

Protecting Lives and Controlling Migration to Europe

Resolution adopted by the EPP Political Assembly
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Over 1.3 million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe in 2015, according to Frontex, most of which entered illegally. In the first half of 2016, over 210,000 refugees and migrants reached Europe through Italy and Greece. Looking at these numbers and at the situation within the EU, it is obvious that better control and a more sustainable approach is necessary. A common European solution and further swift action to tackle the current migratory flows are therefore urgently needed.

The EPP defends the European core values of democracy, freedom, tolerance, human rights and rule of law. At the same time, freedom is contingent on security; maintaining the security of our citizens is the utmost obligation of European politicians and governments. The threat of terrorism requires better protection of the EU's external borders and a thorough identification of every person entering EU territory. We must aim for granting entry into Europe, only for those persons qualifying for international protection under the Geneva Convention. EU Member States, and especially those with external frontiers, must fulfil their obligations and secure their borders effectively in order to safeguard the security of our citizens. Europe has a responsibility to help those qualifying for international protection or in need of humanitarian assistance. However, assistance and protection should primarily be granted by the EU in the crisis countries themselves and in their neighbouring areas. It should be the European Union which decides how many, and who, will qualify for protection within Europe. This is why we need to promote legal access into Europe by means of resettlement programmes. Particular attention must be paid to the protection of women and children, who are disproportionately affected by armed conflict and vulnerable to human trafficking. Uncontrolled access for migrants into Europe is not acceptable as it puts at risk not only the security of European citizens but also our whole democratic and social system, including the rule of law.

The number of unaccompanied minors arriving on EU territory has been constantly growing and is a great source of concern. Not only are many of those arriving to be considered vulnerable victims of smugglers, but the extent of reported cases of fraud regarding age and origin constitutes a threat to the credibility of the asylum process. The authorities of the Member States should jointly try to prevent further increase in the number of unaccompanied minors by more strictly applying methods for detecting fraud, increasing the rate of return for persons denied asylum — particularly regarding this group — and preventing smugglers from working on EU territory by ensuring closer collaboration between migration authorities acting within various Member States and EU-level authorities, such as Frontex, Europol and others.

Operations such as the EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia should be further strengthened as a means of protecting the EU's external borders. Rescue at sea, however, must not be understood to grant automatic legal access to EU Member State territories. Only by making this distinction will we be able to disrupt the current business model of human smugglers and trafficking networks.

European law relating to asylum, borders and immigration is based on the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention, however, was written in a different historical context from our own. Moreover, EU law dealing with asylum (mainly Directives 2011/95/EU and 2013/33/EU) goes significantly beyond the level of protection guaranteed by the Geneva Convention.

In particular, the concept of “subsidiary protection status” constitutes a move away from the principle of protection on strictly individual grounds on which the Geneva Convention is based. The EPP proposes changing the respective Directives in order to return to the original spirit of the Geneva Convention and rethink the notion of “subsidiary protection”. In general, refugees must primarily be supported and taken care of near their regions of origin, and the capacity of our countries to host migrants must be taken into account.

We should emphasise that both international refugee law and EU law (Article 80 of the TFEU) refer to the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing. EU Member States should show more solidarity, on the one hand, while on the other, the UN and our international partners must also assist the European Union with this burden. The challenge is enormous and must be tackled on an international level. We need to encourage non-receiving countries in regions of conflict to be more cooperative in this context. States which do not want to accept refugees should at least contribute more to funding UNHCR and the World Food Programme.

Africa’s share of global population is expected to grow from 16.4% in 2015 to 25% in 2050 and 39% by 2100. The continent is therefore projected to be the largest contributor to future global population growth. These facts and figures must be taken into account when dealing with the complex subject of migration, including both its challenges and opportunities. We will not be able to solve all the problems arising from conflicts in the Middle East, population growth in Africa and climate change on European soil. Therefore, the EPP advocates the creation of safe zones in Africa in which support, assistance as well as protection will be provided. The EPP also stresses the need for improved living conditions in refugee camps, especially in terms of health and education for women and children. We must continue to enhance our support for countries in the region. The European Union has established an Emergency Trust Fund for stability in Africa and in order to address the root causes of migration there. This is an important first step towards both tackling migration in countries of origin and avoiding loss of life in the Mediterranean.

The EPP welcomes:

- The European Commission’s proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System;
- Recent proposals to reinforce Eurodac, given the need for Member States to fully cooperate and share information on all individuals arriving in Europe;
- The creation of the European Border and Coast Guard, building on Frontex, which will help to manage migration more effectively;
- The EU-Turkey agreement, which can be seen as a model for tackling migratory influx.

The EPP calls for:

- The EU to cooperate in bilateral and multilateral frameworks with African and MENA (Middle-Eastern and North African) countries to encourage greater cooperation and integration among these countries on migration management, especially regarding root causes;
- A reform of EU directives 2011/95/EU and 2013/33/EU, making it easier and faster to send back rejected asylum seekers and offering a re-conceived notion of subsidiary protection so that EU Asylum law can more accurately reflect the original spirit of the Geneva Convention offering the right of protection inside the EU based only on individual grounds;
- Better control and a reduction of the influx of irregular migrants and refugees into Europe, respecting the capacity of our societies to host migrants and refugees;
- A stronger focus on resettlement programmes for refugees, managed, for example, by UNHCR and based on the reception capacity of EU Member States;
- An increased cooperation with the UN, and other actors, including increased financial contributions for UNHCR; international law applies equally across the globe, and other wealthy or middle-income countries could do more by offering greater financial support and/or accepting more refugees;
- Better protection of the EU's external borders through patrolling of national coastguards in cooperation with Frontex, EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA and NATO, with the goal of preventing irregular entry into the EU, tackling human smuggling and preventing loss of life at sea;
- A recognition that rescue at sea does not lead to automatic legal access to the EU;
- More financial and technical help for border protection for all South-eastern EU Member States, EU candidate countries and other partner countries in the region;
- The European Commission and Member States to prepare plans for safe zones in which support, assistance as well as protection are provided in regions of conflict and in transit countries outside of Europe;
- Further development of information centres in countries of origin and transit, warning potential migrants of the dangers involved in crossing the sea and the high probability of their being sent back;
- The establishment of asylum and migration centres in third countries, in close cooperation with international institutions such as UNHCR, to which undocumented persons arriving on European soil can be sent;
- Closer cooperation with countries of origin and transit with regard to the management and return of irregular migrants, thereby providing trade and financial incentives for North African countries rejecting categorisation as "transit countries"; we, therefore, fully support the Commission's proposal entitled 'Establishing a Partnership Framework with Third Countries under the European Agenda on Migration'; this proposal should be implemented swiftly; we must introduce a strict conditionality framework for countries of origin and transit regarding development aid, trade and visa agreements;

- The clarification of the European Commission's migration policy objectives with regard to EU funds, including a new framework for performance assessment; financial resources must be directed towards clearly defined priorities;
- The Common European Asylum System to also allow requests for asylum, as well as the processing of asylum claims, to take place outside the EU or at the EU's external borders;
- International agreement on language recognition as an additional tool in establishing nationalities and/or origins as a constitutional criterion for return; qualified experts should assess an undocumented person's linguistic and cultural background in order to establish nationality and origin;
- Investment in long-term policy addressing the root causes of forced migration — including population growth and the effects, especially for youth, of unemployment and marginalisation — in order to create future prospects in the respective country or region as a whole, to enhance security and to engage in effective peace-building and reconciliation efforts concerning the many conflicts in the MENA region and in Africa;
- A foreign policy which does not contribute to the root causes of forced migration and insecurity (e.g. European trade barriers to agricultural products from the region).

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
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