On 4 September 2026, the countries of the core group on return hubs (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Greece) met in Copenhagen and agreed on the next steps towards establishing return hubs outside of the EU. The initiative is presented as part of a broader effort to reshape the EU's asylum and migration policy, with the establishment of external return hubs described as an initial step in this process. The five countries have now moved from developing broad principles towards active engagement with potential partner countries.

The core group agreed on three guiding principles for the proposed Return Hub Model. According to the information published by the Danish Ministry for Immigration and Integration, the model should have a measurable impact on reducing irregular migration to the EU and contribute to what the participating governments describe as a more secure and humane migration system. The countries also envisage the model as a means of disrupting the business model of migrant smugglers, particularly where vulnerable people undertake dangerous journeys to Europe.

Second, the initiative is intended to operate as a pan-European project in full compliance with EU law and international obligations, with particular emphasis on international human rights law.

Third, return hubs model should be developed through equal and mutually beneficial partnerships with countries outside the EU and should contribute to what the participating governments describe as a more effective, fair, sustainable and credible asylum and migration system.

Following the Copenhagen meeting, the five countries agreed that these principles will provide the framework for further development of the Return Hub Model. The next phase will involve active dialogue and negotiations with potential partner countries outside the EU. Before entering into concrete negotiations, the Core Group plans missions to prospective partner countries. These missions are intended to assess whether the countries concerned meet the standards set out in the guiding principles and whether an equal and sustainable partnership can be established.

The participating countries have also agreed on a common timetable for the national legal processes that must be completed before a Return Hub arrangement can become operational. This indicates that implementation will require further domestic legal steps in each participating state, in addition to negotiations and arrangements with potential partner countries.

Source(s)

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Related development(s)
Danish minister holds ministerial meeting with EU partners to discuss return hubs
Date of development
04.09.2026
Country
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Thematic area(s)
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Development type
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