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Bad Deals and Tragic Pacts: The impact of the EU's management of migration through the externalisation of its borders on 'Women on the Move'

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Abstract

In recent years the EU has become increasingly restrictive in its regulation of irregular migration flows despite its outward sustained discourse of safeguarding human lives and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. As part of this restrictive strategy, the EU has invested heavily in the securitisation and the management of migration through the externalisation of its borders. The EU-Turkey Deal struck in 2016 paved the way for further agreements with third countries with poor gender equality and human rights records, such as Libya and Tunisia. This externalisation of migration constitutes an important feature of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum adopted in 2023 with the aim of establishing a common asylum process at EU level. Asylum seekers, particularly girls and women are placed at added risk from these restrictive policies and policies of externalisation, as apart from dangers faced by all asylum seekers, they are at increased risk of human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, and others forms of gender-based violence. Despite offering a short-sighted measure to a complex problem and the adverse humanitarian repercussions and gross human rights violations, particularly on female refugees and asylum seekers, such deals and pacts constitute an integral aspect of the EU's strategic agenda of managing migration through the externalisation of its borders. The article proposes a number of alternative solution-oriented measures which safeguard fundamental human rights and freedoms, in particular the right to asylum for refugee women and girls.

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A Refugee law in crisis

Globally "ethnic tensions, political strife, famine, climate change and terrorism continue to uproot lives…The number of people seeking refuge outside of their home countries or displaced within is higher than ever - and it's women and girls who are suffering the most" (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 2).

Yet, at such time of need, "international refugee law is in crisis" with various nation states relinquishing their obligations to provide protection, more often instead "committed to a pattern of defensive strategies designed to avoid international legal responsibility" (Hathaway & Neve, 1997, p.115–116). The EU-Turkey deal is a case in point.

Indeed, the main objective of the deal was to deter the crossing of third country nationals across EU borders and discourage asylum seeking migration to Europe. Despite its human rights violations and negative repercussions on the well-being of migrants and asylum seekers, particularly on women and vulnerable groups, the EU-Turkey deal remains a distinctive feature of the EU's externalisation of its migration policy as it continues to make agreements and provide funding and other resources to non-EU states, including those with poor human rights records. This coordinated strategy has indeed "unleashed some of the most severe human rights impacts" contributing to a drastic increase in death rates whilst presenting third nations "with more leverage to negotiate their own interests" (Casajuana & Pintus, 2023, p.7).

Half of internally displaced, stateless people and refugees are girls and women (Women for Women International, 2023). Female asylum seekers and migrants are each personally, racially, and culturally diverse. Yet, the feminisation of migration is closely aligned with the feminisation of poverty (Russell, 2014), gender discrimination, and victimisation from life-threatening mental and physical trauma (Setia *et al.*, 2011), and sexual abuse and violence (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021). Thus, in addition to the challenges arising from the migratory experience, they confront additional gender-specific challenges leading to an "added layer of oppression" (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 13). Nonetheless, "their voices are often left out of policies that are designed to protect them" (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 13) resulting in a situation where their needs and realities are often overlooked, and injustices perpetrated. Women and girls are primary victims of the EU-Turkey deal as their human rights, including the fundamental rights to asylum are arbitrary violated. An alternative solution-oriented approach to the EU-Turkey deal thus demands a holistic approach to the well-being of migrant women and girls.

Female integration and wellbeing

"Protection, if carefully designed and delivered, is the critical complement to root causes intervention" (Hathaway & Neve, 1997, p.211). Thus, apart from preventative proactive action to address the pressures of involuntary migration, integration and support initiatives need to be consolidated for those who notwithstanding the externalisation of the EU's migration policy manage to safely arrive within the jurisdiction of the EU. While for all genders, integration is activated through the capacity to exercise one's rights enshrined in international protection, and thus dependent on "legal protection in the process of integration of refugee status determination process" (Jaji, 2009), compared to their male counterparts, female asylum seekers tend to face greater and possibly more complex integration challenges. This is because "it is not only language, culture, access to work and western school systems that present obstacles. Women are traditionally also confronted with additional household and childcare duties. Their challenges are thus twofold" (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021, p.39).

Moreover, given the patriarchal nature of societies in both countries of origin and countries of destination, female migrants are subject to various discriminatory practices, including of a legal and institutional nature on the basis of sex and gender.

Apart from being embedded in non-discriminatory practices, the effectiveness of integration measures largely depend on integrated service provision across all areas of well-being, including health, housing, education, employment, and socio-cultural support and participation. Such constituents of wellbeing are safeguarded under Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which decrees that: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (UN General Assembly, 1948). Yet, female migrants and asylum seekers face various challenges in accessing quality services across all areas, primarily due to issues of accessibility, availability, adequacy and affordability of services. Apart from legal eligibility impediments, barriers might include gender roles and care responsibilities, language and cultural hurdles, inflexible service provision, and lack or limited awareness of available services and their entitlement (De Maio *et al.*, 2017). Another issue which impacts the uptake of entitled services is reliance on informal support networks, rather than access of formal service provision (De Maio *et al.*, 2017). Challenges and barriers tend to be more acute in the uptake of specialist, rather than mainstream services (De Maio *et al.*, 2017). Discriminatory treatment is also a significant challenge for accessing services by female migrants as it is often impacted by institutional forms of racism and patriarchy.

Lacunae in service provision and discriminatory institutionary practices are often justified on the basis of crisis intervention, in the conviction that asylum seeking forms of migration are of a temporary, rather than of a permanent or long-term nature. However, reality shows that a significant proportion of asylum seekers including those who have been granted a temporary protection status will not be able to return to their homes in the immediate future (Lokshin & Olters, 2022). This validates further the need for the provision of effective

high-quality integration policies and services especially for female migrants and asylum seekers who are often "first responders and transfer their experiences directly to their children" (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021, p.39).

Integration entails experiencing a sense of belonging. For this purpose, "safety and security of housing" constitutes a determining factor in asylum seekers' sentiment of "feeling 'at home'" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p.13). Yet, homelessness and housing insecurity and exclusion is a significant reality amongst migrants and asylum seekers, which acts as a major barrier to access other important rights and services.

Home is also intrinsically connected to family relationships and significant others. Family reunion is a significant influencing factor for integration, since it impacts on the opportunities of migrants to rebuild their lives, on social networks, and support structures, which in turn impact all areas of socio-economic and psychological wellbeing. Family separation and barriers to reunion constitute an important contributor to mental health difficulties amongst migrant communities (De Maio *et al.*, 2017). Yet, most EU countries have adopted a resolute restrictive approach to family reunification, despite this being protected under international human rights law. In view of this, the EU needs to consolidate its humanitarian family reunification policies and programs by improving access to reunion through greater flexibility in eligibility criteria, required documentation, concessions and waiving of application and processing fees, and assistance in settlement programmes.

Being physically and psychologically 'healthy' is another important factor for successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Physical and mental trauma often experienced by asylum seekers and refugees increases risks of health difficulties, morbidity, and lowered life expectancy (Setia *et al.*, 2011; UNHCR, 2011). Female refugees and asylum seekers are subject to various health issues, in particular issues relating to maternal wellbeing, chronic diseases including diabetes, hypertension, and cancer, and gender-based violence (Ali *et al.*, 2004; Shaw, 2009), injurious traditional practices (Fathalla *et al.*, 2006; Lawrence & Kearns, 2005), as well as stress-related difficulties (Ohene-Bekoe, 2017). These health issues become augmented through external influences such as lack or limited access to health care, and conditions in detention and refugee camps (Ali *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, access to health care is also impacted by knowledge of existing services (Setia *et al.*, 2011), and long waiting times (Setia *et al.*, 2011) with quality-of-care access best appraised through its uptake (Setia *et al.*, 2011).

Fear and misinformation may also impact access to health (Fathalla *et al.*, 2006; Lawrence & Kearns, 2005), as are language proficiency and cultural beliefs (Ohene-Bekoe, 2017). Indeed, asylum seekers and refugees' health issues are impacted by both proximal factors or daily stressors (such as poverty and social exclusion), and distal factors, characterised by occasional or sporadic events (such as a traumatic event) (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Successful integration thus demands access to "timely, high-quality health care" (Ohene-Bekoe, 2017, p.48).

Education (Akua-Sakyiwah, 2016; Gesemann, 2006), in particular language competency (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009) is another important constituent for integration as it enables understanding about rights and services as well as facilitates employment prospects. Despite that both education and work are guaranteed fundamental rights, female migrants and asylum-seekers tend to face many barriers from officially accessing quality education and employment in the host country (UNICEF, 2017), with various negative repercussions on their wellbeing, as they often end working in the informal economy under precariat conditions and exploitative practices. Training with particular focus on language competency (Namak *et al.*, 2022) and "access to safe and lawful work" including in the digital economy (Nicolle, 2022), supports migrants and asylum seekers to "contribute to the needs of their family, community and the country in which they reside" and "become an economic and social boon to their host countries" (UNICEF, 2017, p.3). These opportunities are particularly warranted for female migrants, as apart from the fact that "gender discrimination closes doors or leads to lower pay" (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 20), gendered work areas and environments such as domestic work, care work and sex work are subject to greater risk and exploitative practices, including isolation, lack of health and safety standards, gender pay gaps and vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse. The integration of female asylum seekers and refugees in quality work not only impacts their wellbeing and helps to "close gaps in poverty, gender equality, and inclusive work" but also sustains "economies on a local and global scale" (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 20) as annually they conceivably contribute to $1.4 trillion to the global GDP (Women for Women International, 2023, para. 18).

Such measures which impact both the affective and functional dimensions (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2018) should help to instil a sense of connectedness and belonging which is pivotal for integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Cheung & Phillimore 2017). The development and implementation of any integration and support initiatives for female asylum seekers and migrants need to be embedded within a trauma sensitive and informed approach. As earlier recalled, violence and abuse against female asylum seekers is "widespread and systematic" (Amnesty International, 2021) and "spatially and temporally complex" (Pertek *et al.*, p. 25) as it traverses across all stages of the migratory experience. Indeed, as "trauma could occur pre-conflict, during conflict, in flight and in refuge" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p. 25), it needs to be "conceptualised as an ongoing and multi-faceted experience" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). Such traumatic experience characterised by dehumanizing and discriminatory treatment includes sexual and gender-based violence, kidnapping and abduction for ransom, human trafficking, child marriage and physical and sexual violence and slavery (Amnesty International, 2021; Casajuana & Pintus, 2023, p.29). The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence is rampant, as one fifth of all displaced women and refugees are subject to such forms of violence (Vu *et al.*, 2014), with another study reporting a prevalence of up to 69.3% of female migrants (as compared to

up to 28.6% of males) (Keygnaert & Guieu, 2015). Despite the varied and multiple physical, psychological, emotional and social aftermaths in both the short and long term (Tavara, 2006), "affecting overall wellbeing" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p. 11), yet it remains the case that "mainstream integration scholarship" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p.11) and services do not give adequate attention to sexual and gender-based violence, with the result that many migrant survivors slip through the cracks of the support system. Effective integration work thus demands building the capacity of frontline workers to recognize trauma and abuse and be empowered to support victims (Mwenyango, 2023).

Heterogeneity and Intersectionality

Though as a population, female migrant and asylum seekers uphold specific needs due to their gendered realities, their heterogeneity leads to "uniqueness in individual circumstances, experiences and opportunities" (Jaji, 2009, p. 223). Recognition is also made of the individualised nature and complexity of migration trajectories, as well as its dynamic, non-linear and non-unidirectional movement from countries of origin to countries of destination (Snel *et al.*, 2021).

Intersectionality acknowledges the interdependence of the "various factors that influence the process of integration" (Jaji, 2009, p.219), including the legal, political, economic, social, and cultural realms. Due recognition of this interdependence and interconnectedness between these multiple dimensions is pivotal for the adoption of "a holistic approach" to integration (Jaji, 2009, p.219). Moreover, an intersectional approach appreciates that "the objective aspects of integration are mediated by subjective factors" that shape the different realities and experiences of women (Jaji, 2009, p.230). It also acknowledges that these intersectionalities can exacerbate existing difficulties and challenges. For example, for female asylum seekers, sexual and gender-based violence intersects with the vulnerability arising from their refugee status as this intensifies victimisation and leaves limited avenues for redress. As a result, such violence becomes particularly salient because of "its targeted nature" (Jaji, 2009, p. viii).

An additional challenge with existing policy development and implementation frameworks is that most service provision is developed within a crisis intervention and 'temporary' protection approach with little focus and opportunities for sincere integration efforts. Yet, the prolonged crisis in the country of origin and protracted statuses of displacement, result in many asylum seekers living in limbo - "denied the right to integrate in the asylum state, yet are unlikely to be restored to meaningful membership in their home community" through successful voluntary repatriation (Hathaway & Neve, 1997, p.130–131). This situation jeopardises asylum seekers' psychosocial needs and wellbeing, leading to "uncertainty and despair" as they "are unable to return home and yet are ineligible for permanent membership in their asylum state" (Hathaway & Neve, 1997, p.132).

Another main failure of existing policy frameworks is intrinsically linked to their governance mechanisms, characterised by top-down interest driven approaches. Despite EU discourse about participation, engagement and ownership by those most affected, migrants and asylum seekers' engagement needs to "move away from symbolism and tokenism" (Ramazani, 2023, p.28) towards sincere and "meaningful participation, efforts to move toward co-design, ownership, and eventual transfers of decision-making power" (Ramazani, 2023, p.28). Meaningful and sincere engagement of diverse groups of migrants and asylum seekers in governance mechanisms and proceedings would ensure that their heterogeneity, experiential knowledge, and expertise is acknowledged and reflected in policy making processes and service provision.

Embodied inquiry

As the EU-Turkey Deal and the externalisation of migration has become an established feature of EU policy despite its negative human rights and humanitarian repercussions, it is imperative that further analysis is sustained on the impact that such praxis has on both the individual and structural level.

In particular, examination is needed on how the 'new' EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (European Commission, 2023) will impact the EU-Turkey deal given the new 'burden-sharing' mechanism across EU countries. This analysis needs to specifically consider a gender impact assessment of the repercussions of such agreements. Its encapsulation of the voices and experiences of female migrants and asylum seekers is pivotal to capture and gain insight of its impact on the embodied realities on migrant's lives.

In addition to being developed and implemented in a gender responsive and culturally appropriate manner, strategies need to build on evidence-based practices, assessment of best practices, and 'strengths-based' models of service delivery (De Maio *et al.*, 2017, p.46) whilst addressing existing gaps in relation to services and programs. In addition, it is pivotal that sensitivity to intersectional issues are addressed "to understand the differences in needs, outcomes and experiences of refugees of all genders and ages regardless of their background" (Pertek *et al.*, 2018, p. 27). This demands fostering collaborative relationships with migrant and refugee communities in order to better understand the needs and realities of female migrants.

While a wider knowledge-base helps to further appraise migratory experiences, the evidence to inform integration policies, services and programs for female asylum seekers and migrants is clear and extant. It points not only to personal circumstances which may lead to vulnerabilities and victimisation, but in particular to structural deficiencies in both countries of origin and host communities. Such structural deficiencies which speak of discrimination, inequalities, and oppressive and exploitative practices, including institutionalised racism and sexism, continue to shape the realities for female asylum seekers and migrants. This thus demands the transformation of discourse and evidence into concrete action.

The new pact on migration and asylum: Another tragic pact for women on the move

Despite EU discourse of human rights, rule of law and solidarity, many lives are still tragically lost in dangerous

migratory processes across the Mediterranean Sea whilst seeking safety, protection, and a better quality of life into Europe. Many other migrants and asylum seekers face detention, inhumane and degrading treatment, exploitation by smugglers and human traffickers, and repatriation and pushbacks by governments. For those who make it into Europe, the challenges are far from over as they continue to face exclusion, ongoing discrimination, racism, hate crime, and exploitative practices.

Unfortunately, the "international refugee protection system serves fewer and fewer people, less and less well, as time goes on" (Hathaway & Neve, 1997, p.137). The New Pact on Migration and Asylum (hereafter referred as the Pact) reached on 20th December 2023 continues this austerity trend, and whilst "hailed in Brussels as a great European success, nevertheless, leaves unresolved some problematic aspects" (De Petris, 2023, para. 4).

The original scope of the Pact was that of addressing the fragmented, isolated, and often ad hoc initiatives to respond to migration flows to the EU by individual Member States. The Pact aimed to redress this problem of individuated state action by providing a joint EU response binding all Member States to act in solidarity with those states on the external European border such as Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain by 'sharing the burden' of migration. The Pact thus aimed at regulating primarily the EU 'internal dimension' of migration, whilst complementing its 'external dimension' of migration management.

The Pact endorsed five main measures, relating to the Screening Regulation[1], which establishes a pre-entry method for the expeditious profiling of migrants and asylum seekers; a revised Eurodac Regulation to prevent different requests under the same name; a revised Asylum Procedures Regulation to enable a more rapid border procedure (up to 12 weeks) along with the customary lengthier asylum procedure; the introduction of the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation which introduces 'compulsory solidarity' on a flexible and discretionary basis to support other EU countries affected by large migratory flows[2]; and the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation which provides for the application of stricter migration management rules (such as longer detention periods) in cases of massive asylum flows.

The Pact has been severely criticised for entrenching "outdated ideas on how to deal with migration and fail to take into account the reality at the EU's borders both on the ground and in the sea" whilst undermining "the right to asylum, international law and human rights" (Lamberts, 2023, para 3).

While making some strides in solidarity among member states for 'burden' sharing, however the 'compulsory' yet flexible and voluntary nature of this solidarity mechanism "seems almost an oxymoron" (De Petris, 2023, para. 22). Moreover, enabling countries to pay a monetary contribution instead of migrant relocation, neither helps to "create a real network of solidarity within the Union" (De Petris, 2023, para. 22), nor addresses the challenges faced by those countries which receive large concentrations of migrants.

The Pact has also been severely criticised for its deficient protection of the fundamental right of asylum, due to its introduction of the use of an accelerated procedure for examining asylum applications. Moreover, being primarily concerned with border and migration management, the Pact sustains the securitization of migration wherein the humanitarian aspects of migration is "negotiated against pre-entry screenings of individuals, reception and resettlement procedures" on the grounds of security issues (Standke-Erdmann, 2021, pg.20).

In terms of the concerns raised on the EU-Turkey deal, a main failure of the pact is that by strengthening existing border management actors, it will "further progress" the externalization of migration, leading to "(re)produce forms of discrimination and violence, as it will be increasingly complicated to hold actors accountable for human rights violations or systemic discriminatory behaviour" (Standke-Erdmann, 2021, p.20). While focussing on the EU internal dimension, the Pact consolidates the externalisation of migration management through agreements and economic support with third countries outside the EU with shady track record of fundamental rights. This will thus see the sustained systematic detention, violence and abuse of migrants with particular damaging impact on female migrants and vulnerable groups.

Indeed, the Pact has been criticised for its reproduction of gendered, racialized, and ableist stereotyping of migrants (Standke-Erdmann, 2021) "which leave no room for people's agency and the adaptation to individual situations and needs" (Standke-Erdmann, 2021, p.19). Moreover, the pact fails to adopt an intersectional approach "at a normative, policy or institutional level" or within its "suggested measures and procedures" (Standke-Erdmann, 2021, p.19).

Due to these issues, the agreement has been criticised for offering "a pact at all costs that undermines the credibility of the EU" (De Petris, 2023, para. 20) and departs from its "principles and values of which it claims to be the proud defender" (De Petris, 2023, para. 25).

The pact will thus further endanger the lives and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees particularly of female migrants and other vulnerable groups through sustaining systematic

[1] Introducing information gathering (including age, nationality, fingerprints and facial image, health and security checks) and a pre-entry process for a more expeditious profiling of migrants and asylum seekers.

[2] States can choose between three interventions: i) relocating asylum seekers, ii) paying a €20,000 contribution for each asylum seeker refused relocation, or iii) financing operational support.

detention in third countries with poor human rights records, undermining procedural standards and safeguards of asylum procedures, and sustaining the outsourcing of migration management to third countries without adequate monitoring and scrutiny. Indeed, "funding autocrats and militias to handle migration management without any democratic scrutiny or fundamental rights is a recipe for abuses and attacks against people's liberties" (Greens/EFA, n.d., para.32).

The Pact indeed goes two steps back from the agreements made in the 'Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration' (UN, 2018) which also aspired towards a common approach to international migration. The global compact, comprising 23 objectives for the improvement of migration management in nations of origin, transit and destination and at local, national, regional and global levels, sought to a) mitigate against adverse factors that inhibit local sustainable livelihoods; b) reduce risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrants throughout the migration experiences within a human rights and supportive framework; c) recognize the, economic, social, environmental and demographic transformations that may impact and result from migration; and; d) develop conducive environments to enable the enrichment of societies through migration. The compact also adopted a gender responsive and gender mainstreamed approach by emphasizing gender equality and female empowerment whilst "recognizing their independence, agency and leadership in order to move away from addressing migrant women primarily through a lens of victimhood" (Lochan *et al.*, 2019, p.36). Despite these noble objectives underlining a human rights approach and cooperation and solidarity, being non-legally binding, the compact leaves migrant protection in the hands of state sovereignty.

Notwithstanding various calls by the humanitarian global community for respect for international law and protection of fundamental rights, "solidarity now means border surveillance within the EU, relocation is not prioritised and there are no specific solidarity procedures for search and rescue disembarkation" (Lamberts, 2023, para 5).

While the initial scope of legal and policy instruments was that of ensuring that refugee protection couldn't be left to political discretion and humanitarian philanthropy, it is now becoming increasingly acceptable that supranational institutions themselves are enabled to act inhumanely outside the rubric of international law. Indeed, "instead of seeking humane and practical solutions to manage migration in an orderly and safe way, EU Member States have been pursuing dangerous policies that are turning the Mediterranean into a graveyard" (Lamberts, 2023, para 3).

Given Turkey's history of sustained violations of human rights, including the poor protection of women's liberties, Turkey and any other countries where fundamental human rights are not guaranteed should not be considered as legitimate partners in the humanitarian 'management' of migration. It is imperative that such deals are relinquished, and true alternatives established that offer safe passages to Europe for asylum seekers, in full protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The EU has and continues to fail from providing safe routes for humanitarian migration. At the same time, it also fails from taking proactive action to prevent migration by addressing its root causes. As acknowledged by the UNHCR (1995, p. 43), "refugee movements are not inevitable, but can be averted if action is taken to reduce or remove the threats which force people to leave their own country and seek sanctuary elsewhere." This demands individual and collective state action to address the issue through the pursuance of political, economic, and humanitarian agendas (UNHCR, 1995).

"Migration is a manifestation of inequality. However, its structural causes in a capitalist, globalised world are not analysed" (Dağdelen, 2018, para. 18), acknowledged, let alone addressed. Indeed, current practices as evident from the EU Turkey Deal and the New Pact for Migration continue to consolidate this structural inequality as migration, framed within the false discourse of human rights becomes another tool for the control and oppression of the rich and powerful over the poor and destitute.

The EU needs to adopt a more proactive approach towards the prevention of involuntary migration, such as those arising from wars and conflicts and violations of human rights and persecution. It also needs to take a more proactive approach to address migratory processes arising from economic and environmental vulnerabilities in countries with high levels of net migration.

This however demands a new economic and political order. It demands a sustained commitment to end the armaments industry and its exports, which fuels wars and conflict, and which profits from the 'border militarization' against irregular migration (de Vries, 2022). It indeed demands recognition that displacement does not take place in a vacuum but is often

> the consequence of decisions taken by powerful individuals and institutions, both within and outside of the countries which actually produce refugees. Wars do not start unless an army is ordered into action… Ethnic cleansing only takes place when political leaders and their supporters conclude that it is in their interest to organize such expulsions. (UNHCR, 1995)

Apart from relinquishing its vested interests in the production and sales of weapons of war, the EU can play a pivotal role as an international mediator for peace - "through its political and financial weight and its comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and resolution, involving CFSP/ESDP and Community instruments." It is indeed "in an excellent position to provide incentives to the conflict parties and can rely on its wide field presence" (Council of the European Union, 2009, p.4). Yet, as evident from the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory and the genocide of people in Gaza, the EU often shuns away from taking such preventative proactive humanitarian action.

Such proactive action also demands a commitment to stop the exploitative transfer of resources from south to north – which wholly benefit the North but continues to oppress

and impede the South from autonomous development. Whilst the exploitation of the South through the uptake of human resources results in brain-drain which "paralyses economic development" (Dağdelen, 2018, para. 12), it benefits countries of destination through more extensive labour power – acting as a reserve army of labour, to keep wages low and work precarious. Indeed, it is estimated that up to 50 per cent of those academically educated emigrate from the South (Dağdelen, 2018). Yet, despite these benefits of migration to the host countries, many "Member States continue to misuse the issue as a scapegoat for societal challenges" (Greens/EFA, n.d., para.2). A new economic model demands a reevaluation of current practices of free trade agreements (Dağdelen, 2018) which sustain 'Open Trade', yet 'Closed Borders' for immigration (Peters, 2015). Proactive measures also entail supporting countries to overcome long-term developmental challenges in line with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (Casajuana & Pintus, 2023, p.53).

The EU is in dire need of adopting a migration policy which "treats people seeking safety with dignity…. enables safe passage, upholds human rights law and facilitates successful integration" (Greens/EFA, n.d., para.2). It demands a shift from current mainstream discourses of migration as an issue of national security towards one of human security, which does not disregard and perpetuate the "insecurity of the people facing persecution in the country of origin or discrimination in their new country or even dying in transit" (Estevens, 2018, p.19). Such migration policy demands an 'integrated' approach, simultaneously tackling the violations of human rights and freedoms, the resolution of conflicts, monetary and organisational development, and environmental protection in a systematic and simultaneous manner (UNHCR, 1995). It also needs to be set within the wider battle against the feminization of poverty, and the struggle for the full appreciation of diversity and women' equality and liberation everywhere. Moreover, it has to be embedded within wider struggles for social, economic and environmental justice, on both the micro personal level and the structural global north-south divide. Conversely, the EU's management of migration through its sustained policy of the externalisation of its borders will only lead to additional 'Bad Deals' and 'Tragic Pacts' for 'Women on the Move'.

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Valeria Bello
Ramón Llull University, Barcelona, Spain

The topic that the article initially proposes is very relevant and would be a very good contribution to the literature on migration and women's insecurities. However, the work would need revision in the way it is developed. This is mostly due to the fact that what the article promises in the abstract and in the introduction is not discussed in-depth in the following section. The article very relevantly starts with considering that the EU-Turkey Deal paved the way for further agreements with third countries and this exposes women migrants to further vulnerabilities due to restrictive policies in those countries, adding additional risks of abuses and gender-based violence. However, after the introduction, which is indeed very well written and interesting, the following section titled "female integration and wellbeing" does not discuss those added vulnerabilities in third countries to which the EU externalized migration management, but rather the section describes more generally the challenges that women could experience in every destination country, even in the EU. In itself, this section is also well written and well discussed but it does not deal with the topic suggested in the very beginning. Here, the author should discuss what are the added vulnerabilities that women face in these third countries where the EU has extended the externalization of migration, such as Libya and Tunisia, as said in the abstract.

The section on intersectionality and the following one on embodied enquiry are crucial for the analysis and I would suggest referring to these issues more transversally in the article.

Also, in the abstract and in the last section, it is written that the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum was adopted in 2023, but it has indeed been adopted by the EU Parliament and the European Council in 2024. In December 2022 and in December 2023 there were provisional agreements between the EU Member States on different regulations and directives that form the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the EU Commission in 2022. Also, the pact's title is not "New Pact on Migration and Asylum" but it is "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum". So, it would be fine to say the new "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum" but not the "New Pact on Migration and Asylum", because it is not its title and secondly, there has never been a previous one signed. So, more attention to such details is indispensable if the "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum" is to be included in the analysis.

The relative section on the EU Pact also presents several paragraphs that start with the same sentence "The Pact has been severely criticised". I would advise to formulate the sentences differently, using synonyms, in order to have a more elegant linguistic style.
Another element to be highlighted is the uneven distribution of the analysis: the last section on the "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum" is much longer than the previous ones, unevenly skewing the analysis on the Pact itself and moving the attention away from the topic initially proposed.

In addition to this, the argument that the EU-Turkey deal has paved the way for additional externalization of migration is not proved in any of the previous sections with a concrete analysis. It therefore remains an argument that the article fails to develop in the analysis.

The section on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum also reads as a literature review and not as a contribution to the literature. It is not adding any specific original analysis that would contribute to the current literature.

I would suggest the following changes:
1) To revise the section on female integration and wellbeing and include an in-depth discussion of what are the added vulnerabilities entailed for women by those pacts mentioned in the abstract.
2) To prove the argument that the EU-Turkey deal paved the way for further agreements.
3) To include more connection throughout the paper and particularly in the analysis of the specific case studies on the issue of intersectionality and embodied inquiry.
4) To revise the section on the EU Pact so as to avoid that it reads only like a review of current existing literature on it and add a specific examination of some parts of the Pacts in line with what is suggested previously in the article, such as the issues of heterogeneity, intersectionality and the embodied inquiry.

Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
No

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
No

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Migration and Security; Intersectionality; Inclusion; Prejudice; Racism.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 31 October 2024

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Christian Kaunert
University of South Wales, Pontypridd, Wales, UK

Bad Deals and Tragic Pacts: The impact of the EU's management of migration through the externalization of its borders on 'Women on the Move

Major Revisions

This could become a fascinating piece given that the author demonstrates empirical and theoretical knowledge on the topic of EU migration management, which could eventually lead to a future publication. However, I believe there are some shortcomings that, in my view, would prevent outright approval. Therefore, I recommend requesting major revisions considering my comments below.

Firstly, I appreciate the topic of the article. Indeed, this subject is under-researched and should be further explored in future articles. The author has uncovered something exciting and indeed under-researched.

There are some shortcomings that need addressing:

- the article needs rebalancing: at present, too much space is dedicated to minute points of the empirical dataset at various points in the article, to the detriment of bringing in conceptual analysis. In this process, the author's own aims become hidden. The article should maintain a tighter focus on its primary aim.
- The introduction is long-winded at the beginning and should state the main aim more swiftly. Why is this topic interesting, despite some criticisms one could raise? What contributions does this article make? Subsequently, the author should clarify the benefits of his/her approach.
- The methodology could be explained more easily to non-specialists regarding that approach. What methodology has the author employed to support the article's claims? More methodological clarity is needed.
- The author must engage more with the EU asylum and migration literature, which would significantly strengthen the article.
- Specifically, there is an issue of under-referencing: much has been written about EU asylum and immigration policy, and the article does not articulate its contribution through the existing literature on this topic. Concretely, the following authors need to be included:
    - El-Enany, N. (2008) [Ref 1]
    - Geddes, A. (2008) [Ref 2]
    - Guiraudon, V. (2003) [Ref 3]

- Kaunert, C. (2009) [Ref 4]
- Kaunert, C. (2010) [Ref 5]
- Kaunert C. & S. Léonard (2012): [Ref 6]
- [Ref 7]
- Léonard S. & C. Kaunert (2019): [Ref 8]
- Léonard S. & C. Kaunert (2020): [Ref 9]
- Levy, C. (2010) [Ref 10]

In addition, there is also a minor point to be revised: the article's overall argument could be signposted more clearly to ensure the reader understands the significance of the points raised in the article.

Nonetheless, despite some criticisms, the article could and should be revised along the points mentioned above. I encourage the author to work on this. Congratulations on finding such an interesting topic! I very much enjoyed reading the article!

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Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?

Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
Partly

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: EU asylum and migration

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 15 October 2024

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Stefania Panebianco
University of Catania, Catania, Italy

This paper addresses a relevant issue of EU migration politics and raises interesting questions related to a specific category of irregular migrants: 'women on the move'. The article focuses upon specific risks girls and women are faced with when embarking in such dangerous journeys and suggests the establishment of the right to asylum for refugee women and girls. This reviewer acknowledged the high potential of this article.
The article is clearly policy-oriented and offers a critical review of the existing norms and regulations of a complex policy that - as it stands - does not guarantee women on the move and denies humanitarian treatments. It starts with a criticism of existing international refugee law and its ineffective humanitarian protection of those in need (women in particular) and then critically explores the external dimension of the European migration and asylum policy.
The use of data to strengthen the author's argument is convincing.
What remains less convincing though, is the selection of the EU-Turkey deal as a key example of inhuman and degrading treatment, without providing specific empirical analysis. Moreover, there is a temporal gap in the analyzed documents, passing from the EU-Turkey deal to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. What is less clear in the document selection is the relevance of the gender-issue in the EU externalization of migration management. In the second part of the paper, in fact, considerations on the externalization of EU borders and, more generally, human dignity and

humanitarian concerns put in the shadow the specific focus on 'women on the move'. Nevertheless, the argument is strong and suggests clear paths for further analysis and more effective dimensions of international protection.

Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
Yes

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Mediterranean migration; external dimension of the European migration and asylum policy; EU externalization of migration management

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.