

Ukrainian Refugee Crisis under the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Influences, Reflections and Suggestions on Europe

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in March 2022, more and more Ukrainian refugees have left their homes and flocked to other countries. Because Europe is geographically adjacent to Ukraine, it has become the first choice for most refugees. This paper will present the current social background of the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Europe and comprehensively analyze European countries' positive attitudes toward welcoming and accepting Ukrainian refugees and the series of significant changes due to challenges such as the occupation of employment opportunities in asylum countries. The paper also analyzes the process and reasons for the transition from solid support to reducing refugee policies' financial and social welfare in asylum countries. Finally, some suggestions are provided for creating a "lifeline" to protect refugees with different needs and promoting political negotiations between Russia and Ukraine from two aspects: humanitarian assistance and political means to ease conflict.

Keywords: Ukrainian refugee crisis, Russia-Ukraine conflict, humanitarian help, geopolitics

1. Introduction

Major regional war conflicts - Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, the war has caused incalculable damage to the economic development, people's livelihood and infrastructure in Ukraine. Affected by the continuous expansion of the war, more and more refugees have fled overseas. According to statistics from the United Nations Refugee Agency, from February 24, 2022 to April 17, about 5 million refugees have fled Ukraine; by the end of 2022, Ukraine Refugees have risen to 10 million [1]. In humanitarian aid and affected by geopolitics, Ukrainian refugees mainly go to Central and Western Europe to seek aid and asylum. With the influx of more and more refugees, European countries are affected by their own national conditions, and their policies on Ukrainian refugees have gradually undergone phased changes. This paper will focus on the analysis of some Central and Western European countries affected by the refugee crisis and the refugee policy. Changes, and put forward some thoughts and suggestions for the follow-up mitigation of the refugee crisis.

2. Going to Europe—Refugee Migration under the Influence of Geographical Factors

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict broke out in March 2022, triggering the most significant refugee influx since World War II. The migration paths of refugees can be roughly divided into three

categories: one is geographically seeking refuge in Central European countries (such as Poland and Hungary) with Ukrainian relatives; the other is going to Western Europe and other countries to seek a living; the third is already abroad but seeks to return home. These three categories of refugees create a significant burden on European countries.

2.1. Reasons for Taking Ukrainian Refugees

Central European countries act as transit points and asylum seekers here, as most refugees leave Ukraine through neighboring countries on Ukraine's western border. As of 17 August 2022, Poland recorded more than 1.2 million Ukrainian refugees (UNHCR 2022b). Other neighboring countries also recorded large numbers of refugees: Moldova (89+ thousand), Slovakia (87+ thousand), Romania (84+ thousand) and Hungary (28+ thousand) [2].

In the early period of the war, Central European countries' accommodation policies for Ukrainian refugees were full of racism and religious identity. Taking Hungary as an example, Prime Minister Viktor Orban proposed to regard the wave of immigrants from outside Europe as "part of the great European population replacement plan" and "regard Ukrainian people as basic human beings", which is "Christian instinct" [3]. It is not difficult to see from these slogans that a large part of Hungary actively provides humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees because of the identity of Ukrainian refugees as "European white Christians", which aligns with the Hungarian people's preference for foreign immigration. The Ukrainian refugee's relatively high level of knowledge and quality also aligns with government preferences. With the support of both parties' preferences and the spontaneous humanitarian assistance of the Hungarian people, the Hungarian government's attitude towards Ukrainian refugees is generally favorable.

Coincidentally, the attitudes of some European countries towards refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and Ukraine are pretty different. Taking Poland as an example, it has shown intense discrimination against African and Middle Eastern refugees and a deformed identity in practical actions. For example, African refugees on the border between Belarus and Poland were forcibly deported by Polish border guards with tear bombs and water cannons [4]. As refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria tried to cross into the forests on the Belarusian border, Poland built barbed wire and fencing along the border. The United Kingdom, as a Western European country, resists refugees at the policy level: In dealing with the refugee issue, the British government proposed the "Rwanda Plan", which plans to send illegal immigrants to Rwanda, Africa [5]. These differentiated practices have also planted new roots and barriers for European countries to deal with the refugee issue.

With the increasingly long-term trend of the Russia-Ukraine conflict since the second half of 2022, based on the inherent prejudice against refugees, as well as the food crisis, energy crisis, and a series of other problems that have broken out since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, European countries have gradually weakened their assistance to Ukrainian refugees with identity preferences: Poland received Ukrainian refugees 24 hours from the beginning, and opened relief centers in surrounding villages to distribute materials to refugees, Polls since August 2023 show that: "The proportion of Poles who think Ukrainian refugees need help has dropped from 84% to 50% [6]." European countries initially based on geographical convenience and blind humanitarian assistance are gradually weakened in the current war environment where the Russia-Ukraine conflict is becoming increasingly intense.

2.2. More Challenged European Economy

Since the outbreak of the new crown pneumonia in 2020, the economies of European countries have faced downward solid pressure. The outbreak of the Russia-Uzbekistan conflict directly led to the shortage of energy and food supplies in Europe, rising prices, inflation, and increased production and

living costs of residents. These series of objective factors have seriously affected the lives of residents in asylum countries. Take Germany as an example: Before the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the average electricity price on February 23 was 99.4 euros/MWh. As of August 31, the German electricity price had risen to 595.6 euros/MWh. However, it remained above 380 EUR/MWh. At the same time, consumer spending fell from a year-on-year increase of 8.5% in the first quarter of 2022 to 5.8% in the second quarter [7]. Therefore, the energy crisis caused by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict directly weakens the purchasing power of German residents to a large extent, affects consumer spending, and ultimately affects the development of the domestic economy.

Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as more and more refugees from eastern and southern Ukraine have poured into European countries, many of them have an influx of high-quality young labor, which brings relatively cheap labor costs and hurts the original labor market in the country of asylum. In addition, under the turbulent environment of the global labor market, the European labor market will inevitably encounter challenges: the real wages of workers will decline, inequality will increase, and policy choices will decrease, which will lead to high unemployment in the country and indirectly affect the employment of refugees. Take Germany as an example. Since the 1990s, Germany has maintained a prosperous job market with low wages. After taking in Ukrainian refugees, the number of unemployed people in Germany will be about 2.497 million in August 2022, an increase of 28,000 from the previous month. Rose to 5.5% [8], so poll respondents supported introducing a policy prohibiting the employment of refugees to alleviate the employment crisis.

In summary, while European countries are sheltering Ukrainian refugees, the new labor force entering the market will have a massive impact on the existing labor market and economic environment, significantly affecting the quality of domestic livelihoods.

2.3. Asylum Countries' Economic Burden

With the influx of massive refugees, European governments must provide many asylums and a series of asylum policies to accommodate refugees. However, due to the influence of geography and government preferences, it is difficult to guarantee the living conditions of refugees. At the same time, the asylum country's fiscal expenditure has continued to increase. The following arguments will take Poland (representing Central European countries), France (representing refugee hosts in Western European countries), and the United Kingdom (representing refugee-sending parties in Western European countries) as examples to discuss.

As a neighboring border country and a vital refugee transit hub, Poland has provided maximum support in the face of a massive influx of refugees: simplified entry procedures, extended asylum duration, opened a website for Ukrainian refugees seeking help and introduced a particular bill to provide housing and meal cash assistance to Ukrainian refugees and measures such as extending the age for refugees to apply for financial assistance, but humanitarian assistance often brings huge costs: as of the nine months since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Poland has used About PLN 4.1 billion have been spent on aid funds for Ukrainian refugees [9]. In this regard, the Polish government had to reduce the subsidies for refugees to apply for subsidies to ease the economic downturn. This is only to satisfy some of the refugees who signed up for Poland, and the Polish government also spent huge expenditures to meet the food and accommodation needs of transit refugees.

France spent 579 million euros in 2022 to resettle refugees. However, the vast financial allocation was ultimately paid for by domestic consumption: severe inflation caused the consumer price index to soar by 5.2% [10], and the government had to reduce the high Welfare to tilt fiscal spending towards refugees. At the same time, due to the influence of geography, the Ukrainian refugees with temporary visas in France cannot go to their relatives and friends like the Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

This also leads to the inability to solve the material conditions, medical education, and other issues of refugees in remote areas on time.

On the other hand, in the UK, since the end of the refugee quota, the Johnson government has shown the so-called “We cannot ask the British taxpayer to pay for everyone who wants to live in the UK” [5], slowly issuing visas to accept people with Compared with the smallest number of refugees (compare with other EU countries). England is also facing a series of problems of financial expenditure on refugees. They plan to repatriate refugees in August 2023 to reduce the financial burden.

To sum up, European countries have always adhered to the humanitarian creed as the basic principle of asylum since the beginning of the war, but in the subsequent process of integrating refugees into social life, they faced a series of housing, medical care, education, and food for refugees. A series of material security issues have had a significant impact on the finances of European asylum countries, which has also led to a series of outbreaks of subsequent refugee problems.

3. Regional Peace and Refugee Security: Reflections and Suggestions on European Countries

Since the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees have tremendously impacted European countries. Looking at the war between Russia and Ukraine, there is no sign of peace, and the scale of the war is further escalating. If European countries still maintain that they have only provided humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the war, it will undoubtedly threaten the entire refugee crisis. Therefore, the author suggests that European countries can leverage their own geographical advantages and international discourse power to promote bilateral dialogue between Russia and Ukraine through political means while implementing humanitarian assistance to slow down the expansion of the war and alleviate the refugee crisis at the source of refugees.

3.1. A New Phase in Humanitarian Aid to Refugees—Personalized Triage for Effective Assistance

At present, most European countries show a unified assistance method in the refugee asylum process: providing temporary asylum, providing transportation assistance, guaranteeing material conditions, providing medical education, and providing employment. These five core measures can quickly admit refugees, but in the long run, they will not be able to meet the needs of refugees and increase the domestic economic burden. In this regard, the author suggests that European countries can classify the destinations of refugees to give help.

3.1.1. Western European Country: Accurately Identify and Break Down Language Barriers

When facing refugees whose destination is their Western European country, the country of asylum can provide consistent humanitarian assistance while simplifying entry procedures and solving the problem of long-term residence for refugees. In this regard, the government can accelerate the precise identification of individual “portraits” of refugees, that is, confirm their age, education, work experience, skills, etc., and then integrate them into the social employment system to create value and live independently, thereby reducing excessive financial bias towards refugees, better playing the role of refugees, and promoting the development of the country’s economy.

The most critical issue in the employment system is the issue of cultural and language barriers. Taking Denmark as an example, data surveys show that due to language barriers, the transition from a Danish-dominated language environment to a multilingual environment may challenge the social cohesion and inclusiveness of the group because Facebook’s translation efficiency is low, leading to

misunderstandings and possible conflict [11]. In this regard, voluntary organizations can regularly carry out cultural literacy in refugee sites. At the same time, European national software companies can accelerate the transformation of artificial intelligence achievements and develop more intelligent translation software to meet the cross-border communication needs of refugees.

3.1.2. Neighbor Country: Enhance Mental and Health Support

In the face of refugees transiting along the way, the asylum country can simplify the refugee identification procedures, reduce checkpoints so they can transfer to their destinations, and reduce travel expenses. When taking in residents who live in short-term or short-term transit, it is recommended that the government strengthen material guarantees, such as ensuring smooth water and electricity, food safety, strengthening the management of medical and health systems, and achieving timely epidemic prevention and treatment, etc.

In the process of temporary accommodation, it is worth paying attention to the psychological trauma of refugees during the migration process. In a psychological survey study of Ukrainian refugees stranded in Poland, depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder were observed in 73% of the respondents, while 66% showed psychological distress [12]. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the psychological problems of refugees on time. The medical delivery points along the way can be equipped with psychologists simultaneously to relieve the stress caused by the war in exile.

3.1.3. Back to Ukraine: Planning of the Armistice Line and Post-War Reconstruction

In the face of Ukrainian refugees eager to return home, European countries can rely on the strength of humanitarian organizations such as the International Red Cross to negotiate with Russia and Ukraine to draw a ceasefire route in the war zone to protect refugees from war on their way home attack. In addition, after the refugees return home, European countries can strengthen economic cooperation with Ukraine, set up resettlement sites for returning refugees, and speed up the reconstruction or expansion of education, medical care, people's livelihood, and other infrastructure in relevant areas to ensure the return of refugees.

3.2. Political Means to Promote Bilateral Peace Talks——Using Political Means to Attract the Dawn of Regional Peace

Bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine have taken a turn for the worse since the start of the Crimea conflict in 2014. The two sides had conflicts and frictions in the Donbas region, where the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are located. Since the regional referendum 2022, the contradictions between the two sides have intensified and led to large-scale armed conflicts. On the other hand, the reason behind its conflict is inseparable from the political threat to Russia that Ukraine wants to join NATO. Since the outbreak of the conflict, Ukraine has received a steady stream of military aid, as well as the expansion and upgrading of military weapons between Russia and Ukraine, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of refugees from the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine on the front lines of the war.

The author believes that war is the source of refugees, and the emergence of refugees can only be delayed if the two sides reach a phased ceasefire.

From the perspective of political negotiations, it is first suggested that European countries should reasonably respond to the impact of the division of military forces since NATO's eastward expansion, and while maintaining the multi-polarization of regional power, bring Eastern European countries into the system and build a European community with a shared future. Secondly, while emphasizing the protection of the right to life and health of the European people, the critical role of the United

Nations in promoting and protecting human rights as well as promoting and respecting peace to ease military conflicts and promote the Russian-Ukrainian dialogue to produce substantive results, which will benefit the interests of both sides. The aim of the truce is achieved to the extent that the damage is minimized. Thirdly, it is suggested to ease the sanctions, change the one-sided economic and trade sanctions against Russia since the conflict, gradually lift the ban on Russia's energy export and trade through negotiations, and solve the stranded problem of its food exports to protect better the quality of life of the people in the country and shelter refugees' life safety.

From the perspective of military assistance, the author suggests that European countries should no longer provide Ukraine with large-scale lethal weapons, whether for self-protection in the multi-polar world system or support against Russian aggression, and warns Ukraine cannot turn its territorial self-defense counterattack into a retaliatory military provocation against Russia. At the same time, it also warns that Russia's military operations against Ukraine will seriously endanger regional security and threaten vulnerable groups' lives. In doing so, one is to consider both parties' interests and reduce the current situation of the continuous expansion of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine; the other is to prevent the regional conflict from directly evolving into a direct war between the two countries. Only in this way can the conflict be weakened from the source, thereby reducing refugees.

4. Conclusion

As the regional conflict that produced the most significant number of refugees since World War II, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has had an extremely significant impact on Russia, Ukraine, and the whole Europe. Unlike the refugee wave since 2014, Europe's attitude and assistance to refugees have changed significantly after international events, such as the new crown epidemic and the energy and food crises under the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This paper first looks at the time point since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, from the asylum country's identity and preference for refugees to selective asylum to a series of impacts on local social resources and economic markets after refugees enter European countries. A series of inductive analyses were conducted on the plunder and impact of foreign countries and the local government's over-budget financial expenditures to meet the living needs of refugees. At the same time, they were also used as examples to illustrate why some countries' policies on refugees are sometimes good and sometimes bad. After summarizing the above reasons, in the second part of the paper, based on the two fundamental issues of the expansion of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and where the refugees should go, the author puts forward suggestions for European countries, explaining how to use them while maintaining the world's multi-polar system. Both political and humanitarian means to protect refugees and slow the conflict between Russia and Ukraine aim to achieve the ultimate goal of world peace.

The shortcomings of this study lie in the following three aspects. Firstly, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a significant impact on all aspects of the life of refugees, while this paper selects examples of refugee life in a general way and does not only focus on a particular topic of a specific topic. On the one hand, the paper needs more in-depth information on the causes of this issue and its impact on refugees and countries of asylum. Secondly, the paper mostly cites news facts and second-hand data from academic literature but needs more collection and analysis of current life data of front-line refugees. The persuasion of this paper needs to be improved. Thirdly, most of the rationalization proposals put forward at the political level in the second half of this paper, and the innovative perspective of the argument is insufficient.

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