

Migration Crisis in Europe: Political, Socio-Economic Reasons and Challenges, Ways of Solution

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Abstract

In 2015, a dramatic increase in migrant flows to Europe from the Middle East and Africa has led to a migration crisis. The main goal of the paper is to analyze the socio-economic impact of the migration flows to Europe and its political consequences. The paper has found that the migration has a negative influence over the European socio-economic environment.

Keywords: European migration crisis, European Union, migration, refugees, Syria war.

Introduction

Population mobility and migration of human masses across continents due to certain factors is a natural process that has been lasting for thousands of years. Throughout the history the European continent has been a vastly attractive destination point for international immigrants. Main reasons for migration over the years were world wars, natural disasters, attractiveness of development of western countries, etc.

As new life tendencies take place in step with the time, the migration has also grown into a different form in the contemporary world. Scholars differentiate two migration drivers — push and pull factors.

Lack of governance in large areas of the world, violent political changes, civil wars, which in turn lead to violence, poverty, persecution, corruption, insecurity, pollution, etc. push people to leave their own countries and move to other locations in search of better life conditions. These conditions relate to economy, technology, society and politics. The continuous high rate of unemployment and consequent human poverty in undeveloped economies force people to move to more developed states with flourishing welfare systems; Day by day developing technology sector, price-affordable new inventions, innovations in transportation and communication spheres increase people's movement, disseminate knowledge about work and welfare opportunities existing all around the world and give migrants an opportunity to maintain almost continuous relations with their distant families and societies; Rapid population growth in Africa, South-Western Asia, etc., and the low demographic growth in Western countries is another important migration driver and also a cause of social change in the receiving areas; Finally, the expansion of the human rights ideas and

values and the actions of the world institutions that promote such ideas and values influence the growth and current transformation of migration (Attina, 2015).

In recent years, Arab revolts led to a rapid expansion of the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean to Europe. Conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa that occurred as a result of the socio-political processes have contributed heavily to the refugee crisis in Europe. The United Nations reported that war in Syria and Iraq, as well as continuing violence and instability in Afghanistan, Eritrea, etc., have driven the crisis (Tomkin, 2015).

Causes of the High Migrant Influx in 2015

In summer of 2015, Europe has faced the highest influx of migrants / refugees since the World War II. 1.8 million illegal border crossings were recorded in 2015, moreover it is forecasted that around three million irregular migrants will enter Europe until 2017 (Migration Watch UK, 2016). According to UNHCR, more than 80 percent of people arriving in Europe by sea in 2015 are from countries in conflict or crisis (Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, etc.). At the same time, there are people leaving their home countries to escape poor economic prospects in parts of Africa and Asia.

The conflict in Syria is the biggest driver of migration. According to estimates Syria has become the top source of refugees (BBC News, 2016). The reason for that was the revolution wave of Arab spring which started in Muslim countries of North Africa and reached Middle East, more precisely Syria. Revolution wave covered the country, which has been ruled by Assad family dictatorship since 1960s.

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Jihadists groups started to spread and commit war crimes using chemical weapons, mass executions, tortures of large scale and repeated attacks on civilians. The civilian population was trapped between the Assad regime, rebel groups and religious extremism. The civil population who bore all the troubles of the devastating war saw the only hope and way out in moving to Europe in search of safety and security.

Another factor for the surge in irregular migration to Europe is the failure of the international community to address conflicts, violence and human rights violations in countries of origin. There is no international political framework for ending the conflict in Syria and no clear international strategy for addressing the conflict in Iraq. The same with Afghanistan and Somalia. Efforts to address the push factors such as the chronic poverty, weak governance climate and environmental changes in many developing countries have also been inadequate (Metcalfe-Hough, 2015).

The dramatic upsurge of the flow of refugees and others seeking irregular access to Europe has led to the crisis in the summer of 2015. Several factors have triggered this crisis. First and one of the main causes of the sudden and massive increase in migrant numbers was the continuing Syrian war and an upsurge of conflicts worldwide in recent years that has fueled record levels of displacement worldwide. The second trigger of the summer 2015 crisis was the change that has been made in Macedonia's migrant policy in June 2015 as the country lifted harsh measures aiming at preventing refugees from entering the country. Consequently the route through the Balkans opened up making the route to Europe much easier for migrants. As a result, the prices for the journey to Europe have also dropped. Now instead of a long, expensive and more risky voyage from Libya to Italy, migrants from the Middle East could take shorter and inexpensive trips from Turkey to the Greek Islands. The weather condition was another trigger for dramatic increase in migrant numbers in the summer of 2015. People illegally migrating across the sea are more willing to make a journey during the summer months before bad weather sets in, when the sea crossings are safer. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel's public announcement that Germany would offer temporary residency to all the refugees arriving also was one of the crisis-triggers in summer of 2015. This was further induced by the television footage of cheering Germans welcoming refugees. Among many reasons for such an influx of migrants causing the crisis there were also 'push' factors in countries that immigrants were coming from. One of those factors in Syria was the government's conscription drive. The Syrian government under Bashar al-Assad started to enlist reservists to serve in the army. Many people migrating from Syria were escaping forced conscription, and yet the Syrian government made it easier for Syrians to obtain passports and therefore to travel. Finally, it should be noted that the shortcomings of underfunded international aid effort also was the factor that has led the situation into crisis, as before this massive influx of people to Europe, millions of Syrian refugees had already fled to neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, etc., where they live in poor conditions. A potential prospect of giving a better education to their children is the main reason for

many refugees for choosing the Europe as a destination point to build a new life. (The Washington Post, 2015).

Challenges Facing European Countries

The massive influx of refugees caught European countries unprepared and they faced a number of serious challenges. According to Victoria Metcalfe-Hough, the European Union member states face a number of challenges in instituting a more effective solution to the current problem:

1. Practical challenge. Many EU frontline countries' asylum systems are simply overwhelmed by the volume and speed of the influx at the time when their economies are particularly weak.

2. Identifying an economic migrant and a refugee. With such a large-scale influx it is difficult to identify those who are in need of international protection and who are not. Furthermore, receiving governments face major challenge in terms of returning failed asylum-seekers.

3. Financial cost. Granting international protection to the large-scale influxes of refugees and others carry substantial financial burden to receiving countries in terms of integration support. There are also concerns about how long refugees will remain in Europe and how long they will need such support.

4. Onward movement. Most refugees are willing to move to other countries within the Union for different reasons (relatives, economic opportunities, employment, welfare support, etc.).

5. Divided public opinion on international migration within the EU. The terrible risks that have been featured in media associated with the journey the refugees take from Syria to get to Europe have swayed the public opinion to some degree, however, anti-immigration policies remain main theme in right-wing politics across Europe.

6. No coherent approach from all member states of the EU. It is difficult to obtain a coherent approach from all 28 European Union member states. Attitudes towards dealing with the issue differs among the member states. Some Central and Eastern European states have rejected Germany's attitude. The United Kingdom has declined to participate in a plan to relocate within the European Union a further 120.000 refugees currently held in Greece, Hungary and Italy, agreed by the EU leaders on 22 September (Metcalfe-Hough, 2015).

Apart from the above-mentioned, we deem the problems the European Union member states face also include:

- Integration problems. Experience shows that migrants from Eastern countries face serious challenges in terms of integration with the local population in Western countries. The main reasons for this derive from clearly observable differences in mentality between indigenous and non-aboriginal population, religious beliefs, lifestyle, different household and family perceptions, as well as other criteria of moral worth.

- Security issues. The population of migrants cover various classes/categories, which include many crime-prone elements among those who arrive. In particular, the mass influx of migrants and their management challenges potentially support the elements affiliated with terrorist organizations to leak into Europe, which in turn pose a great security threat to the host countries.

- Spread of diseases. Due to the circumstance beyond their control and shutting down all hope has led them to a decision to settle in Europe through a challenging and risky journey.

Because of the above, some of the migrants/refugees have encountered difficulties along the way, such as not being able to comply with hygienic standards and consequently becoming infected with serious communicable diseases.

Obviously, problems should have solutions, which need to be addressed when tackling this issue. Efficacy of the solutions much depends on determining the correct approach, in-depth and comprehensive examination of the cause and roots of the problem. So far, the European Union and international community have put considerable efforts in place towards this direction.

Prospects for Resolution

From the scope of international legal framework, there are a number of international law treaties about how the states have to deal with issues concerning migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and people at risk in the seaways that have been negotiated and signed. Most of the European countries who are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, have made long-term commitments under international human rights and refugee law to protect and promote the human rights of all refugees, irrespective of their status. According to the Convention, these states have specific responsibilities to provide international protection for refugees and grant their rights to work, education, housing, judicial system, etc.

It is important to look through some international legal documents that cover all the aspects of the problem of concern and contain rules and norms about aspects of interest while assessing the behavior of the states in the Mediterranean migration crisis. Among such documents are the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS).

The European Union has agreed different initiatives to address the crisis. Steps taken so far toward the resolution of the current problem include:

- The European Commission developed a new tool, what it describes as "Hotspot approach" (currently implemented in Greece and Italy) to manage the flow of people entering the European Union at key entry points. Hotspot is an area of the external EU border facing extraordinary migratory pressure. The hotspot approach allows Member States to request additional resources in order to address

the issues associated with these extraordinary pressures. Various EU agencies - European Asylum Support Office, Frontex (the EU Border Agency), Europol (EU Police Cooperation Unit), and Eurojust (the EU Judicial Cooperation Unit) will run hotspots that will identify, register and fingerprint those entering from outside Europe. Asylum seekers will be separated 'from those who are not in need of protection' (Neville, Sy & Rigon, 2016).

- Legislation on Emergency Relocation of Asylum Seekers. In order to alleviate the pressures of migrant crisis on most affected member states (Greece and Italy) in September 2015 member states agreed to a Commission proposal to relocate asylum seekers across the Union. Also in April 2015 German chancellor Angela Merkel proposed a new system of quotas to distribute non-EU asylum seekers around the EU member states (Huggler & Marszal, 2016).

- Border controls. Several EU member states imposed temporary border controls in order to control the movement of third country nationals as the migrant crisis was putting the Schengen passport-free travel zone at risk. Article 26 of the Schengen Borders Code allows states to keep temporary border controls in place for a maximum of two years, "in exceptional circumstances" (BBC News, 2016).

- The solution to the crisis requires coordination with Third Countries. The European Union has done the following actions in this direction:

- a) Valletta Summit on Migration. On November, 2015, a summit to discuss the migrant crisis was held in Valletta, Malta, between European and African leaders, which resulted in the EU setting up an Emergency Trust Fund to promote development in Africa, in return for African countries to help out in the crisis (TimesofMalta.Com, 2015).

- b) Agreement with Turkey. The European Union and Turkey reached an agreement on a number of measures regarding the migrant crisis. The Turkish authorities have agreed to stop the flow of illegal migrants to the European Union and to improve the condition of two million Syrians in Turkey in return for Turkey's accession process being 're-energized', and 3 billion Euro in additional support and a commitment to the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish nationals travelling to the Schengen zone (Council of the European Union, 2015).

Experts and experts in the relevant fields seek a sustainable solution to the problem.

For this purpose, a number of proposals package has been developed and submitted to the international community's consideration.

Clementine d'Oultremont in her article "The Migration Crisis: A Stress Test for European Values" proposes four recommendations for how the European Union can best address this crisis:

1. The effective implementation of the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility between Member States of the European Union as enshrined in the Treaty.
2. Providing more legal entry and integration channels for both economic migrants and refugees.

3. More European assistance to address the external root causes of migration.

4. To define and broadcast a positive narrative on migration (d'Oultremont & Martin, 2015).

In support of the above mentioned, we think that more global approach should be displayed regarding the issue. The strategy, roadmap related to the problem should be worked out and developed by the world's developed countries. Fire points that cause the masses of people to abandon their homes through a mobilization of public efforts and opportunities. Conflicts must be solved by direct intervention of international forces, in a word, peace must be restored as soon as possible. At the same time, as no country is insured against occurrence of this type of problems in the future, countries that could potentially lead to new influx of migrants and humanitarian disasters should be determined and more preventive measures should be taken to avoid such problems.

In addition to the above mentioned, we believe that on the one hand, based on the principles of humanism, the countries of the European Union must develop common mechanisms to tackle the problem of migration and refugees, and in this field, harmonize their immigration policies, and at the same time, carry out propaganda activities in order to prevent negative mood among the local population rebelling against migrants. On the other hand, together with social and economic projects for refugees already settled in Europe, language, educational and cultural programs need to be launched in order to speed up their integration into the local community. All of these mentioned rise the possibility to give useful results in the future for the old continent which now faces problems of crisis of mass migration, as well as, demographic crisis with rapidly aging and shrinking population.

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