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## Conflict Assessment: European Migrant Crisis

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report focuses on the complex issues that the systemic governing body of Europe faces, due to mass migration from conflict regions in the Middle East and Africa. Also, the underlying conditions found in the lack of opportunity for newly arriving migrants, identity struggles for European citizens, and the role that the media plays in public perception. The European Union and its Member States are challenged with a tug-of-war scenario between frustrated asylum seekers and citizens who disagree with the methods in which their government handles immigration.

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### ABOUT PEACEXCHANGE

PeaceXchange is a multi-dimensional platform that aims to bring young people to the forefront of peacebuilding. Our detailed reports are designed to be accessible to a wide audience and inspire critical discussion in aspects of international conflict resolution. We are determined to empower users through a modern, sophisticated interface that elegantly provides objective information and promotes personal connection with our team. In addition to operating as a resource for funding and valuable avenue for future employment. In essence, PeaceXchange is a collaborative exchange of information that promotes peaceful human connection and unity across nations and cultures.

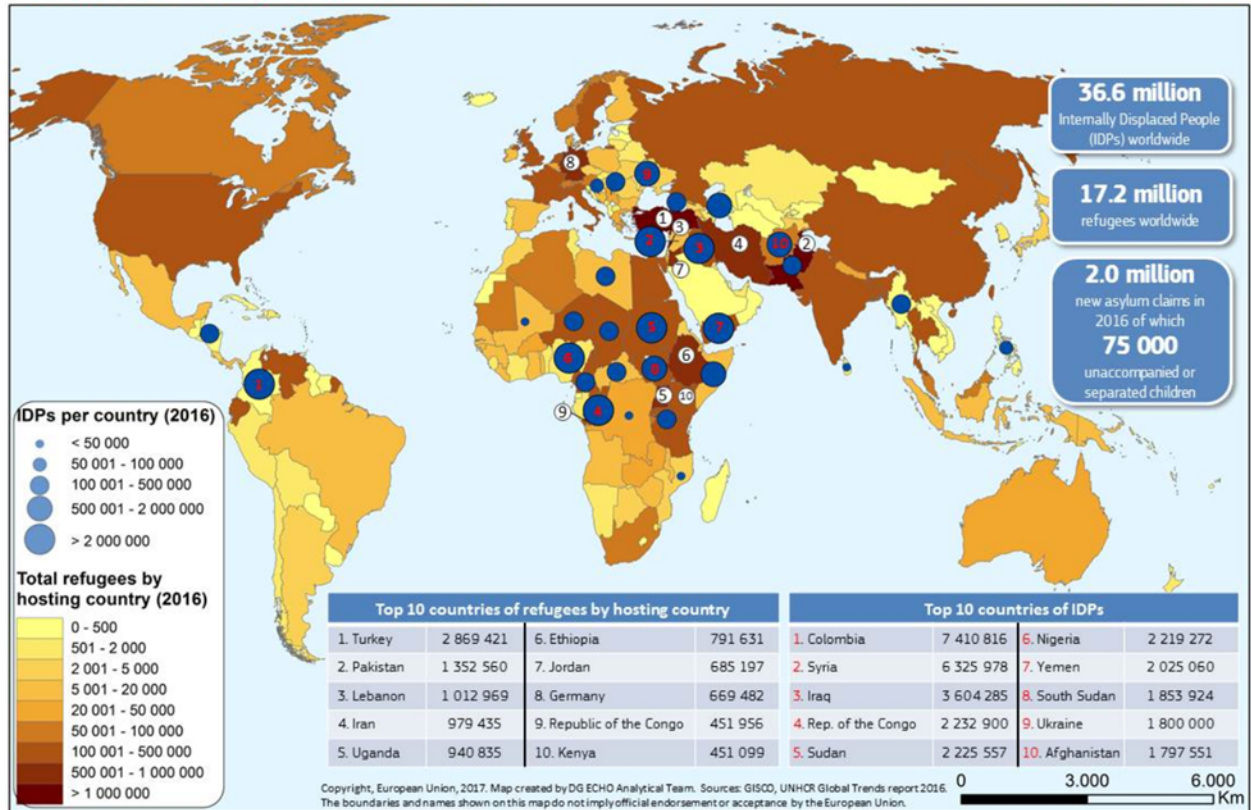


FIGURE 1 REFUGEES BY HOSTING COUNTRIES IN 2016

## Conflict Development Summary

In the past decade, the European Union (EU) has faced continuous waves of migration from conflict regions (See *Figure 1*) culminating in disputes over Euroscepticism<sup>1</sup> and failing refugee societal integration. The logistical obstacles of mass migration into Europe from around the world did prove that institutionally, the EU was not prepared for the political and economic bearing of this magnitude. Even in the efforts the EU has made to resolve these issues, nationalism and populism are still prominent within the citizen population of member states.

<sup>1</sup> Euroscepticism is a criticism of the EU integration practices and policies. It ranges from those who oppose some EU institutions and policies and seek reform, to those who oppose EU membership outright and see the EU as unreformable.

The issue in contention for the citizen population of the EU is security, both physical and ontological security<sup>2</sup>. Critics in the international community attribute crimes committed by migrants to the integration procedural shortcomings and lack of cultural assimilation<sup>3</sup>. Individual perceptions of identity and foreigners, and vice-versa, shape the ways in which



FIGURE 2 REFUGEE MIGRATORY PATHS 2015

communities, state, and the EU assimilate refugees. The states, however, have the power to shape the rhetoric in the favor of successful integration, or complete negligence of migrants.

Beginning as a R2P<sup>4</sup> commitment when hundreds of refugee boats were sinking and going missing in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea, turmoil in the Middle East and Africa pushed millions of people into Europe seeking asylum. *Figure 2* displays the routes in which

<sup>2</sup> According to Ontological Security Theory (OST), states do not merely seek physical security but also ontological security, i.e. the security of the state self-identity. States are thus not only interested in survival (as realists assert) but also in the continuation of the self, i.e. the confidence that the self/state identity will prevail in the international order.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a society's majority group or assume the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group.

<sup>4</sup> R2P (Responsibility to Protect): A modern international norm in providing humanitarian aid to people in distress, especially near one's own territory.

refugees were entering Europe in 2015. Western European states are a destination goal for most asylum seekers. Thus, states caught in between face the brunt of transportation and temporary housing challenges. They also face often violent refugee frustrations over



blockages, delays, and reroutes. Figure 2 illustrates border areas in which barriers were built to limit or halt refugee flow due to border complications and political tension between states.

FIGURE 3 DISPLACED PEOPLES/REFUGEES FROM SYRIA 2015

The EU later made several attempts to disperse refugees throughout Europe under a quota scheme<sup>5</sup> which was somewhat effective but did not solve the problem of effective integration. In addition, over a million refugees became trapped in Turkey while waiting to find transport to Europe. New limitations and border control backed up refugee migration

<sup>5</sup> Quota schemes: Policies which designate the number of immigrants allowed into a territory based on nationality.

in Turkey which left them with more refugees than they could handle and hurt their relationship with the EU (see *Figure 3*). The number of displaced peoples awaiting transportation is the highest in Turkey, but Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Serbia also face a large influx of displaced people in the height of the conflict. This directly correlates with the protesting and frustrations expressed by both local populations and migrants.

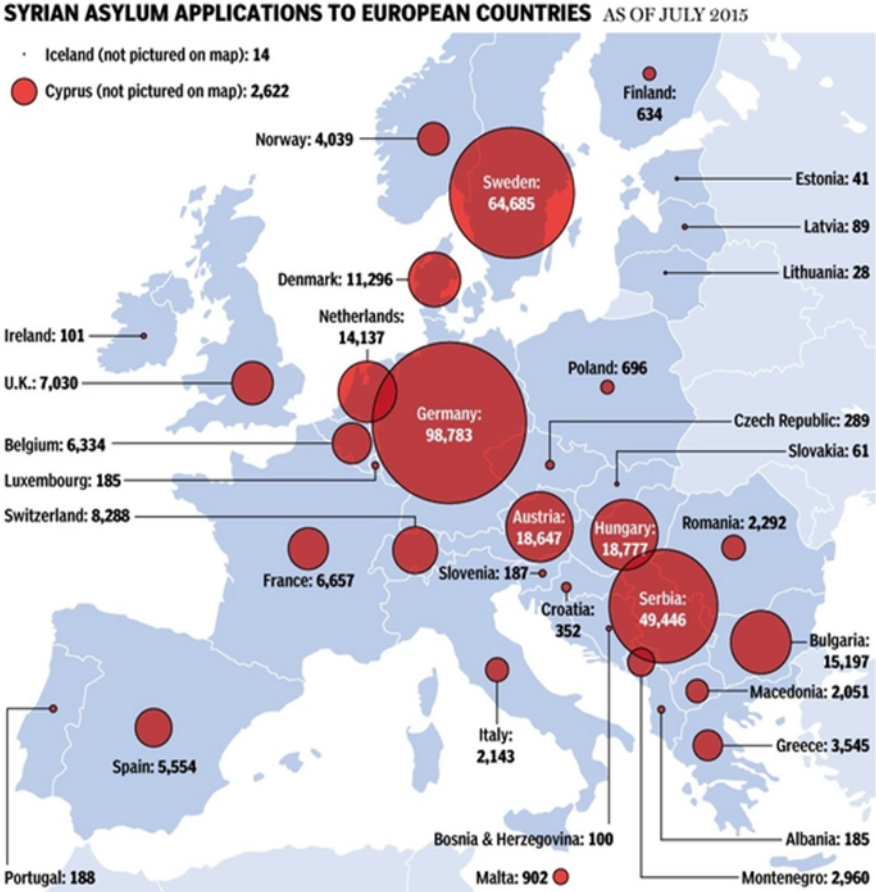


FIGURE 4 SYRIAN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS TO EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Germany is a leading case of some of the toughest challenges in the conflict as will later be discussed. As *Figure 4* shows, Germany received the most asylum applications in the EU. This is due to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her 'open-door' policy, welcoming as many refugees as possible. This was an opportunity

for Germany to lead a comparatively progressive R2P campaign and replenish a diminishing labor force. Migrants, frustrated with their lack of economic, social, and cultural opportunity too often resort to crime to make themselves heard. In turn, Many Europeans fight back as they feel their way of life is being threatened.

## **Variables of the Conflict**

The conflict, although turning violent in several instances, is consensual. This means that both refugees and Europeans want peaceful integration. Dissent only occurs in cases when the physical and ontological security of individuals becomes threatened. This leads to polarization of both European and migrant identities which is in turn amplified by the state and media sources. Efforts by the EU have followed a reactionary model for reduction in such tensions. This is evident in the meetings of the European Council that have sought to provide immediate solutions to escalation instead of looking into the root causes of individual frustrations.

For Europeans, this is a challenge of the Neoliberalism practice at every level of analysis; individual, state, and system. Globalization has forged the EU and its role in international society, resulting in its responsibility to provide human rights advocacy for internationally displaced peoples. For states, participating in intergovernmentalism through the EU essentially ties their state responsibility and expectations to that of the system. For individuals, the democratic institutions in which people make their political voices heard are very important to this conflict. The emergence of protests, new legislation and the forming of political parties demonstrates the values of European citizens are not universal with each other. For governments, this makes finding a cure-all solution nearly impossible.

## **The Early Stages**

In the wake of the Arab Spring and other international conflict before 2015, Hundreds of refugee boats sank went missing on their way to Europe from Turkey and the surrounding area (See *Figure 2*). Human security for thousands became threatened as refugees risked their family's lives to escape war, drought, and other catastrophes. The European Council was driven to assemble and tripled the funding for rescue operations while also deploying immigration officers to non-EU states of refugee migration. Another meeting enacted a

quota scheme which forced EU Member States to receive pre-determined amounts of refugees to distribute the flow of incoming populations based on state capacities. This systemic change started the political tension between states. Countries with large numbers of asylum applications like Italy, Malta and Germany supported the proposal. Others like Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Estonia opposed it.

A later meeting of the European Council relocated 40,000 migrants from Italy and Greece to other Member States and the EU received another 20,000 outside refugees. They also temporarily removed the mandatory quota scheme. Meanwhile, a strike by ferry workers caused major traffic jams in Calais, France. Hundreds of migrants camped nearby exploited the situation by trying to break into lorries bound for Britain. This led to clashes with police, who used batons and pepper spray to hold back the migrants. Some lorry drivers were threatened by migrants wielding knives and iron bars. Officials forced closure of the ferry port and Channel Tunnel. This ushered in the beginning of a series of political border conflicts between states.

The UK, Hungary, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Spain, Ukraine, and Estonia pursued varying methods of physical border barriers as pictured in *Figures 2 & 3* over the course of a few months. Thousands of migrants became frustrated while stuck in border regions and some rioted. In several cases, police forces responded with violence and coercion on migrants. Some states declare a state of emergency. Euroscepticism rose out of a dissatisfaction of how the EU is handled the situation.

## **Open Arms and Higher Walls**

German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, announced that there were "no limits on the number of asylum seekers" Germany will take in. This welcoming change gave hope for many refugees and provided a progressive example of leadership to the rest of the EU, although it became a basis for future conflict and civil unrest. Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations in support of refugees and migrants in several European cities. Thousands

also took part in demonstrations against mass immigration in Warsaw, Prague, and Bratislava. This is the first sign of an identity crisis throughout the EU. Some struggle to find balance between national security concerns, national identity/pride, and the introduction of foreign culture.

The November 2015 Paris terror attacks perpetrated by terrorists entering Europe with migrants killed 130 civilians. Stances on migrants and the vetting process became strict as a result. New limits and border checks throughout the EU begin to fall into system-wide practice, while many citizens take a stronger stance in Euroscepticism.

At the start of 2016-New Year's Eve sexual assaults occurred in Germany's larger cities. Rape, sexual assault, and other crime committed by majority migrant backgrounds are increasingly reported. A new distrust and social polarizing between Germany and migrants occur and deportation laws are evaluated. This leads to the popularization of a nationalist anti-immigration party. Hostilities between Europeans and immigrants erupt in direct conflict across the EU. Stabbings, gunfights, assaults, and seizing of refugee valuables by several states further fuel right-wing extremism and refugee frustrations.

## **Tension Abroad and Persisting Issues**

In early 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, frustrated over insufficient funding, threatened to send millions of refugees from Turkey to the EU. NATO agreed to send a patrol of three ships to aid Turkish refugee transport. NATO's Supreme Commander in Europe claimed that Russia and the Assad regime in Syria were using mass migration as an "aggressive strategy against Europe". The March 2016 EU-Turkey Deal traded irregular migration of Syrian refugees with refugees already in Europe. This improved relations slightly but also challenged Geneva Convention refugee commitments (R2P). Actions like this from the EU are seen to be controversial to the peacebuilding process.

Strict immigration limits and border protests were popularized across the EU from February-April 2016. Many countries that originally opposed the quota scheme had now



entirely restricted refugee access altogether. In June, the UK's BREXIT Referendum passed with a popular vote of 52% in favor of leaving the EU. A significant portion of "leave voters" were attributed to EU immigration policy and English nationalism, a hard blow to the EU system stability and their efforts.

From 2017-2018, tensions continued with Turkey and anti-immigration political parties in Europe. Erdoğan threatened to send the EU 15,000 immigrants each month until the issue was resolved. The Alternative for Germany AfD party and the Fidesz party in Hungary became more popular than ever. An Italian populist movement also rejected foreign naval porting on its coast. During this period, Germany passed legislation to reunite refugee families, allowing 1000 family members to enter. This individual centered policy likely initiated a healing process for many frustrated refugees in Germany. In 2019, the EU recorded its lowest migrant arrival statistics in 5 years. Crime and the lack of refugee opportunities persist as of 2020. Many are living in camps or ghettos without adequate standards of living and minimal civil resources. Right-wing Extremism also persists in Germany with recent protests over the COVID-19 virus and anti-immigration rhetoric, wielding imperial German flags and attempting to storm the Bundestag federal parliament building in August 2020.

## **Media**

What initially started as a systemic struggle in a commitment to protect internationally displaced people and hold member state relations together, developed into an identity crisis for Europeans and a struggle for refugees to assimilate into their new homes. This shift leaves an unresolved and reoccurring dispute over nationalism and refugee economic, social, and cultural rights.

State media has a direct correlation with public perception of refugees. As seen in *Figure 5*, dissatisfaction with EU immigration policy is related to media coverage of asylum applications, with the outlying spike most likely caused by the New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Germany. Rather than framing the conflict from the perspective of the frustrated refugees that struggle to survive in foreign territory, Europeans see a threat to their existence and their national identities. The media and state narrative do not promote shared society in most cases.

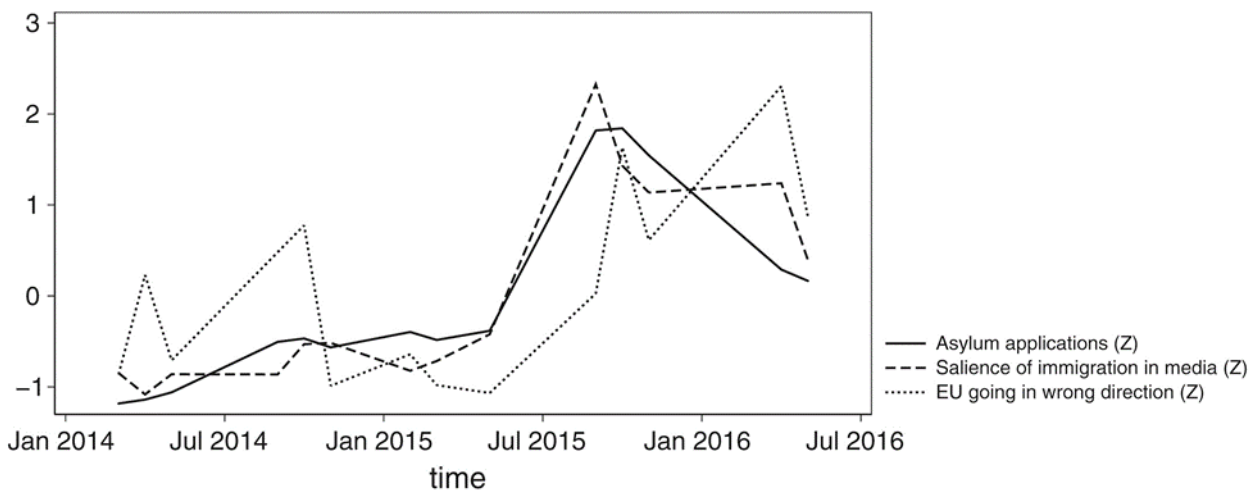


FIGURE 5 EU CITIZEN VS. ASYLUM APPLICATIONS & MEDIA SALIENCE (HARTEVELD, SCHAPER, DE LANGE, AND VAN DER BRUG, 2018)

## Conclusion

Like individuals within their respective states, governments value security. State governments will also respect the voices of the people if those interests align with the interests of the state. In most cases within the EU, these interests correlate. Constructive settlement is plausible with the correct actions of state leadership. Although the range of issues have largely cemented into the system, a restorative model at the current stage of the conflict is necessary in further de-escalating tensions between Europeans and refugees for the long-term peacebuilding goal. Instead of attempting to prevent violence in the conflict, the EU and state leadership must restore the relationship between migrants and Europeans through common understanding and a shared society approach. Through

shared society, European governments will value more than just the individual rights of migrants. They will develop relationships that prioritize community, citizenship, and complete cultural assimilation while further integrating migrants into European society.

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