In light of the current migration “crisis” in the European Union, this paper examines the Union’s relationship with Eritrea, a state which produces a significant number of asylum-seekers who reach the external borders of the European Union. Since 2000, this relationship has been primarily founded upon the Cotonou Agreement, and has been supplemented by the European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights and the European Development Fund, among other measures. Apart from assistance aimed at facilitating development in Eritrea, the EU, as part of its Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, also seeks to limit the number of asylum-seekers leaving Eritrea using policy instruments such as the Khartoum Process.

This paper examines to what extent the EU is successfully balancing its twin objectives of reducing migration from Eritrea as well as facilitating development and growth. As acknowledged by the EU, these two areas are intertwined. This paper further introduces human rights to this policy discussion, and argues that the EU is not acting in a manner which is supportive of the protection of human rights in Eritrea. This argument is based on the EU not utilising the human rights mechanisms available to it, such as the human rights clauses contained in the Cotonou Agreement, to improve the situation as human rights are viewed as a secondary objective in comparison to reducing immigration. The EU’s policy towards Eritrea, and the imbalance between its objectives, is instead exacerbating the current push factors of immigration from the state.