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EXTERNALISATION AND THE OUTSOURCING OF ASYLUM

Topic of the Month Europe Must Act 2025

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Introduction

Migration externalisation is defined as the extraterritorial actions taken by states to prevent mobile persons and groups, including people who migrate and asylum seekers, from entering their legal jurisdiction.

The primary aim of the externalisation is to shift the responsibilities of migration control away from the countries of destination and onto transit or origin countries.

Examples of this strategy are the EU deals with countries such as Turkey, Libya, Egypt, or Morocco with the aim of subcontracting or outsourcing border controls. These deals may include:

- Support for border control and surveillance, and provision of resources and training to border security forces in partner countries
- Funding or facilitating the establishment of checkpoints, detention facilities, or asylum processing centres outside national borders.
- Return and readmission agreements – such as the one between Spain and Morocco – that foresee the forcible return of individuals to their country of origin, as well as obligations for countries to receive back those who transited through their territory.

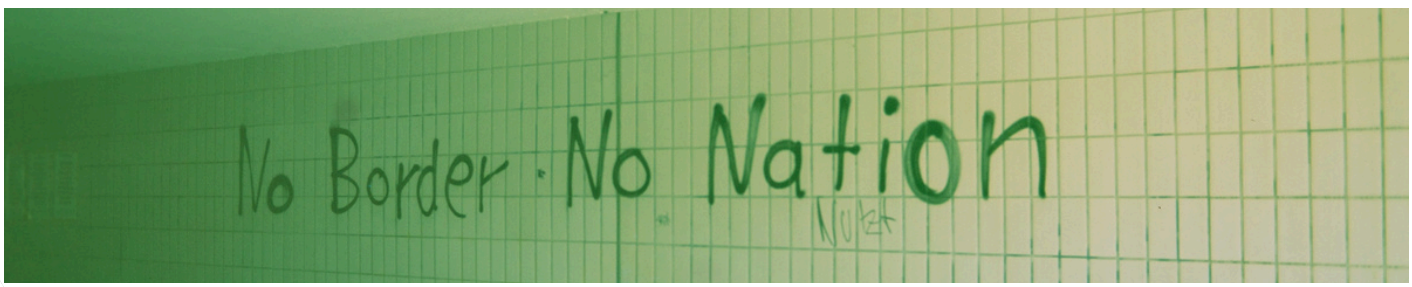
In some cases, international development aid may be used as an incentive. Economic development programs implemented by local or non-governmental actors, but funded by third countries, may also serve as indirect tools of migration externalisation policy.

This idea of relying on externalisation to manage migration is not new, but its increasingly bold implementation marks a significant shift in EU migration governance. As recently as 2018, the European Commission explicitly ruled out the externalisation of asylum procedures and return centres, citing legal, political, and ethical concerns. Yet just seven years later, proposals for processing centres in third countries and expanded return agreements have become central pillars of the Union's strategy.

In the first months of 2025 alone, the European Union significantly intensified its efforts in this direction:

- In March, it proposed a Common European System for Returns, which introduces, for example, the possibility of creating return hubs in third countries
- In April, the European Commission, acting under the new Asylum Procedure Regulation, proposed establishing the first EU-level list of safe countries of origin
- In May, a revision of the 'safe third country' concept was discussed.

In this report, we will explore this recent development in European migration governance, highlight practical examples that underscore the problems of externalisation, and examine positive instances of resistance to this unjust practice.



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Safe Countries of Origin List and Safe Third Country Concept

Since 2015, the EU has been trying to implement ways of externalising migration management outside European borders. While various attempts at extraterritorial processing of asylum have thus far failed due to glaring breaches of human rights, the EU continues to search for ways to prevent people from applying for asylum in EU member states, thus deflecting EU member states legal obligations.[1]

As part of the reform under the new Pact on Migration, the EU has proposed to adopt a list of 'Safe Countries of Origin' by June 2026. While some member states already apply their own safe countries of origin lists, this proposed EU wide list, which currently contains Kosovo, Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as, in principle, EU candidate countries, aims to "address some of the existing divergences between Member States' national lists of safe countries". Applicants from these countries, for which the EU grants international protection at a rate of 20% or lower, will be subject to border procedures or accelerated processes, based on the assumption that their applications are "likely to be unfounded."

Image sourced from Pexels

Dozens of civil society organisations have voiced their concern regarding the risks of violations of human rights in all countries listed in the Commission's proposal.

The new Pact also lays out guidelines for the expansion of the 'Safe Third Country' (STC) concept, which supports the idea that a particular country is not obliged to grant international protection to certain applicants, on the grounds that there is another country, which is not their country of origin, that is safe for them to remain in. Even if, as many have argued, the concept does not comply with the 1951 Refugee Convention, it was first introduced in European law in Article 38 of the 2013 EU Directive and has been maintained and revised in the new EU Pact.

One problematic development is the removal of the necessity of a connection between the protection applicant and the safe third country [2], i.e. non-EU member state. This means that the person does not need to have any meaningful connection to a country, such as family or close ties. Simply transiting through a safe third country, or the existence of an agreement or

[1] Radjenovic, A. (2024). Safe third country concept in the EU pact on migration and asylum, 2.

[2] See Oxfam's Joint Statement: The future EU must uphold the right to asylum in Europe;
Amnesty International: EU: New 'safe third country' proposals cynical attempt to downgrade rights and offload asylum responsibilities;
Joint statement: EU 'safe country' and return proposals would seriously undermine protection and human dignity - JRS Europe;
ECRE: Proposed reform of the Safe Third Country concept | European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

'arrangement' between an EU Member State and a country, would be sufficient grounds to consider their case inadmissible.

The Asylum Procedure Regulation also sets out the possibility that a common EU-wide list of STCs will be established. Individual member states are also given the option to adopt their own national lists. The only situation in which Member States would be required to align their lists to the EU's is if a third country is suspended from the common one.

The definition of 'safe' is also disputed. The Asylum Procedure Regulation requires the third country to provide 'effective protection' in accordance with the Refugee Convention. Refugee Support Aegean's 2024 publication has noted that this represents "an explicit departure of EU law from the 1951 Refugee Convention system"[3]. The report published by the European Parliamentary Research Service notes that "it will explicitly permit Member States to apply the STC concept to certain non-signatories to the Refugee Convention"[4].

This may also mean that, even though many of the safe third countries might have ratified the Refugee Convention, they may not have sufficient asylum laws or processes in place. Support from international organisations, EU member States and European agencies would thus be required, further strengthening the discussion that the EU is seeking to externalise its migration management[5].

The EU-Turkey deal - which designated Turkey as a safe third country despite documented violations of the rights of those returned from Greece [6] - offers a clear warning for the amended safe third country concept due to take effect in June 2026. Similar risks, each with their own specific dynamics, can be seen in agreements that European states have implemented, or attempted to implement, with Libya, Rwanda, Morocco, and Albania.

[3] Ibid, p80
[4] Ibid, p6
[5] For a full overview of the safe third country concept see the full article published by EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service. Safe third country concept in the EU pact on migration and asylum
[6] See Eight years of failure of the EU-Turkey deal: the "safe third country" concept comes under scrutiny by the Court of Justice of the European Union - R.S.A.; EU-Türkiye Statement: Six years of undermining refugee protection | The IRC in the EU

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Externalised Borders and Organised Crime in Libya

In mid-June this year, at least 60 people drowned at sea after two shipwrecks off the coast of Libya. One shipwreck occurred on June 12 near the Alshab port in Tripolitania, on a boat carrying people from Eritrea, Pakistan, Egypt and Sudan. Only five survivors were found, and 21 people were reported missing. Among those feared dead were three women and three children.

The second incident occurred the day after, some 35km west of Tobruk. One person was rescued by fishermen and the remaining 39 were missing. These were just further chapters of a mounting trend. At least 743 people have died in the first half of 2025 attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, 538 of them on the Central Mediterranean route, which remains the deadliest known migration route in the world.

In an attempt to reduce the migratory income, the European Union has been providing equipment and financial support to the Libyan coastguard, a quasi-military organisation linked to militias accused of abuses and other crimes. Through the last few years, we have seen a gradual reduction of state-run search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, together with an escalation of punitive action by states against NGOs providing rescue (an obligation established in maritime law) in the Mediterranean.

This has increased the number of people who, fleeing conflict and persecution in Central or Northern Africa, end up stranded in Libya, often held in detention centres where inhumane conditions, extortion and slavery have been documented. Human trafficking criminal organisations are taking advantage of the instability in the country, but also of the support provided by the EU to policies which repress and torture instead of protecting people in need of asylum.

Image sourced from Unsplash

In February 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Italian and Libyan governments on „fighting illegal migration". This agreement extended a policy of pushing back and detaining people trying to flee northbound, which leaves a heavy trace of violence, including the torture and rape of those detained in Libyan prisons.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has been investigating core international crimes committed in Libya since 2011. Among these, crimes against refugees constitute one of the four priority investigative streams.

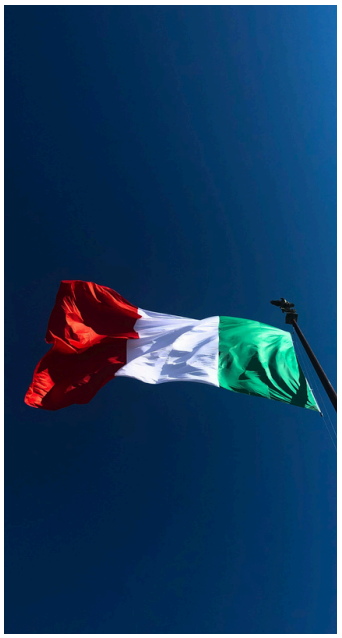

Image sourced from Unsplash

In a recent report to the United Nations Security Council, the ICC Prosecutor described crimes in detention facilities in Libya as "a black box of suffering on the coast of the Mediterranean that nobody has wanted to open." On January 18 2025, the Court issued an arrest warrant against Osama Elmasry NJEEM for a number of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Mitiga Prison from February 2015 to October 2024, including murder, torture, rape and sexual violence against Libyan and non-Libyan nationals. On 19 January 2025, Osama Elmasry NJEEM was arrested in the Republic of Italy, but only two days after Italy released him from custody and flew him back to Libya.

Civil society organisations conveyed dismay at the Italian decision to release Osama Elmasry NJEEM rather than surrendering him to the ICC to face serious charges of core international crimes, which included torture, murder, arbitrary imprisonment, rape and sexual violence against Libyan nationals and non-Libyan nationals.

Since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, the lack of a solid, recognised State authority in Libya has facilitated the growth of mafia crime preying on people seeking asylum for person-trafficking and slavery. The growing externalisation of border control from the EU to Libya represents not only a negligent abandonment of people in need of protection, with thousands drowning in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean, but also a practical alliance with criminal organisations involved in kidnapping, mistreatment, torture and murder.

The UK's former Rwanda policy

In April 2022, the former British government declared that it would be setting out "bold new plans to tackle illegal immigration", aimed primarily at those who arrive by crossing the channel in small boats. As we'll see below, these plans were neither bold nor new, and in using the inflammatory term "illegal immigration", they seemingly attempt to disguise the fact that many (**99%**) who arrive in the UK via small boat without authorisation later apply for asylum, regularising their status.

The policy was set out in the 2022 UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP), and plans were announced to forcibly deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, where their claims would be assessed and, if successful, they would be granted asylum in Rwanda rather than the UK.

Since its conception, the policy was met with opposition from a wide variety of human rights and refugee support organisations and faced multiple legal challenges. This included a near-flight to Rwanda take-off, where 7 people would have been sent to Rwanda until the flight was stopped by a last-minute European Court of Human Rights intervention in June 2022. In 2023, the UK Supreme Court unanimously declared that the policy was unlawful because Rwanda was not a safe country to remove asylum seekers to.

Astoundingly, following this ruling, the former British government enacted a new treaty with the Rwandan government that set out new safeguards and produced new legislation that declared Rwanda to be a safe country. This led to the ratification of the Rwanda treaty, and the "Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024" became law and is now in force.

In 2024, the newly elected Labour government cancelled the plans, describing the programme as an expensive **"gimmick" that had already cost £310million**. Thankfully, no asylum seekers were deported to Rwanda through the policy; however, that does not mean that it hasn't had an impact and isn't deeply meaningful. Firstly, because it serves as a worrying litmus test for the state of the UK political environment, as a policy frequently denounced as unlawful and against human rights was used as an effective "gimmick" and gained some voter support (between **42**-47%). Moreover, as we'll see in the subsequent examples, the UK's Rwanda scheme is one of many, demonstrating a deeply concerning general trend towards the externalisation of asylum to Rwanda.

The wider "Rwanda Policy" Trend

As is likely evident across our report, the externalisation of asylum and migration control is not a new strategy. In fact, it has been an integral strategy for the EU since the 1990s [7], manifesting through various deals, projects and agreements over the years. Similarly, the UK's recently scrapped Rwanda policy is not the only Rwanda-based externalisation project that has been proposed in recent years.

Rwanda/Israel

Between 2014 and 2018, around 4000 people were deported from Israel to Rwanda, under a voluntary scheme where asylum seekers were given the choice of being returned to their home country, detained in Israel or transferred to Rwanda with $3,500 and the opportunity to claim asylum there. Despite this, some were not permitted to claim asylum in Rwanda and others "routinely moved clandestinely to Uganda even if they were willing to stay in Rwanda."

Eventually, after mass international and local criticism, this scheme was abandoned in 2018.

Rwanda/Denmark

In 2021, the Danish parliament established the legal basis for the removal of asylum seekers to a third country while they wait for their claims to be processed. Following this, the Danish government established a bilateral agreement with Rwanda to facilitate the exploration of a programme wherein asylum seekers would be sent to Rwanda "for consideration of their asylum applications and protection, and the option of settling in Rwanda."[8]

Although the Danish government also decided to temporarily abandon their plan to outsource its humanitarian commitments to Rwanda in 2023, in 2024 there were reports of the Social Democratic party in Denmark, describing how the current asylum system wasn't working and, as a result, they may begin to reconsider third-country "solutions" as a way to "reduce the incentive to come here."

[7] It is Obvious from the Map! Disobeying the Production of Illegality beyond Borderlines - Maribel Casa-Cortes, Sebastian Cobarrubias, movements | Vol. 4, Issue 1/2018
[8] Joint Statement on Bilateral Cooperation Rwanda and Denmark

A largely abandoned but worrying trend

The deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda not only poses a serious threat to the 1951 Refugee Convention, but it is also expensive and an ineffective way of handling asylum claims [9] indicating that there appears to be a particularly performative element to the proposed Rwanda schemes. This is especially evident when we consider Denmark's call for a Rwanda scheme despite its low number of applications and the UK's bureaucratic failure, as the amount of asylum claim decisions has slowly declined, leading to an immense and harmful backlog that forces people into a life in limbo [10].

However, although (thankfully) these plans to relocate asylum seekers to Rwanda have been largely defeated so far, this political pageantry is far from harmless. Instead, it depicts a shift towards the growing acceptance of relocating asylum seekers and a shift away from seeing asylum seekers as people.

Spain and Morocco

On June 24 2022, at the border between Nador in Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla, dozens of people trying to jump the border fence were killed and hundreds injured at the hands of Moroccan border police. This tragic event iconized the failure of European migration policies based on the closure of borders, as well as the dynamics of externalisation, where a southern, subordinate country is 'tasked' with criminal repression as part of a European-designed policy.

The tragedy was a direct outcome of a process of cooperation between Morocco and Spain in matters of security and migration, which has a long history but actually took a harder shape in the Nador area through the months preceding the massacre: campaigns of massive detention, raids, pillage and provoked fires in refugee camps and enforced displacements.

Image sourced from Unsplash

This wave of repression was enabled by the re-launching of cooperation in 'security' between the two countries in March 2022. After that date, violations of the human rights of people on the move became common practice in Nador, Tetouan, Tangier, El Aaiún and Dajla. The events of June 24 were the culmination of this mounting strategic pressure on people in need of international protection.

A previous incident, which occurred in 2021, also highlighted the politicisation of migration control between the two countries, with what has been described as "the use of migrants as a weapon". In May of that year, the Polisario Front leader, head of the Sahrawi nationalist liberation movement, received medical treatment in Spain. Morocco responded by loosening border controls, resulting in around 8,000 people arriving in Ceuta from Morocco, presumably as retaliation over the behaviour of the Spanish government in the context of the Western Sahara conflict [11]. Most people were quickly pushed back to Morocco, and in this process, two people lost their lives.

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[9] Collyer, M. Uttara, S. 2023. Offshoring Refugees: Colonial Echoes of the UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership. Social Sciences 12: 451. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080451
[10] Ibid
[11] For example, see What's behind the migrant crisis between Morocco and Spain? | Inside Story

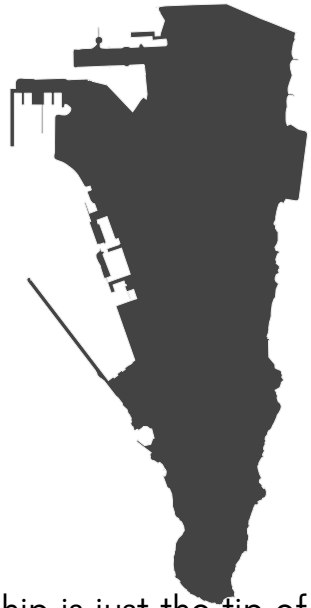
Through the years, Morocco has obtained economic benefits in retribution for repressing people trying to reach Spain, while thousands of people from Morocco and other African countries continue to cross the Mediterranean Sea to the South of Spain or the Atlantic Ocean to the Canary Islands.

In early February 2023, the governments of Spain and Morocco met to sign further agreements, combining a package worth €800 million to encourage Spanish investments with two specific memoranda on migration, importantly focused on reinforcing the borders in Ceuta and Melilla.

In this meeting, the Spanish Minister of Interior, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, noted that Spain was the only country of first access to the European Union registering a reduction in immigration. He attributed this reduction to the close cooperation with Morocco and other countries in the fields of fighting smuggling, exchanging information, and patrolling territories and seas. "Irregular immigration constitutes a common challenge for Spain and Morocco, which both countries are managing together, on the basis of the same integral view on this phenomenon", he said.

In late October 2024, the Permanent Spanish-Moroccan Group held its XXII Meeting to collaborate in migration control. A key component was promoting circular migration as a way forward, within "regular, ordered and safe migration": a governmental strategy to facilitate the temporary inclusion of the Moroccan workforce for labour exploitation in Spain, with the guarantee that the workers will return home at the end of the season.

The Spanish State Secretary for Security, Rafael Pérez, referred then to Morocco as a "priority partner" in matters of migration, and expressed his gratitude for Morocco's "commitment and efforts" in the face of the challenges posed by people trafficking, organised crime and terrorism. He also praised the way in which the intervention of Moroccan agents allowed for the neutralisation of calls made in social networks to organise a massive entrance in the two enclaves in September 2024, and mentioned the reduction in "illegal arrivals" to the Gibraltar Strait and the Eastern Canary islands, saying: "Statistics reflect migratory pressure in the African continent and between Africa and Europe, but also confirm the efficiency of our cooperation".



Looking beyond Morocco

In many ways, the Spanish/Moroccan border management relationship is just the tip of the iceberg. Spain and other European nations have coordinated with Frontex naval and air operations to patrol the West African coastline since 2006, in a bid to stop the "cayuco crisis" – a Spanish term often used in this context to describe the small boats used to reach Spain.

There has also been long history of a Spanish "subcontracting machine", wherein the Spanish government has worked with Senegalese, Mauritanian and Malian authorities to reduce irregular border crossings towards Europe-including building a detention center in Mauritania and previously (before 2010) providing Senegalese authorities with elaborate "gifts" such as policing and security equipment and generous "expenses" pay [12].

[12] Anderson, R.(2014) Hunter and Prey: Patrolling Clandestine Migration in the Euro-African Borderlands. Anthropological Quarterly. Vol. 87. No. 1. pp. 119-149

More recently, in 2024, the Spanish government has asked for renewed support for Frontex to patrol the West African coastline. However, within this call, the Spanish Prime Minister (Pedro Sánchez) declared a rejection of external detention centres outside of the EU.

This has been echoed in July 2025, as after a visit with the Mauritian President, the Spanish Prime Minister launched a message in favour of safe, orderly and regular migration. However, although this appears to be a small but welcome change from some of the other more extreme, anti-migration and anti-refugee cries across other parts of Europe, it also reflects a desire for Spain to continue its policy of instrumentalising migration from Africa to serve Spanish interests by channeling new arrivals into less desirable jobs [13] rather than advocating for people's right to asylum. Moreover, the fact that the rejection of detention camps and a call to respect human rights can be described as a slight positive in contrast with other political discourses demonstrates the extent to which conversations concerning migration and asylum in Europe have shifted towards the dangerously cruel.

Italy/Albania: The sad little tale of the so-called 'Albania Model'

On December 15, 2024, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni closed the annual event of her party with the cry: "Have faith, the centers in Albania will work! They will work! Even if I have to go there every night until the end of the Italian government's term! They will work!". These words, delivered in a tone that echoed little promise of positive developments, marked a paradigm shift in the so-called 'Albania Model' - a model which, through an escalating series of restrictive measures since its approval in November 2023, has redefined the treatment of people who migrate in increasingly punitive terms.

Originally, the protocol called for the holding of asylum seekers from countries deemed safe in the centres of Shengjin and Gjader, Albania, so that their applications for international protection could be assessed through an accelerated border procedure.

Defined by ASGI (Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione) as a "laboratory of authoritarian experiments," the "Albania Model" introduced, with Decree Law 37/2025, the forced transfer of people with a history of migration already detained in Italian CPR centres to facilities in Albania.

Screenshot from Instagram

[13] *Mendoza, C. (2001) The role of the state in infuencing African labour outcomes in Spain and Portugal. Geoforum. 32. pp 167-180.*

This practice, critically analysed by ASGI and the Supreme Court's Legal Office, presents multiple legal issues. The forced transfer is not justified by logistical needs, as Italian CPR centres are not at capacity, but rather constitutes a punitive measure targeting those at risk of losing their residence permits, exposing them to compulsory transfer to Albania.

The "Albania Model" not only restricts people's rights but also erodes broader constitutional guarantees, aligning with recent security decrees that have raised legitimacy concerns regarding fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and detainees' rights. It also creates unequal treatment among detainees, reflecting an authoritarian approach.

The Supreme Court, with order no. 23105/2025 referred the matter to the European Court of Justice, requesting the suspension of detentions and transfers until a definitive ruling on the model's compliance with EU law. The Court expressed serious doubts about the legality and proportionality of detention in Albania, yet the government persists in maintaining this controversial practice.

Key recent developments include the April 19, 2025, ruling by the Rome Court of Appeal, which, as we explore in depth later in this report, held that asylum seekers who apply for protection after transfer to Albania cannot be detained there. Following inspections highlighting critical health and safety concerns, further forced transfers reportedly continued in early May despite warnings from European monitoring bodies and civil society [14].

The Albania Protocol within the Framework of European Migration Policies

As outlined in the 2025 report *Beyond the Border: The Italy-Albania Agreement and the Suspension of Rights* [15], authored by the Tavolo Asilo e Immigrazione (Asylum and Immigration Working Group), the protocol is part of a broader European political strategy aimed at restricting the rights of people on the move [16]. Specifically, the Italy-Albania Protocol fits within the wider European trend of outsourcing asylum procedures and externalisation of border control through agreements with third countries, which limit access to protection and reduce the responsibilities of member states.

Over recent years, the European Union and its member states have increasingly delegated the management of migration flows to third countries through cooperation agreements that often restrict access to international protection and diminish the legal responsibilities of European states. With the ratification of the Protocol under Law No. 14/2024, Italy has taken this approach a step further by transferring asylum application procedures outside its national territory, conducting them in detention centres located in Albania but operated directly by Italian authorities.

Paradoxically, despite aligning with this wider trend of externalisation, the Protocol raises significant legal concerns regarding its compatibility with European Union law. Specifically, the forced transfers of people who migrate already detained in Italy to Albanian territory, and subsequent deportations carried out using Albanian infrastructure such as the Tirana airport, present serious challenges to the observance of procedural safeguards mandated by the EU Return Directive.

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[14] See Il Protocollo Italia-Albania dal 2023 a oggi. Accessed 16.07.2025.
[15]Tavolo Asilo e Immigrazione (2025), Oltre la frontiera. L'accordo Italia Albania e la sospensione dei diritti, pp. 3-4.
[16] For example, see Migration Policy: European Union Increasingly Outsources Responsibility for Asylum. Accessed on 18.07.2025.

Italian authorities lack effective control over these operations, which compromises their ability to ensure proportionality in the use of force, reasonable treatment, and independent monitoring. This situation highlights a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Protocol: while it seeks to advance the EU's political goal of shifting migration control beyond its borders, it simultaneously conflicts with the binding legal protections enshrined in EU law, thereby undermining the very rights it purports to regulate [17].

Resistance and success stories

A Glimmer of Hope: The Italy-Albania Agreement

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) declared in October 2024 that it is illegal to designate only a portion of a non-EU nation as a 'safe country' under the current 2013 Procedures Directive [18]. The court reiterated the right to contest these designations in national courts and made clear that a nation's deviation from the ECHR does not always preclude such a designation, though it must be taken into account.

The ruling had immediate consequences even though it had nothing to do with the Italy-Albania migration agreement. Because Italy had previously used partial designations, Italian courts, citing the ruling, prohibited the transfer and detention of asylum seekers in Albania. The Italian government responded by releasing an updated list of 'safe countries of origin' that avoid partial designations; however, this list was also contested, leading to additional referrals to the CJEU.

A notable example of the legal implications arising from this framework occurred in 2025, when the Rome Court of Appeal ruled in favour of a Moroccan national who had been transferred to an Italian-run CPR in Gjader, Albania, on 11 April [19]. The man, residing in Italy since 2021 and subject to an expulsion order following a 2023 conviction, expressed his intention to seek asylum while detained. The court found that his asylum application, which was made while in Albanian territory, was valid under Italian law, given that the Italy-Albania Protocol treats such locations as comparable to border or transit zones under EU asylum rules [20]. As a result, his detention could no longer be justified for the purpose of repatriation and was deemed unlawful. The court concluded that asylum seekers are not covered by the categories outlined in the Protocol and therefore cannot be held in the Albanian CPR.

This ruling challenges that interpretation, reinforcing the rights of asylum seekers under EU law and further complicating Italy's externalisation strategy.

The Emergency Transit Mechanism

The UNHCR Emergency Transit Mechanism was established to relocate refugees and asylum seekers from Libya to Niger (established in 2017) and Rwanda (established in 2019), where they would be offered solutions such as resettlement to a third country, return or local integration.

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[17] Ibid
*[18]Court of Justice of the European Union. *Summary of the Request for a Preliminary Ruling - Case C-758/24 [Alace]*. Luxembourg, November 4, 2024. Accessed [19.07.2025]. https://curia.europa.eu.*
[19] ANSA. 2025. "Asylum Applicant Cannot Be Held in Albania CPR, Judge Rules." InfoMigrants. Infomigrants. April 23, 2025. https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/64140/asylum-applicant-cannot-be-held-in-albania-cpr-judge-rules.
[20] Merli, Giansandro . 2025. "Chi Chiede Asilo Torna in Italia: L'accordo Con Tirana è Carta Straccia | Il Manifesto." Il Manifesto. April 19, 2025. https://ilmanifesto.it/chi-chiede-asilo-torna-in-italia-laccordo-con-tirana-e-carta-straccia.

As of January 2025, over 6,800 people have been evacuated from Libya, most of whom (see link for details) were later resettled to countries such as Norway, Sweden, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and the USA.

This success seemingly sets this programme apart from the other externalisation examples mentioned here, as it has effectively enabled the majority of people who have accessed it to achieve refugee status and resettle. However, an article in Infomigrants in 2024 highlights the nuance of this success in Rwanda. Interviews with people who have been relocated through ETM describe how they live in limbo for years as their resettlement depends on the unpredictable acceptance as a refugee by a third country. The interviewees also describe how, while Rwanda isn't an unsafe country, they are unwilling to opt for local integration as it does nothing to secure their legal status in Rwanda, and employment opportunities are extremely limited for locals and new arrivals alike.

Ultimately, this relatively small programme has been a success, although it remains an (expensive) emergency mechanism.

Humanitarian corridors

The Humanitarian Corridors initiative - led by Sant'Egidio, the Waldensian Church, and other faith-based actors in collaboration with the Italian government - has enabled the safe, legal arrival of particularly vulnerable refugees from countries such as Lebanon, Ethiopia, and Libya. Unlike many UNHCR-led or state-run resettlement programmes, Humanitarian Corridors has opened the door to those who would otherwise be ineligible for protection under existing schemes. The programme also invests heavily in matching arrivals with host communities, ensuring access to housing, language learning, and integration support from the outset.

This community-based reception model helps avoid the isolation and marginalisation that can follow large-scale government placements, and fosters a stronger connection between the new arrivals and the places they settle. As of 2019, over 2,100 people had benefitted across Italy, France, Belgium, and Andorra. While the initiative is modest in scale, it offers a concrete, rights-based alternative to the logic of externalisation, proving that protection, integration, and solidarity can work hand in hand.

NGOs and Civil Movements Resisting Pushbacks and Supporting People on the Move

Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario: Through its vessel Aita Mari, has rescued over 1,500 people in the central Mediterranean, offering a powerful example of humanitarian action in the face of restrictive migration policies. The organisation continues to transport survivors to solidarity-friendly ports in Spain and the Canary Islands, where dedicated teams provide medical assistance, psychological support, and help with post-rescue rehabilitation.

ResQship: A German NGO operating the vessel Nadir plays a crucial role in observing and documenting human rights violations in the central Mediterranean. Since 2021, Nadir has patrolled international waters to monitor distress cases and intervene when necessary, especially in the absence of state-led assistance. Their work is vital in a context where, despite a 60% drop in sea arrivals to Italy in 2024, the number of deaths has not decreased proportionally, which highlights the deadly consequences of migration externalisation and the urgent need for solidarity-driven responses.

The Granica Group: a Polish social movement made up of activists, local residents, and civil society organisations united in their opposition to the government's approach to the Polish-Belarusian border crisis. The group offers direct support to people on the move in Poland and monitors ongoing human rights violations.

In June 2025, Granica responded to 50 intervention requests, reaching 123 people in need of humanitarian aid along the Polish-Belarusian border. Many were found in poor conditions in the forests and swamps of Podlasie, requiring food, clean water, dry clothing, medical and psychological support, and even power banks to contact loved ones.

Despite pushback policies and rising hostility from political and religious figures, Granica continues to document abuses such as the case of an Eritrean man who was allegedly pushed back three times in as many days. The group warns of an increasingly aggressive public discourse targeting people on the move, racialised communities, and people of different faiths which further underscoring the urgent need for grassroots solidarity and legal accountability.

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Conclusion

As seen throughout this report, the limits of what is considered acceptable - and even legal - in the realm of externalisation keep being pushed further, to the point where we, as the authors, have sometimes found ourselves discussing as "positive" political discourse or initiatives that, at best, serve to make a repressive system more palatable. Yet we have also seen that resistance continues - in the courts, in civil society, and among people on the move - along with examples grounded in protection and solidarity, proving that a different path is possible.

EUROPE MUST ACT.

*We're volunteers and asylum and migration is a complex topic. This means we try to include a variety of opinions and approaches to a topic. We do our best to research and use our expertise accurately however, we also believe it's vital to encourage healthy discussion and stop misinformation. Therefore we encourage any feedback or constructive criticism of our work.

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Europe Must Act (EMA) is a growing grassroots movement, bringing together volunteers and NGOs to campaign for the humane and dignified reception of refugees in Europe.

Europe Must Act
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