

What do the manifestos of European political groups say about asylum and migration?

The adoption of political parties' manifestos is an important step in the pre-election period as they give a clear picture of the political groups and where they stand on different issues. Below are the excerpts of the manifestos which relate to asylum and migration.

Asylum and Migration in the European People's Party (EPP) manifesto:

"Effectively protecting Europe's external borders is a precondition for securing our citizens and the trust in our Union. It is also a precondition to ensure borderless travel within the Schengen area. This is why we will make sure that no one can enter European Union territory without the knowledge and explicit approval of our authorities. At the same time, we assume our Christian and humanitarian responsibility to help those in need and to improve living conditions in their home countries. [...]"

- i. We will equip the European Border and Coast Guard with up to 10.000 new officers, with the latest technology, including drones, and with a direct right of intervention along our common external borders, to put a definite stop to the cynical business of smugglers and of human traffickers.
- ii. We will negotiate border protection agreements with North African countries and help them establish their own powerful coastguards and reception centres, to prevent deadly departures along the Mediterranean coast. We will draw on the success of the EU-Turkey agreement, which lowered illegal arrivals to Greece by 96 % to achieve even better results in the future.
- iii. We will set up a true Marshall Plan with Africa. We will leverage private investments and stimulate economic growth on our neighbouring continent in order to ensure African youth have a chance. Young people with good prospects at home should no longer feel the need to leave their own countries.
- iv. We will push for a decision on a comprehensive European list of safe countries.
- v. We will improve the integration of recognized refugees. We want to ensure that those who come to live in the EU legally become integrated members of our community. We need a solid integration policy to prevent parallel societies. That is why, by virtue of the principle of subsidiarity, we will support the Member States in their endeavours and in the sharing of best practices of integration policy. We will fight with determination against parallel societies and against disrespect for any members of our societies.
- vi. We will reform the Common European Asylum System. Only through a coherent, simplified shared asylum policy across the EU will we guarantee the timely processing of asylum applications and reduce the pull factors arising from differences in Member States' respective legislation. We will establish a European Return Warrant System to ensure the return of rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin. We want to integrate the migration management chain across Member States to effectively prevent asylum shopping.
- vii. We will increase the European funding of returns within the Asylum and Migration Fund. Every year only 40% of illegal migrants that have been ordered to leave the EU are returned or repatriated. By increasing the funding, we will make sure that people who do not qualify for protection are sent back to their countries. We will make EU visas and development aid conditional on cooperating with the EU on migration. We will speed up the systematic return of persons not entitled to protection by depriving EU visas to citizens of third countries refusing to take back illegal migrants".

Asylum and Migration in the Party of European Socialists (PES) manifesto:

“Europe needs a fair common asylum and migration policy, based on shared responsibility and solidarity among Member States, and cooperation with countries of origin and transit. We could all benefit from a well-managed, regular and fair migration system; it can help strengthen the economy, generate new jobs and maintain our welfare system. Europe must manage migration in a more dignified, just and orderly way, maintaining effective control of its borders while fighting human trafficking and the criminal exploitation of people, and enhancing the protection of those in need of asylum. To do this, we must open safe and legal channels, support protection capacities in adjacent regions and tackle the root causes of migration, including climate change. This will require a new partnership with Africa and a comprehensive European Investment Plan for Africa. We will promote better funding of integration policies and support host cities and communities.”

Asylum and Migration in the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR) manifesto:

“The migration crisis revealed one clear fact - solidarity can only be built upon political will. Forcing unwanted rules, threatening sanctions or financial penalties upon Member States damage European solidarity and public opinion of the European Project.

The proposed relocation mechanism highlighted the fact that when it came to breaking the rules, some countries were not held to account in the same way as many of the newer Member States. The greatest strength of the EU is its diversity, and we should draw upon individual and varied strengths in order to have an effective, multi-faceted approach to migration that respects the sovereignty of Member States.

We need a FRONTEX Agency to practically assist border states to cope with migration. But we must be aware that no EU agency can legitimately replace national capacities and capabilities”.

Asylum and Migration in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) manifesto:

“In its current state, the EU asylum and migration system is no longer fit for purpose. We need a new common European response, based on a long-term vision. Liberals strongly oppose all forms of racism, division of societies and hatred against human beings. Any form of violence against people on these grounds must be prosecuted. Liberals will work to ensure that all those that are fleeing the horrors of war or the pain of political repression will find protection. We underline our commitment to the Geneva Refugee Convention and the right to find asylum.

Our policies should aim to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers do not take unnecessary risks with their lives by boarding unsafe boats and falling in with criminal mafias. The EU should aim to provide shelter in the region where asylum seekers came from.

For that purpose, the EU should make migration agreements with safe countries in the Middle East and Africa. These agreements consist of three elements. First, the EU commits to financially support safe countries in hosting refugees. Second, the EU will work to facilitate the resettlement of refugees in a safe, humane, and legal way. Third, we must ensure the return to these safe countries of those migrants for whom, as quick as possible, an effective return decision following due judicial process has entered into force. We will aim to obtain the collaboration of safe countries, in particular by linking financial support to their willingness to facilitate such safe return.

For those who have a right to asylum in the EU, there should be a humane and effective Common European Asylum System with decent reception, responsibility sharing, and efficient procedures in line with EU fundamental rights standards.

The European Border and Coast Guard should become an effective EU border guard service, to ensure consistent control of external borders in line with EU law. The EU should also continue to provide funding and assistance in the region where asylum seekers come from to combat the causes of migration. We want to coordinate development policies between the EU and the Member States in order to stabilise regions of origins, foster good governance, open societies, and to promote opportunities for a good life.

Beyond this, Liberals commit to establish more legal ways to Europe for those that seek jobs, education, or want to invest in our economies. To meet future demographic challenges, we cannot become a Fortress Europe. We want to extend the scope of the EU blue card to act as a EU wide work permit based on objective criteria.

However, it should be up to member countries, based on their demographic and labour conditions, to decide on the number, skills and qualifications of these migrants, and under what conditions. When the permit expires, they should return back to their countries of origin. Free movement of people within the EU is vital for continued European integration and prosperity, so we oppose any re-introduction of permanent internal border controls between Schengen member states.

Alongside this new common approach to migration we need a common commitment to integration. There is no one-size-fits-all policy, but we should ensure best practices are spread across the continent to facilitate and develop capacity for the effective integration of migrants into new communities to avoid instances of tension.”

Asylum and Migration in the European Greens manifesto:

“People have always migrated for various reasons –and always will. We need to make sure that all migrants are treated with dignity and regard for their basic human rights. Building walls is not an option – nor is allowing the Mediterranean to become a mass grave. When newly arrived migrants finds place in our societies, they can contribute both to our economy and our culture.

There is an urgent need to find a fair alternative to the current Dublin system, which leaves border Member States responsible for refugees. We are working for common standards and common rules for labour mobility and migration, and for sharing responsibility equitably across countries, in the spirit of solidarity. Border control must ensure that people in need can effectively register an asylum claim, including having access to asylum procedures in accordance with the rule of law. They need to be registered and fairly allocated among Member States. Asylum seekers’ family ties and other meaningful links to a Member State need to be taken into account. We also want to introduce resettlement and humanitarian visas for refugees in third countries.

We want the Union to support countries regions and cities welcoming a large share of refugees or migrants. Helping asylum seekers should never be criminalised – instead the EU should support rescue options. People do not belong in prison simply for seeking asylum. Asylum seekers should be guaranteed access to legal help.

The European Parliament should be given democratic scrutiny on the implementation of border controls, formal and informal agreements with third countries, and asylum and migration policies. We reject any plans for controlled centres or regional disembarkation platforms outside of the EU.

Europe must establish legal and safe channels for migration. We also need to do a better job at providing opportunities for newly- arrived people. Recognising skilled learnt in the country of origin, providing language training and fighting racism can all help to integrate new comers to the labour market. Underlying all action is respect for diversity, different cultures and languages. Agreement with transit countries should be revised to ensure a proper protection of human rights and EU international commitments”.

Asylum and Migration in the European Free Alliance (EFA) manifesto:

“On migration, the EFA pushes for strong solidarity with countries and regions at the EU borders that are particularly affected by the arrival of people from outside the EU. Every Member State must be involved in inclusive policies for migrants. We need to invest in communities outside the EU and in the EU’s in peripheral areas, to stop emigration and any form of brain drain. That also requires us to invest outside the EU and in our peripheral areas to encourage better inclusion of new citizens. We need to work together to empower our communities and our society”.

Asylum and Migration in the European Left manifesto:

“Inequality, wars, poverty and climate change are forcing millions of people to leave their country looking for a better prospective of life, instead often finding death in that huge and silent cemetery the Mediterranean Sea is today. Europe is guilty and absent: in addition to national egoisms, it refuses to find answers based on openness and solidarity, such as the reform of the Dublin system or the definition of channels for legal migration. We believe that building a new Europe means also to rediscover those values of humanity that today seem forgotten. Moreover, welcome and hospitality policies and recognising migrant’s rights are not just a matter of mercy and goodness, but remain a fundamental part of any redistributive action.

We urge the implementation of the following: [...]

h) Defend migrants’ and refugees’ rights and put an end to the fortress Europe, establishing safe European corridors both for legal migration and receiving asylum seekers. Build links with sending countries; promote a real cooperation, shared responsibility and solidarity-based solutions to foster economic and social integration. Speed up asylum processes as well as resettlement and family reunification programs and condemn unilateral violations by member states which refuse to apply such programs.

i) A Europe of the Peoples must surely encourage artistic creation, and popular education, including fostering a critical spirit; enriched by a spirit of openness, hospitality and solidarity. It will prioritize the widest access to culture and art for all residents, without exclusion”.