



5 December 2025

Response to initiative: Returning irregular migrants – digitalising case management

Returns of migrants whose asylum claims have been rejected must be handled with great care. Just because migrants have not been granted asylum, does not mean that they could not still be in at-risk vulnerable positions during the process of return in Europe, and/or upon their return to their home country. Establishing a secure and dependable data management system is essential for this process and more broadly, for the handling of data belonging to refugees and migrants. Refugees and migrants, much like any individual, must have control, ownership, and agency over their personal information. Despite the General Data Protection Regulation being the gold standard for data governance, refugees and migrants are often denied these same rights. Considering the vulnerable state many of them often find themselves in, it is important to ensure that their data is secured in an environment that is compliant with their own digital information rights. Mismanagement of their data can lead to serious repercussions.

Our secure data project in the Horn of Africa underscores the urgent need for improved documentation regarding refugees and migrants in the region. Much of the ongoing situation, particularly among vulnerable communities, falls into what we term digital black holes : areas where minimal information exists in digital formats. Enhanced data management through *SOLID* refugee *Pods* would provide significant benefits.

SOLID digital pods are personal or organizational data storage units designed to give users full control over their information. Inspired by the *SOLID* framework, these pods act as secure, decentralized repositories where data is stored independently of the applications that use it. Each pod can contain structured personal data, documents, preferences, or any type of digital asset, allowing users to manage, share, and revoke access to their information at any time.

The architecture of *SOLID* digital pods ensures data portability and privacy, enabling interoperability across multiple platforms and services without exposing sensitive information unnecessarily. Refugees and migrants retain ownership of their data, deciding which apps or services can read, write, or modify specific elements, effectively separating identity and personal information from the applications themselves.

Such a system would have many benefits, one of which would be to increase possible interoperability between national agencies, countries, and international organizations regarding data related to refugees. At the same time, it will provide refugees and migrants with greater security and control over their data. Our research indicates that

refugees and migrants often lose access to or are robbed of crucial information about their identity and situation, leading to inadequate documentation of their medical and legal histories. This issue continues upon their arrival in the EU when they apply for asylum.

The EU should prioritise the use of such a secure, federated data system, even when working with data of returning migrants. It would facilitate the transfer of information between different organisations, as well as facilitate and protect future administrative exchanges.

Benefits of Implementing Solid Pods for Refugees and Migrants

The refugee pods consist of features that are relevant for the EU's approach to migration, including:

- **Enhanced communication and knowledge:** Solid pods would enable refugees and migrants to communicate more effectively with relevant agencies, improving overall understanding of the situations in regions of conflict. This insight can guide EU decisions regarding asylum cases and facilitate better intervention strategies related to human trafficking, enhancing the safety of refugees.
- **Mobile and relevant information:** By ensuring that crucial documents and data can travel with refugees and migrants, particularly upon their arrival in the EU, we can enhance the asylum application process, allowing for better-informed decision-making.
- **Increased interoperability:** Solid pods would promote information exchange among EU countries, agencies, and experts in a secure environment. All data remains securely contained within the pods.

Recommendations

We outline three recommendations regarding the initiative of the EU to digitalise case management for returns:

1. Implement solid pods for refugee and migrant data ensuring that all the data is in one place, which is also accessible for the refugees and migrants themselves. These pods would function similarly to the "[jou id](#)" initiative in the Netherlands, allowing data to be shared securely with designated entities such as immigration services, minimizing the risk of breaches and insecure practices.
2. Facilitate connections between refugee pods and all agencies across the EU - potentially extending beyond - to streamline processes, enhance safety, and reduce bureaucratic delays for refugees.
3. Encourage the use of refugee pods in regions where refugees and migrants initiate their journeys. Many essential documents and data are generated early in their travels, including information on routes and trafficking. Refugee pods should be adopted by trusted organisations as a means to empower refugees

with control over their data and information from the outset, whilst ensuring that more information is available on the situation in the ground.

Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance the management of refugee data but also contribute to a more humane and effective response to their needs.