



Selective Solidarity: A Comparative Analysis of EU Responses to Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees

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SELECTIVE SOLIDARITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EU RESPONSES TO SYRIAN AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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ABSTRACT

Since the unprecedented activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, some media outlets have pointed out the differences and similarities between the migration crisis of 2015 and the migration flow of 2022 with the war in Ukraine. Research has shown that some factors such as geographical proximity, shared values and public opinion might contribute to more positive and welcoming migration policies or do the opposite. This study aims to understand what sociopolitical factors have influenced the apparent selective solidarity in the EU, with the adoption of different policies towards migration. Drawing on a comprehensive review of EU migration policy literature, this research undertakes a comparative analysis of the 2015 crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian migration flow to assess whether the EU exhibits a double standard in its treatment of refugees. Based on the data and literature available, the results have shown that the two moments in history were marked by several differences and that the most pressing one was the policies adopted by the European Institutions and the Member States. Influenced by a multitude of factors, the European Union showed a much more compassionate and solidary stance towards Ukrainian refugees than with the refugees coming from the middle east in 2015. As the War in Ukraine is still ongoing and more recent, further research might be needed to analyze how the solidarity and public opinion regarding Ukrainian refugees evolves.

KEYWORDS: European Union; Refugees; Migration; European Policy.

1. Introduction

In 2015, ongoing instability in the Middle East prompted over one million asylum seekers to journey to Europe by both sea and land, initiating one of the most significant migratory movements in recent history, widely termed as “Refugee Crisis”. Similarly, on February 24, 2022, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine caused millions of Ukrainians to seek refuge in neighboring European nations. The international community strongly condemned Russia’s actions, and Europe responded with unprecedented solidarity. Within the first week of the conflict alone, one million people fled Ukraine¹ (UNHCR, 2022).

Historically, migration has been a divisive and contentious issue within the EU, as the 2015 crisis revealed, exposing several vulnerabilities within the Union’s political and institutional framework. Unlike 2015, however, the EU’s reaction to the Ukrainian crisis in 2022 has been marked by a cohesive and unified approach, maintaining strong solidarity among member states, EU institutions, and the broader European public. This contrasting response has led to important questions about the double standards between the 2015 and 2022 crises and the underlying factors driving these divergent reactions and policies.

This thesis seeks to analyze the European Union’s divergent policy responses to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis and the 2022 influx of Ukrainian refugees, with a focus on identifying the double standards shaping the approaches of European policymakers and institutions. Through a comparative examination, this study will investigate the differences in EU policies between these two crises, their possible implications, and the underlying factors that may have influenced decision-making. To narrow the scope of the analysis, this research will specifically examine Germany, France, and Poland, assessing the policies each adopted, the governmental stance toward refugee reception, and prevailing public opinion in response to each migratory wave. The objective of the research is to look at what has happened during these periods of time, establish possible consequences and motivations that led to adopting certain policies and search for learnings that can be used in future policy making.

To do this, the following three research question will be addressed:

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/news-comment-1-million-refugees-have-fled-ukraine-week>

1. What sociopolitical factors explain the disparities in policy response?
2. How did the European Union's policy response differ in 2015 and in 2022?
3. How did Germany's, France's and Poland's response differ in 2015 and in 2022?

This study is organized in three different chapters, with two dedicated to the literature revision and the last one focusing on a comparative analysis of what has been investigated during the first two chapters, to draw conclusions on possible motivating factors and the consequences of it.

Chapter two begins by establishing the historical context that precipitated the 2015 refugee crisis, aiming to clarify the factors that led to such an acute humanitarian emergency and the pressing needs faced by the people fleeing to Europe. This chapter then examines the challenges encountered by the European Union, detailing the policy responses adopted by EU institutions, with a particular focus on the European Agenda on Migration and the EU-Turkey Agreement. To refine the scope, the analysis centers on three EU Member States: Germany, France, and Poland. Within this scope, the chapter explores the responses of these states and their populations, the specific policies implemented, and the role of public opinion in shaping government actions and outcomes.

Chapter three mirrors the analytical structure of chapter two, but with a focus on the 2022 influx of refugees resulting from the war in Ukraine. The chapter opens by outlining the context leading to the conflict and the resulting migration flow, followed by an examination of the policy responses adopted by EU institutions. Using Germany, France, and Poland as case studies, it explores each state's actions, the policies implemented, and the influence of public opinion on governmental decisions. Through this comparative analysis, the chapter investigates how national and European policies and societal attitudes shaped each country's approach to accommodating Ukrainian refugees.

In chapter four, the research and literature converge in a comparative analysis of the European Union's responses to the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 influx of Ukrainian refugees. This chapter examines key differences in EU and Member State approaches, assessing the impact of divergent policies on refugee lives and

integration processes. Additionally, it investigates sociopolitical factors that may have influenced policy choices, with particular attention to the role of media and public opinion in shaping policy makers decisions. The chapter concludes with a comparative overview of Germany, France, and Poland, summarizing distinct approaches, potential motivations, and the broader effects of their respective policies.

In the concluding chapter, I address each of the three research questions individually, demonstrating that the findings reveal a noticeable double-standard in the European Union's response to the 2015 refugee crisis compared to the 2022 influx of Ukrainian refugees, which I argue was influenced by a multitude of factors. I close with a reflection on the key lessons that European institutions, Member States, and the broader public might draw from these responses. This includes evaluating both the effective elements of these policies and identifying areas for potential improvement in future humanitarian crises.

2. Refugee Crisis of 2015

2.1. Putting the Crisis into Context

The ongoing civil war in Syria since 2011 has left the Syrian population in an extremely vulnerable situation leading approximately 4,971,211² refugees to flee the country and another 6 million to live as internally displaced people. About 80% of people in Syria are very poor, and more than 12 million Syrians need help from organizations that provide aid. In 2018, a sad record was reached as many children lost their lives. Besides the huge loss of lives, Syria has also seen its historical and cultural treasures being damaged or destroyed. (UNRIC, 2019). It is truly one of the biggest humanitarian disasters in history.

In December 2010, the Arab Spring began with the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor named Mohammed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire to express his opposition to the unjust confiscation of his vegetable stand by the police due to his failure to secure a license. This incident triggered the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia³ (Al Jazeera, 2020). Motivated by discontent with pervasive corruption, poverty, and political repression, the population mobilized in the streets to advocate for a governmental transformation. The culmination of these protests resulted in the resignation and departure to Saudi Arabia of the authoritarian president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country for over two decades. This first pro-democracy mobilization led to a series of uprisings that involved several large Muslim countries such as Syria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain (history.com editors, 2020)⁴.

The movement sought increased social freedoms and greater participation of the citizens in the political process and decision. As we can see by figure 1, although in Tunisia the protests were effective in changing the government and led to a democratic progress, in other countries it led to small short changes and in some

² This data can be consulted on the official website 'Operational Data Portal - Refugees Situation'. The data described here was updated on October 31, 2024, and the information can be accessed via the following link: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/17/remembering-mohamed-bouazizi-his-death-triggered-the-arab>

⁴ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/mohamed-bouazizi-self-immolates-arab-spring>

cases, it even led to full scale civil wars as was the case for Syria, Libya and Yemen (history.com editors, 2018)⁵.

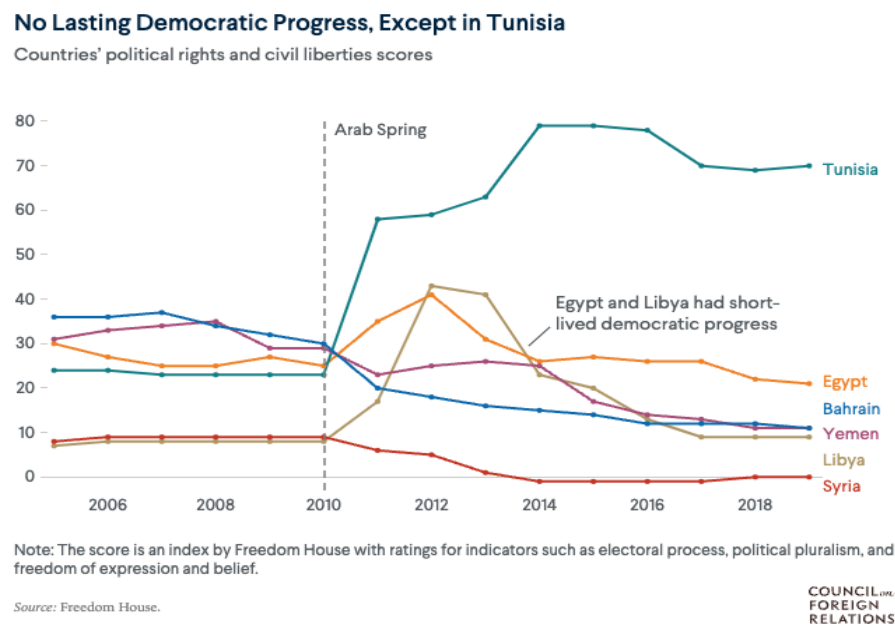


Figure 1. 'No Lasting Democratic Progress, Except in Tunisia' - CFR

Syrians were since 2000, led by the same president, Bashar al-Assad, and living conditions kept declining. The country had high unemployment rates, corruption, and lack of political freedom and this led to widespread discontent throughout the population. The Arab Spring of 2011 brought to light the fragile state the country was in and erupted into one of the largest humanitarian crises in history (BBC, 2023)⁶.

In March 2011, inspired by the events of the Arab Spring in the neighboring countries, fifteen boys in the southwestern city of Deraa, Syria, spray-painted on a school wall: "The people want the fall of the regime." They were arrested and tortured (CFR, 2023)⁷. The imprisonment and torture of these boys, triggered numerous rallies and protests across the country, demanding democratic reforms, the release of political prisoners, more freedoms and an end to corruption. The reaction of President Bashar al-Assad was ruthless, calling the Syrian army to stop the protests, opening fire against the population leading to the death of several protesters (CFR, 2023).

⁵ <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

⁷ <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

Human rights monitors reported that the Syrian army fired on unarmed protesters and carried out mass arrests, both targeting dissidents and indiscriminately sweeping up men and boys. Reports frequently cited instances of torture and extrajudicial executions occurring in detention facilities. Human rights officials from the United Nations estimated that, since mid-March, over 2200 individuals have lost their lives due to actions by Syrian security forces. In response, the UN Human Rights Council made the decision to initiate an investigation into potential crimes against humanity (CFR, 2023).

In late April 2011, the Syrian army deployed tanks, initiating a siege on Deraa. This resulted in an escalation of the civilian death toll, with residents enduring an eleven-day period of isolation from essential provisions such as food, water, medicine, telecommunication, and electricity. Due to the international pressure and condemnation, the government made certain concessions, however, it replicated the response witnessed in Deraa in other locations experiencing protests, although on a larger scale and with significant ramifications. This compelled some adversaries of the government to resort to armed resistance (Al Jazeera, 2011)⁸.

In May 2011, demonstrators are awoken in full force by the release of pictures depicting the mutilated remains of Hamza Ali al-Khatib, a 13-year-old from Dar'ā who endured fatal torture while under police custody. These images are disseminated during protests, evolving into a powerful symbol illustrating the regime's brutality. During these events, President Assad kept a harsh and violent response, blaming foreign conspiracies for the disturbance and turmoil in Syria (BBC, 2011)⁹.

In July 2011, extensive protests took place across Syria, with reports indicating that tens of thousands actively joined street demonstrations in Ḥamāh. In an attempt to weaken the demonstrations, Syrian tanks and troops were sent to Ḥamāh, where security forces conducted house raids and detained individuals suspected of dissent. Worried that the Syrian military's operations in Ḥamāh would culminate in a massacre, the U.S. and French ambassadors of Syria expressed support for the protesters by making a visit to Ḥamāh. The Syrian government condemned the visit, asserting that it was evidence of the west involvement in instigating protests within Syria (Britannica,

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/4/27/syria-sends-army-reinforcements-into-deraa>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13621449>

2024)¹⁰. These events led to an escalation of the uncertain and violent environment in the country, with groups of individuals supporting Assad launching assaults on the U.S. and French embassies in Damascus. Certain protesters managed to climb the walls of the U.S. embassy, causing damage to parts of the building before the embassy guards regained control. At the French embassy, guards prevented crowds by discharging warning shots into the air. Officials from the U.S. and France asserted that the Syrian government allowed the attacks to occur (Britannica, 2024).

In the same month, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was established, comprising defectors from the Syrian military and civilians. Approximately 40,000 soldiers left the national army to form a key opposition group against al-Assad's government. The announcement of this new force of opposition called on other members of the Syrian military to defect rather than participate in violence against protesters (CFR, 2023). The Free Syrian Army (FSA), facing a significant disadvantage in firepower compared to the government, encountered challenges in centralizing command and control within its loosely organized coalition. Coordination among FSA militias was often lacking, and their operations occasionally conflicted due to diverse regional support. Amid limited resources, there were instances where they exploited the populations they were supposed to protect. A civilian counterpart to the FSA was established in Istanbul during the summer of 2011, known as the Syrian National Coalition (SNC). This entity claimed to be the government-in-exile of Syria and received recognition from the United States, Turkey, and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, asserting it as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people." (CFR, 2023).

On September 27, 2011, a significant escalation unfolded as the first large-scale battle erupted between government forces and the armed opposition. Syrian troops engaged in a conflict with army defectors, including members of the Free Syrian Army, within the city of Al-Rastan. Following five days of intense fighting, government forces successfully asserted control over the city (Plofchan, 2014)¹¹.

On October 2, the Syrian Nation Council issued a statement, urging the international community to intervene in defense of protesters in Syria. And on October 4, Russia and China exercised their veto power at the UN Security Council, blocking

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Uprising-in-Syria-2011>

¹¹ <https://www.thecaireview.com/timelines/syrian-civil-war/>

a resolution that condemns the Syrian government's crackdown on protesters (United Nations, 2011)¹². The resolution also warned of potential international sanctions in response to continued violence against demonstrators. With only approximately 7 months of conflict, a grim milestone is reached as the UN announces that 3000 people have been killed since the start of the protests, including nearly 200 children (Britannica, 2020).

Both the SNC and its successor, the National Coalition, struggled to provide substantial diplomatic or material support to the opposition, resulting in limited legitimacy among many of the regime's opponents within Syria. This led to the emergence of rival coalitions, and FSA fighters gradually joined Islamist brigades that, backed by funding and arms from Gulf donors, achieved greater successes on the battlefield against the government (CFR, 2023).

On October 29, The Arab League, a regional organization of Arab states in the Middle East and parts of Africa, formed in Cairo on March 22 1945, officially condemned the employment of force by the Syrian government against protesters and, in early November 2011, Syrian officials consented to an Arab League proposal, urging the Syrian government to cease violence against protesters, withdraw tanks and armored vehicles from cities, and release political detainees (Britannica, 2024). On November 27, the Arab League decided to impose sanctions against Syria, encompassing measures such as prohibiting senior Syrian officials from traveling to other Arab nations, freezing assets associated with the Assad regime, and imposing a ban on commercial flights between Syria and other Arab countries. The imposition of these measures stemmed from the Syrian government's failure to adhere to the peace agreement proposed by the Arab League. Subsequent to the vote, enraged crowds in Syria targeted the embassies and consulates of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and France (Britannica, 2024).

By December 2011, the Syrian government agreed to allow a delegation of monitors from the Arab League to visit Syria to oversee the plan's implementation. However, the credibility of the observer mission diminished swiftly among the opposition, revealing insufficient monitors and equipment deployment as, although the observers first statements about the situation in Syria were positive, reports indicated

¹² <https://press.un.org/en/2011/sc10403.doc.htm>

that violence against protesters in Homs continued while the monitors were in the city. Moreover, the Syrian government manipulated scenes and restricted the monitors' movements (Britannica, 2024). In January 2012, a faction identified as Jabhat al-Nusra declared its affiliation with al-Qaeda, presenting itself as the Syrian arm of the organization. Subsequently, the following month, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the chief of al-Qaeda, issued a call urging Sunnis from various regions to participate in a jihad against the Syrian regime. Jabhat al-Nusra witnessed an influx of recruits, both Syrian and foreign, attracted by its notable battlefield achievements, which surpassed those of competing opposition groups. (CFR, 2023)

Due to concerns about the safety of the monitors, Nabil Elaraby, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, declared the suspension of the Arab League monitoring mission on January 28 of 2012. This decision follows the withdrawal of monitoring delegation members from various Arab countries due to apprehensions about their safety (The Guardian, 2012)¹³.

The violence and instability of the Syrian conflict continued and, with the international community more and more critical of the ongoing situation and the isolation of the Syrian government, Assad declared, in an attempt to diverting attention from the ongoing violence in the country, an accelerated timeline for conducting a referendum on a proposed new constitution, setting the date for February 26. Syrian authorities declared that the constitutional referendum achieved an approval rate of almost 90 percent and reported a high voter turnout. In contrast, the opposition contested that the referendum, conducted hastily amidst prevalent violence, should be deemed illegitimate (Britannica, 2024).

A subsequent accord, facilitated by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and endorsed by both the UN and the Arab League, resulted in a brief, partial cease-fire on April 12, 2012. However, the agreement was short as violence swiftly resumed, escalating to levels surpassing previous instances. Similar to their Arab League counterparts, the UN team of monitors had to be withdrawn due to security concerns (Britannica, 2024).

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/28/arab-league-suspends-syria-monitoring>

Facing limited success in fostering peace directly between the conflicting parties, both the UN and the Arab League aimed to secure the backing of global powers for a political resolution to the conflict. In June 2012, an international conference organized by the UN yielded the Geneva Communiqué, outlining a roadmap for negotiations towards establishing a transitional governing body for Syria. Nonetheless, a consensus between the United States and Russia on whether Assad should be part of a future Syrian government remained elusive, leaving this aspect unspecified (United Nations, 2012)¹⁴.

On July 14, 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross declared the conflict in Syria to be a civil war. This reclassification entails that those engaged in hostilities are now governed by international humanitarian law and are liable to be prosecuted for war crimes (Britannica, 2024). On August 2, having failed to facilitate a resolution to the crisis, Kofi Annan resigned from his role as the United Nations and Arab League peace envoy for Syria. Subsequently, Lakhdar Brahimi, an Algerian diplomat, is designated as Annan's successor. In September, addressing the United Nations headquarters in New York following his initial visit to Syria, Brahimi asserted that the situation in Syria was persistently worsening. He expressed pessimism regarding the prospects for a negotiated peace in the immediate future (Britannica, 2024).

In November, following months of contentious diplomatic efforts, Syrian opposition leaders declared the establishment of a new coalition named the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Within the subsequent month, this coalition gained recognition from numerous countries as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Despite this transition, the divisions and rivalries that plagued the Syrian National Council persisted within the new organization. (Britannica, 2024)

During the summer and fall of 2012, the rebels achieved a series of tactical successes. Government forces were compelled to retreat from regions in the north and east, enabling the rebels to assert control over substantial territory for the first time. In July, rebels launched an attack on Aleppo, Syria's largest city, establishing a presence in its eastern part (Britannica, 2024). However, by early 2013, the military

¹⁴ <https://press.un.org/en/2012/sc10775.doc.htm>

landscape seemed to be approaching a stalemate. While rebel forces maintained control over northern areas, deficiencies in equipment, weaponry, and organization restrained their further advances. Concurrently, government forces, weakened by defections, appeared incapable of making substantial gains. Daily conflict persisted in contested areas, leading to an escalating civilian death toll (Britannica, 2024).

With no decisive outcome in sight, the international supporters of both the Syrian government and the rebels intensified their backing, heightening the potential for a regional proxy conflict. In the latter part of 2012 and 2013, the endeavors of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to provide financial support and weaponry to the rebels became increasingly public (Britannica, 2024). The United States, initially hesitant to supply arms due to concerns about inadvertently supporting radical jihadists with future anti-Western intentions, eventually initiated a modest program to train and equip selected rebel groups. Simultaneously, the Syrian government continued to receive arms from Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. By late 2012, Hezbollah had deployed its own fighters into Syria to engage the rebels (The Guardian, 2013)¹⁵.

As the Syrian army under Assad faced escalating casualties and a rise in desertions, the regime increasingly turned to Iran and Russia for support. Iran, was a longstanding ally with a strategic interest in safeguarding a crucial land route to its proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, allocated substantial financial resources to bolster the Syrian regime. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps played a crucial advisory role for Assad's army, incurring thousands of casualties. Moreover, the Iranian volunteer Basij paramilitary force and the foreign Shia militias it mobilized sustained even higher casualty rates (CFR, 2023).

In 2013, Islamist militants assumed a prominent role as non-Islamist factions waned due to exhaustion and internal strife. The Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, formed partnerships with various other opposition groups and emerged as one of the most effective fighting forces. However, it was eventually overshadowed by a new group (Britannica, 2024). In April 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, declared the amalgamation of his forces in Iraq and Syria under the name Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State in

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/25/saudi-arabia-syria-rebels-armed>

Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Al-Baghdadi intended for the Nusra Front to join the new group under his command, but the Nusra Front rejected the merger, leading to conflict between the two groups (Britannica, 2024). In reality, the emergence of extremist factions in Syria was, in part, orchestrated by the regime itself, as Assad sought to depict a clear dichotomy between his secular governance and an extremist, jihadist alternative. In the middle of 2011, the regime deliberately released numerous Islamist militants from prisons with the intent of undermining the rebellion. Subsequently, these individuals coalesced to form extremist groups like Ahrar al-Sham, which advocated a sectarian agenda (CFR, 2023).

Calls for international military intervention in Syria were renewed after suspected chemical weapons attacks in the suburbs of Damascus resulted in the deaths of hundreds on August 21, 2013. The Syrian opposition accused pro-Assad forces of perpetrating the attacks, while Syrian officials denied using chemical weapons and attributed responsibility, if such weapons were employed, to rebel forces. As UN weapons inspectors gathered evidence at the sites of the alleged chemical attacks, leaders from the U.S., Britain, and France condemned the use of chemical weapons and expressed contemplation of retaliatory strikes against the Assad regime. Russia, China, and Iran opposed military action, and Assad pledged to resist what he characterized as Western aggression (BBC News, 2018)¹⁶.

The possibility of international military intervention in Syria diminished by the end of August, primarily due to discernible opposition majorities in the United States and the United Kingdom against such action. On August 29, a motion in the British Parliament to authorize strikes in Syria failed, and a parallel vote in the U.S. Congress, initially scheduled for September 10, was postponed. Concurrently, diplomatic efforts took precedence, leading to an agreement among Russia, Syria, and the United States on September 14 of 2013. This agreement aimed to place all of Syria's chemical weapons under international control. Subsequently, the accord was implemented, and all declared chemical weapons were successfully removed from Syria by the specified deadline of June 30, 2014 (CFR, 2023).

With all of this happening, millions of people have decided to flee the Syrian territory and to find shelter in other countries, in the hope of finding a better life and

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43697084>

stability.

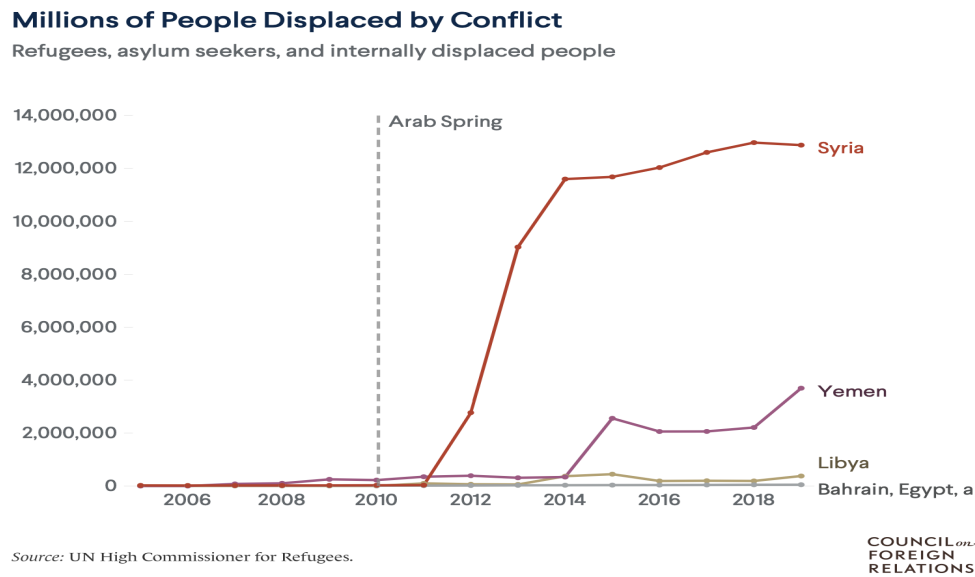


Figure 2. 'No Lasting Democratic Progress, Except in Tunisia' - CFR

The vast majority of Syrians fleeing the country sought refuge in neighboring countries, with Turkey being the neighboring country with the largest number of Syrian refugees (3.7 million), followed by Lebanon (924,000), Jordan (657,000), Iraq (228,000) and Egypt (130,000) (UNRIC, 2019). But as the Syrian conflict intensified in 2014 and 2015, and as the refugees were generally unable to find lawful employment and decent housing or establish permanent legal residence in Lebanon, Jordan, or Turkey, they started evaluating other options. Because the Gulf Arab states did not accept these refugees, Europe emerged as the only other possible destination. (Dragostinova, 2016)

Refugees saw in Europe a possibility of more safety, stability and access to better living conditions and opportunities, a chance to create a future. Although Syria was the biggest driver of the emergence of refugees in Europe, it was not the only one. Other conflicts, including those in Somalia and Eritrea, have displaced millions as a result of identity-based persecution and repression. These people seeking asylum displayed a strong resolve to reach Europe, regardless of the risks and challenges they faced. Additionally, they were willing to pay significant sums of money to intermediaries to facilitate their journey. Faced with their current situation, asylum seekers generally thought that there was nothing to lose in undertaking the dangerous journey to Europe (Yahya, 2015).

From Turkey, the easiest way to enter Europe is through the Bulgarian border, where upon arrival, refugees can register and apply for asylum. However, most Syrian refugees did not want to stay in Bulgaria, a small country with an impoverished economy and fewer opportunities compared to the "big and powerful" countries of northern Europe (Yahya, 2015).

A significant obstacle hindering human movement from Turkey to Bulgaria was the construction of a barbed wire fence initiated by the Bulgarian government in 2014. This measure was ostensibly implemented to counteract human trafficking originating from Turkey. Notably, the construction of this fence demonstrated remarkable efficiency, despite the country facing limitations in financial resources allocated to more pressing infrastructural projects. The formidable nature of the Bulgarian fence posed a considerable risk, prompting refugees to opt for perilous journeys across the Mediterranean. These journeys typically involved precarious boat trips from Izmir, Turkey, to the nearby Greek islands of Lesbos, Kos, and Rhodos, as an alternative to facing the perceived impenetrability of the Bulgarian barrier (Dragostinova, 2016), as we can see from this image Greece and Italy became the main points of entrance in Europe for the refugees.

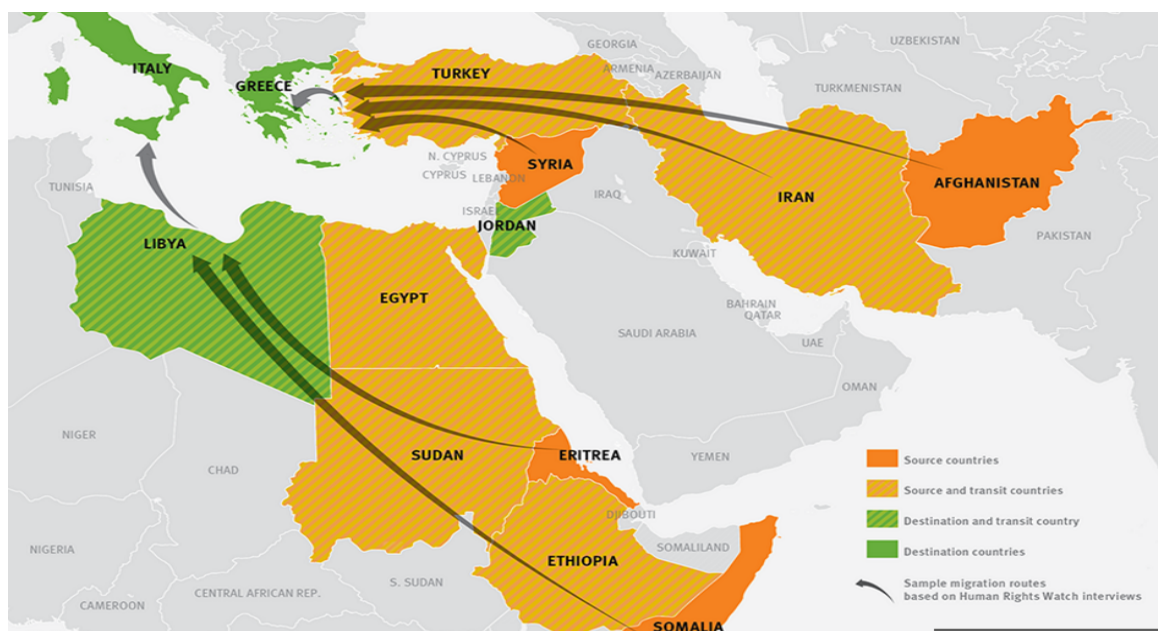


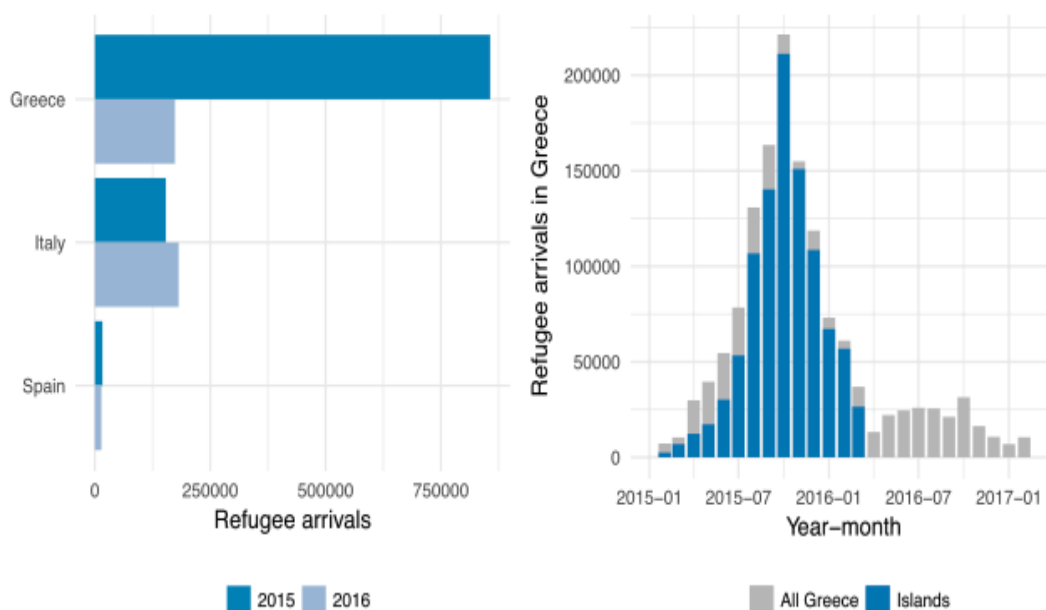
Figure 3. 'The Mediterranean Migration Crisis' - Human Rights Watch

In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at the measures and actions the European Union adopted to address the critical matter of the refugee crisis. We'll go

over the policies that were put in place and the outcomes achieved in mitigating the issues at hand.

2.2. The EU Search for Solutions

The situation caused Greece and Italy, both located in the southern Mediterranean, to become overwhelmed with asylum applications. This made it extremely challenging to protect the human rights of the refugees arriving there. Greece, due to its proximity to the Turkish coast and its numerous islands, quickly became the primary entry point to Europe for most Syrian refugees. As we can see from the following graphs, more than one million asylum seekers arrived in Greece between 2015 and 2016, followed by Italy that, even though on a smaller scale, was the second European country most affected by the arrival of so many people seeking refuge (American Political Science Review, 2019).



Note: Right panel shows the number of sea arrivals across countries at the external border of Europe for 2015 (dark blue) and 2016 (light blue). Left panel shows number of monthly refugee arrivals in all of Greece (gray) and on the Aegean islands (dark blue).

Figure 4. 'Mediterranean Refugee Arrivals' - American Political Science Association

As we can also see from Figure 4, the arrival of boats was not only confined to a brief temporal window but also predominantly localized to approximately twelve Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. Islands in proximity to the Turkish coast experienced refugee arrivals numbering up to five per resident from the beginning of the refugee crisis until the enactment of the EU-Turkey agreement. By contrast, islands situated marginally further from the coast reported virtually no arrivals during the same period

(American Political Science Association, 2019). With a whole population of only approximately eleven million people, the situation in Greece was very precarious, leading to unsustainable and inhuman conditions for the asylum seekers, many of them children, leaving the country with no choice but to ask for European Union solidarity and assistance.

This surge in asylum applications meant that a significant part of the European population came into contact with refugees from culturally distinct nations, affecting not only urban centers but also rural regions traditionally not used to encounters with non-European foreigners and the disparity in the "burden" of the crisis that hit Europe in 2015 among European Union Member States, led to some anger and negative attitudes towards European migration policies, with political movements on the far right, advocating anti-immigration policies, gathering substantial electoral support in several countries that witnessed notable refugee arrivals (Steinmayr, 2017).

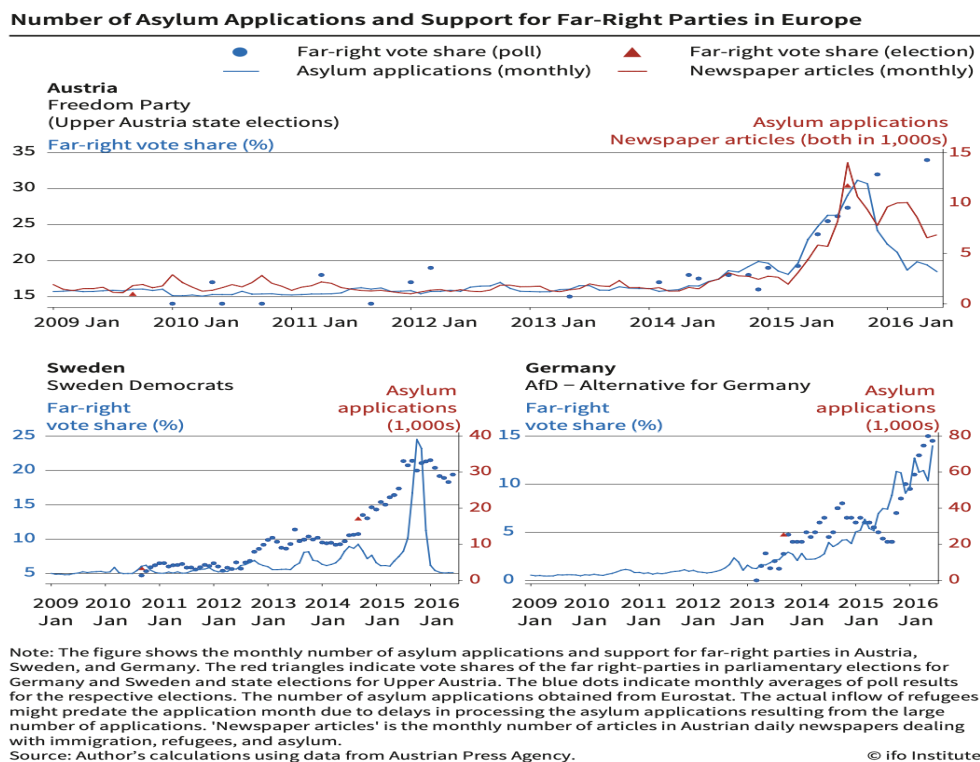


Figure 5. 'Number of Asylum Applications and Support for Far-Right Parties in Europe' - ifo DICE Report

Andreas Steinmayr, presents us with the analysis of these 3 countries, Austria, Sweden and Germany, where, as we can see in Figure 5, it suggests that there's a positive correlation between the number of refugees arriving and the support for far-

right parties. For example, the Sweden Democrats gained 5.7% of the votes in Sweden's 2010 parliamentary elections. After that, their support escalated in correlation with the increasing influx of refugees, a phenomenon that commenced earlier in Sweden compared to other European nations. By the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Sweden Democrats' share of the vote had risen to 12.9%, and polls in late 2015—coinciding with the peak of refugee arrivals in Sweden — indicated their support at around 20%. The party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), established in 2013, also experienced a marked increase in popularity, with polls reflecting a surge in support to up to 15%, paralleling the rise in refugee numbers.

Austria was no exception as, during the 2015 state elections in Upper Austria, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria saw its vote share double from the 2009 elections, securing over 30% of the vote with a strong anti-asylum campaign. Polling data suggests that support for the Freedom Party remained consistent with the 2009 election levels until the latter part of 2014. However, a significant surge in support occurred in 2015, again coinciding with an increase in refugee arrivals (as illustrated in Figure 5, upper panel). Concurrently, the prominence of the refugee issue in the media, as indicated by the volume of newspaper articles addressing the refugee situation, rose nearly in tandem with the surge in asylum applications (Steinmayr, 2017).

Despite the evidence of an increased support to more far-right parties in different European countries, a big part of the population also called upon European leaders to enhance their dedication to upholding human rights and meeting international obligations to safeguard those seeking refuge in Europe.

The European Commission, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), human rights organizations focused on refugees, and national authorities have consistently accused Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain of violating human rights in their treatment of asylum-seekers (Buonanno, 2017). In response, these countries have appealed for solidarity within the European Union. However, humanitarian concerns were not confined to southern countries. During the peak of the migration crisis in 2015–16, refugees reported harsh treatment by Bulgarian border authorities at the Bulgarian - Turkish border (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2015). Even EU candidate states have faced criticism, as human rights advocates condemned

Macedonian border police for using tear gas and rubber bullets to prevent refugees in the temporary camp in Idomeni from dismantling the barbed-wire-topped chain-link fence at Macedonia's border with Greece. (Buonanno, 2017)

In these camps, children had their right to education suspended indefinitely while they waited for their asylum application to be completed. There are several reports of a lack of doctors and access to health care within the refugee camps, as well as poor hygiene conditions that led to the spread of various diseases¹⁷ (Daynes, 2016). Due to the lack of preparation for the wave of refugees that arrived in Europe in 2015 and the lack of investment by the European Union in improving the living conditions of migrants and in political instruments capable of ensuring the needs that the crisis imposed, the refugee camps lacked decent housing, forcing most of those living there to live in extremely precarious conditions, without sanitation and with a lack of access to food and essential goods. It is estimated that, in 2020, there were more than 56,000 asylum seekers in Greece and the situation on the Greek islands was very difficult, especially the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Kios and Kos, where access to the most basic goods and services was very difficult. It is worth noting that the island of Lesbos is where the largest refugee camp in Europe, Moria, was located, a structure created to house 2,000 people and where more than 26,000 were living. (PAR, 2020).

The crisis incited substantial discord among EU Member States by exposing deficiencies in both the Schengen system's capacity to effectively manage external borders and the Dublin Regulation's inability to allocate responsibility for registering and processing asylum applications equitably. As the influx of migrants overwhelmed their resources, Greece and Italy were unable to prevent people from continuing their journey toward northern European countries (Willermain, 2016).

Despite the lack of consensus between member states and European institutions, there were some key turning points events during 2015 that shocked the whole world and put some extra pressure on the EU and the member states putting the idea of the European Union as the keeper of human rights at risk. On the evening of April 18, 2015, a fishing boat transporting approximately 800 migrants overturned and sank off the Libyan coast. With a mere 28 individuals surviving, this incident marked the most severe tragedy in the Mediterranean amidst the refugee crisis. On

¹⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6297302/pdf/clinmed-16-5-437.pdf>

27 August 2015, another horrifying incident marked the ongoing crisis, with the discovery of 71 bodies of migrants and refugees in a refrigerator truck abandoned near the Austrian border with Hungary, of which 59 men, eight women and four children from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Reuters, 2018).

On the 2nd of September 2015, the tragic image of a 3 year old little Syrian boy washed up on a beach, lying face down who lost his life fleeing Syria, shocked the world and brought even more attention to the refugee crisis. These events raised the attention of the whole world and put the EU in the spotlight, intensifying the urgency to find a common response, based on shared responsibility, solidarity, and unity among member states. As the secretary of the United Nations, António Guterres said, "(...) the biggest influx of refugees into Europe for decades requires a "massive common effort" and breaks with the current fragmented approach which has led Europe overall to fail to find an effective common response. (...) Europe is facing a moment of truth. This is the time to reaffirm the values upon which it was built." (Guterres, 2015).

The migration crisis in the Mediterranean has made it a priority to address immediate needs, but it has also made obvious the structural limitations of the European Union's migration policy and the inadequacy of the instruments available. This provided an opportunity for the EU to address the need for its migration policy to be balanced and to send a clear signal to citizens that collective management of migration by all EU actors is more effective. To achieve this goal, the European Commission announced in May 2015 the 'European Agenda on Migration'¹⁸, a new strategic framework laying the foundation for the EU and its Member States to address both the immediate and the long-term challenges of managing migration flows effectively and comprehensively, and setting out the need for a common approach to granting protection to displaced people in need of protection through resettlement (Willermain, 2016).

¹⁸ The 'European Agenda on Migration' launched in 2015 can be consulted on the official website of the European Union 'EUR-Lex', via the following link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015DC0240..>

2.2.1. European Agenda on Migration

The European Agenda on Migration was based on 4 pillars that together aimed to solve the EU's structural problems in the area of migration¹⁹.

The first pillar of the agenda aimed to reduce the incentives for irregular migration. To achieve this, the EU proposed several key actions: addressing the root causes of irregular and forced displacement in third countries through cooperation and humanitarian aid; making migration a central issue in EU delegations; presenting an action plan on the smuggling of migrants in May 2015; establishing stricter measures to ensure third countries comply with their obligations to readmit nationals; adopting a Return Handbook and monitoring the implementation of the Return Directive, which sets common standards and procedures for returning illegally staying third-country nationals; and strengthening and changing the legal basis of Frontex to enhance its role in the area of return (European Commission, 2015).

The second pillar of the 'European Agenda on Migration' focused on border management and control to save lives and protect Europe's external borders. It proposed actions such as strengthening the role and capacity of Frontex, establishing a Union standard for border management, enhancing coordination of coast guard duties, creating a revised proposal on Smart Borders, and increasing the capacity of third countries to manage their borders (European Commission, 2015).

The third pillar aimed to establish a unified and robust European asylum policy. Necessary actions included creating a system to monitor and evaluate the Common European Asylum System, defining guidelines to improve reception conditions and asylum procedures, and establishing a protocol to combat abuses of the asylum system. It also involved strengthening the Safe Country of Origin provisions to expedite asylum applications from applicants from safe countries, promoting systematic fingerprinting and identification, incorporating more biometric identifiers into the Eurodac²⁰ system, and evaluating and possibly revising the Dublin Regulation in 2016 (European Commission, 2015).

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_15_4956

²⁰ European Dactyloscopy (Eurodac) is the European Union (EU) fingerprint database for identifying asylum seekers and irregular border-crossers.

The fourth and final pillar aimed to create a legal migration policy to attract skilled workers to the European Union and facilitate the efficient integration of legal migrants. To achieve this, the European Commission proposed modernizing and overhauling the "Blue Card" system²¹, which allows highly qualified workers from outside the EU to live and work in EU countries. It also proposed establishing a platform for dialogue with social partners on economic migration, redefining funding priorities for integration policies, and making remittances cheaper, faster, and safer (European Commission, 2015).

These measures proposed solutions that would allow for effective management of the migration issue in the long term, however, the crisis experienced in 2015 demanded quick and immediate action.

To combat the loss of life and the humanitarian crisis resulting from the massive influx of migrants in 2015 and the poor management of borders and asylum applications, the European Commission proposed several immediate measures: these included a funding package to triple the funds for operations "Triton" and "Poseidon" in 2015-2016 and to finance an EU-wide resettlement program; Immediate support for a potential Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission on migrant smuggling and human trafficking was also proposed; Additionally, a legislative proposal was planned to activate the emergency system of Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) by the end of May, based on the distribution cellar in the Annex²²; A budget of 30 million euros was allocated for Protection and Regional Development Programs, and the creation of a multipurpose pilot center in Niger by the end of 2015 was also proposed, among other measures (European Commission, 2015).

The European Commission aimed to tackle the underlying causes of migratory flows through its European Agenda for Migration, while also enhancing efforts to combat refugee trafficking and smuggling networks through collaboration between Member States (MS) and third countries. Additionally, it sought to establish a more

²¹ The EU Blue Card gives highly qualified workers from outside the EU the right to live and work in an EU country, provided they have higher professional qualifications, such as a university degree, and a binding employment contract or job offer with a high salary compared to the average in the EU country where the job is located. The EU Blue Card applies in 25 of the 27 EU countries." (EU Immigration Portal, 2022) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:4559508>

²² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/649325/EPRS_ATA\(2020\)649325_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/649325/EPRS_ATA(2020)649325_EN.pdf)

stringent deportation framework for irregular migrants by negotiating readmission agreements with transit countries. This involved granting greater authority to FRONTEX to monitor and patrol European borders in the Mediterranean through the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard. Deployment levels in the Central Mediterranean saw a significant rise to assist Italian authorities in enhancing control over their sea borders and conducting life-saving operations. The revised operational plan of the Joint Operation Triton extended its operational coverage to 138 nautical miles south of Sicily, incorporating a bolstered presence of additional experts, vessels, and aircraft. This augmentation facilitated the deployment of three airplanes, six offshore patrol vessels, twelve patrol boats, two helicopters, as well as nine debriefing and six screening teams during the peak summer period (Willermain, 2016).

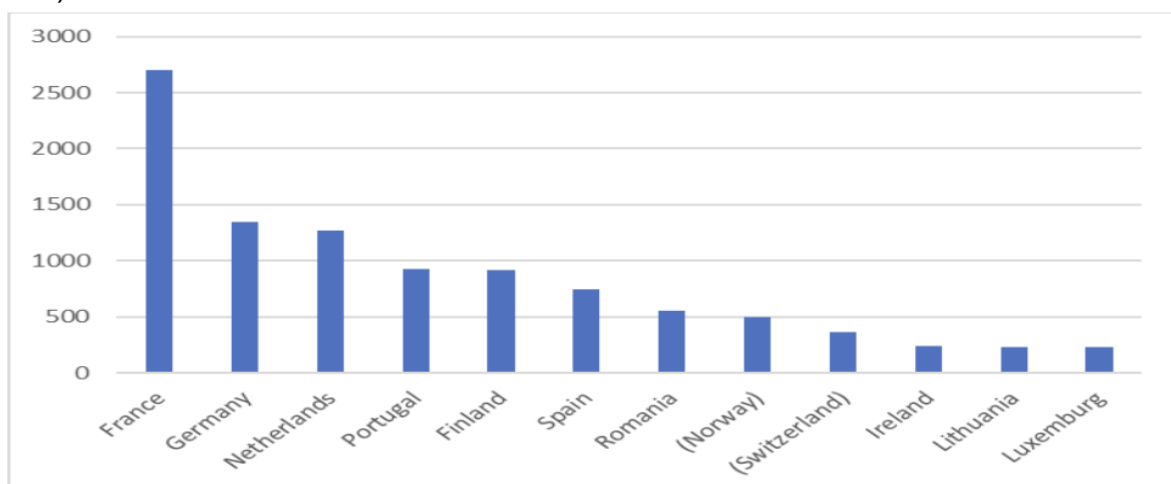
On top of the initial budget of 114 million euros allocated for 2015, the European Commission granted Frontex an extra 26.25 million euros in emergency funding. This additional support was aimed at reinforcing Operation Triton in Italy and Poseidon in Greece from June 2015 until the year's end, resulting in a total budget increase for Triton to 38 million euros and for Poseidon to 18 million euros. Furthermore, the Commission prioritized the implementation of the Common European Asylum System, which includes facilitating the distribution of asylum seekers among Member States and reviewing the Dublin System, which mandates asylum seekers to lodge their applications in the first European territory they enter. (PAR, 2020)

As mentioned before, one of the immediate measures implemented by the EU was the activation of the Emergency system under Article 78(3) of the TFEU to better distribute asylum seekers within Europe. The Justice and Home Affairs Council reached consensus on implementing interim measures to facilitate the relocation of 160,000 asylum seekers, who were demonstrably in need of international protection, from Italy and Greece to the territories of other EU Member States. Additionally, to assist Italy and Greece in managing the extraordinary strain on their asylum and migration systems, Member States committed to enhancing operational support in collaboration with these countries. This support encompasses various activities coordinated by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Frontex in the realm of international protection (European Parliament, 2015). The relocation process was scheduled to span two years, from September 2015 to 2017, with financial support provided by the EU budget to participating EU Member States and associated

countries. As part of the emergency relocation initiative, asylum seekers were deemed to have a high probability of successful application processing (with an EU average recognition rate exceeding 75%) and being transferred from Greece and Italy, where they initially arrived, to other Member States for their asylum claims to be assessed (Willermain, 2016).

Successful applicants were granted refugee status and the right to reside in the receiving Member State. The examination of applications was to be conducted by the receiving Member State in accordance with established regulations and assurances. The criteria for distributing asylum seekers was determined by factors such as GDP, population size, unemployment rate, and previous numbers of asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Of the 160,000 asylum seekers proposed to be relocated from Italy and Greece to other European countries, only a mere 11,966 were actually relocated by 2 February 2017 (European Parliament, 2017).

Despite the legally binding nature of the relocation decisions, certain Member States have failed to adhere to them effectively. This encompasses those Member States, such as Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, which opposed their adoption in the Council, as well as several others facing practical and political obstacles to relocation implementation. According to Figure 6, the top ten countries in terms of total relocations are as follows: France (2,696), Germany (1,349), the Netherlands (1,274), Portugal (922), Finland (919), Spain (745), Romania (558), Ireland (241), Lithuania (229), and Luxembourg (226). Additionally, Norway (493) and Switzerland (368), both Schengen associated States participating in the relocation scheme through bilateral agreements, are also prominent among the top relocators (European Parliament, 2017).



In Figure 7, we see that the Member States with the lowest total numbers of relocations are Poland, Austria, and Hungary, each having not resettled any asylum-seekers. Following them are Slovakia (9), Liechtenstein (10), Croatia (19), Bulgaria (29), Sweden (39), Cyprus (65), and Estonia (78).

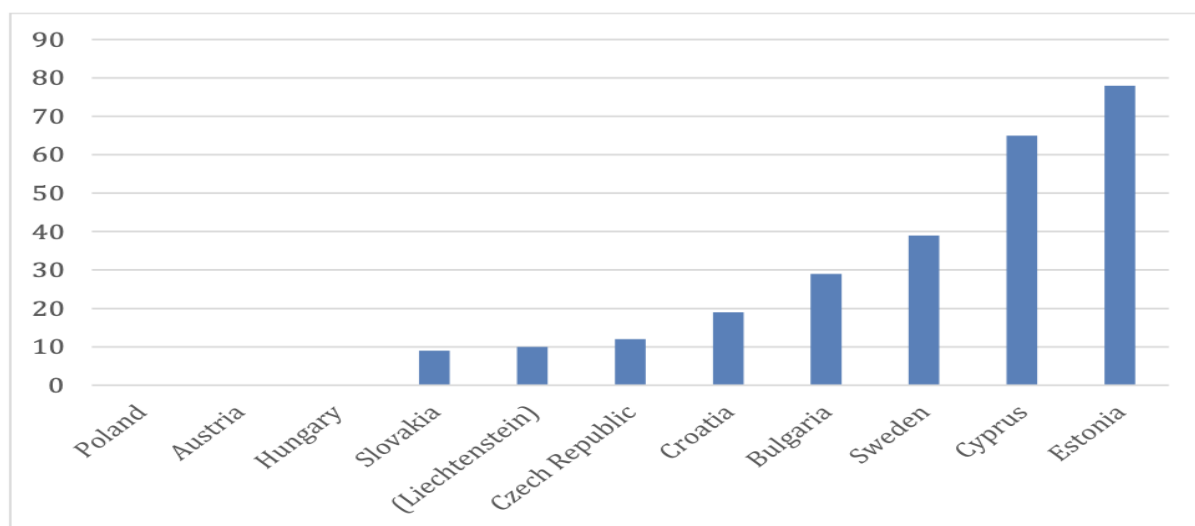


Figure 7. Last 10 relocators in total

As indicated by the evidence, despite efforts from specific Member States and the Commission to urge action and commitment to their obligations from all Member States, the Relocation Plan fell short of success and failed to achieve the intended impact.

In October 2015, the European Commission introduced a strategy involving the establishment of designated 'hotspots' in Italy and Greece. These hotspots were intended to serve as operational bases where the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) would collaborate with task forces composed of frontline Member States. Their primary objectives included the rapid identification, registration, and fingerprinting of migrant arrivals, streamlining refugee screening processes, and facilitating coordinated return initiatives (European Parliament, 2015).

Originally, the hotspot approach was conceived as a mechanism to support the identification of individuals eligible for relocation within the European Union. However, over time, its operational emphasis has shifted towards migration control. This shift has led to concerns regarding the potential infringement of fundamental rights, as the prioritization of migration control objectives has overshadowed the initial relocation-focused intent of the hotspots.

The fundamental concept entailed fostering collaboration among the three agencies, where EASO support teams expedited the processing of asylum cases, Frontex facilitated the coordination of irregular migrant returns to aid Member States, and Europol provided support to the host Member State in investigations aimed at disrupting smuggling and trafficking networks. Furthermore, the Commission allocated 60 million euros in emergency funding to reinforce the reception infrastructures and augment healthcare services for migrants in Member States experiencing heightened pressures. (Willermain, 2016)

In Italy, fixed hotspots were set up in Taranto, Trapani, Pozzallo, and Lampedusa, with mobile units also applying the hotspot strategy at other landing sites where most arrivals—up to 70%—took place. The main focus was on border control and law enforcement, which was clear from the strong presence of Frontex. As a result, the original idea of hotspots serving multiple agencies and purposes seems to have been reduced in practice.

The emphasis on border and migration control has led to a predominant focus on return procedures. Instances of orders to leave the territory and forced removal without adequate hearings or access to the asylum procedure have been documented. Additionally, practices of profiling based on nationality, where arrivals from non-relocation countries are automatically categorized as 'non-refugees', have been observed. These individuals are selectively informed or misinformed about their options and promptly expelled (UNHCR, 2016).

Importantly, potential asylum seekers may not be informed that the intention to apply for asylum should be noted during the pre-registration stage, typically through the compilation of the foglio notizie. Although statements made at this stage theoretically allow for later changes, in practice, individuals were directed to the appropriate procedure based on information disclosed during pre-registration.

Consequently, pre-registration operated as an expedited form of processing, hindering access to international protection procedures, with no legal assistance or appeal options provided (Willermain, 2016).

Most concerningly, this triage process was conducted by police officers, who lack training and expertise in making protection-related judgments. They are tasked with making immediate decisions and referring individuals to either the asylum, relocation, or return process based on the outcomes of the screening. These practices arguably amount to collective expulsion, violating Article 4 of Protocol 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and pose a risk of refoulement²³ for those with international protection needs (Willermain, 2016).

For the limited number of individuals meeting the qualifications for relocation, as determined by the implicit nationality criterion within the 75% EU-wide recognition rate required, referrals for relocation were exclusively channeled through the hotspots. However, deficiencies in capacity for registration and processing resulted in prolonged delays and extended stays in temporary accommodation, often characterized by substandard conditions. These conditions disproportionately impact the most vulnerable individuals, particularly unaccompanied minors (Willermain, 2016).

As one of the countries most affected by the crisis, Italy had yet to establish sufficient accommodation capacity for unaccompanied minors, and their practical prospects for relocation were minimal. Typically, stays occurred within closed reception centers, wherein conditions may constitute systematic or indiscriminate detention, lacking effective judicial oversight or avenues for contesting their deprivation of liberty. Such circumstances stand in contravention of international human rights standards, as well as EU and constitutional guarantees²⁴ (Center for Migration Studies, 2018).

During this timeframe, EASO collaborated with Italian authorities to facilitate the relocation process through a "matching activity." This activity involved assessing applicants profiles, considering various factors such as educational background, professional qualifications, language proficiency, employment history, and familial

²³ Refoulement: the act of forcing a refugee or asylum seeker to return to a country or territory where he or she is likely to face persecution <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refoulement> .

²⁴ <https://cmsny.org/publications/2018smcsc-cse-uam/>

relationships. Based on this assessment, EASO prepared and submitted relocation requests to Member States, prioritizing vulnerable applicants. Typically, relocation candidates were invited to indicate their preferred choices among eight Member States, which EASO endeavors to accommodate to the extent feasible (Willermain, 2016).

Subsequently, security and exclusion screenings were conducted by Italian authorities in collaboration with Member States' liaison officers, facilitated by EASO's intermediation. Upon successful completion of these screenings and approval by the designated Member State for relocation, a relocation decision was formulated with the assistance of EASO experts assigned to the Dublin Unit. This decision is then communicated to the applicant. However, since relocation decisions are generally not subject to challenge, instances of secondary movement have occurred, particularly when candidates were assigned to a relocation state not aligned with their preferences. Technical challenges and additional delays have further hindered trust in the relocation system (European Parliament, 2017).

The function of the five operational hotspots within the relocation framework for Greece, situated in Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos, needs to be delineated into two distinct phases: pre-20 March 2016 and post-20 March 2016, aligning with the enactment of the EU-Turkey Statement aimed at mitigating migratory movements across the Aegean Sea.

Prior to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, hotspots served as reception centers for incoming sea arrivals, facilitating their relocation and directing them towards the asylum or return procedure. Given that a significant proportion of arrivals comprised Syrian nationals, the primary objective was to manage their relocation from Greece, thereby alleviating strain on the Greek asylum system. However, out of the approximately 1 million individuals who arrived on Greek shores in 2015, only a small fraction, approximately 10%, submitted applications for international protection. The majority of these individuals subsequently proceeded to their preferred destinations, notably Germany and other countries, primarily via the Balkan route until its closure in March 2016 (European Parliament, 2017).

Following the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, individuals seeking protection on the islands were relocated to the mainland, resulting in the transformation of hotspots primarily into closed pre-removal detention centers. These centers then served as mandatory confinement facilities for arrivals post-EU-Turkey Statement, awaiting expulsion to Turkey. This shift in focus was initiated by the European Commission, which emphasized the transition from registration and screening to the objective of executing returns to Turkey. Moreover, this change in emphasis was underscored by the amendment to the Decision of 22 September 2015, which allowed the 54,000 places designated for relocation to be repurposed for resettlement from Turkey, in accordance with the agreement. The staffing policy and differential budget allocations further reflect a prevalence of functions related to migration and border control, with Frontex serving as the primary agent supporting Greek authorities (aida, 2017).

Overall, hotspots have failed to alleviate the strain on Italy and Greece, but rather, have intensified their challenges. They contributed to a surge in the number of applicants, exacerbating deficiencies within the Dublin system and prompting the implementation of repressive measures, which overlooked human rights considerations and compromised protection standards. Primarily, hotspots have operated as a "filtering" mechanism, yet with minimal procedural assurances and inadequate recognition or identification of vulnerabilities and special needs. (Amnesty International, 2016)

As mentioned before, one of the most difficult aspects in applying the relocation system was the unwillingness of certain Member States to engage in the relocation and cooperate with the EU institutions and other fellow Member States. This has led the European Commission to explore alternative routes as solutions, such as the EU-Turkey Deal²⁵.

2.2.2. EU-Turkey Deal

Due to its proximity to Syria and Iraq, Turkey has always been one of the countries that has welcomed the most refugees into its territory. In addition to these

²⁵ Council, EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016, available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkeystatement/>

countries, Turkey is very close to Greece, making this European country very attractive as a way of entering the European Union. As a result, the European Council sought to establish a collaborative relationship with Turkey aimed at accommodating refugees within its borders, thereby bolstering its reception capabilities and deterring their onward journey to Europe, particularly amidst the influx of Syrian refugees. Consequently, during the European Council meeting on October 15, 2015, the EU endorsed a Joint Action Plan with Turkey, designed to regulate migratory movements along the Turkey-Greece route. (PAR, 2020)

On November 29, 2015, at the EU-Turkey summit, the Joint Action Plan was activated, and the Statement was signed by both sides on March 18, 2016. The aim of the agreement was to control migratory flows to Europe and curb irregular migration.

In the statement of March 18, the European Union and the Turkish government reached an agreement on several key points. Starting from March 20, 2016, all new irregular migrants or asylum seekers with inadmissible applications crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. As part of a strategy to support Syrian refugees, for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian would be directly resettled in the EU from Turkey. Turkey also committed to taking necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for irregular migration to the EU²⁶.

A Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme was to be activated once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU had ended or been substantially reduced. The process to fulfill the visa liberalization roadmap was to be accelerated, aiming to remove visa requirements for Turkish citizens by the end of June 2016, provided Turkey met the remaining criteria²⁷.

The EU agreed to work closely with Turkey to speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated €3 billion under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and to mobilize additional funding up to an additional €3 billion until the end of 2018 once these resources were nearly depleted. The accession process for Turkey to the EU was to be re-energized, with Chapter 33 being opened during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union and accelerated preparation for opening other

²⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/el/memo_16_1494

chapters. Lastly, the EU and Turkey agreed to collaborate to improve humanitarian conditions within Syria (European Commission, 2016).

As the agreed statement demonstrates, Turkey and Greece were the two governments in charge of implementing every measure of the agreed declaration requiring huge operational efforts from these two States. The Commission had the role of providing Greece with advice, expertise, and financial support from the EU budget, in addition to coordinating assistance from other EU member states and agencies.

Since the onset of 2015 until the end of 2016, Greece had received €352 million in emergency assistance to address migration challenges. Particularly after the 15 June 2016 report, the European Commission has allocated over €90 million in emergency funding from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) to enhance Greece's capacity for receiving and assisting migrants and refugees. Moreover, an additional €198 million has been provided to humanitarian partners via the EU Emergency Support Instrument, established to support urgent needs. Furthermore, on 9 September, an announcement of another €115 million aimed at preparing reception capacities, implementing direct assistance through cash/voucher schemes, facilitating refugee children's access to education, and addressing the needs of unaccompanied minors who require special care and protection. These emergency funds are in addition to the €509 million already designated to Greece under the 2014-2020 national programs (€294.5 million from AMIF and €214.7 million from ISF). In total, the European Union's support to Greece in confronting migration issues surpassed €1 billion, demonstrating a substantial commitment to assisting Greece in managing the migration crisis effectively²⁸ (European Court of Auditors, 2019).

Besides the financial support, EU agencies have also provided significant support to Greece by deploying staff to the Greek islands. As of 28 September 2016, Frontex had deployed 699 officers in Greece, of which 675 were directly involved in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) had stationed 83 interpreters in Greece, alongside 70 experts from Member States, with 41 of these experts working in the hotspots. Europol had also placed 8 specialists in Greece to aid in investigations against migrant smuggling. Furthermore,

²⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/migration-24-2019/en/>

10 guest officers had been recently seconded by Member States to perform second-line security checks in the hotspots, indicating a collaborative effort to address migration challenges in Greece (European Commission, 2016).

By 28 September 2016, approximately six months after the agreement's enforcement, the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement had progressively deepened and accelerated. Notably, there was a significant decline in attempts to cross the Aegean Sea and a decrease in fatalities at sea since the Statement's operationalization, affirming the underlying strategy of the EU and Turkey's decision to execute the agreement. Prior to the Statement's implementation, an average of 1,740 migrants per day were crossing the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands. In stark contrast, from 21 March until 28 September, the average daily arrivals dropped to 94. Furthermore, from exceeding 270 fatalities in the Aegean Sea in 2015, the number of lives lost has dramatically reduced to 11 since the Statement's activation. (European Commission, 2016)

The execution of the EU-Turkey agreement has indeed played a role in markedly decreasing the number of individuals embarking on the perilous voyage to Greece. However, for those who manage to reach the EU, the consequences have been dire, and the number of individuals repatriated to Turkey as part of this agreement has been minimal. A mere 2,140 individuals have been repatriated from Greece to Turkey under this agreement, from March 2016 to March 2023, a situation partially attributed to the recognition by Greek courts of Turkey as an unsafe country for returns in numerous instances. The already complex situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with Turkey ceasing to accept refugees from Greece for 2 years. In 2023, seven years following the agreement's implementation, there were no large-scale returns from Greece to Turkey. Meanwhile, around 32,472 Syrian refugees have been resettled from Turkey to EU member states as part of the deal (Rescue.org, 2023).

As of today, the EU-Turkey deal continues having devastating effects on the lives of thousands of refugees with Greece taking the significant step of broadening the notion that "Turkey is a safe third country" to include nationals from other countries. On 7 June 2021, a Greek Joint Ministerial Decision²⁹ (JMD), declared its intention to

²⁹ Law 42799/2021, 2021; Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021

use the EU-Turkey deal as a model to classify nationals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Somalia as having 'inadmissible' applications on a retroactive basis. This meant that the procedure established by the EU-Turkey statement would be applied not only to individuals entering after the law's enactment but also to those who had submitted applications prior to the law's implementation (Elif Demirbaş and Christina Miliou, 2023). Among the five nationalities specified in the Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD), three are frequently acknowledged as refugees within Greece. Nevertheless, subsequent to the JMD's implementation, there has been a marked increase in application rejections. Specifically, in 2021, there were 6,424 applications rejected on the grounds of being "inadmissible," representing a significant 126% rise compared to the figures in 2020 (Elif Demirbaş and Christina Miliou, 2023).

Even though the goal of the deal between the EU and Turkey has been achieved when it comes to decreasing the illegal migratory flows to Europe, the toll it took on human rights is immeasurable and the signed declaration was met with indignation from several international organizations that spoke out against its terms, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Rescue Committee, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save The Children and Caritas Europa (PAR, 2020). As Karl Kopp, Director of European Affairs at PRO ASYL, said, the deal is a human rights nightmare. It represents an exit of the EU from international refugee protection. The European Union continues to promote the normalization and expansion of policies like the one represented by the deal, endangering human lives, rule of law and democracy itself.³⁰

In the forthcoming chapter, I will examine the responses of Member States to the refugee crisis, with a particular focus on Germany, Poland, and France as case studies. Additionally, I will delve into the potential factors influencing the stance of certain Member States and explore the effects that the governmental policies have had on the populations of these countries.

2.3. Member States Reactions to the Refugee Situation of 2015

It is important to distinguish the response of the Member States to the refugee challenge into two phases. According to H. KRIESI ET AL. (2021), there are three

³⁰ <https://rsaagean.org/en/they-eu-turkey-deal-is-collapsing/>

factors that are particularly important in the way political responses are created in a crisis such as the refugee crisis: the political heritage of the countries, the pressure of the problem and political pressure. Politics restricts the policy options available to policymakers, while the combination of the problem and political pressure determines the urgency and uncertainty of the crisis situation that demands a response from them. Thus, during the refugee crisis the response to the 2015 influx of migrants could come from individual member states, a transnational effort by some subset of member states or a joint EU response. In terms of the possible responses of the different actors, we can first distinguish between 'debordering'³¹ responses and 're-bordering'³² responses, each of which can be further divided into internal and external measures (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021). In the first phase, the responses consisted of "de-bordering" in the face of the urgency of the issue, and in the second phase, the responses were markedly "re-bordering" in the face of the resurgence of widespread discontent on the part of the populations and governments of the Member States.

At first, the Member States that were on the front line, such as Greece, Italy and even Hungary, didn't register all the migrants arriving on their territories, letting most of them enter through Europe. Germany and Sweden, referred to by H. KRIESI ET AL. as "open destination" states, were the ones that contributed the most to receiving asylum seekers in this first phase. At first, the 'reception culture' in both countries welcomed the refugees with open arms. But, under increasing political pressure, the climate quickly changed and both countries sought to tighten their internal asylum policies and seek joint EU solutions (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021).

With the lack of a joint response and a crisis that seemed beyond the control of the European Union, member states opted for 're-bordering' responses. In this second phase, Hungary sought to reinforce its external borders and erected fences that were extended to the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian borders in the fall of 2015 and were gradually updated and reinforced throughout 2016 and 2017 (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021). Italy, on the other hand, did not have the same options as many member states due to its long maritime border and reacted as events unfolded.

³¹ A concept the author uses to refer to policies that open borders and welcome refugees.

³² The concept the author uses to refer to border closure policies aimed at making it more difficult for refugees to enter.

Following the tragic Lampedusa shipwreck in October 2013, which claimed over 300 lives, Italy initiated the "Mare Nostrum" surveillance and rescue operation, saving approximately 150,000 people. Faced with the internal conflict over Mare Nostrum, Italy managed to have its costs shared between the Member States of the European Union, which created Operation Triton and closed Mare Nostrum. Given the continued absence of a joint EU solution, the Italian Interior Minister, Minniti, launched a series of initiatives to externalize external border control. Consequently, in February 2017, Italy entered into an agreement with Libya to curb migratory flows. However, Salvini attempted further measures of external and internal re-bordering. This involved closing ports to NGO ships, expediting deportation procedures, and enacting restrictive asylum and border laws (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021).

In the second phase, even the countries that the author calls "open destination states" resorted to "re-bordering" measures. Germany, one of the countries that has stood out most for its proactivity in receiving refugees and seeking a joint response, has strengthened its border controls and asylum policies. In October 2015 and February 2016, Sweden implemented two sets of amendments to its asylum law. These revisions included measures aimed at expediting asylum procedures and imposing stricter criteria for family reunification. In emulation of Germany's approach, Sweden not only closed its borders but also declared the adoption of temporary residence permits lasting three years in the autumn of 2015 (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021). Countries such as Austria, Denmark, France and the United Kingdom have followed the same logic of 're-bordering' policies and have also strengthened their border controls and continually tightened their asylum policies. Observers noted a perceived "domino effect" where the closure of one country's borders triggered subsequent closures to the east and south, effectively restricting the flow of refugees through the Balkans and Italy. Furthermore, countries that were popular destinations for asylum seekers responded by adjusting their internal regulations to diminish their appeal, implementing more strict asylum legislation (H. KRIESI ET AL., 2021).

In addition to strengthening national borders, Austria sought to guide neighboring countries in a joint solution to control migrants arriving via the Balkans, through border control measures together with Hungary and the Western Balkans. During the Western Balkans conference in Vienna on February 24, 2016, Austria took the lead in proposing a solution. Operating under the banner of 'joint migration

management,' foreign and interior ministers from four EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia) and six Western Balkan candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) reached an agreement. Following the conference, these countries promptly began closing their borders, leading to the stranding of thousands of refugees on Greece's northern border at Idomeni (ICMPD, 2016)³³.

According to Buonanno (2017), the main factors affecting Member States positioning on migration include historical experience, lack of administrative capacity to adequately screen asylum seekers, their attitudes towards humanitarian obligations, demographic trends, migrants preferences for relocation, geographical location on the European continent and public opinion.³⁴ It is interesting to see how, in the light of these reasons, states have responded to the crisis, particularly in relation to the demographic trends in European countries. According to the author, this may have been one of the reasons why Germany stood out so much when it came to receiving refugees. Unlike the UK, France and Italy, Germany's population is expected to decline by 2060, and, above all, it is expected to be a largely aging population, and the reception of refugees could help to reverse this trend, and the author argues that this may have been one of the reasons behind Germany's reception policies.

Public opinion is also one of the reasons highlighted by the author as being one of the major factors influencing the positions adopted by the governments of each state when faced with the possibility of integrating refugees into their countries. On one level there has been the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, which in some member states, such as France and the UK, has made it risky for politicians to support a European solution to manage the flows of irregular migrants (Buonanno, 2017). And on the other hand, the increase of parliamentary seats of far-right parties also did not favor a pro-immigration response, as they took advantage of the situation to proliferate nationalist ideas and halt progress towards a joint response. "Hardliners", such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, took advantage of this to shut down migration to Hungary

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https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/49545/file/ICMPD_ViennaMigrationConference2016_ConferencePublication.pdf International Center for Migration Policy Development

³⁴ I won't go into all the reasons mentioned by the author so as not to repeat something already explored, but if you're interested, I recommend reading the essay, "Buonanno, L. (2017). The European Migration Crisis. In D. Dinan, N. Nugent, & W. E. Patterson (Eds.), *The European Union in Crisis* (pp. 100-130). London: Palgrave Macmillan."

(Barigazzi, 2015). In Greece, the far-right party, Golden Dawn, began marching in various areas of the country where migrants were camped or concentrated (Alderman, 2016). This trend was reflected throughout Europe, where even in Germany, despite the welcoming culture that marked the beginning of the crisis, it collided with a skeptical attitude in the regions of the former East Germany (LEHNE, 2016). However, the moral imperative to welcome and protect refugees had strong popular support, especially in Sweden and Germany, while concerns about the risks and costs of rapid immigration dominated public discourse in France and the UK. Right-wing xenophobic parties played a large role in some Member States and almost none in others (LEHNE, 2016). Finally, the third 'level' was during the UK's Brexit referendum in June 2016, where the desire to decrease the number of intra- and inter-European migrants was the main reason why it appears many voted to leave (Buonanno, 2017, p.13).

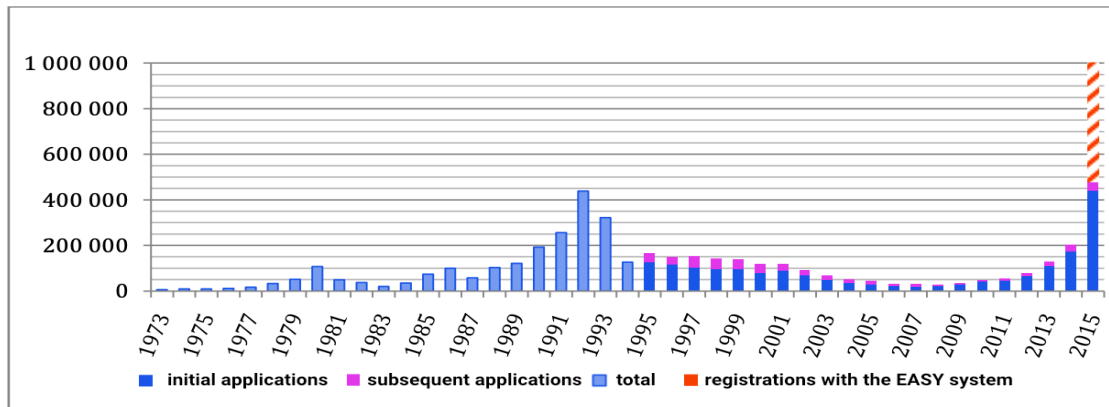
In the following section, I will take a closer look to three specific Member States, Germany, France and Poland, and examine how each one of these countries dealt with the refugee crisis, taking a closer look to the reactions of the governments and policies implemented, as well as the impact in the political polls, public opinion and number of refugees accepted.

2.3.1. Germany

2.3.1.1. A Favored Destination

Germany has long been a favored destination for immigrants and those seeking asylum for various reasons. However, since the summer of 2015, the country has become a prime destination for refugees, particularly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This surge in refugee arrivals has overwhelmingly influenced both political and social discussions. By late summer 2015, amid images of refugees being stuck in trains and camps in Hungary, the German government in essence abandoned the Dublin Regulation and allowed all refugees who had passed through other EU countries to file for asylum in Germany (Economica, 2022). On September 5, 2015, the German government permitted the entry of hundreds of refugees via train who had previously been detained in Hungary. This action is commonly regarded as the start of the refugee crisis, as some say it led to a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving in the subsequent weeks and months.

Asylum applications in Germany 1973-2015



Source: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016, own analysis

Figure 8. Asylum applications in Germany 1973-2015

As we can see in Figure 8, in 2015 alone, Germany received 441,899 initial asylum applications, with the total number, including follow-up requests, reaching 476,649. However, the actual number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany that year was much higher, largely because of the influx of refugees and subsequent registration challenges. These challenges delayed the formal application process, leaving several hundred thousand arrivals unable to officially apply for asylum. The German federal government reported that nearly 1.1 million asylum seeker arrivals were recorded in the EASY³⁵ system last year. Additionally, Germany welcomed thousands more refugees through various humanitarian aid programs (Engler, 2016).

The reasons behind the increase in immigrants are largely debated and generate disagreement. Many media sources and certain political factions in Germany and across Europe suggest that this surge was mainly or solely due to the federal government's open-door policy, frequently attributed to Chancellor Angela Merkel. In early September 2015, an agreement with Austria permitted refugees from Hungary to enter Germany, purportedly setting off a domino effect. Additionally, the government's optimistic "we can do it" mantra and photographs of the chancellor with

³⁵ The EASY system is an IT application for the initial allocation of asylum seekers between the German states. Errors and double counting cannot be excluded. Please check the following page for more information:
<https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Asyl/Fluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsylverfahrens/Erstverteilung/erstverteilung-node.html>

refugees were interpreted by some as a welcoming signal (Ayoub, 2019). While some interpreted these events as an open invitation to refugees, the reality is that Germany's decision and response were motivated by humanitarian concerns, not as an encouragement for refugees to embark on perilous journeys to Europe. Nonetheless, the perception across the continent was different. Quantifying the influence of political actions and symbols on migration patterns is challenging. The federal government's actions may have reinforced the decision of individuals to migrate to Germany and Europe. Yet, these actions alone cannot fully account for the unprecedented scale of refugee inflows from beyond Europe (Ayoub, 2019).

Germany's wealth, good living conditions, social welfare system, and notably, the pre-existing social networks of migrants, make the country one of the most appealing countries to live in Europe. This must also be considered as an influencing factor when it comes to the arrival of a large number of refugees, as well as, of course, the Syrian civil war, making 2015 as the year where the number of people in search of protection has reached an all-time high (Engler, 2016).

In recent years, prior to the refugee crisis, Germany's refugee policy has seen progressive liberalization, including the strengthening of refugees rights. This shift has been supported by several advantageous factors: a manageable volume of applications, robust economic growth, and a growing recognition of the country's demographic aging. Since 2012, Germany has been an active participant in the UNHCR's resettlement scheme. In particular, in response to the crisis in Syria, Germany has become notable among European countries for implementing broad-scale programs that temporarily accommodate Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Between May 2013 and June 2014, both federal and state governments in Germany agreed to make available 20,000 places for people escaping from conflict zones. Those admitted through this program received a residence permit valid for two years and the right to start working immediately. Furthermore, fifteen German states have facilitated the process for Syrian residents in Germany to bring over their family members, provided they can finance their housing and living expenses. By the end of 2015, this initiative had resulted in the admission of approximately 20,000 people (UNHCR, 2019).

2.3.1.2. Germany's Response to the Challenges

A significant rise in applications intensified the political and social discussions on asylum and refugee protection in Germany. Local municipalities encountered increasing difficulties in providing accommodations for refugees. Various temporary housing solutions were utilized across the nation, such as barracks, containers, tents, and school gymnasiums. As of March 2016, 687 gymnasiums were being used to house refugees, severely limiting their privacy and exposing them to ongoing stress. The establishment of these temporary shelters sometimes caused disputes with the local communities. Furthermore, even with several increases in personnel, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), tasked with processing asylum applications, was overwhelmed and lacked the necessary capacity. This led to a growing backlog of cases and longer processing times, with BAMF reporting up to 700,000 pending asylum applications at the start of January 2016 (Engler, 2016).

Given the circumstances, the federal government's primary goal was to speed up the application review process and substantially decrease the influx of new applications. The rising number of asylum seekers since 2012 from Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, combined with their notably low approval rates, reignited discussions about "asylum abuse." In early November 2014, these countries were classified as safe origins, aiming to hasten application reviews and discourage individuals from these nations from applying by signaling the futility of their efforts. In response to the critical events of summer 2015, the government swiftly implemented the Asylum Package I, which was expedited through parliament and enacted on October 24. This package aimed to increase the federal government's contribution to refugee housing costs and introduced several initiatives to expedite the asylum process. It also aimed to facilitate the early integration of refugees likely to stay in Germany (notably from Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Eritrea), offering them access to integration courses during the asylum application process. Conversely, it sought to expedite the departure of asylum seekers deemed unlikely to remain in the country (Engler, 2016).

In response to the ongoing influx of refugees, the German federal government found the initial measures inadequate. In early November 2015, coalition leaders came to an agreement on Asylum Package II, which called for establishing additional

"special reception centers" for asylum seekers from designated safe countries, those facing re-entry bans, submitting repeat applications, or showing a lack of cooperation. At these centers, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees aims to process asylum applications within a week. Applicants whose requests are denied are to be either sent back to their home countries or deported directly from these centers. The second asylum package also introduced further actions, including restrictions on family reunification for certain refugees and facilitating deportations, and came into effect in mid-March 2016. These additional restrictive measures have sparked intense discussions, even within the government itself (DW, 2015).

2.3.1.3. Shifts in Political Dynamics

Migration policy, being a highly prioritized and contentious issue, has sparked divisive opinions and ongoing disputes among both the public and lawmakers, leading to shifts in Germany's political dynamics. This environment has seen a rise in support for far-right factions and anti-immigration positions. The 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD), a party established in 2013, has notably increased its base of supporters and electoral success (BALFOUR et al, 2019)³⁶.

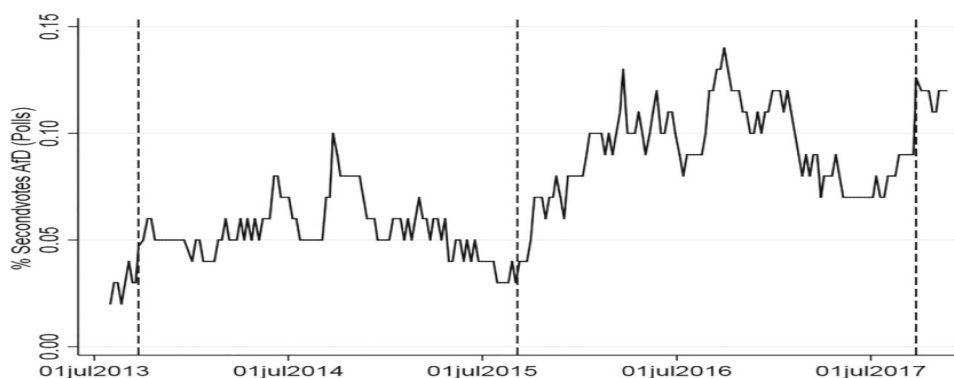


FIGURE 5. National AfD Party polls. *Notes:* These are national polls and election results for the AfD Party over time. The left-hand vertical line is placed at the date of the 2013 federal election (22 September 2013), and the value at this point reflects the actual percentage of votes cast for the AfD Party. The right-hand vertical line is placed at the date of the 2017 federal election (24 September 2017). All other measures of AfD popularity are based on polls conducted by the polling institute Forsa, and are based on surveys of about 1000 participants. The middle vertical line is placed at 5 September 2015, which is widely seen as the beginning of the refugee crisis. Source: Forsa.

Figure 9. National polls and election results from the AfD

³⁶ https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep21237.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A47706a920c476b160065fd35b46277b4&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

As we can see from figure 9, the initial dashed vertical line marks the 2013 federal election, where the AfD Party garnered 4.7% of the vote, narrowly missing the 5% constitutional requirement for parliamentary representation. Subsequently, the AfD shifted its focus from Euro-skepticism to immigration issues. The second dashed line corresponds to September 5, 2015, when the German government permitted several hundred refugees, previously detained in Hungary, to enter the country by train. This event appears to have bolstered support for the AfD Party as well, which has since solidified its stance. By the 2017 election, the party secured approximately 13% of the parliamentary seats (Economica, 2022).

From a different viewpoint, German society has consistently displayed significant solidarity with refugees, including spontaneous acts of support. Numerous individuals greeted refugees at train stations, provided donations of goods, assisted with distributing food in emergency shelters, and offered language classes. Surveys indicate that up to 10% of the population engaged in such supportive activities (Drouhot et al. Comparative Migration Studies, 2023).

The German Federal Government was confronted with a complex and debated challenge that encompasses political, economic, and social integration dimensions. Despite numerous changes and areas to be improved, the reality remains that throughout the 2015 refugee crisis, Germany emerged as a leading nation in addressing the needs of migrants and as a solution driver, acting as an example to be followed.

2.3.2. France

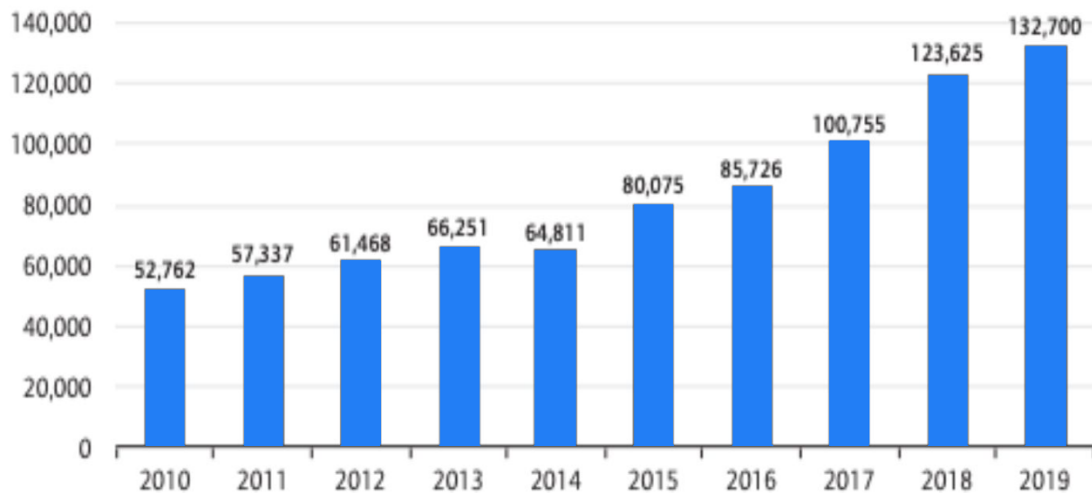
2.3.2.1. The Decline of France's Appeal for Emigrants

France's immigration history can be distinguished between three major historical waves. Initially, from the mid-19th century until World War I, Belgium, Italy, and Eastern Europe were the primary sources of immigrants, along with North Africans from French colonies. The era between the First World War and the Second World War saw an increased immigration from Italy, Poland, Spain, and Belgium to address labor shortages in these countries after the wars, with foreigners making up 5.9% of the population by 1931. The third wave was during the post-World War II period, and

it shifted towards a family reunification policy, moving away from labor-focused immigration. This change aimed to allow immigrant families to join them in France, with a notable policy adjustment in the mid-1970s to regulate the influx due to the “baby-boom” period (Remy, 2015). This era of migration significantly contributed to France's position as a prime destination for immigrants within Europe. Yet, in today's Europe, its allure for immigrants has started to fade. Further into this chapter I will also analyze the possible reasons for France's decline in attractiveness for emigrants.

As part of the European Union, France is required to adhere to and execute the EU's regulations and guidelines concerning refugees. A key piece of EU legislation on the distribution of refugees is the Dublin Regulation. This pact establishes which member state is accountable for processing each asylum application. Although this regulation exists and makes sense, this was one of the reasons, as I have mentioned before, that led to some countries, the so-called “frontline states”, being flooded with asylum requests and incapable of handling the situation.

France was not a frontline state and, as we can see from Figure 10, the number of applications for asylum has remained pretty stable compared to 2014 and especially compared to other Member States in the EU, such as frontline states like Greece or Italy, but even compared to Germany. It is even commonly mentioned that France frequently served as a transit point for refugees en route to other destinations, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. The main countries of origin for first-time asylum applicants are Afghanistan, Albania, Georgia, west African countries (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali), Syria and Sudan (OFPRA, 2019). The population of asylum seekers in France differs from other EU countries: some nationalities – such as Syrians, Iraqis and Eritreans – are comparatively underrepresented while asylum seekers from francophone countries are over-represented (Bouagga, Scalettaris & Tcholakova, 2019).



Source: OFPRA 2019.

Figure 10. Total number of asylum claims submitted in France

According to the Asylum Information Database (aida), France received 50,840 asylum applications in 2015, of which 11,945 were approved for refugee status, resulting in a rejection rate of approximately 74%. Among these, 2,810 applications came from Syrian nationals, with 1,575 being approved, leading to a notably lower rejection rate of 3.6% for Syrian applicants. By November 2015, the date where this report was published, some of these applications were still pending. In 2016, the total number of asylum applications in France increased to 85,244, with 18,555 approvals for refugee status, translating to a slightly lower overall rejection rate of 66.8% compared to the previous year. Specifically for Syrian nationals in 2016, the rejection rate was even lower at 2.8%, with 2,520 out of 3,562 Syrian applications being approved. At the time of reporting, 1,795 applications from Syrian nationals were still under consideration.³⁷

Upon initiating the asylum application process in France, applicants gain specific rights related to employment, housing, and education throughout their stay. Initially, they receive an Asylum Seeker Allowance, which supports their adjustment to life in France. Furthermore, asylum seekers can access the French job market if their

³⁷ If you wish to consult these reports in order to have more information, please visit the following website: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/france/>

application has not been decided within nine months, requiring a work visa application supported by a prospective employer. Additionally, asylum applicants qualify for universal healthcare coverage, ensuring all necessary medical expenses for them and their family are covered, provided they have the necessary documentation, including proof of asylum application and residence. Importantly, the children of asylum applicants are entitled to the same educational opportunities as French nationals, adhering to the French legal mandate of compulsory education for all children, regardless of nationality, between the ages of 6 and 16 (Cockcroft & Provax, 2017).

As we can see by comparing the number of applications for asylum between France and other countries such as Germany or the frontline states, Greece and Italy, the strain on the asylum system in France is comparatively lower and the fact that the French system is no longer so attractive to outsiders seeking refugee can be explained by several factors. One of the reasons behind it can be partially attributed to the economic downturn of 2008 and the subsequent high unemployment rates, especially when compared to countries in Northern Europe such as Germany and the Scandinavian nations (Remy, 2015).

2.3.2.2. France's stance on Receiving Refugees

Taking into account the disparity of the burden between frontline states and other EU member states, and therefore the obvious failure of the Dublin Regulation, which mandated that the immigrants initial country of entry handle asylum applications, some Member States and the European Commission contemplated revising the system to distribute the responsibility of handling large-scale immigration more evenly across countries. Although, initially, France was open to the idea of spreading out asylum applications, it rejected the European Commission's May 2014 proposal for quotas, which suggested relocating 40,000 asylum seekers, primarily from Syria and Eritrea, among EU countries based on factors like GDP, population size, and the number of refugees already hosted. This proposal was grounded in Article 78 of the Lisbon Treaty, allowing for exceptional measures in the event of a sudden influx of immigrants. Other major countries, including Spain and the United Kingdom, also backed France's position, leading to the abandonment of the quota proposal (Remy, 2015).

Despite this, following the widespread circulation of the photograph showing the young Aylan Kurdi on the shores of the Mediterranean, and under additional pressure from Germany, France's stance shifted. President Hollande endorsed a system for distributing refugees, deliberately avoiding the term "quota." He highlighted a "moral obligation" to accept refugees and criticized Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban for his rigidity (DW, 2015).

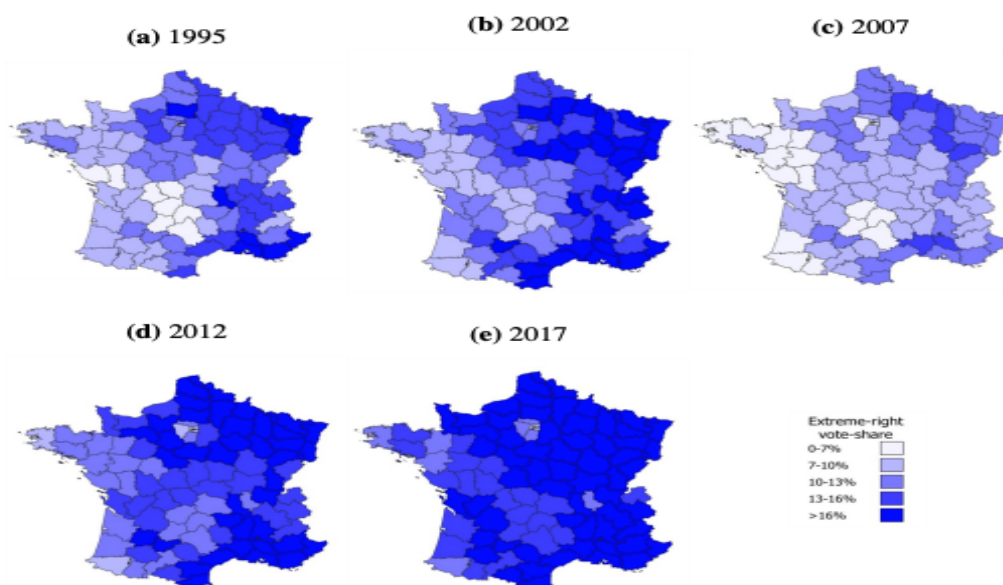
In 2015, the French administration under President François Hollande committed to welcoming 30,000 refugees over the forthcoming two years. This commitment was declared in the aftermath of the terrorist incidents in Paris, where Islamic extremists executed coordinated attacks resulting in the deaths of 130 people. The declaration reaffirmed France's dedication to assist in the refugee crisis, countering concerns that the attacks might prompt France to withdraw its support. Nonetheless, by October 2016, France had only registered approximately 14,000 asylum applications from Syrian refugees, significantly below the initial commitment (Cockcroft & Provox, 2017).

2.3.2.2. Challenges and Shifts in Political Dynamics

This position was heavily criticized by the leader of the National Front party, Marine Le Pen, who condemned President Hollande's proposals, advocating for the immediate reinstatement of full border controls to halt the influx of immigrants into the country. During its tenure, the ruling Socialist Party in France was often tasked with navigating between its humanitarian principles and the necessity to counteract the narratives of right-wing and far-right parties, which criticized the government's perceived lenient stance on immigration. This era was characterized by ongoing pressure from the far-right National Front and the conservative Les Républicains, both of which prioritized immigration in their agendas to appeal to far-right voters, thereby enhancing their standing in polls (Remy, 2015). Following the 2015 refugee crisis, Europe witnessed not just an increase in humanitarian immigration but also significant social transformation.

As we can see from Figure 11, in France, the far-right's portion of the votes escalated from 15% in 1995 to 21.3% in 2017 during the first round of presidential elections. The principal far-right party in France, the *Rassemblement National*,

previously known as the *Front National*, was established on October 5, 1972, inspired by the neo-fascist *Ordre Nouveau* group's ideology. Jean-Marie Le Pen, who led the party for the majority of its existence until 2011, when Marine Le Pen took over, initially centered the party's message around anti-immigration rhetoric. Jean-Marie Le Pen's stance on immigration was clear as early as 1988, warning of the downfall of those who succumb to foreign invasions, and since then the party has kept its stance and focus on the immigration issues as their banner - which was even more reinforced with the terrorists attacks and the refugees crisis in 2015 and the following years. France's presidential elections, which employ a two-round majority system, have seen the electoral period change from every seven years before 2002 to every five years thereafter and as, Figure 11 shows, the growth in far-right electoral support in the first round of presidential elections from 1995 to 2017, has been of a notable 40% increase in far-right votes, particularly pronounced in the country's eastern regions (Schneider-Strawczynski, 2021).



Source: Ministry of the Interior. **Note:** Figure 3 presents maps of the extreme-right vote share at the first round of presidential elections in 1995, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 over French departments. The darker the shade, the higher the extreme-right vote-share.

Figure 11. Far-right vote share at presidential elections first round in France

Additionally, France has experienced increased religious tensions, particularly a rise in Islamophobia. A significant societal aspect of France is its strict adherence to secularism, known as *laïcité*. The CIA World Factbook indicates that Roman

Catholicism is the predominant religion in France, with 63-66% of the population identifying as Catholic, followed by 7-9% identifying as Muslims. There are also smaller communities of Jews and Buddhists. Notably, 23-28% of individuals surveyed report having no religious affiliation, a number expected to increase in future years. This strict secular stance affects the visibility and practice of all religions equally, with significant implications for the Muslim community's religious practices. Coupled with high unemployment rates, France's stringent secularism contributes to its decreasing appeal as a destination for Syrian refugees, who predominantly belong to the Muslim faith (Cockcroft & Provax, 2017).

Last but not least, another significant obstacle France faced during the refugee crisis is the lack of public support, partly stemming from misconceptions about the number of refugees the country has accepted. According to a study by The Telegraph, a predominant belief among the French population is that France has welcomed more refugees than it actually has. The study highlighted that while respondents believed France had accepted 20,000 Syrian refugees, the actual number by 2016 was only 4,000 (Akkoc, 2016). This overestimation fosters a sense of sufficient humanitarian contribution among the public, reducing their inclination towards supporting further refugee intake. Alongside this, it is believed that the escalation of nationalist sentiments across France has further influenced public opinion against increasing refugee admissions. These sentiments have been amplified by the terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice, galvanizing support for far-right political factions like the National Front.

The interplay of political dynamics, public sentiment, and the logistical capacity to assimilate refugees presented a complex challenge for France, as it navigated between upholding humanitarian principles and addressing electoral concerns, the latter being a crucial aspect of democratic governance. Along with domestic issues such as high unemployment and diminished purchasing power, France's appeal as a destination for immigrants has decreased, also reflecting the societal challenges it faces. It is clear that the Syrian refugee crisis has shifted the priorities of both voters and political factions in France which, in the pursuit of re-election, have had to adapt their campaign strategies to mirror the evolving attitudes towards refugees.

2.3.3. Poland

2.3.3.1. Migration as a Fairly New Topic for Poland

Historically, Poland has not been a major destination for economic migrants or refugees. The discourse around international refugee law in Poland emerged prominently only around the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the end of the Cold War and Poland's transition to a democratic system. This period marked a shift in perception towards the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol, which were previously regarded with suspicion as tools of the "imperialistic West" within the Soviet bloc. Poland formally adhered to these international agreements on September 27, 1991, and subsequently incorporated the definition of a refugee into its national law (Kowalski, 2016). The development of Poland's legislative framework for offering international protection to foreigners was a gradual process, with the first comprehensive law enacted in 1997. This legislative evolution reflects the reality that Poland, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, was not a principal destination for asylum seekers at that time.

Additionally, the legal framework in Poland for providing protection to foreigners has been significantly shaped by European Union legislation and policy as a requirement for accession. This alignment was initially part of Poland's preparation for EU membership, necessitating the harmonization of its migration and asylum laws with those of the EU. In 2003, Poland enacted the comprehensive Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners Within the Territory of the Republic of Poland (the 2003 Act)³⁸, which has since undergone several amendments to incorporate evolving EU laws. This Act outlines four types of protection available to foreigners: refugee status and subsidiary protection, as defined by the request for international protection in line with the EU's Qualification Directive; temporary protection, as outlined in the Temporary Protection Directive; the permit for tolerated stay; and asylum (European Commission, 2003).

As mentioned before, Poland never was a primary destination for people seeking refuge and this was not different during the 2015 refugee crisis. Between 2014

³⁸ Please refer to this website for more information: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/act-granting-protection-aliens-territoiry-poland-2003_en

and 2016, the proportion of asylum applications it received out of the total in the EU was modest, ranging from 0.98% to 1.3% (ADAMCZYK, 2017). As we can see by Figure 12 and Figure 13, the number of refugee applications in Poland was the lowest in 2014, with 8,193 submissions, and peaked in 2015 with 12,323 applications. Despite a significant surge in asylum applications across the EU, increasing by 627,860 from 2014 to 2015, Poland saw a relatively minor increase of 4,130 during the same period. In contrast, the largest increases were observed in Germany (268,855) and Hungary (133,220) (ADAMCZYK, 2017).

Asylum applications received in Poland between 2000 and 2022

The top line represents the total number of asylum applications (first applications + revisions). Below are the number of recognized refugees (green) and rejected applications (red).

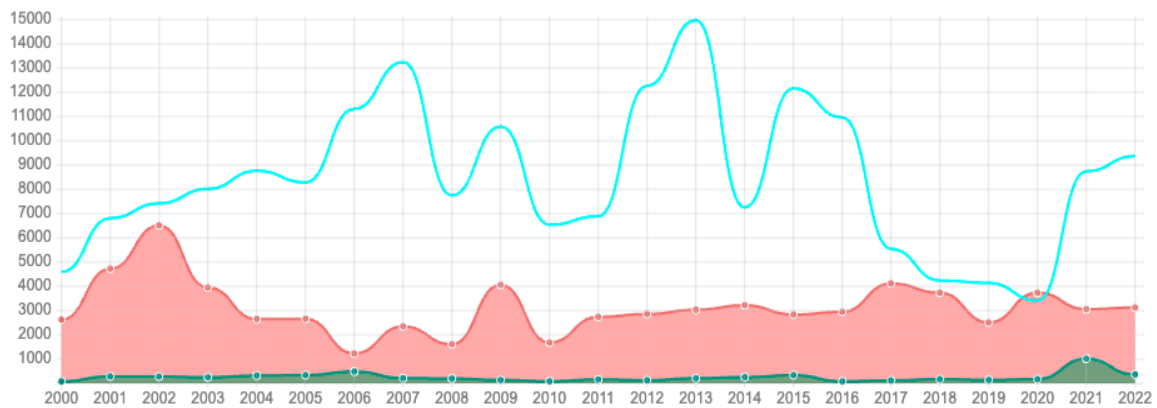
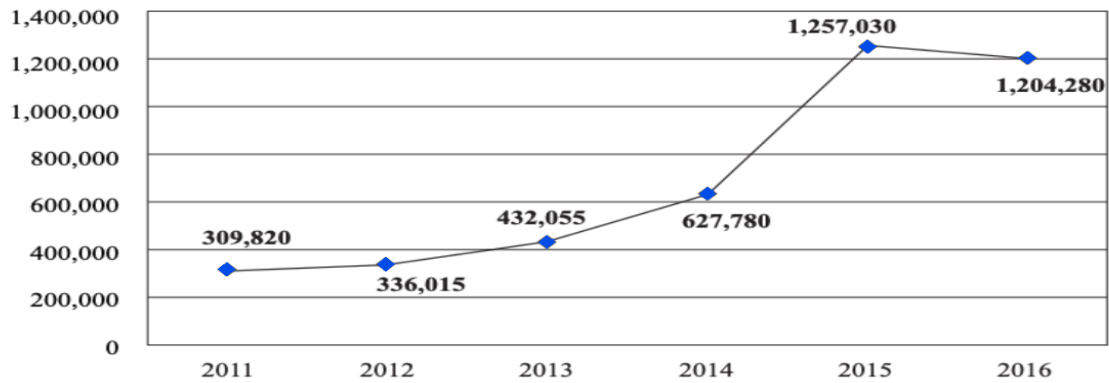


Figure 12. Asylum applications received in Poland between 2000 and 2022



Source: Own research based on *Asylum and new asylum applicants – annual aggregated data* (2016a), Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tps00191&language=en>, 17.02.2016; *Asylum in the EU Member States – Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis: top citizenship*, Eurostat Newsrelease (2016c), 44/2016, 4 March 2016, Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6>, 20.03.2016; *Asylum in the EU Member States – 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2016. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis continued to be the top citizenship*, Eurostat Newsrelease (2017), 46/2017, Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7921609/3-16032017-BP-EN.pdf/e5fa98bb-5d9d-4297-9168-d07c67d1c9e1>, 20.07.2017.

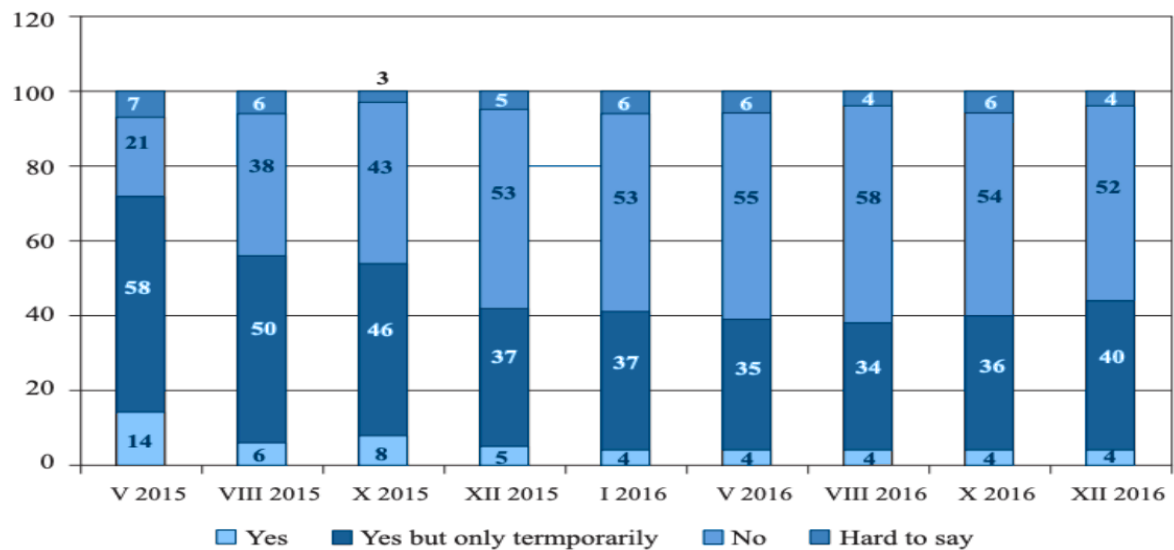
Figure 13. Applications for refugee status in EU countries from 2011 and 2016

Another notable difference from the other EU countries dealing with the refugee crisis, was the country of origin of the asylum applicants. While the demographic profile of asylum seekers in Europe was mainly people coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, those seeking asylum in Poland were primarily from Russia, Ukraine, and Tajikistan, with a notable number from Georgia in 2014 (Kowalski, 2016). Between 2014 and 2016, a very small percentage of individuals in Poland were granted refugee status, with approval rates varying from 1% in 2016 to 4.5% in 2014. Out of 32,837 applicants, only 755 were recognized as refugees during this period. The largest groups among these successful applicants were Syrians (358), Russians (49), and Iraqis (35), with an additional 45 being stateless people. Additionally, asylum status was awarded to 110 foreigners in Poland, marking a significant change as no one had been granted this status from 2001 to 2014. The shift occurred in 2015 when asylum was granted to 109 Ukrainians and one Russian (ADAMCZYK, 2017).

2.3.3.2. Shifts in Political Dynamics

Despite Poland not being impacted by the migration crisis as other European nations were, in 2015, the country entered into a widespread debate on migration policy and the presence of refugees just like its EU neighbors. This discussion also encompassed the European Commission's (EC) proposals for relocation and

resettlement schemes designed to alleviate the pressure on countries most affected by the mass influx of refugees and to promote European solidarity. For the first time, migration issues gathered extensive media coverage in Poland, predominantly negative, which soon led to a decline in public support for accepting refugees. As Figure 14 shows, by April 2016, almost two-thirds of the Polish population opposed the arrival of forced migrants.



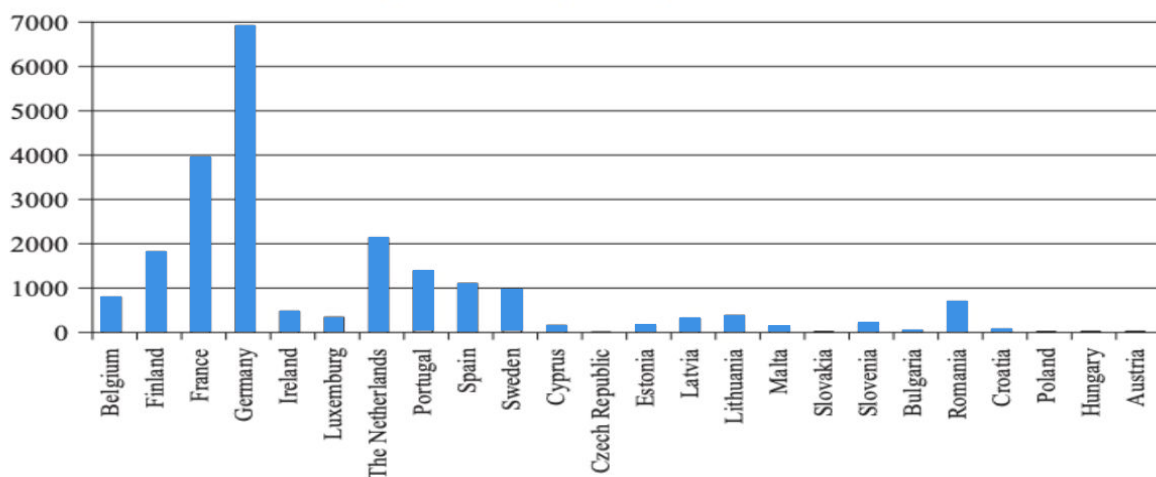
Source: *Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców* (2017), A. Głowacki, CBOS Komunikat z badań nr 1, Warsaw, p. 2.

Figure 14. Poles views on the admission of refugees from conflict areas during selected periods from May 2015 to December 2016

Also, in 2015, during the peak of the Mediterranean refugee crisis, Poland experienced a unique situation with the occurrence of two major elections: the presidential election in May and the parliamentary election in October. This timing led to a highly politicized discussion on the refugee crisis, causing all major political parties to shy away from supporting an active engagement in the European Union's discussions on this matter. The liberal government coalition, which had been in power since 2007 and comprised the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) and the Polish Peasants Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe), hesitantly supported the EU's quota plan introduced in September 2015. However, for domestic reasons, it emphasized that Poland would accept only a small number of refugees. Following the October 2015 elections, the newly elected conservative government of Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) consistently opposed any additional relocation quotas. So, despite

initially supporting the EU Council Decision on September 22, 2015³⁹, for relocating 120,000 people from Italy and Greece by September 2017, Poland, following the October 2015 parliamentary elections and the subsequent shift in government, showcased a change in stance (Kowalski, 2016).

The new conservative parliamentary majority criticized the decision, which the former government had endorsed, through a non-binding resolution on Polish immigration policy passed on April 1, 2016. This resolution disapproved of the September 2015 Council Decision and any future EU mechanisms for refugee relocation. Furthermore, aligning with the skepticism of the Visegrad Group towards the European Commission migration and asylum policy proposals, the new government supported the EU-Turkey Agreement of March 2016. It emphasized addressing the root causes of migration and refugee flows and bolstering EU external border control, similar to the positions held by other Visegrad Group countries (Kowalski, 2016). As we can see in Figure 15, as of July 2017, Poland is among the countries that received close to 0 refugees from the relocation plan, along with other fellow eastern countries such as Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria and Slovakia.



Source: Own research based on *Annex to the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council. Fourteenth report on relocation and resettlement*, Brussels, July 26, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412_eleventh_report_on_relocation_and_resettlement_annex_3_en.pdf, August 10, 2017.

Figure 15. Persons requiring international protection relocated from Greece and Italy by EU country on July 24, 2017

³⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32015D1601>

2.3.3.3. Poland's Special Migration Policy Towards Ukrainians

As mentioned before in this chapter, a lot of asylum applicants arriving in Poland were actually from Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 led to a significant displacement of individuals. Many fled from Crimea and the eastern parts of Ukraine, especially the Donbas region, due to ongoing armed conflict. While the majority found refuge in safer parts of Ukraine under the control of the Kiev authorities, others sought asylum abroad.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by May 2016, the count of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine surpassed 1.7 million, as registered by Ukrainian authorities. This figure does not account for the thousands displaced within Crimea under Russian control. As of June 2016, the externally displaced population reached 1.4 million, with the majority finding refuge in Russia (nearly 1.1 million) and Belarus (almost 140,000), and a smaller number seeking asylum in EU Member States (Jaroszewicz, 2015). UNHCR's report from June 10, 2016, highlighted that the top five EU countries receiving asylum applications were Germany (7,967), Italy (7,267), Poland (5,153), France (3,176), and Sweden (2,742), marking a significant impact of the crisis on international protection requests within the European Union as well.

The data highlights that the primary responsibility for addressing the needs of internally displaced people (IDPs) falls on the Ukrainian government, which has made significant efforts to provide protection and adhere to international guidelines for IDP treatment. However, there are notable concerns about the effectiveness of the support offered to IDPs. This issue is particularly relevant when assessing the situation of Ukrainian asylum seekers in EU Member States, as their status often hinges on the concept of an internal protection alternative (IPA). In the EU, an individual qualifies for asylum if they meet the criteria for refugee status or subsidiary protection. However, an EU Member State may decide that an applicant does not require international protection if the threat they face is confined to a specific region within their home country, allowing them to relocate internally to avoid danger (Kowalski, 2016). This

principle of IPA, outlined in Article 8 of the Recast Qualification Directive of 2011⁴⁰, is also recognized in general international refugee law and human rights law.

Polish authorities have applied IPA in assessing Ukrainian asylum applications, often leading to rejections based on the possibility of finding refuge within other parts of Ukraine. Specifically, individuals from Crimea are typically eligible for refugee status, while those from the Donbas region qualify for subsidiary protection due to regional instability. Despite these rejections, Poland's migration policy towards Ukrainians remains relatively liberal, especially compared to migrants coming from other parts of the world, evidenced by the issuance of over 1 million visas to Ukrainian nationals in 2015 and temporary residence permits to 79,766 Ukrainians from early 2014 to September 4, 2016⁴¹. Moreover, public opinion in Poland towards Ukrainian migrants is generally positive, a noteworthy point considering the complex historical relationship between the two countries (Kowalski,2016).

Compared to the number of asylum seekers coming through the Mediterranean route, the flows of migration coming from Ukraine to the EU are of course low. But, even so, as Michał Kowalski mentioned in Volume 17, Issue 6: Special issue - Constitutional Dimensions of the Refugee Crisis, in 2016, the Ukrainian context posed another potential risk for a refugee crisis at the EU door, one that we now know was actually very real. In the forthcoming chapter, I will examine the migration flows to Europe triggered by the Ukraine war in 2022. This analysis will include an exploration of the historical backdrop that precipitated these events, the European policies implemented to address the resulting challenges, and a detailed look at the specific situations in Germany, France, and Poland amid this ongoing crisis. This analysis aims to provide sufficient data to highlight the distinct differences between the 2022 crisis and the one previously scrutinized in 2015.

3. War In Ukraine

3.1. Putting the War into Context

It has now been over two years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which represents a stark violation of international law and the basic principles of the

⁴⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:337:0009:0026:en:PDF>

⁴¹ https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/report-download_aida_pl_update.v_final.pdf

global order. Many view this event as the most severe threat to European stability and security since 1945. This act is a stark example of Russian revisionism and is classified as a crime of aggression under international criminal law.

Ukraine and Russia have a complex history marked by uneasy relations, geopolitical tensions, and cultural and historical competition. Both countries, which have ethnic Slavic populations and were part of the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991, have followed significantly different historical paths. In the years following the Soviet Union's collapse, Ukraine experienced increasing political polarization, with factions aligning either with pro-Western or pro-Russian orientations. The ascendancy of pro-Western forces during the 2014 Euro-Maidan protests and Ukraine's subsequent moves to align more closely with the European Union exacerbated tensions (KOTOULAS & PUSZTAI, 2022). Although the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a turning point in the scale of aggression, the war began in February 2014 with the invasion of the Ukrainian autonomous republic of Crimea by disguised Russian troops.

From November 2013 to February 2014, significant protests, later known as the Euromaidan, erupted in Kyiv's Independence Square. These demonstrations, which underwent several phases, ultimately led to the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich. This event sparked a violent separatist movement in Ukraine's eastern regions. Initially, in late November 2013, Yanukovich appeared ready to sign an association agreement with the European Union, which required him to release opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko and to start constitutional and legal reforms. However, following a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Yanukovich reversed his decision, leaning instead towards joining the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. This abrupt change prompted immediate protests in Kyiv, driven largely by young people mobilized through social media and text messages. Protesters set up a camp in the Independence Square, and while daily attendance varied, the protests peaked on Sundays, attracting as many as 500,000 people to central Kyiv (Britannica, 2024).

On December 16, 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Ukraine \$15 billion in loans and reduced gas prices to help with the country's financial crisis, caused by a severe depletion of its hard currency reserves. Subsequently, on January 16,

2014, the Ukrainian parliament passed harsh anti-protest laws that restricted freedom of speech and assembly, banned NGOs, and significantly increased President Viktor Yanukovich's powers, effectively creating a virtual dictatorship. These laws were repealed just 12 days later, further galvanizing the protesters' motivations. In an attempt to stabilize his regime, Yanukovich dismissed Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and proposed government positions to opposition leaders Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Vitali Klitschko, both of whom declined. On February 18, clashes with police resulted in over 20 deaths, a precursor to more severe violence. On February 20, the situation escalated dramatically with government snipers shooting protesters from building rooftops in central Kyiv, killing at least 80 people and injuring hundreds (Britannica, 2024).

Amidst this turmoil, Maidan protesters stood firm. On February 21, EU foreign ministers facilitated negotiations in Kyiv, leading to an agreement to form a unity government, restore the 2004 constitution to reduce presidential powers, and schedule new presidential elections by the end of the year. While Yanukovich agreed to remain in office until the elections, he fled Kyiv the next day. The Ukrainian parliament then removed him from office, released Yulia Tymoshenko from prison, and appointed Oleksandr Turchynov as acting president (Open Society Foundations, 2019).

On 27 February 2014, pro-Russian forces seized significant buildings and established control over Crimea, a region with a majority ethnic Russian population. On March 16, a controversial referendum, which was deemed illegal by Ukraine and Western nations, resulted in a portion of Crimea voting to leave Ukraine and join Russia. Two days later, on March 18, an agreement formalizing Crimea's annexation to Russia was signed in Moscow. Subsequently, on April 2, Russian President Vladimir Putin annulled the 2010 Kharkiv Accords, thereby ending the discounts on Russian natural gas that Ukraine had enjoyed in return for hosting Russian naval bases in Crimea. Putin then marked Victory Day on May 9 with a visit to Sevastopol, claiming that a pro-Nazi regime had assumed power in Ukraine, targeting Russian speakers. Despite the lack of substantiation, these claims were persistently propagated by Russian media, reaching extreme levels of distortion in the years that followed (Britannica, 2024).

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 enabled Russia to achieve several strategic goals. It significantly expanded Russian territory by taking control of the strategically important Crimean Peninsula and ensured Russia's lasting control over the crucial military base in Sevastopol, which has been under a Russian leasing agreement since 1991. Additionally, this move allowed Russia to dominate the northern part of the Black Sea region, which is viewed as a vulnerable area in Russian strategic thinking, particularly regarding the potential for Western naval power projection in the Black Sea. This expansion considerably weakened Ukraine's territorial and political power, reinforcing Russia's perception of Ukraine as a prime adversary. It also obstructed Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union and, more crucially, NATO, thereby preventing Western military integration. Furthermore, the annexation demonstrated Russia's military and cyber-warfare capabilities, showcasing its strength in these areas (KOTOULAS & PUSZTAI, 2022).

On May 25, Petro Poroshenko, won the Ukrainian presidential election, which was held without the participation of Crimea and much of the Donbas region. Following his victory, Poroshenko vowed to intensify an Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) to reclaim the territories under occupation. By the end of July 2014, both the EU and the US had escalated sanctions against Russia, which included freezing bank accounts and imposing travel bans on key officials. Following the opening of a new front by separatist forces, which threatened the strategic port city of Mariupol, Poroshenko was forced to call off the ATO. On September 5, delegates from Ukraine, Russia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the two separatist republics convened in Minsk, Belarus, to negotiate a cease-fire, which, despite frequent breaches by both parties, was still in effect by mid-December.⁴²

Throughout this period, Poroshenko's administration was tasked with implementing significant reforms and combating corruption, while contending with the unpredictable challenge posed by Russia. Right-wing militants, who had limited success in elections, were noticeably active in street clashes and within Ukrainian volunteer battalions. The conflict led to approximately 700,000 refugees fleeing from the Donbas to Russia, with thousands more displaced within Ukraine. By the end of

⁴² <https://war.ukraine.ua/the-history-of-russian-aggression-in-ukraine/>

the year, the conflict had resulted in over 4,700 deaths and more than 10,000 injuries (Britannica, 2024).

On February 12, 2015, the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany finalized a 12-point peace agreement known as Minsk II⁴³, which called for an end to hostilities, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the release of prisoners, and the removal of foreign troops from Ukrainian territory. Despite these measures, the peace remained fragile, and although heavy weapons were retracted by both sides by early September 2015, frequent breaches of the ceasefire resulted in over 9,000 deaths and more than 20,000 injuries by the end of the year. In December 2015, Russian cyber-attacks disrupted power for approximately 225,000 people in western Ukraine, with further cyber-attacks targeting Ukrainian infrastructure continuing as the conflict in the Donbas region became a prolonged, frozen conflict over the next six years (Britannica, 2024).

In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky was elected as the president of Ukraine. By September 2020, he had endorsed a new national security strategy that explicitly designated Russia as an aggressor and highlighted NATO membership as a critical objective for Ukraine's defense and foreign policy. Previously, statements from Kyiv had allowed for possible negotiations with Moscow, and early in his term, Zelensky had also entertained such possibilities. However, acknowledging Russia's ongoing hybrid warfare against Ukraine, this strategy emphasized the need for mediated discussions between the two nations, steering clear of direct bilateral engagement (Szeligowski, 2020).

The buildup to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine began in late 2021 when Russian military forces initiated a significant deployment along Ukraine's border, amassing approximately 190,000 troops. Despite ongoing international concerns, Russia consistently denied any plans for an invasion. On December 17, the Russian Foreign Ministry made public a set of demands related to Ukraine, presenting draft agreements aimed at the United States and NATO. These drafts proposed 'security guarantees,' demanding that the U.S. and NATO halt all military activities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia—regions Russia considers within its sphere of influence. Additionally, Russia sought commitments that NATO would not expand further eastward and

⁴³ For the original text of the agreement see the document here <https://peacemaker.un.org/ua-ceasefire-2014>

specifically that Ukraine and Georgia would never be allowed to join the alliance. The U.S. and other NATO members dismissed these demands and threatened Russia with severe economic sanctions should it proceed with further aggression against Ukraine. Despite these warnings, Russia maintained its troop presence along the Ukrainian border, continuing to deny any intent to invade (KOTOULAS & PUSZTAI, 2022).

On February 21, 2022, Russia recognized the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic in Donbas, controlled by pro-Russian separatists, as independent states. The next day, Russia's Federation Council authorized the use of military force abroad, allowing Russian troops to enter these regions of eastern Ukraine. This action escalated into a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which Russia termed a 'special military operation.' Russian forces launched attacks from multiple fronts, including Russian territory, Belarus, and Ukrainian areas already occupied by Russian forces. The international community widely condemned this unprovoked attack, leading to promises of severe sanctions against Russia. In response, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky declared martial law and initiated the mobilization of all eligible Ukrainian citizens for defense (Britannica, 2024).

Russia's initial military strategy envisioned the quick capture of Kyiv within three days, the subsequent collapse of Ukrainian military resistance, a positive reception in many parts of Ukraine, especially in the east, and the strategic dominance over the entire country by Victory Day on May 9. However, none of these objectives were realized. The Russian military encountered significant setbacks and heavy casualties, prompting a revision of their tactical and strategic approaches. The offensive efforts around Kyiv, to the north and east, were abandoned as Russian forces repositioned to intensify their military campaigns in the eastern regions of Ukraine and the southern areas near Crimea, as well as along the Black Sea coast (Kotoulas & Pusztai, 2022).

As we know, the war is still ongoing and there's no predictions of an end to this conflict anytime soon. It is, no doubt, a major historical turning point that already has and will continue to have profound implications on everything from trade, production, supply, and wealth, to security, war, and the ability of the global international society to meet urgent challenges such as climate change, poverty, inequality, and global health.

The Russian invasion has also triggered a major humanitarian crisis, resulting in numerous civilian casualties and the largest refugee movement since World War II. By late June 2022, approximately 8 million Ukrainian refugees had fled the country, with millions more displaced within Ukraine itself (KOTOULAS & PUSZTAI, 2022).⁴⁴

As we can see from figure 16, ever since the invasion of Ukraine the countries from the Schengen area have received and provided shelter to Ukrainians fleeing the conflict and the catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the outflow of millions of refugees has put a strain on neighboring countries such as Poland, Germany, Czech Republic and others.

REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE ACROSS EUROPE (AS OF 14 APRIL 2024)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
 *Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 [1999]) Source: UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

Figure 16. Refugees from Ukraine across Europe (UNHCR)

According to the UN refugee agency, the invasion of Ukraine has displaced nearly one-third of the country's pre-war population, totaling over thirteen million people. This includes more than five million internally displaced individuals within Ukraine and over eight million who have sought refuge in neighboring countries. For context and as we saw in the previous chapter, the 2015 refugee crisis from Africa and

⁴⁴ U.N., 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', 21 June 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

the Middle East saw about one million refugees enter Europe, while the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s resulted in up to four million refugees. As of June 2023, confirmed reports indicate that at least 8,983 civilians have been killed and 15,442 injured, with actual numbers being likely much higher. The majority of these casualties have occurred in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, known collectively as the Donbas, where the conflict has been most intense. U.S. authorities report that as of July 2022, Russian forces have forcibly relocated up to 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees to Russia. Human rights organizations claim that many of these individuals were pressured to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship. Such forcible transfers are considered war crimes under international law. However, Russia describes these actions as humanitarian evacuations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

The conflict has severely impacted Ukraine's infrastructure. Russian air strikes have targeted healthcare facilities, residential areas, and power plants, resulting in widespread electricity outages during the winter months. The destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam, which Ukrainian officials attribute to Russian actions - a claim Russia denies - has caused significant humanitarian issues. The dam's collapse disrupted drinking water supplies for hundreds of thousands of people, posed risks to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and necessitated large-scale evacuations. Across Ukraine, millions continue to face shortages of heat, clean water, and essential supplies. A World Bank report from December 2022 estimated that reconstruction could cost up to \$641 billion. Additionally, the war has raised public health concerns, particularly regarding the spread of infectious diseases, exacerbated by the damaged healthcare infrastructure. And health officials were also worried about high COVID-19 transmission rates, with only 38 percent of the Ukrainian population fully vaccinated (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

In the next section, I will analyze the measures implemented by the European Union to address the challenges posed by the crisis and the strategies devised to assist those fleeing the war. This analysis will include a review of the policy currently in place and explore the prospective avenues available to Ukrainians seeking refuge in the EU.

3.2. The EU Reaction to Russia's War Against Ukraine

From the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU and its member states have vehemently denounced Russia's aggressive war and condemn the illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories including Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson.

Throughout this period, the European Council and the Council of the European Union have convened regularly to evaluate the evolving situation in Ukraine from various angles. EU leaders have consistently demanded that Russia immediately halt its military operations, withdraw its forces and military hardware from Ukraine completely, and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They have also affirmed Ukraine's right to determine its own future and have praised the Ukrainian people for their bravery in defending their nation (General Secretariat of the Council, 2024).

Since March 2014, the EU has been incrementally imposing sanctions on Russia, initially due to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and Russia's deliberate destabilization of Ukraine. These sanctions were further extended on February 23, 2022, following Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine as independent and the deployment of Russian military forces into these areas. The situation escalated after February 24, 2022, when in response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the EU significantly broadened its sanctions. This expansion involved adding a substantial number of individuals and entities to the sanctions list and implementing severe measures aimed at undermining Russia's economic strength, cutting off access to vital technologies and markets, and severely limiting its military capabilities (European Commission, 2024). Since the beginning of the conflict, the EU has implemented 13 rounds of sanctions aimed at reducing Russia's capacity to fund its war against Ukraine, penalizing Russian elites, and weakening Russia's economic foundation.

To date, the European Union has implemented a comprehensive range of sanctions targeting various sectors of Russia's economy and government, including financial, business, defense, technology, and media. The measures include freezing the assets of 419 entities, such as key banks, and 1,706 individuals, mostly Russian officials and elites, who are also subject to travel bans. The EU has restricted

transactions with Russia's central bank and blocked access to its reserve holdings, placed debt and equity restrictions on certain Russian banks and companies, and banned transactions with some Russian state-owned military-industrial enterprises. Additionally, the EU has disconnected ten leading Russian financial institutions, including Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, from SWIFT, the primary international financial messaging system. It has also expanded and tightened export controls on dual-use goods and technologies destined for Russia and specific entities in countries like China, India, and Kazakhstan that support Russia's military-industrial complex (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

Further sanctions include bans on certain exports in the aviation, maritime, and technology sectors, including semiconductors, drone engines, and luxury goods to Russia. The EU has also prohibited imports of various Russian products such as steel, spirits, seafood, gold, diamonds, and other items. It has closed its airspace, seaports, and roads to Russian operators and suspended the broadcasting activities of 13 Russian media outlets, including their subsidiaries. These comprehensive sanctions are part of the EU's efforts to exert economic pressure on Russia in response to its actions (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

A critical and challenging issue for the EU is its energy dependency on Russia, which complicates efforts to completely sever ties with Russia's energy sector. Consequently, while the EU has not banned Russian natural gas imports due to this dependence, it has implemented several significant measures to curtail other aspects of energy trade. These include prohibiting most imports of Russian crude oil and petroleum products, which affects about 90% of Russian oil imports, with an exemption allowing for crude oil delivered via pipeline (European Council, 2024). Additionally, EU companies are restricted from providing oil transport services, except for transporting Russian crude oil and petroleum products to non-EU countries, provided these transactions adhere to price caps agreed upon with the Group of Seven (G7) price cap coalition. This arrangement aims to reduce Russia's oil revenues while maintaining stability in global energy markets. The EU has also banned the export of oil refining technologies to Russia and prohibited the import of Russian coal. In December 2023, the EU enhanced a new anti-circumvention tool designed to combat the evasion of sanctions by other countries and tightened the implementation of the oil price cap. These actions are part of the EU's strategy to decrease its reliance on Russian energy

while addressing the broader geopolitical impacts of the conflict⁴⁵ (European Council, 2024).

The EU has steadfastly opposed Russia's invasion of Ukraine by providing substantial assistance to Ukraine, including financial, humanitarian, and military support. This collective aid, in conjunction with support from the United States, has likely been crucial in bolstering Ukraine's resistance. Without such international assistance, it is possible that Ukraine would have already fallen.

As of late March 2024, the European Union and its member states have provided Ukraine with nearly €81 billion in military, financial, humanitarian, and emergency assistance. This figure rises to almost €98 billion when an additional €17 billion allocated to support Ukrainian refugees within member states is included. Given the current exchange rate of €1 to \$1.08, the amount in U.S. dollars is slightly higher. Since 2022, the EU, its member states, and European financial institutions have made available €47.9 billion for Ukraine. This includes €11.6 billion from the EU budget in 2022, €18 billion in favorable loans for 2023, and €12.2 billion contributed by member states. In February 2024, EU leaders approved an additional €50 billion for the 2024-2027 period, to be distributed through a new Ukraine Facility; this package includes €33 billion in loans and €17 billion in grants, with the first €4.5 billion disbursed in March 2024. The EU also coordinates the delivery of in-kind emergency supplies to Ukraine⁴⁶ (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

In terms of military assistance, through its European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU has allocated €11.1 billion to support Ukraine's military efforts. This includes a new €5 billion Ukraine Assistance Fund approved in March 2024, €3.6 billion between February 2022 and February 2023 for both lethal and nonlethal supplies, and €2 billion for 1 million rounds of ammunition, sourced from member states or through joint procurement despite production challenges. Additionally, the EU has initiated a training mission for Ukraine's armed forces and estimates that members' bilateral military support totals around €22 billion as of March 2024 (Congressional Research Service, 2024).

⁴⁵ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia-explained/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

The invasion of Ukraine has significantly impacted Europe, reinvigorating discussions on previously dormant issues such as security, territorial expansion, and energy independence among EU member states and their populations. Initially, there were concerns that the divisive impact of the war might prevail, especially after the initial unity shown in response to Russia's invasion and admiration for Ukraine's resistance. Many feared that this solidarity would weaken as Europe contended with the war's economic, energy, and humanitarian repercussions over time. However, these concerns have not materialized, instead, the EU has demonstrated a consistently united policy response. As the conflict continues, this unity has only strengthened, with EU member states maintaining a cohesive stance through the unanimous approval of 13 sanction packages against Russia⁴⁷ (European Policy Center, 2024). This sustained solidarity highlights a growing unification among EU countries in face of the crisis.

The invasion of Ukraine has illuminated significant challenges for the EU, prompting a series of unprecedented responses across various policy domains. Among these, reforms in Europe's energy market are set to strengthen the EU's resilience post-conflict. However, the outcomes of other initiatives, such as EU enlargement, are yet to be determined. Historically, the EU managed through various existential crises, assuming that regional stability would persist, a belief that was disrupted by Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine. This event highlighted that while stability is maintained within EU and NATO boundaries, it cannot be presumed on their peripheries. In response to the immediate threat, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy applied for EU membership just three days after the onset of Russia's large-scale invasion. This led to Ukraine and Moldova being recognized as candidate countries, with Georgia positioned as a potential candidate (Nathalie TOCCI, 2024).

These developments indicate a shift but do not yet signify a comprehensive revival of the EU's accession policy. Significant issues still need addressing both in the enlargement countries and within the EU, particularly regarding institutional reforms and decision-making processes. However, it is becoming increasingly clear to both EU member states and candidate countries that the costs of not expanding the

⁴⁷ <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/Cost-of-aggression-EU-sanctions-against-Russia-two-years-on~58f570>

EU could be exceedingly high. Maintaining the status quo is now seen as a risky strategy that jeopardizes European security (Nathalie TOCCI, 2024).

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has brought defense and security to the forefront as critical topics in Europe, and with good reason. This conflict has prompted Europeans to take their security and defense commitments more seriously. However, paradoxically, it has also heightened Europe's reliance on the United States for defense support. The collaboration between the U.S. government and the EU in response to Russia's aggression has been pivotal; operational support from the U.S. has been crucial, as without American military assistance, Kyiv might have fallen, posing a severe threat to the security of the entire European continent (Nathalie TOCCI, 2024).

Furthermore, as European nations are exhausting their military inventories, they find themselves in a position where they need to replenish their supplies, which are often sourced from the U.S. Although European defense industrial projects continue to develop, most immediate defense spending is focused on short-term solutions. Consequently, Europe's dependency on the U.S. defense industry is growing. This increasing dependence is problematic for a union that aims to assert a stronger presence on the global stage (Nathalie TOCCI, 2024).

As in all military conflicts, the humanitarian cost is great and as it has been mentioned above, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led millions of Ukrainians to flee their country and seek safety in EU countries. Therefore, one of the EU's most urgent and significant responses to the invasion of Ukraine was to implement a special protection scheme⁴⁸. This scheme was designed for Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians residing in Ukraine at the time of the invasion, allowing them to enter and stay in the EU with comprehensive rights. While all EU member states participated in this scheme, Denmark opted out due to its unique constitutional arrangements within the EU, instead establishing a parallel national scheme.

The Temporary Protection (TP) directive originated during the civil conflicts in the former Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995 and the Kosovo war in 1998-1999. At that time, the European Union (EU) lacked the authority to take unified action on asylum,

⁴⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2001/55/oj>

migration, or border control. As a result, the management of the massive exodus of people fleeing these conflicts and their subsequent reception in EU states was governed solely by national laws that implemented international commitments. Consequently, one of the earliest actions taken once the EU gained competency, with the Amsterdam Treaty, in this area was the adoption of this directive, which marked a significant EU response to regional warfare. This directive was the inaugural measure of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), and its language often diverges from that used in subsequent directives under the CEAS. The directive serves two main purposes: firstly, to manage large-scale arrivals of displaced people from outside the EU who cannot return to their home countries, and secondly, to ensure a balanced effort among Member States by setting a minimum standard of treatment for these individuals as specified in Article 1 (European Commission, 2022).

The Temporary Protection directive is activated when the Council, based on a proposal from the Commission, determines that a mass influx of displaced people is occurring, particularly when it poses a risk of overwhelming the standard asylum system, thereby jeopardizing its efficiency. This directive was first invoked by the Council in response to the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. It was implemented to provide swift and effective assistance to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, facilitating their immediate needs and support within the EU (European Commission, 2024).

The Temporary Protection Directive establishes the procedures necessary to initiate, extend, or terminate temporary protection. It also delineates a suite of rights afforded to beneficiaries of this protection. These include the issuance of a residence permit for the duration of the protection, which can range from one to three years. Beneficiaries are provided with clear information about their temporary protection status and guaranteed access to the asylum procedure. Additionally, those under temporary protection have the right to employment, though this is subject to the specific rules applicable to the profession and to national labor market policies and conditions. They also have access to suitable accommodation or housing, social welfare or other means of subsistence as needed, and medical care. Minors are granted access to education within the state system. Other provisions facilitate family reunification under certain circumstances and allow beneficiaries to open basic bank accounts and access other banking services. Before receiving a residence permit,

individuals can move to another EU country, and once a residence permit is issued in the host EU country, they are allowed to travel freely in other EU countries for 90 days within a 180-day period (European Commission, 2024).⁴⁹

Before the conflict in Ukraine escalated, the EU had already taken steps to facilitate the integration of Ukrainians by eliminating mandatory visa requirements in June 2017, in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. This change allowed Ukrainian nationals to enter the EU for short stays of up to 90 days within any 180-day period using their biometric passports, provided they met certain conditions such as proving they had sufficient resources for their stay and posed no threat to public policy, health, or security. The removal of intra-Schengen border controls significantly eased movement within the Schengen Area, benefiting third-country nationals like Ukrainians. Those wishing to stay longer or engage in economic activities were required to obtain residence permits, largely governed by national laws (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

According to Eurostat, the rate at which Ukrainians were issued first residence permits in the EU was approximately 750,000 in 2019, 600,000 in 2020, and nearly 900,000 in 2021. By the end of 2021⁵⁰, about 1.57 million Ukrainians were residing in the EU, with Poland being the most significant state issuing these permits and where their integration has had a notably positive impact on the labor market. As a result, when the invasion began, many Ukrainians were already established residents within the EU, with jobs and housing. This existing presence meant that many of those fleeing Ukraine during the invasion had existing connections, such as family members or acquaintances, within the EU. While over 650,000 Ukrainian residents were in Poland, Italy hosted over 230,000, and Portugal and Spain each had over 100,000. UNHCR statistics suggest that many Ukrainians sought refuge in countries across Europe, not just Poland, leveraging these pre-existing links (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

The decision by EU Member States not to impose residence requirements on Temporary Protection (TP) beneficiaries allows them, upon entry into the EU, the

⁴⁹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en for more details on the Temporary Protection Scheme please consult this page on the European Commission website.

⁵⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukrainian_citizens_in_the_EU#Ukrainian_citizens_authorized_to_stay_in_the_EU

freedom to select their destination and travel within the Schengen area during their initial 90 days. The rights provided by the directive are declaratory, meaning that legally, these individuals are entitled to these rights in any Member State they enter. However, the Commission's guidelines require TP beneficiaries to inform the national authorities of their TP status within these 90 days. To facilitate compliance, many Member States have deployed personnel at key transit points like railway stations to assist TP beneficiaries, who are often equipped with necessary language skills. If a TP beneficiary registers in one Member State but later chooses to relocate to another, the only legal requirement is to deregister from the first Member State and register in the new one. This setup grants beneficiaries the right to secondary movement, as defined by the EU, enabling them to move freely and establish residence in any Member State of their choosing (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

An essential aspect of the Temporary Protection (TP) scheme is the integration of refugees into the host countries labor markets and educational systems. The Temporary Protection Directive grants Ukrainians immediate access to the labor market, which has led to relatively high employment levels among displaced Ukrainians within a year or slightly more after their arrival. This employment rate is notably higher compared to other refugee groups. However, several challenges hinder further integration, including a lack of proficiency in the host country's language, protracted processes for recognizing qualifications, and potential mismatches between the refugees skills and available jobs. Other barriers include insufficient job opportunities or information and a lack of childcare services. Despite these obstacles, as we can see in Figure 17, in some countries, the employment rates for displaced Ukrainians are remarkably high. Even in nations where these rates are lower, they still surpass those of other refugee groups who have been in the host country for over a year (Eurofound, 2024).

Estimated employment rates				
Around 10%	Around 15%	Around 20%	Around 30%	Close to 40% or above
Italy ^a	Finland, France, ^b Romania ^c	Austria, ^d Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal ^e	Slovakia ^{b,f}	Czechia, ^g Denmark, ^h Estonia, Ireland, ⁱ Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, ^j Sweden

^a As of November–December 2022; result of a survey (IT1). ^b Share in the adult population. ^c Data from Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (data from another source are also available). ^d As of December 2022; working age population: 20–59 years old. ^e It stands at 26%, but those who work remotely in Ukraine may also be included. ^f Includes those who were employed 'for a certain period of time during the first year of the war'. ^g Includes those who are registered with public employment services. ^h Share of those who are 'available for work' (above 60%). ⁱ As of June 2023; working age population: 20–64 years old. ^j The estimated rate reported in the national contribution is well in excess of 40%, but that may include those Ukrainians who worked in the country before the war, and that number was high. However, other sources (e.g. the FRA survey) showed that the respondents' paid work rates were above 40%: 42% for women and 54% for men.

Note: Most data refer to January, February or March 2023, unless otherwise indicated.

Source: National contributions

Figure 17. Estimated employment rates of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection in selected Member States

To address some of the barriers hindering the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labor market, various Member States have implemented specific measures. These include providing services to help TP beneficiaries find employment, with the private sector creating online platforms to match job offers with job seekers, though these platforms are not always reliable. Additionally, some MS have focused on providing information and assistance to TP beneficiaries interested in self-employment and entrepreneurial activities, often leveraging their connections and market knowledge in Ukraine, as seen in Lithuania. Several countries are also working to streamline the recognition of diplomas, which is crucial for TP beneficiaries with qualifications in regulated professions such as healthcare and education. Germany, for example, has facilitated the rapid initial assessment of vocational qualifications, work experience, and language skills through its Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Trade. Portugal offers a case-by-case assessment, sometimes waiving the requirement for diplomas or other academic documents. Similarly, Spain and Hungary have eliminated administrative fees for the recognition process for these individuals (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

There is a broad agreement among EU Member States on the importance of facilitating employment access for Ukrainian refugees, a principle that is explicitly included in the Temporary Protection Directive. This directive mandates that Member States allow individuals under temporary protection to engage in employed or self-employed activities, though this is subject to the specific rules applicable to the profession and aligned with national labor market policies and general employment

conditions. Some Member States have gone further, enacting specific legislation to ease Ukrainians' access to the job market. For instance, Poland passed a law on March 12, 2022, which allows employers to immediately hire Ukrainian citizens who are legally residing in the country, with an obligation to notify the local Public Employment Service (PES) within 14 days of employment commencement. Additionally, various financial incentives and services across Member States have been implemented to facilitate employment access. Given existing labor shortages, regulations have often been adjusted to promote employment in particular sectors or occupations, demonstrating a proactive approach to integrating Ukrainian refugees into the workforce (Eurofound, 2024).

When it comes to children covered by the TP scheme, ensuring access to education is paramount. EU legislation stipulates that children who have recently arrived must be registered in the educational institutions of the host country within three months of their relocation, as detailed in an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report from August 2022. The report recognizes the inherently unstable conditions of refugees and emphasizes the need for flexible educational approaches to accommodate these children, considering that their future may lie either in Ukraine or the host country. Consequently, it suggests that pathways be developed allowing students to engage with the host state's national curriculum while potentially continuing their education through online platforms linked to the Ukrainian school system (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

According to UNHCR reports as of August 2023, 65% of Ukrainian refugees have expressed intentions to remain in their host countries. While the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science has significantly developed the All-Ukraine Online School to accommodate all learners across various subjects, this fully online learning model presents significant challenges. These challenges pertain to sustainability and quality of education, particularly concerning student wellbeing. As the displacement extends and the likelihood of returning to Ukraine remains uncertain, integrating these students into the national education systems of host countries emerges as the most viable approach. This integration not only ensures continued access to quality

education but also promotes social cohesion and prepares Ukrainian students for future opportunities (UNESCO, 2023).⁵¹

The integration of Ukrainian children, as well as teachers and educational personnel, has been a significant challenge, particularly addressed over the summer. A primary concern has been the language barrier. Many Member States have a wealth of experience in providing language education to third-country nationals lacking these skills, but expanding these programs across all states has proven difficult. Additionally, addressing the trauma experienced by minor refugees has been another critical issue (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023). The report cites practices from various Member States, such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Greece, which include providing resources and initiatives to help teachers support traumatized children. Croatia, Czechia, and Slovakia, for example, offer handbooks on managing pupils' mental health, preventing classroom conflicts, and discussing sensitive topics. To address staffing needs, particularly to assist with language barriers, Poland has established additional learning centers and facilitated the hiring of Ukrainian citizens as teaching assistants. To overcome financial challenges, the European Commission and several Member States have provided additional funding to support states facing difficulties in these integrative efforts (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023).

As mentioned before above, the Temporary Protection (TP) scheme has a duration ranging from one to three years. Since the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was first activated, for the first time ever, on March 4, 2022, it is set to end on March 4, 2025. With this deadline nearing and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine showing no signs of resolution, there is a pressing need for the European Commission and the Council to develop a sustainable plan for the future. This plan is crucial for addressing the needs of the millions of Ukrainians currently benefiting from the TP scheme within the EU, ensuring their continued protection and support.

The Temporary Protection Directive specifies two primary scenarios for ending temporary protection. The Council may end the protection if conditions in the country of origin allow for the safe and permanent return of individuals, ensuring respect for human rights and non-refoulement. Alternatively, the regime must automatically

⁵¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukrainian-refugees-pathways-inclusion-education-insights-host-countries>

terminate after three years. Regarding the aftermath of temporary protection, the Directive provides minimal guidance: it mandates that Member States must process any outstanding international protection applications left unresolved during the temporary protection period, as outlined in Article 17, following the end of temporary protection, the general immigration laws of the Member States, as noted in Article 20, will apply to those individuals, Member States are responsible for facilitating the voluntary return of formerly protected individuals, making decisions well-informed by the current situation in the country of origin, per Article 21(1). They are also required to ensure that those who do not qualify to stay can return to their home countries unless compelling humanitarian reasons prevent such actions, as detailed in Article 22, and, furthermore, the Directive advises against the expulsion of individuals who are medically unfit to travel, as stated in Article 23. These measures aim to provide a structured and humane transition for individuals as they move from temporary protection status towards either returning to their home countries or integrating more permanently into the Member State under its immigration policies (European University Institute, 2023)⁵².

After the expiration of the Temporary Protection Directive Regime in March 2025, Member States have several potential strategies to consider for addressing the status of beneficiaries. These include facilitating voluntary returns to Ukraine for those who wish to go back, extending existing temporary protection regimes possibly through amendments to the Temporary Protection Directive, and processing asylum applications for those seeking more permanent refuge. Additionally, Member States might grant protection statuses or rights to remain under national laws, establish new protection statuses within EU law, or transition beneficiaries to work-based permits to integrate them into the labor market. Each of these options offers a different approach, ranging from repatriation to various forms of legal residency and integration within the EU, catering to the diverse needs and circumstances of the individuals involved⁵³ (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2024).

On June 25, 2024, the Council extended the temporary protection status for over four million Ukrainians displaced by Russia's war of aggression until March 4,

⁵² <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/what-happens-next-scenarios-following-the-end-of-the-temporary-protection-in-the-eu/?print=print>

⁵³ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762309/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762309_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762309/EPRS_BRI(2024)762309_EN.pdf)

2026. While this decision supports the welfare of displaced Ukrainians, similar questions regarding protection and assistance may arise again next year if the conflict persists⁵⁴.

The future remains uncertain, but it is crucial that any decisions made by the Commission and Member States consider the welfare of Ukrainians. These decisions should prioritize human rights, ensure security, and foster European unity, continuing the precedent set by the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive thus far.

3.3. Member States Unanimity in Solidarity

Applications for protection by Ukrainian refugees (24 January 2023)¹

Country	Applications	Pop (mil)	Percent
Czechia	482,618	10.52	4.59
Poland	1,563,386	37.65	4.15
Estonia	42,342	1.33	3.18
Lithuania	73,292	2.81	2.61
Latvia	45,085	1.88	2.40
Cyprus	20,603	0.9	2.28
Bulgaria	151,332	6.84	2.21
Slovakia	107,004	5.43	1.97
Ireland	71,819	5.06	1.42
Germany	1,021,667	83.24	1.23
Luxembourg	6,756	0.65	1.05
Austria	92,019	8.98	1.02
Switzerland	78,467	8.74	0.90
Finland	48,713	5.55	0.88
Norway	37,971	5.43	0.70
Denmark	37,523	5.87	0.64
Iceland	2,239	0.38	0.60
Romania	109,413	19.04	0.57
Belgium	65,979	11.63	0.57
Portugal	57,109	10.35	0.55
Croatia	20,377	3.88	0.53
Sweden	51,029	10.45	0.49
Netherlands	85,210	17.59	0.48
Slovenia	8,659	2.11	0.41
Hungary	33,603	9.69	0.35
Spain	161,012	47.43	0.34
Malta	1,541	0.52	0.30
Italy	169,306	58.98	0.29
UK	157,300	67.03	0.23
Greece	20,955	10.6	0.20
France	118,994	67.84	0.18
Total	4,943,323	528.4	0.94

Figure 18. Applications for protection by Ukrainian refugees (24 January 2023)

The Temporary Protection Directive, established in response to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, was activated for the first time ever by the Council on February

⁵⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/25/ukrainian-refugees-council-extends-temporary-protection-until-march-2026/>

24, 2022, in reaction to Russia's unprecedented invasion of Ukraine. This mechanism was implemented to provide rapid and effective support to individuals displaced by the conflict in Ukraine (European Commission, 2022). The Council of the European Union, which is tasked with making such decisions, approved the proposal unanimously, despite the fact that a qualified majority would have been enough to activate it. This demonstrates a broad agreement among Member States on the urgency of offering protection to those escaping the conflict in Ukraine. The directive is in effect across all EU countries except Denmark, which chose to implement a comparable national program⁵⁵.

In the next section, as I did in the previous chapter, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of three specific Member States - Germany, France, and Poland - to understand their respective responses to the influx of migrants from Ukraine. This examination will include an evaluation of each government's reactions, the policies they implemented, and their subsequent impact on political polls and public opinion.

3.3.1. Germany

As mentioned before in this research paper, Germany has traditionally been a prime location for immigrants and asylum seekers, a trend that continued with the influx of Ukrainians escaping the war to seek refuge in the EU. Refugees primarily fled to Poland, but Germany has become home to the second-largest Ukrainian refugee population in the EU. As we can see from Figure 18, prior to Russia's invasion in February 2022, the Ukrainian immigrant population in Germany was relatively small, with approximately 155,000 residents by the end of 2021, increasing gradually by about 2.6% annually. However, the situation drastically altered in 2022, beginning with 14,000 fleeing in February alone, followed by a significant spike to approximately 417,000 in March. Although the arrival numbers declined subsequently, nearly 64,000 refugees arrived in June 2022. By the end of June 2022, the number of registered Ukrainian citizens in Germany had increased nearly sevenfold to 1.02 million (Steinhauer, H.W., Décieux, J.P., Siegert, M. et al., 2024).

⁵⁵ <https://www.asileproject.eu/reasons-for-the-activation-of-the-temporary-protection-directive-in-2022-a-tale-of-double-standards/>

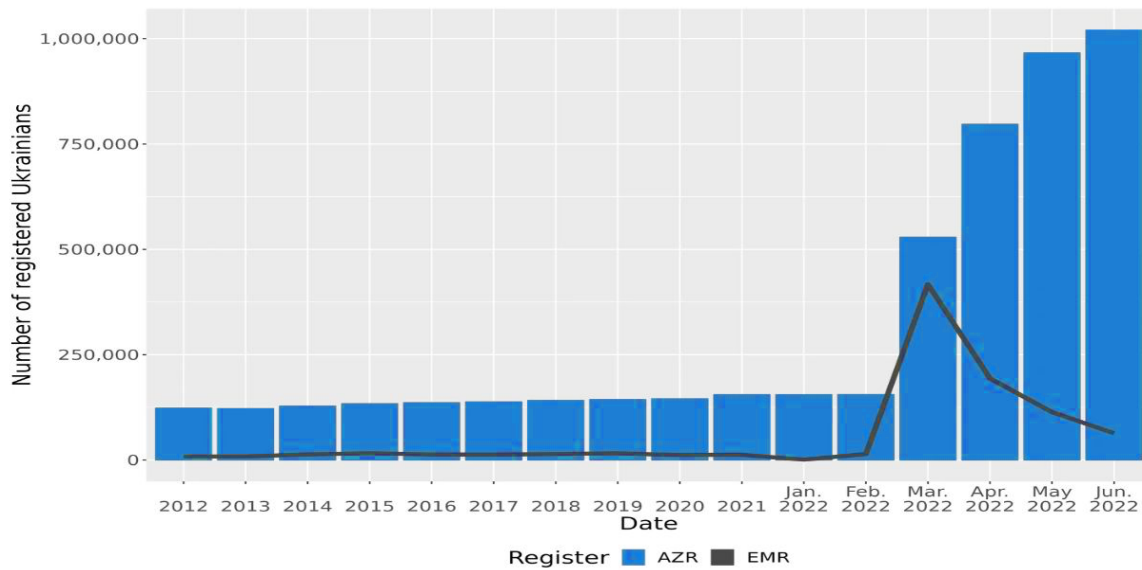


Figure 19. Development of immigrant flows (EMR) of Ukrainian citizens to Germany and stocks (AZR) of Ukrainian citizens in Germany, 2012–2022 (2012–2021: annual figures, 2022: monthly figures). (Source: Special analysis from the German Central Register of Foreigners (AZR) (reporting date 30 November 2022) and German Population Register (EMR))

3.3.1.1. Ukrainian’s Refugees Intentions

Several German research institutions, including the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB), the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, and the Socio-Economic Panel at DIW Berlin, conducted comprehensive surveys of 11,225 Ukrainian refugees between August and October 2022, and 6,754 again in January and February 2023. These surveys were part of the “Refugees from Ukraine in Germany” project, which aims to establish the first representative database on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these refugees, the reasons for their migration, and their integration into German society. The project covers a wide range of topics, including the circumstances of their departure, educational and employment status, German language proficiency, life satisfaction, concerns, family dynamics, childcare, social networks, and support needs. It also explores the refugees’ future intentions regarding family reunification in Germany or potential return to Ukraine.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.850107.en/projects/iab-bib/freda-bamf-soep_survey_refugees_from_ukraine_in_germany.html

As shown in Figure 19, the study revealed a notable shift in the intentions of Ukrainian refugees regarding their duration of stay in Germany. The proportion of refugees planning to remain in Germany for a longer term - either for several years or permanently - increased by five percentage points, reaching 44 percent. Conversely, the percentage of those intending to stay only until the end of the war or who were uncertain about their plans decreased slightly, from 33 to 31 percent and from 26 to 23 percent, respectively. These intentions are subject to change based on personal circumstances or developments in Ukraine. Understanding these intentions is essential for planning effective integration strategies and, if conditions in Ukraine improve, for facilitating the return of refugees.⁵⁷

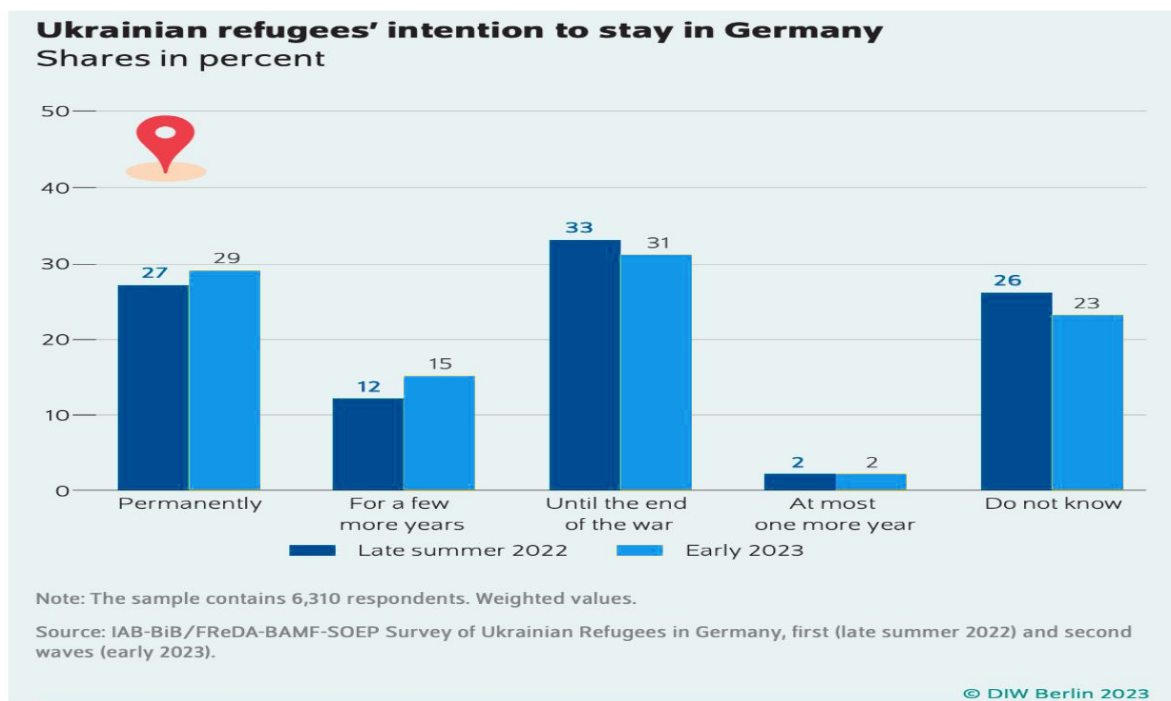


Figure 20. The share of refugees who want to stay in Germany longer term has increased.

The decision for Ukrainian refugees to remain in Germany is influenced by various factors. Refugees with partners abroad are eleven percentage points less likely to want to stay in Germany indefinitely compared to single refugees, while children have no significant impact on this decision. Gender differences are evident,

⁵⁷

https://www.diw.de/de/diw_01.c.878215.de/publikationen/weekly_reports/2023_28_1/ukrainian_refugees_nearly_half_intend_to_stay_in_germany_for_the_longer_term.html

with women being 11 percentage points less likely than men to intend on permanent residency. Other key factors include social integration levels and living conditions, similar to patterns observed in other migrant groups. Refugees pursuing education or training are 11 percentage points more likely to intend permanent residence compared to the unemployed. Proficiency in the German language is positively associated with the desire to stay, possibly because those planning a long-term stay are more motivated to learn the language. Additionally, time spent interacting with Germans and feeling welcomed boosts the likelihood of intending to stay. Housing type also plays a role; refugees in private accommodation are more inclined towards long-term residence compared to those in hotels or guesthouses. Region of origin within Ukraine shows little effect on this intention nearly a year post-departure, whereas individuals who have returned to Ukraine temporarily are less likely to plan a permanent stay in Germany (Brücker, Herbert et al., 2023).

3.3.1.2. Ukrainian's Integration in Germany

Proficiency in the German language is essential for Ukrainian refugees to integrate effectively in Germany, as it facilitates making social connections and accessing employment or educational opportunities. Participation in German language classes has been significant among these refugees. Data from fall 2022 indicates that 51% were engaged in such classes, with the percentage rising to 75% by early 2023, including both current attendees and those who had completed a course. Figure 21⁵⁸ shows that the majority participated in formal integration courses, a trend bolstered by policies making these courses available to Ukrainian refugees from March 2022. Attendance in these courses varies by age, gender, family situation, employment status, and intentions regarding length of stay in Germany. Notably, older refugees (aged 65 and above) and those employed are less likely to attend due to lower mandatory participation rates and time constraints, respectively. In contrast, refugees living with school-aged children and those planning to stay in Germany long-term or

⁵⁸ "Figure 21. Ukrainian refugees' participation in integration courses up to early 2023. Shares in percent"
https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.866701.en/projects/longitudinal_study_of_ukrainian_refugees_in_germany_suare.html

indefinitely are more likely to engage in this language and integration courses, possibly reflecting greater motivation to integrate fully into German society (Brücker, Herbert et al., 2023).

Refugees typically encounter more significant obstacles in integrating into the labor markets of host countries compared to other migrant groups. These challenges largely stem from initial disadvantages, such as limited language proficiency and the absence of professional networks. Consequently, refugees often require more time to achieve labor market integration than migrants who move specifically for employment opportunities.

Ukrainian refugees granted temporary protection in Germany benefit from comparatively advantageous legal conditions. They are immediately eligible for work permits and residence permits valid until March 2024. Unlike other refugees who might receive assistance under the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act, Ukrainians are integrated into the basic social security system under Social Code II, which provides them direct access to Job Centers and higher benefits. As of early 2023, 18% of Ukrainian refugees aged 18 to 64 were employed in Germany. Among these, 39% held full-time positions, 37% worked part-time, and 18% were marginally employed. Additionally, 5% were in training programs, and 2% were interns. Of those not employed, 93% expressed a definite (69%) or probable (24%) willingness to take up employment (Brücker, Herbert et al., 2023).

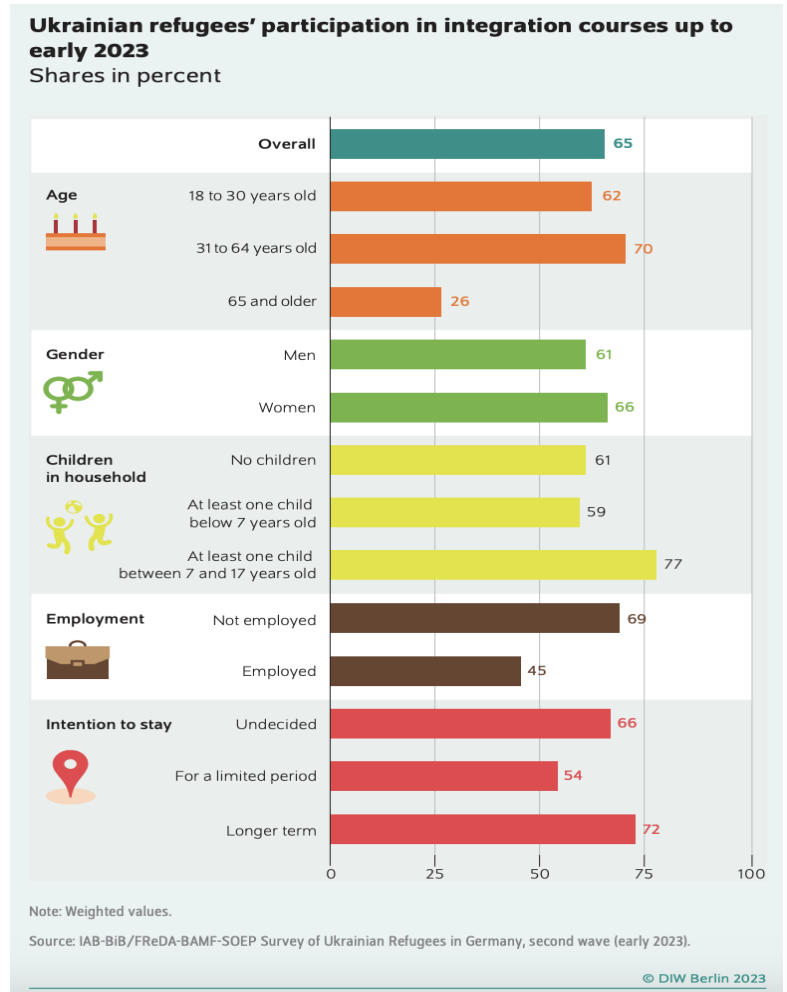


Figure 21. Ukrainian refugees' participation in integration courses up to early 2023

3.3.1.3. Shifting Dynamics?

The EU's activation of the Temporary Protection Directive allowed for an expedited process, granting Ukrainian refugees immediate access to residency, healthcare, education, and employment without the need for formal asylum applications. This proactive and organized response was largely supported by the public and was facilitated through a unified approach across German federal states.

Slightly contrasting, the extremist party, AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) who has 76 seats at the German Parliament, has expressed a nuanced position regarding Ukrainian refugees, aligning with its broader ideological stance and the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The AfD has consistently criticized EU immigration policies, advocating for tighter border controls and stricter registration processes for all refugees, including Ukrainians. They propose measures to ensure that only individuals genuinely fleeing the conflict receive asylum, recommending that non-Ukrainian nationals who left Ukraine should return to their countries of origin. Additionally, the AfD is among the few German political parties supporting the lifting of sanctions against Russia and advocating for a diplomatic resolution involving Russian participation in negotiations⁵⁹. This stance aligns with the party's broader narrative of opposing what it perceives as excessive immigration and emphasizing national sovereignty in refugee policy decisions.

Even though Germany once again demonstrated solidarity and strong organizational efforts in receiving refugees, making it, once again, one of the most sought-after destinations for those seeking refuge, this trend seems to be changing a bit with the AfD gaining more power and influence.

3.3.2. France

3.3.2.1. Why Ukrainians are not drawn to France

As previously discussed in this paper, France is no longer a primary destination for refugees in Europe. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has further illustrated this trend. Nearly one year into the war, France had received only approximately 119,000

⁵⁹ <https://tass.com/world/1735469>

applications for temporary protection, which is about one-tenth of the number received by its neighbor, Germany. And even lower than the intake of other countries such as Bulgaria, Spain and Italy (European Stability Initiative (ESI), 2023).

The case of Ukrainian refugees can be explained by several factors. The geographical proximity of France to Ukraine is a significant factor in the relatively low number of Ukrainian refugees seeking asylum in France. Many Ukrainians have opted to seek refuge in neighboring countries that share a border with Ukraine, allowing them to remain close to their homeland. Another crucial factor is the language barrier. The presence of Slavic languages in certain countries has attracted a significant number of Ukrainian refugees. Notably, four countries among the top eight destinations for Ukrainian refugees - Czechia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Slovakia - have Slavic languages as their official languages. Additionally, the Baltic states, which also feature prominently among the top eight destinations, have a significant number of Russian speakers. Collectively, these seven countries have received over 2.5 million asylum applications, accounting for more than half of the total. The only exception among the top eight destinations being Cyprus, which does not share these linguistic and geographical characteristics (ESI, 2023).

Other factors may also explain the significant disparity in the number of Ukrainian refugees in France. These include the level of financial support available to refugees, the presence of pre-established community networks, and the complexity of bureaucracy. Navigating bureaucratic processes can be particularly challenging without community support or knowledge of the language. Ukrainian refugees have encountered difficulties in accessing information about applying for temporary protection, social benefits, housing programs, education, and employment opportunities in France. To overcome these bureaucratic obstacles, refugees often rely on associations and social media groups that provide information and assistance with relocation and paperwork. While support in countries like Germany is primarily organized at the state level, in France, associations and local residents have played a significant role in welcoming Ukrainians (*POLITICO*, 2023)⁶⁰.

When compared to Germany, the financial support provided by the French government to refugees is significantly lower. As illustrated in Figure 22, the total

⁶⁰ <https://www.politico.eu/article/why-ukraines-refugees-arent-going-to-france/>

monthly social support for a family of two in France is approximately 530 euros, whereas in Germany it is 1,590 euros. This amount in Germany is three times higher and is offered in a country closer to Ukraine, with a much larger pre-existing Ukrainian community. Within the first six months of the conflict, 27,000 Ukrainian refugees arrived in France, compared to 352,000 in Germany (ESI, 2023).

<i>Germany: Social support per month</i>		<i>France: Social support per month</i>	
Benefit	EUR	Benefit	EUR
Mother	502.00	Mother	204.00
Child	348.00	Child	102.00
Subtotal	850.00	Subtotal	306.00
Housing	618.54	Housing	222.00
Heating	122.20	Total	528.00
Total	1,590.74		

Figure 22. Germany and France social support per month

Despite these challenges, the French government has been welcoming to Ukrainian refugees, and the French public has mobilized significantly to provide assistance. Driven by an unprecedented number of French citizens rallying to the cause, host families have played a crucial role, accounting for over 40% of the accommodation solutions (Cour des Comptes, 2023).

Regarding the integration of Ukrainian students into the education system, the French Ministry of National Education implemented several measures to facilitate it. These efforts included establishing a national monitoring unit, streamlining enrollment processes, and providing information about the French education system in Ukrainian. Ukrainian children were enrolled in regular classes and received additional French language support through the UPE2A program. A significant focus was placed on recruiting Ukrainian teachers to assist students, with 95 teachers hired by mid-May. In higher education, institutions, coordinated by Campus France, offered French language courses and assistance to aid students in adapting to university life (cedefop, 2022)⁶¹.

⁶¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/france-integration-ukrainian-refugees>

For social and professional integration, Ukrainian refugees were granted immediate work permits and access to employment programs and vocational training. Public employment services offered personalized assessments and job search support, while specialized language training programs, such as those provided by GRETA, targeted job-related French skills. The Agir program, launched in June 2022, sought to provide integrated support for both employment and housing needs. Despite these efforts, challenges remained, particularly in aligning the duration of temporary protection with vocational training timelines, as well as the risk of underemployment for highly skilled refugees. Non-EU students who fled Ukraine faced additional obstacles, as many of the measures did not extend to them (cedefop, 2022).

3.3.2.2. French Public Opinion on Ukrainian Refugees

A recent survey conducted by FOCUS2030 in June 2022 reveals a strong display of solidarity among the French population towards Ukrainian refugees and the French government's efforts to support Ukraine in the ongoing conflict. Notably, 31% of respondents reported having made a tangible contribution, either financially or through the donation of everyday goods, demonstrating a remarkable level of concrete generosity. Furthermore, a quarter of the respondents indicated their willingness to provide support in the future, while 9% of French citizens reported taking a more proactive role by organizing donation collections, thereby exhibiting a high degree of personal commitment to the cause.⁶²

On another study conducted by Global and European Dynamics (GED)⁶³ in October, when asked if the EU should support Ukraine by delivering weapons, 63% of the French people replying said yes. Another survey carried over by Development Compass⁶⁴ in France, 61% of the people interviewed said the government should do more for refugees and immigrants and only 14% said the government should do less (Hoffmann, 2022).

⁶² <https://focus2030.org/SURVEY-FRENCH-PEOPLE-AND-SUPPORT-TO-UKRAINIAN-REFUGEES-AN-UNPRECEDENTED-1040>

⁶³ <https://globaleurope.eu/europes-future/under-pressure-the-war-in-ukraine-and-european-public-opinion/>

⁶⁴ <https://developmentcompass.org/blog/action/equal-rights-for-refugees-in-france-are-the-public-supportive>

3.3.2.3. Shifting Political Dynamics

Public opinion and widespread solidarity across France have impacted the country's populist parties, which faced criticism for their pro-Russia positions and previous support of Vladimir Putin after the war began. The ideologies of the extreme-right parties, *Rassemblement National* and *Reconquête*, led by Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour respectively, are based on an opposition between "patriotism," seen as virtuous, and "globalism," viewed as a threat. This reflects their nationalism, populism, and pronounced Euroscepticism, alongside a desire for greater independence in a world dominated by the United States. In this framework, Russia holds a key role in the French far right's vision of a multipolar world order, opposing NATO and what they perceive as American imperialism (Ivaldi, 2023).

During the 2022 election, Le Pen reiterated her plan to withdraw from NATO's integrated military command while affirming her commitment to Article 5 on collective defense. She also stated that she would not allow French troops to be placed under the command of any future independent EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC). Additionally, she rejected the idea of France being under an "American protectorate" and advocated for "closer ties between NATO and Russia" to prevent a Sino-Russian alliance⁶⁵ ("Marine Le Pen déroule sa vision", 2022).

Zemmour has also consistently expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, describing him as a "true patriot" and "defender of European values." In 2018, Zemmour stated that he "dreamed of a French Putin"⁶⁶ to halt France's decline. During the 2022 election campaign, he reiterated his views, emphasizing Putin's patriotism and defending his actions as serving Russia's interests, while accusing the United States of trying to dominate Western Europe and provoke Putin. Additionally, the Front National/Rassemblement National party has had financial ties with Russia, a point Emmanuel Macron highlighted during the 2022 campaign to link Le Pen with Putin (Ivaldi, 2023).

Following the outbreak of the war, French populists faced criticism for their pro-Russia stances and previous support of Vladimir Putin, but they responded differently

⁶⁵ https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/13/rapprochement-strategique-entre-l-otan-et-la-russie-accord-de-paris-rapport-a-l-algerie-marine-le-pen-deroule-sa-vision-de-la-diplomatie_6122032_6059010.html

⁶⁶ <https://www.lopinion.fr/politique/eric-zemmour-je-reve-dun-poutine-francais>

to the Ukraine crisis. On February 24, in a press release on her campaign website, Le Pen sought to distance herself from Putin by condemning the Russian invasion and accusing him of disrupting European peace. She urged France to lead a diplomatic intervention under UN auspices, stating, "No reason can justify Russia's military operation against Ukraine. It must be unambiguously condemned" (Le Pen, 2022).

Although France has not been one of the primary destinations for Ukrainian refugees, there has been broad consensus in the country regarding the policies aimed at welcoming and integrating those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Across the political spectrum, from the French government to various political parties, as well as the general population, there has been a consistently positive attitude toward providing support and assistance to Ukrainian refugees.

3.3.3. Poland

3.3.3.1. Changing Dynamics in Immigration to Poland

Historically, Poland was not an immigration destination and experienced a negative migration balance due to significant emigration to Western countries post-2004. The 2011 census indicated that approximately 100,000 foreigners resided in Poland, making it one of the EU countries with the lowest immigrant population. And until around 2015, Eurostat data indicated that Poland had one of the lowest percentages of immigrants among EU countries. Notably, immigration to Poland had several distinctive characteristics compared to Western Europe. Firstly, overall mobility was very low. Secondly, immigrants predominantly came from a few countries, mainly post-Soviet states, with Ukraine being the most significant source. Thirdly, these immigrants were concentrated in a few major urban areas, particularly Warsaw and the Mazovian Voivodeship, which is the metropolitan area surrounding Warsaw. Lastly, the primary form of immigration was temporary or circular migration, which often went unrecorded and was not considered migration under current EU definitions. This pattern has only recently begun to change (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

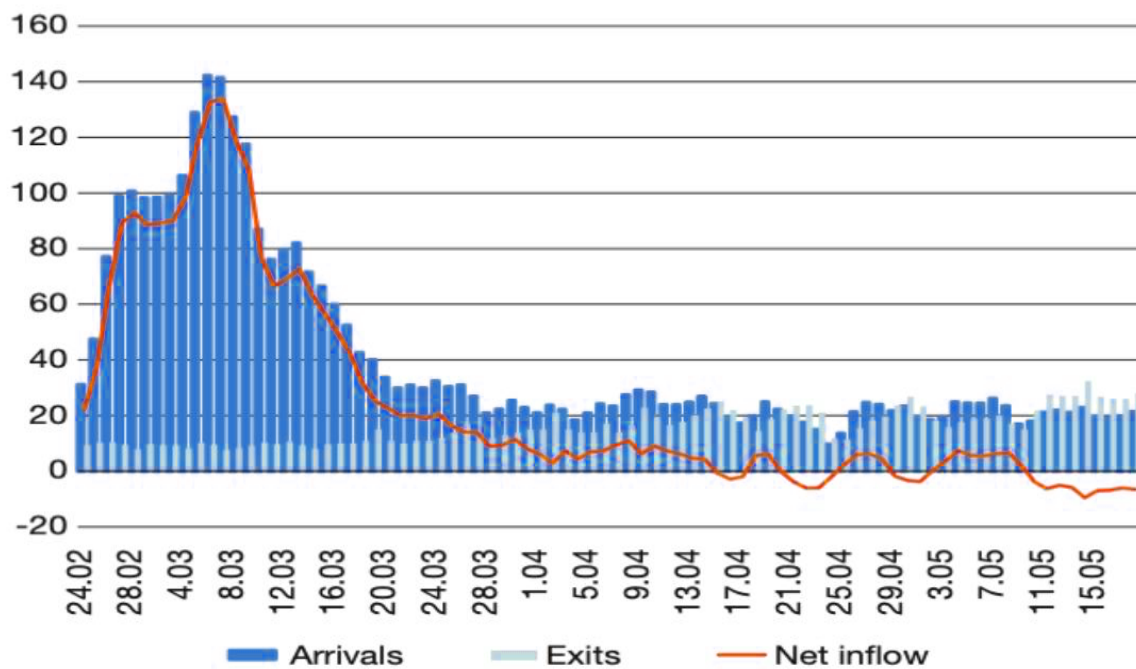
This scenario changed dramatically after the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine. Poland quickly became a leading country in Europe for newly issued residence permits and a global leader in seasonal foreign labor. By 2019, the immigrant population in Poland had surged to over two million, largely due to Ukrainian nationals. This shift

was driven by two main factors: the socio-economic impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which increased migration potential, and Poland's rapid economic growth, which created a high demand for labor. Consequently, instead of humanitarian migration, Poland saw a substantial rise in labor migration facilitated by simplified employment procedures, making its labor market one of the most accessible for foreign workers (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

The war initiated by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has led to the largest refugee migration in Europe since World War II, with an estimated 6.3 million people displaced according to UNHCR (2022). In the first two months alone, nearly 3.5 million war refugees crossed into Poland, with over 95% of them being Ukrainian citizens.

Daily border traffic between Ukraine and Poland, 24 February - 19 May 2022

in thousands



Note: Including non-Ukrainian citizens.

Figure 24. Daily border traffic between Ukraine and Poland, 24 February - 19 May 2022

Figure 23 illustrates the scale of border traffic between Ukraine and Poland, highlighting a significant surge in mobility during the first two to three weeks following the outbreak of the war. The cumulative result of this migration is over 3.46 million entries into Poland and more than 1.39 million departures (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

3.3.3.2. Why Poland is the Main Destination for Ukrainians

Poland has become the main destination for Ukrainian refugees due to a combination of geographical, historical, and socio-economic factors. Its close geographical proximity to Ukraine, with a shared border, makes Poland the most accessible country for those fleeing the conflict. This ease of travel has been a crucial factor in the rapid arrival of millions of refugees since the onset of the war in February 2022 (Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Solga, 2023). Historically, there has been significant labor migration between Poland and Ukraine, with many Ukrainians living and working in Poland even before the war. This established migrant community has provided a strong support system for new arrivals, as many refugees have family ties or connections to these networks, helping them integrate more easily.

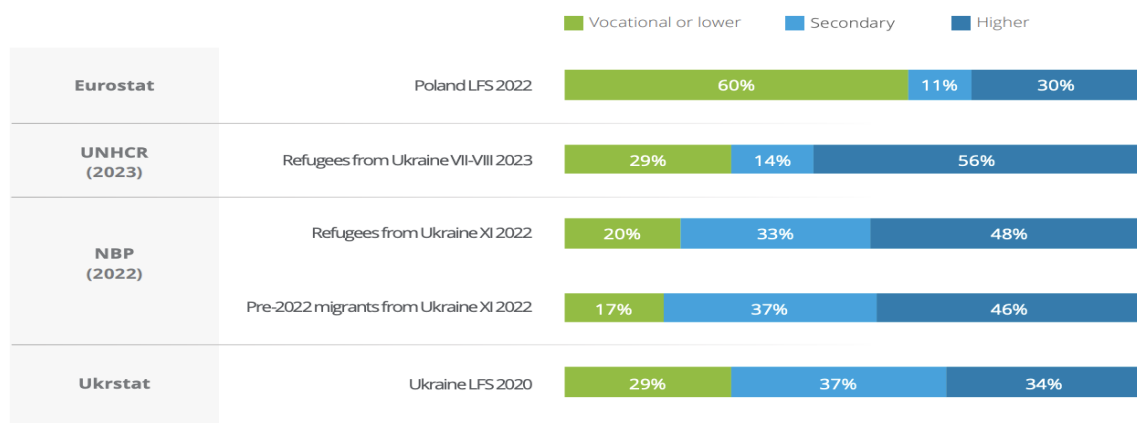
Economically, Poland's growth and demand for labor, particularly in sectors traditionally employing Ukrainian workers, have created opportunities for refugees. The Polish labor market, already accustomed to Ukrainian migrants, has adapted more smoothly to the new influx, supported by government policies that facilitated employment for the refugees (Górny & van der Zwan, 2024). In terms of government response, Poland quickly implemented measures granting temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees, ensuring access to essential services such as healthcare and education. This swift and welcoming approach stands in contrast to the more bureaucratic and slower processes in other EU countries. Additionally, Poland has seen significant social efforts, with communities, organizations, and individuals mobilizing to provide assistance, including shelter, food, legal aid, and language courses. The presence of established Ukrainian communities has further contributed to the social integration of refugees into Polish society (Duszczuk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

As mentioned above, before the war, Ukrainian citizens were the largest group of immigrants in Poland, estimated at about 1.35 million people according to Statistics Poland. This group was primarily composed of men (around 60%) and economically active individuals, making up to 95% of the total. Ukrainians played a dominant role in nearly all migration channels, especially labor migration. Between 2018 and 2021, they received 88% of declarations of intent to employ a foreigner, 98% of seasonal work permits, and over 70% of work permits (based on Ministry of Labour data).

Consequently, most studies on immigration to Poland during this period have focused on Ukrainians due to their significant impact on the economy. (Duszczuk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Polish citizens demonstrated exceptional solidarity with Ukrainian refugees. Public support for accepting refugees was overwhelmingly high, with approval ratings surpassing 90% shortly after the conflict began. Many Poles opened their homes and provided assistance, driven by both humanitarian concerns and historical connections to Ukraine. The Polish government responded promptly by granting temporary protection status to Ukrainians, ensuring their access to social services equivalent to those available to Polish citizens (Golebiowska & Pachocka & Kubiciel-Lodzińska, 2024).

Ukrainian refugees have integrated well into Poland's labor market, which has a structural need for workers due to an aging population and a growing economy. Factors such as high levels of education, cultural similarities, and pre-existing connections to Poland have facilitated their adaptation. Poland's strategic decision to swiftly open the labor market and support refugee inclusion has further aided this process. Since the start of the full-scale war, the number of Ukrainian workers has increased across nearly all sectors. The largest growth has been in manufacturing (almost 34,000 workers), and in accommodation and food services (more than 18,000 workers) (Deloitte & UNHCR, 2024).



Note: (1) LFS stands for the Labour Force Survey, which is conducted with common methodology in all EU countries, 4 candidate countries, and 3 European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. The Ukrainian equivalent is slightly different in its division into complete, basic, and uncompleted higher education. Here we treat uncompleted higher education as secondary education, as we follow the highest level of education attained in line with EU methodology. (2) Ukraine LFS 2020 and Poland LFS 2022 include the 15-64 age group, NBP (2022) cover 18+ age, and MSNA Poland 2023 cover 15+.



Source: Deloitte own elaboration based on Eurostat, <https://nbp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Sytuacja-zyciowa-i-ekonomiczna-migrantow-z-Ukrainy-w-Polsce-raport-z-badania-2022-r.pdf>, UNHCR survey conducted from 13.07.2023 to 21.08.2023, and State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2021).

Figure 25. Education attainment of Poles and Ukrainians

The high level of education among Ukrainian refugees has significantly contributed to their successful integration into Poland's labor market. Surveys by the National Bank of Poland (NBP) and the UNHCR show that the percentage of refugees and pre-2022 Ukrainian migrants with higher education is notably higher than that of both the Polish and Ukrainian populations. In 2022, 48% of Ukrainian refugees held a higher education degree, a figure that rose to 56% in 2023. This suggests that those with higher education were more likely to relocate to Poland or leave Ukraine, as they had the necessary resources. Refugees with a bachelor's degree or higher also had over a 30% higher employment rate than those without a degree (Deloitte & UNHCR, 2024).

Poland's smooth inclusion of refugees in the labor market was made possible by effective policies at both the EU and national levels. The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was activated on March 4, 2022, providing legal protection for Ukrainian refugees across the EU. In parallel, Poland introduced a Special Act⁶⁷, closely aligned with the TPD but broader in scope, covering those who arrived after

⁶⁷ <https://ukraina.interwencjaprawna.pl/the-act-on-assistance-for-ukrainian-citizens/> Act of March 12, 2022 on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country

February 24, 2022. This legal framework granted refugees access to employment, healthcare, education, and essential administrative systems like PESEL and "Trusted Profile," and legalized residency for 18 months. These measures enabled Ukrainian refugees to work, run businesses, or register as unemployed, fostering self-reliance and reducing dependency on humanitarian aid. In addition, Poland's constitutional guarantee of education access ensured that refugee children could attend schools and kindergartens, further aiding their integration. This comprehensive approach by Poland and the EU allowed refugees to achieve a level of independence and stability in their host countries (Deloitte & UNHCR, 2024).

3.3.3.3. Political Dynamics and Poles Opinion on Ukrainian Refugees

Despite this, a survey conducted by the University of Warsaw and the University of Economics and Humanities in Warsaw, published by *Rzeczpospolita* on June 18, 2024, indicates that after more than two years of the full-scale war, Poles have become more negative in their attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees across most areas, with the exception of accepting Ukrainian children into schools. As mentioned before, initially, Poles welcomed these refugees following the outbreak of the war, and the Polish government has since extended their legal stay, along with various support programs. The survey highlights that social benefits for Ukrainian refugees remain a particularly contentious issue. A vast majority of Poles (95%) believe these benefits should be reduced. Furthermore, only 17% of Poles support the idea of allowing Ukrainian refugees to settle long-term, a significant decline from 37% over a year ago. Additionally, 61% of respondents expressed the view that Ukrainians should return to their home country once the war ends (Fornusek, 2024).

The only area where Polish attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees remain positive is education for Ukrainian children, with 82% of Poles supporting their access to education. However, there is little backing for teaching them based on a Ukrainian curriculum. The survey also reveals that only 31% of Poles strongly believe Poland should help Ukraine, a significant drop from 62% in January 2023, while 43% "somewhat agree" with providing assistance. Around 19% oppose aid to Ukraine altogether. While there is still considerable support (62%) for material assistance, such as donations of food and clothing, this figure has also declined compared to earlier surveys. These trends are not unique to Poland; similar decreases in solidarity have

been observed in other countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, though overall support remains strong (Fornusek, 2024).

The response of the Polish government and public to the Ukrainian refugee crisis was markedly different from its reaction to the 2015 refugee influx, when similarly, millions sought refuge. This shift in approach was particularly surprising given that the right-wing, anti-immigration Law and Justice (PiS) government, which led Poland at the time, had previously refused to implement the EU relocation scheme during the 2015–16 European migration crisis. Additionally, in 2021, the same government responded forcefully when Belarus directed hundreds of migrants from the Middle East and Africa toward the Polish border, heightening tensions (Friedman, 2024).

In the next chapter, we will conduct an in-depth comparison of the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian war, building on the analysis from the previous chapters. We will examine the differing policies and reactions to these two significant historical events, with the aim of uncovering the reasons behind the stark contrast in how states and populations responded to what are, in many ways, comparable situations. This analysis will explore the factors that may have shaped these divergent perspectives, despite the similarities between the two crises.

4. Comparative Analysis of EU Responses to Ukrainian and Syrian Refugees: motivations and impact

Based on the analysis in the previous chapters, it is clear that although these two historical moments, the 2015 refugee crisis and the Ukrainian migration flow of 2022, share certain similarities, they were approached and perceived in significantly different ways by European officials, policymakers and citizens from the member states. This chapter seeks to highlight the EU's double standards⁶⁸, examining the contrasting policy responses and member state reactions, as well as exploring the underlying socioeconomic and political factors driving these differences. The policies and actions implemented during these two periods were influenced by various factors, including shared history and culture, international relationships, geographic proximity, and media coverage. These elements can foster either a sense of closeness or

⁶⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/29/ukraine-refugees-european-solidarity-race-gender-proximity/>

detachment, shaping perceptions of similar situations and leading to variations in empathy, solidarity, and cooperation (Pratt & LaRoche, 2022).

4.1. How different Narratives and Perceptions Affect Policy Making

In their article in the Foreign Policy Magazine, Pratt and LaRoche argue that the apparent racial aspect of the double standard reveals how subjective perceptions of proximity and distance shape the boundaries of empathy and sympathy on a geopolitical scale. This distance extends beyond physical space to encompass social distinctions, defining who is seen as "like us" or "different from us" - the concept of "psychological distance" effectively captures these subjective perceptions, integrating social, racial, temporal, and physical dimensions of distance. Research on psychological distance suggests that the more distant a person appears, the less likely others are to feel empathy or act in support. In this way, empathy and cultural commonality are intertwined and mutually reinforced (Pratt & LaRoche, 2022).

This idea that empathy and cultural commonality are created together is quite interesting and, in my opinion, representative of this historic moment we are living. Countries such as Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria, that were prominently against welcoming refugees in 2015 had a completely different attitude when the war in Ukraine started. In 2016, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán referred to non-European refugees as "Muslim invaders" and argued that Hungary should reject refugees from differing cultural and religious backgrounds in order to safeguard its cultural and ethnic homogeneity (Ibañez Salas, 2023). Yet only a week after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Orbán voiced a contrasting stance at the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, using the phrase "we're letting everyone in" (Bathke, 2022)⁶⁹. Bulgarian former Prime Minister Kiril Petkov similarly reinforced this distinction in media statements, noting that "these people are Europeans; they are intelligent and educated," contrasting them with previous waves of refugees. Petkov added that these individuals, unlike prior groups with uncertain identities and backgrounds, were less likely to raise security concerns (Ibañez Salas, 2023). In these statements the

⁶⁹ <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/38928/hungary-welcomes-those-fleeing-ukraine-but-not-illegal-migrants>

contrasting “us” versus “them” is clearly the logic behind the argument of welcoming or not welcoming refugees in their countries.

The EU’s Institutions policy response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis also diverged significantly from its approach during the 2015 refugee crisis, which was marked by internal discord and inaction as we’ve seen in previous chapters. Instead of a controversial cash-for-returns agreement with Turkey to manage displacement from Syria, the EU’s activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) set a precedent for a more compassionate protection system, demonstrating a unified commitment to addressing the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's invasion (Åslund, 2022). Departing from the restrictive “fortress Europe” approach and the rigid Dublin Regulation, the TPD facilitated the swift removal of visa requirements for Ukrainian refugees and established a distinct protection status that granted residence permits for up to three years. This directive provided coordinated rights across the EU, including access to work permits, national healthcare and education systems, and housing benefits, thus embodying a more collaborative and humane European approach to large-scale displacement (Ibañez Salas, 2023).

The Council of the European Union had not previously activated the Temporary Protection Directive due to member states' divergent stances on sharing responsibilities for refugee protection, especially after the Arab Spring, and a general political impasse regarding the reform of the Dublin system. Despite multiple appeals from Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) across political groups for its use in 2016, the EU instead applied the existing framework of the Geneva Conventions on asylum and refugee protection to address the influx of asylum seekers from Syria (Carrera et al., 2022). The TPD, in contrast, would have provided immediate, collective temporary protection without the need for individual assessments. However, Syrian refugees had to undergo individual asylum evaluations upon arrival in EU countries, often facing waits of six months to a year for a decision. Additionally, under the TPD, refugees could choose their place of residence within the EU, unlike Syrian asylum seekers, whose placements were largely determined by the preferences of receiving states. Furthermore, while most Syrians were granted subsidiary protection, which

included residence and work permits, they were generally excluded from family reunification rights (Carrera et al., 2022).⁷⁰

This absolute difference in policy adoption and consensus marks the uncontested difference in dealing with each moment of crisis. It shapes the challenges each group of refugees must face, the integration of these people in their receiving countries and ultimately in the way the moment in history is seen: as a crisis, with all this encompasses or as a moment of unity and solidarity. As argued by Matías Ibañez Salas, the perception of this historical moment, combined with various geopolitical, historical, and cultural factors, influenced the EU to make markedly different policy decisions than it did seven years prior. This led to the unprecedented activation of the EU's most comprehensive and protective mechanism for refugee reception and support to date (Ibañez Salas, 2023).

As Anders Åslund argued, a key distinction between the two historical moments lies in the narrative and the subsequent public perception of the conflicts that drove people to seek refuge in Europe. The Syrian civil war was perceived as highly complex and difficult for many to understand, with multiple actors and fronts, making it challenging for the public to grasp the true nature of the conflict. As a result, there was a lack of a clear and coherent explanation of the war's underlying causes (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).⁷¹ In contrast, the situation in Ukraine was framed in much simpler terms: a clear dichotomy between good and evil. The narrative surrounding the conflict was straightforward and widely understood. For Europeans, it was evident that Ukraine, a democratic nation, was being unjustly attacked by Russia, viewed as the aggressor and oppressor. And this clarity in the narrative contributed to a more unified and empathetic response to the Ukrainian crisis (Åslund, 2022).

These differences in the narratives really influence the perception and public opinion on the conflict. Ukrainian refugees have been coming into the European Union faster and in much larger numbers than in 2015–2016, yet without causing the social and political disruptions seen then. In their article *European attitudes to refugees after*

⁷⁰ https://www.ceps.eu/download/publication/?id=35838&pdf=CEPS-PI2022-09_ASILE_EU-grants-temporary-protection-for-people-fleeing-war-in-Ukraine-1.pdf

⁷¹ <https://rm.coe.int/1680706b00> Media coverage of the “refugee crisis”: A cross-European perspective (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017)

*the Russian invasion of Ukraine*⁷²Alexandru D. Moise, James Dennison and Hanspeter Kriesi, argue that a key part of the explanation for this puzzle lies in the specificities of the crises which drive different dynamics of public opinion. Simply put, Europeans are much more accepting of Ukrainian refugees than they were of Syrian refugees and than they currently are of refugees from Afghanistan or Somalia. This in turn is likely an important reason for why elites have managed to stay united in their strong support for refugees. Initial and continued elite unity may also be responsible for unity seen in public opinion (Moise, Dennison & Kriesi, 2024).

The specific context of the war, along with prevailing attitudes towards it, significantly influences public responses to this refugee crisis. Individuals who express solidarity with Ukraine, endorse Western support efforts, and harbor distrust towards Russia are notably more inclined to support Ukrainian refugees. Unlike attitudes toward other refugee groups, political alignment along the left-right spectrum does not strongly correlate with support for Ukrainian refugees. At both elite and individual levels, support for Ukrainian refugees emerges as a broadly accepted, non-partisan issue (Moise, Dennison & Kriesi, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, the most significant difference between the two historic moments was the contrasting development of the European Union policies towards the two migrations flows. For Syrians there was no real specific and adapted policy, at first it was based on the Dublin system as we have seen previously, and which stated that political refugees were supposed to apply for asylum in the first EU country they entered. In practice, that meant that refugees usually stayed in the first country until receiving the refugee status. Then there was also the Turkey-EU deal, the attempt of setting quotas for each country which just led to more tension between the EU and the East countries of the EU which didn't want to receive any refugees (Åslund, 2022). There was no effective policy towards helping the refugees coming into Europe but rather the rhetoric and the policies implemented were towards helping the frontline states to manage the inflow of migrants and towards protecting the borders - a

⁷² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/01402382.2023.2229688?needAccess=true>

securitisation rhetoric where the victims are the EU member states and not the migrants (Ruiz Benedicto, 2019)⁷³.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies⁷⁴ hypothesized that securitization occurs when a security speech act successfully garners audience acceptance, thereby justifying extraordinary measures. While public opinion undeniably plays a significant role, the ultimate decision to frame a situation as a security issue rests with political actors. In political science, securitization refers to the process by which an issue that ordinarily does not invoke security concerns is redefined as a security threat and subsequently managed through exceptional responses.

In 2015, political figures throughout the European Union sought an appropriate framework to address the mass movement of refugees, including Syrians, across the Mediterranean, a journey often marked by tragic drownings. Even prior to this period, politicians from various affiliations, alongside substantial segments of the media, began portraying refugees and migrants as a potential threat to EU cohesion and to the democratic principles associated with “the West” (Hintjens, 2019). Despite implementing emergency measures across numerous EU member states, such as detention, expedited deportation processes, and enforced destitution for denied asylum-seekers, these strategies did not effectively deter refugee arrivals. This is primarily because “pull” factors are outweighed by “push” factors, which drive individuals to leave their homes and move beyond inadequate conditions in transit-country camps. The sharp increase in refugee arrivals during 2014–2015 highlighted the ineffectiveness of deterrence measures in dissuading new entries (Hintjens, 2019).

By the close of 2015, estimates indicated that between 3,713 and 3,771 individuals had drowned in the Mediterranean that year. The UNHCR, which errs on the side of caution in mortality counts, includes only verified deaths where bodies are recovered and identified as migrants or refugees (UNHCR, 2015). Consequently, the true number of fatalities likely surpasses these confirmed figures. An IOM report

⁷³ https://www.centredelas.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/informe40_GuardingTheFortress_ENG_web_DEF.pdf

⁷⁴ <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/02/01/towards-a-critical-securitization-theory-the-copenhagen-and-aberystwyth-schools-of-security-studies/>

highlights this challenge, noting the particular risk of undercounting when undocumented migrants travel in unmonitored vessels⁷⁵.

According to Hintjens, the initial move toward securitization occurred in May 2015 when Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi published an Op-Ed in the *New York Times*. Renzi described human traffickers as participants in a “new slave trade,” drawing a parallel to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This framing shifted the narrative toward increased border control aimed at targeting “traffickers and smugglers,” thereby diverting attention from the broader need for cohesive European policies to support individuals seeking refuge (Hintjens, 2019).

Renzi’s rhetoric sought to differentiate “deserving” refugees from “undesirable” or “undeserving” migrants, emphasizing protection for the former. Turner highlights that only “genuine” refugees were considered worthy of protection. The establishment of Frontex helped frame migration as a security issue requiring policing. Mogherini, former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission from 2014 to 2019, strengthened this perspective, presenting migration as a military priority with a focus on the perceived ISIS threat in Libya. This second securitization measure was supported by enhanced coordination with Libyan coastguards, military authorities, and the Turkish government. In this framework, refugees ceased to be the primary focus, and Renzi’s slavery comparison faded from the discourse (Hintjens, 2019).

The second securitization initiative occurred in mid-May, led by the former EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini. She approached UN Security Council members, requesting authorization for European forces to conduct “military action against migrant smugglers in international and Libyan waters in the Mediterranean Sea”. By targeting smugglers with military force, the EU argued it could better protect its southern borders, which it portrayed as under “siege” by organized criminal networks. This reframing positioned the EU itself as the primary entity under existential threat from smugglers and traffickers (Hintjens, 2019).

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, was established in 2004 under EU Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004, beginning operations in 2005.

⁷⁵ <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015>

Its core mandate includes coordinating and enhancing the control of EU Member States' external borders, particularly within the Schengen Area, and providing necessary operational and technical support. Frontex's responsibilities encompass strategy development for border control, crime prevention, and interception of unauthorized migrants, often under operations against human trafficking and irregular migration (Ruiz Benedicto, 2019). In 2016, Frontex received its own dedicated resources, including equipment and personnel, following an expansion of its mandate. However, EU Member States are still responsible for contributing additional materials, equipment, and staff for its operations. In 2019, the European Council committed to strengthening Frontex until 2027, enhancing its operational capacity, authorizing it to conduct activities in non-EU countries, and assigning it a more substantial role in coordinating migrant return efforts. This decision also included plans to increase its personnel by 10,000 and allocate funds for acquiring necessary equipment (Ruiz Benedicto, 2019).

As we can see, a crucial element of securitization practices in the European Union is the representation of migration as a cultural challenge, emphasizing the cultural significance of border control. By increasing funding and personnel for border management and entering into agreements with countries such as Turkey and Libya, Europe has achieved a reduction in arrivals. However, this outcome raises significant questions regarding the human and ethical costs of these policies.

According to UNHCR, nearly half of those who reached Europe have witnessed death or have died on their journey. While criminal networks continue to profit, human lives are sacrificed in the name of EU border security. It remains uncertain if these fatalities have significant impact on the perspectives of EU policymakers. However, deaths at sea have, paradoxically, led to increasingly restrictive policies, including obstructing humanitarian search and rescue operations from 2016 onward (Hintjens, 2019). Although the number of total arrivals by sea dropped from over 1 million in 2015 to 116,000 in 2018, according to the UNHCR⁷⁶, the mortality rate rose sharply, from one death per 274 arrivals in 2015 to one per 51 by 2018. EU member states are directly or indirectly involved in military and authoritarian actions that often drive people

⁷⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67712>

to flee, creating a complex crisis of legitimacy within EU governance. Murray and Longo, described this situation as a "wicked" crisis, highlighting the contradictions and tensions within EU values and processes. Despite earlier commitments to confront organized crime networks, the EU has instead resorted to paying certain actors to reduce migrant flows rather than address the root issues (Murray and Longo, 2018).

4.2. The Impact of Different Policies in Integration

The situation for Ukraine was notably different as there were already certain "welcoming" policies in place. Since 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, the EU and Ukraine had formalized their relations through the "EU-Ukraine Association Agreement"⁷⁷, fostering political and economic cooperation. In June 2017, a visa-free arrangement was established, allowing Ukrainian nationals to enter Schengen countries for up to 90 days within any 180-day period (Åslund, 2022). Finally, as discussed in Chapter 3.2, on March 4, 2022, the Justice and Home Affairs Council unanimously implemented the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian nationals.

This policy extended protection not only to Ukrainian citizens but also to non-Ukrainians residing in Ukraine when the conflict began. Refugees from Ukraine were granted three-year work and residency permits, alongside comprehensive social benefits across any EU member state, with no special authorizations required. Additionally, they were permitted freedom of movement within the EU after entry (Åslund, 2022). The EU's approach to Ukrainian refugees was exceptionally unified and distinct from its response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Unanimously adopted at the onset of the Russian invasion, the decision activated the EU's 2001 Temporary Protection Directive, a long-standing framework designed to facilitate a coordinated response without the need for further negotiations on refugee allocation. Around half of the refugees opted to remain in Poland, while others predominantly settled in Central Europe and Germany (Rasche, 2022). The severe nature of Russian aggression against Ukraine generated widespread solidarity among Europeans, resulting in a welcoming environment for Ukrainian refugees across the region. Extending protections to non-Ukrainian residents of Ukraine further addressed any potential claims of discriminatory treatment toward other nationalities (Åslund, 2022).

⁷⁷ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association_agreement_ukraine_2014_en.pdf

Under the temporary protection scheme, Ukrainians were granted rights similar to those of European citizens, allowing them to maintain a sense of normalcy amidst the trauma of displacement. Children were able to attend school, adults could secure employment and participate in the job market, and families had access to housing support. Additionally, refugees should be provided with language classes, a crucial factor in facilitating integration into the host country (European Parliamentary Research Service - EPRS, 2024).⁷⁸ In contrast, many refugees from the Middle East face prolonged uncertainty while awaiting asylum status, often without access to similar resources. This situation enabled Ukrainian refugees to continue building their lives as they await the end of the conflict, unlike many Syrian refugees, who were left in limbo during their wait for official recognition (İçduygu, 2024)⁷⁹.

In many countries, the employment rate of displaced Ukrainians is notably high, often surpassing that of other refugee groups after a comparable period. For instance, in Germany, only 13% of asylum seekers who arrived in 2015/2016 were employed by 2018 (Eurofound, 2024). This success among Ukrainians is due partly to their immediate access to labor markets under the Temporary Protection Directive, as well as their high levels of education. Additionally, language similarities (in countries like Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia) or the presence of significant Russian-speaking communities (in Baltic states) have facilitated their employment (Eurofound, 2024). The language can therefore be a positive motivator for integration but also a barrier, which can explain the differences between employment rates in different member states. As of December 2022, employment rates of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection were quite positive with around 40% or above being employed in countries such as Poland, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; 30% in Slovakia and around 20% in Luxembourg, Austria, Germany and Portugal; and around 15% in Finland, France and Romania (Eurofound, 2024).

While employment rates differ significantly across countries, partly due to variations in data sources and timelines, they indicate generally positive trends. The existing Ukrainian diaspora in many EU countries has further supported new arrivals

⁷⁸ <https://epthinktank.eu/2024/05/08/reception-and-integration-of-displaced-people-from-ukraine/>

⁷⁹ https://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/OpenAccess/BryantLives/BryantLives_07a.pdf

by helping them navigate the local job market and offering practical advice, which has been crucial for their integration (Eurofound, 2024).

The European Commission report on “*The inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in EU education systems 2023-2024*⁸⁰” shows that EU Member States are making substantial efforts to integrate children fleeing Ukraine into their education systems, in accordance with the Temporary Protection Directive. All participating countries are providing extensive support to displaced children, their families, and the educators involved. Additionally, EU Member States are collaborating with Ukrainian authorities to facilitate the eventual safe return of children and youth to Ukraine, recognizing their learning achievements in host countries and ensuring a smooth transition between educational systems.

Thirteen EU Member States provide various forms of financial support for education and training aimed at students, families, and schools. Specifically, 11 of these systems are designed for Ukrainian nationals, while three are available to refugees more broadly. For example, Poland offers monthly state assistance of PLN 400 (approximately EUR 85) to cover early childhood education and care services for Ukrainian citizens. Beginning October 1, 2024, this will be replaced by a new program providing up to PLN 1,500 (approximately EUR 348) to help reduce childcare costs for parents with children aged 12 to 35 months (European Commission, 2024).

In Germany, as of June 1, 2022, Ukrainian students who hold or have applied for a residence permit can access federal education assistance, which typically consists of a combination of grants and interest-free loans. Additionally, Ukrainian refugee students in Poland are exempt from public university tuition fees and can apply for state-funded scholarships and loans. The *Gemeinschaft für studentischen Austausch in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (GFPS) also offers a scholarship program specifically for Ukrainian students in Germany. Moreover, the Foundation for Innovation in Higher Education (Stiftung Innovation in der Hochschullehre) allocated approximately EUR 2 million in special funding for selected projects during the 2022-2023 academic year, which has been expanded by an additional EUR 1.8 million through the end of the 2024-2025 academic year. These projects aim to support students wishing to continue their education in Germany, whether digitally or in person,

⁸⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/224f94b0-32a8-11ef-a61b-01aa75ed71a1>

while fostering strong connections with Ukrainian universities (European Commission, 2024).

These initiatives have led to an increase of over 50,000 students in 20 countries, bringing the estimated total enrollment of Ukrainian children across the EU to approximately 700,000, with 603,914 officially recorded in the survey and the remainder estimated based on prior school year data. However, challenges persist. While initial obstacles related to communication and families' intentions to enroll their children in local schools have diminished, focus has now shifted to more systemic issues. The most frequently reported challenges include language barriers, student well-being, the availability of qualified teaching staff, and the simultaneous enrollment of students in both the host country's education system and Ukrainian schools (European Commission, 2024).

A joint study report on Access to Education for refugee and migrant children in Europe made by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, shows contrasting data when it comes to middle eastern refugees arriving during 2015-2016, where over half of the Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistani, and Iranian children surveyed in the destination countries had been out of school for one to two years, a period which includes the time spent traveling. For Syrian children, the gap in education could extend up to 2.5 years. Nearly half of the children interviewed had spent between one and six months traveling to Europe, and 34% had spent over a year in Turkey before continuing their journey to Europe⁸¹.

The data indicates that language courses, access to the labor market, and entry into the education system are essential components for successful refugee integration, benefiting both refugees and host country populations. This structured approach, along with financial support, contrasts significantly with the response to the 2015 refugee crisis.

4.3. The Role of Media on Public Opinion

Taking into account the argument made by Anders Åslund, that EU policy is to a certain extent, and as a prominent characteristic of democracies, tied and driven by

⁸¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/09/Access-to-education-europe-19.pdf>

public perception and therefore narratives do influence policy makers, the role of the media also has to be referred to. If, as we mentioned previously, the refugee inflow of 2015 was framed as a crisis and as a security threat, with overall creating a quite negative perception, the opposite happened with the inflow of refugees coming from Ukraine in 2022. Reports have emphasized solidarity, humanitarian support, and the shared cultural ties between Ukrainians and many European nations (Ibáñez Salas, 2023)⁸²

Many articles focused on Ukrainian refugees present personal narratives, often highlighting individual stories that include names and details about their journeys. These accounts typically describe the duration of their travels, the specific regions of Ukraine they fled, whom they left behind, and their pre-war lives. The subjects are often women accompanied by children, elderly individuals, or families, with an emphasis on the prevalence of mothers traveling alone with their children. The tone of these articles varies, ranging from neutral, fact-based reporting to highly emotional narratives, particularly when quoting refugees or detailing the hardships faced by children. Accompanying photographs usually depict portraits of the refugees, arriving families, or small groups of refugees interacting with volunteers (Rosstalnyj, 2022).

Nina Rosstalnyj argues in her thesis⁸³ that prevailing gender norms become more pronounced during wartime, positioning women as vulnerable individuals in need of protection, while casting men as potential combatants with an obligation to engage in conflict. This dynamic is evident in the current context, where men are not only denied the right to seek refuge, due to the declaration of the martial law in Ukraine, but where the act of fighting is also idealized as an act of heroism.

A recurring theme in media coverage is the comparison to 2015, either highlighting how the experiences, resources, and frameworks established during that time are aiding the current response, or critiquing the evident double standards (Rosstalnyj, 2022). In an article from Al Jazeera, a series of discriminatory media

⁸² <https://www.euromesco.net/publication/the-refugee-crisis-double-standards-media-framing-and-the-proliferation-of-positive-and-negative-narratives-during-the-ukrainian-and-syrian-crisis/>

⁸³ https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2022/rosstalnyj_nina.pdf Deserving and undeserving refugees? An analysis of the EU's response to the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 compared to the refugee influx from Ukraine in 2022 By Nina Rosstalnyj

coverage was compiled at the beginning of the Ukrainian war⁸⁴, where we can see how the narrative “us” versus “them” is so present.

In this article, we see discriminatory media examples such as when journalist Phillipe Corbé stated, on France’s BFM TV⁸⁵, this about Ukraine: *“We’re not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We’re talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives.”* Or when, Daniel Hannan, in *The Telegraph*⁸⁶ explained: *“They seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts, vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations.”* Reinforcing the idea that war is normal “there”, in underdeveloped and poor countries, but not “here” in thriving modern and democratic Europe, as if war is a condition of poor and uncivilized people, unlike “us” Europeans. Another example the journalist mentioned in his article was when the *BBC* interviewed⁸⁷ a former deputy prosecutor general of Ukraine, who told the network: *“It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair ... being killed every day.”* These media coverage examples starkly illustrate how racism in reporting reinforces the narrative of “deserving” versus “undeserving” refugees.

The portrayal seemed to imply that differentiating Ukrainian refugees from Syrian or Middle Eastern refugees would encourage a more favorable reception, thereby reinforcing a double standard. Positive narratives emerged, grounded in the notion that Ukrainians are educated and share a European appearance, which implicitly justified their welcome, unlike “other” refugee groups (Ibanez Salas, 2023). The result of these policies and media coverage differences is inequality.

As we’ve seen, media coverage has most definitely influenced the policy making during both historic moments, but other factors might have also played a role in this unequal way of treating refugees. One of the differences between the two different arrivals is the demographic profile of the refugees arriving in Europe. In 2015

⁸⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/27/western-media-coverage-ukraine-russia-invasion-criticism>

⁸⁵ <https://x.com/RioMoussallem/status/1497535170450231301>

⁸⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/26/vladimir-putins-monstrous-invasion-attack-civilisation/>

⁸⁷ <https://x.com/AlanRMacLeod/status/1497974245737050120>

most of the refugees arriving to the European borders were men, whilst in 2022, most of the refugees arriving from Ukraine were women and children. The demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees differs notably from that of other refugee populations. Data from sources like Eurostat, NEC, and UNHCR show that approximately 75% of those fleeing Ukraine are women and children (Eurofound, 2024). Most working-age adults among these refugees are women, making up between 61% to 84% in various European countries, with particularly high proportions in countries such as Italy (Eurofound, 2024).⁸⁸

4.4. Further Factors Influencing Solidarity and Shifting Political Dynamics

Another factor that has probably had an impact in the solidarity and policy decisions is the geographical proximity. As Laurie Buonanno argues, one of the factors that influences member states' stance on migration and receiving refugees in their territories is the geographic location on the European continent⁸⁹. As Ukraine is part of Europe the sense of proximity and shared culture and values is more prominent, as well as the fear that the war could spread to bordering EU member states.

Concerns that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could potentially spread to neighboring regions helped to spur one of the largest humanitarian solidarity efforts seen in decades. Additionally, the EU's commitment to stand against Putin's actions by upholding its core values of solidarity influenced policy decisions. Unlike the large-scale displacement from Syria in 2015 and 2016, which was largely viewed as a challenge, the Ukrainian crisis presented an opportunity for Europe to affirm its foundational principles of solidarity, compassion, and empathy through a robust and supportive policy response (Ibañez Salas, 2023).

One prominent characteristic of democracies is how public attitudes are likely to be a facilitator or a constraint for governmental actions. In this case, the emotional impact of the Ukraine conflict sparked widespread support across the EU for welcoming Ukrainian refugees and this extensive support has in all likelihood influenced the policy making of the EU. According to the Flash Eurobarometer survey

⁸⁸ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-03/ef23030en.pdf>

⁸⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318640248_The_European_Migration_Crisis

506⁹⁰, conducted in March 2022, 88% of respondents EU-wide approved of admitting refugees fleeing the war, with particularly high approval rates in Portugal (97%), Finland (95%), Poland (92%), and Sweden (91%). Although support was somewhat lower in countries like Bulgaria (75%) and Czechia and Slovakia (both 77%), a clear majority in each still expressed welcoming attitudes (Eurofound, 2024). By August 2023, some signs of “solidarity fatigue” had emerged, yet 76% of respondents in a Eurobarometer survey on EU priorities still supported accepting Ukrainian refugees. A study by the Joint Research Centre confirmed that, over a year into the conflict, public support remained high (Eurofound, 2024).

Even typically critical right-wing parties, such as Belgium’s Vlaams Belang, showed temporary support for Ukrainian refugees, distinguishing them from other refugee groups. An online survey conducted in March 2022 among Flemish respondents revealed that 59% held positive attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, contrasting with just 29% for refugees from Afghanistan and Syria. Similar distinctions in public opinion were noted in countries like Estonia, despite having few non-Ukrainian refugees (Eurofound, 2024). The Polish government and public response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis differed significantly from its stance during the 2015 refugee influx across the Mediterranean, a period during which Poland’s ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, a right-wing, anti-immigration government, refused to participate in the EU’s relocation scheme. In 2021, this government also took a strict stance when Belarus channeled migrants from the Middle East and Africa toward Poland’s border, escalating regional tensions (Friedman, 2024).

This shift in Poland’s approach to Ukrainian refugees can be attributed to specific acceptance criteria used by the government. Ukrainian refugees, largely consisting of women, children, and elderly individuals fleeing a direct war, were perceived as “genuine” refugees and shared cultural and demographic similarities with the Polish population. These factors likely shaped the government’s more favorable response (Friedman, 2024). This welcoming policy stood in sharp contrast to prior rhetoric from right-wing politicians and the media, which had often portrayed non-European refugees as security threats and a burden imposed through EU relocation mandates (Friedman, 2024).

⁹⁰ https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7871

The same happened in France. Far-right political leaders in France who previously campaigned against immigration, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, have altered their stance on accepting refugees from Ukraine. Leaders such as Eric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen have publicly expressed support for Ukrainian refugees, highlighting a perceived cultural and religious similarity with Christian, European Ukrainians in contrast to Muslim refugees from Syria and Afghanistan (Desai, 2022)⁹¹.

Zemmour, who has positioned his campaign on curbing immigration and upholding traditional French identity, previously dismissed Syrian refugees as economic migrants rather than war refugees. Similarly, Le Pen, leader of the National Rally, differentiated the current crisis from the 2015 Syrian refugee situation, citing security concerns and the demographic differences between the predominantly male Syrian refugees and the women, children, and elderly Ukrainians now seeking asylum (Desai, 2022).

As demonstrated throughout this investigation, even political parties traditionally opposed to immigration have shifted their strongly held positions on this issue. This again can be influenced by all the above mentioned factors, the dependency of democratic parties on public opinion, cultural and religious affinities, the perception of a shared external threat, and geographical proximity.

It is hard to measure with quantifiable data the motivations behind the differences in policy making for the two situations but with what I have shown in this dissertation I can firmly say that a multitude of factors affected the decision making - shared history, cultural proximity, media coverage and public opinion, geographical and border proximity, security and defense - but this is not what we should be looking at. With this data and information, we saw how a crisis can unbecome a crisis. By adopting specific tailored policies for migration inflows and cooperating it is possible to handle a big movement without it being a crisis. We ought to not be looking at the specific factors that affect our view of a situation but to seek solutions that are both humane and socially and economically effective.

⁹¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/french-far-right-politicians-change-their-tune-on-immigration/2531428#>

5. Conclusion

This research sought to examine the similarities and differences between the two major waves of refugee migration into Europe, analyzing the circumstances and motivations that led to distinct policy responses in each period.

In 2015, the refugee situation was framed as a crisis and it did end up being a crisis, with a policy response centered on securitization. This approach prioritized stricter border controls, increased authority and funding for Frontex, and depicted frontline states as the primary victims due to their difficulties in managing the influx. This framing often shifted the focus away from the refugees themselves, who were fleeing conflict and risking their lives to reach Europe. The limited solidarity and cooperation among EU member states, alongside an inadequate response from EU institutions, contributed to a significant humanitarian crisis.

In contrast, the reception and management of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion was met with a notably different perception and policy response. Welcoming Ukrainian refugees was widely supported across almost all EU member states, leading to the unprecedented activation of the Temporary Protection Directive. The response from civil society and institutional organizations was remarkably effective and solidary in most member states, facilitating a humane and compassionate reception for Ukrainian refugees despite the difficult circumstances. While not without challenges, this response was seen as a moment of solidarity and collective pride within Europe. And even though the positive perception and welcomeness of Ukrainian refugees has decreased a little over the time, it is still substantial.

This research seeks to understand the underlying causes of selective solidarity in refugee policy. To address one of the core research questions - what sociopolitical factors explain the disparities in policy responses? - I conclude that discriminatory practices are not driven by a single element but by a combination of factors. These include the public's capacity to identify with and empathize with refugees, the influence of media narratives, the perception of the conflict and understanding of motivations for fleeing, geographical proximity, demography of the refugees, religious affinities and the portrayal of refugees in mainstream media and social media. All these factors and

characteristics combine to favor Ukrainian refugees in 2022 while disadvantaged those who arrived in 2015.

Answering my other research question - how did the EU's policy response differ in 2015 and in 2022? - there were several differences between the two moments in history that deserve to be highlighted. The responses to the refugee crises in 2015 and 2022 reflect significant differences in legal frameworks, policy approaches, and public perception. In 2015, EU actions relied heavily on existing asylum laws, such as the Dublin Regulation, which proved insufficient to handle the large influx. The European Agenda on Migration was introduced to address immediate needs, aiming to control migration flows, strengthen border security, and establish mechanisms for relocation. Additionally, the EU's 2016 agreement with Turkey sought to limit migration by returning individuals who entered Greece from Turkey.

In contrast, the response in 2022 was marked by the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, which facilitated a more efficient and humane process for Ukrainian refugees. The TPD granted immediate access to residency rights, healthcare, education, and employment across all EU member states, bypassing the conventional asylum process. This directive was implemented swiftly and uniformly across EU countries, contrasting sharply with the fragmented responses seen in 2015.

Another critical difference was the level of consensus among EU institutions and member states. The 2015 crisis exposed significant divisions regarding burden-sharing, whereas the 2022 response to Ukrainian refugees showcased an unusual unity across the EU, driven by collective support for Ukraine. Public opinion also varied widely between the two crises. In 2015, the influx of refugees, primarily from Muslim-majority countries, was often met with fear and resistance from political parties and segments of the population. In 2022, however, Ukrainian refugees were generally viewed through a humanitarian lens, reflecting a sense of shared European identity and values.

These differing policy responses also impacted refugee integration efforts. In 2015, integration was obstructed by political resistance, logistical obstacles, limited rights, and lengthy asylum processes. In 2022, the Temporary Protection Directive enabled almost immediate integration of Ukrainian refugees into labor markets and social systems, allowing for a more targeted and effective approach.

In conclusion, the EU's responses to these crises illustrate how geopolitical context, public opinion and legal structures shape migration policies. While both situations posed significant challenges, the contrasting responses suggest a shift toward more cohesive and compassionate policies for refugees perceived as part of Europe's cultural sphere.

Finally, to answer my third research question - How did Germany's, France's and Poland's response differ in 2015 and in 2022? - as we have seen, the policy responses of Germany, France, and Poland to the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee inflow reflect both common trends and notable divergences, shaped by evolving geopolitical dynamics and differences in public opinion.

While Germany and France adopted cautious yet humanitarian responses in 2015, characterized by internal debates and concerns over security and integration, Poland took a stricter stance, openly resisting EU refugee quotas and expressing national security concerns. In each country, public opinion toward Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees was polarized, with far-right influence and mixed sentiment creating a challenging political environment for refugee policy.

In contrast, the 2022 influx of Ukrainian refugees led to a more unified and compassionate approach across all three nations, facilitated by the EU's swift activation of the Temporary Protection Directive. Unlike in 2015, public support for Ukrainian refugees was markedly higher, driven by a shared sense of European solidarity and empathy for those affected by Russia's aggression. This unified support saw a significant financial commitment to integration in both Germany and France, with local communities actively engaging in relief efforts. Poland's response, notably, shifted from resistance to strong humanitarian and financial support, with the public and government alike mobilizing to aid Ukrainian refugees, despite lacking pre-existing structures for such an influx.

To conclude, I would like to leave some learnings and recommendations for the future. The comparison of the European Union's responses to the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises reveals crucial insights and offers some learnings for refining future policies. The handling of Syrian refugees in 2015 and Ukrainian refugees in 2022 indicates the need for adaptable and flexible legislation to manage large-scale migration. The Temporary Protection Directive activated for Ukrainians allowed rapid

support and integration, in contrast to the Dublin Regulation applied in 2015, which was less flexible and led to delays and administrative bottlenecks. Future legal frameworks must include adaptable, swift-response measures to ensure efficiency in urgent situations but also respect human rights.

Additionally, by comparing the two moments in history, we can see how public opinion is a significant driver of policy outcomes, as seen in the starkly different receptions of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. The positive reception of Ukrainian refugees demonstrated the impact of public support on the policy landscape, while the divided response to Syrian refugees exposed the consequences of fear-driven narratives. This accentuates the importance of fostering solidarity and promoting narratives that encourage empathy and support for refugees.

The EU's coordination between national and regional levels also proved critical. The fragmented approach to the 2015 crisis highlighted a lack of unified action, a challenge that improved in 2022. In a historic demonstration of prompt action and unity, the European Union unanimously adopted its most comprehensive legislative and policy framework for asylum and temporary protection within just eight days. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive on 4 March, marking an unprecedented moment of proactive collaboration and consensus among Member States, proving how more efficient the EU is when working as a whole.

The integration of refugees poses ongoing challenges, particularly in securing housing, education, and employment. The integration of Syrian refugees in 2015 exposed gaps in support systems, revealing the need for standardized programs across member states. Access to language training, vocational support, and healthcare is vital not only for refugees' well-being but also for their contributions to host societies. An EU-wide framework for integration would establish continuity and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

Looking forward, the EU should reconsider and reformulate migration, temporary protection, and asylum policies to address unequal treatment and double standards applied to non-European third-country nationals. The Dublin system, in particular, could integrate the legal precedents set by the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to ensure uniform benefits for future asylum seekers across the EU.

Selective solidarity shouldn't be the status quo for the EU, implementing a human-centered approach that recognizes the equal dignity of every person shouldn't be an optional value based on the polarization of the moment, it should be a value the EU upholds always.

Very recently, on the 10 of April 2024, the European Parliament adopted the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which promises to deliver results while remaining grounded in the European values (European Commission, 2024)⁹².

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum is organized around four main pillars. The first pillar enhances the security of EU external borders, focusing on rigorous screening and crisis protocols to manage large-scale arrivals. The second pillar seeks to expedite asylum processes by establishing legal timeframes and streamlined standards. The third pillar introduces a framework of solidarity, enabling EU member states to share the responsibility of processing asylum claims and supporting frontline states through relocation or financial contributions. The fourth pillar emphasizes collaboration with non-EU countries to curb irregular migration, combat smuggling, and establish legal migration pathways.

Although the EU argues the new migration and asylum pact takes a step forward in a more cohesive and humane approach to migration, some organizations and scholars have shown concerns that the pact may erode asylum protections by allowing member states to opt out of hosting refugees through financial contributions, thus weakening collective responsibility and that the pact's accelerated border procedures are likely to increase detention rates, including for vulnerable individuals and families, with limited legal protections that could lead to wrongful deportations and human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2024)⁹³.

Particular concerns also focus on the pact's potential effects on children, as fast-tracked processing could limit access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Additionally, the pact's strategy of externalizing border control to non-EU countries risks transferring responsibility to states that may lack adequate human

⁹² https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en#the-four-pillars-of-the-new-migration-and-asylum-policy

⁹³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/eu-migration-pact-agreement-will-lead-to-a-surge-in-suffering/>

rights protections, exposing asylum seekers to further risks (Human Rights Watch, 2023)⁹⁴.

The pact includes some potentially positive measures, such as rights-monitoring mechanisms and a resettlement framework, which could improve safe pathways for refugees if properly implemented with adequate resources. However, the pact's emphasis on streamlined migration management raises concerns that the rights of vulnerable populations may be at risk. This highlights the need for EU institutions and member states to ensure that human rights and international obligations are central to its implementation, which from what we can see from the new Pact on Migration and Asylum doesn't seem to be the priority.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine initially prompted an unprecedented wave of solidarity, consensus, and cooperation, the future trajectory of this sentiment remains uncertain. As highlighted in this research, public support for Ukrainian refugees, though still substantial, has shown signs of waning as the war persists without a foreseeable conclusion. Future research could investigate whether this welcoming attitude will endure or if the prevailing narrative of "good versus evil" and "oppressed versus oppressor" may eventually shift toward a securitized discourse, similar to the narrative that emerged during the 2015 crisis. Given the varied and strong motivations underpinning current public support, a reversal seems unlikely, however, exploring this possibility could be a valuable extension of this research

⁹⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/21/eus-migration-pact-disaster-migrants-and-asylum-seekers>

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