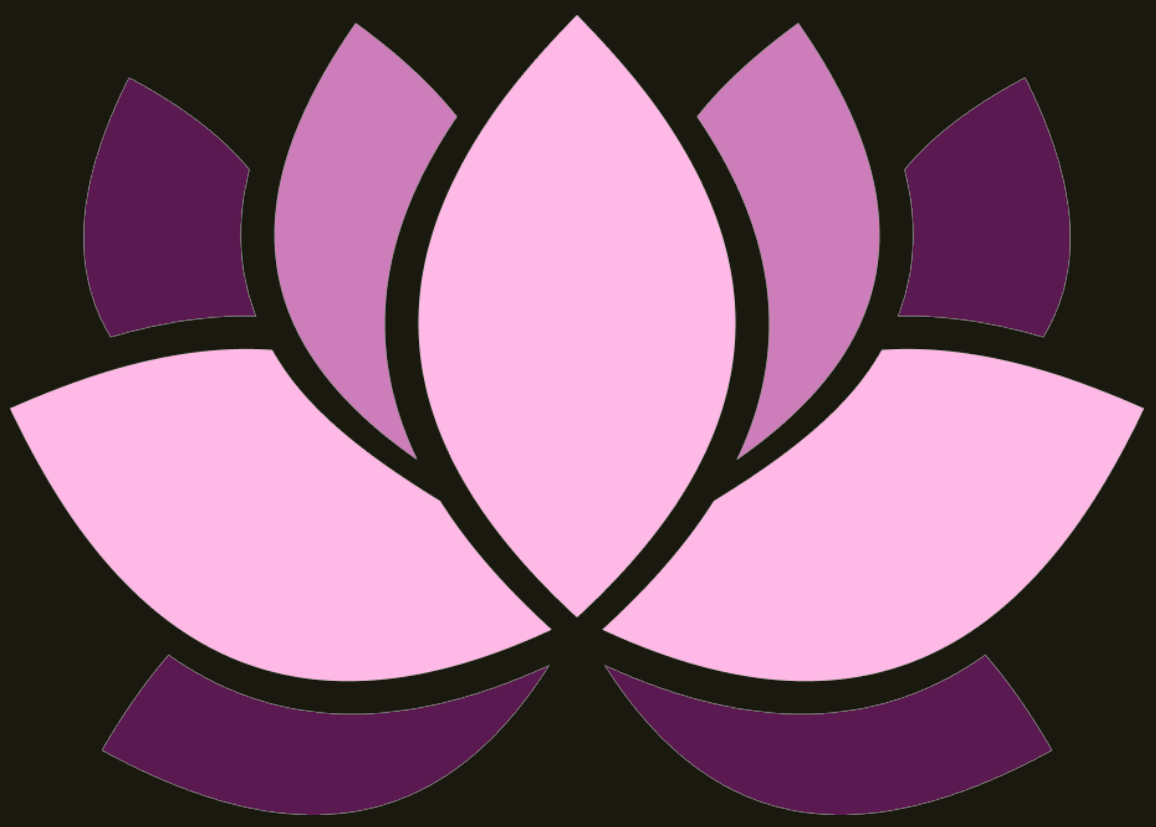
ACADEMIC PREPARATION KIT

19th Regional Selection Conference of EYP CZ



PÍSEK 2026

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Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)

(Twenty) Seven Nation Army: *As geopolitical tensions grow, defence has become a critical concern for Europe, yet Member States have failed to address asymmetrical defence industries across the Union. How can the EU secure the development of a common framework which integrates diverse defence industries and advances a unified defence policy?*

by Ana Miguel Almeida (PT)

Introduction

The growth of geopolitical tensions can be caused by **territorial disputes**, **competition for resources,** or **ideological conflicts**, which impact global stability and security. Moreover, they can affect people's quality of life by **rising costs of living**, causing **mass migrations**, and **public health deterioration**. In response to these issues, the EU has proposed a number of initiatives to match **Member States' efforts** and boost its **military competitiveness**, such as increasing its investment in defence and **procuring**[1] **more public defence equipment**. Additionally, it has structured plans and programs, such as the **ReArm Europe** or the **European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP)**.

These efforts are important not only to organise and combine purchases, but also to achieve the EU's 2030 goals: having at least **40%** of collaborative defence purchasing **by the end of 2027**, closing capability gaps via the SAFE fund, creating military mobility, and a simplified market. Thus, while following a path towards greater military capability, the EU **still faces challenges** due to the **defence industry's concentration** in Western Europe and a **fragmented military industry**. Finally, the EU **is still behind in expenditure** when compared to global competitors, such as the United States and China. Everything Member States do sends a diplomatic message, so will they connect their industrial asymmetries, or will they continue to hinder efforts for a **common European defence policy**?

Key Actors

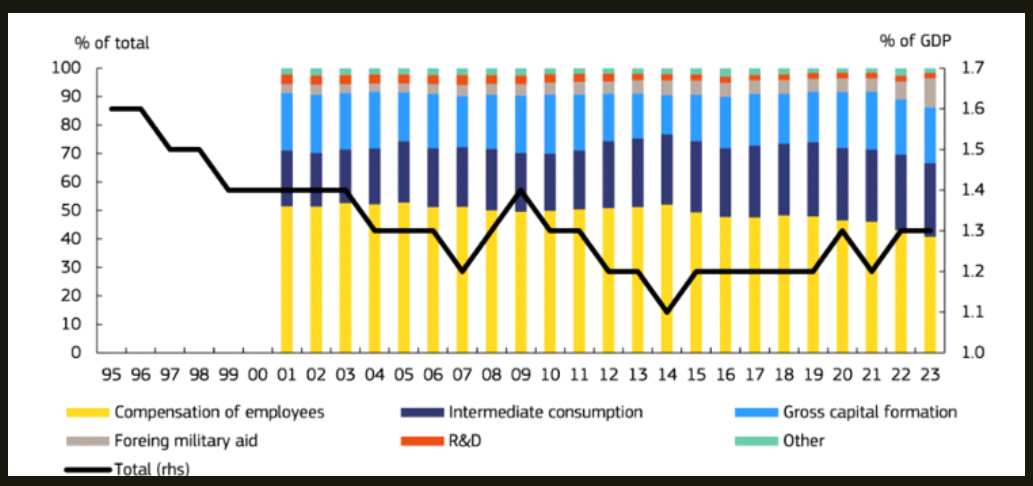
- **The Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS):** is a European Commission department that focuses on the EU Defence Industry. Its purpose is to ensure innovation and competitiveness in the defence industry. Its activities involve identifying challenges and building collaboration between public and private sectors.
- **The European Investment Bank (EIB):** is the financial institution of the EU. Its activities focus on supporting EU development and ensuring cooperation policies globally, such as formal partnerships and financing agreements. It finances **dual-use technologies**[2], military mobility, and NATO defence goals.
- **The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):** is a political and military alliance of 32 countries from North America and Europe, founded in 1949. Its work involves collective defence, crisis management, and decision-making by consensus. It connects North American and European nations for the purpose of military cooperation and coordination.
- **The European Defence Agency (EDA):** helps all 27 Member States develop their military resources. Its work spans from helping nations build their military equipment and funding defence research to training and exercises.
- **The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS):** is the EU's own agency analysing security and foreign policy issues directly for policymakers. It was established in 2002 to be an agency with intellectual freedom and to develop independent thinking. It gives state leaders practical advice on how to build foreign cooperation and defence plans.

[1] **Public procurement** is the process in which governments and military authorities acquire weapons and services related to defence.

[2] **Dual-use technologies** are conceived for civil applications but can also be used in military or defence contexts.

Measures in Place

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine and U.S. President Donald Trump's political pressure on NATO, the EU found it necessary to invest more in military defence. The Union has spent EUR 418 billion on defence in 2025, and the expenditure is expected to reach EUR **454 billion in 2026**. To better **structure the military investment**, recover the years lacking defence spending, and be better prepared for shifting alliances, the EU structured the **Readiness 2030** program, which aims to **rearm Member States**, **fix military weaknesses,** and ensure continuing cooperation between NATO and the EU.



The evolution of EU defence expenditure and its composition (DG ECFIN)

Due to **military panorama**[3] and specialisation differences, the EU strives to **close the gap between Member States** using the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) to interconnect **European transportation, energy,** and **digital services**. The EU has created initiatives, such as the Eastern Flank Watch, the European Drone Defence Industry, the European Air, and Space Shield to protect the **European airspace**, secure **technological networks**, and integrate **air**, **missile,** and **drone defences**. The EU aims to **coordinate its goals** and make every initiative an interconnected self-help mechanism by investing in ways of **innovating** the military landscape with **dual-use technologies**, such as AI-driven autonomous systems and high-density battery storage, while achieving the EU's energy efficiency and climate targets. Alongside the European Defence Fund (EDF), the EU invested over EUR 8 billion in **research and development**. Moreover, initiatives like the Security Campus that gather tools at the JRC laboratories, close the gaps between **research and operations**. Thus, investing in research is important to **reduce the fragmentation** across Member States, building strategic autonomy and a self-sufficient **economic environment**.

Finally, to **enhance the cooperation** between Member States and non-EU countries, the EU established new structural frameworks focusing on **four core areas**: **transportation**, **raw materials**, **joint operational missions**, and **investment**. Coordination across these areas is driven by **new mechanisms**, such as security and defence partnerships alongside **global allies**, for example, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (**PESCO**), in order to **achieve developments** concerning **collaborative defence strategies**. Furthermore, the EU aims to create a **'Military Schengen' zone** to facilitate the **transportation of military equipment**, utilising alternatives like European Military Mobility Enhanced Response System (**EMERS**) to prioritise critical transport during crises, alongside the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) to monitor national defence spending.

What Can the EU Do?

The defence competence is distributed between the **EU and the Member States**. As national security is the responsibility of **each Member State**, the EU has only **supporting competence**, meaning it **cannot pass binding legislation** in this area, however, the EU has specific mechanisms that are able to coordinate and help the defence of Member States. For that reason, the European Commission does not have **legislative power over military** and **operational matters**, leaving decisions to Member States in the Council of the European Union through **intergovernmental unanimity**. However, the EU records its shared competences for support **inside the internal market**, for instance, in **industry** and **research**, to strengthen European defence by indirect routes such as **strategic coordination**.

[3] **Military Panorama** is the global picture of everything that is happening in a specific moment in time.

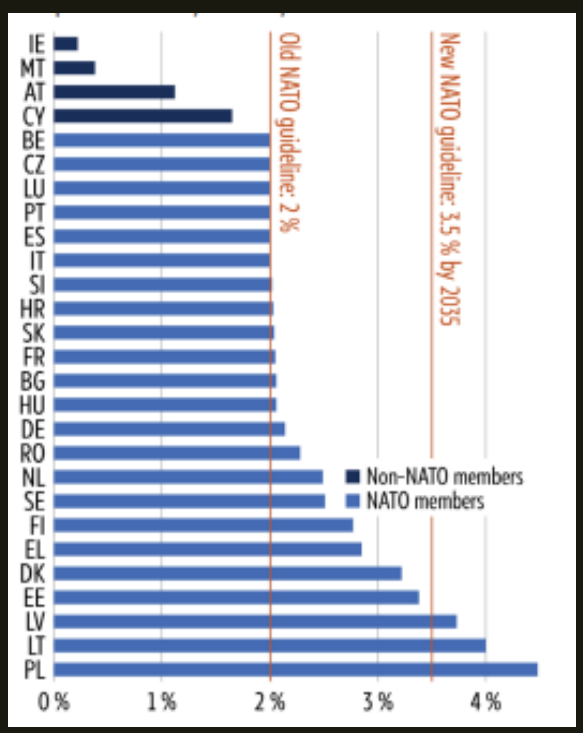
Impact & Key Conflicts

Helping Hand?

For decades, the **EU's defence sector** was under-invested, creating **several disparities** between the **EU and the United States**. As a result, the EU **stopped investing** in defence, and the lack of investment caused important modern defence systems, such as **air-to-air refuelling** and **advanced reconnaissance**, to be drastically downsized or cancelled altogether. Despite efforts to build an **auto-sufficient** military ecosystem, the EU continues to rely heavily on foreign **defence equipment**. The reliance on imported equipment leads not only to financial consequences, but also to long-term losses, creating extreme vulnerability to shifting American political agendas. Additionally, this is highlighted by the **investment**, **military equipment, and capability disparities** between Member States.

Bad Neighbours

Due to insufficient coordination among various EU funding streams and national fragmentation, where **less than 20% of defence spending** is cooperative, the EU **lacks a single defence market**. By prioritising local industry protection over international trade, the advantage of economies of scale[4] is lost. This results in duplicated infrastructure, higher per-unit costs and resource incompatibilities, and lack of uniformity on the **operator systems**, with the EU having 170 different weapons systems in use compared to **30 in the US**. Besides this, the fact that Member States differ on priorities and budgets, mainly due to varying debt levels, geographic **threat perceptions**, and **domestic budget structures,** intensifies the reliance on equipment from abroad. This **aggravates** not only the innovation gap in the **military industry** between Member States, but it also makes it difficult to **unify** the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB).



EU Member State defence expenditure, 2025, in % of GDP (NATO and IISS)

Let it Burn

The EU's military ambitions collide with its climate agenda, as militarism harms the environment not only by consuming its funding, but also through the environmental impact of manufacturing equipment. Furthermore, the expansion of initiatives like dual-use technologies **increases the demand** for critical raw materials and with initiatives such as EDIP, it is necessary to localise **supply chains**, speed up **industrial expansion**, and achieve the EU's military agenda, while also balancing environmental regulations.

An analysis that exposes the challenge to accelerate the military industrial base of the EU.

[4] **Economies of scale** are when the cost of production of a product is reduced because of the high number of products that are produced.

Now What?

Unifying the EU's defence policy means that Member States leave a part of their **sovereignty** behind, while also **stopping dependence** on foreign powers. Additionally, a joint defence means continuing to innovate and exploring new military approaches **while guaranteeing** that the **climate goals** are taken into consideration, and finding a balance between **countries' investment** and **raw materials consumption**. With that in mind:

- How can the EU guarantee Europeans are not paying the price for its high defence standards?
- How should the EU tackle the production of high-tech while detaching from using raw materials from abroad?
- If Member States maintain their sovereignty over defence, how can the EU ensure mechanisms like PESCO are effective?
- What are the main political and industrial challenges when unifying the EU's defence market?

Research Materials

- *'The foundations of EU development and cooperation policies' by European Parliament (2026):* A study that examines the relationship between principles and interests in the EU development and cooperation policies.
- *'What's behind the EU plans for a military rapid response system?' by DW News (2026):* A YouTube video that explains the military system the EU is creating to speed up the defence movement.
- *'BraveTechEU - for Battle-Tested Defence Innovation' by European Commission (2025):* An article that shows an example of an alliance between Ukrainian and European companies, including startups and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.
- *'Has Europe staked its economic future on war?' by Business Beyond (2026):* A YouTube video that explains the military industry's development timeline and how the investment would resonate with the war market.
- *'EU defence policy in the spotlight' by European Court of Auditors (2026):* An article that explains the defence landscape since 2019, its challenges, and opportunities.

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)

Closing Harbours: *The adoption of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum has led to criticism that its provisions on externalisation and burden-sharing may undermine refugee protection and place unequal responsibilities on certain Member and Non-Member States. How can the EU safeguard fundamental human rights while ensuring a fair distribution of responsibilities for asylum management?*

By Iva Novaković (RS)

Introduction

As the EU **tightens its border controls and asylum procedures**, concern persists among prospective refugees. Under the new rules, individuals arriving from countries with an **EU-wide recognition rate**[5] below **20 per cent,** such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Bangladesh, will have to face a much faster and stricter review process right at the border.

Additionally, with the **Return Regulation**[6] coming into effect, newly designated safe third countries play a more active role in **managing returns**. Therefore, questions arise whether these last resorts can take on the responsibility and have the capacity to admit **additional asylum seekers.**

Moreover, the increase in **accelerated procedures**[7] raises fairness concerns. According to the European Policy Centre, compressed timelines could risk rushing individual case evaluations, which could cause the whole process to be based on limited details, resulting in an unjust process.

Ultimately, this shift forces a critical question: Can the EU effectively operate its asylum management without compromising fundamental human rights and imposing a burden on Member States?

Key Actors

- **The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)**: the European Commission's department responsible for internal security, migration, and border management. **DG HOME** is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- **The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)**: provides support and guidance to Member States, such as ensuring fast and efficient asylum procedures, according to the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**. It helps Member States achieve equal results and provides them with the tools necessary to do so.
- **The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX)**: a European agency responsible for fighting cross-border crime. They perform a variety of tasks, such as border surveillance, assisting in return operations, and identifying new technologies that enhance surveillance, detection, and response capabilities.
- **The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**: is an alliance of 126 Non-Governmental Organisations[8] (**NGOs**) based in 40 European countries. It promotes the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law. The ECRE aims to achieve a system that protects refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons with dignity and respect by using court interventions, as well as judgment monitoring.

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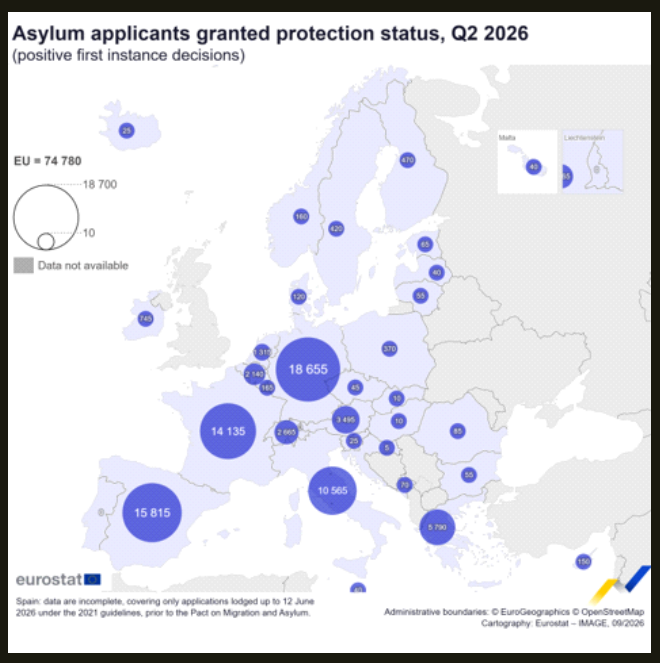
[5] **Recognition rate** indicates the percentage of asylum applicants granted refugee status or subsidiary protection per country.

[6] **Return Regulation** refers to the establishment of a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union. The Regulation significantly broadens the categories of countries to which people may be returned

[7] **Accelerated procedure** refers to a type of border procedure in which the applicant remains in the border area while the application is being processed.

[8] **Non-Governmental Organisation** is an organisation that is trying to achieve social or political goals but remains independent of any government.

- **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** an international organisation which provides assistance for refugees, including food, shelter, water, and medical care, but also works with countries to improve refugee and asylum laws and policies.
- **Refugee Point:** an NGO which helps refugees find long-term solutions, with the goal of them becoming socially and economically independent. They accomplish these goals through two main programmatic pillars: **self-reliance and resettlement**. Since their establishment in 2005, they have **helped over 194 thousand refugees**.



Asylum applicants granted protection status, positive first instance decisions (Eurostat)

Measures in Place

European asylum management was first grounded in the **1951 Geneva Convention**. It prohibited any state from expelling or returning any refugee if doing so would threaten their freedom. This inevitably demanded that Member States ensure that not a single asylum seeker would be returned to a country where they face **persecution**, **creating immense pressure on reception systems**. To combat this issue, the Pact on Migration and Asylum was introduced, and with it, different legal frameworks and laws.

The **Pact on Asylum and Migration** is a package of EU regulations and directives that took effect with the Migration Pact. It established a **solidarity mechanism** in hopes of relocating refugees, where Member States offer support **through return sponsorship, capacity building measures, and operational support**. It is **mandatory**, yet it remains flexible. Two EU agencies **EUAA** and **FRONTEX** help deport rejected asylum seekers to another country, provide money and tools to build better asylum systems, and send extra staff and equipment to help handle busy borders.

The Return Regulation is a legal framework designed to create **standardised procedures** for deporting **third-country nationals**[9] who are staying without authorisation. These rules require those individuals to set a deadline to leave voluntarily, or to be forcefully deported if they do not comply. It also broadens the rules for **safe-third countries**,[10] allowing the EU to send asylum seekers back to a non-EU country if they have a connection to it or passed through it, as long as it is deemed safe and respects human rights. Though, as analysts point out, this system will inflict harm on **2 to 3 million people**, and it could lead to refugees being stuck in unresolved legal statuses.

Finally, **accelerated border procedures** introduce mandatory screening and fast-track processing at external borders through the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**. Critics point out these tight time limits risk rushing individual case reviews and compromising fair adjudications.

[9] **Third-country nationals** refers to individuals who do not hold citizenship of any Member State.

[10] **Safe-third country** refers to a country outside the EU where a person could be sent because a Member State claims the person could have received protection there instead.

What Can the EU Do?

Under Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, border management and asylum matters fall within the **shared competence**[11] between the EU and its Member States. Therefore, the EU can pass common binding laws, but individual Member States **control their own borders** and asylum management. In addition, the EU can issue large budget pools such as the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund** to help improve asylum and migration management, namely supporting infrastructures for the reception of third-country nationals and providing support for vulnerable groups. Finally, the EU can further employ organisations, such as **Frontex**, to help control the number of smuggled immigrants, which will deploy operational support and guards to country borders.

Impact & Key Conflicts

Denial Is a River?

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum introduces **12-week limits for all border procedures** and **mandatory screening**[12] which applies to applicants from origin countries with an EU-wide asylum recognition rate of **20% or lower**. Under the **legal fiction of non-entry**,[13] border workers can deny entry into their country's territory to asylum seekers until they are admitted as a refugee under the argument of **national security**. Further applications may be denied if an applicant's home country is currently designated as a '**safe country of origin**', raising questions about the political grounds behind these designations, such as how people who seek asylum in the EU will be treated and how their claims will be considered. Furthermore, through **Crisis Regulation**,[14] Member States can now easily stop people from applying for asylum during a self-declared **mass influx**[15] or **instrumentalisation**.[16] Ultimately, because the main goal of the Pact is **fast-paced investigation and registration of asylum seekers**, the risk of valid claims being rejected simply because applicants **lack the time to gather evidence** arises.

Not My Problem, That's Just Not My Problem

Under the **Return Regulation**, the EU has set up standardised rules for deporting third-country nationals. To enforce this, the EU relies heavily on **externalisation.** Externalisation refers to sending asylum processes and detention centres outside EU borders to be handled by third countries. Additionally, the EU is making deals with **origin and transit countries**, using money or visa perks, to help them stop migration before it reaches Europe. While EU officials argue these deals help break smuggling networks and restore order, some note it puts an immense amount of pressure on the **transit countries**. By sending these applicants to other countries, it should be ensured that they are properly prepared and **have enough resources to cater to incoming asylum seekers**, which currently is not the case.

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[11] **Shared competence** is an area where both the EU and its Member States can legislate, with Member States only acting where the EU has not exercised its power.

[12] Mandatory screening refers to a fast pre-entry control to quickly check, identify and register third-county nationals.

[13] **Fiction of non-entry** refers to a person physically present on a country's territory who is considered to be legally present only after official authorisation.

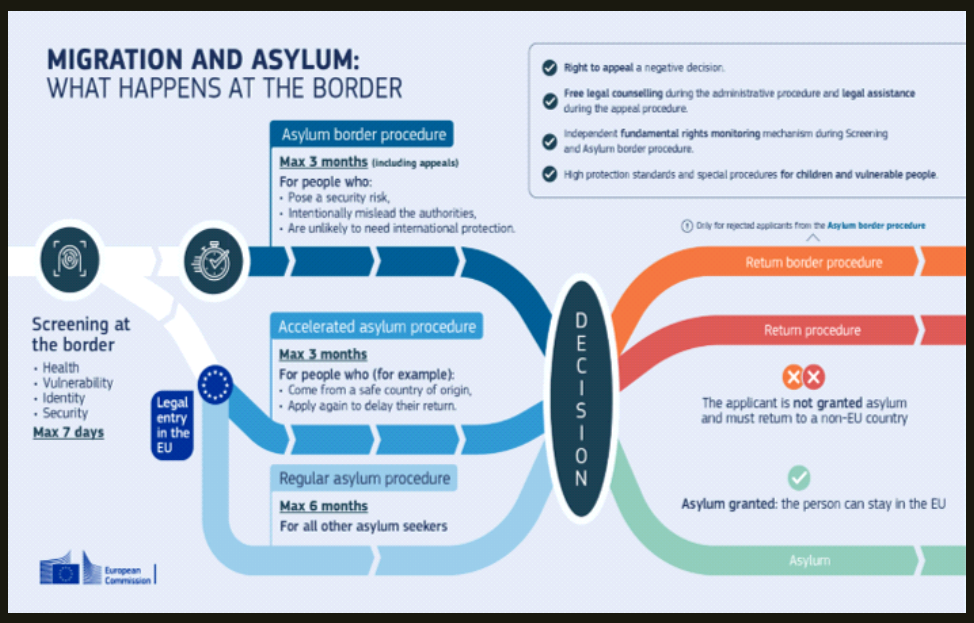
[14] **Crisis regulation** refers to an EU law which lets Member States temporarily stop following asylum rules during mass arrivals or political border crises.

[15] **Mass influx** indicates the arrival in the Community of a large number of displaced persons, who come from a specific country or geographical area, whether their arrival in the Community was spontaneous or aided, for example through an evacuation programme.

[16] **Instrumentalisation** is the usage of a group of people, a crisis, or public policy as leverage for political pressure. For instance, the instrumentalisation of migrants occurs when a state encourages detention-seeker's fast-track border or pushes people across a border to destabilise another country.

That's the Bare Minimum…

Backlash appeared regarding **fast-track measures, which are restricting access to rights**, weakening protections such as the **right to asylum,** and the right to an **effective remedy**. This right ensures individuals can challenge legal decisions in court. Furthermore, opposing parties argue that opportunities for **unlawful pushbacks** and **misuse of detention**, prolonging the time an asylum seeker spends in border facilities, are present. During the **12-week limit** for all border procedures, asylum seekers will most likely be detained in facilities. However, the EU has not yet introduced a **minimum standard** for living conditions in these facilities; thus, **the quality** may significantly differ across Member States. It is important to mention that people may be held in facilities that are difficult for NGOs and legal counsellors to reach. Ultimately, during fast-track procedures, there is a risk of denying thousands of asylum seekers in critical need of help, since these procedures apply only to applicants from origin countries with an **EU-wide asylum recognition** rate of **20% or lower**.



EU Pact on Migration & Asylum Border Procedure Flowchart (DG HOME)

Now What?

With the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU tries to implement **faster border procedures**, but it directly puts a burden on non-leading Member States and potentially puts asylum seekers' safety at risk. Rushing such procedures inevitably leads to overlooking displaced victims, causing them not to receive refugee status. Meanwhile, **broad exemptions during self-declared crises** give individual governments freedom to suspend asylum access altogether. This critical shift in policy leaves pressing questions regarding implementation and oversight:

- How can the EU ensure that fast-tracked border procedures and tight processing deadlines do not compromise an applicant's right to due process, legal counsel, and an individual assessment?
- What precautions should be set in order to protect each individual asylum seeker's rights and needs during detention?
- What safety measures can the EU establish to ensure the Crisis Regulation is strictly invoked under emergency circumstances?
- On what legal and humanitarian grounds should the EU determine which countries qualify as 'safe countries of origin'?
- How can the EU create a fairer system to prevent unfair burden placement on third countries?

Research Materials

- *'Understanding Europe's turn on Migration' by Brookings (2024):* A policy article explaining the EU Migration Pact and the responses of Member States.
- *'Infographic: Understanding the EU Pact on Migration & Asylum' by the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (2025):* a thorough explanation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- **'***Europe's new asylum and migration policies: Could Denmark's model lead the way?' by FRANCE 24 English (2025):* a short news report which explores whether restrictive national models, such as Denmark's externalisation framework, could become the blueprint for wider European asylum policy.

Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)

Unicorns Across the Pond: *The EU is lagging behind the US, as Americans have 8 times more unicorns, privately owned start-ups reaching a value of at least USD 1 billion, crucially affecting the EU's economy and competitiveness across industries. Which measures can the EU employ to encourage the growth of unicorns and stimulate European competitiveness?*

by Batu Bölükemini (TR)

Introduction

Imagine two individual **start-ups**[17] founded on the exact same dates with a similar idea in mind. One is based in **Berlin** while the other is based in **San Francisco**. Five years later, the American-based company is **worth over USD 1 billion**, while the European one has either **failed** to grow, **shut down** quietly, or **relocated** to the US. This is not an imaginary scenario. The US hosts **more than eight hundred unicorns**, privately owned start-ups valued at USD 1 billion or more, whereas the EU counts **little over one hundred**. Despite the fact that the EU hosts **a high-tier research base** and **provides access to the single market**[18] of over **four hundred million consumers**, most promising entrepreneurships struggle to grow beyond their early stages.

The consequences reach far beyond wounded economic pride, as fewer unicorns mean **fewer high-value jobs** and **less private investment** within the EU. The lack of high-value jobs and investments also results in **growing dependence on foreign technology** in sectors as sensitive as artificial intelligence, defence, and green energy. Thus, the EU faces an urgent question: can it close the unicorn gap before its brightest founders leave for the US?

Key Actors

- **Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs[19] (DG GROW):** is the European Commission department responsible for the maintenance of the EU single market. It removes complex trade barriers, helps shape industrial operating policies, supports enterprises and entrepreneurship. In addition, this DG only works as an internal mechanism within the barriers of the EU.
- **Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD):** proposes policies concerning the EU's science and tech operations, and holds financial leverage over Member States. This DG oversees programs that promise start-up breakthroughs such as Horizon Europe, while also transforming early-stage deep-tech research into growing EU unicorns.
- **The European Investment Bank (EIB):** the EU's lending institution, providing direct financing and long-term loans. The EIB also works towards providing better funding for European tech companies at the late stage of their development to potentially prevent them from relocating outside the EU.
- **European Investment Fund (EIF):** represents the EU's financing arm, channelling public guarantees, such as **venture capital** (VC) **funds**[20], that in turn invests in start-ups.
- **The European Startup Network (ESN):** An international **NGO**[21] acting as an umbrella for national startup associations from Europe. ESN shares data via the European Startup Monitor and connects entrepreneurs to cross-border markets, talent, and funding.

[17] **Start-ups** are young companies founded by one or more entrepreneurs to develop a unique product or service, bring it to market, and grow rapidly.

[18] **Single Market** is a unified economic space that allows goods, services, capital, and people to move freely across participating countries without borders or tariffs.

[19] **SMEs** are small and medium sized enterprises, which represent almost the complete entirety of the EU's business.

[20] **Venture capital funds** are pooled investment vehicles that provide capital to early-stage startups and high-potential small businesses in exchange for an equity ownership stake.

[21] **Non-Governmental Organisation** is an organisation that is trying to achieve social or political goals but remains independent of any government.

Measures in Place

Despite the fact that the EU has fallen behind in the **technology and innovation race** over the past years, Brussels has not sat on its hands. The **Draghi Report** and **Letta Report** both highlight the same two problems: **split-up capital markets** and **different policies** on taxes, funding, and many more fields in each Member State. Consequently, in January 2025, the Commission answered with its **Competitiveness Compass**, which aims to **simplify regulations** and **boost funding**. Since then, start-ups and scale-ups have become a top priority within the EU.

Following the issues caused by the differing policies, the **EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy**, adopted in May 2025, covers five main areas: rules, funding, market access, talent, and infrastructure. The strategy's main idea is the **28th regime**, which would give innovative companies **one optional legal status** across the whole EU. This regime proposes **a single set of rules** to make it easier to start and grow an EU-wide business. As a result, founders would no longer need to relearn company law in every country. A formal proposal came in March 2026; however, legal scholars already say it is a weaker version of what Draghi wanted.

Regarding funding, the **Savings and Investments Union** (SIU) wants to channel more of Europe's pool of household savings into capital markets and investment, while the EIB already backs high-risk venture debt. Without the mentioned high-risk venture debt provided, many start-ups would hesitate to try to grow larger or fail trying to do so. In October 2025, the European Commission brought private investors and the **EIB** into a room to launch the **Scaleup Europe Fund**, a multi-billion euro fund for deep-tech scale-ups to help them grow and compete globally. However, despite all efforts, no attempt has been able to close the gap between the **United States' VC** raised and the **EU's VC** raised yet, as European start-ups still raise roughly six times less venture capital than American ones in 2025.



A map showing Europe continues to grow a broader base of startup hubs, the U.S. remains far ahead in both the number and concentration of billion-dollar startups. (StartupBlink)

What Can the EU Do?

The EU's innovation-targeted policies operate at the intersection of shared and supporting competences. EU startup policy relies heavily on **coordination** rather than centralised command, as critical growth levers like taxation and **insolvency law**[22] remain firmly under Member State's legislation. The single market allows the EU to legislate competition rules and spread elements of funding under a single authority. However, the policy areas that most affect whether a start-up can become a unicorn, like **taxation**, **pension fund regulation**, **insolvency law**, and **labour law**, remain firmly in the hands of Member States, and changes often require consensus or lengthy negotiation. This means the **EU's most powerful tool is not command**, but **coordination**: setting common frameworks such as the 28th regime, pooling public investment to de-risk private capital, and applying political pressure, while the final, and often decisive choices are still made in national capitals.

[22] **Insolvency law** is a set of rules, which are triggered once a legal person, e.g. a company, is not able to meet their financial obligations, e.g., a debt.

Impact & Key Conflicts

Whose Capital Is It Anyway?

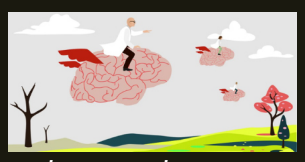
Europe's capital markets remain **deeply fragmented** along national lines, including 27 different systems of security protocols, bankruptcy procedures, and investor protection. The SIU seeks to unlock part of the estimated ten trillion euros sitting in European household savings for productive investment. However, Member States remain protective of their national pension and banking systems, fearing loss of oversight or capital flight to larger, more liquid markets elsewhere in the Union. The result is a paradox: Europe is not short of capital in aggregate, but **that capital rarely flows to where ambitious start-ups need it most**.

Twenty Seven Rulebooks

The proposed **28th regime** aims to give innovative companies an EU-wide legal status, aiming to spare founders the cost and complexity of restructuring under national law each time they expand across borders. Yet, some Member States argue that the current proposal has been diluted to the point of **losing its transformative potential**, retaining too many national carve-outs to truly function as one harmonised regime. For instance, the regime's scope was widened from Draghi and Letta's original vision of a targeted startup vehicle, which focused only on certain companies, to a version open to companies of any size or age, diluting its innovation-specific design **under pressure** from broader business lobbies. Similarly, Article 4 of the actual proposal defers any matter **not explicitly harmonised** to national law, meaning up to 27 different national versions of the '**unified**' EU instead of one single regime. This exposes **a deeper conflict** between the EU's drive for coordination and Member States' attachment to their own company law traditions and tax bases.

Brain Circulation or Brain Drain?

Talent is as decisive as capital. Differences in how Member States tax stock assets make it **much less attractive** for European start-ups to offer **competitive equity packages** compared with their American rivals. This pushes **skilled employees** and, sometimes, **entire founding teams**, straight to the US. Whether this results in a brain drain, damaging the EU's mindpower, or a **healthy circulation of talent** that eventually returns with experience and capital, is debated Europe-wide.



Relevant Blog Post - Capital Gravity: Why Europe's Most Ambitious Companies Still Move West

Innovation Versus Regulation

Finally, the EU's own regulatory systems are frequently cited by founders and investors as adding **compliance costs**[23] that smaller, resource-constrained start-ups struggle to absorb compared with **better-funded American competitors**. Supporters counter that clear, trustworthy rules are themselves a competitive advantage, particularly for sectors such as **artificial intelligence (AI)**, where trust is increasingly a market differentiator. Another issue consists of the fact that the EU has many restrictions that limit data usage for AI and data-intensive companies. Thus, it becomes necessary to weigh how far the EU can **simplify** its regulatory environment without abandoning the protections that distinguish the European model. European Digital Rights, Europe's **largest** digital rights network, has **warned** that the Commission's 'simplification' package weakens core **GDPR**[24] and **AI Act** safeguards, calling it **deregulation** in disguise.

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[23] **Compliance costs** are the expenses a company incurs to follow laws, industry standards, and government regulations.

[24] **GDPR** is an EU regulation ensuring **privacy** and security in Member States.

Now What?

Europe has both **the talent** and **the growing political action** to close the unicorn gap, but unfortunately, **the capital stays fragmented**. Forcing alignment among Member States cuts directly against the same national tax and company-law **traditions** flagged earlier as the EU's 'deeper conflict,' and any push toward harmonisation will need to answer why Member States should give up a **sovereignty** lever that funds their own **welfare** states. EU's most ambitious founders often find it easier to scale abroad than at home. Even though these legislations are deemed to lead to the success of the EU, they still depend on 27 Member States agreeing to **move together**. The debate on the scope of the 28th regime already shows the **tension**: narrowing the regime to 'unicorns' risks repeating the old-economy lobbying that diluted the proposal, while widening it to **SMEs broadens political support** but dilutes the targeted, **high-growth focus** Draghi and Letta originally called for. So, the real issue is not whether the EU needs and wants unicorns; it is how to turn the 27 individual nations into a **single mind** that can actually **compete** with Silicon Valley. Thus, it invites us to think about:

- How can the EU push Member States to align tax rules and stock options without taking away their financial sovereignty?
- Can a unified European stock option framework survive the clash with diverse national labour laws?
- Is a simpler, watered-down 28th regime a real fix, or just a symbolic move?
- How can the EU construct a functional single market for digital and deep-tech scale-ups when national insolvencies trap capital inside local borders?
- Can the EU pool pension funds to finance local scale-ups without violating national fiscal control?

Research Materials

- *'Why Europe Failed to Dominate Tech' by ColdFusion (2025)*: A YouTube video explaining why Europe, despite its research base and talent pool, has not produced its own Google or Facebook-like companies.
- '*Europe has plenty of startups. Why are there so few tech giants?' by CNBC (2026):* A short interview with Arm co-founder Hermann Hauser on the 'scaling problem'. He argues the issue is not the number of startups, but keeping and growing them in Europe, a good prompt for the 'is regulation or capital the real bottleneck' debate.
- *'The lazy myth that Europe regulated itself into decline' by Andy Budd (2026):* A contrarian take arguing regulation is not the real culprit. Directly challenges the 'is regulation or capital the real bottleneck?' framing from the CNBC piece above.
- *'Demand Without Deployment: Why Europe Builds Startups But Struggles to Buy From Them' by Startuprad.io (2026):* Argues the hidden scale-up bottleneck is not capital or regulation at all, but slow public/institutional procurement is.

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)

Reduce, Reuse, Retire: *With Europe's working-age population projected to shrink significantly in the future, Member States' welfare and retirement models face existential challenges. What strategies can the EU propose to ensure sustainable retirement systems across the continent?*

by Evan Calcoën–Jullien (FR)

Introduction

For many decades, nations worldwide have been confronted with a new ongoing demographic challenge: **rapid ageing of the population**. Ageing disparities reveal a long-running issue because the shrinking **working-age population**[25] contributes less and less in the **welfare** and **retirement models of Member States**. This could cause a social and political crisis, as the workforce would see an **increase in contributions they need to pay**. Ever since the Baby-Boom period, this issue has gained in severity in Europe, becoming one of the continents most impacted by ageing, illustrated by the term 'Grandpa Boomers'.

Thus, the EU could seek to **reduce demographic pressure**, make **better use of its existing workforce**, and **redesign retirement systems** around longer and more flexible working lives. To what extent does the inefficiency of welfare systems represent an issue to the EU's stability? Which levers can the EU use to solve this modern issue?

Case Study: Focus on Italy

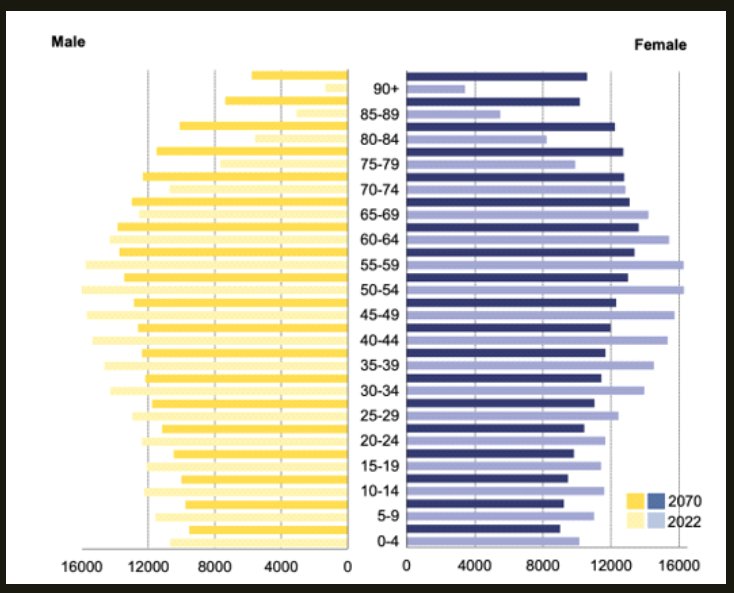
Italy is an **illustrative example** because it combines very **low birth rates**, **rapid population ageing**, and **pressure on pension finances**. Notably, it has **one of the oldest populations among Member States**, since Italians over 65 years old represented 21.7% of the total population in 2015, while it is estimated to go up to 27.7% in 2030. Furthermore, Italy's **fertility rate,** 1.14 children per child-bearing person in 2025, **is far below the replacement level**. **Replacement level** refers to the demographic threshold at which each generation is, in the long run, large enough to replace the previous one. This level is generally estimated at **2.1 children** per child-bearing person. Finally, the **number of workers financing retirees is expected to decrease**. Consequently, the **old-age dependency ratio**[26] will rise from 40.8% in 2022 and likely peak at 66% around 2050. In other words, there were approximately **41 people aged 65 and over** for every 100 people of working age in 2022. This dependence is expected to increase to **66 people aged 65 and over** in 2050.

Italy is not an isolated case in Europe. **Similar demographic pressures** affect countries such as Germany, Spain, Greece, and Portugal, which, despite their pension systems and demographic situations differing, report a low average fertility rate of about **1.3 births** per child-bearing person.

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[25] **Working-age population** is the total number of people in an economy, who fall within the age range from 15 to 64 years old, considered able to work.

[26] **Old–age dependency ratio** refers to the number of elderly people aged 65 per 100 people of working age.



Population, in thousands, by age group and sex, 2022 and 2070 in the EU (DG ECFIN)

Key Actors

- **Directorate General on Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL)**: can study the operation of the different national systems to identify their main weaknesses and their evolutions. Then, **DG EMPL** evaluates whether pensions are sufficient and analyses the risk of elderly persons' poverty. It also studies the consequences of demographic ageing on the balance of the pension systems' durability. Finally, **DG EMPL** can draw Member States' attention to certain difficulties and suggest improvements in the framework of the **European Semester**[27].

- **Member States**: represented by their ministers in the Council of the EU, they negotiate a proposed social affairs policy and vote on it. In this case, Social Affairs and Employment Ministries focus on pensions and employment, while Finance Ministries assess the financial and budgetary impact.

- **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**: Trade unions defend workers' wages, working conditions and pension rights, while also advocating for sustainable pension systems. At the European level, trade unions advocate for adequate and inclusive pensions and have opposed approaches that rely primarily on raising the statutory retirement age or reducing pension adequacy.

- **AGE Platform Europe:** A European network of organisations which focuses specifically on the rights and well-being of older people, protection against old-age poverty, age equality, and access to care and social services. It argues for systems which provide secure and adequate pension incomes for pensioners.

- **European Policy Information Center (EPICENTER)**: A European network of classical-liberal think-tanks that promotes free-market policies, limited government intervention, and greater fiscal restraint. In the context of the pension systems, **EPICENTER** and its member organisations have advocated for greater reliance on **funded**[28] and **personal pension schemes**, arguing that excessive dependence on **Pay-as-you-go (PAYG)**[29] systems creates long-term fiscal and demographic pressures.

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[27] **European Semester** is an annual cycle where the EU countries coordinate their economic, budgetary, employment, and social policies.

[28] **Funded pension system** (or pension by capitalisation) is a retirement model where workers save and invest money into individual or collective funds during their working years.

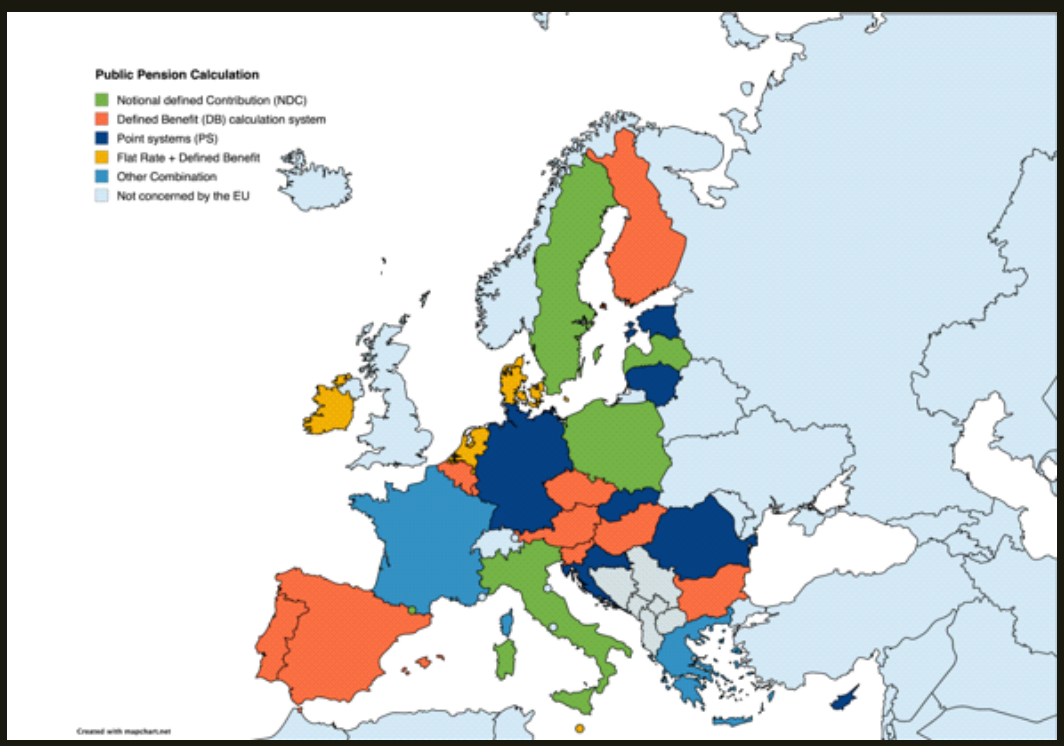
[29] **Pay-as-you-go pension system** is a retirement model where contributions collected from the current active workforce immediately fund the pensions of current retirees.

Measures in Place

At the EU level, the European Pillar of Social Rights recognises the **right to adequate old-age income**. Furthermore, the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158) gives workers **more parental and carers' leave** and more flexible working options. The EU can promote the **portability and coordination of pension rights** for mobile workers across the EU, under Article 48 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). For example, a worker having worked 10 years in France and then 15 years in Germany, despite the fact that these two pension systems are completely different, the EU established strict rules on preserving workers pension rights across the EU.

Furthermore, the EU can **coordinate national employment and economic policies** in the framework of the European Semester, which monitors Member States' pension sustainability and encourages national reforms, and the **Open Method of Coordination (OMC)**[30]. Moreover, the EU can **provide funding** for reforms and active-ageing measures, as part of the European Social Fund Plus, which is its main financial instrument to co-fund national and regional programs in **lifelong learning, upskilling older workers,** and **adapting workplace health** and **safety to age-diverse workforces.**

At a national level, several Member States have **increased retirement ages**[31] or have linked them proportionally to life expectancy. For instance, Sweden has established a hybrid pension system: an automatic balancing mechanism (commonly called **Notional Defined-Contribution**), which adjusts pensions according to the demographic, related to a **PAYG** system and economic developments, representing a more **long-term flexible financial system**. Nonetheless, this system may result in lower pensions during economic downturns and prevents government flexibility in modifying pensions. In the same way, the Netherlands and Denmark connect pension ages to life expectancy, which can **ease pressure on public finances,** but cannot be adapted to workers occupying jobs with **hard working conditions** with shorter healthy life expectancies.



Map representing different methods of public pension calculations (DG ECFIN)

However, some policies have been proven to be **unsuccessful**. For instance, Italy's early-retirement schemes allowed workers to **retire before the standard age**. While politically popular, they reduced the contribution base and increased pension expenditure. Moreover, France also demonstrates that raising the **retirement age alone is insufficient**. The 2023 Retirement Reform, which has led to huge social and political movements of disapproval, gradually increased the **legal retirement age** from 62 to 64, but **employment among older workers** remains **comparatively low**, showing that requiring people to work longer does not necessarily keep them in employment without sufficient job opportunities and support. Thus, French employment among those aged 60 to 64 was still only 42.4% in 2024, compared with 55.9% across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

[30] **Open Method of Coordination** allows Member States to cooperate, align strategies, and share best practices in policy areas that fall primarily under national sovereignty.

[31] **Retirement age** is the specific age set by law or pension rules when a person can stop working and start receiving a state pension or retirement benefits.

What Can the EU Do?

The EU has **important but limited competences** regarding retirement systems. Pension and social security systems remain primarily the **responsibility of Member States**, meaning that the **EU cannot simply impose a unitary European pension age**, **contribution rate,** or **pension models**.

Article 153 of TFEU allows the **EU to support and complement Member States** through measures such as minimum social standards, working conditions, and social protection, but generally **does not allow full harmonisation** of national social-security systems. There is room for common **standards and cooperation**, but national governments may resist policies perceived as restricting fiscal or social-policy autonomy. Differences in **demographics**, **labour markets,** and **existing pension models** make a **one-size-fits-all solution challenging**.

Impact & Key Conflicts

Longer Lives, Longer Careers?

Europe's ageing population puts pressure on **PAYG**, where current **workers finance current retirees** through contributions. Eurostat reported an EU total age-dependency **ratio of 57.1%** in 2025, which means there were **fewer than two people** of working age for every pensioner. The European Commission projects substantial **long-term fiscal effects** from ageing, although the size and direction differ considerably between Member States. One possible response is to **extend working lives**[32], for example through higher statutory retirement ages, flexible retirement or stronger incentives for older workers to remain employed. Yet, workers and trade unions may argue that physically **demanding occupations**, **health inequalities**, and **unequal career histories** make a uniform increase inequitable.

Relevant Video - What Went Wrong with Europe's Pension System? - TLDR News EU

'Save the System!' vs. 'Don't Shrink My Pension!'

Governments are faced with a dilemma: guaranteeing **sufficient retirement income** for all while not making **pension public spending too costly**. **Raising contributions for current workers, reducing benefits, or tightening eligibility** could improve public finances, but may worsen labour costs, reduce **disposable income**,[33] and consequently affect consumption and growth. On the contrary, protecting generous benefits can preserve living standards but requires higher taxation, contributions or borrowing. Younger workers may, therefore, **prioritise affordability** regarding their purchase power, while current and future pensioners **prioritise security** regarding their pensions.

The European Central Bank Report reveals that there is a **third alternative** to solve the pension problem – **change the whole system**. However, a radical change from PAYG system to a **funded pension system may have consequences for current workers**, because it would entail a **double burden** for those generations who are continuing to contribute to the **PAYG system** for existing pensioners while simultaneously having to build up their own pension savings. The policy's main challenge is, therefore, to distribute costs and benefits across generations without worsening poverty among older people.

The Migration Lifeboat

The European Commission identifies **managed regular migration** as one element of its demographic toolbox, alongside **improving working participation**. Additional workers could expand the contribution base and help address labour shortages, but **migration cannot automatically resolve pension pressures**: outcomes depend on employment, wages, integration, and migrants' eventual pension entitlements. At the same time, migration has become an increasingly **politicised topic**, with migrant inflows and integration policies often used by political actors as part of broader debates over national identity, border control, welfare, and electoral competition, which can complicate the design and public acceptance of migration policies.

[32] **Working life** refers to the portion or years of a person's life spent in a paid job or regular employment, typically spanning from the end of formal education until retirement.

[33] **Disposable income** is characterised by the households' available income, after taxes, for consumption, spending and/or saving.

Now What?

Europe's ageing population is increasing pressure on pension systems, raising difficult questions about how **retirement** can **remain financially sustainable** while providing **adequate incomes** for all. Extending working lives, increasing retirement ages, encouraging migration, and adjusting contributions or benefits are possible responses, but each creates advantages and disadvantages across generations and social groups. Since pension policy remains **primarily a Member State competence**, the EU must balance national **sovereignty** with the need for greater **cooperation** and **coordination** among Member States. This leads us to ask these questions:

- Should Member States increase retirement ages, or should retirement remain flexible depending on occupation and individual circumstances?
- How can governments ensure financially sustainable pension systems without increasing the risk of poverty among older people?
- How can the EU better support the different Member States' pension systems while respecting their authority on national social security policies?
- To what extent can the EU solve the demographic pressure on pension systems with new migration dynamics?

Research Materials

- *'Europe Demographic Dilemma' by Thoughts on the Market (2024):* A 10-minute long podcast focusing on the different action policies Member States can set to face future demographic challenges.
- *'Demography of Europe' by Eurostat (2026):* A very useful interactive resource which covers ageing, life expectancy, population structure, and demographic projections with the use of maps, graphs, and comparisons between Member States.
- *'Pension timebomb: why Europe's social contract is becoming unsustainable' by the Guardian (2025)*: A relevant article which explains why the topic of pension has become so crucial in some European countries.
- *'Old Continent, New Growth: Pension Reform as an Economic Engine for Europe" by the Boston Consulting Group (2026)*: This article highlights one of the solutions which could resolve the ageing pressure on pension systems with a funded pension system. This system should not be considered a final solution, but rather an example to consider for its pros and cons.

Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI)

Boiled and Ignored: *Despite climate change being projected to displace up to 1.2 billion people by 2050, international law and European law still offers no formal recognition for 'climate refugees', leading to debates on whether the EU should aim for a distinct legal status for climate-displaced people or adapt its existing migration and asylum framework. How should the EU address this legal dilemma to ensure the most effective protection of human rights?*

by Celia Bucurei (RO)

Introduction

Climate change could displace up to **1.2 billion people** by 2050, making it one of the **defining human displacement crises of the century.** In 2024 alone, **the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)** recorded **65.8 million new displacements** globally, of which **45.8 million** were triggered by natural hazards such as **floods**, **storms**, and **droughts**. Despite this, neither international law nor EU law formally recognises climate refugees as a legal category. The 1951 Refugee Convention, the basis of international refugee protection, defines refugees through a well-founded fear of **persecution linked to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group**, rather than environmental displacement. Consequently, people displaced by climate change may face significant protection gaps. As climate pressures grow, the EU must consider whether to create a **distinct legal status** for climate-displaced people, or **adapt its existing** Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Both approaches raise important legal, political, and practical questions about how human rights can be effectively protected.

Case Study: Europe's First Climate Migrants

When **Storm Daniel** struck Thessaly, Greece, in September 2023, record floodwaters submerged the village of Vlochos. Resident Vaios Giatropoulos witnessed his community submerge under metres of water, leaving families in total uncertainty about their future. The Giatropoulos family belongs to an expanding group of **internal climate migrants**. According to the IDMC, extreme weather events in Greece have forced **nearly 300,000** people to flee their homes **since 2008**. Although **95%** of families in the nearby village of Metamorphosis voted **to relocate together**, Vlochos remains split. While the EU mobilised over €100 million from its Solidarity Fund alongside **emergency civil protection**, its action was strictly limited to public infrastructure repair, failing to offer **individual property compensation** and **long-term human resettlement**. Existing legal frameworks offer little help: EU asylum rules and the 1951 Refugee Convention protect only those fleeing persecution, leaving internally displaced EU citizens without basic guarantees like **state-backed buyouts**[34] or **subsidised housing**[35]. These circumstances raise questions whether existing legal and social protection mechanisms at the EU level are sufficient to support communities facing **permanent** or **repeated displacement**. While a dedicated legal status could provide a **clearer framework** for relocation and **long-term support**, expanding existing mechanisms could avoid creating a new and **potentially fragmented category** of protection. Thessaly, therefore, illustrates the broader challenge of determining how European law should respond to internal climate displacement while balancing **legal clarity**, **long-term protection**, and **Member State responsibilities**.

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[34] A **state-backed buyout** means that a government provides financial help, guarantees, or direct funding to help an investor buy all or the majority of a strategic company for the State's interest.

[35] **Subsidized housing** refers to housing units that receive financial assistance from the government or other organizations to reduce the cost for residents. This assistance helps make rent more affordable for low-income households.



Greek flood after Storm Daniel (Euroactiv)

Key Actors

- **The European Union Agency for Asylum:** supports Member States in implementing the CEAS by providing operational, technical, legal, and practical assistance, including deploying experts to countries facing migratory pressure, training national asylum officials, supporting the assessment of international protection applications, and helping improve reception conditions. It also monitors how Member States implement asylum and reception rules, and provides guidance to promote greater consistency across the EU.
- **The International Organisation for Migration:** is the leading intergovernmental organisation dealing with migration, and plays an important role in understanding the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, and human mobility.
- **The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU):** ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied consistently across Member States. Its interpretation of EU **asylum**[38] legislation and fundamental rights can therefore influence how protection claims are assessed and how existing legal provisions apply to new circumstances. It cannot itself create EU legislation or establish a new climate refugee status.
- **Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)**: develops and implements EU policies on **migration, asylum, and internal security**, including **CEAS**.
- **The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC):** is an independent monitoring body whose data underpins most EU and UN policy discussions. IDMC recorded **23.7 million internal disaster displacements** in 2021 alone, with weather-related hazards responsible for 94% of that figure.
- **The European Environment Agency (EEA):** provides independent information on the environment and climate risks, supporting EU policymaking on climate adaptation and resilience. Its assessments help identify environmental pressures that can contribute to displacement.

Measures in Place

Currently, the main international framework for refugee protection is the **1951 Geneva Convention** and its **1967 Protocol**, which establish the legal criteria for recognising individuals as refugees and outline the protection they are entitled to under international law. Climate change and environmental disasters are not independent grounds for refugee status. However, the principle of non-refoulement[36] may offer protection in specific circumstances. This principle may prevent the return of individuals to situations where they would face a **real risk of life-threatening conditions or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment**, as recognised under international human rights law. At EU level, the Pact on Migration and Asylum establishes common rules for asylum and migration, but does not create a specific protection status for climate-displaced people. Similarly, Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 defines **subsidiary protection**[37] through specific forms of serious harm, yet leaves climate displacement outside its independent grounds.

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[38] **Asylum** is the protection granted by a state to persons who are outside their own country of nationality or habitual residence, and are seeking safety from persecution, serious harm, or for other compelling reasons.

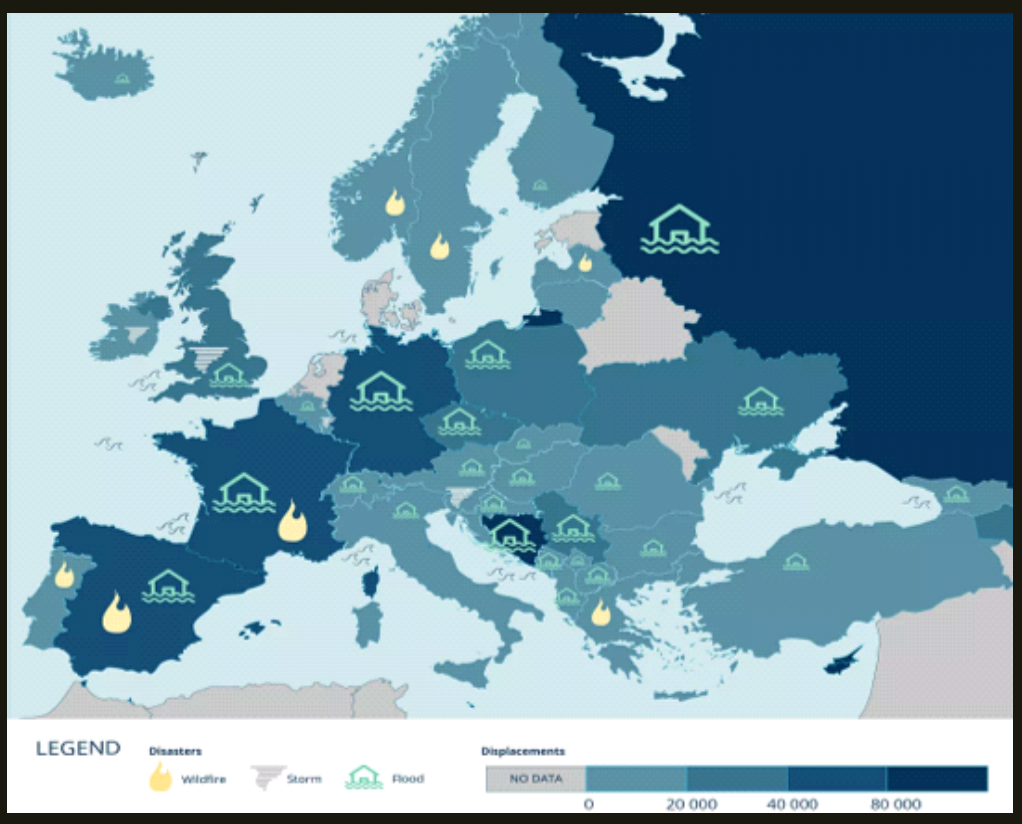
[36] **Non-refoulement** is a core principle of international and EU laws to ensure that an applicant is not returned to a country where they will face persecution.

[37] **Subsidiary protection** is an additional form of international protection that is complementary to refugee status.

Some Member States have developed alternative approaches. Italy introduced a **residence permit** for people unable to safely return to their home countries because of a serious disaster, although **unclear eligibility criteria** demonstrate the challenges of implementing such protection **consistently**. In contrast, Sweden previously provided **statutory humanitarian protection** under the Swedish Aliens Act for individuals fleeing environmental disasters. However, the government subsequently repealed this clause to **align its national asylum** framework strictly with narrower EU directives. Meanwhile, Austrian domestic courts have granted **subsidiary protection** to individuals when environmental catastrophes, such as **extreme droughts**, threaten **basic life-sustaining conditions** upon return. The EU has also developed existing mechanisms that can address aspects of climate-related displacement. These include **humanitarian admission pathways**[39] and legal migration programmes, as well as the Temporary Protection Directive. It can also adapt **eligibility standards** under the EU Asylum Qualification Directive or **deploy emergency relief** through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

What Can the EU Do?

Under Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU and its Member States share responsibility for developing a common policy on **asylum**, **subsidiary protection**, and **temporary protection**. This allows the EU to establish common asylum rules and protection standards, although any changes must follow EU legislative procedures and involve Member States. The current legal framework does not automatically grant protection to people displaced solely by climate-related disasters. Addressing climate displacement, therefore, requires **both EU-level action** and **cooperation among Member States**. The EU could, therefore, consider whether to expand existing protection categories to cover specific forms of climate-related displacement, or establish a separate legal mechanism with its **own eligibility criteria**. Any new framework would also need to clarify how **environmental causality**, the **severity of risks**, and **long-term displacement** are assessed, particularly in cases of **slow-onset environmental degradation**[40].



Displacement in Europe by weather event (2008-2019) (Euronews)

[39] **Humanitarian admission pathways** are legal routes enabling people in need of international protection to enter a country safely and receive protection through mechanisms outside ordinary asylum procedures.

[40] A **slow-onset degradation** is an environmental disaster that evolves gradually from incremental changes occurring over many years or from an increased frequency or intensity of recurring events.

Impact & Key Conflicts

A New Status or an Adapted Framework?

Proponents of reforming the **CEAS** argue that widening **subsidiary protection rules** offers a faster, pragmatically efficient mechanism by building on existing administrative infrastructure, whereas advocates for a distinct status demand tailored rights for environmental victims. Analytical research from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) stresses that the lack of an internationally accepted **legal definition** could lead to **fragmented application** across national borders. Additionally, key rulings by the **CJEU** confirm that current statutes do not recognise environmental hardship as independent grounds for persecution. Policy reports underscore that without precise legislative boundaries, Member States fear setting unmanageable legal precedents for future migration.

The Economic Pressure and Political Resistance

Climate change is intensifying interconnected crises across **food security**, **energy**, and the **economy**, exacerbating existing **continental vulnerabilities**. A direct analysis from climate diplomacy experts demonstrates how environmental degradation triggers interconnected **global crises in energy** and **governance**, shaping EU policy. Consequently, **demographic** and **economic data** from Eurostat demonstrate rising **social costs**, making Member States extremely reluctant to adopt expansive asylum obligations. The European Commission explicitly acknowledges that introducing new legal protection categories creates intense **political friction** regarding **sovereign burden-sharing**, domestic public services, and overall **national economic capacity.**

The Invisibility of Internal Displacement

European asylum law focuses exclusively on **cross-border migration**, yet the vast majority of environmental mobility remains **strictly internal**. Statistics from the **IDMC** confirm that millions of individuals remain displaced within their home countries. Because primary EU instruments cannot easily apply to citizens who have not crossed an international border, the current framework is **structurally disconnected** from the geographical reality of global climate displacement.

The Blind Spot of Minor Disasters

While catastrophic storms attract immediate international aid, minor disasters and **slow-onset environmental degradation** can receive less attention despite their cumulative effects on displacement. The **EEA** warns that incremental soil salinisation, gradual desertification, and localised droughts displace communities long before emergency mechanisms trigger. Existing European **protection mechanisms** leave significant gaps for people displaced by environmental change, particularly those affected by slow-onset processes such as **land degradation** and **desertification**, which do not always fit the requirements of temporary or international protection frameworks.



An Overview - The concept of ‘climate refugee’ highlights the legal and policy gaps surrounding people displaced by climate change and environmental degradation.

Now What?

Climate displacement exposes a gap between the growing effects of environmental change and the existing categories of international protection. The EU must decide whether to **update its existing asylum legislation** or **construct an entirely separate legal mechanism** to address climate-induced displacement, while addressing the practical challenges of eligibility, legal limits, and Member State responsibility. The **Pact on Migration and Asylum** provides a framework for cooperation and solidarity, but climate-related protection raises questions about how its mechanisms could be applied to a new category of displacement. This ultimately raises questions such as:

- Should the EU adapt existing mechanisms within the CEAS, such as subsidiary protection, or establish an entirely new legal status tailored to environmental mobility?
- How can the EU improve consistency in the interpretation and application of protection rules across Member States?
- How can EU asylum authorities and domestic courts establish clear criteria to evaluate individual claims driven by slow-onset environmental degradation (e.g., desertification, soil salinisation) where causality is incremental rather than immediate?

- Given that European asylum law applies primarily to individuals crossing international borders, how can the EU support and protect internally displaced persons who remain within their origin countries?
- How should responsibility and funding for climate-related displacement be divided between the EU and Member States, particularly when relocation becomes long-term or permanent?

Research Materials

- *'Disaster displacement - 5 things you should know' by IDMC, (2024):* A short video explaining why disasters force people to move and what protection exists.
- *'Addressing displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation' by the European Commission, (2022)*: An EU overview of existing approaches to disaster and climate-related mobility.
- *'Legal and Judicial Responses to Disaster Displacement in Italy, Austria and Sweden' by Völkerrechtsblog, (2022):* A comparison of how three European countries address disaster displacement.
- *'Burning forests, emptying rivers, €180bn in damage' by The Guardian, (2026):* A look at the growing economic and political consequences of extreme weather in Europe.
- *'Forced displacement' by DG INTPA, (2023)*: An overview of forced displacement, including how climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters contribute to displacement and the EU's response.

Committee on Culture and Education (CULT)

Cutting Out of the Mother Tongue: *According to UNESCO, 221 regional and minority languages in the EU are considered to be endangered. How can the EU secure the preservation and promotion of regional and minority languages while also ensuring cultural integration within the Member States?*

by Konstanty Lis (PL)

Introduction

Throughout the past millennia, Europe has been home to **hundreds of languages**, many of which have been gradually **replaced**, **changed**, or **completely forgotten**, as a result of wars, **political changes**, and cultural development.

Today, the European Union (EU) has **24 official languages**. However, regardless of whether in **large cities** or in the **countryside**, regional languages spoken by small minorities can be encountered within many countries. The communities speaking those languages may often maintain distinct cultural traditions and **enjoy customs specific to their region**, like a unique style of clothing or local food, **preserving a distinct heritage**.

Yet, despite their cultural importance and long-standing traditions, many **regional and minority languages (RMLs)** face **a declining number of speakers** and the **risk of disappearing** altogether. According to UNESCO, **221 regional and minority languages** across the EU are considered **endangered**. While the EU promotes regional diversity, its programs **have limitations** and must not overstep EU competences, which may act as a functional barrier to new legislation. At the same time, the **assimilation** of minority languages in the past few centuries has contributed to lower cultural diversity, gradually **eroding the rich variety of dialects**. Therefore, one must ask: how can the EU meaningfully work together to preserve its cultural heritage?



Map of endangered languages in Europe (UNESCO)

Case Study: Breton

France, which saw many of its regional languages eradicated as a result of its **state centralisation program**, still enjoys a **diverse linguistic environment** in many of its provinces, although minority groups possess **less freedom** to use their language in daily life than the French language. In the coastal region of Brittany, people continue to use the last Celtic language on the European mainland, Breton, which is considered to be severely endangered, with an estimated number of **107,000 speakers**.

However, in 2024, the network of Breton language schools, Diwan, faced a **serious financial crisis**, reporting a **public funding shortage of over EUR 500.000,** needed for the maintenance of the schools. With Article 2 of the French Constitution establishing **French as the sole official language of the country**, France does not find itself obliged to help with the funding, with around **4000 students in the school network** having to face the consequences of a strict language policy. The lack of governmental support may prove to be deadly to the language, as **the average age of a Breton speaker** is 58.5 years, and the number of speakers has fallen drastically in the last few decades.



Short article showcasing how France deals with regional languages. - French language law: The attempted ruination of France's linguistic diversity.

Key Actors

- **Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC):** develops policies centred around **culture**, innovation, education, and multilingualism. In regards to issues centred on minority languages, DG EAC has the ability to provide funding programmes, **cultural cooperation**, or language learning initiatives, which can strengthen the preservation of RMLs.
- **Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO):** is responsible for the economic and social assistance to less-favoured regions. Additionally, it supports the EU cohesion policy, aiming to reduce inequalities and social disparities occurring in various European regions. In relation to RMLs, it can support cultural heritage, regional development, and social inclusion, especially in provinces with a high concentration of minority languages.
- **European Language Equality Network (ELEN):** a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)[41] dedicated to the promotion and protection of RMLs, which has previously advocated for language rights in countries such as Croatia, Romania, and Spain.
- **Member States**: the 27 countries which form the EU, responsible for recognising and defining national minorities within their borders, additionally having the power to give minority groups the rights to self-determination. They may provide funding for regional languages, establish programmes concerned with their protection, and support their usage in everyday life, for example, in the local cultural sector.
- **Local municipalities:** depending on the amount of autonomy given, regional governments and municipalities may positively influence RMLs by implementing language policies through local education, cultural events, and funding.

Measures in Place

The EU has had many short- and long-term projects regarding the support and preservation of RMLs, such as the **European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages** (**EBLUL**). The Bureau worked closely with the European Commission and was active from 1982 to 2010, when it was **discontinued** due to funding cuts. The agency advocated for the interests of lesser-used languages and tried to influence EU policy on linguistic diversity. It also organised study visits, conferences, and debates, and spoke on behalf of Europe's **50 million speakers of RMLs**.

[41] A **non-governmental organization (NGO)** is a legally constituted organization created by private persons or organizations without participation or representation of any government.

After the EBLUL ceased to exist, another project took its place: the aforementioned **ELEN**. This NGO has found itself successfully campaigning for the causes of minorities, for example, during **Croatia's EU accession process**, when the country tried to pass a referendum which would undermine the Serbian minority, with **ELEN's open letter helping to cancel it**.

The establishment of the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML)** had **significant effects** on the **16 out of 27 Member States who ratified it**, requiring them to take measures to support RMLs in areas such as education, public administration, culture, and justice, for example, by making the Danish authorities accept German as a **language used in court proceedings** in regions populated by the German minority.



*Bilingual, Polish-Kashubian road sign (**Marcin Gadomski,** PAP)*

One of the biggest citizen campaigns in the last few years was the **Minority SafePack Initiative** (**MSPI**). It called on the EU to improve the protection for national and linguistic minorities, and to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity. **Its proposals** included measures directly concerned with the RMLs, education, cultural funding, media, and audiovisual content. The initiative gained over one million signatures, which were required to place it on the EU agenda. However, despite the initial success, **the European Commission rejected the initiative** in 2021, with the final judgement being upheld in June 2025 by the Court of Justice of the European Union. One of the **main reasons for rejection** was the fact that the EU would **overreach its own competences regarding language policies**, which are a competence of Member States.

What Can the EU Do?

The **primary responsibility** for protecting and preserving RMLs **lies within Member States**, as the EU possesses only **supporting competence**[42] in the fields of culture, education, and language policies. However, **this does not stop the EU from supporting Member States** through **funding**, partnership programmes, and transnational cooperation through initiatives such as **Erasmus+**, which incentivises language learning and studies abroad, aiming to make higher education more attractive.

[42] **Supporting competence**, meaning that the EU can only help with the implementation of the laws, without being able to dictate them.

Impact & Key Conflicts

Three Teachers and a Dream

Education is one of the main ways of passing RMLs onto younger generations, but **shortages of qualified teachers** is a significant obstacle in Member States. Such a problem **persists in Finland**, where teacher training is insufficient, as noted by the **ECRML**, which may negatively impact the local languages like **Inari Sami, North Sami,** and **Skolt Sami**. Additionally, as seen in Poland, many minority languages **lack radio and broadcasting coverage**, while others are either **not part of the official curriculum** at all, or the **education is very scarce**.

Terms and Conditions May Apply…

The RMLs protection varies heavily between different European countries. Some languages may have extensive rights in education, administration, media, and public life, with them being granted a co-official status, **for example, in Spain**, a country known for its **autonomous communities**. This allows them **to be used** in public administration, courts, **education**, and official documents. However, some of the local languages like **Aragonese, Asturian,** and **Leonese** only enjoy a '**protected language**' status, which does not give them such privileges.

Meanwhile, **in countries such as France**, the RMLs may not be as respected as in Spain, as the country has only **signed** the ECRML, yet it **has never ratified the Charter**, meaning that the state is not bound by its commitments.

If Nobody Uses It, Does It Even Exist?

Even if governments try to preserve an RML, **its long-term survival** ultimately depends on the **people who decide to continue using it** in everyday life. **Globalisation** and the **growing dominance of 'widely' spoken languages** like English, French, or Spanish can reduce incentives to learn or maintain an ancestral language, especially when **people do not see any benefits in doing so**. In the case of languages like Breton, the population has been **continuously** shrinking, which may be something that future learners will take into account before deciding to learn the language. This raises a broader question: how can the national governments **make minority languages attractive** enough for the local environment to fully embrace them, **instead of abandoning them** in favour of easier choices?

Hey Chat, Can I Get a Shoutout?

In some countries like Poland, **debates can arise** over whether a regional dialect should be considered **a distinct language** or **a local variant of the national language**. This is the case for **Silesian**, which has almost half a million speakers, whose linguistic and political status **remains highly contested**. In 2026, the Polish Parliament passed a bill recognising Silesian as a regional language, but the President **vetoed it, arguing that recognition could encourage further regional autonomy demands** and **emphasised keeping unity in the nation**. This case highlights how governments have to decide between keeping the country more united, or giving **more autonomy to the regions**.

Now What?

RMLs **face different challenges** across the EU, from **unequal legal recognition** and **shortages of teachers** to **declining use** among younger generations. While existing initiatives, such as the ECRML, **provide countries with frameworks** on how to act and give further advice on how to promote and support RMLs, the implementation of those guidelines often remains **incomplete and unsatisfactory**. At the same time, the governments must **balance linguistic and cultural diversity** of their nations with the **calls for autonomy within some regions**, which may **threaten national unity and territorial cohesion**. This ultimately raises questions such as:

- How can national governments make learning RMLs more attractive to the youth?
- What actions should Member States take to further promote preservation of local languages?
- How can the EU support Member States with protection of their RMLs while also respecting their national competences?
- What are the consequences of an endangered language fully dying?

Research Materials

- *'Central Europe's Most Mysterious Language' by Culture.PL (2016)*: An article describing how a small Polish city kept and transformed the language of Flemish colonists who arrived there hundreds of years ago, with only about 20 speakers remaining.
- *'A German city mobilises to save a vanishing language' by The Washington Post (2025):* A story describing the efforts to preserve the language of the Sorbs in Germany, an almost-forgotten Western Slavic language with about 60,000 speakers.
- *'The Lost Languages of France' by General Knowledge (2025)*: A short YouTube video describing the history of French regional languages.
- *'Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger' by UNESCO (2010)*: A detailed research paper going over all of the endangered languages in the world.

Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)

Join Us!: *With Montenegro being the closest Candidate State projected to join the Union in 2028, debates are raised about the challenges the EU faces in enlargement, such as varying levels of support and the stability of the current political system. What steps should the EU take to support potential future Member States while ensuring the process remains transparent and impartial, and to secure support as well as a stable system within the Union?*

by Léonard Villessot (FR)

Introduction

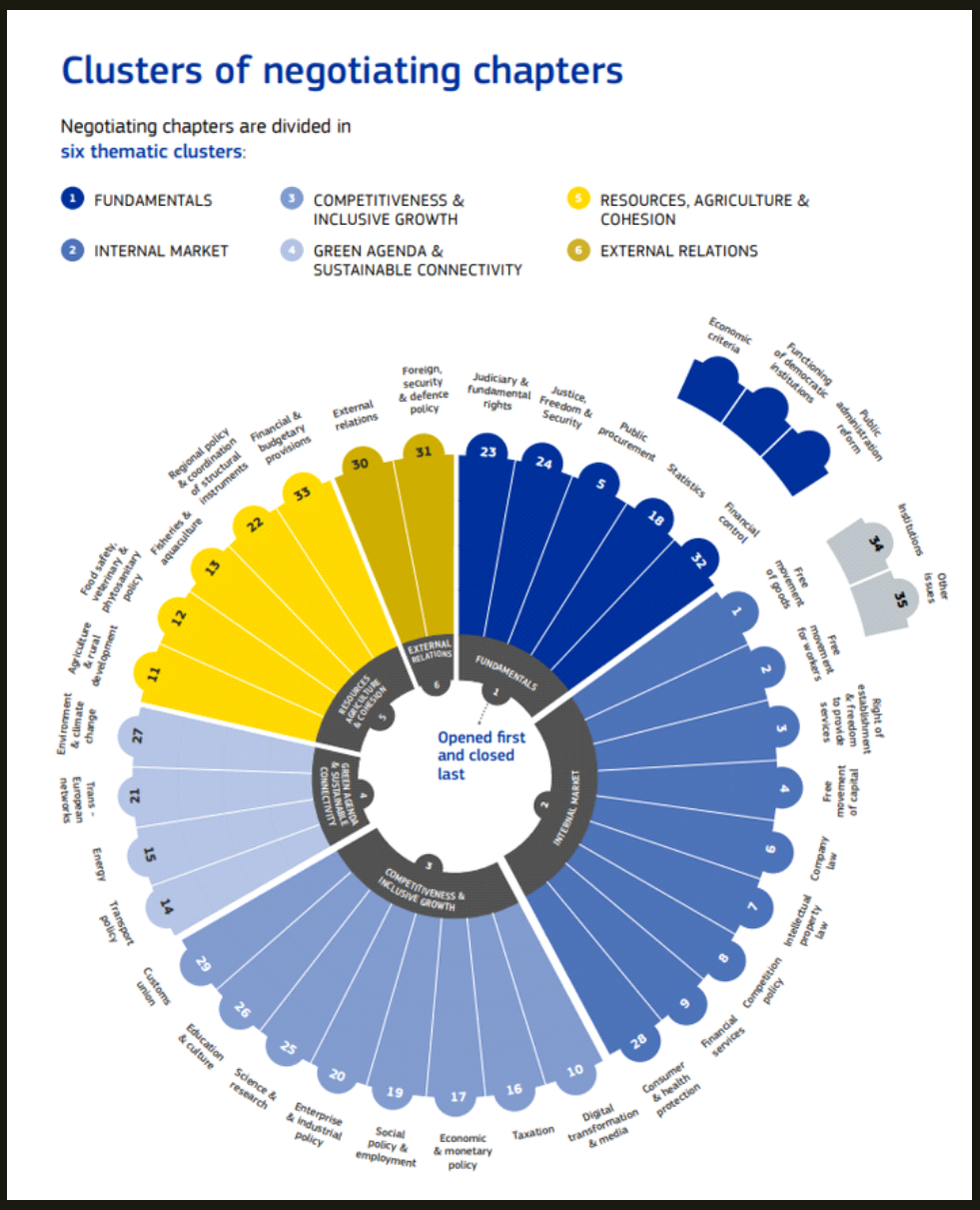
With the recent talks between the European Union (EU) and Canada concerning the **new status** of 'associate member', questions concerning the future of the EU's **expansion** are raised across the Union. With countries such as Montenegro, Albania or Serbia being in the **integration process** since 2010, 2014, and 2012 respectively, deep concerns appear across the EU to **enhance** the whole path of integration, which seems to have slowed down since 2013, when Croatia became the latest Member State.

Issues slowing down the integration process can go from **ongoing conflicts** involving the Candidate States to **significant corruption** or **lack of alignment** with EU policies. The EU's **challenges** concerning enlargement cover multiple aspects, such as ensuring **equal treatment** and support between each Member State. This applies to expansion, notably ensuring that each Member State respects the application of **EU policies** even after integration. Furthermore, ensuring an **impartial treatment** of each Candidate State's integration process. Finally, some challenges also arise from within the EU, such as the problematic use of the **veto**, which can **slow down** an integration process.

Case Study: Ukraine

Four years after joining the list of Candidate States, Ukraine is still in deep water concerning its transition to a Member State. Ukraine officially submitted its **application** to become a Candidate State in February 2022, at the beginning of the Russian invasion. In June 2022, the European Council officially granted the **Candidate State status** to Ukraine. The next step was to formally open **accession negotiations** between Ukraine and the European Council, which happened in **June 2024**. Then, Ukraine completed the **screening process** of the **negotiation chapters**[43] in September 2025. In June 2026, the EU and Ukraine opened the first accession negotiations **cluster** on fundamentals. Additionally, the EU and Ukraine opened the accession negotiations cluster on external relations in July 2026. Ukraine is looking forward to completing all of the 4 remaining cluster negotiations out of the 6 clusters. Nevertheless, Member States such as Poland or Hungary tend to **oppose** integration of Ukraine, preaching that Ukraine is still not done with the 36 stages of the negotiation process, as seen in the figure below. In comparison, during the State of the Union 2026 speech, the EU suggested an **unprecedented** offer to **Canada** to be considered an '**associate member**'. This status **does not legally exist** for now, but it was also thought to be granted to Ukraine. But unlike Canada, Ukraine still does not benefit from this status, which can raise questions about **fairness** in the **integration** or **partnership** process.

[43] **Negotiations chapters** correspond to the different areas for which reforms are needed in order to meet the accession conditions.



Picture explaining all the 35 stages of negotiating chapters (DG ENEST)

Key Actors

- **Council of the European Union:** is composed of government ministers from all the Member States and holds the power to decide whether the Candidate State is joining the EU or not. Given that the enlargement requires absolute unanimity, the process can be stopped or frozen if any single Member State presents opposition to the potential integration.
- **Directorate-General for Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST):** is an agency of the European Commission, taking forward the EU's Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood policies. It administers the 'Enlargement Package', which presents the annual progress of each Candidate State in its integration process.
- **Candidate States:** are states currently aiming to adhere to the Union. They have the duty to align their policies to the accession criteria. Their integration path strongly depends on their ability to align themselves to EU's standards.
- **Transparency International:** is a **Non-Governmental Organisation**[44] (NGO) which provides the corruption index that is used by the EU to assess a Candidate State's political stability.
- **European Round Table for Industry (ERT):** is a corporate lobby, composed of chairs and CEOs of European multinationals. It directly shapes the integration process of Candidate States by co-working with the EU to benchmark the economic requirements, which are used for comparison, for Candidate States.

[44] **Non-Governmental Organisation** is an organisation that is trying to achieve social or political goals but remains independent of any government.

Measures in Place

The first ever EU legislation to determine how the integration process will be conducted is the Copenhagen criteria in 1995. They dictate the requirements that Candidate States have to fulfil to become a Member State: a **stable**, **competitive**, **and functioning economy.** Overall, a **stable political system** which guarantees democracy, respect for the rule of law, protection of minorities and human rights, and it also dictates the need to be able to implement EU law in the Candidate State's own **legal system**. However, current requirements are being criticised as 'not being transparent or measurable'. They mention flaws like **unclear statements, lack of quantitative measures**, and more importantly, an **irregular application** of the *Acquis Communautaire*.[45] That is demonstrated as soon as a Candidate State becomes a Member State – the criteria are rigorously binding before integration, but can stop being relevant right after accession. This imbalance can lead to **democratic or economic backsliding** in the new Member State.

Nevertheless, to soften the strictness of the Copenhagen Criteria, the EU launched programs such as the **Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)**, which aims to financially and technically support reforms in the enlargement region. The **IPA** program is also divided into more specific branches, like the **Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance on Rural Development (IPARD)**, which focuses on the agri-food sectors and rural areas of Candidate States. Additionally, the IPA structure covers **pre-accession subjects**, such as the support of **the rule of law**, **fundamental rights and democracy**, **competitiveness** and **inclusive growth**, **good strategic communication**, and **cross-border cooperation**. Additionally, the EU also developed the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)**, which aims to financially help Candidate States to strengthen their democracy and human rights.

What Can the EU Do?

In order to enhance the whole integration process, the EU can start to experiment with **gradual integration** to speed up the process. Furthermore, the EU can strengthen its sanctions against **democratic backsliding**, such as reducing funding through the **IPA Instrument**. On the other hand, the EU is restricted by the **unanimity vote** in the Council of the European Union when accepting new Member States, which can slow down the integration process.

Impact & Key Conflicts

(Do Not) Join Us!

Supporters of a **fast EU expansion** assert that integration is a strong tool to ensure **global stability** in Europe. They claim that letting Candidate States in a political '**Grey Zone**' creates an **opening** for Russia or China to assert their influence on these territories, located at a **strategic key point**. Integration of these territories can be seen as something mandatory in order to **stabilise** the continent. On the other hand, Member States, such as Hungary, point out the **fragile borders** of certain Candidate States such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, emphasising the **ongoing conflicts** that integration could bring inside the EU's borders. Other Member States, such as Austria, report strong scepticism regarding further enlargement. The opposing states take Cyprus' integration as an example of unsolved conflicts that came into the EU's borders due to similar reasons. Therefore, a **clear division** between supporting and opposing Member States in terms of **fast expansion** exists. Besides, integrating countries with ongoing conflicts inside or at their own borders only because of a geopolitical urge can be considered **unfair** for other Candidate States, as it needs to depend only on criteria and not on biases due to a geopolitical urge.

[45] **Acquis Communautaire** is the collection of common rights and obligations that constitute the body of EU law, and is incorporated into the legal systems of Member States.

Too Fast For Love

With recent complaints concerning the **rule of law, democratic, and political stability backsliding**, the EU's tendency to **ease** Eastern European states' integration tends to spark debates. This is due to the determination to maintain a strong geopolitical presence in the Eastern part of Europe and to the uncertain geopolitical context of this area. Integrating a country like Montenegro can be considered a **crucial choice** for the EU's internal stability, mostly because of an improving, yet still uncertain and unstable political system. Therefore, **fast-tracking** the integration of countries such as Montenegro, Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to their valuable geopolitical, agricultural or economic presence, could lead to a line of questioning concerning **corruption within EU borders**. In short, while integrating the aforementioned Candidate States can be highly rewarding because of their geopolitical and economic value, it may also prove risky due to their progressing, yet sensitive political stability. Candidate States tend to suffer from **significant** corruption.



Relevant Overview - Useful data concerning Montenegro's integration into the EU.

Now What?

With the important economic and geopolitical need to integrate Candidate States into the EU, it becomes highly difficult to ensure both **internal stability within and among Member States**, as well as an impartial and strictly followed integration process. Looking at the current geopolitical climate, it seems essential to **ensure an EU presence in Eastern Europe**, but it also raises questions regarding the **pace** at which Candidate States can meet all necessary integration criteria. This leads us to ask the following questions:

- Does the EU need to internally reform the integration process and, if needed, how should it proceed?
- How can the EU find a balance between internal political and economic issues while working on Candidate States' integration?
- What are the potential solutions to help Candidate States meet the requirements to integrate into the European Union, politically and economically?
- How can the EU ensure the respect the sovereignty and interests of every Member State while integrating Candidate States?

Research Materials

- *'Can the EU speed up enlargement?' by TDLR News EU (2025):* A 10 minutes long YouTube video explaining how the integration process works and how it could be potentially enhanced.
- *'EU enlargement: an own goal or a match-point?' by European Relations (2026):* An article about the pros and cons of a potential EU expansion.
- *'Accelerate the accessions: Why faster is better in EU enlargement policy' by the European Council on Foreign Relations (2025):* an article about why the EU should potentially speed up its integration process.
- *'Can enlargement make Europe safer?' by Trans European Policy Studies Association (2026):* a podcast focusing on the impact on enlargement in EU's security strategy.