INTEGRATION FUTURES WORKING GROUP

Confronting Compassion Fatigue

Understanding the arc of public support for displaced populations in Turkey, Colombia, and Europe

Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan
M. Murat Erdoğan
Lucía Salgado

MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE
mpi
EUROPE

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Executive Summary

Campaign promises to 'send Syrians home' in the May 2023 Turkish elections are an important reminder that public sentiment towards refugees is dynamic and susceptible to political winds, even in the places celebrated for their welcome of large displaced populations. Some of the most generous responses to large-scale cross-border movements of forced migrants—including Syrians in Turkey, Venezuelans in Colombia, and most recently Ukrainians in Europe—hold lessons both on how support has been sustained over time and when and why it begins to fade. Polling reveals a complex and sometimes ambivalent landscape of support. Colombia offered a ten-year residence permit for Venezuelans as the public began to say that borders should be closed to future arrivals, and the European Union reached rare consensus to activate for the first time the Temporary Protection Directive (triggered in 2022 to grant immediate protection to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine), although one year later some members of the public began to demand limits on financial support for Ukrainians.

Experience suggests that even when solidarity blooms initially, it can be difficult to sustain over long periods.

Large-scale displacement can trigger instability and feelings of acute threat in host countries unprepared for the arrival of millions of forced migrants, but in certain cases, it can also uncover deep wells of solidarity that create a path for creative, generous policy responses. Experience suggests that even when solidarity blooms initially, it can be difficult to sustain over long periods. This occurs even when the upper echelons of government officially promote positive narratives (as in Turkey and Colombia immediately following the onset of displacement crises) and when such narratives have taken hold at the grassroots level (as has happened powerfully regarding Ukrainians in Central and Eastern European countries previously resistant to receiving refugees). While the story of solidarity is rightly celebrated, another story is less often explored: that publics have inherent limits to the level of 'sacrifice' that can be asked of them and for how long. As crises wear on, solidarity tends to wane, but policymakers can learn from other contexts to identify the specific factors that bolster or erode support for displaced populations, and use these lessons to better manage future crises.

A close analysis of the ebbs and flows in public opinion of Venezuelans, Syrians, and Ukrainians shines important light on the specific factors that can foster solidarity and those that can undermine it.

Solidarity tends to coalesce around three factors:

- **Cultural proximity.** Feelings of kinship can spark more-generous responses to refugee arrivals. These feelings can arise from cultural proximity (shared ethnicity, religion, and/or language) and from shared history (including memories of cross-border movements). Such feelings may lead to narratives about reciprocity (for example, rhetoric around Venezuelan 'brothers' welcoming Colombians during the civil war, prompting some to say it is Colombians' turn) and moral duty (rhetoric around helping fellow Muslims in Turkey), though this is not always the case.
- **Pragmatism and self-interest.** Solidarity can also be a strategic calculation. When migrants are displaced from neighbouring countries, it may not be physically possible to prevent entry along long,

porous borders; the Colombian government, for instance, quickly realised that closing the border in the wake of the exodus from Venezuela was not operationally feasible (as well as being politically undesirable). In addition, geographic proximity brings not only shared borders but often common history and geopolitical interests, including alliances against a common foe. Host communities may also feel vulnerable in the face of a mutual aggressor (for instance, Poles in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine felt they were in a fight for their own freedom). Thus, accepting a neighbouring country's refugees may be an act of solidarity, a political statement, or even a means to further other foreign or domestic goals.

- **Values.** Generously welcoming refugees can also be linked to a society's core values, such as humanitarianism. In this way, helping refugees can affirm national identity and serve as a tool to foster feelings of pride and self-esteem. In Europe, a bottom-up narrative about the intrinsic value of making personal sacrifices to help Ukrainians, such as bringing food to train stations or hosting displaced families, took root and spread.

However, while feelings of brotherhood, pride, and compassion can be extraordinarily powerful, research shows they do not last indefinitely, nor do they neutralise everyday sources of friction that all groups living side by side tend to face. The arc of support tends to peak during the emergency phase of a crisis (reinforced by either bottom-up or top-down narratives about the importance of standing with newcomers) and gradually wanes as practical concerns about economics, security, or even cultural change come to the forefront. But the speed and degree to which solidarity wanes are not readily predictable and, importantly, are not dictated by arrival numbers alone. Identifying the factors that can undermine generous responses can therefore help to mitigate the harms and social tensions associated with this compassion fatigue. These factors include:

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- **Uncertainty** regarding future arrivals, or feelings that there is no end in sight: it is arguably harder for people to give indefinite or open-ended support, compared to a situation in which the size of the challenge (and resources needed to address it) is known from the beginning. In all three cases examined in this report, Venezuelans, Syrians, and Ukrainians came in successive waves over a period of multiple months or years, with no discernible end to the arrivals. And in all three cases, many people believed that newcomers would eventually return to the countries from which they came—and there is some evidence that welcoming attitudes have been linked to this belief. In Turkey, polls show that in the first few years after the Syrian civil war began, nearly half of the public (45 per cent) believed that Syrians would return, but by 2021, as negative attitudes crept up, only 2.4 per cent of Turks believed this.

- **Perceptions of unfairness** about how burdens are shared and how resources are allocated, especially in situations of economic precarity or external crisis (such as the COVID-19 pandemic or a natural disaster). Specific segments of host populations may feel displaced by newcomers or perceive that investments in refugees are a zero-sum game in which something is being taken away from citizens who themselves may also be struggling. For instance, in Colombia there is heightened sensitivity

over migrants benefiting from programmes earmarked for internally displaced Colombians who were victims of the civil conflict. And in Turkey, anti-Syrian sentiment intensified in the wake of the devastating 2023 earthquake, which raised questions of how humanitarian relief should be allocated. Measures offering targeted benefits to refugees that are not available to other marginalised groups (for instance, subsidised housing for Venezuelans or Ukrainians that is not available to low-income natives) are known to fuel resentment. But while governments and donors have mostly learned to make programming available to entire communities rather than to specific subgroups, there is often a need for clearer messaging about how investments for newcomers benefit all of society.

- **Lack of control** over migration. Anxiety over migration can manifest even when arrival numbers are relatively stable if the public perceives that the government is not managing migration well. Anxiety thus does not always correlate with the volume of arrivals, because of the additional sense of threat that comes with perceptions of disorder and chaos. For this reason, certain crises (including new pressures on borders, uncontrolled irregular migration, and natural disasters) have spiked negative perceptions of refugees and displaced persons. The fear of losing control also extends to what happens after migrants settle—and whether they are numerous or influential enough to disproportionately shape key facets of society through language, culture, or voting. When displaced populations shift from being seen as temporary guests to permanent members of society (and even citizens), new threat frames may emerge about how they are shifting the society's demographic, cultural, political, or religious balance.

Four strategies can help address these anxieties before they escalate into a backlash against refugees:

1. **Invest in measures that alleviate host communities' pain points.** Attitudes that manifest as intolerance or xenophobia may actually be driven by practical fears about livelihoods and scarcity in times of upheaval. Many native-born individuals may feel displaced or that precious resources are being diverted to newcomers at the expense of other community needs. Proactive investments to alleviate pain points (whether around scarce housing, strained health care, or overcrowded schools) are key to addressing anxiety before it becomes entrenched resentment. This also requires in-depth efforts to understand exactly how these anxieties manifest in different contexts and at different times. In countries such as Colombia that have large informal economies, the idea of refugees taking formal jobs away from native-born people is particularly salient, whereas even extreme pressures on education systems have driven less anxiety. In much of Europe, housing pressures are front and centre, and in Poland there is particular concern about the impact of Ukrainians on health care.

2. **Harness grassroots solidarity in the short term, but prepare for fatigue in the long term.** It is important to engage communities in designing and delivering services (e.g., providing housing to newcomers), but governments must have a phased plan for what comes next; emergency reliance on resources provided by ordinary citizens (such as private housing) is not a long-term strategy. Governments need to clearly communicate a plan and timeline to transition to state support and must also support volunteers properly to help them avoid burnout. This communication and support also serve the parallel goals of reducing perceptions of unfairness in the distribution of benefits and resources and of demonstrating that burdens are shared. While citizens are often happy to step in during a period of crisis, the perception that government services are being outsourced indefinitely is likely to erode such support over time.

3. **Prepare for long-term integration from day one, despite a frequent climate of uncertainty regarding when or whether people will be able to return.** Politicians referring to displaced populations as 'guests' can tap into core values of hospitality and reciprocity, but they can also set up expectations that displacement is temporary and that refugees will eventually return to their origin countries. As conflicts wear on and these promises remain unrealised, the gap between expectations and reality can create an intense public backlash. Instead, designing dual-intent policies that can prepare refugees both for potential long-term integration and eventual return can fit different potential future scenarios and assuage public fears because such policies do not rely on selling the prospect of permanent settlement from the beginning. Governments can also crisis-proof their systems through more-flexible integration infrastructure and services that can be flexed up and down without fear of wasted investments.

4. **Solidarity for solidarity's sake may not be sustainable.** Beyond the emergency phase of crisis, leaders should be cautious about asking for support from citizens without offering something in return or demonstrating concrete practical benefits. Solidarity campaigns that frame refugees as victims in need of support can sometimes backfire because some public anxiety relates directly to perceptions that newcomers will be a burden on the receiving society and that they will take away resources from native-born individuals. And although in the long term, refugees often also contribute economically (for instance by creating jobs), these benefits accrue slowly and unevenly. Governments must both acknowledge the costs of immigration and find ways to frame helping others as something that benefits whole communities. One strategy can be to show that foreign aid and development funding flowing into a country as a result of a displacement crisis benefits the local population; for instance, governments can make the point that building new schools to accommodate new arrivals will result in state-of-the-art facilities for entire communities for decades to come. Yet, host countries can become cynical about donor support, as Turkish politicians currently argue that EU financial support is being leveraged to turn Turkey into Europe's 'refugee warehouse'.

While compassion is extremely powerful, it is also highly vulnerable to fatigue. In the long term, politicians must anticipate the gradual ebbing of solidarity by putting in place sound policies to meet practical community needs amid large-scale migration. These include developing and communicating a plan to gradually supplant ad hoc, community-driven support with formal integration policies and structures; finding ways to leverage humanitarian aid for national development; and attending to the most pressing practical concerns that publics have about their future, which immigration pressures may exacerbate in the short term.

1 Introduction

Historic levels of global displacement—exceeding 100 million people for the first time in 2022[1]—have put intense pressure on systems designed to protect people fleeing conflict, instability, and loss of livelihoods. Many governments are now grappling with rising numbers of asylum seekers and (real and perceived) chaos at borders. But within these broad trends, three cases stand out for having triggered a particularly generous response amid enormous upheaval: Turks have welcomed nearly 4 million Syrians since 2011 (the largest number of refugees hosted in any country), Colombians have welcomed nearly 3 million Venezuelans since 2015, and Europe has welcomed more than 5 million Ukrainians (with nearly 2 million in Poland alone) since 2022.[2]

In these cases, newcomers were welcomed into host communities in which they shared a common history, common political opponents, cultural and religious proximity, and in the case of Venezuelans in Colombia, a common language—factors that have created a powerful foundation for solidarity with refugees. Notably, they largely settled directly into urban and semiurban communities rather than refugee camps,[3] and accessed mainstream services alongside citizens, rather than living apart. But over time, host communities have also confronted the practical limits of their generosity. After the emergency phase of a crisis, practical concerns about the future begin to dominate, including whether newcomers are taking more than they are contributing and straining already scarce resources or infrastructure. These concerns can become prominent even in places that have seen immense short-term solidarity on cultural or political grounds.

After the emergency phase of a crisis, practical concerns about the future begin to dominate.

In the three above-noted cases, the speed and scale of displacement surprised host communities that lacked legal structures, services, and in some cases institutions to manage both immediate and medium-term humanitarian needs and long-term integration. Yet in each case, the countries deployed novel legal instruments—in some cases overcoming previous restrictive stances towards migrants and refugees—

1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2023).

2 From February 2018 to February 2023, UNHCR consistently recorded more than 3.5 million Syrians registered in Turkey, with a peak of 3.77 million in April 2022. In March 2023, this number began to decrease, as some Syrians moved on to other destinations, with 3.27 million registered Syrians recorded in October 2023. Turkey also hosts approximately 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers of other nationalities. See UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 'Registered Syrian Refugees', accessed 7 December 2023; UNHCR Turkey, 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkey', accessed 21 May 2023. After Turkey, Colombia hosts the world's second-largest displaced population, with 2.9 million Venezuelans as of November 2023 (though not officially classified as refugees). Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), 'Refugiados y Migrantes Venezolanos en la Región' (fact sheet, 30 November 2023). As of December 2023, UNHCR recorded more than 5 million Ukrainians displaced across Europe. As of 20 November 2023, nearly 955,000 Ukrainians had been recorded in Poland (which includes those who have received refugee status, temporary protection, and other forms of stay), but the cumulative number who have applied since February 2022 is much higher (1.64 million), and the number who have crossed into Poland but not registered is higher still. See UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', accessed 13 December 2023; UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation: Poland', accessed December 13, 2023.

3 In Turkey, although temporary accommodation centres were built at the onset of the Syrian war, only 1.36 per cent of the 3.5 million Syrians in the country lived in these centres before the February 2023 earthquake (which increased the percentage to 2 per cent); the vast majority live in urban, periurban, and rural areas across the country. See M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye. Executive Summary* (Ankara: Eğiten Book Publishing, 2022); Turkish Ministry of Interior, 'Statistics: Temporary Protection', accessed 9 December 2023.

to grant temporary legal status and facilitate access to health care, education, housing, and eventually employment. These countries thus appeared to offer a blueprint to the rest of the world for how to quickly welcome large-scale humanitarian arrivals while keeping negative reactions at bay.

Yet, situations of large-scale displacement also illustrate the fragility and contradictions within public attitudes towards refugees. Positive attitudes towards Ukrainians in Europe stood in stark contrast to the sometimes-hostile political debate surrounding migrants and refugees writ large, as far-right parties achieved important wins in countries such as Italy and Sweden in 2022. In Eastern and Central Europe, Ukrainians were welcomed as 'friends', and positive narratives highlighted their cultural, historical, and ethnic closeness to their host communities, which contrasted with the harsh stance towards asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East, often depicted as a threat. In Turkey, meanwhile, the open-door policy for Syrian refugees at the onset of the war has given way to a situation in which sending refugees home became a key commitment for both presidential candidates in the 2023 electoral campaign. And in Colombia, the initial positive public attitudes towards Venezuelans fleeing the deteriorating situation in their country and narratives of 'brotherhood' following the announcement of the government's historic legalisation effort, which has granted status to nearly 2 million Venezuelans since 2021,[4] have given way to growing public anxiety over this population. The shock of other external crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2023 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, have further imperilled positive narratives about refugees, indicating that there may be a ceiling to people's willingness to sacrifice.

It is no surprise that solidarity tends to wane over time, especially as local conditions worsen, donor support fades, and feelings of competition set in. This is especially true as it is often the places with the least developed integration infrastructure that welcome the majority of the world's refugees. But policymakers can learn much from mass displacement contexts to better anticipate and even ward off the tipping point when solidarity begins to erode and resentment or anxiety sets in. This report analyses the arc of public support in three case studies (Ukrainians in Europe, Venezuelans in Colombia, and Syrians in Turkey) to explore what is known about the factors that drive public solidarity as well as the conditions that can fuel anxiety. It concludes by drawing lessons from these case studies on what policymakers can do to better anticipate inevitable compassion fatigue and to proactively establish policies to sustain public solidarity.

2 Three Case Studies: Perceptions of Syrians, Ukrainians, and Venezuelans

Responses to situations of mass displacement hold useful lessons for understanding ebbs and flows in public support for forced migrants. This section examines three notable case studies in turn—displacement caused by the Syrian civil war, the economic and political crisis in Venezuela, and the war in Ukraine—to understand the factors that drove both feelings of welcome and anxiety around newcomers, and how and why these have changed over time.

4 As of November 2023, 2,496,054 Venezuelans had registered for the ten-year residency permit and 1,987,517 had been approved. See Migración Colombia, 'Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos – ETPV', accessed 11 December 2023.

A. *Syrians in Turkey*

As a result of the civil war that began in Syria in 2011, thousands of displaced Syrians began to seek refuge in neighbouring Turkey. The total number of refugees in Turkey, which was 58,000 in 2011, quickly exceeded 3 million with the arrival of Syrians.[5] This transformed Turkey into the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world.[6] The number of Syrians who have entered Turkey has now exceeded 5 million, of whom approximately 3.3 million have remained in the country and the rest have moved on to other destinations (with 1 million of the latter going to Europe, primarily Germany).[7] In parallel, Turkey has also received large numbers of other asylum seekers and irregular migrants entering across both the Syrian and Iranian borders.[8]

Initially, Turkish solidarity with displaced Syrians was extraordinarily strong. A discourse of 'Islamic brotherhood' was prevalent,[9] and the Turkish public empathised with Syrian war victims. In the 2014 Syrians Barometer survey, only 20 per cent of Turks characterised Syrians as 'burdens on us'; the largest share (41.1 per cent) said they are 'people fleeing from persecution', followed by those who said they are 'guests in our country' (20.8 per cent) and 'brothers and sisters with the same religion' (12.1 per cent).[10] Another important reason for this strong solidarity was the belief that Syrians would eventually return to Syria, and thus the welcome was only temporary. Indeed, Syrians were initially formally referred to as 'guests', and government discourse emphasised hospitality, with former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stating, 'I hope they will return to their homes as soon as possible… but know that if you have to stay here, our home is your home'.[11] Notably, during this time, the opposition parties criticized the ruling government's Syria policy but not the refugees themselves.[12] Due to this combination of factors, solidarity was relatively

Syrians were initially formally referred to as 'guests', and government discourse emphasised hospitality.

5 Although Turkey is a party to both the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, it maintains geographical limitations. Turkey accepts as 'refugees' only persons displaced by 'events occurring in Europe' and who meet the conditions laid out in the 1951 convention. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which came into force in 2013, also adopted this approach when regulating the statuses of 'refugee', 'conditional refugee', and 'subsidiary protection'. See Turkish Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management, 'LFIP', accessed 13 December 2023. However, refugees from Syria were granted another protective status: temporary protection. Thus, this report uses the term 'refugee' in a sociological sense rather than to describe the status they hold in Turkey.

6 Turkish Ministry of Interior, 'Temporary Protection', accessed 19 September 2023; International Organisation for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2020* (Geneva: IOM, 2020), 40.

7 UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 'Registered Syrian Refugees'.

8 According to data from the Turkish Ministry of Interior, an estimated 2 million irregular migrants have been apprehended in the last ten years. In addition, 400,000 non-Syrian nationals have been granted asylum. See M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2019: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Turkey* (Ankara: Orion Kitabevi, 2019), 22; M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye* (Ankara: Eğiten Book Publishing, 2022), 34.

9 For example, in 2012 Prime Minister Erdoğan said, 'we are hosting nearly 200,000 Syrian brothers and sisters'. See T24, 'Erdoğan: 200 bine yakın Suriyeli kardeşimizi misafir ediyoruz', T24, 1 December 2012.

10 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Publishing, 2014), 76 and 160.

11 In March 2013, former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu made the following statement referring to the Syrians hosted by Turkey: 'I hope they will return to their homes as soon as possible, and each of you will return to your warm homes. But know that if you have to stay here, our home is your home, our vaccine is your vaccine, our destiny is your destiny. Because we did not open our doors and homes to you, we opened our hearts'. See Turkish Ministry of Interior, 'Dışişleri Bakanı Davutoğlu "Türkiye Suriyeli Türkmenlerin yanında olmaya devam edecektir"', accessed 19 September 2023.

12 Hilmi Hacaloğlu, 'Suriye Krizine Cumhurbaşkanı ve Başbakan Farklı mı Bakıyor?', VOA, 21 September 2013.

strong and stable in the first seven years after the civil war began, and Syrians had not become a political issue.

However, polling reveals a rapid erosion in solidarity after 2017. While the Turkish public initially perceived Syrians as victims in need of help, after 2017 the public began to see them as a threat and burden.[13] In the 2017 Syrians Barometer, the top answer to the question about perceptions of Syrians was 'they are victims who escaped persecution/war', with 57.8 per cent of respondents selecting this answer. By 2019, only 35 per cent of respondents agreed with this, and it had become only the fourth most frequently mentioned answer. The responses that appeared to be at the top reflected perceptions of threat, social distance, and anxieties. The majority of the public had begun to no longer see Syrians as 'oppressed' and deserving empathy but, rather, as people who would harm Turkey's economy, security, culture, and identity.[14] While in 2020 (in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic), the perception of Syrians as 'victims' appears to have risen to the top again, other anxieties were also frequently mentioned. In the 2021 Syrians Barometer, the top answer was 'they are dangerous people who will cause us a lot of troubles in the future' (40.7 per cent), followed by 'they are burdens on us' (38.1 per cent), and 'they are people who did not protect their homeland' (37.5 per cent).[15]

As the crisis has worn on, integration has emerged as another source of anxiety. Turks are now quite pessimistic about whether Syrians are integrating, and these concerns seem to increase each year. In the 2021 Syrians Barometer, only 1.8 per cent of respondents stated that Syrians have 'completely' integrated into Turkish society; 11.7 per cent said they had integrated 'to a large extent', while 25.2 per cent said 'to a little extent'. Nearly half (48.9 per cent) said they had 'not at all' integrated.[16] According to representative polling conducted in January 2023, Turks now view the issue of refugees as one of the top three most important problems in Turkey, and 88.5 per cent of respondents believe that Syrians should be sent back—up from 30.6 per cent in 2014 and 48.9 per cent in 2017.[17]

Thus, while Turkish society displayed an exceptionally high degree of acceptance and solidarity towards Syrians in the first seven years after displacement, serious anxieties have also come to light. The Syrians Barometers conducted in 2017 and 2019 show the arc of the high level yet fragile support turning into toleration due to mounting concerns and anxieties. As the crisis, which was expected to be quickly resolved in 2011, became prolonged and the number of displaced Syrians soared into the millions in a short period of time, feelings of solidarity were tested and concerns over four main issues—job losses, increasing crime rates, deterioration of public services, and cultural erosion—came to the forefront.

Several factors help explain why and how the mood in Turkey began to sour. These include the cumulative effects of large-scale population change over time (and associated stresses on infrastructure, housing, and jobs), changing settlement patterns that have made Syrians more visible to the public, deteriorating economic conditions and new natural disasters, and poor migration management and communication.

13 Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021*, 104. Respondents were asked to choose the most appropriate expressions to describe Syrians from among the following (multiple selections were possible): 'They are a threat to our country', 'burden on us', 'helpless people who do not defend their country', or 'victims in need of help'.

14 Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021,* 134.

15 Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021*, 103.

16 Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021,* 165.

17 Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021*, 158.

Scale and speed of population change

The number of Syrians in Turkey has increased exponentially in a short time and continues to grow, with no clear end in sight. More than 880,000 Syrian babies have been born in Turkey since 2011. This number alone is higher than the total number of Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan, and Germany.[18] The rapid change has, over time, contributed to anxiety over both practical concerns and identity issues. On the practical side, local infrastructure has not been able to keep up with the scale and pace of population change, especially in border provinces, and public services (such as education and health care) are seen to have deteriorated to below pre-2011 standards.[19] On the political side, the government's decision to grant citizenship to 230,998 Syrians has been seen as a political calculation to increase the Sunni Muslim voting base and has led to opposition parties criticising refugees for this reason as well.[20]

The Turkish economy has also weakened overall, with Turkey's 2022 GDP remaining below its peak in 2013,[21] when the economy seemed to be growing just as the country was beginning to welcome historic numbers of refugees. As the economic situation has continued to deteriorate, the public has criticised expenditures made for refugees. Some politicians have attempted to counter this by talking about the contributions that Syrian workers make to the economy; however this argument does not always resonate with ordinary citizens, largely because Syrians mostly work in the informal economy,[22] where although they are providing 'cheap labour' they are also seen as competing with Turkish citizens.[23] Thus the macroeconomic benefits of Syrian workers are not seen as offsetting the costs of hosting refugees that have accrued to local areas. This has prevented Turkish society from embracing Syrians more widely as a tool for development, instead of seeing them as an economic burden and drain on limited resources.

As the economic situation has continued to deteriorate, the public has criticised expenditures made for refugees.

Changing settlement patterns over time

While displaced Syrians were initially placed in refugee camps in Turkish border cities, a significant shift took place after 2013 when these camps reached their capacity of 250,000 people. The government allowed Syrians to move and settle throughout the country, ushering in a policy of 'unmanaged self-relocation'. Refugee settlement in Turkey thus has become a largely urban phenomenon, with only 2 per cent of Syrians currently residing in camps.[24] Istanbul quickly became a magnet for newcomers and has since become

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18 UNHCR, 'Operational Data Portal: Syrian Regional Refugee Response', updated 8 January 2023.

19 Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP), *Türkiye Country Chapter 2023-2025* (N.p.: 3RP, 2023), 13.

20 This is the number given by the former minister of interior Süleyman Soylu in April 2023. See NTV, 'Kaç yabancıya vatandaşlık verildi? İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soylu açıkladı', NTV, 15 April 2023.

21 Statista, 'Turkey: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Current Prices from 1987 to 2028', accessed 15 June 2023.

22 Although Syrians were granted work permits in 2016, there are only approximately 90,500 registered Syrians working in Turkey; 1 million are estimated to be working in the informal economy. See Luis Pinedo Caro, *Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market* (Ankara: International Labour Organisation for Turkey, 2020); Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 'Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri – Work Permits of Foreigners' (data tables, 2021).

23 According to Turksat workforce statistics, the informal economy is more than 30 per cent in Turkey, and more than 10 million Turkish citizens work unregistered. See TURKSAT (TÜİK), 'İşgücü İstatistikleri', updated January 2020.

24 Before the earthquake on February 6, 2023, the numbers of Syrians in camps had dropped to 40,000. However, some Syrian earthquake victims were placed back in camps, increasing the number to 69,073 as of November 30, 2023. The number is expected to decrease again in the future. See Turkish Ministry of Interior, 'Statistics: Temporary Protection'.

the city with the largest number of Syrians. This pattern also created a natural clustering effect, as Syrians tended to settle together in certain neighbourhoods (referred to as 'little Aleppos'), and increased concerns about competition for housing and employment.[25]

Another effect of Syrians' urban integration was that they became much more visible to the average Turk—and thus triggered a new wave of anxiety and even identity debates within Turkey.[26] According to the findings of the 2021 Syrians Barometer, respondents in border cities agreed with the statements, 'I think that Syrians will harm Turkey's sociocultural structure' and 'I think that Syrians will corrupt Turkish society's identity' at a significantly higher level than the Turkish national average, so much so that for these respondents, even the concern to 'lose jobs over Syrians' ranked lower than these two concerns about social impacts.[27]

Political shifts

New arrivals of (non-Syrian) irregular migrants to Turkey have also had a significant impact on the increase in negative reactions towards Syrians. The perception that the state has been unable to manage border security has fuelled populist political discourse around immigrants and refugees. And the increased visibility of single men, mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, has created a serious security concern in Turkish society, which has had a negative spillover effect on acceptance of Syrians.[28] Security themes dominated the country's May 2023 elections, with concerns around Syrians animating almost all opposition parties, especially the newly established anti-refugee populist parties.

Another important shift has been the change from treating Syrians as temporary guests to the slow acknowledgement that many are unlikely to return to Syria, as the crisis there has not abated (and in many ways has worsened, especially since the February 2023 earthquake). Turkish society, which had long categorised Syrians as short-term guests, has had to undergo a radical shift in acknowledging they had become permanent residents.

Security themes dominated the country's May 2023 elections, with concerns around Syrians animating almost all opposition parties, especially the newly established anti-refugee populist parties.

25 For this reason, the Ministry of Interior launched a 'Plan to Combat Spatial Concentration' in 2022 and announced that no other foreigners would be granted residence in Istanbul in general. Within the framework of the plan, studies were initiated to reduce the number of refugees in 54 Istanbul neighbourhoods that have a foreign population of more than 20 per cent of the Turkish population. M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021*, 158. See also Turkish Ministry of Interior, '"İstanbul'da 39 İlçenin Yabancıların İkamet İzinlerine Kapatıldığı" İddialarına İlişkin Basın Açıklaması', accessed 20 September 2023; TRT Haber, 'Sığınmacıların yerli nüfusa oranı yüzde 25'i geçmeyecek', accessed 20 September 2023.

26 While an extensive research base shows that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice, not all contact is created equal. To improve the chances of fostering trust and cooperation, certain conditions need to be met, including the following: contact should be meaningful and sustained over time (rather than casual or sporadic), groups should have equal status and common goals, and a supportive institutional infrastructure should exist. When migrants arrive in a community characterised by structural inequalities and residential segregation, the full power of contact cannot be realised. See Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp, 'A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751–783.

27 See M. Murat Erdoğan, '"Securitization from Society" and "Social Acceptance": Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees', *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 17, no. 68 (2020): 73–92.

28 See Karar, 'Afgan mülteciler Türkiye sınırında: Yüzlerce erkekten oluşan grup ülkeye giriş yapıyor', Karar, 18 May 2023.

The anti-refugee parties and discourse established in recent years have also brought the issue to the centre of politics. The Turkish state's decision to grant citizenship to more than 200,000 Syrians has been criticised as lacking transparency and being driven by the political interests of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party, the AKP, rather than by humanitarian concerns.[29] Some segments of society fear that if Syrians stay, this will further consolidate the Sunni national identity in the country, at the expense of religious minorities and secularists.

Turkey's geographical and political identity vis-à-vis the European Union has also shifted enormously during this period. After 2014, many refugees coming into Turkey wanted to move to Europe. Between 2014 and 2016, 1.2 million people, half of whom were Syrians, crossed from Turkey to Europe.[30] With the EU–Turkey deal of March 2016, Turkey blocked the passage of asylum seekers. In return, the European Union made promises such as financial support for refugees, resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU countries, and access to the EU membership process and visa-free travel for Turkey. But at the end of the day, only financial cooperation became functional.[31] The European Union's externalisation of migration has further increased the reactions of Turkish society and strengthened anti-Western, anti-European rhetoric in the country amid complaints that it is becoming 'Europe's refugee warehouse'.[32] The earthquake that took more than 50,000 lives in Turkey and another 7,000 across the border in Syria in February 2023 has exposed these social fractures. After the earthquake, residents of some Turkish cities hit by the natural disaster accused Syrians of looting, while statements such as 'We don't want Syrians' and 'No longer welcome' trended on Twitter.[33]

29 International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2016); NTV, 'Kaç yabancıya vatandaşlık verildi? İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soylu açıkladı'.

30 European Stability Initiative, *The Aegean Tragedy – Key Facts and Key Steps* (Berlin, Brussels, and Istanbul: European Stability Initiative, 2020).

31 Seven years since the deal was implemented, slightly more than 30,000 Syrians have been resettled through this scheme. This is a far cry from the 1:1 agreement that was initially proposed, whereby for every Syrian returned to Turkey, one would be resettled to the European Union. See IRC, 'What Is the EU-Turkey Deal?', updated 16 March 2023.

32 In April 2023, the chairman of the main opposition party CHP and presidential candidate K. Kılıçdaroğlu said, 'We will never, ever make Turkey a refugee warehouse'. See NTV, 'Kılıçdaroğlu: Türkiye'yi sığınmacı deposu yapmayacağız', NTV, 25 April 2023. And in 2022, the former minister of interior S. Soylu criticised the European Union and stated, 'We are not and will not be anyone's migrant warehouse'. See Turkish Ministry of Interior, 'Bakanımız Sn. Süleyman Soylu: Şu Ana Kadar 529 Bin Suriyeli Kardeşimiz Geri Döndü', updated 20 October 2022.

33 Maya Gebeily, Ali Kucukgocmen, and Henriette Chacar, 'Earthquake Fans Anti-Syrian Sentiment in Turkey amid Desperate Conditions', Reuters, 13 February 2023.

BOX 1
The difficulties of measuring public opinion on refugees

Surveys seeking to measure public opinion of refugees have important limitations. First, while there are fairly comprehensive efforts to capture attitudes towards migrants overall, fewer surveys focus on refugees specifically. And most surveys on migration concentrate on high-income, Western nations (namely, the United States, Canada, and Western Europe), rather than countries in the Global South that host the vast majority of displaced people.

How surveys ask questions, in what order, and what terminology they use can also have an impact on responses. Simple choices in how questions are formulated (for instance, asking whether people support or oppose a particular policy) can nudge responses in different directions. People can also interpret questions differently; for instance, some might associate 'migrant' with 'asylum seeker', 'irregular migrant', or 'labour migrant'. Social desirability bias, whereby respondents self-censor based on what they think surveyors want to hear, can also make it harder to reliably gauge attitudes, especially unpopular ones. And while surveys are usually designed to be representative of the whole population, sample design can significantly affect representativeness and thus the extrapolation of results to the whole population.

In addition, surveys provide only a snapshot of a specific moment in time and are usually decontextualised, which obscures understanding of the reason for the attitudes captured. For instance, attitudes might be more negative when negative narratives about migration become more salient in the media or political discourse, or due to contextual factors such as economic instability, which are often not captured within the same survey. Lastly, surveys that rely on broad statements (e.g., asking whether people support or oppose welcoming refugees) can lose important nuances, such as opposition to particular measures, varying attitudes among different segments of the population or regions, or specific fears related to the arrival of refugees.

Sources: Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *From Fear to Solidarity: The Difficulty in Shifting Public Narratives about Refugees* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2022); Global Migration Data Portal, 'Public Opinion on Migration', updated 5 April 2023; Sebastian Rinken, Sara Pasadas-del-Amo, M. Rueda, and Beatriz Cobo, 'No Magic Bullet: Estimating Anti-Immigrant Sentiment and Social Desirability Bias with the Item-Count Technique', *Quality and Quantity* 55 no. 2 (2021): 2139–2159.

B. Venezuelans in Colombia

Beginning in 2015, the gradual deterioration of the economic, security, and political situation in Venezuela triggered the mass displacement of Venezuelans to neighbouring countries in the region. Colombia has received the highest number of Venezuelans, welcoming nearly 3 million in roughly eight years—a drastic increase in a country more used to emigration than immigration and that had limited integration infrastructure.[34] Faced with the large number of arrivals, the government set up measures in 2017 to improve migration management and to provide Venezuelans with access to social services through the Special Residence Permit, which granted two years of regular status to Venezuelans.[35] Then in February

34 As of December 2022, there were 2.48 million Venezuelans in the country, according to official data. After rapid growth in the earlier years of the displacement crisis, the number increased somewhat more modestly to 2.9 million by November 2023. See Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia, 'El Gobierno nacional y el Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos lanzan el Capítulo Colombia del Plan Regional de Respuesta para Refugiados y Migrantes 2023-2024', 13 December 2022; R4V, 'Refugiados y Migrantes Venezolanos en la Región'.

35 Sebastian Bitar, *Migration in Colombia and Public Policy Responses* (New York: United Nationals Development Programme, 2022).

2021, the government announced the historic legalisation of millions of Venezuelans in the country, granting them ten years of regular stay—a policy measure that gained worldwide recognition.[36]

The welcoming policies in Colombia can be partly explained by a sense of moral obligation and reciprocity, reflected in some political rhetoric that invoked memories of how Colombians fleeing civil war were welcomed in Venezuela.[37] Former president Iván Duque explained his decision to give nearly 2 million Venezuelans a path to legalisation as an act of brotherhood: 'We have done this because we want to set a framework of a migration policy based on fraternity'.[38] But the move to grant legal status can also be seen as an act of pragmatism, as it enables the state to identify who is entering and staying in the country, which would otherwise be impossible considering the difficulty of monitoring irregular entries along the long, porous border with Venezuela. And some analysts have argued that it was also a political calculation, as the cost of preparing for long-term integration is arguably lower than the long-term cost (and risk) of keeping millions of people in the shadows.[39] Therefore, the large-scale regularisation programmes that Colombia has operated in recent years can be seen as both an act of solidarity and a practical necessity.

The welcoming policies in Colombia can be partly explained by a sense of moral obligation and reciprocity, reflected in some political rhetoric that invoked memories of how Colombians fleeing civil war were welcomed in Venezuela.

Yet, while the national pro-integration narrative enabled ambitious investments in integration, the country has not uniformly embraced this narrative. Welcoming policies have in some places clashed with an increase in negative public attitudes, especially in the areas least prepared to welcome large numbers of migrants and in some of the urban areas in which new arrivals have clustered. While in 2017 a slim majority of Colombians had a positive opinion of Venezuelans, unfavourable opinions grew to 65 per cent by 2023.[40] In a February 2023 poll, 56 per cent of respondents were opposed to the government's policy of granting a ten-year residence permit to Venezuelans.[41] The rise in negative attitudes is linked to a growing perception of Venezuelans as a threat to the country's security and economy. For instance, a survey conducted in 2021 found that eight out of ten Colombian respondents believed that security was worsened by Venezuelans' arrival,[42] even though research studies do not corroborate the link between Venezuelans and crime;[43] in

36 The European Parliament president, for instance, declared that Colombia 'had led by example' in welcoming 1.8 million Venezuelans. See European Parliament, 'EP Press Statement of 15 February 2022 on President Duque's Visit and Speech in the Plenary', accessed 15 June 2022.

37 Luisa Feline Freier, 'Colombia Went Big on Migration. Will Others Follow?', *Americas Quarterly*, 11 February 2021.

38 Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 'A Discussion with President Iván Duque on Granting Temporary Legal Protection to Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia' (interview, CSIS, 26 February 2021).

39 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan and Diego Chaves-González, 'What Comes Next Now that Colombia Has Taken a Historic Step on Migration?' (commentary, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, February 2021).

40 Bitar, *Migration in Colombia and Public Policy Responses*; Invamer, 'Invamer Poll 156 - August 2023', accessed 20 September 2023.

41 Invamer, 'Invamer Poll 156'.

42 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante: incidencia en las políticas públicas' (Boletín 21, Proyecto Migración Venezuela, accessed 14 December 2023).

43 Dany Bahar, Meagan Dooley, and Andrew Selee, *Venezuelan Migration, Crime, and Misperceptions: A Review of Data from Colombia, Peru, and Chile* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2020); Dany Bahar, Meagan Dooley, and Cindy Huang, *Integrating Venezuelans into the Colombian Labour Market. Mitigating Costs and Maximizing Benefits* (Washington, DC: Global Development and Economy at Brookings, 2018).

another survey, 59 per cent said they did not trust Venezuelans.[44] Some political discourse has fuelled this perception of Venezuelans as a security threat. In 2020, for example, the mayor of Bogotá's statement linking crime in the city with migrants led to a sharp increase in the number of online publications on the topic of security and migration.[45]

Apart from security, economic concerns have also become increasingly salient in Colombia. A survey conducted in May–June 2021 found that 80 per cent of Colombians surveyed believed that Venezuelan migration was bad for the economy, and more than half believed that migrants take jobs from locals.[46] Several surveys in 2020 also found that close to 60 per cent perceived migrants as a burden for the state,[47] and only about half agreed that migrants should be beneficiaries of social programmes or be granted access to the labour market.[48] As the crisis wears on, some polling shows an increasing desire to curb the benefits given to Venezuelans, with signs that some see benefits as a zero-sum game.[49] There is also evidence that these public anxieties have directly influenced integration policy. Because of the heightened sensitivities over competition for jobs and economic resources, both local and national policymakers have been careful to frame jobs and training programmes as open to all, with the result that no standalone job programmes were created for Venezuelans. At the same time, policymakers had more leeway to remove barriers for Venezuelans to access schools and other services, as most Colombians agree with granting access to education and health care for migrants (72 per cent in 2021).[50]

Economic threat narratives about Venezuelans reflect a broader sense of economic insecurity in the country, especially considering the economic hardship in the wake of the pandemic.[51] Negative attitudes towards Venezuelans grew during the public health crisis, as pre-existing economic and social problems in the country worsened.[52] And even after the pandemic, a great majority of Colombians are still concerned about the country's economy: according to an August 2023 Invamer poll, seven out of ten Colombians surveyed reported thinking the economy is getting worse, and 60 per cent said they believe the quality and

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44 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

45 According to the Xenophobia Barometer, a platform that monitors xenophobia against migrants in the media and social media, posts linking migration and crime grew 1,394 per cent after the statement of the mayor. See Lucía Ramírez Bolivar and Lina Arroyave Velásquez, *Del miedo a la acción: Migración, pandemia y xenofobia en Colombia, Perú y Chile* (Bogotá: Dejusticia, 2021).

46 A survey conducted in 2021 by Proyecto Migración found that at least five out of ten Colombians expressed this view. A Latinobarómetro conducted in 2020 found that 62 per cent believed that migrants take jobs from locals. See Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'; Latinobarómetro, 'Latinobarómetro 2020', accessed 20 September 2023.

47 According to the Latinobarómetro conducted in 2020, 64 per cent agreed that migrants were a burden for the state. Another survey conducted in the same year by Proyecto Migración found that 58 per cent agreed that migrants were a burden for social services. See Latinobarómetro, ´Latinobarómetro 2020'; Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

48 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

49 A pilot survey (N=741) produced jointly by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and Colombia's Department of National Planning, and piloted in October 2023, showed that a significant number of respondents felt that 'the government helps Venezuelans more than us'. This response is not representative but gives a clue to what is driving anxiety. MPI will analyse the full survey results in early 2024.

50 MPI interviews with Colombian government officials in August–September 2022.

51 The onset of the pandemic itself also caused a temporary spike in negative perceptions, with unfavourability ratings of Venezuelans jumping from 67 to 81 per cent from February to April 2020, before falling back to 65 per cent in June 2020. See Redacción BLU Radio Santander, 'Encuesta Invamer: bumangueses desaprueban gestión del alcalde Cárdenas y creen que la ciudad empeora', BLU Radio, 2 March 2023.

52 Jorge Galindo y Santiago Torrado, 'Los migrantes venezolanos en Colombia afrontan la pandemia entre la vulnerabilidad y la xenofobia', *El País,* 28 August 2020.

coverage of public services is deteriorating.[53] Negative attitudes are also higher among those with lower socioeconomic status, who might perceive higher competition for resources with new arrivals, and those in border areas where public services were already stretched thin before the arrival of Venezuelans.[54]

Interestingly, although Venezuelans share cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic ties with Colombians (which is not the case in many instances of mass displacement), these migrants have also triggered cultural threats. Venezuelans are increasingly perceived as a threat to the social fabric of society: although in 2017 most Colombians (66 per cent) believed that diversity made the country a better place to live, in 2021 a great majority (85 per cent) considered the arrival of Venezuelans to have instead weakened their culture.[55]

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In an environment of heightened tensions and increasing feelings of economic precarity, the government has had to tread carefully to ensure that new integration programmes are not perceived as benefiting newcomers at the expense of natives. In Colombia, there was already a perception that the state had insufficient resources to finance programmes for Colombian returnees and internally displaced persons (referred to as victims of the civil conflict), so policymakers believe that either including migrants in programmes earmarked for internally displaced Colombians or creating standalone programmes for migrants would result in a backlash. As a result, the government has been careful to use donor funding from international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for any programs that include Venezuelans as beneficiaries, thus circumventing both legislative and public perception barriers regarding how state money is spent.

C. Ukrainians in Europe

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 unleashed the largest and fastest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The plight of displaced Ukrainians triggered widespread public solidarity, with polling across Europe showing overwhelmingly positive public attitudes towards welcoming Ukrainian refugees. A two-wave survey conducted in March and June of 2022 found that an average of 81 per cent of Europeans supported welcoming Ukrainian refugees, ranging from 90 per cent in Spain to 76 per cent in France.[56] Public attitudes were also unusually positive in some countries in Eastern Europe that had previously held the most negative perceptions of refugees in Europe. For instance, in Poland, a survey conducted in March 2022 showed that 94 per cent of Poles supported accepting Ukrainian refugees, in stark

53 Invamer, 'Invamer Poll 156'.
54 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, *Migración desde Venezuela a Colombia: impactos y estrategia de respuesta en el corto y mediano plazo* (Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, 2018).
55 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.
56 Catherine E. de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, 'Under Pressure: The War in Ukraine and European Public Opinion', Eupinions, 5 October 2022.

contrast to 2021, when a similar poll found that almost half of Poles surveyed opposed accepting refugees from war-torn countries.[57]

A defining feature of Ukrainian displacement in Europe has been the outpouring of public support from ordinary citizens, whose private donations cushioned the impact of the crisis on public services. As millions of Ukrainians began to cross into neighbouring EU countries during the first months of the conflict, thousands of citizens across Europe opened their homes to welcome new arrivals. In some cases, these offers operated within existing diaspora networks (with citizens opening their doors to Ukrainian family and friends); but even more remarkable was that many volunteers not otherwise connected to Ukrainians offered support to those fleeing the war. In the first half of 2022, almost nine in ten Ukrainians in Italy and Belgium were staying with local families rather than in state-sponsored accommodation, and two-thirds of Ukrainians in Finland and Latvia were also staying with locals.[58] Many grassroots initiatives also sprang up at the border to transport Ukrainians to specific countries, offer free rides, or provide material support. And many actors in the private sector swiftly mobilised to provide financial or material support to new arrivals.[59]

Both national and EU policy responses mirrored this wave of public solidarity. On 4 March 2022, the Council of the European Union unanimously approved the first-ever activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which granted immediate protection to those fleeing the conflict.[60] National policymakers also expressed solidarity towards Ukrainians and developed inclusive responses, even in countries such as Greece, Hungary, and Poland that had previously adopted the most restrictive policies towards migrants and refugees in the past decade. But as in other displacement contexts, the activation of the TPD can also be seen as a pragmatic response, given that Ukrainians already had the right to enter the European Union visa-free for 90 days. Therefore, even had it been desirable, countries would have been limited in their ability to prevent those fleeing the war from crossing into the European Union, and forcing people to apply for protection at the border would have crippled already fragile asylum systems.

The speed with which Europeans were able to broker a political consensus on temporary protection for Ukrainians—when EU-wide solutions to previous migration crises had proved elusive—was both widely celebrated and also criticised for amounting to a 'double standard'.

The speed with which Europeans were able to broker a political consensus on temporary protection for Ukrainians—when EU-wide solutions to previous migration crises had proved elusive—was both widely

57 Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), *Attitudes to Refugees and the Situation of Migrants at the Border* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2021); CBOS, *Opinions about the Russian Invasion of Ukraine* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2022); Karen Hargrave, Kseniya Homel, and Lenka Dražanová, *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants: Poland Country Profile* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2023).

58 Organisation for European Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Housing Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

59 Airbnb, for instance, provided temporary housing for 100,000 Ukrainians, while Uber provided more than 100,000 free rides to refugees. Many other large and small companies have also contributed to the crisis response. See Uber, 'Our Support for Ukraine' (news release, 12 December 2022); Airbnb, '100,000 People Fleeing Ukraine Have Found Stays through Airbnb.org' (news release, 31 August 2022).

60 The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) granted residence, access to the labour market, housing, social welfare assistance, and health care and access to education for children. For more information, see Council of the European Union, 'Infographic – EU Temporary Protection for Displaced Persons', accessed 15 June 2023.

celebrated and also criticised for amounting to a 'double standard'.[61] Policymakers in several countries known for their anti-migrant discourse framed their welcoming stance through the lens of cultural, religious, and ethnic similarities with displaced Ukrainians, making sure to distinguish between Ukrainians and other refugees. In the words of the prime minister of Bulgaria, 'These people are Europeans…These people are intelligent, they are educated people.… This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists'.[62] The Hungarian prime minister also welcomed Ukrainian refugees while emphasising the difference between those fleeing war in Ukraine and the 'masses arriving from Muslim regions in hope of a better life in Europe'.[63] The media echoed this narrative, with an Al Jazeera journalist declaring, 'they look like any European family that you would live next door to'.[64] The demographic characteristics of displaced Ukrainians, who were overwhelmingly women and children, have also reinforced an image of Ukrainians as vulnerable and deserving of help.[65] And while in Western Europe the Syrian displacement of 2015–16 had also unleashed a wave of community support in several countries,[66] the different cultural and religious background of Syrian refugees made fears about cultural erosion and security more prominent.[67] Therefore, particularly in the Visegrád countries,[68] some narratives portrayed Ukrainians as deserving empathy due to their cultural, religious, and ethnic proximity to native-born individuals, while refugees coming from outside Europe were instead depicted as 'bogus refugees' and as a cultural threat.

But ethnoreligious proximity does not tell the whole story. Feelings of solidarity also blossomed more easily due to the large Ukrainian diaspora that existed in Europe before the war and a long history of seasonal and circular migration. Ukrainians in fact constituted the largest migrant population in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which facilitated social contact and familiarity.[69] Neighbouring countries tend to also operate within the same geopolitical context. The common history of Central and Eastern European countries having lived under the oppression of the former Soviet Union created a common foe that affected public attitudes towards Ukrainians. For instance, a survey conducted in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia in September 2022 found that those who blamed Russia for the conflict were more likely to have a positive view of Ukrainians than were those who considered Ukraine responsible.[70]

61 See, for instance, Edith M. Lederer, 'Europe Accused of "Double Standard" on Ukrainian Refugees', AP News, 17 May 2022; Emily Venturi and Anna Iasmi Vallianatou, 'Ukraine Exposes Europe's Double Standards for Refugees' (commentary, Chatham House, 30 March 2022).

62 Rachael Reilly and Michael Flynn, *The Ukraine Crisis Double Standards: Has Europe's Response to Refugees Changed?* (N.p.: Global Detention Project, 2022).

63 Reilly and Flynn, *The Ukraine Crisis Double Standards*.

64 Renata Brito, 'Europe Welcomes Ukrainian Refugees — Others, Less So', AP News, 22 February 2022.

65 Lenka Drazanová, 'Why Are Ukrainian Refugees Highly Welcomed across Central and Eastern Europe?', Wszystko Co Najważniejsze, 23 June 2022.

66 For instance, after Germany decided to welcome more than 1 million refugees in 2015, there was also an outpouring of community support. According to a public barometer conducted in 2016, one-third of Germans surveyed had materially or financially supported refugees in the previous 12 months. See Kerrie Holloway et al., *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants: Germany Country Profile – Second Edition* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2023); Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Eisnecker, and Jürgen Schupp, 'In 2016, Around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped Out on Site—Yet Concerns Are Mounting', *DIW Economic Bulletin* 16 (2017).

67 Jacob Poushter, 'European Opinions of the Refugee Crisis in 5 Charts', Pew Research Center, 16 September 2016.

68 This term is used to refer to Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, which have established a cooperation platform under the so-called Visegrád Group.

69 Drazanová, 'Why Are Ukrainian Refugees Highly Welcomed across Central and Eastern Europe?'.

70 Jana Kazak and Patrik Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4: Support with Some Reservations* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC, 2022).

However, positive attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees across Europe obscure some important nuances and inherent limitations. While surveys show broad support across Europe in terms of opening doors to Ukrainian refugees, views related to what government support Ukrainians should receive and for how long have been more controversial. For instance, the aforementioned survey in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia also found that while 77 per cent of respondents in Czechia agreed with welcoming Ukrainians in their country, almost half (46 per cent) said that support for Ukrainians should be reduced. Similarly, 88 per cent of surveyed Poles favoured welcoming Ukrainians, but only 54 per cent agreed with maintaining the current level of support.[71] The survey also found that respondents in the four countries generally supported some types of assistance, such as access to health care or free language courses, but measures such as providing free public transport or subsidised housing were unpopular.[72] Views are also mixed regarding the number of Ukrainians that should be welcomed. A survey conducted in eight European countries in May–June 2022 showed that while there was overwhelming support for receiving Ukrainians in general, when asked more specifically about volume, only one-third said their country should 'allow many', with the largest share of respondents (40 per cent) agreeing with 'allowing some' and another one-third preferring 'only a few or none'.[73] In a similar vein, a government poll conducted in the United Kingdom in May 2022 found that seven in ten respondents supported resettling Ukrainian refugees in the United Kingdom, but only one-third agreed with taking at least 'a few tens of thousands'.[74]

Thus, while topline support has remained remarkably resilient across Europe more than a year since the start of the conflict,[75] publics are beginning to be divided on what kind of support should be offered and for how long now that the emergency phase is over, particularly given the context of skyrocketing prices and housing shortages. For instance, Poland decided in March 2023 to cut funding for Ukrainian refugees by half. The UK government similarly decided to halve the support provided to local councils to welcome refugees, blaming financial constraints. Funding from international organisations and other donors for Ukrainians is also being reduced. While many European citizens' willingness to host new arrivals cushioned the impact of the crisis on often-stretched reception systems, there are growing reports of hosts asking their Ukrainian guests to leave or not extending their hosting commitment after the agreed period of time, with increasing numbers of Ukrainians facing homelessness.[76] And surveys in Ukraine's neighbouring countries suggest that a significant proportion of citizens believes that support to Ukrainians should be reduced, a perception that is likely to only grow over time.[77]

While topline support has remained remarkably resilient across Europe more than a year since the start of the conflict, publics are beginning to be divided on what kind of support should be offered and for how long.

71 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

72 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

73 Lenka Drazanova and Andrew Geddes, 'Europeans Welcome Ukrainian Refugees but Governments Need to Show They Can Manage', Migration Policy Centre Blog, 20 July 2022

74 Isabelle Kirk, 'Are Attitudes to Ukrainian Refugees Unique?', YouGov, 12 July 2022.

75 A Eurobarometer conducted in June 2023 found that 86 per cent of EU citizens were still in favour of welcoming Ukrainians into the European Union. See Eurobarometer, 'Standard Eurobarometer 99 - Spring 2023', updated July 2023.

76 Sonia Kataria and Jeremy Ball, 'Hundreds of Ukrainian Refugees Face Homelessness', BBC, 11 May 2023; Nikolaj Nielsen, 'Ukrainian Refugees "Told to Vacate Brussels Homes"', EU Observer, 22 June 2022.

77 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

A key question is whether public solidarity towards Ukrainians has ushered in a broader change in support for other migrants and refugees. On one hand, positive attitudes towards migrants and refugees have increased in several countries, hinting at a potential 'halo effect' of Ukrainian displacement. A Eurobarometer poll conducted in May–June 2023 found that positive perceptions of immigrants from non-EU countries have gained ground in 18 EU Member States since 2020.[78] In some countries, the change in attitudes has been remarkable; according to a 2022 survey, positive perceptions of migrants in Hungary increased from 8 per cent in 2019 to 43 per cent in 2022, and the percentage of people in Bulgaria who said they feel empathy towards refugees increased from 3 per cent in 2017 to 49 per cent in 2022.[79] However, it is not clear whether more-positive attitudes towards refugees reflect a real increase in pro-refugee sentiment or whether these populations have increasingly associated 'refugees' with 'Ukrainians', particularly in countries not used to receiving large influxes of refugees.[80] In addition, even if Ukrainian displacement appears to have increased acceptance of other groups, attitudes towards Ukrainians have still been significantly more positive than for other migrants and refugees. A 2022 survey conducted in eight European countries found that in all eight, people were more welcoming towards Ukrainians than Syrians, with particularly pronounced differences in the Visegrád countries.[81]

Moreover, this spillover effect may be short-lived. In Austria, for instance, the proportion of people who considered living with refugees to be good grew from 29 per cent in August 2021 to 43 per cent in March–April 2022, which might be related to the positive attitudes towards Ukrainians at the onset of the conflict. But a follow-up survey in December 2022 showed that this more positive assessment had plummeted to the levels documented prior to the war.[82]

3 Waxing and Waning Public Support: Trends across Case Studies

The three case studies presented in the prior section illustrate that public support for refugees in large displacement situations is hardly one size fits all. A complex web of factors has driven solidarity in each context, including personal and societal values, political calculations, and citizens' perceptions of the changes that newcomers might bring. And these, in turn, have been shaped by socioeconomic and geopolitical shifts.

While at times the solidarity around the large-scale displacement of Venezuelans, Syrians, and Ukrainians has been framed as 'exceptional', there are certain key elements driving generous public and policy responses that policymakers may be able to harness in other situations of large-scale displacement. If

78 European Commission, *Standard Eurobarometer 99 – Spring 2023. Europeans' Opinions about the European Union's Priorities* (Brussels: European Union, 2023).

79 Andrew Dugan, 'Ukraine's Neighbors Grow More Accepting of Migrants', Gallup, 24 February 2023.

80 See Hargrave, Homel, and Dražanová, *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants.*

81 For instance, more than 90 per cent of respondents in Czechia supported allowing Ukrainian refugees, but less than 70 per cent would let in Syrian refugees. Another survey that inquired about welcoming Ukrainians versus other refugees found similar results, with a difference of more than 15 percentage points in Czechia and Hungary. See Drazanova and Geddes, 'Europeans Welcome Ukrainian Refugees'; Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4.*

82 Peter Hajek and Alexandra Siegl, *Integrations Barometer Integrationsbefragung 2/2022* (Vienna: Peter Hajek Public Opinion Strategies GmbH, 2022).

policymakers identify the elements that can drive public support and mitigate public anxiety, they can also create a nurturing foundation for public solidarity to flourish.

A. *What factors explain solidarity towards refugees?*

Cultural and geographic proximity

Newcomer populations are often more easily accepted when they share core characteristics (ethnic, religious, or cultural similarities) and/or a common language with the host population. Visibly different groups tend to elicit greater fears that newcomers are eroding the social fabric or making irrevocable changes to lifestyles, traditions, and even the face of communities (as can happen when newcomers of different religions build new places of worship),[83] particularly in places new to diversity and immigration. At times, this effect can be racialised. For instance, the 'great replacement theory' rhetoric by right-wing nationalist politicians, which weaponises fears of non-White newcomers taking over or displacing native-born people, has become prominent in places such as Italy and the United States.[84]

In Turkey, religious proximity facilitated solidarity towards Syrians fleeing war, with President Erdoğan asking Turkish citizens to help their 'Muslim brothers and sisters'.

Perceived proximity played a key role in the strong support for Ukrainians in Europe, as some leaders and media commentators highlighted their Europeanness and cultural similarities. Particularly in some countries in Eastern and Central Europe, this contrasted with the negative perceptions of refugees coming from other parts of the world, who were instead perceived as a threat. Already in 2015–16, a survey conducted in Poland found that 60 per cent of Poles would accept refugees from Ukraine, but only one-quarter would welcome refugees coming from Africa and the Middle East.[85] While this difference was not as stark in Western Europe, a survey conducted in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Sweden in 2017 also found that public opinion towards refugees from a different ethnicity or from non-European countries was less favourable than that towards refugees with ethnic and cultural ties.[86] Meanwhile, in Turkey, religious proximity facilitated solidarity towards Syrians fleeing war, with President Erdoğan asking Turkish citizens to help their 'Muslim brothers and sisters'.[87] And in Colombia, former president Iván Duque announced the historic legalisation of Venezuelans in the country in 2021, referring to Venezuelans as 'brothers'.[88]

83 In predominantly Christian European countries, there has been greater opposition to Muslim newcomers, which has sometimes spilled over into opposition to refugees in general. For instance, a survey in ten European countries in 2016 found that respondents with more-negative views of Muslims were also much more likely to see refugees as a threat; see Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons, *Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2017).

84 Anchal Vohra, 'Italy Now Has Conspiracy Theory as National Policy', *Foreign Policy*, 8 May 2023.

85 Bart Bachman, 'Diminishing Solidarity: Polish Attitudes toward the European Migration and Refugee Crisis', *Migration Information Source*, 16 June 2016.

86 David De Coninck, 'Migrant Categorizations and European Public Opinion: Diverging Attitudes towards Immigrants and Refugees', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 9, no. 46 (2020): 1667–86.

87 Gonül Tol, 'From "Compassionate Islamism" to "Turkey First"', Middle East Institute, 21 August 2019.

88 *El Heraldo Colombia*, 'Colombia Regularizará a Migrantes Venezolanos', *El Heraldo*, 9 February 2021.

Geographic proximity can also significantly drive solidarity in its own right, which can overlap with racial or ethnic ties. Shared borders facilitate important cultural and economic links, common geostrategic interests, and cross-border mobility, and evidence shows that direct contact between host and refugee populations can play an important role in generating positive attitudes.[89] In Europe, several countries, particularly those neighbouring Ukraine, had a large Ukrainian diaspora before the war.[90] This nurtured a sense of familiarity and made the mobilisation of the diaspora key in the displacement response, with almost one-third of displaced Ukrainians having reported staying with friends and family by June 2022.[91]

Geographic proximity can also lead to a shared history that can be tapped to fuel solidarity.[92] In Colombia, the collective memory of Colombians emigrating to Venezuela was mobilised to encourage support, and in Turkey, the government referred to a common Ottoman past to highlight proximity to those coming from Syria.[93] Neighbouring countries also often have shared political interests, including common political adversaries. In Central and Eastern Europe, the memory of being part of the Soviet Union and the perception of Russia as a common enemy was a key element in the strong solidarity towards Ukrainians. Ukrainians were thus perceived as allies, standing with Poles against Russians, who had in the past posed a threat to Polish identity.[94] The impact of having a perceived shared enemy is also illustrated in polls: a survey conducted in Czechia, for instance, found that 84 per cent of those blaming Russia for the war were in favour of welcoming Ukrainian refugees, compared to 8 per cent who believed the war was caused by NATO and 2 per cent who pointed the finger at the United States.[95]

Shared historic and cultural ties with newcomers can mean they are more likely to be perceived as part of 'us' and not a threatening 'other'.

Therefore, shared historic and cultural ties with newcomers can mean they are more likely to be perceived as part of 'us' and not a threatening 'other'. In some instances, policymakers have leveraged this in a selective manner; for example, Turkey's president emphasised shared religion to rally support for Syrians, while omitting the ethnic differences between Turks and Syrians. At the same time, focusing on similar characteristics or fraternal ties to mobilise support is a double-edged sword. While it can drive solidarity when refugees are culturally, ethnically, or religiously similar to host populations, it can also reinforce the perception that other migrant and refugee groups are less deserving of solidarity. Moreover, proximity alone is not sufficient to maintain public support over time. Despite the religious and cultural similarities between Venezuelans and Colombians and between Turks and Syrians, these countries have still seen rapid deterioration of public attitudes and a growing perception of

89 For instance, polling in Colombia shows that those who had close contact with migrants were more favourable towards granting them access to health care and education. Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

90 According to Eurostat, 1.57 million Ukrainian citizens were authorised to stay in the European Union at the end of 2021, representing the third largest group of third-country nationals in the European Union. See Eurostat, 'Ukrainian Citizens in the EU', updated November 2022.

91 OECD, *Housing Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries*.

92 It should be noted that this is not always the case; sometimes geographic proximity and neighbourliness can also be the source of historical hatred and prejudice.

93 Natalia Banalescu-Bogdan, Haim Malka, and Shelly Culbertson, *How We Talk about Migration: The Link between Migration Narratives, Policy, and Power* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).

94 Overseas Development Institute, 'Will the Conflict in Ukraine Reset the Narrative on Refugees in Europe?' (event, 9 March 2023).

95 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

these refugee populations as threats to the host countries' identity and culture. Therefore, other pieces of the puzzle, such as effective integration policies that foster social cohesion, need to be in place as well for solidarity to remain strong over time.

Pragmatism

Displaced populations typically seek safety close by, especially if they plan to return home eventually, if they already have the legal right to cross a particular border, or if there is an existing diaspora community that can initially support them. This explains why 69 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries.[96] Thus, a sense of pragmatism can drive some welcoming responses: displaced populations have few other options, and it can be impractical (or simply unfeasible) to turn away people who have long enjoyed cross-border mobility. For instance, before the conflict in Ukraine, Ukrainians had the right to stay in the European Union for 90 days without a visa, which meant that EU countries could not legally prevent the massive influx of Ukrainians crossing their borders. The activation of the TPD also had another pragmatic element, which was to avoid the collapse of already-overstretched asylum systems as might have occurred if countries had been forced to individually process applications for millions of people. And for Colombia, which shares long, porous borders of more than 2,000 kilometres with Venezuela, it was simply not realistic to close the border and fully stop migrant arrivals, without sweeping political and economic ramifications. The regularisation of Venezuelans in the country in 2021 also aimed to reduce the large proportion of migrants living in the shadows.

These cases illustrate that developing inclusive responses, for instance by establishing prima facie refugee determination or other automatic forms of group protection, can become a political calculation to manage arrivals in an orderly manner and mitigate negative impacts such as scenes of chaos at the border, extreme pressure on reception and asylum systems, or growing numbers of irregular migrants living in the country. Developing pragmatic responses can, in turn, positively impact public support, since attitudes often do not depend on the number of arrivals but on how arrivals are managed (for more on this, see Section 3.B).

Values

Some countries have linked support for refugees to national values or national pride. For instance, politicians in Colombia have emphasised the social value of hosting refugees and developing a generous humanitarian policy, and the Turkish rhetoric of hospitality and the Islamic values of compassion have been used to garner support for Syrians. Turkish politicians have also invoked their generous welcome of refugees as a source of pride on the international stage.[97] And in Poland, some observers have argued that supporting Ukrainians became an element of social desirability and that it had become 'in fashion' for Poles to talk about how they were helping Ukrainians and hosting refugees at home. In this way, support became something that contributed to social status and self-esteem.[98]

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96 UNHCR, 'Refugee Data Finder', accessed 20 September 2023.

97 The head of Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management agency (AFAD) wrote in 2018, 'The cost of our Syrian guests to Turkey has exceeded 30 billion dollars by 2018. When we compare this figure with the national incomes of other countries, we can say that "We are the most generous country in the world"'. See AFAF Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, 'Head of Afad Dr. Güllüoğlu's 8Th Year of Syrian Crisis Message', updated 20 March 2018.

98 MPI, 'Public Narratives on Refugees: Sustaining Solidarity in Times of Crisis' (webinar, 4 May 2022).

Narratives about 'deserving' refugees can also impact initial solidarity. In many countries, refugees are perceived in the public imagination as vulnerable, and helping them taps into humanitarian values of compassion. But people who do not fit the image of being vulnerable are more likely to be perceived as bogus, or fake, refugees. In Europe, for example, the overrepresentation of women and children in the Ukrainian refugee population fit the image of deserving refugees in some countries, driving public support. At the same time, these types of narratives can also be used to fuel anti-refugee sentiment, as they can create opposition towards refugees who fall outside of this constructed image of how refugees should look or behave. For instance, in Poland, fringe discourse against Ukrainians on social media platforms has emphasised that some Ukrainians do not need help, for instance by highlighting their expensive shopping habits.[99] And in Turkey, the arrival of mostly young men was a factor in the growing perception of Syrian refugees as a security concern.

Refugees are perceived in the public imagination as vulnerable, and helping them taps into humanitarian values of compassion.

In addition to social values, individual values can influence attitudes towards refugees. Party politics, for instance, have been found to affect attitudes towards Ukrainians in some European countries.[100] In Colombia, a study has shown that political fears can drive negative attitudes, as those who perceived Venezuelan migrants to be left-wing were less likely to support welcoming policies.[101] This finding is in line with several studies that have found a link between individual values such as universalism and conservatism and attitudes towards migration.[102]

Tapping into social values, when these are inclusive, can be an effective way to nurture a more welcoming attitude towards migrants and refugees and to avoid narrowing solidarity to those who are culturally or religiously close to native-born individuals. Germany, for instance, drew on its Willkommenskultur, or welcome culture, during the 2015–16 large-scale arrivals of Syrians—a culturally, religiously, and ethnically different population—to encourage support for refugees.[103] At the same time, even if leveraging a sense of national pride or social duty can nurture initial solidarity, support is likely to gradually deteriorate unless policymakers also address public anxieties related to welcoming and integrating new arrivals, which often increase after the emergency phase.

99 Hargrave, Homel, and Dražanová, *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants*.

100 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

101 Alisha Holland, Margaret Peters, and Yang-Yang Zhou, 'Left Out; How Political Ideology Impacts Support for Migrants in Colombia', Social Science Research Network, 22 March 2021.

102 For instance, a study using data from the 2014–2015 European Social Survey in 21 European countries found that respondents who expressed conservative values, such as emphasis on respect for traditions, showed higher symbolic threat towards migrants and were less likely to be in favour of immigration. See Eldad Davidov et al., 'Direct and Indirect Predictors of Opposition to Immigration in Europe: Individual Values, Cultural Values, and Symbolic Threat', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46, no. 3 (2020): 553–73.

103 Kerrie Holloway et al., *Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants*.

B. *What factors can erode public support and cause compassion fatigue?*

Even in situations where solidarity is initially high, practical concerns will eventually begin to bump up against the limits of what people are willing to sacrifice. The rush of solidarity that can come from a crisis or emergency setting—the feeling of 'we're all in it together' and 'everyone has to do their part'—is difficult to sustain indefinitely, especially if the public perceives that the burden is not being shared evenly and that local and national governments, or the international community, are not doing their fair share. In Colombia and Turkey, the initial solidarity towards Venezuelans and Syrians has deteriorated significantly in recent years, as the issue of continuing support has become increasingly contentious. In Europe, overall support for Ukrainians remains high 18 months after the start of the war, but some cracks have begun to show as host communities begin to worry about long-term impacts. Understanding the conditions that lead attitudes to deteriorate over time can help policymakers sustain solidarity and prevent public backlash.

The rush of solidarity that can come from a crisis or emergency setting—the feeling of 'we're all in it together' and 'everyone has to do their part'—is difficult to sustain indefinitely.

Perceptions of unfairness

Large displaced populations are often seen as exacerbating existing problems in host societies, such as housing or job scarcity. Publics generally support granting refugees access to basic public benefits, but there is often a limit to this support, especially if publics feel that refugees are getting more than marginalised or impoverished native-born people. In Slovakia, for instance, almost 60 per cent of people surveyed in 2022 believed that the government treated Ukrainians better than Slovakians, which can explain why, compared to respondents in other surveyed countries, those in Slovakia were keener to reduce support for Ukrainians, and in contrast to all other countries, the majority did *not* support welcoming Ukrainians.[104]

Perceptions of unfairness can be exacerbated when migrants and refugees receive targeted benefits not shared by the wider population or when the public perceives that newcomers receive more than they contribute. In a context of widespread housing shortages and rising housing costs that have sparked protests across Europe,[105] a survey conducted in four European countries found that the provision of subsidised housing to Ukrainians was generally unpopular.[106] In Colombia, programmes that target Venezuelans exclusively are considered politically infeasible, given not only the widespread economic hardship in the country but also existing requirements to earmark services for internally displaced Colombians. Thus, favouring policy interventions that can benefit the whole population, for instance investing in affordable housing for all, instead of measures that target only refugees holds potential to avoid flashpoints for tensions between refugees and host populations.

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104 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4.*
105 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4.*
106 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4.*

Policymakers have faced pressure to enact policies that reflect a transition to more-equitable burden-sharing between hosts and newcomers. Poland, for example, announced in November 2022 that Ukrainians who stayed in reception centres for more than 120 days would be charged 50 per cent of the costs, up to 40 złotys (approx. 9 euros) per day.[107] And as a growing number of Ukrainian refugees have also returned to Ukraine (whether permanently or temporarily), several European governments have announced that they are taking measures to ensure that people do not take advantage of benefits while not in EU territory, measures arguably driven not just by fiscal prudence but also by the desire to reduce perceptions that some Ukrainians are 'gaming the system'.[108] These strategies can therefore act as a signal to the public and mitigate perceptions of unfairness. Yet, cutting support to refugees, especially if they are in a vulnerable position, can delay integration and have important negative economic and social consequences down the line.[109] For that reason, governments need to strike the right balance between supporting new arrivals so they successfully integrate in host societies and ensuring they are not perceived as taking advantage of the system.

The feeling of burden can be seen clearly in border communities that feel disproportionately affected by large-scale arrivals. A survey conducted in Eastern and Central Europe found that people living in cross-border areas were more likely to have negative views towards Ukrainians and, due to their arrival, perceive negative changes to their own lives. In Poland, for instance, 29 per cent of respondents residing in border areas said their lives had been negatively affected by those fleeing Ukraine, compared to 13 per cent of all respondents.[110] In Colombia, negative attitudes towards Venezuelans also concentrate in areas with a high number of arrivals, including regions close to the border.[111] To mitigate negative attitudes, policymakers should focus on measures that promote a more even distribution of the impact, for example through the relocation of new arrivals to other parts of the territory or by providing additional support to disproportionally affected communities.

The feeling of burden can be seen clearly in border communities that feel disproportionately affected by large-scale arrivals.

Perception of being displaced or left behind

Perceptions of unfairness may also increase for segments of the population who are (or perceive themselves to be) in direct competition with newcomers, for instance workers in the industries in which migrant workers are overrepresented or individuals facing housing insecurity. This perception emerges in many surveys showing that native-born people with lower socioeconomic status are generally more likely to perceive the arrival of refugees as an economic threat. In Czechia, for example, respondents identifying

107 Reuters, 'Poland to Charge Ukrainian Refugees for Government-Provided Housing', Reuters, 29 November 2022.

108 European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 'Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine' (information sheet, 31 March 2023).

109 For instance, a survey conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council has found that seven out of ten Ukrainian refugees in neighbouring countries say they are not able to cover basics such as food, water, or accommodation. See Norwegian Refugee Council, 'One Year On: Seven Out of Ten Refugees From Ukraine Risk Falling Into Poverty in Neighbouring Countries', Norwegian Refugee Council, 21 February 2023.

110 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

111 For instance, a survey conducted in the border city of Cucutá in 2017 found that 66 per cent of respondents perceived Venezuelans as a threat to the city. Another study conducted in 2021 found that 86 per cent of regions in the East reported that Venezuelans had a negative impact on the economy, compared to 71 per cent in the Caribbean region. See Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Consultas', accessed 20 September 2023; Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

themselves as having average income and poorer households were more likely to say they experienced negative changes due to the influx of refugees. Similarly, in Slovakia, respondents from poorer households were more likely to believe that support for Ukrainians should be reduced.[112] And in Colombia, negative attitudes towards Venezuelans have been particularly prominent in border areas with pre-existing public service capacity shortages and that have received a high number of Venezuelans.[113]

This fear of newcomers often hinges on a perception of resources as a zero-sum game, in which people believe that granting benefits to newcomers will result in reduction of benefits for native-born people.[114] For instance, in Colombia, access to the labour market has been more contentious than access to other services such as education, amid fears of Venezuelans taking jobs from natives.[115] In Austria, more than one-third of respondents in several surveys conducted in 2022 expressed fears that the arrival of Ukrainians would make it more difficult for Austrians to find jobs.[116] This finding is also why solidarity campaigns that frame refugees as victims in need of support can sometimes backfire, as some public anxiety directly relates to the perception that newcomers will be a burden on the receiving society and that they will take away resources from native-born individuals. Thus, instead of focusing on changing negative attitudes by promoting positive narratives, policymakers should focus first on addressing concrete, day-to-day concerns, for instance increasing investments in overstretched public services or working towards decreasing the unemployment rate of both refugees and locals.

In Colombia, access to the labour market has been more contentious than access to other services such as education, amid fears of Venezuelans taking jobs from natives.

Uncertainty about the future

The Colombian and Turkish case studies are illustrative not just because of the sheer volume of arrivals over time but also because of the inherent uncertainty surrounding these movements. Both Venezuelans and Syrians came in successive waves over a period of multiple years with no discernible end to the displacement. And in both cases, the public initially believed newcomers would eventually return to their countries of origin. It is arguably harder for people to give indefinite or open-ended support, compared to a situation in which the size of the challenge (and resources needed to address it) is known from the beginning. In Turkey, welcoming attitudes were linked to the fact that Syrians were seen as temporary guests, but as the situation became protracted and the guests slowly became more-permanent residents, attitudes took a negative turn. While solidarity for Ukrainians in Europe has remained overwhelmingly positive, there are also signs that this support will be difficult to sustain permanently. For example, in Poland, a survey in August 2022 found that while 87 per cent of Poles supported helping refugees in the first few months of the war, less than one-third (31 per cent) agreed that Poland should support Ukrainians for

112 Kazak and Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4*.

113 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, *Migración desde Venezuela a Colombia*.

114 For instance, a study involving 1062 Poles in 2018 found that 'zero-sum thinking' was associated with lower willingness to host refugees. See Jarosław Piotrowski, Joanna Różycka-Tran, Tomasz Baran, and Magdalena Żemojtel-Piotrowska, 'Zero-Sum Thinking as Mediator of the Relationship of National Attitudes with (Un) Willingness to Host Refugees in Own Country', *International Journal of Psychology* 54, no. 6 (2019): 722–30.

115 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

116 Hajek and Siegl, *Integrations Barometer Integrationsbefragung 2/2022*.

the entire duration of the conflict.[117] Similarly, a 2023 survey in Czechia found that only 9 per cent of citizens were in favour of Ukrainians staying permanently in the country, while almost two-thirds (64 per cent) favoured temporary admission.[118]

When the initial period of emergency displacement begins to stretch into something more permanent, it is also more difficult for donors and citizens to maintain the same level of material support. Many Europeans opened their homes to Ukrainians as millions fled the conflict, but a year later, the willingness of hosts to maintain this support had decreased. In Poland, 63 per cent of Poles indicated in 2022 that they were personally supporting Ukrainians, which dropped to 41 per cent in January 2023,[119] and this figure is likely to continue decreasing. In some emergency situations that become protracted, the diminishing willingness (or ability) of citizens to personally support refugees over time can overlap with donors decreasing their funding or technical support to host countries. This can create a shortfall for governments, which can struggle to maintain the same level of support for refugees, and stretched resources can, in turn, potentially fuel negative attitudes if the host population starts feeling that their guests are, instead, competitors.

Therefore, while leveraging diaspora or public support in the initial stages of a mass displacement crisis can quickly scale up capacity to meet the needs of new arrivals, governments should have a plan to take over these responsibilities after the initial phase of the emergency has passed, to avoid solidarity burnout. Uncertainty about the future, however, also poses an important challenge for governments, which often have the competing policy objectives of promoting the longer-term integration of migrants and refugees while preparing for the eventual return of part of the refugee population to their countries of origin. Adopting a dual-intent approach that can prepare refugees both for integration and for eventual return, for instance by investing in upskilling in sectors relevant to both the host and the origin countries, can be a way to navigate this context of uncertainty and ease public worries that the government is focusing only on the longer-term stay of newcomers.

Adopting a dual-intent approach that can prepare refugees both for integration and for eventual return... can be a way to navigate this context of uncertainty and ease public worries that the government is focusing only on the longer-term stay of newcomers.

Perception of lack of control over migration

Publics all over the world tend to express a desire for orderly and managed migration, and support often hinges on whether they perceive migration as managed effectively regardless of the number of arrivals. When arrivals appear chaotic or refugees are not perceived to be integrating into a society, perceptions of refugees as a threat can increase. In the Greek islands, for instance, the high number of refugee arrivals in 2015–16 and perceptions that the arrivals' impact fell disproportionally on the island communities led to the local population's growing resistance.[120] In Colombia, growing negative attitudes have correlated with

117 Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), *Opinions on EU Integration and Policies* (Warsaw: CBOS, 2022).

118 Jan Cervenka, 'Attitude of Czech Public to Accepting of Refugees from Ukraine – June-July 2023', CVVM, 14 August 2023.

119 Monika Sieradzka, 'Poland-Ukraine: Solidarity with Refugees, Fear of Russia', DW, 22 February 2023.

120 France 24, 'Thousands of Greek Islanders Protest against Migrant Camps', France 24, 22 January 2021.

negative perceptions of the government's management of Venezuelan migration.[121] And in Austria, support for Ukrainians fell over the course of the past year as concerns about their integration gradually increased.[122]

Consequently, policy responses that promote orderly arrivals can create a sense of control and mitigate public anxieties. The perception of threat, for instance, has been lower in Europe with the arrival of millions of Ukrainians than in 2015–16, when the arrival of 1 million refugees threw Europe into a state of disarray. There are many factors behind these different perceptions, but the European Union's swift response to manage arrivals and grant them access to immediate protection arguably provided a sense of control that was missing in 2015–16. Yet, this type of group-determination responses also hinges on its political viability, and it will be difficult to justify politically if widespread public support towards those who are displaced does not already exist.

Sense of existential threat

Cultural and demographic concerns tend to become especially salient for host communities during certain transition periods, for instance when the demographic balance is set to shift or when newcomers gain benefits (such as voting) with which they are seen as able to exercise outsized influence on a society's cultural, religious, or linguistic trajectory. These transitions can also occur when refugees shift from being seen as temporary guests to permanent members of society. A high fertility rate among refugees can also raise concerns about demographic change; for instance, while the average fertility rate in Turkey is 1.9 children per woman, it is 5.3 for Syrians.[123] Once the realisation sets in that refugees' demographic and political clout is growing (and may alter the demographic, political, or religious balance) and that they are not likely to return to their countries of origin, new threat frames may emerge.

In Turkey, despite the government's emphasis on the religious similarities and shared history between Turks and Syrians, a 2020 study found that 82 per cent of Turks felt that they had no cultural commonalities with Syrians.[124] The welcome may have been balanced delicately on the political promise of Syrians as 'guests'. Important nuances also underlie the umbrella of 'Muslim brotherhood'. For Turkey's more secular population, Syrian migration may be linked to a threat of Islamification, while for Turkey's religious minorities, Sunni Arab Syrians can be perceived as a demographic threat that can tip the scale in favour of the ruling party in some regions and further marginalise communities such as the Alevis.[125] And while the former president of Colombia Iván Duque also referred to the fraternal ties between Venezuelans and Colombia, recent polls show that the majority of Colombians perceive Venezuelans as a threat to their cultural identity.[126]

121 For instance, a survey conducted by Invamer in October 2022 showed that 65 per cent of those surveyed considered that the management of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia has worsened. See Invamer, 'Invamer Poll 152 – December 2022', 15 accessed 2023.

122 While in March–April 2022, 65 per cent of Austrians agreed that Austria would be able to cope well with the reception and integration of Ukrainians, this figured dropped to 51 per cent in December 2022. See Hajek and Siegl, *Integrations Barometer Integrationsbefragung 2/2022*.

123 European Commission, *Strategic Mid-term Evaluation of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, 2016-2019/2020: Volume II, Sector Report on Health* (Brussels: European Commission, 2021).

124 Suat Kınıklıoğlu, 'Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes' (SWP Comment No. 5, Centre for Applied Turkey Studies, February 2020); Osman Zeki Gökçe and Emre Hatipoglu, 'Syrian Refugees, Public Attitudes, Policy Areas and Political Parties in Turkey: A Systematic Analysis of Twitter Data' (ERF Working Paper 1469, 2021).

125 International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Refugee Crisis*.

126 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante'.

BOX 2
How do 'threat' and 'benefit' narratives regarding refugees change over time?

Anxieties about immigration typically cluster around three issues: economics, security, and culture. These anxieties are not fixed or static; certain frames can become more or less salient over time and in response to specific external triggers (such as economic downturns or natural disasters) or mediating events (electoral campaigns or social media). In the case studies examined in this report, anxieties manifest as follows:

- **Economics:** Concerns about competition for jobs and resources, as well as stresses on infrastructure such as housing or schools, are a common trigger of anxiety regarding migrants and refugees. However, powerful benefit frames can also develop around economic issues. In some parts of Europe, there is a narrative about Ukrainian refugees' potential to fill labour gaps and to do the jobs that no one wants (though this is context-specific and not universal), whereas in Turkey and Colombia, there is more widespread fear of refugees stealing jobs or distorting the labour market.
- **Security:** Perceptions of crime and insecurity can also change the tide of public opinion. In Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, and Poland, for example, people living in areas bordering Ukraine reported feeling more insecure after the arrival of Ukrainians. In Colombia, people living in border regions and in Bogotá, where the number of Venezuelan migrants is higher, are also more likely to report that Venezuelans represent a security threat. These perceptions can be exacerbated due to political discourse linking migration and crime, even when there is no evidence to back these claims.
- **Culture:** Another salient threat narrative occurs when host populations feel that the arrival of newcomers threatens their cultural or national identity. A majority of Colombians now believe that Venezuelans pose a threat to their culture, despite the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural similarities between the populations. In Europe, the influx of arrivals in 2015–2016 awakened anti-Muslim sentiment and discourse signalling incompatibility between Muslims and European societies, which still resonate among some segments of the population. The arrival of Ukrainians, who are considered to be religiously, ethnically and culturally close, has not elicited the same fear response. Yet, some minoritarian discourse in Poland opposing the reception of Ukrainians has, for instance, criticised the 'Ukrainisation' of Poland, illustrating fears of cultural change. And in Turkey, perceptions of cultural similarity (something people think of as fixed) can be subjective and change over time: while polling shows that Syrians have long perceived cultural similarities with Turks, the reverse is not true, and these feelings of similarity have also decreased over time.

Different anxieties—whether related to economics, security, infrastructure, or culture—can also vary in strength and across segments of the population. For instance, several studies have shown that some demographic characteristics, such as age and socioeconomic level, can affect public attitudes towards refugees, with some studies finding that younger people and those with higher education levels tend to have more-positive views of refugees and migrants. At the same time, this does not always occur. In the case of Poland, young people were more likely than older respondents to report negative experiences, suggesting that other factors, such as information sources and party politics, might also be at play.

Sources: Jana Kazak and Patrik Szicherle, *Perception of Ukrainian Refugees in the V4: Support with Some Reservations* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC, 2022); Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 'Percepción de los colombianos acerca de la población migrante: incidencia en las políticas públicas' (Boletín 21, Proyecto Migración Venezuela, accessed 14 December 2023); Juan Camilo Plata Caviedes, J. Daniel Montalvo, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Garra, and Miguel García Sánchez, eds., *Cultura política de la democracia en Colombia y en las Américas 2021: Tomándole el pulso a la democracia* (Nashville: LAPOP, 2021); Monika Sieradzka, 'Poland-Ukraine: Solidarity with Refugees, Fear of Russia', DW, 22 February 2023; M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2021: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye* (Ankara: Eğiten Book Publishing, 2022).

4 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

While surveys can depict a polarised picture of pro- or anti-refugee sentiment, in reality public views often fall somewhere in the middle: people can often agree that their country should welcome migrants and refugees but at the same time experience fears and anxiety about potential negative impacts on host societies, including the economy or the social fabric. Even amid exceptional solidarity, there is almost always a natural human desire to place limits and boundaries on what people are comfortable sacrificing and how much change is tolerable. Public opinion is thus both multifaceted and dynamic, as different narratives reflecting fear and solidarity become salient at different times and people's priorities shift in response to different external circumstances and events, as well as in response to how leaders and trusted members of their communities communicate these events.

The case studies in this report have illustrated that even when a wave of public support exists for refugees in large displacement situations, this does not always endure over time, nor does support in the abstract mean that there are not pockets of anxiety that can lead to changes in public opinion. At the same time, this does not mean that solidarity fatigue cannot be addressed. The experiences of large-scale displacement in Colombia, Turkey, and Europe offer the following important lessons that can help policymakers better confront solidarity fatigue in future displacement crises:

Public opinion is thus both multifaceted and dynamic, as different narratives reflecting fear and solidarity become salient at different times and people's priorities shift.

- **There is often an unspoken limit to the level of sacrifice that the public is willing to make, either in terms of what is being offered or for how long.** Solidarity towards refugees does not translate to the provision of blanket support, and some measures, such as access to health care, can rally more support than other benefits that are not shared by locals or that might fuel specific fears of direct competition, such as access to the labour market. Moreover, willingness to maintain the same level of support often wanes over time. If the public does not see refugees as contributing to society, they can be gradually perceived as a burden on public resources, particularly if the host population is experiencing economic insecurity.

- **Questions about (perceived) fairness are front and centre.** Even when there is an initial wave of solidarity, perceptions of unfairness can very quickly come to the forefront if the host population feels that resources are not being allocated equitably or that refugees are receiving more support than locals who also need help. This perception of unfairness can become especially salient in border communities, which often take the brunt of welcoming new arrivals, or when the host population experiences economic hardship and public services are already stretched thin.

- **Solidarity hinges on *how* people arrive, including the speed and volume**, **and whether they will return to their countries of origin.** Often, support does not depend on the number of arrivals but on whether arrivals are anticipated and cohere with expectations and on how those arrivals are managed. Perceptions of chaos and disorder at the border, even when the total number of arrivals is not high,

can ramp up anxiety and elicit a threat mindset. Societies that welcome a large, unanticipated population of people in a short period of time have a steep road to climb; exceptional supports need to be put in place (including integration policies and infrastructure) so that rapid arrivals do not trigger anxiety, while also being mindful of how these investments themselves will be received, to avoid backlash. Finally, support is sometimes contingent on the perception that newcomers will eventually return to their countries of origin. As situations of displacement become protracted, initial solidarity can turn into fears of economic, cultural, or demographic change.

To address pockets of anxiety before public support tips into backlash against refugees, policymakers can follow several strategies:

- **Address practical concerns that can ramp up public anxiety.** Underlying most public scepticism about migrants and refugees are very practical concerns that need to be addressed, such as job losses, housing shortages, or overburdened infrastructure, particularly if the public perceives that resources provided for refugees are being taken away from local populations. Investing in these areas that are the source of public anxieties can thus help avoid friction between locals and refugees. Importantly, these community pain points will depend on each local context; for instance, affordable housing has become a key concern in many European countries, while in other countries or regions services such as education or health care might be the main point that can turn solidarity towards refugees into entrenched resentment.

- **Leverage grassroots solidarity in the short term, but prepare for fatigue in the long term.** An outpouring of community support can provide much-needed oxygen to governments during the emergency phase of a large displacement situation. In Europe, for instance, the Ukrainian diaspora and volunteers proved key to providing accommodations for new arrivals and to cushioning the impact on already-stretched reception systems. Yet, citizens' willingness and ability to personally support refugees cannot be sustained indefinitely. To avoid solidarity burnout and to mitigate perceptions that support is being outsourced to citizens, policymakers should make sure that state support gradually replaces the support provided by volunteers.

- **Invest in integration from day one despite uncertainty regarding whether people will be able to return to their countries of origin.** In many host countries, there is a tension between political incentives for politicians to refer to mass displacement as a temporary crisis and the erosion of public support over time if this expectation ultimately clashes with reality. In addition, not investing in integration from day one will likely have important costs in the future if the situation becomes protracted and (at least some) newcomers end up staying in the longer term. To strike the right balance, policymakers can invest in dual-intent policies that can prepare refugees both for potential integration and eventual return.[127] Moreover, after the emergency phase has passed, governments must walk a fine line between supporting newcomers to address their needs and foster their inclusion and showing the host population that newcomers are also contributing to society.

127 OECD, 'Russia's War of Aggression Against Ukraine Generates Historic Migration Flows: More Support Needed for Integration Now and Possible Future Return' (press conference, OECD, 10 October 2022).

- **Acknowledge public concerns, but frame immigration as something that can benefit the whole community.** After the emergency phase and the initial wave of solidarity have passed, perceptions of refugees being a burden on the host country often gradually increase. To sustain solidarity over time, policymakers need to acknowledge citizens' practical concerns about the challenges of welcoming new arrivals and to mitigate disproportionate impacts (e.g., on border communities or cities where refugees concentrate). Policymakers should simultaneously frame immigration as something that can be beneficial for all and show concrete benefits, for instance, by signalling that investments in renovating buildings to accommodate new arrivals will increase the stock of affordable housing for everyone.

Mass displacement crises can unleash a wave of solidarity in host societies, which often taps into feelings of kinship, compassion, and national values of humanitarianism, but solidarity is often fragile. To maintain solidarity over time, policymakers will need to drum up support and resources to invest in the long-term integration of newcomers *and* address practical community concerns—even though both of these can be financially and politically costly. However, recent history provides a clear illustration that the cost of not investing can often be much higher.

To maintain solidarity over time, policymakers will need to drum up support and resources to invest in the long-term integration of newcomers and address practical community concerns.

About the Authors

NATALIA BANULESCU-BOGDAN

Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan is Deputy Director of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) International Programme and a Nonresident Fellow with MPI Europe. Her areas of expertise include social cohesion and identity, values and civic engagement, and the intersection of nationalism and migration. Since she joined MPI in 2008, Ms. Banulescu-Bogdan has primarily worked with the Transatlantic Council on Migration, through which she has helped advise participating governments on various aspects of migration management. She has provided technical support to countries holding the rotating presidency of the European Union and to the annual Global Forum on Migration and Development.

Previously, she worked at the Brookings Institution. Ms. Banulescu-Bogdan obtained her master's degree in nationalism studies from the Central European University in Budapest and her bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Pennsylvania.

M. MURAT ERDOĞAN

Prof. Dr. M. Murat Erdoğan is Director of the Mülkiye Migration Research Centre at Ankara University's Faculty of Political Science. He is a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Turkey Communication Committee, board member of Metropolis International's International Steering Committee, and President of the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration–IGAM-Academy. Previously, he held positions at the Turkish-German University in Istanbul (2017–22) and Hacettepe University in Ankara (1987–2017). He founded and headed the Migration Research Centre at both universities.

Dr. Erdoğan's research interests include voluntary and forced migration, refugees, people of Turkish origin living abroad, the European Union, political cartoons, political behaviour, and Turkish foreign policy. He conducts comprehensive public opinion research and has published widely, including the Euro-Turks-Barometer (on the Turkish diaspora in Europe) and the Syrians Barometer (on Syrians in Turkey). He has also carried out studies as a visiting researcher at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Humboldt University in Berlin, University of Oxford, Johns Hopkins University's American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, and the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin.

LUCÍA SALGADO

Lucía Salgado is an Associate Policy Analyst at MPI Europe, where she focuses on European policies related to migrant integration, asylum, and the reintegration of returned migrants. Prior to joining MPI Europe, Ms. Salgado worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs within the European Commission, and the Consulate General of Spain in Melbourne. She also interned with the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ms. Salgado holds a master's degree in international relations, with distinction, from King's College London, where she specialised in EU migration policy. She also holds bachelor's degrees in sociology and political science from University Carlos III of Madrid.

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www.mpieurope.org

Residence Palace,155 Rue de la Loi, 3rd Floor, 1040 Brussels
+32 (0) 2235 2113