

16 July 2026

Restoring Trust in Europe's Migration System is the title of the Resolution of the European People's Party, adopted at the end of June 2026 by its Political Assembly. As JRS Europe, we think that this title is quite misleading. While States undoubtedly have the sovereign right—and the responsibility—to manage their borders and regulate entry onto their territory, this responsibility must always be exercised in full compliance with international refugee law, European Union law and fundamental human rights obligations, including the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 75 years ago. This is not to be negotiated.

The said Resolution, however, presents migration predominantly through the lens of security, public order and deterrence. In doing so, it constructs a narrative of permanent emergency and moral panic that leads to further erosion of safeguards that protect people seeking safety. Europe does not strengthen its migration system by weakening the legal and moral foundations upon which it is built. And, despite the wording of the Resolution, this is exactly what undermines social cohesion.

We are particularly troubled by the Resolution's continued use of the term "illegal migration" and repeated references to "illegal migrants". Such language is discriminatory and dehumanising. No person is illegal. While a person's migration status may be irregular under domestic law due to reasons like no access to asylum or migration-related systems, reducing individuals to that status strips them of their inherent human dignity – which constitutes the “*overarching value*” of EPP, as one can read in the party's paper [Promoting the Union and Protecting our values](#)- and reinforces narratives that portray migrants and refugees primarily as threats rather than as rights holders. Political language shapes public discourse. We think that it should foster informed dialogue and instill hope, not fear and division.

The Resolution further calls on the European Commission to introduce additional legislation allowing Member States to refuse access to asylum procedures at the external borders under broader circumstances. Such proposals are deeply concerning. Seeking asylum and protection is a fundamental right, enshrined in international and European law and as such must be guaranteed to everybody. It is not about a discretionary political choice of authorities or states; facilitating its enjoyment is a legal obligation of the latter under international and European law. Moreover, the European Union has only recently adopted a comprehensive reform of its asylum and migration framework through the Pact on Migration and Asylum, alongside the proposed Returns Regulation. That framework already provides Member States a considerable margin of discretion to situations involving instrumentalisation and migration management. EPP's calls for further restrictions

before this new framework has even been fully implemented clearly suggest that the objective is no longer better implementation, but progressively lowering protection standards.

JRS Europe is equally alarmed by the proposal to abolish subsidiary protection status. Subsidiary protection is not an administrative anomaly that can simply be discarded to facilitate returns. It constitutes one of the essential pillars of the Common European Asylum System, recognising that many people face a real risk of serious harm even when they do not meet the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Reducing protection to facilitate faster returns fundamentally misunderstands the purpose of international protection. Protection exists because people remain at risk—not because return has become politically inconvenient. The end of armed conflict does not automatically restore safety, dignity or the conditions necessary for sustainable return. Long after violence formally ceases, many countries continue to experience widespread insecurity, institutional collapse, persecution, or humanitarian crises that prevent safe and dignified return. International protection must always be grounded in an individual assessment of protection needs rather than political expediency.

We are likewise concerned by calls to further restrict family reunification. Families are not obstacles to integration; they are often its strongest foundation. Policies that separate families increase vulnerability, undermine well-being, and ultimately weaken social cohesion rather than strengthen it. Attacking, basically, the right to family life and the principle of family unity, based on migration – related administrative status of persons is not compatible neither with the Christian values invoked by EPP, in particular solidarity and tolerance, nor *“the universal respect of undeniable and fundamental rights, as defined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”*.

Equally troubling is the Resolution's rejection of regularisation schemes. Well-designed regularisation mechanisms are an important governance tool available to Member States. They recognise social realities, reduce exploitation, strengthen labour protections and enable people who are already part of European societies to contribute openly and lawfully. Allowing people to move out of irregularity and into legal status benefits not only the individuals concerned but also the communities in which they live and work. Rather than dismissing regularisation as a political taboo, European policymakers should recognise its value as one component of a fair and pragmatic migration system.

Believing that Europe's migration system will (re)gain public trust by keep restricting rights or lowering protection standards is an illusion. Trust is built through laws that are fair, predictable,



and implemented faithfully. It is strengthened when governments demonstrate that human mobility is based on the principles of solidarity, proportionality, human dignity and the rule of law.

As Pope Leo said a few days ago, “Europe possesses a unique potential, stemming from its history and culture, and therefore bears a corresponding responsibility. Thanks to its geographical location and institutional framework, Europe is capable of addressing the crisis in a comprehensive manner, integrating immediate relief efforts into a long-term strategic plan capable of receiving, protecting, supporting and integrating migrants, while at the same time assisting developing countries so that no one is forced to emigrate. All of this must be done with vigilance, ensuring respect for the dignity of every person.”

As Jesuit Refugee Service Europe, together with our country offices across the continent, we reaffirm that the priority today should be investment in small-scale reception, inclusion from day 1, safe and regular pathways that respect both the legitimate responsibilities of States and the inherent dignity and rights of every person.

The above statement is endorsed by JRS Europe, the regional office located in Brussels, and the following JRS country offices, members of the JRS Europe network:

JRS Austria, JRS Belgium, JRS Bosnia, JRS Croatia, JRS France, JRS Germany, JRS Ireland, JRS North Macedonia, JRS Malta, JRS Poland, JRS Portugal, JRS Romania, JRS Kosovo, JRS Serbia, JRS Slovenia, SJM España, JRS Switzerland