



Migration and humanitarian corridors: an EU-funded project as a driver for change¹

Cinzia Leone¹, Gianluca Olcese^{2, 4}, Anna Siri^{3, 4}

¹ Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT), Genova, Italy; cinzia.leone@iit.it

² University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland; gianluca.olcese@umwr.edu.pl

³ Università Pegaso, Naples, Italy; anna.siri@unipegaso.it

⁴ UNESCO Chair in Anthropology of Health. Biosphere and Healing systems, Italy

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Abstract

In recent years, international migration has become a widespread phenomenon within the European Union and the global economy. It involves the movement of people who cross national borders either temporarily or permanently and leave their home country. Modern migration is characterised as a global, multidirectional and large-scale process and is of great interest to Europe and the EU in particular.

After a brief introduction to the data on recent migration trends in Europe, this article presents an EU-funded project that has dealt with the specific case of humanitarian corridors, which emerged from civil society in Italy and have been implemented in several European countries since 2016. As an alternative to uncontrolled migration flows and based on solid experience, the humanitarian corridors are described as the only acceptable alternative to the lack of a common migration policy and presented as a solution to a current and timely challenge for our society today.

Keywords: Migration, Humanitarian corridors, Poverty, European Projects

1. Introduction and concept outline

Over the past few years, transnational migration has emerged as a widespread dynamic in the European Union and in the global economy. This process involves the movement of people who permanently or temporarily cross the borders of their home country. Today's migration is described as a global, multidirectional and mass phenomenon. Among the factors fuelling this phenomenon, economic aspects, poverty and war predominate. In other cases, it is a question of skilled labour migrating to a specific destination country (the so-called brain drain) and who are familiar with the host country.

Migration is a major concern for European governments and the EU as a whole. Indeed, Europe is a continent where around 9% of all EU inhabitants were born outside the EU, totalling 42.4 million people.

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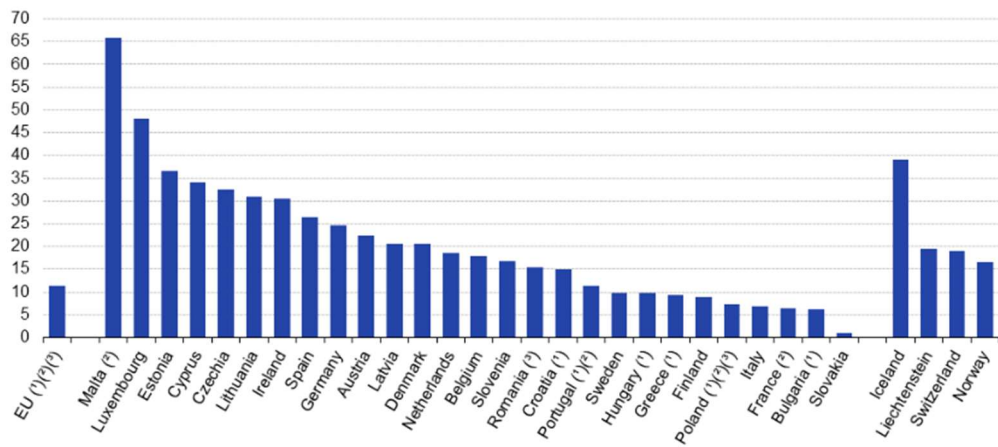


Fig. 1: Immigrants in Europe, 2022. Source: Eurostat²

Germany, the UK and France are the most popular destination countries for migrants, as shown in Figure n.1, which presents the top ten European destination countries. although the data are from 2021, this UN statistic is interesting because it is broken down by gender.

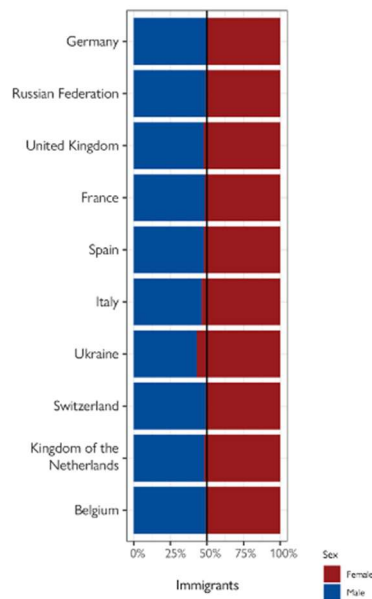


Fig. 2: Top ten European destinations (2020).

Source IOM, 2024: data from UN DESA, 2021

² [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Fig_2_Immigrants,_2022_\(per_1_000_inhabitants\)_rev.png#filelinks](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Fig_2_Immigrants,_2022_(per_1_000_inhabitants)_rev.png#filelinks). Last accessed 10/1/2025.

The following figure illustrates the migration flows of interest for Europe in the period 1990-2020, comparing three different migration flows: 1) migrants to Europe, 2) migrants within Europe and 3) migrants from Europe. They are divided into macro-regions.

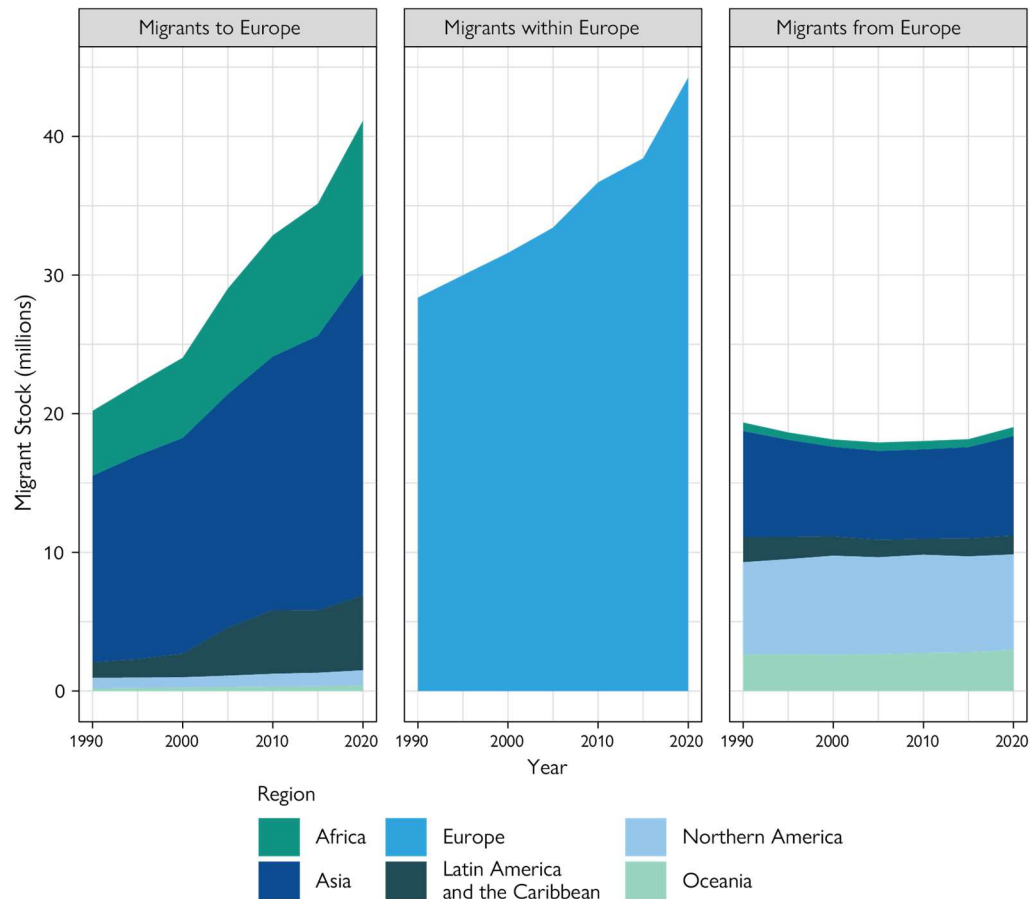


Fig. 3: European migration fluxes 1990-2020
Source IOM, 2024: data from UN DESA, 2021

In the past, the attractiveness of European Union countries for immigrants was determined by relatively favourable economic conditions and political stability. Numerous European countries are recognized for their prosperity and robust institutional frameworks that ensure legal and social safeguards. These include employment protections against unjust dismissal, statutory minimum wages, and comprehensive welfare benefits—all of which contribute to high living standards and attract migrants from less developed regions.

Moreover, as signatories to the Geneva Convention, many European nations are legally bound to grant asylum to individuals fleeing persecution and seeking refugee status.

This migration flow requires both the management of migration by individual countries and concrete international cooperation in this area: the regulation falls under the jurisdiction of sovereign states, implemented through their respective national migration policy frameworks, but there is still a huge need for a common approach and a concerted policy to deal with emergency situations caused by war or poverty, for example.

Humanitarian corridors would be one such solution, as evidenced by the high success rate in integrating these corridors, which have been established in the EU over the last ten years together with the Community of Sant'Egidio, a worldwide movement of volunteers that was founded in Rome (Italy) in 1968 and then spread around the globe with thousands of members on all continents. The aim of migration policy is not only to ensure effective management of migration flows, but also to prevent illegal immigration, which puts people at risk and exposes them to violence and assault, to combat the trafficking of human beings, to guarantee that people from third countries receive fair treatment and to aid them in better adapting to new cultures and societies.

It is generally recognised that Migration is affected by different social, economic, environmental, and political factors in the migrator's home country (referred to as push factors) or in the destination country (so-called pull factors) (Lee, 1966; Parkins, 2010). Despite various attempts and efforts, the EU and individual countries are still looking for a solution to migration flows. In recent months in particular, Europe has been receiving many refugees – individuals, groups or families fleeing their home countries due to war or persecution. Migration is one of the greatest challenges of our time due to its scale, consequences, and impact on various economic and social sectors (Khanna, 2021). Legal migration is a common feature of global migration processes, but illegal migration has been on the rise in recent years (IOM, 2024) and this is where humanitarian corridors come to the aid of our European societies.

Various subjects and fields are attempting to understand the phenomenon of contemporary international migration, including identifying its causes and determinants and predicting its course and impact, which remains a highly relevant topic (Bijak, 2006; Aslany *et al.*, 2021). People's attitudes toward people who leave their countries of residence to migrate are changing due to changes in the modern world. This can be observed in most European societies, where episodes of intolerance or racism towards migrants are commonplace. At the same time, the lack of concrete integration measures (Beverelli, 2022) means that migrants are left without concrete opportunities for personal development, integration into the labour market and full social accommodation.

European production has changed, and immigrants are now filling the employment gap and demand by taking jobs in conditions that are often unacceptable to the native population. Despite their active participation in the workforce and their role in

supporting the host country's economy, some segments of society continue to view them unfavourably, while right-wing political parties throughout Europe exploit their presence for political gain (Solano, De Conick, 2023).

It is important to highlight that, beyond the presence or absence of migration policies, organisations dedicated to assisting and supporting migrants and refugees make a significant contribution—particularly by facilitating the social inclusion of international migrants and refugees within local communities. They can welcome and accompany migrants throughout their integration journey and even – as in the case of humanitarian corridors – pick them up in the countries where they are waiting for the opportunity to migrate. The phenomenon should not be underestimated and the policies of building new walls around the ivory tower of Europe is not successful. This paper focuses primarily on the case of humanitarian corridors as a feasible solution to the migration concern and provides an insight arising from an EU-funded project looking at the implementation of humanitarian corridors on a large scale within the EU. The work provides an overview of migration legislation at EU level and the situation of migrants in Europe and briefly analyses the case of Poland, where one of the partners of the EU project referred to is based.

The aim of this work is to better publicise and disseminate the humanitarian corridors approach as a driver for change in migration policy: practitioners and “ordinary” citizens could consider the possibility of actively participating in the reception of those who enter our society through a humanitarian corridor because they need help and healing.

2. Migration and humanitarian corridors

Humanitarian corridors are a legal means of entry into Europe offered to vulnerable people fleeing from wars, persecutions, and hunger (Morozzo della Rocca, 2023). They primarily save families with children, individuals with disabilities, lone women, the elderly, and the sick.

The EC Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Project *Humanitarian Corridors Integration pathways: fostering better integration opportunities for people in need of protection through strengthened private sponsorship schemes* (Acronym: HUMCORE, Grant Agreement N. 101038285) was one 30-months project coordinated by ACAP/Community of Sant'Egidio in Italy. It involved 11 partners from 9 countries and was focussed on the implementation of humanitarian corridors and dissemination of its concept in the countries not already implementing them. HUMCORE evolved on the principles of humanitarian corridors already developed in the EU, tackling an important topic for our contemporary societies. In fact, especially recently, on a number of occasions humanitarian corridors have been the focus of different narratives in Europe and they have been put on the table in particular in 2022, when the Ukrainian war began, as a means to save lives and therefore attracting great attention.

In the form they have been created, at present they represent a great hope despite the numerical disproportion between beneficiaries and those enduring long journeys across seas, mountains, and deserts. They are not a pass for everyone; they are intended for individuals in need of international protection. However, since vulnerability and suffering are the reality for nearly all refugees and migrants, humanitarian corridors gain universal significance, going well beyond the single corridor performed.

To date their promoters are inundated with requests, appeals, and pleas: in a cynical world, humanitarian efforts raise immense expectations. In the first instance invented and promoted by civil society with the support of the state, humanitarian corridors rescue uprooted individuals from human traffickers on illegal routes, makeshift boats on Mediterranean crossings, violence on Balkan routes, abuses in rogue countries, and disastrous forced and mostly unsuccessful repatriations.

Beyond being a humanitarian intervention, these corridors have the unique feature of effectively integrating beneficiaries – at social and economic levels - into local host communities through a sponsorship and self-financing process focused on civil society. A model is then outlined and run-in: it emphasises private initiative, beneficiary selection tied to sponsorship, and fair collaboration with states in security procedures and the utilisation of legal tools, approved by the hosting country.

In fact, humanitarian corridors are established based on Memoranda of Understanding with governments, and this could not be otherwise, as they involve the sovereignty of nations, have public implications, and are legally complex.

Speaking of numbers and indicators, the humanitarian corridors have a rather wide impact. As a matter of fact, through this channel, from 2016 to 2024, 7,831 individuals have arrived in Europe (source: santegidio.org). They were “classified” as vulnerable, sick, their human rights were violated or at risk of being violated. One can say that the number is relatively low and unmeaningful for the mass of migrants that the EU is currently dealing with. But it is worth to say, for example, that other legal humanitarian admission schemes in Europe, i.e. resettlement programmes, account for numbers that make the figures of the humanitarian corridors pale in comparison. According to UNHCR data of 2022 (cited in Morozzo della Rocca, 2023, p.7), there are only two countries which admitted a higher number of persons within the same time span here considered (France and Germany), but the rest of the EU countries did not surpass the number of humanitarian corridors at all (countries like: Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Austria, Denmark, Croatia, Slovenia, with numbers between 2695 and 35). In many cases they did not admit anyone (Poland, for example)³. In Italy – the country where humanitarian corridors were born - the scheme for humanitarian admission of individuals in need of international protection that totals the highest number of arrivals is the one provided by the humanitarian corridors (6,807 in the period 2016-2024).

³ France admitted 15,725 persons, Germany 14,030, Spain 2,695, Ireland 1,950, Portugal 810, Austria 580, Denmark 345, Croatia 250, Slovenia 35.

Certainly, in the face of global humanitarian needs and migration flows, the numbers associated with the humanitarian corridors represent a mild alleviation of a tremendous and extended tragedy. However, the corridors are emblematic in the measure where they 1) open new welcome avenues of people in needs; 2) initiate concrete integration processes; 3) are a sign of hope, humanism, and humanity; and in any case, 4) save lives.

Implemented by civil society and volunteering organisations in the first instance, they would supplement government gaps or lack of action: in fact, the corridors might justify public inaction or mis-action in addressing humanitarian emergencies. With a negative approach, they could serve as an excuse for governments determined to maintain legal frameworks hostile to immigrants and refugees: where civil society intervenes, no need to take further actions by side of public bodies (Ackermann, Erhardt, Freitag, 2023).

The corridors do not absolve or exclude the responsibilities of the single state and of the EU. The corridors should be observed as additional to the resettlement efforts carried out by states, not substitutes. The corridors represent a positive role of civil society that promotes them at its expense. Legal systems change when cultures change, and civil society mobilisations like those of the corridors, which involve tens of thousands of people in hosting and integrating, can change cultures. In fact, it is not a matter of numbers only: humanitarian corridors can influence mentality. The corridors activity is a very time-consuming action. Persons should be individuated where they are (typically refugees camps or similar) in a foreign country, selected, documents be prepared and then they can arrive in the hosting country. When arrived, another long path begins with different actions, depending on the person's need, but in generally they are the settlement, a language course, assistance, cure, and healing, employment, school or other educational paths, assistance for the daily leaving. Beneficiaries of humanitarian corridors are not left in camp as it happens for those reaching Europe on their own. They are accompanied step by step and surrounded by people in the hosting country who care. They are not left alone, without a cent and without understanding a word. Children are accompanied at school, persons in need are accompanied to the hospitals, they can take a surgery operation and maybe be healed for illness that could be fatal if left in a refugees' camp. They could face a dangerous journey in the Mediterranean Sea or through the Balkan route to which they could not survive – we are speaking of vulnerable people. In the meantime, the humanitarian corridors allow the state of destination to welcome persons selected and arriving with all the documents already in place. Their trip is paid, and the hosting arrangements are planned as well. They will learn the language, be socially integrated and, in the case they can, they will work and send the children to school or be inserted in other educational paths.

Humanitarian corridors can therefore represent a convenient solution to those states which have difficulties to open the borders. They could accept to welcome those selected via humanitarian corridors, aware of the fact that they will not be abandoned. Moreover, humanitarian corridors can represent a flagship, an

honourable action also for those states which do not consider the possibility to open the frontiers to migration flows at all, or do not consider the possibility to invest money on the integration path as a whole.

3. HUMCORE as a driver for change

The project HUMCORE was a project stemming from the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union (AMIF) under the Grant Agreement N. 101038285. The project aimed to enhance integration for third-country nationals in need of protection by improving Humanitarian Corridors (HC) and Private Sponsorship Schemes (PSS) operating since 2016 across 8 EU countries.

HUMCORE project focused on 1) introducing more efficient solutions to enhance integration paths; 2) conducting participatory action research and capacity building activities to expand knowledge among sponsors and involve new countries and beneficiaries; 3) supporting 1,000 individuals from non-EU countries in achieving autonomy and integration into work and university, with at least 200 achieving full integration; 4) conducting comparative analyses on scheme scale-up and visualizing migration patterns through ICT technology, and 5) developing guidelines for effective implementation and advocating for the expansion of HC schemes at the EU level.

In 2019 more than 275 million people were registered as migrants (Khanna, 2021). During the last decades, forced migrations grown much faster than voluntary migration. Our contemporary societies lay their own foundation on the migration. Towards the end of the XIX century, international migrants represented the 14% of the global world population; notwithstanding the number, nowadays they represent only the 3% of the world population and still legal migrations and the welcoming of refugees represent an unsolved issue for many western and developed countries. At the end of 2022, there were approximately 5.4 million people considered as asylum seekers⁴. The HUMCORE project inserted in the European and international framework of legislation, through practising humanitarian corridors as a way of legal migration.

4. Conclusions

The preceding sections of this article present a compelling case for humanitarian corridors as a viable and ethical solution to the challenges posed by contemporary migration flows. The analysis underscores their potential to offer safe and legal pathways for vulnerable migrants while fostering integration through civil society engagement. However, a critical examination reveals both strengths and limitations of this approach, necessitating further reflection on its scalability, political feasibility, and broader sociological implications.

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers>. Last access 8/1/2025.

The authors rightly emphasize that humanitarian corridors, though numerically limited, serve as a moral and practical alternative to chaotic and often deadly irregular migration. The success of these corridors—evidenced by the integration of nearly 8,000 individuals since 2016—demonstrates that structured, community-led initiatives can mitigate some of the systemic failures of EU migration policies. Yet, as the article acknowledges, the scale remains insufficient compared to the magnitude of global displacement. This raises a crucial question: Can such initiatives truly influence broader policy, or do they risk becoming a symbolic gesture that absolves states of their responsibilities?

Here, the work of sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman (2016) on "liquid modernity" becomes relevant. Bauman's critique of globalization highlights how nation-states increasingly outsource humanitarian responsibilities to NGOs and civil society, creating a paradox where private actors fill gaps left by retreating welfare systems. Humanitarian corridors, while laudable, may inadvertently reinforce this trend by allowing governments to avoid systemic reforms. The article hints at this dilemma but could further explore whether these corridors challenge or sustain the current neoliberal governance of migration.

The HUMCORE project exemplifies how civil society can drive change, yet its reliance on volunteerism and private sponsorship raises concerns about sustainability. As Didier Fassin (2012) argues in *Humanitarian Reason*, the moralization of politics through humanitarianism can depoliticize migration, reducing it to a matter of compassion rather than rights. While humanitarian corridors save lives, their dependence on charitable frameworks risks perpetuating a two-tier system where only the "deserving" few receive protection, leaving others to perilous journeys.

Moreover, the article could engage with Saskia Sassen's (2014) concept of "expulsions" to interrogate why migration policies remain exclusionary despite evident humanitarian needs. Sassen's framework suggests that systemic economic and political forces—not just policy inertia—drive the marginalization of migrants. Humanitarian corridors, though valuable, do not address the structural inequalities that force displacement in the first place.

The article effectively critiques the EU's fragmented migration policies but stops short of proposing concrete structural alternatives. While humanitarian corridors are a step forward, they should not divert attention from the urgent need for common asylum standards, equitable burden-sharing, and expanded legal pathways. The work of Thomas Faist (2018) on "transnational social protection" could enrich this discussion by highlighting how migration governance must move beyond ad-hoc solutions to institutionalize rights-based approaches.

Additionally, the authors might consider the geopolitical dimensions of migration. Hein de Haas (2021) challenges the "migration crisis" narrative, arguing that migration is a normal response to global inequalities. Rather than focusing solely on controlling borders, policies should address root causes through development

cooperation and fair trade—a perspective that humanitarian corridors alone cannot fulfill.

The article makes a persuasive case for humanitarian corridors as a pragmatic and ethical model, particularly in the absence of coherent EU-wide policies. However, their true potential lies not in isolation but as part of a broader movement advocating for structural reforms. By combining grassroots initiatives like HUMCORE with political advocacy, civil society can push for policies that expand legal migration channels, enhance integration, and uphold human rights.

Ultimately, while humanitarian corridors are not a panacea, they embody the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility that should underpin European migration policy. The challenge ahead is to scale these efforts while demanding accountability from states—ensuring that humanitarianism does not become a substitute for justice.

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