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THE MIGRATION-SECURITY NEXUS: DESECURITIZATION AND THE SHIFT TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

Abstract

Migration emerged as a security issue in the context of the geopolitical dislocation shaped by the end of the Cold War and by social and political shifts associated with globalization processes. As such, the migration-security nexus tends to present the understanding of migration and migrants as a threat to the destination or transit countries. However, the increasing number of people migrating because of political, societal, economic, and environmental reasons and their heterogeneity requires a change in the approach. Migration couldn't be perceived mostly from the perspective of the potentially generated threat. The article proposes a wider and more sustainable approach to the migration-security nexus based on the desecuritization of migration processes and their participants. Using comparative analysis and discourse analysis, points to three levels of the migration-security nexus, considering the multiple perspectives of migration processes and their practical implications. The approach proposes a more balanced and diverse understanding of research migration in the context of security.

KEYWORDS: *migration, security, securitization, desecuritization, people in the move, receiving countries, illegal migration*

INTRODUCTION

The security perspective in migration research and practice has been one of the most popular throughout the last 30 years. While it was previously considered to be a social and economic phenomenon belonging to the fields of socio-economic history, historical sociology and anthropology, migration is now pivotal in debates surrounding global politics, including the security perspective (Castles and Davidson, 2000; Castles and Miller, 1993; Sassen, 1996; Sayad, 1999; Soysal, 1994). International migration has moved beyond humanitarian, economic development, labor market and societal integration concerns, raising complex interactive security implications for governments of migrant-sending, receiving and transit countries and multilateral bodies. (Lohrmann, 2000) Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been an intense academic debate about the meaning of the notion of *security* in the phenomenon of migration, and how to study the security issues at the beginning of the globalization era (Fierke, 2007; Ticu, 2021). It was connected with the extension of security studies to non-military, environmental, economic,

identity, and migration issues proposed by the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998; Krause, 2017; Walker, 1990) and (on the second stage) with the extension of the referential issues for security studies from state-centered approach, focused on the security of states and their citizens" (Husymans, 2006, p. 3) to the security of individuals, of societies or the entire humanity. Safety or security needs are among the main *pull factors* motivating people to migrate. At the same time, insecurity is recognized as a push factor. (Table 1.)

	Push factors	Pull factors
Economic and demographic	Poverty; Unemployment; Low wages; High fertility rates; Lack of basic health and education.	Prospects of higher wages; Potential for an improved standard of living; Personal or professional development.
Political	Armed conflict, insecurity, violence; Poor governance; Corruption; Human rights abuses.	Safety and security Political freedom
Social and cultural	Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion, and the like	Family reunification; Ethnic (diaspora migration) homeland; Freedom from discrimination.

Table 1. Motivations for migration according to the World Bank

Source: *Migration and Remittances. Easter Europe and the former Soviet Union*, World Bank, 2006, p. 78.

Growing perceptions of international migration as a security issue are intimately related to transnational migration's quantitative and qualitative evolution. In the late 1990s, an estimated 150 million persons were living outside their countries of origin, representing about 2% of the world's population. (Lohrmann, 2000) In 2020, the total number of international migrants was 280,6 million. The international number of forcibly displaced people (largescale involuntary migration), including refugees, has doubled since 2010. Climate change, the population boom in Africa, the situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East, wars and armed conflicts and global pandemics will be the main contributors to migration processes. (Migration data portal). Movements of persons across borders impact international relations (IR) and security by:

- 1. shaping national security agendas of destination and transit countries by perceiving migrations as a threat to economic well-being, social order, cultural and religious values and political stability;
- 2. creating tensions and burdening bilateral relations between states, thus impacting regional and international stability;
- 3. creating unpredictable actors in international relations from migrants and refugees, whose individual security and dignity have been violated by irregular migration flows and involuntary population displacements. (Lohrmann, 2000)

The migration/security nexus has been approached both from a traditional strategic perspective through a focus on the security of the state and a human security perspective through a focus on the security of individual migrants. (Huysmans and Squire, 2009, p. 2). In both cases, migration is mainly perceived as a threat/danger/risk or challenge – for the country (society) of destination and people in the move taking part in migration processes. *Control* and *security* have moved to be central concerns in political and media narratives about migration in Western countries.

In the strategic approach to the migration-security nexus migration is factored into the calculations of national security strategy (Koslowski, 1998; Rudolph, 2006; Choucri, 2002; Weiner, 1992/93). This approach focuses its attention on how far migratory and demographic developments bear upon national security questions (Choucri, 2002; Heisbourg, 1991; Loescher, 1992) in the wide perspective: from refugees turning to violent political actors (Loescher, 1992), to the effect of migration on social cohesion and the availability of a sufficient workforce (Rudolph, 2006). That's why in many policies it is recommended to provide the state's selection of migrants (Constant and Zimmerman, 2005). Strategic approaches not only delete from the security field the normative questions of how securitizing migration produces exclusions, violence, and inequalities; they also reduce the political and social complexity of migration to the strategic interaction between states. (Huysmans and Squire, 2009, p. 5)

The human security approach focuses attention on the security of the individual: they shift away from the state as the subject of security, and bring into view the security of humans who migrate. It is widely presented in the research and practice on refugees and asylum seekers (Nadig, 2002), as well as in the trafficking of (primarily women and children) migrants (Clark, 2003). It is sometimes connected with a rights-based approach, which has been posed as an alternative to a security-orientated approach to forced migration (Goodwin-Gill, 2001), trafficking (Jordan, 2002) and illegal immigration (Cholenewski, 2000).

Both approaches (strategic and human) frame migration in terms of two conflicting security claims – human versus national security. They use a security frame in which *undesirable* migrants are either politicized as *threatening* subjects or are de-politicized as *vulnerable* subjects (Aradau, 2004; Aradau, 2008; Nyers, 2005; Squire, 2009; Huysmans and Squire, 2009, p. 7) (Table 2).

	perspective	security understanding	practical aspects
strategic approach	perspective of the state	security as a value or condition that is affected by migration flows	migration needs to be factored into the calculations of national security strategy
human security approach	perspective of the individual	security as a value or a condition to aspire to by migrants	migrants should be protected as "vulnerable" subjects

Table 2. Strategic and human security approach to migration-security nexus

Source: own study.

This approach is not sufficient to understand all dimensions of the migration-security nexus, also in the context of positive cooperation between these two concepts. It does not lead to desecuritization processes, i.e. the return of migration issues to *normal* politics and addressing challenges related to migration without the need to use extraordinary measures. Finally, it does not provide satisfactory solutions in terms of security practice, especially in a situation where there is a need for states and governments to act more inclusively and more humanely towards migrants and refugees. The dilemmas presented above raise the following **research questions**:

- 1. To what extent can migration be perceived as a security issue?
- 2. What kind of insecurities does exactly migration raise? For whom or what?
- 3. Is it possible to perceive migration as a source of security?
- 4. And the final one:
- 5. Is it possible to build a comprehensive and sustainable approach to studying the migration-security nexus with the implementation of the different perspectives?

Using comparative analysis and discourse analysis, the article aims to propose a wider and more sustainable approach to the migration-security nexus based on the desecuritization of migration processes and their participants. Based on European experience, three levels of the migration-security nexus will be presented, taking into account the multiple perspectives of migration processes and their practical implications.

THREE FACES OF MIGRATION

The approaches to the migration-security nexus presented in the Introduction from the perspective of strategic studies and human security do not exhaust the complexity and multidimensionality of this phenomenon. Moreover, both focus primarily on the perspective of threats (risks or challenges) and are less willing to look for sources of security (chances) in this relationship. For creating a sustainable approach to the migration-security nexus it is crucial to indicate three levels of this relation referring to:

- 1. Migration as an insecurity provider,
- 2. Migration as a referent object under threat
- 3. Migration as a security resource.

MIGRATION AS AN INSECURITY PROVIDER

This approach to the migration-security nexus is – as already mentioned – the broadest and oldest, most strongly represented in international relations (IR).

It results from the primacy of the state-centric approach. The state, having as its primary goal the preservation of its very existence, the maintenance and protection of public order and security, (Mantzoufas, 2006) takes care of the preservation of public order and its citizens. The security of the members of society as a whole has been one of the primary reasons for the birth of the state and remains to this day a key factor in legitimizing its power.

According to Reinhard and Lohrmann (2000, p. 4), in IR, movements of persons across borders affect security at three levels:

- 1. The national security agendas of receiving and transit countries that perceive massive international population movement as a threat to their economic well-being, social order, cultural and religious values, and political stability;
- 2. The relations between states, as movements tend to create tensions and burden bilateral relations;
- 3. Irregular migration flows and involuntary population displacements have implications for the individual security and dignity of migrants and refugees, which may render them, inter alia, unpredictable actors in IR.

In many receiving countries, the sustained arrival and overstay of irregular foreign workers and members of their families is perceived as a growing threat to public order. Alleged involvement of migrants in crime such as drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, thefts, armed aggressions or even terrorist acts, has been used to justify strict measures against irregular immigration and unfounded asylum claims.

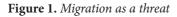
A massive inflow of refugees in a poor area can strain natural resources such as wood, water and land; further impact education, medical care, and housing systems; also increase unemployment. Many developing countries do not have the financial and administrative resources to cope with the growing competition for scarce national resources. Refugee camps are often characterized by high levels of violence and crime, which often spread outside and involve the local population.

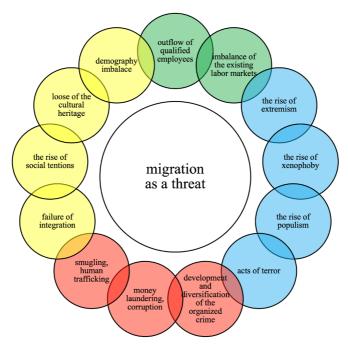
Recognizing migration as a threat requires a precise distinction between real and perceived threats. It is widely recognized, that fears about immigration are often exaggerated, but at the same time perceptions impact policies seeking to constrain migration issues. Although the discourse usually exaggerates threats, it cannot be denied that they occurred – for example, the southern migration route was also a travel path chosen by terrorists. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the variability of migration threats in terms of their type, seasonality and territoriality, and finally – differences depending on the purposes of migration. Additionally, it is important to remember that most of the threats are related to illegal migration.

Migration generates multiple threats in the areas of:

- 1. Law and order: increased activity of criminal groups, especially in the field of human trafficking, forgery of documents, smuggling;
- 2. Political security: acts of terrorism; extremism and the rise of xenophobic sentiments;
- 3. Societal security: closed diasporas unwilling to cooperate with the receiving society, not integrated;
- 4. Economic security: economic burden causing social tensions, especially around the labor market and the distribution of social benefits.

Migration also has a negative impact on migrants' countries of origin. A large outflow of people, including qualified and educated people, leads to an economic phenomenon called brain drain. Poorer countries bear the costs of educating people who later take up work in countries providing better social and financial conditions, and therefore their education *does not pay back* the country of origin. Family and social ties are loosening, which poses a threat to identity and cultural heritage. Figure 1 presents various faces of threats generated by migration.



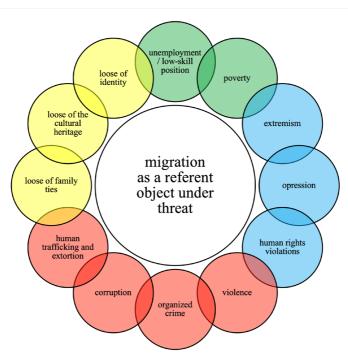


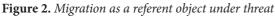
Description: green: threats for economic security; blue: threats for political security; red: threats for law and order; yellow: threats for societal security **Source:** own study.

MIGRATION AS A REFERENT OBJECT UNDER THREAT

It should be remembered that migration processes also pose threats to their participants, both at every stage of the migration process itself and during their stay in the destination country. People leave their countries of origin to escape various threats to human security, including human rights violations, war and social violence, poverty (hunger and lack of income to purchase food), economic inequalities and ecological degradation. Being on the move is affected by different threats, mostly related to their physical security (extortion, human trafficking, violence, crimes) but also by non-physical ones, such as possible loss of identity or link to the cultural heritage, weakening family ties etc. According to the Mixed Migration Centre, 76% of respondents identified at least one dangerous location along their migration route. 20% reported two or more dangerous locations. 58% of all respondents said they had directly experienced one or more abuses during their journey. The most frequently reported risks were robbery (90%), bribery or extortion (74%), kidnapping (39%) and non-physical violence (39%). (Mixed Migration Centre, 2022)

Once in a destination (receiving) country, some face threats to their physical, material and psychological security as well, as demonstrated by violent xenophobic action against asylum seekers in Western Europe, and armed attacks against refugee camps in some developing countries. Discrimination, lowskill positions below qualifications and education, poverty, social exclusion, limited access to the local healthcare systems and different threats generated by organized crime are also present in the country of destination. Migrant workers are more willing to take on jobs that local workers are unwilling to take, such as construction, low-skill service industry, domestic servants or mining. These jobs are often characterized by a lack of legal protection, low pay for long working hours, insecurity and an unsafe working environment. (Hagen-Zanker, 2015, p. 4). At the same time, migrants often have limited legal protection, and hence face constant insecurity. This is not only the case for illegal/irregular migrants, but also for documented ones. Figure 2 presents various faces of threats generated during the process of migration and in the destination country for people on the move.





Description: green: threats for economical security; blue: threats for political security; red: threats for law and order; yellow: threats for societal security **Source:** own study.

MIGRATION AS A SECURITY RESOURCE

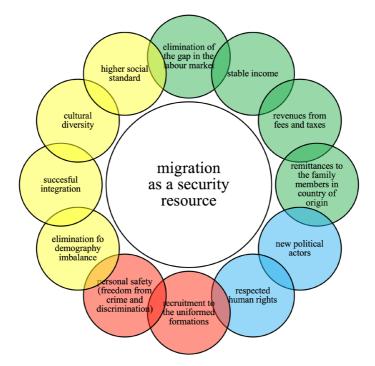
Focusing on the migration-security nexus does not imply forgetting its positive side. It is possible to indicate benefits for the migrants themselves, for countries of origin and for receiving countries. In the case of migrants themselves, it is crucial to remember that people leaving their country of origin may succeed in finding safer and better living conditions in a receiving country – they could escape from the threats in their country of origin, such as wars, acts of terror, crime, discrimination, human rights abuse, extreme poverty, unemployment, natural disasters caused by environmental changes (floods, droughts, hurricanes etc.), lack of access to the health security system.

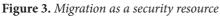
For some groups of migrants, migration is the only way to preserve culture, identity and heritage – in particular in the case of political refugees.

By participating in the economy of their new country, economic migrants contribute to the development of their country of origin through remittances and the reduction of pressures on its labor market. They can also promote their culture and heritage in the receiving countries and be ambassadors for interstate relations.

Countries of destination benefit most from the economic performances of migrants and their contribution to intercultural enrichment. In many receiving countries, especially in Europe, they help to reduce the demographic gap and respond to the needs of local labor markets. Through military, police or border guard service, migrants can directly contribute to ensuring the security of migration destination countries while simultaneously fighting organized crime that preys on people on the move. Moreover, migration brings concerned countries on both sides toward international dialogue and bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Members of some diaspora groups play an important political role in their country of origin and the receiving country. Through the creation of transnational channels, migrants and refugees can support domestic political parties, factions or ethnic groups through representation, political lobbying or, more directly, through recruitment, the sending of funds and arms. They may exert political pressure upon the receiving country's government to redirect its foreign policy towards their country of origin. As a result of the political activity in the destination country, in particular, locally, some migrants become new political actors. In some cases, they became deputies, majors or even government members.

Figure 3 presents various faces of migration as a security resource.





Description: green: for economical security; blue: for political security; red: for law and order; yellow: for societal security **Source:** own study.

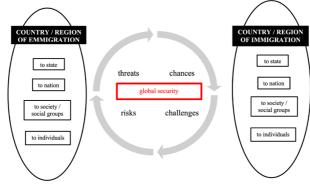
A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO MIGRATION-SECURITY NEXUS

In 2022 G. Dimari, discussing migration threats and challenges in Greece, proposed *flexicuritization* as a pragmatic, utilitarian, flexible and positive form of desecuritization of migration which constitutes a feasible and implementable solution in the Greek case. (Dimari 2022) This proposal was intended to draw attention to the contradictory needs and expectations of two migrant actors – receiving countries (and their societies), and migrants themselves.

Greece has been experienced heavily by the migration crisis (2015 and later) and faced practical problems to solve. According to Dimari, *The security measures that the state should adopt should be based on the construction of a pragmatic, utilitarian and flexible structure that will serve both the security issues of the state that pertain to migration (...) as well as the security and well-being of refugees/migrants.* Immigrants can feel safe when appropriate state apparatuses are set in place to guarantee their safety, while citizens of the host country can also feel safe knowing that migrants who stay in the country will operate within the political, economic and social fabric of the host country, through a structured management network, which will be a framework based on the principle of *security for citizens, security for all.*

Referring to the optimistic Dimari proposal, the paper proposes a wider, sustainable approach to research on the migration-security nexus, which allows for an in-depth and comprehensive study of the issue. This approach, first of all, takes into account three groups of actors – countries of origin, countries of destination and people on the move themselves. Secondly, it requires examining migration both as a threat or challenge, but also as a potential source of security. Thirdly, the proposed approach combines the logic of strategic security and human security – it takes into account both the interests of states and the perspective of an individual – both a migrant and a citizen of the receiving country. The comprehensiveness is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Complex understanding of the migration-security nexus



Source: own study.

According to indicated levels and forms of relation between migration and security, it is possible to characterize the migration-security nexus in three stages:

- 1. Migration is perceived (mainly) as a threat, both to the country of destination (dominant perspective in International Relations) as to the country of origin;
- 2. Migration is perceived as a referent object under threat in this perspective, introduced by the human security approach, threats to people on the move are indicated and analyzed;
- 3. Migration is perceived as a security resource for countries of origin and receiving ones, as well as for the migrants themselves.

Table 3 presents these three stages as well as types of results for any of them.

formation	Types	
	I - migration as a threat to international security by contributing to inter-state	
	conflicts, ethnic conflicts	
Migration as a threat	II - migration as a threat to the national security of the country of origin of	
	migrants by weakening its resources	
	III - migration as a threat to the national security of the destination country	
	I – migrants exposed to dangers of travel, human trafficking, exploitation,	
Migration as a referent	prostitution	
object under threat	II – migrants at risk of losing their identities	
	III – migrants at risk of living outside the law, in poverty	
Mignotion of a compile	I - migrants as a support for labor markets and fill the demographic gap	
Migration as a security	II - migrants as a resource for security systems of countries of destination	
resource	III – migration as an escape from dangerous localizations	

Table 3. Three formations on the migration-security nexus

Source: own study.

The proposed complex understanding of the migration-security nexus is based on three main assumptions:

1. It is crucial to indicate a clear, objective catalogue of the threats posed by migration and implement solutions which provide the protection of all migration actors on the state, society and individual levels, particularly in the destination countries, because here, the fear of migration is the strongest among other actors.

- 2. It is also important to protect human rights and migrants' personal security not only because of humanitarian reasons but also because the immigrant's insecurity might provide additional threats or reinforce existing ones;
- 3. Even those destination countries that are facing problems related to immigration at the same time need migrants to deal with the demographic gap and labor market requirements. So, it is crucial to maximize the benefits related to migration in a sustainable way, with consideration of the needs of all actors.

Conclusions

Various sources indicate that the number of migrants, both undocumented and legal ones, as well as refugees, will increase in the coming years and will, therefore constitute a growing problem, especially for the Western countries. The strategies used to stop migration movements are not effective. In 2008, 1.7 per cent of European land borders were protected by walls. In 2023 – 15.5 per cent (a total of over 2,000 kilometres divided into 17 locations) (Vallet, 2023). Meanwhile, the number of illegal migrants arriving in Europe has increased, not decreased. These and other difficulties in deterring migration (discouraging migrants) should lead to new strategies. Migration cannot be stopped, but it can be managed in a way that maximizes its benefits: for those who move, for the countries and communities they leave, and for the countries and communities that receive them. The proposed sustainable approach to migration-security nexus directs attention to a wider understanding of people in the movement in the context of security, both, on the theoretical and practical level.

The European Union as well as member states are at the stage of the revision of the current migration strategy and related policies. The general idea focuses on the balance between the protection of the national states in various aspects, especially from illegal migration and the needs of labor markets in ageing societies. Security is the main trigger of these changes. The discussion, as well as the implementation of national-level solutions, focuses on better deterring illegal immigration and more efficient returning of them to their countries of origin. At the same time, the focus is put on the mechanisms of legal, clear and quick acceptance for those, who are not posing threats and might contribute to the destination countries' societies. The proposed complex understanding of the migration security nexus corresponds with these efforts and gives the theoretical framework for practical solutions.

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