

Migration and Security in the EU: Reframing the Balance Between State Security and Human Security

Migration et sécurité dans l'UE : Repenser l'équilibre entre sécurité de l'État et sécurité humaine

KASMI Walae

Researcher

Department Of Political Sciences

University of Naples Federico II

Italy

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Résumé

Au sein de l'Union européenne (UE), la migration s'impose comme un défi politique central, souvent perçu comme une menace sécuritaire plutôt qu'un enjeu humanitaire. Cet article examine de manière critique les politiques migratoires de l'UE, en mettant l'accent sur la priorité donnée au contrôle des frontières et à la dissuasion, au détriment du bien-être des migrants. En s'appuyant sur le concept de sécurité humaine, l'étude critique cette approche centrée sur la sécurité, qui expose fréquemment les migrants à des violations des droits humains et à des conditions dangereuses, notamment dans le cadre des accords de l'UE avec le Maroc, la Libye et la Turquie. À travers des études de cas des enclaves espagnoles, des îles Canaries et de la route de la Méditerranée centrale, l'article révèle les coûts humains des politiques migratoires restrictives. Il plaide pour un cadre migratoire centré sur l'humain, aligné sur les engagements humanitaires et les obligations internationales de l'UE. Les recommandations clés incluent l'élargissement des voies migratoires légales, la promotion de l'inclusion sociale et l'assurance de la responsabilité dans les partenariats externes. En intégrant les principes de la sécurité humaine, l'UE peut respecter ses valeurs tout en gérant la migration de manière durable et humaine.

Mots clés: Migration ; Sécurité humaine ; Politique de l'UE ; Contrôle des frontières ; Inclusion sociale.

Abstract

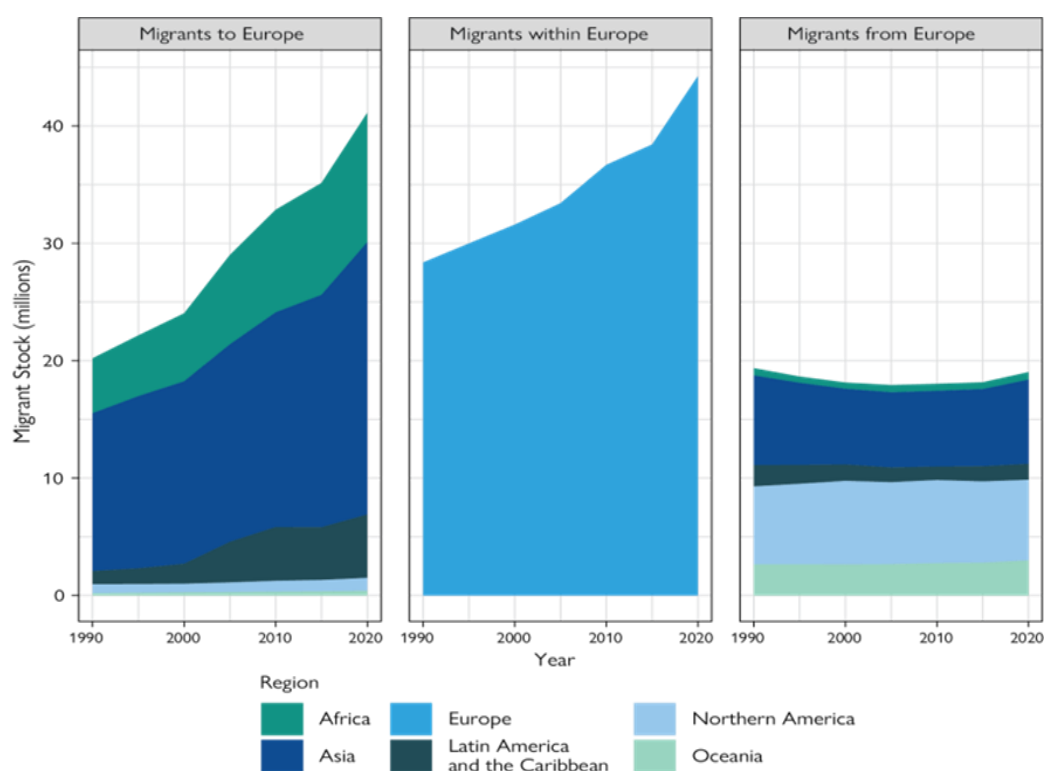
Within the European Union (EU), migration has emerged as a central policy challenge, often framed as a security threat rather than a humanitarian issue. This article critically examines the EU's migration policies, focusing on their prioritization of border control and deterrence over migrant well-being. Drawing on the concept of human security, the study critiques the current security-centric approach that often exposes migrants to human rights violations and unsafe conditions, as seen in the EU's agreements with Morocco, Libya, and Turkey. Using case studies from Spain's enclaves, the Canary Islands, and the Central Mediterranean route, the article highlights the human costs of restrictive migration policies. It advocates for a shift towards a human-centered migration framework that aligns with the EU's humanitarian commitments and international obligations. Key recommendations include expanding safe migration pathways, fostering social inclusion, and ensuring accountability in external partnerships. By integrating human security principles, the EU can uphold its values while effectively managing migration in a sustainable and humane manner.

Keywords : Migration; Human Security; EU Policy; Border Control; Social Inclusion.

Introduction

Migration has been one of the defining issues in recent European political and social landscapes, with complex challenges and intensified political tensions arising from the increasing migrant flows. These flows are driven by a combination of crises, including conflict, political instability, poverty, climate-related disasters, and the lack of better economic opportunities. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were nearly 87 million international migrants in Europe as of 2020, a 16% increase since the migration crisis of 2015. Approximately 40 million of these individuals (less than 46%) are non-European migrants, while others are Europeans moving within the continent (See Figure 1 below) (IOM, 2023). This large and diverse population of migrants has led to significant political and logistical challenges across different member states, where differing national responses have created fragmentation and tension within the EU's migration policy framework.

Figure N°1: Migrants to, within and from Europe, 1990–2020



Source: UN/DESA, 2021¹

¹ This is the latest available international migrant stock data in 2020. “Migrants to Europe” refers to migrants residing in the region (i.e. Europe) who were born in one of the other regions (e.g. Africa or Asia). “Migrants within Europe” refers to migrants born in the region (i.e. Europe) and residing outside their country of birth, but still within the European region. “Migrants from Europe” refers to people born in Europe who were residing outside the region (e.g. in Latin America and the Caribbean or Northern America).

The EU's current migration approach emphasizes state security, often at the expense of migrants' rights and dignity. By framing migration as a potential threat to national stability, the EU has implemented policies focused on border control, detention, and externalization agreements with countries such as Morocco, Turkey, and Libya. These measures prioritize security over safety and human rights, often resulting in inadequate reception conditions and dangerous journeys. For instance, the EU-funded refugee camp on Samos—described by Amnesty International as a “dystopian nightmare”—reveals the harsh realities of a security-first strategy, where migrants face overcrowding, restricted freedom, and substandard living conditions (Amnesty International, 2024).

This article seeks to answer the question: *“How can the European Union transition from a state security-centered migration framework to a human-centered approach that ensures the safety, dignity, and rights of migrants while addressing broader political and social challenges?”* To address this, the research employs a qualitative methodology combining theoretical analysis and case studies. The theoretical foundation draws on traditional and human security concepts, offering a comparative lens to evaluate their implications for migration management.

The case studies: Spain's Canary Islands, Poland's Belarusian border, and Cyprus's buffer zone, were chosen for their representation of key migration dynamics in the EU. Spain's Canary Islands illustrate the challenges of irregular maritime migration, marked by rising fatalities and overcrowded facilities. Poland's Belarusian border exemplifies the militarization of migration management, including controversial measures like allowing the use of live ammunition, raising serious human rights concerns. Finally, Cyprus's buffer zone reflects the complexities of migration governance in a divided territory, where humanitarian obligations clash with restrictive practices. These cases provide a nuanced understanding of the human costs of securitized migration policies across diverse contexts. Data were sourced from reports by international organizations, publicly available statistics, and secondary literature to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how a human security framework can enhance EU migration policies by addressing both humanitarian needs and state security concerns. The first section provides background on the current situation in the EU, setting the context for analysis. The second section explores the theoretical foundations of traditional and human security, establishing the groundwork for understanding their implications in migration management.

The third section critically evaluates current EU migration policies, including the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, Frontex operations, and external agreements, highlighting the limitations of a security-centered approach. The fourth section examines case studies from Spain's Canary Islands, Poland's Belarusian border, and Cyprus's buffer zone, showcasing the tangible human impacts of securitization policies. The fifth section argues that a human security approach aligns with the EU's core values of human rights and dignity, offering a path toward ethical and sustainable migration management. Finally, the article concludes with actionable recommendations for integrating human security principles into EU policies, paving the way for a more balanced and humane migration framework.

1. Background:

The recent elections and the rise of nationalist, far-right parties have intensified political tensions around migration in several EU countries, particularly those on the front lines of migrant flows. In Spain, for instance, recent migration trends have experienced increasing political debate and criticism over the handling of migrant arrivals in its border regions, where reception facilities in the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla are overwhelmed by the surging numbers. In the case of Ceuta, in August 2024, the enclave called for a “humanitarian emergency”, and it was reported by the governor that its facilities for unaccompanied minors are operating at 360% over capacity while another Governmental spokesperson said that they cannot find new spaces to accommodate these migrants “with dignity”. The situation is just as chaotic in the Canary Islands where specialized shelters are at over capacity with increasing numbers where just in the first half of 2024 has marked an 80% increase from the previous year. Spain's experience reflects a broader trend of unequal responsibility-sharing within the EU, as southern border countries face a disproportionate share of migration pressures compared to their northern counterparts. Meanwhile, other EU countries have adopted increasingly restrictive policies, further emphasizing a security-centered approach to migration.

Poland, for instance, passed a controversial law in July 2024 permitting its security forces to use live ammunition in “self-defense” at the Belarusian border, a militarized approach that has raised concerns among human rights groups. This move is part of a broader effort by Poland to secure its borders in response to perceived migration threats from neighboring Belarus (Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2024). Similarly, Finland enacted legislation allowing the suspension of asylum procedures at its border with Russia, citing “hybrid threats” as

justification for these measures. Critics argue that these policies prioritize state security over humanitarian obligations, often resulting in the restriction of basic protections for asylum seekers (Finnish Ministry of Interior, 2024). These measures reflect a trend across Europe, where migration is increasingly framed as a security threat, prompting policies that prioritize border control and deterrence over the protection of human rights. Germany on the other hand, has tightened its border controls, implementing checks at all land borders in response to rising concerns about irregular migration. The German government cited recent incidents involving foreign nationals as part of the justification for heightened security measures, which include a focus on deportations and stricter border surveillance (German Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2024). Similarly, Cyprus faces mounting criticism for alleged pushbacks of migrants stranded in its UN-controlled buffer zone, with accusations of human rights violations as the country grapples with the complex dynamics of hosting refugees from both the Turkish-controlled north and the internationally recognized south (Council of Europe, 2024).

Despite these security-focused measures, migration patterns indicate that restricting legal pathways often forces migrants into dangerous and irregular routes. Frontex data shows a 39% decrease in irregular border crossings during the first eight months of 2024, mainly along the Western Balkans and Central Mediterranean routes with a -77% and -64% decrease. However, the Eastern Mediterranean and Atlantic routes have seen an increase in fatalities, with deaths on the Atlantic route up by 130%, from 320 to 736, reflecting the deadly risks of irregular migration (Frontex, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). These figures underscore the human costs associated with the EU's focus on deterrence, as stricter border controls push migrants to undertake more hazardous journeys.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Traditional vs. Human Security:

When you first hear the word security, the majority of people will think of traditional security or what is often referred to as state-centric security. This type of security emphasizes the protection of national borders and sovereignty, and the integrity of the state against external threats. In this model, security is equated with the state's capacity to defend its borders and maintain internal stability, prioritizing state or national interests above all else. This approach is deeply rooted in realist theories of international relations, which argue that states are the primary actors in an anarchic international system where survival and power are paramount

(Waltz, 1979). Under traditional security, threats are typically seen as military in nature, often involving issues such as territorial disputes, armed conflicts, and political instability. This model assumes that the protection of the state inherently ensures the security of its citizens. However, traditional security frameworks have limitations, particularly when addressing non-military challenges such as migration. By focusing on state sovereignty and territorial integrity, traditional security can neglect the individual-level implications of policy decisions. This approach has been criticized for failing to account for the rights, and safety of people affected by state security measures, especially in complex transnational issues like migration, where individuals may be fleeing precisely the types of conflict and insecurity that traditional security aims to prevent.

In contrast, human security emerged in the early 1990s as a response to these limitations, redefining security to prioritize the well-being of individuals rather than the state. The concept of human security was popularized by the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report* back in 1994, which identified “freedom from fear” (for example the protection against physical violence) and “freedom from want” (addressing poverty) as the dual pillars of human security (UNDP, 1994). Human security seeks to protect individuals from a wide range of threats, including economic hardship, environmental disasters, health crises, and political repression. Unlike traditional security, which views threats as external to the state, human security recognizes that the state itself can sometimes pose threats to its citizens, especially in cases of human rights violations or oppressive policies.

In migration contexts, human security emphasizes the protection of migrants' rights, safety, and dignity throughout the migration process, whether individuals are fleeing violence, seeking better economic opportunities, or moving due to environmental factors. This approach acknowledges that migrants are often vulnerable to multiple forms of insecurity, including physical violence, exploitation, and legal challenges, and that these issues should be addressed through policies that prioritize their well-being over state-centered security concerns.

2.2. Human Security in Migration Studies:

The application of human security to migration studies has grown over the past few decades, as scholars and policymakers recognize the need for approaches that center on individuals rather than states. Migration is inherently a human phenomenon, driven by individuals' aspirations for safety, stability, and opportunity. However, traditional security perspectives often frame

migration as a challenge to state sovereignty, leading to policies that focus on containment and deterrence rather than protection and inclusion.

A human-centered approach to migration calls for policies that uphold the rights of migrants, including their right to seek asylum, to be free from arbitrary detention, and to access essential services. This approach aligns with international human rights principles, as articulated in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Refugee Convention. According to this view, the well-being of migrants should be at the core of migration management, especially in contexts where migrants face heightened vulnerabilities. For example, many migrants experience physical danger during their journeys, either from harsh environmental conditions or from exploitation, including sexual and labor exploitation, by smugglers. Upon arrival, many face discrimination, inadequate access to healthcare, and substandard living conditions in their host countries. Women and young children, often the most vulnerable, disproportionately bear the brunt of these hardships. Integrating human security into migration policy could mitigate these risks by promoting safe and legal migration pathways, ensuring humane treatment in reception centers, and providing resources for integration into host communities. Scholars argue that this approach not only protects migrants but also contributes to broader societal stability by fostering inclusion and reducing the potential for social conflict (Betts & Collier, 2017). As a result, human security has become an essential framework for understanding and addressing the complex, multifaceted challenges of migration.

2.3 Relevant Theories and Frameworks:

In migration studies, theories such as securitization and constructivism are instrumental in explaining how migration is framed and managed. These theories help to analyze the factors driving the EU's security-focused migration policies, as well as the ways in which migration could instead be addressed through a human security lens.

The securitization theory was developed by the Copenhagen School, securitization theory explains how certain issues, including migration, are constructed as security threats. According to this theory, an issue becomes a matter of security not because it is inherently dangerous, but because it is framed as a threat by political actors (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998). Through discourse, policymakers, media, and other influential actors can "securitize" an issue, elevating it to an existential threat that justifies extraordinary measures. In the EU, migration is often

framed as a threat to social stability, economic security, and cultural identity, leading to policies that prioritize border control, surveillance, and deterrence. This framing has significant implications for how migrants are perceived and treated, as it often leads to restrictive measures that can compromise migrants' human rights. For example, the EU's externalization of border control, such as its agreements with Turkey and Libya to manage migrant flows, reflects a securitization approach that shifts responsibility away from EU borders, reducing the need for direct accountability, and the same is done by European countries such as Italy with its failed deal with Albania. By constructing migration as a security issue, the EU justifies measures that focus on containment and deterrence, rather than addressing the root causes of migration or the needs of migrants. Securitization theory thus provides a useful framework for analyzing how migration has been constructed as a threat within EU policy discourse, often overshadowing the humanitarian and human security considerations central to migration management.

Constructivism theory in international relations on the other hand, focus on how ideas, norms, and identities shape states' behaviors and policies. Constructivism posits that the meaning and significance of migration are not fixed but are shaped by social interactions and discourses. In the EU context, constructivist scholars examine how migration is perceived and how these perceptions influence policy decisions. For example, migration is often associated with cultural identity and social cohesion within the EU, leading to fears that large influxes of migrants could disrupt social order. These perceptions are not based on objective threats but are socially constructed through media portrayals, political rhetoric, and public debate. These constructivist perspectives highlight that migration policies are shaped by narratives and assumptions, which can either support or hinder human security approaches. For instance, framing migrants as "threats" or "others" can legitimize restrictive policies, while framing migration as an opportunity for cultural exchange and economic growth could encourage more inclusive policies. Constructivism thus underscores the importance of changing the narrative around migration if the EU is to adopt a more human-centered approach. By challenging the dominant security discourse and promoting narratives that emphasize common humanity and mutual benefits, policymakers could shift migration policy toward a model that respects both state interests and migrant rights.

Together, these two theories offer valuable insights into how migration is framed within the EU and the implications of these frames for policy development. While the securitization approach has led to restrictive, security-focused policies, constructivist perspectives suggest that a shift

in the narrative could open the door for human security-centered migration policies. Recognizing and addressing these frames is crucial for advancing a migration framework that respects human dignity, reduces vulnerabilities, and aligns with the EU's commitment to human rights.

3. Current EU Migration Policies and the Security-First Approach

The European Union's migration policy framework has undergone significant evolution over the past decade in response to increasing migration flows, particularly since the 2015 migrant crisis. As migration pressures have intensified, the EU has implemented a range of policies aimed at managing migration in a way that balances state security, humanitarian responsibilities, and the logistical realities of the situation. Key policies include the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, the operations of Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), and cooperative agreements with non-EU countries.

The *New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, introduced in 2020, represents the EU's latest attempt to create a comprehensive and cohesive migration policy. The pact emphasizes solidarity and responsibility-sharing among member states while focusing on border control, efficient asylum processing, and accelerated deportation for those without valid claims to stay. One of its core objectives is to reduce the strain on frontline countries by redistributing asylum seekers across the EU through voluntary contributions or mandatory "solidarity contributions" in the form of financial assistance or direct relocations (European Commission, 2024). However, despite its attempt to create a more unified system, the New Pact has faced criticism especially when it was adopted in 2024 for its strong emphasis on deportation and return, which some argue reinforces a security-centered rather than a humanitarian approach to migration management.

Another essential component of the EU's migration policy is Frontex, the agency tasked with coordinating border control across member states. Frontex plays a vital role in managing external borders, conducting surveillance operations, and coordinating with national border agencies. Frontex's role has expanded significantly since 2015, with the agency now possessing its own personnel and equipment to support EU border security. In recent years, Frontex operations have focused on high-traffic regions, such as the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, to intercept irregular migrants and prevent unauthorized entry. However, the agency also has faced controversy regarding allegations of human rights abuses and involvement in illegal "pushbacks" of migrants attempting to enter the EU (Frontex, 2024). Despite these criticisms,

Frontex remains a cornerstone of the EU's strategy to maintain border integrity and reduce irregular migration.

3.1. Border Control and Deterrence Focus:

In addition to internal policy measures, the EU has adopted a strategy of *border externalization*, which involves shifting migration control responsibilities to neighboring non-EU countries to prevent migrants from reaching Europe's borders. This approach includes agreements with countries like Morocco, Turkey, and Libya, which play critical roles in managing migration flows along the EU's external borders. The EU's relationship with these countries is built around financial support, capacity building, and cooperative border enforcement measures, often with the goal of keeping migrants in transit countries before they reach the EU.

The *EU-Turkey deal* which was signed back in 2016, is one of the most prominent examples of border externalization. Under this agreement, Turkey agreed to prevent irregular migration across the Aegean Sea to Greece in exchange for substantial financial aid and political concessions from the EU. The deal also allows Greece to return migrants to Turkey if they do not qualify for asylum. While this agreement has succeeded in reducing migrant flows to some extent, it has faced criticism for subjecting migrants to prolonged detention in overcrowded camps on Greek islands, where they await processing or potential return to Turkey (European Commission, 2024). Human rights organizations argue that these conditions, exacerbated by the slow processing of asylum claims, undermine migrants' rights and well-being. Similarly, the *EU-Libya cooperation framework* has placed Libya at the forefront of managing migration flows along the Central Mediterranean route. In this arrangement, the EU provides financial and logistical support to the Libyan coast guard, enabling it to intercept boats attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy or Malta. Migrants intercepted by the Libyan coast guard are often returned to Libya, where they are detained in facilities widely reported to be inhumane, with allegations of torture, forced labor, and exploitation. Despite knowing these conditions, the EU continues to support Libya in managing migration, citing the need to reduce irregular migration and prevent deaths at sea. This approach has sparked widespread criticism for exposing migrants to severe human rights abuses and compromising the EU's commitment to protecting fundamental rights (Amnesty International, 2024).

Another key partner in the EU's border externalization strategy is Morocco, which serves as both a transit and origin country for migrants aiming to reach Europe. Under its agreements

with the EU, Morocco has received substantial financial assistance to bolster its border security, combat human smuggling networks, and enhance conditions for migrants within its territory. However, this partnership has drawn criticism due to significant human rights concerns. Migrants intercepted in Morocco often face deplorable conditions in makeshift camps or are forcibly returned to deserted areas. The regions around Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's enclaves in North Africa, have become hotspots for tragic incidents. In June 2022 for example, a mass attempt to cross into Melilla resulted in the deaths of at least 37 migrants and injuries to hundreds more. Amnesty International documented the excessive use of force by Moroccan and Spanish security forces, including beatings, tear gas, and other non-lethal weapons used against migrants. Survivors reported horrific conditions, with some migrants crushed against fences or falling to their deaths. The lack of immediate medical care for injured migrants and the absence of accountability for these actions underscore the severe human rights violations inherent in this deterrence-focused approach. These events highlight the dire consequences of prioritizing border security over migrant safety and dignity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children (Amnesty International, 2022).

The EU's focus on border control and deterrence is also reflected in its "closed controlled access centers" on several Greek islands, where migrants are held in tightly regulated environments. These centers, funded by the EU and operated with the assistance of Frontex and Greek authorities, are designed to expedite asylum processing and reduce irregular movement. However, the emphasis on control often comes at the expense of humane conditions, with facilities operating under detention-like restrictions and limited access to services. These conditions illustrate the EU's prioritization of security and deterrence over human security, reinforcing a state-centric approach to migration.

3.2. Criticisms from a Human Rights Perspective:

The EU's security-first approach to migration has been heavily criticized by human rights organizations, who argue that these policies often neglect the welfare of migrants and violate basic human rights standards. Amnesty International and other groups have condemned the EU's reliance on detention, externalization, and restricted movement as approaches that exacerbate migrants' vulnerabilities and expose them to dangerous conditions.

One distinct example is the EU-funded refugee camp on the Greek island of *Samos*, which was described as a "dystopian nightmare." The Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre, like similar

facilities on other islands, is overcrowded and operates with strict movement restrictions, effectively detaining asylum seekers within its confines. Conditions in the camp have been reported as below standard, with limited access to healthcare, sanitation, and adequate shelter. These circumstances not only jeopardize the health and well-being of migrants but also create an environment reminiscent of detention centers rather than humanitarian reception facilities (Amnesty International, 2024). The situation in Samos highlights how the EU's emphasis on containment and control can lead to the neglect of migrants' rights and dignity, undermining the EU's commitment to human rights.

Another example is the situation of *stranded migrants in Cyprus*, particularly those in the UN-controlled buffer zone between the Turkish-occupied north and the internationally recognized south. Nearly 70 asylum seekers remain in this buffer zone, unable to move forward nor return. Cyprus has faced criticism for alleged pushbacks of migrants, and human rights organizations argue that these actions are violations of international law. Migrants in the buffer zone endure unsafe conditions, with limited access to essential services, reflecting the human cost of a migration policy focused more on restricting movement than on providing safety (Council of Europe, 2024). The Cyprus situation illustrates the complex ethical and legal challenges posed by the EU's restrictive migration policies.

The EU-Libya cooperation framework has also come under heavy scrutiny for exposing migrants to grave risks. Detention centers in Libya, where migrants intercepted by the Libyan coast guard are held, have been widely condemned by international organizations for their inhumane conditions, which include reports of torture, forced labor, and sexual exploitation. Advocacy groups have argued that by supporting Libya's migration management, the EU is complicit in these abuses. Despite these concerns, the EU justifies its cooperation with Libya as a necessary measure to reduce dangerous sea crossings, demonstrating a willingness to compromise migrant welfare for the sake of deterrence and border control.

These criticisms from a human rights perspective underscore the ethical dilemmas inherent in the EU's security-first approach to migration. By prioritizing state security and border management over human security, the EU's policies risk dehumanizing migrants and exposing them to significant harm. A shift towards a human-centered framework would require the EU to reconsider its reliance on externalization, detention, and deterrence, placing greater emphasis on humane treatment, safe migration pathways, and the protection of migrants' rights.

4. Case Studies: Effects of EU Migration Policies on Human Security

4.1. Criticisms from a Human Rights Perspective:

Italy and Greece, as key entry points for migrants and asylum seekers, have faced disproportionate pressures from migration flows due to their geographical locations on the EU's southern borders. EU policies, including the *Dublin Regulation*, which requires asylum seekers to be processed in the first EU country they enter, have placed significant burdens on these frontline states. As a result, Italy and Greece bear much of the responsibility for managing new arrivals, leading to overcrowded detention centers, strained resources, and growing humanitarian concerns. In Italy, detention centers and reception facilities in regions like Lampedusa and Sicily often exceed capacity, resulting in substandard living conditions and limited access to essential services such as healthcare and legal support. Similarly, Greece's island reception centers, especially on Lesbos and Samos, have been criticized for operating at multiple times their intended capacity. The infamous *Moria camp* on Lesbos, which was designed for around 3,000 people but at times held over 12,000 before a fire destroyed it in 2020, remains an obvious example of overcrowding and insufficient resources. The replacement facilities, such as the *Samos Closed Controlled Access Centre*, have done little to alleviate these issues.

These resource-strapped environments exacerbate the vulnerabilities of migrants, particularly children, women, and unaccompanied minors who often face higher risks of exploitation and abuse. Additionally, the lack of adequate psychological support services for individuals who may have fled traumatic situations further highlights the gap between humanitarian needs and the capacity of Italian and Greek facilities to meet them. From a human security perspective, the conditions in Italy and Greece illustrate the ethical and practical limitations of EU policies that focus more on containment than on protection and integration. Without greater resource allocation and responsibility-sharing among EU member states, frontline countries will continue to struggle to uphold migrant welfare.

4.2. Italy-Albania Partnership and Voluntary Relocation Mechanism:

Italy's recent partnership with Albania is part of a broader effort to manage migrant flows by transferring migrants to non-EU countries for processing. In 2024, Italy began implementing an agreement to relocate certain groups of migrants to Albania temporarily, seemingly to relieve pressure on Italian reception facilities. This agreement is controversial because it places

migrants in a third country, where protections and conditions may not align with EU standards. Migrants relocated to Albania may experience disruptions in accessing legal counsel, healthcare, and other essential services, raising concerns about their treatment and rights under the agreement (Euronews, 2024). This policy is part of the EU's *Voluntary Relocation Mechanism*, which aims to relieve frontline states like Italy and Greece by redistributing asylum seekers across willing EU member states. However, the voluntary nature of this system limits its effectiveness, as participation is inconsistent among member states. Countries with fewer migration pressures are often reluctant to accept relocated migrants, leading to uneven burden-sharing and perpetuating overcrowding in frontline countries. Critics argue that both the Italy-Albania partnership and the Voluntary Relocation Mechanism fall short of addressing the root causes of migration challenges, focusing instead on temporary solutions that may compromise human security.

From a human security perspective, these policies reveal the EU's ongoing struggle to implement a cohesive migration system that balances burden-sharing with migrant protection. The Italy-Albania partnership, in particular, raises ethical questions about the responsibility of the EU to ensure safe and humane conditions for migrants transferred to third countries, emphasizing the need for robust oversight and accountability.

4.3. Spanish Enclaves in North Africa: Ceuta and Melilla

Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves on the North African coast, represent another critical area where EU migration policies impact human security. Due to their geographical proximity to Morocco, these enclaves are frequent entry points for migrants attempting to enter Europe. Spain has responded by heavily fortifying the borders of Ceuta and Melilla with high fences, barbed wire, and increased border patrols to deter unauthorized crossings. While these measures have reduced successful entries, they have also led to frequent injuries and, in some cases, fatalities among migrants attempting to scale the fences. The humanitarian concerns in Ceuta and Melilla extend beyond the physical dangers of crossing. Once in these enclaves, migrants are often placed in overcrowded reception centers, where they face long waits for processing and limited access to services. In August 2024, Ceuta declared a “humanitarian emergency” as its facilities reached 360% capacity for unaccompanied minors, underscoring the impact of resource limitations on migrant welfare (Anadolu Agency, 2024). The restrictive conditions in Ceuta and Melilla exemplify the physical and psychological toll that border-focused policies

can impose on migrants, raising ethical concerns about the EU's reliance on deterrence rather than protection.

4.4. The Atlantic Route to the Canary Islands

The Canary Islands have seen a dramatic increase in migrant arrivals via the Atlantic route, particularly from West African countries. This route is among the most dangerous for migrants, as it involves long stretches of open sea with challenging conditions. Many migrants attempt the journey in unseaworthy boats, leading to frequent fatalities. Despite efforts by Spanish authorities to intercept these vessels, the Atlantic route continues to see high numbers of migrant arrivals, with a significant increase in recorded deaths in recent years.

Upon arrival in the Canary Islands, migrants face overcrowded reception centers that often lack adequate resources. The sharp rise in arrivals, including an 80% increase in the first half of 2024 compared to the previous year, has strained local infrastructure and raised concerns about the treatment of migrants (The Diplomat, 2024). The EU's security-focused approach, which limits access to safer migration pathways, has likely contributed to the increased reliance on this perilous route. Human rights organizations argue that the lack of safe alternatives forces migrants to undertake dangerous journeys, highlighting the need for a migration policy that prioritizes safety and human dignity.

From a human security perspective, the Atlantic route underscores the urgent need for the EU to establish safer, legal pathways for migration. Without such options, migrants will continue to risk their lives on dangerous journeys, and the Canary Islands will remain a flashpoint for the human consequences of restrictive EU migration policies.

5. Arguments for a Human Security Approach in EU Migration Policies

A human security approach to migration aligns with the European Union's foundational values of human rights and addresses the ethical and practical challenges of current security-first paradigms. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights underscores the importance of human dignity, stating in Article 1 that "human dignity is inviolable," a principle that should extend to all individuals, including migrants (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2012). However, current policies often prioritize state security, leading to practices like detention and externalization agreements that expose migrants to inhumane conditions. For example, the EU's cooperation with Libya has been widely criticized for enabling the return of migrants to

detention centers where torture and exploitation are rampant (Amnesty International, 2024). Such measures undermine the EU's commitments to international conventions like the 1951 Refugee Convention and weaken its moral legitimacy.

A human security framework offers a more sustainable and ethical response to migration governance by addressing root causes such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. As Triandafyllidou (2024) argues, globalization has intensified mobility while simultaneously creating economic and political inequalities that push individuals to migrate under precarious circumstances. By investing in development, education, and human rights in origin countries, the EU can create conditions where migration becomes a choice rather than a necessity, reducing irregular migration and its associated risks. Additionally, legal migration pathways, such as humanitarian visas and temporary protection schemes, can ensure safer and more orderly migration. Restrictive EU policies have driven migrants toward perilous routes, such as the Atlantic passage to the Canary Islands, where fatalities have risen significantly in recent years (UNHCR, 2024). As Vaughan-Williams (2015) points out, securitized borders exacerbate these risks, turning migration into a life-and-death gamble. Shifting toward policies that prioritize safety and dignity can reduce humanitarian crises at borders while managing migration more effectively.

A human security approach also fosters integration and social cohesion. Migrants who feel secure and respected are more likely to contribute positively to their host communities. Providing access to education, healthcare, and legal support facilitates successful integration, which is essential given the EU's demographic challenges, such as an aging population and labor shortages (Triandafyllidou, 2024). Inclusive policies counteract xenophobia and promote tolerance, reinforcing the EU's vision of a united, diverse Europe.

From a global perspective, adopting a human security framework positions the EU as a leader in ethical migration governance. Migration policies based on human security principles set a benchmark for global practices, reinforcing the EU's commitment to multilateralism and human rights (Bilgic, et al., 2020). By embracing such a framework, the EU can shape migration management beyond its borders, fostering cooperation and ethical practices worldwide. Therefore, integrating human security into migration policies enables the EU to balance state and human security while ensuring the dignity and safety of migrants. This approach not only

aligns with the EU's foundational values but also addresses the complexities of migration management in a way that promotes long-term stability and cohesion.

6. Policy Recommendations for Integrating Human Security in EU Migration Policies

❖ Expand and Streamline Safe and Legal Migration Pathways:

The EU must address the lack of sufficient legal migration options, which drives many migrants toward irregular and dangerous routes. Increasing the availability of temporary work permits, humanitarian visas, and family reunification programs would provide safer alternatives to irregular migration. Streamlining administrative processes to reduce bureaucratic delays and making entry criteria consistent across member states would also improve accessibility. These measures would not only reduce the risks associated with irregular migration but also ensure better management of migrant flows across the EU.

❖ Establish a Unified, Cohesive EU Migration Framework:

To overcome the disparities in migration management among member states, the EU needs a binding, unified migration framework. This framework should include fair distribution of responsibilities based on economic capacity and population size, as well as emergency relocation mechanisms to manage high influxes of migrants. A cohesive system would alleviate the disproportionate burden on frontline states while fostering solidarity and cooperation among all EU member countries.

❖ Strengthen Monitoring and Accountability in External Partnerships:

The EU must ensure that its agreements with non-EU countries like Turkey, Libya, and Morocco align with human rights standards. Accountability should extend to both partner countries and the EU itself, ensuring that EU funding, policies, and operational support do not contribute to rights violations. Independent oversight mechanisms must assess the conditions in facilities and the implementation of agreements on both sides. Financial aid should be conditional upon meeting clear human rights benchmarks, ensuring external migration control efforts uphold the safety and dignity of migrants.

❖ Enhance Reception Conditions and Resource Allocation in Frontline States:

Reception facilities in frontline states, often overcrowded and under-resourced, must be improved to uphold humane standards of care. Increased funding through programs like the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) should support better infrastructure, healthcare, and legal services. Establishing EU-wide minimum standards for reception conditions would guarantee consistent and adequate care, ensuring the dignity and security of migrants in their initial stages of arrival.

❖ **Foster Social and Economic Inclusion for Migrants and Asylum Seekers:**

Integration programs that promote social and economic inclusion are critical for long-term stability. Investments in language training, vocational skills, and certifications tailored to local labor markets would empower migrants to contribute meaningfully to their host communities. Ensuring access to healthcare, education, and shelter, regardless of a migrant's status, would further reduce vulnerabilities and enhance social cohesion across the EU.

❖ **Promote Public Awareness and Address Misinformation on Migration:**

Public perception plays a crucial role in shaping migration policies. To counter misinformation and fear, the EU should launch awareness campaigns to highlight the realities of migration and the positive contributions migrants make to society. Partnering with NGOs, media outlets, and local organizations can amplify accurate information and humanize the migration discourse, fostering empathy and support for humane migration policies.

7. Future Directions and Areas for Research

As the EU continues to navigate the complexities of migration management, several areas of research are essential to better understand and improve the integration of human security principles into migration policies. One key area for further research is the evaluation of human security policies in migration contexts. Specifically, there is a need for empirical studies assessing how human-centered policies impact both migrants and host communities. Research should analyze the effectiveness of policies that prioritize migrant well-being, such as expanded legal pathways, enhanced reception conditions, and integration programs, in achieving both humanitarian and security objectives. This would provide valuable insights into the practical outcomes of human security approaches, highlighting best practices and areas for improvement within the EU's migration framework.

Another important focus is on migrant integration outcomes within a human security framework. Studying how migrants fare in terms of economic participation, social cohesion, and psychological well-being when policies are centered around human security can shed light on the long-term benefits of this approach. Research should examine integration success rates, barriers to self-sufficiency, and social inclusion metrics to understand how effectively migrants are able to transition into their host societies. This line of inquiry is particularly relevant in the EU, where public perception of migration often shapes policy decisions; evidence of successful integration could support policies that emphasize human rights and social inclusion. Finally, there is a pressing need for empirical research on the human impacts of existing EU migration policies. The focus should be on documenting and analyzing the lived experiences of migrants affected by policies such as detention, externalization agreements, and restrictive asylum processes. This research would help illuminate the unintended consequences of security-focused policies, providing critical data to inform future policy adjustments. Such studies should include interviews, case studies, and longitudinal analysis to capture a comprehensive picture of migrant welfare and identify areas where policy adjustments could better align with human security principles. Future research in these areas would offer valuable guidance for policymakers seeking to create a migration framework that is both effective and humane, enabling the EU to uphold its commitments to human rights while managing migration in a sustainable, socially cohesive manner.

Conclusion

The European Union stands at a critical juncture in its approach to migration. As migration flows continue to test the EU's policies and values, it is clear that a security-focused approach has significant limitations. While current policies aim to protect state borders and control movement, they often do so at the expense of the rights and dignity of migrants, fostering conditions that can lead to overcrowded facilities, extended detention, and humanitarian crises at key entry points. This article has argued for a fundamental shift in EU migration policy toward a human security framework, one that places the well-being, safety, and rights of individuals at the center of migration management. This study makes significant scientific contributions to the discourse on migration and security by applying the human security paradigm to critique existing EU policies and practices. It provides a theoretical foundation and actionable recommendations that can guide policymakers in transitioning toward a more humane and balanced migration framework. The analysis demonstrates that securitization not

only undermines the EU's values but also creates systemic challenges that impact migrants and member states alike. However, this research has limitations. Reliance on secondary data and case studies may not fully capture migrants' lived experiences or the complexities of local implementation. Future studies should incorporate qualitative fieldwork and longitudinal assessments to evaluate the long-term impacts of human-centered policies. Comparative analyses with other regions could also offer valuable insights into best practices and the scalability of human security approaches.

In conclusion, adopting a human-centered approach aligns with the EU's principles of human rights and dignity. By prioritizing legal migration pathways, improving integration programs, and fostering public understanding, the EU can address migration challenges ethically and effectively. This shift would not only enhance social cohesion and stability but also reaffirm the EU's global leadership in humane migration governance. As the EU faces these challenges, it has the opportunity to demonstrate that security and compassion can coexist, setting an example for ethical and sustainable migration management.

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