-skilled sectors, offering governments facing financial strain from an ageing population some economic relief. In contrast, the care economy, which relies heavily on medium-skilled workers and requires significant emotional labour rather than formal qualifications, continues to experience persistent staff shortages. Seasonal worker programmes address agricultural labour needs, but these initiatives do not provide integration pathways or rights protections comparable to those available to higher-skilled migrants. The political sustainability of this scenario remains moderate, as it satisfies neither proponents of rights-based governance nor advocates of open market policies, but instead reflects a compromise typical of pluralist democratic systems responding to competing pressures.

This scenario is projected to produce more positive outcomes; however, these benefits are primarily EU-centric. Anticipated advantages include partial alleviation of Europe's labour shortage, improved control of irregular migration, enhanced coordination in EU governance, and increased digital capacity in migration management. Conversely, this scenario may neglect a balanced approach that addresses the interests of the Mediterranean region and does not depart from established migration policies. Additionally, it raises concerns regarding mobility hierarchies, the exclusion of low-skilled migrants, the categorisation of "desirable" versus "undesirable" migrants, and the expansion of digital surveillance.

This scenario maintains a stance in which security controls remain in place while economic pragmatism is prioritised. Considering the current trajectory, the history of EU cooperation with third countries, and the nature of recent agreements, this outcome appears the most probable. It represents a middle-ground scenario in which the Pact is implemented not solely as a security-driven framework but also in line with the principle of controlled permeability, reflecting earlier approaches such as the EU Mobility Partnerships and Common Agendas on Migration and Mobility that sought to balance migration management with legal mobility and economic cooperation (Reslow & Vink, 2015; Brocza & Paulhart, 2015).

Underlying factors of the Pact for Scenario 1

In this scenario, the new Eurodac and the wider interoperability architecture, including Visa Information System (VIS), Schengen Information System (SIS) and European Criminal Records Information System for Third-Country Nationals

(ECRIS-TCN) is expected to support elements such as highly coordinated EU governance, increased digital capacity, filtered mobility, and controlled permeability. According to European Commission implementation documents, interoperability is anticipated to enable faster, safer, and more efficient migration governance. Similarly, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) implementation reports indicate that data integration will further centralise EU migration governance (EPRS, 2025a & EPRS, 2025b). The Screening Regulation introduces rapid screening and early filtering for individuals with a low likelihood of admission, thereby establishing risk-based mobility governance. As a result, this framework is likely to institutionalise selective permeability, controlled mobility, and a distinction between beneficial and high-risk migrants. The Pact's provisions on biometric data collection, the expansion of Eurodac, interoperability between EU information systems, and enhanced security screening are expected to facilitate more intensive digital surveillance and data concentration. Together, these developments may contribute to the gradual transformation of migration governance into a data-driven security governance model.

The 20% Acceptance Rate Rule stipulates that individuals arriving from countries with an acceptance rate below 20% are subject to border procedures, rapid screening, and accelerated rejection (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024a). This mechanism directly establishes mobility hierarchies and nationality-based risk governance, reinforcing distinctions between so-called "good" and "bad" migrants. The differentiation between "useful" and "undesirable" migrants in this context is driven entirely by this rule.

The Pact's integration of border cooperation, return cooperation, and readmission

The Pact's integration of border cooperation, return cooperation, and readmission agreements with third countries establishes a framework in which countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Türkiye function as transit managers, labour reservoirs, and migration buffer zones.

agreements with third countries establishes a framework in which countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Türkiye function as transit managers, labour reservoirs, and migration buffer zones. Consequently, the lack of a fully integrated mobility area in the Mediterranean can be attributed to this externalised governance structure.

In summary, if Scenario 1 applies, the New Pact does not eliminate securitisation; it rationalises and digitises it whilst selectively opening up channels of mobility required by Europe's demographic and economic needs. Thus, securitisation persists, but economic pragmatism is now integrated into the system. Therefore, this scenario does not constitute a departure from the logic of existing relations. Instead, it represents a more digital, coordinated, and selective continuation of that logic.

Scenario 2 - Transactional externalised security regime

This scenario offers a forecast grounded in the transactional externalisation approach, the Fortress Mediterranean concept, and relevant literature on securitisation and externalisation. Within this framework, the central aim of migration governance is to restrict access to Europe.

The analytical foundation of Scenario 2 is heavily informed by critical migration scholarship and contemporary policy analyses. Theoretically, it is grounded again in the securitisation frameworks pioneered by Bigo (2002) and Huysmans (2006), which explain how migration is discursively and operationally constructed as a core security threat. To understand how these security logics manifest beyond EU terri-

tory, the scenario incorporates Cassarino's (2018) extensive work on the externalisation of border controls and the readmission mechanics of migration diplomacy. Empirically, this framework is enriched by regional policy evaluations, and reports.

In Scenario 2, the core mechanisms include return centres, third-country agreements, expedited border procedures, detention-focused border zones, and readmission diplomacy (Conte & Yavçan, 2024). Solidarity among EU member states remains limited, with migration control responsibilities increasingly delegated to Southern Mediterranean countries. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Mauritania function as buffer zones, extensions of the EU's external borders, and filtering areas for migration.

In this worst-case scenario, the Mediterranean ceases to function as a shared space of mobility and instead becomes a highly securitised geopolitical border region. Migration is no longer framed as an issue of development or human security but is treated primarily as an internal security matter. Over time, as the risk of the EU's migration governance collapsing increases, the EU achieves a short-term reduction in irregular crossings, a political deterrent effect, and enhanced border capacity. However, this approach results in increased human rights violations, the erosion of the principle of non-refoulement, diminished normative legitimacy for the EU, the strengthening of human trafficking networks, and the expanded use of migration by partner countries as a tool for diplomatic leverage. Consequently, a security-oriented approach becomes permanently embedded in migration governance.

This scenario would necessitate a substantial expansion of the EU Pact's external

dimension within its operational framework. For instance, new agreements modelled on the Tunisia agreement could be established with Egypt, Libya, and Algeria, accompanied by a significant increase in financial support for border management in partner countries. The operational capacity of FRONTEX would be further enhanced, and maritime operations in the Central Mediterranean would be intensified to ensure that vessels are intercepted prior to reaching international waters. However, this scenario does not broaden legal migration pathways, as the Skills Partnership programmes are limited in scope and remain primarily skills selective. The primary function of these programmes is to provide a semblance of legitimacy to the EU's migration governance structure, which fundamentally operates as a system of restrictions.

The consequences of this scenario are problematic across multiple dimensions. Irregular migration does not cease; instead, it evolves into forms that are more costly, more dangerous, and increasingly associated with criminal activity. As routes across the Central Mediterranean become more restricted, irregular migrants may shift to alternative routes via West Africa or the Eastern Mediterranean corridors. Simultaneously, Europe faces persistent labour shortages that cannot be addressed through migration and mobility, resulting in economic slowdowns in the care, agriculture, and construction sectors, or increased exploitation within the informal labour market as these sectors rely on undocumented workers. Relations with partner countries deteriorate in a self-reinforcing cycle, as existing conditions foster resentment rather than genuine cooperation. The legitimacy deficit in governance continues to deepen.

The New Pact also allows for integrated solutions with third countries regarding

border cooperation, anti-smuggling efforts, readmission, and return arrangements, which align with anticipated policy developments. However, the continued emphasis on securitisation and externalisation in this scenario risks transforming countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Mauritania, and Algeria into migration buffer zones, outsourced border managers, and containment partners. Specifically, the Tunisia agreement model, the rationale of the EU-Türkiye statement, and previous co-operation with Libya are further expanded. As a result, the Mediterranean is increasingly positioned as an extension of the EU's external border, a development directly attributable to the Pact's externalisation strategy.

Underlying factors of the Pact for Scenario 2

The new Screening Regulation relies on identity verification, security assessments, health evaluations, and risk classification. The border asylum procedure facilitates the expedited exclusion of applications with a low probability of approval. This framework institutionalises a policy of preventing entry prior to integration. Migration is reframed from a domain of humanitarian protection to one of security screening. As a result, detention-focused border zones, expedited rejection procedures, and accelerated returns become integral components of the system. The mechanisms established by the Pact provide the operational foundation for the so-called Fortress Mediterranean approach. The new Pact architecture reinforces the connection between asylum rejection and returns decisions, thereby promoting deterrence-based governance, expedited removals, and border containment. Migrants are increasingly regarded not as applicants for protection, but as populations subject to rapid removal. The

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concepts of return centres, readmission diplomacy, and detention-based strategies are directly supported by this mechanism. The EU may implement exceptional procedures in cases of instrumentalisation, mass influx, or security emergencies. This framework risks normalising exceptional measures, potentially transforming temporary border practices into a permanent mode of governance.

Scenario 3 - Fragmented multi-layered governance

This scenario relies on a crisis-driven reactive governance at EU level. In this model, the EU fails to establish a unified strategic governance framework. As a result, the system becomes fragmented, crisis-focused, and remains in a state of continual reactivity. Certain member states reject relocation mechanisms, others enforce strict border controls, and some promote migration to address labour shortages. Common rules are inconsistently applied, leading to an increase in legal disputes. Although a “common pact” exists at the EU level, in practice, multiple migration regimes have developed (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024).

Governance in the Mediterranean region relies on temporary crisis agreements, ad hoc diplomatic efforts, urgent return negotiations, and shifting coalitions. Events such as the Tunisian crisis, the Libyan conflict, Sahel migration flows, and climate-induced migration continually destabilise the system. Such a system may produce short-term, incremental benefits, including the development of flexible policies by certain states and the emergence of innovative models at the local level. However, it is also likely to result in fragmentation within the EU's migration governance. This fragmentation may manifest

as increased secondary movements, legal uncertainty, persistent crises, and a gradual erosion of governance capacity.

Consequently, a preference for crisis-focused, reactive governance is likely to lead to a transition to a permanent emergency mode. This scenario is particularly concerning because it does not reflect a deliberate governance strategy but rather the inevitable outcome of governance failure. The responses of the EU and its member states to these crises remain temporary and inconsistent, shaped primarily by immediate domestic political pressures rather than by comprehensive strategic frameworks.

During periods of significant political pressure, emergency agreements are established with partner countries, and development funding is exchanged for border management cooperation, which remains inadequately designed and insufficiently overseen. Legal frameworks are repeatedly stretched and, at times, violated. As front-line countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain implement unilateral measures that other member states oppose, coordination among EU member states deteriorates. Although human rights protections are upheld rhetorically, they are suspended in practice. Collectively, these dynamics deplete governance resources, deepen mistrust between the EU and partner country governments, increase human rights violations, and worsen labour market outcomes on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Underlying factors of the Pact for Scenario 3

This scenario does not constitute the complete failure of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Instead, it reflects a context in which, despite the Pact's formal

During periods of significant political pressure, emergency agreements are established with partner countries, and development funding is exchanged for border management cooperation, which remains inadequately designed and insufficiently overseen.

adoption, implementation cannot occur in a common and consistent manner due to political, institutional, and geopolitical fragmentation. The central issue is that the Pact exists without joint governance. As a result, the scenario is characterised by incomplete integration, ongoing crises, divergent national implementations, ad hoc diplomatic efforts, and the normalisation of emergency governance. The primary mechanism shaping this scenario is best described as “implementation asymmetry under permanent crisis conditions.” The implementation logic of the Pact relies on national plans, varying operational capacities, and phased adaptation. This framework enables some states to accelerate digitalisation, establish more effective asylum systems, and pursue labour migration reforms. For instance, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries may develop more tightly controlled systems, while frontline countries such as Italy or Greece may adopt alternative governance practices. This dynamic results in multi-layered governance. Although this scenario may initially seem beneficial, it generates several adverse side effects.

In scenario 3, the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation emerge as the most frequently invoked provision of the EU Pact, having been activated on multiple occasions. Allowing member states to provide financial support and technical assistance in lieu of relocation results in a “minimum compliance architecture” rather than a unified European system. While some states accept migration, others implement exclusively deterrent approaches. As a result, secondary movements, forum shopping, and legal inconsistencies become more prevalent. The observation that “there is a common pact at EU level, but multiple regimes emerge in practice” directly arises from these dynamics. This scenario is also reinforced by emergency clauses

across the Pact architecture, including provisions that allow extended time limits, derogations from ordinary procedures, and crisis-based restrictions, as well as related developments in the Schengen framework.

Scenario 4 - Rights-Based regional partnership

Scenario 4 integrates a human rights centred partnership approach into cooperative regional governance. Within this model, migration is conceptualised as an issue of shared development, demographic sustainability, regional mobility, and human security, rather than solely a security concern. It expands legal pathways for mobility, establishes jointly designed Talent Partnerships, develops diploma recognition systems, institutionalises frameworks for circular migration, and strengthens rights-based monitoring mechanisms.

Joint decision-making, equal partnership, and mutual capacity-building between the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries are prioritised. The Mediterranean is reconceptualised as a governance area and a common mobility zone, rather than a border region. For the first time, demographic complementarity is systematically integrated into governance frameworks. Expected outcomes include reduced pressure from irregular migration, more sustainable labour mobility, enhanced normative legitimacy for the EU, and increased regional security.

However, this scenario necessitates a high degree of political coordination and incurs greater costs. Additionally, anti-migration sentiment and populism in domestic politics must be addressed. As a result, realisation of this scenario depends

on political conditions that are currently absent but plausible: sustained centrist governance in key EU member states, recognition by policy-makers of the unsustainable costs of a security-first approach, and institutional innovation that establishes long-term governance frameworks resilient to electoral-cycle fluctuations.

In this scenario, legal migration pathways are institutionalised and expanded. Multi-year labour migration agreements between the EU and key partner countries create transparent, predictable, and appropriately scaled channels for workers across all skill levels. Skills Partnerships become genuinely co-designed frameworks, with partner countries actively participating in EU-led programmes, including sector definition, candidate selection, skills development investments, and return or settlement options. Joint development investments are incorporated into mobility governance, with the Global Gateway fund strategically allocated to education and vocational training systems that prepare workers for mobility while simultaneously strengthening human capital in their countries of origin. This scenario yields positive outcomes, including enhanced regional legitimacy, more stable labour market matching, reduced incentives for irregular migration, and the emergence of a genuine Mediterranean governance community.

Underlying factors of the Pact for Scenario 4

Scenario 4 may materialise if the EU were to act on Migration and Asylum in its sense of optimism and normative form with its all elements. In this context, the Pact functions not only as a mechanism for border control, return, and deterrence, but as a rights-based, predictable, and

jointly designed governance framework that enhances regional sustainability. The external dimension of the Pact includes tools such as Talent Partnerships, the EU Talent Pool, skills-matching mechanisms, labour mobility agreements, and legal migration channels with third countries. These elements are essential for realising this scenario. If these tools remain limited to programmes for highly skilled workers, the scenario aligns with Scenario 1. If expanded to include channels for medium-skilled, low-skilled, seasonal, and cyclical mobility, they facilitate Scenario 4. The Pact also establishes a solidarity system among member states, involving relocation, financial contributions, and operational support, which in principle supports this scenario. If solidarity is reduced to financial contributions or externalisation funds, the scenario shifts towards Scenario 2. Genuine relocation and responsibility-sharing reinforce Scenario 4.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

A joint assessment of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Mediterranean Pact reveals that Euro-Mediterranean migration governance stands at a historic threshold of transformation. Yet the direction of this transformation remains undetermined. The four scenarios developed throughout this study demonstrate that the Euro-Mediterranean space will not follow a single linear trajectory in the coming decade; rather, it may evolve toward different governance forms along the fault lines of tension between security, economic pragmatism, demographic pressures, human rights norms, and geopolitical competition.

Among the scenarios analysed, the most plausible model appears to be Integrated Selective Governance. The existing Pact

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Shared-ownership, predictable, rights-based mobility mechanisms could both address Europe's labour needs more sustainably and reduce governance crises across the Mediterranean.

architecture aims not to halt migration entirely, but to manage it selectively and in a controlled manner. Europe's demographic ageing and labour shortages make certain legal mobility channels a structural necessity. At the same time, however, the logic of securitisation, digital surveillance, border procedures, and externalised control mechanisms continue to occupy the centre of governance. For this reason, a full pivot by the EU toward a rights-based regional partnership model in the short to medium term appears politically unlikely.

That said, the most sustainable and regionally stable scenario remains the Human Rights-Centred Regional Partnership model. Security-centred approaches alone cannot halt irregular migration entirely; on the contrary, they render mobility more dangerous, more costly, and more precarious. Likewise, externalisation-focused regimes generate persistent distrust in relations with Southern Mediterranean countries and erode the EU's normative legitimacy. By contrast, shared-ownership, predictable, rights-based mobility mechanisms could both address Europe's labour needs more sustainably and reduce governance crises across the Mediterranean.

The central conclusion of this study is as follows: the future of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance is fundamentally a matter of political choice rather than technical capacity. The same Pact architecture could evolve into either a security-centred, externalised regime or a more balanced, collaborative governance model. The determining factor is the political logic with which existing instruments are applied. Within this framework, several core policy recommendations emerge.

First, EU institutions must move beyond an approach that frames migration governance exclusively around border security. The European Commission and member

states should expand instruments such as Talent Partnerships and the EU Talent Pool beyond the selection of highly skilled workers to encompass the structural labour needs of medium and low skilled sectors as well. Predictable, rights-based legal mobility channels should be established particularly in the care economy, agriculture, logistics, and construction. Failing this, these sectors will remain dependent on undocumented labour and labour exploitation will deepen.

Second, stronger democratic and legal oversight mechanisms must be established over the EU's externalisation policies. The European Parliament, the European Ombudsman, and fundamental rights bodies should regularly scrutinise migration agreements concluded with Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and similar countries from the standpoint of human rights impact.

Third, Mediterranean countries must not be viewed merely as «buffer zones» or «migration-stopping partners». Countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Türkiye, which is also an EU candidate country, must be meaningfully included in policy design processes. Mobility governance should be built on principles of joint decision-making and mutual benefit rather than unilateral conditionality. Joint institutional mechanisms should be developed in particular in the areas of diploma recognition, circular migration, vocational training, and post-return reintegration.

Finally, Euro-Mediterranean migration governance must move beyond short-term crisis diplomacy. Migration must cease to be a security issue addressed only when emergencies arise, and must instead be considered alongside long-term regional sustainability, demographic transformation, labour planning, and human security perspectives. The future of the Mediterranean appears to depend less on

further hardening of borders than on managing mobility in a more predictable, more equitable, and more institutionalised manner. The fundamental choice before the Euro-Mediterranean region is therefore clear: either a drift toward an increasingly securitised, fragmented, and crisis-driven mo-

bility regime, or the construction of a more balanced governance model that redefines migration within a framework of shared sustainability and regional cooperation. The coming decade will be the decisive period in the context between these two approaches.

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Restrictive Externalisation under the Pact: Italy, Spain and the Way Ahead

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Introduction

Migration governance externalisation (MGE) is a policy approach centred on the outsourcing of migration governance functions to origin and transit countries in exchange for resources and support. This includes a wide array of instruments, including cooperation frameworks, funding conditionality, bilateral agreements, diplomatic relations, and operational support.

Over the last two decades, MGE has become increasingly central to European Union (EU) migration governance to the point of constituting the dominant - and often exclusive - approach through which European and national policy-makers govern international human mobility (Pasetti & Lupi, 2025). Historically rooted in the European long-standing “*obsession sécuritaire*”² and in the asymmetric power relations shaping its foreign action with African countries (Gabrielli, 2007), the prominence of MGE has more recently reflected the EU’s internal crisis of solidarity and responsibility-sharing (De Leo & Milazzo, 2024), as illustrated by the failure of the 2016 relocation mechanisms. In the current context, externalisation is thus often functioning as a convenient exit strategy and, in practice, the only policy option around which compromise among member states has been possible (Carrera et al., 2019; Milazzo, 2025).

MGE’s growing prominence has been accompanied by a progressively restrictive character, firmly entrenched in the institutional affirmation of the far right and its securitised anti-immigration discourse, which has established restrictive solutions

as the “default migration policy” (Villa, 2025). This restrictive turn in migration policy, however, does not reflect any novelty in the EU political imaginary but rather the return to a deep-rooted understanding (Gabrielli, 2007): similar policy options were already discussed and attempted at the EU level in the 1990s, in fact, but they largely failed, primarily due to resistance from key partner countries (most notably Morocco; see Gazzotti, 2021).

It is worth noticing that MGE does not necessarily take a restrictive form; it can also be used to facilitate international mobility. Policy examples include the EU resettlement and humanitarian admission framework, Talent Partnerships and, more recently, some of the actions foreseen in the Pact for the Mediterranean. Although these initiatives remain limited in scale, unevenly implemented or largely programmatic, they are significant in showing that externalisation can, at least in principle, be pursued as a mobility-enabling approach rather than solely for restrictive control (on this see also Özerim’s contribution in this Joint Policy Study).

The restrictive turn is qualitatively and quantitatively evident. From a qualitative perspective, a growing body of scholarship shows how deterrence and containment logics have gradually crowded out the programmatic and political space for mobility and protection-oriented approaches, rendering them even more marginal than they already were (e.g., Abubakar et al., 2024, and Wolff, 2024). From a quantitative standpoint, as illustrated by Mastrosanti (2025), investment

² According to Gabrielli 2007, “*obsession sécuritaire*” (security obsession) refers to a dominant framing in EU migration policy that treats migration primarily as a security problem (*sécuritisation*), linked to crime, terrorism, and loss of state control. This framing legitimises restrictive and preventive measures, including externalised border controls, while marginalising social, economic, and rights-based approaches.

patterns reveal a structural prioritisation of restriction: funding devoted to border management, surveillance, and returns vastly outweigh resources allocated to resettlement, labour mobility schemes, or humanitarian admission channels.

Against this background, this chapter pursues three main objectives. First, it analyses how this approach of restrictive externalisation is concretised in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, identifying associated challenges and risks. Second, it comparatively examines how such approach has been interpreted in terms of governance by Italy and Spain during the Pact's implementation (2024-2026) - two relevant cases for comparison due to their similar migration governance trajectories, but distinct recent policy choices. Third, drawing on comparative insights, it offers policy recommendations on MGE in the EU. The chapter's sections follow this sequence of objectives. Methodologically, the chapter follows a qualitative, policy-oriented approach combining desk research, legal and policy analysis, and five semi-structured interviews with policy-makers, stakeholders, and experts.

Restrictive MGE in the New Pact: features, challenges and risks

Following almost ten years of political deadlock and protracted negotiations, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was formally adopted in May 2024. While externalisation occupies a relatively limited space within the Pact, it plays a significant political and policy role. This is due, first, to the scope and significance of the changes introduced through its externalisation-related provisions compared to previous EU legislation and, second, to

the fact that these provisions are closely accompanied by complementary instruments that lie formally beyond the Pact itself but are tightly connected to it in practice, e.g., return regulation (European Commission, 2025).

In broad terms, the externalisation dimension of the Pact is articulated through three closely interlinked normative nodes. The first is the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1351, AMMR), which reshapes responsibility-sharing mechanisms through a system of “mandatory yet flexible” solidarity, whereby member states are required to contribute but retain discretion over the form of their contributions. At the same time, the Regulation largely reaffirms the pre-existing allocation of residual responsibility to first-entry member states, thus maintaining a core structural feature of the system. In parallel, it embeds co-operation with third countries as a central component of migration governance, enabling member states to channel their solidarity contributions towards measures implemented in third countries.

The second is the Asylum Procedures Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1348, APR), which strengthens expedited and border procedures and expands the relevance of concepts such as “safe country of origin” and “safe third country”. In doing so, it complements and reshapes the operation of the Dublin system by enabling responsibility to be managed through procedural tools - particularly inadmissibility decisions and pre-entry screening - rather than through formal allocation criteria alone. These instruments, and especially the latter as newly amended in 2026, facilitate the external handling of asylum claims by enabling the declaration of inadmissibility and the transfer or return of applicants to the third countries deemed safe, even where there is no in-

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dividual or territorial link with the third country.

The third node lies in the emerging EU return framework, notably the proposed Returns Regulation (European Commission, 2025) that aims to harmonise and accelerate return procedures while explicitly intensifying cooperation with third countries. By promoting arrangements that may include pre-removal cooperation, return hubs, and strengthen readmission partnerships, it further anchors MGE within the post-asylum phase of migration governance. For the first time, it allows returns not only to countries of origin but also to “safe third countries” (as defined by the APR) as well as to other third states, provided that an agreement - even of an informal nature - is in place.

These developments mark a significant transformation in the nature and scope of EU MGE. With these changes, the traditional security-oriented objectives pursued through MGE move beyond the conventional policy boundaries of border control and migration containment and extend into a domain that has until now remained anchored within EU territory: international protection. While earlier initiatives had already foreshadowed this shift, often through ad hoc or bilateral arrangements, the Pact contributes to institutionalising these practices within the EU's legislative framework, thereby marking a significant restrictive turn in European migration governance.

Challenges and risks

The current model of restrictive MGE presents five fundamental and interlinked sets of challenges. The first concerns policy viability, namely the practical feasibility of implementing MGE. Beyond formal agreements, externalisation requires resources, administrative capacity, organ-

isational structures, technical expertise, coordination mechanisms, institutional competence, and monitoring systems to translate commitments into practice while ensuring compliance with EU standards. As shown by the literature, this is an extremely complex process to realise in practice, not only because of the difficulty of guaranteeing adequate conditions per se, but also because of the complexity of governing externalisation measures in an environment that is increasingly multi-level and reliant on the action of public and private actors operating both within and beyond EU territory (Cassarino, 2023; O'Flaherty, 2025; Pasetti & Lupi 2025).

The second set of challenges concerns external relations with non-EU countries. In addition to implementation-related difficulties, externalisation raises wider issues of foreign affairs between the EU and partner states. Restrictive externalisation can indeed generate significant pressures on third countries, particularly where migration governance responsibilities are shifted without corresponding institutional capacity or long-term support. Moreover, cooperation often rests on a partial and fragile alignment of incentives and interests (Cassarino, 2023). EU objectives focused on border security, migration control, and containment do not always converge with the strategic priorities of partner countries, especially in African contexts where migration plays a central role in incomes, labour markets, and regional integration (Bisong, 2025). Managing these divergences represents a structural challenge for the design and sustainability of externalisation frameworks.

A third set of challenges concerns intra-EU relations, particularly in terms of solidarity and responsibility-sharing among member states. As noted by Mastrosanti (2025), “when solidarity is flexible and externalisation is available, decision-makers

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prefer the latter because it buys time.” More broadly, in a highly polarised political debate on migration and in a context marked by persistent divergences among member states, externalisation has increasingly functioned as a political instrument to circumvent the difficult negotiations required by internal solidarity mechanisms. This dynamic raises questions about how externalisation interacts with, and potentially reshapes, the balance between national responsibility and collective EU governance in the migration field (Tsourdi, 2017).

The fourth set of challenges, tightly intertwined to the formers, concerns migrants’ protection and human rights safeguard. The growing reliance on restrictive externalisation makes increasingly visible the contradictions that these measures entail in terms of protection standards, procedural safeguards, and the practical capacity of EU and national authorities to ensure rights in practice for people on the move. When implementation is weak, cooperation with third countries is based on uneven guarantees, and when intra-EU responsibility-sharing remains fragile, the risk is not simply policy failure but the downgrading of legal protection itself.

All these generate a fifth set of challenges concerning the accountability and legitimacy of the EU as global actor. The increasing reliance on restrictive externalisation places the EU in a position where it must reconcile competing and, at times, contradictory roles. To put it simply, this raises questions as to whether, how, and to what extent restrictive externalisation can be pursued while preserving its accountability as a representative of European societies and member states, its legitimacy as an international partner, and its capacity to act as an effective guarantor of funda-

mental rights (Ashraf, 2025; Marin et al., 2024; O’Flaherty, 2025).

These challenges translate into a set of specific risks, widely identified by research and international organisations and rights bodies such as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and UNHCR.

The first set of risks relates to the practical feasibility of implementation but extends well beyond it. A core risk is policy ineffectiveness, namely the inability of externalisation measures to deliver their stated objectives. Returns provide a clear illustration: despite decades of emphasis on “credible returns”, the EU’s effective return rate has remained structurally low, at 29% in the last quarter of 2025 (Eurostat, n.d.), and even lower towards several African countries - with particularly stark cases such as 4% to Senegal and 2% to Mali in recent years -, thus casting doubt on the capacity of restrictive externalisation to achieve the control objectives with which it is typically justified (Fernando-Gonzalo, 2023; Stutz, 2025; Villa, 2025).

The second set concerns risks linked to EU-third country relations and the increasingly transactional and conditional nature of externalisation, which may generate significant pressures and negative externalities in partner countries. The case of Mauritania illustrates how migration partnerships may be followed by intensified crackdowns and mass apprehensions, with reported abuses in detention and expulsions towards neighbouring borders, generating diplomatic tensions and domestic contestation (Bisong, 2025). A second risk is policy spillover: conditioning cooperation on migration control can distort other policy domains, including development and humanitarian assistance, undermining

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their effectiveness when subordinated to containment objectives (Pasetti & Lupi, 2025). Finally, externalisation increases the risk of instrumentalisation and political leverage by partner states, understood as the capacity of these actors to strategically use migration cooperation as a bargaining tool to extract concessions or exert pressure on the EU and its member states. The Ceuta case between Spain and Morocco (May 2021) shows how cooperation can be used to trigger sudden crises, exposing member states and the EU to coercive pressure and reverse conditionality (Cassarino, 2023).

The third set of risks relates to the domain of intra EU solidarity. Here, the key risk is a shift from responsibility sharing to responsibility shifting. The Pact's flexible solidarity framework, by allowing member states to substitute relocations with financial or operational contributions, may incentivise outsourcing solutions as the politically easiest option, thereby reinforcing reliance on third countries rather than consolidating shared internal governance (Milazzo, 2025; Mastrosanti, 2025). In practical terms, this may translate into resources being channelled outward towards migration control and containment, while the structural dilemmas of internal burden sharing remain unresolved, reproducing fragmentation and asymmetries among member states.

A fourth set of risks concerns the **erosion of protection standards and procedural safeguards for migrants**. The Pact's externalisation-related reforms, for instance through the expansion of the "safe third country" logic, can facilitate inadmissibility decisions and accelerate transfers with weaker guarantees. Related concerns include reduced access to effective remedies (including appeals), difficulties in securing interpretation and legal assistance, and heightened exposure to refoulement (direct

or "chain"), as well as unlawful expulsions and pushbacks (see, for instance, O'Flaherty, 2025). Moreover, deterrence-centred externalisation strategies may displace movements rather than reduce them, pushing migrants towards alternative and often more dangerous routes, thereby increasing exposure to violence, exploitation, and death, while also strengthening smuggling markets (Forin et al., 2025).

The final set of risks concerns the **role, legitimacy and accountability of EU institutions**. As externalisation interacts with implementation constraints, tensions in relations with third countries, and persistent weaknesses in intra-EU solidarity, it affects the EU's capacity to operate coherently across its different institutional functions. In particular, these risks relate to how the EU performs simultaneously as an international partner, as a framework for collective action among member states, and as a system tasked with ensuring compliance with fundamental rights.

These risks are further shaped and deepened by the **opacity and limited transparency** that characterise many externalisation arrangements. The increasing reliance on non-standard, informal or soft-law instruments often circumvents formal ratification procedures and parliamentary scrutiny, as illustrated by the EU-Tunisia Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership. However, also formally binding arrangements have also proven to constrain accountability: status agreements concluded by EU agencies (as Frontex) with third countries may in fact include immunity clauses that restrict judicial scrutiny and independent monitoring (Pasetti & Lupi, 2025). Similar concerns emerge with respect to EU funding, which has often been channelled without evaluation and audit, as documented in the case of EU support to border management in Morocco in the late 2000s (Gazzotti, 2021).

The increasing reliance on non standard, informal or soft law instruments often circumvents formal ratification procedures and parliamentary scrutiny.

Table 1. From challenges to risks in EU's restrictive MGE

Challenge domain	Core challenge	Main associated risks
Viability	Practical feasibility of policy implementation	Policy ineffectiveness (failure to achieve stated objectives)
External relations	Cooperation with non EU countries	Negative externalities in partner countries Policy spillover into other cooperation areas Instrumentalisation and political leverage by partner states Displacement of routes, increased danger, and strengthened smuggling markets
Intra EU relations	Solidarity and responsibility sharing among member states	Shift from responsibility sharing to responsibility shifting Fragmentation and asymmetries among member states
Migrants' protection and HR safeguard	Capacity to ensure protection standards and rights in practice	Erosion of safeguards Reduced access to remedies and legal assistance Exposure to refoulement, expulsions, and pushbacks Diversion towards more dangerous routes Stronger smuggling markets
EU institutions	Accountability and legitimacy of EU as global actor	Risks affecting the role, credibility, legitimacy, and accountability of EU institutions

Note. Elaborated by author.

Table 1 summarises the five main challenge domains discussed above and the key risks associated with each of them.

It is worth noting that these sets of challenges and risks are not discrete, but rather mutually reinforcing and cumulative. Taken together, they make restrictive MGE not merely a contentious policy option, but a structurally precarious mode of governance for the EU. In this sense, restrictive externalisation exposes the EU not only to operational shortcomings and political tensions, but also to more fundamental issues concerning its credibility,

legitimacy, accountability, and capacity to uphold the rights-based and rule-of-law principles that underpin the very nature and purpose of its institutions.

The Italian MGE model

Italy is placed at a central position in the European migration governance, and the central Mediterranean route has been one of the most widely used access point to the EU: between 2015 and 2025 almost 1 million arrivals by sea to Italy has been recorded (UNHCR, n.d.), and 971,111 asylum applications were pres-

In the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis – and in parallel with a growing concern over security and economic shifts following the Arab Springs – Italian externalisation focus shifted from cooperation on regular and irregular migration (mainly focused on returns) to border control and migration flows containment.

ented in the country, according to Eurostat 2025 data (Eurostat, n.d.). Within this context, externalisation has become a key element of migration governance. Developed during the 1990s, it has been constantly expanding both in quantitative and qualitative terms, with an increase in the number of countries involved in cooperation and a diversification of approaches, tools, and actors involved (Cutitta, 2018; Fontana & Rosina, 2024).

Initially, Italian MGE targeted neighbouring countries in North and Eastern Africa and combined a mixed approach that used visa/entry quotas conditionality as a reward for cooperation in return and readmission matters (Cassarino, 2010; Fontana & Rosina, 2024). However, in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis – and in parallel with a growing concern over security and economic shifts following the Arab Springs – Italian externalisation focus shifted from cooperation on regular and irregular migration (mainly focused on returns) to border control and migration flows containment.

Particularly from 2016 onwards, Italy has invested in bilateral cooperation with several countries in the Sahel area (i.e., Niger, Nigeria and Sudan) and West Africa (i.e., Ghana, Gambia, Ivory Coast) with the explicit aim of limiting mobility in the Sahel: 61% of externalisation tools implemented in sub-Saharan countries focus on preventing irregular departures (Fontana & Rosina, 2024; Spagnolo, 2019). That said, in terms of duration and degree of cooperation, as well as the resources involved, the core partners of Italian MGE remain Libya, Tunisia and – albeit to a lesser extent – Albania (Abbondanza, 2024; Ceccorulli & Danisi, 2025). An additional key feature of Italian MGE is the growing informalisation of the relationships with third countries. Most instruments used for border control

and prevention of irregular migration are currently governed by informal or semi-formal arrangements that escape both parliamentary scrutiny and public accountability (Frasca & Roman, 2023; Fontana & Rosina, 2024).

Memoranda of understanding between ministries or police forces, operational protocols between technical agencies, and political declarations have proliferated since 2010, and now form the backbone of cooperation with both Libya and Tunisia. Such informality is increasingly combined with the use of national and EU funds – allocated either directly to third states, or to private entities or international organisations operating within them – as an alternative to formal agreements or political dialogue, in line with broader EU trends (Tsourdi & Zardo, 2025; De Leo, 2025). Informality and conditionality are strictly connected with the myriad of state and non-state actors involved in the Italian MGE, from militias and paramilitary forces responsible for torture and human rights violations to international organisations whose presence in countries such as Libya and Tunisia has not effectively prevented such violations.

The above features – considering their historical evaluation, explicit and implicit priorities, domains, objectives, and instruments – allow us to frame the Italian model of MEG as essentially shaped by a security-oriented logic, in which the containment of mobility and the acceleration of return have represented the primary aims of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to the consistent detriment of a more comprehensive approach integrating development, protection, and the rights of migrants (O'Flaherty, 2025). In this picture, labour mobility governance has remained marginal in the last ten years, with little to no effort devoted to the establishment of an institutional frame-

work capable of matching labour market needs in Italy with employment opportunities for workers abroad: the «entry quota» system, devoted to govern labour mobility, has not been significantly reformed since the 2000s despite changes in migration flows, and is considered to be ineffective by several stakeholders, including employers organisations (Ponzo, 2025). Moreover, development aid funds – as those channelled through the Fund for Africa between 2017 and 2022 – have been increasingly redirected towards migration governance objectives.

The Italian MGE model after the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2023-2026)

In recent years, under the far-right government led by Giorgia Meloni, Italian MGE has entered a new phase in which well-established externalisation tools have been combined with new approaches. This phase has largely overlapped with the final negotiations and early implementation of the Pact, and the government has invoked the need to apply “EU law” to justify some of its newly developed strategies.

First, cooperation with Libya and Tunisia on border containment has consolidated and normalised through the construction and maintenance of the so-called SAR zones and the consistent support through training, vessels, and technical equipment, irrespective of their documented use in context of human rights violations (OHCHR, 2026). This consolidation has been largely aligned with EU policies, particularly in its emphasis on securitisation and conditionality (Zardo, 2022; De Leo, 2025).

EU financial instruments – including the EU Support to Border Management In-

stitutions in Libya and Tunisia and the consolidation of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM Libya) – have provided the institutional scaffolding for cooperation arrangements negotiated in Rome. From this perspective, it is likely that EU and national cooperation on border management will be further reinforced under the EU Pact, and that even the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management (Regulation (EU) 2024/1351, RAMM) solidarity funds will be invested by Italy in cooperation with third countries, in continuity with current border-management strategies.

Second, from 2023 onwards, the Italian government attempted to partially broaden cooperation with third countries along two pathways: the development of partnership with sub-Saharan states under the so-called Mattei Plan, presented as a way to “address the root causes” of migration; and the expansion of labour migration quotas for the 2023-2025 period. The Mattei Plan was inspired by a «whole of government» governance approach, attempting to link development, migration causes, and trade partnerships through the engagement of both private and public companies, thus showing, compared to previous development strategies, a more economic-development oriented commitment (Carbone & Ragazzi, 2024). This strategy seems to deviate from the purely securitarian approach mentioned above, and resonates, at least rhetorically, with the trend in EU external migration governance of blurring the boundaries between development cooperation and migration control (Tsourdi & Zardo, 2025; Cassarino, 2025). However, as of early 2026, the implementation of the Mattei Plan has fallen short of expectations: the structural factors most directly implicated in migratory pressures – above all youth unemployment and the absence of adequate labour market integration pathways – have remained largely unaddressed

Labour mobility governance has remained marginal in the last ten years, with little to no effort devoted to the establishment of an institutional framework capable of matching labour market needs in Italy with employment opportunities for workers abroad.

The cooperation with transit states, particularly Libya and Tunisia, on border management has remained the structural core of Italian externalisation and, despite the evidence of fundamental rights violations, it is unlikely that it will be abandoned during the future implementation of the EU Pact.

(Stocchiero, 2026). The quotas mechanism has also failed to increase legal entries and regular labour migration in Italy, while opening up new spaces for fraud and exploitation. In 2025, for instance, out of 181,450 quotas to allow for the legal entry of migrant workers, only 49,762 migrants entered Italy and only 14,490 finally obtained a working residence permit (Portghese et al., 2026).

The third and most innovative strand has concerned the externalisation or, more precisely, the extra-territorialisation of asylum and return policies through the protocol signed in 2023 with Albania. The deal allows Italy to establish detention centres on Albanian soil, where asylum and return procedures are carried out under Italian jurisdiction. This model departs significantly from the classic logic of externalisation: rather than fully delegating asylum or return procedures to a third country, it seeks to construct a legal fiction of equivalence between the procedures carried out in Albania and those carried out in Italy (De Leo & Celoria, 2025). Although the Italian Prime Minister presented the deal as an early implementation of the EU Pact, the model does not fully replicate the safe third country logic advanced in the APR. Nonetheless, it has paved the way for a new approach to externalisation that has significantly influenced the model developed in the new EU regulations, particularly in the Return Regulation (Ceccorulli & Danisi, 2025). Offshore asylum processing is currently suspended pending the assessment of the Court of Justice of the EU on the compatibility of extra-territorial procedures with EU law. However, the possibility of re-adapting the Albanian model in light of the Pact, by turning Albania into a safe third country or a “return hub”, where Italy transfers the jurisdiction and legal responsibility entirely to Albania, remains open.

Overall, the “new” tools experimented in Italy over the last three years have shown very different degrees of effectiveness. The Mattei Plan and the increase of legal migration via «quota» scheme, which might in principle have represented a different orientation in Italian migration policy, have been the most visible failures, largely due to weak implementation and bureaucratic constraints both at the consular level and in Italy itself (Bonizzoni et al., 2025). Nor can the “Albanian model”, as such, be considered effective: the extra-territorial asylum centres never became fully operational (only 36 asylum seekers were transferred before the Courts’ suspension of the deal) and are currently used as pre-removal detention centres (CPRs) managed by Italian authorities, at high costs and with no significant success in return rates (Rondi & Millona, 2025).

However, beyond its shortcomings and its possible incompatibility with EU law, the deal has functioned as a policy laboratory, acclaimed by several member states and serving as an important reference point for the concept of “return-hubs” in the new Return Regulation. Whether it will eventually be re-adapted (as a safe third country, a return hub, or some hybrid configuration) remains an open question, but its influence on the trajectory of European MGE, especially in relation to asylum and return, is already visible. Finally, the cooperation with transit states, particularly Libya and Tunisia, on border management has remained the structural core of Italian externalisation and, despite the evidence of fundamental rights violations, it is unlikely that it will be abandoned during the future implementation of the EU Pact.

The Spanish MGE model

Externalisation has constituted a core pillar of the Spanish migration governance

model since its inception, closely linked to Spain's geopolitical position as the EU's southern gateway. Located at the intersection of the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic migration routes, Spain also hosts the only land borders between Africa and the EU, in Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclaves on Moroccan territory. These sites concentrate migratory pressure, diplomatic sensitivity, and political attention far beyond their territorial size. As a result, migration governance has historically been framed in Spain not only as a domestic policy issue, but also as a strategic domain of external relations (Echeverría et al., 2024; Gabrielli, 2023a).

The landmark agreement signed with Morocco in 1992, which formalised cooperation on the return of migrants in an irregular situation, laid the foundations for Spain's MGE - at least on paper. In practice, however, the agreement took many years to be implemented, and returns of irregular migrants continued to be managed largely on a case-by-case basis (Arango & Martin, 2005; Gabrielli, 2023b; Tittel-Mosser, 2018). Nevertheless, its underlying logic informed the subsequent development of a broader network of bilateral agreements aimed at facilitating returns, which in the following years expanded to include Algeria (2002), Nigeria (2001, 2005), Guinea-Bissau (2003) and Mauritania (2003). Taken together, these instruments constituted the first layer of the Spanish MGE model, primarily oriented towards migration containment.

A second layer, which emerged slightly later, concerned broader frameworks for migration deterrence at origin and in transit. These arrangements marked a

qualitative leap by embedding migration objectives within wider foreign policy and development agreements (Echeverría et al., 2024). The first and most emblematic expression of this approach was the Africa Plan (2006-2008), adopted after the so-called cayuco crisis in the Canary Islands. The Plan covered countries along the West African route - including Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea and Cape Verde - and institutionalised a logic of conditionality whereby cooperation on migration containment was linked to development aid, foreign investment, and trade facilitation. This model was later replicated through Africa Plan II (2009-2012) and Africa Plan III (2020-2023), consolidating Spain's role as a pioneer of migration diplomacy within the EU.³

Over time, the Spanish model has displayed a strong degree of continuity, with externalisation remaining a defining feature despite changes in government. This trajectory was only temporarily interrupted by a partial downsizing of externalisation efforts following the 2008-2009 financial crisis. From 2018 onwards, renewed arrivals marked a new phase of re-engagement, with bilateral cooperation once again centred on Morocco and complemented by new arrangements (e.g., the agreement with Mauritania in 2020) and by the approval of the Third Africa Plan in 2019 (Echeverría et al. 2024).

This phase also marked a growing Europeanisation of Spanish externalisation efforts. Owing to its strategic position, Spain became a major recipient of EU funding. It is worth noting, however, that these funds were also mobilised to pursue objectives that sit uneasily with migration

Over time, the Spanish model has displayed a strong degree of continuity, with externalisation remaining a defining feature despite changes in government.

³ See Defensor del Pueblo (2021). For an overview of cooperation frameworks, see the website of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.exteriores.gob.es/>). Relevant documents include the Joint Declaration on Spanish-Senegalese Cooperation in the Fight against Irregular Migration, and the Memorandum of Understanding on Migration Management and Governance (2021).

containment, including initiatives to combat racism and xenophobia (Gabrielli, 2023b). This coexistence of divergent policy goals constitutes a defining feature of the Spanish migration governance model and has been described by Gazzotti et al. (2023) as an emblematic expression of the “neurotic politics” underpinning Spanish MGE.⁴

The Spanish MGE model after the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2024-2026)

The current stage of the Spanish MGE reinforces the traditional rationale of migration control and containment, while also expanding a set of complementary and partially alternative policy avenues.

On the control and containment side, and in line with the core orientations of the EU Pact, Spain has strengthened its action along the two layers identified above: readmission, and deterrence at origin and transit. These objectives lie at the heart of the National Implementation Plan approved in 2024 and of the subsequent Executive Strategy on asylum and migration. Beyond Pact-related measures, this orientation is also clearly reflected in the *Estrategia España-África 2025-2028*, which replaces the earlier *Africa Plans* and explicitly integrates migration control into Spain’s external action. The strategy reaffirms conditional cooperation with key partner countries such as Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia, embedding migration objectives within a broader diplomatic, security and development framework.

Within this architecture, Morocco remains the cornerstone of the Spanish MGE

model. Since 2024, cooperation has been further intensified through financial transfers, operational coordination and political alignment, with Spanish authorities repeatedly presenting the bilateral relationship as a model of effective external cooperation (Echeverría et al., 2024; Gabrielli, 2023b). At the same time, Spain has diversified its partnerships along the West African route, notably with Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia, while maintaining operational cooperation with Algeria. EU-backed initiatives with these countries have focused in particular on maritime surveillance, joint coordination mechanisms, and strengthened migration management capacities (Echeverría et al., 2024; Pasetti & Lupi 2025).

At the same time, Spain has expanded policy avenues that partially offset the externalisation logic. In this respect, three complementary directions can be identified. The first concerns the easing of regularisation pathways. This has been pursued through the reform of the Foreign Law Regulation (Royal Decree 1155/2024), which has streamlined access to residence and work permits and broadened pathways to regular status, as well as through the extraordinary regularisation process introduced by Royal Decree 316/2026, which at early June is still ongoing. Together, these measures constitute alternatives to a governance approach centred exclusively on returns, as highlighted in the literature (see for instance, Carrera et al., 2025).

The second direction concerns the strengthening of regular mobility channels. Spain has expanded circular migration schemes through new and renewed mobility agreements with Morocco and Sene-

⁴ Gazzotti et al. (2023) use “neurotic politics” to describe a contradictory mode of governance in which restrictive migration control coexists with inclusion and rights-oriented measures, generating persistent tensions and incoherence in policy design and implementation.

gal, as well as with several Latin American countries. In parallel, the 2024 reform of the GECCO programme (*Gestión Colectiva de Contrataciones en Origen*) has broadened both its geographical scope and its functional design, extending recruitment beyond strictly seasonal work and facilitating more stable forms of labour mobility. Although still quantitatively very modest when compared to investment in externalisation, these channels suggest a willingness to keep legal migration pathways open alongside containment-oriented measures.

The third direction relates to the reinforcement of the national reception system for international protection. Notwithstanding persistent deficiencies, particularly in the Canary Islands and in transit zones at air borders (Garcés-Masareñas & Pasetti, 2019), Spain has expanded its asylum reception infrastructure, strengthened procedural guarantees, and mainstreamed gender and child-protection perspectives across the system. The *Sistema de Acogida de Protección Internacional* (SAPI) has been enlarged in capacity and resources, alongside measures aimed at accelerating access to asylum procedures, improving the identification and protection of vulnerable persons, and reinforcing safeguards in detention and border procedures.

Overall, hence, the post-Pact Spanish migration governance appears to reinforce its dual and “neurotic” logic. On the one hand, migration containment through externalisation remains the dominant and organising rationale, fully consistent with the historical trajectory of the Spanish model. Cooperation with third countries, deterrence at origin and transit, and reliance on EU funding continue to underpin this approach, despite well-documented limitations in terms of policy viability, displacement towards more dangerous routes, the erosion of protection standards, and the heightened risks this entails for the safety and lives of

migrants (Gabrielli, 2023a; Gazzotti, 2021). On the other hand, this containment-oriented approach has been recently complemented by a set of alternative and partially countervailing policy avenues, including eased regularisation pathways, a strengthening of legal and circular migration channels, and an expansion of reception and protection capacities. Despite their significance should not be overstated, due to their ad hoc character (e.g., extraordinary regularisation) and/or limited scale and impact (e.g., work-related pathways), these alternatives represent significant and meaningful changes compared to the Italian case.

Discussion and policy recommendations

The comparison between Italy and Spain provides a useful analytical lens through which to reflect on the restrictive externalising turn in EU migration governance under the Pact on Migration and Asylum. First, it helps identify the main challenges and risks that these EU-southern border countries are likely to face as key implementers of externalised governance. These include implementation hurdles and the limited capacity to ensure adequate protection standards and procedural safeguards for people arriving at their borders and/or applying for asylum in their territory; potential retaliation, and (more or less (violent) forms of political leverage by partner countries, which may instrumentalise migration for strategic purposes, as well as the broader risks associated with a system of flexible solidarity that may (still) shift onto them the primary responsibility for reception and processing.

The similarities regarding the kind of challenges and are rooted in the broadly analogous trajectories of migration governance

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in the two countries. Since the 1990s, both Italy and Spain have relied on cooperation with origin and transit countries as a core instrument of migration governance, using externalisation primarily to contain arrivals and facilitate returns through transactional arrangements combining border control, financial support, development cooperation, diplomatic concessions, and selective mobility opportunities. While partner countries differ according to route-specific geographies - Libya, Tunisia, and Niger in the Italian case; Morocco, Mauritania, and Senegal in the Spanish one - the underlying logic remains largely the same.

At the same time, however, the comparison is equally useful in highlighting key differences between the two countries, particularly with regard to their migration governance approaches during the most recent Pact implementation (2024-2026). This constitutes the second central dimension of the analysis.

On the one hand, Italy has moved to the forefront of the Pact's most restrictive developments, especially in relation to the externalisation of asylum. The Albania deal is emblematic in this respect. As discussed in Section 3, even if it does not fully replicate the Pact's safe third-country or return-hub model in strict legal and operational terms, its political and symbolic impact has been considerable. The agreement has contributed to normalising the idea that asylum procedures can be displaced beyond EU territory and has helped legitimise broader EU debates on return hubs and the expanded use of safe third-country logics. Taken together with strengthened cooperation with Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, this trajectory positions Italy not merely as an implementer of restrictive externalisation, but as an actor actively pushing the EU agenda further in that direction, suggesting a higher degree of exposure to the challenges and risks identified in this analysis.

On the other hand, Spain illustrates the existence of partial alternatives within this increasingly restrictive framework. While externalisation remains a core pillar of Spanish migration governance, in the post-Pact phase it has been combined with expanded regularisation pathways, stronger legal and circular labour mobility instruments, and investments in reception and protection systems. This does not make the Spanish model non-restrictive, nor does it eliminate the significant problems associated with its externalisation practices. However, it shows that policy options remain available beyond - or at least alongside - restrictive externalisation (as illustrated by the contrast between regularisation programmes and return-hub approaches), and that securitisation does not need to exhaust the scope of policy options.

In a political context in which restrictiveness increasingly functions as the default migration policy, this is arguably the most relevant finding for policy-oriented reasoning. More specifically, it suggests that Spain - at least *prima facie*, pending the full implementation of the Pact - appears to be exposed to the challenges and risks of migration governance externalisation to a lesser extent than Italy. More broadly, it indicates that a compromise between migration control, labour mobility, and justice-oriented approaches - addressed by other contributions in this Joint Policy Study - may still be achievable.

Finally, the comparative insights developed in this section provide an empirical basis for leveraging the findings of the literature into broader policy recommendations and for reflecting on the future trajectory of EU migration governance externalisation under the Pact framework.

1. Making policy viability and fundamental rights a binding precondition for externalisation

While externalisation remains a core pillar of Spanish migration governance, in the post-Pact phase it has been combined with expanded regularisation pathways, stronger legal and circular labour mobility instruments, and investments in reception and protection systems.

A first priority concerns the practical feasibility of policy implementation, which emerges as a central constraint affecting both effectiveness and legitimacy. Externalisation should therefore be grounded in a viability-by-design approach requiring a systematic verification of administrative capacity, coordination mechanisms, monitoring systems, and resource availability before implementation. This implies the operationalisation of common EU standards, clear milestones, transparent decision-making processes, and supported by independent audits in order to avoid the consolidation of ad hoc and weakly structured arrangements. In parallel, measures that displace or accelerate asylum or return procedures beyond EU territory should be subject to an ex-ante feasibility and fundamental-rights impact assessments. These assessments should function as a condition for implementation and scaling-up, with clear compliance benchmarks under EU law and systematic involvement of the European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), enabling the Commission to halt or redesign measures that increase rights risks. In this perspective, strengthening EU-based processing capacity, particularly in asylum and reception systems, should be prioritised over border-shifting solutions that structurally weaken oversight. This prioritisation improves legal certainty and administrative effectiveness while reducing incentives to outsource governance functions in ways that raise viability and accountability risks. Finally, improving policy viability requires consolidating reception, integration, and, where relevant, regularisation mechanisms as structural components of migration governance. As illustrated by the Spanish case, these instruments can contribute to stabilising migration systems and reducing pressure on re-

turn-based approaches, provided that they are adequately resourced and coherently implemented.

2. Rebalancing cooperation with third countries towards sustainable and reciprocal frameworks

A second set of recommendations addresses the challenge of cooperation with non-EU countries, which remains central to externalisation but often relies on fragile, short-term, and asymmetric arrangements. To reduce these vulnerabilities, EU external action should move beyond deterrence-driven and transactional approaches and towards long-term cooperation frameworks centred on skills development, labour mobility, and institutional capacity-building. In addition, MGE should systematically incorporate mechanisms for mitigating negative externalities. This includes assessing and addressing the impacts of cooperation on detention practices, internal displacement, and political instability in partner countries, as well as ensuring that corrective measures are embedded within cooperation frameworks. A key element of this rebalancing concerns the need to scale up legal mobility pathways as integral components of external migration governance. While existing instruments such as Talent Partnerships illustrate the potential for a more balanced approach, their impact remains limited as long as they are treated as marginal or complementary tools. Finally, a more structural decoupling of development and humanitarian cooperation from migration-control conditionality is necessary to prevent policy spillovers and ensure that external action remains coherent with broader EU objectives. While current EU frameworks increasingly legitimise conditionality, the analysis developed in this chapter suggests that its expansion risks undermining both policy effectiveness and long-term cooperation.

Externalisation should therefore be grounded in a viability-by-design approach requiring a systematic verification of administrative capacity, coordination mechanisms, monitoring systems, and resource availability before implementation.

3. Reasserting internal solidarity as a non-substitutable component of EU migration governance

A third priority concerns solidarity and responsibility-sharing among member states, which the chapter identifies as a structural weakness of the current EU migration governance framework and a key driver of externalisation. To counter this dynamic, EU governance should move towards the establishment of a non-substitutable baseline of internal solidarity. This would require limiting the extent to which member states can replace relocation or internal measures with financial contributions or externalised actions, thereby preventing the systematic shift from responsibility-sharing to responsibility-shifting. In parallel, strengthening transparency on the practical effects of solidarity mechanisms is crucial. Publishing detailed and disaggregated information on how different forms of contribution affect reception and processing capacities would help make trade-offs more visible and reduce the incentives for symbolic or minimal compliance. Ensuring the effectiveness of such a system also depends on reinforcing EU-level monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, particularly in relation to asymmetric implementation patterns. Without stronger oversight, there is a significant risk that restrictive measures advance more rapidly than solidarity-based ones, further entrenching governance imbalances.

4. Strengthening protection standards and ensuring enforceability across externalised contexts

A fourth set of recommendations addresses the challenge of ensuring protection standards and rights in practice, which, as shown in the chapter, is particularly exposed to systemic risks under restrictive externalisation. In this regard, the use of safe third-country and third-country return concepts should be strictly constrained and li-

mitted to cases where effective protection is guaranteed not only formally, but also in practice. This requires the establishment of clear and enforceable criteria, combined with effective judicial scrutiny. More broadly, all externalisation instruments - including informal and funding-based arrangements - should systematically integrate binding fundamental-rights clauses with operational enforcement mechanisms, including the possibility of automatic suspension in cases of non-compliance. A central issue concerns access to justice. MGE should not lead to accountability gaps, and therefore legal responsibility chains must be clarified to ensure that individuals affected by decisions taken in externalised contexts retain effective access to judicial remedies, including in relation to administrative decisions on asylum admissibility and return. Finally, protection requires the establishment of independent and continuous monitoring systems capable of operating across the full implementation chain, including in extraterritorial settings. Such mechanisms are essential not only for identifying violations, but also for informing policy adjustment, suspension, and/or redesign.

5. Reaffirming the EU's accountability and legitimacy as a global actor

As externalisation extends into the core of the asylum domain, the EU faces growing tensions between its strategic objectives and its commitment to fundamental rights. Addressing these tensions requires reinforcing accountability across all forms of MGE, including informal and non-standard arrangements that often escape scrutiny. In this regard, strengthening parliamentary oversight, judicial control, and transparency is essential to prevent accountability gaps and to ensure that external action remains subject to democratic and legal constraints. Greater visibility over agreements, funding, and implementation practices is a necessary condition

Strengthening parliamentary oversight, judicial control, and transparency is essential to prevent accountability gaps and to ensure that external action remains subject to democratic and legal constraints.

for preserving institutional credibility. Accountability must also be ensured at the operational level. This entails, as aforementioned, reinforcing independent monitoring and complaint mechanisms, particularly in relation to the activities of EU agencies beyond EU territory. Finally, as externalisation involves multiple actors and layers of governance, it is crucial to clarify responsibility chains across EU institutions, agencies, and member states.

Ultimately, reinforcing accountability is not only a matter of institutional design, but also of normative consistency. The credibility

of the EU as a global actor depends on its ability to ensure that its external action remains aligned with the principles it promotes internationally. In this sense, addressing the accountability implications of externalisation is a precondition for preserving the EU's legitimacy and effectiveness in migration governance.

Table 2 provides a synthetic overview of the possible avenues for intervention by linking the five main challenge domains of restrictive MGE and their associated risks to a set of corresponding policy recommendations.

Table 2. From challenges to risks in EU's restrictive MGE

Challenge domain	Core challenge	Main associated risks	Policy recommendations
Viability	Practical feasibility of policy implementation	Policy ineffectiveness and failure to meet stated objectives	Apply a viability-by-design approach before externalisation Conduct ex-ante feasibility and fundamental-rights impact assessments Prioritise EU-based processing where feasible Strengthen reception, integration, and regularisation pathways
External relations	Cooperation with non EU countries	Negative externalities in partner countries. Spillover effects across wider areas of cooperation. Political instrumentalisation and leverage by partner states	Establish long-term cooperation frameworks Include externality-mitigation clauses as a standard feature of partnerships Expand legal mobility through EU-level instruments Decouple development cooperation and assistance from migration-control conditionality
Intra EU relations	Solidarity and responsibility sharing among member states	Shift from responsibility sharing to responsibility shifting Fragmentation and asymmetries among member states	Maintain a non-substitutable baseline of internal solidarity Increase transparency on the practical delivery of solidarity measures Strengthen EU monitoring and enforcement to prevent asymmetric implementation
Migrants' protection and HR safeguard	Capacity to ensure protection standards and rights in practice	Erosion of procedural and substantive safeguards Reduced access to remedies and legal assistance	Narrow the use of safe-third-country and third-country-return concepts Embed binding fundamental-rights clauses with automatic suspension mechanisms across

		Exposure to refoulement, expulsions, and pushbacks Diversion towards more dangerous routes. Expansion of smuggling markets	cooperation instruments Guarantee effective access to judicial remedies in externalised contexts Institutionalise independent and continuous rights monitoring throughout implementation
EU institutions	Accountability and legitimacy of EU as global actor	Risks affecting the role, credibility, legitimacy, and accountability of EU institutions	Strengthen parliamentary oversight, judicial control, and transparency Clarify institutional responsibility across all EU actors involved in externalisation

Note. Elaborated by author.

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EU-Maghreb Talent Partnerships: A Precarious Relationship or a Way towards Rights-based Migration?

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Introduction

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission unveiled the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, alongside a Communication and a Roadmap for implementation. Presented as a “new paradigm based on comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit to the EU is being developed,” the aim of the Pact is to embed migration in international partnerships to prevent irregular departures and loss of life, fight migrant smuggling, reinforce co-operation on readmission, and promote legal pathways (European Commission, 2024). As such, and particularly focusing on legal pathways, Talent Partnerships (TPs) were launched in 2021 (European Commission, 2021). They represent a major attempt by the European Union (EU) to build a more structured framework for labour migration cooperation with third countries.

Conceived at the intersection of three politically urgent agendas - EU demographic decline, partner-country youth unemployment, and irregular migration management - TPs promise to deliver what the Commission has termed a “mutually beneficial” framework linking skills development, legal mobility, and development cooperation. As of 2026, five partnerships had been formally launched with Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt⁵ in the Southern Neighbourhood, and with Bangladesh and Pakistan in South Asia. In the North African cases, the partnerships have progressed beyond initial launch roundtables, with Tunisia’s roadmap endorsed in 2025, Morocco’s priority sectors identified in 2024, and a technical workshop held in 2024 to advance cooperation with Egypt (European Commission, 2025).

This paper focuses on TPs between EU member states and North African partner

countries. It seeks to understand the tensions between labour mobility schemes and border control priorities by investigating the contradictions between domestic labour shortages, the outsourcing of temporary labour, and the commitment to rights-based mobility under the Pact. It asks: under what conditions do TPs function as rights-enhancing mobility schemes, and under what conditions do they reproduce and formalise labour precarity? To answer this question, this chapter uses a qualitative comparative approach. While it is too early to fully assess their effects on labour mobility, the objective is to identify the design conditions that determine whether TPs can work as “win-win” schemes or whether they extend prior patterns of precarity into a new institutional setup.

The chapter argues that whether TPs achieve a rights-based approach or reproduce a formalised precarity is contingent on several factors: whether sectors reflect mutual labour-market needs between sending and receiving country, whether workers are treated as agents rather than undifferentiated beneficiaries, and whether mobility is decoupled from return and readmission conditionality. In cases where these conditions are absent, TPs risk reproducing precarity when mobility remains temporary, narrow, and weakly embedded in rights enforcement especially for workers in already precarious sectors. The chapter thereby contributes to the broader Joint Policy Study’s central debate on whether the emerging Pact(s) architecture fosters policy alignment across security, labour mobility, and demographic sustainability, or institutionalises their fragmentation. Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt represent different versions of these tensions.

Methodologically, the chapter offers a critical policy analysis of TPs. It draws on

⁵ TP with Egypt is relatively less well documented than Morocco/Tunisia, and levels of implementation remain opaque.

empirical material including primary EU and member state policy documents, including the Pact and Talent Partnership Communication and Roadmaps;⁶ international organisations reports as well as evaluations of the Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa (THAMM) programme and the Pilot Project Addressing Labour Shortages Through Innovative Labour Migration Models (PALIM) alongside national labour statistics from the *Haut-Commissariat au Plan* (HCP) in Morocco, the *Institut National de la Statistique* (INS) in Tunisia, and the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) in Egypt; and secondary academic literature on EU mobility partnerships and temporary migration. The three North African cases are read comparatively with attention to how sectoral priorities, labour-market conditions, mobility-control logics, and readmission processes unfold across each context. Additionally, the analysis draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in May 2026 with representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the European Commission.

Unpacking the “win-win”: sectoral divergences and the politics of priority-setting

A typology of labour mobility schemes

TPs can be situated within a longer and wider EU engagement with its Mediter-

anean neighbours on governing external migration. Notably, the 2020 New Pact on Migration and Asylum seeks to deepen the linkages between migration management, development, and cooperation with countries of origin in the Southern Neighbourhood, building on prior frameworks such as the 2015 European Agenda on Migration and Mobility Partnerships with Morocco and Tunisia. In the New Pact, TPs sit under the objective of promoting legal pathways, alongside other priorities such as cooperation on readmission and returns, and anti-smuggling measures within the Pact's broader aim of “embedding migration in international partnerships” (European Commission, 2024). In this context, TPs are presented by the Commission as instruments that both “boost labour mobility” and “contribute to wider migration management” through cooperation with third countries (European Commission, 2025). As such, TPs are not only labour mobility schemes but are also part of broader governance of migration, under the Pact framework, a positioning that is echoed in the more recent 2025 Pact for the Mediterranean's agenda on skills, mobility, migration management and regional cooperation (Stanicek, 2025).

The Commission presents TPs as a structured framework for cooperation which can be grouped into four areas: (1) skills development and vocational training in partner countries; (2) legal mobility pathways for workers and students; (3) qualifications recognition and skills validation; and (4) support for integration and reintegration across the migratory cycle (European Commission, 2025). TPs propose a new set of mobility schemes for workers or students combined with related investments in capacity-building in partner countries as a way to help attract talent

⁶ The full texts of the Talent Partnership Roadmaps with Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt are not publicly available. The chapter instead is based on existing communications and published briefs.

to Europe and foster deeper cooperation on migration with third countries (Hooper, 2021). Notably, they draw on the Global Skill Partnership (GSP) model, a proposal to link skills formation and skilled migration through ex ante public-private agreements that create dual tracks: a domestic track training workers to remain in the country of origin, and a migration track training workers explicitly for employment abroad (Di Salvo, 2022; Clemens, 2015). Because of their scope and breadth, TPs can be seen as quite ambitious programmes that seek to move beyond existing bilateral agreements on labour mobility - although their implementation remains dependent on the political will and labour market needs of individual member states (Schneider, 2021).

The GSP has been acknowledged as a primary reference model for the European Commission in designing legal pathways, linking skills to mobility (Di Salvo, 2022: 14). Many predecessors exist for this model. As Di Salvo (2022) documents, their conceptual lineage runs through the EU's Mobility Partnerships (from 2008), the 2017 pilot projects on legal migration, the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), and the THAMM programme. The assessment of these initiatives coalesces around a fundamental question, namely whether mobility frameworks benefit labour markets in a rights-based way that is effectively a "win-win" or do they institutionalise a form of managed precarity that is focused on selecting workers for destinations where labour demand is high but where their rights protections are contingent on employer cooperation or even political will?

The outcomes of international labour mobility are not uniform. The literature distinguishes four possible results of skills mobility for origin countries and workers (Kone & Ozden, 2017; Kelegama & Weer-

aratne, 2016: 212; Sumption, 2013). Brain drain refers to the net loss of human capital when skilled workers emigrate and do not return, depleting the origin country's productive capacity (Kone & Ozden, 2017: 10). This creates a win-lose outcome where destination countries gain at origin countries' expense particularly if this exacerbates labour and skills shortages. Brain gain describes the scenario where migration creates incentives for skills acquisition in the origin country, ultimately increasing human capital even accounting for emigration (Kone & Ozden, 2017: 12). Brain circulation refers to a continuous, repeated movement of workers between countries in which knowledge and skills transfer in both directions, generating development benefits on both sides (Kone & Ozden, 2017: 14). Brain waste, by contrast, occurs when migrant workers are placed in jobs below their qualification level through poor skills recognition or restricted labour market access. Migrants may lose out, perhaps by working in jobs below their skill levels either because of exploitation or due to a poor recognition of qualifications. This can result in deskilling and underutilisation of human capital (ILO, 2023).

These outcomes are not equally likely under all mobility schemes. Which outcome materialises depends on specific structural conditions in the design of the scheme. The sections that follow use this framework to assess which of these outcomes are more likely to be produced by TPs with Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, focusing in particular on sectoral divergence, labour segmentation, circularity, and reabsorption at the end of the mobility cycle. The three North African states share features that make them comparable. This includes high youth and graduate unemployment, long-standing emigration corridors to specific EU member states such as France, Spain and Italy, and prior

Morocco and Tunisia are part of a long-standing and predominantly European corridor, shaped by colonial ties and post-war recruitment, whereas Egyptian labour migration has historically been oriented towards the Gulf with Europe being a secondary and more recent destination.

involvement in the THAMM programme. At the same time, they also diverge. First, they sit on different migration pathways. Morocco and Tunisia are part of a long-standing and predominantly European corridor, shaped by colonial ties and post-war recruitment, whereas Egyptian labour migration has historically been oriented towards the Gulf with Europe being a secondary and more recent destination (Migration Data Portal, n.d.). Second, they enter TPs with different levels of existing bilateral cooperation on labour mobility with EU member states. Morocco and Tunisia have long-standing and institutionalised arrangements, including Morocco's *Gestión Colectiva de Contrataciones en Origen* (GECCO) scheme with Spain and seasonal agreements with France for example (European Migration Network, 2021a, 2021b). Finally, their domestic labour-market structures are made up of different reabsorption capacities. Morocco combines a services and agriculture dominated economy with persistent brain drain pressures on tertiary educated nationals; Tunisia has a comparatively larger industrial employment base, closer sectoral overlap with EU shortage sectors but also a higher emigration intent in the region; while for Egypt, there is an overproduction of post-secondary graduates relative to absorption capacity alongside a declining public-sector employer of last resort (OECD, 2024b; OECD, 2022; Barsoum & Abdalla, 2020; see section 3). Together, the three cases point to distinct ways in which TPs risk reproducing rather than resolving the tensions between legal pathways and securitised migration control.

Drawing on these elements, and across the cases, the subsequent analysis un-

packs the “win-win” narrative and proposes a worker-centric analysis that assesses (i) the potential of labour segmentation, (ii) circular migration and the risks of securitisation, and (iii) the challenges of re-absorption at the end of the mobility cycle.

Sectoral divergences between EU labour shortages and domestic employment

The 2023-2025 roundtables with Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt have produced Talent Partnership Roadmaps identifying mutually agreed sectors of common interest (European Commission, 2025). For Morocco these include mechatronics, lorry drivers, construction, agriculture and tourism. Tunisia's roadmap covers information and communication technology (ICT), tourism, transport and logistics, construction, agriculture, and electrical and metallurgic industry. Egypt's covers ICT, construction, tourism, agriculture, transportation, and energy. These sectoral choices reflect EU labour shortage data but also the priorities of specific member states, notably Germany, Belgium, and France, which have been most active in implementing pilot schemes under THAMM (European Migration Network, 2021a).⁷ Mobility schemes have been criticised for reflecting the political priorities and labour market needs of destination countries, often overshadowing the priorities and labour market profile of the third countries (Hooper, 2021). While TP sector selection reflects some domestic complementarities in terms of sectoral priorities, they also reflect a strong orientation towards matching European shortages in transport, construction, tourism, ICT, and industrial trades. The challenge, however,

Mobility schemes have been criticised for reflecting the political priorities and labour market needs of destination countries, often overshadowing the priorities and labour market profile of the third countries.

⁷ THAMM was implemented mainly from 2019 to 2023 in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia by the ILO, IOM, and partners. It aimed to improve labour migration governance, protect migrant workers, and expand safe, regular, mutually beneficial mobility. Its “holistic” approach linked policy reform, skills recognition, labour-market data, job placement, and cooperation between governments, social partners, and non-state actors.

is also that sectors, such as tourism, transport, and ICT, are central to the development strategies and employment needs of North African states (Interview with ILO THAMM Coordinator, May 2026).

Across EU economies, shortages are concentrated in a mix of low-, medium-, and selected high-skilled sectors, notably construction, hospitality, transport and logistics, agriculture, healthcare, and parts of ICT (European Labour Authority, 2025).⁸ Shortages can be explained by a mix of factors including demographic, training, and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic all of which impact sectors differently. For example, demographic⁹ changes and the shrinking working-age population are likely to further exacerbate pressures on social security systems, increasing the need for younger workers to fill the gaps in the care sector (European Labour Authority, 2025). Simultaneously, given Europe's Digital Decade targets regarding the digital transition, which aim for at least 20 million ICT specialists by 2030, it is unsurprising that the demand for such occupations outpaces the supply in a number of countries in Europe (Eurostat, 2025a). Further entrenched by the COVID-19 pandemic, shortages in transportation are mostly due to demographic changes, unattractive working conditions, and mismatches between available skills and job requirements

(EURES, 2024). Meanwhile the digital and green transitions are encouraging automation with service diversification across sectors reshaping the demand for broader interpersonal skills and ICT in particular (Di Salvo, 2022).

North African countries are also going through phases of demographic transition, albeit not at the same pace and with the same consequences, due to their substantive differences in terms of population size.¹⁰ The COVID-19 impact on North Africa has been particularly harsh and has aggravated employment situations, particularly for the most vulnerable, although employment, labour force participation, and unemployment recovered through mid-2021 (Krafft et al., 2022). In terms of sectoral distribution, employment remains primarily concentrated in agriculture and fishing, services, and industry. In 2025, in Morocco, the services sector employed 49.7% of people, followed closely by agricultural work at 25.5% while industry was at 12.8% and construction at 12% (HCP, 2025a). The agricultural sector has also witnessed a drop of 41,000 jobs, which could be explained by the negative effect of drought and longer-term rural economic pressures. Tunisia presents a fairly similar picture whereby the services sector employs 54% of the workforce, followed by manufacturing at 20%, and agriculture at 14%

⁸ The shortage occupations most relevant to the Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt Talent Partnership roadmaps are sector-specific positions in transport, construction, tourism and selected technical fields: shortages were reported in 21 countries for heavy truck and lorry drivers, 22 for building and related electricians, 23 for welders and flame cutters, 17 for waiters, 22 for cooks, and 15 for software developers (EURES, 2024).

⁹ Demographic shifts and their intertwinement with labour-market transitions are further discussed in Chapter 4 (Shared Prosperity for All Generations?) of this volume.

¹⁰ Demographic transition differs from the EU's ageing population and labour-shortage context. While North African states are also experiencing falling fertility rates and rising life expectancy, the population remains comparatively young. Despite access to education increased at a faster rate than in other regions, the proportion of youth NEET (not in employment, education or training) is estimated at 31.0%, with rates higher among young women than young men (Stoevska, 2025). By 2050, the old-age dependency ratio is expected to more than double, with expected but uncertain disruptions to labour markets caused by the digital and climate transitions (Morgandi et al., 2025).

(INS, 2025). Meanwhile in 2024, in Egypt, agriculture and fishing remained the largest employment sectors (18.7%) followed by retail trade (15.5%), and manufacturing (13.2%) (CAPMAS, 2025).

Considering Tunisia's relatively larger industrial employment base, in comparison to Morocco for example, there is somewhat more overlap with the EU more technical shortage sectors such as metallurgy, electrics, and technical pathways.¹¹ Yet, the services sector still dominates employment while graduate unemployment remains high in all three cases. In 2024, the unemployment rates, at 13.3%, 15.3%, and 6.6% for Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, signal a wider structural mismatch between training and educational outputs and domestic labour market absorption that mobility schemes alone cannot resolve (Reuters, 2025; World Bank, n.d.; Ahram Online, 2026). Without a full consideration of which markets these trainees and returnees are supposed to fill, TPs although complementary run the risk of reproducing existing dynamics of young unemployed graduates.

This is even more accentuated considering the durability of current sectoral priorities in the context of the green and digital transitions. Di Salvo (2022) notes that the twin transition is likely to produce heterogeneous effects across the skill spectrum, with low-skilled workers in Southern Mediterranean countries among those most exposed to reallocation and displacement. Between 2008 and 2018, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Southern Mediterranean countries increased by 17.8%, driven particularly by transportation (+47.8%) and construction (+40.2%) (Di Salvo, 2022: 29). These are sectors under-

going significant structural transformation under decarbonisation pressures, such that the skills being developed and transferred today may become obsolete or require significant upgrading/upskilling within the same decade. With the green and digital transitions looming in the region, it is important to consider whether sectoral choices in the roadmaps with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt are sufficiently forward-looking to generate durable developmental gains domestically, or whether they will temporarily serve current EU shortage needs without adequate investment in the social and economic ecosystems that would make those benefits sustainable for origin countries as well.

This does not only have implications for the development trajectories of sending countries, but they also shape the labour market conditions and rights protections available to individual workers both at destination and upon their return. Coupled with the risks of circular migration, border control logics, and precarity, labour shortages and sectoral priorities however only represent a small part of the picture.

What divergences mean for workers and countries of origin

Labour segmentation and precarity

The European Commission presents TPs as a framework to boost international labour mobility “at all skills levels” in a “mutually

With the green and digital transitions looming in the region, it is important to consider whether sectoral choices in the roadmaps with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt are sufficiently forward-looking to generate durable developmental gains domestically.

¹¹ It is difficult to fully assess the match between sectoral priorities and labour shortages vs. domestic labour markets. The three North African states mostly publish data by sectors (i.e., agriculture, services, industry, etc.). Due to this classification, tourism and ICT can be folded into services while technical trades such as metallurgic work can be accounted for in the industry category.

beneficial" way, including through vocational training, qualifications recognition, fair recruitment, monitoring working conditions, and reintegration support (European Commission, 2025). A central question raised here is whether widening legal pathways also improves the terms on which workers are incorporated into destination labour markets.

The precariat is defined by the absence of labour security across several dimensions: employment, work, skill reproduction, income, and representation (Standing, 2014). In the EU, precarious work exhibits key features across member states relating to the stability of contract, the type of work contracts such as temporary contracts, poor or lack of access to social security, low salary and income security, underemployment and low employability, and training opportunities (Letourneux, 2012). Sectors directly connected to the North African TPs differ in levels of regulation enforcement, informality, seasonality, and employer dependency. Migrant workers in critical sectors such as transport, agriculture, hospitality and construction are often among the most weakly protected and the most vulnerable in European labour markets. Additionally, Eurostat data shows that non-EU citizens face weaker labour-market outcomes than EU nationals with 22.5% of non-EU citizens holding fixed-term contracts (in comparison to 10.9% of nationals) (Eurostat, 2024). Migrant workers were also more likely to be overqualified than EU nationals for their job with rates standing at 39.4% and 20.8% respectively (Eurostat, 2025b).

Previous mobility schemes have encouraged the exchange of graduate students to receive formal training and have their skills recognised upon their return. Pilot Project

Addressing Labour Shortages Through Innovative Labour Migration Models (PALIM), implemented between Belgium and Morocco, was designed to respond to labour market needs in the ICT sector while developing the professional skills of young Moroccan graduates. Under the programme, 120 Moroccan students received seven-months intensive training course in ICT, a sector where the Belgian Flemish region faced shortages since 2017 (Global Skill Partnerships, 2022). Participants were subsequently offered employment matches with companies in both Belgium and Morocco. PALIM is closer to the developmental logic developed in TPs whereby mobility is linked to training, skills acquisition, and some prospects of professional recognition.

By contrast, labour shortages have also been dealt with through a long pattern of circular migration designed around repeated recruitment and entrenched precarity. The decades-long Spanish-Moroccan GECCO programme, a bilateral circular migration scheme that predates TPs, examined further in Chapter 2 of this volume, is illustrative of this. Women generally tend to return to the Huelva farms year after year, on seasonal contracts (European Migration Network, 2021b). Workers are critical to the collection campaigns, yet there is no skills recognition process¹² since matchmaking is relatively easy as workers repeatedly come back with the same employer (European Migration Network, 2021b). Similarly, Italy's quota system reserved places for non-seasonal jobs in construction and tourism-hotel sectors for specific nationalities (European Migration Network, 2021b). The COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the abusive practices and harsh working and living conditions of seasonal workers (Augère-Granier, 2021).¹³ While these sit outside

Migrant workers in critical sectors such as transport, agriculture, hospitality and construction are often among the most weakly protected and the most vulnerable in European labour markets.

¹² In 2022, Women as Financially Independent Rural Actors (WAFIRA) was launched, seeking to address the reintegration of Moroccan women, via business skills and entrepreneurship development training, in seasonal agricultural work in Huelva under GECCO (Migration Partnership Facility, 2022).

the formal TP framework, they nonetheless represent the bilateral structure onto which TPs are being grafted as they are expected to “go hand in hand with comprehensive migration management including in particular on effective cooperation on readmission” (European Commission, 2023: 15). The normalisation of labour dynamics within migration governance raises the question of whether the new framework will meaningfully change the conditions of workers in these sectors or if TPs will simply formalise existing arrangements.

TPs seek to target all skills levels. The widening of the term “talent” to encompass workers at all skill levels can be understood as a deliberate rhetorical move to distinguish the initiative from Blue Card-style elite mobility schemes and to signal relevance to sectors such as construction, agriculture, logistics, and tourism, where shortages are most acute in EU member states (Solidar, 2021). Yet, existing programmes like PALIM and THAMM have favoured medium to high skilled workers. While the sectoral and skills composition remains to be seen in the application of TPs, the widening of the term talent risks flattening different forms of mobility into a single policy narrative. In their framing, workers seem to be presented as a homogenous category that is only differentiated by sector. However, sectors themselves present different concentrations of precarity with varying levels of protection, recognition, and job security. The construction and transport sectors for example have varying levels of vulnerability to them in terms of workers’ rights, permits, and salary in comparison to ICT-related pathways, which are more

likely include formal training and clearer professional recognition.

Among sectors as well, a gender lens is essential for assessing labour segmentation particularly with regards to precarity. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2017: 22), almost half of women and 39% of men aged 20-24 years old work in precarious jobs, with the share of people decreasing with age. Migrant women may be further disadvantaged due to their background, and they may also face gender-based discrimination. Once “talent” is widened to include all skill levels, the central issue becomes whether this produces meaningful labour-market inclusion or channels workers into already segmented sectors under unequal conditions.

Circular migration and migration control

At the soft launch of the TPs in 2021, circular migration, the model where participants return to their country of origin after a defined period of work or training in the destination country, was presented as one way to address concerns about brain drain while responding to labour shortages in destination countries. While not addressed as directly, pilot projects for TPs all provided temporary mobility schemes of limited duration, generally lasting from six months to a year, after which participants subsequently returned to their origin country (Solidar, 2021). With circular migration arrangements, migrants can fill labour market needs in destination countries and reap the economic benefits temporarily, without com-

The construction and transport sectors for example have varying levels of vulnerability to them in terms of workers’ rights, permits, and salary in comparison to ICT-related pathways, which are more likely include formal training and clearer professional recognition.

¹³ The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the protection of seasonal workers in June 2020, as a reaction to this situation.

mitting destination countries to the required support for their long-term integration. In this sense, as Bauböck and Ruhs (2022) argue, temporary labour migration programmes are normatively attractive because they appear to offer “triple benefits” for destination countries, origin countries, and migrants. Workers can fill vacancies abroad improving their economic and social contexts, origin countries benefit from remittances and the return of skills and know-how, and destination states can fill gaps by expanding legal pathways without committing to a long-term integration and its political repercussions. In the case of young people who have strong links to their social environment, temporary and circular migration programmes can be a way to enhance their experience abroad as a way to find employment and career prospects at home (ICMPD, 2021: 27).

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At the same time, temporary labour migration programmes present a set of limitations especially where work permits are tied to a specific employer and access to welfare benefits and social protections can be restricted (Bauböck & Ruhs, 2022: 531). Family reunion also remains limited, representing a significant trade-off for workers who despite bettering their socioeconomic situations have to endure separation as a heavy burden (Bauböck & Ruhs, 2022: 537).

Existing restrictions, while deepening precarious conditions for workers, are also what makes them politically acceptable at home vis-à-vis destination states’ constituents. The limitations on workers’ upgrading to permanent status and restriction of welfare access are part of how temporary schemes expand labour mobility while containing long-term settlement. Because of this, circularity can become entangled with migration control making it harder to sustain the «triple benefits» logic. France, for instance, has maintained

seasonal work agreements with Morocco and Tunisia since 1963, with pre-selection of candidates organised and financed by the sending countries themselves, and a maximum duration of six months per year (European Migration Network, 2021b: 10). Additionally, the July 2023 EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding pairs the commitment to work towards a Talent Partnership for Tunisian nationals with provisions on returns, readmission and anti-smuggling (García Andrade & Frasca, 2024). In the Ad Hoc Query, Spain directly frames Morocco as a selected priority partner for labour mobility schemes not necessarily on development grounds but because it is “a strategic partner in the migratory field” (García Andrade & Frasca, 2024: 34). This entanglement is itself gendered. In the GECCO scheme, recruitment in origin has favoured Moroccan women, and specifically mothers of young children, precisely because family ties at home are treated as a guarantee of return (Zeneidi, 2017).

Return and readmission cooperation are not only a coercive instrument for removing those who no longer have the right to stay but it also regulates and disciplines foreign workers’ mobility, incorporation, and belonging in destination countries (Cassarino, 2014). Solidar, a European network of over 50 member organisations, cautions that safeguards are necessary to prevent third countries’ development needs from becoming a “false pretence” to require participants to return to their origin country once the Partnership is completed, irrespective of their labour-market position and individual migration status (Solidar, 2021). The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) similarly remains critical and expressed concern about TPs, as well as bilateral labour migration agreements, as a means of labour migration governance, specifically in light of the Pact on Asylum’s “large

focus on deportations and border controls” (ETUC, 2021).

A further concern is that the circular migration framework, as currently designed, does not adequately account for the preferences and aspirations of workers themselves. While circular migration is often presented as the natural preference of migrants, the empirical evidence is more mixed: some workers do prefer cyclical patterns, but many seek longer stays, settlement options and the possibility of family reunification (Wickramasekara, 2011). Any normative assessment of temporary labour migration programmes must weigh not only the interests of states and employers, but also the fair representation of migrant workers’ own interests in the design of schemes that directly shape their lives. In TPs, without a clear role for workers’ representatives such as trade unions, workers’ preferences are assumed, which presents them as beneficiaries of mobility first rather than agents with varying interests and ambitions (Interview with THAMM Coordinator, May 2026).

While generally the argument is that countries of origin can benefit from the enhanced skills upon their return, these need to be aligned between sectors promoted for host countries and sending countries. At present, the mismatch between TP priority sector and the labour markets in each state is at odds. The challenge is to “select a sector that both the origin and destination countries view as a priority and then offer training that

could be applied in both contexts” (Hooper, 2021). Accounting for emerging sectors on each side of the Mediterranean, this challenge also needs to embed flexibility more clearly in sector choices, particularly as transitions reshape the future of labour markets.

Reabsorption and the brain drain challenge

A parallel set of challenges appears at the other end of the migration cycle, namely when it comes to sending countries’ capacity to reabsorb returning workers and to manage the development costs of outward mobility. Where domestic labour markets remain unable to absorb returnees into stable and relevant employment, return may do little to reduce structural unemployment or underemployment.

The debate on brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation has long shaped academic and policy assessments of labour migration from the Global South (Meyer, 2001; Skeldon, 2009; de Haas, 2010; Rajan, 2022). In Egypt, outward migration has historically been analysed as easing graduate unemployment rather than depleting scarce human capital in a context of overproduction of individuals with post-secondary education and university graduates relative to domestic labour market absorption capacity (Sika, 2010).¹⁴ Morocco and Tunisia present a more acute risk profile.¹⁵ In both countries, emigration of tertiary-educated nationals

Any normative assessment of temporary labour migration programmes must weigh not only the interests of states and employers, but also the fair representation of migrant workers’ own interests in the design of schemes that directly shape their lives.

¹⁴ EU Commission 2022 Action Document Annex: Low-educated workers show very low unemployment levels whereas much higher unemployment rates are recorded with higher levels of education attainment, such as university and intermediate secondary level (34% and 48.2% respectively).

¹⁵ According to HCP Data from 2018-2019 survey, a third of Moroccan emigrants have tertiary education compared to 13% across the whole adult population while a significant number of departures are for education purposes (OECD, 2024b). Additionally, only half of returning migrants return to jobs in Morocco (OECD, 2024b). In a further HCP study in 2020, 8.8% of the Moroccan population was living abroad and for most the main factor was to find a job. The bulk of migrant communities from both countries is found in EU countries, specifically France, Spain, and Italy.

has raised sustained concern about the loss of high-skilled human capital (ICMPD, 2021).¹⁶

When assessing TPs through the full migratory cycle, reabsorption challenges remain. The ILO's guidance on labour market reintegration acknowledges that countries producing large outward migration flows frequently lack the institutional capacity to support returnees, resulting in concentration in low-skilled informal employment on return (ILO, 2023). In both Morocco and Tunisia, this problem is shaped not only by high youth unemployment, but it is also compounded by relatively weak employment intermediation. In Morocco, youth unemployment among 15-24-year-olds reached 36.7% in 2024 (HCP, 2025a), while the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024b) notes that relatively few hires occur through ANAPEC¹⁷ and that most job search is undertaken through direct contact with employers and networking. In Tunisia, youth unemployment reached 37.7% in early 2025 (INS, 2025), while ANETI¹⁸ is reported to suffer from significant understaffing, weak matching systems, and high administrative burden with counsellors lacking the necessary skills (OECD, 2022).¹⁹

Beyond institutional capacity, reabsorption also depends on whether skills and training are subsequently translated into formal employment. TPs, much like their predecessors, are built on a multi-stakeholder engagement of public and private partners both at the origin and destination countries (Di Salvo, 2022: 11). Economic activity and employment have historically been driven by older firms and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with high salaries encouraging graduates and skilled individuals to accept jobs in the public sector (Casanella et al., n.d.). The public sector has historically been the graduate employer of last resort under the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) authoritarian bargain as it offers notoriously better working conditions and stability. Over the past decades, however, its role has contracted. In Egypt, for example, the share of public sector employment for all working men and women fell from 33% in 1998 to 26% in 2018 (Barsoum & Abdalla, 2020: 5).²⁰ Similarly, in Tunisia, labour market's dependence on public sector employment as a buffer has been structurally weakened under fiscal consolidation, reducing the state's traditional role as employer of last resort for returning graduates (OECD, 2022).

¹⁶ While this trend can be more pronounced for those with higher levels of educational attainments, these figures are broader than tertiary-educated nationals. According to the Arab Barometer survey in 2024, Tunisia was the leading country for population's desire to emigrate in the region, with 46% of its people saying they have considered leaving the country (Abufalgha, 2024). In Morocco, 35% have responded the same. Percentages of citizens who have considered emigrating has remained unchanged in the past two years of countries surveyed. These figures are even higher for the youth with 71% of young Tunisians and 55% of young Moroccans, aged 18-29, say they want to leave (Abufalgha, 2024).

¹⁷ ANAPEC is Morocco's public employment agency responsible for job placement, counselling and employment intermediation.

¹⁸ ANETI is Tunisia's national employment agency. Its mandate is focused on matching jobseekers with vacancies, counselling, and supporting employment programmes.

¹⁹ THAMM sought to mediate some of these issues by specifically targeting job matching potential and pre-departure orientation. The final evaluation suggests that progress was uneven due to delays and coordination bottlenecks (ILO, 2024).

²⁰ The decline in the Egypt context has not been steady but saw a renewed bump as a response to the 2011 uprisings – demonstrating the continued relevance of public sector employment as a tool for gaining support and managing dissent (ILO, 2024).

In light of these changes, mobility and skills partnerships programmes have invoked the private sector as key stakeholders for managing return and local job creation (IOM, 2023). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in particular present several constraints in all three cases across productivity and potential for expansion. In Morocco, companies employing ten or fewer represented 86.1% of firms registered with the national social security fund in 2024, while micro, very small and small enterprises accounted for 98.5% of all active legal-entity enterprises (OMTPME, 2025). The small size coupled with high informality levels (33.1% in non-agricultural sectors according to the HCP in 2023)²¹ presents barriers to scaling and raising productivity (OECD, 2024b). In Tunisia, private-sector job creation has been concentrated in low-skill intensive and low-productivity activities with high unemployment rates amongst tertiary graduates (see above). The ICT, retail, manufacturing, and business services sectors have generated employment for tertiary graduates, although manufacturing's absorption capacity remains limited and risks overqualification (OECD, 2022). Egypt presents a different picture in which sectors such as ICT and finance remain too small to create adequate employment opportunities, leaving highly educated workers to navigate between moving abroad, unemployment/underemployment, and informality (OECD, 2024a).²² Under these constraints, private sector participation may help with streamlining cooperation, providing trainings/opportunities, and improving matching worker profiles, but it

is difficult to see how alone it can meaningfully develop into a stable and skill-appropriate reabsorption channel.

Conclusions and policy recommendations: is a rights-based approach possible?

TPs are presented as a “mutually beneficial” framework to boost labour mobility at all skill levels while also creating legal pathways to migration. This chapter has asked under what conditions do TPs function as rights-enhancing mobility schemes, and under what conditions do they reproduce and formalise labour precarity. The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that whether they can work as rights-based schemes depends less on their framing and more on the underlying contexts and the political priorities in which they are embedded.

First, sectoral priorities outlined in the roadmaps remain to a large degree geared towards labour shortages, while domestic needs in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt are partially reflected. While it is difficult to fully map out how they compare overall, mostly due to different classifications and sectoral divisions, the “win-win” claim remains somewhat fragile especially if reabsorption at home remains weak and workers' rights remain secondary. Sectoral priorities must reflect mutual labour-market needs, taking into account demographic

²¹ Trade accounts for 44.1% of informal sector employment, followed by services (28.7%), industry (15%), and construction (12.2%). Informal sector employment is predominantly urban (77.6%) according to the HCP (2025b).

²² According to the same OECD (2024a) report, the share of informal employment is high, accounting for 67% of total employment with the incidence of informal employment for those aged 15-24 years old standing at 91%. Underemployment is also important with around 10% of male workers being overqualified with this being more pronounced in sectors such as ICT, finance, and the services industry.

Across TP design documents and previous labour mobility programmes, workers are presented mostly as recipients of training and mobility opportunities – a relatively undifferentiated category – rather than workers with distinct interests and ambitions that are shaped by sector, skill level, gender, and legal status.

changes and the twin transition not only in Europe but also in third countries.

Second, in its current framing, across TP design documents and previous labour mobility programmes, workers are presented mostly as recipients of training and mobility opportunities – a relatively undifferentiated category – rather than workers with distinct interests and ambitions that are shaped by sector, skill level, gender, and legal status. While the needs of member states, private sector actors, and third countries' is to a large degree understood, TPs must create more scope for understanding workers' conditions and trajectories beyond the training period.

Third, considering that the sectors covered by TPs are not equivalent, in the sense that they do not generate equal levels of recognition, stability or even reintegration (i.e., ICT vs. construction vs. transport), flattening out the complexity of defining "talent" can be problematic. It risks stunting the development of a meaningful rights-based framework and instead reproducing forms of managed precarity that has been critiqued in models of circular migration. As such, a greater focus on understanding third countries' capacity for reabsorption as well as training, alongside enforcing the portability and recognition of qualifications and the protection of workers' rights throughout the migratory cycle, is necessary.

Seen through the typology of brain drain/gain/circulation/waste, TPs seem to be outcome - contingent rather than intrinsically beneficial. They may support brain circulation where sectors are selected with the needs of both sides in mind, qualifications are recognised, and workers are supported through the full migration cycle especially at the stage of re-entering decent work. But in contexts where workers are drawn from already

constrained sectors and where return is shaped by unemployment, informal work, or underemployment, the outcomes may not be as optimistic, resulting in brain waste or reinforcing the existing pattern of brain drain.

In terms of recommendations, they are as follows:

1. TPs should be designed around shared priorities, not EU shortages alone. Sector selection should be assessed based on demand in both destination/origin countries, and should revolve around transparent data, partner consultation (including workers and trade union representation), and forward-looking assessments of the twin transitions.
2. Any "win-win" approach needs to centre workers and migrant communities as equal beneficiaries. Embedding the worker's voice into programme design, monitoring, and evaluation through trade unions and civil society organisations (CSOs) is crucial for developing a rights-based framework – one that recognises that workers' aspirations are not uniform and circular migration is not always the default preference. Without doing this, private-sector participation risks emboldening employer influence without improving workers' protection, especially in contexts where workers' legal status is tied to permits/not being able to change employers.
3. A rights-based approach requires strong reintegration and reabsorption, rather than seeing mere return as proof of success. The role of the private sector should be carefully delimited especially considering the contexts of North African countries where firms are small, weakly connected to training institutions, informal, or operating in low-productivity sectors.

4. At the same time, public employment services, career centres, training institutions, and qualifications agencies need a continued and sustained support.
5. Finally, there is a need to fully decouple the promotion of skills circulation across both sides of the Mediterranean from securitised migration frameworks. Decoupling, in practice, means that the core of TPs should be focused on labour mobility and skills circulation that respond to needs on both sides of the Mediterranean. This requires a shift in focus towards the portability and recognition of qualifications, the possibility of renewing permits or changing employers, independent monitoring of labour rights, and access to social protection in cases of return. If TPs remain tied to return and readmission logics, their potential will be constrained not only at the level of results but also for trust between workers and stakeholders. A credible model would treat mobility in ways that lead to fair recruitment and enforceable labour rights with the aim of developing a longer-term institutional cooperation on mutually beneficial skills development rather than filling labour shortages provisionally.

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Shared Prosperity for All Generations? Reviewing the Pacts through an Intergenerational Fairness Lens

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Introduction: demographic challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region?

In 2024, the first ever European Commissioner for the Mediterranean and the first ever European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport were appointed. Dubravka Šuica (Croatia) and Glenn Micallef (Malta) took office on 1 December with the second mandate of Ursula Von der Leyen as President of the European Commission (EC). Commissioner Šuica's Mission Letter explicitly included the implementation of the Demography Toolbox,²³ to "ensure the EU facilitates member states' efforts to address their demographic challenges", including "the international aspects of demography."²⁴ This duty comprises "increasing participation in the labour market, especially by women, young people and other underrepresented groups and look[ing] at how demographic change is affecting the sustainability and adequacy of social protection in the member states." Notably, the Mission Letter to the newly appointed Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, does not mention any of these.²⁵

While concerns about current and future generations,²⁶ particularly youth, are common across the whole Euro-Mediterranean area, policy responses are neither similar nor complementary. In the North, ageing and low fertility rates have triggered debates about solidarity, dialogue and transfers between generations (Chybalski & Marcinkiewicz, 2022; Giarelli, 2026). In the South, social inequalities, conflict and unemployment appear as sources of instability that legitimise security-based measures to block and divert migration flows outside of the Single Market (Ferreira, 2019).

This chapter bridges current European Union (EU) debates on intergenerational fairness (IGF) with Euro - Mediterranean governance and cooperation frameworks to examine to what extent existing arrangements seek long -term regional prosperity for all. The study seeks, first, to assess whether Mediterranean and Migration Pacts are coherent and consistent with intergenerational ambitions across borders; and second, to develop recommendations to ensure that prosperity is shared by all generations across the basin. The analysis draws on a qualitative methodology combining analytical and systems-thinking frameworks. First, the Pacts and the IGF Strategy were reviewed to identify their potential for

²³ This toolbox for "harnessing talent in Europe" facing "a major demographic transition," is structured around five pillars, including "where necessary, addressing labour shortages through managed legal migration, in full complementarity to harnessing talents from within the EU." See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/27-10-2023-harnessing-talent-in-europe-commission-launches-the-demography-toolbox_en

²⁴ Mission Letter to the Commissioner for the Mediterranean by the President of the European Commission: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/1600f2ce-6c02-4d68-a0f2-d72e5d9f700d_en?filename=mission-letter-suica.pdf

²⁵ Mission Letter to the Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport by the President of the European Commission: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/c8b8682b-ca47-461b-bc95-c98195919eb0_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20MICALLEF.pdf

²⁶ The UN Declaration on Future Generations, Annexed to the Pact for the Future (2024), understands future generations as "all those generations that do not yet exist, and who will inherit this planet" (United Nations, 2024: 52).

redistribution, recognition and representation as defining features of justice.²⁷ Second, a multi-stakeholder consultation was held in two parts: a survey was first conducted among Euro-Mediterranean stakeholders²⁸ about their perceptions on the alignment between IGF principles and migration governance. The results of the survey informed a Three Horizons²⁹ (Curry & Hodgson, 2008) workshop where participants reflected on the systemic reforms needed to achieve intergenerationally fair mobility and cooperation frameworks in the Mediterranean. The recommendations stem from the combined outcomes of these methodologies.

The chapter warns about the unfair implications of utilitarian approaches to migration governance based on conditionality, deterrence and border security. To do so, it follows a strand of work that addresses intraregional inequalities, including colonial legacies, racist and gendered distribution of rights and resources, as central mechanisms of intergenerational transmission (Christophers, 2018; Giarelli, 2026). In a context of neoliberalisation, we argue, overlooking these aspects can legitimise the dismantling of social protection structures and the selective implementation of welfare policies, further intensifying such segregation. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to assess the impacts of demographic

shifts in the Euro-Mediterranean basin. The goal here is to discuss the biased nature of their governance and to propose pathways to readjust it according to justice principles.

Sections 1 and 2 explore Euro-Mediterranean debates on demographic transitions and IGF, with a particular focus on the circumstances that led to the adoption of these agendas as a means to illustrate the causes and consequences of the “politicization” of demography. Section 3 applies an intersectional perspective to IGF based on Nancy Fraser’s (2003, 2008) notions of justice as distribution, representation, recognition and participation. The Mediterranean Pacts on Migration and Cooperation are analysed under this lens, with a particular focus on alignment and overlaps. From this analysis, a series of policy recommendations is made in Section 4, based on the identified links between the Pacts analysis and the Three Horizons workshop where Euro-Mediterranean migration and IGF stakeholders reflected on transition pathways towards fairer futures.

People moving, people growing: unpacking the “demographic dividend”

The chapter warns about the unfair implications of utilitarian approaches to migration governance based on conditionality, deterrence and border security.

²⁷ We address justice from Nancy Fraser’s (2028) perspective, which understands it as “parity of participation” and addresses redistribution, recognition and representation as its core dimensions.

²⁸ This group of stakeholders comprised civil society actors, academia, international organisations and local governments from France, Germany, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia. Seventeen of them participated in the survey and eight took part in the Three Horizons workshops. Fifteen out of the 17 stakeholders work mostly on migration and asylum, while the other two work mostly with youth and long-term governance.

²⁹ Curry and Hodgson (2008: 2) describe this methodology as a futures technique that “connects the present with desired (or espoused) futures, and helps to identify the divergent futures which may emerge as a result of conflict between the embedded present and these imagined futures.” In the context of this study, it allows the discussion to overcome reactive recommendations and to propose policy approaches that seek systemic transformation. The process included a survey circulated to Euro-Mediterranean Migration and IGF stakeholders (16 responses) that informed Horizon 1 (what’s not working today), followed by two online workshops where seven stakeholders reflected about necessary measures (Horizon 2) to achieve a fair Euro-Mediterranean area (Horizon 3).

What is striking about demographics in the Euro-Mediterranean area is not so much the facts, but their politicisation.

In 2020, the 21 countries surrounding the Mediterranean basin had a combined population of around 529 million inhabitants, of whom 205 million lived on the northern shore, and 324 million on the southern and eastern shores (Ambrossetti, 2020). Although demographic transitions around the basin tend to converge in the long run (Doignon et al., 2023), most northern countries today show low or negative natural growth, while southern and eastern shores present high natural growth (Doignon et al., 2023). Against this background, economists speak about the demographic dividend to describe the potential economic opportunities stemming from the coincidence between Europe's ageing population and an unfinished demographic transition in its neighbourhood (Ambrossetti, 2020).

Estimations about demographic scenarios in the Mediterranean foresee a "window of opportunity" for the next decade. Until 2035, northern countries with high old-age dependency ratios could leverage the relatively low ratios in the South (Ambrossetti, 2020; Doignon et al., 2023; Majorano Sarapo et al., 2023). However, Southern and Eastern countries have not yet benefited from this dividend due to labour market shortages, high inflation rates, and in-

creasing income inequalities (Doignon et al., 2023). This particularly affects youth as, despite higher qualifications than their parents, they face unemployment, precarity, a housing affordability crisis and rising living costs (Giarelli, 2026; Doignon et al., 2023).

What is striking about demographics in the Euro-Mediterranean area is not so much the facts, but their politicisation (Pinyol-Jiménez & Domingo, 2025; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2009; Dubert García & Pérez Caramés, 2021). Despite the proven inaccuracy of the gloomiest predictions across the century,³⁰ the notion of "demographic crisis"³¹ has been consistently instrumentalised by economists and institutions alike (Pérez Díaz, 2021). For years now, OECD³² governments and academics have alerted about the pressure of *dependency ratios*³³ on welfare systems, calculating options to address growing imbalances between the dependent part of the population (children and the elderly) on the working-age population (Giarelli, 2026; Milijić et al., 2025). Counterintuitively, despite the critical contribution of positive migration balances to prevent demographic decline in EU, concerns about ageing labour markets and threatened pension systems go hand in hand with increasingly restrictive migration regimes.

³⁰ Pérez Díaz (2021) exemplifies the failure of demographic forecasts by mentioning alarms about fertility decline in the beginning of the 20th century – followed by concerns over the *baby boom* pressure on welfare systems, exacerbated by neoliberal arguments around the "inmorality" of excessive public spending on older generations.

³¹ Critical scholars contest negative narratives about demographic change by noting that demographic shifts have brought unexpected progress on a variety of aspects that range from the decline of women's reproductive work to the questioning of patriarchy or the increase of life quality before elderly ages (Pérez, 2021).

³² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, abbreviated as OECD and based in Paris, is an international organisation of 38 countries from the Global North working in favour of democracy and the market economy. For further reference on their views about ageing and welfare systems, see https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/10/ageing-populations-their-fiscal-implications-and-policy-responses_be4bd619/6aec03b3-en.pdf

³³ Ratio of the economically dependent part of the population (children and persons aged 65 or over) to the working-age population (aged 15-64). The result is expressed as the number of persons under 15 and aged 65 or over per 100 persons aged 15-64. (Source: Ined Glossary).

Is intergenerational fairness a concern in the Mediterranean?

Philosophical and political concerns about justice between generations were already present in 18th-century debates (Gómez Franco, 2020: 51). Institutionally, the concept of *intergenerational fairness* is broadly understood as equity or justice between living generations, and also between current and future generations³⁴. Among policy-makers, it was used first in the United States of America (USA) in the 1980s, and spread to Europe especially after the 2008 crisis (Giarelli, 2026: 8). The notion of fairness is entrenched with social justice dimensions (Gosseries & Meyer, 2009; Gómez Franco, 2020) and, when applied to policy, it has taken diverging and ambivalent applications (Giarelli, 2026; Christophers, 2018).

While scholars and institutions warn about the pressures of ageing populations on welfare systems, evidence from the Euro-Mediterranean area suggests that “conservative, less redistributive (especially Mediterranean) states actually have significantly higher levels of intergenerational inequality than more redistributive social-democratic states (and that liberal welfare states)” (Christophers, 2018: 111; Chybalski & Marcinkiewicz, 2022). As in sectors like trade, energy or services, the Euro-Mediterranean region

is described at the same time as a hotspot of inequalities (Al Shami, 2021) and as a territory of “opportunity” with strong potential for win-win solutions (IEMed, 2021, 2022; Majorano Sarapo et al., 2023). However, policy priorities are often split by thick borders.

Dual policy approaches to demographic transitions

Demographic shifts depend on a combination of fertility, mortality, and migration balances. For more than a century now, policy frameworks have tried to control them through policy in different ways and with uneven outcomes (Dubert García & Pérez Caramés, 2021; Legg, 2005). Within EU boundaries, demographic change is increasingly addressed through intergenerational solidarity and fairness discourses, with the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy³⁵ (2026) conceived as a participatory, cross-cutting initiative to rebalance long-term interests across age cohorts and policy domains. Externally, demographic arguments and references to “shared prosperity” and “mutually beneficial partnerships” in the Mediterranean coexist with a transactional deployment of migration governance mechanisms as instruments for addressing or pre-empting EU welfare and demographic challenges (Fargues, 2008).

This duality dates back to colonial times and found continuity in the EU integration project³⁶ (Kateb & Kassir, 2013). With

Demographic shifts depend on a combination of fertility, mortality, and migration balances. Policy frameworks have tried to control them through policy in different ways and with uneven outcomes.

³⁴ As per the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy: “An intergenerational approach therefore calls for determination rooted in shared responsibility and solidarity so that all generations, first and foremost young people, are not merely prepared for the future but equipped to shape it, supported by the experience, contribution and solidarity of all generations” (EC, 2026: 4).

³⁵ See https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/intergenerational-fairness-communication/intergenerational_fairness_strategy_layout.pdf

³⁶ At the end of World War II, France and Germany designed migration policy frameworks to regulate labour market and demographic structures according to national interests (Kateb & Kassir, 2013: 233). In the seventies, policies to foster “en masse return of migrants to their countries of origin” (Doignon et al.,

the neoliberal turn in the eighties, ageing concerns took over in the Single Market, triggering scepticism about the sustainability of welfare systems and unleashed debates around “active ageing”³⁷ (Giarelli, 2026). The appointment of a Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport seeks to “strengthen communication between generations” (Giarelli, 2026) in the EU.³⁸ As Giarelli (2026: 4) suggests, while European liberal democracies hold “a consensus on an intergenerational pact for the fair retribution of resources between generations,” the starting point of current European debates is the “widespread pessimism around young people’s prospects and evidence of a fracturing social contract” (Wildman et al., 2022, cited in Giarelli, 2026: 7).

Academic and policy literature points to diverse transformations that should occur in the education, housing, workplace or pension system in the EU to address “labour shortages” induced, it is assumed, by low fertility rates and longer life-expectancy (Barabaschi, 2015; Vettori, 2010; Capasso & Ferragina, 2019; Ambrossetti, 2020; IEMed, 2021, 2022; Doignon et al., 2023). At the same time, migration policies focus mostly on containing the arrival of non-EU populations through a proven exacerbation of the scope and impacts of irregular migration and a demonstrated scarcity of regular migration pathways (Ferreira, 2019). This utilitarian approach to migration has institutionalised asymmetric forms of border externalisation and has expanded the repertoire of coercive policy instruments

(Tsourdi et al., 2022; Pasetti & Lupi, 2025).

What is “fair”? Addressing intergenerational justice through an intersectional lens

Critiques of IGF agendas argue that the neglect of aspects like social class, gender or ethnicity can turn it into a “smokescreen” that “distracts from social inequality by masking the role of *intersecting identities* (sic) (Holman & Walker, 2021, cited in Giarelli, 2026: 9). In a context of neoliberalisation, some scholars argue, the growing focus on intergenerational differences and conflicts (Giarelli, 2026) obscures “the intergenerational transmission of structural (class *and* race and gender-based) inequalities” (Christophers, 2018: 102) and can legitimise “further austerity, the withdrawal of entitlements and the dismantling of welfare states” (Shaw 2019). Borders further complicate the picture, both in terms of “inequalities between citizens and non-citizens within the nation state,” and of “global inequalities between countries” (Fernandez 2011: 86).

Critical social theorists like Nancy Fraser (2003, 2008) underscore that justice manifests itself through *parity of participation*, understood as “social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society

2023: 120) stimulated family reunification. In that period, Southern European countries, “long-standing labour exporters to other European countries and to America and Oceania” (Doignon et al., 2023: 120), turned into destination countries, particularly for unskilled labour (Doignon et al., 2023: 121).

³⁷ The years 1993 and 2012 were dedicated to solidarity between generations and, in 2005, a EU Green Paper called for a “new solidarity between generations” to “confront[ing] demographic change” (Barabaschi, 2015).

³⁸ See https://policy-lab.ec.europa.eu/intergenerational-fairness_en

to interact one another as peers” (2003: 37). Hence justice requires attention to distribution, recognition and representation³⁹ dynamics.

The following section explores the Pacts that operate in the Mediterranean through those lenses. These aspects are particularly relevant in the Mediterranean, which stands out as a hotspot of inequalities and a major human corridor globally (Al Shami, 2021). Under this perspective, migration can be understood as “a means of closing the gap” produced by the uneven development of global capitalism, rooted in colonialism, southern debt, aid politics, and the geopolitics of Northern military interventions in the Global South (Fernandez, 2011: 90).

Pacts and Strategy analysis: core focus, goals, actors, expected outcomes

Despite differences in their consultation processes, policy priorities and implementation strategies, the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Pact for the Mediterranean and the IGF Strategy share a core set of demographic and socioeconomic concerns. These include ageing EU populations, worsening living conditions for younger generations, growing skills gaps in critical sectors, and a cross-cutting commitment to green and digital transitions. However, whereas both Pacts address human mobility as an opportunity to tackle labour and skill shortages in favour of the sustainability of welfare

states (EC, 2020; EC & High Representative, 2025), these dimensions are scantily developed in comparison to measures and investments to strengthen border security, block irregular migration, and promote and accelerate returns. Similarly, while the EU flagship IGF Strategy includes, on paper, the Mediterranean,⁴⁰ the scope of this ambition and the means to achieve it remain unspecified.

This section examines the narratives, priorities and instruments foreseen by each framework, assessing to what extent their scope and implementation serve these priorities effectively and fairly across shores and populations, in terms of redistribution, recognition and representation.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

The Pact on Migration and Asylum presents demography as a challenge (European Commission, 2020: 1) and draws a clear line between who will contribute to closing the gap and who will benefit from it: “Working with third countries on legal pathways is fully in line with the EU’s interests. Europe has an ageing and shrinking population. The structural pressure this is expected to create on the labour market is complemented by specific skills shortages in different localities and sectors such as health, medical care, and agriculture.” (EC, 2020: 24).

The explicit connection between migration and demographic challenges in the EU is addressed through legal pathways: “More could be done to increase the im-

Despite differences in their consultation processes, policy priorities and implementation strategies, the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Pact for the Mediterranean and the IGF Strategy share a core set of demographic and socioeconomic concerns.

³⁹ Fraser argues that “[r]edistributive policies have misrecognition effects when background patterns of cultural value skew the meaning of economic reforms” (2003: 43).

⁴⁰ The IGF Strategy states among its goals: “Strengthening relations with the EU’s wider neighbourhood and building up defence readiness and capabilities through the SAFE instrument are investments for a peaceful future. Cooperation frameworks, such as the Pact for the Mediterranean, support jointly owned initiatives that promote investment in skills, economic development, resilience and social cohesion across the region, recognising the role of people – especially young people – as drivers of innovation and shared prosperity.”

pact of the EU legal migration framework on Europe's demographic and migration challenges" (EC, 2020: 25). Formally, the Pact addresses redistribution issues explicitly⁴¹ and announces an "informal expert group on the views of migrants" and policies to ensure "migrants fully benefit from the European Pillar on Social Rights" as a "key objective". However,

the mechanisms through which this is operationalised remain unclear. The table below summarises the key features of the Pact in terms of cooperation, demographic and fairness narratives.

Benefits for partner countries are only mentioned in section 6 of the Pact. "It is important to address the complex challenges

Table 1. Cooperation and demographic narratives in the Pact for Migration and Asylum

Dimension	Approach
Consultation process	Dedicated high-level and technical consultations with the European Parliament, all member states, and stakeholders from civil society, social partners and business
Demographic narrative	EU ageing and shrinking population; skills shortages in specific sectors and localities
Whose interests?	Framed as "fully in line with the EU's interests"; benefits emphasised for member states and the EU labour market
Main tools	Legal migration pathways, faster asylum and return procedures, stronger role for EU agencies and funds
Solidarity	Solidarity and responsibility defined internally between member states (burden-sharing)
Partnership goals	Development cooperation, security, visa, trade, agriculture, investment and employment, energy, environment and climate change, and education
Non-EU countries and citizens	Third countries as implementation partners for control and returns; migrants as labour resources and objects of procedures, consulted via "expert group"
IGF implications	External actors and non-EU citizens are instrumental, not equal fairness subjects

Note. Elaborated by author.

⁴¹ The Pact provides evidence in this regard: "For example, in 2019, there was still a significant shortfall in the employment prospects of non-EU nationals – at around 60% of 20-64 year olds, compared to around 74% for host country nationals" (EC, 2020: 27). Furthermore, it commits to "recognise that people with a migrant background (e.g., foreign born or second-generation migrants) often face similar integration challenges to third-country nationals."

of migration and its root causes to the benefit of the EU and its citizens, partner countries, migrants and refugees themselves" (EC, 2020: 17). It also mentions youth and economic opportunity, without clear associated measures: "Economic opportunity, particularly for young people, is often the best way to reduce the pressure for irregular migration. The ongoing work to address migrant smuggling is one example of the critical importance of relations with the countries of North Africa." (EC, 2020: 18). The Pact also mentions support for "maximising the positive impact of migration and reducing the negative consequences for partner countries, for example by reducing the transfer costs of remittances, reducing "brain drain", or facilitating circular migration" (EC, 2020: 20).

Instead, the notions of solidarity and responsibility are internal: "The New Pact recognises that no member state should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that all member states should contribute to solidarity on a constant basis" (EC, 2020: 2). Although it recognises the importance of establishing partnerships with third countries, the expected benefits and the assumed expertise are concentrated on one shore: "The new procedures will allow asylum and migration authorities to more efficiently assess well-founded claims, deliver faster decisions and thereby contribute to a better and more credible functioning of asylum and return policies. This will be of benefit both to member states, and to the EU as a whole" (EC, 2020: 5).

The Pact for the Mediterranean

Endorsed in October 2025, the Pact for the Mediterranean states that "[s]ince the establishment of the Barcelona Process in 1995, creating an area of common peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean region has been a strategic goal for the

European Union" (EC & High Representative, 2025: 1). It aims "to bring about a paradigm shift, which is necessary to realise the full potential of our partnership and to work together based on the principles of co-ownership, co-creation and joint responsibility" (EC & High Representative, 2025: 1). The narrative of the Pact is decidedly more intergenerational, people-centred and forward-looking than the Pact on Migration. The *People* pillar of the Pact appeals directly to demographic trends:

"While in the EU, we are confronted with declining demographic trends impacted by a combination of high life-expectancy and decreasing birth rates, the southern part of the Mediterranean region faces social, economic and demographic pressures. With the Pact, we have an opportunity to invest in education, skills, circular migration and livelihoods" (EC & High Representative, 2025: 4).

The Pact explicitly links IGF and education, which is seen as "key to ensuring a smooth transition to, and within, labour markets and enhance competitiveness" (EC & High Representative, 2025: 5). However, the heaviest financial and institutional commitments concentrate on trade and investment modernisation, T-MED energy and clean-tech cooperation, digital and transport connectivity, and blue and green economy platforms, all largely aligned with EU competitiveness, energy security and value-chain goals. People-centred measures rely more on scaling existing tools (Erasmus+, TVET, Covenant of Mayors) and relatively modest new schemes. Also, support is conditional on reform: Southern Mediterranean partners are expected to modernise regulatory frameworks (trade, investment, climate, energy), strengthen border management and returns, and implement

The heaviest financial and institutional commitments concentrate on trade and investment modernisation, T-MED energy and clean-tech cooperation, digital and transport connectivity, and blue and green economy platforms.

whole-of-route migration management, often as conditions for accessing investment and technical assistance. Local governments and communities bear front-line roles in climate adaptation, blue-green transitions, disaster preparedness and migration management, frequently with limited fiscal and administrative ca-

capacity. Legal migration pathways and protection, though mentioned, remain comparatively narrow and discretionary. The table below summarises the Pact's approach towards demography and IGF.

The Intergenerational Fairness Strategy

Table 2. Cooperation and demographic narratives in the Pact for the Mediterranean

Dimension	Approach
Consultation process	Ten Southern Mediterranean partners, EU member states, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, non-EU neighbouring countries, United Nations (UN) agencies and other international organisations
Demographic narrative	EU faces declining demographic trends; southern partners face social, economic and demographic pressures
Whose interests?	Framed as creating “an area of common peace and prosperity” and a “paradigm shift”, but strongly aligned with EU competitiveness, energy security and value-chain goals
Main tools	Trade and investment modernisation, T-MED energy and clean-tech cooperation, digital and transport connectivity, blue and green economy platforms; education and youth mainly via Erasmus+, TVET and Covenant of Mayors
Solidarity	Narratives of co-ownership, co-creation and joint responsibility
Partnership goals	Investment in skills, circular migration, livelihoods, green and blue transitions, connectivity and modernisation of regulatory frameworks
Non-EU countries and citizens	Southern partners expected to reform and strengthen border management and returns; local authorities carry front-line roles with limited capacity; migrants and refugees experience enforcement, with narrow legal pathways and protection
IGF implications	Intergenerational fairness is invoked (especially around education and youth), but people-centred measures are relatively modest and conditional compared to economic and security-driven commitments

Note. Elaborated by author.

The narrative of the IGF Strategy also addresses demographic trends, but it points out different policy priorities, particularly access to housing, work and income, as well as long-term care and healthcare (EC, 2026: 3-4). The strategy sets a “new intergenerational ‘contract’” building’ on three dimensions: “1) Fair policy-making, that embeds long-term thinking and the youth perspective; 2) Fair opportunities uniting generations around shared goals for a better future; and 3) Fair places that foster intergenerational fairness across territories” (EC, 2026: 7).

generational) barriers faced by migrants and other communities suffering discrimination: “Structural barriers in education and training, employment, poverty, high housing costs, and access to services accumulate and are often passed from one generation to the next, and are particularly felt by people facing discrimination, including those with migrant background, Roma and LGBTIQ+ people” (EC, 2026: 5). See the table below for a summary of the features that distinguish this Strategy from the Pacts.

In terms of recognition, the document acknowledges the structural (and inter-

Finally, as part of its commitment to “mainstreaming IGF across EU Policies”, the

Table 3. Cooperation and demographic narratives in the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy

Dimension	Approach
Consultation process	One-year process of workshops and seminars, a citizens' panel from all 27 member states, and online engagement platforms
Demographic narrative	Demographic transition reshapes access to housing, work, income and care; present decisions on public finances and regulation shape future generations' constraints or capacity to act
Whose interests?	Defines a “new intergenerational contract” within the EU, centred on younger and future generations of EU residents
Main tools	Three pillars: fair policy-making (long-term, youth perspective), fair opportunities (shared goals for a better future), fair places (territorial fairness); mainstreaming IGF into EU policy cycles
Solidarity	Emphasises solidarity between generations and across territories within the EU, via budgetary, regulatory and governance reforms
Partnership goals	Positions external cooperation (SAFE, Pact for the Mediterranean) as investments in a peaceful future, supporting skills, economic development, resilience and social cohesion
Non-EU countries and citizens	Recognises structural barriers affecting people with a migrant background, Roma and LGBTIQ+ people; external partners are referenced through existing frameworks rather than as co-designers of IGF
IGF implications	Offers a broad fairness agenda with strong recognition of structural inequalities, but largely overlays this onto existing Euro-Mediterranean instruments without rebalancing power or representation across shores

Note. Elaborated by author.

Strategy explicitly addresses the Mediterranean neighbourhood: “Strengthening relations with the EU’s wider neighbourhood and building up defence readiness and capabilities through the SAFE instrument are investments for a peaceful future” (EC, 2026: 14). In this regard, the Strategy states its alignment with cooperation frameworks like the Pact for the Mediterranean and manifests its support to “jointly owned initiatives that promote investment in skills, economic development, resilience and social cohesion across the region” (EC, 2026: 14).

Neither the consultation process that led to the Strategy nor the implementation roadmap foresee any specific mechanisms to operationalise these.

Neglected demographic realities in Mediterranean policy priorities

The politicisation of demography is not only apparent in what policies prioritise, but also in what they neglect. While the “shared prosperity” narrative of the Barcelona Process has survived substantive geopolitical shifts, the Mediterranean space has progressively shrunk into a transactional space where borders are the core policy instrument to address a rich, diverse and unequal set of demographic realities. Furthermore, migration and youth precarity are addressed alternatively as challenges and as instruments to tackle market gaps. Rights and democratic values, once core dimensions of EU discourses in the Neighbourhood

(Rivera-Escartín & Fernández, 2024), have progressively faded from policy and financial agendas in favour of pragmatic alliances between public and private stakeholders.

From an intersectional perspective, the lack of mechanisms to address wealth, gender and racial inequalities within one of the most unequal and mobile territories of the globe suggests little chance of achieving shared prosperity in the short, medium and long term. Despite narratives of demographic and socioeconomic convergence (Doignon et al., 2023; Bürgisser & Di Carlo, 2023; Casau & Herrero, 2024), the EU is pending a thorough conversation about the “Mediterranean poor”⁴². Besides this, scholars and activists have been warning about a set of pressuring socio-political realities that remain unattended:

- Feminised and precarised care-giving value chains (Bettio et al., 2006; Ireland, 2011)
- Overrepresentation of racialised populations in the informal economy (Aramayona, 2025)
- Violence and precarity over vulnerable populations in the agrofood industry⁴³
- The irreparable losses of conflict and genocide for current and future generations
- “Coastalisation” trends with urbanisation and tourism concentration in maritime areas (Lagarias & Stratigea, 2023)
- Increasingly service and tourism-based

The politicisation of demography is not only apparent in what policies prioritise, but also in what they neglect.

⁴² See https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fairness_infographics_mediterranean-poor.pdf

⁴³ See <https://effat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Briefing-Note-ahead-of-EP-Plenary-Debate-on-Farmers-and-Farm-Workers-Conditions.pdf>

economies with high concentrations of pollution and low value added (Bürgisser & Di Carlo, 2023)

- Rural depopulation and low-tech industrial activity (Bruno et al., 2021; Herrero & Rial, 2023)

In the current circumstance⁴⁴ and against the framework of overlapping mandates and increased intra EU polarisation over Euro-Mediterranean relations,⁴⁵ the dominance of Migration Pact narratives risks turning the ambitions of the Pact for the Mediterranean and the IGF Strategy into “empty signifiers” (Rivera-Escartín & Fernández, 2024).

Conclusions and recommendations

Far from scholarly optimism, the demographic *window of opportunity* in the Mediterranean appears narrow and unfairly distributed. While the three frameworks are aligned on signalling the vulnerabilities of current and future generations in the basin, the actions proposed to address what is described as a demographic crisis are selective, conditional and, oftentimes, contradictory. This section underscores the main conclusions of the frameworks’ analysis from an intersectional justice lens and provides recommendations to strengthen its core dimensions. The recommendations also build on a consultation with 20 Euro-Mediterranean stakeholders working on migrations and future generations agendas that engaged in a Three

Horizons discussion (Curry & Hodgson, 2008) around IGF in the Mediterranean.

Redistribution: whose prosperity?

The Pacts and the IGF Strategy are aligned on the scope and means to achieve the EU’s interests. In this regard, seasonal (low-skill) and long-term (high-skill) labour shortages, ecological and digital transition goals and, to a lesser extent, trade and the sustainability of EU welfare systems are consistently addressed as policy priorities. Euro-Mediterranean frameworks internalise the benefits of regional cooperation while understanding (and often externalising) as costs any outcomes that do not directly benefit EU citizens or territorial interests. Addressing these asymmetries will require concrete commitments to:

- **Prioritise social protection and decent-work standards in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, including** increased Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe and Global Gateway funding to universal social protection, education, health, care systems and local green jobs in the Southern Neighbourhood. Cooperation and sectoral programmes in agriculture, construction, tourism and care should be contingent on compliance with EU and the International Labour Organization (ILO) decent-work standards, collective bargaining and social security

⁴⁴ According to Casau & Herrero (2024), this process is not new and is partially a consequence of EU integration: “The European integration process led to the emergence of a ‘manufacturing divide’ within the EU, meaning that the manufacturing activity has been increasingly concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe (Germany being the leading country), while it has shrunk sharply in Southern Europe.”

⁴⁵ At the time this Joint Policy Study was being drafted, intra-EU discussions about the suspension of the EU-Israel Association agreement were in place.

coverage for migrant workers, including seasonal and informal workers. This includes efforts to address the gendered division of labour as a shared Euro-Mediterranean responsibility, funding public care infrastructures and securing rights so care and domestic workers do not absorb the costs of austerity and demographic shifts.

- **Correct the distributive imbalance of labour-migration policy tools.** Support safety and security in a broad sense: safe pathways, secure legal status, and access to housing, health and income, closing administrative loopholes, structural poverty, precariousness and segregation. This includes observing the recommendations about Talent Partnerships addressed in Chapter 2.
- **Align fiscal, climate and migration policies with safety and intergenerational sufficiency.** Subject EU competitiveness, security and migration frameworks to systematic coherence with IGF principles and human-rights objectives, including their effects on impoverishment and displacement in the Mediterranean. Programming decisions in NDICI-Global Europe, Asylum and Migration Funds and Global Gateway flagships in the Mediterranean should undergo IGF assessments that identify who bears adjustment costs (by age, territory and status) and trigger redesign where younger, poorer and southern populations hold disproportionate burdens.

Recognition: whose responsibility?

The architecture of responsibility is fragmented, ambivalent and conditional. Aspects like political rights, democratic participation, territorial equity and long-term

welfare are mentioned as relevant dimensions of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. However, their policy implementation remains vague and scattered. As a result, the three frameworks are aligned and endorse each other insofar as none of them is required to take explicit responsibility for the social and political dimensions of prosperity that they nominally recognise. In terms of what this means for Euro-Mediterranean peoples of both shores, there is an explicit gap between the rights and participation channels of EU citizens and the rest of the world. To address this, the EU should:

- **Embed human rights and anti-discrimination policy measures in IGF and Euro-Mediterranean frameworks.** Demographic and competitiveness debates should be framed through a human-rights-based approach to avoid sliding into purely utilitarian framings of migration and migrant communities. Operational guidelines for the Pact for the Mediterranean and EU migration partnerships should explicitly reference the Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 21 TEU and existing anti-discrimination directives, and require ex-ante checks and ex-post monitoring of impacts on non-EU citizens and stateless persons. Communications on demography, skills and “talent” should undergo internal review to ensure they do not devalue certain groups or address demographic change as a crisis.
- **Address colonial legacies through historical rigour, symbolic and legal measures.** Support initiatives that review Euro-Mediterranean history from a fair and shared lens that recognises all contributions, redistributes responsibilities, and acknowledges past and present colonial and segregation patterns, including in media, museums, curricula and public institutions. Euro-

Mediterranean curricula, museum cooperation projects and public-history programmes financed under Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and NDICI-Global Europe should explicitly include colonialism, slavery and anti-colonial struggles as shared Mediterranean history, developed with scholars and communities from both shores. Where possible in EU law, member states should review nationality, residence and compensation schemes that still reflect colonial hierarchies, in consultation with affected communities and independent experts.

- **Recognise intersectional vulnerabilities and neglected contributors.** Ensure that gender, youth and diversity components in the three frameworks move beyond elite interlocutors to include women, youth and marginalised groups working in communities, sustaining households and performing precarious work. Monitoring systems for the Pact for the Mediterranean, NDICI-Global Europe and the IGF Strategy should disaggregate data and fund organisations representing those groups (grass-roots women's groups, migrant and diaspora organisations, informal workers' unions). Diaspora organisations should be treated as strategic governance partners, with regular seats in programme steering committees, not only as remittance senders.

Representation: whose future?

Across the three frameworks, intergenerational issues are named, but explicit commitments are only made when they

concern EU territorial interests and socio-political priorities. Hence IGF goals are applied selectively: where in service of EU competitiveness (ageing, skills, green transition), they include policy instruments. When regarding migrant, poor and racialised populations, these appear as desirable outcomes achievable through market solutions, labour migration management, and anti-smuggling policies. The notion of mutually beneficial partnerships (Pact on Migration and Asylum) and the principle of flexibility (Pact for the Mediterranean) consolidate a trend initiated by the differentiation mechanisms established by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004. This shift has turned Euro-Mediterranean relations into a pragmatic and selective negotiation system that only certain private and public stakeholders can leverage.⁴⁶

Establish binding participation channels modelled on fair governance standards. Institutionalise structured roles for civil society organizations (CSOs), including migrant workers and their families, diaspora, youth, women's and LGBTIQ+ groups from both shores, in the governance of the Pact on Migration, the Pact for the Mediterranean, and IGF follow-up. The ILO's fair-migration approach is a relevant reference point for standing tripartite-plus bodies at Euro-Mediterranean level, where governments, employers and workers' organisations participate alongside migrant, diaspora-, youth-, women's- and LGBTIQ+-led organisations from both shores. Establish formal, mandatory mechanisms for Southern Mediterranean CSOs and diaspora organisations to be included in the National Implementation Plans and the on-

⁴⁶ While the three frameworks mention extensive consultations, those are often restricted to selected stakeholders from EU and international institutions, governments from EU member states and concerned neighbour countries, and private sector (particularly firms, investors and financial entities). Local and regional authorities, as well as civil society actors, are often consulted and also funded to implement programmes in line with the frameworks' priorities, but they are rarely involved in negotiation processes.

going review and evaluation of the New Pact.

Hold governments and institutions accountable to Article 21 TEU⁴⁷ when they undermine the rights and integrity of current and future generations. Introduce accountability measures and sanctions for governments and institutions on both shores that systematically violate human-rights commitments, hinder civil society efforts or undermine local democracy. At EU level, regular public reporting

should assess how the Pacts realise intergenerational fairness for all those affected by their policies, not only EU citizens.

Strengthen local democracy and multi-level governance by upgrading existing structures like the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM). Enhance local and regional mandates in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, recognising their central responsibilities in inclusion, social policy and climate adaptation.

⁴⁷ Article 21 TEU sets out the principles inspiring what the EU does internationally – its external actions. These principles are democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law. Universality means that human rights and freedoms apply to everyone, and indivisibility means that these rights and freedoms are equal in importance, so this article commits the EU to considering economic and social rights to be as important as civil and political rights. See <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/165/emberi-jogok>

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