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26.06.2026: Return Hubs: The EU Disposes of Its Responsibility

After months of negotiations, the EU Council, the Parliament, and the Commission have agreed on the most significant change to European migration policy in decades. Just a few days after the implementation of the CEAS, the political center joined [far-right forces](#) and voted for a fundamental [overhaul of EU return procedures](#). At the heart of this overhaul are the so-called 'Return Hubs', which are detention centres located outside the EU. These hubs are intended for individuals without valid residency status. After the bill was passed, lawmakers from the right wing, including German AfD lawmakers, clapped along to chants of "[Send them back](#)".

Until now, people with rejected asylum applications could only be deported to their countries of origin or to states with which they have a demonstrable connection. As early as [March](#), representatives from Germany, Austria, Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands met with the explicit intention of loosening exactly these rules. The blueprint for the planned tightening measures is Italy's Albania Deal.

The agreed regulations still require formal confirmation by the EU Parliament and member states, and could [enter into force within the coming weeks](#). Under the new law, refugees could be forcibly transferred to return hubs in third countries, where they would [await final deportation](#), even if they have no connection to those countries. In practice, these facilities are [equivalent to prisons](#): those held there would [not be permitted to leave the premises](#). This would apply to minors too; even children could be detained there alongside their parents.

In addition, the maximum detention period for individuals awaiting deportation would increase from six months to up to two years. For individuals classified as a "[security risk](#)", indefinite detention could become possible, despite the term remaining deliberately vague. One EU official put it plainly: "[The goal is to send people to their country of origin. If this is not possible, we would wait until it is possible.](#)". As a result, people could be held for months or even years in a country entirely foreign to them, solely on the basis of a rejected asylum application.

Another element of the regulations is the obligation for refugees to cooperate fully with authorities. In practice, this could grant local police and migration agencies sweeping powers to search individuals and "relevant premises", yet another deliberately broad formulation. Consequences could include home raids, seizure of phones or laptops, and severe violations of privacy. Once again, the sole justification is often a rejected asylum application. These measures are increasingly reminiscent of the repressive tactics employed by ICE. At the same time, entry bans would be drastically tightened. The existing five-year maximum could be increased to ten years, and for those falling under the broadly defined "security risk" category, lifetime bans would become conceivable.

Just weeks ago, 17 EU member states signed the Chişinău Declaration, calling for a broader interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, specifically targeting Article 3 of the ECHR, which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. The motivation is obvious: the planned outsourcing of deportation procedures to third countries directly conflicts with this fundamental standard, given the far more precarious detention conditions and severely limited legal protections in those states.

Similar outsourcing models have already proven inhumane, costly and counterproductive. Time and again, they have resulted in refugees being exposed to violence, abuse, exploitation and death.

By transferring people to non-EU states, the EU increasingly evades its direct responsibility, offloads oversight and accountability onto third countries, and reproduces colonial structures. The current regulation, the Chişinău Declaration and the CEAS are the ultimate consequence of an increasingly restrictive EU asylum policy: detention periods are expanding, safeguards are being dismantled, and the risk of serious human rights violations is growing. It is also the clearest sign yet that right-wing and far-right narratives no longer merely influence European migration policy, they now drive it.

Detaining people in closed facilities outside Europe deepens trauma, isolation and the stripping of rights. Instead of keeping those seeking protection out of Europe at any cost and outsourcing responsibility to third countries, what is needed are real investments in reception, care and integration. Stay informed about the developments surrounding the CEAS implementation and stand up against the European deportation system and the ongoing erosion of fundamental rights.