

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT AND THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN EUROPE, 2014-2022

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Abstract

This study investigated Russia-Ukraine conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Europe between 2014 and 2022. It examined how the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Western countries, over the annexation of Crimea in 2014, created economic hardship in Europe. The study also interrogated how the partisan nature of external intervention in the 2022 outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine aggravated the humanitarian crisis in Europe. Ex-post-facto research design was employed to guide the study. The data for the study were generated mainly from secondary sources and analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique. Two international relation theories were used as theoretical framework. They are the theories of Realism, and liberalism. The study made the following findings: 1) Western countries suffered the effect of the sanctions they imposed on Russia through a counter-trade ban by Russia. 2) Some EU member states suffered loss in terms of exports to Russia which caused economic growth impediment and high fiscal spending. 3) Western sanctions against Russia made Europe to experience a reduction in household consumption due to high prices in oil, gas, wheat, and mineral. 4) The partisan involvement of NATO member countries in the conflict heightened Russia's attack on Ukraine and contributed to a high level of humanitarian crisis across Europe. Based on these findings, the study recommended the following: 1). Russia and Ukraine should find a diplomatic solution to resolve the conflict. 2). There should be a UN embargo on all forms of military aids or sales to the governments of Russia and Ukraine until the conflict is resolved. 3). The UN should outlaw any form of external partisanship in the conflict that undermines established peace process. 4). There should be adequate funding for the United Nations Refugee Agency and other relief agencies to tackle humanitarian challenges in Europe.

Keywords: Conflict, Humanitarian crisis, Refugee, Migration, Realism, Liberalism

Background to the study

Humanitarian crises are usually triggered by events such as armed conflicts, epidemics, genocide, natural disaster, famine, terrorism, election violence, economic collapse or other major emergencies. Some of these crises are confined within the borders of States while others have destabilized entire regions. Some have killed hundreds of thousands of people in an instant while others have displaced communities over generations. Some humanitarian crises make global headlines and draw immense funding while others fly under the radar of international interest. In all these crises, one thing they have in common is their influence in the prolonged disruption of human's normal daily activities and the constant shaping of human collective history.

Historically, Europe have witnessed several periods of mass emigrations, forced relocations, displacements and resettlements which triggered heavy humanitarian crisis. In 1648, the Cossack

rebellion in the eastern parts of Poland and Lithuania, which led to the creation of Cossack Hetmanate was accompanied by mass atrocities committed by the Cossacks against civilian population of Ukraine (Jewish encyclopedia, 2005).

The uprising triggered a period of political turbulence and in-fighting in the Hetmanate and forced thousands of people from different parts of Europe to flee their homes in search of safety, protection and assistance. This mass movements of civilian population across international border-points as refugees appear to have set the stage for what will later become Europe's future humanitarian crises.

Before the 1st World War, poverty and land scarcity led to large scale migration from Europe to North America. The Holodomor – to kill by starvation, a man-made famine orchestrated by Josef Stalin on the people of Soviet Ukraine between 1932-1933 killed millions of Ukrainians ([Basciani, 2011](#)). During that period, most peasants in Ukraine were forced to relocate to other parts of Europe as refugees. According to [Basciani \(2011\)](#), the famine was exacerbated by the government's rejection of outside aid, confiscation of household foodstuffs and the restriction of population movements.

In addition to ethnic Ukrainians, national minorities were also oppressed and deported in the 1930s and 1940s. They include ethnic Germans, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Bulgarians, Armenians, and Greeks ([Malynovska 2006](#)). As the international refugee regime began taking shape, the emergence of anti-immigration laws in the US through the Immigration Act of 1917, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924, significantly curtailed transnational European migration. Groups displaced by the 1st World War were again displaced by the 2nd World War from reception countries in Europe ([Kulischer 1949](#)).

The Second World War took an enormous toll in Europe. It is estimated that millions of people died as a result of the war. Displaced persons-camps were established in Germany, Austria, and Italy primarily for refugee from Eastern Europe and for the former inmates of the Nazi German concentration camps. In an article written by Mark Wyman (no date) titled: “*DPs Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*”, two years after the end of the 2nd World War, some 850,000 people lived in displaced-persons' camps across Europe, among them were Armenians, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Yugoslavs, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Hungarians and Czechoslovaks. This internally displaced population were provided with essential needs and assistance at all stages of their displacement.

During the late 1990s, governments, international organizations and the public became increasingly aware of the problems faced by refugees and internally displaced people. This was largely as a result of live television reports, which provided dramatic images of desperate people fleeing from war in places such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chechnya, and Kosovo.

Before Russia's military entanglement with Ukraine, Europe's humanitarian crisis centered on refugee issue. There were high inflow of thousands of forced migrants crossing into the European Union (EU) by land and sea, in search for better life. The surge was usually dominated by people from Eastern Asia, Africa and South American countries. From the United Kingdom to France, Poland to Germany, Italy to Greece, Austria to Netherlands, Spain to Bulgaria, Portugal to Estonia and other neighboring Mediterranean countries, people's humanitarian needs have by all means, remained an issue of concern.

In 2015, more than a million refugees and forced migrants, including children, women and men, crossed into the European Union by land and sea (UNHCR, 2015; Marianna, 2019). On arrival, they attracted the sympathy of receiving societies in various EU countries. In Greece, for example, local communities, hand-in-hand with networks of volunteers, responded to their urgent needs, including health and safety (Karakayali, 2018). Many others helped them on their way to Germany and Sweden (Mars, 2016).

Those who stayed back lived in overcrowded former military camps, abandoned factories and other disused public buildings such as holiday camps and orphanages, with inadequate facilities and social services to meet their basic needs. Addressing the health and housing needs of these people at short notice remained financially and logistically challenging for Greece where domestic and economic problem had forced the country's population into seeking for emergency aid (Aiyar et al., 2016). Since 2011, austerity policies in Greece constrained the country's capacity to meet the basic needs of her own citizens and that of the refugees, thereby evoking formal and informal humanitarian initiatives for diverse beneficiaries. Cabot (2018) describes Greece as 'a humanitarian venue of global significance where refugee crisis has opened up a booming humanitarian marketplace'.

According to *Europol 2016*, an estimated 90 per cent of migrants are brought to Europe by human smugglers and criminal networks coming mostly from Bulgaria, Hungary, Iraq, Kosovo, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Syria, and Turkey. Migrants are also involved in public order disturbances. Often times, frustrated migrants seeking permission to transit to northern parts of Europe blocked roads and attempts pulling down border fences (Chrisafis, Walker, and Quinn, 2016).

The 2014 armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine activated a new humanitarian crisis in Europe. The conflict has caused tragic human suffering for millions of people in Europe. The conflict which began in November 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea, became a full-blown invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military in 2022. The reason behind the annexation of Crimea has a complex historical background that revolves around the struggle for self-determination, national identity and political power. The actors involved are, as well, divided by national ideologies drawn between European Union and political influence alongside strong nostalgic feelings of historical and cultural ties with Russia under Soviet Union.

In 2007, Ukraine initiated a bilateral institution of Association Agreement with the European Union (EU). The Agreement was expected to establish a political and economic tie between the EU and Ukraine. On 18th September 2013, the Ukrainian parliament otherwise known as Verkhouna Rada, approved the draft Association Agreement, and waited for the adoption of the remaining bills necessary for the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) scheduled for 29th November 2013. The plan, however, became aborted on the 20th day of November 2013 via government decree suspending preparations for signing the agreement. In its place, the decree proposed the creation of a 3-way trade commission between Ukraine, the EU and Russia.

The move was a result of pressures from the Russian president, Vladimir Putin who believed that the EU deal with Ukraine was bad for Russia's security interest. The development did not augur well with most Ukrainian populace. The situation was further worsened by an infuriating statement made by Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich, who in a television interview said that an alternative for reforms in Ukraine and an alternative for European integration does not exist. Yanukovich's statement attracted a lot of criticisms from Ukraine's opposition parties which later developed into wide protests across Ukrainian cities. For many weeks, the protest continued despite heavy police presence. On 23rd November 2013, clashes between protesters and police turned to violent riots and civil disobedience in response to police brutality and government repression.

As the riots grew bigger and bigger, Russia cashed into the situation to annex Crimea and, thereafter, instigated a pro-Russian unrest in Luhansk and Donetsk regions, located in the eastern part of Ukraine's border with Russia and predominantly inhabited by Russian-speaking population. Following the conflict in these two areas, which was also known as 'Donbas'. Russia's President Vladimir Putin recognized them

immediately as independent republics and then sent troops to support them in their agitations. Following Putin's order, Russian forces invaded and occupied key Crimean locations including airports and military bases.

While the uprising raged, the Independence square in Kyiv, otherwise known as 'The Maidan' became a huge [protest camp](#) and makeshift barricades. Protesters were guarded by volunteers in improvised uniform, helmets, shields and armed with sticks, stones and petrol bombs. According to a report published by the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (UNHCR) titled: "[Accountability for killings in Ukraine from January 2014 to May 2016](#)", the uprising resulted in the [deaths of almost 100 protesters and 13 police officers](#).

On February 2014 members of President Yanukovich's party lost its majority grip in the parliament, leaving the opposition members large enough to impeach Yanukovich out of office by majority vote. This allowed the Ukrainian parliament to pass series of laws that removed police from Kyiv, canceled anti-protest operations, restored the 2004 constitution and freed political detainees (Fisher M.,2014). As the escalating violence continued, Yanukovich and some of his close allies fled the country to Russia (Walker S., & Salem H., 2014). In early 2019, a Ukrainian court found Yanukovich guilty of treason and charged him in absentia, with the offence of requesting Russian President to send troops to invade Ukraine after he had fled the country (Roth A., 2019).

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the pro-Russian separatist agitation in Donbas region not only brought about restriction of movements of people in the eastern part of Ukraine but also, created a division of Ukrainian population into areas under Government Controlled (GC) and Beyond Government Controlled (BGC) areas. It cut Ukrainians off from one another and widened the rift between them. The conflict also made the humanitarian consequences on Ukraine's civilian population to become highly devastating as millions of people became more vulnerable and more dependent on the continuous delivery of protection and humanitarian aid.

According to the UN refugee agency, as a result of the crisis, about a quarter of the Ukrainian population became displaced and millions fled to neighboring countries, including Hungary, Moldova, and Poland. According to reports, in February 2022, Poland welcomed more than 3.2 million Ukrainians refugees. Roy D. (2022), in an article titled: '*How bad is Ukraine's humanitarian crisis?*', notes that Ukraine's humanitarian crisis would be the largest war-related mass migration since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s.

The European Union (EU) responded unanimously by backing a plan to activate the bloc's [Temporary Protection Directive](#), to permit fleeing Ukrainians to enter and stay in EU countries up to three years without applying for asylum. At the UN, the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [appointed a crisis coordinator](#) for Ukraine and announced [\\$20 million in aid](#) from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund. Likewise, the UN refugee agency raised [\\$1.7 billion](#) for humanitarian assistance.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea attracted economic sanctions on Russia. The sanctions were enacted in a coordinated manner designed to cause concrete economic damage on Russia. The sanctions were imposed by the countries in the European Union, the United States, Canada, and their allied partners. Edward Hunter Christie (2015), in an article published in NATO Review titled: *Sanctions after Crimea: Have they worked?* outlined the three types of sanctions imposed on Russia.

The first restricts access to Western financial markets and services for designated Russian state-owned enterprises in the banking, energy, and defense sectors. The second places an embargo on exports to Russia of designated high-technology oil exploration and production equipment. And the third is an embargo on exports to Russia of designated military and dual-use goods.

Few months after, Russia reacted by imposing a ban on food import from the Western nations. A report by [Jennifer Rankin](#) (2014), published on 7th August 2014 in 'The Guardian' captioned: *Russia responds to sanctions by banning western food imports*, notes that the import ban was placed on vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, milk and dairy products from the US, Canada, Australia, Norway and the European Union.

For the Russian economy, the sanctions helped to worsen the macro-economic challenges in the country especially, the fall in oil prices which caused a significant downturn on the value of the *Rouble* and increased capital flight. The sanctions on access to financing forced Russia to use part of its foreign exchange reserves to support the sanctioned entities. At the same time, the ban on Western food imports led to higher food prices and hence to further inflation.

The 2022 outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine attracted military and financial supports from many countries to Ukraine. A fact-based database known as *The Ukraine Support Tracker* listed the military, financial and humanitarian aid promised by different governments to Ukraine between January 24, 2022 and July 1, 2022. It covers those from the EU member states, members of the G7, Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, China, Taiwan and India. Added to these were private donations and transfers from international organizations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. There were also in-kind shipments of military equipment, weapons, medicines and foodstuff. The provision of military weapons to Ukraine by Western nations is aimed at helping Ukraine achieve victory over Russia and, by extension, weaken Russia's influence in eastern Europe.

The Russia-Ukraine war has caused enormous humanitarian emergency in Europe. The war has damaged critical infrastructure. Homes, schools, water, electricity, health and sanitation facilities, have become inaccessible. According to reports from 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview the conflict has caused more than 5,000 deaths and more than 7,000 injured, and damaged or destroyed approximately 55,000 homes. [Donahue](#) (2022), considered the conflict as one of Europe's gravest security and humanitarian crises since the 2nd World War. Donahue's view is also shared by Forbes, in Semotiuk, (2022), who believed that the war triggered one of the largest and fastest refugee movements that Europe has witnessed since the end of the 2nd World War.

The involvement of outside countries in the war has been on the partisan basis. While the Western powers, operating under the umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are openly supporting Ukraine in the prosecution of the war by providing various forms of financial and military assistance, it is reported that China, Iran and North Korea are secretly supporting Russia. These assistances are aimed at giving a comparative advantage to the parties they align with in the war over the other. The partisan involvement of the Non-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries in the war, which came along with the imposition of sanctions on Russia, over Russia's annexation of Crimea, has negatively affected Europe's economy. The impact of the conflict also worsened an already bad refugee situation in Europe and by extension, escalated the humanitarian crisis in the European Union.

This study, therefore, attempts to investigate how the imposition of sanctions over the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 created economic hardship in Europe. It also seeks to interrogate how the partisan nature of external intervention in the 2022 outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine aggravated the refugee crisis in Europe. The study was delineated between 2014 and 2022 because it was the period that the Russia-Ukraine crisis gained global attention and became an international concern.

Statement of Problem

Since the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Russia have influenced the domestic politics of her former communist neighboring countries, sometimes, taking advantage of the political turmoil in those countries to seize and establish military control over them. During the volatile conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the ethnic Armenian territory of [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), Russia sold weapons to both countries and, at the same time, led attempts for the two warring nations to put down their arms. In Moldova, Russia deployed troops to support a small separatist movement of Russian-speakers that eventually formed the tiny breakaway republic of [Transnistria](#) (Charles King, 1999).

In Georgia, Russia provided military support to the autonomous region of [Abkhazia](#) to fight a brief war with the central government of Georgia and in 2008, it responded to an attempt by Georgia to retake [South Ossetia](#) with a massive counter-offensive (Ariel Cohen & Robert E. Hamilton, 2011).

[Chechnya](#), a Russian republic which suffered terribly under Soviet rule, when it declared its wish for independence, was grounded down by Russia in two brutal wars (Jacob W. Kipp, 2001). And in 2007, the Russian Federation launched a [cyber-attack](#) against Estonia (Rain Ottis ,2011).In Ukraine, things were stable until 2014 when a pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich opposed the policy decision to make Ukraine a member of the European Union as members of the Union usually joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) afterwards, under the influence of the US ([Ragini Sehgal](#), 2022).

Russia's opposition to Ukraine's membership of NATO brought about serious tension in the relation between Ukraine and Russia. Like [Keith Gessen](#) (2022) rightly stated: “It was NATO's expansion in eastern Europe that had been the greatest irritant to the relationship between Russia and the West, a relationship that found Ukraine trapped in between”.

Russia's recognition of self-declared Donbas republics as independent states in 2014 attracted limited sanctions on Russia from Western countries. After Russia commenced attacks on Ukraine in Feb 2022, more countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore joined the list to impose sanctions on Russia. The sanctions were wide-ranging, targeting individuals, banks, businesses, monetary exchanges, bank transfers, exports, and imports (Melander, et.al. 2022).

The [Central Bank of Russia](#) was blocked from accessing more than \$400 billion in [foreign-exchange reserves](#) held abroad (NPR, 28 FEB 2022). The US [Foreign Assets Control](#) (OFAC) prohibited American citizens from engaging in transactions with Central Bank of Russia, and other major financial institutions in Russia (U.S. Department of the Treasury. 28 February 2022). The intent of the sanctions was to push Russia into a deep [recession](#) and [hyper-inflation](#). In the EU, a ban on Russian oil was imposed Two Chinese state banks—the [Industrial and Commercial Bank of China](#), and the [Bank of China](#), cut in the purchase of Russia's raw materials in an effort to limit Russian access to foreign currency ([Agence France-Presse](#). 26 February 2022).

[Switzerland froze a number of Russian assets](#) and joined EU sanctions. The Central Bank of Russia was blocked from accessing more than \$400 billion in [foreign-exchange reserves](#) held abroad ([The New York Times](#), 28 February 2022).[South Korea](#) stopped transactions with Russian banks with an aim to restrict the purchase of Russian treasury bonds. Many companies exited Russian markets in order to avoid being sanctioned Business organizations such as Visa, Mastercard, and American Express blocked Russian banks ([France 24](#). 2 March 2022).

The US instituted [export controls](#), a unique sanction focused on restricting Russian access to high-tech components, both hardware and software, made with any parts or intellectual property from the US. The sanction required that any person or company that wanted to sell technology, semiconductors, encryption software, lasers, or sensors to Russia request a license, which by default was denied. The enforcement mechanism involved sanctions against the person or company, with the sanctions focused on the shipbuilding, aerospace, and defense industries ([The Economist](#). 25 February 2022).

The UK closed its airspace to Russian airlines. The US, EU and Canada issued a similar ban. Russia issued a reciprocal ban, forcing many airlines to reroute or cancel flights to Asian destinations (PortCalls Asia. 28 February 2022). In [New Zealand Parliament, Russia Sanctions Act 2022](#) was passed against individuals connected to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. [The Bahamas](#), [Antigua and Barbuda](#) and [Saint Kitts and Nevis](#) also joined the list of countries that imposed sanctions on Russia (Craymer, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has created a huge humanitarian condition in Ukraine. Thousands of refugees have fled the country to neighboring countries. People living in the conflict-affected areas have fallen victim to active hostilities and the number of civilian casualties has increased exponentially. Civilian objects like housing, schools, health facilities, electrical and water infrastructure have constantly come under attack. The eastern regions of Donbas remain outside of Ukrainian government control.

Humanitarian partners in Ukraine estimate that, as at March 2022, at least 5.7 million people have been directly or indirectly affected as a result of the conflict, out of which 4.1 million require humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian community is particularly concerned about the people living along the 'contact line', of whom thousands are in Government controlled areas (GCAs), the rest are in non-government- controlled areas (NGCAs). Civilians in this area are most directly affected by the conflict with insecurity, movement constraints, loss of livelihoods, absence of rule of law, protection concerns and very limited access to basic services.

This study has both broad and specific objectives. Broadly, the study examines the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Europe between 2014 and 2022. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify how the imposition of sanctions on Russia over the annexation of Crimea in 2014 created economic hardship in Europe.
2. Ascertain how the partisan nature of external intervention in the 2022 outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine increased the humanitarian crisis in Europe.

Review of related literature

The thrust of this literature review is to examine how scholars have attempted to explain the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Europe. The thematic areas of concentration are:

1. Economic hardship in Europe as a result of Western sanctions on Russia in 2014
2. Europe's humanitarian crisis as a result of external interference in Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022.

The ultimate goal for imposition of every sanction is to effect policy change in a sanctioned target by doing the severest possible harm. The most comprehensive sanction on Russia by Western countries was imposed in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea and the violent unrests that erupted in eastern Ukraine. In the EU, sanctions and restrictive measures are part of the foreign and security policy, especially when dealing with non-EU countries. As an element of the EU's foreign and security policy,

Russell (2018), observed that the EU has put in place 42 sanctions programmes, making it the world's second-most active user of restrictive measures, after the U.S.

The majority of studies dealing with EU sanctions during the early period, focused on Yugoslavia. In this regard, De Neilly (2003) sees the imposition of sanctions on Serbia as the EU's attempt to conduct real and effective foreign policy, whereas De Vries (2002) discusses the nature of targeted and non-targeted sanctions on Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. De Wilde d'Estmael (1998), however, emphasizes that the EU did not impose sanctions autonomously for the first time on Serbia, but that the first sanctions regime was implemented through the European Community in the 1980s, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In her study "European Union Sanctions and Foreign Policy: When and Why do They Work", Portela (2010) explains that sanctions regimes originally imposed through the EU always correlated with the implementation of the UN Security Council measures, are were closely intertwined with UN practices. The imposition of EU sanctions has substantially increased over the past decade, implying the changing geopolitical environment and EU's efforts to pursue a more determined foreign policy, usually with support from the U.S. Contemporary scholars and those who studied sanctions long before the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia came about bring an analysis which confirms that the durability of sanctions affects their success.

Neuenkirchn and Neumeier (2015) argues that the longer the targeted government can withstand the economic and political pressure associated with economic sanction, the lower the expectations that the sanction would actually trigger the desired change in the target's political and social environment. This implies that with the passage of time, target countries adapt to new economic reality and reduces the economic costs of sanctions. In his study on the strategy undertaken by some Iranian firms to counter the Western-imposed economic sanction on Iran, Bewley (2021), observed that pay-cuts were not a preferred option during sanctions but instead, a reduction in fixed and overhead costs.

With regards to the sanctions on Russia, Brunat (2016) argued that it would only worsen the economic war between the West and Russia since the European countries would pay a higher price in the energy sector as well as agricultural exports and European agro-food. Kholodilin and NetSunajev (2016) took a step further by criticizing the impact of the sanctions on both European and Russian economies and concluded that the sanctions implemented by Western countries and Russia against each other exert an impact on the aggregate economic activity in both regions.

While these views provide useful argument on the political and socio-economic effect of the sanctions on both sides, Gould-Davies (2018), identified the different ways that Russia responded to the sanctions. These includes adaptation, evasion, avoidance and retaliation, using policies and resources to limit the impact of the sanctions, inducing Western companies to violate sanctions, seeking ways to mitigate sanctions by finding other partners (namely China) to replace countries from the West, and proposing counter-sanctions to punish the West, respectively.

The sanctions imposed on Russia over theannexation of Crimea forced Crimea to become an economically isolated area. The economic prosperity promised by the Russian authorities before the annexation did not happen. The increase in wages and pensions made by Russia to Crimeans at the early stage of the annexation did not last long. Teifukova, (2017) noted that after the annexation of Crimea as Russian territory, prices of goods became several times higher than in Ukraine. Increase in price of food products and the depreciation of the ruble became the order of the day. This affected the consumer opportunities of the Crimean population. The social and economic situation in Crimea after its occupation

became characterised by a rapid turn to Soviet standards from the sectorial structure of the economy to the social security indicators

According to 2016 Crimean statistical service (CSS), since 2014 foreign trade in Crimea suffered considerably. Segodnya (2017), notes that the growth income of the Crimean people became absorbed by inflation forcing inflation level to exceed the mark of 75%. The foreign trade turn-over of Crimea amounted up to 70 million USD. When compared with the time before Russia's annexation of the peninsula, the Crimean export fell by approximately 28 times, and imports, by 35 times (CepreeBa, 2017).

Western sanctions against Russia's annexation of Crimea affected the manufacture, trade, and tourism sectors. The ban on import of goods from Crimea and Sevastopol forced foreign investors to escape from Crimea in order to protect their businesses from being sanctioned. The agrarian sector of the peninsula also suffered losses, as Crimea could not become independent from the water resources from Ukrainian river Dnipro. Tourism, being Crimean's main source of income before the annexation became seriously injured with a decreased number of visitors by 50% comparing to 2013.

In the financial sector, the financial sanctions limited Russia's international financing. The US administration and the EU froze Russia's companies access to Western financial markets, which also prevented Western companies from investing in Russia. Western financial institutions were banned from issuing loans with maturity periods exceeding thirty days for several of Russia's biggest banks and companies. The financial sanctions also forced Russian private debtors to pay back foreign credits and scared most potential creditors away (Anders & Maria, 2021).

In Crimea, the Western sanctions isolated Crimea's two main banks – RNKB and Genbank, which were included in the sanctions lists. And as noted by Tishenko & Kazdobina (2016), the sanctions never allowed a full-fledged functioning of any international payment system or an international financial institution in Crimea. The transition to the legal field of the Russian Federation after the annexation of Crimea significantly affected small business owners in the peninsula who were neither ready for the size of Russian fines nor its tax system. Unreasonable penalties for the slightest violation affected small businesses and over time, forced them to close down (Teifukova, 2017).

The Western sanctions enforced restrictive measures, assets freeze and travel ban on over one hundred individuals and 44 entities suspected of undertaking activities leading to the breach of international law, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. Some of those on the list include Sergey Valeryevich Aksyonov, Prime Minister of Crimea; Vladimir Andreevich Konstantinov, Speaker of the Supreme council of the autonomous republic of Crimea; Denis Valentinovich Berezovskiy, Commander of the Ukrainian Navy; Sergey Pavlovych Tsekov, Vice speaker of the Crimean Verkhovna Rada; Leonid Eduardovich Slutski, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Chairman, and many others (Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP).

The sanctioned organisations includes Donetsk People's republic and Luhansk People's Republic, Pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, Donetsk Republic and Free Donbas (the two political parties that contested seats in what was considered as illegal Donbas election), Companies that were illegally transferred to Russian ownership, such as the Sevastopol and Kerch Commercial Seaport companies (European Parliament, 2016).

With regard to the restrictions on economic relations with Crimea and Sevastopol, the sanctions apply to EU persons and EU companies that operate in Crimea and Sevastopol. The restrictions includes import

ban on goods from Crimea and Sevastopol, ban on trade and investment related to certain economic sectors and infrastructure projects, prohibition to supply tourism services, and ban on export of certain goods and technologies (EU delegation to Russian Federation, 2018).

With respect to economic sanction targeting exchanges with Russia in specific economic sector, Russian banks and companies were granted limited access to EU capital markets. Export and import on trade in arms was banned. A ban on export of dual-used goods for military use or military end users in Russia was enforced, as well as the curtailment of Russian access to certain sensitive technologies and services used for oil production and exploration (EU delegation to Russian Federation, 2018).

America's response to Russia's annexation of Crimea came through the issuance of series of Executive Orders. The Executive Orders delegates the implementation of certain sanctions that are in accordance with the US Sanctions Act and in-line with US government agencies. The Executive Orders condemned Russia's behavior on Ukraine, its territorial sovereignty, security and stability, and the annexation of Crimea. The Executive Orders are as follows:

Executive Order 13660 of 6th March 2014 authorizes sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as well as illegally acquiring assets that belong to Ukrainian people. The sanctions also imposed travel bans on individuals and officials who are believed to be directly or indirectly involved in the situation on the ground in the Crimean Peninsula.

Executive order 13661 of 17 March 2014 broadened the spectrum of the national emergency that was previously stipulated in Executive Order 13660. The U.S. extended the list of persons that contributed to the situation in Ukraine, mainly referring to those officials and senior officials in the government of Russian Federation who have acted in a way to undermine Ukraine's democratic processes, its territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the independence of the Ukrainian people.

The Executive Order of 20 March 2014 entitled “*Blocking Property of Additional Persons Contributing to the Situation In Ukraine*”, again broadened the sanctions that were previously announced in the two previous Executive Orders - Executive Order 13660 and Executive Order 13661 respectively. Similar to the previous Orders, the Executive Order of 20 March 2014 found that the policies of the Russian Federation undermined democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine; threatened its peace, security, stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and thereby, constitutes a threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States (The White House, 2014b).

Executive Order 13685 expanded the scope of the diplomatic and financial measures against Russia including the suspension of credit finance encouraging exports to Russia and finance for economic development projects in Russia. It also prohibits the provision, exportation or re-exportation of goods, services (not including financial services) or technology in support of exploration or production for deep water, the Arctic offshore, or shale projects that have the potential to produce oil in the Russian Federation (Executive Order 13685 of Dec. 19, 2014).

The Western sanction on Russia made Russia to turn to China. Ikenberry, (2014) argues that the reason was not just to restrain the impact of the sanction, but instead to set the groundwork for curtailing U.S. supremacy in the global sphere. Although rapprochement between Russia and China is nothing new, the cooperation became intensified in 2014 through the China-Silk Road Economic Belt and the Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia. The two countries' strategic alignment was also proven in Crimea when China refused to criticize Russia and abstained from the United Nations Council's resolution on the Crimea referendum.

The annexation of Crimea also made the energy sector to become a target of sanction. The sanction forced international oil companies such as Shell and ExxonMobil to suspend their project plans with Gazpromneft, thereby stripping the Russian oil magnum of opportunity of sharing technology and skills with their Western counterparts and implying that up to \$500bn in planned investment was forsaken (Gould-Davies, 2018).

Additionally, as a result of the annexation, foreign bank exposure and FDI inflows became halved and the proportion of Russian inter-bank loans and deposits outside the country declined from 60% to 37%. In the first three years of sanction, the ruble's average annual exchange rate in 2014 – 2016 against the euro depreciated by over 40% and by over 50% against the US dollar (Korhonen et al. 2018:11). Foreign liabilities in the private sector decreased by \$37bn in comparison to 2013, when an increase of \$115bn was observed (Gurvich and Prilepskiy, 2015: 360-361).

The U.S. sanctions against Russia's annexation of Crimea restricted Russian access to global financial markets. All these seen as negative signal by investors, were followed by a significant outflow of private capital from Russia (Tyll et al. 2018:26). On the EU, the sanctions impact on EU-Russia trade relations with a continuous trade decrease, dropping by 44% between 2012 and 2016 from A339 billion in 2012 to A191 billion in 2016 (European Commission, 2019).

As a result of the sanctions, most European memeber states suffered loss in terms of exports to Russia. Germany, the highest importer from Russia in the EU with A32857 million and the highest share in total extra EU imports, suffered more than 40% of Western losses as a result of the sanctions. Germany could be said to be worst hit due to its A6871million trade deficit with Russia. Besides Germany, Italy and France also suffered high export losses. In 2016 alone, France experienced a decline of A1630 million in value added and 23000 jobs being endangered due to sanctions (European Parliament, 2017:12).

In the agric-food sector, Ukraine and Russia are major suppliers of energy and agricultural products. As a result of the sanctions, production capacities of the agricultural products were reduced as well as private consumption, making prices of many core products to rise. According to a study conducted by European Investment Bank, the impact vary across European countries. They are felt more in countries where consumption is more sensitive to energy and where a relatively large share of the population is at the risk of poverty. Countries in the Central and South-eastern part of Europe tends to be more affected (European Investment Bank, 2022).Sanction impact also weakened EU firms. Business companies closer to Ukraine and Russia such as Hungary, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania felt the pressure more than the companies in Greece, Croatia and Spain (European Investment Bank, 2022).

The overall impact of the sanctions on Russia created an economic hardship in Ukraine which forced millions of Ukrainian civilians to flee into other parts of Europe. The situation, when added to an already bloated humanitarian condition in Europe, created a huge humanitarian crisis. This forced energy and commodity prices to rise, disrupted international trade and execerbated uncertainty. It caused job losses which led to high level of unemployment and economic hardship of many kinds accross Europe. Many households, especially the poorer ones suffered higher food and energy prices. Some governments experienced severe fiscal pressure as a result of high unemployment, falling household incomes and low household consumption. Governments in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain were forced to seek international financial assistance.

In some countries, government's spending patterns became counter-cyclical, in other words, it remained stable while governments tried to maintain demand in the economy and protect households through the provision of unemployment, health and other benefits. To address this fiscal pressure, countries like

Iceland, Ireland, Latvia and Slovakia re-allocated public resources, taking money from sectors with large allocation to finance spending in areas with small allocation.

Interrogating Europe's refugee crisis with respect to external intervention in the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict demands an inner look at the concept of conflict. Ordinarily, conflicts arise from competition among opposing interests that underlines power dynamics. It dates back to the beginning of human history. The potential for conflict exists where opposing interests, values, or needs distort one's relationship with others. Over the years, the world has witnessed various sizes of armed conflicts. According to Marshall and Gurr (2005), some conflicts have been successfully managed, while others have brought about devastating consequences such as wholesale killings.

Jeong (2008) enunciated instances of bloody conflicts that debase human history. Cambodia witnessed mass extermination of the regime's enemy classes in the mid 1970s. Indiscriminate killings of civilians by militia groups in Rwanda led to loss of thousands of lives. Civil wars in Sudan and the Congo could be said to be one of the most brutal internal wars, involving the deaths of millions of people. Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina was expressed in mass killing of Muslim population by Serbian militia groups. The Chechnya war was a case of horrific human rights violations, while the civilian populations in Iraq became terror victims and hostage to religious, sectarian violence unleashed as a consequence of the US invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's government (Jeong, 2008).

The list is endless. Scholars have also carried out studies on cases of conflicts that received extensive support from outside states. Coverdale (2015), revealed that Germany and Italy aided the Spanish nationalists with air raids, equipment and weapons during the 1936–39 Spanish war. Nachmani (1990), observed that the opposing sides in the 1946–49 Greek war received support from Albania, Bulgaria and the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the United Kingdom and the USA, which backed the existing Greek Government. Rasler (1983), observed that the 1975–90 Lebanese war became internationalized following forceful interventions by Israel and Syria. Wood (2003), states that the USA provided both economic and military assistance to aid the El-Salvador's counter-insurgency efforts against the rebel group the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) during the 1980–92 Salvadoran Civil War.

Humphreys et.al., (2008), notes that the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone received training in Libya and material support from neighboring Liberia during the 1991–2002 Sierra Leone civil war. Massey & May (2006), points out that France provided logistics as well as reconnaissance intelligence to the Chadian government during its conflict with insurgent groups between 2005 and 2010. Roberts (2011), records that Qatar not only distributed weapons to the opposition movements in Libya, they also provided basic infantry training to Libyan rebels and even sent Qatari special forces to the front-lines towards the end of the Libyan conflict in 2011.

Added to this, is the conflict that arose from the Syrian government's brutal response to the protest movement in 2011 which sparked an armed confrontation between the government forces and the opposition. Since then, the country has been ravaged by a civil war that has also served as a proxy battlefield for competing external powers. Niklas (2016) notes that approximately two-thirds of all armed conflicts recorded between 1975 and 2009 involved outside states providing support to either the government or the opposition.

Given the above scenario, one may be obliged to ask why some states provide support to other states that are engaged in war. In an attempt to answer the above question, Siverson & Starr (1999), stated that for a state to intervene in another state's war, it must not only have a consequential interest but also, the

opportunity and the willingness to pursue it. Opportunity refers to whether the state has sufficient capabilities to involve itself in another state's conflict. This also means that external supports are provided by countries that have a wide-ranging foreign policy agenda and the needed resources to intervene. In addition, such intervening states often have a strong interest in the conflict. They may also be directly affected by the outcome of the conflict as well as its potential spillover effect.

The 2013 political crisis in eastern Ukraine transformed a situation of local conflict into a war through the appearance of paramilitary and military forces as well as arms and financial resources supplied by Russia. The intervention by Russia on the crisis not only became the initial signal of war, it has also prolonged the conflict and made a negotiated settlement harder to achieve. In the same manner, the Western power's resolve to assist Ukraine in the war has also strengthened Ukraine's determination to fight.

The NATO member countries' interference in the Russian-Ukraine conflict coupled with the immense threat to life and the destruction of civilian infrastructure forced many people in Ukraine to flee to safer areas within Ukraine and across Europe. The International Migration Outlook of 2022 notes that since the start of the conflict, close to 7 million individual refugees from Ukraine had been recorded across the EU and other OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – member countries (OECD, 2022 report). Ukrainian refugees sought refuge in top EU countries like Spain, France, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Germany. In another account, the United Nations Humanitarian Commission for Refugees UNHCR, states that as at 24 February 2022, more than six million Ukrainians fled their country while millions others were displaced within Ukraine (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>).

In France alone, the French Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded 55,272 displaced persons entering the country between 24th February and 12th May 2022, of whom 98% were Ukrainian nationals (<https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/dossiers/situation-en-ukraine/foire-aux-questions-accueil-des-refugies-ukrainiens>). Smaller member states like Malta, Lithuania, Finland, Estonia also had their own fair share of Ukrainian refugees.

In April 2022, the UN Refugee Agency, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared Ukraine as “a level three emergency” and “the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II”. Level three emergencies are rare. It is the highest level of alert. The decision puts the crisis on par with Syria during its civil war from 2011. This decision was intended to mobilize a total UN response, increased coordination, and for additional capacities and funding (UNHCR, 2022). All these have come to prove that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia in 2022 generated an unprecedented outflow of Ukrainians to other parts of Europe thereby creating a high level of humanitarian needs across the continent.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict, which is now in its 9th year, has caused significant loss of lives and goods on both sides (Nasir et.al., 2022; Shams-Esfandabadi et.al., 2022). The conflict has also triggered an unwholesome debate among researchers. Scholars such as [Keith](#) (2022), [Roy](#) (2022), [Ragini](#) (2022) and [Katya](#) (2022) have focused mostly on the historical link of Ukraine with the Russian federation as the logical reason for the conflict leaving behind the humanitarian and refugee problem which the conflict has created across the EU.

There is a fundamental flaw in the argument put forward by scholars like [Keith](#) (2022) and [Roy](#) (2022) in their attempt to explain why Russia annexed Crimea. As earlier noted, both scholars tried to link the reason to strong nostalgic feelings of Ukraine's historical and cultural ties with Russia under Soviet Union, which of course, is what President Putin alluded for the annexation. However, the scholars failed

to understand the complexity of the reasons behind the invasion which revolves around the struggle for self-determination, national identity and political power. Key among these reasons includes Putin's determination to bring back many post-Soviet break-away colonies into the Russian federation, stop NATO's further expansion along Russia's western border, and the strive to return Russia to its geopolitical and strategic position of power and influence which was respected globally. On the part of Ukraine, the country wants to integrate into Europe partly in response to regional security threats from Russia as well as other socio-political and economic benefits.

Similarly, the attempt by Ragini (2022) to explain the impact of the international sanctions was also defective. The is because the author only contextualized its effect on the part of Russia as a sanctioned target, leaving out any explanation on how the sanctions affected the economies of the West and their allied partners imposing it. As Korhonen (2019) rightly noted, Russia is the world's largest exporter of natural gas and the world's second largest exporter of crude oil - depending on Saudi Arabia's output level. This means that any constraining action against Russia would also have repercussion outside the country. It can also be argued that with Russia and Ukraine as major exporters of wheat, the conflict destabilized the global food supply and prompted a rise in food insecurity. This, of course, corroborated the March 2022OECD's report on the economic and social impacts and policy implications of the war in Ukraine which estimated a rise in inflation by 2.5 percentage points globally.

Katya (2022), attempted to down-play the efforts of Russia in resisting the shock of the sanction. This was also fundamentally wrong. It could be noted that soon after the Western countries launched a broad package of sanctions against Russia for its illegal annexation of Crimea and undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Russia took measures to counter its effect. Some of the measures includes moving away from relying on the dollar in an effort to protect its economy, reducing its reliance on foreign loans and investments as much as possible, seeking for new trade opportunities away from western markets, cutting the size of its budget, and taking steps to create its own system of international payment in case it gets cut off from SWIFT – a global financial messaging service which is supervised by the major western central banks. Through these measures, Russia tried to build almost an alternative system to enable it cope with the consequences of the sanctions from the west and keep its economy afloat.

A careful look at the totality of these arguments of the researchers exposes three areas that demands researchers' attention. Firstly, researchers have not adequately examined whether the burden of sanction imposed on Russia over the annexation of Crimea in 2014 created economic hardship that further contributed to the humanitarian situation across Europe. Secondly, adequate effort has not been made to examine how to reduce the suffering of those affected by the conflict as well as improve their living conditions. Finally, satisfactory effort has not been made to investigate how the partisan nature of intervention by Western countries, under the umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the 2022 outbreak of Russia-Ukraine conflict contributed in intensifying the conflict, such that led to an increase in the level of humanitarian situation in Europe. These are the missing links that the study is set to fill.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted two international relation theories as frameworks to explain the subject matter. These are defensive realism theory, and liberalism theory. Realism as a theory was developed by Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980) but influenced by Reinhold Neibuhr, and Thomas Hobbs (1588-1679). However, the intellectual hegemony of Morgenthau's classical realism was later modernized by Kenneth

Waltz (1924-2013) who later became popular as the most influential advocate of defensive realism. The realist paradigm focuses on states in their relation with one another. There are different classes of realism. These include classical realism, neo-realism and structural realism. Defensive realism is a structural theory and a sub-set of structural realism. In defensive realism, Kenneth Waltz argues that the anarchical structure of international system encourages states to maintain moderate and reserved policies to attain national security (Waltz, 1979).

Defensive realists consider the world as anarchic with no international authority to which all countries come under and as a result, nations are left to defend and attend to their own interests, using the power they have in the forms of military or economic power as the means of action. Given the constant clash over the protection and advancement of respective national interests, realists believe that the occurrence of military conflicts between states is inevitable and as such, seen as the primary method to which political change takes place (Wivel, 2018). Scholars such as Stephen (1989), Charles (1999), and Fareed (1992) clearly outlined the basic assumptions of defensive realism which include:

1. States as the most important actors.
2. The international system is anarchic. In other words, it exists in a state of constant antagonism
3. States must pursue power in order to survive
4. All states within the system pursue self-interests
5. The primary concern of all States is power and security
6. States form alliances to obtain favorable balance of power
7. States are in constant competition because States can never be certain of other side's intention.

Defensive realists emphasize the competitive and conflictual side of international relations. By seeing the state as a principle actor, they believe that national interests, especially in times of war, leads the state to speak and act with one voice. They advocate that all leaders should recognize this, as they attempt to manage their states' affairs in order to survive in a competitive world. Central to this view is that human beings are egoistic and desire power and that human selfishness, appetite for power and inability to trust others leads to predictable outcomes. Perhaps this is why war has been so common throughout recorded history.

Study.com, an online lesson journal defined Liberalism as a moral philosophy that is based on the right of an individual. Jumarang (2011) and Meiser (2018) further explained that the theory takes an optimistic view of the world by advocating that democracy should be the central element of society and that international institutions and frameworks should enhance multinational co-operation. The two basic assumptions of liberalism were outlined by Michael & Stefano (2011) and Stephen (1998). They include:

1. People have the right to be treated and a duty to treat others as ethical subjects and not as objects or means only. This means that citizens are entitled to equal respect and concern.
2. States can cooperate for a mutual gain. In other words, for countries to achieve best cost-benefit result, they must work together and by working together, they would achieve peace through compromise with institutions as mediators.

Application of defensive realism and liberalism theories to our study.

Past wars have shown that aggressive and power-hungry leaders tend to exploit economic, religious, ethnic and political factors as a means to wage war. Going by this assumption, it can be said that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was bound to happen, given that both Russia and Ukraine were once part of the Soviet Union and that developments from the past contributed to the current conflict. Further to this explanation, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 from a realist perspective centers on Russia's concern over the threat to their security. This can be understood from the defensive realist position, which is one variation of the theory.

According to Feng and Ruizhuang (2006), defensive realist notes that a state will take action because of their discontent with the international political status quo and would do so to maintain a balance of power between them and other states. Relating this to Russia's actions, it can be said that the Russian leadership resented the international system, particularly with the recent advancements made by the military alliance known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO. Since the end of the cold war, NATO had expanded eastwards, recruiting countries as members and in recent times there are attempts to include Ukraine as a member (Kirby, 2022). For Russia, it is important that she maintained her influence in the post-Soviet era by having close economic and political ties with their former communist constituents. However, NATO's expansion has lessened the likelihood of that happening. Given that much of the former eastern bloc states have already joined the alliance, it becomes difficult for Russia to assert influence over them. This made Russia to see Ukraine as the red line to which NATO should not cross as that would amount to a direct threat to them (Sauvage, 2022; Saranya, 2022).

The western countries response to the Russia's action in Ukraine, in violation of international law, can also be understood from the view of defensive realism. According to Feng and Ruizhuang (2006), countries seek to compete for power due to their distaste of the international political system and the aim of carrying out such actions would be to maintain a balance of power. Amplifying this further, Lobell (2017) and Rendall (2006), stated that the aggressive actions of one state may prompt other states to engage in measures that the latter may not only feel more protected, but also restrict the powers of the aggressor. This, of course, relates to the way in which the West responded to the Ukrainian crisis.

Since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, more European countries have increased their military spending and countries such as Sweden and Finland have put forward proposals to join NATO because of the potential threat posed to them by Russia. They believe that by engaging in these measures, they would be able to maintain the balance of power.

On the aspect of humanitarianism, Realists argue that humanitarian intervention is not purely motivated by humanitarian ideals rather, it aims to maintain or increase the power of nations over others. In other words, states tend to hide under the guise of rendering humanitarian services to nations in conflict, only to maintain or increase their own power and at the same time, reduces the power of other nations (Szende, 2012).

It is also necessary to note that humanitarianism is based on a view that all human beings deserve respect and dignity and should be treated as such. Humanitarian work is geared towards advancing the well-being of humanity as a whole. The four core principles which is fundamental to humanitarian action are the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. In the instance of the Russian-Ukraine conflict, the activities of some western-led humanitarian agencies portrayed an absence of these core objectives.

In the usage of liberalism to explain the partisan intervention by western countries such as the United States and other European states in the Russian-Ukraine conflict, the study concentrated on the interdependent nature of states with regards to economic activity. As rightly noted by Richardson (2002), different countries depend on one other for the trade of goods and services. By so doing, they engage into activities that may serve as an alternative to military action. One such act is economic sanctions. As noted by Toh et al. (2022), it was this approach that western countries and their allies employed when responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, by imposing sanctions against Russian banks, businesses and politicians with regards to their financial assets, investments and trade activities (Toh et al., 2022).

Given that Russia is also involved in international trade, western countries believe that by imposing the sanctions, Russia would not only be isolated but would also face adverse effects on her economy which in turn, would either compel Russian authorities to pull out of Ukraine for the sanctions to relax, or even drive its citizens into rebellion against the government because of the frustrations they would feel as a result of the sanctions.

In the study of the Russian-Ukraine conflict and the subsequent western response and humanitarian challenge that came with it, one would understand that each of these theories have explained in their own manner the complexities of the crisis. The usage of the defensive realism theory to explain Russia's invasion shows how the crisis had been building up for years, coupled with the personal beliefs held by Russia over the intimate connection between Russia and Ukraine. The theory also showed how European countries have increased their military spending and even some of them attempting to join NATO in order to quell Russia's expansionist aggression and maintain a balance of power.

From the perspective of the west's response, the liberal concept of economic inter-connectedness enabled them to impose sanctions on Russia.

In the course of our study we observed that Russia was not the only country that suffered the impact of the sanction imposed by the west. The effect of the sanctions was also felt by other countries in the EU. It is important to note that Crimea has a strategic value in Europe. As a peninsula, it is an agrarian area that grow essential crops in commercial quantity for export to the EU and other parts of the world. Also, the Black Sea port of Crimea is a gateway to many European countries and the Middle East. Added to this, is the presence of the Black Sea oil and gas company located in Simferopol, Crimea.

After the annexation of Crimea as Russian territory and the consequent sanctions imposed on Russia by the west, the mutual economic relation between the EU and Russia became severed, making Russia to become an economically isolated area. Ukraine is a major supplier of corn, barley and sun flower seeds which is used to the production of cooking oil. As a result of the sanction restriction, Ukraine's ports were blockaded and importation of agricultural products originating from the Russian-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk in Crimea into the EU was stopped. Its effect exposed citizens of most EU countries to very un-usual problems. There were increases in prices of food products which affected many households. Also, the ban on import of goods from Russian-controlled Crimea and Sevastopol forced foreign investors out of Crimea in order to protect their businesses, some of which were located in other parts of Europe.

The study also revealed that between 2014 and 2022, the number of refugees in Europe increased as a result of the conflict. This also made the number of people in-need of humanitarian assistance in the EU to increase more than it was before the years of the conflict. It could be noted that Europe has always been a continent of migration. At all times, large number of migrants flee across the Mediterranean Sea to seek

asylum in Europe.

Before 2014, EU member states received over 1.2 million asylum applications, which was more than double the amount of the previous year (Eurostat, 2016). The immigrants were mostly political refugees who fled from wars and persecution in their home countries. Statistics provided by Eurostat (2016) show that the top three origins of asylum seekers in 2015 are originally from countries in an ongoing state of civil war in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. There were also economic migrants coming from parts of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe whose primary motivation for leaving their home country was for economic gain (Park, 2015).

However, between May 2014 and mid-April 2022, after Crimea's annexation and subsequent invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the UN listed 7.6 million Ukrainians across Europe with Poland hosting over 1.5 million as registered refugees (Willem, et.al., 2018). The influx of Ukrainian refugees across the EU countries affected the economies of the host countries and increased their humanitarian needs. By February 2022, the UN estimated 15.7 million Ukrainians in need, of which 10.3 million have been reached by aid agencies (UN-OCHA, 2022).

We also observed that between April and June 2022, the conflict in Ukraine became a risk multiplier to existing humanitarian crisis in some countries outside Europe especially in the Middle-East and North African (MENA) region. For example, countries like Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, Libya as well as millions of people in Palestine experienced a drop in humanitarian assistance from international bodies.

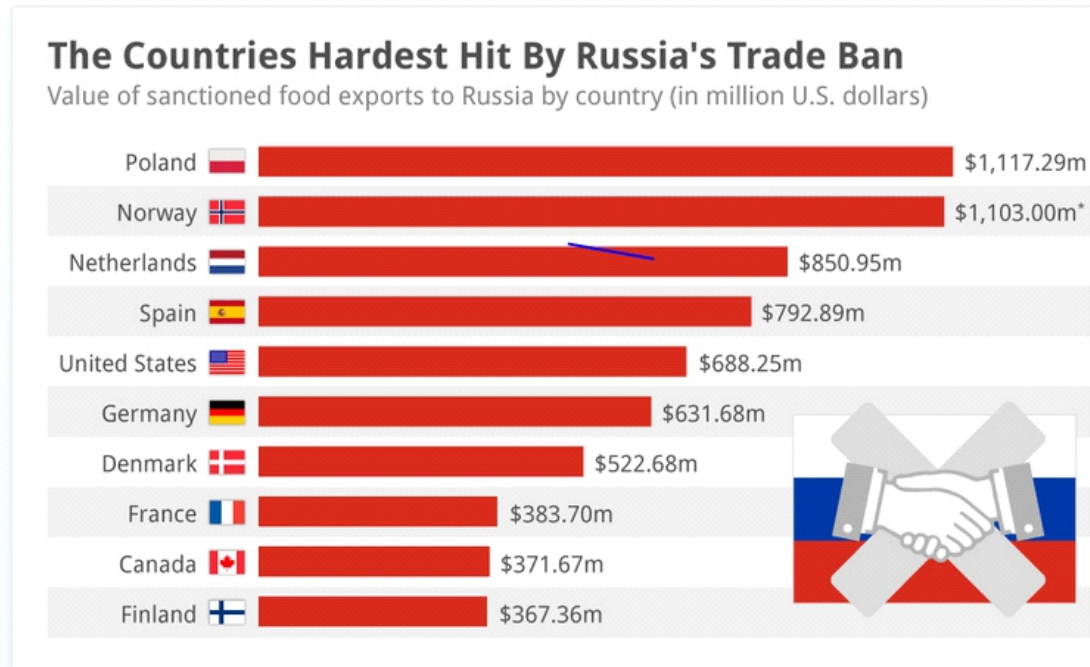
It is important at this point to state that political solutions to the conflicts in Palestine, Syria, Libya, and Yemen are yet to materialize. As a result, millions of people cannot return to their homes. There is food insecurity particularly in Yemen, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon. This, according to UN-OCHA (2022), worsened the standard of living for millions of people in these countries, and called for an additional need of humanitarian assistance.

Our other observation centered on the intervention of western countries in the conflict. We discovered that the partisan nature of the West in the conflict forced Russian government to step up their attack on Ukraine. NATO and their western allies emphasized defending the United Nations Charter and democracy as their primary objective for intervening in the conflict. However, the consistency of west's military and technical support to Ukraine, since the conflict began, made Russia to consider US and NATO as participants in the war. In view of this, Russia became more aggressive and determined in their resolve to annihilate Ukraine.

Western sanctions on Russia and its contribution to economic hardship in Europe

Western countries suffered the effect of the sanctions they imposed on Russia through a counter-trade ban from Russia. Soon after European Union member states and the United States introduced a wide variety of economic sanctions against Russia as a consequence of the illegal annexation of Crimea and for undermining territorial integrity of Ukraine, Russia introduced its own counter-sanctions, which ended exports of foodstuffs from Russia to the sanctioning countries. The analyses in the graphs below emphasize more on this:

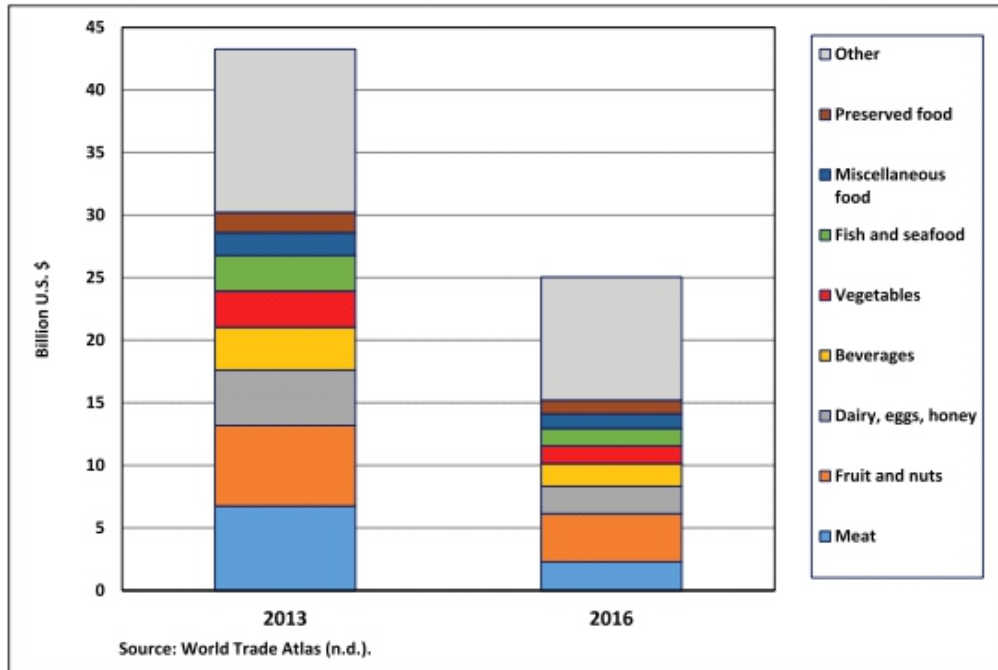
Fig. 1.



Source: World Trade Atlas (2021)

In analyzing the value of food products from western countries banned for export to Russia, one could observe from the graph above that countries like Poland, Norway, Netherlands, Spain, United states, Germany and Denmark suffered the highest hit, having lost billions of dollars as a result of the trade ban. In March 2022, Russia, the world's second largest exporter of wheat in response to the trade restriction, banned exports of wheat and other grains to western countries. It became a global crisis made worse by a rising surge of food price, a situation which analysts like Thomas and Strupczewski (2022) described as “a persistent uncertainty that has become a drag on consumption and investment and will impede growth”. In a similar development, Mari and Axel (2022) in an article titled: '*Trade restrictions are inflaming the worst food crisis in a decade*', noted that the countries mostly affected by the trade ban are developing economies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (World Bank Global Trade Alert, 2022).

Fig. 2. Russia’s agricultural imports from Western countries



Source: World Trade Atlas

In response to the western sanctions, Russia imposed an agricultural import ban in 2014 against the EU, United States, Norway, Australia, and Canada. The ban covered beef, pork, poultry, milk, cheese, dairy products, fish, fruit, vegetables, nuts, and many processed foods. The ban was later expanded to Albania, Iceland, Montenegro, and Liechtenstein. Although initially created for a year, the ban was renewed in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 (William M., *et.al.*, 2019).

It could be stated that Russia is a major market for EU agricultural goods. In 2013, it imported US\$15–US\$16 billion of EU agricultural products, representing about 10% of total EU agricultural exports, and 35%–40% of Russia's total agricultural imports. Russia's import ban adversely affected many EU agricultural producers, especially of meat, dairy, fruit, and vegetables.

Dillen (2015) stated that in 2013, Russia was the top destination for EU meat taking 18% of European meat exports, as well as for dairy such as yogurt, buying 17% of total EU exports of that product), fruit (40% of EU exports), and vegetables (23% of EU exports). However, in 2015–2016 Russian imports of the above products from the EU virtually ceased to exist. Between 2013 and 2016, EU exports of cheese, fruits and vegetables were down by 20% and 9% in value terms, respectively (Global Trade Atlas, n.d.).

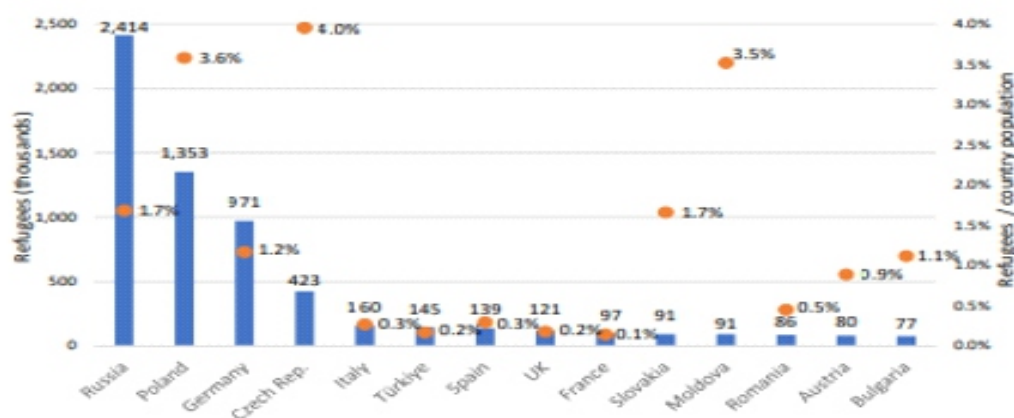
Refugee & humanitarian crisis in Europe as a result of NATO's partisan intervention in the Russia-Ukraine conflict

NATO's involvement in the Russian-Ukraine conflict appears delusive. While NATO is coordinating Ukraine's request for assistance and supports from allies to deliver humanitarian, non-lethal and financial

aid to Ukraine, it is at same time, trying to increase Ukraine's resistance so that Russia does not gain a decisive victory in the war. By so doing, NATO have indirectly increased Russia's appetite to fight and escalate the violence. This, in effect, has led to a high number of deaths of Ukrainian civilians. It has also caused high number of civilian casualties and destroyed both civilian and state infrastructures.

According to 2022 Internal Displacement Report, since the beginning of the crisis, millions of individual Ukrainian refugees have fled across the borders to other parts of Europe. As observed by UNHCR (2022b) the movement of international refugees has been pendular, with about 12 million refugee movements out of Ukraine. The graphs and tables below further explain this assertion:

Fig. 3: Individual refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe, top host countries



Source: UNHCR (2022b)
Data as of August 30, 2022

The UNHCR graph above, shows Russia, Poland and Germany as the main countries of arrival for Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the conflict. Newly arrived refugees often come from areas heavily affected by the fighting. They often arrive in a state of distress and anxiety, without clear plan of where to go and with less economic resources (data.unhcr.org)

Table 1. Refugee influx from Ukraine: the biggest receiving countries (24 May 2022)

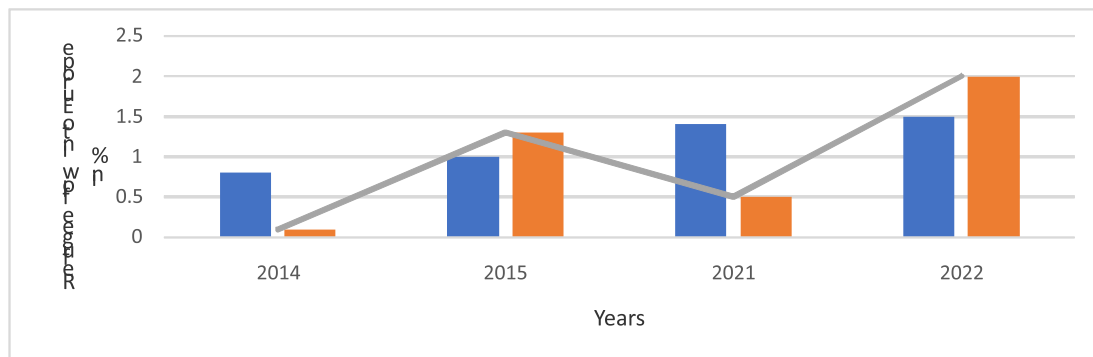
| Country | Refugee population | Total POPULATION | Share of population |
|----------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Poland | 3,544,995 | 37,768,292 | 9,4 |
| Slovakia | 446,755 | 5,459,642 | 8,2 |
| Hungary | 654,664 | 9,614,006 | 6,8 |
| Romania | 972,203 | 18,995,613 | 5,1 |
| Germany | 600,000 | 84,290,181 | 0,1 |

Source: UNHCR (2022) for refugee statistics and Worldometers (2020/2022) from the overall population

Refugees from Ukraine sought for refuge in the top countries listed above. In Poland, 3.5 million displaced persons were recorded entering the country between February 24 and May 12, 98% of whom were Ukrainian nationals. In Slovakia, a total of 446,755 temporary protection documents was granted to persons displaced by the war. Hungary with a total population of about 9.6 million is accommodating thousands of Ukrainian refugees, same as Romania and Germany. The surge in the number of new arrivals of Ukrainian refugees overstretched the capacity of some EU countries to sustain humanitarian support of migrant populations. Overcrowded reception facilities generated additional challenges in providing adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, sufficient access to health and learning opportunities for children and families. In light of the continuing conflict in Ukraine coupled with the deterioration of the humanitarian situation at the global level, it is expected that the number of people seeking refuge in Europe will continue to grow.

It could be observed from the graph above that by the middle of September 2022, three EU countries comprising Poland, Germany and Czech Republic accommodated almost 3 million Ukrainian refugees. Another 1.35 million people spread across various other European OECD member countries while more than Four hundred thousand others escaped to non-European OECD countries.

Fig.4. Movement of Ukrainian refugees to other parts of Europe



Source: Compiled by the Researcher from cited sources on 10th August 2022

From the graph above, it could be observed that in 2015, a year after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the percentage of Ukrainian refugees who fled across the borders to other parts of Europe rose from 0.1% to 1.3%. By 2021, the figure sharply fell to 0.5% as a result of thousands of Ukrainian refugees who returned home following signs of political stability in Ukraine. The figure, however, rose again to 2% in February 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It could also be observed from the Series One in the graph that the percentage of refugee-flow from other countries into Europe rose from 0.8% in 2014 to 1% in 2015. The increase continued in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

This was a result of thousands of refugees arriving on boats to seek for asylum in the EU especially people coming from Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and South East Asia. The steady influx of millions of refugees into Europe aggravated a pre-existing humanitarian situation in the EU into a humanitarian crisis.

Summary and Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014, forced millions of Ukrainian civilians to flee their homes to safer zones across the EU borders. The responsibility of hosting the refugees primarily landed on the shoulder of the EU member States. According to UNHCR (2022), the major receiving countries in Europe are Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Germany. Following the movement of Ukrainian refugee population across Europe, humanitarian situations deteriorated. As stated in OCHA (2022b), as at August 24th 2022, almost 18 million people (40%) of Ukraine's population are estimated to be in-need of humanitarian assistance.

The ideological key players in the conflict are Russia, Ukraine and NATO. Each of these parties sought to secure the lives of and properties of its citizens and members but, their strategies encroached on each other's interest. Russia's driving motivation for the war is to restore the country to the former glory it enjoyed as Soviet Union which enjoyed global power and influence until it collapsed in 1991. Ukraine is fighting back, trying to defeat what they see as an occupation. The US and NATO alongside their allied network used weapons supply and economic sanctions to guard Ukraine against Russia's military invasion.

The study found out that the Russian-Ukraine conflict created humanitarian crisis in Europe and reduced the continent's economic growth between 2014 and 2022. It also revealed that the ban on importation of goods from Russia to the EU as a result of the western sanction on Russia as well as Russia's counter-sanctions which ended exports of foodstuffs from Russia to the West, led to increase in prices of foodstuffs in the EU. The increase in prices of foodstuffs also led to a reduction in household consumption. Added to these, some EU member states suffered loss in terms of exports to Russia which caused supply chain disruption and higher fiscal spending. Our findings also revealed that the US and NATO's partisan involvement in the conflict made Russia to heighten their attacks on Ukraine, a brutal attack that caused thousands of Ukrainian deaths and damages to critical infrastructures. As a result, millions of Ukrainian civilians fled to other parts of Europe as refugees making the level of humanitarian crisis across Europe to rise.

Recommendations

Our study was able to establish that the Russian-Ukraine conflict heightened the humanitarian crisis in Europe between 2014 and 2022. In view of the foregoing, we put forward these recommendations for policy implementation:

1. The zero-sum nature of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in which both countries and their supporters seek for total victory does not augur well under the present circumstance. Thus, both Russia and Ukraine should take a concrete step towards finding a diplomatic solution to resolve the conflict. In the same vein, the United Nations should come up with a peace plan that is aimed at ending the conflict. Such peace plan should not be open-ended but must be tied to a time-frame for implementation. The UN should outlaw any form of external partisanship in the conflict which may undermine any established peace process.
2. The UN should impose an embargo on all forms of military aids or sales to the governments of Russia and Ukraine until the conflict is resolved. They should as well, sanction any nation that violates the embargo. There should be adequate funding for refugees from the UN refugee agency,

UNHCR, and other relief agencies. In addition, private donors should support innovative solutions to augment the larger humanitarian response system. The EU should draw on the experience of the aid it provided Turkey, in support of Syrian refugees, and approve a package of financial support for its member states hosting fleeing Ukrainians. For reasons of solidarity, wealthy nations should, as well, take in a share of Ukrainian refugees.

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