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State of Asylum Conference: Implementing the Pact, together with credible entry and return policies, are key to restoring public trust in migration management



On 18 June 2025, the EUAA hosted the EU’s first annual State of Asylum Conference. Discussions centred around a key question: is EU Asylum at a Crossroads? To answer, the Conference brought together high-level European policy makers including Ministers of Interior, senior officials, and representatives of international and civil society organisations to debate the past, present and future of the EU’s evolving migration policy agenda, in the face of a challenging international security environment.

This week, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) hosted the EUAA’s first State of Asylum Conference. The event brought together **around 1 000 online and in-person attendees** to debate the evolving EU migration and asylum policy agenda. Opening the Conference, the EUAA’s Executive Director, **Ms. Nina GREGORI**, framed its central, titular question by asking participants to reflect on **whether the EU’s migration and asylum systems are at a crossroads** and, if they are, what choices are available to policy makers. With evidence-based policy-making being a core principle of democratic societies, she stressed the value of the Agency’s work and most notably, the recently-published [Asylum Report 2025](#) as a factual basis that set the stage for the day’s discussions.

Looking to the **future**, the first panel discussion, entitled “*Migration and Asylum at a Crossroads: Where do we go from here?*” invited high level European policymakers to reflect on where European migration policy might go next. **Mr. Makis VORIDIS**, Minister of Migration and Asylum in Greece noted the evolution of the EU’s migration policy as one headed in a stricter direction, concluding that a return policy needs to be a

cornerstone of any serious migration strategy. He stressed the need for such a policy to be developed in parallel with the ongoing implementation of the [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), welcoming the recent Commission proposal for a Regulation for a [Common European System on Returns](#) (CESR). **Ms. Mari RANTANEN**, Minister of Interior of **Finland** distinguished between labour migration, international protection and the instrumentalisation of migrants, stressing the need for clear rules that address all three phenomena, as well as the need to strengthen European efforts at cooperation with third countries on migration management.

In the same panel, **Mr. Andi MAHILA**, Deputy Minister of Interior in **Albania**, stressed the need for European countries to remain united and work together, noting that “*migration and asylum are not mere challenges, they reflect the values we uphold*”. **Mr. Michael SPINDELEGGER**, Director-General of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) concluded by reflecting on the decreasing trend in asylum applications lodged in the EU+. This was the result of intense work by EU Institutions and Agencies, national administrations and other stakeholders he noted, but also geopolitical shifts that have driven [the recent decrease in Syrian applications](#) and, conversely, the increase in Venezuelan applications – stressing the need for cooperation with the US authorities.

Turning to the **present**, a second panel discussion, entitled “*EU Working Together: Stepping up EU Migration and Asylum Management, in the face of mounting European and international challenges*” saw senior European officials, together with the UNHCR and IOM, reflect on the Pact on Migration and Asylum and its ongoing implementation. The EUAA’s Executive Director, **Ms. Nina GREGORI** stressed the need for ongoing political commitment for the implementation of the Pact, an observation that **Ms. Beate GMINDER**, recently appointed as Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs at the European Commission and **Mr. Kim FREIDBERG**, Director for Home Affairs at the Council of the EU, reiterated in their own comments. Ms. Gregori called for the allocation of sufficient resources to Pact implementation on a national level, including within judiciary bodies, and emphasised the plethora of Agency and European support available to make optimal use of finite resources. As the Pact enters into application in mid-2026, Ms. Gminder reflected on the ongoing transition to the new rules and the need to fine-tune some elements, referencing recent Commission legislative proposals on the Safe Country concepts. She nevertheless called for balanced ways to address irregular migration, including with stepped up efforts on legal pathways and integration into host communities.

With international organisations being key partners, **Mr. Philippe LECLERC**, Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe at the UNHCR, urged both panellists and attendees not to lose sight of the human aspects of migration; stressing that refugees contribute to EU Member States’ GDP. Against the UNHCR Global Trends Report showing [over 122 million forcibly displaced people](#), he emphasised the need for a protection-sensitive implementation of the Pact, ensuring effective solidarity between Member States and with people seeking safety. He also acknowledged the need for a routes-based approach to international protection, one that ensures protection closer to countries of origin. **Mr. Lukas GEHRKE**, IOM Director of the Global Office in Brussels, observed that displacement drivers are worsening, referencing several examples. **All agreed that Pact implementation is going well so far, and Member States will be ready, as failing to implement is simply not an option.**

A final panel discussion reflected on **the past and how it draws lessons for the future**, notably the increasing role the EUAA has played in helping Member States manage their international protection obligations, and what this means for the Agency’s future. The panel featured notable actors from the Agency’s past, including its first Executive Director **Mr. Robert VISSER**, two former Chairpersons of its Management Board, including **Dr. David COSTELLO** and **Mr. Wolfgang TAUCHER**. Together with the current Chair of the EUAA Management Board, **Ms. Evelina GUDZINSKAIT?**, they reflected on the challenges the Agency has faced, particularly in getting Member States to a place where they were able to accept European support in the field of asylum. In fact, Ms. Gudzinskait? observed that while asylum may be at a crossroads, “*the Agency is not at a crossroads, it’s on a highway*” to building trust and solidarity between European countries.

Closing the panel, **Mr. Mikael RIBBENVIK CASSAR**, the EUAA's Deputy Executive Director, also a former Chair of both the-then EASO and current EUAA Management Boards, reflected on the Agency's journey to unquestioned and critical relevance in the field of migration. However, he stressed that the path to restoring public trust in asylum management runs through recalling a basic principle in international protection: *“Asylum is a binary system: Protection or return. Both outcomes must lead to different doors. Too often that is not the case.”*

View photos of the event on the EUAA [Flickr Channel](#).

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