

## WESTERN EUROPE'S POPULATION GROWTH AND MIGRATION CRISIS

Since the dawn of man, populations have been growing, shrinking, and migrating across borders. In recent years, the region of Western Europe has been struck with a Population and Migration crisis. The more prominent countries of Western Europe facing such crises include France, United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, and Portugal. Recently these countries faced an influx of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. In 2015 alone, around 1.1 million immigrants migrated to Germany.<sup>1</sup> This mass of immigrants has caused populations to grow unexpectedly. The increased immigration has now left many Western European countries debating whether to leave their former policy of open borders or deport unwanted immigrants back to their home countries. The Western European population and migration crisis is caused by its fertility and death rates, the graying of society, urbanization, as well a significant increase in immigration of people from Asian and African countries.

Until around 2011, the discussion in Western European countries such as Germany and France about a population crisis was limited. However, a series of uprisings known as the Arab Spring took place and increased the importance of the debate about the migration crisis. It is important to understand that the Arab Spring was a series of uprisings over the implementation of democracy, dissatisfaction with governments in the Middle Eastern region, and a wish for freedom, liberty and equality. These disputes have led to civil wars, the forming of radical groups, and economic failure in the countries affected by the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring reportedly had killed over 250,000 people by 2015.<sup>2</sup> A mother of nine, Mariam Akash said, "We're just living on the edge of life. We're always nervous, we're always afraid."<sup>3</sup> These push factors have caused a massive Population Implosion in the Middle East. A large amount of migrants are leaving the Middle East and fleeing to other countries in search of a better life. In

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, "Reality Check: How many refugees in Germany will become EU citizens", Para. 3

<sup>2</sup> Rodgers, "Syria: The story of the conflict", Para. 1

<sup>3</sup> Rodgers, "Syria: The story of the conflict", Para. 11

Syria alone, 4.5 million people have fled to other countries since the conflict began, and 1.2 million people were displaced within Syria.<sup>4</sup> Most of these migrants have fled to Europe. Once in Europe, they take advantage of open borders in order to travel to countries with higher affluence in hope for a better future. Most migrants arrive in Europe by sea. While immigration numbers are down from the height of the crisis in 2015 and 2016, even in 2018, over 56,000 immigrants arrived in Spain, 28,700 in Greece and 22,500 in Italy by sea.<sup>5</sup> This is only the documented number and experts have no recorded numbers on how many migrants have crossed border illegally and not officially asked for asylum yet. Once in Spain, Italy, or Greece, immigrants normally choose to migrate to countries which are typically in Western Europe. These countries exhibit such pull factors causing many more migrants to follow and leave their homes in the Middle East or North Africa to pursue a better, more economic fruitful life in Western Europe. The chain migration that has followed led to an astounding number of immigrants. Population expert, Owen Patterson, a member of the British Parliament, predicts that there will be 3.6 million people who have migrated to Germany by 2020.<sup>6</sup> The amount of immigrants flooding into the countries are not the only problem Western European countries face with the migrants, as many of these immigrants choose dangerous paths across the national borders.

The immigrants coming from North Africa or the Middle East often traverse illegal and perilous ways to cross the borders into European countries. Due to the implementation stronger border security, building fences and barriers around borders by some countries in Europe, immigrants have started to use dangerous and precarious ways to migrate into Western Europe. Immigrants must now pay large sums of money to have smugglers ferry them across the Mediterranean Sea. The price can range from between \$700 and \$7,000 for the crossing.<sup>7</sup> The smuggler's boats are usually filled past carrying capacity, and most operate under complete darkness in order to evade the patrols watching the borders. This has caused many tragedies as the smugglers' boats have capsized, drowning the many families with young children as well as young adults who are only looking for a better life. For example, in 2014, a sixteen-year-old Somalian boy named Said witnessed a deadly tragedy when his overcrowded fishing trawler ran

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<sup>4</sup> Rodgers, "Syria: The story of the conflict", Para. 16-17

<sup>5</sup> Henley, "What is the current state of the migration crisis in Europe", Para. 3

<sup>6</sup> BBC, "Reality Check: How many refugees in Germany will become EU citizens", Para. 6

<sup>7</sup> Glazer, "European Migration Crisis", Para. 4

into a rescue ship. Said was only one of the twenty-eight survivors.<sup>8</sup> The route which many migrants take is to ferry across the Mediterranean Sea. Many humanitarians have called this the world's most dangerous route as more than 1,900 deaths have been reported in just the first six months of 2015, and in April 2015 alone, approximately 1,265 people died from overcrowded migrant boats sinking.<sup>9</sup> This precarious path has caused many tragedies with people unable to reach their final destination of Western Europe. Although many of the immigrants who come to Western Europe travel across the Mediterranean Sea, thousands of immigrants also travel over land to reach Western Europe.

Most immigrants migrating from the Middle East or other countries pass through the Mediterranean Sea, but many also walk or drive through Turkey, or use the seaway to Greece and Italy to reach their destination of Western Europe. Many immigrants walk through the war torn streets of Middle Eastern Countries in order to reach the safe destination of Turkey. Once in Turkey, they can use cross over by sea into Greece or Italy and from there over land to Western European countries, which are all part of the Schengen Agreement. The Schengen Agreement is an agreement between the European nations to abolish borders between their countries.<sup>10</sup> This agreement has caused much dispute over the last couple of years, as many immigrants while entering Europe illegally, are able to travel through the continent freely. On July 29, hundreds of migrants marched into the Eurotunnel train terminal in Calais, France in order to catch trains heading to England.<sup>11</sup> The problem of immigrants crossing borders between various European countries freely has plagued Europe, and police spend most of their day looking through trains and checking identifications in order to keep illegal immigrants from entering other countries. The immigrants pouring in through France, Italy and other countries are mostly young males. One of these migrants named David Omoh, who is a twenty-two-year-old Nigerian migrant said, "We are young boys, we need work."<sup>12</sup> This shows that many young immigrants do not want to harm any Western Europeans, but rather just want to find jobs in order to support their families. Many of these young men migrate to Europe alone and once settled in with a job, send money back to their family in order to help them cross the border illegally or apply for their family's

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<sup>8</sup> Glazer, "European Migration Crisis", Para. 2-3

<sup>9</sup> Glazer, "European Migration Crisis", Para. 24

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, "Schengen Area", Para. 1

<sup>11</sup> Glazer, "European Migration Crisis", Para. 5

<sup>12</sup> Pitrelli, "The French-Italian border reveals the essence of the European clash on migration", Para. 12

reunification in the Western European Country if accepted as a legal immigrant. The amount of immigrants who come to the European Union is increasing as many immigrants find new land or sea routes into Western Europe.

Due to the increasing number of immigrants coming into Europe, some European Countries have changed their laws and border security and made it more difficult to migrate from the Middle East and Northern Africa into Europe and Western Europe. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, the amount of immigrants pouring into Western Europe increased and peaked in 2015/2016. The crisis has slowed down since its peak. This has caused many Western European countries to try to completely shut off their borders, or deport illegal immigrants who are unwanted in their country. This fear of immigrants by people in Western European countries is caused by various recent terrorist attacks committed by radical Muslims and Arabs. The terrorist attacks have been happening since as far back as 1995 when radical Algerians detonated bombs on Paris subways and trains.<sup>13</sup> The most recent a Christmas Market shooting in France which was committed by the child of Moroccan immigrants.<sup>14</sup> This shooting occurred on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018. These terrorist attacks have led to much controversy over whether or not the immigrants should be allowed into Western Europe. In addition, the influx of immigrants has led to the rise of many far right political groups. These political groups have called for the deportation of all immigrants and also the closing of borders within the European Union. Many migrants living in Germany or other Western European countries have ties to their homelands, which has caused suspicions to rise among some. As anti-immigrant ideas spread, it has become more and more difficult to migrate into Western Europe, and yet the number of immigrants migrating into Western Europe continues to be steady.

Despite the amount of people immigrating into Europe, the population in Western Europe is also affected by the amount of people emigrating to other countries each year. Many young Europeans hear about the pull factors of other countries such as America. For instance, the Pew Research Center has estimated that approximately 2.9 million Americans were born in Western Europe as of 2017.<sup>15</sup> Out of every 1,000 Ireland residents, 29.4 people migrate to America.<sup>16</sup> This figure conveys just one of the many countries which comprises Western Europe. The

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<sup>13</sup> Glazer, "European Migration Crisis", Page 19

<sup>14</sup> Willsher, "Chérif Chekatt: who is the Strasbourg shooting suspect", Para. 5

<sup>15</sup> Mises Institute, "3 Times As Many Europeans Move to the US, than the Other Way Around" Para. 11

<sup>16</sup> Mises Institute, "3 Times As Many Europeans Move to the US, than the Other Way Around" Para. 15

amount of people who migrate out of Western Europe has created a Brain Drain. The term Brain Drain refers to the emigration of highly educated people. The emigration of Western Europeans and Brain Drain has caused some problems for Western European countries involved.

The emigration of young, educated Western Europeans as well as the low birth rate in Western European countries has caused problems as the median age of Western Europe has risen. This has caused many work force related problems as Western Europe is facing the growing problem of the graying of society. Graying of society refers to the rise of the median age in a region. The median age in Germany, one of Western Europe's most prominent countries, is 47.4 years old. This affects the total dependency ratio which is 52.1 percent.<sup>17</sup> The total dependency ratio refers to the number of children and elderly people who rely on the working class. The percentage 52.1 shows that over half of the population is dependent on the other. The median age also affects the amount of women who are able to give birth in Germany. The percentage of population under 25 years old is 22.81 percent.<sup>18</sup> This means that in the coming years there will be a shortage in the number of kids born. The median age in Germany and other Western European countries will cause many future economic problems.

The high median age which Western Europe is facing is causing a variety of issues. For instance, the Western European countries have recently faced a decline in their birth rates and fertility rates due to the rising median ages. In Spain, the fertility rate is 1.50 children born per woman.<sup>19</sup> The birth rate is 12.1 births per 1,000 people. The natural growth rate of France is 0.37 which is a 2018 estimate made by the CIA.<sup>20</sup> The natural growth rate of Germany is -0.17.<sup>21</sup> The countries fertility and birth rates are so low, that the number of deaths exceeds the number of births each year. The populations have continued to expand however due to the amount of immigrants migrating into their countries.

In history the countries of Western Europe have also been affected by plagues, wars, and other factors contributing to higher than usual death rates. However, currently the death rates of these highly developed Western European countries are considerably low due to advanced hospitals and medicines, and also due to the fact that they have not been involved in a major war

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<sup>17</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Germany- People and Society"

<sup>18</sup> IBID

<sup>19</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Spain- People and Society"

<sup>20</sup> CIA World Factbook, "France- People and Society"

<sup>21</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Germany- People and Society"

since 1945. The death rate of Germany for instance is 11.8 deaths per 1,000 people.<sup>22</sup> This is similar to the death rate of France which is 9.4 deaths per 1,000 people.<sup>23</sup> The low death rates contribute to high life expectancies. In Germany, the life expectancy is 80.9 years.<sup>24</sup> The life expectancy of a person born in France is very similar to that of Germany's at 82 years on average.<sup>25</sup> These figures are a result of advanced health care, safe drinking water, and high access to sanitation facilities. Since Western Europe is known to be a highly affluent country, many of these services are natural to the citizens of countries such as France and Germany. Other factors affecting the death rates of citizens of Western Europe is the use of contraceptives. In many sub-Saharan countries, the amount of adults with HIV and Aids is very high. However, due to the use of contraceptives, Western European countries have very low rates of HIV and Aids. In France for instance, 0.5% of its adult population has HIV or Aids.<sup>26</sup> This number is very low compared to that of other, less affluent countries. While the death rates of Western European countries are currently relatively low, they are expected to rise as its population becomes older.

The last factor which affects populations, is the area where citizens reside. In Western Europe nearly all people are found in cities or suburbs. Western Europe's populations have always been centered around the industrialized cities, but more and more people have started to flock to the urban areas of bigger cities. Western Europe has several of the largest cities in the world. These include London, Madrid, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. These cities are centers of economic prosperity and technological advancements. In France, 80.4 percent of its population is centered in urban areas including Lyon and Paris.<sup>27</sup> In Germany, 77.3 percent of the population is centered in its urban cities.<sup>28</sup> The major German cities include Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Munich. The rate of urbanization in both countries is fairly high. In France, 0.72 percent of its population moves to an urban area annually.<sup>29</sup> Due to the large quantities of people living in urban areas, despite a general decrease in population, overpopulation of urban areas is a rising issue in Western European countries.

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<sup>22</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Germany- People and Society"

<sup>23</sup> CIA World Factbook, "France- People and Society"

<sup>24</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Germany- People and Society"

<sup>25</sup> CIA World Factbook, "France- People and Society"

<sup>26</sup> IBID

<sup>27</sup> CIA World Factbook, "France- People and Society"

<sup>28</sup> CIA World Factbook, "Germany- People and Society"

<sup>29</sup> CIA World Factbook, "France- People and Society"

As world populations skyrocket, the population of Western Europe has changed tremendously. The change of Western Europe's population has many contributing factors including urbanization, immigration, emigration, as well as birth and death rates. These factors have all contributed to a growing crisis which Western Europe is facing. As migrants stream across the borders and the median age of Western European citizens rises, the demographics of Western Europe's countries population changes completely. With global populations expected to reach 10 billion soon and citizens of Western European countries turning to radical views on immigration, it is important that Western Europe governments handle its population crisis now in order to prevent the crisis from growing. The populations of the world will always migrate and grow or shrink, but it is up to the governments of these nations to deal with the demands and wants of its populations.