

## Public Sentiment and Policy Impact: Host Country Citizens' Attitude Towards Refugees and Migrants as a Key Criterion for Migration Policy

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### Abstract

In the context of growing socio-economic inequalities, oppressive regimes and civil wars in various countries of Africa and the Middle East, migration has once again risen to prominence in the public discourse across Europe. As a key destination for asylum seekers due to its geographical proximity with conflict epicenters, including Ukraine, it has become a focal point in debates surrounding asylum policies. Despite the extensive effort made by international organizations like the European Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the anti-immigrant sentiment among local populations which view this not as a humanitarian gesture, but as a threat to national identity and security, has significantly intensified in recent years. This paper argues that while various statistical criteria are typically used by researchers to evaluate the effect of migration policies, they may fail to reflect the public attitude due to misinformation and lack of transparency on refugee management. With the economic impact of immigration identified as a major concern, this analysis suggests that policymaking should focus on resolving concerns about job competition and pressure on the public services by enhancing capacity to manage the influx and by providing accessible information on the procedures following an asylum seeker's arrival at a reception center.

### Introduction

Among the diverse global challenges international organizations strive to address, migration has proven to be a pressing topic with a growing demand for border control policy-making as a response to recent violent conflicts, including, but not limited to, the Syrian Civil War, the War in Afghanistan, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Hostilities in close proximity to the homes of civilians have pushed millions to seek refuge elsewhere, with the route to Europe appearing most promising (Di Iasio & Wahba, 2020). More specifically, Angela Merkel's decision as Germany's Chancellor in August 2015 to suspend the Dublin Regulation, an European Union (EU) law requiring asylum seekers to apply in the first EU country they enter, served as a de-facto invitation to Middle-Eastern and Sub-Saharan nationals fleeing their homeland due to instability or authoritarianism (Dernbach, 2015). With Germany envisioned by many as the end of their forced displacement journey, however, this brave but arguably hasty move led to over 1.1 million people registered upon arrival by the end of 2015 (*Migration Report*, 2016, p. 2). Despite being named TIME's person of the year for her humanitarian approach to the migrant crisis, the public opinion on Merkel dramatically shifted after the noticeable strain on public services and isolated incidents involving refugees, such as the 2015 New Year's Eve assaults in Cologne (*Migration Report*, 2016). "Wir schaffen das,"<sup>1</sup> a phrase originally symbolizing hope and determination under Merkel's moral leadership and positioning her country as a role model in the global response to the refugee crisis, soon became a subject of mockery by critics, mainly on the political right, who used it to highlight the perceived disconnect between the government's promises and the actual challenges of absorbing so many newcomers (Karnitschnig, 2020). The backlash triggered conflicts within the EU, and as

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<sup>1</sup> "We can manage this" (translated from German)

Germany's case became emblematic of a naive or misguided optimism that ignored the complexities of the migrant crisis, this approach appeared more as a "great gamble" rather than a justified political move (Oltermann, 2020).

The debate on migration exists beyond Europe with other regions of the world also witnessing major emigration waves like those from Mexico to the US where the total encounters at the southern border exceeded 2 million in 2023 alone. Canada is another example, as it has been experiencing a housing shortage with rental vacancy rates of only 0.9% in Vancouver and Québec, and 1.5% in Toronto and Montréal, a problem blamed once again on the disproportionate influx of people (*Rental Market*, 2024, pp. 10, 81, 100, 107). Subsequently, and especially in major urban centers like these, homelessness has been on the rise, exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing options, with around 25,000-35,000 homeless people any given night, which when broken down per capita translates to about 13 homeless people per 10,000 residents nationwide (*Everyone Counts*, 2024).

What unites these cases is the growing anti-immigration sentiment among locals overwhelmed by the strain on government services such as healthcare, education, and housing. Some residents feel their resources are stretched thin, fueling frustration and contributing to a sense of unease or resentment towards new migrants. Additionally, accusations of compromised safety made by citizens of main refugee-hosting countries have prompted anti-immigrant protests and petitions. The role of those seeking international protection in the formation of such issues, however, is often exaggerated as in the above example with Canada where contrary to popular belief, refugees comprised only 17% of the country's immigrant intake for 2021 (*Immigration in Canada*, 2024). For this reason, supporters of accommodating economic migrants and war refugees, convinced of the importance of this humanitarian gesture, argue that providing refuge and support is a moral obligation and emphasize the benefits of diversity. Polarized opinions like these and the politics behind solving the migrant crisis by ensuring mutual acceptance between locals and migrants is what this research aims to investigate. This paper argues that the host country citizens' attitude towards war refugees and economic migrants is a key criterion for successful integration of newcomers and handling migration.

### **Typical criteria for measuring migration policy effectiveness**

When measuring the effectiveness of migration policy, the typical criteria used by researchers worldwide include investigating the economic impacts, the level of integration achieved and demographic indicators like population growth.

The economic way of thinking about policies refers to whether they are designed to fill labor shortages, boost economic growth or increase tax revenues. Ideally, migrants should be able to find jobs at a rate similar to the native population of the country and should receive wages corresponding to the type of labor they perform with no evidence of wage suppression. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution is another main sign that government policies benefit the local economy (*How Immigrants*, 2018).

Integration or acculturation as "the process of mutual adaptation between the host society and the migrants themselves" requires a different policy framework targeted at improving social cohesion and promoting diversity (*IOM AND MIGRANT*, n.d., p. 1). Integration courses have been widely adopted to assist foreigners in adapting by providing language skills and essential

knowledge about the host country's laws, values and social norms. Assessing language acquisition and civic participation among migrants is a tool authorities use to evaluate the performance of institutions managing these courses.

Demographic indicators and whether targets related to population growth and age distribution have been met serve as other criteria for handling migration successfully. Through population pyramids, the receiving country's government can track if the inflow of people is helping balance out aging populations ("Ageing Europe," 2023). Namely, reversing the decreasing fertility rate and keeping it above the replacement rate is what host countries usually seek to accomplish when welcoming migrants (Ortega-Gil et al., 2022).

### **Locals' attitudes as a main criterion**

While each of the criteria described above reveals a significant part of managing migration, these pieces do not represent the full picture. Evident in numerous instances are discrepancies between statistical data and the internal dynamics of a state experiencing a period of migrant inflow. While reports may highlight that migrants contribute significantly to tax revenue, which should support public services and infrastructure, local residents may feel like these benefits are unfairly distributed or fear the possibility of job competition causing the displacement of native workers. In a different scenario, crime statistics might indicate that migrants are not disproportionately involved in criminal activities while local perceptions of safety might be negatively influenced by media coverage or misinformation.

Recent events that sparked such a controversy are the far-right riots in the United Kingdom (UK) after rumors about the culprit of the July 29th mass-stabbing in Southport falsely identified him as a Muslim immigrant named Ali al-Shakati, who "had arrived in the UK on a small boat in 2023" (Mohamed, 2024). As a response to the unfounded speculations, judge Andrew Menary lifted 17 year old Axel Rudakubana's anonymity order, despite the British laws regarding protecting minors' identities, justifying his decision as a measure to prevent those "up to mischief to continue to spread misinformation in a vacuum" (Vinter, 2024). The identity disclosure of Rudakubana, born in Cardiff, Wales, to Rwandan parents, proved the importance predisposed beliefs have on public perception and reaction. Despite clear evidence refuting the rumors, the pre-existing biases and fears about migrants fueled continued unrest and violence.

This case highlights how deeply entrenched stereotypes can drive social tensions and influence behaviors. Counterintuitive to the impression such isolated violent acts can give, statistics present a different reality. With a year-on-year difference of -8.11%, crime rates in the UK (excl. Scotland) have significantly decreased over the 12 month period from June 2023 to June 2024, compared to the same time period ending in June 2023 ("Explore Crime," 2024). And yet, how the public feels about an issue has proven to be most indicative of the government's success or failure in addressing it, which suggests that to build an inclusive society, the attitude of host country citizens is crucial, and factors influencing it must be investigated further. This process must, of course, be backed up by statistics on the predicted contribution migrants will have on a state's economy.

### **Factors influencing host country's citizens attitudes towards migration**

Polarized opinions on the numbers and types of migrants a country should accept have continuously divided societies, particularly those located in regions that are prime destinations

for people fleeing poverty, inequality, persecution and conflict. These countries, often seen as attractive due to their economic opportunities, political stability or social services, are the most susceptible to intense debates and divisions over migration policies. Among the underlying drivers of societal divisions are some socio-demographic factors which will be discussed in the following sections.

## **Socio-demographic factors**

### ***Generational difference***

Generational differences significantly impact views on migration, as younger and older generations often have contrasting perspectives influenced by historical contexts and relative exposure to diversity (6.2 Political, n.d.). The concept of "political socialization," which refers to how individuals develop their beliefs, values and attitudes, is central to understanding these differences and is a process commonly shaped during one's mid-teens and mid-twenties by factors such as family upbringing, education, media exposure and significant socio-political events (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). Nevertheless, a political generation doesn't necessarily stick with the same set of opinions throughout the life course, but instead reorients if expectations aren't met or new factors come in place.

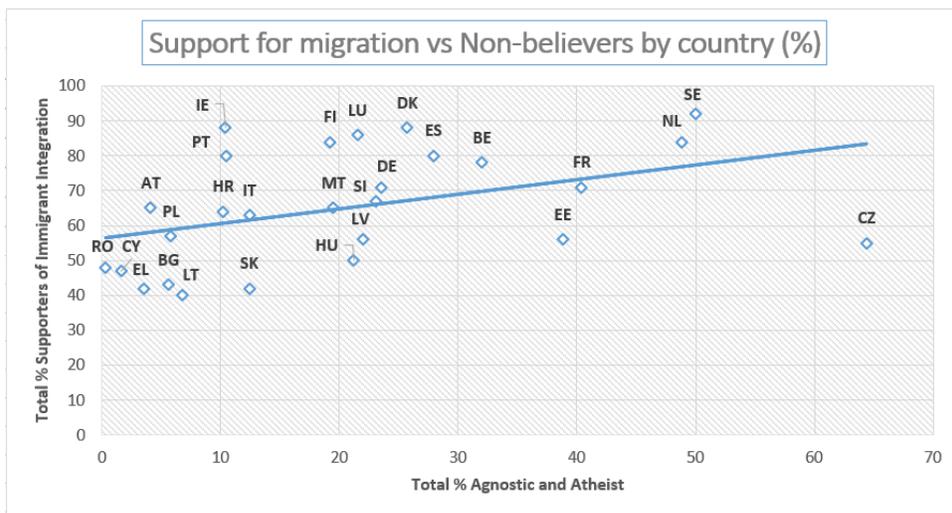
A 2023 study examining how generational cohorts' attitudes toward immigration are shaped by the political climate during their formative years identifies the temporal-spatial political context as crucial to forming these attitudes. Specifically, it defends the hypothesis that cohorts socialized during periods emphasizing equality are more likely to support immigration, as opposed to those socialized during times prioritizing tradition (Jeannet & Dražanová, 2023). Having lived in an increasingly integrated environment where multiculturalism and diversity have become the norm, younger people nowadays are largely exposed to the former. Their political socialization process is typically influenced by liberal education systems, media, travel, and global humanitarian movements, which prompts them to embrace migration policies highlighting human rights, inclusivity and the benefits of a diverse workforce. When US citizens were asked about what businesses facing labor shortages should do, raise wages to recruit Americans or recruit immigrant workers to keep costs down, 60% of those aged 65 or older chose the former, while only 36% aged 18 to 29 preferred this to recruiting foreigners (Orth, 2022). While this supports the research results, such data doesn't comment on which side is "correct" or on whether liberal views are what societies should strive for. Excessive inclusiveness can blur the lines between preventing inequality based on stereotypes and adhering to the law, evident in the fact that about half US citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 believe that illegal immigrants should be "allowed to stay in the U.S. and eventually apply for citizenship," compared to only 31% of people aged over 65 (Orth, 2022).

While a common temporal-spatial environment often influences individuals' political beliefs in a similar direction, this is no guarantee that opinions will remain consistent. Certain people's views might deviate from what's most prominent due to outside factors like belonging to an underrepresented group, or even cohorts as a whole can slightly alter or shift their stance throughout their lifetime. Thus, while the political climate during one's formative years is likely to bring about similar attitudes about immigration, generalizing this for distinct communities within the state risks ignoring the impact individual experiences have on shaping these attitudes.

## Religion

Another trend associated with generational difference is a decreasing religious affiliation among young people worldwide. While studies have shown that this is a factor contributing to the LGBTQ+ rights movement due to fewer people being concerned with the same-sex marriage ban for religious reasons, as well as abortion rights, the influence religion has on one's stance in the immigration debate doesn't appear that convincing. Among surveyors asked whether religion has a major impact on their opinion of how immigration should be dealt with by the government, only 7% agreed it does. By contrast, 35% of respondents admitted that opposing gay and lesbian couples has been rooted in their religious beliefs (2. Young, 2018).

Despite the presumed insignificant role of religion, more specifically of Christianity among US citizens as according to the poll above, translating this to inherently Christian nations around Europe reveals a different picture. Plotting data of the total % of EU citizens sharing agnostic (non-believer) and atheist views by country against the total % of immigrant integration supporters, a scatter plot diagram visualizes a low positive correlation between the two variables (*Discrimination in the European*, 2015). Among societies less dependent on religion, generous views on migrant acculturation prove to be more prominent, with the exception of the Czech Republic where 65% have stated that immigrants are a burden to the welfare system, and above 70% - that they increase the crime rate (Dodevska, 2021).



This model, however, cannot be discussed thoroughly without taking into account the limitations of establishing a causal relationship between religion and attitude toward immigration. No religion is inherently anti-migrant in its teachings, and religious books tend to be a subject of interpretation by local preachers or representatives of religious groups on a national and international level (Christerson et al., 2024). Religion can be utilized as a political argument to either support or oppose immigration, evident through the way different leaders justify their decision on whether to comply with refugee quotas. Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister, emphasizes Hungary's identity as a Christian nation to point out the incompatibility between majority non-Christian asylum seekers from the Middle East and citizens of his country, thus rejecting the refugee quotas assigned by the EU. On the other hand, Pope Francis who advocates for acceptance and warm welcoming of those in need of shelter, and numerous refugee charities run by churches argue that Christianity's core principles dictate their efforts in aiding people regardless of their background (Storm, 2017).

For this reason, defining this relationship as correlational instead of causal helps us focus on other variables to explain the positive slope of the graph above. Associated with high numbers of non-believers is also the high democracy index in European countries like Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, all of which were estimated as a 10 by the Polity5 Project of 2020: with this being the maximal score on the range, it indicates competitive, multi-party elections and recognizes these countries as fully democratic ("Democracy Index," 2024). While democracy itself doesn't dictate attitudes on immigration, it can indirectly influence local people's perception of the possible benefits of newcomers through the instrumental variable of how confident citizens are in their government's policies in general, and more specifically, in regard to migrants. This applies especially to attitudes on those granted asylum as trusting authorities in maintaining the influx proportional to that country's job and accommodation capacity is crucial to building a welcoming and supportive society.

If, however, there is an aspect of religion that could potentially prevent peaceful cooperation and thus partially explain the positive slope above, this would be religious fanaticism and the extent to which members of a society identify with extremist views of their religion's dominance over others. In Europe's case, where an estimated 76% of the continent's population is Christian, this phenomenon would most likely express itself as a juxtaposition between Christianity and minority religions (*Europe*, 2015). A study conducted among 15 western European countries revealed that Christians, regardless of being church-attending or non-practicing, were more likely than people without a religious affiliation to hold anti-immigrant views and express hostility to Jews, Muslims, and migrants (*Study: Christians*, 2018). An example is France, where 72 percent of churchgoers and 52 percent of non-practicing Christians agreed that French ancestry should be kept "truly French," as opposed to only 43 percent of atheists and agnostics questioned. Undeniably though, the transition between having religious beliefs and expressing religious zealotry is far less prominent and on a much smaller scale than other extremist movements in history, such as the 19th and 20th century German nationalism, culminating during Bismark and Hitler's reign.

Although some people may consider their religion when forming an opinion on how their country should handle forced displacement, religion is by no means a definitive factor for the formation of a shared anti-immigrant sentiment. Individual religious fanaticism, even though present, lacks the ability to determine how a nation where such extremes are rare can incline toward rejecting Christianity's core values.

### **Preferences for migrant category**

With the possibility of religion playing a significant part in preventing inclusivity or discouraging empathy for the average host country citizen ruled out, this next section will focus on discussing how opinions on immigration may vary based on the category of migrants host country citizens are questioned about.

A major distinction is that between migrants working as high-skilled and low-skilled laborers. With economic concerns as a main driver of anti-immigrant sentiment, investigating what causes nuanced attitudes has been the objective of numerous studies (Nowrasteh, n.d.). Accusations that immigration abuses the welfare state and increases government debt and budget deficits have prompted researchers to seek evidence of whether natives in migrant receiving countries are more or less accepting of foreigners in relation to the role they'll have in the job market. As an underlying concept, the net fiscal burden hypothesis claims that the

government incurs a higher marginal cost from a migrant's entry, including expenses for social services and public infrastructure, than the marginal revenue it gains through direct taxes on the migrant's economic activities and additional taxes generated by that person's presence (Fiscal Burden, n.d.). From the perspective of locals, however, this is not a fixed scenario as surveys on the preferences for the level of skill immigrants possess reveal. Compared to low-income respondents, among whom the difference wasn't that significant, wealthier citizens across the 15 European countries examined reportedly expressed a stronger preference for migrants working as high-skilled over those working as low-skilled laborers (Naumann et al., 2018). There are two explanations for the results: low-income natives have a general tendency to oppose immigration more out of job security-related fear, and high-skilled migrants are more well accepted universally due to the perceived economic benefits they can offer, regardless of the economic background of the native respondent.

The Eurobarometer *Integration of Immigrants in the European Union* report that covers survey results featuring all member states confirms the correlation between income level and migration acceptance mentioned above. When asked whether actively promoting migrant integration is a necessary investment in the long run, the percentage of respondents agreeing saw a steady increase in respect to the class they consider themselves belonging to. Starting out from the working class and peaking at those surveying as part of the upper middle class, the percentage of supporters was 60, 65, 72 and 81 respectively (*Integration of Immigrants, 2022, p. 73*). Mirrored in another classification of EU member state citizens, this time based on their reported difficulty paying bills, the results persist as the difference between those who admit to experiencing difficulties and those who "never" or "almost never" do is 19% (*Integration of Immigrants, 2022, p. 73*).

With evidence that income level is among the most decisive factors influencing attitudes, understanding how opposition differs based on the migrant's background and their set of skills is necessary to create an even more complete picture of the immigrant-host country citizen dynamics. Though limited to Great Britain, the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford has found that greater importance is attached to migrants' skills rather than their country of origin (*UK Public, 2023*). Twenty and 21% of participants agreed that when it comes to professionals from India and Poland respectively, many should be allowed to immigrate and the numbers of those voting "Allow some," "Allow few" and "Allow none" also remained largely identical. Unskilled laborers, on the other hand, were regarded much less favorably as consistent with previous research. Most importantly, country of origin seemed not to be a factor that natives take into account when asked, for example, about Indian and Polish unskilled individuals. In this instance, results remained similar, as only 8% and 9% were in support of granting entry on a large scale (*UK Public, 2023*).

### **Changes to ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity**

No debate on immigration is complete without raising the question of the demographic and cultural change that inclusivity in this, and other contexts, brings about in society. Some factors significantly influence the opinion locals in migrant receiving countries hold about welcoming immigrants, including perceived impacts on local job markets, social services, and public resources. The economic impact has emerged as a top concern, while religion and migrant characteristics unrelated to the benefits or dangers they might pose have taken a back seat. Coexistence and integration, however, are peacefully accepted only under the condition

that it doesn't compromise personal comfort, safety, and quality of life. For this reason, policies should be designed to address these concerns, with special focus on preventing potential areas of tension, which could negatively impact the community and exacerbate any existing hatred, prejudice, and societal imbalances.

### **Policy Implications**

Despite the abundance of research on attitudes toward immigrants as a whole, few scholars have isolated the cases of specific migrant groups and differentiated between how each is regarded (Abdelaaty & Steele, 2020). Survey results tend to draw misleading conclusions about natives' attitudes due to question formulations which combine immigrant categories under the common term of "migrants." In fact, while international migration encompasses all foreigners who have moved to the country regardless of their motivation, the context in which most surveys conducted in Europe aim to collect data is the ongoing migrant crisis (*What Is the Difference*, 2022). For this reason results, which at first glance refer to how well immigrants are or aren't integrated, how high support levels are as voted by local communities, etc., often reflect the public perception not of foreigners in general, instead of asylum seekers and those granted the refugee status (*Migrants, Asylum*, 2018).

This distinction suggests that when evaluating policies, we should target those concerning asylum applicants and the procedures following their reception. More specifically, their access to the labor market and the awareness host country citizens have of enforced legal frameworks regarding immigration and refugee rights is essential for fostering social cohesion.

### **Fulfilling economic and labor shortage-related goals**

While granting international protection to refugees is undoubtedly consistent with the moral values upheld by organizations like the EU, taking into consideration the capacity of host communities should remain a priority to ensure that the integration process is sustainable and does not overwhelm existing resources (*Aims and Values*, n.d.). As a measure of how welcoming a state is, policies restricting immediate access to the labor market have been utilized by various recipients as a deterrent to potential asylum seekers. The Refugee Convention declares that EU member states are not obliged to give a work permit to anyone not legally resident and can thus place conditions 'for reasons of labour market policy' (*Policy Paper*, 2024, p. 3). One such condition is a waiting period before being allowed to enter the workforce, and it varies greatly among European countries, ranging from one month in Portugal to twelve months in the UK. Exceptions, however, can be found on both ends: in Greece and Austria, in addition to non-EU states Sweden and Norway, some individuals can work right upon submitting their asylum claims, as opposed to Lithuania and the Republic of Ireland which are the only EEA members not granting the right at all (*Asylum Seekers*, 2013).

This freedom on refugee work-related policy making is largely justified by the context-dependent benefits or drawbacks of each approach. Among the benefits of delaying access to the workforce is guaranteeing thorough assimilation through language acquisition courses, while a major challenge is the dependence on economic state assistance during the waiting period. Immediate employment, on the other hand, allows refugees to become self-sufficient more quickly, while posing the risk of causing job market pressure and exacerbating job competition in case of high unemployment (Ginn, 2023, pp. 6-9). When it

comes to completely denying access to the workforce, it can grant a sense of control over the actions of asylum seekers once on host country's territory but can equally be a gateway for illegal exploitation of those desperate to find alternative means of income beyond the limited government assistance they receive. While it's unclear how many people engage in such informal, unregulated channels, out of the over 5,500 inspections carried out by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) in Ireland in 2014, 43% uncovered cases of labor exploitation many of which were in sectors dominated by foreign laborers (*All Work*, n.d., p. 2). Unpaid overtime, wages below the legal minimum and mistreatment are among the issues of employment ban for asylum seekers in Lithuania and previously, the Republic of Ireland, which has, after reports by the Irish Refugee Council, reformed its policies to allow participation in the labor market six months after applying for international protection (*Access to the Labour*, 2024). It's likely that more restrictive policies on the right to work increase the chance of threats forcing workers to comply with exploitative conditions. This suggests that the best pathways for managing the issue are either shortening the waiting times or ensuring thorough oversight by regulatory bodies to proactively inspect high-risk sectors in order to mitigate exploitation risks and uphold labor standards.

To develop policies tailored to a specific state in case that state chooses to grant labor access as recommended by this paper, a comprehensive assessment must be conducted to identify which approach will be most suitable for that state's needs in respect to the labor market and the qualifications immigrants possess. After comparing these aspects and following the example of the UK, a *Shortage Occupation List*, now replaced by the *Immigration Salary List* can be created and referenced while reviewing work permit applications (Morris, 2024a). They serve similar purposes, though with updated criteria the ISL, introduced in April 2024, focuses on managing skilled worker immigration by setting specific salary thresholds for occupations that are in demand. A key feature of the ISL is the removal of the 20% "going rate" salary discount, which used to allow employers to recruit foreign workers at salaries 20% below the standard rate for listed occupations. The ISL still includes a 20% discount, this time, however, on the general salary threshold. This applies only in case it doesn't reduce the salary below the minimal threshold set for that particular occupation (Morris, 2024b). Similar policies can benefit both the local workforce and immigrant/refugee communities by ensuring fair compensation, which attracts skilled workers and thus fills critical labor gaps, supporting economic growth, while also preventing wage suppression.

Another initiative with a similar concept of facilitating the matching of employers with non-EU nationals is the EU Talent Pool, currently launched by the European Commission as a web-based Pilot portal designed to showcase applicants' qualifications and professional experience ([Communication from], n.d.). Despite not targeting asylum seekers exclusively, priority sectors affected by immigration, such as healthcare and education, can be better supported by ensuring that they keep up with the demands of a growing population. Aligning the EU Talent Pool and derivative programs with these fields can help enhance service delivery both by employing skilled foreigners and by increasing host country's infrastructure capacity (*EU to Facilitate*, 2024).

Nevertheless, major limitations prevent the effective adoption of similar frameworks as the UNHCR and OECD-led dialogues with employers have revealed (*OECD Engaging*, n.d.). Among the shared obstacles in hiring asylum seekers that most stakeholders addressed is matching refugee and asylum seekers' formal qualifications to the host country requirements and recognizing degrees and certifications acquired abroad. This, combined with concerns

about an applicant's length of stay or uncertainty regarding the rights and conditions of employment, has caused employers to overestimate the inconvenience of recruiting foreign candidates. Lack of language proficiency is another barrier for entering a wide range of occupations, especially in the service sector. While integration courses can help address this, skill identification and profiling remains a challenge. Still, international efforts like the "Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals" developed by the European Commission, alongside country-specific ones like Norway's *Introduction Programme* and Finland's *Skills Assessment Centers*, offer promising approaches to addressing these challenges and enhancing workforce (Huddleston, 2016).

With corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a widespread motivation especially among larger companies, assimilating third country nationals into the workforce is increasingly feasible. For this to be effective, it is essential to provide comprehensive language and integration courses, establish robust platforms for skill assessment, and facilitate meaningful interactions between job seekers and employers.

### **Transparency**

Ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers are net fiscal contributors overall should be the first step of policy-making in major immigrant-receiving countries. Though one strategy would be attracting skilled individuals through tailoring their qualifications to the local market's needs, similar policies can be applied to migrants working as low-skilled laborers. Job matching and accommodation in close proximity to employment opportunities can help maximize their economic potential in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and caregiving, which natives often avoid due to having a comparative advantage in occupations requiring communication in the local language (Jaumotte et al., 2016). Additionally, offering targeted vocational training and social integration support will enhance their long-term employability and social participation.

Assimilation into the host country's environment and culture, however, is a process equally dependent on the support expressed by local citizens. Regardless of how successful the policies regulating the influx of asylum seekers and the procedures following their reception are, persisting prejudices might stand in the way of natives recognizing the economic benefits migrants bring. This indicates lack of transparency in communicating how immigration is sustainably regulated, instead inciting deep resentment even in response to isolated incidents.

The Special Eurobarometer 519 report, which ranks EU member states by the answers respondents gave to a set of questions on the topic of immigrant integration in their country, reveals a notable similarity between the rankings for two questions in particular. Countries where a high percentage of respondents agreed that promoting immigrant integration is a "necessary investment in the long run" closely align with those where citizens reported feeling "well informed" about immigration and integration matters. Notably, over four-fifths of member states maintain their positions within the same half of the ranking and the same five countries top both podiums (Integration of Immigrants, 2022, p. 70). This correlation suggests that government transparency is a decisive factor in shaping the public perception of the long-term economic and social necessity of such initiatives.

Governments can engage in effective communication through providing accessible information about immigration policies, how they reflect changing societal dynamics and evolve as studies and statistics point to new labor market needs and demographic trends. Official websites and public campaigns can be used as mechanisms to foster a more informed and

cooperative public. Failure to counteract misinformation would be detrimental even to a system of well-designed procedures that include maintaining the influx proportional to a country's capacity and executing successful integration strategies. Allowing misconceptions to flourish could spark resistance, undermining the implemented policies. Disinformation campaigns, too, fall into this category and though most are initiated by xenophobic or extremist individuals, social media algorithms, as well as the lack of critical media literacy among the public significantly amplify their scope (Szakács & Bognár, 2021, p. 45). These can shift public opinion in either direction, for example by directly addressing foreign nationals through false accusations of criminal offenses, but can also manipulate news outlets and online forums to make some views seem more prevalent. Inflated protest sizes are one instance of how disinformation can indirectly shape opinion by creating a false impression of widespread opposition, ultimately distorting public perception (Sparrow, 2024). Preventing such disguised strategies of influence is what governments should focus on to ensure well-justified votes and conflict-free integration.

It's worth noting that less informed citizens don't necessarily indicate lack of government transparency but can instead mirror a society with limited exposure to foreigners and protection seekers as a consequence of specific historical or geopolitical contexts. In such cases, immigrant integration may not emerge as one of the primary issues on the mainstream political agenda, leading to its deprioritization both by policymakers and the electorate. Consequently, it might not become a critical factor for voters, reducing the likelihood of single-issue voting on these matters and allowing them to remain peripheral in political campaigns and governance despite their long-term societal importance. Open communication channels, however, must still be available, in addition to public forums and press briefings hosted by governments to ensure accountability even when addressing topics that may not dominate the immediate political discourse.

## Conclusion

While no universal framework can target the needs of every refugee-receiving country with equal effectiveness, various surveys and studies have highlighted that boosting economic growth and reversing adverse demographic trends are common aspects of successful immigrant integration. Although statistics can, on paper, predict the potential outcomes of accommodating a set number of refugees, the local population's attitude toward newcomers is crucial in shaping societal dynamics.

This mutual process requires policies which, on one hand, regulate the reception of asylum seekers and the numbers of those granted with the refugee status to ensure that public resources and services are not strained beyond capacity. On the other hand, justified refugee quotas must be shared with the public through open communication channels in order to guarantee transparency and prevent resistance due to misinformation or manipulative political rhetoric. Refugees and asylum seekers' net fiscal contribution is dependent on both host society's support on a daily basis and the employee-employer relationships they establish. Uncertainties regarding the conditions of engaging in the workforce is another issue governments are advised to resolve by streamlining employment pathways, offering language and vocational training, and ensuring that legal barriers to the labor market are not exacerbated by exploitation of foreign nationals.

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