

Joint Statement on the EU Return Regulation and the Implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum - ALDA Migration Hub

Adopted

June 2026

Democracy, Dignity and Human Rights Must Remain at the Heart of Europe's Migration Policies

"For more than twenty-five years, ALDA has worked alongside local communities affected by conflict, displacement and social transformation - from the Western Balkans to Ukraine, and across Africa, South-West Asia and Türkiye. Throughout this history, one principle has remained constant: **every person deserves dignity, protection and the opportunity to participate fully in society.**"

Nataša Vučković, President of ALDA

"Local and regional authorities stand on the front line of migration governance. They are the institutions that transform policies into realities, rights into services, and solidarity into action. Their role must be recognised, supported and strengthened."

"Democracy can only thrive when every person is treated with dignity, when rights are protected without exception, and when local communities are empowered to build inclusive societies. At a time when democratic values are increasingly challenged across Europe and beyond, migration governance must remain firmly rooted in human rights, solidarity and the rule of law."

Maddalena Alberti, ALDA Migration Hub Chair & Mohammed Mustafa, Hub Coordinator

On **12 June 2026**, the [EU Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) officially entered into application across Member States. This marked the beginning of the most comprehensive restructuring of the European migration and asylum system in over a decade, covering asylum procedures, border screening, return policies, solidarity mechanisms, reception conditions, and governance frameworks.

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Only days later, the **European Parliament voted on the new [EU Return Regulation](#)**, reinforcing the common European framework for returns and introducing strengthened enforcement measures, expanded cooperation with third countries, and mechanisms that may include increased detention and external “return arrangements”.

While these instruments are presented as necessary to improve efficiency and coherence, they also raise serious concerns regarding safeguards, proportionality, and the protection of fundamental rights, particularly for vulnerable groups, including children, families, and persons in need of international protection.

At the same time, **Europe is witnessing a worrying normalisation of public and political discourse that reduces human mobility to simplistic narratives of exclusion**. Expressions such as “send them back” are increasingly shaping the tone of debate, narrowing space for nuance, empathy, and rights-based policymaking.

Recent political debates in several Member States, including references in France and Spain to a **“Not our Europe” narrative**, reflect a deeper tension within the European project: between a Europe grounded in solidarity, human rights, and shared responsibility, and a Europe increasingly framed through containment, exclusion, and selective belonging.

ALDA does not accept the normalisation of exclusion as a policy horizon. Migration cannot be reduced to enforcement, and human beings cannot be reduced to categories of removal.

The implementation of the Pact from 2026 onwards will significantly increase the responsibilities of local and regional authorities in reception, integration, child protection, housing, education to diverse cultures, and social cohesion. Yet their role remains insufficiently recognised in formal EU governance structures, which continue to be predominantly state-centric.

This structural gap between **responsibility on the ground and recognition in decision-making** is not only a governance issue. **It is a democratic risk.**

ALDA therefore calls for a migration governance model grounded in **multi-level democracy**, where local and regional authorities are fully recognised as co-designers, co-implementers, and co-evaluators of migration policy.

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We further stress that all measures under the EU Return Regulation and the broader Pact must fully comply with the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**, international refugee law, and the principles of necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination. Any procedures involving detention, accelerated processing, or external cooperation mechanisms must include strong safeguards, independent monitoring, and effective access to legal remedies.

At a time of increasing polarisation and democratic fragility, Europe cannot afford migration policies that weaken social cohesion or erode trust in institutions. Policies must instead reinforce democratic resilience through participation, transparency, and accountability at all levels.

For ALDA, founded on the principle that democracy is built locally, this is not theoretical. It is practical and urgent. This statement is the result of **extensive consultation with ALDA members, local authorities, civil society organisations, and institutional partners across Europe**, particularly those working directly with migrants, asylum seekers, and displaced communities. It reflects lived experience from the ground, where policies are not abstract legal texts but daily realities shaping access to housing, education, healthcare, protection, and dignity.

We therefore reaffirm a fundamental principle:

A Europe that governs migration without local democracy risks losing both legitimacy and humanity.

Migration governance must be rooted in dignity, solidarity, and participation. It must resist fear-based narratives and ensure that human rights remain at the centre of all legislative and operational decisions.

Governing Board of ALDA

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