

Forum: UNHRC

Issue: The Massive Migration to the European Mediterranean Coasts and Refugee Management.

Officer: Sara Rosales

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Term Definitions	4
Mediterranean Migration Routes	4
Asylum Seekers	4
Irregular Migration	4
Refugee Management	4
Background Information	5
Historical Context of Mediterranean Migration	5
Impact of COVID-19 on Migration Patterns	5
Recent Trends (2015-2024)	5
Impact of climate change on migration patterns	6
Organisations Involved	8
European Union	8
Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency)	8
IOM (International Organization for Migration)	9
UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)	9
Timeline of Events	10
Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions	13
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	13
EU-Turkey Statement	13
1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol	13
Challenges in Refugee Management	14
Search and Rescue Operations	14
Reception and Processing Centers	14
Integration Policies	14
Human Rights Concerns	14
Previous Attempts to Solve Issue	15
The EU-Turkey Statement of 2016	15
Possible Solutions	16
Bibliography	17

Introduction

The Mediterranean Sea has experienced countless transformations and developments; one thing that stands out the most is the recent growing amounts of mass migrations. The refugee crisis in the Mediterranean Sea experienced further troubles for the Mediterranean countries on how to accommodate and manage the massive amount of immigrants coming from all over the world. The modern era has led to a system of capitalist states which view the existence of borders as integral. This phenomenon has not only reshaped the demographic landscape of many European countries but has also sparked intense debates on human rights, national security, and international cooperation.

The new data highlights the scale and dynamics of the Mediterranean migration crisis in recent years. More than 274,800 migrants reached Europe by illegal means in 2023, a 35% increase compared to 2022, and the highest level since 2016. The Central Mediterranean route continued to be the most active, with around 113,000 crossings. The biggest groups of migrants were Syrian nationals, followed by Afghan and Tunisian nationals. The UNHCR data showed around 90% of Mediterranean sea arrivals during 2023 were in Italy, Greece, and Spain. The human cost is still significant, with an estimated 3,279 individuals reported dead or missing during Mediterranean crossings in 2023. What drives these migration patterns includes economic motivations, political instability, and climate change, with young adults between 18-35 years representing the majority of migrants.

The Mediterranean Sea, which once was a symbol of cultural exchange and economic prosperity, has become known as the world's deadliest migration route. Thousands of individuals risk their lives every year in dangerous sea crossings, seeking safety and better opportunities on European shores. The scale of this migration has placed a lot of pressure on coastal nations, particularly Italy, Greece, and Spain, therefore straining their resources and testing the limits of their systems.

The refugee crisis has exposed large gaps in the European Union's asylum policies and highlighted the need for a more cohesive and impactful approach to refugee management. While some countries have demonstrated compassion and openness, others have responded with restrictive measures, leading to tensions within the EU, between member states and raising questions about the EU's commitment to human rights and solidarity.

The challenges associated with this massive migration extend beyond immediate humanitarian concerns. Countries struggle with the long-term concerns of integrating large numbers of refugees into their societies, including providing education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities to them.

As the international community seeks to create solutions to this ongoing crisis, it's crucial to address both the symptoms and root causes of this massive migration. This includes not only improving rescue and reception mechanisms but also investing in conflict resolution, economic development, and climate change mitigation in different countries.

Term Definitions

Mediterranean Migration Routes

The Mediterranean Migration Routes are paths from North Africa, Libya/Tunisia, and Turkey to Europe, shaped by socio-political and economic factors, making them dangerous.

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers flee persecution or conflict, seeking protection in another country. They apply for asylum to gain refugee status while their claim is reviewed.

Irregular Migration

Irregular migration is crossing borders without legal authorization, such as entering without documents or overstaying a visa, and doesn't always involve seeking protection.

Refugee Management

Refugee management involves policies and actions by governments, organizations, and NGOs to meet refugees' needs, including protection, shelter, food, healthcare, and resettlement support.

Background Information

Historical Context of Mediterranean Migration

The Mediterranean region has a rich history of migration since thousands of years ago. In the early modern era (16th to 18th century), migration was primarily from Europe to Africa and the Middle East, because people were seeking better opportunities or fleeing from religious persecution. This trend intensified in the 19th century, with large numbers of European people moving to North Africa. The direction of migration began to shift in the 17th century due to growing European influence and economic changes, which eventually led to the colonization of North Africa and the Middle East. During the Iron and Bronze Ages, studies have discovered widespread migration around the Mediterranean, indicating strong connections between distant populations. The region has always been characterized by constant movement of various groups, including soldiers, pilgrims, diplomats, and travelers, all contributing to the complex issue that is Mediterranean migration patterns

Impact of COVID-19 on Migration Patterns

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered global migration patterns, and its effect will probably persist for years to come. International migration saw sharp declines, with first residence permits for third-country nationals in Europe decreasing by 24% in just a year, and net migration to the United States dropping by nearly half between 2020 and 2021. Internal migration patterns also changed, with many core cities experiencing net migration losses while more rural areas saw gains. The mobility of tourists in Europe changed from heterogeneous patterns to more uniform distributions due to the restrictions formed due to the pandemic.

Recent Trends (2015-2024)

The number of international migrants in the world reached 244 million in 2015, a record which was high at the time. By 2024, this number increased to 281 million. The global refugee population tripled or more over the past decade, reaching 43.4 million by the end of 2023.

Forced displacement has seen a significant rise. In 2015, there were 15.1 million refugees globally, a 45% increase from three and a half years before that. By the end of 2023, the number of forced displaced people worldwide reached 117.3 million, with predictions that suggested it could rise to 120 million by April 2024.

Germany emerged as the second most popular destination for international migrants globally in 2015, following the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted migration patterns, leading to declines in international migration and shifts in internal migration trends.

International remittances surged by 650% between 2000 and 2022, reaching USD 831 billion⁵. This increase has made migrant remittances a crucial factor in boosting the GDP of developing nations, surpassing foreign direct investment.

Recent conflicts have driven large-scale displacements. The 2023 conflict in Sudan displaced over 7 million people, while escalating violence in Myanmar displaced more than 1.3 million within the country. The ongoing situation in Gaza has led to the displacement of up to 1.7 million people between October and December 2023.

Impact of climate change on migration patterns

Climate change is recognized as a significant driver of migration patterns, particularly more towards the European Mediterranean coasts. This is linked to the broader issue of refugee management, which presents complex challenges for policymakers and humanitarian organizations.

Extreme weather events, such as floods, storms, and droughts, are causing short-term population displacements. In 2017 alone, disasters mostly related to extreme weather, displaced 18.8 million people across 135 countries. Similarly, gradual environmental changes like the rise of sea levels, shifting rainfall patterns, increased salinization, and declining soil fertility are driving long-term migration trends.

The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable to these climate-induced changes. By 2050, climate out-migration hotspots in the southern Mediterranean are

expected to include coastal areas in Tunisia, parts of Morocco, and regions in Algeria and Egypt, especially across the Nile Delta and Valley. These areas are becoming hotspots due to serious water scarcity issues and the impact of rising sea levels.

As a result, climate-related migrants are likely to be forcibly displaced towards urban areas such as Algiers, Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli, Casablanca, Rabat, and Tangiers. This urban migration trend may lead to disproportionate population growth and serious pressures on cities' resources and planning capabilities. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that climate change threatens agricultural productivity, particularly in rural areas, prompting people to move to cities or seek opportunities in other countries.

The scale of this impact is very significant. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted as early as 1990 that the greatest single impact of climate change might be on human migration, with millions of people potentially displaced.

It's important to note that southern Mediterranean countries, while being less responsible for global warming, are more exposed and vulnerable to climate change risks. This disparity adds another layer of difficulty to the issue, as it raises questions of global responsibility and burden-sharing in managing climate-induced migration.

The situation presents significant policy implications. Current international refugee and immigration policies do not adequately address forced climate migrants. There is a need for anticipatory engagement and policy development to address the complex interplay between climate change and migration. If managed well, migration can be a valuable adaptation strategy to reduce people's vulnerability to a warming climate and increase resilience to further changes.

Climate change is amplifying displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee, particularly in the Mediterranean region. This presents a significant challenge for refugee management and requires coordinated international action.

Organisations Involved

European Union

The European Union has been actively involved in addressing the issue of massive migration to European Mediterranean coasts and refugee management through a multi-faceted approach. The EU has developed the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which aims to streamline asylum procedures, ensure solidarity among member states, and strengthen partnerships with non-EU countries. This pact includes measures to secure external borders, establish fast and efficient procedures for asylum claims, and create an effective system of solidarity and responsibility sharing.

The EU has also launched military operations like EUNAVFOR MED to disrupt human smuggling networks. Additionally, the EU has engaged in agreements with countries like Turkey and Tunisia to stem illegal crossings and manage refugee populations. Despite these efforts, challenges still persist, including disagreements among member states and the need for a more comprehensive and humane approach to migration management. The EU continues to work on balancing border security, humanitarian concerns, and the fair distribution of responsibilities among its member states.

Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency)

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, plays a very crucial role in addressing Mediterranean migration and refugee management. It was established in 2004 and expanded in 2016, Frontex coordinates border control efforts and manages the EU's external borders. Some of its activities include aerial surveillance, information sharing with local authorities, and supporting search and rescue operations. Frontex assists EU member states in border management and collects data to analyze migratory patterns. However, the agency has faced criticism for its role in intercepting migrants and potential human rights violations. Frontex's involvement highlights the complex balance between border security and humanitarian obligations in managing migration flows in the Mediterranean region. Despite controversies, Frontex remains a key player in the EU's approach to migration management.

IOM (International Organization for Migration)

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plays a vital role in addressing Mediterranean migration and refugee management. IOM implements initiatives like the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration across 14 African countries. This program focuses on protecting migrants, assisting vulnerable individuals, and supporting voluntary returns and reintegration.

IOM's activities include conducting search and rescue missions, establishing Migrants Resource and Response Mechanisms, providing direct assistance to migrants, facilitating voluntary return programs, and collecting crucial data on migrant profiles and needs. The organization also works to strengthen migration governance in partner countries and promote safe migration practices.

Despite its approach, IOM faces significant challenges in addressing the complex issues of Mediterranean migration. These include funding limitations, restricted access to key locations, and the ever-changing nature of migration patterns.

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also plays a very important role in addressing the massive migration to European Mediterranean coasts and refugee management. UNHCR focuses on providing emergency protection, life-saving assistance, and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees along the Central Mediterranean route.

Key activities include conducting evacuations of vulnerable refugees from Libya to safer countries, supporting governments in improving reception conditions and refugee status determination procedures, and monitoring facilities hosting displaced people.

The agency collaborates with organizations like IOM and UNODC to support trafficking victims and at-risk individuals. UNHCR emphasizes the need for human rights safeguards, increased search and rescue efforts, and expanded resettlement quotas.

Timeline of Events

August 30, 2008

Italy's treaty with Libya aimed to strengthen ties but sparked controversy over joint patrols returning migrants, risking human rights violations. It reduced migrant arrivals but raised concerns about Libya's human rights record and the EU's refugee stance.

April 23, 2015

After deadly Mediterranean shipwrecks, EU leaders pledged to triple Frontex funding, strengthen patrols, and tackle trafficking. The summit shifted EU policy but exposed divisions over refugee quotas and rescue efforts, leading to the European Agenda on Migration.

May 18, 2015

The EU's Operation Sophia aimed to disrupt Mediterranean smuggling, but critics warned it militarized migration and risked safety. Training Libya's Coast Guard raised concerns about cooperation with Libyan authorities.

June 22, 2015

The EU's Operation Sophia aimed to disrupt Mediterranean smuggling, rescuing thousands but critics argued it pushed smugglers to riskier routes. Its focus on training Libya's Coast Guard raised human rights concerns.

July 13, 2015

Hungary built a 175-kilometer razor-wire fence to block migrants, citing sovereignty. Led by Orbán, it drew EU criticism for undermining solidarity and Schengen principles, closing a key Balkan route and deepening EU divisions.

August 31, 2015

Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" speech in 2015 embraced an open-door policy for refugees, leading to over one million arrivals. It highlighted Germany's humanitarian stance but polarized society, strained EU unity, and fueled populism, reshaping migration policies.

- September 2, 2015** The image of three-year-old Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on a Turkish beach shocked the world, sparking outrage and briefly increasing support for refugee resettlement. While it humanized the crisis, its impact on migration policies remained limited amid ongoing border control debates.
- October 15, 2015** The 2016 EU-Turkey deal aimed to curb migration, offering aid for Syrian refugees and stricter border controls. Critics saw it as outsourcing EU duties and ignoring Turkey's human rights issues, shifting migration control and impacting EU-Turkey relations.
- October 16, 2015** Hungary built a razor-wire fence on its border with Croatia, diverting migrants to Slovenia and deepening EU divisions, challenging Schengen, and setting a trend for physical barriers.
- October 25, 2015** After Hungary's border closure, Slovenia faced 12,600 migrants in 24 hours and activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for aid. This highlighted the strain on smaller countries and the need for coordinated EU responses and better burden-sharing.
- March 18, 2016** The EU-Turkey deal aimed to curb migration by returning migrants from Greece to Turkey in exchange for resettling Syrians in the EU. Critics raised human rights concerns, and its implementation faced challenges, especially on Greek islands.
- November 3, 2016** Over 340 migrants died in a deadly Mediterranean tragedy off the Libyan coast, highlighting the dangers of sea crossings and reigniting debates on EU migration policies. It called for safer asylum pathways, questioned smugglers' roles, and emphasized EU states' responsibilities in search and rescue.
- February 3, 2017** Italy's deal with Libya aimed to curb migration by supporting the

Libyan Coast Guard in exchange for preventing departures and accepting returns. Critics warned it trapped migrants in unsafe conditions in Libya, raising concerns about human rights and international law while reflecting EU efforts to externalize border control.

June 11, 2018

Italy's government refused to let the NGO ship Aquarius dock, stranding 629 migrants. Spain accepted the ship, sparking a diplomatic crisis and highlighting EU tensions on migrant rescue. Italy's hardline stance, led by Salvini, pushed for more burden-sharing and fueled debates on NGO rescues and EU migration reform.

June 11, 2018

Italy's populist government blocked the NGO ship Aquarius from docking, stranding 629 migrants. Spain eventually accepted it, sparking a diplomatic crisis and highlighting EU tensions on migrant rescue. Led by Salvini, Italy's stance pushed for more burden-sharing and fueled debates on NGO rescues, human trafficking, and reforming the EU's Dublin Regulation.

December 20, 2023

The European Council reached a migration agreement with a solidarity mechanism for asylum relocations and financial contributions. It balanced frontline states' quota demands with Eastern Europe's resistance, strengthening border controls. Critics argue it may not ensure fair burden-sharing but could lead to a more coordinated EU system.

Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) plays a key role in Mediterranean migration, particularly Article 14, which protects the right to seek asylum, and Article 13, which ensures freedom of movement. It also supports rights like protection from torture, the right to life, and non-refoulement. However, implementing these rights amid the migration crisis is challenging, as countries balance human rights with security and resources. Despite guiding frameworks like the UDHR and the 1951 Refugee Convention, rising displacement has sparked resistance, highlighting tensions between ideals and reality.

EU-Turkey Statement

The EU-Turkey Statement, signed on March 18, 2016, aimed to address migration by returning irregular migrants from Turkey to Greece. For each Syrian returned, another would be resettled from Turkey to the EU. Turkey agreed to curb migration routes, while the EU pledged €6 billion in aid and visa liberalization. The deal reduced Aegean crossings but faced criticism for potentially violating international laws. Despite challenges, it remains central to EU-Turkey migration cooperation.

1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are crucial UN instruments addressing migration to European Mediterranean coasts and refugee management. The 1951 Convention defines refugee status, outlines legal protections and rights, and establishes the principle of non-refoulement. Initially limited to European refugees pre-1951, the 1967 Protocol removed temporal and geographic restrictions, extending protection globally. Key aspects include defining refugee status, establishing minimum treatment standards, and outlining state obligations. With 145 countries ratifying the Convention and 146 the Protocol, these documents continue to shape international refugee protection efforts. Implementation challenges persist, especially with rising migration pressures in the Mediterranean. Despite ongoing debates, these instruments remain crucial in guiding international refugee and migration policies.

Challenges in Refugee Management

Search and Rescue Operations

Search and rescue operations don't increase crossings, as changes are due to other factors. While they reduce mortality, the EU struggles with coordination, pushbacks, and disembarkation disputes. Despite this, they're vital for saving lives.

Reception and Processing Centers

The EU's asylum system struggles with processing and distribution, as migrants bypass the Dublin Regulation. This puts pressure on countries, especially in northwestern Europe. Disparities in reception and integration exist, with some countries adopting strict policies while others face overloads. The lack of a functional EU-wide distribution mechanism remains a key issue.

Integration Policies

Integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the labor market faces challenges in the EU. While labor market access is legislated, issues like administrative delays, restricted access, and lack of support persist. High unemployment, qualification recognition, and language barriers complicate integration. Policies vary widely, leading to uneven outcomes for refugees across member states.

Human Rights Concerns

The increasing number of incidents involving violence and human rights violations against refugees and migrants at European borders is a major concern. UNHCR has reported numerous cases of pushbacks and ill-treatment at land and sea borders. The practice of 'pushbacks' violates the right to seek asylum and often results in inhumane treatment. There are also concerns about the conditions in reception centers, particularly in overburdened countries. The new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, while aiming to improve control over arrivals, has been criticized for potentially limiting access to asylum procedures. Balancing border security with humanitarian obligations remains a significant challenge in managing migration flows.

Previous Attempts to Solve Issue

The EU-Turkey Statement of 2016

This agreement aimed to reduce irregular migration from Turkey to the EU by returning all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to Greek islands back to Turkey. In exchange, the EU would resettle one Syrian refugee from Turkey for every Syrian returned. The deal also included financial support for Turkey to assist refugees and accelerated visa liberalization for Turkish citizens. While it led to a decrease in crossings and fatalities in the Aegean Sea, it has faced criticism for potentially breaching international laws.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

Proposed in 2020, this pact seeks to regulate, harmonize, and coordinate EU member states' management of irregular arrivals. It establishes a solidarity system for distributing the burden of asylum claims between member states, allowing countries to either receive asylum seekers, pay €20,000 per non-admitted asylum seeker, or contribute to migration-related projects in countries of origin. The pact aims to reduce conflicts between EU members and create a more homogeneous and predictable management system. However, its implementation faces challenges due to its complexity and opposition from some member states.

Possible Solutions

To address the massive migration to European Mediterranean coasts and refugee management, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Enhancing the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) would ensure fair and efficient processing of asylum claims across EU member states. Implementing a more equitable burden-sharing mechanism, as proposed in the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, could alleviate pressure on frontline countries. Strengthening cooperation with countries of origin and transit is crucial to address root causes of migration and improve border management.

Expanding legal pathways for migration, such as the Talent Partnerships initiative, could reduce irregular migration flows. Simultaneously, improving search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean while combating human smuggling networks is essential for saving lives. Investing in digital solutions could streamline asylum procedures and facilitate integration of refugees in host communities.

Continued support for refugees in transit countries, particularly Turkey, through funding and assistance programs is vital. Developing more effective return and reintegration programs for migrants not eligible for asylum, increasing resettlement quotas, and improving legal channels for refugees to access the EU could reduce dangerous sea crossings. Finally, fostering genuine bilateral dialogue with Mediterranean partners to create mutually beneficial migration management strategies is key to a sustainable solution.

This comprehensive approach aims to create a more humane and effective system for managing migration flows while addressing the needs of both refugees and host communities.

Bibliography

"Migrants have crossed the Mediterranean for centuries – but they used to head from north to south". The Conversation. Tramontana, F. (n.d.). Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"EU external borders: Irregular border crossings fall one third in the first half of 2024". (n.d.). Frontex. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"West and Central Mediterranean situation". (n.d.). Global Focus. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Managing migration in the Eastern Mediterranean: Challenges and opportunities". (n.d.). IEMed. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Mediterranean: Central Mediterranean Route Was the Most Active Migratory Route in 2023, Crossings and Rescue Efforts Continue, Multiple Trials Related to Migration in Italy Happening as Court Prepares to Rule on Albanian-Italian Deal, Attack on Human Rights NGO KISA Highlights Rise in Racist Violence". (n.d.). European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

Mukhamedova, F., & Tyukin, I. (2024). "Machine learning analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on migration patterns". *Scientific Reports*, 14(1). Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"The COVID-19 Pandemic, Migration and the Environment". (n.d.). Environmental Migration Portal. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

Elejalde, E., Ferres, L., Navarro, V., Bravo, L., & Zagheni, E. (2024). "The social stratification of internal migration and daily mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic". *Scientific Reports*, 14(1). Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

González-Leonardo, M., López-Gay, A., Newsham, N., Recaño, J., & Rowe, F. (2022). "Understanding patterns of internal migration during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain".

Population Space and Place, 28(6). Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Coordination breakdown: the impacts of COVID-19 on migration in Europe - World". (14 March 2024). ReliefWeb. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: context, challenges and limitations". (27 May 2024). Elcano Royal Institute. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

Blanc, E. (2023). "The EU in motion through emotions: Fear and migration policy in the Euro-Mediterranean context". *Mediterranean Politics*, 1–26. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Managing migration in the Eastern Mediterranean: Challenges and opportunities". (n.d.). IEMed. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Migratory routes". (n.d.). Frontex. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration: one year on". (n.d.). EEAS. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

Rossi, R. (2019). "The role of the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR in the EU and Italy: Still entrapped by a securitization approach to Mediterranean migration?". *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 11(4), 369–385. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

"Protection and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees along the Central Mediterranean route". (6 July 2021). Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Archived from the original. Retrieved 10 February 2025.

