

A European response to the migratory challenge: a new migration model



1. Migration as a European challenge

The phenomenon of migration and displacement - triggered by armed conflict, persecution, lack of economic perspectives and degradation of living conditions due to climate change – has reached unprecedented levels, posing an historical and unavoidable challenge to the European Union and the international community.

Recent geopolitical developments and natural disasters will likely result in greater instability and add to the migratory pressure in Europe and the Mediterranean; from the unjustified and unprovoked aggression in Ukraine to the hybrid attack by the Lukashenko regime, from the crisis in Syria to the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan, from the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, particularly in Niger, to the deadly earthquake in Morocco and flooding in Libya, and recently, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Since 2020, the EU has experienced an increase in instrumentalisation of migrants at its external borders. The Hellenic/Turkish border crisis in Evros in March 2020 caused by Turkey, the arrival of illegal migrants in Cyprus, the crisis at the Spanish/Moroccan border in Ceuta in May 2020 and the provocations by the authorities of Belarus against Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland in 2021, are clear examples. Meanwhile, the Central Mediterranean, the overland routes in the East and the Western Balkans, remain the most active routes for migrants illegally entering the EU.

The latest Schengen barometer indicates record primary and secondary flows, and a record number of asylum requests overburdening national reception systems. An unprecedented wave of new internal border controls, which clearly shows that our system has to be renewed, is threatening free movement – the very essence of European integration.

For the EPP it is crucial to acknowledge that increasing migratory flows raise security concerns and affect the European Union as a whole, and that they require a common European response, most notably when it comes to the EU external borders some of which are still too fragile. No single Member State can escape the ramifications of these challenges alone. Fighting illegal immigration effectively must be a collective responsibility of all Member States, with the support of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, commonly known as Frontex.

The catalyst underpinning these dynamics is an unprecedented rise of migrant smuggling. Smugglers are responsible for a staggering death toll, with over 20,000 deaths in the last 10 years in the Mediterranean alone. As stated by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during her recent visit to Lampedusa: “We will decide who comes to the European Union and under what circumstances. Not the smugglers”.

At the same time, we must address the challenges to our internal security that come with illegal migration, disinformation campaigns and extremist propaganda, a lack of integration and the building of parallel societies. Even more so following the horrific terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel and the subsequent rise of anti-Semitic incidents and terror threats in Europe and globally. Loyalty to our basic European democratic values, such as the rejection of anti-Semitism and respect for Israel’s right to exist, is non-negotiable. In the face of these developments, we as EPP are determined to enhance our cooperation to oppose and fight any attempts at destabilising our societies.

Therefore, the EPP stresses the need to reinforce migration governance and management policies, as well as the controls performed at the EU external borders. We sustain the necessity of a new migration model that considers all of the main migratory routes to Europe, and prioritises cutting down criminal networks, ensuring protection - foremost in the region of origin - to those who are fleeing from wars, starvation, and persecution, as well as strengthening the internal and external dimensions of EU security.

2. Building a new migration model

In October 2023, we commemorated the nearly 400 migrants who perished at sea close to Lampedusa a decade ago. To prevent such tragedies from reoccurring, we need to deliver on a common European strategic approach to manage migration while fighting against human smuggling. **The EPP wants the Mediterranean to be a sea of peace and prosperity, an area of mutually profitable cultural and economic exchanges. The EPP also expresses its deep concern with the migration situation in the English Channel and the Canary Islands.**

Christian Democracy is rooted in the principle of human dignity. Guided by this principle, the EPP strives for a humane yet rules-based approach to migration, grounded in responsible and sustainable long-term solutions that prevent illegal migration and asylum abuse while preserving stability, social peace, and acceptance of those in need of protection in our societies and communities. The right to life of every human being is not a topic of political competition, nor the claim of any specific ideology.

Unity shall continue to inspire and guide the current negotiations on the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**, aiming to establish a system that can ensure efficiency, a balanced distribution of responsibilities and burden for hosting migrants, as well as strong protection of human rights, with special attention to vulnerable people, and promotes mutual recognition of the asylum decisions of Member States. A successful reform should include; a) swift asylum procedures and additional responsibility criteria for the examination of asylum applications; b) an obligation of solidarity towards the countries of first entry, notably in periods of migratory crisis; c) repatriation procedures for illegal migrants coming from safe countries and a clear definition of safe third countries, in full respect of migrants' rights; d) zero tolerance towards any form of facilitation and encouragement of illegal immigration, including by private entities that may be involved in criminal activities; e) a strengthening of Frontex, including a clear redefinition of its missions so as to enable its agents to better control the external borders of the Union; f) the establishment of asylum processing centres outside the Union managed by Frontex and Member States in conjunction with third countries.

The **external dimension** of migration policies plays a pivotal role. The EU must strengthen its efforts in the search for structural and longstanding solutions, and ensure a change of pace in its relations with third countries by developing new, innovative approaches and comprehensive partnerships, especially with Africa and the Middle East. In this context, the EU must provide the necessary legal framework to strengthen the safe country concept and enable asylum procedures third countries. Solid multilateral action is needed for a renewed collaboration between countries of origin, transit and destination. Synergies across policies should be increased and the EU could further support and coordinate bilateral and multilateral agreements between Member States and third countries. In the framework of these bilateral agreements, the EU and its Member States should not hesitate to condition development aid on the readmission by

third states governments of their nationals who are staying illegally in the EU, while minimising consequences for the local communities.

Every year, over 300,000 foreign nationals are ordered to leave the EU because they have entered or are staying illegally. However, only around 22% of them return to their home country or to the country from which they travelled to the EU. Despite the continuous efforts of Member States, the European Commission and Frontex, including the appointment of the EU Return Coordinator in March 2022 and the adoption of an EU Strategy for Voluntary Returns, the return rate of rejected asylum seekers remains too low. This is something that needs to be clearly addressed and changed. Member States must enhance information sharing and coordination of rejected applications between reception facilities and relevant actors involved on the ground, in order to prevent absconding and secondary movements. The recent stabbings in France and shootings in Belgium further highlight the necessity of a resolute and more effective EU return policy.

We need to make full use of all our viable tools, such as the **Team Europe Initiatives**, the **EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration**, as well as the EU Action Plans for the Western Balkans, Central Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean, Atlantic and Eastern Mediterranean routes.

We must act in close coordination **with G7 partners and our African counterparts**, and with relevant international organisations, particularly the **United Nations** and its Agencies, as well as the **African Union**.

Only we, the EPP, can tackle the complexity of the challenge ahead of us. We stress the following emerging priorities, that require translation into timely action, and to be systematically encompassed in the political dialogue with third countries and international organisations; a) Addressing the root causes of illegal migration; b) Enhancing our fight against human smuggling and trafficking, and preventing threats to our internal security and deaths along migration routes; c) Defining selected legal migration channels; and d) A new approach to EU-Africa cooperation.

a. Addressing the root causes of illegal migration

The EPP is aware that in order to design solid and structural solutions to the migratory challenge, our joint efforts must find a way of reinforcing collaboration with third countries so that these countries can grow and offer perspectives for their youth at home. This means working towards increasing and diversifying **job opportunities through capacity building activities and training initiatives, as well as technology transfers in priority areas** (digital transformation, sustainable infrastructure, and renewable energy) and targeted cooperation interventions. Education remains within the core of these principles, as it cultivates freedom, liberty and solidarity, elements which are necessary to tackle propaganda, fanaticism, extremism and all forms of hatred.

Tackling vulnerability factors (political, socio-economic, and environmental) is paramount to promote **peace, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights**. Simultaneously, the fragility and instability of certain states must be taken into account, together with rising humanitarian needs and demographic, economic and environmental shifts requiring a strong focus on poverty reduction and livelihood perspectives.

Therefore, the European Union shall **support sustainable and inclusive economic growth in partner countries** by creating conditions that **foster foreign investment from Europe in a safe and legal environment, promote new business opportunities and employment, strengthen the creation of decent**

jobs, and improve the supply of and access to basic services such as education, health, and security. Thereby promoting European values such as democracy, rule of law, equality between men and women and the fight against corruption.

In parallel, **bolstering the European perspective of the Western Balkans is crucial** to ensure long-term stability and a successful migration strategy. The EPP will continue to support the region in its reform process. We renew our commitment to deliver the integration once the necessary criteria are met, while approaching the Western Balkans on their path through gradual sectoral integration and cooperation. To maintain the momentum of European integration, pursuing the ongoing reform efforts within the Western Balkans is crucial. At the same time, the EU institutions shall enhance the Union preparedness to absorb new members, including through the necessary institutional reforms. In this context, engagement with the Western Balkan and the Eastern Partnership countries must continue to better prioritise management of the migratory flows. Visa non-alignment which contributed to an increase of illegal migration on the Western Balkan route must be avoided, including the use of new tools and leverages such as a revised Visa Suspension Mechanism.

b. Enhancing our fight against human trafficking and preventing threats to our internal security and deaths along migration routes

Europol data is striking: more than 90% of all illegal arrivals to the EU are facilitated by criminal networks, and their activities generated up to 6 billion euros in global profits. Stemming illegal flows and the related deaths, both at sea and on land, requires effective **border management** and **improved cooperation with countries of origin and transit** in the fight against criminal networks and migrant smugglers, as well as an intensification of our fight against organised crime and its illegal financial flows inside the EU. Frontex is essential when it comes to protecting the EU's external borders in full collaboration with the Member States.

Security and protection must remain our paramount priority: We must strengthen the security and protection of our external borders, with integrated border management and physical infrastructure, where necessary, while enhancing interoperability of our surveillance system. We call on the European Commission to immediately mobilise substantial EU funds and means to support Member States in reinforcing border protection capabilities and infrastructure, means of surveillance, including aerial surveillance and equipment. Enhancing operation IRINI should also be a priority for discussion.

Cracking down on trafficking networks through more advanced law and order cooperation at all levels must be prioritised and backed by appropriate legislative action. Security interventions and border controls must be coupled with **a structured and effective collaboration with transit countries**, particularly with the countries **on the southern bank of the Mediterranean**, as well as with countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership. Otherwise, as indicated by UN and EU Agencies in several reports, they risk producing negative side-effects, such as placing a premium on smuggling services, pushing up demand and profits, or diverting migrants from land to sea routes.

We need to stimulate cooperation of local authorities by providing them with equipment and training and any necessary capacity-building opportunity, as well as by supporting law-enforcement and judicial authorities involved in the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Furthermore, we must better inform and warn potential migrants about risks and dangers they face when putting themselves in the hands of smugglers. The aim of such initiatives should be improving outreach

and carrying out **information campaigns**, especially in the most remote and disadvantaged areas of countries of origin. Such awareness campaigns are of paramount importance as they contribute to disrupting the narrative of the criminal networks. We also stress the need for regular adaptation and monitoring of the effectiveness of such campaigns, as the smugglers' narrative continues to attract a rising number of illegal migrants.

c. Defining selected legal migration channels

The EPP is convinced that alongside fighting against human trafficking and migrant smuggling and promoting alternative opportunities to illegal migration, legal migration channels represent a component of the global response to the migratory challenge.

Although regular labour migration is a factor in many EU economies, especially in light of the current demographic trends, EU governments have a role to play both in controlling immigration and promoting a family and pronatalist policy, as well as in rethinking our model of economic growth. A joint effort towards the adaptation and fine-tuning of entry quotas and working permits for foreign workers could stimulate positive social and economic dynamics in the countries involved, while disrupting trafficking networks. We must also be clear that the regularisation of migrants, who entered an EU Member State illegally, can under no circumstances be a solution to Europe's labour problem.

"Labour corridors" allowing for the screening of qualified workers outside EU borders and the matching with employers experiencing a shortage of workers, could represent a complementary model. Under these schemes, eligible applicants would be allowed to enter the EU labour market legally and would be better prepared to integrate in their host country and communities. For such an initiative to be implemented, a well-functioning and efficient control system, that allows for record and profile screening through well updated information-sharing among Member States, should be put in place. The involvement of regional and local authorities as well as civil society organisations in the selection of beneficiaries and in the reception process would be important.

More for more approach: Opening labour migration possibilities as a part of broader partnerships with third countries that also include enhanced cooperation on readmission must be a win-win strategy.

Only by defining clear and legal pathways for migrants and aligning the needs of both origin and destination countries, can the EU ensure an orderly management of migration, enhance our fight against human trafficking, and respond to the shared challenge of replacing illegal flows with legally channelled migration. These improvements would also provide secure alternatives for individuals seeking to migrate.

d. A new methodological approach with Africa

The drivers of displacement and migration in Africa are multi-faceted. Displacement in Africa continues to grow with more than 44 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, up from 38.3 million at the end of 2021. With ongoing and emerging conflicts, severe drought, devastating floods, human rights violations and new emergencies, the number of forcibly displaced people in Africa is set to increase further.

Africa should be a priority: it is clear that the continent's considerable needs call for EU action of high impact and visibility. The EPP asks for the creation of a far-reaching EU investment plan for Africa, aimed at balancing the Union interests with the rights of Partner States to witness their own develop-

ment and progress. This investment plan shall include conditionalities on the effective cooperation of the governments of beneficiary countries in migration matters, such as the systematic readmission of their nationals and stricter controls on the issuance of consular passes.

Going forward we must explore, in cooperation with the international community, the creation of “processing hubs” all along migration routes, such as in Africa, in the countries of origin, transit, and destination. The different profiles and needs of refugees and migrants can then be analysed with the objective of an early identification of those who are likely to have international protection needs.

This could contribute to addressing the root causes of illegal migration and reinforce cooperation with and solidarity for countries of origin and transit countries hosting refugees. It could also facilitate returns for illegal migrants who are identified as not needing international protection, which would need to be supported by reintegration opportunities in the destination countries.

It is paramount to revive the **EU-IOM Joint Initiative** enabling **illegal** migrants to return to their countries of origin in a safe and dignified way, either from the EU or from third countries, in full respect of international human rights standards and in particular, the principle of non-refoulement.

Our efforts can only succeed if adequately coordinated. In this regard, it is fundamental to make full use of the **Team Europe initiatives** undertaken by the European Commission and Member States along the main routes (Central Mediterranean, the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean), reinforcing our partnerships with relevant third countries.

A substantially strengthened EU-Africa partnership, coupling a renewed political commitment with the upscaling of our investments and our bilateral trade, based on a new model of cooperation among equals, in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility sharing, is an essential pillar of a successful migration strategy.



Rue du Commerce 10
1000 Brussels
T +32-2-2854140
E connect@epp.eu

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