

## SCTMG 2020

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

## SYRIAN REFUGEES IN EUROPE

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### *Abstract*

In this article, the author tries to determine the social and economic context of Syrian refugees accommodation in the European Union countries. Based on statistics and social surveys, the author concludes that the inflow of refugees insignificantly impacted the rate of unemployment or the wage level in host countries. At the same time, most Syrian refugees are young males who compete for jobs with workers of the same age and education, as a rule. In this case, the influence of Syrians on the employment of low-qualified young people in some economic sectors is significant. Let us remember that the situation in Syria has changed a lot for the last year. Significant forces of Islamists were defeated by the government army in the Syrian desert and pro-USA forces have finished the destruction of the IS together with its numerous supporters and the Syrian infrastructure on the right bank of the Euphrates. However, the situation is still turbulent. The “sleeping cells” of the terrorists disturb both government and Kurdish force, but there is nobody in this land anymore who would enforce Islamic laws, cut heads for rock-music, fight every day or kill the entire nations. Against this background, the number of refugees returning to Syria from adjacent countries is growing. more than a thousand refugees have returned to Syria in 24 hours. It is not surprising that knowing this the German Federal Ministry of Interior began wandering if Syria is really dangerous for those who seek asylum in Europe.

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**Keywords:** Syrians, refugees integration, unemployment, European Union, Germany, Sweden.



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## **1. Introduction**

The migration crisis or the crisis of refugees in Europe has led to the securitization of migration and forced to treat the problem of migration mainly in the context of security (Kravchenko, 2016).

Meanwhile, as the acute phase of the crisis has finished and the inflow of migrants becomes weaker, the social and economic consequences of this situation, both current and long-term, are coming to the fore in the EU countries.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The article will analyze the situation with Syrian refugees in Europe.

## **3. Research Questions**

The article tries to find out what the situation with Syrian refugees in Europe is as well as the consequences of this situation. The research also tries to evaluate the economic situation.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to consider the importance of the situation with Syrian refugees for Europe.

## **5. Research Methods**

The research will rely on the analysis and synthesis of information on the designated topic.

## **6. Findings**

The peak of the migration crisis in Europe and the EU was in 2015. In the same year, the vector of relationships between Russian and Europe also took a particular direction. First, this was about a possible end to the EU. In addition, doubts arose about multiculturalism policy and the risks to European society stability and national security appeared. Moreover, the military assistance to Syria from Russia has questioned the order in the global community.

In 2014 more than half a million refugees migrated to Europe, while the next year this number was more than a million people (Akopyan & Kozhina, 2016).

Of all the immigrants, 35 % headed to Germany. The key component in the composition of migrants belongs to Syrians (29 %). Refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq account for 14 and 10 % respectively.

As it was stated by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, the receipt of applications for subsidiary protection was suspended until new instructions on their consideration. This will require the evaluation of the situation in Syria by the Ministry. As Funke Media Group was informed by organizations that help refugees in Germany, the applications for asylum, submitted for the last weeks by Syrian refugees, will be rejected, as the German Federal Ministry of the Interior doesn't consider Syria as a military conflict zone.

However, the representatives of the Ministry said that the final decision on migrants hadn't been made so far.

Let us remember that the situation in Syria has changed a lot for the last year. The terrorist Islamic State (prohibited in Russia) has lost all its territory in Syria and Iraq. Significant forces of Islamists were defeated by the government army in the Syrian desert and pro-USA forces have finished the destruction of the IS together with its numerous supporters and the Syrian infrastructure on the right bank of the Euphrates. However, the situation is still turbulent. The "sleeping cells" of the IS disturb both government and Kurdish force, but there is nobody in this land anymore who would enforce Islamic laws, cut heads for rock-music, fight every day or kill the entire nations (Barslund et al., 2018).

The only large center of terrorist actions remained in Syria is Idlib, where there is the largest concentration of opposition militants from other districts, such as Eastern Ghuta, Darra, and Aleppo, who don't want to lay their arms. Idlib, controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra, a terrorist organization prohibited in Russia, remains a serious problem. However, in the rest of Syria, the restoration processes are on the full way with temporary accommodation zones being built for those who lost their homes. Damascus has agreed to give an additional period of amnesty for military service evaders. Against this background, the number of refugees returning to Syria from adjacent countries is growing. According to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, more than a thousand refugees have returned to Syria in 24 hours. It is not surprising that knowing this the German Federal Ministry of Interior began wondering if Syria is really dangerous for those who seek asylum in Europe (Borjas & Monras, 2017).

Damascus welcomes the return of each of more than 6.6 million refugees who fled during the war. Every working hand will count towards the restoration of state and every child is important to form a new young generation of Syrians that will have to recover their country from ashes of the civil war in the decades to come.

Let us note that despite the growth of tension in Europe, the percentage of approved applications to acquire the status of emigrants for Syrians is almost equal to 100 %. This makes the levels of unrest and economic instability remain high, while the degree of distrust by Europeans to political leaders increases.

The impulse of refugee's flow was in 2015. Even before Russia started its military action in Syria, this flow was larger than 100 thousand people. This number declined after one month of Russian operation already. The increase in the number of refugees fleeing to Europe during the second month of operation was due to migrants from Afghanistan which wasn't connected with Russian activities in Syria. However, the highest level of Syrian migrants' inflow was in August and September when several media reported on military help of Russia to Syria with a view of supporting the regime of Bashar Assad.

It's worth noting that there are several routes that refugees choose. For example, Syrian and Afghanistan refugees usually move to Greece and Hungary via Turkey. This explains the involvement of the Turkish government in solving this problem. Besides, people from the African continent and Syria prefer to migrate via Italy and Spain. Those who received rejection in other countries of Europe go to Hungary (Konle-Seidl, 2018).

Refugees choose European countries because of social benefits, such as cash benefits, permits for work and accommodation, food distribution, housing subsidies, free medical insurance.

### **Economic expenditures on refugees**

In 2014 the number of displaced persons in the world reached 59.5 million people, which is 8.3 million higher than in 2013. This data are from the Global Trends report published in Geneva by UNHCR

As experts say, there has never been such a high rate of growth in the number of people leaving their homes due to military conflicts, retaliation, and natural disasters.

In 2014, 42.5 thousand people were fleeing their homes on average every day. They became either refugees, internally displaced persons, or asylum seekers.

Currently, one in 122 persons on our planet belongs to one such group. In 2013 there were 51.2 million displaced persons in the world. Ten years ago, this number was 37.5 million.

By the end of 2014, there were 19.5 million registered refugees (16.7 million in 2013), 38.2 million displaced persons (33.3 million in 2013), and 1.8 million people awaiting decisions on their asylum applications (1.2 million in 2013) in the world.

As Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, stated after the publication of the report, the world is entering a new era where the scope of global displacement of population eclipses everything that has been seen before. Those who inflict conflicts enjoy impunity more and more often, while the international community demonstrates the lack of ability to work together to stop wars, he said.

At least 15 conflicts arouse or started again in the last five years: eight in Africa (Libya, north-east of Nigeria, South Sudan, Burundi), three in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen), one in Europe (Ukraine) and in Kyrgyzstan, as well as some regions of Myanmar and Pakistan.

In 2014 the number of refugees and displaced people has grown in all the regions of the planet (Gasnov, 2016).

In Europe, the number of refugees grew by 51 % (from 4.4 to 6.7 million people).

In the region of the Middle East and North Africa, the number of refugees and displaced persons increased by 19 %. Now, this region takes first place in the world in terms of refugees coming and fleeing.

In Asia, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has increased in the last year by 31 % up to 9 million people. However, Afghanistan that occupied the first place in terms of the number of people leaving the country, gave way to Syria in 2014.

In sub-Saharan countries, the number of displaced persons increased by 17 %.

The reason is multiple conflicts in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR highlights that this data doesn't include Nigeria as the calculation methodology for internally displaced persons has changed, which has led to inconsistencies in the data. By the end of 2014, there were 3.7 million registered refugees and 11.4 million internally displaced persons in these countries.

In the countries of America, the number of people who left their homes has increased by 12 % for the last year. The number of refugees from Columbia has decreased to 360 thousand people. However, this country remains one of the leaders in terms of the number of internally displaced people (about 6 million).

The highest number of refugees (3.88 million) in 2014 was due to the conflict in Syria. The second place is occupied by the conflict in Afghanistan (2.59 million) and the third place belongs to Somalia (1.11 million). Among the countries that accept refugees the first place belongs to Turkey (1.59 million). In the last year, the first five countries also included Pakistan (1.5 million), Libya (1.15 million), Iran (982 thousand), and Ethiopia (659.5 thousand).

According to the IMF, the expenditures on refugees in the European countries accounted for 1 % of the national income in Great Britain, Spain, and Cyprus in 2016. Though IMF predicts the growth of the EU economy due to the cheap labor force (refugees) but these predictions are improbable because of low qualifications and bad knowledge of European languages paired with the desire of refugees to receive benefits, rather than work. That's why currently this crisis in Europe is associated with losses and attempts to cover them. For example, the German finance minister offered to introduce a complementary tax on the gas all over Europe. This will impact not only refugees but local people (Kravchenko, 2016).

The attractiveness of European countries is also explained by the lack of internal border controls in the EU according to the Schengen Agreement. This gave an opportunity to move all over the EU after entering any European country. Also, according to the Dublin Agreement, the major part of the responsibility for refugees belong to those countries where these refugees entered the EU (Italy, Greece, Hungary).

These events were exactly the reasons for the crisis as there was no unanimity among the EU member-states in terms of accommodating migrants which led to excessive load on migration services of some countries.

Moreover, the European countries weren't ready for such a number of refugees economically. For example, refugees could use tents in the Middle East countries due to the mild climate. However, in European countries, they can live only in heated premises.

Also, the migration process already went out of control and became chaotic. In the previous years, the leader of Libya Muammar Qaddafi restricted this flow and refugees remained in the country that is favorable to live. Nowadays, nobody deals with this problem.

There are also external factors that impact this crisis. These include the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan and the excessive numbers of migrants in the Middle East which led to cutting the amount of money allocated for helping refugees.

We should also note some negative effects of the migration crisis, such as the division of Europe and Brexit.

The important thing is that Europe divided into countries that advocate for accepting refugees and countries that communicate anti-immigrant attitudes. That said, the countries of East Europe blame the Western European countries for the situation as the latter take part in the military operation in Syria.

The adoption of the EU plan to accommodate more than 100 thousand migrants in 2015 resulted in an increase of resentment in the Eastern European countries. Slovakia and Hungary addressed the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg in an attempt to contest the decision on refugee accommodation (Ternovaya, 2016).

The EU countries started to introduce strict conditions to push back migrants. For example, Austria decided to accept no more than 80 applications for asylum a day. In Denmark, the government

accepted the laws which give police the right to search refugees and withdraw money and valuables worth over 1,500 dollars. De jure, these valuables and money should cover the expenses on holding migrants. In Denmark, those refugees that obtained asylum are not allowed to bring their families to the country for the next three years. Germany introduced restrictions for the accommodation of refugees by introducing the requirement to finish professional training courses for all young refugees.

All this indicates that European countries implement a policy that meets their state interests. However, they are not ready to elaborate on a joint solution to overcome this crisis according to the German model but prefer to implement limiting measures.

The crisis also brought about the increase in terrorist risks, as people in European countries think that terrorists and recruiters enter the EU disguised as immigrants. According to the European Police Office, several thousand jihadists trained in terrorist camps may live in Europe. There is also an opinion that several individuals responsible for terrorist attacks in Paris returned to Europe disguised as migrants. This stimulates fears and negative attitudes towards real emigrants.

Moreover, the migration crisis led to a lack of social security in Europe. Migrants are accused of crimes against women, robberies, and assaults of older people.

We should also note the growth of opposing forces in society. They advocate for the interests of European citizens, infringed by migration policies. For example, the non-profit organization Soldiers of Odin, which became known in Estonia, protected the rights of citizens and some social strata. Such activities aimed at controlling illegal actions in some settlements originated in Finland after several cases of violence by emigrants towards European women (Medushevsky, 2017; Ternovaya, 2016).

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front party in France, declared that the German migration policy aims to lower the cost of labor by attracting refugees. The crisis mostly affects its initiators. The party of Angela Merkel lost in two out of three federal lands during regional elections in March. The elections were won by the party advocating for restrictions on migration. Besides, more Europeans become unhappy with migration policies. This, for example, resulted in burning houses for refugee accommodation. All this decreases the popularity of the government and may lead to changes in the political landscape of Europe.

Another effect of the crisis is the transformation of European identity as European programs don't provide for adaptation or integration of emigrants.

Milos Zeman, the president of the Czech Republic, stated that integration is possible only in the case of similar cultures. In Europe, it is commonly perceived that Christian and Muslim worlds can't coexist. Moreover, there are talks about the necessity to establish an agreement in the Middle East countries where there are a lot of religious conflicts.

Despite advocating strongly for human rights, Europe implemented the following actions towards migrants (Akopyan & Kozhina, 2016).

1. Created a security fence, i.e. border control after the terrorist acts in Paris.
2. Destroyed the camps of refugees that made them flee to Greece from France.
3. Involved NATO to find ways to overcome the crisis.

4. Made agreement with Turkey to restrict the inflow of refugees in this country). This agreement provoked debates in the EU. Some politicians think that Turkey supports ISIS. Italy called this agreement a suicide while Britain said that it wouldn't establish a visa-free regime for Turkey.

5. In 2016 the European committee created an action plan to save the Schengen zone. According to this plan, Greece will improve control means on the external border of the Schengen zone while other countries won't let emigrants pass to other member-states via their territories.

As for the Russian Federation, this country is not attractive due to insignificant social benefits. The emigrants from the Middle East don't stay in our country and try to enter the EU.

According to the Federal Migration Service, the number of Syrians that use Russia as a transit state increased since 2015. This resulted in closing the border and establishing the border between Norway and Russia.

It is interesting to note that in 2015 our country refused to give refugee status to 337 Syrians while 15 Afghan received this status.

Also, the economic instability in Russia transforms our country into the source of refugees for the European countries and not into the receiver of them.

The situation negatively influenced the image of our country abroad. The government of Europe and Turkey blamed Russia that it provoked the wave of immigrants due to its military operation in Syria.

The NATO Supreme Commander in Europe accused the Russian Federation in creating panic among Syrians and, as a consequence, their flight from the country.

The European migration crisis is a clear example of flaws in the system. The Gold Billion project aimed at restricting the wave of emigrants near the borders of conflict zones. One of the responsibilities of UNHCR was to provide financial aid in developing countries. Different countries gave money to maintain refugee camps. On the other hand, holding people in cramps became unacceptable which resulted in unauthorized migration flows provoking the migration crisis.

Europeans were convinced that the Schengen zone has a place for everybody and increased the quote of accepted emigrants. This led to the collision between citizens from prosperous European states with their values and poverty, natural anarchy aimed at survival, which happened in the European territory. In Europe, these opposing worlds have no tolerance for each other.

It's worth noting that the situation with migration in Europe may decrease the geopolitical influence of the EU due to disagreement in the European society and make the situation in economic in social security spheres more difficult. That's why this crisis should become a lesson for the rest of the global society showing that state interests are the key interests for any country, while rights and duties under international treaties take second place (Akopyan & Kozhina, 2016).

Russia should understand that government interests rather than the interests of oligarchs and the opinion of the rest of the world, including European countries, must become a priority. The immigration crisis has had a small impact on Russia so far. However, the country may be asked to accept refugees in the future, especially when the EU named the interaction with Russia in terms of migration and counterterrorism as one of the five guiding principles in relationships with the country.

Sociological surveys indicate that the increase in the number of refugees from Syria made the citizens of member-states feel the risk of losing their jobs and become victims of terrorist attacks. The majority of respondents in Greece and Italy, for example, claimed that their own countries will turn into the worst living places if more representatives of other races, ethnic groups, and nationalities will live here. Most respondents in Germany, Greece, Italy, and Great Britain agreed that the inflow of refugees will increase the possibility of terrorist attacks in their countries (Akopyan & Kozhina, 2016).

Turkey was affected by the crisis even worse as most Syrians in Turkish cities have to live in slums, which increases isolation and the existing social gap between refugees and local people. A negative attitude towards Syrians is growing with the spread of districts with precarious and temporary housing, while the government has to find ways to provide workplaces, infrastructure, transport, schools, safety and other social benefits to refugees.

Syrians as the first wave immigrants in Europe have to overcome a lot of difficulties in searching for a job, including bad knowledge of language and difficulties in the recognition of qualification. Nationality, religion and social position also become barriers on the way to integration on the labor market, for example in Greece and Italy. Criteria, established by receiving countries to obtain work, also decrease the opportunities for employment. For example, in Germany employers pay attention to the will of an immigrant to follow the local way of life. In Great Britain, the major requirement is the knowledge of the English language.

According to the research of German IAB-BAMF-SOEP centers, low-qualified men and women between 18- and 34-years old account for 55 % of newly arrived refugees of the working-age (18–64 years old). The biggest group of refugees include young low-qualified males between 18 and 34 years old, the number of which accounts for 30 % of all the refugees arrived in 2014–2018. The OECD statistics show the same employment structure of Syrian refugees exists in other European countries. For example, in Sweden low-qualified young people account for 26 % of all Syrians who have recently acquired the status of a refugee.

Thus, largely one population group in European countries experience shock from the influx of immigrants: between 2014 and 2017 the number of low-qualified young people in Sweden who were protected internationally reached 20 % of all employed people of the same age, sex, and education. The same data in Germany is a bit lower and equals to 12 %.

The low level of unemployment among young low-qualified works can be seen in all countries of the EU. In 2017 the level of unemployment in this group was 18.9 %, while the number of working-age people (15–64 years old) in general was lower in all countries (7.8 %).

Even in Germany where the rate of unemployment is 3.8 %, the share of unemployed people among low-qualified youth was 13.1 %. There is also an apparent gender segmentation in the labor market among low-qualified young people. In such sectors as manufacturing, construction, and transport with more than 70 % of jobs taken by men, there are 50 % of low-qualified young men in Germany and about 40 % in Sweden.

If we consider age and job experience segmentation, we can see that the competition for workplaces among low-qualified young people increases because of the influx of refugees. Thus, this demographic group experiences significant pressure from migrants entering national labor markets.



## 7. Conclusion

To solve the refugee crisis, host countries have to solve a very challenging problem, i.e. provide refugees with employment under minimum negative consequences for local citizens.

The social integration of Syrians supposes their employment within the formal sector of the economy. Otherwise, they can't count on a decent wage and social benefits.

At the same time, the entrance of refugees to the labor markets of host countries can increase the level of unemployment and decrease the income of local citizens, which will undoubtedly enhance negative attitudes towards migrants. When creating integration programs, one has to account for these conflicting goals, considering social, economic and demographic indicators on regional, local, and municipal levels.

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