

UNIVERSITY OF PIRAEUS



DEPARTMENT OF MARITIME STUDIES

**‘THE COERCIVE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN
THE 20th CENTURY; POLITICS,
GEOPOLITICS AND THE IMPLICATIONS
ON MARITIME TRANSPORT’**

FRAGKOUDAKIS GEORGIOS

Master's Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Maritime Studies at the University of Piraeus as part
of the requirements for obtaining the Master's Degree in Shipping Management

Piraeus

April 2026

Declaration of Authenticity

I solemnly declare that the thesis has not been written in a manner that defames or slanders any person, that it fully respects personal data, and that it does not constitute intellectual property theft, an act that is punishable by law. This thesis has been checked for authenticity (plagiarism) and the entire thesis does not contain plagiarism to a very large extent, except for definitions, theorems or methods that are applied in the same way in all scientific writings. I also declare that this paper is my intellectual property and represents my personal perspective on the subject. The sources used are listed in detail within the paper with full references to the authors. The supervision of my professor, who played a regulatory role in the proper structuring of the thesis, as well as the university institution, which provided the means to achieve this goal, played a catalytic role in the writing of this thesis. I undertake to submit the thesis. I understand that I am obliged to submit my postgraduate thesis to the Department electronically, while at the same time I recognise that there is the possibility of the scientific community utilising the thesis for the benefit of society.

Three-Member Examination Committee

Supervisor: Galani Katerina

Member: Christodoulou Anastasia

Member: Polemis Dionysios

CONTENTS

Declaration of Authenticity.....	ii
List of Abbreviations.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	v
Περίληψη.....	vi
Summary.....	vii
Chapter 1 — Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose and research questions.....	1
1.2 Methodology.....	3
1.3 Statistical overview, maritime implications and structure of the study.....	5
Chapter 2 — Historical and geopolitical context.....	6
2.1 The Eastern Mediterranean as a geopolitical crossroad.....	6
2.1.1 The Eastern Mediterranean as a hub for trade and migration.....	7
2.1.2 Major forced migrations from 1920 to the present day.....	8
2.1.3 The sea as a dangerous area.....	10
2.1.4 Forced population movements and maritime policy.....	14
2.2 Geopolitical dynamics and implications for maritime transport.....	16
2.2.1 International organisations.....	16
2.2.2 Legal framework and Institutional weaknesses.....	17

Chapter 3 — Institutional and Regulatory Framework.....	18
3.1 International Law and Maritime Conventions.....	18
3.2 Institutional Mechanisms and Oversight.....	20
3.2.1 International Maritime Organisation (IMO).....	20
3.2.2 FRONTEX.....	21
3.2.3 European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA).....	21
3.2.4 UNHCR and IOM.....	22
3.2.5 Conflict between competent institutions.....	22
3.3 Challenges in implementing the framework.....	23
3.3.1 Pushbacks.....	24
3.3.2 FRONTEX.....	24
3.3.3 Imbalance between humanitarianism and security.....	25
Chapter 4 – Economic Impact of the Phenomenon.....	25
4.1 Impact on shipping businesses and trade networks.....	25
4.2 Impact on Ports and the Supply Chain.....	28
4.3 Socio-economic and political impacts.....	30
Chapter 5 — Review and Conclusions.....	32
5.1 Frequency of the phenomenon.....	32
5.2 Institutional and political weaknesses.....	33
Chapter 6 — Proposals for Addressing the Phenomenon.....	35
6.1 Institutional and legal interventions.....	36
6.2 Shipping and operational measures.....	37
6.3 Socio-economic and geopolitical policies.....	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	41

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Title
IMO	International Maritime Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IOM	International Organization for Migration
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
SAR	Search and Rescue
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
SOLAS	Safety of Life at Sea
EU	European Union
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency

List of Figures

	Title	Page
1	Major immigrant routes in the Mediterranean Sea	2
2	Monthly flow of arrivals of refugees and migrants in Greece (2015-2017)	28
3	Disembarkation of immigrants in the organisation by Italian Coastguard	29

List of Tables

No	Title	Page
----	-------	------

1	Overseas migrations to Europe from 2009 until presently	11
2	Number of deaths on overseas passage in the Mediterranean Sea	11
3	Refugees and migrants in Greece per structure and hosting facility (as of 1/8/2017)	26

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία θίγει το ζήτημα των εξαναγκαστικών μετακινήσεων πληθυσμών στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο κατά τον 20ό και 21ο αιώνα, δίνοντας βαρύτητα στο πολιτικό, γεωπολιτικό και ναυτιλιακό επίπεδο. Η ιστορική προσέγγιση αποτυπώνει την μεγάλη συχνότητα του φαινομένου, από τις ανταλλαγές πληθυσμών της δεκαετίας του 1920 μέχρι και τις τελευταίες μετακινήσεις προσφύγων δια θαλάσσης που προέρχονται από συγκρούσεις στη Μέση Ανατολή και την Βόρεια Αφρική. Τα στοιχεία που συγκεντρώθηκαν επισημαίνουν πως οι θαλάσσιες μετακινήσεις δεν αφορούν μόνο την ανθρωπιστική διάσταση του φαινομένου, αλλά αποτελούν και ανασταλτικό παράγοντα στην λειτουργία της ναυτιλιακής επιχειρηματικότητας, των τοπικών κοινωνιών και της γεωπολιτικής ηρεμίας των θαλάσσιων ζωνών.

Το θεσμικό και νομικό πλαίσιο που είναι υπεύθυνο για την έρευνα και διάσωση στη θάλασσα εμφανίζει αξιοσημείωτη ανεπάρκεια. Πιο συγκεκριμένα παραμένει ασαφές ποιο κράτος οφείλει να δεχθεί την αποβίβαση των διασωθέντων αλλά και ο διαχωρισμός των αρμοδιοτήτων ανάμεσα στις χώρες της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης. Την ίδια στιγμή, δεν μπορούν να παραλειφθούν οι πολυσύνθετες επιπτώσεις του φαινομένου που εξετάζεται, οι οποίες αγγίζουν την κοινωνική, οικονομική και πολιτική σκοπιά. Η ανάλυση υπογραμμίζει πως οι μεταναστευτικές-προσφυγικές μετακινήσεις γίνονται αντικείμενο διαπραγματευτικής ισχύος συχνά από κράτη, ενώ οι τοπικές κοινωνίες δέχονται υψηλό φόρτο διαχείρισης στις εγκαταστάσεις τους.

Στο τελευταίο κεφάλαιο προτείνονται μέτρα που βασίζονται σε τρεις άξονες. Αρχικά, είναι απαραίτητο να εφαρμοστούν θεσμικές και νομικές αποφάσεις για τον σχηματισμό οργάνου συντονισμού και σταθερού οργανισμού μετεγκατάστασης εντός της ΕΕ. Επιπρόσθετα, είναι αναγκαίες ναυτιλιακές και επιχειρησιακές κινήσεις όπως η θέσπιση αποζημιώσεων, η εκπαίδευση των ανθρώπων που εργάζονται εντός των πλοίων και η αξιοποίηση τεχνολογικών μέσων. Στον κοινωνικό, οικονομικό και γεωπολιτικό τομέα, πρέπει να μεριμνήσουν οι εμπλεκόμενοι φορείς ώστε να ξεκινήσουν οι διαδικασίες για επενδύσεις στις τοπικές κοινωνίες, προώθηση επαφών με τρίτες χώρες και μέτρα πρόληψης στις χώρες που είναι αφετηρίες εξαναγκασμένων θαλάσσιων μετακινήσεων.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Εξαναγκαστικές μετακινήσεις πληθυσμών· Ανατολική Μεσόγειος· Θαλάσσιες μεταφορές· Έρευνα και διάσωση· Ναυτιλιακή πολιτική

Summary

This paper addresses the issue of forced population movements in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 20th and 21st centuries, focusing on the political, geopolitical and maritime dimensions. The historical approach reflects the high frequency of the phenomenon, from the population exchanges of the 1920s to the latest movements of refugees by sea fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. The data collected indicate that maritime movements are not only humanitarian in nature, but also constitute an obstacle to the functioning of maritime entrepreneurship, local communities and the geopolitical stability of maritime zones.

The institutional and legal framework responsible for search and rescue at sea is seriously inadequate. More specifically, there is a lack of clarity regarding the responsibility for disembarkation and the division of responsibilities between European Union countries. At the same time, the complex implications of the phenomenon under consideration, which touch on social, economic and political aspects, cannot be overlooked. The analysis highlights that migration and refugee movements are often used as a bargaining chip by states, while local communities bear a heavy burden in managing their facilities.

The final chapter proposes measures based on three pillars. Firstly, it is necessary to implement institutional and legal decisions to establish a coordination body and a permanent relocation agency within the EU. In addition, maritime and operational measures are needed, such as the introduction of compensation, training for people working on ships and the use of technological means. In the social, economic and geopolitical spheres, the parties involved must ensure investment in local communities, promote contacts with third countries and take preventive measures in countries that are the starting points for forced sea crossings.

Keywords: Forced migration; Eastern Mediterranean; Maritime transport; Search and rescue (SAR); Shipping policy

Chapter 1 — Introduction

1.1 Purpose and research questions

This master's thesis analyses forced sea crossings in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 20th century and their impact on maritime transport and shipping policy. In this context, the choice of the Eastern Mediterranean attracts the attention of those interested in the subject, as it is a point of great geopolitical importance due to armed conflicts and political interests in general. As a result, maritime areas have become a dangerous exit route for people from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Triandafyllidou 2018; Fargues 2017). This phenomenon has led to signs of a humanitarian crisis, as well as major changes in maritime rules and search and rescue (SAR) practices, continuously readjusting international maritime law and giving a different explanation for it (Papanicolopulu 2016; IMO 2004). During the 20th century, the following cases of coercive movements stood out:

- The flee of Greek Refugees from Smyrna and the Asia Minor coast in the 1920's.
- The compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey imposed by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which resulted in extensive maritime transport of people who had left their homeland.
- The displacements that followed the World Wars and colonial departures in the region.
- The movements resulting from the Arab-Israeli conflicts and the Cyprus crisis (1974), where there were intense incidents of transport and evacuation by sea (Hirschon 2003; Zürcher 2007; Bialasiewicz 2012).

The above events demonstrate that the sea was a place where violence and instability were prevalent to such an extent that shipping had to deal with humanitarian issues as well as broader security issues (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway 2015; Collyer 2016).



Figure 1 - Major immigrant routes in the Mediterranean Sea (Lovro Iussich, 2018)

As shown in Figure 1, the main sea routes used for forced migration to Europe form a complex network of routes connecting North Africa, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean with the EU's external borders. These routes are not just geographical lines on a map, but reflect deeper geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, and socioeconomic inequalities that push populations into dangerous sea crossings. Mapping these routes introduces the reader to the breadth and complexity of the phenomenon, providing a key reference point for the analysis that follows in the subsequent chapters.

The scientific relevance of the topic is based on three main axes. Firstly, the documentation of maritime movements as a recurring pattern in critical situations in the Eastern Mediterranean, which highlighted shipping routes as a critical channel for salvation (IEMed 2020; International Affairs 2023). Second, the institutional/legal dimension, as the obligation to rescue (UNCLOS Article 98) and the SOLAS/SAR frameworks shape the operational environment of maritime transport when vulnerable populations are involved (IMO 2004; Papanicolopulu 2016). Thirdly, in the measurable dimension of the phenomenon: quantitative indicators from agencies such as UNRRA/UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and ICMPD allow for the mapping of routes and the assessment of risks and loads for the shipping sector (UNHCR 2023; IOM 2022).

Summarising the above data, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What geopolitical, socio-economic and institutional factors contributed to the forced sea crossings in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 20th century?
2. In which geographical areas did sea crossings take place and what geopolitical events shaped them?
3. What was the role of international organisations (UNRRA/UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, ICMPD) in human rescue, transport, disembarkation and repatriation, and how did they influence maritime practices?
4. What impact did these movements have on maritime transport (ports, fleet, shipping costs/insurance) and on maritime policy in general?

1.2 Methodology

The methodology applied is mixed and based on three points: systematic bibliographic reference, quantitative documentation from international organisations (statistics on arrivals by sea route, search-and-rescue (SAR) incidents, journey duration and missing/deaths at sea) and institutional/legal analysis of the maritime framework. This choice aims to ensure that the study responds effectively to the issue it addresses, providing answers based on scientific references, statistical data and legal clarifications that can give the reader a clear overview of the subject (UNHCR 2023; IOM 2022).

(a) Analytical literature review

The study conducts a structured review of academic and policy literature in three main areas that are directly relevant to forced sea crossings in the Eastern Mediterranean. First, it surveys the international legal framework that defines search and rescue (SAR) obligations at sea, including the duty to render assistance under UNCLOS and SOLAS, as well as the principle of non-refoulement in refugee law. This clarifies what states and shipmasters are legally required to do when confronted with people in distress at sea (UNCLOS, 1982; SAR Protocol, 2004; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway, 2015; Papanicolopulu, 2016). Second, it examines how institutions such as the IMO, FRONTEX, EMSA, UNHCR and IOM shape actual practice through coordination, monitoring, operational guidance and border management, and how tensions around

responsibility-sharing and accountability emerge in that process (Guild, Costello & Moreno-Lax, 2021; Triandafyllidou, 2023). Third, it analyses evidence on the economic and logistical impact of these crossings on commercial shipping, ports, coastal communities and supply chains, focusing on delays, rerouting, insurance costs and port congestion as reported by international organisations (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022; EMSA, 2023).

(b) Quantitative documentation

A timeline will be created for all events and statistical data will be collected from sources such as: UNRRA/UNHCR Archives (inventories, flows, repatriations), IOM Migration Data Portal (disembarkations, incidents), ICMPD (policies/routes) and ICRC Archives (maritime transport/protection operations). The processing will include descriptive statistics, risk indicators (e.g. deaths/missing persons per 1,000 crossings), and route mapping, with the aim of capturing the most intense flows and their relationship to historical decisions (UNHCR 2023; IOM 2022; ICMPD 2021).

(c) Institutional/legal analysis

The coercive movement of people across the sea underlined the need for a clear regulatory framework that would apply to the international community. Rescue obligations at sea will be examined in accordance with UNCLOS Article 98 and the corresponding SOLAS and SAR (IMO 2004; Papanicolopulu 2016). Because forced sea crossings repeatedly expose people to life-threatening situations, this study examines state and shipmaster rescue obligations at sea under UNCLOS and SOLAS/SAR, and how these are implemented in the Eastern Mediterranean (Papanicolopulu, 2016; IMO/SAR, 2004; IMO, 2023). Special emphasis will be placed on the process of disembarkation in a place of safety, the responsibilities of states with ports, and how surveillance/deterrence practices interact with the reality of the maritime business sector (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway 2015; Cusumano & Villa 2019). The legal-institutional framework will add its own dimension to the work in order to show when and how rules enhance or limit the ability to search and rescue and move safely by sea (IMO 2004; Papanicolopulu 2016).

1.3 Statistical overview, maritime implications and structure of the study

In order to document the scale and intensity of the phenomenon, Chapter 4 of this paper will present comparative flow/risk tables for the Eastern Mediterranean, using official data from the UNHCR (arrivals/routes) and IOM (deaths/missing persons). The aim is not simply to record absolute figures, but to highlight (a) forced movements based on the region and time period (e.g. increase in flows during periods of tension), (b) the formation of routes (e.g. Aegean/Levantine) and (c) institutional adjustments (agreements, operational changes) (UNHCR 2023; IOM 2022; ICMPD 2021). The use of risk indicators will allow readers to draw insights from a range of characteristics such as region, geopolitical strategy, wars, regulatory provisions beyond the aggregate numbers, demonstrating how operational risk changes (Missing Migrants; Papanicolopulu 2016).

The impact on maritime transport manifests itself on multiple levels. Firstly, the intensification of SAR calls. SAR refers to the search and rescue assistance provided by states to save people in distress. The consequences are immediate in terms of routes, costs, insurance and the liability of captains/shipowners (IMO 2004; Cusumano & Villa 2019). At the same time, ports located at borders (e.g. island ports) have to cope with large waves of transport, with congestion and pressure situations, which burden supply chains (Maritime Policy & Management; IEMed 2020). As a result, control policies, having to cope with the pressure of this situation, can lead to a shift towards more precarious sea routes, increasing human risk and operational uncertainty (Kinacioglu 2023; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway 2015). These dynamics generate ripple effects across supply chains and coastal communities, which—willingly or not—become frontline reception points during mass sea arrivals (Kinacioglu, 2023; UNHCR, 2023).

At the institutional level, the obligation to rescue remains a cornerstone of maritime practice: UNCLOS (Article 98) requires states to ensure that shipmasters provide assistance to persons in distress, while SOLAS/SAR conventions ensure the preparation and transport of people to a place of safety (IMO 2004). However, scientific debate highlights the tensions that arise between maritime safety, humanitarian protection and border control, especially when it comes to managing migration flows resulting from government policy strategies (Papanicolopulu 2016; Collyer 2016). Consequently, understanding the context requires cross-referencing stable movement flows with substantive institutional intervention arrangements and critically assessing the

effectiveness of search and rescue and disembarkation mechanisms (UNHCR 2023; IOM 2022; ICMPD 2021). Methodologically, the contribution of this paper lies in that it combines:

- A presentation of historical and pivotal forced movements in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 20th century,
- a quantitative analysis of official data on maritime movements/risks, and
- an institutional/legal assessment of the consequences for the functioning of maritime transport and shipping policy.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 provides the historical and geopolitical context (with an emphasis on the 20th century and maritime routes), Chapter 3 analyses international institutions and the regulatory framework, Chapter 4 applies quantitative/qualitative analysis (tables, diagrams, mapping), Chapter 5 links the findings to the implications for maritime transport and shipping policy, and Chapter 6 draws conclusions and policy recommendations (UNHCR 2023; IMO 2004; ICMPD 2021).

Chapter 2 — Historical and geopolitical context

2.1 The Eastern Mediterranean as a geopolitical crossroad

The Eastern Mediterranean occupies a unique geographical space, connecting three continents — Europe, Asia and Africa — and has historically served as a meeting point for trade, energy, populations and geopolitical power. Its strategic importance is reinforced by the fact that it is a transport corridor connecting the Western Mediterranean with the Suez Canal, which handles approximately 12% of global maritime trade (IMO, 2023). At the same time, control of the Dardanelles, the Aegean Sea and the maritime areas around Cyprus makes the region an important arena for geopolitical confrontation (Fargues, 2017).

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the geopolitical fragility of the Eastern Mediterranean stems from the co-location of several high-salience factors in the same maritime space, including energy corridors, contested jurisdictions and protracted conflicts (Kinacioglu, 2023):

- Strategic passages: Suez, Dardanelles, Aegean Sea.
- Subsea natural gas and oil reserves: Levantine Basin, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt.
- Areas of recurrent armed conflicts: Syria, Lebanon, Israel–Palestine.
- Major naval installations: US, Russian, NATO and EU bases.

This complex mix of interests characterises the region as a centre of conflict, negotiations and movement, with the result that any political crisis or military conflict has direct consequences for shipping and maritime transport (Kinacioglu, 2023).

2.1.1 The Eastern Mediterranean as a hub for trade and migration

The maritime space spanning the Aegean, Levantine and Suez points is one of the most crucial points bordering the sea. More specifically, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO, 2023) estimates that 25% of maritime energy transport and approximately 30% of EU imports pass through this area. More specifically, the Suez Canal is a landmark in the Eastern Mediterranean, through which more than 23,000 ships carrying 1.2 billion tons of cargo pass annually (UNCTAD, 2022). Furthermore, the Eastern Mediterranean is directly connected to the Black Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, one of the most important maritime corridors for Russia, Ukraine, and other Black Sea countries to access the markets of the Mediterranean and the European Union. This strategic connection reinforces the geopolitical role of the region, as control or destabilization of the Straits directly affects trade flows of energy and raw materials (Fargues, 2017; Kinacioglu, 2023).

On the other hand, the region's significant commercial growth also has some disadvantages: Geopolitical crises can restrict maritime transport or create high transport costs as long as maritime transport is not running normally (Maritime Policy & Management Journal, 2022). Some indicative situations that demonstrate this fact are the Syrian conflict (since 2011), post-2011 instability in Libya and the conflicts between Israel and Palestine. These situations have had a negative impact on trade, transport and maritime security. Impacts are measurable: increases in premiums, rerouting and schedule delays are documented in institutional reporting for the period 2016–2022 (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022; EMSA, 2023).

This analysis focuses on forced maritime movements—involuntary crossings driven by conflict, persecution or acute insecurity—rather than voluntary labour migration (Triandafyllidou, 2023). The existence of migration in the region creates serious underlying risks. According to data, the Eastern Mediterranean is the region most affected by migration in Europe. Between 2014 and 2024, more than 2.7 million people travelled by sea, with the main route being from Turkey to Greece.

Overall, between 2014 and 2024, there were 31,100 deaths and missing persons in the Mediterranean. Of this number, 45% were concentrated on the eastern side of the region (IOM, 2023).

2.1.2 Major forced migrations from 1920 to the present day

It is a fact that the Eastern Mediterranean region has experienced many incidents of mass forced displacement due to its unique geographical location. From the Treaty of Lausanne to the current Syrian crisis, the shipping world has been called upon to deal with conditions of human survival during displacement to wider areas (Hirschon, 2003; Sayigh, 1998).

Population exchange through the Treaty of Lausanne (1923)

The war between Greece and Turkey ended in 1923 with the mutual signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, which stipulated a compulsory exchange of populations. More specifically, it is estimated that 1.5 million Greek Orthodox Christians were transferred from Asia Minor and permanently relocated to Greece, while approximately 500,000 Muslims left Greece for Turkey (Hirschon, 2003). The movement of these two populations took place exclusively by sea, with the cooperation of the League of Nations and Greek state ships to transport people, animals and property. The main route was from the coasts of Smyrna, Constantinople and Asia Minor to the ports of Kavala, Thessaloniki and Piraeus (Zürcher, 2007).

In this case, according to League of Nations data, it was noted that the sea routes were well organised, the ships were adequate and contingency plans were in place (ICRC Archives, 1924). In summary, this operation was officially organized and successful, given the number of people who were transported, as there were no serious security risks or lack of communication between those involved.

Arab-Israeli conflict in the region of Israel (1948–1973)

In 1948, approximately 700,000 Palestinians left their homeland and fled by sea to Lebanon, Cyprus and Egypt due to the establishment of the State of Israel (Sayigh, 1998). In addition, another 300,000 people were forced to migrate by sea, mainly to Lebanon and Syria, due to the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973) (IEMed, 2020). During this period, the International Committee of the Red Cross provided valuable assistance to refugees through numerous SAR operations and, more generally, many maritime rescue and search operations (ICRC, 1975).

The Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974)

Another significant incident of forced displacement of civilians occurred in Cyprus following Turkey's invasion in the island, resulting in the removal by sea of approximately 160,000 Greek Cypriots and 50,000 Turkish Cypriots. The ships called upon to assist in the movement of these people were bound for Rhodes, Crete and Piraeus (IEMed, 2020).

There were 400 officially recorded ship transfers between July and October, mainly to the ports of Larnaca, Limassol and Famagusta, which were attended by military and commercial ships. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations had a significant influence, as they managed to rescue a large part of the population and treat the wounded. The aforementioned ports were considered SAR hubs, as nearby shipping infrastructure was mobilised in these areas to prepare for the transport of people whose lives were in danger (ICRC Archives, 1975).

Maritime transport due to the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990)

The civil war that broke out in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 resulted in the migration of thousands of people to Cyprus and Greece. Organisations such as the ICRC, the UN and shipping companies worked together to make sea travel as safe as possible. The ships called upon to provide assistance were essential in defusing the crisis. The benefit that came out of this tragic war was the conclusion of international and uniform provisions that obliged the responsible institutions to intervene in situations where civilians were in danger at sea (Papanicopolulu, 2016).

The modern refugee crisis (2011–present)

The greatest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century arose in Syria and its repercussions were felt strongly in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In particular, the civil war in the region forced more than 5.7 million Syrians to leave their country and 1.5 million people to use the Eastern Mediterranean as a means of escape (UNHCR, 2023). The main route observed was from the coast of Turkey to the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos. Europe received 1 million people in 2015 who arrived via the sea, while 850,000 of them chose the Eastern Mediterranean to travel to parts of Europe (UNHCR, 2016).

From this large forced refugee movement, the IOM Missing Migrants Project highlights the recording of 31,000 deaths and missing persons in the Mediterranean since 2014. Approximately half of these cases were observed on routes in the Eastern Mediterranean (IOM, 2023).

The European Union, in consultation with its Member States, designed Operation Sophia (2015-2020) to address the impact of such a large mobilisation of these people. The aim of this operation was to organise and implement sea rescue operations. However, in 2016, the agreement signed between the EU and Turkey reduced official movements by 77%. The price of this agreement was an increase in deaths from unsafe sea routes, as traffickers organised transport via dangerous routes to avoid strict controls (FRONTEX Annual Risk Analysis, 2022).

2.1.3 The sea as a dangerous area

The Eastern Mediterranean is one of the most complex maritime areas in the world, fraught with danger. At the same time, given the region's importance as a trade route, the area has become a key route for forced human movements, resulting in a space where human lives are at significant risk on a daily basis (Triandafyllidou, 2023). The sea crossings of the Aegean, the Libyan Sea and the Central Mediterranean have been deemed inadequate due to poor planning in the area of search and rescue coordination (SAR) and the presence of military forces at the borders of coastal states. The activities of traffickers who exploit the desperation of people who want to move to other countries

should not be overlooked, as this increases the number of accidents and deaths at sea (Kinacioglu, 2023).

Year	Western route (Spain)	Central route (Italy)	Eastern route (Greece)	Total persons
2009	10.242	11.043	39.975	51.018
2010	6.245	4.450	55.688	66.383
2011	9.800	64.300	57.000	131.100
2012	8.200	15.200	37.200	60.600
2013	8.600	45.300	24.800	78.700
2014	9.300	170.700	50.800	230.800
2015	10.000	153.842	856.723	1.049.400
2016	10.658	181.126	182.534	374.318
2017	22.103	119.369	29.718	171.190
2018 (until March 31 st)	3.385	6.295	5.318	14.998
Total	88.291	771.783	1.368.433	2.228.507

Table 1 - Overseas migrations to Europe from 2009 until presently (Lovro Iussich, 2018)

As shown in Table 1, overseas movements to Europe from 2009 to the present day show sharp fluctuations, which directly reflect the evolution of conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The significant increase in arrivals after 2013–2014 is linked to the escalation of the war in Syria, but also to the destabilization of Libya and Iraq, as confirmed by data from the UNHCR (2023) and the IOM (2022). 2015 was a pivotal year, as the table shows the peak of the flows, with more than 1 million people using sea routes — mainly the eastern Mediterranean passage from Turkey to the Greek islands. The gradual decline after 2016 is linked to the EU–Turkey Statement (2016), which, according to analyses by Triandafyllidou (2023) and Moreno-Lax (2018), limited official flows but did not address the causes of migration.

Year	Deaths	Ratio deaths / total number of immigrants
2014	3.538	1.52%
2015	3.771	0.36%
2016	5.096	1.36%
2017	3.139	1.83%
2018 (until 31 st March)	1.063	7.08%
Total	16.607	0.74%

Table 2 - Number of deaths on overseas passage in the Mediterranean Sea (Lovro Iussich, 2018)

Table 2 reveals one of the most tragic aspects of this phenomenon: the extremely high risk of loss of life. A significant percentage—approximately 45%—corresponds to the eastern Mediterranean crossing, which is characterized by unsafe boats, inadequate SAR coverage, and unclear distribution of responsibilities between states (Papanicolopulu, 2016). The increase in deaths after 2016, despite the decrease in total arrivals, confirms the phenomenon of "risk shifting": smugglers are taking people on longer, uncharted, and dangerous routes to avoid surveillance (Moreno-Lax, 2018; Kinacioglu, 2023). Table 2 also reflects the failure of coordinated SAR operations, as a large number of incidents are recorded in areas where there is institutional fragmentation between FRONTEX, national coast guards, and coastal states (Guild, Costello & Moreno-Lax, 2021). Overall, Table 2 not only serves as a statistical representation, but also highlights a structural problem of security and humanitarian protection in the Mediterranean: deterrence policies and limited coordination lead to higher death rates, confirming that a reduction in arrivals does not imply a reduction in risk for migrants.

UNHCR (2022) notes that between 2014 and 2023, more than 28,000 people lost their lives or went missing while attempting to cross the Mediterranean. The IOM (2023) emphasises that the Eastern Mediterranean accounts for nearly 45% of all deaths in the wider region, making it extremely dangerous for human safety. The causes of this high mortality rate are multifaceted, but can be summarised in three main factors: the use of ships and boats with a higher capacity than intended, the problematic SAR (search and rescue) service, and the direction of migration towards routes that put human life at risk in order to avoid any controls that might prevent them from moving (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020).

FRONTEX, through its analysis, concluded that, following the establishment of the agreement between the European Union and Turkey (2016), flows from the Turkish region to the Greek islands decreased by approximately 77%. The EU–Turkey Statement (2016) committed Turkey to prevent irregular sea departures and accept returns from Greek islands, in exchange for EU financial and political support; this reshaped local SAR and reception practices in the Aegean (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022). However, the number of deaths has been observed to increase, the reason being that traffickers are finding more dangerous routes to divert people who want to migrate, as controls are more lax at these points. This trend is known in the scientific community

as the "substitution effect". In other words, the shift of migration waves to more precarious areas when controls are stricter elsewhere (Moreno-Lax, 2018). It is worth noting that, on average, the duration of journeys increased by 40% between 2016 and 2022. Correspondingly, mortality rates increased proportionally.

The presence of military forces at sea borders is another factor that has a negative impact on the security of maritime areas. Strengthening surveillance by national coast guards and developing modern control mechanisms, such as UAVs (unmanned aircraft, either autonomous or remotely piloted) and satellite networks, aims to restrict illegal movements. However, it forces many people to choose more dangerous, uncharted routes (Léonard & Kaunert, 2020). The result of this situation is an increase in shipwrecks, as the boats carrying the population are forced to travel long distances without the necessary equipment and in difficult weather conditions that compromise both the safety of transport and rescue operations.

The UNHCR (2022) argues that for 75% of deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean, SAR operations did not act in time to prevent an accident. The reasons for this were the inaction of the responsible authorities, the lack of cooperation with national governments, and the failure to establish a single operational centre where most decisions would be taken. In many cases, it has been observed that the inaction exceeded 8 hours from the first notification of a safety issue until the response teams were able to reach the people, with the result that it was not possible to save human lives (EMSA, 2023).

In this context, an incident that illustrates the issue under discussion, the shipwreck off Pylos in June 2023, is widely known. In that tragic accident, it is estimated that over 600 people died of drowning. Reports indicate that there were serious delays in the mobilisation of the Greek patrol authorities, FRONTEX and the Libyan border guards, due to disagreements over who was responsible in this particular situation (Moreno-Lax & Mann, 2023). This incident was considered one of the deadliest accidents in Europe in the 21st century and clearly demonstrates the lack of communication and cooperation between states and international authorities.

This precarious situation in the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of movement has implications for maritime policy. According to analyses carried out by IEMed (2023), rescue efforts carried out by commercial ships result in delays of around 35%, while the

increase in costs is remarkable. The economic burden generated by forced sea crossings is not borne by a single actor but is distributed across multiple levels. Commercial shipping companies have to absorb higher fuel consumption, increased insurance and risk premiums, schedule disruptions and rerouting costs. At the same time, frontline ports are forced to reallocate capacity and personnel away from their primary commercial role toward first reception, medical screening and emergency assistance for new arrivals. This dual pressure also affects the surrounding coastal communities and local economies. Institutional reporting describes these costs as region-wide and persistent, rather than occasional (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022). Some of the larger ports, such as Limassol and Piraeus, have adopted a strategy of continuous route changes to combat the pressure they are under. Smaller ports, such as Kos, Leros and Lesbos, are operating at a capacity that is much greater than what their facilities can support (Lloyd's, 2023).

In view of the above, it is now vital to establish a unified framework for control, coordination and enforcement in order to address phenomena that will lead to the aggravation of the problem in the Eastern Mediterranean (Carrera & Geddes, 2021). In order to achieve this, a combination of actions will be required, such as the creation of protocols to be followed during rescue preparations, instant access to various types of data, and the provision of material and equipment in SAR situations.

2.1.4 Forced population movements and maritime policy

The Eastern Mediterranean accounts for approximately 20% of global shipping activity, highlighting the importance of this region for maritime transport (Papachristos et al., 2022). However, it cannot be ignored that the high volume of shipping traffic in this area raises serious issues of migration waves originating from many continents and cultures. The result is that, on a daily basis and under unclear conditions, human trafficking routes to various countries in Europe are being established. Shipping has to deal with all these situations with a policy that requires smooth navigation and, above all, the protection of human life. (Moreno-Lax & Mann, 2023).

UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), in Article 98, emphasises that shipmasters are legally obliged to offer assistance to any person in

danger at sea without any restrictions such as nationality, profession, financial status, etc. (Papanicolopulu, 2016). More specifically, an IMO study reports that over the last ten years, 25% of commercial ships in the Eastern Mediterranean have been involved at least once in rescuing people in distress. Therefore, the conclusion is that ordinary ships specialising in the transport of goods gain experience in searching for and intervening in situations where human lives are at risk.

It should be noted that commercial vessels assisting rescue operations face operational challenges. One of these is the delay that follows an attempt to approach a vessel where human lives are at risk, as in order for this to happen, the captain has to change his predetermined course and may not be able to disembark at the designated port in time. Financially, this change in the ship's direction puts even more strain on the shipping company, as fuel costs are prohibitive (IEMed, 2023). In particular, Lloyd's Market Report states that the financial damage from a change of course for the above reason is in the order of €25,000-60,000. In other words, the total amount that the commercial shipping industry in the Eastern Mediterranean is required to pay for rescue services is estimated at approximately €2.3 billion per year (IOM, 2022; UNHCR, 2023).

Insurance coverage is another equally serious issue that plagues shipping companies. More specifically, it is not clear from insurance companies or any other body whether they are responsible for covering the costs of this activity carried out by a commercial ship. They consider that SAR operations are not within their remit to cover financially and do not recognise their involvement (Lloyd's, 2023). Therefore, commercial ships are called upon to manage new financial burdens arising from the gap between shipping companies, insurance companies and the absence of an entity with the ability to create a common ground of cooperation.

The International Maritime Organisation considers it a major issue to create detailed guidelines that will clarify the responsibilities of commercial ships, the relevant government agencies of each state with regard to the sea, and international bodies. In addition to the obvious lack of a common strategy among maritime operators, FRONTEX and national port authorities, the conflict between states with maritime borders is noteworthy in some cases (Moreno-Lax, 2018). The result of this situation is that each country operates individually and each rescue operation at sea is a choice of the respective government as to whether to act and how. Consequently, based on the

above, there is a geopolitical dimension to this situation. There are instances where the tendency of people to use the sea as a means of escape to other areas has been used by states as a lever of pressure against other states (Triandafyllidou, 2023). A typical example is the conflict that arose in the Eastern Mediterranean between Greece and Turkey, where they disagreed on SAR operations.

The design of a fully organised and independent structure to address the problem of forced movement by sea, in conjunction with maritime policy, seems imperative. The use of artificial intelligence, which will assist in predicting migration flows, collecting SAR information, obtaining data from satellites and meteorological forecasts (EMSA, 2023), will be a considerable aid in this effort to prevent crisis and improve operational readiness (EMSA, 2023). By implementing the above proposals, the Eastern Mediterranean has the opportunity to establish joint cooperation between the competent authorities and innovative solutions that will prevent situations and tend to achieve the goal of safety and protection of human life.

2.2 Geopolitical dynamics and implications for maritime transport

The Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to its strong commercial growth, also functions as an environment where research policies, rescue operations and protection of maritime transport are implemented. Shipping companies adapt by rerouting away from hotspots, training crews in SAR procedures and absorbing higher risk premiums, as reflected in institutional reporting (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022). The parties involved in finding a common code of communication include international bodies, state agencies, shipping companies and ports of embarkation and disembarkation. However, the undertaking presents difficulties such as differences in interests at the national level between countries, inadequate infrastructure and the presence of military forces at state borders (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway, 2015).

2.2.1 International organisations

The handling of maritime transport in the Eastern Mediterranean region requires the joint presence of many international institutions. Each of them has its own role to play in the effort within an organised and coordinated framework. The most important of these are the following:

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
- International Maritime Organisation (IMO)
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- FRONTEX
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

Each organisation individually offers a great deal of assistance in supporting maritime safety. However, the lack of a unified approach to operations causes serious delays, significant risk and additional costs for the shipping industry (Papanicolopulu, 2016).

2.2.2 Legal framework and Institutional weaknesses

The legal and institutional framework governing maritime migration in the Eastern Mediterranean is characterized by overlapping jurisdictions, fragmented responsibilities, and limited enforcement mechanisms. Although UNCLOS, SOLAS, and the SAR Convention establish the duty to rescue persons in distress at sea, they do not clearly specify which coastal state is ultimately responsible for disembarking those rescued, nor do they provide an effective mechanism for resolving jurisdictional disputes between neighbouring states (Papanicolopulu, 2016). As Moreno-Lax (2018) explains, this ambiguity creates operational inconsistencies, especially in areas where search and rescue (SAR) zones are politically contested, such as between Greece and Turkey.

At the European Union level, the institutional framework is equally fragmented. FRONTEX — under Regulation 2019/1896 — has a mandate limited to supporting national authorities, without the power to compel states to accept disembarkation or to intervene decisively in disputed SAR zones (Guild, Costello & Moreno-Lax, 2021). EMSA also provides technical assistance but lacks operational powers in migration-related incidents. This institutional design distributes responsibility without establishing clear accountability, leading to what Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway (2015) describe as a "responsibility vacuum" in maritime governance.

These institutional weaknesses have direct operational consequences. The absence of a binding mechanism for allocating responsibilities leads to prolonged delays in rescue operations, inconsistent coordination between coastal states, and reduced predictability for commercial vessels operating in the area (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

For commercial vessels, this translates into additional fuel costs, deviations from planned routes, and increased legal and corporate risk when responding to distress calls. UNHCR (2023) and IOM (2022) point out that delayed or contested responsibility for SAR operations has contributed to numerous incidents in which ships have remained at sea awaiting disembarkation permits, exacerbating humanitarian vulnerability and undermining the safety of navigation.

The interaction between humanitarian obligations and security policies further intensifies these challenges. Efforts to prevent irregular arrivals — through enhanced border surveillance, pushbacks, or restrictive disembarkation protocols — often conflict with fundamental principles such as non-refoulement and the duty to render assistance (Moreno-Lax, 2018). This contradiction creates operational dilemmas for both state agencies and commercial vessels, as their humanitarian obligations often conflict with political pressures to strengthen border control. According to Kinacioglu (2023), the convergence of these priorities contributes to the creation of an environment of "securitization," where migration is primarily treated as a geopolitical risk, further complicating the coordination of operations.

In this context, the humanitarian-security contradiction is not a separate issue but a direct consequence of the institutional and legal shortcomings that characterize the existing system of governance. The fragmentation of responsibilities, combined with the inconsistent implementation of policies, creates a vicious circle in which neither effective migration management nor adequate protection of human life at sea is achieved. This systemic imbalance highlights the need for a more coherent and legally robust framework that can combine maritime safety, state sovereignty, and the protection of human life at sea.

Chapter 3 — Institutional and Regulatory Framework

3.1 International Law and Maritime Conventions

International maritime law plays a very important role in reducing maritime migration flows and ensuring the safety of human life at sea. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982) contributes significantly to this, which, in addition to defining maritime zones, obliges countries to provide valid assistance to people whose lives are in danger (Article 98). This article legally ensures the framework for

humanitarian rescue, without taking into account the nationality, professional/economic status or status of the rescued person (Papanicolopulu, 2016). In addition to the provision on the obligation to provide assistance, UNCLOS imposes a responsibility on shipowners to take rescue action.

In addition, according to the SOLAS Convention (1974, rev. 2020), high safety standards and equipment, materials and machinery are mandatory on ships under the responsibility of the IMO. SOLAS (1974/2020), Chapter V, Regulation 33, obliges shipmasters to render assistance to any person in distress at sea and to deliver survivors to a place of safety (IMO, 2023). The SOLAS Convention guarantees the safety of the crew and passengers on board, while also designating ships as responsible for the forced movement of migrants and refugees. During the period 2015–2019, more than 1/5 of rescue operations in the Mediterranean were carried out by commercial ships, with significant financial and administrative implications for the companies undertaking this mission (Papachristos et al., 2022).

The role of SAR is the key factor in the organisation of search and rescue zones. It establishes each country's responsibility to create a search and rescue coordination framework that will be called upon to lead operations in its area of responsibility. However, in the Eastern Mediterranean, the implementation of the Convention faces obstacles due to a conflict of interests between Greece and Turkey, which causes significant delays and disagreements at the political level (Moreno-Lax, 2018). More specifically, between 2015 and 2020, there were over 200 recorded instances in which the transfer of rescued persons was delayed because the two countries failed to clarify their respective responsibilities (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020).

Another equally important provision is the Geneva Convention (1951) and the 1967 Protocol, which form the basis of international refugee law. Non-refoulement—as articulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention—prohibits returning individuals to places where they face persecution or serious harm; in the Mediterranean it is frequently contested through pushbacks at sea that preclude access to asylum procedures (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway, 2015; Triandafyllidou, 2023). In the Mediterranean region, this principle is frequently called into question by refoulements, which are contrary to the ideas promoted by international law and the European institutional framework (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hathaway, 2015). The UNHCR (2023) has

highlighted thousands of instances of such practices, noting that they undermine the global effort to protect human security.

Another important regulation, the International Convention on Human Rights at Sea, is in line with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The European Court of Human Rights has consistently made it clear that refusing to rescue or illegally returning migrants is a violation of fundamental human rights (Hirschon, 2003; Triandafyllidou, 2023).

In conclusion, the legal protection of forced sea movements is at a high level. However, the implementation of these provisions does not seem to work efficiently in practice in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Although UNCLOS, SOLAS and SAR create a comprehensive framework for the protection of human life, geopolitical tensions, lack of cooperation and deterrence policies are obstacles to achieving maritime safety.

3.2 Institutional Mechanisms and Oversight

The implementation of international and European law at sea is a matter that has a specific structure. It is based on designated organisations that have a legal foundation, operational powers and the ability to monitor situations. This method ensures that efforts are made from many perspectives, such as support for the plan from the UN, the provision of services by reputable European bodies, and specialised bodies whose task is to provide oversight and technical support. On the other hand, theoretical planning often fails to translate into practical implementation due to ambiguous responsibilities and insufficient oversight/supervision mechanisms (Moreno-Lax, 2018).

3.2.1 International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is an official UN agency for the management of shipping at a global level. Since its creation in 1948, it has promoted a plethora of conventions that are applied worldwide, with SOLAS and SAR being prime examples, which lead countries' governments to draw up safety and rescue measures (IMO, 2023). At the same time, the IMO's role is to issue guidelines, coordinate the legislative framework and monitor the implementation of regulations.

At the same time, it should be noted that the IMO does not have executive powers. It does not have the authority to impose sanctions or intervene in rescue situations. This

means that practical implementation is at the discretion of countries, even though it is legally protected. The absence of an enforcement mechanism plays a catalytic role in the emergence of discrepancies between theory and practice (Papanicolopulu, 2016). This problem became clear in 2015 in the case of the Mediterranean, where thousands of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan moved to the Aegean. Although the IMO made remarkable efforts, it failed to solve the problem in practice, resulting in numerous reports of inaction and targeted refusals to rescue (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020).

3.2.2 FRONTEX

FRONTEX (full name: *European Border and Coast Guard Agency*) was established in 2004. It was strengthened by Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, which reinforced its position from a support institution to an autonomous organisation with its own operational structure and organisation. FRONTEX now has a workforce of around 10,000 people, spread across various countries for border protection and rescue operations (Léonard & Kaunert, 2020).

FRONTEX is based on European law and is obliged to comply with international regulations, specifically the principle of non-refoulement. It should be noted that several investigations have found instances where FRONTEX failed to respond to illegal returns of migrants from Greece and Hungary, raising questions about the agency's accountability (Amnesty International, 2021; Moreno-Lax & Mann, 2023). The problem stems from the lack of clarity in its regulatory framework. More specifically, FRONTEX has an obligation to provide assistance to Member States, but does not have full control over the enforcement of sanctions. The result is that, in this case too, there is a gap where responsibility is transferred from one level to another.

3.2.3 European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA)

The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) is governed by Regulation (EC) No 1406/2002. Its purpose is to provide surveillance tools, satellite monitoring and digital data to assist Member States and FRONTEX at a technical level. In addition, the CleanSeaNet system is noteworthy, as it uses satellite images to reveal areas of high pollution. In addition, it is used to search for and locate boats and ships carrying migrants and refugees via satellite (EMSA, 2023).

Furthermore, EMSA promotes AIS (Automatic Identification Systems) networks for the purpose of locating vessels while they are at sea. According to studies, the use of EMSA data in SAR operations reduces delays by 30-40%, increasing the likelihood of rescue (Papachristos et al., 2022). At the same time, it should not be overlooked that it is dependent on countries for the use of data. This means that countries such as Italy implement this technology frequently, while other countries, such as Greece, experience delays in its practical operation (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

3.2.4 UNHCR and IOM

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the Geneva Convention (1951) and is responsible for the safety of refugees and monitoring the implementation of the Convention by countries. In the Eastern Mediterranean, UNHCR monitors the arrival of forced sea crossings, highlights rights violations and promotes humanitarian solidarity. At the same time, it intervenes effectively at the legal level where the principle of non-refoulement is challenged through public reports or international courts (UNHCR, 2023). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), through the 1951 Convention, focuses on practical issues. It processes statistical data, assists with voluntary returns and liaises with states to ensure safe transport by sea. The IOM has significant quantitative data on the Eastern Mediterranean region, which facilitates further study of the issue (IOM, 2023).

On the other hand, in order for the UNHCR and the IOM to remain active and contribute consistently, the consent of state governments is necessary. Often, their actions are not enough to prevent violations. This is confirmed by the incidents of recorded pushbacks in the Aegean Sea between 2016 and 2022 (Heller & Pezzani, 2017).

3.2.5 Conflict between competent institutions

In the Eastern Mediterranean, the joint presence of organisations leads to overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities. IMO regulations, European Union mechanisms and humanitarian organisations create a comprehensive protection framework. At the same time, on a practical level, the lack of unified coordination leads to the nullification of the aforementioned organisations and their functions. The consequences that arise are:

- Significant inaction and loss of life: UNHCR reports that delays in SAR coordination are responsible for over 20% of recorded deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean between 2020 and 2022 (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022).
- Conflicts of interest: A consistent example is Greece and Turkey, which disagree on the sovereignty of SAR areas. At the same time, agencies such as FRONTEX and EMSA are unable to sanction the behaviour of such countries.

3.3 Challenges in implementing the framework

The European Union is promoting the establishment of an organised and collective framework to address migration flows in the Eastern Mediterranean maritime region. To achieve this goal, the " Pact on Migration and Asylum ", which was advanced by the European Commission in 2023, plays a supporting role, seeking to strike a balance between the protection of human rights and the protection of borders. This regulation attempts to offset the disadvantages of the Dublin Regulation, according to which the integration of forcibly displaced persons was the sole responsibility of frontline states (Guild et al., 2021). The Pact on Migration and Asylum promotes the following approaches:

1. Registration of arrivals through the creation of centres operating in the border area.
2. Speedy execution of asylum procedures in order to reduce waiting times.
3. Meaningful solidarity measures, whereby states have the option of accepting the relocation of asylum seekers or offering alternative forms of support such as financial assistance, staff deployment, etc.

Although the innovative nature of these actions is evident, the implementation of the regulation faces obstacles. Central and Eastern European countries do not accept relocation as an obligation, using the excuse of national sovereignty and the preservation of social uniformity (Carrera & Geddes, 2021). As a result, the map of Europe is made up of countries that have to manage a large volume of forced arrivals, such as Greece, Italy and Malta, while other countries simply limit themselves to funding programmes to deal with the phenomenon. This gap is also reflected in the numbers based on official data. In 2022, approximately 104,000 refugees and migrants

landed on the coast of Italy, while Greece recorded 18,000 arrivals. It is easy to see how these numbers can be considered unmanageable, as they exceed the capacity of state mechanisms for receiving migrants and refugees (UNHCR, 2023). The lack of effective distribution of arrivals increases the burden on ports and maritime transport in general, as commercial ships are called upon to contribute to human rescue operations.

3.3.1 Pushbacks

A strategy that is highly controversial and exacerbates the inadequacy of the European framework is *refoulement*. Between 2016 and 2022, many human rights movements reported at least 17,000 incidents in which migrants were forced to withdraw from European maritime borders without their asylum applications being approved (Heller & Pezzani, 2017). This conflicts with the principle of non-refoulement, which is a legally binding convention formed in Geneva in 1951, as well as Article 19 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The European Court of Human Rights has issued rulings against countries that have implemented the same policy (e.g. *Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy*, 2012). Although the court attempted to provide a solution, the practical implementation of these rulings has not been able to help curb the phenomenon (Moreno-Lax, 2018). The lack of consistency between the legal substance and the enforcement of the measures recommended reflects the inadequacy of the executive bodies.

3.3.2 FRONTEX

FRONTEX contributes to the protection and safeguarding of European borders, having attracted intense criticism for its role. Although it supports SAR operations with human resources, its activities focus almost exclusively on the militarisation of maritime borders (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020). Official sources report that FRONTEX's support with ships, drones and satellite systems has not been sufficient to reduce mortality rates in the Eastern Mediterranean. One reason for the high mortality rates is that forced movements lead to uncontrolled routes and, as a result, endanger human lives (Kinacioglu, 2023). Prioritising border integrity over humanitarian obligations does not result in meaningful protection for migrants and refugees. Amidst this climate of uncertainty, the European Parliament has repeatedly called on FRONTEX to operate

with greater transparency in cases of refoulement in the Eastern Mediterranean (European Parliament, 2022).

3.3.3 Imbalance between humanitarianism and security

In summary, Europe's approach to migration and asylum management is functionally contradictory in that, although it serves to safeguard human rights, it places excessive emphasis on border security to the extent that it detracts from equally serious factors that are contributing to an increase in the phenomenon. More specifically, the dysfunctional distribution of these roles results in:

- A discrepancy between regulations and practices: European states are unable to implement the guidelines set out in European institutional decisions.
- Unequal division of states: Countries located on Europe's maritime borders face the largest waves of forced ship movements, without having the necessary resources to deal with the risk.
- Political instrumentalisation: The pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean region is being exploited by European and non-European countries, resulting in the formulation of policies that leverage the phenomenon for bargaining power (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

Chapter 4 – Economic Impact of the Phenomenon

The study on forced transfers of people in the Eastern Mediterranean must examine factors beyond the historical and institutional level. The negative consequences have an equally significant impact on the shipping industry, supply chains, local communities, the international economy and broader political stability.

4.1 Impact on shipping businesses and trade networks

Commercial ships sailing in the Eastern Mediterranean are the main means of transport for migrants and refugees on the move, and there are many cases where they do not receive the necessary support from the competent authorities. Under these circumstances, the mandatory participation of these ships in rescue operations stands out. Under Article 98 of the UNCLOS Convention and the SOLAS Regulation, the ship's captain is obliged to assist in situations where there is a clear danger at sea. In other words, ships engaged in commercial routes, transporting containers, fuel or other

flammable materials, may interrupt their route to offer assistance to shipwrecked persons, injured persons and, in general, persons in danger (Papanicopolulu, 2016).

According to data from the UNHCR and the IOM, from 2015 to 2019, approximately 20% of rescue operations in the Mediterranean were carried out by commercial ships (UNHCR, 2023). The economic and business impact was significant. Ships did not arrive at their destination on time, resulting in losses and the disruption of several commercial agreements. The delay of a large container ship translates into economic losses of \$30,000 to \$50,000 per day, according to a study by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS, 2021). In addition, increased uncertainty about cargo delivery times has had a negative impact on the reliability of trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean, with several companies choosing not to use this area for commercial activity.

Structures & hosting facilities	Guests		Capacity
	Structures	Hosting facilities*	
Eastern Aegean Islands			
Lesvos	4,843	0	3,500
Chios	2130	1,369	1,100
Samos	2,562	0	850
Leros	685	125	1,000
Kos	1,830	1,072	1,000
Other islands		642	
Total islands	11,146	3,208	8,685

Table 3 - Refugees and migrants in Greece per structure and hosting facility (as of 1/8/2017)

(CENTRE OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH, 2018)

In addition, forced transport phenomena create insurance and legal problems for shipping companies. It is a fact that ship owners have suffered losses from obligations that insurance companies have not recognised as their responsibility. At the same time, human resources were called upon to deal with health risks, as the need to accommodate people whose boats had been wrecked was not accompanied by the corresponding medical equipment (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020). As a result of these risks, insurance premiums for targeted maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean have increased by up to 15% (Papachristos et al., 2022). A notable incident occurred in 2020 involving the

Maersk Etienne, when the tanker took in 27 migrants in the Mediterranean, resulting in it remaining at sea for over a month without being able to approach a port that would allow assistance to be provided to these individuals and service to be provided to the commercial vessel. The ship's resources were insufficient to care for the entire population it was hosting, and this inaction created operational problems on the ship (ICS, 2021). This incident highlighted the lack of management of this situation with regard to the disembarkation of the transported population and the obligations of the countries involved.

Another important observation is that commercial routes in the Eastern Mediterranean are declining in the long term. Commercial reliability in the Eastern Mediterranean has been structurally undermined by rerouting, delays and operational disruptions linked to forced sea crossings. Institutional reporting shows that voyage durations on key routes in the region have increased by up to 40% between 2016 and 2022, and that commercial vessels frequently experience significant schedule deviations and waiting times while being diverted to assist or avoid high-pressure areas, with knock-on effects on ports and supply chains (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022; EMSA, 2023). These recurring delays, the need to adjust routes, and the associated rise in operating and insurance costs make the area less attractive for stable long-term commercial traffic, and shift cargo flows toward alternative corridors. More specifically, ship owners are choosing not to navigate in areas characterised by high-risk migration flows, with the result that they are operating in other ports, such as Valencia or Rotterdam (Notteboom & Rodrigue, 2020). In this way, the strategic importance of Eastern Mediterranean ports is being replaced by others, reducing their competitiveness on the European map.

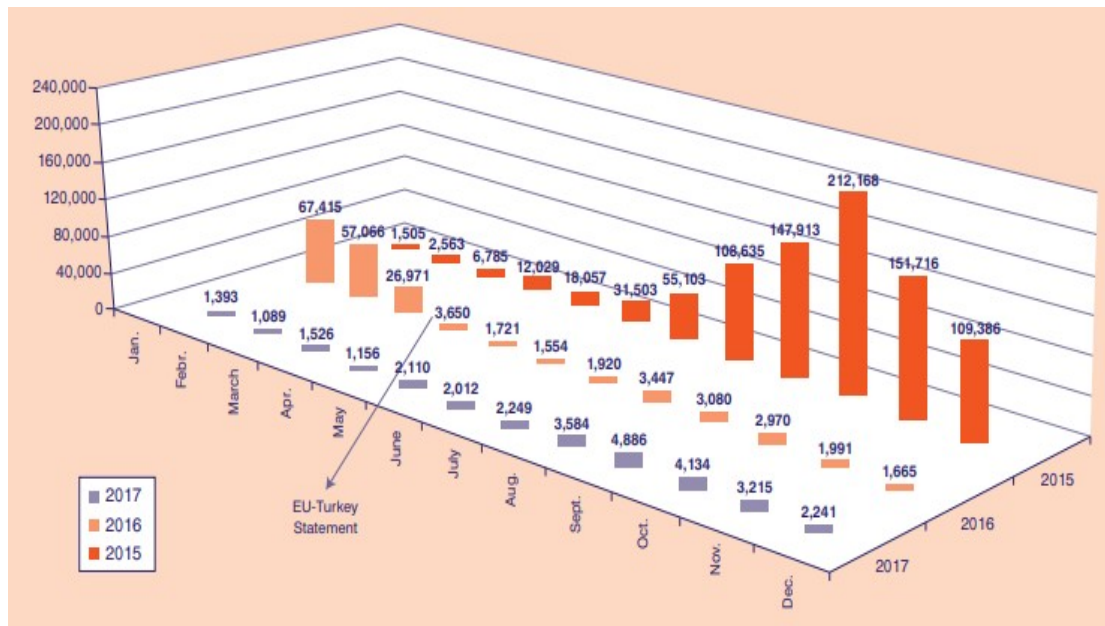


Figure 2 - Monthly flow of arrivals of refugees and migrants in Greece (2015-2017)

(CENTRE OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH, 2018)

In summary, the shipping industry in the Eastern Mediterranean faces a humanitarian obligation to protect human life and significant economic, insurance and operational costs. The absence of a collective institutional mechanism for compensation and support makes the problem more apparent and, under certain conditions, may undermine the support of commercial ships to assist in their humanitarian obligations in the future (Moreno-Lax, 2018).

4.2 Impact on Ports and the Supply Chain

The ports of the Eastern Mediterranean, especially those located on the European border, such as Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Lampedusa and Sicily, have been under considerable pressure from forced migration flows. At times, their facilities have to serve as international shipping hubs, but also as reception and temporary accommodation areas for migrants and refugees. The result is often an excessive concentration of infrastructure, which seriously hinders the operation of ports and the wider supply chain (Triandafyllidou, 2023). Empirical work on port–city relations shows that, under conditions of intense passenger inflow, port infrastructure and terminal space are rapidly reallocated from routine operations (fishing activity, coastal shipping, repair and small-scale maritime services) to crowd management, safety control, and first-reception functions (Pallis, 2015). The incident in Lesbos in 2015, when migrant arrivals reached 600% of the average for the previous decade (UNHCR,

2023), cannot be overlooked. As a result, not only was there congestion in port infrastructure, but also an increase in idle time, up to 20% in the loading and unloading of commercial ships (Papachristos et al., 2022). Similar conditions were observed in Lampedusa, where the port had to operate as a regular arrival centre, leaving insufficient space for commercial ships and boats.



Figure 3 - Disembarkation of immigrants in the organisation by Italian Coastguard (Lovro Iussich, 2018)

These pressures have a direct impact on the supply chain. The inertia observed in ship servicing translates into further delays in logistics services and higher storage costs. According to studies, each additional day of delay at a port can increase total logistics costs by 0.5–1%, with significant negative consequences for companies active in global trade (Notteboom & Rodrigue, 2020). In particular, for perishable goods with a limited shelf life, such as agricultural or pharmaceutical products, these delays can result in serious financial losses for owners. The pressure not only puts a strain on facilities but also hinders land transport. Trucks and trains near ports are also experiencing longer waiting times, as parking spaces and customs are often full or delayed due to large population movements. This creates a chain reaction of delays throughout the supply chain, with the impact being felt even in Central European markets (Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2020).

Another consequence for shipping is that ports were required to invest in additional infrastructure, as it was necessary to provide facilities that would serve both commercial activity and the provision of services to migrants and refugees. For example, temporary accommodation for migrants was created beyond the loading and unloading areas so that commercial activity could continue without losing valuable time (European Commission, 2023). However, the constant need to process resources and transport

personnel significantly reduces efficiency. Finally, the constant change of ports into service areas for people arriving from forced displacement has a social and economic impact on local communities. The large and sudden influx of migrants and refugees into port areas places intense pressure on local economies and social infrastructure. Ports in the Eastern Mediterranean are not only commercial nodes for cargo handling, fisheries and ferry traffic, but also, in practice, points of first reception, medical screening and short-term accommodation for people arriving by sea (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2022). This dual role disrupts normal port activity. For sectors such as tourism, which depends heavily on the image of safety, predictable services and uninterrupted ferry connections, the visible presence of emergency operations in port zones can translate into cancellations, loss of bookings and a shift in demand away from smaller island destinations (Triandafyllidou, 2023). That perception can undermine the attractiveness of the area for visitors and intensify political and social tension within the host community, unless port authorities, municipal actors and local stakeholders coordinate responses to manage these flows in a way that protects both local economic interests and social cohesion (Pallis, 2024; Notteboom, Pallis & Rodrigue, 2021). Fishing activity is also affected, as access to quays, storage spaces and fuel or maintenance points can be delayed or deprioritised when port authorities are forced to reallocate berths and staff capacity to reception and control tasks (UNHCR, 2023). Small and medium-sized enterprises clustered around the port — transport services, accommodation, catering, onshore logistics, repair yards — depend on the stable flow of both tourists and maritime commerce. When that flow becomes unpredictable, their revenue base becomes fragile and they are pushed to absorb additional costs without structural support (IOM, 2022; EMSA, 2023). Beyond the economic dimension, sustained pressure of this type accelerates local political and social polarisation: parts of the resident population perceive the port less as an economic asset and more as a constant emergency zone, which fuels tension between local authorities, economic actors and new arrivals (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

4.3 Socio-economic and political impacts

The forced displacement of populations in the Eastern Mediterranean region not only poses challenges for shipping facilities and trade. It also has an impact on the societies and economies of the states that are heavily burdened by these movements, as well as on the geopolitical reality of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Societies with ports that frequently receive migrants and refugees, such as Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Sicily, have been affected in terms of their social fabric. The reception and accommodation of this entire population has placed unbearable pressure on public services. More specifically, hospitals had to be allocated emergency funds to enable the treatment of all injured people and those in need of medical care, while schools had to set up temporary classes to support individuals in their educational careers. Local authorities were tasked with finding financial resources at short notice to draw up budgets that would cover housing and services for people arriving by sea (Triandafyllidou, 2023). There were many instances where local residents expressed concern about the social and economic conditions that had developed in the area. As a result, political polarisation and intense confrontation within society were observed (Ambrosini, 2021). In addition to the above, the coexistence of local residents with thousands of refugees and migrants strengthened their social ties, taking into account the presence of many volunteers and NGOs active in the area. Nevertheless, xenophobia has also reared its head, with some local political organisations exploiting the situation for electoral purposes (Triandafyllidou & Mantanika, 2022).

The lack of drastic solutions has had numerous negative economic consequences. The integration of such a large number of people into local communities comes with a high financial cost, which is detrimental to local and national budgets. According to the European Commission, Greece, as a country on the border of Europe, spent at least €3 billion on managing forced sea movements between 2015 and 2020. Most of this money was used in the islands of the Eastern Aegean (European Commission, 2021). In addition, these areas are facing losses in sectors such as tourism, as visitors to these areas seem to prefer not to choose these places as they are negatively affected by port congestion and the existence of camps (Zachariadis, 2020).

At European level, forced sea crossings are high on the political agenda. Turkey, aware of its geopolitical position, has often treated the country as a gateway for migrants and refugees to Europe as a bargaining chip with the European Union since 2015 (Carrera & Geddes, 2021). This incident clearly shows how forced sea crossings are being used as a means of geopolitical pressure. The lack of a commonly accepted European policy until the emergence of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was enough to cause disputes between Member States, with Italy, Greece and Malta claiming that other countries do not seem to have a common policy on the issue (Guild et al., 2021).

Finally, the socio-economic and political implications of the phenomenon extend over a longer time horizon. The interaction of local residents and institutions in the crisis is shaping demographic changes and differences in existing regional development plans. The Eastern Mediterranean is a maritime area where forced displacement is not a temporary phenomenon but a constant parameter that will play a role in the functioning of shipping.

Chapter 5 — Review and Conclusions

For at least 100 years, the Eastern Mediterranean has been a place of continuous forced displacement of people. According to the above analysis, there is remarkable historical significance, inadequacy on the part of the institutions involved, and multidimensional implications of the issue for shipping, ports, societies, and the geopolitical context. The review of all these parameters aims to draw critical conclusions that will lead to important proposals for addressing the phenomenon.

5.1 Frequency of the phenomenon

The long history of forced population movements in the Eastern Mediterranean is proof that this is a phenomenon that has existed throughout time. Since the 19th century, wars and disputes between states, combined with geopolitical adjustments, have resulted in a more intense presence of this issue in the 20th century. A notable example is the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which led to the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, with around 2 million people being forced to leave the places where they grew up and undergo a process of readjustment to their new countries (Hirschon, 2003). In the years that followed, the Eastern Mediterranean became the scene of violent displacement, as was the case on the island of Cyprus in 1974, where the Turkish army invaded, culminating in the removal of around 200,000 people (Loizos, 2008). Similarly, the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s led to forced displacement, with maritime transport from this incident also affecting the Mediterranean, with refugees arriving at the ports of Italy and Greece.

This pattern observed in these cases is now evident. The problems that arise in the geopolitical sphere are transformed, as history shows, into forced sea crossings. The sea is a route of salvation for people facing serious obstacles in their own country, but at the

same time it is also a threat to human life. More specifically, estimates show that from 2014 to 2022, at least 25,000 people lost their lives in the waters of the Mediterranean in order to reach Europe (IOM, 2022). The conclusions drawn from the course of the years are as follows:

- People are moving under dangerous conditions, without a unified plan and without protection.
- Communities in coastal areas are under great pressure.
- International decision-making bodies are not functioning effectively and are largely inactive.
- The political sphere exploits these developments without taking into account the human cost.

The persistent nature of the phenomenon shows that the Eastern Mediterranean is not only characterised by isolated crises, but also by a geographical location prone to recurring waves of migration and refugees. The result is that strategies focused on short-term deterrence measures are unlikely to succeed. On the other hand, long-term, organised and people-centred solutions are needed to address the nature of the phenomenon.

5.2 Institutional and political weaknesses

The study conducted on the institutional and political actors involved in forced displacement in the Eastern Mediterranean reveals a complex mix of regulations, organisations and policy-making, which is more contradictory than stable and effective. The existence of global legal conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), provides a framework that defines the obligations of states and ships for rescue at sea. In practice, however, these regulations are applied very sporadically and in different ways from country to country, leading to frequent conflicts of jurisdiction (Trevisanut, 2014).

A notable example is the obligation to protect and disembark. Although the international legal framework is clear that every ship is obliged to protect people in distress at sea, it is not clear which authority regulates the country that is required to

assist those rescued. This leads to diplomatic disputes and situations where commercial ships are held for weeks with refugees and migrants in poor conditions, without a port of call (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020). The lack of clear guidelines from institutions creates obstacles to shipping.

At the European Union level, FRONTEX is presented as a key operational pillar for the proper management of maritime borders. However, despite its significant financial and human resources, the agency has been heavily criticised for human rights violations, particularly through illegal pushbacks (Moreno-Lax, 2018; Carrera & Cortinovis, 2019). The difference between the rescue mission and the deterrence policy undermines the credibility of the European Union. The irony is that agencies that are officially obliged to protect human life are at the centre of suspicions of violating it.

At the same time, the lack of unified decision-making between international and local institutions makes the ineffectiveness more apparent. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has promoted guidelines for search and rescue (SAR) operations, although these do not impose sanctions, with the result that each country acts in accordance with its own interests (Papastavridis, 2016). The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) contributes with humanitarian solidarity, but has no role in maritime operations. Taking the above into account, responsibility is divided among many stakeholders, with no one being solely responsible.

Another notable obstacle is the political exploitation of forced sea transport by certain countries. More specifically, Turkey has used sea transport to Greece on several occasions to negotiate with greater leverage against the European Union, showing that the lack of a collective institutional mechanism gives ground to political strategies that are contrary to humanitarian values (Geddes & Scholten, 2021). In the same context, countries such as Libya and Lebanon are unable to deal with their own migration crises, shifting responsibility to European and international bodies.

The results are summarized in the following findings:

- There is a sharp conflict between the political handling of phenomena and the humanitarian aspect of situations.
- Commercial shipping activities are at the mercy of political compromises.
- The institutions involved do not have a unified framework and operate independently.

In conclusion, institutional and political inadequacies are a significant deterrent that is essentially at the root of the problem. The lack of a unified and coordinated framework provided by an official European body undermines any effort to properly address forced displacement.

The analysis carried out shows that movements at sea are not just a complex humanitarian policy issue, but also a catalytic parameter capable of influencing the future of shipping and the stability of the region. The Eastern Mediterranean will continue to play this role as long as solutions are not explored in the right direction. Interest should focus on a unified solution to the issue and not on whether incidents are increasing or decreasing for purely statistical reasons.

As a general observation, a collective approach should be explored that would translate forced displacement as a permanent and multi-level challenge, taking into account the humanitarian dimension, maritime action and geopolitical planning from a general perspective. The next chapter will move in this direction, providing an in-depth analysis of the method that will achieve this expectation.

Chapter 6 — Proposals for Addressing the Phenomenon

The previous chapters have made it clear that the forced sea movements of people in the Eastern Mediterranean are a multifaceted problem that occurs consistently. The solution cannot be limited to deterrence actions or fragmented rescue operations. There is a serious need to develop a comprehensive strategy that takes into account humanitarianism, protection, the smooth operation of commercial ships, and cooperation between states and institutions.

6.1 Institutional and legal interventions

The issue analysed in the Eastern Mediterranean region reveals that institutional shortcomings lie in the disembarkation of refugees and migrants. Although international resolutions such as UNCLOS and SOLAS make clear the plan that exists for rescue operations, they cannot clarify which country has the responsibility to receive these people. This failure to bridge the gap leads to situations where commercial ships are immobilised for days or even months at sea, causing hardship for the people on board (Cusumano & Pattison, 2020). In order to overcome these obstacles facing the European Union, the following measures will need to be taken:

1. Responsibility allocation body

The mechanism will operate through the IMO's administrators and will be in constant communication with the European Union. Its primary responsibility will be to monitor specific ports in the Eastern Mediterranean that meet the conditions for receiving refugees forced to travel by sea. In this way, the route that a commercial ship must take to reach its destination as safely as possible will not be unknown.

2. Population relocation body

The Dublin Regulation makes it clear that states that continuously receive migrants and refugees beyond their capacity to accommodate them () suffer a clear injustice (Guild et al., 2015). Now, under a new framework, it will be possible to distribute rescued persons based on criteria such as population, economic development of the region and the reception capacity of each state, so that each country's contribution is legally binding and not discretionary (Carrera & Cortinovis, 2019).

3. Emphasis on SAR guidelines

The IMO's information on search and rescue should be mandatory for shipping organisations through oversight mechanisms and strict penalties when rules are violated. Joint cooperation with organisations such as the UNHCR and the IOM will be beneficial for regulating the control of maritime zones, limiting the political exploitation of the issue (Moreno-Lax, 2018).

The above measures have the potential to significantly strengthen the organisational framework of the institutions. Greater security for individuals, reduced uncertainty and less political confrontation between the states in the Eastern Mediterranean are a given.

6.2 Shipping and operational measures

Although not a primary means of managing forced sea movements, the shipping industry is forced to shoulder a heavy burden in rescue situations. Ships engaged in commercial voyages are called upon to assist in situations for which they have not been prepared. This results in long delays, financial losses and pressure on the crew. In order for commercial ships to operate more effectively, decisions must be made that clarify responsibility, financing and the integration of technological means.

1. Provision and payment of compensation

The presence of commercial ships in rescue situations translates into more fuel, delays in cargo transport, high insurance premiums and a lack of legal compliance. The creation of a European Maritime Search and Rescue Fund would provide an opportunity to offset these costs. The organisations providing this financial support would consist of the European Union and funding from other public institutions (ICS, 2021). This would alleviate the serious concerns of shipowners, who would no longer view forced transfers as additional costs but as an act of human solidarity.

2. Training of ship crews

At present, most ship employees do not have the necessary knowledge to respond appropriately to rescue situations. It is valuable for maritime academies to focus on training in areas such as basic medical knowledge and first aid, managing large populations in small spaces, psychology and passenger protection (Cusumano, 2017). At the same time, training should be provided on an ongoing basis so that merchant ship crews are kept up to date and undergo regular examinations.

3. Use of technology

The promotion of an Operational Centre focused on the Eastern Mediterranean is capable of greatly enhancing coordination in the region. The provision of satellite data, drones for monitoring and artificial intelligence algorithms are important tools for both predicting maritime movements and preventing rescue situations (Baird & Kitada, 2019). The easy and rapid exchange of information between states, ports, ships and,

more generally, the European bodies involved will play a catalytic role in faster decision-making and potentially saving human lives.

4. Construction of rescue ships

An equally important decision is the design and promotion of vessels that will focus exclusively on providing support in rescue situations. These ships will be permanently stationed in major ports in the Eastern Mediterranean. They will operate on an emergency basis to provide assistance to commercial vessels, in order to share people, machinery, cargo and anything else that may be needed. Cooperation between the public sector (universities) and the private sector (shipping companies) would be ideal for implementing the above, without causing congestion in ports.

5. Bridging the gap between shipping and insurance companies

The use of commercial ships in operations to protect people travelling by sea increases insurance costs for shipping companies. Through mutually acceptable cooperation and sustainability arrangements, special clauses could be included in insurance contracts for rescue situations, so that rescue operations are taken into account financially without ultimately causing major budgetary deviations.

If the above actions are implemented, there are great prospects for transforming shipping from an organisation lacking rescue initiatives into a responsible body providing support, training and technology. Based on the above parameters, it is realistically achievable to protect human life at sea more frequently, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of commercial ships.

6.3 Socio-economic and geopolitical policies

The proper handling of forced movements is not only a matter of institutional and maritime issues. A plan is needed that takes into account social, economic and geopolitical factors, to which maritime movements must be adapted. Ports that receive excessively large cargoes and the economic data of countries such as Greece and Italy are directly affected by the tension building up in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, the proposals to be analysed in the political sector have

an obligation to help strengthen communities, shield economic stability and put an end to the political exploitation of the phenomenon.

1. Strengthening infrastructure

Many places, such as the Aegean islands and the southern coast of Italy, have often been challenged by migration movements by sea, with the serious consequence of huge concentrations in hospitals, schools, ports and service centres. The European Union is called upon to prepare special programmes for these areas, aimed at developing health and education facilities, creating new jobs and providing financial resources for the local economy. However, these funds must be received at a steady rate so that communities can withstand this situation and not face the disadvantages of migration (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

2. Funding for specific countries

Countries under severe pressure such as Greece, Italy, Malta and Cyprus should be supported with larger amounts in the context of the high bailouts taking place there. An economic crisis control organisation could draw on resources when transfers exceed expectations. In addition, local authorities should be included in European budgets to promote business initiatives that bring migration closer to the local economy.

3. Cooperation between countries

Forced sea crossings are often exploited by countries such as Turkey and Libya, which aim to negotiate better terms through this phenomenon. In order to protect the humanitarian character of these movements, cooperation agreements must be concluded that aim at financial rewards through acts of solidarity. A prerequisite is the provision of accountability systems so that funding is available when there is a clear obligation to respect international law and prevent violations (Geddes & Scholten, 2021). In the same vein, cooperation with global bodies such as the UNHCR and the IOM must act as guarantors.

4. Basic investments in countries

In the long term, reducing forced migration is linked to addressing its root causes, which include war, poverty and, more generally, imbalances. The European Union and global institutions are called upon to embrace a policy of development in countries of origin, with an emphasis on infrastructure, education and sustainable development projects. This would reduce the prospect of forced migration while increasing the stability of countries (Betts, 2021).

The implementation of the above policies could transform the response to forced displacement from an ongoing crisis into a systematic strategy for stability. Support for local communities, fair distribution of economic burdens, responsible cooperation with third countries and strengthening countries of origin form a coherent framework that reduces pressure on shipping, strengthens social cohesion and promotes geopolitical balance in the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Legal texts & institutional frameworks

European Commission (2023). Pact on Migration and Asylum. Brussels: European Commission.

International Maritime Organisation (IMO) (2023). Search and Rescue Manual (SOLAS/SAR guidance). London: IMO.

Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Border and Coast Guard.

Regulation (EC) 1406/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Maritime Safety Agency.

UNCLOS (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. United Nations, New York.

United Nations (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*. Montego Bay: United Nations.

United Nations (1951). *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. Geneva: United Nations.

United Nations (1967). *Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*. New York: United Nations.

SOLAS (2020). *International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea*. London: IMO Publications.

SAR Protocol (2004). *International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Manual*. International Maritime Organisation.

Scientific articles

Baird, N., & Kitada, M. (2019). Big Data and the Maritime Industry. *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 18(3), 385–404.

Bialasiewicz, L. (2012). Off-shoring and out-sourcing the borders of Europe: Libya and EU border work in the Mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), pp. 843–866. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.660582>

Carrera, S. & Geddes, A. (2021). The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Towards a new policy architecture? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(3), pp. 345–369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1874039>

Collyer, M. (2016). Migrant journeys across the Mediterranean: Processes and dynamics. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(7), pp. 1065–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1141391>

Crawley, H. & Skleparis, D. (2018). Refugees, migrants, neither, both: Categorising those crossing the Mediterranean Sea. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1), pp. 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224>

Cusumano, E. & Pattison, J. (2020). The Politics of Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean. *Marine Policy*, 119, 104067. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104067>

Fargues, P. (2017). Migration in the Mediterranean Basin: Historical pathways and policy challenges. *International Migration Review*, 51(3), pp. 515–542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12244>

Fargues, P. & Bonfanti, S. (2020). The demographics of forced migration in the Mediterranean. *Population Studies*, 74(1), pp. 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2020.1735134>

Gammeltoft-Hansen, T. & Hathaway, J. (2015). Non-refoulement in a world of cooperative deterrence. *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 53(2), pp. 235–284.

Geddes, A., & Scholten, P. (2021). *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*. Sage.

- Guild, E., Costello, C. & Moreno-Lax, V. (2021). The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in light of the UN Global Compact on Refugees. *CEPS Policy Insight*, Brussels.
- Hirschon, R. (2003). Crossing the Aegean: An appraisal of the 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(1), pp. 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/16.1.45>
- Heller, C. & Pezzani, L. (2017). Blaming the rescuers: The impact of EU migration policies on Mediterranean SAR operations. Forensic Oceanography Project Report.
- Kinacioglu, M. (2023). Militarised governance of migration in the Mediterranean. *International Affairs*, 99(6), pp. 2423–2441. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia129>
- Léonard, S. & Kaunert, C. (2020). The securitisation of migration in the European Union: Frontex and border security. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 35(2), pp. 223–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2020.1705711>
- Lovro Iussich (2018). Search and Rescue Operations of Immigrants at Sea: Challenges for the Crew of Merchant Ships. *Review article*.
- Loizos, P. (2008). *Iron in the Soul: Displacement, Livelihood and Health in Cyprus*. Berghahn Books.
- Moreno-Lax, V. (2018). The architecture of functional jurisdiction: Unpacking contactless control in the Mediterranean Sea. *German Law Journal*, 19(3), pp. 423–460. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2071832200022731>
- Moreno-Lax, V. & Mann, I. (2023). Analysis of the Pylos shipwreck: Lessons for European SAR policy. *Migration Policy Centre*, University of Oxford.
- Notteboom, T., Pallis, T., & Rodrigue, J.-P. (2021). Port–city relationships. In *Port Economics, Management and Policy*.
- Pallis, T. (2015). Cruise Shipping and Urban Development: State of the Art of the Industry and Cruise Ports. International Transport Forum Discussion Paper No. 2015/14. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Pallis, T. (2024). Port-Cities, Ports and Cruise: Enhancing a Mutually Beneficial Symbiosis. In *Cruise Port City Compass – Global Cases Inspiring Sustainable Connections & Communities*. MedCruise / AIVP.

Papachristos, G., Tsioumas, V. & Kanellopoulos, K. (2022). Port congestion and maritime delays: An analysis of the Eastern Mediterranean under migration pressure. *Marine Policy*, 140, 105054. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105054>

Papanicolopulu, I. (2016). International law and the protection of people at sea. *International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, 31(2), pp. 385–412. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718085-12341399>

Papastavridis, E. (2016). The Interception of Vessels on the High Seas: Contemporary Challenges to the Legal Order of the Oceans. *Ocean Development & International Law*, 47(1), 36–69.

Petrillo, E. & Panebianco, S. (2020). Refugee governance and humanitarian practices in the Mediterranean. *Global Affairs*, 6(3), pp. 255–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1818300>

Sayigh, Y. (1998). Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 27(3), pp. 21–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2537942>

Trevisanut, S. (2014). Search and Rescue Operations in the Mediterranean: Factor of Cooperation or Conflict? *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 26(4), 668–693.

Triandafyllidou, A. (2023). Governing irregular migration in the Mediterranean: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 36(1), pp. 45–72. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac051>

Triandafyllidou, A. & Isaakyan, I. (2016). *Climate-Driven Migration and European Policy Challenges*. Springer.

Zürcher, E. J. (2007). *Turkey: A Modern History*. I.B. Tauris, London.

Reports by international organisations & statistical data

Amnesty International (2021). *Frontex: Human rights violations at Europe's borders – Accountability challenges*. London: Amnesty International.

EMSA (2023). *Annual Maritime Safety Report*. Lisbon: European Maritime Safety Agency. Available at: <https://emsa.europa.eu/>.

European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) (2023). *Annual Maritime Safety Report*. Lisbon: EMSA.

European Parliament (2022). *Frontex scrutiny and accountability at the EU's external borders*. Brussels: European Parliament.

European Commission (2023). *Pact on Migration and Asylum*. Brussels: European Commission.

FRONTEX (2022). *Eastern Mediterranean Route Monitoring Report*. Warsaw: European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

FRONTEX (2023). *Risk Analysis Report 2023*. Warsaw: European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

IEMed (2023). *Maritime Pressures and Trade Flows in the Eastern Mediterranean*. Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean.

ICMPD (2021). *Migration Outlook for the Mediterranean*. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

IOM (2022). *Migration Data Portal & Missing Migrants Project*. Geneva: International Organisation for Migration.

IOM (2023). *Missing Migrants Project: Mediterranean Route Analysis*. Geneva: International Organisation for Migration.

IMO (2023). *Search and Rescue Manual: Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)*. London: International Maritime Organisation.

Lloyd's Market Report (2023). *Maritime Insurance Premiums in High-Risk Zones*. London: Lloyd's Research Institute.

UNHCR (2016). *Mediterranean Situation: Operational Data*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR (2022). *Maritime Deaths in the Mediterranean*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR (2023). *Operational Data Portal – Mediterranean Situation*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNCTAD (2022). *Maritime Transport Report: Suez Canal Trade*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

World Bank (2023). *Groundswell Part II: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.

Books

CENTRE OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH (2018). GREEK ECONOMIC OUTLOOK. Issue 35, February 2018.

Fargues, P. (2020). *Migration across the Mediterranean: Past, Present and Future*. Springer, Berlin.

Goodwin-Gill, G. & McAdam, J. (2021). *The Refugee in International Law*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hirschon, R. (2003). *Crossing the Aegean: An appraisal of the 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Lutterbeck, D. (2018). *The Rise and Fall of Border Control in the Mediterranean*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Tsakalidis, A. (2021). *Maritime Security and the Eastern Mediterranean*. Routledge, London.