# European Commission proposes redefining safe third countries to streamline asylum process



The European Commission has unveiled a sweeping proposal aimed at reforming the treatment of asylum seekers, significantly altering how "safe third countries" are defined. This move is seen as a pivotal shift in the EU's approach to managing the influx of illegal migrants, allowing for the transfer of non-EU asylum seekers to designated countries outside the bloc without the need for a prior legal connection. This proposal echoes aspects of the controversial UK policy to deport migrants to Rwanda for processing, a tactic that has drawn considerable criticism.

Currently, the EU’s regulations require asylum seekers to demonstrate a connection to any safe third country before they can be transferred there. This could include family ties or prior residence. The newly proposed changes would eliminate this requirement, granting EU member states increased flexibility when determining the designation of these third countries. While the Commission argues that this will streamline the backlog of asylum requests and ease pressure on EU states, it raises significant concerns about the potential erosion of asylum rights.

Critics, including organisations like Amnesty International, caution that this amendment could jeopardise the rights of vulnerable groups seeking refuge. They argue that it risks exposing asylum seekers to the dangers of refoulement—being sent back to countries where they could face persecution. In essence, detractors fear the proposal could facilitate arbitrary detention and overlook the needs of those fleeing conflict or oppression.

The reform is part of a broader migration strategy enacted by the EU in 2023, which also includes the establishment of a list of 'safe countries'. This list currently comprises nations such as Egypt, Tunisia, Bangladesh, and Morocco. According to some estimates, the new framework could potentially expedite the processing of applications from these regions, but human rights advocates argue it might inadvertently reinforce discrimination against specific populations, particularly political dissidents and marginalized communities.

Similar initiatives are emerging beyond the EU’s borders. The UK government, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, is also exploring the idea of establishing return hubs in collaboration with third countries to manage the flow of migrants who have been denied asylum. Starmer’s administration claims to seek effective alternatives to previous policies, such as the scrapped Rwanda plan, which had faced considerable backlash due to its ethical implications. While the UK is negotiating these frameworks, it remains to be seen how effective such measures will be in curbing irregular migration.

In Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has furthered these discussions by promoting a controversial plan to divert migrants to Albania for processing. This initiative aims to deter dangerous sea crossings, with plans to house migrants in reception centres in Albania. However, the implementation of this plan has faced legal challenges within Italy, as concerns mount over compliance with European law.

As the European Commission seeks to implement these proposals by 2026, they are likely to stir heated debate among member states and human rights advocates alike. The landscape of asylum policy is shifting, and while the Commission champions these reforms as necessary for practical governance, the implications for human rights could prove profound and alarming. Scrutiny from the European Parliament and ongoing negotiations among member governments will ultimately determine the paths these changes will take and their impact on the future of asylum in Europe.

Reference Map: - Paragraph 1: Sources 1, 2 - Paragraph 2: Source 2 - Paragraph 3: Sources 2, 3 - Paragraph 4: Source 4 - Paragraph 5: Source 5, 6 - Paragraph 6: Sources 4, 7 - Paragraph 7: Sources 5, 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2058514/eu-makes-huge-migration-change> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-proposes-allowing-deportation-asylum-seekers-third-countries-2025-05-20/> - The European Commission has proposed significant amendments to EU asylum laws, allowing member states to deport rejected asylum seekers to third countries without prior connections. This redefines the 'Safe Third Country' concept, aiming to streamline asylum processing and alleviate pressure on EU asylum systems. Critics, including Amnesty International, warn that the plan could threaten asylum rights and increase risks of refoulement and arbitrary detention. The proposal is part of the broader EU migration pact adopted in 2023 and is anticipated to take effect in 2026, pending approval from the European Parliament and member governments.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-issues-list-safe-countries-migrant-returns-that-includes-egypt-tunisia-2025-04-16/> - The European Commission has released a list of 'safe countries' for returning failed asylum seekers, including Egypt and Tunisia. This list aims to expedite asylum procedures for nationals from these countries, under the assumption that their claims are likely to be unsuccessful. The list also includes Bangladesh, Colombia, India, Kosovo, and Morocco, and can be revised over time. Human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, have criticized the measure, warning that it could lead to discrimination against refugees and overlook vulnerable groups like political dissidents, LGBTI individuals, journalists, and activists.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-seeking-third-countries-host-deported-migrants-2025-05-15/> - The British government, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, is in negotiations with several unspecified third countries to establish 'return hubs' for migrants who have been denied asylum and have exhausted all legal means to stay in the UK. This move aims to bolster the government's credibility on immigration control, a politically sensitive issue. Starmer is seeking effective alternatives to the previous Conservative administration's controversial plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, which he had previously criticized and scrapped upon taking office. During a visit to Albania, Starmer emphasized efforts to combat human trafficking and was met with a refusal from Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama to establish a similar returns model for the UK.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-ship-heads-back-albania-with-eight-migrants-2024-11-06/> - An Italian navy ship departed Italy for Albania with a small group of eight migrants, as part of a controversial plan to process asylum applications abroad. Promoted by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the plan aims to deter migrants from undertaking dangerous sea crossings to Europe by sending them to monitored camps in Albania instead of Italy. A previous attempt to send 16 migrants to Albania had failed after a Rome court ruled they could not be detained in the Balkan country. In response, the Italian government has strengthened the legitimacy of its list of safe countries, hoping to avoid future legal challenges. Italy plans to send only non-vulnerable men from countries considered safe, with a limit of 36,000 per year. Migrants will be housed in two reception centers in Albania, with a maximum of 3,000 people at a time.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-top-court-take-weeks-rule-albanian-migrant-camps-plan-2024-12-04/> - Italy's Supreme Court heard cases related to the government's plan to divert migrants to Albania but will take weeks to determine its legality, according to sources. Lower courts in Italy have questioned its legality, arguing it goes against European law. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's plan includes deporting certain migrants to Albania from a list of 'safe countries' and repatriating them quickly after an expedited review, and in most cases, denying their asylum requests. The Supreme Court will review the legality of this list and the Interior Ministry's appeals against rulings that invalidated the detention of migrants in Albania. In the meantime, the sending of migrants to Albania has been paused, and it is expected that the European Court of Justice will clarify whether the interpretations of Italian judges were correct, which will take months. Meloni remains confident that her plan will succeed. Additionally, the Italian Parliament approved a bill to transfer decisions on migrant detentions from specialized courts to regular appellate courts.
7. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/20/the-council-and-the-european-parliament-reach-breakthrough-in-reform-of-eu-asylum-and-migration-system/> - The Council and the European Parliament have reached a breakthrough in reforming the EU asylum and migration system. Member states are required to establish adequate capacity to carry out border procedures and enforce return decisions for a specified number of applications. The 'Safe Third Country' concept allows authorities to reject an application as inadmissible if the applicant can be sent to a third country deemed safe, where their life and liberty are guaranteed, and they are protected against refoulement. A connection between the applicant and the third country is essential for this transfer to be lawful.