

The Ukrainian Migrant Flows to Greece due to the Russian-Belarus Invasion

By Gregory T. Papanikos *

Migration flows are as old as human history itself. In Greece, the first movements of people are recorded in the 13th century BCE and not stopped ever since. Inflows and outflows of people are a permanent feature of Greek history. However, a distinction should be made between three types of flows. Firstly, people are forced to leave their country because of national agreements of resettlements. A world example of such resettlement was the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey in the first part of the 20th century. Secondly, people flee an area to save their lives because of war and prosecutions, including genocides. An example of such migration was the outflow of Greeks from Asia Minor because of the war between Turkey and Greece. Thirdly, people migrate for social reasons which may include economic, political and educational purposes. This was definitely the case of the post-Second World War period in Greece when many Greeks moved outside of Greece to find better jobs abroad (e.g., Germany); study abroad (e.g., U.K.); and to live in a democratic country (e.g., Canada, Sweden, etc.), because in Greece a dictatorship (1967-1974) had abolished democracy. Greece has also been on the receiving end of many migrants from all over the world for the same reasons. The latest example is the flow of Ukrainians who are coming to Greece due to the Russian-Belarus invasion of their country. These migration flows are examined in this paper.

Keywords: migrants, refugees, migration policy, Greece, Ukraine

Introduction

The Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine took many Europeans by surprise.¹ Many of them thought that a European war was a thing of the past and some unfortunate incidents such as the NATO bombing of Serbia were an exception to the rule. As far as human beings are concerned, war brings death and all kinds of displacement; the war in Ukraine is no exception. Since the beginning of this war, millions of Ukrainians have fled the war zone, either migrating inside the country or outside in the nearby bordering countries. According to the International Migration Office (IMO), from the beginning of the war on 24 February 2022, close to seven million Ukrainians have fled the country to find a safe shelter elsewhere. The number of people displaced inside Ukraine is not known as of yet.

Greece does not border Ukraine, but it has contributed its share in providing shelter to all Ukrainians who left the country due to war and decided to come to Greece. By the end of May 2022, 32.6 thousand Ukrainians have entered Greece as

*President, Athens Institute for Education and Research, Greece.

¹I have examined the issue of the Ukrainian war in a series of papers, see Papanikos (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e)

refugees. Historically, Greece is a country where all kinds of migrations have occurred, which include the flows of outmigration and immigration and the types, whether economic migrants and/or asylum seekers.² Since antiquity Greeks themselves have migrated for various reasons all over the Mediterranean and even beyond. More recently, Greeks left the country after the Great Recession of 2008 and went to more advanced countries of Europe, North America and Oceania. Concurrently, many migrants and refugees were entering Greece to either be employed in various low-level skills jobs or seeking asylum as a first step to move to another European country, primarily in Germany and U.K. Most of them enter Greece as illegal migrants creating huge problems at the Greek borders and in the main cities where they end up. Greek migration policy towards these types of migrants and refugees, who mainly come from Africa and Asia, has been criticized as being discriminatory, inhumane and racist. In addition, the instrumentalization of migrants and refugees has created a political strife between the European Union and Turkey.

However, this is not the case with the Ukrainians. The Greek policy authorities acted very fast and designed a very effective migration policy towards Ukrainian war refugees—completely unprecedented for the Greek government which usually is notorious for its slow and ineffective policy implementation. This is not unique to Greece, but extends to all the countries of Europe which are more than welcoming to refugees from Ukraine while at the same time making life difficult for any other migrant from Africa and/or Asia. This differentiation in treatment has already raised some voices against this type of discrimination, but the explanation might be different from admitting migrants/refugees based on pure racist criteria. Economics might provide a non-racist explanation of this discrimination as explained below in this paper.

Including this short introduction, this study is organized into five sections. In the next section an argument is made which may provide a “rational” explanation for why the Ukrainian migrants/refugees are treated differently. In the next section, data on the total outmigration of Ukrainian refugees are presented. In section four, the statistical data on Ukrainian flows to Greece are examined since the beginning of the war until the end of May 2022. The last section concludes.

Selected Literature Review and Some Theoretical Considerations

All types of migration have been the subject of many disciplines including the arts. Some of the best novels in the world deal with the issue of migration. The well-known work of Homer, *Odyssey*, describes the nostos of one person, Odysseus, to return to his homeland. In this present study, the emphasis is on economics. A selected literature review is provided that demonstrates that migration imposes huge economic costs. Migrants should be welcomed by a public authority which requires an administrative structure in order to manage the entire

²In Papanikos (1991), I examined the Greek emigration to Canada and in Papanikos (2003) I estimated the number of migrants/refugees living in Greece.

process of the migrant/refugee flow requiring funding to provide food, clothes, shelter,³ education,⁴ social services⁵ and finally work for the migrants/refugees. All these should be decided by the political process and in democratic societies like the ones of Europe and USA where migration has become a major political issue as explained by Nath, Pedriana, Gifford, McAuley and Fülöp (2022). See also the study by Yang (2021), which compares the 2016 presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders on this issue.

Arts, culture and literacy writings have been influenced by migration stories. Ait Idir (2019) looks at literacy writings of Tayeb Salih and Joseph Conrad. The author of the article emphasizes the issue of alienation when people move to the north coming from Africa. Similarly, Chamekh (2021) examines illegal migration in Tunisian rap music. He studies the music as a means of resistance and protest against conditions which force many Tunisians to go to Europe, emphasizing, from an artistic point of view, the increasing security efforts of the EU⁶ and Tunisian authorities. What is missing here is the fact that all these impose costs, which at the end of the day, are paid by the taxpayers of these countries.

The legal aspects of migration impose huge costs on both the host and home countries of migrants when it comes to family unification issues⁷ and social security and pension matters.

All these sentiments—real or actual does not really matter—impose an economic cost on the host country. Resources should be expended to facilitate some kind of integration into the community. In many cases, migrants do not want to integrate, especially their children, because the return to the lost homeland is always in the back of their minds.⁸ This important issue is discussed among many others by

³Given the huge inflows of migrants in countries like Turkey and Italy, Francese, Uz and Adamo (2016) have looked at how these flows have affected the city architecture in these two countries. In Athens in the 1920s, entire city-suburbs were built to shelter the over one-million refugees who fled the Asia Minor to avoid massacre. The prefix “Nea” is a reminder of their old areas in Asia Minor, e.g., Nea Ionia, Nea Smyrna, Nea Philadelphia.

⁴On the educational differential achievements of migrants and the host population, see Sakellariou (2017). Also, Zervas (2017) looks at the history of educational provision in USA emphasizing the needs of migrants.

⁵Lee and Weng (2019) look at the challenge of social work provisions to immigrants and refugees. This exerts additional costs and very much depends on the cultural characteristics of the displaced people. Language and religion are some of them.

⁶See Zichi (2018) for a discussion of one aspect of the security issue, namely the development of a European fleet in the Mediterranean to prevent illegal migration.

⁷For example, see Duca (2014) for family unification legal issues in Europe.

⁸One important aspect of the integration of children—the so-called second generation—is the acquisition of language skills of the host country. On the other hand, parents may want their children to learn their own language. In many cases this has some positive results as children become bilingual as has been demonstrated by Corbari (2017). This, of course, is not the case when migrants move to another country simply to work for a short period of time—a few months or years—and then return back to their country of origin. In many cases, they leave their children back home as was the case with Greeks who moved to Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. This is also the case of Mexicans today who migrate to the USA, creating inflows and outflows of Mexican workers. On the latter issue, see González-Rosas and Zárate-Gutiérrez (2018). It is interesting to note that Greeks migrated to Germany after the Great Recession of 2008 to find employment. The interactions of old Greek migrants to Germany and the new wave are examined by Tseligka (2022).

Avgoulas and Fanany (2021) for the Greek diaspora to Australia. In a similar context, Pelliccia (2017) researches the identity of second generation of Greeks in Italy.

Internal migration, another important aspect of displacement, is discussed by Arnon and Shamai (2016) for the case of Israel. They look at the issue of cultural integration, which, despite the fact that migrants have a cultural affinity with the local population, conflicts did arise imposing costs on decision making at the community level. Similarly, Ozdemir and Dokmeci (2016) looked at the internal migration in Turkey from a demographic point of view.

Economics is also an important part of the literature on migration. In many cases, refugees and asylum seekers who claim that their lives are at risk may be disguised economic migrants, i.e., people move to find better paid jobs and avoid absolute poverty.⁹ These economic migrants—legal or illegal—impose all kinds of economic and social costs, which, at the macro level, the host country should take care of, but at the microeconomic level, firms and other providers of employment to migrants should adjust their management approach. Cheng-Fei Tsai and Yen (2017) examined the adjustment process of Chinese immigrant wives in Taiwan. Reddy Edara (2020) studied the Filipino catholic migrants in Taiwan, finding that religion plays an important role in migrants' wellbeing. Both studies concluded with a number of suggestions to improve the management and social welfare of such migrant workers.

The above limited literature review solely based on papers published in the various eJournals of the *Athens Institute for Education and Research* show that migrations impose serious costs on the host country. This cost is multidimensional and includes economic, social, political, cultural, educational and religious aspects. If a strict cost-benefit analysis is applied, and assuming that the total number of migrants/refugees a given country like Greece can accept is fixed (say N^* as in Figure 1), then as far as Greece is concerned more Ukrainians will be admitted, *ceteris paribus*, than any other migrants/refugees of a different nationality. Furthermore, if, from a philanthropic point of view, helping one refugee is as good as helping any other, then there is no ethical reason why Greece could not admit only Ukrainians as far as the number of Ukrainians wanting to come to Greece is greater than N^* .

It is true that the migration/refugee crisis of Ukraine was met with an unprecedented positive reaction by all European countries. Governments and the citizens of Europe open their national borders to welcome Ukrainians who left their country. The only grievances were that there was a discrimination against other migrants/refugees. It is true that there was a difference, but this can be explained by a generic cost-benefit analysis. For whatever reasons, admitting Ukrainians is not the same as admitting a refugee from an Asian or an African war-stricken country. One easy explanation is to infer that the Greek policy authorities are racists and xenophobic and this is the reason why they prefer to admit Ukrainians to any other

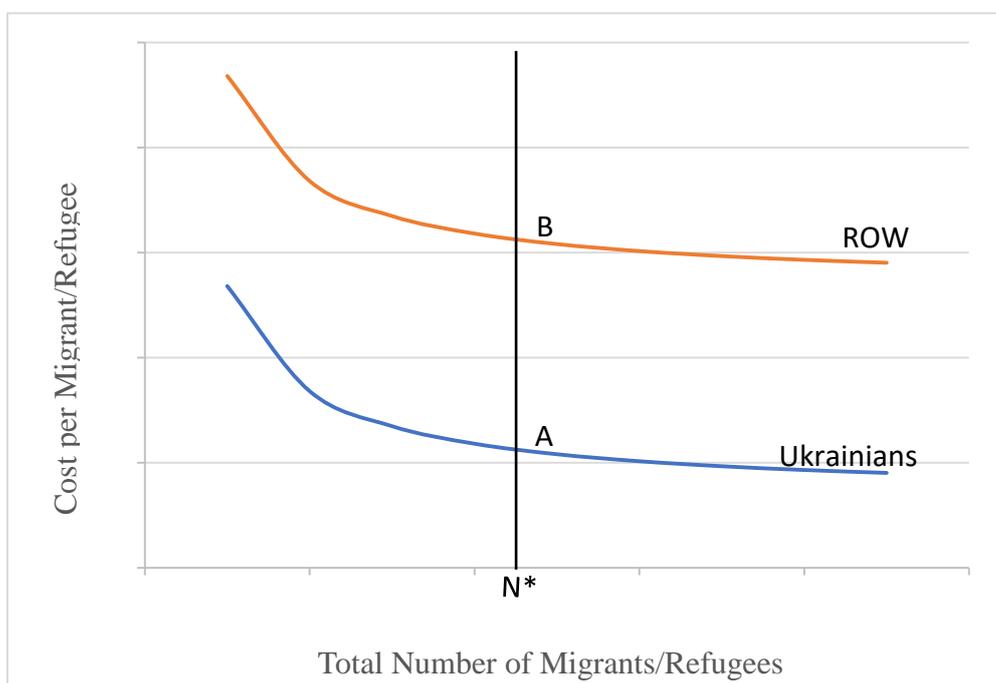
⁹Most migrants live in relative poverty in their host country, but they are better off relative to their home country. On the relative poverty of migrants in Italy, see Rimoldi and Barbiano di Belgiojoso (2016).

nationality. Of course, at the extreme end of racism and xenophobic sentiments, a country may decide to admit zero migrants/refugees.

Figure 1 offers another explanation for this behavior. It is constructed in such a way so that the average cost of admitting a refugee from Ukraine is much lower than any other refugee coming from the rest of the world (ROW). This might explain why so many refugees were admitted not only into Greece, but into all other European countries, particularly those countries which border Ukraine as will be shown in the next section.

Assuming that admitting a migrant/refugee from one country as from any other country, then admitting only Ukrainians should be morally accepted and it does not necessarily demonstrate a policy of discrimination based on racism and intolerance. If the costs for admitting a migrant/refugee is not the same, then maximizing the number of migrants/refugees admitted in one country requires the equalization of marginal costs of admitting a migrant/refugee. As it stands, Figure 1 shows that only Ukrainians will be accepted because they incur the lowest average cost.

Figure 1. *Costs per Migrant/Refugee*



The next question which naturally arises is, why do Ukrainian migrants/refugees have a much lower economic cost than any other migrant/refugee? The cost is multidimensional, but at the end of the day it can be reduced to money (economic) cost. The economic costs are direct and indirect, short-term and long-term, fixed and variable. The direct economic costs arise immediately with the arrival of a migrant/refugee. These people must be fed, clothed and sheltered from day one of their arrival. Also, these people need public services such as health,

education and security (policy) services. These make up the short-term (immediate) direct economic costs.

There are many additional costs which normally occur in the long run, say after one generation. The new generation of migrants who are born in the host country impose a cost on the country because they normally require additional social services, but the whole situation may get very dire if the youth of migrants feel that they are not welcomed in their place of birth. France, and to a certain extent many other European countries, have experienced social grievances that led to riots. It goes beyond the scope of this study to estimate these costs, but assuming that these issues do not exist or playing the blame game does not solve the problem. This might explain why Ukrainians are more welcome than other refugees: they impose the least of short- and long-term economic and social costs. The Ukraine flow of refugees is examined in the next section.

The Total Flow of Ukrainian War Refugees

Since the war started on 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians left the country and found shelter first in the neighboring countries (see the map in Figure 2), and then to other countries which wanted to admit them. In the past, Europe has had to cope with an influx of migrants/refugees many times, but the current numbers are unprecedented. Also unparalleled is the geographical proximity of the home country making it much easier to cross only one border.

Figure 2. *Ukrainian War Refugees to Neighboring Countries*



Source: United Nations (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>)

Table 1 provides data on the Ukrainian migration to border countries. In total, close to seven million Ukrainians had fled by the end of May 2022. On 4 March 2022, the European Council adopted a temporary protection mechanism for all Ukrainians who left the country.¹⁰

¹⁰See <https://bit.ly/3mamEGy>.

Of great interest is where did these refugees choose to go? Half of them (52.84%) went to Poland. The influx of 3.7 million Ukrainians to Poland in just a three month period (a number equal to almost 10% of the Polish population) is unprecedented. Similarly, of great interest is the number of Ukrainian refugees who were accepted into Hungary. There, 10% of the total refugees or 698,420 were admitted into Hungary which corresponds to 7.16% of the Hungarian population. What is of interest for Poland and Hungary is the fact that during the crisis of Syrian refugees, both countries were reluctant to accept refugees coming from this area. Discrimination is an easy explanation, however including the economic and social cost of accepting refugees may be another explanation.

Table 1. Total refugee influx from Ukraine in neighboring countries by the end of May 2022

Country	Refugees	% Of Refugees	Population	% Of Population
Poland	3,690,089	52.84%	37,950,802	9.72%
Romania	587,219	8.41%	19,286,120	3.04%
Russian Federation	1,041,095	14.91%	144,104,080	0.72%
Hungary	698,420	10.00%	9,749,760	7.16%
Republic of Moldova	483,306	6.92%	2,620,490	18.44%
Slovakia	466,264	6.68%	5,458,830	8.54%
Belarus	16,648	0.24%	9,379,950	0.18%
Total	6,983,041	100%	228,550,032	3.06%

Note: The accumulated data in this table is higher than the total number of refugees fleeing Ukraine presented above since it also takes into account people crossing the border between Romania and Moldova.

Source: United Nations (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>) and World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=PL>).

A last note on Table 1 is that many bordering countries may admit Ukrainian refugees as a demonstration of their historical anti-Russian feelings. Countries like Moldova and Poland still fear that a Russian invasion in their countries is possible. However, this cannot explain the feelings of Greeks towards Ukrainian refugees. Traditionally Greece had close ties with Russia going back to the late centuries of the first millennium. It seems that the invasion of Ukraine may tear apart these long, good relations. One demonstration of this was the welcoming of Ukrainian refugees.

The Flow of Ukrainian War Refugees to Greece

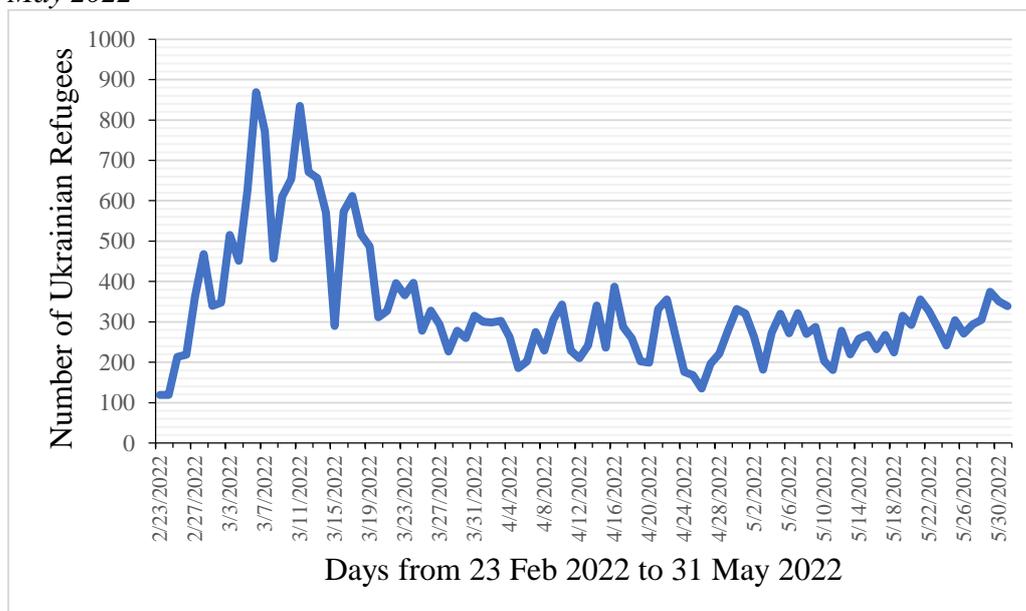
The Greek government reacted immediately to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, unprecedented for the Greek state bureaucracy. There are a number of reasons why Ukrainians are more than welcome in Greece. As a matter of fact, they would have been more than welcome if the war was not with Russia, which from the Greek point of view, bears the same characteristics as Ukraine. What are these

characteristics? Firstly, both Greece and Ukraine share the same religion. i.e., they are both Greek Orthodox. Second, they share long cultural and historical affinities that go back to the Homeric years. For example, Snake Island is also called the “Achilles’ Island” because according to the Greek mythology, Thetis brought in the island and buried the corpses of Achilles and Patroclus after they were killed in the Trojan War. More significantly, in 1815 in Ukraine (the city of Odessa which was a Greek settlement established in the 6th century BCE), a secret Greek society was formed to liberate Greece from the Ottoman yoke. Thirdly, as Herodotus has said, Ukrainians and Greeks are “homotropous” which etymologically means that they have the same (homo) ways (tropous) of behavior; so much so that they would become completely immersed in Greek society. Their only difference is the language, but even that may be quickly surpassed because they use the Cyrillic alphabet which is most similar to the Greek alphabet than any other language. After all, the Ukrainian alphabet was created by two Greeks—the brothers Cyril and Methodius, the so called “apostles of Slavs”—in the 9th century CE.

Based on all this, the affinity between Ukrainians and Greeks is very strong, making it easy for the Greek Government to implement a favorable refugee policy and so they did. It should be noted that many of these refugees are of Greek descent, especially coming from cities like Mariupol which had a strong Greek community for centuries. Thus, this welcoming is not so “innocent” since in reality it reminds many Greeks of the inflow of Greek refugees from Asia Minor in 1922 or from Istanbul in the 1950s.

Figure 3 shows the daily arrivals of Ukrainian refugees to Greece. Actually, there was a complete open borders policy making it extremely easy to enter Greece. The daily inflow climaxed in the first 2-3 weeks of the invasion, and it has stabilized thereafter with the trend to be downward (not shown in the graph).

Figure 3. Daily Inflows of Ukrainian Refugees to Greece from 23 Feb 2022 to 31 May 2022



Source: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/ukraine/>.

The maximum inflow occurred on 6 March 2022 with 869 refugees entering Greece that day (Table 2). The minimum flow of only 119 refugees happened during the day of the invasion (24 Feb 2022), as well as the preceding day (23 Feb 2022). On average during the entire period under examination (end of May 2022), the daily inflow of refugees was 333 people, but almost half of the total inflow happened during the month of March (Table 3).

Table 2. *Summary Statistics of Ukraine Refugees to Greece from 23 Feb 2022 to 31 May 2022*

Variable	Number of People
Sum	32,589
Average	333
Maximum	869
Minimum	119
Standard Deviation	148

Table 3. *Ukraine Refugees to Greece by Month*

	Total Number of Refugees	Average Number of refugees
February	1501	250
March	14630	472
April	7759	259
May	8699	281

The average daily inflow of Ukrainian refugees to Greece was 250 people in February; it almost doubled during the month of March (472 daily average inflow); it decreased to 259 in April and picked up in May to 281.

The future of these inflows will very much depend on the war developments in the Ukraine. If a peaceful solution is established, then not only will the inflows stop, but many of the refugees will return home. For those who remain in Greece, the cost of adjustment and integration will be negligible.

Conclusions

In this study I am not claiming that there is no discrimination against migrants/refugees caused by racist and intolerance motives. In any country, there will be some percentage of the population against migrants/refugees irrespective of where they are coming from. This percentage of population is not static and depends very much on the costs incurred by the local population. The higher these costs are, the higher the percentage of the local population who are against admitting and welcoming migrants/refugees, and this is the real danger for democratic societies. By accepting migrants/refugees who incur a higher cost, may fuel racist and intolerant sentiments of a much wider part of population, which may lead to extreme racist political parties to be elected as governing parties.

The conclusion of this study is that admitting migrants/refugees should be carefully designed so that political stability and social cohesion is maintained. The

case of Ukrainian migrants/refugees coming to Greece shows the actual costs do play a role and should be taken into consideration. Extreme voices of making value judgements and accusing everybody who raises concerns on the unconditional admitting migrants/refugees are as dangerous to democracy as those voices who shout that no migrant/refugee should be admitted.

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