

# Unwanted People and Desired Citizens

Contemporary Attitudes, Challenges and Perceptions  
of Migration and Integration



Edited by

**Cezary Smuniewski, Andrea Zanini,  
Cyprian Aleksander Kozera, Błażej Bado**

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Warsaw 2024

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Cyprian Aleksander Kozera  
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Immigrants *Ante Portas*  
and Desirability of People on the Move:  
Selective Perceptions of Forced Displacement  
and Voluntary Migration  
from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

This analysis discusses migration from Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe to the EU. It dispels myths about African migration, noting that most Africans migrate within Africa and not to Europe. African migrants are mainly young, educated, and equally gendered, and many seek better job opportunities. The majority of them use regular channels, contrary to the popular notion of a mass influx of irregular migrants. The chapter also explores the migration crisis in the Middle East, particularly Syria and Afghanistan, which are mainly due to armed conflicts and human rights violations. These conflicts have resulted in millions of registered refugees worldwide, with a significant number reaching the EU. The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine caused rapid displacement, with Europe showing collective solidarity despite criticisms of double standards in refugee treatment. Finally, the analysis covers migration from Eastern Europe, mainly Ukraine, to the EU. This migration has always been directed towards the West due to better economic prospects and political escape. The number of Ukrainians with valid EU residence permits has doubled from 2013 to 2021. The recent full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia triggered a massive wave of refugees to Western countries, mainly Poland, which has shown exceptional support for these refugees, including financial help and societal integration. The research is based on analysis of official data and reports issued by the United Nations and the European Union institutions, complemented with existing literature on the subject to provide context, background, and additional perspectives.

**Keywords:** immigration, migration, immigrant, refugee, Africa, Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine

## 1. Introduction

This chapter discusses migration from Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe to the EU. In the first section, the authors dispel myths about African migration, noting that most Africans migrate within Africa and not to Europe. African migrants are mainly young, educated, and equally gendered, and many seek better job opportunities. The majority of them use regular channels, contrary to the popular notion of a mass influx of irregular migrants.

The chapter in its second section also explores the migration crisis in the Middle East, particularly Syria and Afghanistan, which are mainly due to armed conflicts and human rights violations. These conflicts have resulted in millions of registered refugees worldwide, with a significant number reaching the EU. The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine caused rapid displacement, with Europe showing collective solidarity despite criticisms of double standards in refugee treatment.

Finally, in the third section, the analysis covers migration from Eastern Europe, mainly Ukraine, to the EU. This migration has always been directed towards the West due to better economic prospects and political escape. The number of Ukrainians with valid EU residence permits has doubled from 2013 to 2021. The recent full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia triggered a massive wave of refugees to Western countries, mainly Poland, which has shown exceptional support for these refugees, including financial help and societal integration.

The research is based on analysis of official data and reports issued notably by the United Nations and European Union institutions such as Eurostat, Frontex, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and is complemented with existing literature on the subject to provide context, background, and additional perspectives.

## 2. *Africans ante portas*

### – the myth and the facts of African migration to Europe

This section of the chapter presents the most recent trends and numbers concerning EU and UK-destined migration from the African continent, including both Sub-Saharan and North Africa.

A survey by the International Organization for Migration conducted in 2018 revealed that since the end of the Cold War, the number of Africans



living outside of Africa has more than doubled, with the growth in Europe being the most visible (McAuliffe, Ruhs 2018: 44). The researchers have noted, however, the lack of reliable statistics detailing how many Africans have migrated to Europe. Indeed, there are numerous pseudo-statistical summaries and simplifications describing the scale of African-originated migration in statements by political commentators and news outlets. Moreover, this non-scientific approach is often overexploited in official parliamentary discourse, mostly by right-wing “conservative” and populist politicians across Europe. These political groups have created an image of a growing threat from waves of African migrants, massively and illegally crossing the Mediterranean Sea. This perception is embroiled in numerous postcolonial stereotypes, in which Africans are subjected to protectional subjection, sometimes demonized – and not that seldom – even animalized. Such an approach reflects some Occidentalist fears and prejudices against strangers or “aliens.” (Bauman 2016)

Migration from Africa to Europe received increased attention from the outbreak of the so-called migrant or refugee crisis in 2015. A stereotypical view of solely “black African men” attempting to cross the Mediterranean on tiny boats to southern Italy or making landing operations in overloaded pontoons on the rocky beaches of Greece has rather unconvincing confirmation in the statistical data gathered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) (Popławski, Kozera 2019: 185–198). In fact, migrants endeavoring to reach Europe are almost equally from Africa and Asia, and nearly half of those coming from Africa are women.

In 2022, around 330,000 irregular border crossings were detected at the EU’s external borders. The Western Balkan route accounted for nearly half of the total (i.e., 145,600 – 45%), with citizens of Syria, Afghanistan, and Turkey accounting for the largest number of detections. The number of detections on the Central Mediterranean route rose by more than half to almost 103,000 detections, with Egyptians, Tunisians, and Bangladeshis as the top three nationalities. There were also about 42,800 irregular border crossings detected on the Eastern Mediterranean route, with Syrians, Afghans, and Nigerians being the most reported nationalities. The Western Mediterranean route saw a decrease in migratory pressure in 2022, with almost 15,000 detections, around a fifth fewer than in the previous year (80% of the irregular migrants came from Algeria and Morocco). The Western African route accounted for slightly more than 15,000 detected crossings, translating to almost one-third fewer than in 2021. More than

two-thirds of the detected migrants came from Morocco and other sub-Saharan countries. The eastern land border of the EU (with Belarus and Russia) accounted for roughly 6,100 crossings, a 25% drop compared to the previous year. Currently (as of January 2023), most migrants endeavoring to reach Europe are from Asia and Ukraine (*EU's external borders in 2022* 2023).

African migrants are not presently “overwhelming” the flow to Europe. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the total number of African migrants reached about 40 million. This is only 15% of the global migrant population, much less than Asia’s (40%) and Europe’s (20%) shares. Less than one-third of all African migrants live in Europe (*Africa and Europe Facts and Figures on African Migrations 2022*: 3–4). Africans constitute only 10% of the total number of refugees who have arrived in Europe during the last decade. It is worth noting that African migrations toward Europe consist mainly of so-called economic migrants. They are mostly young, educated people looking for better job opportunities, and almost half of them are women. According to reports presented by UNHCR, only 7–10% of African migrants in EU countries are refugees from so-called “failed or fragile states” (such as Eritrea or Somalia). In recent years, travel restrictions and border closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic led to reduced flows of asylum seekers and other migrants from Africa to Europe. Consequently, fewer citizens of African states have been crossing the Mediterranean, and there has been a drop in marriage migration and family reunions (Natale, et al. 2018: 4).

Contrary to what many European citizens may believe, between 2010 and 2015, about 80% of all immigrants and refugees arriving from North and West Africa to Europe migrated through regular channels (UNODC OSM 2021). In 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), Frontex registered around 40,000 irregular border crossings into the EU from Africa, which represents less than 10% of the regular migrations from Africa to Europe between 2019 and 2020. Irregular border crossings from Africa to Europe represent less than one-third of all irregular crossings into Europe in 2019. Furthermore, the number of irregular migrants arriving from Africa to Europe has recently decreased (*Scaling Fences 2019*: 6).

On the other hand, Europe (EU and the UK) ranks as the leading destination for African migrants outside Africa, and migration from Africa is the main variable, or theme, in Europeans’ assessment of control of the EU external borders. The dominant dynamics of African migration, however, are primarily regional. Between 70% and 80% of Sub-Saharan African migration takes place in a country next to the country of origin

and thus remains within Africa (Bertossi, et al. 2021: 8). Similarly, the majority of African refugees are located in Eastern and Central Africa. Intra-African migration – during the COVID-19 pandemic (Maru 2022: 1) – has grown rapidly as free movement protocols are implemented together with infrastructure development. South Africa, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria are among the top migrant destination countries on the continent, revealing their positions as economic hubs for their respective subregions.

Forced into migration by conflict, climate change, or the pursuit of better life prospects, thousands of Africans cross the Mediterranean to seek shelter and better living conditions within the EU or UK. Millions more, however, seek the same in their neighboring states and thus remain in Africa, or are internally displaced within their own countries. Thus, what frightens many Europeans, especially those of the populist political orientation, is just the tip of the iceberg of African migration. Furthermore, Sub-Saharan migrants are not the dominant group among Europe-destined migrants, and even less so “young black males.” If they stand out in the news reports, it is due to our perception or its attempted manipulation.

### 3. Forcibly displaced asylum seekers from the Middle East and Central Asia

This part of the chapter discusses the most available data (at the time of writing this chapter) on asylum applications and migration to Europe from conflict-prone countries in the Middle East (mostly focusing on Syria) and Afghanistan. Displacement from these countries mostly resulted from the Syrian conflict that started in 2011 and the ongoing instability in Afghanistan. Therefore, the reason for forced displacement is mainly armed conflict-related; however, in both cases, human rights violations, persecution, poverty, and environmental challenges also play a significant role. This part also briefly explores the challenges faced by migrants, the responses of host countries, and public perceptions in the countries where the migrants reside.

It is somewhat of a cliché that the Middle East and Afghanistan have long been conflict-ridden and unstable regions. The armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the civil war in Syria and other ongoing violent conflicts in the region, have caused enormous human misery, displacement, and, consequently, migration. These wars have resulted in the loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, failure of governing institutions,

and the degradation of fundamental human rights. As a result, millions of people have fled their homes in search of safety and stability.

The Syrian civil war has resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in modern history, with millions of Syrians fleeing their homes due to violence, persecution, and human rights abuses. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2021, there were over 6.7 million registered Syrian refugees worldwide, with the majority being hosted in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Similarly, UNHCR states that, as of 2021, there were over 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees worldwide and outside of their country of origin, with the majority being hosted in Iran and Pakistan, and over 4.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Afghanistan itself.

Globally, according to UNHCR statistics, 72% of the world's total refugee population (out of 103 million) comes from five countries: Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (5.6 million), Ukraine (5.4 million), Afghanistan (2.8 million), and South Sudan (2.4 million). Thus, the states of Afghanistan and Syria account for almost 10 million people seeking refuge outside their home country, making up nearly 10% of the global refugee population (UNHCR 2023a).

In 2015 alone, between 1.1 and 1.3 million people, mostly from Afghanistan and Syria (accounting for about 10% of all Afghan and Syrian refugees), reached the EU, with the majority going to Germany. Germany still hosts the highest number of refugees from different countries in the EU (Kroet 2016). That year witnessed the largest number of refugees arriving in Europe in decades, according to a Pew Research Center survey from 2016 (Pew Research Center 2016).

This significant flow of migrants into Europe caused a visible and negative public backlash among European societies. The overwhelming majority of the European public disapproved of how the EU institutions were handling the human displacement and refugee flows. Most of the opposition came from countries on the frontline and at the entry points of refugees to Europe, such as Greece (94% disapproved) and Italy (77% disapproved). However, the disapproval rate in Germany during the peak of arrivals reached 67%, according to the same Pew Research survey, meaning that a strong majority of two-thirds of the German population was against the refugee flow or the measures undertaken to accommodate them in Germany (Stokes 2016).

While 2015 observed the peak of migration towards the EU, the trend is currently increasing again. According to the European Union Agency for

Asylum (EUAA), European Union countries received almost one million asylum applications (966,000 to be precise) in 2022, reflecting an almost 50% increase compared to the numbers in 2021 (EUAA 2023). Asylum applications in 2022 were the highest since the European refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. According to the EUAA Annual Overview data, asylum applications in the EU+ countries<sup>1</sup> increased by 57% in January 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. The same report also indicated that Syrians, Afghans, Turks, Venezuelans, and Colombians continued to lodge the most applications for asylum in the EU+, accounting for 44% of all applications in January 2023. Furthermore, using a different legal status, around 4 million people have fled Ukraine and are currently under temporary protection in the EU+ countries, which allows them to stay, work, receive medical assistance, and join educational opportunities. If these two numbers were combined, the forcibly displaced population in 2022 was at least four times larger than during the “migration crisis” of 2015.

Furthermore, the dynamics of this migration flow were much more intense. According to migration observers, in the two months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than five million Ukrainians fled their country. This has been considered one of the fastest displacements in post-World War II history (Bahar 2022). Comparing with other refugee flows in previous years, Dany Bahar states that “it took four years for five million Syrians to leave their country after civil war broke out in 2011, and more than four years for the same number of Venezuelans to flee after 2014, when their country’s political and socioeconomic crisis deepened.” For the Ukrainians and their neighbors receiving them, it all happened within the first two months since the Russian invasion.

Leah Zamore (2022) argues that the EU’s response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis was a sign of collective solidarity, which was rare and different from the approach utilized by many European countries. The UN Syria Commission Chair, Paulo Pinheiro, in an interview, expressed his observation of double standards in hosting refugees, comparing Syrians and Ukrainians fleeing their countries. He stated that “[t]here is openness and generosity vis-a-vis Ukraine that I don’t criticize at all. They deserved it. But I would like very much that the same treatment will be

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<sup>1</sup> EU+ Countries are 27 European Union Member States, the UK, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Andorra and the Balkan Countries, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia.

applied to the Syrian refugees.” (Ghadakpour 2022) Freelance journalist Heloisa Quiala (2022) analyzed the media coverage of refugees in the UK and found strong indications that some mainstream media have reported on refugees from Ukraine differently than they have on refugees from the Global South.

However, according to official data, the first responding institutions, to whom applications for asylum and temporary protection were directed, granted positive decisions (refugee status or subsidiary protection) mostly to Syrians, Afghans, and Ukrainians. This indicates that institutions and their normative approach do not discriminate and apply the same set of rules and standards to different cases that fit the asylum or temporary protection legal framework (EUAA 2023).

#### 4. The reception of Ukrainian economic migrants and refugees to the EU: The case of Poland

Since the end of the Second World War, one of the main migration directions on the European continent has been the movement of people from the East to the West. At that time, the border between Western and Eastern Europe was defined politically by the Iron Curtain. The motivation was twofold: people sought either an economically better life or escape from political oppression imposed by socialist or communist regimes. The demarcation of what is currently considered Eastern Europe followed the political and economic transition of the post-Warsaw Pact countries, starting with the democratic revolution in 1989. Countries from the central part of the continent, like the Baltic states, the Visegrad Group, and the Eastern and Western Balkans, eventually fully integrated with the Western political and economic world by adopting free market policies and joining Western institutions like NATO and the European Union. In the second and third decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the direction and motivations of migration remained the same. What changed was the shift eastward of the border of the countries people have chosen to emigrate to, best described as NATO’s Eastern Flank.

This part of the chapter will examine migration from four main countries of Eastern Europe – Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine – to the European Union immediately before the Russian aggression on Ukraine in 2014, during the period of the stalled conflict in Ukraine from 2014 to 2022, and after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February



2022. The focus will be on migration directions, migrants' motivations, and the reception by host states and societies. The immigration of Ukrainians to Poland, as the primary recipient of the migration flow, will serve as a leading example.

In 2013, the number of Ukrainians holding a valid residence permit in the European Union was relatively low, amounting to approximately 875 thousand. The majority lived in four countries: Italy (approx. 233 thousand), Germany (approx. 227 thousand), Poland (approx. 175 thousand), and Czech Republic (approx. 107 thousand) (Eurostat 2022). The main direction of emigration in the period after Ukraine's independence was post-Soviet countries, where 2.2 million out of 2.9 million Ukrainian expatriates had moved (data for 2012) (Prague Process 2018: 41). The primary motivation for migration was seeking an economically better life. At that time, Ukraine was either in recession or experiencing minimal economic growth, and living conditions, especially outside the larger cities, were poor compared to its neighbors (World Bank 2013). Labor emigrants constituted the vast majority of Ukrainian emigrants, with approximately half working in Russia and others in the countries of Central Europe, namely Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia (Prague Process 2018: 45). Another significant group – students and pupils – was relatively much smaller but grew steadily, reaching 55 thousand in 2011 (Prague Process 2018: 57).

In 2014, the Russian Federation initiated a hybrid war against Ukraine, leading to the occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (Kozera, et al. 2020: 77–97), where a small-scale military conflict continued until the full-fledged invasion in February 2022. These circumstances contributed to the growing number of Ukrainians leaving the country for economic reasons. Between 2013 and 2021, the number of Ukrainians with valid residence permits in the EU more than doubled to almost 1.6 million people (Eurostat 2022). In 2021, over 651 thousand Ukrainians were registered in Poland, 230 thousand in Italy, 193 thousand in Germany (a decrease partly due to 43 thousand Ukrainian nationals acquiring German citizenship), and over 193 thousand in Czech Republic, listing the most significant immigration countries (Eurostat 2022). Among the main reasons for issuing permits to remain in the EU were employment (57.3%), family reasons (20%), and education reasons (2.5%) (Eurostat 2022). More generally, the discrepancy between the standard of living in Ukraine and the Central European countries grew, and the migration process became more accessible.

The migration of Ukrainians to Poland was generally perceived as “trouble-free,” both in terms of the labor market and socio-cultural integration, especially when compared to migrant communities from culturally distant countries like Vietnam or those in the Middle East. This overall positive reception among Poles stemmed from the assumed temporary nature of Ukrainian migration, its relatively small scale during that period, and, most significantly, the cultural proximity between Polish and Ukrainian people (Kindler, et al. 2022: 105–136).

The migration situation changed drastically on February 24, 2022, when the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine. By March of that year, it controlled approximately 25% of Ukrainian territory (Breteau 2022). The rapid advance of the Russian armed forces resulted in a massive refugee wave to neighboring countries in the West. According to UNHCR data, there were 8,207,977 refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe and 5,093,606 registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe, 1,593,860 of whom were recorded in Poland (status as of May 9, 2023) (UNHCR 2023b). The “Rapid Gender Analysis Ukrainian Refugees in Poland” showed that among the over 1.8 million refugees who crossed the Ukrainian-Polish border during the first three weeks of the aggression, about 30–40% were children under 14 (UNOCHA 2022). Women and children represent 87% of the refugees in Poland, with the remaining 13% being older persons (Institute of New Europe 2023). This gender and age profile is a consequence of the Ukrainian government introducing a ban on most men aged 18 to 60 leaving the country in anticipation that they might be conscripted in the future.

The response of the Polish government and society to this migration wave from Ukraine was nothing short of outstanding. The estimated value of the total annual expenditure by public authorities allocated to help refugees, along with Poles’ private expenses incurred for this purpose during the first three months of the war, amounted to 25.4 billion Polish zloty (approx. 6.1 billion US dollars), which is 0.97% of GDP (Baszczak, et al. 2022: 4). The response of the Polish people to the crisis was immediate and very generous – 77% of adult Poles got involved in helping refugees from Ukraine (Baszczak, et al. 2022: 4). On March 12, 2022, the Polish government quickly adopted a special Act allowing Ukrainian refugees to obtain a Polish personal ID number (PESEL), which granted them the right to free health care and education (Act 2022/583). Polish citizens opened their homes, literally and metaphorically, like never before.



## 5. Conclusions

This analysis of migration patterns and their perceptions provides an overview of the recent dynamics of people moving from Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine, to Europe.

African migration to Europe is often mischaracterized and misunderstood. Contrary to popular belief, African migration is primarily within Africa, with only a fraction reaching Europe. The majority of African migrants are young, educated individuals seeking better job opportunities, and nearly half are women. The portrayal of African migrants as overwhelmingly irregular or as refugees from “failed states” is incorrect, with the majority migrating through regular channels and for economic reasons.

Migration from the Middle East and Central Asia, particularly from conflict zones like Syria and Afghanistan, has created significant refugee populations. Despite some public backlash in Europe due to the large influx of refugees during the peak of the crisis, European institutions continue to grant asylum or temporary protection to a large number of refugees from these regions. The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in another significant wave of displacement, with Europe responding with collective solidarity, albeit facing criticism of double standards in the treatment of refugees.

Migration from Eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine, to the European Union has surged due to the conflict with Russia. While the migration was primarily driven by economic prospects before the war, the recent invasion has led to a significant increase in refugees. The response from countries like Poland, the primary recipient of Ukrainian refugees, has been commendable, demonstrating successful integration efforts and generous support from the public and the government.

In conclusion, migration trends reflect broader geopolitical and socio-economic contexts. The portrayal of migration and migrants is often skewed by political manipulation and media narratives, which tend to emphasize irregular migration and crisis situations. Meanwhile, the reality of migration is often rooted in economic aspirations and regional dynamics. The responses to these migration flows reveal the capacity for empathy and support, as well as the persisting challenges and biases in policies and public perceptions.

Last but not least, whether we want it or not, migration does not stop or end. The ancient method of erecting walls, which has recently gained

renewed attention, only slows down the process, deviates the routes, and even feeds transnational organized crime, without stopping people from crossing the border. It serves the public discourse of governments, yet, it cannot solve “the migration problem” as it continues to occur. Indeed, migration is an ever-lasting phenomenon occurring since the very beginnings of humankind, and history proves a wall – however sophisticated – has never entirely stopped one.

Furthermore, migration is a driver of change and progress. Without people moving, there would have been no exchange of ideas, technology, or creation of new concepts and breakthroughs that occurred only when people moved to a different environment. The question is: to what extent and at what pace do modern European societies want this change to happen to them? This question remains open for philosophical and political discussions. Hopefully, this chapter serves as a foundation for such fact-based and educated exchanges.

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