CONCEPT NOTE

Migration Governance and Refugee Protection

Dates	3–4 February 2027
Location and format	Center for Artificial Intelligence (Cairo) at Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (THWS). Two days in person.
Working language	English
Academic coordinator	Prof. Dr. Abdullah Omar Yassen: abdullahomar.yassen.extern@thws.de Maximilian Hieber, maximilian.hieber@study.thws.de
Conference framework	The 72nd International Conference of the Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem (AWR)

1 Background

Migration governance is being reshaped by changes in asylum law, cooperation with countries of origin and transit, efforts to increase return, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. These developments raise connected questions about refugee protection, state responsibility, access to asylum, inclusion and the rights of people on the move. The conference will bring together academic and practitioner perspectives from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and other relevant regions.

The two-day conference will take place in Cairo at THWS on 3–4 February 2027. Day one will address migration broadly, including externalisation, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, European return policies, regional protection challenges, inclusion and durable solutions. Day two will focus on AI, migration and law through a research presentation, an invited keynote and a dedicated panel. A closing roundtable, tour and residence visit will complete the second day.

2 Aim and objectives

The conference aims to assess current changes in migration and asylum governance and identify approaches that uphold refugee protection and human rights while addressing the practical challenges facing states, communities and migrants.

- Examine externalisation, migration partnerships and the allocation of responsibility between destination, transit and origin countries.
- Assess the early implementation of the EU Pact and its implications for access to asylum, procedural safeguards and solidarity.
- Compare how European states promote or enforce return and evaluate voluntariness, safety and sustainable reintegration.
- Analyse AI and digital technologies in migration governance, including the EU AI Act and safeguards for affected people.
- Bring regional, interdisciplinary and practitioner perspectives into discussion of protection, inclusion and durable solutions.
- Develop research partnerships, policy insights and publication opportunities, including contributions to the visiting lectureship research.

3 Thematic scope

Contributions may be doctrinal, comparative, empirical, interdisciplinary or practice-oriented. Papers addressing migration generally are welcome; an AI focus is required only for the dedicated panel on day two. The main themes are:

- Externalisation and migration partnerships: cooperation with third countries, offshore arrangements, access to protection, accountability and the distribution of responsibilities. Discussion will distinguish asylum-processing arrangements from third-country return arrangements.
- The EU Pact after its 2026 application: early implementation of asylum and border procedures, screening, Eurodac, reception standards, responsibility and solidarity, and implications for legal assistance and vulnerable applicants.
- European return policies: return counselling, financial incentives, assisted voluntary return and reintegration, enforced removal, readmission cooperation and third-country return hubs. German programmes such as REAG/GARP and StarthilfePlus offer possible case studies. [3, 5]
- Protection and solutions beyond Europe: displacement and migration in Egypt and the wider Middle East and North Africa, including relevant experience from Iraq and the Kurdistan Region; inclusion, livelihoods, social work, legal pathways, local integration and resettlement.
- AI and migration governance: asylum and migration decision-making, digital borders, biometrics, surveillance, algorithmic bias, data protection, human oversight and effective remedies.

Across these themes, discussion will consider non-refoulement, individual assessment, access to remedies, children and other people with specific protection needs, and the experiences of migrants, returnees and host communities. The return session will examine how incentives and enforcement affect the reality of voluntary choice and how outcomes should be assessed beyond departure figures.

4 Call for papers

An open Call for Papers will invite contributions from law, migration studies, political science, sociology, social work, development studies, ethics, technology and related fields. Researchers, practitioners, policymakers, civil society organisations and organisations led by refugees and migrants will be encouraged to contribute across the themes above.

Submission requirements: a proposal of up to two pages setting out the research question, approach and main argument or findings, accompanied by references, a short biography of up to 100 words and 3–5 keywords. Contributors should indicate their preferred theme. Submissions and presentations will be in English.

- **Proposal deadline:** 10 December 2026
- **Notification of acceptance:** 15 December 2026.
- **Optional Full-paper submission:** 30 January 2027

The full paper will be in consideration for publication in the AWR quarterly. Conference acceptance will not guarantee publication; papers will be subject to the journal's editorial requirements and review process.

The announcement will provide the submission contact or portal, the participant registration link and practical information. The scientific committee will assess relevance, quality, clarity and the balance of disciplinary, geographical and practitioner perspectives.

5 Keynote speakers

Two complementary invited keynote speakers are planned, supported within the THWS resource ceiling:

- Keynote I on migration: a specialist in migration and refugee protection, externalisation, European asylum reform or return, introducing the broader migration discussions on day one.
- Keynote II on AI: a specialist in AI law, migration technologies or human rights, contributing to the second-day focus on AI, asylum and borders.

Speaker selection will consider expertise, regional relevance and travel costs, including the feasibility of inviting Europe-based speakers. Invitations and financial arrangements remain to be finalised.

6 Proposed two day programme

Day one 3 February 2027

Migration governance externalisation asylum reform return and protection

Time	Session
09:00–09:15	Welcome and opening remarks
09:15–10:00	Keynote I Migration governance, refugee protection and changing state policies
10:00–11:15	Panel I Externalisation of migration control and responsibility for protection
11:15–11:30	Coffee break 1
11:30–12:45	Panel II The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum after its 2026 application
12:45–13:45	Lunch 1
13:45–15:00	Panel III How European states promote return — incentives, enforcement and reintegration
15:00–15:15	Coffee break 2
15:15–16:30	Panel IV Migration and refugee protection in Egypt, the Middle East and North Africa
16:30–17:30	Panel V Inclusion, livelihoods, legal pathways and durable solutions
17:30–17:45	Reflections and close of day one
19:00–21:00	Conference dinner Indicative provision for approximately 30 participants

Day two 4 February 2027

Artificial intelligence migration and law followed by the visit programme

Time	Session
09:00–09:10	Welcome and introduction to the AI sessions
09:10–09:35	Research presentation by Prof. Dr. Abdullah Omar Yassen AI regulation in migration and asylum and lessons for Iraq
09:35–10:15	Keynote II Artificial intelligence, migration governance and human rights
10:15–10:30	Coffee break 3
10:30–11:45	Panel VI AI, asylum and borders — regulation, accountability and protection
11:45–12:30	Closing roundtable Research priorities, policy lessons, publication plans and future cooperation
12:30–13:30	Lunch 2
13:30–14:00	Transfer and arrangements for the afternoon visit
14:00–16:00	Host-organised tour and residence visit Destination, access and itinerary to be confirmed by the local organisers

7 Timeline

Target date	Action
21–09 Novemer 2026	Finalise the revised concept; Ralf to liaise with the host school on the Cairo venue and arrangements for 3–4 February
15 November 2026	Confirm the proposed scientific committee; invite two keynote speakers; publish the announcement Call for Papers and registration route
November/December 2026	Disseminate through AWR partner institutions and personal networks
10 December 2026	Deadline for two-page proposals with references and biographies
11–15 December 2026	Scientific review and selection of proposals
15 December 2026	Notify contributors of acceptance
20 December 2026	Confirm keynote arrangements and contributor participation
Early January 2027	Prepare the programme; confirm catering dinner and visit logistics
15 January 2027	Publish the final programme registration details venue and public transport information
30 January 2027	Optional full papers for consideration by the AWR quarterly
3–4 February 2027	Hold the two-day conference in Cairo

8 Scientific Committee

No	Member	Position and institution

1.	Prof. Dr. Ralf Roßkopf	Vice President for International Affairs, German Jordanian University.
2.	Prof. Dr. Abdullah Omar Yassen	Visiting Professor, Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (THWS), Germany
3.	Prof. Dr. Paiman Ahmad	President, University of Raparin.
4.	Prof. Dr. Yadgar Kamal Ahmmad	Head of the Department of Law, University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH).
5.	Prof. Dr. Jiyar Aghapouri	Professor of International Studies and the Director of Center for Peace and Human Security (CPHS) at The American University of Kurdistan (AUK).