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Refugees and the EU: A Study of the Preferential Treatment of Ukrainian Refugees

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Introduction

“It is different in Ukraine than in countries like Afghanistan... We’re talking about neighborhood help,” Austria’s Chancellor Karl Nehammer claimed when discussing Austria’s different response to refugees from these two countries (Bayoumi 2022). This quote represents one of many examples in which the rhetoric around Ukrainian refugees has differed compared to refugees from other countries. The war in Ukraine created one of the largest refugee crises in the world today, and the European Union has played a significant role in accepting these individuals into various Member States. The protection of Ukrainian refugees, or any refugee for the record, is important. However, examples such as the quote from Austria’s Chancellor indicates how the European Union has been more accepting and welcoming to Ukrainian refugees compared to refugees coming from other places, indicating potential biases of European Union policies and the othering of non-Ukrainian refugees.

To study this, this paper will utilize a comparative case study of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees. The paper will compare these two cases because they are the two largest refugee crises in the world today, and the magnitude of both conflicts provides a strong foundation to be able to compare the actions of the European Union. First, this paper will analyze the way in which the European Union has acted regarding Ukrainian refugees, looking at both the policies enacted and the treatment of refugees within the European Union. Then, this paper will discuss how the European Union reacted to Syrian refugees, primarily focusing on the years of 2015 and 2016 except where more recent information is pertinent. To do so, this essay will first discuss previous literature regarding why the treatment of refugees varies depending on the conflict or country they are fleeing. Then, it will study the cases of Ukraine and Syria in particular, focusing on analyzing data, types of discrimination, and the role that the EU played in each crisis. Through

comparative case studies, this paper will argue that Ukrainian refugees receive quicker acceptance into and better treatment from the European Union compared to refugees not from Europe due to the othering of non-European refugees within the region.

Literature Review

Introduction

When analyzing the treatment of refugees from various conflicts, scholars have sought to explain why some refugees receive different treatment than others. Scholars argue that the media's establishment of threatening narratives around immigration, the dehumanization of groups, and the fear of changing a culture within a country all impact attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. Regarding the media, some authors discuss its implications more generally while others argue how the media impacts hostility towards specific groups. Underlying these arguments is the idea there exists a level of fear around immigration. This essay will focus primarily on how this fear impacts non-Ukrainian refugees more, creating a sense of "othering" towards them, and it explains the faster acceptance of Ukrainian refugees into the European Union and better treatment.

The Media and Public Opinion

The media impacts public opinion regarding immigration and policy decision-making. In a 2008 article, J. David Cisneros argues that the media uses images and news coverage to portray immigration as a "dangerous pollutant" that threatens to contaminate communities (570). To begin, the author discusses how metaphors in general play a significant role in the way in which humans understand certain concepts, and the metaphors that have surrounded immigration impact how governments and their citizens think about and act towards immigrants (Cisneros

2008, 570). Alarming metaphors contribute to the othering of immigrants within popular discourse, and, as a result, impact public policy as well (Cisneros 2008, 591). In addition to describing immigration as a pollutant, images of migrants that have the individual ““directed towards the observer’s eye,”” indicating that they are ““coming at the viewer,”” portrays the idea that migrants invade a country, making them out to be a “toxic threat” (as cited in Cisneros 2008, 581) This example convincingly explains how the media creates fear over immigration and what would happen if new people entered a country.

While Cisneros focuses on the case of the United States, other scholars have focused on European media discourse on immigration and its effect. The authors conclude that the media under-represents migrants and, when they are represented, they are often shown as delinquents or criminals (Eberl et al. 2018, 207). Media framing differs based on where migrants come from and the context of the area they are leaving, the term “migrant” being associated with economic threat and “refugee” being associated with economic burden for example; however, the authors find that media coverage generally tends to be negative, even arguing that some refugees should not receive the legal refugee status in the first place (Eberl et al. 2018, 207, 210, 212). The rhetoric that the media shows its audience dictates their voting tendencies as well (Eberl et al. 2018, 215). Negative media coverage tends to increase the viewpoint of perceived threats and promote “stereotypical attitudes” on the campaign trail (Eberl et al. 2018, 215). Additionally, exposure to news sources that promote the victimization frame can create compassion within its audience; however, scholars do not universally agree with this argument (Eberl et al. 2018, 215). Regardless, the way in which the media frames immigration elicits a specific emotion from its audience, and this can impact voting tendencies (Eberl et al. 2018, 215).

As a result, the media's discussions on immigration have prompted a stronger prevalence of Euroscepticism and anti-immigration focused political parties (Eberl et al. 2018, 211). In general, the authors found that the way the media frames refugees and migrants negatively impacts public attitudes, especially when the media portrays immigrants as a threat since "repeated exposure to news portrayals of social groups in relation to economic, cultural, or security threat frames increases prejudice over time" (Eberl et al. 2018, 213). The influence of the media and the framing of immigration changes depending on the country, and this comes from different factors such as if they exist as a country of new or old immigration (Eberl et al. 2018, 216-217). Similar to Cisneros, the authors convincingly indicate that media portrayal impacts public attitudes around immigration. They help to further describe the power that the media holds to influence public opinion on immigration and how different groups fit into a specific frame; however, they articles do not go into as much detail as to why some groups are viewed as more threatening than others. This essay will analyze this more to provide an explanation.

Emotions and Anxiety

Other scholars analyze how emotions, perceived threats, and prejudice impact attitudes toward immigration, emphasizing differences in attitudes toward non-European immigrants. Sharon Xuereb introduces the social identity theory, which proposes that humans "categorise themselves as belonging to specific groups, and that they identify their ingroup as distinct from an outgroup," to explain why people view members of their in-group more positively (Xuereb 2023, 2). In the context of European Union immigration, this suggests that immigrants from white, European countries will be viewed more favorably than those who are Muslim or non-European. Xuereb cites evidence that non-European asylum seekers trigger greater fear over

cultural differences, financial burden, and potential criminality, regardless of the accuracy of these claims (Xuereb 2023, 3). These fears prompt more negative emotions towards Syrian and Somali asylum seekers than Ukrainian refugees, who share “a White European identity and an identity of Christian heritage” which makes them less likely to be seen as an economic, cultural, or social threat and thus more likely to be accepted (Xuereb 2023, 11). In a survey of 287 respondents from the United Kingdom and Malta, Xuereb concluded that the respondents indicated more negative emotions regarding prejudice and threat perception and a negative attitudes toward helping refugees towards Syrian and Somali asylum seekers than towards Ukrainian asylum seekers (Xuereb 2023, 11). Additionally, Xuereb noted that negative emotions created more prejudice which promoted the decrease in a willingness to help, and a reverse effect stemmed from positive emotions (Xuereb 2023, 11). The research provided by Xuereb indicates how emotions impact attitudes toward immigration, and it impacts certain groups of asylum seekers more than others.

Anxiety has also proven to be a potential trigger for public opposition to immigration. Brader, Valentino and Suhay find that anxiety around immigration plays an important role in opinions and political decisions, regardless as to whether the individuals migrating pose an actual threat (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 959). In particular, the authors separate their claim from that of a perceived threat due to their belief that characteristics such as race or ethnicity can cause these emotions on their own (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 960). Furthermore, the findings within their research indicate that anxiety around immigration impacts opinions and politics, and ethnicity plays help to instigate anxiety (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 975). The authors acknowledge that the media portrays immigration as dangerous; however, they conclude that the media’s role in associating group cues with an outgroup that is already

stigmatized triggers negative emotions such as anxiety (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 975). When this plays out into politics, the authors' results conclude that emotions play an important factor in triggering hostile opinions and actions (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 976). As noted previously, this article indicates how the media holds an incredible amount of power to influence negative emotions regarding immigration. In doing so, it reflects the theories regarding why immigration policies and attitudes exist the way they do intertwine with one another. Anxiety proves to be a strong prohibitor of immigration, and as the authors note, the media helps to instigate or exacerbate this fear.

Dehumanization of Refugees

The dehumanization of refugees also impacts immigration attitudes and policies. Bruneau, Kteily and Laustsen (2018) looks at the way in which dehumanizing Muslim refugees in 2015 impacted immigration policies in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, and Greece. The authors' found dehumanization is widespread in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe, and it is strongly associated with anti-immigrant sentiments and actions, as demonstrated during the 2015 refugee crisis (Bruneau, Kteily, and Laustsen 2018, 645). Dehumanizing stems from the belief that certain people are viewed as not full humans, and this idea exists in places in Europe due to a lack of experience with refugees and increased anti-refugee political statements (Bruneau, Kteily, and Laustsen 2018, 645, 659). When looking at Spain, Hungary, Greece, and the Czech Republic, the authors found a prevalence of the dehumanization of Muslim refugees, and, when controlled for political conservatism, prejudice, and trait empathy, dehumanization proved to directly impact the public opinion of Muslim refugees in Europe (Bruneau, Kteily, and Laustsen 2018, 655, 657). The article effectively explains how the dehumanization of Muslim refugees negatively impacted immigration opinions in 2015, increasing "resistance to refugee settlement,

support for anti-refugee policies, and a greater tendency to sign petitions opposing aid to refugees” (Bruneau, Kteily and Laustsen 2018, 657). The authors hypothesize that this might occur because blatant dehumanization makes people want to exclude refugees as it portrays them as threatening or not important to the host country (Bruneau, Kteily, and Lausten 2018, 658). This research conducted by the authors reflects another aspect of the way in which a different rhetoric prompted a fear of immigration.

Furthermore, the media has played an important role in creating the dehumanizing narrative, as Lazović explains in the analysis of the way in which three British newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Independent*) used metaphors and dehumanizing language against refugees in 2015-2016 (Lazović 2021, 115). The author points to examples such as the use of metaphors related to water in which migrants are claimed to be “‘pouring in,’ ‘swamping,’ ‘flooding in’” and others (as cited in Lazović 2021, 120). The author notes the media’s use of these metaphors regarding Chinese refugees from 1850-1890; however, it is not something specific to that time as these metaphors have been used in British media recently (Lazović 2021, 12). The words that newspapers use can evoke specific responses from individuals, even subconsciously, which can impact association and the ability to empathize with each other (Lazović 2021, 124). Lazović found the media uses dehumanizing language that makes refugees appear threatening and argues this can influence the ideologies and belief systems of its audience while impacting the discrimination of refugees (Lazović 2021, 135). Additionally, despite efforts from UN experts to convince the press to stop the use of dehumanizing language, this has yet to occur (Lazović 2021, 135). Lazović’s research shows that the media can initiate a dehumanizing narrative around refugees, instilling a sense of fear amongst its audience. This provides

additional evidence that the media plays a significant role in perpetrating anti-immigrant narratives.

The Fear of Immigration and Culture

The characteristics of groups of migrants also impacts the public's attitude towards them entering a country. Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) analyze the relative importance of economic versus cultural concerns on public attitudes toward immigration within the United States as well as in Europe and Canada (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 225). In their review of the literature, Hainmueller and Hopkins concluded that arguments based on economic concerns, including how immigration would impact the labor market, did not prove to have a significant impact on public attitudes toward immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 240). Instead, the authors argue that "sociotropic" concerns such as how immigrants would impact social groups and the economy of a country impact attitudes on immigration more (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 242). Additionally, these reactions change depending on where the immigrants are coming from and what kind of tone, either pro-immigration or anti-immigration, the media portrays them through (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 233, 234). Furthermore, the authors claim that how the public views their national identity and the importance of an immigrant assimilating into a country impact immigration attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 235). For example, the authors argue that if assimilation is an important indicator of immigration attitude, then whether an immigrant speaks a different language plays a key role in dictating their acceptance (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 235). In doing so, the authors highlight that the public fears certain groups of immigrants will change the national identity, norms, and language regardless of whether these fears are credible. Understanding the impact of fear provides valuable information regarding why the public and their governments act the way they do.

Conclusion

Previous literature analyzing the reasons why a country either supports or does not support immigration stems from various elements that all cultivate a sense of fear. Additionally, while each article argues a specific concept that plays a strong role in the attitudes surrounding immigration, one can also see the way in which the theories overlap. In doing so, it helps to indicate how many layers exist within this research, all contributing to public opinion and policymaking. This essay will look at Ukrainian and Syrian refugees to see how the treatment of refugees plays out within the European Union and these two groups. Additionally, it will touch on how the othering of Syrian refugees has played an important role in this difference, touching on various aspects of the previous literature to indicate why this is the case.

Method

This paper will compare the treatment and experience of Syrian refugees to Ukrainian refugees as these are two of the largest refugee crises in the world today. Additionally, both crises have been handled differently which leads to questioning why this is the case. The research will be divided into two main parts: (a) a case study analyzing the facts of Ukrainian refugees entering the European Union, (b) a comparative case study regarding Syrian refugees attempting to enter the European Union. Furthermore, each of those two sections will discuss (a) statistics, (b) support and aid, (c) and discrimination and/or the role of the EU in the respective conflict. Additionally, parts of this essay will focus on the years 2015 and 2016 regarding the Syrian refugee crisis to provide a stronger comparison to the current Ukrainian refugee crisis. However, there are instances in which focusing on later aspects of the Syrian refugee crisis provides essential information.

Ukraine

Background statistics and special protection policies

As of July 2023, the UN Refugee Agency has recorded over 6.2 million Ukrainian refugees and 17.6 million people that need humanitarian assistance in 2023 due to this conflict (“Ukraine Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR” n.d.). Of the 6.2 million Ukrainian refugees, 4.2 million have been granted a special temporary protection within the European Union (“Refugee Inflow from Ukraine” 2023). The Temporary Protection Directive was enacted on March 4, 2022, and it includes residence, entrance into the labor market, medical care, social welfare, and education protections (“EU Solidarity with Ukraine” 2023). The Temporary Protection Directive applies to those living in Ukraine on and prior to February 24, 2022, if they fit into one of the following categories: Ukrainian citizens and their families, non-Ukrainian citizens that have international protections, or non-Ukrainian citizens that permanently reside in Ukraine due to the inability to return to their origin country (“Refugee Inflow from Ukraine” 2023). Additionally, Ukrainian citizens that left before February 24, 2022, Ukrainian citizens who were in the European Union boundaries before February 24, 2022, and non-Ukrainian citizens that do not permanently reside in Ukraine but cannot return to their origin country can also experience these protections (“Refugee Inflow from Ukraine” 2023). This policy does not prevent those leaving Ukraine from being able to apply for refugee status; however, this provides automatic protection while limiting the “pressure on the national asylum systems of EU countries” (“Refugee Inflow from Ukraine” 2023). This temporary protection grants a unique status to those fleeing Ukraine to allow them to leave the country quickly.

The Temporary Protection Directive was enacted for the first time since its establishment in 2001 (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). The ability for the European Union to enact the policy as fast

as it did given the fact that it was an unprecedented action indicates the European Union's desire to assist those leaving Ukraine immediately.

Support and aid for Ukrainian refugees in the EU

Ukrainian refugees receive support from a wide range of people in the EU regarding their special status. Näre, Abdelhady, and Irastorza (2022) from the University of Helsinki reflect on this in their article. In 2022, most Ukrainians seeking refuge in the European Union fled to Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Norway, Finland, and Sweden, and many of these countries housed more Ukrainian refugees than the total number of Syrian refugees who tried to flee to Europe in 2015 (Näre, Abdelhady, and Irastorza 2022, 255). The authors note that despite the number of Ukrainian refugees that the EU hosts, some right-wing populist parties in Sweden, Norway, and Finland have supported Ukrainian refugees fleeing to their country, contradicting previous stances regarding the refugees fleeing Syria (Näre, Abdelhady, and Irastorza 2022, 255).

Additionally, they highlight one of the reasons as to why people such as Riikka Purra from the Finns Party, a far-right populist party in Finland, accept Ukrainian refugees is because "they are Europeans, Christians and mostly women and children" (Näre, Abdelhady, and Irastorza 2022, 256). This justification highlights how refugees who do not exhibit these same characteristics are othered in a way that Ukrainian refugees are not. The acceptance of Ukrainian refugees by right-wing parties and the Temporary Protection Directive noted above indicates that this has not instigated a state of panic within the Nordic countries (Näre, Abdelhady, and Irastorza 2022, 256). This is a generalized statement that does not prove that every person, government official, and political party is in favor of Ukrainian refugees residing in the European Union; however, far-right political parties accepting Ukrainian refugees deviates from their usual standpoint of opposing migration.

Additionally, the European Union has provided aid to Ukraine and its refugees outside of the Temporary Protection Directive. The European Union has provided over €82 billion, equating to more than \$88 billion, in support towards Ukraine (“EU Solidarity with Ukraine” 2023). More than 37% of this comes in the form of financial and humanitarian aid, 20% of it is in direct support for refugees, 30% of it in military aid, and 11% in grants and loans from Member States of the European Union (“EU Solidarity with Ukraine” 2023). In addition to attempting to help people flee Ukraine, the European Union has also provided significant monetary funding to Ukrainian refugees and the country of Ukraine as a whole.

The European Union also provided medical aid to Ukrainian refugees at a rapid pace. In “Facilitating access to medicines and continuity of care for Ukrainian refugees: exceptional response of the promise of more inclusive healthcare for all migrants,” published in the *BMJ Global Health* journal, the authors analyze the impacts of the Temporary Protection Directive, including how it granted immediate medical assistance to Ukrainians fleeing the conflict (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). They note that this allowed municipalities to receive training on how to treat those coming from Ukraine and indicated the rights that Ukrainian refugees had due to the Temporary Protection Directive (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). The Temporary Protection Directive also addressed the need to treat long-term illnesses and chronic diseases, establishing long-term care for Ukrainian refugees (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). However, the authors mentioned that non-Ukrainian citizens fleeing the conflict in Ukrainian do not receive the same healthcare access (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). In general, migrants in Europe struggle to receive the proper medical care and access to treatment for long-term illnesses due to systemic problems or monetary, cultural, or language roadblocks (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 1). Additionally, the access to specific medicines within the European Union prohibits migrants from receiving specific

healthcare (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 2). For example, the authors highlight that as of August 2022, 1,560 Ukrainian refugees needed treatment for tuberculosis with one third of those people having Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis; however, some of the medicine required to treat these patients are either in short supply in the EU, not able to be given out, or are too expensive (Aljadeeah et al. 2022, 2). Access to important healthcare to migrants within the European Union continues to be very lacking. However, the provisions granted by the Temporary Protection Directive provide important steps to making these changes. While healthcare access for migrants still has problems, the change in access for Ukrainian immigrants further highlights their better treatment within the European Union.

In addition to the Temporary Protection Directive and monetary aid, the European Union has enacted other policies to showcase their support for Ukraine. Four days after Russia invaded Ukraine, on February 28, 2022, Ukraine sent in an application to become a member of the European Union, and on June 23, 2022, the European Commission unanimously voted to move Ukraine to candidate status (“Ukraine” 2023). The change of status of Ukraine indicates the EU’s commitment to solidarity with Ukraine. Additionally, the European Union enacted four sanctions against Russia, particularly on Vladimir Putin’s and the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko’s regimes (“Ukraine” 2023). On May 12, 2022, the European Commission proposed a one-year suspension on “import duties on all Ukrainian exports to the EU” (“Ukraine” 2023). Additionally, the European Commission proposed “Solidarity Lanes” within Member States for Ukraine to receive agricultural goods because the Russian navy blocked the ports in the Black Sea that they would normally use (“Ukraine” 2023). These lanes helped to export over 10.9 million tons of goods (“Ukraine” 2023). The European Union also proposed the creation of a Ukraine Facility on June 20, 2023, where they would provide and control the monetary support

and assistance programs for Ukraine from 2024 until 2027 (“Ukraine” 2023). The policies that the European Union and the European Commission enacted indicate the distinct level of support that they want to give to Ukraine. In doing so, it showcases how supporting Ukraine goes further than housing the individuals fleeing the war.

Discrimination of refugees fleeing Ukraine

Newspaper outlets have reported on discrimination amongst individuals fleeing Ukraine. In March of 2022, NBC News released an article entitled “‘Open the door or we die’: Africans report racism and hostility trying to flee Ukraine”, written by reporters Char Adams, Zinhle Essamuah, Shamar Walter, and Rima Abdelkader, that describes how African immigrants in Ukraine experienced discrimination while trying to flee Ukraine (Adams et al. 2022). The article recounts the experience of Alexander Somto Orah in which he and a group of friends attempted to get on a train to Poland; however, they were removed from the train, being told that it was for “‘Ukrainians only’” (as cited in Adams et al. 2022). Additionally, Orah said no one looked at his passport to determine if he was Ukrainian prior from being removed from the train (Adams et al. 2022). Reports like this exist in various news outlets and social media posts, prompting the African Union to release a statement saying “‘reports that Africans are singled out for unacceptable dissimilar treatment would be shockingly racist and in breach’ of international law” (as cited in Adams et al. 2022). Additionally, the United Nations discussed the reports outlined above, and during a press conference the UN high commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi said, “‘there should be absolutely no discrimination between Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians, Europeans and non-Europeans. Everybody is fleeing from the same risks’” (as cited in Adams et al. 2022). Notably, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the statistics regarding the number of African and Black people within Ukraine had not been reported on in over 20 years; however, it was

estimated that over 16,000 African students were in Ukraine at the time of the invasion (Adams et al. 2022). The accounts of African and Black individuals attempting to leave Ukraine indicates a bias amongst those in Ukraine as well. This proposes the idea that even within those fleeing the same conflict, there exists a sense of othering when determining who can seek refuge in the European Union.

The Foreign Affairs Ministry in Ukraine warned its citizens that these reports could be related to Russian propaganda (Adams et al. 2022). Malcolm Nance, the MSNBC terrorism analyst argued that both could be true, meaning Russia might exacerbate truthful claims of discrimination to their advantage (Adams et al. 2022). However, the existence of this issue argues for the importance of further research in this area. To fully understand the impact of discriminations within Ukrainian refugees, it would be useful to conduct further research on this specifically; however, that research would extend beyond the abilities of this paper.

Syria

Background statistics and the role of Turkey

According to the UN Refugee Agency, since 2011 6.6 million people have fled their homes and 6.7 million have been displaced within Syria (“Syria Refugee Crisis – Globally, in Europe and in Cyprus” 2021). Additionally, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon host the majority of Syrian refugees, and 3.6 million live in Turkey alone (“Syria Refugee Crisis – Globally, in Europe and in Cyprus” 2021). Comparatively, the European Union houses 1 million asylum-seekers and refugees from Syria, and 70% of those are housed in Germany or Sweden (“Syria Refugee Crisis – Globally, in Europe and in Cyprus” 2021). The statistics surrounding

the Syrian refugee crisis indicates how other countries outside of the EU have played a significant role in housing Syrian refugees.

Turkey has been pivotal regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. In “The EU’s Approach to the Syrian Crisis: Turkey as a Partner?” Çiğdem Nas from the Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul analyzes what kind of role the EU and Turkey play in the Syrian refugee crisis. The European Union and Turkey both wanted to quickly establish peace and stability within the region, and they both wanted to help aid in a transition to democracy within Syria (Nas 2019, 55). However, 2014 terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Germany, and the United Kingdom, all related to *Al-Qaeda* and other ISIS terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, made security issues a major focus for most Member States within the European Union (Nas 2019, 55). Additionally, in October of 2015 alone 10,000 refugees attempted to cross the Aegean Islands to reach Greece (Nas 2019, 58). Therefore, Nas notes that the European Union relied on Turkey to work together on a solution regarding the refugee crisis (Nas 2019, 58). On November 29, 2015, the European Union and Turkey’s government agreed to a plan in which Turkey would work harder against human smuggling networks while working with Greece and Belgium to prevent irregular migration paths, and in return the European Union would provide monetary and technological aid to Syrian refugees residing in Turkey (Nas 2019, 58).

Despite this plan, the number of refugees reaching the Aegean Islands continued to grow, and Italy, Greece, and Hungary struggled to manage the number of refugees at their borders (Nas 2019, 58-59). Because of this, on March 18, 2016, Turkey and the European Union agreed on a different plan that highlighted a 1:1 formula in which “all irregular migrants would be returned to Turkey on 20 March” (Nas 2019, 59). Additionally, simultaneously the Aegean Islands returned one Syrian to Turkey as another Syrian refugee was relocated to a European host

country (Nas 2019, 59). Nas highlights how this policy severely decreased the number of refugees fleeing to the Aegean Islands (Nas 2019, 59). During the Syrian refugee crisis, the European Union relied heavily on Turkey to mitigate migration flow from certain parts of the European Union. In comparison, the European Union enacted special protections for Ukrainian refugees that allowed them to enter the EU fast, reflecting a different commitment to housing refugees from different conflicts.

Protections granted to Syrian refugees

The status of Syrian refugees' protections varies across countries. Regarding the host countries of Syrian refugees, Turkey is the only country that signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, a document that legally defines what a "refugee" is, highlighting the legal protections and practices surrounding refugees, and one of the key ideas of this document is that refugees are not allowed to be sent back to a country in which they would "face serious threats to their life or freedom" ("The 1951 Refugee Convention" n.d.; Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35). In "Syrian Refugees: Challenges to Host Countries and the International Communities," Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişci from the Brookings Institution argue that, as a result, most Syrian refugees are labeled as "guests" instead of being granted a refugee status (Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35). The "guest" label that most Syrian refugees receive in their host nations does not hold any legal protections (Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35). Additionally, the authors note that even in Turkey the protections of the Geneva Convention can only go towards refugees coming from specific events in Europe (Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35). Instead of receiving the legal refugee status, Syrian refugees receive a temporary protection status within Turkey, very different from the Temporary Protection Directive, which does not allow Syrians to stay within the country for a prolonged period (Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35). The authors also indicate that

without the refugee status Syrians struggle to receive education, food, social, and healthcare rights, and they are prohibited from legally working in the country that they reside in (Ferris and Kirişci 2016, 35-36). Syrian refugees receive very few legal protections due to their status, struggling to receive the proper care and ability to regain a sense of livelihood when they must seek refuge in a new host country. The protections granted to Ukrainian refugees, while lacking in areas, are different than what Syrian refugees receive, indicating how Syrian refugees receive different treatment both in their inability to enter the EU and their lack of legal protections.

In addition to the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, in Radka Havlová and Kristýna Tamchynová's, from the University of Economics in the Czech Republic, research, they showcase how the Dublin convention in 1990 and the Dublin II Regulation in 2003 helped to dictate policy regarding refugees and asylum seekers entering the European Union from the Syrian refugee crisis (Havlová and Tamchynová 2016, 85-86). They note that these policies have refugees apply for asylum in the country that they first enter in the European Union, and it advises those countries to handle the processing of those asylum applications (Havlová and Tamchynová 2016, 86). Due to these regulations, countries such as Italy, Bulgaria, and Greece, EU border countries, take on a heavier load which was evident during the Syrian refugee crisis (Havlová and Tamchynová 2016, 86). The authors indicate that this is one reason Member States in the EU adopt strict immigration policies and why in 2015 Lithuania, Portugal, and Estonia rejected all the asylum applications their country received (Havlová and Tamchynová 2016, 86). The authors note the argument that the EU has been ineffective regarding the Syrian refugee crisis because the provisions of the Dublin regulations do not evenly distribute refugees throughout the region (Havlová and Tamchynová 2016, 87). The policies that the European Union utilized during the Syrian refugee crisis exacerbated this issue due to the inability to house

refugees in a sustainable way for all Member States. However, this reflects very differently than the crisis in Ukraine. Instead, the EU was able to invoke the Temporary Protection Directive, notably outlined before the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, to quickly provide refuge and legal protections to millions of Ukrainians fleeing their country.

Monetary aid for Syrian refugees

As noted above, the European Union provided humanitarian aid to Syria. In fact, the European Union was the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to Syria (Nas 2019, 53). According to the European Commission, 70% of Syrians require humanitarian aid, and this need has been exacerbated even further due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquakes that occurred in Syria in February 2023 (“Syria” n.d.). The European Commission claims that since 2011, it has donated more than \$32.4 billion to the crisis in Syria in humanitarian, economic, development, and stabilization aid (“Syria” n.d.). In particular, the European Union has allocated over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid directly to Syria with an additional nearly \$1.51 billion to host communities and countries both in and outside of Syria (“Syria” n.d.). However, despite the amount of humanitarian aid that the European Union was able to provide to Syria, EU struggles to work effectively with non-governmental organizations and national development agencies, and this made the aid that they were able to give not as impactful (Nas 2019, 53). When comparing the \$32.4 billion in monetary aid given to the Syrian refugee crisis to the over \$88 billion in aid provided to Ukraine, one can clearly see the difference in level of financial support. Additionally, the support given to Syria has been allocated over the course of twelve years; however, the monetary support given to Ukraine has been allocated over the course of almost two years. Notably, in 2023 alone, the European Union gave over \$200 billion to Syria after the earthquakes that happened earlier this year (“Syria” n.d.). This aid is incredibly important;

however, it does make one wonder why this aid has increased drastically over the course of one year when this country has been in heavy conflict for more than a decade. The European Union struggled to provide more monetary aid to Syria until this year; however, the EU did not struggle the same way when it came to supporting Ukraine.

Differing opinions on the EU's involvement in Syria

Different opinions exist within Member States regarding the role of the EU in the conflict in Syria. In “Why Europe won’t rebuild Syria,” written for the Atlantic Council, Eugenio Dacrema from the Institute for International Political Studies indicates that in recent years disagreements surrounding the role of the EU in Syria have increased (Dacrema 2019). The EU’s position states that they are committed to non-engagement regarding the Bashar al-Assad regime unless they implement an “inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people” (as cited in Dacrema 2019). However, in 2018, Poland’s deputy foreign minister went on an official visit to Syria (Dacrema 2019). In 2019, Italy announced that it was considering reopening the embassy in Damascus, Syria, and other countries in the European Union such as Hungary and the Czech Republic have indicated that they were not following the EU’s policy of non-engagement either (Dacrema 2019). Dacrema clearly indicates how Member States within the European Union have showcased their disagreements with EU policy, creating confusion and criticism regarding how the EU handles the conflict (Dacrema 2019). The inability to come to a consensus on how to handle the issue produces a stalemate in effective policies on the issue. This reflects a different position and urgency compared to the role of the EU in protecting Ukraine in which the organization acted swiftly and held a more cohesive opinion on its role.

The different opinions surrounding the conflict in Syria also impact Syrian refugees within the EU, and the attitudes towards Ukrainian versus Syrian refugees highlights this. A survey conducted by Lenka Dražanová and Andrew Geddes of the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute found that 23.4% of Slovaks, 25.3% of Hungarians, 36.4% of Italians, 36.0% of Austrians, 44.5% of Romanians, 52.4% of Germans, and 34.1% of people from Poland surveyed believe that they should allow many Ukrainian refugees into their respective countries (Dražanová and Geddes 2022). Comparatively, 7.4% of Slovaks, 6.0% of Hungarians, 23.0% of Italians, 13.0% of Austrians, 16.7% of Romanians, 25.5% of Germans, and 10.0% of people from Poland believe that they should allow many Syrian refugees into their country (Dražanová and Geddes 2022). Additionally, this result as well as other results from this survey coincided with the argument that Europeans tend to have more negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, particularly Muslim refugees (Dražanová and Geddes 2022). The authors note this occurs throughout all of Europe, but the survey indicates a starker difference between attitudes in Eastern and Central European countries, arguing this is most likely due to the fear of changing national identity or due to the lack of contact with Syrian refugees within these countries (Dražanová and Geddes 2022). Regardless these attitudes regarding Syrian refugees versus Ukrainian refugees indicates how Syrian refugees are othered within these countries, inhibiting their ability to be accepted into the European Union and receive the same treatment.

Eugenio Dacrema also highlights that in many Member States, discussions related to Syrian refugees have not existed within recent years (Dacrema 2019). Some Russian diplomats have argued that the EU should focus on the reconstruction of Syria to send Syrian refugees back; however, many of these discussions have not occurred within the EU itself (Dacrema 2019). However, Dacrema shows that not every Member State has shied away from these

discussion. In Germany topics related to Syrian refugees continue to be relevant in domestic politics, and the 2018 election cycle showcased this (Dacrema 2019). The Green Party, which tends to view refugees favorably, has grown in prominence recently (Dacrema 2019).

Additionally, Germany indicates its hard position against the Assad regime because it is trying to push legal consequences for members that have human rights violations against them (Dacrema 2019). The differing opinions highlighted by Dacrema related to Syrian refugees within Member States and political parties in Europe is contradictory to what occurred regarding Ukrainian refugees. This comparison showcases the difference in how groups of refugees have been viewed in Europe while indicating countries' willingness to host them.

Identity and conflict details

Identity plays a key role in the othering of Syrian refugees. Lamis Abdelaaty, from Syracuse University, indicates how this was the case in “European countries are welcoming Ukrainian refugees. It was a different story in 2015”. The author notes that when Russia invaded Ukraine, the media and foreign leaders were quick to differentiate Ukraine from other conflicts with the prime minister of Bulgaria saying that Ukrainian refugees ““are intelligent, they are educated...This is not the refugee wave we have been used to”” (Abdelaaty 2022). It is important to note, that Syrian refugees are also well educated (Abdelaaty 2022); however, the narrative surrounding Ukraine was that they were like Europe. They were like those already living in the European Union. Additionally, the author argues that the idea that most Ukrainian refugees are White and Christian whereas most Syrian refugees are Muslim is used to enforce this narrative as well (Abdelaaty 2022), further indicating how the identities of these two groups of people have been used differently. Syrian refugees are othered in the media and by some politicians, especially when arguing why Ukrainian refugees should receive better treatment than them.

Additionally, Abdelaaty highlights how the location and actors of the two conflicts impact policy decisions. The fact that Russia invaded Ukraine has impacted the response of the European Union due to a previous history with Russia (Abdelaaty 2022). The author notes that the proximity of Ukraine to the European Union can lead to fear amongst European countries that they might be in Russia's line next (Abdelaaty 2022). The physical location of the conflict also addressed how the European Union justifies helping groups of people over others because, as the author indicates, it portrays Syrian refugees as "'others' escaping distant conflicts—and their plight does not evoke the same degree of shock and empathy" (Abdelaaty 2022). The way in which the distance and details of the conflict influences the European Union's reaction emphasizes how the othering of Syrian refugees impacts their treatment compared to Ukrainian refugees.

Conclusion

It is important to note that this article is not arguing that Ukrainian refugees should not receive the protections they have. In fact, the paper has also noted areas in which the European Union has neglected to protect Ukrainian refugees as well. Instead, the goal is to point out the difference in responses to Syrian versus Ukrainian refugees and the implications of that.

The European Union has treated Ukrainian refugees different than Syrian refugees, highlighted by the various policies that grant Ukrainian refugees protections regarding both their ability to enter the European Union and their treatment once they are there. Regarding the Syrian refugee crisis, the European Union has focused on monetary over legal protections; however, the European Union has donated nearly \$50 billion more to Ukraine than to Syria. In doing so, this reflects a different treatment of the two groups. Additionally, politicians have noted Ukraine's similarities and proximity to the European Union, justifying the differential treatment by

othering Syrian refugees. This sense of othering impacts the urgency of the European Union to enact effective policies regarding these groups of people. The European Union, as indicated via their policies regarding Ukrainian refugees, has the resources to provide needed protections to refugees. However, they have not offered the same responses and general urgency to respond to Syrian refugees, indicating that the issue does not stem from their ability to help.

The sense of othering reflects much of the previous literature. For example, the rhetoric provided by the media would justify viewing certain groups of people differently. Additionally, this sense of othering that the media and politicians foster would impact anxieties around immigration as well. As a result, one must note how the reasons as to why individuals view certain groups of migrants or refugees from specific conflicts different can all work off one another. Additionally, this can also provide limitations to the research. The ability for these explanations to work off one another can lead to difficulties pinpointing one explanation. However, regarding the treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees, the othering of Syrian refugees reflects the strongest argument as to why they are treated differently, and it encapsulates other arguments over one overarching umbrella of explanations.

While this research solely compares the treatment of Syrian refugees to Ukrainian refugees, one can also extend it to the comparison of Ukrainian refugees to non-European refugees. The magnitude of each crisis provides the strongest basis for a comparison to generalize the preferential treatment of Ukrainian refugees versus non-European refugees within the EU. To enhance this research even more, one should investigate other specific examples in which the European Union has treated refugees differently than Ukrainian refugees. In doing so, it would benefit the generalization by crafting an explanation to see if a country that has similar demographics to Syria would experience similar treatment. Additionally, one could look into

how the location of conflicts impacts how the European Union acts. Within this paper, the othering of Syrian refugees combines both explanations, but it would also be interesting to look at their direct impacts separately.

The paper emphasizes the way in which the European Union reacts to refugees and migration depending on where they come from. This has serious implications related to policies and the protection of refugees, especially considering how powerful the EU is as an international organization. The analysis provided can act as an important reflection on the European Union to indicate where changes can be made to protect refugees regardless of where they are coming from.

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