



## ILLEGAL MIGRANT CRISIS IN GREECE AND TÜRKİYE THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

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<p><b>Info Article</b></p> <p>Received : 01 April 2025</p> <p>Revised : 03 Mei 2025</p> <p>Accepted : 02 Juni 2025</p> <p>Publication : 30 Juni 2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> <i>Irregular migration becomes the most pressing humanitarian &amp; political issue in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey-Greece 2022-2024, the increasing flow of migrants (driven by conflict, poverty, and limited legal migration channels) has subjected both countries to overlapping security, legal, and humanitarian pressures. The research examines the crisis through two theoretical lenses: Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and the Human Security Framework. Based on recent data, legal cases, and institutional reports, the study highlights persistent abuses such as expulsions, limited asylum protection, and the abuse of geopolitical leverage, especially under the EU-Turkey Statement and Greece's "safe third country" designation. Despite some examples of cooperation, securitized responses continue to dominate, enabling smuggling networks and putting migrants at great risk. The paper concludes that tackling irregular migration requires moving beyond reactive policies towards sustainable solutions rooted in regional cooperation, legal integrity and the fulfillment of human security. Only through this integrated approach can the region move from managing symptoms to addressing the root causes of migration.</i></p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> International Conflict, International Cooperation, Illegal Migrant, Human Security, Eastern Mediterranean</p>	
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<p><b>Licensed Under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License</b></p> 	<p><b>Abstrak :</b> Migrasi tidak teratur menjadi masalah kemanusiaan &amp; politik yang paling mendesak di Mediterania Timur, Turki-Yunani 2022-2024, meningkatnya arus migran (yang didorong oleh konflik, kemiskinan, dan terbatasnya jalur migrasi legal) telah membuat kedua negara mengalami tekanan keamanan, hukum, dan kemanusiaan yang tumpang tindih. Penelitian mengkaji krisis melalui dua lensa teori: Teori Kompleks Keamanan Regional (RSCT) dan Kerangka Kerja Keamanan Manusia. Berdasarkan data terbaru, kasus-kasus hukum, dan laporan-laporan institusional, studi ini menyoroti pelanggaran yang terus terjadi seperti pengusiran, perlindungan suaka yang terbatas, dan penyalahgunaan pengaruh geopolitik, terutama di bawah Pernyataan Uni Eropa-Turki dan penunjukan "negara ketiga yang aman" oleh Yunani. Meskipun ada beberapa contoh kerja sama, respons yang tersekritisasi terus mendominasi, memungkinkan jaringan penyelundupan dan menempatkan para migran dalam risiko besar. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa penanganan migrasi tidak teratur membutuhkan langkah yang lebih dari sekadar kebijakan reaktif menuju solusi berkelanjutan yang berakar pada kerja sama regional, integritas hukum dan pemenuhan keamanan manusia. Hanya melalui pendekatan terpadu ini, kawasan ini dapat beralih dari mengelola gejala menjadi menyelesaikan akar penyebab migrasi.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Just like birth and death, the movement of people across national borders has long been a core aspect of human societies, especially in a global context where the right to freedom of movement is strongly upheld by numerous international legal frameworks. The urge to migrate (particularly from economically disadvantaged countries to more developed ones, often through irregular means) has grown stronger, especially among young people. This trend is driven by various factors such as limited resources, uncertain futures, and increasingly restrictive immigration policies and regulations (Bah, 2023). Migration has long been a natural aspect of human life, supported by global legal frameworks that uphold the right to mobility. Economic hardship, limited prospects, and rigid border controls increasingly push young individuals from poorer regions to seek opportunities abroad, even through unauthorized routes.

The term "illegal migrant" (also called "illegal immigrant" or "undocumented immigrant") refers to individuals who enter or remain in a country without legal authorization or required documentation (Wex Definitions Team, 2023). The issue of "illegal migrants" more accurately termed "irregular" or "undocumented" migrants remains a major challenge in the Mediterranean, particularly along the Greece-Türkiye border. The migration crisis has emerged as one of Europe's most significant challenges over the past decade. It has driven millions of people escaping war and severe poverty to undertake perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety and prosperity within the European Union. Since its onset, the crisis has fueled considerable political and social tensions across both EU and non-EU nations, sparking ongoing debates about how best to address and manage the situation. Numerous strategies and policy decisions have been implemented in attempts to curb the crisis (Fo, 2023). The migration crisis, caused by millions escaping conflict and hardship to find refuge and better opportunities in Europe, has created major political and social tensions within the EU and beyond, leading to various initiatives and discussions focused on addressing the issue.

The Syrian Civil War has introduced a new layer to the ongoing security challenges between Greece and Türkiye. Millions of Syrian migrants initially sought refuge in neighboring Türkiye, and a substantial number of them later crossed illegally into Greece in an effort to continue their journey deeper into Europe (Öztürk & Erkan, 2023). In the last five years, data shows that Türkiye and Greece became the most preferred destinations for refugees escaping the Syrian Civil War. Türkiye close

proximity to Syria and its long-standing role as a host country make it a primary refuge, while Greece serves as a key entry point to Europe through dangerous Mediterranean Sea routes. The high influx reflects both the urgency of displacement and the strategic location of these countries in regional migration patterns.

With a 911 km land border shared with Syria, Türkiye has been one of the most heavily impacted countries by the crisis. The initial large-scale movement of Syrians into Türkiye began when 252 people entered through the Cilvegözü border gate in Hatay, marking the start of a continuous influx of Syrian refugees into the country that persisted until 2017 (Erdogan, 2024). Türkiye sharing a 911km long border with Syria has made it a primary destination for Syrian refugees, beginning with 252 individuals entering through Cilvegözü in Hatay, followed by ongoing large-scale refugee arrivals until 2017. By the end of 2022, the number of Syrians had fallen by 200,000 compared to the previous year to 3.565.898 and on December 31, 2023, it was announced to be 3.214.780, decreasing further by 320 thousand.<sup>5</sup> At the time of reporting SB-2023 (as of July 4, 2024), the number of Syrians was announced as 3.111.047. This is a decrease of more than 626,000 from the number announced on 31.12.2021 (Erdogan, 2024). Between the end of 2021 and the first week of July, 2024, the number of Syrians in Türkiye experienced a significant decrease.

The Copenhagen School argues that security is not an inherent quality but a product of human creation. The notion of security varies depending on the prevailing circumstances and how threats are perceived. Therefore, discussions on security must address inquiries such as who formulated this notion and with what purpose. Security is established when the necessity arises. Expanding on this idea, Buzan argued that the perception of security could be associated with different sectors and identified five distinct sectors such as political, military, environmental, economic, and societal (Firat, 2024). According to the Copenhagen School, security is not an innate characteristic but something shaped by human interpretation and situational context. Buzan further develops this perspective by associating security with five key areas (political, military, environmental, economic, and societal) highlighting that its definition depends on who constructs it and for what reason.

One of the new extensions brought to the security approach by the Copenhagen School is the theory of regional security complexes. The regional security complex theory (RSCT) also presents a more up-to-date and pertinent approach to conceptualizing energy security. Buzan is the founding academic associated with this

particular theory, with additional contributions from Wæver (Firat, 2024). The Copenhagen School's Regional Security Complex Theory, initially formulated by Buzan and later refined by Wæver, provides a contemporary and region-focused perspective on interpreting energy security. The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) has played a key role in examining regional security dynamics. Developed by Buzan and Wæver, RSCT offers both a theoretical and conceptual foundation for analyzing the structure and behavior of regional security, especially in the post-Cold War context. It explores the historical development of each regional security complex, providing a thorough understanding of security interactions within specific regions (Farzayee, 2023). The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Buzan and Wæver, offers a valuable framework for examining regional security structures and patterns, especially after the Cold War, by exploring the historical development and unique dynamics of each region.

When applying the Regional Security Complex Theory from a global to a local perspective, its structure can differ depending on the power capabilities of states and their shared perceptions of threats. Moreover, the involvement and stance of global powers toward a particular region can further influence and complicate its development (Öztürk & Erkan, 2023). The application of RSCT from global to local contexts based on the power capabilities of states and how they perceive threats, while the involvement and approach of global powers can further shape and complicate the security dynamics of a region. Buzan and Wæver in 2003 said that the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory emphasizes heightened security interdependence among states within a particular region. They specify that this interactivity is stronger within the region due to geographical proximity and shared security dynamics, while interactions with actors outside the region tend to be more diffuse. At the core of the RSC theory lie two pivotal concepts: interdependence and security (Sukaedi & Yogaswara, 2024). This show Regional Security Complex theory focuses on strong security connections between geographically close states sharing common security issues, centered around the concepts of interdependence and security, whereas relationships with outside actors are typically less direct.

The concept of Human Security was first introduced in the 1994 UN Human Development Report and further developed by the 2003 Commission for Human Security, which defined it as the need "to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment" (Nurse, 2023). This

definition sets the foundation for addressing the plight of illegal migrants crossing the Mediterranean, whose lives are frequently at risk due to unsafe migration routes, exploitation, and lack of state protection. The UN General Assembly resolution 66/290 defines human security as people-centered, emphasizing prevention, protection, and empowerment, particularly in complex and context-specific threats (Nurse, 2023). This approach is crucial in the Mediterranean crisis where migrants, often treated as national security concerns, must instead be viewed through a human security lens that prioritizes their survival, dignity, and freedom from fear.

As existential threats to humanity intensify, Nurse (2023) argues for a paradigm shift to transform international security systems through early warning, prevention, and human security integration (Nurse, 2023). The mass and often fatal migration attempts from Türkiye to Greece underscore this need, as climate change, conflict, and poverty continue to push people toward perilous journeys with little international risk mitigation infrastructure in place. Migration is driven not only by war or disaster but also by poverty and the lack of opportunities, which ultimately strip people of their agency and force them into dangerous decisions, such as illegal crossings over the Mediterranean (Baggio, 2025). Human security must address these root causes to mitigate forced displacement, especially in hotspot regions like Türkiye, which hosts millions of refugees and serves as a launch point for risky maritime migration.

Kerwin, Hare, & Fuentes emphasize that human dignity is the inherent value of every person, regardless of status, and that states have an obligation to provide safe and legal migration channels and protect migrants in transit (Kerwin, Hare, & Fuentes, 2025). In the case of the Mediterranean, this calls for both Greece and Türkiye to collaborate in providing structured migration alternatives rather than punitive border controls that endanger lives. They further argue that humanitarian programming must respond to the distinct needs of migrants at different stages, including building the agency of displaced populations, such as Syrian refugees in Türkiye (Kerwin, Hare, & Fuentes, 2025). This perspective is critical in the Greek-Turkish context, where refugee children, women, and minority groups are highly vulnerable yet often overlooked in policy planning and humanitarian responses.

Perrin notes that migration has always been central to human history, driven by the pursuit of security and opportunity (Perrin, 2025). The Mediterranean migration flows are a modern reflection of this pattern, yet the response remains securitized rather than humanitarian, ignoring the age-old truth that movement is often a survival strategy

rather than a crime. He adds that conventional humanitarian approaches often focus narrowly on providing basic needs, but successful refugee responses require professional, coordinated, and equitable frameworks (Perrin, 2025). The crisis in the Mediterranean is exacerbated by inconsistent EU policies, fragmented aid, and overburdened local infrastructures in Türkiye and Greece, which fail to provide lasting support.

Muguruza explains that human security integrates development, peace, and human rights, shifting the focus from state security to individual well-being (Muguruza, 2017). This framework challenges the dominant border control narrative in the Mediterranean, emphasizing instead the importance of supporting migrants as individuals deserving safety, opportunity, and dignity. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in 2000 that human security includes human rights, education, healthcare, and governance, not just the absence of conflict (Muguruza, 2017). Applying this principle, Mediterranean migrants deserve more than just rescue at sea, they deserve systems that give them a real chance to build a future in a stable environment. Security is subjective and based on perception; thus, true security must be measured by how secure people feel from threats (Muguruza, 2017). In Greece and Türkiye, many illegal migrants live in fear of detention, deportation, and abuse, highlighting the inadequacy of current approaches to ensuring genuine human security.

Protection and empowerment are the two strategic pillars proposed by the Commission on Human Security, which aim to shield individuals from widespread threats and enhance their capacity to shape their own lives (Muguruza, 2017). This dual strategy should guide migration policies in the Mediterranean by protecting migrants from violence and exploitation while offering legal pathways and social integration mechanisms. According to Baluev et al, human security diverges from traditional territorial security by focusing on individual existential conditions, not competitive individualism (Baluev, Kazakov, Rykhtik, Ulmayeva, & Ustinkin, 2017). This distinction is critical in reframing the Mediterranean crisis, from a border issue to a human survival challenge demanding humane, cooperative solutions from both Greece and Türkiye.

The UN General Assembly's 2012 common understanding of human security reflects the growing international shift toward people-centered policies (Baluev, Kazakov, Rykhtik, Ulmayeva, & Ustinkin, 2017). Yet, in the Mediterranean, this shift remains more rhetorical than practical, as evidenced by ongoing deaths at sea and the

criminalization of those seeking refuge. Human security includes fulfilling material needs and enabling participation in society without obstruction by state policies (Baluev, Kazakov, Rykhtik, Ulmayeva, & Ustinkin, 2017). For the Mediterranean migrants, restrictive asylum procedures and pushback practices severely limit their ability to live with dignity, revealing a stark disconnect between policy commitments and reality on the ground. Lastly, both human security and comprehensive security include political, economic, social, and environmental threats (Baluev, Kazakov, Rykhtik, Ulmayeva, & Ustinkin, 2017). Addressing the illegal migrant crisis between Türkiye and Greece requires such a multifaceted approach, recognizing that people do not risk their lives at sea unless all other avenues for security have been denied.

Over the past five years, Greece has experienced a significant rise in the number of illegal migrants arriving from Syria and other conflict-affected countries. This increase is largely driven by ongoing instability and humanitarian crises in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa. From 2022 to 2023, sea arrivals to Greece saw a dramatic jump, rising from 12,758 in 2022 to 41,561 in 2023. This surge not only reflects the worsening conditions in the migrants' home countries but also underscores the mounting pressure on Greece as a primary gateway into the European Union (Operations Data Portal UNHCR, 2025). On the other hand, despite the rising number of migrants, their journey along the Mediterranean Sea Route remains perilous and fraught with danger. In 2022, a total of 343 individuals were reported as lost or missing, while this number significantly increased to 799 in 2023, corresponding with the surge in migrant arrivals during that year. As of 2024, the number of lost and missing individuals stands at 125, illustrating the continued risks faced by migrants attempting to cross this treacherous route in search of safety and stability.

The conflict forced millions of Syrians to leave their homes and seek refuge in Türkiye, which, from the outset, demonstrated a willingness to receive Syrian refugees. However, many of these refugees intended to reach Europe, leading to a sharp rise in irregular crossings from Türkiye to Greece, and subsequently from Greece to other parts of Europe. Greece, already struggling with its own economic recession, was unprepared to handle the influx and quickly became overwhelmed by the growing number of migrants (Fo, 2023). Millions of Syrians fled to Türkiye during the conflict, but many intended to reach Europe, leading to a surge in irregular migration through Greece, which struggled to manage the influx due to its ongoing economic crisis.

In March 2016, EU and Turkish leaders agreed to tackle irregular migration in light of the massive number of migrants travelling through Türkiye. The statement set out a number of principles. The EU remains committed to the implementation of the statement and continues to support Syrian refugees through the facility for refugees in Türkiye. Refugees in Türkiye receive aid from the EU to improve their living conditions. The EU facility for refugees in Türkiye, which manages a total of €6 billion in funding, provides a joint coordination mechanism that aims to ensure that the needs of refugees and host communities in Türkiye are addressed in a comprehensive manner (European Council, 2024). The 2016 EU–Türkiye Statement reflects a strategic effort to manage irregular migration through financial aid and cooperation, helping improve refugee conditions in Türkiye. However, it also raises concerns about the EU outsourcing its responsibilities and the long-term sustainability of such an approach.

## **METHOD**

A research library is an institution that houses an extensive collection of scholarly works, expert analyses, original archival materials, and a wide selection of both fiction and non-fiction literature across diverse subjects. While academic research libraries are commonly associated with universities, this is not always the case. Some of the most prestigious academic libraries in the world include the Harvard University Library, the University of Toronto Library, Yale University's Beinecke Library, and the Bodleian and Magdalen Libraries at Oxford University. (Hudzon, Burhanuddin, & Seniwati, 2025). Research libraries are essential to advancing scientific progress, as they offer access to high-quality scholarly resources. Although often connected to universities, these libraries can also operate independently while maintaining their important role.

Library information systems are crucial for libraries because they provide access to a wide range of knowledge. These systems may include searchable academic journals and abstracts, as well as various other content types such as notes, recordings, documents, and images. Some databases may only offer citation information without granting full-text access to the materials (Linda Hall Library, 2023). Library databases serve as the foundation of research libraries, enabling users to efficiently search and access a wide range of information sources. By offering diverse types of content (both full-text and citation references) these databases support thorough and comprehensive research for scholars and students alike.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

From 2022 to 2024, irregular migration between Greece and Türkiye has remained a deeply politicized and humanitarian issue, shaped by shifting border policies, diplomatic tensions, and evolving migration routes. According to Frontex (2024), the Eastern Mediterranean route (which includes movements between Türkiye and Greece) saw 41,561 illegal border crossings in 2022, rising to 59,544 in 2023, a 43% increase from the previous year (FRONTEX, 2024). Most migrants originated from Afghanistan, Syria, and sub-Saharan Africa, with Türkiye acting as a major transit hub for those attempting to reach the European Union via the Aegean Sea or the Evros land border.

The illegal migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, particularly between Greece and Türkiye, has remained a critical humanitarian, political, and security issue over the past three years. Both countries serve as pivotal points along the Eastern Mediterranean migration route, with migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia attempting dangerous sea crossings in search of asylum, protection, or better economic opportunities in Europe. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), approximately 42,000 irregular migrants entered Europe through Mediterranean routes in 2023, with 14,576 arriving via the Eastern Mediterranean route, primarily involving Türkiye and Greece (International Organization for Migration, 2025). This number reflects a notable increase from previous years, demonstrating how instability in origin countries and limited legal migration pathways continue to drive dangerous sea journeys.

Moreover, the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum recorded over 15,000 illegal border crossings in 2023 via land and sea, the majority of which involved migrants entering from Türkiye (MedMA, 2025). This shows that despite fortified border controls and stricter EU policies, the route remains active and dangerous. These data points not only validate the magnitude of the crisis but also expose systemic inefficiencies in current deterrence strategies. Türkiye, as both a transit and host country, continues to grapple with managing irregular migration. As of early 2024, over 12,000 irregular migrants were apprehended at the Türkiye-EU border, particularly in Edirne and along the Aegean coast (Daily Sabah, 2024). Türkiye also regularly rescues migrants pushed back from Greek waters, an issue it claims reflects violations of international law by Greece. For example, in January 2024, 25 migrants were rescued

by the Turkish Coast Guard after allegedly being pushed into Turkish waters by Greece (Dincel & Akkir, 2024). This highlights not only the humanitarian risks involved but also the growing mistrust between the two nations.

On the other side, Greece has been widely criticized for systematic pushbacks, the illegal practice of returning migrants without allowing them to apply for asylum. A report by the Council of Europe and Human Rights Watch (2024) revealed persistent allegations of migrants being abandoned at sea or forced back into Turkish waters by Greek authorities (Blackburn, 2025; Amnesty International, 2021). Greek officials deny these claims, but the consistency of survivor testimonies, videos, and third-party verification has added credibility to the accusations (Gatopoulos, 2025; Reuters, 2024). The repeated allegations of pushbacks by Greek authorities highlight serious violations of international asylum law and human rights standards. While Greek officials deny wrongdoing, the growing body of evidence (including testimonies, videos, and independent reports) raises grave concerns about accountability and the EU's role in upholding its legal and moral obligations.

These actions reflect a deeper crisis of legal compliance and border securitization. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has noted that Greece's practice of designating Türkiye as a "safe third country" to deny asylum claims further complicates the legal protections migrants are supposed to receive (ECRE, 2023). Many migrants are returned to Türkiye under this legal fiction, despite the fact that Türkiye's asylum system itself faces serious capacity and rights challenges (AIDA, 2024). These procedural obstacles increase the risk of refoulement, returning individuals to places where they may face harm.

Moreover, smuggling networks operating between Turkish and Greek islands continue to endanger lives. The Migration Policy Institute (2023) highlights that smugglers often use unsafe rubber dinghies, sometimes overloading them with more than 40 migrants, leading to frequent maritime fatalities (Baykal & Özdemir, 2024). The BBC (2024) reported that in some cases, Greek authorities have allegedly abandoned migrants on life rafts without engines, leaving them adrift in the open sea, a practice widely condemned by human rights groups (Smith & Steele, 2024). The ongoing operations of smuggling networks and the reported abandonment of migrants at sea expose the deadly consequences of inadequate and harsh border management. These practices not only put countless lives at risk but also reflect the failure of both

origin and destination countries to provide safe and legal pathways for migration, ultimately fueling a cycle of exploitation and human rights abuses.

Despite the grim realities, cooperation is not entirely absent. In late 2023, Greek officials publicly praised Türkiye for a more constructive stance on migration, referring to it as a “U-turn” in policy (Psaropoulos, 2023). This moment of diplomacy demonstrates the possibility of joint migration management, though such efforts remain rare and fragile. Still, it raises the hope that regional migration governance can move beyond blame games toward shared responsibility. Greece has continued to prioritize securing its borders by expanding physical infrastructure and enhancing surveillance systems. The extension of the Evros border fence and the installation of advanced monitoring technologies like thermal cameras and drones were major initiatives aimed at deterring irregular crossings from Türkiye (Nikolova, 2024). This approach shows that Greece is heavily focused on border defense as a national security strategy, but it may risk over-militarizing humanitarian issues.

In parallel, Greece signed bilateral agreements with countries like Bangladesh and Egypt to facilitate the return of irregular migrants, while working with Frontex to enhance voluntary return mechanisms (Ministry of Migration & Asylum of Hellenic Republic, 2022). These partnerships aim to ease pressure on Greece’s asylum system, but they also raise concerns about the conditions to which returnees are sent, especially if the receiving countries lack protection mechanisms. However, one of the most controversial actions by Greece has been the repeated use of pushbacks at sea and land borders. In 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Greece’s systematic expulsions of migrants without due process were in direct violation of human rights law (Strasbourg, 2025). This decision reaffirms the urgent need for Greece to align its border practices with international legal standards, especially regarding the right to seek asylum.

Türkiye has also taken a firm stance on irregular migration by intercepting thousands of migrants attempting to cross into Greece. In 2024, Turkish authorities reported stopping over 12,000 irregular migrants at the EU border (Daily Sabah, 2024). This action reflects Türkiye’s intent to present itself as a reliable EU partner, but it also underscores how the country serves as both a migration hub and a gatekeeper, often under pressure from Europe. Operational cooperation between Türkiye and Greece has seen improvement, with the two nations holding joint coast guard meetings for the first time in five years in late 2024 (AP News, 2024). This renewed engagement

demonstrates that despite political tensions, shared security interests can foster collaboration. Still, such cooperation must also be anchored in shared humanitarian principles, not just mutual deterrence goals. These efforts continue to fall within the broader framework of the EU-Turkey Statement, signed in 2016, which outlines Türkiye's role in stemming migration flows in exchange for EU financial support (European Parliament, 2025). While this agreement has stabilized migration numbers to some extent, critics argue it externalizes the EU's asylum responsibilities onto a third country with its own migration challenges.

Nonetheless, Türkiye has strategically used its leverage in this agreement, at times threatening to suspend cooperation to gain political or financial concessions from the EU (Kılıç & Bayram, 2021). This indicates that migration management in the region is not just a humanitarian matter but also a complex geopolitical bargaining tool. On the Greek side, there's also growing criticism regarding the use of inadmissibility decisions that deem Türkiye a "safe third country" for returns. However, reports suggest that many migrants sent back to Türkiye face harsh conditions, including arbitrary detention and the risk of chain deportations (ECRE, 2023). This challenges the legal and ethical grounds of Greece's return policies and calls for stronger safeguards.

Meanwhile, Türkiye itself has faced scrutiny for its treatment of non-Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, particularly regarding the limited legal protections and reports of forced deportations (İÇDUYGU & Aksel, 2012). Although Türkiye hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally, its uneven protection standards highlight the limits of relying on it as a primary destination or buffer zone for migration. Finally, analysts emphasize that Türkiye's migration policy is shaped as much by domestic security concerns as by its external relations with the EU (Baykal & Özdemir, 2024). This duality reveals the fragile balance between humanitarian responsibility and political calculus in migration governance, raising the question of whether current strategies truly address root causes or merely manage symptoms.

## **CONCLUSION**

The irregular migration crisis between Türkiye and Greece represents a complex intersection of humanitarian urgency, regional insecurity, and geopolitical negotiation. As demonstrated by the steady increase in migrant flows from 2022 to 2024, particularly along the Eastern Mediterranean route, this issue continues to challenge not

only the national capacities of Türkiye and Greece but also the cohesion and legal consistency of broader European Union migration policy.

Through the lens of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), the migration dynamic between these two nations is more than a bilateral issue, it is embedded within a regional structure of interdependence, threat perception, and overlapping vulnerabilities. Türkiye and Greece, due to their geographic proximity and strategic positioning, form part of a tightly linked regional security complex, where migratory pressures are perceived not only as humanitarian challenges but also as national security threats. Yet, this securitized approach has proven insufficient in resolving the deep-rooted drivers of migration and has often resulted in the reinforcement of borders over the protection of people.

On the other hand, the Human Security Framework offers a more holistic and people-centered alternative to address the Mediterranean migration crisis. It emphasizes the dignity, rights, and existential needs of individuals, particularly migrants and refugees who are frequently subjected to dangerous journeys, exploitation, and legal ambiguities. As highlighted in numerous reports, both Türkiye and Greece have fallen short in fully embracing this framework. Systematic pushbacks by Greek authorities, limited legal protections in Türkiye, and the lack of safe migration alternatives expose migrants to continuous cycles of vulnerability, abuse, and displacement. International obligations under human rights law are often overshadowed by the strategic calculus of border control and political leverage.

The ongoing use of migration as a geopolitical bargaining tool exemplified by Türkiye's leverage under the EU-Türkiye Statement further complicates humanitarian protection. Meanwhile, Greece's reliance on the "safe third country" designation to deny asylum claims, and the use of inadmissibility decisions, undermines the right to seek refuge, often resulting in violations such as refoulement or indefinite limbo for migrants. These practices not only breach international legal standards but also reinforce a policy framework that treats people on the move as threats rather than individuals in need of protection.

Despite intermittent cooperation, such as recent joint coast guard meetings and bilateral return agreements, the prevailing emphasis on deterrence and containment continues to overshadow the necessity for sustainable, rights-based solutions. The failure to ensure safe and legal migration channels, combined with the inadequate

capacity of local systems and fragmented humanitarian responses, has allowed smuggling networks to thrive and migrant fatalities to rise.

Ultimately, resolving the irregular migration crisis between Türkiye and Greece requires a fundamental shift from reactive, security-driven responses to comprehensive strategies rooted in human security and regional cooperation. This includes investing in long-term development in origin countries, strengthening legal migration pathways, upholding international protection norms, and fostering shared responsibility among all actors involved. Only by integrating these approaches can the region move from managing symptoms to addressing the root causes of migration, restoring both security and dignity to one of the most vulnerable populations in the world today.

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