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# Migration Dilemma: Security versus Humanitarian Nexus

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## Abstract

*International Migration has always been a global phenomenon that is considered as a highly politicized topic in an interconnected world. In addition to that, due to the civil wars, poverty, and famine taking place in different countries, an increase in the number of global migration is witnessed. Thus, on one hand, this global phenomenon secured a place on the international and domestic security agenda as it is linked to terrorism as well as threatens the states' national identity. On the other hand, international migration can also be explained from a humanitarian perspective since the reason behind the refugee movement is primarily seeking international protection. Therefore, this article will explore international migration from a security and humanitarian lens. In addition to that, a short case study focusing on the European Union's management of the migratory pressure of 2015 will be used to better understand the variation in responses.*

[ **Key words** ] : International migration, Security, National identity, International protection, Humanitarian approach, European Union (EU).

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## INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, international migration moved to the top of the governments' agenda setting receiving a high degree of political attention accompanied with a rapid change in the international and domestic migration policies and systems. International migration covers different categories of migration; however, this research considers two categories: refugees and irregular migrants. According to Collinson (1993, p. 59), refugee "signifies a person fleeing any one of a wide range of life-threatening conditions, including war, famine, natural disaster, oppression, persecution or massive human rights abuses". Irregular migration is defined by the European Commission (2018) as the "movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries". These two categories of migration can be considered as suitable examples of people in need of international protection considering the restrictive security-oriented view of the host countries.

Linking international migration to security is not a new concept; however, a contested one. This topic is challenging because it can be studied from two different perspectives: Security studies and Migration Studies (Huysmans & Squire, 2010). A dilemma can be deduced in categorizing international migration. Some believe that migrants threaten the security of a host state while others argue that migrants should be looked at from a humanitarian lens. More specifically, refugees and irregular migrants fleeing from wars are in desperate need for international protection. Therefore, the first section will tackle the migration-security nexus focusing on migrants as a security threat. The second section will focus on the migration-humanitarian nexus showing that people fleeing their home countries due to civil wars need protection. The third section will present an empirical case study of how the EU managed the refugee crisis.

### **International Migration from a Security Lens**

An intensive literature is found on this topic where scholars believe that migrants pose a security threat on the identity and sovereignty of the host state, specifically Western States. Due to the limited space, this research will only cover the societal security which focuses on the "threats and

vulnerabilities that affect patterns of communal identity and culture” (Buzan, 1991, p. 447). Since migration threatens the identity and culture; thus, it was put on the international agenda after the Cold War. To be more precise, Pugh (2000, p. 19) stated that “the security risk is commonly understood to mean that an unregulated intake of immigrants is undermining national identities and/or jeopardizing a relatively prosperous Western way of life”.

Migratory movements impact three aspects of national security which are “state capacity and autonomy, the balance of power, and the nature of violent conflict” (Adamson, 2006, p. 165). Besides that, migrants threaten the national identity of the host state specifically in the aspects related to language, religion, ethnicity, and culture. According to Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000, p. 358), although it is evident that forced migration poses a threat on the identity of the host state more than the voluntary migration; however, this is based on the subjective explanation that can be used by the people.

Having a migratory influx threatens the cultural identity of an existing society which results in having a political constituency demanding migratory restrictions (Buzan, 1991, p. 447). Thus, the public opinion plays an important role in framing migration as a security threat although most of the times the threat is not real. In some cases, political leaders use the migration issue as a card to gain electoral votes as this topic is considered as highly sentimental. Another major point is the clash of civilizational identities between the West and Islam (Buzan, 1991, p. 448). This point reoccurred in the recent migratory pressure specifically with the Eastern European States as will be discussed in the section below.

For instance, Western states are witnessing the rise of many existential anxieties and fears about their identity and security (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002, p. 21). This is still convenient since it is represented through the increase in right-wing political parties in Europe who are anti-immigration. It can be argued that people tend to accept the sensitivity of national sovereignty and national identity over migrants. A clear example of this is the BREXIT referendum which reflected on the conservative anxieties about destructions of national sovereignty (Iaknis, et al., 2018, p. 5). This

shows that the migration-security nexus is an existing ongoing topic that will never be less important due to the variation in the civilizations identities.

### **International Migration from a Humanitarian Lens**

With the increase in civil wars, oppressions, and famine across third world countries, an increase in migratory movement is being witnessed. Refugees fleeing wars and migrant smuggling represent a humanitarian issue for the bare minimum that hundreds are dying on the high seas yearly (Pugh, 2000, p. 3). People are risking their lives to reach a safe place where they can be provided with international protection based on the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>1</sup>. Normally, irregular migration poses a humanitarian dilemma for states on whether irregular migration through smuggling is a crime.

Whenever a humanitarian crisis occurs, concerns intensify on migratory issues and refugee influx which is merged within the international system; rendering migration a sensitive political issue rather than humanitarian (Collinson, 1993, p. 5). Developed countries tend to promote their values of democracy and protection of human rights; however, when it comes to migration issues they tend not to take a firm stance in seeing the situation of migrants as humanitarian.

According to Versluys (2009) and Orbie et al. (2014), the EU is considered as a main regional player, largest humanitarian donor, when it comes to offering, supplying, and organizing humanitarian assistance as well as shaping a humanitarian module, except that obstacles and complexities remain on the subject of integration of humanitarian aid programs in policies and plans of crisis response and intervention

### **Managing the “Refugee Crisis” in the EU**

The unexpected developments in the Middle East and North Africa in the late 2010 and early 2011 resulted in what is called the Arab Spring. The political instability and turmoil in the MENA region resulted in people fleeing the oppressions and violations to neighboring countries and later to the

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<sup>1</sup> Read more on the 1951 Refugee Convention on <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>.

European continent. People were either crossing to Europe by the sea mainly the Central Mediterranean Route or by the land crossing Turkey to enter to Greece. The Arab Spring opened the door for other nationalities as well to use illegal pathways to reach Europe.

During the period before 2011, policies and policy measures adopted by the EU were sufficient to deal with migratory flows. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2011) is considered as the main reference in humanitarian assistance because it asserted on the fact that humanitarian aid operations should respect the principles of “neutrality, impartiality, and nondiscrimination”. According to the European Union (2008), the main objective of humanitarian aid is ‘to relieve and prevent the suffering of victims of humanitarian crises’

Since the EU migration system was developed in modern times, the policies and instruments adopted included improved standards better than the Geneva Convention that was revised in 1949 (Von Helldorff, 2015, p. 3). The key priority for policy-making was the internal security of the region; thus, policies were created upon this criterion. Migratory issues were always based on the political will; however, the extent of it varied between the different periods<sup>2</sup>.

Some Member States viewed the migratory pressure from a humanitarian perspective while others viewed it from a security-oriented lens. For instance, the purpose of the Mare Nostrum Operation which was launched by the Italian government was to tackle the humanitarian emergency on the high seas (Cuttitta, 2014). Another example, in 2015, Germany took another stance in responding to the migratory pressure through working upon an “open-door policy” (Hillman & Long, 2018) to welcome all people that are in search for international protection.

Other Member States, such as Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia viewed refugees and irregular migrants as a threat to their sovereignty and national identity. According to Zaun, the lack of contact of the people in these countries with migrants from different backgrounds is one of the main reasons why there is a lack of tolerance for asylum seekers (Zaun, 2016, p. 53). Also, the

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<sup>2</sup> The different periods cover the timeframe before the Arab Spring (up until 2011), the period of the Arab Spring (2011-2014), and the period of the so-called “refugee crisis” (2015-at the time of writing).

“Christian Identity” of the Visegrad countries<sup>3</sup> is sought to be protected from any invasion of other religions, in the case of the refugee crisis it is Islam (Brunsdan, 2017).

Another example is the temporary reintroduction of internal border control by several Member States such as Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, and others serves as a controversial unilateral response in closing the borders in light of the refugee migratory pressure (Migration and Home Affairs, 2017). Similar to this, Hungary took a more extreme stance in building a fence on its southern border to keep out migrants and prevent illegal migration. These measures are taken to control and limit the movement of people in need of international protection.

Finally, elections across Member States took place between 2017 and 2018. The spread of rightwing and nationalist parties across the EU means that a rise in xenophobia is to be seen in the refugee and asylum matters. Both Austria and Italy elected hardline governments with Prime Ministers being Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Guiseppe Conte respectively. These two countries joined the Eastern bloc in being led by conservative right-wing political leaders.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, a rescue vessel called the Aquarius was carrying more than 600 migrants and refugees on board; it was not granted permission to dock on the Italian and Maltese shores (EL PAIS, 2018). The Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez ordered to offer a safe port for the vessel at the port of Valencia arguing that it is a humanitarian duty. This is another clear example on how the newly elected governments are acting with respect to the refugees and irregular migrants.

## **CONCLUSION**

The response to international migration had always been double-folded: on one hand, migration is seen as a security threat to the identity and culture of the host country which affects its stability; and on the other hand, migration is seen as a humanitarian duty to provide international protection to people in need of it. Although most of the times the threat is not real; however, people tend to believe that migrants pose a threat on their national identity. Migrants are greatly affected by the views of

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<sup>3</sup> Visegrad Countries consist of Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia

the countries that are hosting them. States should look at migrants specifically irregular migrants from a humanitarian perspective since these people are risking their lives to reach a safe place. In the case of the EU, a clear variation in the perception of Member States towards the refugee crisis. The dilemma of collective identity and state sovereignty between Member States is greatly affecting the variation in responses towards the refugees and irregular migrants. However, with the elections taking place and the right-wing political parties increasing, one can presume that the EU asylum system will towards a more restrictive approach.

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