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Analysis of the state of Iranian migration to the countries of Western and Northern Europe

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Abstract. Given the current conditions of the world economy, the concept of migration is becoming increasingly more important. In connection with the topicality of the subject of migration, the authors decided to examine it on the example of Iran and its economic and socio-political ties with the countries of Western and Northern Europe. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the relationship of Iranian remittances to mutual foreign trade through an analysis of the state of Iranian migration in the countries of Western and Northern Europe. The results were subsequently graphically interpreted through a bubble displays and cartogram and suggest that the strongest European partner in the field of migration is Germany, which has long been associated with Iranian and Shiite culture. The results of the research can be applicated in economic and socio-political area of research and practice.

 ${\it Keywords}:$ for eign trade, Iran, Migration, Remittances, Western and Northern Europe

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Анализ состояния иранской миграции в страны Западной и Северной Европы

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Аннотация. В современных условиях мировой экономики концепция [1] государственной миграционной политики становится все более важной. В связи с актуальностью темы авторы решили рассмотреть ее на примере Ирана и его экономических и социально-политических отношений со странами Западной и Северной Европы.

Цель исследования — на основании анализа состояния иранской миграции в странах Западной и Северной Европы оценить динамику денежных переводов Ирана во внешней торговле с этими странами. Для достижения цели авторы использовали общие методы анализа и синтеза, индукции, дедукции и сравнения. Результаты были впоследствии графически интерпретированы с применением картограммы. На основании результатов исследования можно сделать выводы, что самым сильным европейским партнером в области миграции является Германия, которая долгое время ассоциировалась с иранской и шиитской культурой. Данные результаты могут найти применение в области экономических и социально-политических исследований и практики.

Ключевые слова: внешняя торговля, денежные переводы, Западная и Северная Европа, Иран, миграция

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Introduction

The migration of people, especially workers, is one of the main features of the modern global age, despite the persistence of many barriers. In the case of economic migrants, it mainly concerns less developed and poorer countries, moving towards countries with stronger economies

and greater opportunities for social stability and employment for migrants to improve their living situation and increase social and health security. Reasons for relocations can be, in addition to economic, also family, education, or escape from war, persecution, terrorism and human rights violations. The adverse effects of climate change and other environmental factors that encourage forced migration are also becoming a very urgent problem today. Given the current global conditions, the concept of migration is becoming increasingly important. Today, more people live in a country other than the one in which they were born than ever before. In 2019, the number of migrants worldwide reached an estimated 272 mil., which is 51 mil. more than in 2010. International migrants now make up 3.5% of the world's population. Compared to 2.8% in 2000 and 2.3% in 1980¹.

Remittances are a relatively simple and popular way for a migrant to transfer parts of his cash earned abroad to his home country. The specificity of remittances lies in their essence to help raise the standard of living of their family, living in the home country. As the migrant is the source of these funds, he alone decides on the extent and frequency of sending remittances, and on the other hand, the receiving household decides on the method of handling the funds thus obtained. In addition to targeting, the importance of remittances also lies in their impact on developing countries, to which approximately 60% of official remittances have already flowed at the beginning of this century [Gammeltoft 2002, p. 181]. Therefore, we can state that the capital obtained through remittances helps in the fight against poverty, increasing the income and purchasing power of the population and at the same time point to the effectiveness of migration.

According to the United Nations², about one billion people in the world – or one in seven – are involved with remittances, either by sending or receiving them. Around 800 mil. in the world – or one in nine people – are recipients of these flows of money sent by their family members who have migrated for work³. As another source of external income, remittances are complemented by official and private flows, i.e. foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance (ODA) and government subsidies on the one hand, and portfolio investment, bank loans and possible income from tourism on the other. According

¹United Nations (2020), *Migration*, available at: https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html (Accessed June 15, 2020).

²United Nations (2019), *Remittances matter: 8 facst you don't know about the money migrants send back home*, available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040581 (Accessed June 12, 2020).

³United Nations (2020), Migration...

to the United Nations (UN), remittances in low- and middle-income developing countries have long been ranked second on the main foreign financial resources after FDI, while in the lowest-income countries they contribute much more significantly to GDP and imports than is the case in middle-income countries [Holmvall 2007, p. 10; Ratha 2003, p. 157].

The Agenda for Sustainable Development until 2030 for the first time recognized the relationship between migration and sustainable development. Almost 11 of the 17 sustainable development goals include goals and indicators related to migration or mobility. The main principle of the agenda is not to leave anyone behind, not even migrants⁴.

The main reference of the SDGs to migration is set out in Objective 10.7: 'To facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. Other targets directly related to migration mention trafficking, remittances, international student mobility and more. Moreover, migration is indirectly relevant to many more cross-cutting targets'5.

The issue of current migration at the time of ongoing globalization and sometimes deglobalization tendencies is perceived as a very urgent topic. Through remittances, it affects international economic relations, and thus also affects the nature of the economy in certain regions. In our research, we decided to address the issue of migration of the Iranian population, especially to the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Iran is currently going through a turbulent period not only in economic life but also in social and political and, last but not least, in the security of the country itself. Therefore, the issue of Iranian migration is undoubtedly an important milestone in the mutual political and trade relations between the EU and Iran.

Literature review and Methodology

The theoretical basis of migration and remittances is very broad. The main subject of research is migration, especially by Taylor et al. (1996), who research focused mainly on its direct and indirect effects on the economy. Honorari et al. [Honorari et al. 2017] focused on the generalization of migration with a target on its character in Iran, focusing on

⁴United Nations (2020), Migration...

⁵United Nations, International Organisation for Migration (2018), *Migration and the 2030 Agenda: A Guide for Practitioners*, available at: https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-and-2030-agenda-guide-practitioners (Accessed June 9, 2020).

the study of Iranian migration in Western Europe. Iran-Shiite migration is also the subject of research by Legrain (1986), Buttcher (2007), Mohagheghi (2007) and currently van den Bos (2020). Rasoulinezhad, Popova (2017) also devoted their research to the issue of Iran focusing mainly on the analysis of the Iranian economy and its bilateral relations. The role of remittances as an important source of income for the home countries of sending migrants has been addressed by several authors in their research. In his work, Swamy (1981) focused mainly on the quantification of remittances and their limitations. Gammeltoft (2002) devoted his research to the relationship between migration and remittances, as did Holmvall (2007) and Ratha (2003), which examined the impact of remittances as income in countries with different income levels. Due to this contribution, we based our research on the literature of Russell, Teitelbaum (1992), which addressed the issue of remittances in measuring their share in macroeconomic indicators, forming a picture of the bilateral relationship between the countries studied.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the relationship of Iranian remittances to mutual foreign trade through an analysis of the state of Iranian migration in the countries of Western and Northern Europe. The authors decided to examine the issue of Iranian migration and remittances from Western and Northern Europe to Iran by comparing the share of Iranian remittances in foreign trade turnover with the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The results were then interpreted using graphs and cartograms in Microsoft Excel. For Fig. 3 and 4 used, the results of the analysis are represented by a bubble graph, which indicates that the larger the bubble size of each country, the greater share of the remittances of Iranian migrants living in the European country on their foreign trade. The source document of the state of Iranian migration for the authors of the research is the database of the United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs called UN Migrant Stock by Origin and Destination 2019. In connection with the study of foreign trade results, the authors used the UNCTAD database.

One of the limitations of our research is the fact that in connection with the analysis of the results of Iranian remittances in the countries of Western and Northern Europe were from 2018, as the World Bank does not have more recent data. Other compared indicators are processed with the relevant year 2019. However, we assume that there were no major changes in the values of remittances year-on-year 18/19. As the share of remittances in the foreign trade balance is only of a comparative nature, the results of our research are interpretable and with minimal deviation.

The results of the research are divided into two parts. The first part analyses the migration of the Iranian population in Europe and its territorial structure. The second part of the results presents an overview of the economic nature of migration in the form of remittances and the amount of their impact in selected countries of Western and Northern Europe.

Iranian Migration and its Position in European Countries

In general, the trend of global migration is the arrival of migrants to high-income countries. While in 1990 there were approximately 78 mil. migrants in high-income countries, in 2019 there were approximately 176 mil. migrants (United Nations Population Division 2019). In the case of Iranian migration, trend is the same. In 2019, we monitor approximately 1.2 mil. Iranian migrants in high-income countries, while in 1990 there were only about 560 thousand Iranian migrants living in these countries. Compared to middle-income countries, in 2019 there are approximately 124 thousand Iranian migrants and less than 1,200 people are placed in low-income countries (United Nations Population Division 2019).

From a time-series development viewpoint of Iranian migration in the territory of Europe, we observe a growing trend in the volume of the stock of Iranian migrants. In 1990, there were approximately 259 thousand Iranian migrants in Europe, in 2005 there are noted approximately 343 thousand Iranian migrants, in 2015 approximately 426 thousand Iranian migrants and in 2019 we monitor approximately 482 thousand Iranian migrants (United Nations Population Division 2019).



Fig. 1. Iranian Migrant Stock Structure in Europe in 2019 (in %)

Source: United Nations, Population Division,
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019

Fig. 1 shows that most Iranian migrants are in Western and Northern Europe. As we observe an increasing proportion of Iranian migrants coming mainly to higher-income countries, this statement is logical. In our research, we also rely on the findings of the authors Honorari et al. (2017), who came to several conclusions in their research study on the issue of Iranian migration in Western Europe. According to their results, the reason for the migration of Iranians to Western Europe is mainly educational and, to a lesser extent, political. Iranian migrants in Western Europe have a positive attitude towards their position in society and are satisfied with their income situation. They are also most often permanently employed or studying here (Honorari et al. 2017).



Fig. 2. Iranian Migration Stock Structure in Western and Northern Europe in 2019 (in ppl.) Source: United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019

The structure of Iranian migrants in the countries of Western and Northern Europe in 2019 is illustrated in Fig. 2. It follows that the darker the colour of the European country, the more migrants from Iran there were in 2019. The highest number of Iranian migrants was according to United Nations Population Division (2019) recorded in Germany (127,177 migrants), the United Kingdom (89,794 migrants), Sweden (79,308 migrants), the Netherlands (33,819 migrants) and France (25,091 migrants).

There are several reasons for that many Iranian migrants in Western and Northern Europe. One of the main factors determining the lives of Iranian migrants is the position of the Iranian religion, especially its Shiite branch, which in Iran is professed by approximately 89% of the

Iranian population (World Population Review 2020). Western Europe in particular plays a key role in Iran's migration trends. According to van den Bos (2020), the main demographic and institutional depictions of Shiite life in Europe have appeared since the end of the twentieth century, especially in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. According to his research, the centre of Shiite migration in Europe was mainly the UK, as London has always been an institutionalized base for Iranian Shiites. Apart from the United Kingdom, France was also an important centre of Shiite Islam, where a cultural centre (Center culturel et religieux *chiite en Europe*) was established in the 1960s. It is important to note that Paris was also the centre of several Iranian clerical dissidents. By 1984, a network of mosques appeared throughout France, the founders of which were part of the diplomatic staff of the Iranian embassy (Legrain 1986). Germany and the United Kingdom are linked by comparable waves of Shiite migration (Böttcher 2007). It is believed that the main ethnicnational Shiite migrants in Germany are predominantly Iranians (Mohagheghi 2007), suggesting the presence of Iranian majority. Compared to France and the United Kingdom, Germany offers a highly developed institutionalization of Shiite life (van den Bos 2020). While the French Federation (French Fédération) is one of several French organizations focusing mainly on individuals and national umbrella bodies, ethnic and generational bodies have never been one component acknowledged in the UK. In 2009, the German Islamic State (German Islamische Gemeinschaft der schiitischen Gemeinden Deutschlands) (IGS) represented more than one hundred local communities belonging to individual mosques (Moscheegemeinden), while organizations operating only under the auspices of the IGS represent various ethnic-national ideological tendencies (van den Bos 2020).

In connection with the established hypotheses concerning the issue of Iranian migration in the territory of Western and Northern Europe, the authors came to several conclusions. As it is clear from the available data of the United Nations Population Division (2019), compiled in Tab. 1, that most Iranian migrants lived in 2019 in Germany with 127,177 people.

Iranian Remittances and its Share of Foreign Trade Turnover with European Countries

From a theoretical point of view, it is clear that a full assessment of the relationship between international migration and economic development must take into account the direct and indirect effects of labour migration. Since, according to the results of the authors Honorari et al. (2017), that Iranian migrants are long-term employed. in our research we decided to take into account the amount of their remittances. According to Taylor et al. (1996), the direct effect of migration is the contribution of remittances to national income. Among the indirect effects, the above authors include a change in production resulting from a decrease in the workforce, but in particularly emphasize the role of remittances in the process of facilitating foreign exchange between countries. Among the authors dealing with remittances and their quantification is Swamy (1981), who in his research tried to quantify the flow of remittances sent back to the home country, especially to migrant's friends, his family and loved ones. However, measuring remittances is still very challenging and often statistically inaccurate, as migrants often enter developed countries outside official remittance channels and repatriate their earnings and savings through informal structures. Our research is based on previous results by Russell, Teitelbaum (1992), who examined the volume of remittances in relation to the results of foreign trade between countries in the world economy. In our case, we decided to modify their methodology and adjust it to the form we require, taking into account the results of foreign trade turnover between Iran and the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Table 1 provides an overview of Western and Northern Europe countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) and their economic level, measured by GDP p.c., stock of Iranian migrants in these countries, the absolute amount of remittances sent from those countries to Iran, the amount of foreign trade turnover with Iran and the relative amount of remittances measured as a share of foreign trade turnover.

Based on the data represented in Table 1., we state that most Iranian migrants from the compared countries of Western and Northern Europe are in Germany, with the amount of 127,177 people. The second country with the highest number of Iranian migrants is the United Kingdom, among the countries under comparison, where in 2019 lived 89,794 Iranian migrants. A relatively high proportion of Iranian migrants (79,308 people) also live in Sweden. From the point of view of remittances, an important European country for Iran is especially Germany, from which in 2018 were sent the most remittances in the amount of 91 mil. \$. Sweden and the United Kingdom also play an important role in taking remittances into account, as from both of those two countries send 51 mil. \$ to Iran.

Iranian Remittances Overview in Western and Northern European Countries

Sending Country of Remittances	GDP p.c. (\$)	Iranian migration stock 2019 (ppl.)	Total Remittances in Iran 2018 (mil. \$)	Foreign Trade Turnover 2018 (mil. \$)	Remittances as a Percentage of Foreign Trade Turnover (%)
Austria	51,230	18,291	15	848.76	0.02
Belgium	47,293	11,399	8	652.82	0.01
Denmark	61,834	17,716	12	158.14	0.08
Finland	50,136	9,137	4	164.77	0.02
France	41,441	25,091	16	2,863.14	0.01
Germany	47,514	127,177	91	3,751.60	0.02
Ireland	79,415	488	1	126.84	0.01
Netherlands	53,583	33,819	23	1,290.03	0.02
Norway	81,336	18,707	14	33.17	0.42
Sweden	55,767	79,308	51	399.83	0.13
Switzerland	83,136	12,998	6	512.67	0.02
United Kingdom	42,366	89,794	51	262.17	0.19

Source: Authors own processing according to UNCTADstat (2020), World Bank (2019, 2020), United Nations Population Division (2019)

In connection with the analysis of Iran's trade relationship with the countries of Western and Northern Europe, we came to the conclusion that the highest Iranian foreign trade turnover in 2018 was with Germany (3,751.60 mil. \$), France (2,863.14 mil. \$) and the Netherlands (1,290.03 mil. \$). However, Russel, Teitelbaum (1992) consider it important to take into account the share of remittances in various economic indicators in analysing migration and its economic impact through remittances, we decided to calculate the share of remittances in mutual foreign trade between Iran and the host country of Iranian migrants, measured by the amount of foreign trade turnover, which in numerical expression represents the last column of Table 1 and the graphical representation of the results is represented by Fig. 3 and 4.

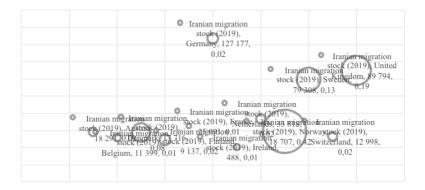


Fig. 3. Iranian Migration Stock and its Remittances as Western and Northern European Countries' Share of Mutual Foreign Trade Turnover in 2018/2019, including Norway

Source: Authors own processing according to UNCTADstat (2020), World Bank (2019, 2020), United Nations Population Division (2019)

Using a bubble display, we reached several partial conclusions by measuring the share of remittances and turnover of Iran's foreign trade with the host country. The larger the area of the country shown in Fig. 3, the higher the share of Iranian remittances in Iran's foreign trade with that country in Western and Northern Europe. It therefore follows that such countries include, in particular, Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. However, we consider Norway to be an extreme observation in our measurements, caused mainly by the low value of mutual trade with Iran (33.17 mil. \$), the lowest of the

observed countries. Based on inspiration from the research of Kittová, Steinhauser (2017), after removing this observation from our measurements, we came to undistorted results, which is showed in Fig. 4.

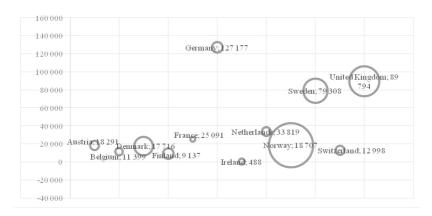


Fig. 4. Iranian Migration Stock and its Remittances as Western and Northern European Countries' Share of Mutual Foreign Trade Turnover in 2018/2019, excluding Norway Source: Authors own processing according to UNCTADstat (2020), World Bank (2019, 2020), United Nations Population Division (2019)

After removing Norway as an extreme observation in our measurements, we arrived at an interpretation of the results without bias, which caused visible changes in Fig. 4, which identifies the share of remittances and mutual foreign trade excluding Norway. The results are visibly different in the case of Fig. 4. Also, in this case, the larger the area of the country shown in Fig. 4, the higher the share of Iranian remittances in Iran's foreign trade with that country in Western and Northern Europe. These results also correlate to a large extent with the number of Iranian migrants in these countries without considering the values of Norway. As a result, according to our measurements, Iran has the largest share of Iranian remittances in foreign trade turnover with the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and Germany.

Based on an examination of the amount of remittances of Iranian migrants living in Western and Northern Europe, according to the World Bank (2020), Germany had the highest volume of remittances in 2018, amounting to 91 mil. \$. This value is also the highest among all the countries of Western and Northern Europe compared.

In the analysis of the share of remittances in mutual foreign trade, measured by the turnover of mutual foreign turnover between Iran and the host country of Iranian migrants in Western and Northern Europe, we concluded that the highest share belongs to Norway (0.42%) and the United Kingdom (0.19%). In connection with Norway, marked as extreme observation, we created 2 models in our measurements, one in which we left Norway in observations and the other in which Norway was removed.

Conclusion

Based on the research carried out by analysing the state of Iranian migration in the countries of Western and Northern Europe and evaluating the relationship of Iranian remittances to mutual foreign trade between these countries and Iran, we came to the following conclusion. The highest number of Iranian migrants in 2019, among the countries of Western and Northern Europe, was in Germany, at 127,177 people. The second country with the highest number of Iranian migrants is the United Kingdom, among the countries under comparison, where 89,794 Iranian migrants lived in 2019. A relatively high proportion of Iranian migrants (79,308 people) also live in Sweden.

In connection with the examination of remittances of Iranian migrants, we came to the conclusion that remittances of Iranian migrants living in Germany to Iran were the highest among the compared countries of Western and Northern Europe in 2018. The value of these remittances was 91 mil. \$. Furthermore, most remittances went from Sweden and the United Kingdom, worth 51 mil. \$. In the analysis of the share of remittances in mutual foreign trade, measured by the turnover of mutual foreign trade between Iran and the host country of Iranian migrants in Western and Northern Europe, we came to the conclusion that the highest share has the United Kingdom at 0.19%.

Due to the tense situation in the Middle East, we anticipate an increase in the number of migrants heading to Europe in the future. Given the nature of Iranian migrants, we also expect an increase in the number of migrants in the more economically developed countries of Europe, especially Germany. Iran's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement at the beginning of 2020 adversely affected not only economic but especially political relations between the European Union and Iran. If US sanctions continue to determine the critical state of the Iranian economy, it is more than likely that the Iranian people will be forced to leave their country and emigrate. It is therefore up to the European and Iranian authorities to reconsider the priorities of their relationship and

to show interest in re-trading together and reducing the negative economic consequences of US sanctions. Given the results of our research, it will also be necessary to cooperate on the issue of international migration, which is nowadays gaining more importance.

The current tense and uncertain situation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected the functioning of the world economy and its future development. The spread of the virus in Iran, following the relentless US sanctions, has once again disrupted the Iranian economy and the functioning of the Iranian population. As of August 21, 2020, there were 352,558 confirmed cases in the country and the number of deaths had already exceeded 20.264 (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2020), but unofficial statistics show even higher numbers. According to the Migration Data Portal (2020), employed migrants, especially in lower paid jobs, may be more affected and threatened by the spread of Covid-19 in countries that have already been affected as well as in countries where the pandemic is still spreading. The pandemic also affected the countries of Western and Northern Europe. As of 21 August 2020, Germany had 228,621 confirmed cases and 9,253 deaths, France had 229,814 confirmed cases and 30,480 deaths, and the United Kingdom had 322,280 confirmed cases and 41,403 deaths (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control 2020). We therefore expect that in the context of the extremely unfavourable situation in Iran and the closure of the borders of European countries, the migration of the Iranian population will be a major problem, especially if they are unable to emigrate to the usual European countries.

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