

REDEFINING CITIZENSHIP



RESIDENCE AND IRREGULARITY IN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

As European governments and populations grapple with questions of belonging in an era of tightening migration controls, the very nature of citizenship is being redefined.

Although citizenship remains a foundational status that defines access to rights, protections, and political participation, it has increasingly been presented as a privilege one that can be earned, restricted, or even withdrawn. At the same time, the way a person enters a country is progressively used to determine their access to this status, as problematic concepts such as “illegal migrants” and “illegal routes” are mobilised to justify exclusion.

As each European country maintains its own evolving set of policies governing citizenship, residence, and protection, it remains difficult to form a comprehensive picture at the EU-wide level.

Comparative research offers some insight into these variations, including the 2019 report [The European Benchmark for Refugee Integration](#) and the 2026 working paper [Pathways to European Citizenship: A Comparative Case Study of Spain and Poland](#). Together, these studies highlight the uneven and shifting landscape in which citizenship is no longer a fixed status, but an increasingly contested and politically shaped category.

Building on recent research and broader developments across the continent, this report explores these shifting policies and increasingly polarised approaches that determine belonging.

NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP, NATURALISATION AND THE BOUNDARIES OF BELONGING IN EUROPE

Citizenship is officially defined in [EU terminology](#) as the “particular legal bond between an individual and his or her State.” This bond expresses a formal relationship and the protection, duties, and recognition that come with it. Yet, citizenship also has a [broader socio-political meaning](#): beyond the legal status, it includes the rights and obligations derived from membership in a political community, as well as the national identity attached to it.

Seen this way, citizenship becomes part of wider policies of belonging, not just an administrative category, but a tool through which states define who belongs and on what terms¹. Migration in Europe has transformed these boundaries, challenging long-standing assumptions about national membership and creating more diverse lived experiences of citizenship itself².

[Naturalisation](#) sits at the centre of these debates. It is the formal process through which a state grants citizenship to an individual who applies for it, usually after a period of residence. States also grant citizenship in other ways—for example, to spouses of nationals, adoptees, or the descendants of citizens born abroad. On paper, naturalisation appears procedural and objective. In practice, its meaning can be contested, and the criteria set by states reveal underlying ideas about who truly qualifies as one of “us.”

At the core of contemporary debates lie two broad visions. A universalist conception sees citizenship primarily as a legal bond: those who meet the criteria and share the formal status should enjoy equal rights and obligations. A nativist approach centres national identity, often tied implicitly or explicitly to ethnic or cultural lineage.

In simple terms: universalism emphasises equality of membership, whereas nativism emphasises protection of an imagined core community.

¹ Kristol, A., & Dahinden, J. (2020). Becoming a citizen through marriage: How gender, ethnicity and class shape the nation. *Citizenship Studies*, 24(1), 40–56.

² Papparusso, A., & Wihtol de Wenden, C. (2025). The shifting of traditional understanding of citizenship due to international migration. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10.

This tension becomes visible in the criteria that European states use to determine whether someone has built a “sufficiently strong” bond to merit citizenship. Most European citizenship is acquired at birth, but no country in the region recognises unconditional jus soli (granting citizenship based solely on place of birth). This means that most children born in Europe to non-European citizens face additional procedures before being recognised as citizens. For adults, long-term residence is a common requirement for gaining citizenship, yet rarely sufficient on its own.

Economic resources have become a key filter. States may require proof of stable income, participation in the formal labour market, or the absence of welfare receipt. Fees can be high, and while only Malta currently grants citizenship by investment, several countries offer golden visas that facilitate later naturalisation. These economic barriers raise questions about whether citizenship is drifting towards a market-based logic³.

All EU countries impose conditions of “good character” (e.g. lack of a criminal record), and nearly all require evidence of integration. This usually includes language tests—often at increasingly demanding levels—assessments of knowledge about the country, civic integration courses, or, in some contexts, informal requirements such as recommendations from citizens.

Second-generation migrants tend to benefit from simplified procedures, including exemptions from economic requirements, illustrating a partial acknowledgement that socialisation, not only formal criteria, matters. At the same time, some states grant citizenship exceptionally for achievements in sport, culture, or national interest, which underscores how strategically and politically the category can be used. (See this [link](#) for a useful visualisation of this data).

Yet even after someone succeeds in meeting all conditions, the symbolic equality promised by citizenship is not always realised. As we’ll discuss in detail below, in many European states, naturalised citizens—especially those holding dual citizenship—face broader possibilities of citizenship revocation, even when they will be left stateless. Grounds include treason, acting against constitutional order, disloyal speech, or vaguely defined threats to national interests. In several countries, these grounds apply only to naturalised citizens, creating a formal inequality at the heart of the status. Recent discussions, such as Denmark’s proposal for screening candidates for “anti-democratic attitudes,” further illustrate how citizenship acquisition is increasingly tied to ideological expectations and political anxieties.

³ Stadlmair, J. (2018). Earning citizenship. Economic criteria for naturalisation in nine EU countries. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 26(1), 42–63.

This clashes against previous frameworks, such as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness which set important legal limits on how states can grant or withdraw citizenship. The Convention aimed to prevent and reduce statelessness by requiring states to ensure that individuals are not arbitrarily deprived of nationality, particularly if such deprivation would leave them without any citizenship. It also establishes safeguards around birthright citizenship, loss, and renunciation, reflecting a broader recognition that citizenship is fundamental to the protection of human rights.

These current trends show how naturalisation in Europe has become more contested, politicised, and conditional. Historically, citizenship policy was often framed as a pathway to integration. Today, many states treat naturalisation instead as the final proof of successful integration, reversing the logic. This shift risks excluding people precisely because they lack the rights, stability, or sense of security that citizenship is meant to provide. Evidence also shows that naturalisation itself facilitates integration and socio-economic mobility, suggesting that restrictive policies may be counterproductive.

Naturalisation thus offers a window into how Europe defines belonging. It reveals a continent torn between universalist principles of equal membership and nativist pressures to protect symbolic national boundaries. As migration continues to reshape European societies, the choices made around citizenship will remain central to determining who can belong—and on what terms.



EU CITIZENSHIP, PROTECTION AND RESIDENCE

Many people living in Europe aren't citizens of a European nation and are, instead, residents. A resident is someone who legally resides in a country and holds a resident permit, which is an official document that allows one to live in that country, which they were not born in.

However, navigating residency and citizenship in EU countries is far from simple for people who have come to Europe seeking protection. Each EU member state has different requirements and qualifying criteria for obtaining national citizenship, temporary protection or permanent residency.

EU citizenship, then, is the automatic right given to all citizens of EU member states, and is an additional citizenship, rather than a replacement of national citizenship.

EU citizenship gives people the right to:

- non-discrimination on the basis of nationality
- move and reside freely within the EU
- vote for and stand as a candidate in the European Parliament and municipal elections
- consular protection (help from the embassy or consulate of any other EU country to EU citizens in distress in a country outside the EU where they have no embassy or consulate of their own country)
- petition the European Parliament and complain to the European Ombudsman
- launch or support a European citizens' initiative, asking the European Commission to propose legislation on an issue that matters to them
- contact and receive a response from any EU institution in one of the EU's official languages



Imagen from freepik

As an applicant for International Protection, a person's legal status can be viewed as having temporary residence in a state while they are awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim. Within the EU, asylum seekers are given certain rights, as well as responsibilities which they are obliged to comply with (a full explanation of the rights and responsibilities of asylum seekers in Europe can be viewed on the [European Commission's website](#)). Moreover, with the reforms to the EU asylum procedure, the European Commission notes that the Asylum Procedure Regulation aims to provide a "common, fair and efficient procedure for handling asylum applications".

Temporary Protection, on the other hand, is the protection mechanism which was triggered across the EU+ countries for Ukrainian citizens after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and has since been prolonged, with the latest extension approved by the European Council on 13 June 2025, until 4 March 2027. This extension ensures continued legal residence, access to employment, housing, education, healthcare, and social assistance, and access to (or the means to access) suitable accommodation for BoTP who fled the Russian invasion. Different EU countries, however, tightened rules and procedures for eligible beneficiaries. Examples include: Norway limited protection for individuals from Ukrainian regions deemed to be safe, such as Lviv and Zakarpattia, and reduced state-provided accommodation. The Netherlands introduced a cost-sharing system requiring beneficiaries to contribute to food and accommodation expenses.

For people seeking International Protection in Europe, citizenship or residency cannot be obtained until they have received a positive outcome for their asylum application. After receiving permission to stay, countries have different time frames and different regulations around qualifying criteria for citizenship or residency. This criterion is also open to reform, such as the new proposed changes in the UK (as discussed below) and in Ireland, where they have recently increased the time frames for eligibility to apply for citizenship. Until December 2025, a person with refugee status was entitled to apply for citizenship three years after entering the state of Ireland. New rules now require people to wait until five years after they receive their refugee status before they can apply. During this 5-year wait, they are entitled to a residence permit.

Taken together, these layered and evolving frameworks illustrate how residence pathways in Europe remain complex, unequal, and deeply shaped by shifting political priorities rather than consistent principles of inclusion.

RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES AND DUAL NATIONALITY

From a more fundamental and less policy-based orientation, Hannah Arendt⁴ described citizenship as ‘the right to have rights’; human rights were, she pointed out, inaccessible to those without a political community (ie, a country of nationality) to enforce them. Guaranteeing rights was the obligation of states to their citizens, and citizenship was defined by the simple fact of belonging to a community. Yet, in recent times, we see processes of instrumentalisation of citizenship for defined political purposes of governments.

In a thorough revision of the recent history of citizenship deprivations in Britain, Francis Webber suggests that the British legal system is gradually changing notions of citizenship, from the inalienable constitution of a person as incumbent of rights (with the consequent accountability from the State to ensure those rights) to the notion of a privilege which some would enjoy by birth and others would have to achieve. Webber refers to Theresa May, the country’s home secretary at the time, asserting in December 2013 that ‘British citizenship is a privilege, not a right’, as she revealed that she had revoked the British citizenship of 20 British jihadists that year.

The constitution of citizenship as a privilege, repeated by successive Home Office ministers, refers particularly to Muslims with dual citizenship, not to the British population as a whole or to persons with dual citizenship without a ‘suspicious’ background. For citizens who are sole British nationals, the assertion is nonsensical: their citizenship is an inalienable, irrevocable and unconditional right. Citizenship becomes a withdrawable ‘privilege’, contingent on good behaviour, only for British-born, registered or naturalised citizens having another nationality or the possibility of accessing one, and depending on particular religious or ethnic associations. This sets up a hierarchy of citizens on the grounds of their cultural background, religion or international connection.

Webber reminds us that “deprivation of citizenship means the loss of home, family, protection and belonging. It can lead to loss of liberty and even life.” Effectively, the deprivation of citizenship operates as the reverse of asylum and international protection, as illustrated by the many cases in which people deprived of British citizenship are prey to state violence thereafter.

⁴Arendt, H. (1951). The origins of totalitarianism, Harcourt, Brace and World, Chapter 9.

The process described by Webber refers to Britain's policies to prevent and punish jihadist terrorism, and the Islamophobic trends that come with these policies. Most famously, the case of Shamina Begum, a British-Bangladeshi girl who travelled to Syria at the age of 15 to join ISIS and was later rescued from the organisation, sparked controversy when the British government stripped her British citizenship ten years after, on the grounds that she posed a threat to national security.

The deprivation of citizenship from dual nationals has also been incorporated into the legislation of other European countries as a governmental strategy to confront political adversaries. The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion reports on recent developments in Hungary, which reflect this instrumentalisation of citizenship for the interest of certain groups in an unequal society.

While the measures developed in Britain target Muslim populations (mostly linked to South East Asia), recent amendments to Hungary's Fundamental Law target those who dissent from government views. The amendments will allow the suspension of citizenship for dual nationals deemed a threat to public order, safety, or national security.

When they were introduced, the 'suspension of nationality' was labelled by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee as a "legally meaningless concept" that in practice was "nothing more than a creative re-labelling of depriving someone of their citizenship for political reasons."

The legislation implementing these restrictions was passed in June 2025. It defined the new regulation as a form of temporary citizenship deprivation for up to ten years, effected by a ministerial decision. In an attempt to comply with European Union law and the 1961 Statelessness Convention, only Hungarian dual nationals whose second nationality is from a non-EU state will be eligible for suspension of citizenship, and authorities must consider the individual's actual ties to Hungary, including the effect on family life. However, the grounds for removal of citizenship established in this law are still vaguely defined as service in foreign armed forces, joining a terrorist organisation, conviction for serious crimes, or "engaging in activity that is offensive to the national security, sovereignty or the constitutional order of Hungary, in the interests of, on behalf of, or as a representative of a foreign power or organization."

Universal human rights go hand in hand with citizenship, which grounds a person's rights in the state administering a territory or nation. Governmental strategies to deprive dual nationals of their citizenship not only result in the extensive amputation of fundamental rights but also constitute a manipulation of civil law to the service of political interest.

3 IMPORTANT UPDATES: UK REFUGEE AND CITIZENSHIP REFORMS

Against this broader shift toward the instrumentalisation and conditionality of citizenship, the following recent reforms in the UK illustrate how these dynamics are being translated into more widespread policy changes.

Changes

1. *UK Dual National Passport Requirements*

As of February 2026, UK Dual Nationals (except for Irish dual nationals) are required to enter the UK using a British passport or pay £589 for a “certificate of entitlement” to prove their British citizenship.

This has been an expensive (and badly communicated) bureaucratic update, which has led many people to struggle to return to the UK and prevented families from reuniting at critical moments.

It also speaks to something more than this; the UK appears to be one of a few countries pioneering a new approach to citizenship where all citizens are no longer treated the same. Although, in theory, the new requirement doesn't affect any British citizen's right to enter the country, in practice it does, creating a new (albeit currently minor) tiering system within British citizenship.

Moreover, this appears to be another step in the wrong direction. It is yet another instance of measures once harshly imposed on marginalised groups gradually being extended to the broader population, as we witness an increasing amount of limitations, checks, monitoring and administrative requirements that increasingly constrain the fundamental human desire for mobility.

Proposals

2. *Refugee Temporary Protection Status*

“Adults and accompanied children claiming asylum from today will receive a 30-month period of protection, if granted. At a 30-month review, refugees with a continuing need of sanctuary will have their protection renewed, while those whose countries are now deemed safe will be expected to return home.”

This is the latest international protection update from the British government, which will accompany other previous reforms, such as the restrictions on family reunion (for more on this, see our previous report).

The statement made by Shabana Mahmood on the 3rd of March cites that the strategy behind these updates is to reduce “pull-factors” and ultimately asylum claims in Britain. This is despite the fact that there is widespread acknowledgement amongst researchers and policymakers that there is no evidence of the existence of “pull factors”.

Worse still, this latest reform is likely to create mass harm. Researchers have often argued against the violence of uncertainty⁵, its effect on health and how it should be limited when it comes to policy development. In 2021, a UK-based study found empirical evidence on how the asylum waiting time undermines refugee health⁶. Furthermore, evidence from Denmark (where they have similar policies) highlights how policies such as these have a particularly adverse effect on women and, in particular, single mothers, who can become trapped in cycles of poverty and harm.

What the UK government now aims to implement flies in the face of this evidence, inflicting harm on those who are legally defined as needing protection and seemingly setting refugees up to fail, as this harm is likely to impact their ability to settle and become part of their new communities.

Along with the new asylum changes, there is a promise to provide new safe and legal routes. The details of these routes have not yet been released. However, it is worth noting that along with these changes has been the announcement that student visas for people from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan have been indefinitely paused as of 26th March. This is despite the fact that applying to university schemes and scholarships was one of the only ways for these nationals to safely enter the UK with a valid visa and claim asylum.

3. *The Earned Settlement Proposal*

These changes to settlement will largely affect all immigration categories, from refugees to international students to skilled workers and will be applied to everyone in the UK currently who has not yet received indefinite leave to remain (except those whose right to stay in the UK came from the EU Settlement Scheme).



⁵ Grace BL, Bais R, Roth BJ. The Violence of Uncertainty – Undermining Immigrant and Refugee Health. N Engl J Med. 2018 Sep 6;379(10):904–905. doi: 10.1056/NEJMp1807424. PMID: 30184446.

⁶ Jenny Phillimore, Sin Yi Cheung, The violence of uncertainty: Empirical evidence on how asylum waiting time undermines refugee health, Social Science & Medicine, Volume 282, 2021, 114154, ISSN 0277-9536,

In the November 2025 statement, Shabana Mahmood explains that these new requirements will mean that settlement will require the following:

"Applicants must have a clean criminal record.

They must speak English to a high standard.

They must make a sustained and measurable economic contribution.

Finally, they must have no debt in this country."

Crucially, there are also updates to the standard waiting period before a person would be eligible to apply for settlement, which for refugees will increase to a baseline waiting period of 20 years before becoming eligible for permanent settlement.

It's worth bearing in mind that these proposals do not need a vote from MPs to be put into effect. Instead, these changes will automatically be implemented through a revision of visa and settlement regulations, which is done through statements of changes to the immigration rules. Revealing the deeply undemocratic way in which migration is controlled and harm is inflicted

This proposal has rightly been called out as racist and classist, and combined with the proposal above, demonstrates the UK's determination to create a system that is as uncomfortable and damaging as possible for those whom previous governments declared to protect.



Picture from Freepik

MASS IRREGULARITY AND MASS REGULARISATION

On Monday, 26th January, the Spanish government launched a decree that will regularise the situation for all those who have arrived in Spain before the 31st December 2025, and have been living and working without papers (excluding persons who are studying in Spain). The decree emerged from an agreement between the left-wing party Podemos and the social democratic party PSOE, but was actually a victory of the campaign Regularización Ya (Regularisation Now), a platform that includes more than a hundred civil society organisations and migrant collectives.

The pathway to this achievement started in April 2020, in the midst of the COVID pandemic, after the Portuguese government announced an extraordinary provisional regularisation for all those with pending migration claims. In July 2021, Regularización Ya gathered more than 500.000 signatures to approve a Popular Legislative Initiative (PLI) for massive regularisation. Signatures were obtained and delivered in December 2022, but the process was interrupted because of the Covid pandemic. The pressure of the movement remained steady until the 9th April 2024, when the PLI was approved to be debated in parliament. This, in turn, sparked a complex parliamentary arithmetic which led to the proposal being frozen.

As a result, Regularización Ya moved to propose a royal decree, which would allow them to avoid possible amendments from right-wing groups. Podemos offered to co-write the text with them and introduced the proposal whilst negotiating other resolutions with PSOE.

This is how a stern and steadfast civic movement managed to set the political agenda and make Spain a little bit more democratic. The massive regularisation decree will generate an exceptional route to access residence and work permits for undocumented people already living in Spain. By the first week of March 2026, this process was still at the stage of text adjustment and definitive closure of the draft, after receiving 350 proposed amendments from associations, NGOs and other social agents.

An extraordinary regularisation is a public policy mechanism that allows for the provision of residence permits to people living in a country without prior legal authorisation. Its purpose is not to promote future immigration, but to manage a current reality. An extraordinary regularisation process has a multitude of benefits, such as bringing people out of the shadow economy, reducing work exploitation, improving administrative management and increasing the tax income of a country.

It operates as a procedure applicable to individuals fulfilling certain requirements, such as a minimum time of stay in the country or a lack of a criminal record. Extraordinary regularisations are used recurrently across European countries like Italy or Portugal (as aforementioned), extending access to civic rights, improving integration and adapting administration to the current demographic situation.

Spain has had a number of extraordinary regularisation processes since the 1980s, initiated by both social-democratic (PSOE) and conservative (PP) governments. Combined, these initiatives have regularised the situation of more than a million people, allowing them to legally live and work in Spain. To find out more about the eight previous extraordinary regularisation processes, take a look at our recent explainer post on our website.

Regularisations are part of the habitual toolkit of European migration policies. They work through the individual analysis of each application to filter those who comply with their requirements. Regularisation processes constitute a workable strategy to provide access to citizen rights for inhabitants, facilitate the administration of social, economic and democratic life in a territory and prevent the abuses and illegalities which are facilitated by irregular conditions.



IN CONTRAST: THE EU'S DEPORTATION REGULATION

The positive impact of massive regularisations on welfare, rule of law and democracy stands in stark contrast to the current trends toward massive deportation. On the 9th March, the European Parliament voted on a new Deportations Regulation, which is expected to establish a system of expanded detention and mass deportation across the Union.

This regulation may be setting the stage for a European version of the tension and violence we have seen in recent months across the USA, under Donald Trump's aggressive campaign to detain and expel people who have settled in the US, there have been: mass raids targeting homes, schools and places of worship, and deaths at the hands of enforcement agents in custody and on the streets. The EU's Deportations law will expand detention, fast-track deportations, and provide a legal purpose to the strengthening of Frontex as a European police corps. In combination with third safe country regulations (which we have discussed in a former Topic of the Month report), the Deportations regulation will even allow governments to deport people to places they have no connection to.

Still, countries in the European Union have extensive and broad experience developing systems that guarantee the integration and accommodation of newcomers in diverse communities. This experience constitutes evidence that a welcoming Europe is possible, desirable and a horizon worth working for. By providing citizenship rights, regardless of whether the affected collectives are in need of asylum or protection, mass regularisations can have a great positive impact in providing welfare, equality and stability to a society



Picture from Canva

SELECTIVE CITIZENSHIP - GET THEM TO THE GREEKS

In contrast to recent developments in Spain outlined above, where the government has implemented a broad regularisation measure for people living without papers already present in the country, policy debates in Greece reflect a markedly different approach to migration governance. Rather than expanding pathways to legal status for those already residing in the country, the Greek government has emphasised stricter enforcement against irregular migration while simultaneously expanding controlled channels for labour migration.

Recent developments in Greece bring to light an increasingly selective approach. The government has reiterated that individuals who enter the country irregularly will have no opportunity to regularise their status. Thanos Plevris, Minister of Immigration and Asylum, has stated unequivocally that 'anyone who is currently illegal will remain illegal,' emphasising that no new legalisation programmes will be introduced. Under this approach, those residing without legal status face arrest, possible imprisonment for two to five years, and subsequent return to their country of origin.

In parallel, newly recognised asylum seekers may face stricter integration requirements, including labour participation aligned with their skills, agricultural work pilot programmes and a stronger emphasis on integrating into work instead of long-term dependence on benefits.

At the same time, the government argues that stricter enforcement is compatible with the needs of the national economy. Greece continues to experience labour shortages in sectors such as tourism, construction, and agriculture. The migration bill currently under discussion in the Hellenic Parliament seeks to address these shortages by simplifying procedures for recruiting workers from abroad through formal agreements with countries including India, Bangladesh, and Egypt. The legislation also introduces fast-track recruitment procedures for large public infrastructure projects. According to the government, these measures are intended to ensure that labour migration occurs exclusively through regulated channels.

The proposed legislation also aims to simplify administrative procedures for migrants who already reside legally in Greece. However, it simultaneously tightens conditions for maintaining legal status. For example, people's residence permits may be revoked if they remain unemployed for three to six months, a provision that could create significant insecurity for workers in seasonal sectors.

Opposition voices have raised concerns about the social and legal consequences of the proposed reforms. Giorgos Psychogios, speaking on behalf of SYRIZA – Progressive Alliance, has argued that the legislation introduces restrictive provisions that fail to reflect the realities of incoming persons integration. He criticised the narrow scope of the proposed 'second chance permit' (Article 40), noting that it excludes long-term residents who may have become irregular due to administrative or procedural errors. As an example, he cited people who have lived in Greece for decades and whose children attend Greek schools but who now risk deportation due to technical mistakes in their applications.

Further concerns relate to the growing role of temporary employment agencies, which could increase the risk of labour exploitation and the loaning or borrowing of workers with a precarious migration status between employers. The bill has also attracted criticism for abolishing provisions that previously granted residence permits to unaccompanied minors once they reached adulthood, provided they had attended school in Greece.

Taken together, the proposed reforms illustrate a dual strategy: the tightening of enforcement against irregular migration alongside the selective facilitation of labour migration through legal channels. The government presents the policy as a means of protecting legal migration pathways and addressing labour market needs, which may deepen precarity for individuals and families and limit possibilities for long-term integration and regularisation into society.



CONCLUSION

At the core of this report is the sense that citizenship is no longer a stable endpoint, but an increasingly conditional and contested status, shaped by a broader trend toward temporality and uncertainty.

While Spain demonstrates how mass regularisation can bring people out of the shadows, strengthen democratic participation, and improve social and economic outcomes, developments in Britain and Greece illustrate a growing tendency to instrumentalise citizenship and legal status for political and economic purposes. Across these contexts, we see the emergence of stratified systems of belonging, where access to rights is increasingly uneven and dependent on shifting policy priorities.

More broadly, the report highlights how the boundaries between irregularity, residence, and citizenship are becoming blurred, with legal status no longer providing the security and permanence it once promised. Instead, conditionality, surveillance, and the possibility of exclusion are extending across categories that were previously considered stable.

The central lesson remains clear: Europe has both the resources and the experience to build fair, transparent, and inclusive systems that recognise the humanity of all who live within its borders. The question is no longer whether such an approach is possible, but whether European states are willing to confront the moral, social, and political costs of continuing down a path of exclusion.

Europe Must Act.

**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 2026