

Paving the way for a **Green debate** on
**REFUGEE, ASYLUM &
MIGRATION POLICIES**

May 2016



GEF

**GREEN EUROPEAN
FOUNDATION**

A challenge for political ecology

The great influx of refugees and migrants into Europe over the course of the past two years, only comparable to the number of displaced persons at the end of the Second World War, has shaken the EU to its core and has caused a severe crisis on refugee and migration policies. The Union risks jeopardising the founding principles commonly agreed on and written in the EU Treaties, which include the Charter of Fundamental Rights and compliance with international public law.

Since 2008, the Green European Foundation has sought to contribute to the democratic development of the European political sphere, with the European Union's polity and policies as its main themes. As part of these efforts, a dialogue has been established with the main Green actors across Europe, in order to build common proposals for alternative refugee, asylum and migration policies.

Although the refugee population in the EU is still dwarfed by that of the regions immediately around it, in the European Council, only Chancellor Angela Merkel tried to advocate and implement a policy of openness and solidarity vis-à-vis the desperate situation of refugees, but she was isolated amongst her peers. We now face **a situation where internal border controls are re-established within the EU, and the right to asylum is de facto denied by many governments in contradiction with EU treaties.** Recognition rates remarkably vary across Member States, with some taking advantage of the vague wording of the Geneva Conventions to turn down crowds of refugees fleeing war and persecution. Moreover, the EU, to the astonishment of human rights advocates, started courting Turkey to curb the influx. Open questions, such as **what should replace the clearly broken Dublin system,**

the future of Schengen or the issue of safe and legal access or hotspots and 'safe' transit countries, still abound and continue to dominate the debate.

The Member States' inability to decide and implement a truly European asylum reform of the current legislation exemplifies **the state of disarray of the EU. This is due to the lack of a common political understanding about a "general common interest" of European citizens** against the xenophobic and egoistic developments in our societies.

Moreover, the wider public debate has yet failed to clearly distinguish between the issue of refugees and that of migrants, which hinders effective and fast reactions. The increasing influx of migrants due to climate change is not properly addressed, fostering inequality and resource scarcity.

Without a doubt, these tragic political developments in our European societies raise a challenge for everyone, including Green political parties, whether in governments or in opposition. Hence, in a time where more than simplistic answers are urgently needed, it is **crucial that the European Green political family formulates an alternative to the recent policies put in place by most national governments across Europe, as well as by European institutions.**

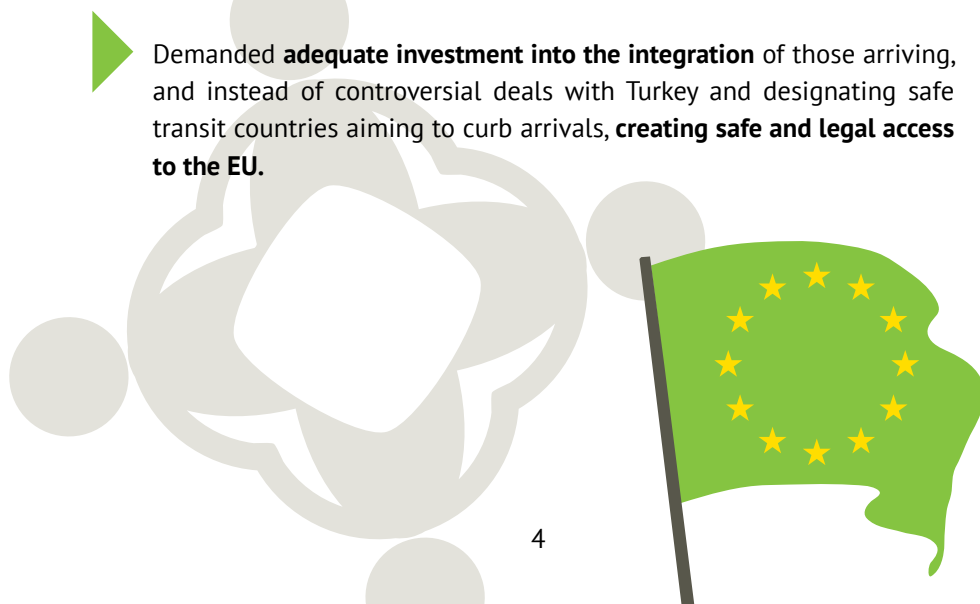
The aim of this brochure is to provide a summary of the main Green positions on the topic, both at European and national level. The information is based on public documents such as European Green Party resolutions and public positions of Greens in the European Parliament, as well as on a survey conducted by the Green European Foundation in the second half of 2015.

This brochure is not intended as a stand-alone instrument, but rather as an introduction to further reading on the subject. All publications quoted throughout the text can be ordered by email at info@gef.eu. The Green European Foundation website (www.gef.eu) can also be explored for further information.

Acting within the European institutions

At the European level, the Greens have clearly articulated their views such as in the [European Green Party's resolution](#) adopted at their Council in Lyon in November 2015. In the past years, the party and the [Green Group in the European Parliament](#) have called on many occasions for a new, fairer distribution system instead of the dysfunctional Dublin regulation, and have in particular:

- ▶ Requested **binding quotas** and much larger-scale permanent relocation mechanisms, taking into account the preferences of refugees, instead of ad hoc solutions;
- ▶ Highlighted the importance of **solidarity towards asylum seekers** as well as among Member States, and demanded the mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions;
- ▶ Called on all stakeholders to act in accordance with international law, focusing on saving lives by **strengthening search and rescue operations** instead of building fences;
- ▶ Demanded **adequate investment into the integration** of those arriving, and instead of controversial deals with Turkey and designating safe transit countries aiming to curb arrivals, **creating safe and legal access to the EU**.



In early 2016, a number of Green Members of the European Parliament – namely Ska Keller, Jean Lambert, Judith Sargentini, Bodil Valero and Josep-Maria Terricabras – published the paper: “[The Green Alternative to the Dublin System](#)”. The paper was launched on 25th February 2016 and builds further on the positions of Greens at the European level. However, it should be noted that those demands have not been adopted as an official position of the Green Group in the European Parliament yet.

Checkpoint Europe: The Return of Borders

The [latest edition of the Green European Journal](#) also contributes to fostering the exchange with a variety of social actors in our societies, in order to build cultural and social alliances desperately needed to change the current political discourse. The edition focuses on the question of **what borders mean in today's Europe** – be it the harrowing images of refugees risking their lives to scale barbed wire fences, or the policing of public spaces in the name of security measures. Whereas once walls and barriers appeared to be crumbling on the continent, it seems today that the space around us is increasingly being carved up, sometimes very starkly with the return of border controls, other times almost imperceptibly with the creeping entrenchment of cleavages in identity. What does this trend tell us about the Europe we inhabit today? Are new battle lines being drawn?

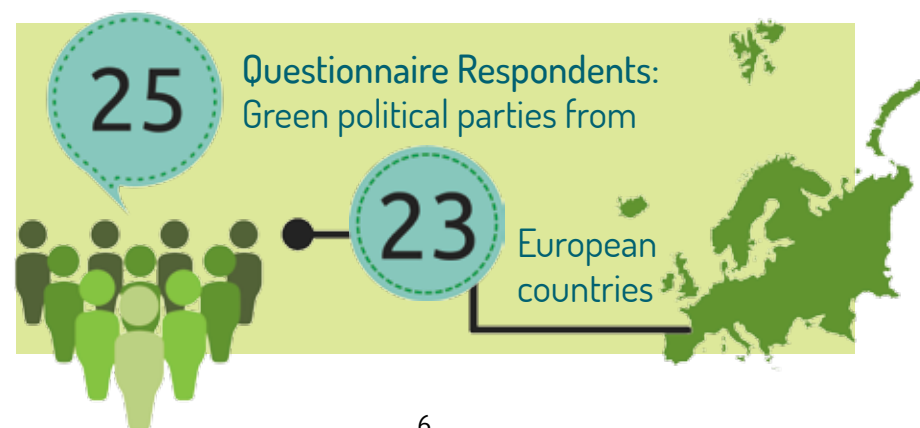


Read more on www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu.

Finding common responses: A Green European Foundation study

At the end of 2015, the **Green European Foundation** commissioned a study entitled “Towards a Common Green Response: Points of agreement, disagreement and issues for further internal debate among European Green parties on refugee and migration policies”. The study provides an overarching assessment of where the Green parties across Europe stand on migration, asylum and refugee policies.

The purpose of this study is neither to name and shame, nor to reveal a ‘silver bullet’ solution. The objective is rather to **provide the groundwork for a wider debate within the European Green political family to ultimately come forward with common proposals to face the challenges ahead**. Representatives from **green political parties across Europe** answered the same questionnaire between October and December 2015. Their answers were compared and clustered to highlight the main points of agreement, disagreement and open questions observed between them. In the next pages, you’ll find a summary of the main findings of the study.



Common ground amongst national Green parties

Although complete consensus is not always present, it can be stated that **the Greens generally agree on the following points:**

There should be **no cap on how many refugees we can accept** in Europe. Persons defined as refugees by the Geneva Convention (that is, covering those fleeing war and persecution) must be granted asylum. Most Green parties in Europe answering the questionnaire opposed a cap on legal and humanitarian grounds.

The **EU and its Member States should join forces to pay the costs** of accepting and integrating refugees. While the polled parties had different views on the extent to which the EU or its Member States should bear the costs, most of them agreed that the local municipalities should rather provide infrastructure and cooperation than money.

Fully open external EU borders are seen as unrealistic at this point by most of the party members interviewed, but rather a certain level of organising border security systems is seen to be necessary to preserve free movement within the Schengen area. However, not all Greens welcome an EU-level coordination of border security and several respondents indicated that providing safe passage into the EU would greatly reduce the need to police borders.

Information, integration, in particular through language and professional training, personal contact, and education are the **best tools** to tackle both people’s fear of migrants and their xenophobia. Several parties answering the questionnaire called for constructive debates by politicians as well as calm and transparent governance.

▶ **Pinpointing safe transit countries** and countries of origin arbitrarily is **not seen as a viable solution** to the problem by all Green parties polled. Although there are debated points, a clear Green stance emerges against the designation of certain countries as 'safe'.

▶ That **Europe should not aim to send people back as soon as conflicts end** is the almost unanimous view of all respondents. Instead, the choice of the people potentially growing up, or spending a significant part of their lives in the EU should be taken into account.

▶ Concerning **binding quotas**, no common consensus can be found within the European Green political family. Although it is largely agreed on that the existing Dublin system is dysfunctional, and ultimately a majority supports the idea of binding quotas, some Green parties pointed out that, in terms of implementation, the system contradicts open borders. Several also stressed the importance of the refugees' right to choose where they want to go.

▶ Whether or not, or to **what degree refugees should be able to choose** from among Member States, is a divisive issue among the polled Green parties. Some parties completely oppose any limitation on the refugee's choice whereas others are in favour of little to no choice for anyone. The most widespread opinion within the Green political community is that the refugees' preferences should be taken into account as much as possible. Relocation in groups and taking into account existing communities, skills, family ties, cultural and linguistic vicinity were also mentioned by many respondents.

▶ **Whether refugees should be allowed to move and work freely** in Europe is also a point of disagreement within the European Green political family up to the present. This question is especially interesting, given that allowing this could undermine the quota system supported by several Green parties. The majority of interviewees are in favour of granting free movement to refugees, some suggest binding social benefits available to a certain Member state, and some propose the introduction of restrictions of movement for some time, primarily not to defy the purpose of the quota system.



Points of divergence

The four main points of disagreement between the Green parties in Europe, as identified by the study, are:

▶ The question of whether the borders should be opened for **people who are fleeing poverty or climate change** turned out to be a clearly divisive issue among the polled Green parties. The persons who come to Europe for those reasons are perceived as migrants by some of the respondents, and are not considered equally as refugees like people fleeing war and persecution. However, most of the interviewed Green parties hold that it is important to establish legal channels to get into the EU for other reasons than fleeing a war or out of political reasons.



Five issues remain open questions for most green parties interviewed, and the study's analysis clearly shows that further debate is needed within the European Green family to shape a common vision in the following areas:

The question on **how the EU should help its Member States facing the most migratory flows** is not met with a distinct Green vision. Although there seems to be no questions about the fact that the Member States with the largest migratory flows do not get enough support, a concrete suggestion on what specifically needs to be done is lacking. Financial, policing and logistical assistance to the affected Member States was mentioned but not further elaborated.

Although most of the survey was conducted before the Paris attacks in November 2015, the answers to the question **whether there is a security threat** related to mass migration revealed that the Greens have not clearly articulated a common stance on this issue. In fact, the very perception of the nature and the level of the threat varied greatly among respondents, several of whom referred to right-wing politicians' fear mongering with which they try to manipulate the electorate. The real threats, according to many, are poverty, xenophobia, lack of sufficient supply (e.g. food and hygiene) for arriving asylum seekers, inadequate integration for groups already here, as well as wars and arms sales. However, many of the polled Green parties admitted that the threat of terrorists' infiltration is also present and needs to be dealt with.

On the **Member States' right to decide on asylum claims**, there is a widespread consensus among the polled parties that recognition rates do indeed greatly vary across Member States. However, no clear Green vision emerges as to whether or to what degree the EU should take over its Member States' role in deciding asylum claims by centralising or unifying asylum procedures, giving way to manifold and sometimes vague propositions. Most parties would welcome stricter and more uniform guidelines, and a few suggested also the establishment of an EU decision-making body instead of leaving those obligations to the Member States.

Moreover, the question on **how asylum seekers can be prevented from moving on** before their case is decided remains open. While detention is by and large rejected by the Green political community, there is no fully-fledged common opinion on the alternative that could be used instead. The multi-faceted overall picture is probably largely due to the fact that the problem affects Member States to different degrees and in essentially different ways. The basic approach of most parties appears to be represented by incentives such as social benefits or education opportunities. Some advocate steps to temporarily limit freedom of movement. The need for a faster and more unified system came up often in the answers, as has the need to abandon the Dublin regulations for a fairer distribution mechanism taking into account preferences of the refugees themselves.

Regarding those asylum seekers whose claims are rejected, or had been rejected a long time ago, particularly in the cases where asylum seekers decided to stay in the EU despite the rejection, there are little answers amongst the interviewed Green parties across Europe. As many respondents pointed out, a working system, no matter how welcoming it is, has to have limits within which it can function. The indecision as to where exactly the line should be drawn is palpable in the Green parties' answers, the majority favouring possibilities to legalise or regularise the situation of those illegally in the EU, and several respondents mentioning incentives for voluntary return programmes.

The study also revealed that some points that are a consensus for the Green actors active at the European level, are not always so straightforward for the national green parties, whether for pragmatic reasons or out of principle. **Binding quotas** are such an example of policy which is fully defended by the European Greens but rejected or questioned by some national parties. The European Greens also defend the possibility to **take personal preferences into account** into the relocation mechanism, and the ability for **refugees to move and work freely** in the EU, once granted a refugee status. These two points are much more debated by national parties, some of them agreeing fully with these proposals whilst others opposing them entirely or partially.

In addition, even if they share the same global vision, Green political actors have different constraints and opportunities whether they act at the local, national or European level. The points of disagreement within the Greens, and especially the issues which still pose questions to the Green parties outlined by the study, show us the urgent need to deepen our exchanges about our experiences at all levels.

The Green political family has an obligation and the responsibility to stand for a united and credible answer. Yet, applying our green values of openness and fairness is not so straightforward in a context of growing social tensions and polarised public opinion. Faced with the complexity of the system and the variety of individual realities, Green activists and politicians are often struggling to find the balance between idealism and pragmatism.

Green European Foundation asbl
Brussels office:

3 Rue du Fossé, L-1536 Luxembourg
15 Rue d'Arlon, B-1050 Brussels

This publication has been realised with the financial support of the European Parliament to the Green European Foundation. The European Parliament is not responsible for the content of this project.

www.gef.eu

www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu

info@gef.eu



https://twitter.com/GEF_Europe



<https://www.facebook.com/GreenEuropeanFoundation>