

# Refugee Crisis in the European Union Countries: Problems and Consequences

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## Abstract:

The article presents the results of a study of the negative impact of the European migration crisis (European refugee crisis) on various spheres of European society and the societies of individual EU countries (using the examples of Germany and Poland). The research methodology involves identifying current problems of Ukrainian migrants, assessing the socio-economic situation of EU citizens, assessing the impact of the migration crisis and identifying mechanisms for reducing its negative impact using sociological and expert survey methods. A comparative analysis of the features of the European migration crisis of 2015-2016 and the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine in 2022 was carried out. The main negative consequences of the migration crisis for Europe are identified as: a gradual decline in the economy and inflationary processes, rising prices and housing rents, and overloading of the social

security system, social services, healthcare and the labor market. It is noted that, on one hand, the socio-cultural proximity and similarity of democratic, humanistic values Ukrainians and Europeans share contribute to the integration of Ukrainian refugees in host countries. On the other hand, the positive attitude of national governments and citizens towards Ukrainian refugees can strengthen the process of intolerance towards other refugees of culturally different countries, therefore acting as a factor of internal political and inter-ethnic conflicts. The following mechanisms have been identified to reduce the level of the negative impact of the migration crisis on the EU: economic (redistribution of the EU budget in accordance with the number of refugees in the host country, investing in the restoration of Ukraine after the war); international legal (improving international legislation regarding refugees); political (updating and developing a strategy for the EU migration policy); social mechanisms aimed at social support for refugees.

## Introduction

In the scientific circles of European and Ukrainian scientists, the problem of migration and refugees in the European Union has remained relevant for 2-3 decades. At the same time, there are two options for the terminological interpretation of this multidimensional phenomenon. The absolute majority of Ukrainian scientists use the term „European migration crisis“, and among European scientists (and even more politicians and journalists) the term „European refugee crisis“ is very often used [1,2,7,12,13]. However, despite differences in terminology, the European migration crisis („European refugee crisis“) is a negative socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political phenomenon that has led to a disruption in the functioning and governance of the European Union as a whole. Additionally, it has entailed a threat to political, socio-economic and security components of stability in individual EU countries.

To date, the greatest migration crisis in Europe occurred in 2015-2016 due to an increase in the flow of refugees from zones of armed conflicts and humanitarian disasters (Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Venezuela, etc.) [6,9].

At that time, the European Union was not ready for such challenges - there was no consensus strategy for the EU migration policy that had been approved by all countries. For Europeans, the „European migration crisis/European refugee crisis“ turned out to be not only a humanitarian and socio-economic crisis, but also as

a crisis of governance in the European Union; it became a real threat to the integrity and stability of the EU as a geopolitical entity [2, p.39]. This was due to problems with the legal foundations of European migration policy, the determination of migrant quotas for EU countries, the determination of the legal status of refugees (although it is based on the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees), and the emergence of security threats from smuggling and terrorism. But the greatest threat to the stability of the EU, according to scientists, was the negative socio-cultural consequences, which in the scientific and political space were called „Islamization“ and the creation of „Eurabia“ (political neologism, English Eurabia), the transformation of European Christian values and a threat to Western civilization that would be brought about using Islamic ideology [1,4,8]. As a result of the integration of Muslims into the Western European community, problems with assimilation, the erosion of democratic values and fundamental traditions of indigenous Europeans, as well as their rights being neglected, have intensified, leading to violations of the legal and democratic structure of the EU.

The full-scale war that began on February 24, 2022, in Ukraine has had a significant impact on European Union countries: firstly, there are socio-economic consequences associated with financial, humanitarian and armed support for Ukraine; the energy crisis and restrictions as a result of sanctions against the Russian Feder-

ation; secondly, security consequences, the essence of which is that the threat of aggression and the example of the use of force against a neighbouring country creates an unstable situation in the region, affecting political relations between European countries; and, most importantly, the migration consequences caused by a large number of refugees from Ukraine to European countries, which in turn requires socio-economic, humanitarian and psychological support from European states and societies (according to Eurostat data as of mid-August 2023, regarding the number of refugees from Ukraine, the number of people who had temporary protection status in the EU reached 4.7 million, and there were a total of 5.88 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe) [3].

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the problems, consequences and mechanisms for reducing the negative impact of the European refugee crisis in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war.

## Methodology

The pilot study is aimed at identifying the problems and consequences of the European refugee crisis in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as identifying mechanisms for overcoming the socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences of the migration crisis in Europe. The methodological basis of the study is general scientific and it employed empirical methods of knowledge, making it possible to identify the following research objectives: 1) identify current problems of Ukrainian immigrants in host communities of European Union countries; 2) assess the socio-economic situation of EU citizens in connection with the increase in the number of refugees from Ukraine (using the examples of Germany and Poland); 3) assess the impact of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in the EU; 4) identify mechanisms for reducing the negative impact of the socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences of the migration crisis in the countries of the European Union hosting Ukrainian refugees.

## Participants

The study involved 580 participants. Of these: 1) 80 were experts in the field of political science, economics, psychology or sociology, or

they were scientists working on the problems of people affected by armed aggression; 2) 200 internally displaced persons from Ukraine who received temporary protection status in Germany and Poland (the average age of the respondents was 39.8 years, of which 74% were women and 26% were men); 3) 300 people living in Germany and Poland and are citizens of those countries (the average age was 42.8 years, of which 64% were women and 36% were men; 41% were citizens of Poland, 59% were citizens of Germany). The study among Ukrainian refugees in Europe and citizens of Germany and Poland was conducted from June-August 2023 together with volunteer organizations and specialists who provide primary psychosocial services to displaced people.

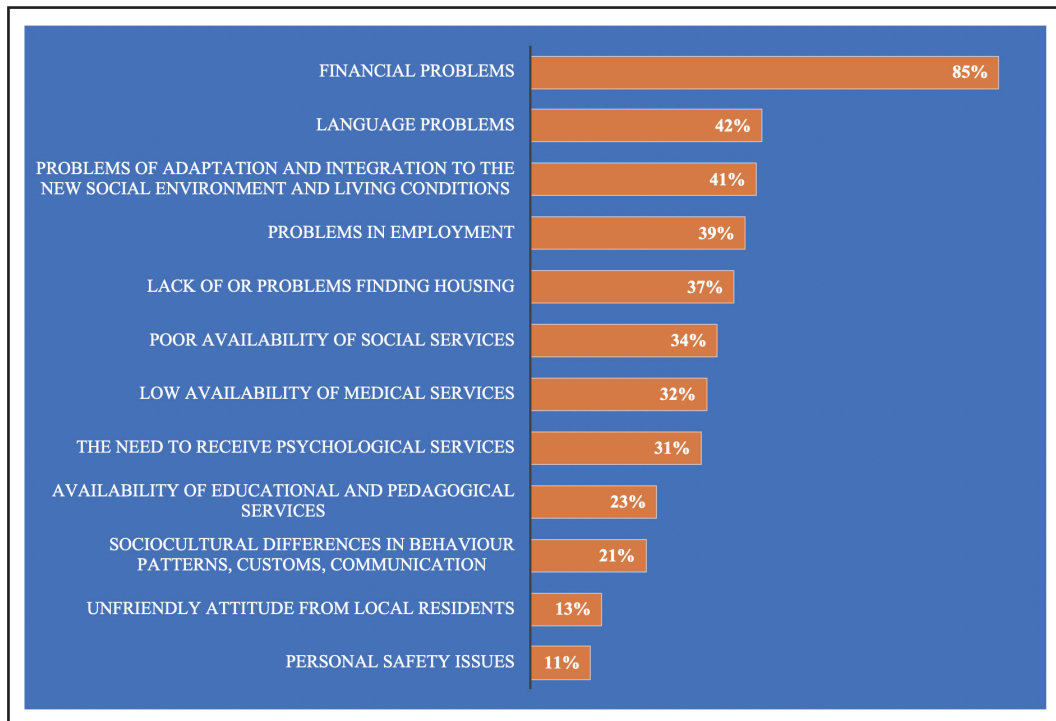
## Methods

According to the specific objectives of the pilot study, we used the following methods: 1) to identify the current problems of Ukrainian immigrants in host communities of the European Union countries - a mass sociological survey (random sampling); 2) to assess the socio-economic situation of EU citizens in connection with the increase in the number of refugees from Ukraine - a mass sociological survey of German and Polish citizens living in host communities (random sampling); 3) to determine an assessment of the impact of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in the EU and identify mechanisms for reducing its negative socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences - an online expert survey. To process the research results, methods of mathematical statistics (using SPSS 17.0 software) and a method of content analysis of respondents' answers to open questions were used.

## Results

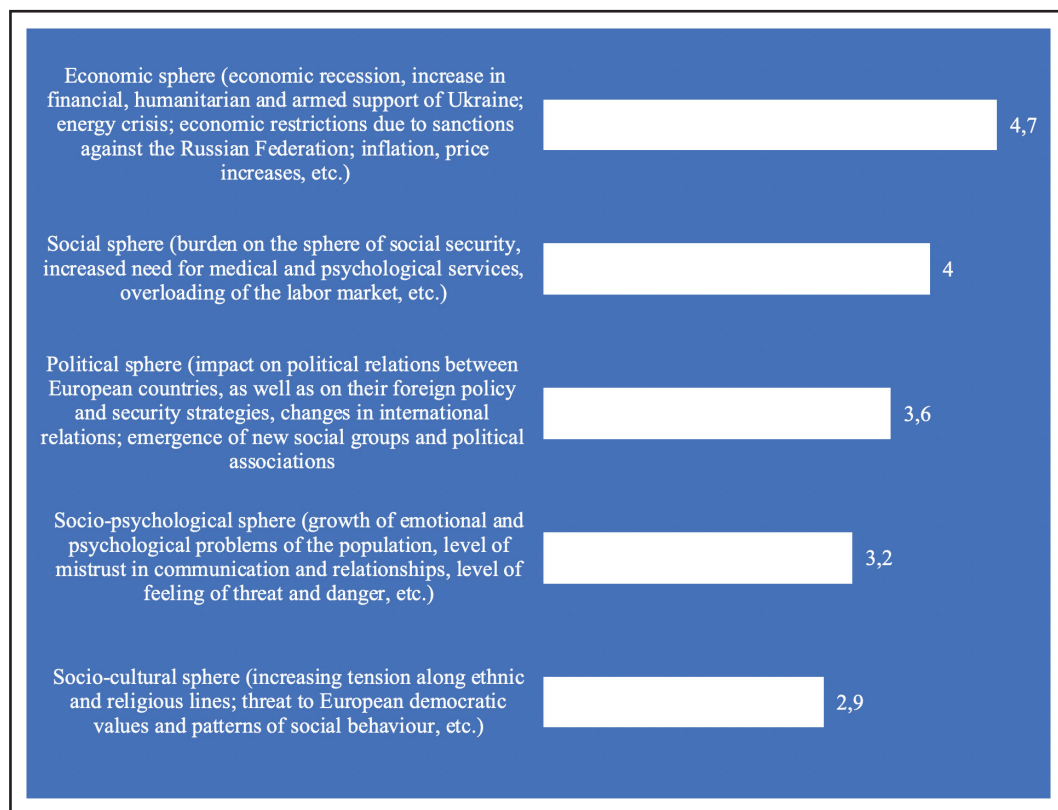
To identify current problems facing internally displaced persons in the EU, 200 internally displaced persons from Ukraine who received temporary protection status in Germany and Poland were interviewed (in Germany there are 28% of such persons of the total number in the EU, in Poland it is 24% [3]). The problems faced by refugees from Ukraine indirectly indicate the general state of the social and economic sphere of societies in European countries (Fig. 1). It is also important to assess the attitude towards

**Figure 1** Current problems of Ukrainian refugees in EU countries (several options could be selected)



**Figure 2** Assessment of the socio-economic situation by EU citizens in connection with the increase in the number of refugees from Ukraine (several options could be selected)



**Figure 3** Assessing the negative impact of the migration crisis in the EU on different areas of society

Ukrainian refugees on the part of citizens of host countries: 79% of Ukrainians noted local residents having a positive attitude towards them (according to Gradus Research Plus [5]).

As can be seen from the diagram, the main problems of internally displaced persons from Ukraine are: financial and material (a lack of funds, a lack of housing, job search); adaptation problems that may be associated with unfamiliarity with the language of the host country; accessibility of social, medical and psychological services. Sociocultural differences do not have a significant impact on the social and psychological well-being of Ukrainians abroad.

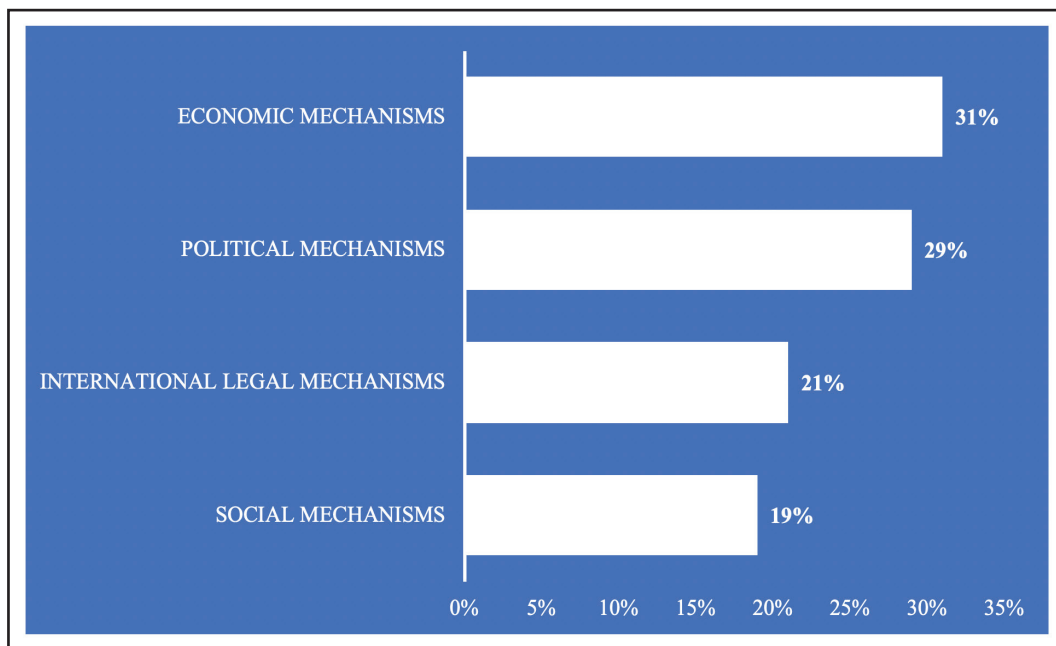
To assess the socio-economic situation of EU citizens in connection with the increase in the number of refugees from Ukraine, 300 respondents – citizens of Germany and Poland – were interviewed. In general, 84% of respondents had a positive attitude towards refugees from Ukraine, and 81% supported the EU migration policy on providing asylum and temporary protection status. Fig. 2 presents the results of an-

swers to the question: „What, in your opinion, was most influenced by the war in Ukraine and the increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees in the EU?“

According to the survey results, the greatest problems brought about by the influx of refugees from Ukraine are socio-economic – rising prices, inflation and job search, although the impact of the global economic downturn should be noted. Respondents also noted a significant burden on the sphere of social protection and social services (21%). It is interesting that the increase in sociocultural and interethnic tension was noted by 14% of respondents. This represents a positive trend compared to the migration crisis of 2015-2016, which was associated with the increase in refugees from Muslim countries [6,10].

Using an online expert survey (80 Ukrainian and European scientists in the field of political science, economics, psychology and sociology), an assessment was made of the impact of the migration crisis in the EU in connection with the war in Ukraine. The experts were asked to rate

**Figure 4** Mechanisms for reducing the negative impact of the European migration crisis (results of content analysis)



the negative impact on different areas of society on a 5-point scale (Fig. 3).

According to these experts, the migration crisis has had the greatest negative impact on the economic sphere (4.7 points), which in turn affects the general well-being of the population of European countries. Following this is the social sphere (4 points), which in European welfare states (social states) is a system-forming feature and is associated with a significant burden on the provision social, medical, psychological and pedagogical services. The negative impact on the political sphere (3.6 points) should also be noted, and it is manifested in threats to the integrity and political stability of the EU as a political entity, the radicalization of political views and positions, and tension in political relations between European countries (Western Europe, Central-Eastern Europe, South Europe, Balkan countries, Baltic countries). According to experts, the sociocultural (2.9 points) and socio-psychological (3.2 points) spheres have experienced a lower level of negative impact.

Experts also suggested identifying the most effective mechanisms to reduce the negative impact of the European migration crisis (European refugee crisis). A total of 164 responses from the

surveyed experts were received (answers to an open-ended question). Using the content analysis method, groups of mechanisms were identified and united by semantic and content similarity (Fig. 4).

The content of the selected categories of content analysis is as follows:

- Economic mechanisms (31% of all statements). The semantic content of the category is represented by the following typical answers: „creation of new jobs“, „development of a strategy for the restoration of Ukraine after the war“, „redistribution of the EU budget depending on the number of refugees accepted“;
- International legal mechanisms (29% of all statements). The semantic content of the category is represented by the following typical answers: „improving international legislation regarding refugees“, „involving the countries of North America and the Global South in solving the problems of Ukrainian refugees“;
- Political mechanisms (21% of all statements). The semantic content of the category is represented by the following typical answers: „updating and developing a strategy for EU migration policy“, „political and economic

support by Western European countries for the Baltic countries and Central-Eastern Europe“, „implementation of the idea of common European responsibility for solving migration problems“;

- Social mechanisms (19% of all statements). The semantic content of the category is represented by the following typical answers: „increasing spending on social work and social services“, „ensuring the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups of refugees and people in need of protection“, „social programs for the integration of refugees into host societies“, „involving specialists from other countries, from Ukraine in particular“, „support for public and volunteer organizations“, etc.

## Discussion

An analytical review of publications on the European migration crisis and the results of this study of the problems and consequences of the growing number of refugees from Ukraine identified several controversial issues.

Firstly, despite the fact that the majority of migrants and local residents show a positive, friendly attitude towards each other, financial and material problems and problems with the provision of social, medical and psychological services come to the fore. The war in Ukraine affected not only the financial and material losses of Ukrainian refugees in the EU (they became recipient countries of the European Union, which provides social assistance to ensure a minimum standard of living), but also the economies of European countries, whose budgets require additional funds to provide for Ukrainian refugees; this is reflected in rising prices and inflationary processes. On the other hand, Ukrainian refugees competed in the labor market with other categories of refugees who acquired this status before the start of the war in Ukraine. Taking into account such features of the Ukrainian mentality as hard work, education and tolerance, they have an advantage in employment over refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. This could create tension and radicalization among other ethnic communities living in the EU. In addition, there is a significant burden on the social security and social protection systems, social services and the healthcare system, which do not have the resources to cover and provide

services for all the categories of refugees and the local population.

Secondly, if the European migration crisis of previous years (especially 2015-16) contributed to the emergence of such a phenomenon in socio-political opinion as „Islamization“, the signs of which were a threat to democratic values and the foundations of multiculturalism, Ukrainian refugees do not fit into the typical category of those arriving in EU countries during previous migration flows. The similar sociocultural values of Ukrainians and European residents helped improve integration processes [14,15]. This situation poses a threat to the values of multiculturalism, the basis of which is a tolerant attitude towards cultural differences. However, in practice, the crisis of 2015-2016 showed the reluctance of refugees from Muslim countries to integrate into European society and comply with the principles of the rights and freedoms of citizens, as they created their own ethno-national and religious communities (notable examples are France, Germany and Sweden). As a result of the coexistence of different cultural groups in a single socio-economic and political space, it gives rise to problems that force many European countries to abandon the policy of multiculturalism and change their migration legislation. The positive attitude of national governments and citizens towards Ukrainian refugees can strengthen the process of intolerance towards refugees from other, more culturally dissimilar countries, and therefore act as a factor in internal political and inter-ethnic conflicts.

Thirdly, a controversial issue among experts is determining the level of negative impact of the refugee crisis on various spheres of EU society and its national societies, as well as the mechanisms for reducing and overcoming such an impact. As we noted and revealed from the results of the study, most experts agree that the crisis has had a significant impact on the EU economy, especially on the less developed countries of the European Union. Therefore, the main mechanisms for reducing the level of negative impact should be economic ones. Yet, despite the agreement of experts on the decline of the economy and some decline in well-being, there is no unity in determining effective economic mechanisms. Two aspects can be highlighted here: On one hand, many experts consider the most effective

mechanism for overcoming the migration crisis to be the return of refugees to Ukraine after victory in the war. This involves EU investment in the restoration of Ukraine and the creation of favourable socio-economic conditions for the existence and development of citizens. On the other hand, it requires a redistribution of the EU budget in accordance with the number of refugees in host countries and the level of their GDP. In our opinion, such a mechanism is only possible if appropriate political decisions are made and it is the political will of EU national governments.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: 1) For Ukrainian refugees, the most pressing problems are financial and material difficulties, difficulties with employment, and inaccessibility to social, medical and psychological services. Problems of integration may be associated with ignorance of the language of the host country; 2) Surveyed citizens of Germany and Poland determined that the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis had the greatest impact on the economy and well-being, the labor market, the sphere of social services and social security; 3) Sociocultural proximity and the similarity of the democratic, humanistic values of Ukrainians and Europeans contribute to the integration of Ukrainian refugees in host countries; 4) Experts believe that the migration crisis has the greatest negative impact on the economic and social sphere, and the main mechanisms for reducing or overcoming the negative impact are economic, international legal, political and social mechanisms.

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