

## SNAPSHOT

### Introduction

In April 2022, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [announced](#) it would pilot a reception center at the US-Mexico border to process migrants and people seeking asylum—only four months after the White House had confirmed its interest in European reception centers as a model. It is crucial to identify not only what has succeeded and failed in the European context, but also what does and does not apply in the very distinct US and regional Americas context. In this backgrounder, the Women's Refugee Commission looks at asylum processing in Europe and makes recommendations for US policymakers based on lessons from European models.

### Overview: European Union Asylum Processing Framework

States in the European Union (EU) are governed by the [Common European Asylum System](#) (CEAS), which establishes minimum legal standards as well as extensive guidance and technical support for the processing and adjudication of applications of people seeking asylum across EU states. Nonetheless, compliance and consistent implementation of the CEAS remain ongoing issues across EU member states. [Compliance deficits](#) include inadequate reception of people seeking asylum, barriers to making applications for asylum, lack of special procedural guarantees for vulnerable populations, and unfounded discrepancies in the rates at which asylum is granted.

### Asylum processing timeframes: The inequity and limited efficiency of triage

Following the influx of people, primarily Syrians, seeking asylum in Europe in 2015–2016, there was a proliferation of efforts across European states to increase the speed and flexibility of asylum processing. Many European countries opted for systems that triage and track individuals based on their profiles into accelerated, regular, or specialized procedures. However, triaging often relies on a speeded-up process that results in lower-quality decision-making and, in some cases, unfounded rejections and refoulement – the forcible return of people seeking asylum to a country where they are likely to be persecuted.

### Reception centers: A spectrum of approaches

Individual European states and the EU as a bloc have turned to the reception center model to increase organization and efficiency in processing people seeking asylum by co-locating processing, services, and sometimes housing. Rather than a unitary one-stop-shop model, the reception center concept has taken [differing and evolving shapes](#) across European states. These centers fall broadly into three categories—(1) first arrival centers; (2) asylum processing centers; and (3) specialty centers—and are generally distinct from formal detention centers run by some European states.

### Lessons from European models: Reception center efficacy depends on fairness

The various reception center models piloted by European states have achieved only limited efficiency at the expense of consistent fairness in even the most successful cases. Moreover, the applicability of these limited successes to other countries is further reduced in the context of the extremely distinct regional dynamics of the Western Hemisphere.

### Recommendations for US policymakers

- US policymakers must ensure that any reception or processing centers not only **provide orientation and access to the spectrum of services necessary to ensure dignity and due process** for people seeking asylum, but also **protect the independence and integrity of the service providers**.
- US policymakers must **guarantee the continuous and responsive engagement of civil society** as they develop reception/processing centers for people seeking asylum, including through the support of appropriate investment in US civil society.

- US policymakers must ensure that any development, piloting, or implementation of reception centers—like the [Enhanced Central Processing Centers](#)—(1) **minimize restrictions on movement**, including those posed by remote locations; (2) **exclude the adjudication of the merits of the asylum application**; and (3) **ensure that stays are extremely limited**.
- US policymakers must **ensure that any triaging (1) incorporates safeguards throughout the process to protect people seeking asylum from return to danger; (2) ensures transfer from accelerated to regular procedures for complex cases and continued meaningful avenues for appeal at any stage and track of the process; and (3) does not rely on designation of “safe” countries of origin**. As WRC called for in our [comment on the Interim Final Rule](#) on Procedures for Credible Fear Screening and Consideration of Asylum, Withholding of Removal, and CAT Protection Claims by Asylum Officers, such safeguards must include adequate timeframes and appropriate support for case preparation, meaningful access to legal representation, and extremely strict limitations on detention.
- In developing, piloting, or implementing any reception center-type model, US policymakers must **ensure that sustainability is a central consideration**, up to and including careful analysis and selection of more sustainable alternatives that protect the human rights of and guarantee dignity and due process for people seeking asylum.

Read the [full backgrounder](#).

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### Women’s Refugee Commission

The Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth who have been displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice. Since our founding in 1989, we have been a leading expert on the needs of refugee women, children, and youth and the policies that can protect and empower them. [womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org).

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