

EPP Group position paper on asylum and migration

Executive Summary

- Managing migration has been and will continue to be one of the defining, intergenerational challenges and opportunities for Europe. The EPP Group, inspired by the principle of human dignity, which dictates one cannot deny help to those in need, wants to ensure a humane approach to migration grounded in responsible solutions.

Protecting the vulnerable - The fight against smuggling and trafficking networks

- It is crucial to reinforce every measure against smugglers and human traffickers, break their business model, end their impunity and protect the lives of refugees. Enhanced cross-border cooperation, increased information sharing, coordination between Member States and closer engagement, as well as well-structured and permanent cooperation with third countries remain key to prevent migrant smuggling and trafficking.

Strengthening the Schengen area

- The European integrated border management (EIBM) is an instrument of critical importance in the management of the EU external borders.
- All Justice and Home Affairs agencies with a role in border management should have adequate funding. The EPP Group firmly supports FRONTEX as a key EU agency in ensuring the effective protection of Europe's external borders.
- Member States retain their right to introduce temporary internal border controls as a measure of last resort, which should only be set up exceptionally and proportionately for a limited period. Any such measure should be withdrawn as soon as the threats cease to exist.

Improving Return and Readmission

- An efficient return policy for those third-country nationals without legal grounds to stay in the EU is imperative for effectively implementing of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and safeguarding the Schengen area.
- Member States' return systems need to work in a coordinated manner, enhancing information sharing and coordination on rejected applications to prevent absconding and secondary movements. It is crucial that return decisions are mutually recognised.
- Cooperation with third countries should be mutually beneficial and based on the 'more for more' principle. All relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, should be linked with cooperation in field of migration and return and readmission. The EPP Group takes note of the successful use of visa conditionality and reiterates its call to expand the conditionality mechanism. Insufficient cooperation by countries of origin and transit should lead to a decrease in cooperation and support from the EU, without affecting necessary humanitarian aid.

The CEAS and the New Migration and Asylum Pact

- The establishment of a new comprehensive legislative framework in the field of asylum and migration must be an urgent priority in order to have the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in place during this parliamentary term.

- It is of the utmost importance to put in place a common migration and asylum system able to function properly at all times and to respond to current and future migration crises.
- It is crucial to ensure fair sharing of responsibility, better compliance with the rules and the hierarchy of criteria for determining which EU Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application, and the effective carrying out of transfers.
- It is essential that all Member States contribute fairly. The EPP Group is in favour of a mandatory solidarity mechanism with flexible ways to support Member States in need, including through financial contributions, voluntary relocations and other measures.
- The border procedure is an important tool to ensure the process for application is clear and to improve border management prior to a decision authorising the entry into EU territory. Discussions should also continue on allowing the lodging of asylum applications outside the EU territory
- The new rules for asylum should make the system more efficient and resilient, discourage abuses and prevent unauthorised movements. There should also be clear and appropriate obligations for the applicants and defined consequences if they do not comply.
- Every safe country, both EU Member States and third countries, in the Mediterranean has a role to play in search and rescue operations. The EU should resume the discussion about regional disembarkation platforms on both sides of the Mediterranean where asylum seekers can be safely received and their claims assessed in an efficient, dignified and humane way.
- Vessels conducting search and rescue operations must comply with relevant international and Union law, follow the rules of and cooperate with the authorities in order to ensure the safety of migrants. The EPP Group calls on the Commission to put forward a Code of Conduct for the involvement of civil society organisations participating in search and rescue activities, in order to avoid loss of life at sea.

Legal Migration

- We must keep a fair and necessary distinction between those who arrive to the EU in a legal manner and those who arrive irregularly.
- The EU has to improve migration rules and explore ways of attracting manual labour as well as highly skilled legal migrants and entrepreneurs who can fill vacant job posts and boost economic growth, including consideration of point-based models such as the ones developed in Canada and other countries.
- Member States' competences in this field must be respected. The Member States are responsible for determining the conditions for granting access to their labour markets.

Addressing the root causes of migration

- Measures aimed at contributing to the economic development of local communities and regions and, in so doing, reducing migration pressure by improving the skills and employability of third-country nationals remain at the centre of our core objectives.
- The EU's enlargement efforts in the Western Balkans and the EU's active neighbourhood policy help to broaden the area of prosperity and strengthen the rule of law and are therefore effective tools for better management of migration flows.

Integration

- Integration is a precondition for an inclusive, cohesive and prosperous society. A new approach on integration is needed, focused on social and labour market inclusion, providing language and integration courses with specific focus on young and female migrants and other vulnerable people as well as addressing the challenges of marginalised communities, aiming at minimising the risks about possible exposure to criminal networks and radicalisation. Integration at its earliest stage is an essential factor contributing to societal cohesion.
- The rule of law and fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, gender equality and respect and dialogue between religious communities, are essential elements of our value system and must be respected by all. We cannot allow parallel societies in which the core values of the Union are systematically undermined.

Instrumentalisation

- The EU must quickly respond to instrumentalisation of migrants on its external borders through a comprehensive approach that takes into account operational, legal, financial and diplomatic measures. This includes close cooperation with countries of origin and transit to prevent departures and visa policies aimed at destabilising the EU.
- The instrumentalisation of migrants highlights the importance of having an effective and integrated border management system. EPP Group calls on the Commission to make available funds for the creation of physical infrastructure to strengthen national border protection systems.
- The EPP group strongly supports the Commission's proposal to include provisions on the instrumentalisation of migrants in the Schengen Borders Code, allowing Member States to act in a more effective and coordinated.

Lessons learned from the reception of Ukrainian refugees.

- The EPP Group welcomes the unprecedented solidarity seen in the response to Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, including the first ever activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), an efficient tool in providing swift protection to Ukrainian refugees.
- EU funding to ensure adequate housing, education and health care is vital to support Member States and local authorities in covering the costs and providing better assistance. The reception of Ukrainian refugees has identified the limited capacities of our reception systems, underscoring the urgent need for swiftly distinguishing between beneficiaries of international protection and economic migrants.

Climate-related migration

- Climate change is an underlying factor for migration or displacement, and more people are expected to migrate due to its impacts. There is a need for the EU to consider the effects climate change will have on the migratory flows to our Union in the future.
- Climate change is not a cause compatible with protection within the EU asylum acquis or the international refugee regime. It is vital that EU development cooperation and humanitarian policies support climate change adaptation, build resilience and reinforce disaster risk reduction in third countries as a way to mitigate the consequences of climate change. Poverty undermines the resilience of local populations, which is why a reinforced focus on economic growth and job creation is imperative to address socioeconomic challenges.