

Policyweekly

Migration and its Discontents: Implications of the Rising Wave of Anti-Immigration Policies in Europe



Policy Recommendations

- 1** There is a need for global efforts to end wars and violent conflicts, particularly in countries of Africa.
- 2** The international community should support the actualisation of IOM's Strategic Plan 2024–2028, which focuses on saving lives and protecting migrants, driving solutions to displacement, and Facilitating pathways for regular migration.
- 3** International and regional organisations should collaborate with national governments to strengthen border governance in countries where porous borders are easily exploited for irregular migration.
- 4** National governments should be supported to set up and strengthen institutions for combatting human trafficking.
- 5** The growing poverty and inequality in Africa need to be addressed through investment in policies and programmes that deliver sustainable development.

Introduction

Anti-immigration policies have been rising across Europe, with [many European countries](#) introducing harsh immigration laws. In [June 2024](#), the European Commission adopted [new rules](#), which tightened the [Schengen Area](#) and the European Union's external borders with stricter measures introduced for immigrants, particularly non-EU nationals. [Analysts](#) fear that this trend may continue with tougher anti-immigration policies being introduced across Europe as more far-right political parties gain increased political influence in Europe. There has been a rise in the number of immigrants pouring into Europe. The [2024 World Migration Report](#) shows that European countries dominate the top 20 destination countries of migrants globally. In Germany alone, the number of immigrants increased from 7.28 million in 1995 to 14.22 million in 2020. In 2022, of the [2.9 million asylum applications](#) registered in 162 countries, Germany alone recorded 217,800 new claims. In 2023, the number of irregular border crossings at the EU's external border was approximately [380,000](#). The [number of migrants](#) who reached Europe's shores through the Mediterranean Sea alone increased from 180,000 in 2022 to 275,000 in 2023.

Beyond the nominal rise in the number of immigrants, including irregular migrants pouring into Europe, other factors contributing to discontent with immigrants across Europe include the increasing cost of living

and security concerns associated with immigrants. What is more, anti-immigration policies are increasingly becoming political tools, especially with the pressure from far-right political parties whose political influence is increasing across Europe. Also, the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) fears that misinformation and politicisation are fueling the current wave of anti-immigration policies in Europe. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly explains and highlights the implications of the rising wave of anti-immigration policies across Europe.

Drivers and Enablers of Rising Immigration in Europe

The [IOM](#) reports that the number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades, with the number of international migrants in the world estimated to be about 281 million in 2020, that is, 3.6 per cent of the global population. This signifies a sharp rise from the estimated 150 million migrants recorded in 2000 and 128 million migrants recorded in 1990. By the end of 2022, there was a total of [35.3 million refugees](#) and [5.4 million asylum-seekers](#) globally. Europe remains a major destination region for immigrants, with countries like Germany, United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy ranking among the top [20 countries of destination](#) for immigrants globally. Together, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy had over 43 million immigrants in 2020. This is more than the size of Ghana's population.

The increasing migration to Europe is driven by a number of factors. First is the rise in violent conflicts in places like sub-Saharan Africa, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. In 2015, more than [1.3 million people](#), mostly fleeing a violent conflict in Syria, headed to Europe. By the end of July 2024, over [6 million refugees](#) fleeing the war in Ukraine were registered across Europe. Similarly, the breakdown of law and order in post-Ghadafi Libya increased the gaps through which irregular migrants poured into Europe. In fact, the violent conflict in post-Ghadafi Libya created an economy where the facilitation of migration to Europe via the sea was commoditised, with various militia groups controlling various sea routes and making revenue from the smuggling of migrants to Europe through the sea routes under their control (see Iwuamadi, Okoli & Chukwura, 2020). As of 2016, revenue from smuggling of migrants was estimated to be around [\\$978 million, which is about 3.4 per cent of Libya's 2015 GDP of \\$29.1 billion.](#)

The worsening economic hardship in many African countries has also contributed to the flow of immigrants to Europe. In Nigeria, for instance,

[Sixty-three per cent \(133 million\)](#) of the people are multidimensionally poor. Many of the poor people have a perception of greener pastures in Europe and, therefore, seek various means, including taking desperate measures to migrate to Europe through irregular means. As a corollary to economic hardship, trafficking in persons has been on the rise, from which human traffickers make huge amounts of money. Persons facing economic hardships easily become victims of human trafficking due to the perception that migration to Europe would ease their economic hardship. In this regard, Nigeria has been a major source of irregular migrants to Europe. In 2016, [59 per cent](#) of victims of trafficking (VoT) assisted by IOM were Nigerians. The IOM estimates that about [80 per cent](#) of Nigerian women and girls arriving in Europe by sea in 2016 were VoT for sexual exploitation.

Migration and its discontents: Understanding the rising anti-immigration policies in Europe

Europe is experiencing growing discontent with the rising immigration in the region. This discontent is connected to various factors. First is the huge number of refugees (35.3 million globally in 2022) and asylum seekers (5.4 million globally in 2022) in Europe, which accentuates discontent with immigrants because it means that more resources would be required by host countries to provide for refugees and asylum seekers. Second is the security concerns like the [2015-16 terror attacks in France and knife attacks](#) in Germany in which the main suspect was a Syrian refugee. Consequently, the far-right political parties in Europe have taken advantage of the situation to deepen anti-immigration sentiments and push for anti-immigration policies. Together, the rising cost of managing refugees and asylum seekers and the security concerns about them provide the basis for the growth of populism and pressures from far-right political parties in Europe to push for anti-immigration policies. For instance, the growth of France's opposition National Rally in European and parliamentary elections has seen increased pressure for the introduction of more restrictive immigration and asylum legislation in France. The same is the case in Germany, where, due to the increasing influence of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), in crunch state elections, the Socialist-led coalition has come under pressure to introduce stiffer immigration policies. Germany, which has long been considered one of the EU's most open members, recently [reduced welfare benefits for some refugees](#) and started [deporting Afghan nationals](#) to their homeland for the first time since the Taliban took power in 2021. In the [Netherlands](#), the far-right-led new coalition, Freedom Party (PVV), has threatened to adopt the

most stringent immigration rules in the EU because the country can no longer cope with the influx of immigrants. To tighten immigration, the government plans to implement [stiff measures](#) like freezing new asylum applications, providing only basic accommodation, limiting family reunification visas and accelerating forced returns.

The anti-immigration policies in Europe seem to be yielding results already, as can be seen from the drop in the number of irregular immigrants in the EU. Between January and July 2024, the number of irregular immigrants arriving in the EU dropped by [36% year on year to 113,400](#). If the trend of anti-immigration policies continues in Europe, there will be a further drastic drop in irregular and regular immigrants arriving in the EU in the coming years.

What do the rising anti-immigration policies in Europe mean for the world?

The rising wave of anti-immigration policies in Europe has far-reaching implications for the world but may affect different regions of the world disproportionately. Developing countries of the global South, especially countries in sub-Saharan Africa, may be the most impacted. Africa continues to benefit immensely from the growth in global migration, particularly in terms of migration from Africa to Europe. The number of Africans living in different regions also grew from around 17 million in 2015 to over 19.5 million in 2020. In 2020, there were [11 million](#) African-born migrants living in Europe. This number contributes to the high international remittances flowing into some African countries like Nigeria. Nigeria is among the top ten countries receiving international remittances globally. The country received over [20 billion USD](#) as international remittance in 2020. Hence, the rising anti-immigration policies in Europe may reduce the flow of international remittance to Africa. For Europe, restriction of immigration may also affect the supply of labour and the young population needed to diversify some of the ageing populations in Europe.

Recommendations: Dealing with migration for mutual benefits

1. **Silence the guns:** There is a need for global efforts to end wars and violent conflicts, particularly in countries of Africa. To this end, the international community must work together to accelerate the global agenda aimed at ending violence, such as the Pact for the Future – an outcome document of the just concluded United Nations General Assembly (UNGA79). Urgent attention must be given to the conflicts in Libya,

Sudan, Ukraine, and the Sahel region.

2. The international community should support the actualisation of IOM's Strategic Plan 2024–2028, which focuses on saving lives and protecting migrants, driving solutions to displacement, and Facilitating pathways for regular migration.
3. **Joint efforts to strengthen national border governance:** international and regional organisations should collaborate with national governments to strengthen border governance in countries where porous borders are easily exploited for irregular migration. This is especially so for countries like Libya, where the borders are porous and give easy access to the Mediterranean.
4. **Strengthen mechanisms to combat human trafficking:** National governments should be supported to set up and strengthen institutions for combatting human trafficking. To this end, the activities of Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) should be bolstered through capacity building and technical assistance.
5. **Address poverty and inequality:** the growing poverty and inequality in Africa need to be addressed through investment in policies and programmes that deliver sustainable development.

Conclusion

International migration has continued to grow globally, with an estimated 281 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth in 2020. Europe has remained one of the top destination regions for migrants. Factors like violent conflicts, poverty and human trafficking have contributed to the flow of immigrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers, to Europe. The increased number of immigrants in Europe has created discontent in many European countries. This has increased pressure, particularly from the far-right political parties, for the implementation of tougher immigration policies. Already, countries like Germany have started implementing stiff immigration policies, which have started yielding results by cutting the number of immigrants in the countries. Yet, the implementation of anti-immigration policies would have some unintended consequences for Europe and other parts of the world. This Weekly, therefore, recommends measures for managing migration for the mutual benefit of the countries of origin and destination.

References

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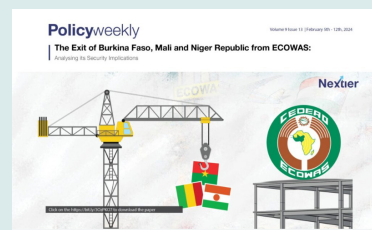
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