

EMN Cyprus High-level Presidency Conference Taking stock of the Pact on Migration and Asylum: turning strategy into reality

19 – 20 May 2026

Nicosia, Cyprus

Conference Report – Day 2

BACKGROUND

The European Migration Network (EMN) Cyprus Presidency Conference *Taking stock of the Pact on Migration and Asylum turning strategy into reality* took place on 19-20 May 2026 under the auspices of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The conference was organised by the Cyprus National Contact Point of the European Migration Network and the European Commission.

Taking place shortly before the entry into application of the Pact on 12 June 2026, the conference reflected on the state of play of preparations for the entry into application of the Pact and the opportunities and challenges ahead. The conference took a forward-looking view, recognising that 12 June 2026 is a start date for the beginning of a new approach to migration management in the EU, also considering the objectives of the European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy. EMN Cyprus held a two-day conference on the Pact's implementation, strategic priorities and future challenges. The conference also provided an opportunity to reflect on how to translate the objectives of the long-term European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy¹ into concrete action.

Discussions on 20 May were open to EU Member States, EMN Observer Countries, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Red Cross, as well as wider civil society and NGOs.

Panellists discussed how proper, sustainable implementation of the Pact would require structured coordination, investment in resourcing and digital tools, and legislative adaptation by EU Member States, with support from key partners.

SUMMARY OF DAY 2 DISCUSSIONS

PANEL 1: BEYOND SOLIDARITY: RESOURCING EU MEMBER STATES THROUGH MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

The first panel was moderated by **Sarah Schlaeger**, Senior Lead – Policy and Liaison, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, ICMPD, who highlighted the key role of NGOs in Pact implementation, emphasising their frontline presence and direct support to migrants and refugees. She underlined that adequate resourcing is essential, noting that the protection system envisaged under the Pact cannot be delivered by Member States and the European Commission alone, but requires the involvement of all stakeholders.

¹ European Commission [European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy](#), accessed on 22 May 2026.

Robert France, Head of Unit, Funding Coordination, DG HOME, European Commission (online), outlined the additional significant additional funding to support Pact implementation, including EUR 1.8 billion in 2024 under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)² review, with allocations to EU Member States and the EU Agency for Asylum (the EUAA), and further top-ups bringing total support to around EUR 3 billion for 2025–2027. EU Member States have also been able to increase their allocations, bringing total additional resources to around EUR 4.4 billion. This funding has been aligned through extensive dialogue with EU Member States and tailored to national implementation plans, prioritising key areas such as adequate capacity for asylum border procedures, legal counselling, and reception systems, while also reinforcing EU agencies' capacity. Looking ahead, the new MFF approach aims to strengthen **simplicity, flexibility, and performance-focus** in EU funding. This includes a more streamlined programming system, greater flexibility for Member States to allocate funds across home affairs priorities proportionally, and a shift towards performance-based funding linked to concrete results and milestones rather than cost-based financing. These changes are designed to better support investments and reforms, incentivise faster implementation of the Pact, and ensure resources are used more strategically.

María Gádor Enciso Henares, Advisory Member at the Directorate-General for International Relations and Immigration, Ministry of the Interior, Spain, identified how the Pact's '**new ways of working**' required strategic approaches to human resources, infrastructure and IT systems. Solidarity must be **concrete, predictable and needs-based**, adapting to pressure, not only linked to a high level of asylum applications, but also sea arrivals, which require a humane and immediate response. Spain expressed their desire for solidarity negotiations to have been more ambitious but emphasised the need to be pragmatic. As key elements ensuring EU Member States preparedness, Spain highlighted the need for **IT systems, infrastructures, legal procedures and standards**, as well as adapting permanent ways of working, while staying flexible to identify new challenges and solutions, and able to scale-in and scale-out to build resilient systems. This required EU level support and engagement from the European Commission, EU agencies and other EU Member States in an **honest, direct and empathetic dialogue**, and connecting long term internal and external dimensions by supporting the key role of civil society organisations (CSOs) through funding such as the Global Europe Instruments.³

The importance of leveraging the expertise of civil society and the specialised procedural support offered by international organisations and CSOs was discussed with Red Cross Cyprus, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), UNHCR and IOM.

Julie Lejeune, Director, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), **highlighted that members of their civil society umbrella organisations had reported funding cuts, audits, and limited transparency** at the national level. This was reflected in the proposed MFF which allowed for the exclusion of CSOs from funding, either by changing priorities within home affairs, higher cofinancing rates which poses difficulties for refugee and migrant-led organisations, and/or the reduction of objectives for social inclusion. Key consideration needed to be given for a sound contingency and resilient systems that are flexible and able to face global unpredictability, and acknowledge the **institutional memory and know-how of CSOs**, who could act as multipliers and valuable **contributors to national asylum systems**. ECRE presented some of the gaps reported via the Asylum Information Database (AIDA)⁴ including structural under-staffing of **child protection authorities** and **legal counselling and assistance**. She recommended increased collaboration with CSOs to cover those gaps, also to provide medical checks, screening to identify vulnerabilities and to be involved in independent monitoring mechanisms.

Marios Argyrou, Secretary-General, the Cyprus Red Cross Society, listed significant challenges due to insufficient and **unpredictable funding**, relying on a fragmented mix of International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) mechanisms, EU funding, occasional national support, private donations and volunteer

² European Commission, 2025, [Multiannual financial framework | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

³ European Parliament, 2026, [Global Europe instrument | Think Tank | European Parliament](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

⁴ ECRE, 2026, [Home - Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

contributions, none of which were fully aligned or timely. These constraints are intensified by the scale of needs in Cyprus, making it difficult to sustain operations, especially when project cycles are too short to support integration, capacity building or long-term impact. He also pointed to gaps in formal coordination with public authorities, which currently depended on informal relationships, and noted that key operational costs, such as infrastructure, were often not covered by EU funding, increasing the vulnerability of frontline services.

Christine Goyer, Senior Protection and Solutions Coordinator, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, stressed that Pact implementation must remain firmly **anchored in protection outcomes**, not only operational readiness, highlighting risks of fragmentation, uneven implementation across Member States, and gaps in fundamental rights safeguards, including access to legal aid and counselling. She emphasised the need for effective oversight and compliance with EU and international law, strong procedural guarantees in border and accelerated procedures, and mechanisms to redirect complex or vulnerable cases, while cautioning against increased use of safe third country concept. UNHCR priorities included promoting **alternatives to detention, strengthening access to legal assistance, improving identification and support for vulnerable individuals**, and ensuring **independent monitoring** mechanisms, alongside continued engagement with EU Member States and cooperation with EU institutions and agencies.

Vassiliy Yuzhanin, Chief of Mission, IOM Cyprus, highlighted that the Global Compact for Migration⁵ and the Pact are closely aligned, offering valuable global dialogue, funding, and expertise, including through platforms such as the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF).⁶ EU Member States and institutions also contribute significantly to related funding mechanisms, supporting implementation efforts. In addition, the UN Network on Migration⁷ provides practical guidance across key areas such as sustainable reintegration, alternatives to detention, and health preparedness. IOM's added value lies in both **policy development and practical implementation**, including return and reintegration assistance, identity and vulnerability assessments, counselling, and digital tools, while linking voluntary return programmes with reintegration in countries of origin, supported by a strong global data network.

PANEL 2: TURNING EVIDENCE INTO STRATEGY: STRENGTHENING SITUATIONAL AWARENESS FOR EFFECTIVE PACT DELIVERY

The second panel was moderated by **Ilze Silima-Osmane**, EMN Latvia and co-chair of the EMN Statistics Working Group who presented the role of high-quality, independent and timely data in migration policy, drawing on her experience as the EMN Statistics Working Group working heavily on the EMN Asylum and Migration Overview, and its statistical annexes, both in collaboration with Eurostat and also the EMN Observer Countries.

Martin Taschner, Head of Unit, Pact Coordination, Austria, Germany, DG HOME, highlighted that the Pact was a strong example of evidence-based policymaking, requiring the integration of diverse data and actors to build shared situational awareness, improve forecasting, and support decision-making, including through EMN inputs. Regarding migratory forecasting this meant a structured analytical approach, bringing analysts together to analyse the migratory situation, run models, and then analyse the outcomes together with migration experts. While data quality and its use for decision-making have improved, key gaps remain in areas such as **reception data, attempted irregular border crossings, or better data on secondary movements**, alongside the need to utilise for the future data coming from the large-scale IT systems such as the Entry/Exit System (EES)⁸ and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS).⁹ He also stressed that strengthening data, **forecasting and foresight capacities**, including longer-term perspectives, would be essential to anticipate

⁵ International Organisation for Migration, [Global Compact for Migration | IOM, UN Migration](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

⁶ United Nations, [International Migration Review Forum | United Nations](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

⁷ United Nations, [United Nations Network on Migration](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

⁸ European Commission, [Entry/Exit System \(EES\) - EES](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

⁹ European Commission, [European Travel Information and Authorisation System \(ETIAS\) - ETIAS](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

migration trends and support contingency planning as well as effective implementation at both EU and Member State level.

Complementary insights from Eurostat and the EUAA highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen monitoring practices, foster trust in statistics and address forthcoming challenges in data collection.

Susanne Taillemite, Head of Unit, Population and Migration, Eurostat, highlighted that the annual migration management cycle¹⁰ relies on high-quality and reliable statistics. Eurostat data is produced jointly with national statistical institutes using common methodologies to ensure comparability, independence, timeliness, accuracy and confidentiality. Lessons from the first Annual Asylum and Migration Report¹¹ underlined the importance of quality data for decision-making, while challenges were noted in ensuring timely data collection in a fast-evolving migration context. The Pact also brings complexity due to multiple data providers and overlapping sources, which can create **inefficiencies, inconsistencies**, and a lack of trust from users. Ongoing efforts aim to streamline processes, including **aligning methodologies** with the EUAA and developing a new single data flow model, to simplify the process and improve efficiency, comparability and timeliness while **reducing the burden** on national administrations.

Ward Lutin, Head of the Asylum Knowledge Centre, EUAA, highlighted that the EUAA provides a wide range of situational awareness products, both quantitative and qualitative, such as the Database on International Protection,¹² the case law database,¹³ its Asylum Report,¹⁴ and monitoring reports, which are deep-dive reports into the situation in EU Member States that feed into the European Commission's annual Asylum and Migration Report. Data is sourced from EU Member States and desk research and CSOs are involved through the EUAA consultative forum.¹⁵ Monitoring is a new but central task, focused on assessing system resilience, identifying capacity gaps, and supporting trust through in-depth, thematic and ad hoc monitoring. Early findings have shown that monitoring alone already encourages EU Member States to strengthen preparedness, including training and procedures, while helping to identify gaps and shortcomings and act as political leverage to secure resources. **Contingency planning** should go beyond a tick-box approach to ensure measures are effective in practice, with monitoring helping to **prioritise support** where needed. Monitoring was also expected to guide the future prioritisation of EUAA activities, supporting a more strategic and coordinated approach over time.

Representatives from Sweden and Norway emphasised the importance of evidence-based decision-making, situational awareness and preparedness.

Christian Lovering, Ministry of Justice, Division for National Policy on Migration, Sweden, emphasised the growing demand for data, particularly as the Pact would generate even more information, enabling real-time understanding of migration trends and supporting the evaluation of ongoing policy reforms. The European Commission's Annual Asylum and Migration Report was identified as a key tool, providing a shared evidence base across Member States, while improvements in timeliness were critical for moving from **reactive to anticipatory** approaches, including **contingency planning and resource allocation**. He further stressed the need for supporting preparedness across multiple sectors such as housing, education and returns, not only migratory flows.

Minda Asgard Musk, Head of Statistics and Analytics at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), Norway, highlighted the need for strong investments in both **case handling and analytical systems**, including merging data for a holistic perspective and automating processes where possible. Building trust in data was also critical, requiring consistent delivery of reliable and relevant information over time, as well as responsiveness to user needs. At the operational level, ensuring that **data was actively used** remains a challenge. Norway benefits from EU-wide data and networks to understand

¹⁰ European Commission, 2025, [First Annual Migration Management Cycle - Migration and Home Affairs](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹¹ European Commission, 2025, [The European Annual Asylum and Migration Report](#), 26 May 2026.

¹² EUAA, [Home | DIP EUAA](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹³ EUAA, [EUAA Case Law Database](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁴ EUAA, [Asylum Report | European Union Agency for Asylum](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁵ EUAA, [Civil Society and the Consultative Forum | European Union Agency for Asylum](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

migration trends, using Eurostat and EUAA data actively to compare with other countries, and complement statistical analysis with contextual insights through direct exchanges with peers.

Lithuania's MIGRIS system was presented as a national-level solution enabling interoperability and facilitating efficiency. **Indrė Gasperė**, Director, Migration Department, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, presented MIGRIS,¹⁶ a system that supports asylum and migration management by enabling efficient, data-driven decision-making, allowing applicants to submit electronic evidence and streamlining case processing. It also strengthens monitoring of irregular migration and border management by enabling **real-time checks of individuals' status**, which proved effective during high-influx situations such as the 2021 crisis and the arrivals following the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The system is highly integrated with national registers and information systems, and ongoing testing within the Eurodac environment shows positive results, with plans for full integration. Improved data quality and comparability strengthen cooperation and solidarity by enabling more accurate, real-time assessments to guide relocation mechanisms. They support more coherent, evidence-based policymaking by allowing better analysis of migration trends, contributing to more harmonised asylum, integration and return policies. In addition, interoperable systems and common data standards facilitate seamless information exchange across databases, enhancing efficiency and security, particularly in the management of external borders through faster identification processes.

PANEL 3: DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF NEW TOOLS

The final panel, moderated by **Michael Beys**, Administrative Officer A, Deputy Ministry of Innovation and Research, Cyprus explored digital innovation in migration management. Examples from Estonia, Germany and the Netherlands illustrated how digital tools are being used to support workflows in border, asylum and return procedures. Together with DG HOME, the EUAA and Frontex, speakers highlighted key governance aspects for the development and management of new technologies, including AI. These include staff training and human oversight when using automated tools, strong data protection safeguarding, ensuring digital inclusion and accessibility, tailoring digital solutions to address specific needs and fostering codesign and development of IT tools with their users, as well as interoperability.

Anne Sheridan, Policy Officer, Unit A3, Situational Awareness, Preparedness and Forecast, DG HOME, European Commission, emphasised that digitalisation and technology were **key enablers** of effective migration management in the short, medium and long term. She noted the **variety in the level of digital services and tools** utilised by Member States in this context, ranging from moving away from paper-based systems to more complex digital tools, citing the 2022 EMN-OECD inform on the use of digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) in migration policies¹⁷ and the 2021 EMN study on data management in the asylum procedure.¹⁸ The European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy emphasises the need for **modern, secure and efficient systems** to support timely, high-quality decision-making across areas such as asylum, borders and returns, including the use of AI under appropriate safeguards and human oversight as outlined in Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (the AI Act).¹⁹ In this regard, she noted the targeted stakeholder consultation opened by the Commission on 19 May on the draft classification guidelines for high risk AI systems, which would close on 23 June 2026.^{20 21}

¹⁶ The Government of Lithuania, The Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, [EMigris](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁷ European Migration Network and OECD, 2022, [EMN-OECD-INFORM-FEB-2022-The-use-of-Digitalisation-and-AI-in-Migration-Management.pdf](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁸ European Migration Network, 2021, [Accurate, timely, interoperable? Data management in the asylum procedure](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 ([Artificial Intelligence Act](#)), accessed 26 May 2025.

²⁰ European Commission, 2026, [Targeted consultation on the draft guidelines for the classification of high-risk artificial intelligence systems | Shaping Europe's digital future](#), accessed 10 June 2026.

²¹ The deadline was later extended to 23 July 2026, European Commission, 2026 [Targeted consultation on the draft guidelines for the classification of high-risk artificial intelligence systems | Shaping Europe's digital future](#), accessed 26 June 2026.

She also highlighted the importance of **digital inclusion**, highlighted by the recent EMN inform on bridging digital divide,²² ensuring that tools remain accessible to users, including vulnerable groups, and that structural barriers such as digital literacy, connectivity and costs are addressed, while maintaining the core principle of manual oversight and human-in-the-loop.

Berna Kalkan, Digital Innovation Coordinator, the European Union Agency for Asylum (the EUAA), highlighted that the EUAA supports Member States in advancing digitalisation by acting as a facilitator of change, **scaling up national good practices into EU-level solutions** through projects, exchanges and innovation mapping. This includes innovation areas such as **dialect identification** (the Netherlands), **digital case management systems**, **information provision portals** (the Let's Speak Asylum Portal, EUAA), identification technologies and new Pact requirements which are underway like audio recording and automated and machine-translated transcription. Digitalisation plays a key role in **improving the efficiency, accessibility and quality of decision-making**, supporting both case handling and applicant self-reliance. At the same time, challenges remain in terms of capacity, resources and legal constraints, but these can be addressed through continued cooperation, sharing examples from practice, and ensuring strong governance, safeguards and accountability.

Ilze Perczaka, Head of the Return Knowledge Office, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), described **Frontex's mandate and operational role** in facilitating information exchange and developing **tailor-made digital solutions** to strengthen Member States' implementation of border and return procedures. One key example of high data quality infrastructure is **EUROSUR**,²³ which supports **early warning mechanisms** and **situational awareness at external borders**. Digital systems improve data quality and compliance with requirements through layered security, analytical functions and actual services, such as imagery for situational awareness. The digitalisation of return procedures is complex due to different Member State implementation and can be understood as an 'onion' model: at the core are national return case management systems, followed by a second layer of connections at national level (e.g. links with asylum systems and criminal records), a third layer ensuring effective national processing, a fourth layer at EU level (such as readmission case management and reintegration systems), and a final layer focused on interoperability, ensuring all components are connected and function together effectively.

Liis Valk, Head of the Identity and Status Bureau of the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board, highlighted that Estonia continues to develop digital tools in migration management, driven by the need for efficiency with limited personnel, while recognising there is still room for improvement. Key tools include the **automated biometric identification system** (ABIS), **migration surveillance systems** (MIGIS) for early detection of system abuse, self-service portals, and integrated background checks based on the principle of collecting data once and sharing it across systems. Efforts also focus on **improving data exchange**, including with administrative courts to streamline appeal procedures in preparation for the Pact. At the same time, challenges remain, including **ensuring preparedness for crises** (e.g. loss of connectivity), maintaining alternative non-digital solutions, addressing primary users' capacity to engage with digital tools, and ensuring flexibility so systems can be adapted quickly to changing processes or legislation.

Johannes Wenisch, Head of Department, Artificial Intelligence and Business Intelligence, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Germany, presented AI systems such as the Dialect Identification Assistance System (*Sprachbiometrie-Assistenzsystem* or DIAS). These are used as assistance tools rather than decision-making systems, with **human oversight** always required for final decisions. Key lessons have included the importance of keeping humans in the loop, involving all stakeholders (especially users) in system development, and ensuring the ability to measure the performance and meet minimum requirements for quality of machine learning systems, especially when external services were integrated. He also stressed the need for **non-technical staff to develop sensibilities and capabilities to check and interpret outputs**, particularly for large language models, and the

²² European Migration Network, 2026. [EMN inform explores digital inclusion and accessibility in legal migration procedures](#), accessed 10 June 2026.

²³ Frontex, [EUROSUR](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

importance of **training users** and **developing clear, binding guidelines** to ensure systems are used appropriately.

Sophie Bakker, Policy Adviser, Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Ministry of Justice and Security, the Netherlands, highlighted that the Netherlands had redesigned its asylum procedures as part of Pact implementation, with systems operating across both new and existing IT landscapes. The approach is driven by a strategic focus on **flexibility, efficiency** and **user-centred design** to promote uptake, including automating procedures where possible while maintaining human oversight and manual override options, keeping in mind the needs of vulnerable people. Key challenges include managing significant backlogs and supporting case workers through system changes, alongside ensuring applicants can interact with, share feedback on and follow their procedures, which has been shown to improve their experience. A new **self-service screening tool**, to be implemented from 12 June and developed thereafter, aims to streamline data collection within tight timelines, with a focus on intuitive design, multilingual access and digital inclusion, while ensuring applicants feel safe and supported throughout the process.

KEY MESSAGES FROM DAY 2 – PRESENTED BY EMN CYPRUS:

- Resourcing is a key enabler of Pact implementation, supported by increased EU, with a stronger focus on simplicity, flexibility and performance-based allocation.
- The successful implementation of the Pact will depend on solidarity and preparedness.
- Effective implementation will require coordination, adequate resourcing and digital tools.
- Funding and multilateral cooperation will remain essential to implementation efforts.
- Civil society and international organisations will continue to play an important critical operational and monitoring role.
- High-quality data will be critical to preparedness and evidence-based decision-making.
- Digital tools can enhance efficiency, provided that appropriate safeguards are in place.