What is Your Thinking in the Global Issues? European Migration Crisis: The Unavoidable Reality

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Abstract: Migration has been a human phenomenon with varying motivators, scales, destinations and distances covered, within or crossing national boundaries. However, the scale of global migration have changed to a vexed level especially in the last few decades which has been exacerbated by conflicts, wars and economic dwindling of many 'third world' countries. The paper discussed European migration crisis that have been aggravated by political upheavals, conflicts, wars and insurgencies in countries like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Mali, southern Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo which forced millions fled their homes. The author discussed also the responses of European nations in conjunction of Paris terror attack of 13th November, 2015 which irked the sympathy refugee migrants deserved.

Keywords: migration, migrants, forced migration, refugees, European Unions

1. Introduction

Migration is inherent human phenomenon derived by push and pull factors from both generating and receiving geographical areas. The scale of migration has been changing over time and the circumstances that generate push and pull migrations, this may only pose problems to supplying and receiving areas when they are adversely affected in their respective circumstances at varying degrees. Migration simply mean movement of people changing or affected in their respective circumstances at varying degrees. That is expecting better economic conditions in the receiving places than in the sending places.

There were many causes of migration ranging from socio-economic to natural and man-made factors that cut across the globe in varying forms and patterns. Migration can be as a result of socio-economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, low wages, poor working conditions, social insecurity, poor structure of the economy and dissolution of social fabrics; where people in a particular area experienced social and/or economic hardships may generate migration to where they think their lives will be better as [2] termed it desire for ‘betterment’. That is expecting better economic conditions in the receiving places than in the sending places.

Migration to Europe involved all types of migrants from voluntary to compulsory that are flowing into Europe and other western world being the major recipient of these migrants. This migration is predominantly the international migration, mostly from Asia, Africa and Southeast Europe. Ten major sources of migrants were identified to be from Middle East, Africa, South and Central Asia mainly from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Gambia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan [5] [6], [7]. Migrants from these countries flown to Europe are mostly through the cheaper and risky routes across the Mediterranean Sea, other sources are from the Western Balkans include Serbia, Kosovo and Albania [8]. As [4] reported, majority of the migrants are from the developing countries and the migration pressures have resulted from where political systems have fail, shifts in the location of economic growth areas and from displacement caused by conflicts.
In recent years, the scale of migration has grown tumultuously and the nature of the flows has changed as a consequence of economic meltdown, political crisis, wars and insurgencies events in many parts of the world [9]. Political instability and wars in the Middle East, South and Eastern Asia has exacerbated the migration pressure more especially in the last decade. Similarly, [4] opined that, economic meltdown, political crisis, wars and insurgency are the major reasons for generating high rate of migrants from Africa. The scale of international migration into Europe has been increasing pressure and posed threat to receiving countries and has taken centre stage of European Union concern and debates.

2. Methodology

Methodology adopted is basically ‘desk-top’ in other words, ‘document analysis’ as the case of qualitative research method where the data collected are from documents. On this subject matter, I consider secondary data is easier to get and use for this type of study as recommended by [10] and [11] ‘document analysis’ may be necessitated when circumstances or proceedings ‘cannot be investigated by direct observation or questioning’. The author was motivated by the intrinsic media commentators that dominate the centre stage of daily news on migration crisis hitting Europe especially from war riddled or torn zones of Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia and Africa.

3. Migration Perspectives

As it has been explained, migration is the movement of people from one geographical place to another with the intentions of settling temporarily or permanently in the new location. The scale of migration can be small or large as it may involve individuals, family units or large groups of people or a whole society. The movement can be short or over long distances and even from one country to another, but short distance movement or migration within one state nation is often affect local environment and indeed, this is the dominant form of migration globally. Movement that involved crossing nation state boundaries (international migration), on the other hand, in the recent decades is on the increase globally.

The scale and the nature of migration flows has grown and changed as a consequence of economic, social and political events in many countries as [1] and [4] described it ‘migration era’. Although migration is not cause by singular factor, but various factors are attributed to migration that emanated at the supply (origin) source among which are physical, economic, social and political or rather natural and human factors. These factors or motivators of migration lead to individual decision to move on either voluntary or forceful basis.

3.1 Migration Motivations

Many studies have identified various migration motivators on the basis of either voluntarily (wishes) or forceful; as a result of natural or human phenomena. However, either ways, once people were set to migrate, it is on account of what initiated the movement is regarded as ‘motivator’.

Under any factor one perceives migration, it obviously has direct connotation with one or combination of physical, economic, social and political events as motivator(s) for migration in any given circumstance. In any of these, there are variant elements or circumstances that warrant migration, although some may only influence small scale migration while some influences large scale migration. For instance, rogue environment, erosion and the like influences migration usually at small scale, while economic and political motivators mostly influence large scale migrations that often involve crossing nation state boundaries. In any given society, when the socio-economic and political imbalances between regions manifested, it will lead to push factors in fall behind societies and pull factors in safer and prosperous societies as [2] described it as potential aspiration for ‘betterment’. Similarly natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, desertification, drought and famine as well as man-made disasters, such as armed conflict, internal strife, ethnic or religious cleansing, persistent violence, persecution, human rights violations, and the like are generally considered as the major large scale migration motivators [1]; [3]; [4] & [12].

In the last two decades political instability, armed conflict, and internal strife in many countries of Africa, central and Southeast Asian regions couple with wars instigated more migration than that of economic and other natural disaster motivators. For instance, political crisis, armed conflicts and wars (insurgencies) in some African countries like that of Mali, southern Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo and Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria forced hundred thousands of people fled their homes [13]. Similarly, political upheaval in Egypt and Libya forced couple of thousands people to fled and became refugee migrants. When wind of political changes blew across the Middle East rekindled/ignited violence and to some extent wars in countries like Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Kurdish war/persecution in Turkey/Iraq forced many out of their homes. Correspondingly, crisis in Pakistan/Kashmir, war in Afghanistan, Rohingya persecution in Myanmar (Burma) necessitated hundreds of thousands to leave their homes [3]; [5]; [6]; [7]; & [14]. Many of these migrants crossed over their countries boundaries and became potential refugees in other countries of their destinations known as International Displaced Persons (IDP).

Forceful migration has been identified by many studies have associated with many problems to the migrants’ supplying and receiving areas. Displacement is highly associated with massive loss of economic and socio-cultural tangible and symbolic commodities. As [1] explained, people forced to flee their homes share many common types of vulnerability regardless of the underlying reasons for their displacement. Migrants were compelled to leave all but a few possessions behind, such as home, land, terminates stable employment or economic activities, traditional livelihood and means of generating income, stripped of their means of survival, disintegration of the family and community ties, friendship, cultural heritage and a sense of belonging to their places and more so, face difficulties to be absorbed into the receiving society. Furthermore, migrants are vulnerable to wide-range acts of violence and human rights violations, such as attacks on camps, forced conscription, sexual assault, rape,
impoverishment, social isolation, exclusion from health, welfare and education provision, these are the common pernicious effects migrants face especially in the receiving society where they are likely to stay [1]; [4]; [15] & [16]. In addition, [1] observed, migrants generally are found to be ‘unhappy with their lives’ compounding their quandary, often are stigmatized and may also be viewed with suspicion and hostility in the areas to which they flee.

4. Nature of European Migration

Europe for long has been seen as the prosperous region economically and politically by especially developing countries whose economy is lagging behind. With the waves of economic and socio-political problems circumscribed most of the developing nations; motivate migrants from these countries on assumptions of obtaining probable desired employment, better and safe life in Europe. Although, other motivating factors play significant roles in initiating migration such as natural and man induced disasters, more especially the later, influence most of the migrations in the last two decades. These are generally emanated from political turmoil and environmental catastrophic events as factors in areas where migration crisis and flight became necessary.

Although crisis driven migrations can occur in any part of the world and its effects can be felt in a far distance location as Richmond (1994) explained “incidents occurring in one place trigger a chain of events the effects of which are felt in countries far removed from the source”. This is exactly the reflection of what Europe is experiencing as the destination of migrants from crisis driven migration areas far away from Europe. The momentum of crisis causes migration into Europe King (2002) observed it has been identified to be “since 1990 when migrants have emanated from the Gulf war, persecution of Kurdish populations in Turkey and Iraq, war and famine in various parts of Africa and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. War and ethnic cleansing led to massive displacements of population like one million Bosnians, Albanian, Balkan, etc emigrants became refugees”.

In recent years, the exacerbated political turmoil in the Middle East countries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen intensified the momentum of migration to Europe through Turkish-Greek border. Furthermore, instability and the collapse of the political system in some North African countries especially Libya and Egypt made their Mediterranean border so porous and permeable, which triggered and widen the flow of migrants easier from Africa to Europe through the Euro-Mediterranean border [4]; [13] & [17]. This is similar to what [4] explained, the scale of migration has grown and the nature of the flows has changed as a result of migration motivation events.

It has been presumed that, the six years war conflict in Syria continues to be by far the major driver of the migration in the last four years. According to BBC report, it was estimated that over 5 million Syrians fled out, even though majority of them were hosted by neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan [13]. Furthermore, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reported over one million migrants arrived Europe in 2015 through Mediterranean Sea were identified to be from the top three nationalities of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqis. Syrians were regarded to be the largest migrants group in 2015 with about 49% of the total migrants. Similarly the ongoing Taliban violence in Afghanistan forced some hundred thousand to migrate which constituted 21% then followed by the political unrest of Iraq which made up 8% and persecution in Eritrea made up 7% of the total migrants while the balance 15% from other countries. Deteriorating security and groan poverty in Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Kosovo is also leading people to look for new lives elsewhere in Europe, have also contributed to the migrants’ influx [13] & [18].

Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) (2015) reported that, ‘International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated over 464,000 migrants have crossed into Europe by sea for the first nine months of 2015, Syrians made up the largest group. Afghans looking to escape the ongoing war with Taliban and Eritreans force fleeing made up the second and third largest groups of migrants respectively’ [19]. Similarly, later the IOM estimated more than 750,000 migrants were identified to have reached the European borders by sea between January and November 2015, compared with just 280,000 for the whole of 2014 although, the figures do not include those migrants who sneaked into Europe unnoticed during the period under review and by the end of 2015 the figure estimated to have exceeded one million migrants of which 58% were men, 17% women and 25% children [13]; [18] & [19].

5. Discussion

The paper discuss the current issues of the European migration crisis as perceived in different contexts as relate to anticipated circumstances and problems to form a base line for drawing conclusion. These anticipated problems led to the Europe outcry and disgust migrants by closing borders and building fences or sealing borders with a razor wire to prevent migrants from entry after hazardous life risky journey. The fears are mainly surrounding social, economic, cultural and political consequences of migration on Europeans which resulted to inhospitable responses by most of the EU countries. It was reported that on 14 September 2015, Hungary blocked the migrants’ route from the site of Serbia, heavily manned with security and helicopters hovering above to prevent migrants crossing the border entering Hungary. The Hungarian government announced the construction of a 175-kilometre-long razor-wire fence along its southern border with Serbia and another 40-km razor-wire fence along its border with Croatia in 2015 blocking migrants crossing it borders [6]; [13] & [18]. The Paris attacked of 13th November, 2015 has show-cased the fears of migrants destination acceptability and or refusal and worsen the situation of in-hospitality approach to the migrants. This created serious tensions among both European Unions and non-member countries in the region.

According to [13], over 1,034,698 immigrants arrived Europe in 2015 out of which 1,000,573 (96.8%) arrived by sea, and 34,125 (3.2%) by land. Similarly, UNHCR estimated over 1,055,200 refugees and migrants detected to
have arrived Europe till December, 21st 2015, three to four times more than that of 2014. Equally, EU’s external border forces, Frontex, detected in single months of July 107,500 migrants, 190,000 in August, 267,000 in September, 276,000 in November, and 214,700 in December migrants were detected crossing the EU sea and land borders, bringing the total number of refugees and migrants detected at EU external borders in 2015 to 1.83 million. The migrants were detected in their respective routes as recorded 880,000 in Greece, 764,000 in Hungary and Croatia and 157,000 in Italy, just only 3% of the migrants came by land and the vast majority arrived through Mediterranean Sea routes [18]. This shown that largest proportion of the migrants arrived through Greece which registered 48.2% of all, this may not be unconnected with the short voyage/sailing distance of 6-kilometre water crossing to the Greek islands of Chios, Kos, Samos and Lesbos (Lesvos), which are close to Turkey and are thus a quick and easy access border into Europe. In addition to this, close proximity of Turkey–Syria resulted Syrians made up the larger proportion of migrants travelling from Turkey to Greece axis, thus estimated over 70% of the arrivals in Greece believed to have come from Syria. This has been reverberating as the result of the six year old Syrian war. On this migratory routes, [17] observed, when the Europe-Mediterranean border-control regime shut off the central Mediterranean route, thereby triggered and diverted flow of migrants to the Greek-Turkish border as migratory routes to Europe through the Mediterranean. While, Hungary and Croatia together registered 41.7% and 9.6% in Italy of the total migrants detected.

5.1 European Unions States Response

The European Union’s Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, proposed to distribute 160,000 asylum seekers among EU states with the support of Germany, Italy and France demanded asylum-seekers to be shared more evenly between EU states under a new migrant quota system to be set out. On 22 September, 2015, European Union Interior Ministers meeting in the Justice and Home Affairs Council, approved a plan to relocate 120,000 asylum seekers over two years from the frontline states Hungary (54,000), Greece (50,400) and Italy (15,600) to all other EU countries on the basis of quotas, taking into account the size of economy and population of each state, as well as the average number of asylum applications. Although, the decision was taken by using the instrument of a qualified majority votes, but the decision created high tension among some member states where Finland abstained from voting while, countries like Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom have opted-outs of the quota decision and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia voted against the quota sharing and declared that they will not accept any imposition of redistribution of immigrants on quota sharing system [13] & [18]. Consequently, EU’s response was, since Hungary voted against the relocation plan, its 54,000 asylum seekers will not be shared and for then, only the 66,000 who are in Italy and Greece will be redistributed instead. However, Slovakia went an extra mile, politically, threatening to take legal action against EU’s mandatory migrant quotas at European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Germany, Italy and France are in the fore front and willing to accept migrants or asylum-seekers among EU states. Prior to this in early September 2015, Chancellor Werner Faymann of Austria, in conjunction with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, announced that migrants should be allowed to cross the border from Hungary into Austria and onward to Germany. Thereafter, on one single day (on 5 September 2015), Austria noted over 6,500 migrants had crossed the Austria-Hungarian border with additional 2,200 migrants that are already on their way to Germany [18]. Germany decided to suspend the general procedure as regards Syrian refugees and to process their asylum applications directly itself. The change in Germany asylum policy incited large numbers of migrants to move towards Germany, especially after German chancellor Merkel stated that “there is no legal limit to refugee numbers”.

In 2015, it was reported that, EU member states received 1,255,640 first times asylum applications, a number that is more than double that of 2014. The highest number of first time applicants of 441,800 were registered in Germany constituted 35% of all applicants in EU states, followed by Hungary with 174,400, (14%), Sweden 156,100, (12%), Austria with 85,500, (7%), Italy 83,200, (7%) and France 70,600, (6%). Germany, Sweden, Italy, France, Hungary and Austria were among the top asylum recipients of EU, received around two-thirds of the EU’s migrants. Furthermore, Germany pledged to take in 500,000 migrant’s refugees despite steeper challenges, from German oppositions to the government’s admission of the new wave of migrants and has been an increasingly tense political debate, coupled with a rise in anti-immigrants (Pegida) movement flourished and protests. The Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted that Germany has the economic strength to cope with the influx of migrants and reiterated that there is no legal maximum limit on the number of migrants Germany can take.

On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, Hungary apart from closing borders and building razor wire fence to prevent migrants from entering Hungary, also mounted heavy security to keep undocumented migrants out and helicopters hovering above the border areas from the site of Serbia. Indeed, the circumstances most of the migrants fled out their homes could not have allowed carried any document which was left behind while running for the dear life. It then announced that, from 15 September, 2015 all migrants who ‘illegally’ (undocumented) enter the Hungarian territory of Schengen Area will be ‘arrested with the threat label of criminal charges and face imprisonment from 3 to 5 years’. On 16 September, it was reported that Hungarian police had used tear gas and water cannon on protesting migrants demanding the opening of the green border. Following these Hungarian disgust and inhospitality attitudes on the migrants, Austrian chancellor Werner Faymann’s remarks that, “Hungary’s treatment of refugees is akin to Nazi policies” ([13] & [18].

5.2 Paris Attack Swats and Shriek Migration Crisis

Paris attacked of 13th November, 2015, has changed and transformed European migration crisis into security debates where many countries especially those who declared their
opposition of accepting migrants, urging for clampdown on free movement across European borders. According to ‘The Wall Street Journal’ (2015), France believed that “Islamic State (IS) militants terrorists planned the attacks and believed the assailants carried out the atrocities on behalf of Islamic State” who might have infiltrated the thousands of migrants from the Middle East and the possibility that at least assailants may have posed as Syrian refugee. Evidence shown that some of the attackers crossed European Union’s boundaries to get to Paris were said to have been registered in Greece. Then France called the Schengen freedoms (which provides for passport-free travel across the borders of 26 signatory countries) should be abolished.

This episode has fuelled arguments and quickly galvanized opponents over whether Europe will abolish the continent’s system of open borders of Schengen accord on security and better joint protection of the Union’s external frontiers. Unfortunately, the voices of countries on the front line of mass migration, urging for open border for migrants/refugees, led by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, are facing even precipitous, stronger opposition and intensified criticism from anti-immigration groups who want to show they are taking national security more seriously than exalted European ideals. This transformed and spurred calling for increased restrictions on migrants’ entry and the closure of European borders [6]. What is clear is that, the attacks put the Schengen open-borders policy under pressure with intensified criticism on security concerns about the free migrants’ entry.

The EU’s agreement to share refugees around Europe on quota system is still legally binding on member states, but with the tragic events of Paris, it faced slim political possibilities for its enforcement. Many media commentators observed tensions in the EU have been rising because of the ‘distribution idea now looks even harder to implement in the face of political doubts from many countries’ and policy of opening the border for everyone in this region simply cannot stand anymore. Critics (anti-immigrants) used the opportunity and said it had become clearer than ever that the migrants from the Middle East represented a severe security threat to the EU states. Country like Poland announced the country would not honour its earlier commitment to take in about 7,000 asylum-seekers as part of the EU-wide plan to redistribute migrants across the member states [6]& [18].

However, the attack highlighted the need to secure the EU’s external borders by possible legal mechanism, for more EU cooperation on security, more border controls within the EU and joint protection of the external frontiers. There were calls for urgent need to protect Europe’s external frontier to control those coming to Europe, to take fingerprints scans of migrants and cross-check them against international criminal databases as suggested by Merkel. But still the fear of few terrorists will slip in unnoticed among the hundreds of thousands migrants who are coming, therefore, the best option is to stop them coming to Europe.

At an international summit meeting in Turkey, Europe has tried to reduce the migration flow by lobbying Turkey to stop migrants from crossing to the Aegean Sea into Europe. Europe seeks a reaching agreement with Turkey in which the EU agree to ‘help’ resettler set of refugees living in Turkey. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in response has pressed for string concessions in return, among which including visa-free European travel for Turks and a broadening of EU membership talks, which EU leaders have been reluctant to grant Turkey [6], [13] & [18]. Already, Turkey accommodated over 3 million estimated Syrian refugees and mounting political pressure on European governments to contain the migration flow could increase Turkey’s (Mr. Erdogan’s) leverage.

According to [13], in early February 2016, EU approved the sum of three (€3) billion Euro ($3.3billion; £2.2billion) in funding to help Turkey cope with the Syrian migrants flow. The question remains open that ‘is this grant on the humanitarian, moral ground or otherwise?’ Would the funding continue for long and Turkey has the capacity of containing the migrants for long? This signifies Europe is trying to stem migrants and keen to express to the middle-east migrants don’t come to Europe, Turkey is a safe country, so stay there.

Other incidences of the European migration crisis include wrecked boats, small inflatable or flimsy rubber dinghies usually used by migrants in their dangerous, suicidal and horrific voyage to Europe which committed thousands to drown. For instance in early September 2015, the picture of dead “Alan Kurdi”, 3-year-old boy, who was drowned when he and his family were in a small inflatable boat which capsized after leaving Bodrum trying to reach the Greek island of Kos. This made news headlines around the world which touches the minds and captured the attention of millions of sympathizers who make some grief comments and circulated the picture in the social media. Furthermore, IOM estimated that a total of 3,692 migrants and refugees lost their lives in the Mediterranean in 2015 out of which 2,961 in the Central Mediterranean and 731 in the Aegean Sea as against a total of 400 in 2014 [6]& [13].

6. Conclusion

Although it has been noticed the magnitude of migration to Europe has grown and the scenery of the flows has changed, this has consequence of economic and socio-political incidents of the supplying and receiving regions. Generally, migration flows are from poorer to richer countries and from those where political systems have collapsed to those with more stable political environment (Europe). Consequently, looking at the scenarios of the European migration crisis, it is a clear testimony that majority of the migrants or rather refugees are from the ‘developing’ countries (“Third World”) where the political turmoil, war ravaged and economic crunched, to the wealthy enclaves and industrialized Europe where the political climate is stable. Indeed, the economic landscape and stable political climate of Europe are very relevant to pull migration and the pressure is resulted from budge in the economic progression areas and displacement caused by conflicts.

Responses and treatment from some European states to the migrants is detestable and inhospitable even before and after the Paris attack, claiming to protect their countries from what they perceive to be a singular threat to their territorial
integrity. Initially European fear was on economy, competition in the labour markets, social integration and for welfare benefits of their privileged lifestyles. The main idea was to restrict migrants’ flow into Europe thereby labelled immigration as ‘security threats’, ‘illegal’ (“undocumented”) ‘undesirable’ rather than perceiving them as potential labour force.

Although, security issues all over the world has become a matter of concern especially in the last two decades where terror attacks are on the increase and should not be compromise. But the flight of forceful migrants from conflicts should be treated with humanitarian perspectives and the refugee migrants should have legal protection in their respective destinations. It has been observed by Richmond (1994) that world today lacks effective global governmental institutions and the United Nations “has failed dismaly to prevent civil wars from occurring on all continents” and stemming the proliferation of international “arm” bazaar. On the other hand, globalization has liberalized goods, services, information and money flow relatively freely across borders, while people do not have the wisdom and privilege of relative free border crossing; where weapons were exported from probable industrialized Europe to developing countries which fuelled arm conflict. It is expected that the United Nations effective global governance should control territories and their resources, both material and human, must be held in trust for global prosperity. Therefore, the United Nations and other Regional Government Unions should focus vehemently and collaborate in preventing political conflicts, civil wars, insurgencies and combating terrorism in all their ramifications in all parts of the world, then the scale of refugee migration will be stemmed to the barest minimum.

As noted earlier, migrants choice of destination countries are largely based on better economic conditions and prospects, therefore, funding other countries to contain migrants will only provide short term solution to the problem, especially if the funding last for a short period. Countries’ that lack resources for accommodating migrants could in the long run allow the migrants to continue with their journey to potential destinations likely to be Europe.

Indeed, if the status-co of the present world glaring regional disparities in prosperity between the developed and developing nations is maintained, migration crisis will continue until this dichotomy is bridged. Therefore, the industrialized Europe and other wealthy nations should pull up resources and diversified their economic investments into the so-call ‘Third World’ countries. This will guarantee employment opportunities and economic prosperity in these countries, and in turn retain people in their countries visa-vie reducing migration volume and conflict on economic grounds, otherwise, migration to Europe is unavoidable reality.

References


