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POLICY REVIEW – EU Migration and Asylum Policy

The European Union adopted a series of legislative acts to reform its legal framework on asylum and migration management. The union aimed to establish an “effective, humanitarian, and safe European migration policy” (Consilium, 2025). The policy review tries to analyze the European Union’s Migration and Asylum Pact 2024 by focusing on the objectives and components of the policy. It will assess the effectiveness of the policy in tackling the challenges of immigration. The readers will gain insights into the impact of the policy framework in managing the influx of refugees to Europe. The Union’s policy, in essence, represents the fundamental ethos of protecting human rights and promoting the rule of law by ensuring the principle of burden-sharing among the member states. Through mechanisms such as relocation schemes and financial support for frontline countries, the policy ensures that no single state bears a disproportionate burden, particularly those receiving high refugee inflows due to the Russia-Ukraine war (Council of European Union, 2024).

No policy is ever made in a vacuum. Similarly, the pact did not emerge in isolation but was a manifestation of recent social, political, and security challenges. The policy was introduced amid a rapid increase of migrants spurred by the ongoing geopolitical conflicts, namely, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict. This was in addition to the already existing migration influx that spiked national security concerns. Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, millions have been forced to flee conflict, overwhelming the existing national asylum systems in several European Union countries (European Commission, 2024). The influx of refugees increased pressure on the member states to extend asylum and protection. This increased the burden on the limited resources of the countries and brought forth the deficiencies in the previously fragmented migration policy. Socially, the 2024 pact reflects the need of the union to ensure that its ethos of protecting human rights is upheld. The guiding principle is rooted in the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which mandates that every person seeking asylum is entitled to dignity and fair treatment (European Commission, 2024). The policy aimed to ensure full integration of the asylum seekers by providing them with uniform economic and legal frameworks across the union.

Politically, the rise of populist sentiments across territories also influenced the Union’s decision to revise the migration policy. Populist leaders and parties in countries such as Hungary and Poland have been cashing in on the public sentiments over immigration, securitizing it as a threat to the national identity and economic well-being of citizens. This rhetoric resonated with voters

in several member states, leading to increased political pressure on national governments to adopt tougher immigration policies (Smith & Jones, 2023). This tussle between the national aspirations and supranational cohesiveness is one of the reasons that led the union towards reforms. Across these countries, the amplification of nationalist narratives by populist leaders has not only polarized public opinion but also pressured governments to adopt more stringent migration policies, further entrenching a cautious approach towards migration (Reuters, 2022). The European Union's response was to then come up with a framework that would accommodate individual states' differences and also maintain the union's core commitments. The reformed pact was designed to streamline the response to the challenges of migration and to enhance cooperation among member states. The goal was to balance security threats while fulfilling humanitarian responsibility. From the security lens, the policy aimed to counter the issues of terrorism and drug peddling across borders. The union came up with standardised return mechanisms and improved data-sharing rules.

Firstly, the pact has brought in a uniform policy on the treatment of asylum seekers with the aim of making the system more equitable and fairer. For instance, Italy and Spain adopted centralized digital application system to streamline the asylum arbitrations. Both countries reported a decrease in the average time to process asylum claims from 150 to 120 days. Secondly, the pact brought in coordinated border controls to safeguard security. The supporters of the policy view this as a necessary step to protect the union from external threats. Additionally, the step also would enable tracking of the migration flows. Thirdly, to reduce the burden of accommodating asylum seekers on a few states like Italy and Greece, the union came up with mechanisms to redistribute the burden. Under this attribute of the pact, France and Germany took up relocated asylum cases, while Poland received additional financial support to expand its facilities. This highlights the success of the union in fostering mutual support among member states. Lastly, the pact came up with mechanisms to strengthen ties with countries of origin and transit so as to ensure a safe return of the individuals who do not qualify for asylum. The European Union signed agreements with Turkey and Morocco to facilitate the same.

Despite the Migration and Asylum Pact 2024 addressing challenges faced by the union due to the migration influx, there are gaps and lacunae that exist. Firstly, there continue to be disparities across member countries. The varied national interests are a roadblock to the implementation of uniform asylum mechanisms. For instance, while Italy has implemented a centralized digital system, on the other hand, Hungary, due to its internal politics and Orban's interests, has continued with a decentralized system. This patchwork approach has led to unequal protection and service delivery across the union (Smith, 2024). Secondly, the goal was to expedite the process of asylum arbitrations. While the policy has done that, it has also led to the vulnerable

groups being even more affected. The rapid processing, aimed at deterring irregular migration, sometimes neglected the comprehensive assessment of protection needs for these groups (Jones, 2024). Lastly, the partnerships with the third-party countries—although they look very executable. This does not necessarily target the grassroots problems. The policy has superficially tried to solve the issue. However, the policymakers fail to consider that the countries of origin, like Syria and Afghanistan, continue to be in turmoil. Then, the question is how would these countries handle the arrival of their people back to their borders. Hence, the long-term drivers of migration have not been considered.

As highlighted earlier, the pact was formulated to fulfil the ambitions of the European Union having a unified migration policy. However, the stakeholders failed to identify that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work for the union. In the long term, the debate of sovereignty versus supranationalism would continue, where the member states might not be very willing to give up on their sovereignty. Further, in a bid to enhance its own security, the European Union's pact has focused on speeding up the processing of asylum-seeking applications. However, this could very well lead to further marginalisation of vulnerable groups, as stated earlier. Cases reported in Greece and other frontline states illustrate instances where expedited processing resulted in inadequate assessments of claims, ultimately compromising the rights of the most vulnerable (Castles & Miller, 2022). Additionally, the European Union on the burden-sharing aspect has left it to the member states' voluntary choices on how they wish to contribute and take part in the sharing of resources. Add to this the disparity in the economic affluence of the members, and one can see how this availability of choice would become a challenge in the implementation of the policy in the future. This can potentially lead then to only a few states bearing disproportionately the socio-political costs. Wealthier countries with better administrative capacity are more capable of absorbing additional cases, whereas less affluent nations may struggle, potentially leading to political backlash and further fragmentation within the Union (Sager, 2020).

In conclusion, the European Union's Migration and Asylum Pact 2024 is an ambitious effort on the part of the Union to identify the challenges caused by the influx of migrants and to reform the previous migration policy. The formulation process successfully involved multiple stakeholders who came up with the four strong pillars of the pact. These are the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the migration management mechanisms, standardized return procedures, and solidarity and burden sharing. Despite considerable achievements of the policy, there are gaps that need to be overcome to ensure that the policy becomes holistic and comprehensive.

Looking forward, a policy that would have filled the existing lacunae would potentially lead to a more predictable and efficient migration management. It would also reduce the burden on individual countries, ensuring fair treatment of asylum seekers. This will, in the present

geopolitical context, also reinforce the European Union's credibility as a global actor committed to both security and human rights. On the other end of the spectrum, the failure of the union to fill the gaps could lead to further fragmentation and political divisions on the subject of migration within the union.

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