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The Emigration of Medical Doctors from Albania: Brain Drain vs Return and Cooperation

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Across many countries of Central and Eastern Europe the emigration of skilled professionals since 1990 has become a serious problem of the loss of specialised human capital. This paper on Albanian doctors is one of the first to study in depth an example of this broader phenomenon of brain drain from the CEE region. There is a global demand for medical doctors which exceeds supply, leading to international competition in which the richer countries, with higher salaries and better working conditions, attract medical graduates and trained doctors from poorer countries. The migration of doctors from Albania is set within this globalised and hierarchised market for medical expertise. On the one hand, the movement of doctors to richer countries helps to plug the deficit in their supply in such countries and enables the individuals concerned to improve their incomes and life conditions. On the other hand, the loss of medical professionals severely harms the structure and quality of the health service in the sending country. This paper addresses three main questions. First, what are the characteristics of the Albanian medical brain drain in terms of its size, socio-demographics and destination countries? Second, what are the causes and consequences of Albania's loss of medical doctors? Third, what are the prospects of the migrant doctors returning to Albania or contributing their expertise from abroad? Answers are provided via a dual methodology of an online survey of Albanian doctors currently working abroad (N=301) and follow-up interviews with 25 of them. More than half of the survey respondents do not intend to return to Albania and a further third are undecided. Interview data indicate that the doctors are well-integrated abroad and see 'no future' for themselves and their families in Albania. There is, however, a greater willingness to share expertise with the home country via cooperation and short visits. Obstacles to return are partly income-related but, to a greater extent, reflect the poor working conditions and career prospects in Albania, including endemic corruption – the same factors that caused emigration in the first place. The policy implications of our findings are challenging; one solution is to mandate a period of work in Albania for newly qualified doctors before they are allowed to go abroad.

Keywords: Albania, emigration of medical doctors, brain drain, potential return, diaspora cooperation

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Introduction and context

At both a European and a global level, there is a systemic shortage of trained health professionals, including medical doctors, who form an important niche in the globalised market for highly skilled labour (Adovor, Czaika, Docquier and Moullan 2020; Grignon, Owusu and Sweetman 2013). This global and regional supply–demand inequality leads to an 'unhealthy' competition for doctors in which the winners are the richer countries, which are able to offer high salaries and good working conditions – and the losers are poorer countries which suffer from a medical brain drain. Is it fair, one may ask, that a relatively poor country like Albania should fund the upbringing and expensive training of medical graduates, only for those highly educated individuals to be lured to rich countries like Germany or the United States to remedy the insufficient supply of home-grown doctors? Is this not a form of development assistance given by poor to rich countries and therefore fundamentally unjust? (King 2018).

These questions have particular poignancy when we consider that doctors, nurses and other health professionals do the most vital job imaginable – they sustain and restore human life. Yet the training of doctors is longer, more demanding and more expensive than just about any other profession and entry requirements for admission to medical schools are amongst the highest of all tertiary-level subjects. Hence, we argue that the 'brain drain' of doctors is uniquely problematic, exacerbating already existing health-service inequalities between rich and poor countries located respectively in the global North and global South or, within Europe, between 'West' and 'East'. At the same time, we acknowledge the innate tension between, on the one hand, the individual's right to migrate and seek self-improvement and, on the other, the structural injustices in the geographical distribution of the costs and benefits of training and employing doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

Like all segments of the labour market, the competition for medical doctors is determined by the interaction of supply and demand (Buchan, Campbell, Dhillon and Charlesworth 2019; Grignon *et al*. 2013; Kroezen, Dussault, Craveiro, Dieleman, Jansen, Buchan, Barriball, Rafferty, Bremner and Sermeus 2015; Tajdens, Weilandt and Eckert 2012; Wismar, Maier, Glinos, Bremner, Dussault and Figueras 2011). Given the situation of overall shortage, the market is mainly demand-driven. The key demand factors are demographic: ageing populations, especially in Europe and North America with the retirement of the baby-boomer generation born in the early postwar years; rising life expectancy due to medical advances and more-healthy lifestyles; and the need to recruit more medical staff to support the continued advances in treatment and research. Also noteworthy is the ageing of doctors, one third of whom were aged over 55 in the EU in 2020 (Mara 2020). Consequently, most European and OECD countries report chronic shortages of doctors and other medical personnel (Kroezen *et al*. 2015; Mara 2020; OECD 2019; Wismar *et al*. 2011).

The supply side of the labour market is characterised by the insufficient production of young doctors in many advanced countries and hence the existence of many unfilled vacancies and the policy of recruiting doctors from other countries. One result is the growth in enrolment for medical degrees in poor countries, in response to the high salaries and good career prospects abroad. This raises important ethical and moral questions over the extent to which richer countries are exploiting poorer ones in the competition for trained doctors and medical graduates (Glinos 2015; Mara 2020, 2023). On the other hand, the 'beneficial brain drain' hypothesis argues that the incentive of higher incomes through emigration stimulates overall entry into higher education and training, thereby improving the stock of human capital in the source country net of emigration (Commander, Kangasniemi and Winters 2004; Docquier and Rapoport 2012).

As well as the more obvious supply and demand drivers, there are numerous individual and conditioning factors which shape the migration of doctors and other health-service personnel. The individual-scale elements include classic socio-economic 'push and pull' factors – such as low earnings and poor living standards in the

country of origin and higher incomes and a better quality of life abroad. The conditioning factors consist of facilitating/discouraging elements such as spatial distance, language knowledge, the culture of the destination country, visa issues, the possibility to take dependents and, more specific to professional and highly skilled migrants, the recognition of qualifications. Mara (2023) analysed some of these factors influencing the migration of health professionals from the Western Balkans to the richer countries of Europe, especially Germany. Her gravity-model analysis confirmed the importance of income differentials in explaining mobility patterns, as well as geographical proximity and institutional/policy factors such as the German 'special regulation' introduced at the end of 2015 facilitating the immigration of health professionals from Albania and other countries of the Western Balkans. In fact, the European scenario comprises complex chains of migration and replacement migration, so that even some advanced countries 'lose' their doctors and health professionals to richer countries where salaries and working conditions are better – for instance, from Germany to Switzerland, from Sweden and Finland to Norway and from the United Kingdom to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. At the bottom of the chain of supply are countries like Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which train and then 'give' their doctors to Germany and other wealthy countries. Our paper advances Mara's (2023) quantitative exploration of the emigration of health professionals from the wider Western Balkan region by an in-depth focus on the emigration of doctors from one country, Albania, employing a mixed-methods approach combining an online survey with qualitative interviews.

Focusing more specifically, then, on Albania, the population there, too, is rapidly ageing. According to the Albanian Census of 2023 (INSTAT 2024), the share of the population aged 65+ almost tripled over the past 22 years, increasing from 7.5 per cent of the total in 2001 to 19.7 per cent in 2023. This share will undoubtedly continue to grow because of increasing longevity, a declining birth rate (down to 1.3 children per woman in the early 2020s) and the still-ongoing emigration of younger-age cohorts, which also removes some of the future reproductive potential of the Albanian population.

Two other important segments of contextual information complete this Introduction: the massive relative scale of Albanian migration and the parlous state of the Albanian health system. Since 1990, Albania has experienced one of the largest emigrations, relative to the size of its population, in the world. Emigration has dramatically reduced the Albanian population from 3.2 million at the last communist-era census (1989) to 2.4 million at the 2023 census. Between the two most recent censuses (2,831,741 in 2011; 2,402,113 in 2023), the population shrank by nearly 15 per cent (INSTAT 2024). Migration abroad, coupled with intense internal migration, has infused every sector of the Albanian society, economy and landscape; few families or places remain unaffected (Vullnetari 2012). International bodies such as the World Bank (2016) and OECD (d'Aiglepierre, David, Levionnois, Spielvogel, Tuccio and Vickstrom 2020) rank Albania amongst the top countries globally both for the ratio of its 'stock' of emigrants to the resident population (around 40 per cent) and for the relative scale of its brain drain as a share of total emigration in the period 2011–2019 (also around 40 per cent; Leitner 2021). Moreover, according to the European Training Foundation, health-sector staff (doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists and pharmacists) – and particularly doctors – are the group of professionals the most affected by the Albanian brain drain (ETF 2021).

More than three decades after the first frantic exodus of the early 1990s, when Albanians flocked over the mountainous border with Greece or crowded onto boats bound for Italy (King 2003), the migration is ongoing, only nowadays it is characterised by a departing population which is younger, more educated and professionally qualified (Leitner 2021). Its continuation into the near future seems assured, given recent survey results on 'potential migration' – people who declare an intention to migrate. A 2018 survey by King and Gëdeshi (2020) indicated that 29 per cent of survey respondents (N=1,421 for all respondents) expressed their intention to migrate but that the share was much higher – 52 per cent – for the younger cohorts aged 18–40

years; it was 60 per cent for those aged 18–25. Moreover, these figures are higher than those from a similar survey undertaken in 2006, when the population appeared less migration-prone (King and Gëdeshi 2020: 140–141).[1]

Regarding the poor state of the Albanian health sector, relevant World Health Organization (WHO) and Eurostat data are presented by Mara (2023). In 2020, Albania spent 3.2 per cent of its GDP on publicly funded health, lower than all of its Western Balkan neighbours (for instance, Serbia 5.1 per cent or Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6.4 per cent) and much lower than Germany (8.6 per cent) or the EU average (8.1 per cent). Bear in mind that these percentages are of vastly differing levels of GDP *per capita*, which depresses the real situation in Albania even further. As a result of a combination of under-investment and emigration, Albania has the lowest density of doctors per 100,000 population in Europe. According to WHO figures quoted by Mara (2023: 36), the ratios for 2020 are as follows: Albania 188, Bosnia and Herzegovina 232, Montenegro 274, North Macedonia 296, Serbia 270, Germany 446 and the EU as a whole 374.[2] Finally, gross monthly earnings for health professionals in Albania are, once again, the lowest in Europe – less than one third of the EU average, less than one quarter of the level in Germany and below one fifth of the Swiss figure, based on purchasing power parities (Mara 2023: 39).

Aims, questions and methods

Our broad aims in the paper are threefold.[3] First, we aim to document the history and scale of the exodus of doctors, including destination countries and the socio-demographic characteristics of the emigrant doctors. Second, we seek to uncover the causes and consequences of the brain drain of doctors from Albania. Third, looking to the future, we ask: What are the prospects for the 'diaspora of doctors' to return to Albania?[4] If, however, return was not an option for many individuals, to what extent are the emigrant doctors willing to contribute to and cooperate with their home country in other respects?

Given that, in Albania, the emigration of doctors is a hot topic much discussed in government and other circles, yet with hitherto only anecdotal evidence, we see our paper's main function as an information-gathering exercise based on robust survey data. Whilst the robustness of our research data is compromised by our inability to claim that it is based on true random sampling, it is enhanced by a sequenced mixed-method approach which starts with a large-N online survey and then continues with a smaller-N round of interviews. We follow the conventional definition of mixed methods as research which 'collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative approaches or methods in a single study' (Tashakkori and Cresswell 2007: 3–4). Provided the two kinds of data collection are carefully aligned and planned in advance to respond to the same set of research questions, 'triangulation' – the comparison and confirmation of findings – can improve the validity of the research results (Gamlen 2012: 321).

In order to gather data to respond to the above aims and questions, our research design comprised three stages. First, we carried out a review of literature and statistics from Albanian and international sources, although these yielded only partial insights as the phenomenon of Albanian doctors' migration is not well-documented. The second stage and principal method was an online survey of Albanian medical doctors who live and work abroad, mainly in Europe. The survey was administered during the period November 2022 to March 2023 and elicited 301 valid responses. The third stage consisted of 25 follow-up qualitative interviews with emigrant doctors who had answered the survey questionnaire and indicated their willingness to take part in an interview. Given the distance factor, most of the interviews took place via zoom but a few were face-to-face when the interviewees were visiting Albania. The interviews were selectively transcribed and translated into English; they provide nuanced insights to complement the survey data.

As there is no register of Albanian doctors working abroad, a major challenge was how to access the survey population. We used various contact strategies: initially a range of respondents who were part of the first

author's personal, social and professional networks. This early approach was followed by social-media networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn; and snowballing out from prior respondents who were asked to recommend friends and colleagues who were also Albanian doctors working abroad.

After establishing an initial contact via email, a copy of the online questionnaire was sent, together with a covering letter outlining the purpose and scope of the survey. Two reminders were sent at monthly intervals to non-respondents. Around 45 per cent of the individuals to whom the survey was sent answered the questionnaire. We feel that this is an acceptable level of response to an online survey of this kind where there is no obligation to respond and no payment for doing so.[5]

That said, we cannot be categorical about the degree of representativeness of the sample of respondents. We cannot claim an absence of bias between those who responded and those who did not; nor between the sample respondents and those doctors abroad whom we were not able to contact.[6] Nevertheless, given the large number of questionnaire respondents (301) and the reasonable number of qualitative interviews (25), we feel that our results are, at least, indicative and, in fact, very revealing.

The online survey consisted of eight blocks of questions:

(i) basic demographic data of the respondent (age, gender, civil status, country of birth and of current residence);
(ii) education and work experience before emigrating;
(iii) reasons for migration and for choice of destination country;
(iv) studies completed abroad, if any (level, specialisation etc.);
(v) employment abroad;
(vi) social networks and social capital (both with colleagues abroad and in Albania);
(vii) prospects for returning to Albania (desire to return, when, what kind of job, reasons to return or not to return, conditions for return, obstacles to return etc.); and
(viii) for those not intending to return, cooperation envisaged with Albania (what type of collaboration, obstacles to collaboration etc.).

These questions and subquestions were designed both to yield a comprehensive profile of the phenomenon of Albania's brain drain of doctors and to shed light on the aims and research questions enunciated earlier.

For the interviews, we chose 25 out of the larger number who consented to be interviewed. This selection was made on the basis of gender balance, country of qualification and country of current residence, with the dual aim of achieving both representativeness and variety across the survey respondents. We found that a high level of 'saturation' of interview data – in terms of experiences, perceptions and views expressed – was gained with this number of participants. This number is also consistent with the research literature's views on 'How many interviews is enough?' (Baker and Edwards 2012; Green and Thorogood 2004; Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). For instance, Green and Thorogood (2004: 102–104) maintain that, if research is focused on a single participant category (e.g. Albanian doctors working abroad), 'little new information is likely to be generated after interviewing 20 people'. From the interview transcripts, quotes were strategically chosen to represent consistently expressed views and experiences in shedding light on our research questions.

History, structure, size and characteristics of Albania's 'diaspora of doctors'

The first set of questions is addressed via a combination of the methods described above: secondary literature and statistics, questionnaire survey data and qualitative interviews.

Development and typology of the medical diaspora

On the basis of multiple sources, we propose a fourfold typology in the evolution of the emigration of Albanian doctors.

First, there was a large-scale emigration of Albanian doctors during the 1990s, part of a wider-scale brain drain which saw substantial shares of the Albanian scientific and professional elite emigrate abroad during the first, highly chaotic decade of the post-socialist transition (Gëdeshi and Black 2006). During this first phase and also subsequently, many Albanian doctors emigrated to the United States through the Diversity Visa Program for qualified individuals and their families. Some of them were able to get their medical degrees recognised by taking extra exams or following additional specialist training; others, however, ended up working below the level of their skills, experience and qualifications. Based on the 2012 American Community Survey, Nedelkowska and Khaw (2015: 5) estimated that, after 1990, 1,700 first-generation Albanians with degrees in medicine emigrated to the US. Although there is no exact record of the number continuing to work as doctors, a graph in the same report (2015: 7) indicates that just over 1,000 were working in 'medical science and services' in 2012. Further insights are offered by Gjergji, one of the US-based interviewees who moved there in the early 1990s:

> *A small number of* [Albanian] *medical doctors were integrated, because they arrived here when they were young and took what were called 'boarding exams'; they obtained high scores and are working as medical doctors… The key to success was to get high scores. Many Albanian doctors who emigrated* [to the US] *in the 1990s were in their 40s and 50s; they may have been good doctors in Albania but they failed to score high enough in these entry exams. Some of them work in hospitals in other capacities, others shifted to other professions… They are well-paid but they do not make as much as they could* [if they had been classified as professional medical doctors].

According to our questionnaire data, about 8 per cent of the Albanian doctors abroad belong to this early-emigrated group who left during the 1990s.

A second group of survey-respondent doctors are Albanian students who, having completed high school in Albania, did their medical degrees abroad and stayed abroad after graduation, either in their study country or another one. Our survey results show that 32 per cent of the respondents pursued the study-abroad route. Italy was the most popular choice for a foreign medical school but many other OECD countries were represented, including Germany and the UK as the next most important.

The third group, accounting for more than half (54 per cent) of the online-survey respondents, is made up of doctors who did their training in Albania and then moved abroad for employment, some immediately after graduation, others after some years working in Albania. Most went to Italy and Germany. The latter country became more attractive after 2016 and the institution of the 'Western Balkan Regulation' which proactively facilitated the immigration of already qualified young doctors from Albania and the neighbouring countries of the region (Mara 2023: 35, 39).

The fourth group are the children of Albanian emigrants abroad, either born abroad or taken abroad as children by their migrating parents. The children then pursued their medical studies in their parents' host country. They account for the smallest fraction of our online survey – 6 per cent – but this could be an under-estimate of their true size since they may be beyond the reach of our survey's access points.

How many Albanian doctors are there abroad?

An initial issue to be problematised is the definition of the term 'Albanian doctor'. In the previous subsection, we took a deliberately broad, ethnicity-based approach. A much narrower definition would be to confine the label to those who received their medical training in Albania and subsequently emigrated to work as a doctor abroad: 62 per cent of the online survey sample conform to this stricter definition. A more ambiguous category are high-school-leaver Albanians who take their medical degrees in other countries and continue to work abroad: some would argue that they are not emigré doctors since they did not emigrate *as* doctors and, hence, constitute less of a medical brain drain. Furthermore, the distinction between the two categories (trained in Albania, trained abroad) is not always clear-cut in cases where, for instance, an individual takes their first medical degree in Albania followed by specialised training or a PhD abroad.

In the absence of a definitive register of doctors who have emigrated from Albania, we can only draw inferences from various sources which are themselves estimates or otherwise debatable. Three main sources can be noted. First, the Albanian Order of Physicians has the function to issue a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' to medical doctors who wish to emigrate and practice their profession abroad (Gjypi 2018). In an interview, the President of this Order told us that 809 doctors received the Certificate during the years 2018–2022. As an indication, this represents around 61 per cent of the 1,322 students who graduated from the Medical Faulty of the University of Tirana over the same period. However, not all medical graduates who emigrate necessarily have the Certificate and there are other universities in Albania which run degrees in medicine.

The second source consists of OECD data on 'foreign-educated' medical doctors in OECD countries. According to this source, there were 1,161 Albanian doctors working abroad in OECD countries in 2021.[7] This source also enables comparisons to be made and Table 1 sets the figures for Albania alongside those for the other Western Balkan countries. Some caveats need to be made about this source. It excludes the (probably small) number of Albanian doctors working in non-OECD countries. More importantly, it excludes Albanian doctors who studied and qualified abroad and then remained abroad. It also excludes, during the last years, those who work in the USA (107 doctors in 2016; no data since then). This means that the data in Table 1 are under-estimates.

Table 1. Emigration of medical doctors from Albania and the Western Balkans

Country	Year	Number abroad	Number in home country	%
Albania	2019	1,028	4,745	21.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2015	812	7,413	11.0
Kosovo	2020	600	4,429	13.5
Montenegro	2018	46	1,730	2.7
North Macedonia	2015	1,714	6,219	27.6
Serbia	2016	2,729	27,563	9.9

Source: ETF (2022); Mara (2023); OECD (2019).

Finally, there are fragmented data from individual host countries. Those for the USA were noted above. The most significant European country is Germany, which recorded 988 Albanian medical doctors in 2021, a nearly sevenfold increase from 149 in 2013. Other figures which we were able to source were for Switzerland (42 Albanian doctors), the UK (32) and Austria (25). When combined, these statistics indicate that the real size of the Albanian doctors' diaspora is considerably larger than the OECD figure and, based on the German data, is increasing rapidly.

Our own estimate, based on the various figures quoted above and on email and contact lists sent out for the online survey, is that the diaspora of Albanian doctors lies within the range 2,000–2,500 and possibly higher. This figure equates to around half of the number of doctors working in Albania.

Destination countries

According to answers from the online questionnaire, Albanian doctors are working in 20 countries around the world. In order of importance, these are Germany (35.3 per cent), Italy (23.7 per cent), the US (14.3 per cent) and the UK (9.0 per cent); hence, 82.3 per cent in these four countries. Table 2 shows the remaining countries, down to a threshold of 2 per cent of the total (N=301). Countries with a handful of Albanian doctors but fewer than 2 per cent include Austria, Belgium, Turkey, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands.

Table 2. Countries where Albanian doctors trained abroad and are working abroad

Countries where doctors trained abroad	% N=94	Countries where doctors are working abroad	% N=301
Italy	41.9	Germany	35.3
Germany	17.7	Italy	23.7
USA	7.0	USA	14.3
France	6.5	UK	9.0
UK	6.0	France	3.3
Turkey	4.7	Canada	2.7
Greece	3.7	Sweden	2.0
Netherlands	2.8	Greece	2.0

Source: Authors' survey, 2023.

Interestingly, the countries of current work and residence do not correspond very closely to those where students who did their medical training abroad studied. As Table 2 shows, Italy replaces Germany at the top of the list, Germany is second, followed at some distance by the US, France, the UK, Turkey, Greece and the Netherlands, all above the 2 per cent threshold. Below this threshold for studying medicine abroad we find Switzerland, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Sweden, Canada, Portugal and Ireland.

We thus observe that some countries which are geographically near Albania (notably Italy and Greece) or where living costs and tuition fees are low by European standards (Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria) are chosen as logistically and economically convenient places to study but not necessarily to pursue a working career. Having said that, most of those who did their medical training in Italy do continue their medical careers there. However, there is also a tendency for some of those trained in Italy, as well as many of those with degrees from Greece and Turkey, to advance their careers by onward-migrating to more-wealthy countries in Europe and North America, where higher incomes, better career options and more agreeable living conditions are available. The following interview extract from Shpëtim, in Italy, shows how Italy can be used as a launch-pad for a mobile medical career in countries with more advanced and specialised health systems:

> *In the future, I would like to move to another country, an English-speaking country… Italy, when compared to Albania, has many positive features. However, when compared to other developed countries in Europe, it lags behind in terms of its economy, research and other aspects… I would like to go somewhere where there is a larger international* [medical] *community… I would feel more at home there.*

An important characteristic of the Albanian doctors' diaspora is its fast growth, especially over the decade since the passing of Germany's Employment Regulation for the Western Balkans at the end of 2015. The 'WB Regulation' was designed to attract doctors from the six countries of the region by recognising their diplomas and offering fast access to vacancies and work and residence permits (Mara 2023). The upward trend is likely to continue in future years, according to the interviewees, in response to Germany's ongoing shortage of medical doctors.

Interviewees in Germany describe how the country is a 'perfect combination' of high salaries and living standards, good working conditions and prospects for professional advancement, generous social security and free education for children. The following extract from the interview with Brunilda, who had recently graduated in medicine in Albania and had just moved to Germany, is typical of those who had moved to this country:

> *There were 22 students in our graduating class and 17 of them wanted to emigrate, mostly to Germany but also to Italy and Sweden. Germany is the preferred destination because of the simpler procedures to go there… The existence in Tirana of centres offering information about migrating to Germany certainly helps to make the process easier… It is a bit more difficult to go to Italy or Sweden; you need somebody there who can help you, so it takes longer… Italy is attractive as an option because it is close to Albania – which is important for some people – but the salaries there are not as high* [as in Germany]. *Also, our diplomas are not recognised and so you have to take extra exams… In Sweden, the salaries are high but the language* [is a challenge].

Socio-demographics of Albanian emigrant doctors

The first demographic feature that stands out from the online survey is the relatively young age structure of the doctors working abroad. The average age is 37 years and almost three-quarters of them (73.6 per cent) are in the age group 25–40 years. This is in stark contrast to the age profile of doctors in the EU noted earlier – 1 in 3 of whom are aged over 55. From the survey, we find an approximate balance in numbers between men and women, and nearly two-thirds of the respondents (63.7 per cent) are married, some of them to a non-Albanian spouse (which is likely to diminish the likelihood of a return to Albania).

As well as being characterised by their youth compared to the overall population of doctors in Europe and Albania, there are clear indications from our survey respondents, especially the interviewees, that those who migrate are 'the brightest and the best'. In the view of Dorina, in Germany, the doctors who go abroad are not only high performers in medicine but also high-flyers because they have to learn German (or another language) quickly in order to access and perform their jobs abroad. Gjon, from the US, recounted his experience as follows:

> *We were 25 students in my class* [of medical students]. *Of the best students, none are still in Albania… I am in the US, one is in Sweden, most are in Germany. Many of my peers, excellent students of medicine, are no longer in Albania… The elite of Albania's medical students has emigrated, which I find very sad.*

Luan, in Italy, gave a somewhat more variegated diagnosis:

> *The most ambitious of the medical doctors in Albania emigrate. Those who do not are from medical families who are well-off financially and have their own private practices… Another segment comprises those who did not excel in medical school and lack ambition... Others want to stay close to their families… Lastly,*

there is a small number who are engaged in politics and, through this, want to climb the career ladder in the healthcare business sector.

Causes and consequences of the emigration of doctors

This is the second cluster of questions addressed by our empirical research, comprising reasons for emigrating, the social and professional experiences accumulated abroad and some reflections on the consequences of this specialised medical brain drain from Albania.

Reasons for emigrating

Survey respondents were presented with a list of 16 possible reasons for emigrating and were asked to select up to 3. From this table we excluded the very small number of respondents who, as 'second-generation doctors', declared themselves to have been 'born in the diaspora'. The reasons were grouped into 5 sets: economic, education, family, health and 'other'. Table 3 displays the results. The percentage figures refer to all the aggregated factors checked, since each respondent could check a maximum of 3 reasons; hence, for this table, N=542.

Table 3. Reasons for doctors to emigrate from Albania (N=542)

Reason	% citing this factor
Economic factors (N=274)	**50.7**
To improve living standards	30.0
No job in Albania or job lined up abroad	2.0
Inadequate working conditions in Albania	14.9
Inadequate social security in Albania	3.6
Repayment of debt	0.2
Educational factors (N=145)	**26.7**
Own education abroad	22.7
To finance or progress children's education	4.0
Family reasons (N=36)	**6.6**
To accompany or join spouse abroad	3.9
To marry or just married	2.7
To escape family problems	0.0
Health (N=11)	**2.0**
To access necessary medical treatment	2.0
Other factors (N=76)	**14.0**
See no future for me (and my family) in Albania	6.4
I do not like living in Albania	2.8
I always wanted to emigrate	1.1
To seek adventure	0.9
Other	2.8

Source: Authors survey, 2023.

Economic factors account for just over half of the aggregated reasons. Although the Europe-wide shortage of doctors constitutes a structural 'demand-pull', the economic factors listed in the questionnaire represent

a constellation of mainly 'push' factors for emigration. The two main elements are the low incomes and poor living standards in Albania (30 per cent) and the poor working conditions (15 per cent). Earlier, we noted that the gross monthly earnings of Albanian health professionals in 2018 were less than one third the EU27 average. In countries like Germany and Switzerland, the salary differential is much greater – 4 to 6 times greater (Mara 2023: 39). Yet, the qualitative interviews reveal that, often, a higher salary is not the main incentive to migrate; rather, poor working conditions and low standards of professionalism in the Albanian health system seem to weigh more heavily. This key point is illustrated from a variety of perspectives in the following interview extracts:

> *The main factor pushing medical doctors to migrate is* [the opportunities for] *professional development abroad… specialisation plays a key role. In Germany, when a medical doctor starts his/her job, automatically the specialisation starts… Another aspect is the technology, the equipment available, new research methods and participation in national and international conferences. All these things make our work more interesting and pleasant. So, it's not only about the salary... but also professional development… The work of a doctor is not just to earn a living; it becomes a mission* (Artan, Germany).

> *Any medical doctor who wants to work* [hard]*, who is passionate about his/her work, who wants to be valued and encouraged to advance and have opportunities for promotion, who wants to lead a normal life… has to go abroad… Certainly most of us would not have left Albania if these things were possible* [in our country]. *After all, it's not easy to be an emigrant; you will always be a foreigner in a foreign country* (Mirjeta, US).

The second important set of factors scored by the survey respondents are those related to education (27 per cent). This mainly concerns the doctors' own education and specialisation, including opportunities to do a PhD or join a research laboratory. The quote from Artan, above, speaks to this factor. A small share (4 per cent) underlines the importance of education abroad for their children. Family and health pick up relatively small shares of the reasons checked by respondents – 7 and 2 per cent respectively.

More revealing are some of the factors mentioned under the 'other reasons' heading in Table 3, notably the phrase 'I see no future for me (and my family) in Albania'. There is a general feeling, widespread amongst the Albanian population, especially the younger and more-educated individuals, that emigration is the only way to achieve a 'normal life' (see Mirjeta's quote above) and escape the difficulties, frustrations and disappointments of living in Albania. Quite apart from low incomes and poor career prospects, many interview participants, like Gent in Germany, below, referred to the corruption, the bribery and the need to 'know the right people' as endemic features of Albanian society, including the health system.

> *In Albania, there is always frustration and disappointment. All the time, you see how powerless you are if you don't know someone* [who can help you]… *Some of my fellow-students were the children of so-called 'celebrity doctors'. Upon completion of the specialisation stage, some vacancies suddenly opened up in the University Hospital. All of these new positions were awarded to the children or nephews and nieces of those holding high positions… The rest of us were told that there were no more positions available. Total disappointment, massive corruption. That is the main reason for emigration.*

Experiences abroad: professional life, social capital and identity

According to our survey and interview data, Albanian doctors appear to lead socially and professionally satisfying lives abroad yet, at the same time, they maintain frequent contact with relatives and friends in Albania and preserve their Albanian identity. The migrant doctors' social capital – in the form of formal and

informal links to other people, membership of social networks and participation in associations in the host country – is a good indicator of their overall integration. Likewise, social capital linkages back to Albania shed light on our research participants' material and emotional connections to their homeland, including the possibility of returning there some time in the future.

Two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that they have either 'frequent' (31 per cent) or 'very frequent' (35 per cent) social contacts with their work colleagues in the host country. This is backed up by interview accounts. Shpëtim's extract below is a good illustration and also opens up wider insights into the history of Albanian migration to Italy.

> *I have very good and close relations with my Italian colleagues. We often hang out together after working hours. This is the reality in this city* [Milan]. *Before, they* [Italians] *thought that we just came over here* [i.e. Albanians migrating to Italy] *for a better life. Now they see our migration as a choice we make… Also the image of Albania has changed. Italians visit Albania and see it as a beautiful and fast-developing country.*

The latter part of Shpëtim's quote refers to the enhanced image of Albania and Albanians in the eyes of the Italian population. Back in the 1990s, Albanian immigrants in Italy were stigmatised as rough, uncivilised people prone to criminality (King and Mai 2002). In more recent decades, Albanians have changed that image, largely through their individual efforts of working hard and trying to assimilate into Italian society in an unobtrusive way (King and Mai 2008).

At the same time, Albanian doctors abroad retain strong ties to the home country. According to the responses to the online survey, 96 per cent keep in regular contact with family members in Albania and 69 per cent with friends; however, fewer are in regular touch with colleagues working in the Albanian health sector (38.5 per cent). Communication is maintained via the usual means: phone, email, Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime etc. Here is a typical statement from Lindita, who has been living in France for 10 years:

> *I speak to my family every day and I am up-to-date with everything that happens in Albania… I receive information from family and friends who are still in Albania.*

Visits to Albania are also frequent. From the survey, 40 per cent visit more than once a year and 44 per cent visit on average once a year. Usually, these visits take place during the summer holidays and/or at New Year, with a much smaller share who visit once in several years (14 per cent) or only on exceptional occasions such as funerals or weddings (2 per cent). The less-frequent visitors are mainly living in distant destinations such as North America or Australia.

Through these contacts, as well as the internet and Albanian TV channels accessed abroad, emigrant doctors are generally well-informed about political, economic and cultural developments and events in Albania. As a result – and also by linking up with other Albanians in their host location – they are able to preserve much of their Albanian identity and sense of national belonging. Afërdita, who has just completed her PhD in medicine in the Netherlands, gave her account as follows:

> *My mind is that of an Albanian. When I wake up in the morning, I first check the news in Albania and then the Dutch news… When I arrived to start my PhD, I was 23 and felt totally Albanian. Perhaps I will feel increasingly Dutch as the years go by but I believe I will always remain Albanian in my heart.*

Compared to the close family and social links that respondents keep with Albania at a personal level, their more organised or 'structural' social capital – by which we mean membership of more formalised social

networks and associations – is rather weak. According to the online survey, only 18.4 per cent of respondents participate in Albanian associations, organisations or formalised networks in the host countries; mostly these are medical associations, cultural organisations or student bodies. Most of these associations are small, given the limited number of Albanian doctors in most of the countries surveyed.[8]

Consequences

Undoubtedly, the large scale of the emigration of doctors from Albania has deleterious effects on the country's health sector and, thus, damages the health and wellbeing of the Albanian population, who are deprived of at least some of the care they need unless they are able to pay for expensive private treatment.

There are regional effects, too. Health services are especially scarce in rural areas and many regional hospitals suffer from the lack of specialist doctors and surgeons. The international emigration of doctors is interwoven with doctors' internal migration from rural, peripheral areas of the country to the capital, Tirana. Indeed, 57 per cent of medical doctors in Albania are concentrated in the capital city (Gjypi 2018). There is a further knock-on effect in that this is one of the reasons often cited by poor Albanian families who migrate or seek asylum in EU countries in the absence of satisfactory healthcare in the home country (Gëdeshi and King 2022). Likewise, the powerful currents of internal migration, overwhelmingly focused on the Tirana urban region, are partly driven by the lack and poor quality of health services in rural areas and provincial towns (Vullnetari 2012).

Above all, the emigration of doctors and other healthcare professionals inflicts a heavy financial cost on Albania, already a very poor country by European standards. In its study on the *Cost of Youth Emigration*, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2020) estimated that, in 2018, the cost of the upbringing and education of a young emigrant in Albania amounted to 9,267 euros for those with secondary education and 18,283 euros for those having completed tertiary education. The *per capita* cost of educating emigrating doctors will be even higher, given their long and expensive training. As a result, the country loses millions of euros every year owing to emigration in general and the brain drain of doctors in particular.

The role of the doctors' diaspora in developing the health system in Albania

The diaspora of Albanian medical doctors has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the home country's health system in two ways. The first is the return of doctors who have experienced high-quality training, specialisation and medical practice in the health systems of advanced OECD countries. The second is cooperation between the medical diaspora and healthcare institutions, research institutes and university medical schools in Albania. These two development-oriented processes are the final set of issues we address.

What prospects for return?

Economists argue that the return migration of experienced and high-skilled migrants, such as doctors, can generate a positive stimulus to the economic and social development of the countries of origin by introducing new ideas, technologies, skills and experiences and financial capital acquired abroad (Lucas 2005: 244–248; Wahba 2022). Thus, 'brain return' compensates for the preceding brain drain.

Unfortunately for the 'brain return' hypothesis, only 15 per cent of Albanian doctors working abroad want to return home, according to our survey. More than half, 53 per cent, declare that they do not intend to return while the remainder, 32 per cent, say that they are undecided. Theoretically, the return of doctors with

experience, training and specialised knowledge gained from working abroad should boost the standard of medical expertise in Albania. The potential exists for this return transfer of enhanced human capital – so why do only 1 in 7 Albanian doctors working abroad want to return? The reasons are varied and bear a close resemblance to the factors which led to the doctors' emigration in the first place. They are best articulated by our sample of 25 interviewees.

Synthesising the narratives of the interviewed participants, many say that they have become well-integrated in their respective host countries, having made good economic and career progress which they are sceptical of being able to build on were they to return to Albania. Many doctors have already started a family abroad, some with a non-Albanian spouse. Bringing their children back to Albania and putting them into a different education system, with a switch in the language of instruction, is seen as a formidable challenge – as other studies of 'returning children' have shown (Cena, Heim and Triandafiou 2018; Grosa 2022; Vathi, Duci and Dhembo 2016). The doctors also talk about progress in their personal lives which they are unwilling to give up – more disposable income, a better quality of life in a more peaceful and well-ordered environment, new friendship circles and access to cultural and sporting facilities. Others point out that, in spite of some changes and improvements in Albanian living conditions, the medical infrastructure and working conditions are not yet adequate for them to seriously contemplate returning. Finally, interviewees identify corruption, social injustice and insecurity as ongoing problems. Hence, hope for a good future in Albania is largely misplaced. Lindita, interviewed in France, gives a typical account of some of these factors obstructing her return, stressing that salary is not the main factor:

> *In Albania you don't need your salary to be as high as in France. I could return for perhaps half of my French salary. However, many other conditions would need to be in place, related not only to the workplace but also to the social aspect… I am used to the fact that, in my current place, social life is much more important… Social and cultural conditions are just as important as work for me. In order for me to return, all these conditions need to be in place. I don't see that happening in the next 5–10 years. So perhaps I will return only when I retire, buy a house by the sea and enjoy my Albania.*

Just under a third of the survey respondents answered that they are undecided whether they will stay abroad or return at some point in the future. Luan (in Italy) is typical of this group:

> *I have certainly thought about returning. In fact, I think about it all the time. After all, Albania is my country; regardless of the situation there, it is my country. But I don't know… I have friends who are medical doctors there so I am quite familiar with the health system* [in Albania] *and I know how problematic it is… At the moment, it seems difficult to become part of that system… Yet, in the future, I would not exclude it* [returning].

Both Luan's and Lindita's narratives indicate that the return of doctors to Albania is contingent on the existence of some improvements in the country. In the questionnaire survey we asked the 'undecided' group about the preconditions which would need to be in place for them to seriously consider return. Respondents were given a list of possible elements and invited to tick as many as they thought relevant to their decision-making. Table 4 presents the results, which are largely self-explanatory. The percentage figures refer to the proportion of the sample answering this question (N=93) who cited each of the preconditions listed.

Table 4. Preconditions for the return of doctors to Albania (N = 93)

Specified preconditions	% citing
Improved political and economic stability	65.5
Thorough structural reform of the health system	55.9
Lower level of corruption	51.6
More investment in the healthcare sector	51.6
Increased job security, including social security	51.6
Improvements in infrastructure, cleaner environment	40.9
Improvement in public order	37.6
Change of mentality in the country	35.5
Receiving a salary equal to the one I have abroad	31.2
Good social and cultural life	26.9
Receiving a salary higher than the one I have abroad	12.9
No further opportunities for career development abroad	5.4
Other	9.7

Source: Authors' survey, 2023.

Cooperation with the diaspora

Given the general lack of desire on the part of Albanian doctors abroad to return home, arguably a more realistic path is to foster the collaboration of the doctors in ways that do not involve them resettling in Albania. Like return migration and development, there is an established and growing literature on diaspora mobilisation as a development-inducing mechanism (see, *inter alia*, Aguínas 2009; Lucas 2005: 207–229; Sørensen 2007), although little is said in this literature about the specific role of medical professionals in the improvement of the health sector in their countries of origin.

Table 5. Support expressed by Albanian doctors abroad for different kinds of cooperation with the health sector in Albania (N=173)

Form of cooperation	% respondents supporting
Joint projects	69.9
Training courses for doctors/students	62.4
Writing joint articles	49.7
Consultancies for the government or private sector	48.2
Online medical diagnoses	47.9
Participation in medical interventions in hospitals	47.9
Professional exchanges	32.9
Summer schools	26.0
PhD mentoring/supervision	18.5
Other	1.7

Source: Authors' survey, 2023.

According to the online survey, only 11.5 per cent of the doctors abroad have had concrete experiences of collaboration with Albania's healthcare system. Where cooperation has occurred, it has been sporadic and mainly initiated by the doctors themselves. The forms of collaboration reported include medical consultancies,

joint scientific studies and papers, participation in conferences and seminars, guest lectures and media interviews (the last of these especially during the Covid period). Yet, almost 60 per cent of respondents say that they 'would like to cooperate' with healthcare institutions and medical research initiatives in Albania. Table 5 sets out the types of cooperation that respondents would like to support – a wide variety of initiatives for joint work. Since respondents could cite multiple forms of cooperation, the percentage scores (as for Table 4) do not sum to 100 but refer to the share of the sample answering this question (N=173) who checked each type of collaboration.

The problem seems to be that reciprocal willingness is not forthcoming from the Albanian side, even though many respondents and interviewees indicate that they would be willing to offer their expertise for zero payment. To illustrate some of the points mentioned above, we quote extensively from the interview with Alban in Switzerland:

> *We are willing to cooperate but we are not sure whether the same willingness is present in Albania. I visit Albania at least twice a year; I have my father, relatives and friends there. I know colleagues working in cardiology* [his specialist field]… *but I have not heard of any initiatives being taken.*

Alban sees the collaborations as not just one-way – from the 'expert' diaspora doctors to the 'less expert' doctors in Albania. Rather, he sees the collaboration as

> *an exchange of experiences from both sides. Perhaps colleagues from Albania could come to our clinics* [in Switzerland] *and follow a specialised training course… On the other hand… doctors and colleagues here are willing to go and help people in need, who do not have the financial resources* [for the treatment they need]. *If there are the requisite infrastructures in place in university clinics* [in Albania], *there are surgeons and cardiologists who could go several times a year for surgeries and to cooperate with colleagues from Albania. I can think of several other positive examples. For instance, an internationally renowned Albanian surgeon in Switzerland regularly visits Prishtina* [in Kosovo] *and carries out expert surgeries there.*

As Alban's final remark shows, cooperation is not limited to Albania – and both the survey respondents and the interviewees confirmed their willingness to collaborate with Kosovo, which is predominantly ethnic-Albanian, and North Macedonia, where there is a large minority of ethnic Albanians.

Conclusions and policy suggestions

Over the past decade, Albania has experienced a rapid increase in the emigration of medical doctors, recording one of the highest rates in Europe. This trend looks likely to continue, unless remedial measures are taken. Those who leave are distinguished by their youth and ambition. The emigration of Albanian doctors represents a massive loss of both human capital and investment in the production of that human capital – a significant part of the 559 million euros annually that the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2020) estimates is lost to the country through the emigration of its young people. For the doctors in our survey, the financial loss of their training is greater for those fully trained in Albania prior to emigration than for those who are educated in Albania up to high school and then do their medical degrees abroad.

It is true that the cost of the medical brain drain could be reduced if medical studies were not so highly subsidised from the public purse and students had to bear a higher share of the costs by paying higher fees or taking out loans. Theoretically, such a measure would partially solve the financial impact of the brain drain

but, at the same time, this would be self-defeating since most students, except those from very wealthy families, would never be able to afford to study medicine.

Most Albanian emigrant doctors do not intend to return to Albania. This is arguably our key finding and the most worrying one for the future of the Albanian healthcare sector. Here we come back to a fundamental dilemma intrinsic to the debate on brain drain noted earlier. How can we reconcile the individual's right to migrate in order to achieve self-improvement with the structural inequalities and injustices in the global supply and demand for medical professionals? Most of the interviewees are acutely aware of this tension at the heart of their behaviour. They gave powerful justifications for their decision to leave Albania yet, at the same time, expressed unease and sadness that the best of Albania's young doctors are lost to the country.

The obstacles to return are more or less the same factors that drive the emigration. Low salaries in Albania are, of course, important but equally, if not more so, are working conditions, prospects for career development and the overall social and political environment in Albania. If there is one phrase that encapsulates both the decision to leave and the reluctance to return, it is that 'there is no future in Albania'. These factors are not unique to doctors but have been found to be equally relevant in surveys we have carried out on the Albanian population as a whole (King and Gëdeshi 2020) and of specific segments of the population such as the 'scientific diaspora' of PhD-holders (Gëdeshi and King 2021) and university students (King and Gëdeshi 2023).

Moving from the 'knowledge production' of our key findings summarised above to 'knowledge utilisation' leads us into what has been called the 'research–policy nexus' in migration studies (Scholten 2018). We identify three fundamental policy questions. How can the emigration of young doctors be staunched? How can those abroad be encouraged to return? Finally, given that many doctors will not return, how can the 'diaspora of doctors' be mobilised to help develop the Albanian health system in other ways? Many helpful insights are given by the survey respondents and interviewees. Here, we summarise and put structure to these suggestions and answers.

First and foremost, the Albanian health system needs major reform and increased resourcing so that doctors are offered not just a satisfactory income but also, more importantly, good working conditions and continuous professional advancement in an environment that is secure and better-equipped. Albania should aim at EU levels of investment in its health services in terms of the share of GDP – at least 8 per cent, a more than doubling of its present share. How to boost this spending level raises the old question of 'taxing the brain drain' (Bhagwati 1976). A tax on immigrant earnings in more-developed countries to compensate for the highly skilled emigrants' education in their less-developed countries of origin could be considered as an act of international redistributive justice. Such a proposal is administratively challenging and can fall prey to tax evasion. Furthermore, there is the task of ensuring that such repatriated tax revenue is productively used to improve Albania's health training and delivery systems.

Second, one way to boost the supply of doctors would be to increase the number of medical students by expanding quotas and opening up new faculties of medicine. Cooperation could be sought from established medical schools in Europe to advise on curriculum planning and resources, supported by staff and student exchanges and internships. The obvious danger of this policy – that the extra supply of doctors would only lead to more brain drain – would need to be countered by other policies. One of these relates to a new law approved by the Albanian parliament in September 2024 which requires medical graduates trained in Albania to remain in the country for at least 3 years. However, the likely outcome of this regulation will be to push more Albanian medical students to pursue their studies abroad.

Third, both within the medical sector and in the broader realm of Albanian society and governance, there needs to be created a more transparent, meritocratic ethos, free of corruption, nepotism and a culture of bribery and favours. The health system should be immune to political influence or the interference of other power brokers.

Fourth, given the evidence presented in the online survey and the interviews that the current diaspora of doctors abroad has a low likelihood of returning but is more open to various forms of collaboration, plans should be put in place to manage cooperative efforts, including joint projects and research, training visits and exchanges, lectures and consultancies. Such cooperation can be supported by new and advanced technologies of online communication. Within this framework of diaspora mobilisation, there should be a strategy of replacing long-term emigration by circular mobility. This would boost the skills and qualifications of Albanian doctors and bring new ideas and operating systems into the Albanian health sector.

Finally, it would be useful to establish a database of Albanian doctors abroad in order to facilitate cooperation and to attract the return, on a short or longer term, of expertise in needed specialised fields.

Notes

1. These survey results are consistent with findings from the Regional Cooperation Council's annual *Balkan Barometer* reports. According to the 2023 Barometer survey, 44 per cent of the surveyed population of the 6 countries of the Western Balkans 'would consider living and working abroad', as would 71 per cent of youth aged 18–24. For the aggregate population surveyed, the figure for Albania (49 per cent) is significantly higher than the regional average. These figures indicate ongoing increases in intentions to migrate since King and Gëdeshi's 2018 survey (2020), although attention should be paid to the wording of the key question, which can influence response rates.
2. We think that the Albanian figure of 188 might be artificially inflated, since previous years' figures were consistently lower – in the 120s – and there was no marked increase in the training of doctors in medical schools nor increased investment in the health sector to warrant a jump to 188 in 2020.
3. This paper is based on and reproduces some sections from an informally published working paper (see Gëdeshi, King and Ceka 2023).
4. We use the term 'diaspora' in its descriptive sense of meaning a 'scattering' rather than alluding to its historical origin as a process born out of trauma and exile.
5. The survey was administered from Albania where there is no formal procedure for ethical approval for this kind of research. Nevertheless, for both the online survey and the follow-up interviews, we adhered to standard ethical procedures of the anonymity of participants and their right to withdraw at any time and general principles of 'no harm' to anyone involved.
6. Possible sources of bias between respondents and non-respondents include differences in age, gender, specialisation, country of qualification and country of residence and work.
7. Data from http://data-explorer.oecd.org/.
8. Some of the associations are larger and their membership extends to ethnic Albanians from other Western Balkan countries. As an example, the League of Albanian Doctors in Switzerland has around 400 members from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro (see https://www.swissalbned.ch/). The goal of the association is to help Albanian doctors' integration in the host country, to exchange medical information and expertise through conferences, workshops and online platforms and to collaborate with the healthcare sectors in the doctors' home countries.

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Outsiders not Worth Trusting? Accounting for Concerns over Immigration in Central and Eastern Europe

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This study uses European Values Study 2017 data to identify key correlates of economic and cultural concerns over immigration in Central and Eastern Europe against the backdrop of the 2015 refugee crisis. It does so by running fixed-effects regression models covering 10 CEE countries and testing the associations between core cultural identities and basic values on the one hand and concerns over immigration on the other. It was found that low trust in people of another nationality and – to a lesser degree – low generalised social trust were associated with both economic and cultural concerns over immigration in CEE. Also, CEE residents subscribing to both voluntarist and ascriptive nationhood criteria were more likely to be concerned about economic and cultural aspects of immigration than those having a purely voluntarist conception of nationhood. It was also found that the association between national pride and economic concerns over immigration is stronger in Visegrád countries. Meanwhile, the study did not generate evidence that immigration attitudes in CEE were related to the strength of national identification, religious affiliation, cosmopolitan identity, Universalism or perceived state vulnerability. The article maintains that immigration attitudes in CEE are deeply embedded in societal value systems that are, in turn, shaped by distinctive historical legacies.

Keywords: immigration attitudes, Central and Eastern Europe, national identity, social trust

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> *The truth is that they* [migrants] *don't respect* our *culture, they don't respect* our *laws, and they don't respect* our *way of life; instead they make room for their own way of life, then suppress* ours, *and finally supplant* ours *with theirs. The issue of migrants is therefore an issue of* identity *as well as sovereignty* (Viktor Orbán, 27 June 2017).

Introduction

When migration seems to be on everybody's lips in most of Europe, it is easy to forget that immigration – both as an actual reality and 'a looming prospect' – is experienced differently in the various national contexts. This was particularly evident in the heat of the 2015 refugee crisis which ended up pitting a largely (although not uniformly) solidarity-oriented Old Europe versus strongly anti-immigration countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).[1] Paradoxically, the crisis served to strengthen anti-immigration dispositions in CEE more than it did in the West, despite the fact that CEE countries did not see a substantial rise in their refugee populations (Bell, Valenta and Strabac 2021; Lancaster 2022; Peshkopia, Bllaca and Lika 2022; van der Brug and Harteveld 2021). While it is very tempting to look for universal Europe-wide explanations of immigration attitudes, such attempts are likely to tell only part of the story, as identical variables may acquire different meanings depending on the national context (Chang 2019; Esses, Wagner, Wolf, Preiser and Wilbur 2006).

While public opinion on immigration attracted considerable scholarly interest (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014), only a fraction of existing research on the determinants of immigration attitudes focuses on the CEE region. Nevertheless, CEE presents an interesting case of high opposition to immigration in the absence of large immigration flows. This is in contrast with Western and Northern European countries which hosted substantial immigrant populations in previous decades. One of the sources of this paradox may be that, since the beginning of the post-communist period, CEE countries share 'a desire to build an ethnically and culturally homogeneous society with a distinct national identity based on an ethno-cultural core nation' (Gorodzeisky 2023: 656). If immigration numbers in Old Europe are high enough for immigration attitudes to be shaped by real (although subjective) experiences – either personal interactions with immigrants or perceived impacts of immigration on the country – immigration in CEE remains, by and large, a potential or future issue. In such a context, immigration views are expected to be shaped by collective identity attributes as well as core value orientations.

While, in many CEE countries, immigration is often construed as a future eventuality, it has become increasingly important in recent years. Even before hosting unprecedented numbers of refugees fleeing war in Ukraine in 2022, some CEE countries saw the figures of economically driven immigration rise (Duszczyk and Matuszczyk 2018). Moreover, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have been facing a challenge of coercive engineered migration (Greenhill 2010) from Belarus since 2021. All this shows that the issue of immigration is becoming more and more relevant in the CEE region and is likely to become even more important due to the demographic challenges which these countries will be facing in future years. It is therefore very important to know which factors are driving immigration attitudes in the region, not least because these views are likely to play an increasingly important role in shaping people's political choices. Moreover, insights into the determinants of immigration attitudes could feed into immigrant admission and integration policy approaches, helping CEE countries to accommodate migration in a harmonious way.

This article aims to answer the following research question: why are some CEE residents more concerned with immigration than others? Seeking to shed more light on the key drivers of immigration concerns in the CEE region, the study encompasses 10 countries that joined the European Union (EU) in the last two decades – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.[2] It employs the 2017 European Values Study (EVS) data to run fixed-effects linear and logistic regression models,

focusing on outcome measures capturing economic and cultural concerns over immigration. The study tests a range of hypotheses on the relationship between CEE residents' collective identities and value orientations on the one hand and immigration concerns on the other. Given that EVS 2017 fieldwork took place in 2017 and 2018, the article offers an explanation of CEE residents' immigration views against the backdrop of the 2015 refugee crisis. By focusing on the correlates of immigration concerns in CEE and offering a region-specific interpretation of the findings, the paper offers an attempt to bring more understanding into the complex relationship of the CEE region with immigration. While the statistical approach adopted here means that the comparative analysis of immigration concerns in CEE and Old Europe is not pursued, the findings of this research may provide an impetus for this kind of study by engendering hypotheses on how the correlates of immigration concerns may differ in two parts of the continent as well as the contextual factors that may explain these differences.

The findings of the study suggest that key individual predictors of immigration concerns in CEE are the level of social trust and the content of national identity. A low level of trust in people of another nationality is associated with high concerns over immigration. Similarly, opposition to immigration in CEE was also found to be related to low levels of general interpersonal trust. Meanwhile, those CEE residents who defined national membership using both ascriptive (ancestry, being born in a country) and voluntarist (respecting a country's political institutions and laws, speaking a country's main language) criteria were more likely to be concerned about immigration than people defining their national identity in solely voluntarist terms. Social trust and the content of national identity were shown to be important for shaping both economic and cultural concerns over immigration. The study also found that the relationship between strong national pride and high concerns over immigration was strong only in the Visegrád Four – countries in which the issue of immigration had been made the object of political mobilisation to a higher degree than in most other countries in the region. Additionally, the study found that stronger attachment to Europe and less-frequent church attendance were correlated with an optimistic view of immigration's economic impacts. Finally, the study did not find evidence that strong national attachment fostered anti-immigrant sentiments in CEE.

Low social trust and a high prevalence of ethnicised understandings of nationhood are important characteristics of CEE societies, both of them deeply rooted in historical processes and experiences – primarily those related to state and nation formation as well as the communist period. The article therefore shows that immigration attitudes are deeply embedded in societal value systems that are, in turn, shaped by distinctive historical legacies. In so doing, it reflects on what these value systems and legacies imply for the development of immigration attitudes in the future. I maintain that, for immigration attitudes to change in CEE, historical imprints on prevailing value systems need to be acknowledged and counterbalanced by alternative – and potentially more inclusive – narratives around national identity as well as a person's relationship with others. The paper also suggests that building a healthy state with strong national attachments is not incompatible with a pro-immigrant ethos. Finally, the study emphasises the role of the high political salience of immigration in activating the negative effect of patriotism on immigration attitudes.

Literature review and hypotheses

Multiple quantitative studies have shown that so-called 'sociotropic' explanations of immigration attitudes – focusing on the perceived economic and cultural impact of immigration on the whole country – carry more weight than those focusing on an individual's self-interest. Moreover, the finding that anti-immigrant attitudes are primarily driven by concerns over the cultural impact of immigration as well as its supposed threat to national distinctiveness has repeatedly emerged (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014: 225). However, these findings were mainly informed by studies focusing on immigration attitudes in North America and Western

Europe. Meanwhile, two recent studies on immigration attitudes in CEE suggest that economic concerns may be as important as cultural fears in shaping people's immigration attitudes in the region (Duman 2022; Thérová 2023). Duman (2022) found that economic fears were 'vastly crucial in shaping the public attitudes against migrants and refugees across CEE countries' (2022: 112) and that all countries in the region saw large increases in welfare nationalism after the refugee crisis.

As outlined above, economic or cultural concerns over immigration are often conceptualised as potential predictors or mediators of immigration attitudes (Heath, Davidov, Ford, Green, Ramos and Schmidt 2020). However, this study seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature that treats concerns over immigration or perceptions of immigrant threat as an outcome variable (Bandelj and Gibson 2020; Meuleman, Abts, Schmidt, Pettigrew and Davidov 2020). Importantly, the determinants affecting concerns over immigration may differ depending on how these concerns are framed. In a study focusing on 16 Eastern European countries, Bandelj and Gibson (2020) found that a respondent's economic status was statistically significantly linked to concerns over immigration only when immigration was framed as an economic (as opposed to cultural) problem. Both cultural and economic concerns about immigration may be closely linked to social identities (Tajfel and Turner 1979) as well as basic value orientations (Duman 2022: 112–113). This article seeks to identify which identities and values matter the most and under what conditions.

A significant number of studies analysed how immigration attitudes were informed by various aspects of national identity, including patriotism or national pride, nationalism, the intensity of national self-identification and the content of national identity. A traditional distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism[3] was commonly invoked with respect to the latter aspect, with ethnic construal of national identity repeatedly emerging as an important determinant of anti-immigrant attitudes (Byrne 2011; Lindstam, Mader and Schoen 2021; Wright 2011). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that neither civic nor ethnic national identity were relevant for explaining immigration attitudes in Asian countries (Jeong 2016). Therefore, the overwhelming evidence confirming the relevance of ethnic/civic distinction might well be related to the presence of geographical bias in immigration research.

Some studies have looked into the interaction effect between ethnic and civic national identities. According to Byrne and Dixon (2013), civic nationalism can also lead to hostility towards immigrants. In particular, higher support for the civic understanding of nationhood is associated with stronger anti-immigrant attitudes for people who have little affinity for ethnic concepts of national identity (Byrne and Dixon 2013: 106). Moreover, a number of authors have suggested that the ethnic and civic dimensions of nationalism should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, as people can adopt both conceptions of nationhood simultaneously (Hjerm 1998; Janmaat 2006; Reeskens and Hooghe 2010). It was also suggested that, in European countries, the key distinction was between those who perceived their nation as a merely cultural and civic entity (a 'thin' conception of nationhood held by voluntarist nationalists) and those who believed that ascriptive national membership criteria – ancestry and birthplace – were also important (a 'thick' conception of national identity espoused by multiple nationalists[4]) (Bartasevičius 2023). However, it was shown that the latter conception brings a certain degree of ambivalence to people's stances on immigration (Lindstam, Mader and Schoen 2021). There is therefore a need to check the extent to which a 'thick' conception of nationhood is associated with anti-immigrant views. CEE countries provide a good context for testing this relationship as they have more multiple nationalists on average than Western or Northern European countries (Bartasevičius 2023).

H1: In CEE, espousing both ascriptive and voluntarist nationhood criteria simultaneously is associated with negative views towards immigration.

The intensity of national identification can be understood as the extent to which a person feels attached to their country. Having reviewed existing survey evidence on the relationship between national identification and anti-immigrant sentiment, Pehrson and Green (2010: 699) suggested that there was no clear positive relationship between the two. Meanwhile, the findings of their own study showed that 'national identification was significantly associated with negative feelings toward asylum-seekers only among individuals who endorse an ethnic definition of the English national group' (Pehrson and Green 2010: 700). Nevertheless, a cross-national EU-wide study by Curtis (2014) concluded that greater national identification was matched by less-inclusive views towards immigrants. While there is, therefore, some ambiguity regarding the relationship between national identification and immigration views, nationalism (expressed as the perceived superiority of one's nation *vis-à-vis* the others) was consistently found to predict more-negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Esses, Sutter, Bouchard, Choi and Denice 2021; Jeong 2013). Finally, like national identification, patriotism was found to have uneven effects on immigration attitudes in different studies, with strong national pride at times predicting more negative attitudes, more positive attitudes or having no effect (Esses *et al.* 2021). While Jeong (2013) concluded that national pride led to pro-immigrant sentiment in the US, a study looking at a broader set of countries found that pride in one's country was associated with anti-immigrant views in every country included in the analysis except Portugal, Canada and New Zealand (Citrin 2013).

H2: In CEE, strong national identification is associated with negative views towards immigration.

H3: In CEE, strong national pride is associated with negative views towards immigration.

In addition to testing the hypotheses, the study will assess whether or not the relevance of key national identity variables depends on country-level characteristics. Based on previous literature, it is reasonable to expect that the role that patriotism plays in shaping immigration attitudes will be contingent on how prevalent alternative conceptions of nationhood are in a country (Esses *et al.* 2006). If strong national pride is expressed in a country characterised by the high popularity of a 'thick' conception of nationhood, patriotism can be expected to be associated with anti-immigrant sentiment. Another potentially important country-level characteristic is the level of a country's ethnic homogeneity. In a recent study on public attitudes towards asylum-seekers in CEE, Gorodzeisky (2023) found support for the hypothesis that citizens from ethnically homogenous countries adopt less-exclusionary attitudes toward asylum-seekers than citizens from countries characterised by a lower and less-stable share of the ethnic majority. However, there is also evidence suggesting that anti-prejudice norms may be more characteristic of ethnically heterogeneous countries (Igarashi and Nagayoshi 2022). Citizens of an ethnically homogeneous country may be more likely to report anti-immigrant attitudes because – in this ethnodemographic context – it may actually be normative to hold such views (Igarashi and Nagayoshi 2022: 1). If this is indeed the case, one would expect people expressing strong national identification and pride with their ethnically homogeneous country or those espousing a 'thick' conception of nationhood to hold more-negative views of immigrants than those who do not have strong emotional attachment to their country or who reject ascriptive nationhood criteria. Also, no such relationship should be found in ethnically heterogeneous countries. Finally, the relationship between national identity variables and concerns over immigration in Visegrád countries may differ from that observed in other CEE countries. This is because the political mobilisation over the immigration issue in response to the 2015 refugee crisis was strongest in the Visegrád Four.

Another individual-level factor that could play a role in explaining anti-immigrant attitudes in CEE is the strength of European identity. Interestingly, the kind of effect which (positive or negative) attachment to Europe may have depends largely on how this supranational identity is perceived. There are at least two broad

forms of European identity. The first emphasises the crucial role of Christian legacy and treats Europe as primarily a cultural community. This way of defining European identity – sometimes called 'European nationalism' – is built on the idea of a 'primordial European identity' (Risse 2015, cited in Lancaster 2022: 551) rooted in common cultural history and is therefore expected to correlate with negative attitudes toward non-European immigrants. However, strong European identity can also be seen as an expression of approval for civic principles defended by the EU, including democracy, tolerance, non-discrimination and human rights. In congruence with this view, Curtis (2014) found that those who feel European hold more favourable views toward immigrants. If European identity is related to pro-immigrant views, cosmopolitan identity (feeling attached to the world) can be expected to have a similar effect (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya and Jackson 2005).

H4: In CEE, having a strong European identity is associated with positive views towards immigration.

H5: In CEE, having a strong cosmopolitan identity is associated with positive views towards immigration.

Like attachment to Europe, religious identity is a multilayered concept which can relate to immigration attitudes in different ways. Analysing the relationship between religious identity and attitudes towards immigration in Western Europe, Storm (2011: 219) found that Christian identification was often perceived 'as a cultural identity label with little religious content, and frequently conflated with national, ethnic, local or family identities'. The author's analysis suggested that Christian affiliation (regarding oneself as belonging to the Christian religion) was associated with anti-immigrant attitudes (2011: 206). In a study focusing on immigration attitudes in Poland, Thérová (2023) found that religiosity had become one of the strongest predictors of anti-immigrant attitudes after the 2015 refugee crisis (2023: 398). However, the same study by Storm (2011) concluded that 'regular church attendance' was 'associated with positive attitudes to immigration' (2011: 206). Since regular churchgoers may have 'greater concern with and exposure to civic moral values, actively religious people express more tolerant attitudes to other people in general' (Storm 2011: 206), including immigrants. Recent analysis by Gu, Zhang and Zhiwen (2022) confirmed that membership in religious organisations and church attendance decreased hostility towards immigrants.

H6: In CEE, regarding oneself as belonging to the Christian religion is associated with negative attitudes towards immigration.

H7: In CEE, frequent church attendance is associated with positive attitudes towards immigration.

Along with various types of collective identity variables, social-psychological factors and basic human values can also be expected to affect people's immigration attitudes. Two of these have been repeatedly invoked in previous studies on the determinants of immigration views – interpersonal (social) trust and Universalism. Focusing on Western and Northern European countries, Sides and Citrin (2007: 493) found that higher levels of social trust tended 'to produce attitudes that are less anti-immigrant'. While there are more studies echoing these findings (e.g. Ekici and Yucel 2015; Herreros and Criado 2009; Mitchell 2021), Thérová's analysis of the Polish data did not identify any significant link between social trust and opinions on immigration (2023: 398). This negative finding provides additional incentive to explore the relationship between interpersonal trust and immigration attitudes in a smaller set of CEE countries. Meanwhile, Universalism, operationalised as 'understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature', has been shown to correlate with pro-immigrant attitudes in some CEE countries (Cichocki and Jabkowski 2019: 40; Thérová 2023: 398).

H8: In CEE, low interpersonal trust is associated with negative attitudes towards immigration.

H9: In CEE, support for Universalist values is associated with positive attitudes towards immigration.

Finally, previous research suggested that immigration attitudes could be related to perceived collective (state) vulnerability. Having conducted the analysis on immigration attitudes in Russia, Gorodzeisky (2019) demonstrated that perceived state/collective vulnerability in areas such as the economy, government functioning, the education system and health services 'tends to notably increase anti-immigrant attitudes among ethnic Russians' (2019: 208). In Gorodzeisky's study, perceived vulnerability was assessed by measuring how satisfied people were with the current situation in each area indicated above. In CEE countries, it is likely that so-called 'losers' of the post-communist transformation (see e.g. Barowiec 2023) will perceive their state as being in a poor condition and vulnerable to a higher degree than those who supposedly benefited from democratisation and the market economy. It is therefore possible that diverging assessments of the country's post-communist developments relate to immigration attitudes.

H10: In CEE, high perceived collective (state) vulnerability is associated with negative attitudes towards immigration.

Data and method

The analysis presented in this article was carried out using EVS 2017 data.[5] The dataset contains all the variables required for testing the hypotheses identified above in the 10 CEE countries included in the present study. Most importantly, the dataset includes data on the content of national identity – an aspect of national identification not captured by many other European-wide surveys. Since previous studies pointed to the centrality of both economic and cultural concerns in shaping CEE residents' immigration views, this study ran statistical models on two different outcome variables – one of them reflecting economic fears and the other measuring cultural concerns. The first outcome variable measured respondents' agreement with the statement that *Immigrants take jobs away from [NATIONALITY]* on a scale from 1 (strong agreement) to 10 (strong disagreement), capturing realistic threats as posited by integration threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 1993). The second outcome variable measured whether respondents indicated immigrants/foreign workers among groups of people that they would not like to have as neighbours, relating to a fear of the cultural 'other'. This survey item has been used for measuring cultural prejudice and xenophobia in multiple studies (see e.g. Arts and Halman 2006; Chacha and Kobayashi 2018; Strabac and Listhaug 2008). While the first outcome measure may be seen as referring to immigrants who are already in the country, it also captures people's concerns over the economic consequences of future larger-scale immigration. This is particularly likely in countries with relatively low numbers of foreigners.

As core identities and values tend to form early in a person's life and are considered to be rather stable, one can be reasonably confident that it is these identities and values that shape CEE residents' views on a relatively new issue of immigration and not the other way around. This is essential, as many quantitative studies of immigration attitudes struggled with the issue of endogeneity and were unable to convincingly show that immigration attitudes were indeed the result and not the cause of explanatory variables (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014: 243). Only those variables that measure core identities and values were therefore used when testing hypotheses of this study. All independent variables that were included in statistical models to test the hypotheses of this study are listed in the table below.

Table 1. Main independent variables used in the study

Possible determinants of immigration concerns	EVS 2017 question	Response options
Content of national identity (H1)	Some people say the following things are important for being truly [NATIONALITY]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is? • To have been born in [COUNTRY] • To respect [COUNTRY]'s political institutions and laws • To have [COUNTRY]'s ancestry • To be able to speak [THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE]	Very important/Quite important/Not important/Not at all important (coded from 1 to 4)
National identification (H2)	Would you tell me how close do you feel to your country?	Very close/Close/Not very close/Not close at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Patriotism (H3)	How proud are you to be a [COUNTRY] citizen?	Very proud/Quite proud/Not very proud/ Not at all proud (coded from 1 to 4)
European identity (H4)	People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how close do you feel to…? [CONTINENT; e.g. Europe]	Very close/Close/Not very close/Not close at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Cosmopolitan identity (H5)	People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how close do you feel to…? World	Very close/Close/Not very close/Not close at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Belonging to the Christian religion (H6)	What is your religious denomination?	Do not belong to a denomination/Roman Catholic/Protestant/Orthodox (Russian/ Greek/etc.)/Jew/Muslim/Hindu/ Buddhist/Other Christian (Evangelical/Pentecostal/Free church/etc.)/Other (coded from 0 to 9)
Church attendance (H7)	Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?	More than once a week/Once a week/Once a month/Only on specific holy days/Other specific holy days/Once a year/Less often/ Never, practically never (coded from 1 to 8)

Table 1. Main independent variables used in the study (cont.)

Interpersonal trust (H8)	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	Most people can be trusted/Can't be too careful (coded as 1 and 2 respectively)
Trust in people of another nationality (H8)	Could you tell me whether you trust people from another nationality?	Trust completely/Trust somewhat/Do not trust very much/Do not trust at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Trust in people of another religion (H8)	Could you tell me whether you trust people from another religion?	Trust completely/Trust somewhat/Do not trust very much/Do not trust at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Universalism (H9)	To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of all humans all over the world?	Very much/Much/To a certain extent/Not so much/Not at all (coded from 1 to 4)
Collective/state vulnerability (H10)	Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them: • The education system • The health care system • The government	A great deal/Quite a lot/Not very much/None at all (coded from 1 to 4)

Notes: prepared by the author using EVS variable report, available at: https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/evs-trend-file-1981-2017/data-and-documentation-evs-trend-file/

This study drew on existing research to determine the content of the national identity definitions of EVS 2017 respondents. Using latent class analysis, Bartasevičius (2023) identified two broad groupings of EVS 2017 respondents according to their understandings of nationhood: voluntarist and multiple nationalists. The first group of respondents was characterised by their dismissal of the ascriptive criteria of national membership (ancestry, being born in a country) in favour of voluntarist attributes of national identity. In contrast, multiple nationalists simultaneously approved of ascriptive and voluntarist national membership criteria. A binary variable representing the content of national identity was therefore used in regression models (1 – multiple nationalist; 0 – voluntarist nationalist).

A composite measure of perceived state vulnerability was used, derived by adding reported levels of confidence in the education system, the health care system and the government. High scores on this index indicated high perceived collective vulnerability. The vulnerability measure employed in this paper is, nevertheless, different from the original index used by Gorodzeisky (2019). First, while Gorodzeisky used level of dissatisfaction with each aspect of state functioning to construct a perceived state vulnerability index, the present study relied on confidence measures. Second, while, in Gorodzeisky's study, responses to each dissatisfaction item ranged on an 11-point scale, a 4-point scale was used to assess respondents' confidence levels in this analysis. Third, as EVS 2017 did not contain a suitable measure capturing CEE residents' (dis)satisfaction with the state of the economy, this item was not part of the present study. These measurement aspects may have had an effect on the results. The EVS 2017 variable on religious affiliation was recoded to binary to test the effect of Christian belonging. Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Other Christian (Evangelical/Pentecostal/Free Church/etc.) respondents were coded as 1; all others as 0.

Six socio-demographic covariates were included in statistical models: sex (1=male; 2=female), educational level, age, size of town, unemployment status and occupation type. Respondents' educational level was measured using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), varying from less than primary to doctoral or equivalent. Five town-size categories were used according to the number of residents: under 5,000, 5,000–20,000, 20,000–100,000, 100,000–500,000 and 500,000+. Dummy variables were used for unemployment status (1=unemployed; 0=all others) and occupation type (1=having an occupation belonging to major groups 6–9 of the International Standard Classification of Occupations – the so-called 'blue-collar' professions (Elias 1997); 0=all others). It was also presumed that the extent to which someone sees immigrants as economic competitors of the local population can be strongly influenced by their personal views towards competition, income equality and the centrality of economic growth. Therefore, the following survey items were used as covariates when modelling economic concerns: How would you place your views on this scale? Competition is good–Competition is harmful (10-point scale), Incomes should be made more equal–There should be greater incentives for individual effort (10-point scale). A dummy variable was also employed for assessing the perceived importance of economic growth and creating jobs in relation to environmental protection (1=believing that economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent; 0=all others).[6]

Finally, to test the interaction effect between national pride and the prevalence of nationhood conceptions, previous findings on the percentage of voluntarist nationalists in each CEE country were employed (Bartasevičius 2023: 946). Census data were used for measuring CEE countries' ethnic homogeneity. A percentage of non-ethnics (people who do not belong to a 'titular' majority) among all those who declared their ethnicity was estimated for each country (the data are provided in Appendix A).

The analysis presented in this article is based on fixed-effects regression models. Using country fixed effects allows the researcher to control for country-level heterogeneity and test whether the effects of individual-level predictors are present in the whole CEE region (Möhring 2012). Linear regression models were run with the 'Immigrants take jobs away from [NATIONALITY]' variable and binary logistic regression was employed for the second outcome measure ('not wanting to have immigrants/foreign workers as neighbours'). In addition to the effects of individual-level predictors, cross-level interaction effects were estimated to check whether the effects of national identity variables were moderated by country-level characteristics. Separate regression models with a single cross-level interaction term were run to check for each of the possible cross-level interaction effects outlined above. The study also tested for any interaction effects between those key individual-level predictors (see Table 1) which had been shown to have a statistically significant relationship with the outcome in the model with main effects only. A model containing all statistically significant interaction terms is reported.[7] To account for the arbitrary correlation of the errors within clusters (countries), clustered standard errors were used (Davis and Deole 2015; Espinosa, Guerra, Sanatkar, Paolini, Damigella, Licciardello and Gaertner 2018; Lancaster 2022). Analysis was run using the Fixest package in R (Bergé 2018). As this study is concerned with the immigration attitudes of native residents, first-generation migrants were excluded from the analysis. Respondents with missing data on any of the included predictor or outcome variables were also excluded.[8]

Results

Main analysis

The main output of the regression models is presented in the tables below. Four models are reported for the first outcome measure (assessment of whether immigrants take jobs away from natives) and three for the second (indicating/not indicating that they would not like to have immigrants/foreign workers as neighbours). For both outcome measures, Model 1 includes only key predictors used for hypothesis testing (see Table 1). Model 2 additionally includes control variables and is therefore the main model, while Model 3 produces standardised regression coefficients. Model 4 reports statistically significant interaction effects as identified in this analysis. It is only reported for the first outcome as no statistically significant interaction terms were identified for the second one.

Table 2. Fixed-effects OLS regression models with the following outcome measure: assessment of whether immigrants take jobs away from natives

	Model 1	**Model 2**	Model 3	Model 4
Content of national identity	–0.797***	–0.612***	–0.079***	–1.133***
	(0.095)	(0.113)	(0.015)	(0.205)
Strength of national pride	0.002	0.053	0.012	0.144
	(0.102)	(0.100)	(0.024)	(0.165)
Strength of national identification	0.134	0.104	0.022	0.096
	(0.106)	(0.122)	(0.025)	(0.124)
Strength of European identification	–0.414***	–0.340**	–0.086***	–0.333**
	(0.086)	(0.091)	(0.023)	(0.090)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	0.036	0.021	0.006	0.014
	(0.079)	(0.092)	(0.025)	(0.092)
Belonging to Christian denomination	0.095	0.098	0.015	0.123
	(0.165)	(0.163)	(0.025)	(0.161)
Frequency of church attendance	0.070*	0.085**	0.066**	0.085**
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.022)
Interpersonal trust	–0.389*	–0.298*	–0.041*	–0.841**
	(0.126)	(0.131)	(0.018)	(0.241)
Trust in people of another religion	–0.084	–0.100	–0.025	–0.093
	(0.078)	(0.086)	(0.022)	(0.083)
Trust in people of another nationality	–0.594***	–0.462***	–0.117***	–0.469***
	(0.083)	(0.088)	(0.022)	(0.090)
Feeling concerned about humankind	–0.042	0.005	0.002	–0.000
	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.021)	(0.067)
Perceived state vulnerability	0.038	0.013	0.008	0.008
	(0.061)	(0.064)	(0.039)	(0.062)
Sex	–	0.042	0.007	0.045
		(0.098)	(0.016)	(0.093)
Education level	–	0.120***	0.067***	0.116***
		(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.023)
Age	–	0.005	0.030	0.005
		(0.004)	(0.024)	(0.004)
Size of town	–	0.072	0.032	0.073
		(0.042)	(0.018)	(0.042)
Unemployment status	–	0.134	0.010	0.126
		(0.134)	(0.010)	(0.139)

Table 2. Fixed-effects OLS regression models with the following outcome measure: assessment of whether immigrants take jobs away from natives (cont.)

Occupation type	–	–0.163	–0.026	–0.148
		(0.090)	(0.014)	(0.087)
Level of support for competition	–	–0.082**	–0.062**	–0.080**
		(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.023)
Level of support for income equality	–	0.120***	0.116***	0.120***
		(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Prioritising economic growth and jobs vs environment	–	–0.387***	–0.061***	–0.369***
		(0.069)	(0.011)	(0.065)
National pride x percentage of non-ethnics in a country	–	–	–	–0.021*
				(0.009)
National pride x living in a Visegrád country	–	–	–	0.402*
				(0.139)
Interpersonal trust x content of national identity	–	–	–	0.709*
				(0.267)
N	10,065	8,167	8,167	8,167
R^2	0.114	0.150	0.150	0.156
Within R^2	0.067	0.100	0.100	0.106

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with clustered standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Table 3. Fixed-effects logistic regression models with the following outcome measure: would not like to have as neighbours – immigrants/foreign workers (mentioned/not mentioned)

	Model 1	**Model 2**	Model 3
Content of national identity	0.071**	0.062**	0.025**
	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.007)
Strength of national pride	–0.005	–0.003	–0.002
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.006)
Strength of national identification	–0.006	–0.005	–0.003
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)
Strength of European identification	0.023*	0.017	0.014
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.007)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	0.018	0.021	0.018
	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.012)
Belonging to Christian denomination	–0.006	–0.012	–0.006
	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.012)
Frequency of church attendance	–0.004	–0.005	–0.012
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.009)
Interpersonal trust	0.074*	0.066*	0.028*
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.012)
Trust in people of another religion	0.026	0.037	0.029
	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.015)
Trust in people of another nationality	0.064**	0.055**	0.043**
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.011)
Feeling concerned about humankind	–0.003	–0.004	–0.004
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Perceived state vulnerability	–0.007	0.004	–0.008
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.016)

Table 3. Fixed-effects logistic regression models with the following outcome measure: would not like to have as neighbours – immigrants/foreign workers (mentioned/not mentioned) (cont.)

Sex	–	–0.006	–0.003
		(0.011)	(0.005)
Education level	–	–0.009	–0.015
		(0.004)	(0.007)
Age	–	0.001*	0.020
		(0.000)	(0.008)
Size of town	–	–0.014	–0.020
		(0.008)	(0.011)
Unemployment status	–	–0.032	–0.007
		(0.021)	(0.005)
Occupation type	–	–0.001	–0.000
		(0.016)	(0.008)
N	9,820	8,576	8,576
Likelihood ratio test (χ^2)	1,312.0***	1,283.5***	1,283.5***
McFadden's R^2	0.096	0.107	0.107
Within McFadden's R^2	0.033	0.040	0.040

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with clustered standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Based on the regression models, only one of the three national identity variables had a statistically significant relationship with immigration attitudes in CEE. In accordance with theoretical expectations, espousing both voluntarist and ascriptive nationhood criteria was shown to be positively associated with economic (–0.612, p=0.000) and cultural (0.062, p=0.004) concerns about immigration, providing strong support for H1. The findings suggest that subjective definitions of who is to be included in or excluded from the national community play a more important role in shaping CEE residents' immigration attitudes than the affective dimension of national identity. In fact, the present study provides no evidence that strong emotional attachment to one's country (0.104, p=0.413; –0.005, p=0.526)[9] or national pride (0.053, p=0.610; –0.003, p=0.735) engender anti-immigrant views. Therefore, H2 and H3 were not supported. Nor was the effect of national pride on immigration views moderated by the prevalence of the voluntarist conception of nationhood in a country. More generally, the findings suggest that there is nothing incompatible between a strong national consciousness and a pro-immigrant disposition in CEE. At least in principle, countries in the region could invest in both strengthening the cohesiveness of their national communities and ensuring a wider acceptance of immigrants.

However, the analysis of interaction effects revealed that national pride has a stronger positive association with economic concerns about immigration in ethnically homogenous (–0.021, p=0.049) and Visegrád countries (0.402, p=0.018). While these findings require further development, one could tentatively hypothesise that, in relatively ethnically homogeneous CEE countries, 'uniform' ethnic composition acts as one of the sources of national pride. Meanwhile, a significant interaction term between national pride and living in a Visegrád country may suggest that the relationship between national pride and immigration views becomes more relevant under the conditions of intense political mobilisation over immigration. To the extent that the political mobilisation around the immigration issue after the 2015 refugee crisis was strongest in Visegrád countries, the present study provides some support for Lancaster's (2022) observation that the politicisation of migration leads to the increased relevance of pre-existing sociocultural attitudes for the formation of immigration attitudes (Lancaster 2022: 560).

In models focusing on economic and cultural concerns over immigration, feeling close to Europe was shown to be associated with positive views on immigration in CEE (–0.340, p=0.005 and 0.017, p=0.091 respectively). As the p value of the regression coefficient in the second model was slightly over the accepted threshold of 0.05, H4 is only partially confirmed. Meanwhile, H5 is not supported as cosmopolitan identity did not have a statistically significant relationship with immigration attitudes in CEE (0.021; p=0.824; 0.021, p=0.181). The finding that feeling close to the world is not associated with pro-immigration views in CEE is puzzling and leads one to look more closely into the mechanism linking European identity and immigration attitudes. If European identity consisted of nothing more than a set of abstract civic values defended by the EU (e.g. individual rights, tolerance, non-discrimination etc.), it is not clear why cosmopolitan identity – which can be viewed as a broader and fuller embodiment of the same inclusive values – does not seem to engender pro-immigration views. The relevance of European identity for immigration attitudes in CEE could, therefore, be explained by the specific stances taken by Germany and the EU on the management of the 2015 refugee crisis. For CEE residents, Europe – both by pursuing a humanitarian 'open door' policy towards refugees and pushing for burden-sharing arrangements within the EU – emerged as the key actor facilitating migration from third countries. In this context, it is not surprising that, in CEE, people who do not feel close to Europe tend to have negative views on immigration.

Both hypotheses on the role of religiosity in shaping immigration attitudes in CEE (H6 and H7) were rejected. According to the models, there is no statistically significant relationship between identifying oneself as a Christian and one's immigration views (0.098, p=0.561; –0.012, p=0.625). Meanwhile, contrary to theoretical expectations, a positive association between the frequency of church attendance and expressing economic concerns about immigration was found (0.085, p=0.004). There is no evidence, however, that church attendance is related to cultural concerns over immigration (–0.005, p=0.244). If one of the main mechanisms through which church-going fosters pro-immigrant attitudes in Western European countries is the exposure of church-goers to 'civic moral values' (Storm 2011: 206), this mechanism does not seem to be working in CEE countries. One possible explanation of this could be that, in some CEE countries, religious affiliation is an important element of national identity – and church-going in such a context may strengthen conservative national values as much as (if not more than) support for religious or ethnic diversity. Another characteristic of the CEE region which could be relevant for explaining the positive association between the frequency of church attendance and expressing economic concerns about immigration is the relatively low numbers of recent immigrants. If immigrants made up a more significant share of church-goers in CEE countries, this may lead to 'increased solidarity towards immigrants and positive attitudes to immigration' among native church-goers (Storm 2011: 190). Finally, while church-going may foster sympathy for Muslims as fellow religious practitioners in countries with significant shares of Muslim immigrants (Storm 2011: 209), this may not work in low-immigration CEE countries, where Muslims are often perceived as a 'religious other' or even a 'threat'.

Nevertheless, the findings do not provide confirmation that immigration attitudes in CEE are affected by CEE residents' trust in people of another religion (–0.100, p=0.275; 0.037, p=0.089). Broadly speaking, the results suggest that the angle of religion – while indeed important and deserving of further scholarly attention – is not the most important one for understanding immigration attitudes in CEE. Instead, immigration seems to be primarily viewed through the ethnic prism, as a low trust in people of another nationality emerged as the most important predictor of both economic and cultural concerns about immigration (–0.462, p=0.001; 0.055, p=0.004). Interestingly, even when controlling for the effect of trust in non-nationals, low general interpersonal trust is also associated with anti-immigration attitudes in CEE (–0.298, p=0.049; 0.066, p=0.039). Since 2 out of 3 social trust variables were found to be statistically significant, H8 is confirmed. Additionally, a statistically significant interaction between generalised interpersonal trust and the content of national identity was identified in the model on economic concerns over immigration (0.709, p=0.026). Namely, for people who

trust others, the effect of espousing both voluntarist and ascriptive nationhood criteria on economic concerns over immigration is stronger than for those who do not trust others. For the latter group of people, the content of national identity may matter less as their views on immigration are largely steered by low social trust. Also, for voluntarist nationalists, the effect of interpersonal trust on economic concerns over immigration is stronger than for those who have a 'thick' conception of nationhood. Therefore, the study suggests that 2 key predictors of immigration attitudes in the region – social trust and the content of national identity – should not be viewed in isolation from each other.

Overall, both generalised interpersonal trust as well as trust in non-nationals is lower in CEE compared to Western and particularly Nordic Europe. While this is often linked to the atomising effect of the socialist era in CEE, post-communist transformation accompanied by rising unemployment, poverty and social inequalities could also have contributed to low levels of interpersonal trust in the region, not least by fostering survival values that tend to correlate with a perceived threat of foreigners and ethnic diversity (Rimac and Zrinščak 2010: 110–111). A lack of trust in non-nationals could also flow from the dominance of a 'thick' conception of nationhood which – as confirmed by this study – is also associated with anti-immigrant views. Low general interpersonal trust as well as trust in non-nationals may partly explain why anti-immigrant views are higher in CEE, although this hypothesis would need to be tested in future studies employing multi-level designs. Meanwhile, another basic human value – Universalism – was not related to immigration attitudes in CEE (0.005, p=0.943; –0.004, p=0.710), leading to the rejection of H9. H10 was also not supported, as the analysis did not generate evidence that would confirm the relationship between perceived state vulnerability and immigration attitudes in CEE (0.013, p=0.840; –0.007, p=0.621).

Education level and age were the only socio-demographic predictors found to be related to immigration attitudes. People with a higher education level were less likely to think that immigrants take jobs away from natives (0.120, p=0.000), while older respondents were more likely to mention immigrants/foreign workers as a group of people whom they would not like to have as neighbours (0.001, p=0.035). As expected, economic concerns over immigration in CEE were associated with negative attitudes towards competition (–0.082, p=0.006), support for income equality (0.120, p=0.001) and the prioritising of economic growth and job creation over the protection of the environment (–0.387, p=0.000). Total R-squared and pseudo R-squared values of the main models (0.15 and 0.107 respectively) indicate a moderate-to-low goodness of fit and correspond to those reported in other quantitative studies on immigration attitudes (e.g. Jeong 2016; Lancaster 2022). Neither of the 2 main models suffers from the multicollinearity problem, as testified by low variance inflation factor (VIF) scores.

Robustness test and country-specific analyses

To test the robustness of the results provided above, we assessed the extent to which model findings changed after excluding respondents from one selected country. In total, 10 fixed-effects regression models containing respondents from 9 CEE countries were run for each outcome measure (see Appendix C). The associations between multiple national identity and low trust in people of another nationality on the one hand and high economic and cultural concerns over immigration on the other remained statistically significant in these models. However, the association between high interpersonal trust and low concerns over immigration retained statistical significance only in 2 'drop-one' models focusing on economic concerns and 5 models for cultural concerns. Therefore, this robustness test confirms that evidence on the positive association between general interpersonal trust and pro-immigration attitudes in CEE is not as strong as evidence on the effects of multiple national identity and trust in people of another nationality – and should, therefore, be subject to further tests using newer survey data.

To gain additional insights on the extent to which the effects of individual-level predictors differ by country, country-specific regression analyses were run (see Appendix B). Overall, important differences in coefficient estimates across countries were found, with some identified associations going against theoretical expectations. Interestingly, in Estonia and Lithuania, national pride was found to be statistically significantly associated with low concerns over the economic impact of immigration. Also, in Slovakia, respondents who belonged to the Christian denomination were less likely to mention immigrants among people whom they would not want to have as neighbours. It is also noteworthy that the effect of national identity content on immigration attitudes does not reach statistical significance in Visegrád countries, the sole exception being the model on economic concerns over immigration in Czechia. These additional analyses confirm that the importance of the various determinants of immigration attitudes is not the same in the different CEE countries, warranting further research into how national contexts shape these associations. For example, it could be hypothesised that a positive association between national pride and low economic concerns over immigration in Estonia and Lithuania is due to the fact that – at the time when EVS 2017 survey was conducted – these countries had relatively small immigrant populations as well as a comparatively low politicisation of the immigration issue. However, when focusing on important national characteristics, future studies should also assess the degree to which differences between countries could have been affected by comparability biases that often characterise analyses of cross-national survey data (Meitinger, Schmidt and Braun 2023: 493).

Discussion and conclusions

This study has found that the low trust in people of another nationality was statistically significantly associated with both economic and cultural concerns over immigration in CEE. Importantly, the main fixed-effects models additionally showed that low general interpersonal trust was also statistically significantly associated with concerns over immigration. While this finding is conceptually relevant and the interpretation of its meaning in the CEE context is provided below, the robustness tests conducted as part of this study call for further confirmation of this association in future research.[10] Also, CEE residents subscribing to both voluntarist and ascriptive nationhood criteria are more likely to be concerned about the economic and cultural aspects of immigration than those having a purely voluntarist conception of nationhood. It was also found that not feeling close to Europe as well as frequently attending church are related to economic concerns over immigration; however, the evidence is not strong enough to conclude that these variables affect cultural concerns as well. Additional analyses focusing on separate CEE states showed that the size of the effects of these individual-level variables differed substantially between countries, thus illustrating the diversity of national contexts within the CEE region and calling for further research on how these associations are conditioned by specific country-level characteristics. A larger sample of countries would help to take this research field forward.

A generally low level of social trust found in CEE societies is inseparable from the often complex historical experiences that characterise this region. In particular, ‘the long-lasting impact of the communist period on the range of social values’ (Rimac and Zrinščak 2010: 107) – including interpersonal trust – is widely acknowledged both by ordinary citizens and by academics. In the communist era, the threat of state surveillance as well as the inability of the state to fully meet people’s economic and cultural needs led to the burgeoning of small ‘private circles, usually among family, relatives and close friends’ (Rimac and Zrinščak 2010: 108–109). In the prevailing atmosphere of fear, interpersonal trust was limited to these small circles and could not extend to broader society (Schwartz, Bardi and Bianchi 2000). Furthermore, post-communist transition brought considerable economic hardships and inequalities, creating a sizable group of ‘transformation losers’ and reinforcing ‘survival’ values that are hardly compatible with trust in others (Rimac and Zrinščak 2010: 110). Reflecting on these legacies is particularly useful for understanding the nexus

between low interpersonal trust and economic concerns over immigration in CEE. Additionally, a low level of trust in people of another nationality could also be linked to oppression at the hands of multi-ethnic empires as well as an ethnocultural nationhood tradition. It is therefore hardly surprising that low interpersonal trust is associated not only with economic but also with cultural concerns over immigration.

The content of national identity is another variable that is strongly influenced by historical processes. The formation of ethnoculturally defined nations in the 19th century and the resulting ethnocultural nationhood tradition still affects the prevalence of alternative understandings of nationhood in CEE. On average, CEE countries have more residents espousing both voluntarist and ascriptive conceptions of nationhood than Western and Northern European countries (Bartasevičius 2023). Like interpersonal trust, the content of national identity is therefore closely intertwined with the region's history and is unlikely to be subject to quick changes in time. Inasmuch as economic and cultural concerns over immigration are associated with social trust and definitions of nationhood, CEE residents' attitudes towards immigration are unlikely to undergo a sudden improvement either. As emphasised by Sides and Citrin (2007), 'creating more favourable attitudes towards immigration may require re-imagining national identities' (478). Like efforts to improve interpersonal trust, this would be a slow process. In addition, it is by no means clear that CEE political elites would be willing to move away from ethnocultural understanding of nationhood given its effective track record of sustaining social solidarity in the region (Sides and Citrin 2007: 502).

Given that this research relies on regression models, the findings do not easily lend themselves to causal interpretation. While all of the main predictors included in the models measure core identities and value orientations which are unlikely to be heavily affected by people's views on immigration, a certain degree of reverse causality is, nevertheless, possible. One way to avoid this issue in the future would be to adopt longitudinal and experimental research designs. Also, the EVS 2017 dataset did not allow me to conduct a more nuanced analysis of the correlates of immigration attitudes according to the type of immigration (e.g. labour or forced, coming from Europe or other continents etc.). Given how multi-faceted immigration is, looking into the determinants of various kinds of immigration may generate findings that are substantially different from those reported in this article. Generating policy-relevant insights into how CEE residents react to different types of migrant and what this reaction depends on could be one of the avenues for further work on immigration attitudes. Finally, as the sample of this study was limited to CEE residents, the paper does not claim that the main correlates of immigration concerns identified here are less relevant in Old Europe or elsewhere. Rather, the focus was not only on identifying significant correlates but also on revealing the region-specific meaning of these variables by showing how and why they matter in post-communist CEE. Future studies may use these findings to engage in further comparative work on immigration concerns in CEE and Old Europe.

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Notes

1. However, a recent conjoint experiment showed that individual preferences for asylum and refugee policy in Hungary and Poland were not so different from those found in Western Europe (Jeannet, Heidland, Ruhs 2021).
2. Latvia is a notable omission as it did not collect EVS data in 2017 or 2018.
3. While ethnic nationalism is based on the belief that a nation is, first and foremost, a community of presumed common descent, civic nationalism emphasises respect for the laws and institutions of the country as well as a feeling of being a member of the national group.
4. The term 'multiple national identity' was introduced by Hjerm (1998).
5. Documentation of the EVS 2017 Integrated dataset (full release): https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/full-release-evs2017/documentation-survey-2017/
6. The key findings were robust to omitting these additional covariates.
7. Findings from the models with a single interaction term are available upon request.
8. Some 5,817 and 5,408 observations were excluded due to missing values in the main models for economic and cultural concerns over immigration respectively.
9. Here and below, the figures from the models on economic concerns are reported first and are followed by the output from the models on cultural concerns over immigration.
10. As explained in the previous section, while the coefficient sign for interpersonal trust remained the same after excluding respondents from one selected country, the required level of statistical significance was not reached in several 'drop-one' models.

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Appendix A. Census data on the ethnic composition of CEE countries

Country	Non-ethnics as a percentage of all residents who declared their ethnicity	Census year	Source
Bulgaria	14.5	2011	https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/
Croatia	9.0	2011	https://web.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/census2011/results/htm/E01_01_12/E01_01_12.html
Czechia	13.9	2011	https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&z=T&f=TABULKA&katalog=30715&pvo=OTCR111&v=v122__null__null__null
Estonia	30.2	2011	https://www.stat.ee/sites/default/files/2020-08/2011%20Population%20and%20Housing%20Censuses%20in%20Estonia%2C%20Latvia%20and%20Lithuania.pdf
Hungary	6.8	2011	https://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tables_regional_00
Lithuania	14.9	2011	https://www.stat.ee/sites/default/files/2020-08/2011%20Population%20and%20Housing%20Censuses%20in%20Estonia%2C%20Latvia%20and%20Lithuania.pdf
Poland	1.6	2011	https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/wybrane-tablice-dotyczace-przynaleznosci-narodowo-etnicznej-jezyka-i-wyznania-nsp-2011,8,1.html
Romania	11.1	2011	https://web.archive.org/web/20130717125951/http:/www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf
Slovakia	13.2	2011	https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/bd447dc5-c417-48d6-89e1-0a2d60053cf6/Table_10_Population_by_nationality_2011_2001_1991.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kojGfKx&CVID=kojGfKx&CVID=kojGfKx&CVID=kojGfKx&CVID=kojGfKx&CVID=kojGfKx
Slovenia	7.7	2002	https://www.stat.si/popis2002/en/rezultati/rezultati_red.asp?ter=SLO&st=7

Appendix B. Regression models for separate countries

OLS regression models with the following outcome measure: assessment of whether immigrants take jobs away from natives

	Bulgaria	**Croatia**	**Czechia**	**Estonia**	**Hungary**	**Lithuania**	**Poland**	**Romania**	**Slovakia**	**Slovenia**
Intercept	4.399***	7.708***	7.243***	9.470***	1.292	10.555***	6.695***	6.386***	4.570***	8.200***
	(1.186)	(1.249)	(1.018)	(1.226)	(1.068)	(1.440)	(1.197)	(1.445)	(0.916)	(1.134)
Content of national identity	–0.252	–0.965***	–0.710**	–0.445*	–0.410	–0.775*	–0.128	–0.597	–0.238	–0.900***
	(0.377)	(0.261)	(0.216)	(0.217)	(0.332)	(0.329)	(0.341)	(0.423)	(0.216)	(0.204)
Strength of national pride	0.249	0.024	0.259	–0.528**	0.283	–0.640***	0.171	–0.198	0.093	–0.063
	(0.153)	(0.161)	(0.137)	(0.183)	(0.145)	(0.156)	(0.206)	(0.189)	(0.130)	(0.154)
Strength of national identification	–0.650**	0.123	0.109	0.132	0.350*	–0.070	–0.006	–0.111	0.633***	0.096
	(0.197)	(0.183)	(0.183)	(0.201)	(0.173)	(0.208)	(0.193)	(0.222)	(0.154)	(0.194)
Strength of European identification	–0.588**	0.082	–0.765***	–0.270	–0.489**	–0.283	–0.207	–0.263	–0.274	0.010
	(0.198)	(0.202)	(0.187)	(0.184)	(0.187)	(0.243)	(0.169)	(0.249)	(0.202)	(0.176)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	0.521**	–0.339	0.345*	–0.152	–0.006	0.267	–0.020	–0.164	–0.236	0.013
	(0.186)	(0.178)	(0.345)	(0.174)	(0.164)	(0.231)	(0.152)	(0.231)	(0.167)	(0.157)
Belonging to Christian denomination	–0.114	–0.025	–0.594*	0.004	0.602*	0.824*	–0.656	0.136	0.944***	–0.091
	(0.234)	(0.312)	(0.267)	(0.340)	(0.237)	(0.417)	(0.415)	(0.581)	(0.221)	(0.240)
Frequency of church attendance	0.139*	0.048	–0.030	0.100	0.199***	0.256***	0.073	0.035	0.074	0.030
	(0.060)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.067)	(0.053)	(0.072)	(0.062)	(0.076)	(0.038)	(0.051)
Interpersonal trust	0.186	–0.405	–0.429	–0.166	–0.122	–0.581*	–0.542*	–0.632	0.443*	–0.585*
	(0.284)	(0.297)	(0.225)	(0.236)	(0.219)	(0.251)	(0.237)	(0.360)	(0.182)	(0.232)
Trust in people of another religion	–0.344	–0.112	0.074	–0.321	0.310	–0.104	–0.411	–0.005	–0.050	–0.227
	(0.234)	(0.309)	(0.154)	(0.195)	(0.201)	(0.322)	(0.250)	(0.243)	(0.151)	(0.237)
Trust in people of another nationality	–0.060	–0.377	–0.343*	–0.584**	–0.767***	–0.644*	–0.249	–0.138	–0.526***	–0.405
	(0.242)	(0.322)	(0.162)	(0.214)	(0.201)	(0.317)	(0.254)	(0.247)	(0.150)	(0.247)
Feeling concerned about humankind	0.435***	–0.130	–0.113	0.071	–0.096	0.012	–0.183	0.165	–0.157	0.016
	(0.132)	(0.103)	(0.109)	(0.125)	(0.109)	(0.128)	(0.111)	(0.109)	(0.083)	(0.114)
Perceived state vulnerability	–0.143*	0.027	0.001	–0.183*	0.276***	–0.323***	0.112	0.075	–0.067	–0.211**
	(0.058)	(0.071)	(0.053)	(0.074)	(0.048)	(0.071)	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.044)	(0.064)
Sex	0.383	0.037	–0.479*	0.447	0.024	–0.323	0.081	0.142	0.264	–0.217
	(0.222)	(0.232)	(0.201)	(0.228)	(0.197)	(0.233)	(0.213)	(0.249)	(0.164)	(0.198)
Education level	0.018	0.075	0.123	0.047	0.210**	0.002	0.110	0.098	0.161**	0.224**
	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.066)	(0.070)	(0.074)	(0.070)	(0.061)	(0.081)	(0.054)	(0.073)

Age	–0.009	0.018**	–0.002	0.005	0.012*	–0.005	0.029***	–0.006	–0.001	0.012
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Size of town	0.282***	0.052	0.137	0.022	0.065	–0.077	0.043	–0.054	–0.073	0.014
	(0.077)	(0.086)	(0.072)	(0.083)	(0.069)	(0.095)	(0.076)	(0.092)	(0.071)	(0.095)
Unemployment status	0.479	0.072	0.950	0.432	–0.311	0.695	–0.489	–0.030	0.296	–0.255
	(0.446)	(0.328)	(0.580)	(0.633)	(0.546)	(0.463)	(0.547)	(0.833)	(0.349)	(0.426)
Occupation type	–0.602*	–0.080	–0.370	–0.083	–0.222	–0.056	–0.356	–0.089	0.250	–0.052
	(0.247)	(0.270)	(0.218)	(0.267)	(0.233)	(0.265)	(0.250)	(0.289)	(0.175)	(0.240)
Level of support for competition	–0.115**	–0.041	–0.124**	–0.074	–0.069	0.009	–0.145***	–0.034	–0.142***	0.084*
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.054)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.039)	(0.050)	(0.035)	(0.043)
Level of support for income equality	0.248***	0.071*	0.163***	0.073	0.064*	0.147***	0.125**	0.082*	0.052	0.136***
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.044)	(0.031)	(0.044)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.029)	(0.035)
Prioritising economic growth and jobs vs environment	–0.590**	–0.411	–0.551**	–0.107	–0.370	–0.097	–0.483*	0.064	–0.204	–0.175
	(0.218)	(0.223)	(0.188)	(0.246)	(0.202)	(0.223)	(0.200)	(0.242)	(0.164)	(0.215)
N	850	897	927	622	1033	569	789	815	986	679
R^2	0.21	0.09	0.17	0.16	0.18	0.20	0.22	0.04	0.16	0.22

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Logistic regression models with the following outcome measure: would not like to have as neighbours – immigrants/foreign workers (mentioned/not mentioned)

	Bulgaria	**Croatia**	**Czechia**	**Estonia**	**Hungary**	**Lithuania**	**Poland**	**Romania**	**Slovakia**	**Slovenia**
Intercept	–3.417***	–5.489***	–1.394	–6.219***	0.309	–6.971***	–3.506**	0.136	–2.282**	–4.249 ***
	(0.832)	(1.075)	(0.778)	(1.062)	(0.697)	(1.427)	(1.210)	(0.876)	(0.831)	(1.142)
Content of national identity	1.036***	0.446*	0.237	0.359	–0.087	0.347	0.459	0.439	0.156	0.513*
	(0.288)	(0.226)	(0.167)	(0.190)	(0.239)	(0.312)	(0.479)	(0.290)	(0.196)	(0.212)
Strength of national pride	0.161	–0.215	0.128	0.048	–0.065	–0.142	0.248	0.001	–0.003	–0.123
	(0.105)	(0.136)	(0.108)	(0.159)	(0.101)	(0.145)	(0.218)	(0.119)	(0.119)	(0.160)
Strength of national identification	0.051	0.085	0.232	0.059	0.049	–0.098	–0.324	–0.033	0.082	–0.046
	(0.137)	(0.148)	(0.145)	(0.173)	(0.121)	(0.195)	(0.189)	(0.144)	(0.139)	(0.193)
Strength of European identification	0.027	0.164	–0.149	0.023	0.051	–0.128	0.351*	–0.089	0.142	0.010
	(0.141)	(0.162)	(0.145)	(0.162)	(0.130)	(0.234)	(0.163)	(0.160)	(0.185)	(0.174)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	0.582***	–0.048	–0.011	0.123	0.149	0.277	–0.124	0.080	0.125	0.073
	(0.131)	(0.146)	(0.116)	(0.153)	(0.114)	(0.217)	(0.154)	(0.148)	(0.155)	(0.159)

Belonging to Christian denomination	0.105 (0.167)	–0.244 (0.252)	–0.103 (0.213)	0.211 (0.297)	0.118 (0.162)	0.818 (0.399)*	–0.094 (0.474)	–0.292 (0.353)	–0.608** (0.203)	0.143 (0.241)
Frequency of church attendance	–0.029 (0.042)	–0.083 (0.046)	0.045 (0.046)	0.077 (0.058)	–0.022 (0.036)	0.088 (0.065)	–0.018 (0.067)	–0.045 (0.049)	–0.118*** (0.035)	0.011 (0.051)
Interpersonal trust	0.185 (0.198)	0.646* (0.299)	0.507** (0.170)	0.102 (0.214)	0.605*** (0.150)	1.208*** (0.253)	0.350 (0.288)	–0.158 (0.223)	–0.004 (0.171)	0.226 (0.248)
Trust in people of another religion	0.038 (0.165)	0.655** (0.241)	–0.073 (0.123)	0.467** (0.166)	0.056 (0.138)	0.191 (0.293)	0.660** (0.225)	0.052 (0.151)	0.450** (0.141)	0.178 (0.238)
Trust in people of another nationality	0.149 (0.169)	–0.069 (0.250)	0.507*** (0.130)	0.373* (0.178)	0.157 (0.136)	0.899** (0.283)	0.274 (0.224)	0.008 (0.153)	0.205 (0.139)	0.050 (0.249)
Feeling concerned about humankind	0.007 (0.090)	0.074 (0.082)	–0.045 (0.084)	0.300** (0.116)	0.029 (0.075)	–0.421*** (0.120)	0.111 (0.113)	–0.137* (0.068)	–0.060 (0.077)	0.138 (0.114)
Perceived state vulnerability	0.049 (0.041)	0.115* (0.058)	–0.092* (0.042)	0.094 (0.065)	–0.178*** (0.033)	0.028 (0.067)	–0.156* (0.061)	–0.062 (0.041)	0.068 (0.040)	0.126* (0.064)
Sex	0.121 (0.156)	0.154 (0.190)	–0.075 (0.157)	–0.571** (0.204)	0.192 (0.135)	0.278 (0.220)	–0.053 (0.209)	0.002 (0.158)	–0.096 (0.150)	–0.318 (0.197)
Education level	0.013 (0.048)	0.020 (0.057)	–0.077 (0.052)	–0.046 (0.061)	–0.128* (0.051)	0.073 (0.066)	–0.164* (0.068)	–0.031 (0.053)	–0.053 (0.049)	0.081 (0.076)
Age	0.001 (0.005)	–0.005 (0.005)	0.009 (0.005)	0.025*** (0.006)	–0.005 (0.004)	0.012 (0.007)	–0.001 (0.006)	0.007 (0.005)	0.009* (0.005)	0.011 (0.006)
Size of town	–0.206*** (0.055)	0.093 (0.070)	–0.034 (0.056)	–0.006 (0.074)	–0.136** (0.047)	–0.139 (0.092)	–0.088 (0.080)	–0.038 (0.059)	0.099 (0.063)	–0.228* (0.110)
Unemployment status	–0.194 (0.300)	–0.166 (0.265)	–1.138* (0.482)	–0.311 (0.625)	0.005 (0.381)	–0.861 (0.455)	–0.233 (0.527)	–0.663 (0.659)	0.008 (0.311)	0.453 (0.404)
Occupation type	0.080 (0.174)	0.349 (0.215)	0.003 (0.173)	–0.413 (0.232)	–0.131 (0.159)	0.257 (0.241)	–0.056 (0.234)	0.158 (0.183)	–0.340* (0.160)	0.035 (0.230)
N	907	933	933	663	1,119	613	795	875	1,035	703
McFadden's R^2	0.09	0.08	0.06	0.12	0.08	0.18	0.14	0.02	0.07	0.05

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Appendix C. Regression models after excluding one country (robustness analysis)

Fixed-effects OLS regression models with the following outcome measure: assessment of whether immigrants take jobs away from natives

	W/O Bulgaria	W/O Croatia	W/O Czechia	W/O Estonia	W/O Hungary	W/O Lithuania	W/O Poland	W/O Romania	W/O Slovakia	W/O Slovenia
Content of national identity	–0.632***	–0.536***	–0.596**	–0.634**	–0.666***	–0.595***	–0.636***	–0.599***	–0.662***	–0.558**
	(0.116)	(0.103)	(0.131)	(0.126)	(0.115)	(0.117)	(0.118)	(0.117)	(0.109)	(0.121)
Strength of national pride	0.011	0.049	0.016	0.087	0.002	0.112	0.045	0.085	0.038	0.070
	(0.107)	(0.119)	(0.110)	(0.099)	(0.106)	(0.085)	(0.107)	(0.104)	(0.109)	(0.108)
Strength of national identification	0.194	0.099	0.106	0.090	0.061	0.107	0.108	0.141	0.027	0.103
	(0.089)	(0.147)	(0.134)	(0.133)	(0.133)	(0.130)	(0.135)	(0.127)	(0.109)	(0.132)
Strength of European identification	–0.311*	–0.401***	–0.287**	–0.338**	–0.314	–0.348**	–0.344	–0.354**	–0.329**	–0.373**
	(0.094)	(0.079)	(0.084)	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.097)	(0.106)	(0.100)	(0.095)	(0.096)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	–0.026	0.078	–0.032	0.032	0.018	0.007	0.016	0.050	0.043	0.024
	(0.086)	(0.086)	(0.089)	(0.101)	(0.106)	(0.095)	(0.104)	(0.095)	(0.096)	(0.103)
Belonging to Christian denomination	0.102	0.117	0.191	0.104	0.062	0.058	0.140	0.114	–0.027	0.126
	(0.201)	(0.183)	(0.152)	(0.175)	(0.191)	(0.166)	(0.163)	(0.168)	(0.128)	(0.186)
Frequency of church attendance	0.079*	0.088*	0.098**	0.080**	0.073**	0.076**	0.084**	0.089**	0.092**	0.091**
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.024)
Interpersonal trust	–0.346*	–0.284	–0.268	–0.305	–0.299	–0.276	–0.259	–0.253	–0.410**	–0.274
	(0.134)	(0.144)	(0.142)	(0.146)	(0.159)	(0.135)	(0.140)	(0.128)	(0.092)	(0.141)
Trust in people of another religion	–0.071	–0.100	–0.142	–0.094	–0.168	–0.089	–0.062	–0.109	–0.080	–0.093
	(0.087)	(0.094)	(0.097)	(0.096)	(0.075)	(0.089)	(0.077)	(0.097)	(0.099)	(0.091)
Trust in people of another nationality	–0.500***	–0.466**	–0.458**	–0.445**	–0.391***	–0.456**	–0.487***	–0.506***	–0.448**	–0.452**
	(0.086)	(0.096)	(0.106)	(0.096)	(0.072)	(0.091)	(0.090)	(0.086)	(0.105)	(0.091)
Feeling concerned about humankind	–0.041	0.030	0.010	–0.004	0.023	0.007	0.028	–0.032	0.017	0.009
	(0.054)	(0.073)	(0.075)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.071)	(0.070)	(0.067)	(0.073)	(0.071)
Perceived state vulnerability	0.035	0.007	0.018	0.024	–0.049	0.028	0.001	0.005	0.030	0.028
	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.066)	(0.043)	(0.065)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.067)	(0.066)
Sex	0.003	0.048	0.113	0.002	0.038	0.075	0.042	0.020	0.013	0.064
	(0.104)	(0.110)	(0.076)	(0.098)	(0.112)	(0.099)	(0.108)	(0.106)	(0.108)	(0.107)
Education level	0.135***	0.125**	0.120**	0.123**	0.110**	0.127***	0.120**	0.121**	0.108***	0.113***
	(0.021)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Age	0.007	0.003	0.006	0.005	0.005	0.006	0.002	0.007	0.005	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)

Size of town	0.038	0.072	0.065	0.074	0.077	0.072	0.064	0.089	0.096*	0.075
	(0.030)	(0.046)	(0.048)	(0.045)	(0.051)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.042)	(0.038)	(0.044)
Unemployment status	0.044	0.199	0.103	0.115	0.192	0.102	0.177	0.153	0.099	0.173
	(0.109)	(0.189)	(0.138)	(0.134)	(0.144)	(0.137)	(0.142)	(0.139)	(0.137)	(0.145)
Occupation type	–0.124	–0.174	–0.145	–0.174	–0.131	–0.170	–0.136	–0.179	–0.239**	–0.160
	(0.085)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.098)	(0.098)	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.096)	(0.062)	(0.099)
Level of support for competition	–0.073*	–0.087**	–0.078*	–0.082**	–0.081*	–0.088**	–0.071*	–0.088**	–0.071*	–0.096**
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.019)
Level of support for income equality	0.101***	0.128**	0.112**	0.122**	0.133**	0.119**	0.119**	0.125**	0.127**	0.116**
	(0.017)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Prioritising economic growth and jobs vs environment	–0.368***	–0.381**	–0.359**	–0.401***	–0.368**	–0.408***	–0.366**	–0.434***	–0.363**	–0.401***
	(0.071)	(0.077)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.077)	(0.070)	(0.075)	(0.054)	(0.078)	(0.074)
N	7,317	7,270	7,240	7,545	7,134	7,598	7,378	7,352	7,181	7,488
R^2	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.15
Within R^2	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.9	0.11	0.10	0.10

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with clustered standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

Fixed-effects logistic regression models with the following outcome measure: would not like to have as neighbours – immigrants/foreign workers (mentioned/not mentioned)

	W/O Bulgaria	**W/O Croatia**	**W/O Czechia**	**W/O Estonia**	**W/O Hungary**	**W/O Lithuania**	**W/O Poland**	**W/O Romania**	**W/O Slovakia**	**W/O Slovenia**
Content of national identity	0.050**	0.064**	0.061*	0.059*	0.071**	0.063**	0.065**	0.057**	0.067**	0.064**
	(0.011)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Strength of national pride	–0.007	–0.000	–0.006	–0.003	0.000	0.000	–0.004	–0.005	–0.000	–0.001
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Strength of national identification	–0.003	–0.009	–0.009	–0.004	–0.006	–0.003	–0.000	–0.006	–0.003	–0.004
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Strength of European identification	0.016	0.016	0.021	0.016	0.017	0.019	0.011	0.023	0.015	0.019
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)*	(0.010)	(0.010)
Strength of cosmopolitan identification	0.008	0.025	0.024	0.022	0.019	0.021	0.027	0.022	0.018	0.021
	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Belonging to Christian denomination	–0.018	–0.008	–0.010	–0.015	–0.028	–0.016	–0.013	–0.008	0.008	–0.016
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.016)	(0.027)

Frequency of church attendance	–0.005 (0.004)	–0.003 (0.004)	–0.006 (0.004)	–0.006 (0.004)	–0.005 (0.005)	–0.006 (0.004)	–0.005 (0.004)	–0.004 (0.004)	–0.002 (0.003)	–0.006 (0.004)
Interpersonal trust	0.071* (0.029)	0.066 (0.030)	0.058 (0.030)	0.072* (0.030)	0.052 (0.028)	0.049 (0.024)	0.069 (0.031)	0.070* (0.029)	0.081* (0.027)	0.071* (0.030)
Trust in people of another religion	0.045 (0.021)	0.035 (0.021)	0.049* (0.019)	0.031 (0.020)	0.041 (0.022)	0.037 (0.021)	0.032 (0.020)	0.043 (0.022)	0.024 (0.016)	0.039 (0.021)
Trust in people of another nationality	0.057** (0.016)	0.057** (0.015)	0.043** (0.011)	0.056** (0.016)	0.056* (0.017)	0.048** (0.013)	0.056** (0.015)	0.062** (0.014)	0.056** (0.016)	0.057** (0.015)
Feeling concerned about human kind	–0.006 (0.010)	–0.005 (0.011)	–0.003 (0.011)	–0.008 (0.009)	–0.005 (0.010)	0.002 (0.008)	–0.005 (0.010)	0.001 (0.010)	–0.001 (0.010)	–0.006 (0.010)
Perceived state vulnerability	–0.007 (0.009)	–0.007 (0.009)	–0.003 (0.010)	–0.006 (0.009)	0.003 (0.007)	–0.005 (0.009)	–0.003 (0.010)	–0.003 (0.010)	–0.008 (0.009)	–0.006 (0.009)
Sex	–0.010 (0.012)	–0.008 (0.013)	–0.005 (0.012)	–0.001 (0.010)	–0.013 (0.011)	–0.009 (0.012)	–0.006 (0.012)	–0.005 (0.012)	–0.002 (0.012)	–0.002 (0.011)
Education level	–0.010 (0.005)	–0.011* (0.004)	–0.008 (0.004)	–0.009 (0.005)	–0.007 (0.004)	–0.011* (0.004)	–0.007 (0.005)	–0.008 (0.005)	–0.007 (0.004)	–0.010* (0.004)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)
Size of town	–0.009 (0.007)	–0.018 (0.008)	–0.016 (0.009)	–0.015 (0.009)	–0.012 (0.009)	–0.012 (0.008)	–0.015 (0.009)	–0.016 (0.009)	–0.019* (0.008)	–0.013 (0.009)
Unemployment status	–0.039 (0.024)	–0.038 (0.029)	–0.017 (0.014)	–0.033 (0.022)	–0.036 (0.023)	–0.024 (0.020)	–0.034 (0.023)	–0.031 (0.021)	–0.034 (0.025)	–0.042 (0.021)
Occupation type	–0.005 (0.018)	–0.008 (0.016)	0.001 (0.018)	0.005 (0.016)	0.001 (0.018)	–0.003 (0.017)	–0.001 (0.018)	–0.008 (0.016)	0.011 (0.013)	–0.001 (0.018)
N	7,669	7,643	7,643	7,913	7,457	7,963	7,781	7,701	7,541	7,873
McFadden's R^2	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.12	0.12	0.10
Within McFadden's R^2	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04

Notes: β coefficients are reported, with clustered standard errors in the parentheses. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

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Governing Integration Policies in a Multi-Level Setting: Austria and Czechia Compared

Anna Lukešová*

In migration studies, scholars differ in their emphasis on which level of government plays the central role in immigrant integration policies. There are voices drawing attention to a 'local turn', highlighting the rising power of local actors in immigrant integration. At the same time, other authors point to a 'national turn', connected to the introduction of civic integration policies – or even the Europeanisation of integration policies coming from the supranational level. In order to better understand how integration policies are governed, this article compares the Austrian and Czech governance of these policies, examining the relationship between the different levels of government involved. The analysis is based on Scholten's typology of centralist, localist, decoupling and multi-level forms of governance. It asks how integration policies are governed in Austria and Czechia and how their governance changed with the implementation of civic integration policies. While centralist and decoupling tendencies appeared in the Austrian case, a multi-level governance approach emerged with civic integration in Czechia. These results disprove the assumption of a supposedly more likely multi-level governance approach in a federal state and a more centralised logic under the unitary regime, as suggested by the literature.

Keywords: migration, integration policy, civic integration, multi-level governance, Austria, Czech Republic

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Introduction

Although most European states have a long-term experience of immigrants, the search for an appropriate strategy on how to successfully integrate them continues to this day, resulting in a high multiplication of practices. The academic debate of the last decade discusses three contradicting phenomena in this regard. Firstly, the literature talks about a 'local turn' in immigrant integration policies (henceforth referred to just as integration policies), highlighting the growing role of local actors in the area of immigrant integration. Several studies show that local governments develop their own integration strategies (Caponio and Borkert 2010; Flamant 2020; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten 2017). The second phenomenon points to an opposite trend – the 'national turn' in integration policies – uncovering the increase of state involvement in immigrant integration with the introduction of civic integration measures (Emilsson 2015; Gebhardt 2016). The third phenomenon of Europeanisation of the integration agenda via the EU's immigration policies (Block and Bonjour 2013; Carrera and Wiesbrock 2009) renders the issue even more complicated, as it adds another layer to immigrant integration governance.

These separated discussions create confusion about how integration policies are governed in Europe. Who has the main say in immigrant integration? Local or national authorities? Or else, is there a multi-level kind of governing of immigrant integration, taking the EU level into account as well? Considering these general questions, the article works with two conceptual frameworks. The first is immigrant integration with a special focus on civic integration policies (CIP) that stand behind the most significant changes in integration policies of the last two decades in the whole of Europe. Multi-level governance (MLG) constitutes the second theoretical concept applied in the analysis, using Scholten's (2013) typology of the relationship between various levels of government in a multi-level setting.

As Scholten argues, '[a]lthough much work is done on either national or local level migrant integration policies, much less research has been done on the relation and interaction between these two levels' (Scholten 2013: 218). This study aims to contribute to this gap by offering a qualitative comparison of immigrant integration governance in Austria and Czechia. These two countries were selected because they are similar in many aspects but differ in their political regime, Austria being a federation while Czechia represents a unitary state. This is an important variable because, as the literature suggests, 'at least some of the issues [of immigrant integration] are subject to multi-level governance' in federal countries (Seidle and Joppke 2012: 3), while '[u]nitary states are generally assumed to have state-centric or top-down governance structures' (Scholten 2014: 154). With regards to this discrepancy, the article assumes that, in Austria, the subnational level enjoys more space to shape integration policies than it does in Czechia, where subnational authorities have limited opportunities to step into integration policy-making. In the Czech case, the centralisation argument is then further endorsed by already existing scholarship which points to the leading role of the national authorities in the field of immigrant integration (Dohnalová 2021; Kušniráková 2014; Pořízek 2018; Zogata-Kusz 2020).

The article thus investigates how different levels of government cooperate in integration policy-making in these two countries and how the governance of integration policies changed following the introduction of civic integration. To answer these questions, I conducted a document analysis of various primary sources, including my own semi-structured interviews with actors involved in immigrant integration in both countries. The methods are described in more detail in the methodological section which follows the theoretical part of the article. The third section sheds light on the development of integration policies in both countries under study before coming to the main analysis of the types of immigrant integration governance as suggested by Scholten. Finally, the conclusions summarise the principal findings and identify possible future work to be done on the investigated issue.

Civic integration and governance in a multi-level setting: theory and literature

As mentioned above, the research builds upon two main theoretical concepts: civic integration and Scholten's typology of governance in a multi-level setting. This section takes a closer look at both approaches as well as it briefly scans the literature concerning these issues. Starting with the former, civic integration is embodied in the scholarly debate focused on immigrant integration and citizenship as, with CIP, 'integration arises through immigrants' acquisition of "citizen-like", or civic, skills' (Goodman and Wright 2015: 1886). As Goodman and Wright state, 'These might include speaking the host-country language, having knowledge about the country's history, culture and rules and understanding and following the liberal democratic values that underscore their new home' (Goodman and Wright 2015: 1886).

Immigrants gain such 'skills' through their participation in various introductory programmes, integration contracts, courses or tests offered by the host state. As Goodman observes, these measures may appear in all phases of the integration process, which she calls 'gates of state membership': entry, settlement and citizenship (Goodman 2010: 755). Civic integration does not concern all categories of immigrants but applies only to third-country nationals (TCNs), as other categories – such as refugees and EU nationals – follow different integration schemes. For this reason, this article concerns policies targeting regular TCNs only. Also, in contrast to the views of Goodman and Wright, the article does not see civic integration measures as 'uniquely applied as conditions in the process of obtaining citizenship' (2015: 1886), as many of these arrangements can be offered to immigrants voluntarily without elements of coercion.

Such an understanding stems from studies that show a considerable divergence in CIP use. Goodman, for instance, unambiguously demonstrates this diversity through her CIVIX index (Goodman 2010, 2014). Austrian and Czech cases also support the argument of divergent approaches to civic integration, as Austria represents one of the strictest CIP regimes in Europe, while Czechia belongs to the moderate group, applying a mixture of obligatory and voluntary measures (Mourão Permoser 2012; Simbartlová 2019). While such findings led some authors to the conclusion that the notion of national models of integration is still on the scene (Borevi 2014; Jacobs and Rea 2007), other experts point to a certain convergence (Joppke 2007) or even Europeanisation (Block and Bonjour 2013) in integration policies with CIP across Europe. The issue of the relationship between the EU and the studied cases in the immigrant integration agenda is also tackled in this article as this question relates to the typology presented by Scholten.

Scholten's typology of the relationship between various levels of government is the second theoretical approach of this study. It stems from the broader literature on multi-level governance (MLG), first introduced by Marks in the 1990s, followed by numerous other scholars (see Bache and Flinders 2004; Enderlein, Wälti and Zürn 2010). Marks defined MLG as a 'system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local' (Marks 1993: 392). The approach was first utilised to analyse just a few EU policies – especially those governing cohesion – but progressively entered into academic debates on other EU agendas. In 2006, Zincone and Caponio (2006) introduced this framework to migration studies too, pointing to the necessity of analysing the relations between different levels of government. At first, several studies examined the role of cities and local governments in the area of both migration and integration (Caponio and Borkert 2010; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009). Full use of the MLG approach to study migration and integration policies emerged only later on (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018; Scholten and Penninx 2016).

Following Zincone and Caponio's suggestion, Scholten developed a typology of relations between various levels of government (Scholten 2013, 2016, 2019; Scholten and Penninx 2016). The author argues that, in the long term, MLG presents only one mode of interaction that emerges between actors operating in a multilevel setting. He subsequently demonstrates in his research that there are four types of governance: centralist,

localist, decoupling and multi-level. 'Centralist governance' is characterised by a top-down relationship between national and subnational governments, while international cooperation is managed through the intergovernmental approach. Thus, the state and the national government represent the key actor, whereas subnational authorities only follow national guidelines and their role is to implement the already designed policies.

The second type stands for the opposite. 'Localist governance' is present where a certain degree of devolution appears. A bottom-up approach accompanies the relationship between the levels, subnational authorities act as policy-makers and the horizontal cooperation of subnational governments is a common tool for sharing best practices. Although Scholten's work emphasises the local-level policies, i.e. in terms of cities and municipalities, the recent literature sheds light on the growing role of regional authorities, also now regularly interacting with the national level of governance (Campomori and Caponio 2017; Manatschal, Wisthaler and Zuber 2020; Schmidtke 2021). As this research highlights similar proof – and because the political system of the cases studied differs namely in the governance of regions – the regional level enriches the original localist governance in this article.

As for the third mode, 'decoupling governance' means that subnational authorities either do not follow the national strategies or they contradict them; thus no effective cooperation occurs between the levels of government. Lastly, MLG corresponds to 'some form of coordinated interaction between various government levels in the scope of a specific policy domain (…) where the multi-level character of a policy problem is explicitly recognized' (Scholten 2013: 220). Such multi-level interactions are distinguished in particular by a depoliticised, functional and technocratic orientation of cooperation with weak institutional policy structures.

This typology of relationships between various governmental levels and actors offers a unique opportunity to contribute to the unclear debate about the 'turns' in integration policies – whether it be a local, national or supranational turn – connecting the two literature strands on immigrant integration and MLG together. While several works have already applied Scholten's typology to study immigrant integration (Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt 2020; Rosenberger and Müller 2020; Scholten and van Ostaijen 2018; Spencer 2018), this article enriches the existing debate with a novel aspect of comparing two diverse political regimes, as discussed more in detail in the subsequent section.

Methodology

As this article analyses Austrian and Czech immigrant integration policies, a comparison is the main methodological approach of the research. Several aspects drove the selection of these cases. Firstly, both states are neighbours geographically situated in Central Europe – a region often omitted in the academic debate on immigrant integration compared to its Western counterpart. Although studies on migration-related topics in Central European countries have been increasing over the last two decades, the issue of immigrant integration still needs further examination. As the current state-of-the-art indicates, Austria and Czechia offer important knowledge in this area (both thematically as well as geographically speaking) (Kraler 2011; Kušniráková 2014; Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2012; Zogata-Kusz 2020). Furthermore, the countries have similar demographic and geographic sizes and share a long common history, together with cultural closeness based on Christianity, impacted on especially by Roman Catholicism. Austria and Czechia also represent states with the highest share of foreign citizens in their population in the Central European region (Eurostat 2022), which reflects both countries' long-term experience with immigration as they accepted significant numbers of guest-workers before 1989 and tackled refugee flows both before and after 1989 (Drbohlav 2004; Kraler 2011). The two states also began to deal with the issue of immigrant integration at the end of the 1990s, eventually introducing

civic integration measures for TCNs – as the only cases in Central Europe mapped by scholars thus far (Kraler 2011; Lukešová 2022; Mourão Permoser 2012; Simbartlová 2019).

Nevertheless, there are divergent aspects which are also important for the comparison. Due to the separation by the Iron Curtain and the related different paths of political development, Austria has been impacted on by migration in larger numbers than Czechia. The country also acceded to the EU a decade earlier, which further influenced the diverse migration policy-making of these countries. Most importantly, however, Austria and Czechia represent countries with different political regimes, a federal and a unitary one, which is a crucial variable on which to focus when investigating the role of different governmental levels in integration policy-making. Such a comparison is missing in the current migration literature dealing with multi-level analyses, focused either on federal or unitary states or simply not taking this factor into account at all (e.g., Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero 2014; Joppke and Seidle 2012; Scholten 2019).

As for the methods, I conducted a qualitative document analysis, inquiring about various types of primary sources. Among the most important are 42 semi-structured qualitative interviews that have been carried out between 2018 and 2024 with diverse important actors involved in integration policy-making in both countries. The data collection took place as part of my PhD research, which was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and which triggered the need to complement the dataset more recently, especially in the Czech case. The interviewees represent various governmental levels and actors, identified through the analysis of official documents and snowball sampling while aiming to cover the most important stakeholders involved in immigrant integration in both countries. English was the language in which 22 interviews were conducted (except for one which was held in German) with Austrian representatives of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BMEIA), the Federal Ministry for Women, Family, Youth and Integration (BMFFJI), the Expert Council for Integration, the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), the government or administration of 5 Austrian provinces, administration of 4 Austrian municipalities, 4 Austrian NGOs involved in immigrant integration and an international organisation involved in immigrant integration in Austria. As for the Czech case, 20 interviews were conducted in Czech with representatives of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI), the Refugee Facilities Administration (SUZ), the administration of 6 regional integration centres (2 run by SUZ, 2 by regional administrations, 2 by local NGOs), the administration of 2 Czech regions and 2 Czech municipalities, 4 Czech NGOs involved in immigrant integration and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Prague. An overview of all the interviews conducted is shown in Annex 1.

Before the interview, the participants were provided with the set of questions, which focused on (a) the introduction of the institution being represented in the interview, (b) the development of (civic) integration policies in the country and (c) the role, activities and relationships of integration actors across various governance levels (international, national, sub-national, civil society). I also obtained informed consent from all interviewees, offering them information on the research project and treatment of the data collected, as well as the possibility to withdraw their participation if they so wished. Where an audio recording was made, the interview was later transcribed, while interviews with no audio recording were preserved as notes. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed qualitatively, distributing labels and sub-labels driven by the research theoretical framework to the relevant quotes. The analytical labels represent clusters of (1) introduction to the institution, (2) general information on migration and migration policy development in the country, (3) general information on immigrant integration and integration policy-making in the country, (4) concrete information on CIP implemented in the country, (5) analysis of the individual types of actors involved in (civic) integration policy-making in the country and (6) analysis of relationships between these actors as inspired by Scholten's framework. The use of concrete quotes in the text presented here serves as an illustration of primary data material supporting my arguments, while attempting to avoid excessive citing. For the sake of protecting participants' identity, the interviews are partly anonymised – revealing just the type of

institution which the participant represents – or fully anonymised, depending on the consent given. In addition, the analysis investigated various legislative, governmental, parliamentary, regional and other documents, mostly available online or provided by the participants.

The development of integration policies in Austria and Czechia

Although both countries experienced immigration in the long term, it took decades for the state administrations to recognise and reflect on this fact. The next section traces the development of Austrian and Czech integration policies as the basis for the main analysis of how different governmental levels cooperate in immigrant integration governance in the studied cases and how the governance of integration policies changed with the introduction of civic integration.

Integration policy-making in Austria

The year 1989 saw several transforming processes launched across the whole world, including changes in migration patterns and related governance as a consequence. During the 1990s, migration became highly politicised by the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Green Party, promoting different views on immigrants settling down in Austria (Borkert 2015; Kraler 2011). The integration agenda appeared as a relevant public topic for the first time, being primarily linked to negative connotations of a failure of integration (Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2012). As a response, the Aliens Act reform of 1997 applied the principle of 'integration before new immigration' (Borkert 2015; Kraler 2011). The restrictive approach has thus accompanied Austrian integration policy since its very infancy.

The FPÖ celebrated the success of its anti-immigrant rhetoric in the 1999 elections, becoming the coalition partner of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) for the period 2000–2006 and contributing significantly to a further tightening of integration policies in Austria. With the 2002 reform of the Aliens Act, Austrian policy-makers introduced the first civic integration measures for long-term immigrants. Under the so-called Integration Agreement, immigrants became responsible for either proving their knowledge of the German language at the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) with an international Austrian language certificate or completing a language course provided by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) within the first 4 years of their stay in Austria. In the case of non-compliance, a sanction system has been developed, ranging from financial to possible deportation penalties and placing Austrian integration policies among the strictest in Europe (Mourão Permoser 2012).

The same coalition managed to toughen integration policies even further with the 2005 reform of the Law on Residence and Settlement. While the reform increased the language requirement to the A2 level of CEFR, it also widened the scope of the ÖIF language course from 100 to 300 hours and complemented it with a final test (Anon 2005; Mourão Permoser 2012). In the same year, the amendment of the Citizenship Act added civic integration requirements for naturalising immigrants by implementing the obligation of having a long-term residence permit before naturalisation. Thus, applicants for citizenship became obliged to pass the Integration Agreement, which they needed for their long-term residence in Austria. Moreover, the Citizenship Act reform also introduced a new test assessing the applicants' knowledge of the country's history, political regime and the province of the applicants' residence (Goodman 2014; Stern and Valchars 2013).

The elections of 2006 changed the political environment, bringing the Social Democrats (SPÖ) back to government. The new SPÖ–ÖVP coalition subsequently adopted a different approach to the issue of immigrant integration. First, it renewed consultations with NGOs which were halted during the ÖVP–FPÖ government (Borkert 2015) and launched the process of creating a National Action Plan for Integration (NAPI). To serve

as a basis for the overall integration policy in Austria, the policy-makers consulted several stakeholders – ranging from experts to citizens as well as migrant organisations (Interview No. 9) – and adopted the final document in January 2010 (Kraler 2011). Such cooperation resulted in the creation of two platforms of integration policy coordination. The first is the Expert Council for Integration (*Expertenrat für Integration*) which gathers together migration scholars and experts whose aim is to provide the federal government with expert know-how on integration (Federal Chancellery of Austria 2022). As for the other, the Advisory Committee on Integration (*Integrationsbeirat*) consists of representatives from all federal ministries, provinces, Austrian associations of cities and municipalities, federal social partners, as well as NGOs and an IO (UNHCR) and should serve as a multi-level exchange platform (Federal Chancellery of Austria 2023).

On the other hand, a restrictive attitude persisted, even despite the presence of SPÖ in the government. The Aliens Act reform of 2011 introduced a further tightening of integration conditions for TCNs. First, newcomers to Austria needed to prove their knowledge of German on the A1 level of CEFR *before* their arrival (Anon 2011). Next, the Integration Agreement has been reformed into two modules, the first serving long-term immigrants – during their first years of stay – with the requirement of an A2 level of CEFR; the second then requiring applicants for the EU long-term residence permit to prove their language knowledge on the B1 level.

To stabilise this highly politicised, controversial and sensitive topic, the Ministry of the Interior established a State Secretary for Integration whose aim was to centralise the integration policies' initiatives and to bring about a more pragmatic approach to tackling immigrant integration, with a meritocratic narrative replacing the previous focus on cultural and value-oriented aspects (Gruber and Rosenberger 2018; Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2012). Nonetheless, the institution operated only between 2011 and 2013 as, following the elections of 2013, its leader Sebastian Kurz was appointed as the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs. With this change, the integration agenda moved into his ministry, which was renamed the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA).

Although the establishment of the state secretary aimed at a technocratic orientation and depoliticisation of the issue (Gruber and Rosenberger 2018), integration emerged again as a hot topic with the refugee crisis in 2015. Although the CIP examined here do not deal with asylum-seekers and refugees, the situation – which emerged in 2015 – fundamentally affected integration policies targeting regular TCNs in Austria. Aside from the adoption of the 50 Points Plan for Integration focusing solely on incoming refugees, a completely novel legislative piece dealing with the integration of TCNs was eventually approved in 2017. This new Integration Act introduced the final changes in the Integration Agreement arrangement, appointing an 'integration exam' secured by ÖIF as the only eligible means to prove immigrants' knowledge of the appropriate language as well as their civic knowledge for both modules (Anon 2017). The possibility of demonstrating this with a simple international language certificate was thus abolished.

Integration policy-making in Czechia

Although Czechoslovakia had already gained some experience with migration before 1993 – especially with guest-workers from other communist countries such as Vietnam, Cuba or Mongolia or refugees from Bulgaria and Greece (Drbohlav 2004) – the main migration boom started with the dissolution of the federation in 1993, with the numbers not dropping to below 200,000 since 1997 (Czech Statistical Office 2022). Czech policy-makers, therefore, launched a significant reform of migration policies, resulting in the adoption of new Aliens and Asylum Acts in 1999 and constituting the basis of Czech migration management in force still today. The question of immigrant integration went hand-in-hand with this reform: the Principles for the Concept of Immigrant Integration were adopted in 1999, followed by a more elaborate Conception of Immigrant Integration, approved in 2000 and altered in 2006, 2011 and 2016.

With this step taken at the turn of the millennium, Czechia admitted the long-term nature of immigration, which required sophisticated long-term integration strategies. Thus, integration measures have already been realised since the early 2000s through state financing dedicated to integration projects run by various NGOs (Čaněk and Čižinský 2011; Zogata-Kusz 2020). Aside from legal counselling and activities aimed at the majority population, NGOs also started to develop language and integration courses to help immigrants with their orientation in society (Tollarová 2011; Vláda ČR 2004).

A significant step in Czech integration policies was the introduction of the first civic integration measure in the form of proof of language knowledge on the A1 level in 2009 (Anon 2007; MŠMT ČR 2008) which was eventually raised to the A2 level since September 2021 (Vláda ČR 2021). With this requirement, the Czech government had to ensure an even distribution of Czech language courses in all regions, as NGOs had operated particularly in large cities up until then (Interviews No. 2, 4). Thus, the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for migration management, launched public funding calls for creating regional integration centres, financed by the European Integration Fund (MV ČR 2010). Subsequently, an interesting variety of centre operators emerged: NGOs, regional administrations as well as a state institution – Refugee Facility Management (SUZ) (MV ČR 2014).

Aside from language knowledge, foreigners' orientation in Czech society represented another main area of integration activities set up by the Updated Conception of 2006 (Vláda ČR 2006). The first integration courses appeared in the form of so-called 'courses of socio-cultural orientation', designed for long-term settled immigrants and consisting of around 2-hour-long meetings focused on specific topics of daily life (e.g., children's schooling, job-seeking on the Czech labour market, the pension system etc.) (Interviews No. 2, 5). The second, called the 'adaptation–integration course', was designed for newcomers as an 8-hour-long course offering foreigners the basic information needed for their orientation in the new environment (Interview No. 6). Alongside these courses organised in Czechia, immigrants could gain information even before going to Czechia through a 'pre-departure packet' distributed free of charge at Czech embassies and consulates abroad since 2013 (MV ČR 2014).

Another major step in developing Czech integration policies came with the new Citizenship Act of 2013, which introduced new conditions for immigrants' naturalisation: passing a language test on the B1 level and a civic knowledge test (Anon 2013) both of which were similar to the Austrian naturalisation process. The final changes in Czech integration policies then emerged in 2019, when the amendment of the Aliens Act introduced the issue of immigrant integration into the Czech legislative framework for the first time (Anon 2019). Firstly, the amendment anchored the existence of the integration centres and opened the way to financing them directly from the national budget without dependence on EU funds (Interviews No. 26, 33). The amendment also implemented obligatory participation for selected groups of newcomers in a shortened 4-hour-long adaptation–integration course, with a possible financial penalty in cases of non-compliance (Anon 2019).

Governing immigrant integration in a multi-level setting

After outlining the development of integration policies in both countries, this section aims to respond to the research questions on how different levels of government cooperate in immigrant integration governance in Austria and Czechia and how this governance changed with the introduction of civic integration measures. For this purpose, the following subsections analyse both case studies according to Scholten's typology of governance in a multi-level setting: the centralist, localist, decoupling and multi-level governance.

Centralist governance

The central government has played and still is playing a crucial role in integration policies in both countries under study, although in a different way. With regards to Austria, while the Ministry of the Interior took over the responsibility for the immigrant integration agenda in the 1990s (Kraler 2011) – introducing several integration reforms during the 2000s – it is actually with the NAPI process (2009–2010) and the establishment of the state secretary (2011) where the central government took the main initiative and institutionalised immigrant integration as an autonomous policy field on the federal level (Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2012). Although we can observe a certain kind of multi-level coordination in this period (more details in the MLG section below), the introduction and amendments of civic integration requirements have always brought a strong centralist tendency to governing immigrant integration in Austria.

The centralist governance in managing immigrant integration in Austria was affirmed not only by several non-federal interviewees – representing all kinds of governance levels and actors (Interviews No. 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18) – but also by the BMEIA itself. Explaining the process of implementation of the Integration Act (2017), enshrining CIP into an individual legislative piece, the BMEIA's representative revealed the strong role played by federal actors in implementing national integration policies at the regional level:

> *The thing is, this is a federal law, and we are a federal state, but we have provinces as well (…). Although the provinces have their own competencies and are allowed to implement laws by the federal system by themselves sometimes, this one, the Integration Act, made it clear that there is a specific way that this needs to be implemented (…). There were several meetings in the provinces where the representative (…) from the Integration section* [at the BMEIA]*, together with the people from the ÖIF, they went to each province individually, like a tour you could say, but the most important people, they came into dialogue, they showed them how to implement it, and this literally right after the law came into force, so in the same week actually. So it was a very tough time, the weeks after this came into force because… The philosophy of this law is also to help the provinces and not leave them alone to implement it by themselves but making them sure there is ÖIF in each province and they take care of it and this is how you can cooperate with them* (Interview No. 9).

The increasing role of the ÖIF embodies such centralist governance the most intelligibly. Established in 1960 by the UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior with the initial aim of supporting the integration of recognised refugees only, its target group widened, with the 2002 legislative reform, to include all TCNs, when the ÖIF became the main ministry's partner in implementing the Integration Agreement with its civic integration conditions (Mourão Permoser 2012). Up to 2017, TCNs could fulfil their agreement's requirements with a standardised international language exam and therefore were not dependent on the ÖIF. However, this changed with the Integration Act of 2017 where only the ÖIF integration exam became eligible to fulfill the agreement's conditions. The role of the ÖIF has thus risen to become the central agency executing federal integration policies in local practice.

> *The Austrian Integration Fund is represented in all 9 provinces. There is at least one integration centre of the Austrian Integration Fund, so this means there was, everywhere, one centre of the Austrian Integration Fund who made sure that, in that province, it* [the Integration Act] *was implemented by them. (…) Otherwise, it would not have been possible to achieve standardisation and to make sure that this was implemented in a correct way* (Interview No. 9).

As various scholars demonstrate in their work (Dohnalová 2021; Kušniráková 2014; Pořízek 2018; Zogata-Kusz 2020), the national level of governance also occupies the central role in immigrant integration in the Czech case on a long-term basis. Since the end of the 1990s, the agenda has been driven by the Ministry of the Interior (MoI), the only exception being the years 2004–2008 when this role was handed over to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Under MoI, the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (OAMP) covers the whole migration issue, including immigrant integration. It is precisely here that all proposals for national strategies and measures for migration and integration are born, such as the Principles or the Conception, the legislative proposals, the subvention calls and so on.

Another significant actor on the national level, which is subordinated to the MoI, is the SUZ which, aside from managing refugee facilities on Czech territory, also administers some of the integration centres. When the MoI launched the creation of a network of such centres in 2009, only 2 regional administrations and 2 NGOs replied to this call. For this reason, the MoI secured the operation of the centres in the remaining 10 regions through the SUZ in order to cover the immigrant integration needs in the whole country (Interview No. 4). Nevertheless, as the MLG section here below reveals, Czech integration centres are governed in a decentralised manner which characterises CIP governance in Czechia more generally, while the centralist tendency is more extensive in the Austrian case, especially with regards to the implementation of civic integration measures.

Localist governance

While centralist governance seems to occupy a significant position in immigrant integration governance in both countries, a more profound look reveals the multiplicity of actors stepping into the process of immigrant integration and the relevant policy-making. In the Austrian case, the research analysis has revealed that localist governance characterised the main approach to immigrant integration during the 2000s. Whilst the question of immigrant integration was subject more to political discussions than real policy-making on the federal level, manifested only by the adoption of *ad hoc* civic integration measures in the 2000s, several regions and municipalities have already created departments focused on immigrant integration (Interviews No. 8, 12, 14, 18, 23) or even developed their own integration strategies (Interviews No. 20, 29):

> *The regions already had integration units when, on the federal level, there was nothing for this part. On the federal level, there was the* Bundesministerium *which dealt mostly with (…) the restrictions for people coming to Austria – and it was not about integration – and only several years after some of the regions already had integration units, only then did the federal level start to deal with this issue* (Interview No. 22).

The governance of integration policies is thus firmly developed in most of the Austrian provinces on a long-term basis and existed even before the country, at the national level, started to establish its own systematic approach to immigrant integration. Today, provinces usually operate provincial integration platforms of exchange between all relevant stakeholders and seak to cooperate with other provinces and cities active in the field (Interviews No. 8, 14, 16, 20, 22). Another good example of horizontal cooperation is the Conference of Provincial Integration Officers (LIRK), which takes place once a year, gathering together representatives of all provincial integration administrations to exchange best practices.

Not only provinces but cities and municipalities also collaborate on the question of immigrant integration horizontally within their national associations (*Österreichischer Gemeindebund* and *Österreichischer Städtebund*) (Interviews No. 18, 23, 29). Although big cities such as Vienna, Innsbruck, Salzburg or Graz belong to the most active self-government units with steady integration departments and their own integration strategies (Interviews No. 8, 16, 18, 23), several smaller municipalities, such as Dornbirn, Bregenz or Hallein,

are representatives of good practice in immigrant integration on the local level as well (Interviews No. 12, 16, 18, 20, 29).

Regarding the Czech case, the research material revealed that regions and cities stay somewhat inactive in immigrant integration. Only 2 regions out of 14 represent an exception in this regard: the City of Prague, acting simultaneously as a region and a municipality – like Vienna – and the Region of South Moravia. Yet, their activity stems mainly from the invitation made by the MoI to create integration centres as the MoI's idea behind the establishment of such centres in Czechia was decentralisation, asking regional authorities to take an active part in immigrant integration through the management of such facilities. Only the Region of South Moravia administration reacted to the first appeal made in 2009, followed by the City of Prague in 2012. NGOs took care of the integration centres in 2 other regions but no reaction to the invitation came from other regional authorities (Interview No. 4).

Aside from the big cities of Prague and Brno, which dispose of more evolved local integration strategies, only a few smaller municipalities – such as Havlíčkův Brod, Plzeň or Pardubice – work on their own integration projects or strategies. Nevertheless, their active approach began only very recently due to the incentives offered by the MoI (MV ČR 2014, 2016, 2021). Yet, these represent exceptional cases in the Czech environment as other local governments take a rather inactive, even ignoring, stance towards the integration agenda, which holds for both the regional and the local levels.

While horizontal coordination works well in the Austrian case, no such cooperation occurs in Czechia. Only unofficial communication based on personal ties between individual officers takes place according to the interviewees (Interviews No. 27, 28). The research thus revealed no real localist governance in the Czech case, whereas this type of governance historically characterises integration policy-making in Austria, especially during the 2000s before the federal level started to involve itself systematically in the agenda with the NAPI process.

Decoupling governance

With the increasing interference of the federal government in immigrant integration governance, it is possible to trace a rise in decoupling relationships in Austrian integration policy-making. A different approach by subnational authorities, not following national strategies – or even contradicting them – has occurred, especially since the refugee crisis of 2015, which significantly impacted on the Austrian experience with migration (Interviews No. 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 22). To attract the FPÖ's voters, the ÖVP occupied the integration agenda (Interview No. 32) and introduced additional restrictions with the Integration Act of 2017, which moved the federal mindset further away from the local setting. Eventually forming a coalition with the FPÖ between 2017 and 2019 did not help to improve the already-existent decoupling trend.

The political environment plays an important role in the difference between the federal and the subnational levels in Austria. As provinces are federal states possessing numerous autonomous competencies, provincial politics represents a strong aspect of Austrian multi-level coordination. Thus, when the political environment of the federal government is distinct from that of provinces, disagreement in dealing with such a sensitive topic as immigrant integration emerges naturally. As confirmed by several interviewees from all governance levels and actors (Interviews No. 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25), the diverging political setting constitutes the root of the conflict between the federal and subnational levels.

> *We try to look at things without (…) misusing the situation for political purposes, for getting votes from the people who don't like foreigners, we do what's necessary to be done. (…) The more and more radical way that the Austrian government went, the federal government, with this coalition of the ÖVP and FPÖ, not*

allowing anyone else to come to Austria, trying to get them out of the country as soon as possible and so on, [our region] *tried to go differently. Also other regions (…) try to go down this kind of pragmatic route of helping the people where help is needed* (Interview No. 16).

While the federal representatives speak of the close cooperation between the federal actors and the provinces (Interviews No. 9, 11), the majority of non-federal interviewees referred to uneasy cooperation, no real discussion or no interest at the federal level in the local experience and needs (Interviews No. 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 25, 29). They especially criticise the ineffective use of *Integrationsbeirat*, originally meant to serve as an exchange platform:

We also have contact with the Ministry of the Exterior [BMEIA] *because we are part of the* Integrationsbeirat *(…) but it's quite a formal meeting. So it's not really an exchange of thoughts or discussion where we decide anything, it's more that there are one or two topics which are very relevant at the moment and then there are some lectures (…)* (Interview No. 25).

At the moment, they [*Integrationsbeirat* meetings] *are quite boring, because they are a kind of… We are getting lectures there from (…) the Austrian Integration Fund (…) presenting, I would say, minor issues (…).* Interviewer: So it's not like a roundtable discussion? *No! Not at all. (…) For half an hour* [at the end of the day], *we are allowed to say things (…)* (Interview No. 16).

We can thus trace clear signs of decoupling governance as described by Scholten in Austria, especially since 2015. By contrast, however, my research did not find such a disrupting element in Czechia, which corresponds with the missing localist tendency in this case. Contrarily, all three governmental levels agree about smooth cooperation (Interviews No. 4, 7, 27, 28, 33, 39). Such a different outcome between the studied cases stems namely from their distinct political regimes. While the federal system enforces Austrian provinces with strong local politics that can easily come into conflict with the federal level, Czech regional politics does not play such a significant role because of the limited competencies that Czech regions possess in the unitary state regime. Although the analysis revealed a sort of decoupling relationship of the national level of governance with some NGOs (Interviews No. 1, 4, 33, 34, 40, 41), this cannot be assessed as decoupling governance due to the substantial cooperation of the MoI with other NGOs, which is discussed in more detail below.

Multi-level governance

Several pieces of evidence indicate that an MLG trend appeared in immigrant integration policy-making in Austria with the NAPI process (Interview No. 9; Kraler 2011; Kraler and König 2014). Some interviewees, federal as well as non-federal (Interviews No. 8, 15, 25), confirm that there was real multi-level collaboration between 2009 and 2014:

So, it first started in 2010, (…) the basis of the integration policy was the National Action Plan for Integration (…). This was the key policy document, a guideline for the integration policy in Austria and it was created by having… More than 140 experts came, having dialogues with them, representatives from the migrant organisations, the citizens and a steering group, so actually many people were involved in this process, it was not only a process from the top down but from the bottom up too. This was very important

when you set up something like that, the National Action Plan, you have to have people from all specific… All partners, all stakeholders, otherwise, this is not sustainable (Interview No. 9).

At the time when it [*Integrationsbeirat*] *was created, our former Prime Minister, Mr. Kurz, (…) was the integration minister – he was the integration state secretary at the beginning. And he really tried to use this structure for a real discussion at the beginning. (…) And the first time I was there (…),* [*Integrationsbeirat* meetings] *were lively discussions (…)* (Interview No. 16).

Not only interviewees but also some experts have pointed to the MLG nature of cooperation during this period (Gruber and Rosenberger 2018). However, other scholars and research interviewees show a different point of view. For instance, Kraler highlights that several 'NGOs as well as various municipalities and provinces – above all Vienna – were critical of how the [NAPI] process was managed and its resulting action plan' (Kraler 2011: 48). Interviewees' testimonies then also reveal a long-term difference in the mindset at the federal and the subnational levels:

We are working in really different ways sometimes, and it's also a little bit in conflict between the national and regional levels. (…) [T]*he cooperation between federal and regional level is not so good. (…) I would say it's right from the beginning. (…) It was sometimes really difficult to work together because there were different ways of thinking about how to do* [things] (Interview No. 22).

The interviewees also referred to the limited possibilities to influence the integration policy-making even in the case of the legislative procedure. Subnational authorities are endowed with no hard power in the legislative process as they can only comment on federal proposals – and these comments represent just an issue to be considered by the federal parliament. Although 2 non-federal interviewees from the regional level of governance expressed their positive view of a possible bottom-up influence (Interviews No. 14, 20), the majority agreed on its rather limited likelihood of really impacting on integration policy-making on the federal level. Such a view has been confirmed not only by the provincial representatives (Interviews No. 8, 14, 16) but also by the representatives of Austrian municipalities (Interviews No. 18, 23, 29) and NGOs or an international organisation (Interviews No. 10, 12, 25). It is therefore not straightforward to conclude that there truly was a multi-level mode of governance in Austria.

The Czech case, however, shows a different picture. Already with the Principles of 1999 and the Conception of 2000, Czech policy-makers emphasised the necessary involvement of subnational authorities in immigrant integration (Vláda ČR 1999, 2000). The most important incentives for such cooperation were launched in 2008 through the so-called 'emergent projects' for municipalities and the creation of integration centres in the regions (MV ČR 2009), both aimed at persuading subnational governments to take responsibility for immigrant integration in their constituency (Interview No. 4; MV ČR 2009, 2014). However, as only 2 regional administrations and 2 local NGOs responded to the call for the creation of integration centres, the MoI appointed the SUZ to be responsible for centres in the remaining 10 regions. While one could assume that this was a strong centralist move, the reason for handing the centres over to the SUZ was the inactivity of regional actors in responding to the call, not the centralisation efforts of the MoI (Interviews No. 2, 27). On the contrary, the integration centre run by the Region of South Moravia is considered 'a miracle' – an example of how the centres were supposed to work initially (Interview No. 4).

In addition, the testimonies of the representatives of regional integration centres (Interviews No. 2, 3, 5, 37) reveal a significant decentralisation of the centres' work, as shown in the example of the socio-cultural courses:

It is absolutely up to us. (…) Nobody influences us in this. We can get inspiration from other centres but it is absolutely only up to us (Interview No. 2).

We choose the topics on the basis of the actual situation in the region, based on demand on the part of the clients, what they are interested in, what they need, what they are dealing with the most right now – for example, via legal and social counselling. We either arrange the topics ourselves or in cooperation with experts on the given topic (…) (Interview No. 5).

The adaptation–integration courses are another sign of an MLG approach in Czechia. While it seems that this course was launched by the MoI, my interviews revealed that the initiative came from the foreigners themselves working in the NGO Slovo 21 – and its design was developed in a cross-level expert group:

[The course] *was established some 10 years ago – at least, quite a few years before,* [there was] *a need to do something like this, so that the foreigner gets something like a package of information which would help him at the beginning of the stay to orientate in society (…). As a first format (…), there was a lot of cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, other non-governmental organisations, Refugee Facility Management, the IOM* (…) *and also foreigners who knew what they encountered (…).* Interviewer: And the idea came from Slovo 21 directly? *Yes.* Interviewer: Not from the Ministry [of the Interior]? *No* (Interview No. 34).

A weak institutional setting, constituting a part of the MLG as described by Scholten, also complies rather more with the Czech than with the Austrian case. Whilst there exists a well-developed framework for coordination across horizontal (LIRK, the associations of Austrian municipalities and cities) as well as vertical (*Integrationsbeirat*) levels, such a coordination framework does not exist in Czechia. Only the quarterly meetings of the integration centres organised by the MoI could be considered as a similar cross-level platform. According to the interviewees from both national and regional levels, this cooperation works well and the local reality is reflected in the national conceptions thanks to this platform (Interviews No. 4, 33, 37). It would just need a more coordinated approach of exchange with other actors as well, which does not exist in Czechia (Interview No. 28).

The role of the EU also constitutes an important part of the multi-level type of governance. The relation of the countries studied with the EU-level governance of immigrant integration varies greatly; it also highlights the MLG approach applied in Czechia, unlike in Austria. The basic difference lies in the distinct periods of accession to the EU club which gave the examined cases divergent positions, especially with regards to CIP implementation. As some scholars point out (Carrera 2006; Carrera and Wiesbrock 2009), it was Austria, together with Germany and the Netherlands, which strongly lobbied in the early 2000s for a provision in the Long-Term Resident Status Directive enabling the Member States to require TCNs to comply with but not limiting civic integration conditions applied by national legislation. Such an approach to supranational negotiations rather endorses the centralist argument in the Austrian case as the state played a crucial role in establishing a common approach to immigrant integration on an international scale.

Czechia represents a very different picture. As a new country which accessed the EU in 2004, the harmonisation of the national legislative framework with the EU *acquis* significantly impacted on the development of Czech migration and integration policies (Baršová and Barša 2005; Čaněk and Čižinský 2011). Czech integration policy-makers followed the European guidelines substantially, getting their inspiration for best practices through the EU networks or bilateral cooperation with the other Member States such as Portugal, Germany or Austria (Interview No. 4, 6, 7, 27, 28). This example further proves that, in Czechia, the MLG approach is applied, especially with CIP implementation, while the centralist argument appears stronger in the Austrian case.

Conclusions

This article set out to determine how integration policies are governed in Austria and Czechia and how the governance changed with the introduction of civic integration. To answer this question, my analysis was based on the typology of relations between governments in a multi-level setting introduced by Scholten (2013), thus composed of a centralist, localist, decoupling and multi-level kind of governance. Two aspects constitute important variables forming part of the investigation. The first is the implementation of civic integration policies and the second contends with the different political regimes of the selected cases, a federal and a unitary one. Taking influence from the literature, my research presupposed that, in the Austrian federal state, an MLG trend is more likely to occur – including the governance of new civic integration measures – than in the Czech case as a unitary state, where a centralised logic of integration governance is expected.

Nonetheless, the analysis carried out in the Austrian case has shown that, increasingly, the Austrian federal government took immigrant integration governance into its own hands more and more firmly, namely in connection with the implementation of the CIP. While there was some rather localist governance with only *ad hoc* civic integration measures applied in the 2000s, the rising federal power led to efforts for a multi-level type of governance between 2009 and 2014 with the NAPI process and the establishment of the state secretary. Nevertheless, several testimonies pointed to the long-term decoupling relationships between the government levels, which the refugee crisis of 2015 further underlined, as the visions on how to incorporate immigrants started to differ considerably between the federal and subnational authorities. While the division of powers and a multi-level network of coordination are more formalised in the Austrian case, this does not necessarily lead to cooperation but may also create a space for division and conflict. The politicisation of immigrant integration and the diverse politics of the federal and subnational levels play a further significant role in the relationships between actors across governance levels in Austria, preventing policy-makers from effective MLG cooperation.

Surprisingly, however, the analysis discovered a more efficient MLG process in the Czech case, especially in relation to the CIP implementation. While the national government has occupied the central position in integration policy-making since the end of the 1990s, the harmonisation with the EU *acquis* as well as efforts to decentralise immigrant integration governance to the subnational level characterise the cooperation of various actors across different governmental levels. With the introduction of the first civic integration requirement, the MoI initiated the creation of regional integration centres, giving them considerable liberty in organising their further activities, especially in the case of socio-cultural courses. With regards to the adaptation–integration course, applied uniformly in the whole country, a closer look also revealed bottom-up incentives and management of the course. The depoliticised manner of dealing with immigrant integration, the technocratic and functional orientation of cooperation together with the weak institutionalisation of this policy area further enable an MLG approach which matches Scholten's description.

The overall conclusions stemming from this research are twofold. First, the results support Scholten's argument that there exist more types of governance between different governmental levels than just MLG and show that the various modes not only shift over time but may also overlap, as the Austrian (centralist and decoupling modes) and Czech (centralist and MLG modes) cases reveal. However, secondly – and more importantly – the article's main assumption has to be rejected in the end: there exists more MLG in the Czech case, representing a unitary state with a supposedly centralist tendency while, in federalist Austria, where a multi-level form of cooperation was anticipated, centralist and related decoupling governance were observed instead. Above all, these distinct approaches to governing immigrant integration emerged in connection with the CIP application in both countries. As these results do not conform with other research conclusions made thus far, such as the 'local' or 'national turn' in immigrant integration, a further examination of various cases using an

MLG analysis is needed to understand the real influence of civic integration on governing integration policies in Europe. What is more, as this article shows, adding diverging political regimes as an independent variable into the comparative analysis of immigrant integration governance helps to discover new findings enriching the literature on MLG in migration studies.

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Annex

List of Interviews Conducted

Interview No. 1. Representative of a Czech NGO involved in immigrant integration (phone call).
Interview No. 2. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 3. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 4. Representative of the Czech MoI (in person).
Interview No. 5. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 6. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Czechia (in person).
Interview No. 7. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Czechia (in person).
Interview No. 8. Representative of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 9. Representative of BMEIA (in person).
Interview No. 10. Representative of an Austrian NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).

Interview No. 11. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Austria (in person).
Interview No. 12. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Austria (in person).
Interview No. 13. Representative of an Austrian NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).
Interview No. 14. Representative of an Austrian provincial government office (in person).
Interview No. 15. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Austria (in person).
Interview No. 16. Representative of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 17. Representative of an Austrian NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).
Interview No. 18. Representative of an Austrian municipal administration (in person).
Interview No. 19. Representative of an Austrian municipal administration (in person).
Interview No. 20. Representatives of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 21. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Austria (in person).
Interview No. 22. Representative of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 23. Representative of an Austrian municipal administration (in person).
Interview No. 24. Representative of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 25. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Austria (in person).
Interview No. 26. Representative of the Czech MoI (phone call).
Interview No. 27. Representative of a Czech regional administration (phone call).
Interview No. 28. Representative of a Czech regional administration (phone call).
Interview No. 29. Representative of an Austrian municipal administration (phone call).
Interview No. 30. Representative of BMFFJI (in person).
Interview No. 31. Representative of an Austrian provincial administration (in person).
Interview No. 32. Representative of the Expert Council for Integration (online).
Interview No. 33. Anonymous participant involved in immigrant integration in Czechia (in person).
Interview No. 34. Representative of a Czech NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).
Interview No. 35. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 36. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (online).
Interview No. 37. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 38. Representative of a Czech NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).
Interview No. 39. Representative of a Czech municipal administration (in person).
Interview No. 40. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).
Interview No. 41. Representative of a Czech NGO involved in immigrant integration (in person).
Interview No. 42. Representative of a Czech regional integration centre (in person).

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Migrants' Perceptions of the Rejection of their Social Remittances: What Prevents Migrants from Combating Disinformation by Sharing their Perspective from Abroad?

Ilona Bontenbal*

This research sets out to analyse which factors hinder the attempts of migrants from Russia to combat disinformation about living in Finland – which represents the 'West' – through social remittances. This was looked at from the perspective of a particular case, 'the child custody' disinformation dispute. The research finds that migrants do actively try to shape the ideas that their friends and family in Russia have of Finland; part of this happens through discussion of the child custody case. The migrant interviewees had tried to provide information that differed from that provided by the Russian media and officials. However, they had found it difficult to change the perspectives and opinions of their friends and family through social remittances because of the strong foothold that traditional media outlets have in Russia, the perception of a strong East vs West dichotomy and a perceived mistrust of migrants and the things which they report from abroad. The study offers insights into the various factors that constrain the transmission of social remittances.

Keywords: social remittances, migrants, disinformation, Russia, Finland, child custody

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Introduction

Individuals can receive information that influences their opinion on something from various sources. It is often education, the media and, more generally, the internet which are considered to be central channels for receiving information. However, in some countries, such as Russia, these traditional sources are increasingly controlled by the state and used to convey one-sided and/or erroneous misinformation (inaccurate information resulting from a mistake) and disinformation (a deliberate attempt to deceive or mislead) (Hernon 1995). In such contexts, in which information channels are highly restricted, alternative sources of information become especially interesting to consider. One such channel for outside information is that of social remittances transmitted through migrant social networks or 'diaspora knowledge networks' – as termed by Meyer (2007).

Social remittances are ideas, know-how, cultural practices, information, attitudes and values that are transmitted by migrants from one context to another (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Suksomboon 2008). A substantial number of studies have established that, by transmitting such social remittances, migrants can provide their contacts living in the country of origin with outsider perspectives from abroad regarding issues such as work and employment (Grabowska 2017; Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Haynes and Galasińska 2016; Karolak 2016; Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß 2010), gender norms (Dannecker 2009; Main and Gózdziak 2020; Mukherjee and Rayaprol 2019; Vianello 2013) and migrating and living abroad (Mukherjee and Rayaprol 2019; Suksomboon 2008), to name but a few. However, the transmission of social remittances is not automatic and there are several studies that show how it can also be unsuccessful (Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017; Levitt 1998).

This article explores migrants' perceptions of the factors that hinder their agency in tackling disinformation through sharing their 'outsider' perspective and experiences through social remittances. This issue is looked at in a Finnish–Russian transnational context, which represents an interesting East–West migration setting in which social remittances have not before been studied. The article contributes to the scholarly discussion on the rejection of social remittances and the understanding of whether (or not) migrants can 'counteract Kremlin propaganda' (as defined by Fomina 2019), in the context of Russia's shift towards greater social conservatism under the authoritarian regime led by Putin. In this authoritarian regime, the state relies on a variety of methods to minimise political unrest and maintain its grip on power – for example, through the exertion of a large coercive apparatus, control over the key political institutions and the constraining of media freedom in order to control the narrative and the information that people receive (see Bunche, Koesel and Chen Weiss 2020 on authoritarian regimes). What makes the context even more interesting is Russia's centuries-long 'love–hate relationship' with the West and the implications that this relationship has for any attempts to counterbalance Russian state propaganda narratives (see Fomina 2021). Over the past several centuries, Russian politics and culture have been in a 'tug of war' between Westernising or Europhile tendencies and anti-Westernising or Eurosceptic tendencies (Kaempf 2010; Korosteleva and Paikin 2021). While, in the Russian narrative, the West is frequently depicted as an offensive opponent (Baumann 2020), the Western 'other', on the other hand, has also played an important role as a prism through which to build a self-understanding of what Russia is. As such, the question of Russian identity has been caught up in its relationship with the West (Kaempf 2010).

This study focuses on migrants' attempts to shape and challenge the perceptions that their family and friends have regarding Finland, which represents the West, particularly in relation to disinformation regarding child-custody arrangements – i.e., 'the child-custody case' – a Russian disinformation campaign against Finland according to which Russian children are being mistreated there. Through discussing this case, the article also contributes to the discussion of the role and effects of migration and transnationality on child rearing and parenting – a well-researched topic in migration studies (see, e.g., Brandhorst, Baldassar and Wilding 2020; Nedelcu and Wyss 2019; Pustułka 2012; White 2011). Previous research has shown that the ideas that are remitted regarding child care

and parenting do not always fit the perspectives of the recipients of remitters and that there might be clashes of norms, values and practices between senders and receivers (see Grabowska and Engbersen 2016; Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Levitt 2001; Main and Gózdziak 2020; Vlase 2013). The article explores: a) how migrants from Russia living in Finland perceive that their attempts to share their perceptions about the West and life in Finland and, through this, to combat disinformation, particularly relating to the 'child-custody case', are met by their friends and family in Russia; and b) the factors which make it difficult for migrants to provide an outsider perspective and combat disinformation through social remittances. 'Outsider' information refers here to information and perspectives that migrants have gained after their migration abroad and/or which diverge from information shared through the controlled information channels in Russia. The research is based on 35 interviews with migrants from Russia living in Finland.

Theoretical background: **migrants' social remittances and their rejection**

In Russia, because of the strict media control, it has become difficult for people to receive multisided information and perspectives which do not align with the goals of the government. One information channel which is more difficult for governing elites to control is facilitated by individuals who have left Russia and live abroad but who maintain social contacts with their family and friends living in Russia. Since migrants have gained experience and information from outside their community of origin, they can bring new information to their networks (Lindstrom and Muñoz-Franco 2005). In other words, migrants can 'exit with voice' (Waddell 2014), use their voice after exit (Fomina 2019) or leave open a door for the diffusion of ideas (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2009). The potential role of such insider–outsider agents (Grabowska and Garapich 2016) has increased due to improvements in communications and travel technology – such as smartphones – which have increased the density, multiplicity and importance of transnational interconnectedness. Migrants can easily and relatively cheaply stay in contact with their family and friends in their country of origin (Levitt 1998; Urinboyev 2021; Vertovec 2001).

Some researchers refer to the ideas, know-how, information, attitudes and values transmitted by migrants through transnational networks from the country of settlement to the societies of origin as 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Suksomboon 2008). When migrants are in contact with their non-migrant acquaintances, they share social remittances about their life and experiences in the country of settlement, such as how they choose places to live and work (Vertovec 2007), the education or welfare system in the country of settlement (Bontenbal 2022) and their progress and reception at the destination (Isaakyan 2015; Mukherjee and Rayaprol 2019). Unlike other forms of global cultural circulation, social remittances generally occur personally and directly between social peers who know each other or who are connected to one another by mutual social ties. The messages, transmitted and diffused through interpersonal relations and between group members based on personal preference or mutual ties, are potentially even more powerful agents of change than messages conveyed through impersonal channels of information, such as the mass media (Lindstrom and Muñoz-Franco 2005).

Both migrants and non-migrants are part of the social remitting process and they can both act as filters of what gets transmitted and accepted. However, being actively part of the social remitting process means that, if norms, values and behaviour can be passed on, they can also be resisted, changed, manipulated or blocked (Grabowska and Garapich 2016). When friends and family members living in the country of origin receive remittances, they interpret what the migrants are telling them and perceive what returnees and visitors are doing. Based on the remittances they receive, the non-migrants actively select what to try to make sense of and what to not (Mata-Codesal 2011, 2013.) Some new ideas and practices are adopted unchallenged, other new elements are grafted onto existing ones (Levitt 1998) and some new ideas are rejected (Grabowska and

Garapich 2016; Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017). In case of rejection, the migrant may become even more convinced about the norms and values that prevail in their country of origin (Fidrmuc and Doyle 2004).

Sometimes social remittances are rejected because migrants may want to remit ideas about change that are not always possible or desired by people in the country of origin (Levitt 1997; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Vari-Lavoisier 2014). This can be, for example, because the change in norms brought about by social remitting is likely to be imposed at the expense of other existing norms and on who might have been benefitting from the prevailing norm and its benefits previously (Levitt 1998; Vari-Lavoisier 2014, 2015). Migrants remit ideas and norms that fit with their own knowledge and support their own normative vision and this vision is not always shared by those who have not migrated (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Vari-Lavoisier 2015; Waddell 2014). Previous studies show that social remittances may be rejected, for example, because they are considered to represent foreign ideologies – such as consumerism (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011) or the fear that they may set a bad example for youth (Levitt 2001) – or because the social remittances are considered misplaced or inappropriate (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Waddell 2014).

The child-custody case

Russia has, in recent years, escalated its disinformation campaigns against the United States and Europe (Lanoszka 2019; Tiido 2019). This escalation had already started before the beginning of Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014. One example of such campaigns comes from Russia's neighbouring country, Finland: in 2010, a diplomatic dispute erupted between Finland and Russia, which was mainly covered by the media. The events started to enfold when disinformation was widely shared in Russian mainstream media according to which Russian children in Finland were being mistreated by the Finnish authorities.

According to the reports, Finnish social-service officials were systematically seizing Russian children from their parents on wrongful grounds, taking them into custody and placing them in social care or giving them up for adoption. In some cases, the wrongfulness of this was emphasised by the fact that the children were supposedly being given to same-sex couples in Western countries (Bjola and Papadakis 2021). Disinformation about child-custody arrangements in Finland has since been widely disseminated in the Russian media. The message has been that Russians living in Finland are being poorly treated and Russia has called for action from its citizens to correct the situation. The purpose has been to undermine trust in the Finnish authorities (Tiido 2019) and to use Russian citizens abroad as a tool of influence (Luukkanen 2016).

According to Luukkanen (2016), however, the disinformation campaign has not been particularly successful among migrants from Russia in Finland, due to people remaining calm, the welfare institution enduring and successful integration. According to Tiido (2019), the fact that Finland's Russian-speaking community is, in general, reluctant to get involved in political disputes and tries to go unnoticed instead of drawing attention to itself and that, as a minority group, lacks a common ground, has also led to the campaign not being successful among Russian citizens abroad.

Even though the campaign did not gain significant international coverage (Bjola and Papadakis 2021), it did have a long-lasting impact on the perceptions of Russians. According to survey results from 2021, even 10 years after the start of the campaign, some 7 per cent of Russians living in Russia remember reading or frequently seeing news in the Russian media about families of Russian origin facing problems in Finland, while 22 per cent report having read or heard something but have no specific recollection of it (Finnish Foreign Ministry 2021). Among the interviewees, the child-custody case was considered common knowledge (in line with Bjola and Papadakis 2021) and something that most of the interviewees had discussed with their acquaintances living in Russia. Although the main uproar around the child-custody case occurred around 2010, during the time in which the interviews were conducted in 2018–2019 this still seemed to be something that

the interviewees wanted to discuss and bring up as an example of their communication with friends and family in Russia.

Most recently, in 2023, the use of child-custody cases as propaganda escalated again in the Russian media in relation to Russia's war in Ukraine. This time, the Finnish authorities were supposedly stealing Ukrainian refugee children in Finland. The message was the same as before: the Finnish authorities, as representatives of European authorities, cannot be trusted. As part of this the hashtag #EuropeStealsChildren was deployed (Stolzmann, Mattila, Roslund, Kurki, Ritonummi, Pehkonen 2023).

Data and method

In Finland, Russian-speakers (also including, for example, a large number of individuals who have migrated from the former Soviet Union) form the largest migrant group and constitute about 1.5 per cent of the 5.5 million inhabitants (Official Statistics of Finland, 2022). The number of migrants from Russia living in Finland has grown particularly rapidly since the 1990s. The most common reasons for migration to Finland are marriage to a Finnish citizen, the return migration of individuals considered as Finnish descendants, work and studies (Lehtonen 2016).

As mentioned above, the fieldwork for this research was carried out between January 2018 and May 2019. Altogether, 35 individuals were interviewed. Each interviewee was interviewed once. During the interviews, the migrants were asked to recount what kind of things, regarding Finland and living in Finland, they had discussed with their family, friends and acquaintances living in Russia. The interviewees brought up several topics, one of which was the 'child-custody case'. The focus is on direct interpersonal contact and thus excludes the sharing of information through, for example, social media posts, which are not targeted at a specific acquaintance.

The interviewees had migrated to Finland between 1993 and 2018. All of them had Russian citizenship before their migration and, at the time of the interviews, 13 had Finnish nationality. Instead of using the concept of Russian migrants, the concept of migrants from Russia is used because not all migrants from Russia are and/or consider themselves to be ethnically Russian. The primary commonality of the interviewees is thus their lived experience in what they consider the entity of Russia and their embeddedness in the Finnish–Russian transnational field, rather than their Russian ethnicity. Russian-speakers from other countries, such as other former Soviet republics, as well as transit migrants who move to Europe via Russia, are excluded.

Of the interviewees, 12 had come to Finland to study, 12 for family reasons, 9 due to having Finnish 'roots' and 2 for work-related reasons. Almost all of the interviewees came from areas of Russia close to Finland. Although there were some exceptions, most of the interviewees thus came from the European part of Russia – the Karelian area of Russia was particularly over-represented as an area of origin of the interviewees. Altogether, 26 women and 9 men were interviewed. Overall, there are more female (*circa* 65 per cent) than male (*circa* 35 per cent) individuals from Russia or the former Soviet Union living in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland, n.d.). In particular, the number of Russian-speaking women aged over 20 years is much higher than that of men (Varjonen, Zamiatin and Rinas 2017). The youngest interviewee was 21 years old and the oldest 85; 14 were employed at the time of the interview, 2 were unemployed, 5 were retired, one was on maternity leave and 12 were currently studying at a higher education institute in Finland. This reflects not only the fact that many Russians come to Finland to study but also the phenomenon that Finnish integration policy tends to steer migrants towards re-education and low-skilled sectors, rather than capitalising on qualifications already acquired in the country of origin (Bontenbal 2021; Krivonos 2015). Of the 35 interviewees, 30 either have tertiary education or are currently studying at a higher education institution in Finland.

The interviewees in this study were found through various channels, such as the mailing lists of Russian cultural organisations in Finland, national and local migrant organisations, Finnish language classes targeted at Russian speakers and snowballing. It is possible that this method meant that mainly individuals who participate actively in society and are also more integrated in Finnish society were reached – whereas, for example, individuals who are unemployed or not studying or participating in the third sector were not. The recruitment channels probably also had an impact on the sampling of the research participants, since the interviewees for this research in general believed that stories about children in Finland being taken away without sufficient reason were wrongful information. There were two interviewees who had, at first, been unsure what to believe but none expressed a firm belief that Russian children are mistreated in Finland. Thus, my research focuses on those who trust the child-custody authorities and try to convince their interlocutors in Russia and counteract the propaganda, rather than on the opinions of those who share the perception of the Russian state propaganda. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form and given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. This ensured that interviewees were giving informed consent. When the project started, no independent ethics approval was required in the country context in which the research was conducted. The interviewees were ensured full anonymity, and no real names or places are used in the article. Ethically speaking, anonymity is especially important since, although the migration of educated, critically thinking and opposition-minded individuals might not be a problem for the authoritarian regime in a political sense (Lassila 2019), it may become a problem if these people not only stop using their voice upon exit but exit with a voice and keep influencing their country of origin. The interviews lasted on average one hour and were conducted in Finnish, English or Russian, depending on the interviewees' preferences. In the case of interviews conducted in Russian, help was provided by a Russian-speaking research assistant.

After interviewing, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. To analyse the research material, thematic content analysis was used as the main analytic strategy, whereby the data were systematically organised into increasingly abstract units of information (Creswell 2007). The data were first coded with the research questions in mind. The coded interview segments were then organised into thematic subcategories. Based on the initial thematic categories, the first segments of analysis were written and these texts were then organised under the main categories – which all focus on the reasons for the rejection of social remittances. These main categories are: 1) the strong foothold of traditional media; 2) the East vs West dichotomy; and 3) the status of migrant. Each main category forms a sub-chapter in the analysis part of the article. The quotations used in the text are word-for-word recounts and function as examples of analyses and to illustrate the validity of the observations. The quotations have been chosen to represent the most common and typical themes in the research material. They also bring the participants' voice into the study (Creswell 2007).

Results: reasons for the rejection of migrants' social remittances related to the 'child-custody case'

The analysis will explore how migrants perceive that their attempts to shape and challenge their acquaintances' perceptions about Finland – particularly in relation to the 'child-custody case' – through social remittances, have succeeded and what factors have hindered their attempts.

There was a consensus among the interviewees that their friends and family in Russia often have misconceptions, based on exaggerations and disinformation, about life in Finland. This was particularly underlined by their perception of the child-custody case, which was described by most of the interviewees as something which they have actively discussed with their friends and family living in Russia and which has evoked great interest and many questions: 'Everyone [Russian acquaintances] kept asking me whether my children were with me and I told them that: "Yes and it's not true [what they're saying in the Russian media]"'

(F, 36). The interviewees spoke of how they had gained knowledge on the topic through their employment, their social contacts – such as neighbours and family members – and their own experiences: 'This child protection case interests them enormously, because it annoys them but, because I have some work experience in this field [in Finland], I can explain how things are actually done and so on' (F, 28).

The interviewees had tried but had often found it difficult to shape the perception that their friends and family have of the 'West' and Finland – and the child-custody case in particular. There are three main factors which, according to the interviewees, made changing the opinion of non-migrant acquaintances concerning the child-custody case and, more broadly, 'living in the West', difficult. These are: a) the influential foothold of information provided by the mainstream Russian media; b) a perceived strong East vs West dichotomy; and c) emigrants not being trusted. In the following sub-chapters, each of these factors will be analysed in more depth.

Rejection resulting from the strong foothold of the traditional Russian media

The interviewees perceived that one of the main reasons why they have had difficulty changing their acquaintances' opinions and perceptions is that the Russian mainstream media has such a strong foothold in determining people's thinking.

According to the interviewees, people tend to form strong opinions based on information provided by the media – especially TV news – and these opinions are difficult to change. This applies to both the child-custody case and to Finland in general. The interviewees themselves had also initially heard about the child-custody case from the Russian media and two of them mentioned that, when they first moved to Finland, they were afraid of this and did not know what to believe. For example, one interviewee, who had a child living with her in Finland, noted:

> *I also watched those Russian news stories – and almost believed them– but then I was like, no, no. Because I know for myself and I told them* [family in Russia] *that, in Finland, children are not taken away without checking several times that the family does not take care of them* (F, 42).

After migrating to Finland, some of the interviewees had discussed the child-custody case with their Finnish acquaintances and co-workers, which had helped to build trust in the Finnish children's service authorities. This is in line with previous findings that migrants from Russia tend to gain a sense of trust in the Finnish state (Saarinen 2007) and, particularly, Finnish public health care, public social care, the judiciary and the police (Castaneda and Koskinen 2014).

However, mainly because the information provided by the media is seen as one-sided and often erroneous, the interviewed migrants felt a need to transmit 'rightful' information based on their own experiences. They pointed out that it is mainly through the media that their acquaintances have been fed stereotypical and misleading information about Finland which they (the migrants) then have to dismantle. In particular, people who had not been to Finland themselves were seen as being strongly influenced by the image provided by the media in their home country. One interviewee, for example, noted: '… they [her friends and family in Russia] ask me about it all the time and they usually believe those media, those news stories. They think that social workers in Finland take Russian children. It is a popular issue' (F, 29).

Because of the lack of truthful information in the Russian media, the role of providing rational and impartial information regarding Finland and/or Russia was, according to the interviewees, left to them. One interviewee noted in this regard: 'I do it very actively [correct any misinformation], because it [media coverage] is very politicised and tendentious; they result in very concise viewpoints and so I have shared more objective

information and shown them the other side of the coin' (M, 28). Interviewees felt that the fact that the migrants had their own experiences of Finland and, in some cases, of also raising children or working in social care in Finland, gave them a more comprehensive understanding which they were then able to share. One interviewee, for example, described trying to provide friends and family back in Russia with information 'which is difficult to obtain from newspapers or other sources' (F, 45).

The interviewees noted that the way in which Finland is described in the Russian media also influences how migrants living in Finland are seen by those who remain in the origin country. Since the West is, according to the interviewees, often described in negative terms, this also reflects negatively on how migrants are viewed. If the Western lifestyle is seen as morally corrupt, as exemplified, for example, by children being taken away from their parents/families without proper reason, migrants living in Finland may also become disapproved of. This was another reason why the interviewed migrants tried to change, through social remittances, how their acquaintances in Russia view Finland. Moreover, for some, discussing the child-custody case also had a personal dimension. Three of the interviewees noted that their relatives living in Russia had been worried that the interviewees' children might be taken away from them. By telling their relatives that the stories were false, the migrants were reassuring them that their children were safe in Finland.

However, although the interviewees reported that they try to change the understanding that their acquaintances have formed regarding Finland from the Russian media, many find it very difficult. They noted that, even though they had tried to explain that, in Finland, social services do not take children away for no reason, their acquaintances had not wanted to believe them, indicating a rejection of social remittances (Grabowska and Garapich 2016; White 2019). One interviewee, for example, noted:

> *Well, my mother and grandmother were quite worried and they watch everything and believe everything that they see on the news in Russia... Even though we give them totally contrary information, they just think that we are trying to calm them down and are not telling them the truth, and that the TV and news are actually telling them the truth, ha ha!* (F, 42).

The failed transmission of social remittances can have various implications. When friends and family do not want to believe what they are told, this may cause a strain on the transnational relationship and lead to the migrant not wanting to share things again. One interviewee described how, despite her efforts, she had been unable to convince some of her acquaintances living in Russia that it is safe to travel to Finland with their children. As a result, one of her friends, who had been planning to do just that, ended up cancelling the trip. The interviewee noted: 'They went to other countries and they spend a lot of time with friends in the Czech Republic but they never made it to Finland – because they were afraid that someone would take their kids away' (F, 30).

Rejection resulting from an East vs West dichotomy

The second aspect which, according to the interviewees, had led to the failure of their social remittances related to a perceived East vs West dichotomy in people's thinking. Interviewees described how Finland is perceived in Russia as part of the 'West', whereas Russia is considered to be part of the 'East'. Providing an understanding of what life is like in Finland thus means communicating a broader vision of Europe and an understanding of what life is like in the 'West' (see similar findings in the Moldovan context by Mahmoud, Rapoport, Steinmayr and Trebesch 2014 and in the Ukrainian context by Solari 2019). Therefore, migrants explaining to their family and friends about the child-custody case is just one part of explaining what life is like in Finland in general – and the two cannot be completely separated. One interviewee, for example, noted:

'I have spoken about how things are done in Europe. And I use this notion of Europe because Finland is not understood as separate but, in a way, as part of Europe and the West' (M, 28).

The perception of such a division between East and West has had consequences insofar as migrants are hopeful that they have been able to influence perceptions. Because the West is frequently depicted as an offensive immoral opponent (Baumann 2020), then ideas, values and information transmitted from Finland may also be rejected. According to the interviewees, the association of the European lifestyle – with its disapproved-of liberal values in particular – can lead to the rejection of social remittances from migrants. As noted by Kulmala and Tšernova (2015), in Putin's Russia, a strong family-centred ideology has dominated, emphasising the protection of so-called traditional conservative family values. According to this ideology, fostered by Russian leaders, Russia is a mainstay of the conservative world against the values of the West (Davydova-Minguet 2014; Krivonos 2018). One interviewee, for example, noted that '… some of them [acquaintances in Russia] very, very strongly believe that Mother Russia should be, like, the only homeland and that Western countries are, like, rotten' (F, 23). Europe being considered too liberal has led, according to the interviewees, to some of their acquaintances stigmatising everything related to Europe and thus also to Finland. Consequently, no ideas or information are welcome and disinformation regarding the child-custody case can be difficult to challenge.

According to the interviewees, whether a person's acquaintances are pro-West or pro-East greatly influences the likelihood that the things which migrants tell their acquaintances in Russia are believed, valued and accepted. A number of interviewees noted that some of their acquaintances or people whom they know are liberal, pro-West, pro-Finland or 'fans of the West' and are thus interested in how things are done abroad and especially in Europe. Being pro-Western had, according to the interviewees, made their acquaintances more receptive to social remittances transmitted from Finland, including perceptions regarding the child-custody case. Correspondingly, acquaintances in Russia whom the interviewees described as patriotic and conservative were less willing to accept social remittances from Finland. Interviewees said that older people, in particular, often belong to the group holding a negative view of Europe. One interviewee, for example, noted: 'My father is a little bit more critical about it, about Europe, because he is an old-fashioned Russian guy. I can't really change him in this case because, like, my parents are quite old' (F, 19).

While surface-level cultural practices transmitted from the West may be easier to pass on, it is particularly issues that are more deeply rooted in the mentality of people and society which, according to the interviewees, are more difficult to challenge. For example, interviewees described how business ideas from the West have been more accepted than ideas about democracy or liberalism. One interviewee noted regarding this:

> *It depends on the ideas. If we're talking about business ideas, trade and technology, it's certainly open because these are surface-level things but, if we're talking about large ideologies, it's closed. The conservatism and a thousand-year-old tradition in this kind of communitarianism system, which emphasises community and traditions, makes it closed* (M, 28).

As noted by Portes (2010), the various elements that compose culture and social structure can be hierarchically arranged into 'deeper' factors – which are fundamental but often concealed within everyday social life – and 'surface' phenomena, which are more easily adapted and readily evident. Value and norm systems that are part of 'deep' culture are difficult and slow to change (Dzięglewski 2016; Järvinen-Alenius, Pitkänen and Virkama 2010; Karolak 2016). According to Cingolani and Vietti (2019), this may be because there might, for example, be a fear of cultural and economic neo-colonialism from European countries.

What should also be noted, however, is that, although it is considered part of the 'West', many of the interviewees said that Finland, in general, has had a strong country brand in Russia. One interviewee, for example, noted that:

> *In general, people have a more positive feeling about Finland as a country where people live and how this life is structured. So, I think these ideas would be welcomed if they are branded under Finland* (F, 30).

However, according to the interviewees, openness towards Finland has been changing lately, particularly in relation to the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by European countries, including Finland. These sanctions have, according to the interviewees, weakened the relationship between the countries, which in turn has influenced the acceptance of social remittances. In relation to this, it should be noted that our interviews were conducted before Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the impact that this war has had on Russian–European relations. However, at the time of the interviews, the annexation of Crimea had already occurred and hostility towards Western and liberal values was strongly present among Russian political leaders and visible, for example, in the Russian mainstream media. The situation was thus not completely different to what it is now although, since then, relations have further deteriorated. It can therefore be assumed that this further deterioration now has an even more impeditive impact on the transmission of any social remittances from Finland, as part of the West, to Russia. In practical terms, the closing of the Russian–Finnish border in 2023, in particular, has hindered this process (Mata-Codesal 2011).

Rejection resulting from the remitters' emigrant status

A third aspect which, according to the interviewees, makes changing the opinions of non-migrants – both about the child-custody case and, more broadly, about 'life in the West' – difficult, was related to them being emigrants. They pointed out that, in the Russian context, emigrants are often not trusted and the outsider information provided by them is therefore not valued (see contrary findings from Gawlewicz 2015, in a Polish–UK transnational context). The findings indicate that the way in which migration is perceived among friends and family has a role in how the things that emigrants report from abroad are accepted and valued.

Another aspect revealed in the interviews was that there are significant differences between Russians in how emigration is seen: some noted that their acquaintances had reacted positively to their migration, with two interviewees particularly mentioning that emigration is a common dream among Russians. However, others noted that they had received mainly negative feedback on their decision to move to Finland. According to the interviewees, emigration is often seen as something that has a negative influence on Russian society and its economy (see a similar finding by Dzięglewski 2016 in the Polish context). In particular, the loss of highly educated individuals is seen as a problem and thus their migration is, according to the interviewees, disapproved of. Interestingly, the idea that migration is a betrayal was mentioned in relation to how acquaintances in Russia have perceived emigration abroad. Thus, as noted by Teferra (2005), those who have left the country are not always seen in a positive light and sometimes a stigma hangs over them. The analysis indicates that this stigma can hamper the acceptance of social remittances.

Attitudes towards emigration seem to be an issue particularly related to the East vs West setting, and migration to the West, to Finland, is especially seen as unpatriotic and even selfish. One interviewee, who went to Finland to study, recounted that her tutor in Russia told her: 'Okay, you can go to China or countries which are closer to us economically but Finns, they are closer to the US and the US is our enemy. It's like you're going to our enemy'. The interviewee commented that it is 'ridiculous but, unfortunately, it's true' (F, 23). It thus seems to matter where you move to, with some places being more acceptable than others. The

interviewee further noted that many of her acquaintances 'were very unhappy that I was moving to a Western country because they think that Russian people should stay in Russia and invest in Russia and not go away and work for someone else' (F, 23). This quote again illustrates the pronounced East vs West worldview.

These opinions of the interviewees' acquaintances about migration influence the acceptance of ideas and information that the emigrants transmit from abroad. Several interviewees perceived that the things which they tell their acquaintances regarding the child-custody case and life in Finland are not accepted and valued because their initial migration to Finland is criticised. Furthermore, some of them noted that, if they were to migrate back to Russia, it is unlikely that, for example, any professional skills which they acquired in Finland would be valued and accommodated in Russia. Instead, they would have to go back to the way things are done in Russia (in line with Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2009). Having gained a European perspective is, according to the interviewees, not always appreciated – for example, in the labour market. One interviewee (F, 21), for example, said that, when she was doing an internship in Russia, her boss did not appreciate her 'European' understanding of the duration of a working day. She says that her boss was surprised when she wanted to leave work after eight hours and said in a demeaning way: 'Oh, this is the European style'. As Brinkerhoff (2006) notes, for diaspora contributions to be effective, the homeland society needs to be welcoming and not, for example, to criticise the diaspora. In this research, this manifests itself in such a way that, when emigration is not valued, migrants' opinions on issues such as the child-custody case are also not appreciated.

What further affects how acquaintances see migration is related to whether migrants are still seen as part of the homeland society group or not. One interviewee, for example, noted that acquaintances have told her that she is '… a different person now that she has moved away' and that she is no longer Russian (F, 31, nurse). However, to be able to positively engage, there ought to be a level of mutual recognition and migrants need to be recognised as 'us' and not as outsiders (Abdile and Pirkkalainen 2011). Furthermore, individuals are only effective influencers if they understand the sociocultural environment of both their country of origin and their country of settlement and are thus attuned to contextual information on both sides of the boundary (Tushman and Scanlan 1981). This enables them to seek out relevant information in one context and disseminate it in the other. Some said that, since they are out of touch with how things are in Russia, they are no longer considered part of the in-group and thus their perceptions from abroad are also unwelcome.

However, contrary experiences also emerged from the interviews, with some interviewees mentioning that, although certain of their acquaintances are no longer interested in their opinion, others appreciate them even more now that they have lived abroad. It seems that acquaintances who have a positive perspective on moving and living abroad are often also more appreciative of information and news shared from abroad. As one interviewee, who originally moved to Finland to study, stated: 'I'm a star there, you know, I've escaped. Ha ha!' (F, 21, employed in logistics). The interviewees' status as people who have moved abroad can make them appear worth listening to.

Discussion and conclusion

This study provides insights into why the attempts of migrants to share information and shape the perceptions that their non-migrant friends and family have about life in Finland – and, more generally, the West – sometimes fails. On a theoretical level, the research adds to the understanding of the acceptance and rejection of migrants' social remittances and the limits to the role that migrants can have as agents of change (Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017; White 2019). The transferring of social remittances is facilitated by close contacts with friends and family, visits to the country of origin and individualised and tailor-made stories about life in the host society (see Bontenbal 2022). However, the findings illustrate that, although migrants can have agency in deciding what kind of information and narrative they transmit to their

society of origin, the impact of these narratives remains limited due to various factors that limit receptivity and absorptive capacity (Nevinskaitė 2016; Siar 2014). Therefore, social remittances are not always a powerful tool for bringing about change in attitudes or perceptions. Contextually, the study offers a new perspective on the Finnish–Russian transnational field, which has not been analysed before in the scholarly discussion of social remittances.

The findings illustrate that, besides 'activists' who try to counteract Kremlin propaganda (as found in Fomina 2019), so-called 'ordinary people' also take on the role of correcting disinformation (see also Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2009 on ordinary people remitting). Migrants may feel a need to influence what their friends and family think about their host society, since this can also impact on how they view migrants and their life in the host society. Migrants therefore try to exercise agency to influence their acquaintances' perceptions and correct mis- and disinformation. In terms of the child-custody case, in particular, the interviewees had gained a level of trust in the Finnish child-welfare authorities and did not believe the narratives repeated in the Russian media about families being treated wrongly – this is also what they shared with their acquaintances in Russia. In this regard, the study contributes to the understanding of migrants' trust in the host-society authorities (see Korzeniewska, Erdal, Kosakowska-Berezecka and Żadkowska 2019).

Concerning contributions to the research field and, particularly, the discussion on barriers to the transmission of social remittances, this research finds that the transmission of social remittances can be hindered by several factors, some of which are probably more context-dependent than others. The three factors identified as hindering the transmission of those social remittances that are the most prominent in the interviewees' narratives are the significant role of the mainstream Russian media, a perceived East vs West setting and a perception – by those who have remained in the origin country – of those who have migrated as outsiders. What is interesting is that all these factors are also strongly interlinked and that it is particularly the geopolitical East vs West positioning that seems to also underline the other hindrances: it is, above all, migration to the West that is disapproved of – and it is the Russian media's portrayal of the West that is difficult to change through social remittances.

This study has found that, besides looking at individual- or micro-level factors related to the remitter or recipient – such as socioeconomic position, professional status, education level or legal status (Boccagni and Decimo 2013; Kapur 2004; Levitt 2001; Spilimbergo 2009; Vari-Lavoisier 2014) – on which previous studies have largely focused, it is also important to look at macro-level aspects related to the recipients' and host countries' geopolitical stances and existing cultural and political rifts. The findings exemplify that the relationships between countries and the international geopolitical situation can influence the acceptance of social remittances (see also Isaakyan 2015). Perceived ideological rifts can make the transmission of social remittances more difficult, in that they thus cannot be separated from other influences in society, which is why they are also not unattached from the international relations of states. It would be worthwhile, in future research, studying further how power relations, political rifts and geopolitical positions impact on social remittances. When researching remittances to or from Russia, it is particularly important to take into account the existing dichotomies between the West and the East. The image of the 'West' conveyed by the Russian media is not easily changed, even by personal accounts. The role of this East vs West dichotomy in post-Soviet countries would also be interesting to consider.

In terms of limitations, it should be noted that the research can only capture the perception of the remitters, so more research is needed to capture the perception of the recipients of remittances. Furthermore, as mentioned in the data-collection description, it is possible that the selection of interviewees is skewed towards those who are more active in society, more integrated and more trusting of the Finnish authorities concerning the child-custody case. It should thus be noted that the findings do not attempt to represent the perceptions of

all migrants from Russia in Finland nor of all Russian speakers in Finland. Although the interviewees in this study said that they believe the Russian version of child-custody arrangements in Finland to be based on disinformation, this is not to say that all migrants from Russia in Finland think in this way or trust the Finnish authorities. On the contrary, previous studies have shown child-custody arrangements to be a particularly sensitive issue that can cause tensions and mistrust between migrants and representatives of the state, such as social workers (e.g. Aure and Daukšas 2020; Korzeniewska *et al*. 2019).

As a final note, it is worth pointing out that, although the interviews were conducted some years ago, the research findings derive new relevance from the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine. News media have recently reported stories about families separated by different understandings of the war: many individuals who have emigrated from Russia and are living in Ukraine or other European countries condemn the invasion, while family members who have not migrated and are living in Russia have been exposed to Russian disinformation and thus believe the war to be justified. It seems that, despite the efforts of family members living abroad to explain how things are in Ukraine, many in Russia have been unwilling to believe it (see, for example, Miridzhanian 2022; Viner 2022). This research similarly illustrates how disinformation is difficult to combat and explains some of the reasons why this is so. Although the data collection for this research was carried out before the Russian war in Ukraine, at the time of the interviews, the findings were also able to shed light on current events and especially on why it can be difficult for migrants to provide outsider information and perspectives from abroad.

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Political Integration through Latent and Manifest Political Participation: The Vietnamese Diaspora in Poland

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This article investigates the integration of Vietnamese-origin immigrants into the political sphere in Poland. Drawing on the reconceptualisation of integration as a two-way interactive process between migrant actors and host countries, this study examines the Vietnamese's political integration by disentangling the migrant group's willingness to be politically integrated through their participation in the political opportunities granted in the host society. Empirically, this study focuses on the viewpoint of immigrants, analysing the Vietnamese's latent and manifest political participation in Polish society. By employing mixed-method research with a parallel mixed design utilising qualitative and quantitative data, this study discloses the visibility of political integration into Polish society among Vietnamese-origin immigrants. The integration is characterised by a modest willingness for political engagement, exhibited by a low involvement level in latent activities and a very low rate of engagement in the manifest dimension. Political integration motivation is highly linked to the perception of obligation fulfilment to the host society, the desire to gain recognition from the hosts and the protection of liberal values. The results also uncover a variation in political participation across primary demographic factors, with a high degree of involvement manifested among males, older people and the 1.5 and second generation.

Keywords: Vietnamese immigrants, Vietnamese diaspora, Poland, political integration, political participation

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Introduction

How and to what extent do Vietnamese-origin immigrants in Poland integrate into the political sphere in the host society? This study is devoted to understanding the political integration of Vietnamese immigrants in Polish society. To this end, we have developed a theoretical framework for accommodating migrant political integration by adopting the two-sided reconceptualisation of integration, indicating the interaction between the host society and immigrants. We argue that political integration should be seen as a bidirectional and interactive process – involving migrant actors and the host society – aimed at reaching a joint movement and adaptation in the political sphere in the residence country (Penninx 2019; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016). In this process, Polish society is responsible for including immigrants and their descendants in the political sphere by providing legal frameworks to facilitate opportunities and access to the political realm for migrant-origin individuals. In parallel, the Vietnamese are responsible for taking up the opportunities granted to engage in the political sphere in the residence country. In this process, we perceive immigrants as active actors who are able to grasp granted opportunities for political integration. Empirically, we observe the political integration of the Vietnamese in Polish society by assessing their capacity for integration facilitated by opportunities granted in the host country (Hammond 2013). Thus, we exclusively focus on the integrative mechanism pertaining to migrant-origin individuals' ability and willingness to be involved in the political sphere in the host country through their political participation (Morales 2011). In this vein, we build on a conceptual framework for latent and manifest political participation developed by Ekman and Amnå (2012) to investigate Vietnamese political integration into Polish society.

The Vietnamese community marked its first presence in Poland in the 1950s, originating from cooperation between the socialist states of Vietnam and Poland during the Cold War era as a result of the 'socialist fraternity' project, whereby the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites aimed to assist their socialist 'younger brothers' (Halik 2007; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). The migrant group has now become one of the largest non-European immigrant communities in the country. Poland, with the refusal of voting rights for immigrants from outside Europe Union, is placed in a very low position in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (Solano and Huddleston 2020). This refusal of the political inclusion of immigrants certainly also affects integration in other dimensions. Our main aim is thus to contribute to the current literature on the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland by examining the political aspect of Vietnamese integration in which the social, cultural and economic aspects of integration received a plethora of academic interest (Głowacka-Grajper 2006; Grabowska and Szymanska-Matusiewicz 2022; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2015; Hữu 2021; Nowicka 2014; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2015a, b). Meanwhile, the political dimension of integration has been poorly covered. What is essential is that, by considering immigrants as active actors in the integrative process, this study can see how the Vietnamese negotiate their adaptation to the political sphere thanks to political opportunities granted in Polish society. It is not limited to the exploration of political integration only by voting but also takes into account other forms of migrant-origin individuals' political activities, as long as this does not reveal unlawful acts that have the potential for marginalisation or exclusion. Therefore, this work is of significance in understanding the scale and nature of the Vietnamese community's political involvement, broadening our knowledge about the functioning of this migrant group in Poland.

In this study, we employ mixed-method research with a parallel mixed design using both qualitative and quantitative data to analyse the political participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Polish society. Quantitative data, coming from an original complex survey with a sample of 347 Vietnamese-origin immigrants, are used to configure the pattern of political integration of the migrant group through their latent and manifest political participation. Meanwhile, qualitative data gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews play a crucial role

in providing further evidence explaining how the migrant group is involved in the political sphere in Polish society.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background of this study, where the conceptualisation of political integration is thoroughly deliberated. Here, through the brief discussion of the evolution of integration and its criticism, we place our view on political integration and its empirical measurement in our study. In the following section, we show how Polish society is open to including migrant-origin individuals in the political realm by analysing the legal conditions for immigrants' political engagement. We then move to a discussion of the methodology of this study, in which we justify the reasons for applying mixed-method research with the use of a parallel mixed design and how qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. After that, we present the findings of this study. By combining the illustration of quantitative and qualitative data, this section uncovers the political integration of the Vietnamese in Poland by disclosing the tendency and interpreting the way in which the migrant group participates in the political sphere of the host country. The final section concludes, discussing the main findings of this study in relation to relevant published work. It also highlights contributions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

The concept of political integration: A theoretical framework

'Integration' is a central concept in migration studies, capturing the process of immigrants' adaptation and settling in a destination country (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Ryan 2022). The research on migrant integration was popularised by the Chicago School in the early 20th century, which adhered to the classical assimilation perspective to see migrant integration as a linear and one-sided process and emphasising migrant-origin individuals' gradual abandonment of their original culture and acceptance of the dominant cultural patterns and values shared by the native population (Gordon 1964; Park 1926; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918). This perspective was challenged by subsequent empirical studies in which immigrants and their descendants were found to retain their original culture and persist in maintaining their ethnic differences. Alternative theoretical frameworks have been developed to account for the phenomenon, particularly the pluralist theory (Zhou 1997a), the structural perspective (Barth and Noel 1972) and the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997b). While these perspectives seek to explain the difference in integration between the various groups of migrants, their questions concerning the disinclination of the second generation to be culturally absorbed into the receiving societies remain unanswered and they still adhere to the linear notion initiated by classical assimilation theory.

Recently, 'integration' has received growing criticism in migration studies, in which the normative sense of the concept used in political rhetoric and research that is affected by the 'assimilationist stance' is potentially seen as an insufficient tool with which to capture the complexity and dynamics of adaptation and settlement among contemporary migrants in Europe (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018; Phillimore 2012). In addition, scholars consider 'integration' to be a fuzzy concept with messy measurements for empirical analyses (Schinkel 2018). In this light and drawing on empirical evidence, a dozen studies have disputed the notion of integration (Favell 2022; Ryan 2018; Ryan and Mulholland 2015). Meanwhile, other researchers propose alternative perspectives and concepts to capture migration as a complex and dynamic process of adaptation and settling in destination societies – notably, belonging (Eckersley 2017), anchoring (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2016, 2020) and differentiated embedding (Mulholland and Ryan 2022). Despite this fact, scholars who advocate using 'integration' in migration studies have tried to adapt the concept (Barbulescu and Beaudonnet 2014; Lessard-Phillips 2017) by reconceptualising 'integration' as a two-sided process of adaptation between the host society and immigrants (Klarenbeek 2019; Penninx 2019; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016). This approach describes the mutual changes that follow immigration for both the receiving countries and the

immigrants (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016), moving beyond considering integration as a one-way process foregrounding the conformity of migrant-origin individuals to the host society. This two-sided integration centres on the reciprocity between the receiving and the immigrating sides, in which the adaptation and change of immigrants results in changes in the receiving society, in turn conditioning the integration process' direction and temporal outcomes (Penninx 2019).

In this study, we adopt the two-sided reconceptualisation of integration to develop a theoretical framework for migrant political integration. We identify this latter as a dimension of integration (Heckmann 2005; Penninx 2019) and view it as a two-way interaction process between the receiving societies and immigrants with the aim of reaching a joint adaptation in the political sphere in a residence country. This process encompasses the reciprocity of rights and obligations of the two partners – immigrants and the receiving society – in which the country of residence is responsible for including immigrants and their descendants in the political sphere by providing legal frameworks to facilitate equal opportunities and access to the political realm between the autochthonous and the non-autochthonous residents. In parallel, individual immigrants are responsible for seizing the opportunities granted to engage in the political sphere in the residence country (Penninx 2019). In this process, we perceive immigrants as active actors who are able to take up these granted political opportunities for political integration; they can expose their reversible political integration at any time, depending on their motivations and resources for integration. In this vein, we preclude considering 'integration' as a unidirectional and 'end-state' process, taking the political patterns and modes displayed by the autochthonous people as a standpoint from which to evaluate the degree of immigrants' political integration in the host society. Instead, migrant-origin individuals' political participation can take very different forms from those of native individuals as long as they do not manifest unlawful acts and results in political consequences that have the potential for marginalisation or exclusion (Sajir 2018).

Although our view on political integration as a two-way process is in line with previous work on this subject (Bauböck, Kraler, Martiniello and Perchinig 2006; Sajir 2018), we are critical of how the concept is translated into empirically observable results in the literature. Generally, scholars have not reached a consensus on this issue. Some refer to the rate of successfully obtaining citizenship through naturalisation as a core indicator of the success of migrant political integration (Howard 2010; Martiniello 2006). This discussion regards citizenship and political integration as closely intertwined concepts (Mollenkopf and Hochschild 2009), in which the political integration of immigrants is implied as the process of inclusion of 'diverse people into a common citizenry' (Bloemraad 2006: 35). In another approach regarded as the responsiveness of the political system, scholars opt for measuring the degree of political integration in terms of policy and political outcomes, assessing the success of immigrants' political integration through the responses of the political system to the needs of immigrants, whereby the representation of migrant groups is guaranteed in policymaking in the host country. This view underlines the change in policies and institutions in favour of immigrants as core indicators for the measurement (Mollenkopf and Hochschild 2009; Jones-Correa, 2005). For example, Bauböck *et al.* (2006) postulate that policy changes, with more political rights granted to immigrants, indicate a high degree of migrant political integration. In addition to citizenship and the responsiveness of the political system, scholars also point to the identification with the host society and the internalisation of political values and norms of host politics as two more crucial indicators for migrant political integration (Bauböck *et al.* 2006).

While these approaches are suggestive in empirically observing migrant political integration, they are problematic on the following points. First, obtaining citizenship through naturalisation does not reflect political activism and the willingness to be politically involved in the host politics among migrant-origin individuals. Scholar thus, call for a separation between integration and national citizenship – as two independent constructs – considering citizenship as a simple tool of integration (Hansen 2003) or a potential facilitating condition of political integration. Second, the identification with the host society and the internalisation of political values

and norms in the host society still more or less mirror the linear notion of integration avoided in this study. Third, the responsiveness of the political-system approach implies that, although the two-way approach of political integration emphasises the responsibility between immigrants and the receiving society, the relationship between the two 'partners' is unequal in terms of power and resources in the integrative process. The receiving society, especially its institutional structure and public reaction to newcomers, is far more decisive for the outcome of the integrative process than the immigrants themselves (Penninx 2019). As we discuss in the next section, this inharmonious relationship holds true for the Vietnamese in Poland when the host country provides them with very limited rights (no right to stand in elections, join political parties or vote in local elections) for their political integration as third-country nationals, especially the Vietnamese without Polish citizenship. This lack of integration for immigrants on the part of the host country also seemingly indicates the lack of integration into the political sphere in the receiving society on the part of immigrants. The responsiveness of the political system approach is, thus, problematic because it does not entail the action, aspiration and capacity of migrant-origin individuals in the interactive process of political integration (Hammond 2013; Morales 2011) reflected in our own conceptualisation of political integration.

Considering the above, our study is exclusively interested in the integrative element which focuses on migrant-origin individuals, empirically observing the political integration of the Vietnamese in Polish society by assessing their capacity for political integration through the political opportunities granted in the host country. More specifically, in our empirical analyses, we look at Vietnamese immigrants' ability and willingness to be involved in the political sphere through political participation in the receiving society. This empirical measurement approach to migrant political integration, on the one hand, satisfies our two-way conceptualisation of political integration that considers migrant-origin individuals as active actors and is suitable for the case of the Vietnamese in Poland, where legal conditions for immigrants' inclusion into the host politics are limited, as discussed below. On the other hand, it aligns with previous work analysing migrant political integration (Morales 2011; Sajir 2018). Drawing on a well-known conceptual framework for political participation developed by Ekman and Amnå (2012), this study analyses Vietnamese migrants' political integration by examining their latent and manifest political participation in Polish society. This framework is considered comprehensive and advanced in researching individuals' political involvement because it fulfils consensus on political participation that comprises not only observable but also unobservable political behaviours (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Morales 2011; Pilati and Morales 2019; Schildkraut 2005). The latent form, also labelled as civic participation, denotes individuals' readiness and willingness to take political action, comprising involvement and civic engagement. Involvement refers to attention to – and interest in – political and societal issues and curiosity about political affairs, measured through indicators such as interest in politics and (self-assessment) knowledge of the host politics. Civic engagement refers to activities by ordinary citizens intended to influence circumstances in society that are relevant to others. This form is composed of discussing politics, reading and watching (following) political news and doing voluntary work (Ekman and Amnå 2012).

Manifest participation refers to individuals' concrete activities that affect politics and political outcomes in society or the decisions that affect the public sphere. It consists of formal political activities and extra-parliamentary activities. The former denotes political acts directed towards elections or conventional political institutions or actors, including voting in elections, supporting political parties, donating money to political parties and contacting politicians and civil servants. The latter is divided into legal and illegal extra-parliamentary activities. The illegal form points to unlawful actions like participating in illegal demonstrations or violent protests bordering on riots. Because this study only observes the political engagement of the Vietnamese conditional on the willingness of the host society, meaning that political activities undertaken by the migrant group should be legal under the laws of the Polish state, the illegal extra-parliamentary activities staged by the Vietnamese are not taken into account in this study. Legal extra-parliamentary activities refer to protesting

behaviours, including boycotting, demonstrating, striking, handing out leaflets, signing petitions and contacting the media (Ekman and Amnå 2012).

The legal framework for the political participation of Vietnamese in Poland

This section discusses the opportunities granted to foreigners for political engagement in Polish society. It should be noted that the host society's willingness to include immigrants plays a decisive role in determining migrant-origin individuals' inclination to be integrated into the political arena in the interactive integration process. Here, we consider the political opportunity regulated in the legal frameworks adhering to policies of migration and integration implemented by the Polish state.

The legal framework for immigrants' political integration in Poland was initially set up in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland in 1997. It provides the most fundamental legislation regulating the rights of foreigners who reside in the country. According to the Constitution of Poland, all people under the authority of the Polish State shall enjoy the 'freedoms of expression' (Article 54), 'freedom of peaceful assembly' (Article 57) and 'freedom of association' (Article 58) (Kaźmierkiewicz and Frelak 2011: 7). Foreigners are considered equal to citizens according to the law and they shall not be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason (Article 32) nor subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 40) (Szulecka, Pachocka and Sobczak-Szelc 2018: 30). However, it should be acknowledged that the Constitution offers general protection to people and exemptions from principles stated in the Constitution regarding foreigners should be specified by statute or relevant laws.

According to the Law on Polish Citizenship of 2 April 2009 (which entered into force on 15 August 2012), a foreigner can be naturalised in Poland in four ways – namely, by virtue of law, by being granted Polish citizenship, by being recognised as a Polish citizen and by Polish citizenship being restored (Sobczak-Szelc, Pachocka, Pędziwiatr and Szałańska 2020). Once a foreigner is granted Polish citizenship, he or she reserves all political rights regulated by Polish laws. Otherwise, there are many differences between a foreigner – primarily a third-country national – and a citizen of Poland.

The right to vote and stand in elections is restricted to Polish citizens. Poland has not approved the ratification of the European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level of 5 February 1992. Article 6 of the Convention states that every foreign resident legally residing in the country for at least 5 years is granted 'the right to vote and to stand for election in local authority elections' (Kaźmierkiewicz and Frelak 2011: 7). Amendments to the Law on Local Elections that entered into force on 1 May 2004 led to changes in the local electoral system. According to the amendments, only citizens of European Union Member States residing permanently in the given district are granted the right to vote in local elections, such as voting for community/municipality council and city mayors/community heads (Kaźmierkiewicz and Frelak 2011: 7; Łodziński, Pudzianowska and Szaranowicz-Kusz 2014: 12; Sobczak-Szelc *et al*. 2020). It does not include the right to stand in the local executive elections (Electoral Code 2011, Articles 10 and 11) (Łodziński *et al*. 2014).

Under the Law on Associations of 7 April 1989, foreigners may join existing associations such as trade unions, foundations, employers' and other organisations but may not be members of political parties. The restriction of membership of political parties to Polish nationals is written in the Law on Political Parties of 27 June 1997, where Article 2 states that 'Membership of political parties is open to citizens of the Republic of Poland...' (Kaźmierkiewicz and Frelak 2011: 9; Sobczak-Szelc *et al*. 2020).

Regarding the right of assembly, Article 1 of the Law on Assemblies reserves the right of peaceful assembly for 'everyone'. A peaceful assembly is defined as a gathering of at least 15 persons. The gathering functions

as 'called up to hold a session or make a joint declaration'. Under this law, foreigners with legal status can organise such gatherings (Kaźmierkiewicz and Frelak 2011: 10).

Drawing on the legal framework for immigrants' political participation in Poland, we can see that the Vietnamese are granted limited political rights for their political integration into Polish society. As third-country nationals who do not obtain Polish citizenship, Vietnamese immigrants are prevented from having legal rights to engage in the political process. They have no right to stand in elections, join political parties or vote like their European Union counterparts in local elections. While these political rights are fundamental for migrant-origin individuals' political engagement in the country of residence, the restrictions on the rights may impede the political activism of Vietnamese immigrants, reducing their willingness and ability to be involved in the political process. However, according to the legal frameworks, third-country nationals are not legally excluded from practising civic and political activities as long as they obey Polish laws. In this sense, the conceptualisation of political integration employed in this study, looking at the latent and manifest dimensions of migrant civic and political participation, provides appropriate theoretical guidance for empirically observing the migrant group's integration into the political sphere in Poland.

Research methods

The empirical analysis of this study employs data from a doctoral research project implemented in Poland from 2018 to 2023.[1] The project employed mixed-method research with a parallel mixed design in which qualitative and quantitative methods were used to jointly seek answers to the research questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). This application provides the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views, validating one database with the other (Creswell 2015) to gain multidimensional and comprehensive insight into the engagement of the Vietnamese in the political sphere in Polish society. It thus allows us to observe how immigrants as active actors negotiate in order to adapt to the political sphere conditional on the political opportunities granted in the host country. By employing this design, the two methodological traditions were practically independently implemented (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). The quantitative method was used through a survey to draw out the pattern and measure the degree of political integration by researching the migrant group's latent and manifest political participation. Meanwhile, the qualitative method used semi-structured interviews to understand and interpret how the Vietnamese are involved in host politics. After the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed, the findings from the two methodologies were mixed and integrated to provide a more illustrative insight into the political integration of the Vietnamese in Polish society.

The quantitative data come from an original survey conducted from mid-May to mid-September 2020 in Warsaw and the surrounding areas of the Voivode of Mazovia Region, where Vietnamese people account for more than 80 per cent of the total number of legal Vietnamese immigrants in Poland (Office for Foreigners 2020). The survey was administered with a questionnaire as a data collection tool, consisting of a battery of questions measuring variables capturing latent and manifest political participation. Due to the challenges in drawing up an adequate sampling frame for correctly identifying and determining the sample size of Vietnamese-origin migrants in Poland, which results from the impossibility of including irregular ones and the fluctuation in the number of Vietnamese people in the country, using a simple random sampling method based on formal registration of places of residence for the quantitative survey was deemed not workable. Therefore, the survey categorised the Vietnamese into different groups – as students and academics, business-owners and employees (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019) – to which different sampling strategies were applied to select Vietnamese respondents randomly.

The survey used face-to-face interviews for data collection for business-owners and employees who were recruited by employing a two-stage sampling strategy. In the first stage, the centre sampling technique (Baio,

Blangiardo and Blangiardo 2011) was applied to identify locations where the Vietnamese often congregate; the random walking technique (Graffigna, Bosio and Olson 2010) was then employed to access respondents in the second stage. Because the offline survey was conducted during the outbreak of Covid-19 in Poland in 2020, the interviews were carried out when regulations on social distancing were broadly lifted; we proceeded with the assurance of safety, for example, keeping an appropriate distance and wearing medical masks. A total of 217 questionnaires were collected through face-to-face interviews. For the students and academics, online interviews were applied using self-administered questionnaires through Google Forms. Respondents from these groups were selected from a sampling frame of a list of emails of participants (including scholars and graduate students) joining the 4th Workshop of Vietnamese Students in Poland in 2019, organised by the Vietnam Association of Science and Technology in Poland. Respondents who are students were also approached using a list of the Facebook addresses of members of a Facebook group of Vietnamese students in Poland. Because the Facebook group involves users with diverse backgrounds, members as students were identified by checking their private profiles and filtered to sort out those studying in Warsaw. The two lists were checked to determine whether an overlap existed, which helped to draw up a final list of students. A simple random sampling method was used to select respondents from student and academic groups. Among those selected, 130 respondents agreed to participate in the online interviews. In total, the survey recruited 347 respondents.

The socio-demographic characteristics of our survey indicate that male respondents constituted a slightly larger share than females in the selected sample – 53.6 per cent compared to 46.4 per cent. While the oldest group (46 years and above) made up a modest portion (16.8 per cent), the percentages of respondents from younger groups were much higher, with 44.1 per cent from the 30–45-year category and 39.1 per cent from the under-30s group. The majority of respondents were those who were married or had a life partner (59.4 per cent), followed by the single group (36.5 per cent). Those who are divorced or widowed accounted for tiny portions of the sample, 3.8 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively. In the sample, nearly nine-tenths of respondents were first-generation Vietnamese (89.1 per cent), while 1.5 and second-generation respondents constituted only 10.9 per cent. Almost all respondents (99.4 per cent) owned legal status, and a very modest share of the sample (0.6 per cent) was irregular at the time of the survey. Among legal respondents, 19.2 per cent earned Polish citizenship. The number of respondents holding short-term resident permits is nearly two times larger than those with long-term residence, 43.9 per cent compared to 22.2 per cent. 14.1 per cent was in the situation of renovating resident permits.

We acknowledge the limitations regarding the sample's small size and under-representativeness, which does not reflect an adequate quota of the different groups structuring the Vietnamese community in Poland. Therefore, these limitations require prudence in generalising and validating the study's findings on scale and patterns within the Vietnamese community in Polish society. Quantitative data from the survey are analysed using descriptive statistics to portray the trends and patterns of political engagement of Vietnamese-origin immigrants. We will further apply the Chi-squared test to elaborate on how the political participation pattern differs across three primary categories of gender, age and migrant generation.

Qualitative data were collected between May 2020 and January 2021 by conducting 15 semi-structured interviews. The participants consisted of 15 Vietnamese people who were approached using snowball sampling and who satisfied the following sampling criteria: had lived in Poland for at least 1 year, were at least 18 years old at the time of the interview and were a member of political parties or actively participating in civic and political activities in Poland. Of the 15 interviewees, 11 were male and 4 were female. Most interviewees (8) were aged between 30 and 49 years, followed by 6 informants in their 50s and above. Only one participant was under 30. Most of the participants (13) were married or had a life partner, with 10 in a homogenous relationship and 3 living with Polish spouses or partners. Of the other 2 interviewees, 1 was single and the

other was widowed at the time of the interview. Most participants (11) were first-generation Vietnamese, while the 1.5- and second-generation categories comprised 4 participants. All informants were legal immigrants, with 9 people obtaining Polish citizenship and 6 others still holding Vietnamese nationality.

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland at the time of data collection, all qualitative interviews were conducted online using voice calls from the Messenger app on Facebook. The interviews were initiated with a brief introduction to the study's purpose and the permission requirement for recording. After acceptance, the interviews proceeded with an interviewing scenario probing informants' views of the importance of the interest in the host politics, of the importance of Vietnamese immigrants' interest and participation in the political sphere, of informants' initiation of political engagement, participation in political activities and the challenges of the Vietnamese-origin immigrants in participating in the political sphere in Polish society. Each interview ranged from 40 minutes to more than an hour. Although disadvantages occurring during online interviews – such as dropped calls or poor audio clarity – caused misunderstandings and limited the ability to generate meaningful conversations, online interviews were more flexible in scheduling, providing more private spaces for the informants to feel comfortable in narrating rich information. Qualitative data were analysed using deductive content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008: 108). After transcribing the interviews from audio files into texts, we organised and coded the data corresponding to the categories and concepts identified, before writing reports interpreting the findings and results.

The Vietnamese identity of the author who conducted all the semi-structured interviews became a substantial advantage for the qualitative data collection. It allowed Vietnamese, the first language of the interviewer and all participants, to be used in all interviews, ensuring a thorough and mutual understanding of communication. Unlike most of the Vietnamese in the United States who are critical of the communist government of Vietnam (Le 2014), the Vietnamese in Poland are virtually constituted of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese workers and students who are strictly connected to the North Vietnamese government and, thus, more politically affiliated with the communist state (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). The positionality of the interviewing author, who comes from contemporary Vietnam ruled by the communist government, could thus be seen as an insider by proxy with the community, especially with the interviewees, regarding migration background (Carling, Erdal and Ezzati 2013). The snowball sampling method also guarantees the trust of any subsequent participants introduced by previous ones. This positionality helped to ensure the psychological safety and convenience of the participants. Moreover, the informants became even more open to a greater degree – and willing to share their stories with the author – as they put much of their trust in the interviewer during the interaction. This phenomenon makes the author's positionality become fluid, from an insider by proxy to a trusted insider (Baser and Toivanen 2018) which, in turn, provides many benefits in the qualitative interviews and results in rich and reliable data being collected.

Researching political issues reminded us of a notable characteristic of the Vietnamese, who regard politics as a sensitive topic. In addition, as documented in the literature, many Vietnamese people are reluctant to engage in politics because they consider political participation risky (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). Thus, when conducting the semi-structured interviews and the survey and when designing questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides, the project avoided any wording which might frighten respondents and interviewees; we obtained their informed consent after explaining to them the purpose of the study and reassuring them of the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. In particular, in the semi-structured interviews, informants were asked for their permission to record the interviews and notes were made for interviews in which informants refused to be recorded. The application of the snowball sampling method in the semi-structured interviews might lead to the spread of participants' information within the community due to the open network through which participants were approached. We addressed this issue by assuring subsequent participants of the guaranteed confidentiality of information in the process of obtaining informed consent from previous ones.

We also acknowledge that exposing the real names of informants agreeing to participate in semi-structured interviews and presenting qualitative results might potentially cause harm to them. Thus, we guaranteed their confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the informants whose narrations are quoted.

Empirical findings

Latent political participation

Table 1 presents the quantitative findings on Vietnamese immigrants' latent form of political participation through 5 indicators: interest in Polish politics, (self-assessment of) knowledge of Polish politics, discussing Polish politics, following Polish politics and involvement in voluntary work in the host society. As shown in the table, the Vietnamese are generally characterised by a somewhat low level of latent political participation.

Table 1. Latent forms of political engagement of the Vietnamese in Poland

Forms of latent political participation	Percentage in total response	Total response	Non-response	Total sample
Interest in Polish politics				
Very interested	9.68			
Fairly interested	36.25			
Not very interested	43.50	331	16	347
Not at all interested	10.57			
Total	100			
Knowledge of Polish politics				
Very well informed	3.65			
Reasonably informed	19.76			
Only a bit informed	56.53	329	18	347
Not at all informed	20.06			
Total	100			
Discussing Polish politics				
Almost every day	8.43			
Sometimes	36.45			
Rarely	40.96	332	15	347
Never	14.16			
Total	100			
Following (reading or watching) political news				
Almost every day	17.58			
Sometimes	35.76			
Rarely	34.55	330	17	347
Never	12.12			
Total	100			
Involved in voluntary work				
Yes	30.72			
No	69.28	332	15	347
Total	100			

Except for following political news, the number of respondents with answers denoting the low degree of engagement constituted larger shares than those reporting high participation for all investigated forms of latent activities. Based on the high degrees of latent political engagement, following political news is the form involved in by the highest proportion of respondents (53.34 per cent), which is also the only form engaged in by more than half of those surveyed. This is followed by an interest in politics (45.93 per cent) and political discussion (44.88 per cent). Meanwhile, self-assessment of knowledge of Polish politics is the form that received the lowest proportion of respondents with the answers pertaining to high degrees of engagement. This might be partly attributed to most Vietnamese immigrants' limited knowledge of the Polish language, as demonstrated by the survey's finding that less than 15 per cent of respondents indicated a high level of Polish proficiency. Table 1 shows that only 23.41 per cent of the respondents declared that they were 'reasonably' or 'very well-informed' in understanding host-country politics, nearly 3 times lower than those who indicated their limited knowledge of Polish politics. Involvement in voluntary activities, a form of civic engagement investigated by a question regarding giving money to charity, was confirmed by nearly one-third of respondents (30.72 per cent), compared to the percentage of those not involved in the activity (69.28 per cent).

However, as presented in Table 1, the high levels of latent political participation are defined by a predominance of moderate answers. The high degree of interest in Polish politics comes mainly from the 'fairly interested' answer. Similarly, the high levels of (self-assessment of) knowledge of Polish politics, political discussion and following political news are primarily constituted by the answers 'reasonably informed' and 'sometimes', respectively. This finding again reinforces the relatively low level of engagement in latent political activities among the Vietnamese in the survey.

We further break down the latent political participation of the Vietnamese into primary demographic factors – gender, age and migrant generation – by applying the Chi-square test to examine whether the latent forms vary significantly across the demographic factors. The findings are displayed in Table 2.

The results suggest that, except for involvement in voluntary and charitable work, most latent forms of political participation are greatly conditioned by gender, age and migrant generation. Regarding gender, the results show a higher percentage of men than women in latent political participation, which is proved by statistically significant Chi-square tests on interest in Polish politics ($p=0.049$), (self-assessment of) knowledge of Polish politics ($p=0.001$) and discussion about the host politics ($p=0.039$). This finding implies a higher level of political activism among Vietnamese male immigrants than females. For age, Table 2 reveals a higher proportion of older respondents than younger ones participating in latent political activities, which is also confirmed by Chi-square tests, specifically in interest in the host-country politics ($p=0.000$), (self-assessment of) knowledge of the host politics ($p=0.022$), political discussions ($p=0.000$), following the host-country politics news ($p=0.001$) and involvement in doing charitable work ($p=0.083$). Finally, the variation of latent political participation by migrant generations only significantly manifests itself in (self-assessment of) knowledge of Polish politics and following political news. The 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese migrant individuals are found to have a higher degree of self-assessed knowledge of the host-country politics ($p=0.002$) and following political news regarding the host society than the first Vietnamese generation ($p=0.006$).

Table 2. Latent political participation of the Vietnamese by gender, age and generations

Latent political activities	Gender (per cent)		Age (per cent)			Generations (per cent)	
	Male	Female	18–29	30–45	45+	1st	1.5 and 2nd
Interest in Polish politics							
Very interested	9.8	8.8	9.2	7.8	15.4	9.2	13.5
Fairly interested	42.2	28.3	24.6	40.4	53.9	36.4	35.2
Not very interested	37.6	51.4	48.5	44.0	28.8	43.9	40.5
Not at all interested	10.4	11.5	17.7	7.8	1.9	10.5	10.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chi-squared test	$\chi2$=7.9, p=0.049, N=321		$\chi2$=26.26, p=0.000, N=323			$\chi2$=0.74, p=0.86, N=331	
Knowledge of Polish politics							
Very well informed	3.4	4.1	3.9	2.2	7.7	2.4	13.9
Reasonably informed	10.1	28.3	13.8	23.0	28.9	18.8	27.8
Only a bit informed	63.5	49.7	55.4	57.5	53.8	58.3	41.7
Not at all informed	23.0	17.9	26.9	17.3	9.6	20.5	16.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chi-squared test	$\chi2$=17.05, p=0.001, N=321		$\chi2$=14.73, p=0.022, N=321			$\chi2$=14.8, p=0.002, N=329	
Discussing Polish politics							
Almost every day	8.6	8.1	6.2	7.8	15.4	7.8	13.5
Sometimes	43.1	28.4	26.9	40.1	46.2	37.6	27.1
Rarely	35.1	48.0	41.5	44.4	32.7	40.7	43.2
Never	13.2	15.5	25.4	7.7	5.6	13.9	16.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chi-squared test	$\chi2$=8.4, p=0.039, N=322		$\chi2$=28.14, p=0.000, N=324			$\chi2$=2.47, p=0.48, N=332	
Following (reading or watching) political news							
Almost every day	14.8	20.2	15.3	16.3	29.4	15.4	35.2
Sometimes	31.5	38.2	25.4	41.2	45.1	37.9	18.9
Rarely	38.9	31.2	40.8	32.6	21.6	33.8	40.5
Never	14.8	10.4	18.5	9.9	3.9	13.0	5.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chi-squared test	$\chi2$=4.94, p=0.18, N=322		$\chi2$=22.37, p=0.001, N=322			$\chi2$=12.6, p=0.006, N=330	
Involving in voluntary works							
Yes	31.2	29.6	24.2	32.2	40.4	31.0	28.6
No	68.8	70.4	75.8	67.8	59.6	69.0	71.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Chi-squared test	$\chi2$=0.09, p=0.75, N=325		$\chi2$=4.98, p=0.083, N=323			$\chi2$=0.08, p=0.77, N=332	

The quantitative findings above provide significant insights into the scale and patterns of the surveyed respondents' latent form of political participation. Here, we present the qualitative results enabling further

understanding of the way in which the Vietnamese are involved in latent political activities. Our analysis reveals that the perception of the importance of interest in politics is a crucial driver of interest in Polish politics among our participants. For example, Mr Nam, an IT technician who arrived in Poland aged 10 and is one of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese interviewees, shared his view on this issue with almost all other informants. He revealed that concern about politics in the host country helps to protect the migrants' rights and interests, due to acknowledging and understanding those political outcomes that influence migrant individuals' daily lives. Interest in the politics of the residence country helps immigrants to be aware of the host country's political system and to foresee and respond to political outcomes affecting their living, as Mr Nam, now in his 20s, points out here:

> *I think we need to be concerned about Polish politics because it is important. It is related to the lives of the Vietnamese people here. Because each political party has different policies related to foreigners, any party coming to power will directly affect foreigners here. So politics is significant and we need to be concerned.*

Qualitative data also disclose that the issue of political parties in Poland prevalently disclosed in narratives raised special concerns by the interviewees. Participants particularly showed censorious attitudes toward the ruling party, PiS (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – Law and Justice Party) and suspicion about its opposition, PO (*Platforma Obywatelska* – Civic Platform Party), whose ideologies are primarily attributed to the current political cleavage in Poland. In his narrative below, Mr Định, now in his 60s, who arrived in Poland 2 years after the fall of communism in the country, strongly criticised the ruling party, PiS, for issuing policies to control the media, business and the judiciary and adopting an anti-migrant vision in their political programme. His view is analogous with those of most informants who disclosed a negative view of the PiS ruling with its concentration of power and perceived the party as authoritarian, conservative, pro-nationalist or even communist. Despite showing intensively unfavourable attitudes towards the PiS party, informants seemed to doubt the power of the opposition, the PO party. While this latter party was more or less supported by a number of interviewees thanks to its political stand inclining towards protecting democratic values and supporting immigrants, informants suspected that the party is still weak, incompetent and incapable of solving social problems and leading Poland to become a strong country. Mr Dinh says:

> *The PiS party, when it came to power for the first time, changed a series of issues such as controlling the media, strangling business and manipulating the judiciary. It is not as liberal as the PO party. At that time, I strongly condemned it. Furthermore, as you might know, the PiS party almost follows the path of a communist party, interfering with the media, changing the national court and controlling the President. What does it mean for the separation of powers? That is, the National Assembly, the President and the Constitution are in its hands.*

The competition between the two parties during the last presidential election in 2020 was also central in the political discussion of participants in qualitative interviews. Ms Duyên, a woman in her 40s who arrived in Poland in the 1990s and is currently working as an office staff member, narrated that she was intensely involved in talking about Polish politics with colleagues in the workplace during the last presidential election. Like other informants who find the lead of the PiS risky in maintaining a consolidated democracy in the country and who favour a change in the ruling party after the election, she showed her support for the PO party's candidate in the discussions with colleagues concerning the last presidential election in Poland.

For example, I often discussed the two presidential candidates in the last election, Trzaskowski and Duda. My colleagues in my office were divided into two groups, one supporting the incumbent president and the other supporting Trzaskowski. I was in the group that expected a change, so I supported Trzaskowski.[2] I had arguments with my friends in the office about why I supported and should support Trzaskowski. The reason is that I need a change in the cabinet of the government...

While evidence in the quantitative findings showed that involvement in voluntary work attracted the engagement of a number of Vietnamese people, the qualitative results show the scope of and the reason behind this type of civic engagement. Participants in the qualitative interviews indicated that they were involved in a wide range of voluntary work, which primarily related to other immigrant groups or Polish society rather than simply within the Vietnamese community. The voluntary work included participating in associations that protect the environment and supporting vulnerable people by delivering free food and clothes to those experiencing poverty or without housing. Notably, during the interviews, Mr Phúc (60s), who came to Poland at the end of the 1990s and is one of the 3 informants actively engaging in voluntary activities, felt very proud when recalling charitable acts caried out during the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland:

We thought we could not do anything to support Poland in fighting against the pandemic better than doing what we did. This means that, although we cannot find a cure for the pandemic, we should do everything else. Our ability is that we are cooks working in restaurants and, thus, we can make and take meals to everyone. Those who participate directly in the fight against the epidemic are doctors, sanitary and epidemiological workers, law-enforcement agencies, the authorities and police officers. They are always on duty, so we have to support them.

As narrated by Mr Phúc, his voluntary work supported the frontline forces fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. The support was implemented to his team's full capacity, such as supplying meals and medical masks for Polish nurses and doctors. In addition, the participants were unanimous in the view that doing charitable work or engaging in voluntary work is significant for the Vietnamese immigrants' integration into the political sphere in Poland. On the one hand, engaging in such activities is supposed to provoke and promote the political activism of the Vietnamese, who are allegedly disinclined to involve themselves in political affairs. On the other hand, charitable works, particularly recent activities supporting Polish doctors in the fight against Covid-19, are well known by the Poles, thus the Vietnamese become more positively visible in the eyes of the native population. Consequently, it helps to gain more tolerance and recognition of the Vietnamese community by Polish people, facilitating Vietnamese integration in all dimensions, including the political sphere. As clarified by some informants, the main reason for engaging in voluntary work is the desire to pay off the debt and take responsibility towards the host country that the migrant group perceives to be their second homeland, manifesting their sense of belonging to Polish society.

Manifest political participation

As discussed above, as third-country nationals who do have not obtained Polish citizenship, Vietnamese immigrants are not granted legal rights to vote, stand in elections, and or join political parties. In order to investigate the degree of engagement in the voting of respondents, we asked the surveyed individuals whether they voted in the last local and national elections. The finding shows that most respondents, accounting for more than 80.78, are not eligible to vote. This result implies that a significant share of individuals joining the survey does had not acquired Polish citizenship. Among the 19.22 per cent of respondents who were eligible

to vote, the percentage of individuals who voted in both the last elections is smaller than those who did not, which is the same for both local and national elections, – 7.51 per cent (corresponding to 39 per cent of eligible voters) and 11.71 per cent (corresponding to 61 per cent of eligible voters), respectively.

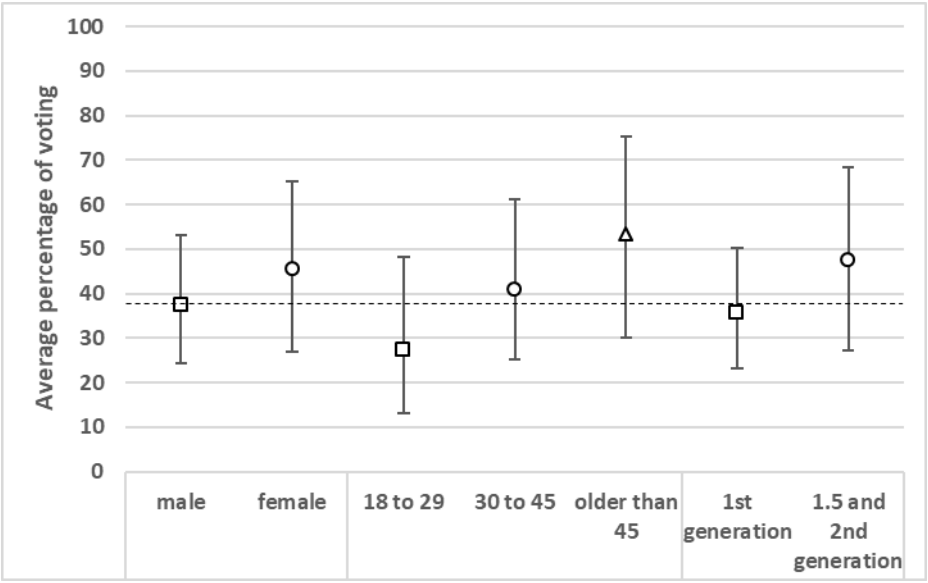
The qualitative findings reveal the participants' agreement on the active tendency to vote among Polish-naturalised Vietnamese people. The informants postulate that most Vietnamese people who hold Polish citizenship vote in every election at both local and national levels. These findings present an image that is different from that found earlier in the quantitive analysis, which disclosed a small percentage of Polish-Vietnamese individuals involved in voting. It should be noted that the informants' assessment of this issue is concluded through their subjective observation and experience of the voting participation of the Vietnamese who are known and close to them. A high consensus among the informants of semi-structured interviews on the findings reflects a limitation of snowball sampling that can result in the enrollment of participants with similar experiences, which might lead to the production of biased information. Therefore, the supplement of quantitative data from the survey helps to improve the validity of the findings. Regarding voting, informants also pointed out three fundamental reasons for casting a ballot in elections among Polish-naturalised Vietnamese. First, it is regarded as the fulfilment of the rights and obligations of the country. Second, voting is viewed as a straightforward form of expressing opinions and making political decisions. Third, the participants perceive voting engagement as contributing to building the country by setting up a new state apparatus to lead Poland for the future. As exposed in the narration of 60-year-old Mr Định below, acknowledging the impact of the outcomes of elections on his life stirs up the inclination to vote.

> *When I lived in Poland, I became politicised and had my own political views. The ruling PiS party directly affected my life, so I needed to have a voice and make a choice by myself. Thus, since I got Polish citizenship, I went to the polls at every election. I voted in all elections at all local and national levels.*

Figure 1 presents the difference in voting in the last national election among eligible respondents (19.22 per cent of respondents in the survey) across gender, age and generation. Although the figure depicts a more active tendency to vote in the last national election among females, older people and respondents from the 1.5 and second generations, the results from Chi-square tests of the differences were statistically insignificant. This finding implies an unclear discrepancy in the voting behaviours of the Polish-naturalised Vietnamese across all demographic characteristics.

In addition to voting, we examined other formal political activities related to the manifest participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland. The respondents were asked whether they engaged in the following 4 traditional forms of political participation in the last 12 months: supporting political parties, contacting politicians, contacting civil servants and donating money to political parties. As presented in Table 3, the number of respondents who took part in those traditional forms in the last 12 months is deficient. Generally, the proportion of the surveyed engaging in the first three activities is smaller than 5 per cent. Specifically, only 2.69 per cent supported political parties, 3.59 per cent had contacts with politicians and 3.89 per cent contacted civil servants. Although the number of respondents who donated money to political parties is more than that of the first three forms, the number is unremarkable, accounting for only 8.08 per cent of respondents. However, this result is interesting when uncovering a greater willingness for political giving among the Vietnamese compared to the Poles, whose number donating to political parties was recorded as no more than 1 per cent (Ponce and Scarrow 2011).

Figure 1. Voting in national elections by gender, age and generations



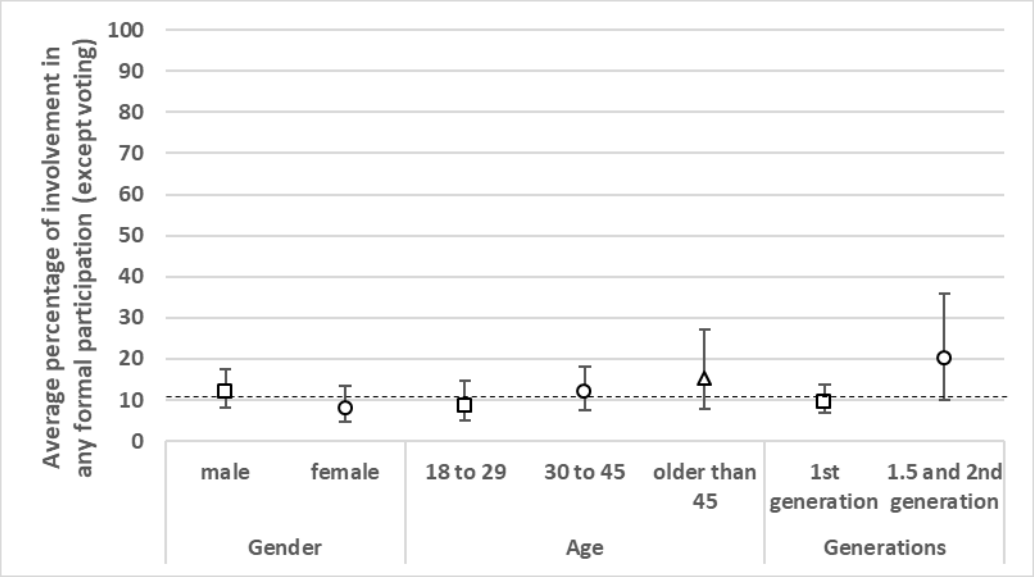
Note: The dot/square/triangle indicates the value of the mean and the bars mark the 95 per cent confidence interval of the mean. The dotted line indicates the value of the sample mean. $\chi^2 = 0.373$, p = 0.541, N = 62 (gender); $\chi^2 = 2.60$, p = 0.272, N = 59 (age); $\chi^2 = 0.78$, p = 0.37, N = 64 (generations).

Table 3. Formal political activities

Formal activities	Supporting political parties	Contacting politicians	Contacting civil servants	Donating money to political parties
	(per cent)	(per cent)	(per cent)	(per cent)
Yes	2.69	3.59	3.89	8.08
No	97.31	96.41	96.11	91.92
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(N)	334	334	334	334
Non-response	13	13	13	13
Total sample	347	347	347	347

In Figure 2, we portrayed how the percentage of individuals participating in traditional forms of political engagement – except voting– varied by gender, age and generation. In this analysis, we constructed an indicator, a dichotomous variable assigned the value of 1 – indicating any of the 4 conventional activities in which the respondent had participated in the last 12 months – and 0 otherwise. As illustrated in the figure, just over 10 per cent of respondents were involved in any of these activities. The findings also show that the variation of engagement in formal forms across age and generation is unsurprising. A high percentage of participation is seen among more politically active categories: males, older respondents and people within the 1.5- and second-generation categories. While it is not possible to verify the variation of the pattern of engagement in formal political activities across gender and age, as shown in the p-values, the potential difference between migrant generations is confirmed through a Chi-square test with a statistical significance at a 10 per cent level (p=0.063).

Figure 2. Formal political form by gender, age and generations



Note: The dot/square/triangle indicates the value of the mean and the bars mark the 95 per cent confidence interval of the mean. The dotted line indicates the value of the sample mean. $\chi^2 = 1.51$, p = 0.219, N = 327 (gender); $\chi^2 = 1.747$, p = 0.417, N = 325 (age); $\chi^2 = 3.46$, p = 0.063, N = 334 (generations).

Our qualitative interviews further revealed that most informants supported political parties during elections by mobilising friends or relatives to vote for the preferred parties. Mr. Văn, who came to Poland in the late 1990s and was now in his 50s, stated that he supported the political party campaign by urging Vietnamese people to vote for candidates of the PO party in elections. During the last presidential election, he mustered votes for the coalition between PO and other parties in the competition with the PiS party.

> *Well, I am a member of the PO party. I go to every party meeting. In fact, the PO does not have that many party members – only 30,000–40,000 – and they do not need a large number of members as long as its members can mobilise strong support for them in elections. So I support them in this way, mobilising supporters. For example, if the Mayor of Warsaw runs again for election as a presidential candidate, I will urge all Vietnamese who support the PO to vote for him.*

Although most participants favoured the PO party due to its liberal stand, it does not mean all Vietnamese in Poland supported it. Unlike other informants, Mr Văn referred us to a few Vietnamese immigrants supporting the PiS party. However, as he stated below, these people become supporters of the PiS not because of their identification with the party's political stance but because of promises regarding social security:

> *In my opinion, not many Vietnamese people support PiS because people are afraid of the party's xenophobic stance. However, up to now, there are also some Vietnamese people who support it because it grants them 500 zl. Because these people see financial benefits, they support the party. However, they do not know much about politics.*

Regarding engagement in legal extra-parliamentary activities, we asked respondents in the survey whether they had taken part in the following activities in the previous 12 months: striking, boycotting, handing out leaflets, protesting, contacting the media or signing petitions. Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents

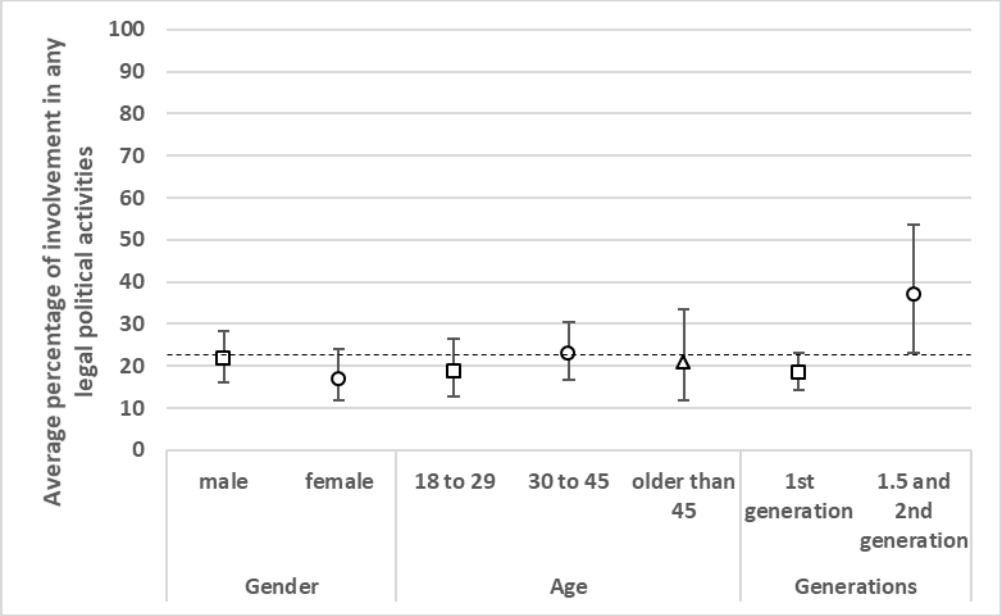
participating in each activity, with very few participating in them in the previous 12 months. The lowest percentage concerned going on strike, at only 1.8 per cent, followed by boycotting (3.89 per cent) and handing out leaflets (4.79 per cent). More respondents engaged in protesting (8.8 per cent) and contacting the media (8.68 per cent). Most respondents joined the legal extra-parliamentary form by signing petitions (12.87 per cent). This pattern of Vietnamese immigrants' political participation is relatively analogous to that of Poles' engagement in non-conventional political activities. Data from recent waves of the European Values Survey show that signing petitions was preferred the most by Polish people (37.12 per cent), nearly three times higher than the second most favourable activity – peaceful demonstrations (13.63 per cent). Boycotts and strikes persuaded very few Polish people to participate – just 5.3 per cent and 4.7 per cent, respectively (EVS 2022).

Table 4. Legal extra-parliamentary activities (%)

Formal activities	Striking	Boycotting	Handing out leaflets	Protesting	Contacting the media	Signing petitions
Yes	1.80	3.89	4.79	8.08	8.68	12.87
No	98.20	96.11	95.21	91.92	91.32	87.13
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	334	334	334	334	334	334
Non-response	13	13	13	13	13	13
Total sample	347	347	347	347	347	347

Figure 3 portrays how engagement in legal extra-parliamentary forms varies across gender, age and generation. Like formal political activities, we constructed a dichotomous variable, assigned the value of 1 whenever the respondent had participated in any of the 6 legal extra-parliamentary activities in the previous 12 months; 0 otherwise. Compared to the participation in the formal form shown in Figure 2, the average percentage of individuals engaging in legal extra-parliamentary activities, as illustrated in Figure 3, is approximately 2 times higher (20.36 per cent compared with 10.78 per cent). Interestingly, the variation of involvement in this kind of manifest political activity across genders and generations is similar to that of traditional forms. Male respondents (more than 20 per cent) constituted a slightly higher share than females (less than 20 per cent) in involvement in legal extra-parliamentary activities. However, this difference in terms of gender is not supported by the Chi-square test ($p = 0.295$), pointing to an uncertain variation by gender. Unlike gender, the gap in involvement in non-conventional political forms is real for generations, as shown by a statistically significant Chi-square test ($p = 0.009$). Respondents belonging to the 1.5 and second generation constitute a more substantial share – 2 times higher than the first-generation group – in engaging in the extra-parliamentary form, around 40 per cent for the younger generation compared to 20 per cent for first-generation immigrants. As for age, although the Chi-square test uncovers unclear evidence for a discrepancy across age groups ($p = 0.7$), the result suggests a non-linear association between age cohorts and participation in legal forms among the Vietnamese. Figure 3 shows that the highest percentage of those surveyed who took part in the legal extra-parliamentary form was respondents aged 30 to 45 (approximately equal to the average rate of joining this form of the whole sample). In contrast, respondents attached to the younger and older categories have low engagement. Specifically, just under 20 per cent of respondents joining the form are aged 18 to 29 and the proportion of the oldest people is slightly over 20 per cent.

Figure 3. Legal extra-parliamentary form by gender, age, and generations



Note: The dot/square/triangle indicates the value of the mean and the bars mark the 95 per cent confidence interval of the mean. The dashed-dotted line indicates the value of the sample mean. $\chi^2 = 1.097$, p = 0.295, N = 327 (gender); $\chi^2 = 0.712$, p = 0.7, N = 325 (age); $\chi^2 = 6.79$, p = 0.009, N = 334 (generations).

Qualitative interviews revealed that most participants participated in manifest political forms by protesting. Some demonstrated opposition to 'inappropriate' policies adopted by the Polish government. For example, they were protesting against the law on 'the protection of freedom of social media users' differing from that of the ruling party in its control over the judiciary branch. Some pointed to the support for primary- and high-school teachers' demand for higher pay, engaging in demonstrations to make abortion law stricter or supporting the LGBT+ or gay-pride movement. Other participants also reported helping people who joined protests by donating food or money and expressing an opinion to advocate protests. Mr Hùng, a participant in his 40s actively doing voluntary work even though he arrived in Poland just 3 years previously, narrated how he was involved in the host politics through protesting activities:

> *I participate in political movements that stand up for the weak in society. For example, I participated in protests of gay pride or LGBT… I also engaged in demonstrations against the abortion law with Polish friends and foreigners.*

Signing petitions is also a manifest form of political engagement that several participants have taken. As they said, petitions were made to oppose drafts or bills proposed by the Polish parliament –such as the new draft of the abortion law – or which supported LGBT+ movements. In addition, handing out leaflets or banners is a form of protest that participants indicated enabled them to expose their expressions. For example, Mrs Hồng (40s), who arrived in Poland in 1996 and considered herself active in protesting activities, reported that she held up a banner to oppose 'inappropriate' policies adopted by the government in order to express her opinion on the issue:

I also hang up a banner at home with the slogan 'I oppose' because I thought that decisions made by the government were bad. So that is a way for me to express my views.

In sum, our findings uncovered a very low degree of participation in manifest political forms among Vietnamese immigrants. The participatory pattern is characterised by a tendency to prefer extra-parliamentary activities over formal political participation. The gap in manifest political participation is evident solely in terms of immigrant generations, especially in non-conventional political activities, where the 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese immigrants are shown to be more active than first-generation Vietnamese.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analyses have revealed Vietnamese-origin immigrants' modest willingness to integrate into the political sphere in the host country, exhibited by a low level of involvement in latent activities and a very low rate of engagement in the manifest dimension. This finding is understandable when referring to previous studies documenting that the Vietnamese in Poland are cautious and reluctant to engage in political affairs, considering political discussions as 'sensitive issues' (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019). The degree of political participation of the Vietnamese in Poland mirrors the low degree of political participation among migrant groups in European countries with new migration experiences, such as Hungary, Italy and Spain (Pilati and Morales 2019). It also imitates the pattern of the political participation of non-European nationals, especially those from Asian and African countries, in other European contexts (Pilati and Morales 2019). However, compared to their counterparts in the United States, the Vietnamese in Poland are much less active in political participation. A study of the Vietnamese-American people's political participation in the US shows that the Vietnamese are relatively politically active, with more than 70 per cent of those who acquired American citizenship engaged in the last election and more than 55 per cent involved in non-conventional political activities such as protesting, campaigning and attending local meetings (Le 2013). The reason for the difference can be attributed to the effect of premigratory political socialisation in which most of the Vietnamese in Poland experienced political learnings in the context of a communist culture prior to migration, characterised by political apathy and a low level of political efficacy (Mieriņa and Cers 2014). This political culture is thought to migrate with the Vietnamese to the residence country, discouraging the migrant group from political participation in Poland.

In our findings, we observed a variation in the degree of participation across forms of political activities. Like the results of Lee's work (2019), in which Vietnamese students in the Czech Republic were shown to be inclined towards civic engagement and tended to withdraw from the traditional form of political activity, we found that the Vietnamese in Poland prefer latent political participation while being unwilling to participate in manifest political activities. In addition, the findings of this study reflect those of Le (2013), who revealed a significant preference for non-conventional political activities over traditional political acts among the Vietnamese in the US. We detected a tendency for Vietnamese to be more active in non-conventional political acts (legal extra-parliamentary activities) than formal political activities within the manifest dimension. These results are highly suggestive. While the disinclination to manifest political activities can be understood as a result of the premigratory political culture that offered very limited political efficiency for Vietnamese political participation in the host country, it should be noted that the perception of civic engagement as an obligation to the host society can be a crucial factor in driving their preference for involvement in latent political activities.

We also uncovered a significant variation in the pattern of political engagement across primary demographic factors. The difference between men and women in political engagement is displayed solely in latent political activities, in which a high degree of involvement was found among males rather than females.

This finding can be attributed to the lesser motivation and fewer resources associated with political participation due to Vietnamese women taking on more family responsibilities compared to men. Also, the gendered stereotype in Confucian contexts that incites women to focus on family duties while discouraging them from participating in social and political affairs provides justifiable insight into understanding the difference in political engagement between Vietnamese men and women. Like gender, the variation in age groups is only manifest in the latent forms of political participation, with older people being very willing to be involved in political affairs. The greater political activism of older Vietnamese immigrants compared to the younger ones can be explained by the lifecycle and generational effects, where young immigrants have less motivation for focusing on host-country politics due to their unstable residencial situation in the host country, prefering to put more resources into their living and responsibilities for their families. Unlike in gender and age, the variation in the degree of engagement across generations is observed in both latent and manifest forms of political participation, in which the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese people show a higher level of participation in the host politics than the first generation. This result implies an increased willingness to be included in the political sphere in Polish society for the first 2 groups, confirming the findings of previous studies which observed these generations' high connection to Polish society (Pokojska 2017; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). It should be acknowledged that high human capital – notably knowledge of the Polish language and culture, coupled with being politically socialised in the host country with the political culture of a democratic regime – enables the 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese-origin immigrants to have a higher level of political participation than the first generation.

Interestingly, we found Vietnamese migrants' sense of responsibility towards Polish society to be an incentive for the former's political integration into the host country. As evident in our findings, the migrant group's civic engagement and political participation – notably voluntary involvement, voting and protesting activities – are regarded as the fulfilment of the rights and obligations of the country. This perception results from their gratitude to Poland, defined as the second homeland, for accommodating them during their immigration. In this sense, we can be reminded of filial piety, a prevalent value in Vietnamese culture that describes children's respect for their parents. This cultural value is relevant in accounting for Vietnamese immigrants' political integration into Polish society, stimulating the Vietnamese to pay off their presumed debt to the host society. Additionally, our findings disclose that their willingness to be involved in political activities comes from the desire to gain the host's recognition for the migrant group's presence and role in Polish society. In this vein, our results align with findings from the work of Grabowska (2023), in which the charitable activities of the Vietnamese in Poland are found to play similar roles. However, our study postulates that it is not only charitable work but also other forms of the civic and political participation of the Vietnamese that carry analogous values and meanings, manifesting their belonging to Polish society.

This study provides significant insights into the Vietnamese in Poland, advancing knowledge on the political aspect of the migrant group in Polish society, which has thus far been sidelined in academic discourse. Although this gap has been filled by the recent publications of Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2017, 2021, 2022) and Hữu (2022), those works are based on the ethnographic methodological perspective and exclusively touch on the migrant group's transnational political practices with a focus on pro-democracy activism or online political involvement. By employing a parallel mixed method with the use of qualitative and quantitative data, this current study is one of the first investigations providing a comprehensive picture of the political integration of the migrant group through their pattern of engagement in the political sphere in Polish society.

We provide ample empirical foundations that reinforce the conceptualisations applied to the empirical analysis of Vietnamese-origin immigrants' political integration in Polish society. Unlike recent research that employs alternative perspectives and concepts to examine the complex and dynamic processes of immigrants' adaptation and settling in destination societies, we adapt the two-sided reconceptualisation of 'integration' to

investigate how the Vietnamese integrate into the political sphere in Polish society. By employing this conceptual framework, we observed the visibility of political integration into Polish society among Vietnamese-origin immigrants, with their wide range of latent and manifest political activities. For example, they were interested in political parties in Poland, following and discussing political news concerning presidential elections. Furthermore, we found that the dominance of the preference for liberalism among the Vietnamese can be seen as the core, stirring up the migrant group to get involved in protests against the ruling party for issuing policies challenging liberal values in Poland.

While the results provided crucial insights into the political practices of the Vietnamese in Polish society, this study contains limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the small sample size of the survey and the limitation in the number of participants involved in the qualitative interviews can have drawbacks in generalising and validating the study's findings. Second, the research design focusing on a single migrant group in a single context might result in overlooking the effects of contextual factors affecting migrant political participation and may not allow the degree and pattern of Vietnamese political engagement to be presented from a comparative perspective. For example, the similarities and differences in involvement in the political sphere in the host country between the Vietnamese in Poland and their counterparts in other Central and Eastern European countries cannot be studied. Therefore, future work could be implemented by focusing on the political integration of Vietnamese immigrants in several destinations in the Central and Eastern European region, thus helping us to understand the effects of contextual factors – for example, political opportunity structure and citizenship policies – on migrant groups' political participation and the degree and patterns of Vietnamese immigrants' political participation from a comparative perspective. Furthermore, the effects of contextual factors on migrant political integration should be taken into account when it is approached as a two-way process of the interaction between the host country and migrant-origin individuals. It helps to uncover a more nuanced picture of migrant political integration by considering how the host country negotiates in a bid to adapt to the integrative process in accordance with migrant actors' ability and willingness to be included in the political sphere in the host society.

Future work can also focus on other issues that were not included in this study. It can touch on Vietnamese political integration in Poland by employing alternative conceptualisations of migrant political integration or alternative perspectives to capture the complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional processes of migrant adaptation and settlement in the host country in order to understand how the Vietnamese in Poland negotiate their involvement in the political sphere in Polish society. More importantly, future studies should consider significant drivers of Vietnamese-origin immigrants' political integration in Polish society. This can be achieved by considering the influence of important demographic and migrant factors, such as education, religion, employment, language proficiency, citizenship acquisition, length of residence in the host country and identity. In addition, the approach to social capital offers a lens that helps to figure out how types of social networks – particularly bonding and bridging ties –accumulated in the host country, form the way and degree of the migrant group's political engagement. Likewise, from transnationalism, an analysis of political and non-political transnational ties with the homeland will reveal how the ties with the origin country determine the integration of the migrant group into the political arena of the destination country. In particular, future work should not overlook the way in which communist legacies, a distinctive political characteristic of the Vietnamese in Poland, influence the political integration of the Vietnamese in Poland.

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Conflict of interest statement

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Notes

1. Project title: 'Political Integration of the Vietnamese Diaspora in Poland'.
2. Trzaskowski is a Polish politician. He became the PO party's candidate for the presidency of Poland, standing in the presidential election in May 2020.

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Uncovering 'Invisibility': Identities and Experiences of Exclusion among Highly Educated Germans of Polish Descent

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Despite representing the second-largest immigrant group in Germany, Polish immigrants and their descendants are understudied and have often been described as 'invisible' as they have a reputation of 'becoming German' quickly and unproblematically. Challenging this notion and considering the prevalence of anti-Eastern European racism in the German context, this study analyses interviews with 22 highly educated Germans of Polish descent, focusing on how interviewees talked about being German and/or Polish and their experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination, in both their childhood and teenage years and as adults. In so doing, the study contributes to the literature on how the ethnic and national identities of white descendants of immigrants are related to experiences of exclusion. Specifically, some interviewees (Type 1) said that they felt only German (and not Polish) and denied experiencing stigmatisation or discrimination in their present lives. Other interviewees (Type 2) embraced a symbolic Polish ethnicity while framing exclusionary experiences as a thing of the past. Type 3 interviewees reported a process of re-ethnicisation, arguably enabled by the absence of exclusionary experiences in their present lives. Finally, there were interviewees (Type 4) who reported embracing their Polish identity, which led to experiences of stigmatisation in certain contexts.

Keywords: self-identification, second generation, Polish immigration, stigmatisation, Germany, ethnicity

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Introduction

Polish immigrants and their descendants represent the second-largest group of immigrants in Germany, after immigrants from Turkey (see BAMF 2024). In 2022, more than half (1.3 million) of the 2.2 million people of Polish migrant background in Germany held German citizenship (see BAMF 2024).[1] However, they have been in neither the academic nor the public spotlight, arguably because of their 'invisibility' in terms of their 'unproblematic' and 'quick' integration and their lack of difference from people read as German in terms of phenotype, religion and culture (see, e.g., Loew 2014; see also Boldt 2012; Smechowski 2017, the former of whom coined the term 'quiet integration' with regards to the identities of so-called '*Aussiedler*' – i.e. ethnic Germans who first had remained in what became Poland in 1945 and later migrated to Germany). In addition, Polish first names are not always recognisable as Polish because many of them are common in Germany, too. Immigrants from Poland have also made use of the possibility of surname change (*Namensänderungsgesetz* 2023). Hence, descendants of Polish immigrants who grew up speaking 'accent-free' German may not carry any markers of their migrant background. The group is also 'invisible' in yet another sense: their experiences are rarely discussed in the recently emerging public debate on (everyday) racism in Germany. Indeed, this debate seems to focus on anti-Muslim and anti-Black racism (see DeZIM 2022) and to neglect the experiences of Polish and, more generally, Eastern European immigrants and their descendants (see Pürckhauer 2023).

Despite the group's 'invisibility', however, research on first-generation immigrants from Poland, such as Boldt's (2012) work on the identities of so-called '*Aussiedler*', suggests that their feelings of belonging and identities are not free from ambivalence and friction, nor have they been spared experiences of stigmatisation. Similarly, journalistic work (Smechowski 2017) has vividly described how the strong will of immigrants from Poland and their children to 'become German' as quickly as possible and to climb the social ladder – Smechowski uses the term *Strebermigranten* (careerist migrants) – is motivated by the shame of being 'different' and their experience of belonging to a stigmatised group.

Supporting these descriptions, research comparing recent Polish and Turkish migrants' identification with Germany shows that, while Polish immigrants perceive less discrimination and value incompatibility over time than Turks, they still experience persistent group discrimination, which negatively impacts on their identification with Germany (Diehl, Fischer-Neumann and Mühlau 2016). Moreover, research in the UK has demonstrated that Polish migrants' whiteness does not prevent them from experiencing racism and xenophobia, especially post-Brexit (Rzepnikowska 2019). Thus, Polish migrants have been described as being positioned 'on the peripheries of whiteness', in that they are 'both racialised and able to benefit from their position as "paler migrants"' (Narkowicz 2023: 1534; see also Runfors 2021).

Comparable qualitative studies of Polish immigrants' and their descendants' lived experiences of racism are still lacking in the German context. However, current research exploring racism against Eastern Europeans in Germany more generally (see DeZIM 2022; Lewicki 2021; Lewicki 2023) shows that, although one may be inclined to believe that the image of Poles and Poland in Germany has improved since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, 'people from Europe's East are distinctively, yet ambiguously racialised' (Lewicki 2023: 1481) by being 'positioned as inferior Others within hierarchies of Europeanness' (Lewicki 2023: 1494). On the one hand, 'Eastern Europeans' (including Poles) are, at times, 'included in global racialised categories of "Europeanness"' (Lewicki 2023: 1483). On the other, however, they are over-represented in precarious jobs in Germany and these disadvantages are flanked by a discourse that invokes 'tropes of backwardness' (Lewicki 2023: 1494), imagining them as 'a lesser breed, carriers of disease, specifically skilled manual workers, a strain on public services, and criminal tricksters' (Lewicki 2023: 1483). Because of their strong desire to assimilate, Polish immigrants and their descendants in Germany are often valued as 'good migrants' in comparison to, for example, immigrants from Muslim-majority countries (see, e.g., Ulrich and

Topçu 2010). However, it is precisely such expectations of assimilation and 'catching up' that constitute their racialisation as inferior (see Lewicki 2021). In addition, although their post-migration status may improve over generations, their racialisation is sticky because of the 'political–economic peripheralisation of the region' (Lewicki 2023: 1494), which has a historical legacy. Indeed, anti-Slavic racism and anti-Polonism are deeply rooted in German history (see, e.g., Kopp 2012).

Thus, although Polish immigrants and their descendants are 'invisible' and have a reputation of assimilating and 'becoming German' quickly and unproblematically, there is reason to believe that, first, they have experienced stigmatisation and discrimination in Germany and, second, that these experiences of exclusion are related to their identities – by, for instance, pushing them towards identification with Germany (Smechowski 2017) or weakening their identification with Germany (Diehl *et al.* 2016). Overall, there is little knowledge about the ethnic and national feelings of belonging and self-identifications of descendants of Polish immigrants, their experiences of exclusion and the ways in which these feelings and experiences are related.

To take a first step towards closing this gap, this study analyses data from qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 highly educated Germans of Polish migrant background. It asks the following research questions: Do they identify as German and does Polish ethnicity play a role in the interviewees' lives and in what ways? Do they experience (or have they experienced) stigmatisation and/or discrimination because of their Polish background – and how can we interpret the relationship between these experiences and their ethnic and national self-identification and feelings of belonging?

Descendants of immigrants' identities and their connection to experiences of ethnoracial exclusion

In the following literature review, I use two umbrella terms: 'identities' and 'experiences of ethnoracial exclusion', terms which I clarify before turning to the central findings in the literature.

I use 'identities' to encompass the concepts not only of (ethnic and national) identity but also of (self-)identification and notions and feelings of belonging. The identity perspective answers the question 'Who am I and where do I belong?' in terms of the characteristics and social experiences that an individual shares with other group members – note that the groups in question can be religious, local, racial or supranational (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux and Fleischmann 2019). This perspective is often investigated by asking what kinds of categories individuals use for self-identification (see, e.g., Zhou and Xiong 2005). Importantly, the identity perspective considers not only how individuals think about themselves but also how others view and act towards them (Jenkins 2014). Moreover, individuals can be thought of as having multiple identities that may, at times, be in tension with one another (Verkuyten *et al.* 2019). Although all individuals have multiple group memberships (and thus multiple identities), much (yet not all) research on immigrants' and their descendants' identities focuses on ethnic and national identity. As pointed out by Verkuyten *et al.* (2019: 393): 'For the immigrant, questions about ethnic and national identity (as well as religious, local and supranational group belonging) are almost inevitable and, in many cases, similar questions are raised for their descendants as well'. As will be shown below, many studies use the term 'ethnicity' instead of 'ethnic identity' and the national identity in question usually refers to that of the receiving country.

The notion of 'belonging' goes beyond the concept of identity by including emotions related to embeddedness; belonging is associated with 'spaces of familiarity, comfort and emotional attachment' (Lähdesmäki, Saresma, Hiltunen, Jäntti, Sääskilahti, Vallius and Ahvenjärvi 2016: 237; see also Antonsich 2010) as expressed in the idea of 'feeling at home' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197). Thus, belonging as a concept focuses the analytical gaze on the emotional and affective dimensions of being connected to a larger community. Notably, there is also a tendency to use the terms 'identities', '(self-)identifications' and 'notions (or feelings) of belonging' interchangeably (see, e.g., Simonsen 2018).

The second umbrella term, 'experiences of ethnoracial exclusion', can be defined as encompassing experiences of exclusion based on 'racial status, ethnicity, nation origin and/or other ascribed characteristics' (Imoagene 2019: 265; see also Lamont, Moraes Silva, Welburn, Guetzkow, Mizrachi, Herzog and Reis 2016: 7). Notably, experiences of ethnoracial exclusion include (but are not limited to) experiences of racism, understood as experiences of being othered, excluded or discriminated against based on biological or cultural characteristics (see Balogun and Joseph-Salisbury 2021). Experiences of ethnoracial exclusion may entail stigmatisation, in which individuals experience 'disrespect and their dignity, honour, relative status or sense of self [being] challenged' (Lamont *et al.* 2016: 7). Stigmatisation occurs when an individual is insulted, excluded from social networks, subjected to prejudice, made the victim of jokes or stereotyped. Alternatively, ethnoracial exclusion may be experienced through discrimination, when an individual is 'prevented [from] or given substandard access to opportunities and resources such as jobs, housing, access to public space, credit and so on' (Imoagene 2019: 265; see also Lamont *et al.* 2016: 7).

I turn now to the literature on the identities of (descendants of) immigrants in Western contexts. This literature has argued that whether (descendants of) immigrants have a choice in how they identify is related to whether they have to deal with outsiders' ascriptions (as is the case if they are non-white) and, relatedly, with experiences of ethnoracial exclusion directed towards themselves or their group. In the US, which has a longer tradition of migration studies than Europe, researchers have contrasted the identities of the white descendants of immigrants with those of non-whites. More specifically, the ethnicity of the white descendants of immigrants has been described as (gradually) losing its social and political significance in processes of assimilation, as outlined in the field's classical accounts of how European immigrants became 'Americans' (see, e.g., Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993). Additionally, Gans (1979; see also Waters 1990) showed that white descendants of immigrants may still develop a 'symbolic ethnicity' – understood as a voluntarily adopted identification with the ethnicity of their ancestors – through 'symbols', which can involve ethnic food, religious holidays, ethnic festivals and an interest in politics in the old country. Importantly, Gans (1979: 6–7) outlined that 'symbolic ethnicity' is adopted by those who have become non-ethnics, 'who lack direct and indirect ties to the old country' and who do not interact with 'other ethnics in important secondary group activities'. Moreover – and in stark contrast to non-white immigrants – they are neither categorised by members of the majority society based on their phenotype nor discriminated against. Rumbaut (2008: 110) described this mode of ethnic identity formation as 'facilitated by an absence of prejudice and discrimination in the core society'. Thus, in a situation of 'freedom of role definition' (Gans 1979: 8), white descendants of immigrants may search for 'easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity' (Gans 1979: 8) and then choose 'a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country' without having to incorporate that feeling into their everyday behaviour.

White descendants of immigrants may, however, not always retain 'symbolic ethnicity'. As argued by Anagnostou (2009: 94), white ethnicity, too, has 'social valence' and is not just a matter of individual choice, but is socially and culturally produced. Likewise, Anderson (2016: 1451), who studied second-generation Germans in Australia, found that her interviewees' narratives were reflective of 'deeper, subconscious layers of ethnic identity' expressed through emotions such as 'shame and pride'. Importantly, Anderson (2016: 1451) also found that her participants were especially aware of 'the embodied reality of their German identity' when they encountered prejudice or felt out of place because 'Germanness' was ascribed to them by others. Recent research on the descendants of white immigrants has thus started to challenge the notion that these individuals' ethnicity is necessarily symbolic.

As for the non-white descendants of immigrants, it has been in the wake of the so-called 'new era of mass immigration' to the US that migration scholars have become increasingly aware that these individuals' identities are not primarily a matter of choice but are strongly influenced by the majority society's ascriptions

(see, e.g., Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). Moreover, 'in the face of perceived threats, persecution, discrimination and exclusion', studies have found that these individuals develop a 'reactive ethnicity' – that is, increased ethnic consciousness and ethnic identification in reaction to perceived exclusion based on their ethnicity (Rumbaut 2008: 110; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Recent empirical research – especially on second-generation immigrants in Western Europe, the context of the present study – has provided further insight into the relationship between identities and experiences of ethnoracial exclusion. Within this context – and especially with regards to Germany – it has been pointed out that 'the boundaries between national and ethnic identities can be regarded as "bright", forcing members of the second generation into an uncomfortable choice between national identity and parental heritage' (Alba and Foner 2015: 199). However, in Germany, there is also evidence that hyphenated identities such as *Deutschtürken* ('German Turks') are gradually increasing in presence (see Schneider, Chavez, DeSipio and Waters 2012a: 215–216), testifying to the boundaries between national and ethnic identities in Germany becoming porous and less 'bright' and 'the dwindling centrality of single ethnic belongings' (Crul and Schneider 2010: 1249).

On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that, as in the US context, the second generation may develop a 'reactive ethnicity' (see Çelik 2015; Skrobanek 2009). Studying the ethnic identities of second-generation Turkish immigrant youth in Germany, Çelik (2015: 1652) found that his interviewees neither defined themselves as German nor referred to a hybrid identity; instead, they 'displayed a strong emotional commitment to a pro-Turkish identity'. He further showed that their reactive ethnicity was strongly linked to perceived discrimination.

Focusing specifically on the national identity of the second generation in large European cities, Schneider, Fokkema, Matias *et al.* (2012b: 290) remark that this 'feeling of belonging is complicated' because of '"othering" that range[s] from simple remarks to overtly xenophobic treatment and [is] quite frequent for persons considered to "come from somewhere else"'. Drawing on quantitative survey data from the second generation from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia in Berlin and Frankfurt, they showed that the respective comparison groups (respondents who were the children of native-born parents) showed much stronger feelings of national belonging than the second-generation respondents (Schneider *et al.* 2012b: 291), although most second-generation respondents still reported having either 'strong' feelings or an 'ambiguous or neutral' position. Likewise, Simonsen's (2018) qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews conducted with second-generation immigrants of Middle-Eastern descent in Denmark, outlined different types of feelings of belonging to Denmark: dis-identification (rejection of Danishness), non-identification (lacking a feeling of Danishness), ambivalence and identification. Moreover, Simonsen differentiated between *belonging in* (understanding Denmark as home) and *belonging with* (self-identifying as Danish). Importantly, Simonsen's interviews also showed that whether or not interviewees self-identified as Danish was dependent on their experiences of stigmatisation and how they interpreted them.

Overall, the literature on second-generation identity has shown, firstly, that experiences of exclusion have an important influence on the kind of identity that members of the second generation develop and, secondly and relatedly, that different paths are taken by white and non-white descendants of immigrants. Against this background, the study of the descendants of Polish immigrants in the German context is particularly interesting. Not only have their experiences of exclusion and their identities not yet been studied but the case of these individuals – positioned on the periphery of whiteness and as racially 'in between' (Narkowicz 2023) – can also provide a new perspective on the ways in which the relationship between second-generation identity and experiences of exclusion may be realised.

Sample characteristics, methods of data generation and analysis

Empirically, the study is based on 22 semi-structured interviews with 11 male and 11 female interviewees who live (or, until recently, lived) in Hamburg (see also Piwoni 2024, which is based on this and two other samples but which analyses the data from a different theoretical angle). All interviewees were either born in Germany or went there before starting primary school. In the literature, the second generation is defined as children born in the receiving country to at least one foreign-born parent – and this category often includes persons who were born in a foreign country to at least one foreign-born parent but arrived in the receiving country in early childhood (see, e.g., Imoagene 2019). The interviewees all spoke German without a non-German accent and had either an MA or BA degree (or equivalent). One had a PhD and two were MA students at the time of the interviews. Overall, the interviewees can be regarded as belonging to the 'middle class', operationalised as encompassing individuals with tertiary education who are typically professionals or managers (see Lamont *et al.* 2016). The youngest interviewee was 24 at the time of the interview, the oldest was 45 and 17 were in their 30s.

In sampling, I focused on individuals who live and work in a 'multicultural' city context, who formally belong in Germany (since they hold German citizenship) and who are well integrated according to parameters such as knowledge of the German language, educational attainment and/or integration in the job market but whose membership may still be contested in daily life. In addition, in the literature on the 'integration paradox', it has been argued that more highly educated minorities perceive higher levels of discrimination, which has been explained by their greater exposure to it, derogatory messages (through the media and greater contact with majority members in the labour market) and their greater awareness of the negative climate with which immigrants are confronted, which makes them more sensitive to discrimination (see, e.g., Steinmann 2019; Verkuyten 2016). Interviewing highly educated members of the second generation is therefore particularly well suited to eliciting experiences of exclusion. Table 1 provides further information on the interviewees. Please note that pseudonyms were chosen to reflect the interviewees' real names, using either Polish names/spelling or German names/spelling depending on the individual's background.

To recruit interviewees, I used multiple points of entry, including personal contacts, professional networks such as LinkedIn, local groups such as the German–Polish association and a specialised recruitment company for immigrants and their descendants. The goal was to capture as many different ways of self-identification as possible. Nevertheless – and as is typical for qualitative research – the number of interviewees informing each of the types I am going to present in the 'Findings' section should not be taken as representative of the actual distribution of these types among second-generation descendants of immigrants from Poland.

The two interviewees recruited through the professional company received compensation for their participation, while others were offered 10€ vouchers for online (book)stores. However, not all interviewees accepted the vouchers and, in some cases, I refrained from making the offer to avoid potential discomfort. Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The entire research process was implemented according to guidelines that were approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Passau.

Interviews were described in advance as focusing on 'everyday experiences' and 'identity' and took place between 2018 and 2021, either by phone or (VoIP)-mediated technologies (Skype or Zoom). Online communication has become extremely common for members of the middle class and I was able to establish a rapport and generate trust with the interviewees (for similar experiences with regard to the advantages of Skype- and Zoom-interviewing, see, e.g., Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey and Lawless 2019). The interviews lasted between 45 and 160 minutes (average length 90 minutes).

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Born in Germany (b) or age of arrival	Citizenship	Age	Educational status	Occupation
1	Magdalena	F	b	German + Polish	In her 30s	Equivalent to BA	Team leader in finance
2	Tamara	F	b	German + Polish	25	BA	MA student
3	Maria	F	5	German + Polish	35	Diploma/ MA equivalent	Manager in advertising
4	Luisa	F	under 1	Only German	In her 30s	MA	Manager
5	Leonie	F	b	Only German	24	BA	Professional in real estate
6	Jessica	F	2	Only German	32	PhD	Junior manager in urban municipality
7	Karolin	F	under 1	German + Polish	35	MA	Project manager in communication
8	Anna	F	under 1	German + Polish	37	BA	Professional in big firm
9	Emilie	F	under 1	Only German	34	BA	Assistant to the executive board
10	Alicia	F	b	German + Polish	33	BA	MA student
11	Christoph	M	3	Only German	36	MA	Manager in real estate
12	Mark	M	2	Only German	34	MA	Professional in marketing
13	Izabela	F	6	Only German	45	Equivalent to MA	Teacher (high school)
14	Piotr	M	2	Only German	36	Equivalent to MA	Federal official
15	Jan	M	b	German + Polish	35	MA	Entrepreneur
16	Jonathan	M	b	Only German	29	MA	Teacher (private school)
17	Christian	M	b	German + Polish	29	BA	MA student and advertising professional
18	Jakob	M	b	German + Polish	30	MA	Researcher
19	Johannes	M	6	German + Polish	37	Equivalent to MA	Consultant/ technical officer
20	Karol	M	3	Only German	34	Equivalent to BA	Key account manager
21	Konstantyn	M	b	Only German	32	MA	PhD student
22	Slawomir	M	4	German + Polish	34	MA	Communication designer

Interview questions, interviewing style, and interviewer's positionality

The interview questions were designed as open questions to elicit extensive accounts and narratives from the interviewees and included questions about the interviewees' self-understandings and feelings of belonging in general – and in regard to their Polish background and Germany in particular. I also asked whether and in which situations they felt that their migrant background mattered in their daily lives and whether they had had experiences of exclusion, such as being discriminated against. Overall, the interviewing style was receptive, in that interviewees had a large measure of control in answering the relatively few questions I asked (Brinkmann 2013: 31).

I, myself, conducted all the interviews, with the exception of three that were conducted by trained student assistants. I am a middle-aged German mother with a Polish migrant background (second generation), a fact that I revealed to the interviewees right from the start. As I shared a Polish migrant background (and a comparable class and generational position) with the interviewees, they may have relied on me to know 'what things are like' for a German of Polish origin; mothers, in particular, may have felt 'understood' and more at ease than male interviewees. Nevertheless, I found that both female and male narratives were rich and the rapport which I was able to establish was reflected in the interviewees' deep reflections.

Methods of data analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed using the software programme MAXQDA in several rounds of coding. Initially, I used the strategy of 'themeing the data' (Saldana 2013), in which I coded units of meaning as presented by the interviewees. Next, I interrogated these meaning units in terms of the concepts on which my research questions are based: notions of self-understanding, feelings of belonging and experiences of exclusion (see Kvale and Brinkmann 2015). Comparisons were made across interviews to identify similarities and differences between meaning units and to discover patterns in the co-occurrence of specific ideas. This process led to the identification of four different types of interviewee in terms of their ethnic and national self-identifications and feelings of belonging, as well as the ways in which their identities were related to experiences of exclusion. Finally, I analysed my findings in light of the literature on second-generation identity. The main findings are presented below, with quotations taken from transcriptions of the recordings, which have been translated from German to English and occasionally edited for clarity or context. Interviewee pauses ('...') and omissions in quotations ('(...)') are used where appropriate.

Findings

As outlined above, the literature on second-generation identity has suggested differentiating between feelings of 'belonging in' (understanding a place as home) and feelings of 'belonging with' (self-identifying as a member of a nation/culture) (see Simonsen 2018). In the case of the 22 Germans of Polish descent interviewed for this study, it was – for all of them – self-evident and unquestionable that they felt at home in Germany, in that they felt 'most "in tune" with society's values and how life is lived' (Simonsen 2018: 134). As in Simonsen's (2018: 133) study, the interviewees' feelings of 'belonging in' were motivated 'with reference to the fact of having been born and raised in the country and always [having] lived there' and many described being German in a 'matter-of-fact way', for instance by referring to their German citizenship and to German as their language or by identifying with what they perceived to be the German way of 'doing things' (here interviewees sometimes referred to stereotypical German traits such as being organised, appreciating structure and punctuality, etc.).

However, with regards to their feelings of 'belonging with', only three interviewees (Type 1) self-identified as only German, whereas the majority of the remaining interviewees said that they were both German and Polish and elaborated extensively on their feelings of belonging to Poland, Polish(-speaking) people and Polish culture – and the reasons for these feelings. Importantly, their Polish ethnicity was not accompanied by a dis- or non-identification with Germany, which aligns with Crul and Schneider's (2010: 1249) finding on 'the dwindling centrality of single ethnic belongings'. However, as will be shown, there were important differences between interviewees in terms of whether and, if so, to what extent these feelings were relevant to how they organised their lives in the past (childhood and teenage years) and present (adulthood). As for experiences of exclusion, the majority of the interviewees recalled experiences of stigmatisation and/or discrimination when they were children or teenagers, such as name-calling and being confronted with Polish jokes or stereotypes (for example, that Poles steal cars) but also receiving bad grades or facing a double standard in school; in particular, several interviewees said that teachers tried to prevent them from going to the *Gymnasium* (a selective secondary school that prepares pupils for university study). As for their adult lives, a few interviewees spoke about being confronted with stereotypes and stigma.

In addition, many interviewees said that they felt that the societal changes which Germany has seen in recent decades, such as the acknowledgement that Germany is an 'immigrant nation' and the appreciation of a pluralistic notion of nationhood (see, e.g., Piwoni 2012), have affected their personal and, more generally, Polish-immigrant position in German society in a positive way. Moreover, with the exception of those interviewees who also felt stigmatised in the present (Type 4), many others said that other groups of immigrants were more 'in the spotlight' with respect to stigma and discrimination. As Leonie said:

> *Of course, when you are from Poland, you have this reputation of 'People in your country – they steal cars and they will steal just anything'. But this has changed a lot. I feel that this was much worse in the past and that, today, other nations are focused on and* [people of] *other nations are* [confronted with comments], *like 'Your compatriots are all thieves'. Well, yes, today, this is* [for Poles] *not the case anymore.*

When trying to make sense of why they were subject to less stigmatisation in the present than in the past, interviewees would either point out – as Leonie does above – that Poles' image and standing in German society has changed for the better or they would argue that this is because of their position in society. Piotr combined both arguments as follows:

> *Well, yeah. I would put it like that: my time at school was not easy for me. I had difficult teachers. And then I was told – or they told my parents – that I should leave school and go to a Polish school. Even though I cannot read or write in Polish. (…) These were different times. (…) Today, it does not really matter where you are from. Today, if you belong to a certain circle of people – or, let us say, to a certain status group – and then you talk to people, then one's descent does not play a role. That's quite interesting and, as I said, an ice-breaker even. But back then, in school, it would be like, 'Oh, here comes the Pole'. And people would be a bit, a bit, prejudiced. Funnily enough, it was the older generation – teachers and so on.*

Finally, I found that interviewees were reluctant to label their experiences of exclusion (past or present) as 'racist' and instead spoke of 'stigma', 'prejudice' (as in the above quote) or 'stereotypes' with which they were confronted. As outlined in the introduction, there is ample evidence that anti-Eastern European racism is a reality in Germany, although this type of racism receives limited attention in the German media compared to anti-Black or anti-Muslim racism. Eastern Europeans' avoidance of describing experiences of exclusion as 'racist' may therefore reflect the general use of the term 'racism' in society and in the media (see Piwoni 2024). Similarly,

they may not feel 'entitled' to use this description because they are white. In what follows, I introduce four types of interviewees, who differ first in regards to their identities and second in the ways in which these identities are related to their experiences of exclusion.

Type 1: Feeling German

Three interviewees – Johannes, Karol and Konstantyn – said that they felt primarily German and that they did not have any strong emotional attachment to Polish people or Poland as a country. Karol, for instance, stated the following:

> *I feel German. For me, those* [my Polish roots] *are my roots and I accept them but they are… emotionally, I would say, I don't have much of an attachment to them, to be honest. I think it would be terrible if something bad happened there* [in Poland]. *There is no question about it. But maybe it is not necessarily worse than in another country. Yes, I grew up here* [in Germany]. *I consciously never lived there* [in Poland]. *And I can't imagine living there either.*

Type 1's strong identification did not mean that they were denying their Polish roots but was, rather, a recognition of how 'German' their upbringing had made them. Another interviewee, Konstantyn, said: 'I grew up Germany and I actually feel quite German but I also have Polish roots'. Furthermore, Johannes pointed out: 'So I can speak Polish and I know the people. I also like the mentality very much but, yes, I am somehow indeed German. And, I don't know, if I had to choose between German and Polish citizenship, it wouldn't be difficult for me'. When asked about experiences of exclusion, Johannes, Karol and Konstantyn all stated that, in their present lives, they have never felt excluded or treated unfairly because of their Polish roots. Konstantyn even denied recalling any such experiences when thinking about his childhood.

> *Er,* [because of] *my background, disadvantages? No, I think I can give a blanket negative answer. I can't think of anything and I can't imagine why* [this would have happened]. *(…) I'll say that the obviousness that I'm Polish isn't really there. And I* [thus] *don't see how I could have been disadvantaged because of that.*

While Konstantyn did not offer deeper reflections on his 'invisibility', which he depicted as fact and as something that has always been there, Johannes elaborated on his parents' conscious attempts to assimilate and become invisible:

> *And my parents tried to adapt very quickly. And they also tried to adopt German, yes, German characteristics (...) and somehow internalise that very quickly. I am sure about that. Also, my father always told me, 'Behave correctly here, we mustn't draw attention to the fact that we're from Poland'. (…) These days,* [this] *is not my credo. It was my parents'.*

Importantly, Johannes also recalled that his parents' efforts were a reaction to widespread stigmatising stereotypes about Poles:

> *And he* [interviewee's father] *said, 'Hey, we have to get involved here'. My father is involved in the church; he was a parent representative both in primary school and the Gymnasium, for example. So he has always*

tried to get involved everywhere. To show that we are also hard-working, even though we come from Poland. And then, because it was more like (…): the lazy Pole maybe [versus] *the hard-working Germans.*

Here, Johannes framed his parents' engagement as an attempt to counter the stereotype of 'the lazy Pole' and to show that they were 'also hard-working'. In the literature, 'working hard' has frequently been described as a strategy that minorities adopt to respond to racism, stigmatisation and discrimination (see, e.g., Imoagene 2019). In the case of Johannes' parents, however, this strategy was part of a broader goal, which was to 'adapt very quickly'. Indeed, Johannes recalled his father's credo of not drawing attention to their Polish ethnicity. In addition, at another point in the interview, he recalled him saying, 'We have to behave like our neighbours, the Germans'.

Johannes described the result of his parents' attempts as his current feeling of being culturally more German than Polish – a fact about which he was ambivalent: 'Of course, it is right to adopt things. But I think it's a pity – and that's also an important point– that the Polish, yes, values, that is, characteristics, have been completely shaken off. In other words, that you completely give up the culture you come from'.

Type 2: Embracing symbolic Polish ethnicity

When I asked Christoph about his identity, he answered, 'So, first of all, I am a Pole' (note that this identification did not prevent him, like all the interviewees, from identifying himself as German in a 'matter-of-fact way'). He elaborated as follows:

Even though Poland is in the East, I feel drawn to it because they are relatively open, communicative and warm-hearted, which is maybe not the case with Germans. And every time I go to Poland, even though I didn't grow up there or anything, there's a certain air, a certain smell – everything that somehow reminds me of home, even though it was never my real home.

Here, Christoph ascribes positive characteristics to Polish people – they are 'open', 'communicative and warm-hearted'. In addition, he associates his stays in Poland with feelings of nostalgia and a sense of being at home. However, as it emerged later in the interview, Christoph only travelled to Poland to visit his family no more than once a year and had no Polish friends at all. Moreover, he did not speak Polish in his everyday life and his contact with Polish culture was limited to occasionally reading Polish books and watching Polish movies for nostalgic reasons. When asked why he had no Polish friends, he even explained how distant he felt from Polish culture in general: 'I often notice with Poles I meet that they partly adopt the values of their parents or grandparents – which are so typically Polish – but I can't really relate to them myself'. Thus, although Christoph had not hesitated to self-identify as 'a Pole', his Polish ethnicity did 'not affect much in everyday life' (Waters 1990: 147), as is typical for symbolic ethnicity. His symbolic ethnicity was also 'costless' in another dimension. As outlined by Gans (1979) and Waters (1990: 147), it did not determine 'whether [he would] be subject to discrimination'. The two interviewees who subscribed to symbolic Polish ethnicity both rejected the very idea that they were being stigmatised or discriminated against because of their Polish descent. If anything, they located experiences of being othered or receiving stigmatising comments in the past. Indeed, Christoph recalled being socially excluded and confronted with stigma and even briefly considered using the term 'racism' to describe his experiences:

I was not thwarted as such. But I know… early childhood memories… that in kindergarten and in primary school… that we used to live in this square area with row houses and kindergarten and school were right

around the corner and there was racism. Yes, I don't know whether this was really racism but you could feel that one tried to keep a distance because one has been 'the Pole', you know. In kindergarten, I know, I was excluded – and those memories, I do have.

As Leonie explained: 'So, discrimination is a very strong word. I have never experienced that, so the only thing you could say I have experienced are jokes or sayings. But I don't think they were ever said to me in a bad way. (...) But, yeah, that has changed a lot, too'.

Now living in a multicultural, urban, middle-class environment, both Christoph and Leonie were convinced that prejudice against Poles was a thing of the past. Moreover, given their accent-free German and the fact that other people did not recognise them as Polish, it was up to them whether or not they raised the topic of their Polish descent. Leonie, who neither spoke Polish nor had Polish friends and regretted that she was 'not that much connected' to Polish culture, said that she had a 'positive feeling' when talking about her background and that it makes for interesting conversations 'when people come from different cultures and have something to tell'. Although Christoph's and Leonie's symbolic Polish ethnicity was based on associating 'all things Polish' with 'spaces of familiarity, comfort and emotional attachment' (Lähdesmäki *et al.* 2016: 237), these feelings did not motivate them, for example, to establish close contact with other Poles. This 'costless' identification with Polish culture is in stark contrast to Type 3s' efforts to 'regain' their Polish ethnicity.

Type 3: Re-ethnicisation as a corrective

Across all the interviews, there were 5 interviewees, all women, who told me that they had rediscovered – or were in the process of rediscovering – their Polish ethnicity after a period of being 'out of touch' with their Polish roots. Izabela's story is ideal-typical in this regard. Having arrived in Germany before starting primary school, she remembered having lost touch with the Polish culture and language in her youth.

I have to say that, when I was a teenager, [my Polish origin] *kind of faded into the background a bit. I didn't have any Polish acquaintances, friends or anything else. The only people I spoke Polish with were my parents – who also lived in Germany – and my grandparents, who stayed in Poland. (...) I left home when I was 20 and, after that, I spoke* [Polish] *with my parents when I spoke* [to them] *on the phone but, otherwise, Polish didn't play any role at all in my life. I have to say, in all honesty, that I wasn't that interested* [in my Polish roots].

When I asked her whether other people had pointed out her Polish origin (for example, by asking about the origin of her name), she replied that she had been 'invisible' because both her first name and her surname had been changed to a German variant by the German authorities when her family arrived in Germany. Only recently, in connection with the birth of her first child, did she initiate a reversal of this administrative act. At the time of the interview, both her first name and her surname were spelled in Polish again – her first name with an 'a' at the end and her surname with an 'sz' instead of the German 'sch'. She reflected, as follows, on why she had initially (in her youth and early adulthood) accepted the German spelling and why she now preferred the Polish spelling:

Of course, the people who knew me back then knew that I was [Isabell]. *I let myself be called that because I wanted to be as German as possible. And, at some point, I returned to* [Izabela], *that is, to my actual name. And that was a bit strange – that the people who have known me for so long should then call me*

[Izabela] *and no longer* [Isabell] *(...). But I feel much more comfortable with it because, at some point, I actually had the feeling that I was not* [Isabell] *at all.*

Having wanted 'to be as German as possible', Izabela said that she had been okay with having a German name. Now, however, she feels that she is not Isabell at all and feels much more comfortable with having a name reflective of how she self-identifies – as a 'German with a Polish core', as she said at another point.

As a child, Izabela lived in a small village. There, she experienced severe stigmatisation. She recalled that the other children did not want to play with her because she was from Poland and that she had been called a lot of names. Furthermore, she remembered that the landlady had a key to her family's flat and, when the family was not there, she would go into the flat and check what 'the Poles' were doing and whether everything was 'in order'. However, she also experienced that the better she spoke German and the better a pupil she became, the more she was accepted and respected: 'Then I was no longer a "leper" but simply belonged'. Looking back, Izabela believes that her status as the best in her class meant that her Polish roots were 'forgotten', as she put it – sometimes even by herself.

However, as an adult, and especially around the time when she had her first child, the feeling that she needed to change her name because she could no longer identify with it became very strong. In consequence, she started learning Polish, which she had almost forgotten, to 'gain the language back'. She joined a group for young Polish mothers to improve her language skills and to be able to speak with her children in Polish. She also contacted her relatives in Poland and started to travel there to visit them. Overall, the process was by no means – and, in contrast to what Gans (1979) and Waters (1990) describe with regard to symbolic ethnicity – 'costless'. Instead, there were many challenges: meeting relatives was neither easy nor always pleasant, as some of them supported rightist politics in Poland; she also found learning Polish – forcing herself to read exclusively Polish books and teaching her children the language – at times 'exhausting'. However, she felt that she needed to take this route because of deeply rooted emotions:

These interpersonal relationships between grandparents and children or parents and children, [for me] *take place in Polish. Well, that's somehow..., I've never experienced it any other way. I don't have a language for it in Germany. Well, of course I have a language for it* [German]*, but I don't get the same feeling* [when using it]*. That's why I have to speak Polish with my children if I want to convey a certain feeling to them (...). That doesn't work in German.*

In recent literature, it has been argued that white ethnicity, too, may not always be purely symbolic and that emotions make people aware of the embodied reality of their ethnic identity (see Anderson 2016). For Izabela, this embodied reality became particularly important and 'unignorable' when she was about to become a mother. Moreover, the feeling that she actually had 'a Polish core' was related not only to positive experiences regarding 'relationships between grandparents and children or parents and children' but also, as shown above, to vividly remembered negative childhood memories of being othered because of her Polish identity. As a result – and as in Anderson's (2016) interviews with descendants of German immigrants – feelings of shame contributed to Izabela's late acceptance of her 'Polish core', even though these feelings had first led her to strive to demonstrate her being German. Importantly, her Polish ethnicity came to the fore in a situation in which she had achieved social status as a well-educated, middle-class German in an urban milieu that valued bilingualism and multiculturalism. Now, standing up for her ethnic feelings is no longer linked to experiencing stigmatisation. On the contrary, she experienced that people '[were] very excited that my children are growing up bilingual'. Furthermore, in the rare situation when people would stare at her because she was speaking Polish to her children, she said that she would switch to German to make people aware of her actual status.

She knew that many Germans still hold negative stereotypes about Poles but said that she, personally, was not affected by them because of her education, her status and her accent-free German: 'I think it also depends a bit on what you do as a Pole. I think there is also a difference between someone with an academic degree –perhaps working as a doctor or something else – and coming to Germany for six weeks to look after old people'.

Izabela's story certainly stands out, as she went to great lengths to 'regain' her 'Polish core'. However, four other interviewees – Tamara, Jessica, Karolin and Anna – also reported rediscovering their Polish identity in connection with feelings of authenticity and the notion of 'standing up' for what they 'really were' after a phase in which they had tried to assimilate and become invisible in reaction to childhood experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

Type 4: Remaining Polish – and the costs that come with it

About half of the interviewees said that, although they had grown up and felt 'at home' in Germany, they had always had a strong sense of belonging to Poland as a country – Polish(-speaking) people, Polish culture, Polish traditions, Polish food, the Polish language and values they framed as Polish, such as hospitality, creativity and spontaneity. Antonsich (2010: 647) pointed out that 'a sense of feeling "at home"' is often generated by language, 'which resonates with one's autobiographical sphere' but also 'other forms of cultural expressions, traditions and habits' as well as 'cultural practices like, for instance, food production/consumption'. In that sense, the interviewees' Polish ethnicity was an additional and emotional 'home' to them.

In terms of self-identification, most of them, like the Type 3 interviewees, emphasised that they felt both German and Polish, describing themselves, for example, as 'German with Polish roots' (Slawomir), as having grown up in Germany 'but with strong ties to Poland' (Christian), as 'German–Polish' (Alicia) or as 'German with a Polish migrant background' (Jonathan). Magdalena and Maria stressed their strong emotional attachment to Poland through metaphorical self-descriptions, thereby reflecting how much of an emotional 'home' their Polish ethnicity was for them: 'I'm Polish at heart, but in reality or, let's say, in my everyday life, I'm more German. But this gut feeling, or this feeling of belonging, is often very Polish' and 'I am actually Polish. I am a German constitutional patriot (...), but somehow my heart, as they say, is very attached to Poland'.

Moreover, these feelings of belonging and their Polish ethnicity played an important role in their everyday lives. They all had at least a few Polish-speaking friends, and very often their best friends were also of Polish origin. Some had Polish spouses or were married to Germans of Polish descent, and the mothers raised their children bilingually. They also said that they travelled to Poland as often as possible and tried to keep up to date with Polish politics and culture. Clearly, these interviewees did not 'resort to the use of ethnic symbols' (Gans 1979: 1); rather, their ethnicity was practically relevant 'in action' and not only in 'feeling' (Gans 1979: 8).

Maintaining their Polish ethnicity over the years came, as many reported, with stigmatisation and even discrimination in different contexts. Of all the interviewees, the Type 4s reported such incidents the most frequently and many went into great detail when recalling specific situations in their childhood and teenage years.

As for their current lives, whether they still experienced exclusionary incidents depended on the interviewees' concrete social milieus. While some interviewees said that they would no longer have such stigmatising experiences given the cosmopolitan milieu in which they now lived (see, for example, Piotr, who is quoted at the beginning of the 'Findings' section), others reported that living out their Polish identity would, at times, necessitate having such experiences. Luisa, who was married to a Pole working as a car dealer, asked me, referring to the widespread stereotype of Poles stealing cars: 'How often do you think I had to hear: "Oh, a Pole, and then also a car dealer at that?"' Furthermore, Emilie, a mother raising her son bilingually, said that,

when she met other mothers, they were surprised when she switched to Polish when talking to her son and that they then sometimes made hurtful comments:

> *'Oh God, are you Polish?' Really, they say 'Oh God!' And* [I answer]: *'Yes, I am Polish'.* [And then they go:] *'Oh, I've got to make sure my pram doesn't get lost'. And then they laugh and leave you alone with these thoughts, yes.*

Moreover, Emilie was married to a German whose family happened to be very prejudiced against Poles. Spending time with her in-laws meant having to deal with all sorts of derogatory comments. Living out one's Polish identity and thus voluntarily becoming visible as Polish was therefore fraught with the risk of being personally racialised, depending on the situation and context. However, for Type 4 interviewees, their Polish identity was so important that they accepted the stigma that came with standing up for their descent. In consequence and, as with other stigmatised groups (see Lamont *et al.* 2016), they developed behavioural strategies to cope with such situations. Luisa, who said that she had to endure comments about her husband being a car dealer, said:

> *In the meantime, I'm completely over it and he's just an entrepreneur for me (...). He just deals in goods. And that just happens to be cars. And I sometimes laugh about it,* [and] *I respond with a joke myself. I don't let it get to me like that. It doesn't affect me at all when someone says something. But 10 years ago, I remember, it really upset me when someone said something* [like that].

The literature has described in detail the emotional toll of being denied recognition and respect and of having to develop strategies to cope with stigmatisation (see, e.g., Lamont *et al.* 2016). Similarly, Luisa describes, firstly, how she developed a strategy to frame her husband's job as 'respectable'; secondly, how she reacts to the stigmatising situation itself by either de-escalation or humorous confrontation (countering with a joke); and, thirdly, how she has developed a shield over the years to protect herself. Despite downplaying the costs associated with being visible as Polish, Type 4 interviewees' experiences in particular illustrate the reality of anti-Eastern-European racism in Germany.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study conducted with a group located 'on the peripheries of whiteness', who are 'both racialised and able to benefit from their position as "paler migrants"' (Narkowicz 2023: 1534), contribute to the literature on second-generation identity by demonstrating that there are multiple ways in which this position can play out in terms of ethnic and national identities. Descendants of Polish immigrants may, as classic accounts of white identity would have it, resort to identifying exclusively as German (Type 1) or to a symbolic Polish ethnicity (Type 2) but not necessarily so. They may also rediscover (Type 3) or maintain (Type 4) their Polish ethnicity (alongside a German national identity) and accept the costs associated with identifying as Polish in terms of experiences of exclusion such as stigmatisation. Types 3 and 4 demonstrate that the second-generation ethnic identities of whites are not always only 'symbolic', 'playful' and 'costless' (see Waters 1990) but can also be complex and deep and have far-reaching effects on behaviour (see Anagnostou 2009; Anderson 2016). Furthermore, this paper has shown how these identities are linked to interviewees' experiences of exclusion – past and present. While Type 1 and Type 2 interviewees said that they did not experience exclusion in the present (although some recalled having experienced it in the past), Type 3 interviewees adopted a 'reactive' Polish ethnicity after a period in their lives when they had tried to distance themselves from being Polish in response

to childhood experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination. Type 4 interviewees reported many incidents of past and present stigmatisation and discrimination. While previous literature has acknowledged that experiences of exclusion influence the identity development of the second generation, it has mainly done so with regards to the non-white descendants of immigrants. This study on the descendants of Polish immigrants in Germany shows that experiences of exclusion are of relevance to the identities of individuals positioned 'on the peripheries of whiteness' (Narkowicz 2023: 1534), too. Moreover, the study outlines particular forms which this influence may take: while Type 1 interviewees' development of an exclusively German identity can be interpreted as a reaction to past stigmatisation and/or Polish immigrants being negatively stereotyped, Type 2 interviewees' symbolic Polish identity was enabled by the perceived absence of such experiences and stereotypes in the present. Type 3 interviewees' rediscovery of their Polish ethnicity can be interpreted as a belated reaction to prejudice, stigmatisation and discrimination, while Type 4s' experiences demonstrate that standing up for one's Polish identity is associated with experiences of stigmatisation.

Type 3 interviewees' re-ethnicisation, in particular, requires further discussion. In previous literature, 'reactive ethnicity' is applied to non-white individuals and groups, who reaffirm their ascribed ethnicity in reaction to feeling 'othered' (Çelik 2015; Rumbaut 2008). Type 3 interviewees also recalled experiencing stigmatisation. However, in response to this experience, many of them had, at some point, chosen to be invisible and thus to escape stigma. At a later stage in their lives, however, they recovered their Polish ethnicity and began to openly identify with their Polish roots. Notably – and in contrast to the groups described in the literature to date – this recovery occurred in a context in which they no longer perceived stigmatisation or discrimination. I therefore suggest interpreting their re-ethnicisation as a corrective response to their initial approach to coping with stigma, which involved assimilating and possibly even hiding their roots. Future research could explore this type of 'reactive ethnicity' – which we may call 'corrective ethnicity' – in more depth, for example by asking whether it is also common among other groups positioned 'on the peripheries of whiteness' (Narkowicz 2023).

While this study focused specifically on interviewees' ethnic and national identities, their experiences of exclusion and how these phenomena are related, it is important to point out that, first, individuals may develop identities and feelings of belonging beyond and aside from their ethnicity and national identity. As previous research on the second generation has shown, they may, either additionally or instead, have feelings of belonging to a city or a neighbourhood or develop identification on the supranational level such as 'European' (see, e.g., Schneider *et al.* 2012b). Furthermore, identities are fluid, flexible and unfixed (Lähdesmäki *et al.*, 2016), which means that we should not conclude from interviewees' statements about their identities in the situation of an interview that these identities are static and stable or an 'achieved' and never-changing state. Second, many factors aside from experiences of exclusion can be assumed to influence the ethnic and national identities of members of the second generation, as this study indicates. These include upbringing, generation, gender, age, neighbourhood and milieu. In terms of the impact of upbringing, for example, Johannes, a Type 1 respondent, pointed out that it was his father who had taught him not to draw attention to his Polish background and, as a result, he now felt more German than Polish. With regards to Type 3 interviewees, it could be argued that their rediscovery of their Polish ethnicity was enabled by their social status (class and educational background) and the environment in which they now work and live, which values multiculturalism. Moreover, the interviewees' striving for authenticity, self-expression and being in touch with their 'real self' – arguably typical concerns of members of the educated middle class (see, e.g., Méndez 2008) – appeared to be important motivators of their efforts. Thus, in line with recent research demonstrating the impact of class in the context of migration (see, e.g., Barglowski 2019; Barglowski and Pustulka 2018), one could argue that a certain class position – or the regaining of a certain class position after migration and the associated self-esteem and self-confidence – may be a favourable condition for the rediscovery of ethnicity. In addition and, as shown

in research on recently arrived Polish migrant mothers, mothering seems to be related to processes of constructing ethnic difference – and ethnicity is particularly salient in narratives on child-rearing (Lisiak and Nowicka 2018). Notably, all of the Type 3 interviewees who engaged in rediscovering their Polish identity were women and for one of them, Izabela, it was the birth of her first child that triggered the process. Likewise, the expression of symbolic Polish ethnicity (Type 2) was enabled by a milieu that valued multiculturalism; those who had retained their Polish identity (Type 4) were specifically well equipped, by status and education, to respond to stigmatising experiences. Future research could build on these insights and study the impact of additional factors in detail, possibly through an intersectional lens.

Importantly, given the popular and stereotypical notion of the 'invisibility' and smooth integration of Polish immigrants and their descendants, the findings point not only to past experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination among Polish immigrants and their descendants but also to the fact that becoming German as quickly as possible is often a reaction to stigmatisation and discrimination and is thus not entirely voluntary.

Finally, the case of the Type 4 interviewees reflects that, even today, when public discourse is dominated by the idea of Germany as a 'country of immigrants' and even if one is safely located in the educated middle class and in a multicultural milieu, standing up for one's Polish identity and thus deciding against 'invisibility' is associated with experiences of stigmatisation. Thus, the findings call for further research on the racialisation of Polish immigrants and their descendants in particular and, more generally, on those groups who are lauded for assimilating quickly, 'catching up' and being 'invisible' (see Lewicki 2021) – a topic which, to date, has been largely neglected both in academic discourse and among the German public.

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Note

1. Polish migration history to Germany dates back to the Middle Ages and increased significantly in the 19th century when, due to industrialisation, workers were needed in Prussia's coal mines and steel industry (Loew 2014). After World War II, people from Poland arrived either as 'ethnic Germans' (*Aussiedler*) or as workers or students for political and economic reasons (Nowosielski 2019). Following Polish accession to the EU in 2004, Germany restricted labour migration from Poland until

May 2011. Since then, however, the number of immigrants from Poland has increased, with a decline between 2015 and 2021; in 2022, Poland was the third most important country of origin of immigrants to Germany, with 107,060 people moving to Germany (BAMF 2024).

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Between the Assumed Ends and the Required Means: How Did Brexit Impact on the Life Strategies of Poles in the UK?

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The life strategies of Polish post-accession migrants built after 2004 were based on the specific conditions then prevailing in Poland and the UK. However, conditions have changed over the years and recent events – particularly Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic – rapidly revalued migrants' accumulated resources and changed the context of their migration. They have introduced uncertainty about the adopted life strategies, mobilised to once again rethink the future and to make decisions that had often been postponed for many years. The 2018–2021 demographic statistics clearly show an exodus of Poles from the UK from over 1 million in 2017 to fewer than 700,000 by the end of 2021. Despite the correlation of dates, this is not necessarily a result of Brexit or of the pandemic. This article seeks to answer the question of how Brexit impacted on the life strategies of Poles and how could it be a catalyst in their decisions to return to the home country. It is based on qualitative research comprising 30 interviews with Polish migrants in the UK, conducted online in 2020–2021 – thus just after Brexit – and during the coronavirus pandemic.

Keywords: Brexit, migration, life strategy, Covid-19 pandemic, uncertainty, return migration

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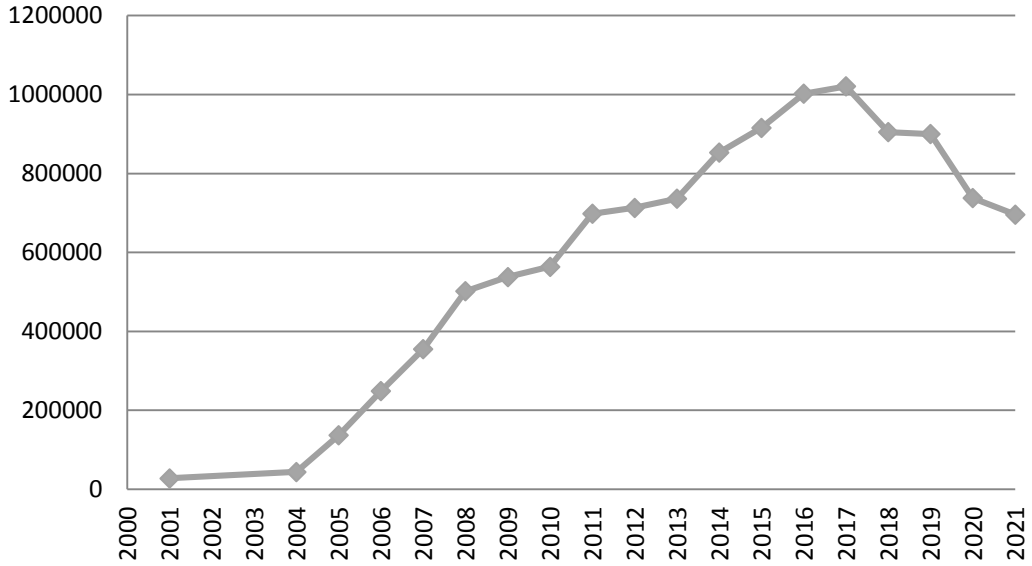
Introduction

The influx of immigrants to Great Britain that occurred after the accession of 8 Central-European countries (the so-called A-8 or EU-8) to the European Union on 1 May 2004 has been named as one of the biggest migration waves in modern European history (Iglicka 2010; Trevena 2009). Of all the migrant groups from the new EU countries and from Central-Eastern Europe, the Poles were the most numerous and often also acted as a reference (Narkowicz 2023) for the leaders of the pro-Brexit referendum campaign in 2016 (Sudarshan 2017). The number of Poles in the UK (based on ONS data) increased from 44,000 in February 2004 to 399,000 in December 2007. In just 3.5 years, it rose nearly 10 times. Later, after a temporary slowing down during the international economic crisis of 2008–2009, the migration flows accelerated again to reach a record 1,021,000 in December 2017 (Office for National Statistics, n.d.). After that peak, the numbers started to fall sharply, reaching 'just' 698,000 in December 2021. What caused such a rapid growth and outflow? Is the currently observed wave of returns the effect of Brexit (and later the pandemic) or is it just a coincidence timewise and the true reason lies elsewhere?

Figure 1. Polish migrants in the UK 2001–2021



Source: ONS data.

Jancewicz, Kloc-Nowak and Pszczółkowska (2020: 102) posited that Brexit would not significantly affect the outflow of migrants from the UK as long as the UK economy remained strong. Through this article, based on qualitative research, I argue that Brexit has, however, had a long-term impact on migrants' life decisions and that the main reason for their decision to return was not purely economic but, rather, socio-psychological – disillusionment with the UK and British society, as well as the general 'change of atmosphere' (a phrase that appears frequently in interviews) felt on a political, media and social level. Above all, Brexit (and the Covid-19 pandemic) provided the impetus to reflect on life strategies and to make long-postponed decisions, including potential return migration. These decisions were, again, not necessarily driven by economic calculation – including a narrowing of the unemployment or wage gap – but more often by the stage of life in which post-Brexit migrants found themselves; family, housing and inheritance considerations were sometimes the deciding factors. Young people who moved to the UK as 20-year-olds in 2004, 2005 or 2006 are now approaching 40, often having already met their economic (or other) migration goals. Brexit and the pandemic were factors that

might have led to reflection about where they wanted to spend the rest of their lives (Szkudlarek 2019), something that had been not considered for years – partly, maybe, as a result of an 'intentional unpredictability' strategy (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007: 9). The result of this crisis-driven reflection is a polarisation of strategies – on the one hand, a wave of return migration visible in the ONS statistics and present in the interviews and, on the other, a significant increase, after 2016, in applications for citizenship (Trąbka and Wermińska-Wiśnicka 2020).

The main aim of this article is to investigate how – if at all – Brexit (and the pandemic) impacted on the life strategies of Polish migrants in the UK who arrived there after Poland's accession to the EU but before the Brexit referendum in June 2016. My assumption is that the crisis moments (such as Brexit or the pandemic) may lead to migrants reflecting on the reformulation of their life strategies, including making the possible decision of a return migration (Dzięglewski 2021).

Theoretical framework and key concepts

The key theoretical concept related to this article is 'life strategy' (Burski 2019; Mrozowicki 2011). The term 'strategy' implies that an individual has a plan to achieve the desired goals but under conditions of uncertainty. Dumitru Sandu wrote that a life strategy 'is not simply an action, but also a kind of perspective on the action itself. It is the perspective of the long-term relationship between the assumed ends and the required means' (Sandu 2000: 67). Often, the problem with the implementation of a life strategy is that, while its goals do not change, the conditions under which the individual tries to achieve these goals change. Thus, strategies are constantly being updated or even need to be remade. The most often, these changes are gradual and take place over a period of years – sometimes a person does not even notice them and continues to pursue his/her original aims although, from a practical point of view, it either no longer makes sense or it has acquired a different meaning. Sometimes, however, reality changes so rapidly that it is impossible not to notice the change – and these moments have a mobilising effect on rethinking life strategies. It may happen that such events even force certain steps and decisions to be taken. In recent years, Europe has experienced several overlapping events: Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and, even more recently, the war in Ukraine and rampant inflation. It is not strange, then, that the topic of functioning in moments of crisis has gathered much attention in the academic environment (Schneider, Burgmer, Erle and Ferguson 2023). Focusing on the first two events – Brexit and the pandemic – this article tries to show how they affected the life strategies of Polish post-accession migrants in the United Kingdom.

Returning to the quote from Dumitru Sandu, we perceive the aforementioned 'means' to be resources (Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu and Westman 2017), thanks to Wojciech Łukowski, author of the book *Małe Miasto w Wielkim Świecie* (2023). Mobility, then, is described as resource management. The individual, in building his or her life strategy, seeks to multiply possessed resources while, at the same time, trying not to lose them (Hobfoll *et al.* 2017: 105). Emigration can also be undertaken to accumulate specific resources – for example, economic or education-related. Migration, like any rapid change, involves a significant re-evaluation of existing resources, some of which may be completely useless in the new location while others, previously useless, will prove crucial. The same is true of changes brought about by sudden, disruptive events – such as Brexit or the pandemic. This re-evaluation – the reversal of order, the time it takes to find oneself in a new reality – is associated with the anthropological term of *liminality* (Thomassen 2014; Turner 1967; van Gennep 2004). Some scholars have pointed out that Brexit fits into this pattern of liminality (Genova and Zontini 2020) because it reverses the well-entrenched and familiar order of the pre-liminal (separation) phase, goes through the liminal (transition) period and ends with a new post-liminal (incorporation) order. It also contains an

element of uncertainty, of order reversal, anti-structure and chaos characteristic of the 'in-between', transitional phase (Reed-Danahay 2020: 17).

When analysing the material collected in qualitative research from a biographical perspective, one encounters a problem with the notion of 'migration strategy' or 'life strategy' (White 2009). This is because the notion of 'strategy' implies the intentionality of action – the planning of the migration process in order to multiply or convert individuals' resources (Bourdieu 1986). However, in the statements of many of the interviewees, we often see the casualness of the migration process – they came to the UK by chance, most often at the instigation of family or friends, in order to 'try it out' and return as soon as something goes wrong or life abroad simply gets boring. Such a suspension, like an indefinitely prolonged liminal 'in-between' phase according to some authors, was characteristic of 'liquid' post-accession migrations undertaken under conditions such as the free movement of people, goods and services within the European Union (Grabowska-Lusińska 2013). This leaving of an 'open door', sometimes for years, has been called by Eade *et al*. (2007: 9) a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability'. Migrants did not consciously make final decisions; they left as many doors open as possible, did not cut family, social and often even professional ties with Poland, did not integrate into British society and were sometimes even living in two countries at the same time. This could potentially develop into a form of circular migration (Cassarino 2004; Jaźwińska and Okólski 2001; Triandafyllidou 2010); however, such an 'in-between' phase could last for years and concern people who did not travel back to Poland at all or only went occasionally for short visits (like Christmas). It was only Brexit (and the pandemic) that changed the reality and forced them to make certain decisions that had been postponed for years. Therefore, we can talk about the mobilising effect of Brexit on the life strategies of Polish migrants (Szkudlarek 2019: 84), including the decision to stay in the UK, return to Poland or eventually even go elsewhere. However, while Brexit (and the pandemic) were catalysts for these decisions, our research showed that they were not the cause of them.

We assumed in our research that Brexit (and the pandemic) – and especially the uncertainty caused by these two phenomena – could lead to a decision to undertaking return migration. In the definition of the term formulated by Dustmann and Weiss (2007: 238) we read that it is 'the situation where the migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad'. However, in the post-referendum period, despite the assurances of the UK government, it was not certain what the legal issues would look like nor that the decision to return would be entirely voluntary. This feeling of uncertainty in the context of changing conditions could lead to a rethinking of life strategies (Lindley 2006).

Methodology and interviewee profiles

This paper is based on the results of qualitative research conducted in 2020 and 2021 in the framework of the project 'The Impact of Brexit on Migration from the V4 Countries to the UK: Migrant Strategies' (2019–2023). The research was conducted simultaneously by partners from 4 Visegrad Group countries. The Polish part was carried out by the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw, which conducted 30 in-depth online ethnographic interviews with 29 migrants aged between 26 and 54 (1 interview from 2020 was repeated in 2022) with the use of an interview guide (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

The group researched consisted of those who arrived in the UK after 2004 and remained there at least until the Brexit referendum in 2016. The interviewee who was the last to arrive went to the UK in June 2016, just a few weeks before the referendum; the earliest interviewee to arrive did so in 2005. The interviewees who were in the UK for the shortest period of time had stayed there for 5 years (2016–2021) and, for the longest, 16 years (2005–2021) at the moment when the interviews were carried out. If we calculate the average of all 29 participants, the statistical interviewee arrived in 2011 and had therefore spent 10 years in the UK. All the interviewees spoke English, with some even declaring that they could hardly remember how to communicate

in Polish (which was not really true – everyone spoke perfect Polish). All the interviews were conducted in Polish.

Of the 29 interviewees, 20 were in a stable relationship and 14 were married. Two interviewees (men) were divorced (both divorces took place before they left Poland). Two women had British husbands and 1 man had a British partner. Another 2 women had foreign husbands (not British). About half of the interviewees had no children.

We initially planned to conduct traditional ethnographic research (cf. Agrosino 2007; Lune and Berg 2017; Spradley 1979) in two locations – London and a small town in the English countryside. This choice of location was due to the very different distribution of votes in the Brexit referendum (the provinces overwhelmingly voted 'leave', while London voted 'remain'). Also, migrants living in cosmopolitan and multicultural London experience a very different relationship with British society compared to those who lived in small towns. We wanted to recruit participants with a balance in criteria such as educational level, gender, family status, occupation and socio-economic position.

The date of the planned research coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ban imposed on international travel, which was later extended; we therefore did not know when it would be lifted. It was then decided, in July 2020, to conduct the entire project exclusively online. Although ethnographic research using online tools, including groups on social media, already has its own history (Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff and Cui 2009; Mann and Stewart 2000), we were among those who conducted it under the very specific circumstances of the pandemic (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšeli, Tomaževič and Umek 2020). The pandemic not only changed people's attitudes towards the Internet for work, entertainment, maintaining social ties and communication – this form of conducting research seemed completely natural and understandable for the interviewees. It was easy to arrange an interview because most people were at home working remotely – or not working at all – due to repeat lockdowns. This meant that recruiting interviewees was less of a problem and the 'snowball' effect in this case was to receive more migrants' profiles on social media. Interlocutors were found on Facebook groups – e.g. 'British Poles' with 136,000 followers – or by the researchers' private contacts. For interviewing, we used standard Internet communicators such as Zoom, Google Meets or Messenger.

A side-effect of this method was that the study group was expanded to include people living in very different parts of the United Kingdom, which would have been extremely difficult if we had conducted traditional fieldwork. Eleven interviewees lived in Greater London, 15 in other regions of England, 2 in Northern Ireland (Belfast) and one in Scotland. Two people (a couple) had returned to Poland in 2020 after spending 5 years as emigrants, one was preparing to return at the time of our interview and one was living in Poland but working remotely in England (this was a possibility due to the pandemic prevailing at the time). In terms of education level, those with a university degree were slightly over-represented (which might have resulted from the method of acquiring the interviewees) – 2 had PhDs and 1 was doing doctoral studies, 8 had secondary or vocational education and the rest had either a BA or an MA (or the equivalent). This did not, however, differ much from the average in the Polish migrant population in the UK, of whom 64.1 per cent had higher education (BA or MA) and 30.7 per cent secondary or vocational education, while 1.5 per cent only went to primary school (Fihel and Piętka 2007: 19). Twenty-two interviewees came from large Polish agglomerations (Warsaw, Tricity, Cracow, Poznań, Wrocław and the Katowice urban area) and 7 from smaller towns and villages (fewer than 100,000 inhabitants).

The members of the study group were diverse in terms of their occupation in the UK: 9 held high, stable and well-paid positions in corporations or academic units (academics, managers, a doctor, language teachers), 5 were self-employed (e.g., hairdresser, landlords living from renting apartments), while the rest had more-or-less physical jobs (in catering, factories, care services, warehouses and pubs). Oral consent was taken and

interviews anonymised in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules in the social sciences. Participants were informed each time about the purpose of the study and the scientific nature of the interview, as well as about their anonymity. Qualitative data included in-depth, semi-structured interviews as audio files (mp3) and transcribed interviews held as RTF documents. All these files were stored in a password-protected folder on a hard disc. All personal data were minimalised. The place of residence of the interviewees is given as cities (in the case of settlements of more than 100,000 inhabitants) or counties (fewer than 100,000 inhabitants).

In researching the impact of Brexit on the life strategies of migrants from Poland, we chose to adopt a biographical perspective and followed it during data analysis. We consciously do not use the phrase 'biographical method' (Chase 2005; Kaźmierska 2012), as we did not follow its assumption of allowing the interviewees to speak freely about their lives. However, we attempted to reconstruct and describe the person's biography – including basic facts about their life both before and during migration – in order to better understand their life decisions and strategies. The interviews were interpreted using narrative methods, focusing on each biography as a case study (de Fina and Georgakopoulou 2019). In this way, we sought to provide deeper insights into the interviewees' lives, priorities and motivations and the goals conditioning their life strategies at particular moments and phases of their biographies.

Life strategies and the impacts of Brexit

Why did they come?

Poles are a long-established migratory society and, many times in their history, emigration has been a response to economic, social and, more often than not, political problems. It is enough to mention the Great Emigration after the defeats of the national uprisings in the 19th century and, later, the wartime emigration or the dissidents during the communist era. Already before the outbreak of the First World War, there were approximately 1.9 million people of Polish origin living in the USA (Kicinger 2005: 5). In 2019, approximately 4.4 million Polish citizens lived abroad (Kilkey, Piekut and Ryan 2020: 6). These historical backgrounds have not been without an impact on post-accession migration, especially when we compare the percentage of Poles who emigrated to the UK after 2004 (*circa* 2.37 per cent) with the percentage of those from other countries of the V4 region who joined the EU on the same day – Czechs (*circa* 0.49 per cent) and Hungarians (*circa* 0.97 per cent).[1] Only Slovaks with around 1.88 per cent were close but it is true that Slovakia also had an emigration tradition with over half a million ethnic Slovaks who emigrated to the USA between 1870 and 1914 (O'Donnell 2019), while the Czech Republic and Hungary were, instead, receiving rather than sending societies (Black, Engbersen, Okólski and Panţîru 2010: 8).

However, although the history and historically driven traditions are important, there were other reasons, too. Crucial were economic and social factors. Poland after the fall of communism was a poorer country than its neighbours – according to the International Monetary Fund (n.d.), GDP *per capita* in 1990 was USD 1,629 in Poland, USD 3,312 in Hungary and USD 3,300 in Czechoslovakia. In comparison, the UK's GDP was, at that time, USD 20,884 – nearly 13 times higher than that of Poland. On the eve of the latter's accession to the European Union, in April 2004, unemployment stood at 19.9 per cent and was, moreover, geographically unevenly distributed – for example, in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, it reached as high as 31 per cent (Statistics Poland 2005). It was also significantly higher among young people, who constituted the majority of post-accession migrants (Fihel and Piętka 2007). The minimum wage in Poland in 2004 was equivalent to EUR 177 while, in the UK, it was EUR 1,083 (Eurostat, n.d.).

The United Kingdom, as one of the 3 countries of the so-called 'old Union' (the others being Sweden and Ireland), decided to fully open its labour market from the very first day after the accession of the EU-10 countries. Several points led to the fact that the largest group was Polish emigrants heading to the British Isles. Michał Garapich (2019: 14–16) lists both push and pull factors. The former include the entry into the labour market of the baby-boomers born in the 1980s, which overlapped with the unemployment caused by systemic transformation and left young people without the prospect of finding their first job in the country, a lower level of urbanisation than in the West, coupled with an educational boom and increased pressure to move to the cities while housing was in short supply. Additionally, this made emigration a natural solution to coping with this situation. Not insignificant, according to Garapich, were the migration networks that had already been developed and the fact that many people already had contacts on the islands, whether from the old, wartime or post-war emigration or from later labour migration, often operating in the grey economy. In 1993, visas for entry into European Union countries were abolished, which greatly facilitated the movement of people. Among the pull factors should be noted, in particular, the chronic shortage of a labour force, especially in certain sectors, which characterised the British labour market during the period of intense growth between 2004 and 2008 (Garapich 2019: 16), as well as the strong position of the British pound.

In short, one could say that such a large migration wave after 2004 resulted from a confluence of various political circumstances, socio-demographic forces in Poland and a pent-up demand in the UK for a low-skilled labour force – and far exceeded the Polish government's assumptions of 100,000 additional migrants (Okólski and Salt 2014: 24). Marek Okólski and John Salt wrote that this 'unexpected' and unprecedented scale of post-accession migration from Poland to the UK was an effect of a complex combination of circumstances which happened to coexist: 'right people, right place and right circumstances' (Okólski and Salt 2014: 32; cf. Fihel and Piętka 2009). Although economic reasons were the most important and were the basis of the vast majority of decisions to migrate, there were also other reasons why Poles chose to come to the UK.

When investigating the impact of Brexit on the life strategies of Polish post-accession migrants, we naturally asked questions about their reason for leaving. It may not be surprising that economic reasons dominated the responses but it is worth mentioning that they were not the only reasons. Often the motivations were complex and interviewees listed several factors that prompted them to migrate to the UK (Szkudlarek 2019). For many young people the difference in wages and more working opportunities were a powerful enough trigger: 'So I realized that either I could work in Poland for £1.5 an hour or I could work here for £6 an hour. This is why I decided to come' (male, 47, Edinburgh). They came to the UK to realise their dreams, as in the case of one interviewee who migrated to raise funds for a PPL(A) pilot's licence course.

Among the economic reasons, it is worth distinguishing between those related to the desire to earn money for a specific purpose (most often housing, a car, studies) and those stemming from the migration that resulted from career failures in Poland and sometimes debts. The 1990s were not only a period of poverty and painful transformation but also a time when enterprising people could quickly spread their wings in the changed socio-economic reality. The private enterprises that were set up at that time developed quickly – but then sometimes collapsed just as quickly when Western capital began to flow into Poland in a wider stream and stronger competition emerged (Krajewski 2022). Among our 29 interviewees, 2 had such a history:

> *My start in life was in the 1990s. While at university, I started a company. And that company grew very quickly; it became a medium-size company employing over 100 people. So when I fell (...) that fall was also very painful. I couldn't declare bankruptcy in Poland at that time and, in saving myself and looking for a new life (...) I took a job. Unfortunately, this past situation was chasing me all the time. I couldn't disentangle myself from the growing debt because, in those days, there was no bankruptcy procedure for a civil partnership. I was constantly on the run from the debt-collection system, even though I was already*

> *pursuing a career in another industry and even though I was earning more and more. But still, I was unable to deal with this hump from the past* (male, 54, Surrey).

For other interviewees, the motivation for leaving Poland was to study in the UK or to learn English. Some took advantage of the facilities offered to students by the European Union, especially the Erasmus programme. After the scholarship, they often decided to stay in the UK, possibly returning there after completing studies in Poland. For 2 interviewees, the departure was due to an offer to undertake doctoral studies at British universities (female, 38, Belfast; male, 34, London).

One group is made up of well-educated people with an excellent command of English and mostly from the younger generation, who could be called 'global citizens' or 'global nomads' (Kannisto 2014). Because of their specialist training and language skills, they can work almost anywhere in the world and often already had international experience before arriving in the UK. One example is a doctor who, after receiving her degree in Poland, had already worked in several countries; she has now found employment in the UK but does not rule out the fact that the UK is only a life stage and she will soon go elsewhere (female, 37, Derbyshire).

Migrants often followed existing migration networks (Haug 2008; Munshi 2020; Ryan and Dahinden 2021). Some of these had already been established in the pre-accession period and consisted of relatives and acquaintances who had worked in the grey sphere or on the basis of a visa or arrived in the UK much earlier as a consequence of the Second World War. Migration networks provided a sense of security and support and could also result in providing real help in the initial phase of migration – arranging things like housing and/or a first job and issuing the necessary documents:

> *The year before we left together in 2015, my boyfriend had been in England for 2 months and already had friends he was staying with at the time. And when we left together in 2016 after high-school graduation we also stayed with these friends. That was our kind of starting base. The friends helped us to find a place to stay and they also helped us look around for work. They showed us agencies where we could apply for work* (female, 26, Buckinghamshire).

The question 'Why did they come?' – in light of the situation described above, in which both Poland and the UK found themselves in 2004 – is probably too trivial. The question 'Why did so many come?' is more complicated. Okólski and Salt, who posed it in 2014, also were unable to find a single answer, because this unprecedented wave of arrivals was, in their view, due to a certain coincidence that occurred in a certain place and a certain time and concerned a certain group of people – or, rather, a whole generation of young Poles. In the rest of the article, I would like to refer to this analysis by Okólski and Salt from 10 years ago to try to answer the question of how their life strategies had changed since their migration and how – if at all – Brexit impacted on them.

The impact of Brexit (and the pandemic)

As we saw in the statistics presented above, after 2016, migration trends clearly reversed and the number of Poles living in the UK fell by almost a third in just 4 years – a rate comparable to the earlier increase in that number between 2005 and 2009. How – if at all – did Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic contribute to that reversal and change migrants' life strategies? In the light of the research conducted, the answer to this question seems to us to be similarly complex, as is the search for the causes of such a large wave of migration after 2004.

Socio-psychological impact

The psychological and social dimensions of Brexit featured most strongly in our interviews and had potentially the greatest impact on the life strategies of Polish migrants in the UK. Above all, the result of the referendum was a shock that caused a re-evaluation of the previous assessment of reality. The referendum, which was victorious for those who supported the 'leave' option, came as a surprise both to those interested in British politics and to those migrants who lived in isolation from it. It was a shock to both migrants and the British.

Many, as they admit, existed in bubbles, especially those living in London or university cities like Oxford – revolving in a metropolitan, academic or international environment and among young people, they did not realise how many supporters of Brexit there were in the country:

> *I was in a very specific place in this context, because afterwards, when I read the polls, London, Oxford and Cambridge were the places where there was a lot of support for 'remain' and I also saw that in person. For example, when you walked along the Thames, people had these big signs in their gardens with 'Remain' in blue. From what I remember, the 'leave' was in red and I didn't actually see any red signs. It was everywhere 'remain' – in windows and in gardens. At the university, in general, it was very one-sided, in the sense that I didn't meet anyone who wanted to leave – or at least no one said it out loud, because I have the impression that it would be very frowned upon in that environment. Even (...) our directors were English and they were puzzled that the very fact that there was a referendum was unthinkable and they said that they were ashamed of their country after all. There was such a pro-EU climate in general* (female, 37, Oxfordshire).

The referendum and the campaign were so focused on the topic of migration and migrants that a significant number of interviewees perceived the outcome of the vote as a kind of expression of the will of the British people as regards their stay in the UK. Poles suddenly felt unwelcome by much of British society (Kilkey *et al.* 2020: 9). They also felt discrimination and racialisation at being perceived as part of the 'Eastern European' group by the British (Lewicki 2023). As the largest group of migrants from EU countries, they were often the group referred to in the campaign. This reflection was widespread and unexpected as, until then, most of the migrants lived in the belief that British society is open, tolerant and benefits from migrant labour: 'I felt that I was not so welcome by the general public here' (male, 33, London).

Many interviewees stressed that the English culture, in which civility, tolerance and openness are important values, distorted the true picture. The referendum was a test which showed that, in fact, the majority of the population was against migrants.

The people we spoke to emphasised that, during the referendum campaign and after the announcement of the results, both in the media and on the streets, a 'wave' of anti-immigrant rhetoric could be observed – which, in some cases, affected the way that people behaved. Migrants no longer felt comfortable speaking Polish in public on the phone, in a shop or on public transport (Rzepnikowska 2019). In workplaces, they started to be reminded to speak to each other in English:

> *There were a few older Englishmen who wore 'vote leave' badges on their uniforms. And they happened to behave very rudely if they heard migrants talking among themselves in their native languages (...) he would sometimes point out to me that this is England, this is an English store and we should speak English here* (female, 26, Buckinghamshire).

Police statistics actually show an increase in hate crimes immediately before and immediately after the referendum (Home Office 2016). This was due to the prominence of the topic of immigration in the referendum campaign, which largely focused precisely on immigrants and their role in the UK's situation. In their extensive analysis of the media coverage of the 2016 EU referendum campaign, Moore and Ramsay (2017) noted that, in the 18-month period leading up to the referendum, the topic of immigrants in the context of Brexit came up 4,383 times in the media – and in 16 out of 18 months could be considered the most important topic in the campaign. A study by Carr, Clifton-Sprigg, James and Vujić (2020: 2) shows how hate crimes increased as a result of the referendum campaign by 15–25 per cent and was the highest in areas that voted to leave the European Union. In 2016/2017, a total of 80,393 hate crimes were recorded in England and Wales which, compared to 62,518 in 2015/2016, was an increase of 29 per cent (Carr *et al*. 2020: 9). However, it is worth mentioning also that there exist studies which, from a long-term perspective, show a decrease in anti-immigrant rhetoric as a result of Brexit (Schwartz, Simon, Hudson and van-Heerde-Hudson 2020). This does not change the fact that, during the campaign period and just after the referendum, the increase in anti-immigrant attitudes in British society and in the British media was visible and felt by Poles living in the UK and which is also reflected in our research:

> *I think such anti-immigrant attitudes were there before – Brexit just brought them out. People were like that before. Unfortunately, the British, not all of them but a large part, are xenophobic, they are racist. It's been in their mentality for a very long time, very deep – and Brexit just brought it out* (female, 37, Derbyshire).

The unexpected result of the referendum brought uncertainty about what migrants' existence would be like in the new reality. Although the British government was quite quick to respond by reassuring them that EU nationals who were in the UK at the time would be able to stay legally, there was uncertainty at the outset – for example, about the regulation concerning employment for nationals of other countries. One interviewee, who had just been in the process of changing jobs at the time, recalls:

> *After the referendum, unfortunately nobody called me* [with a job offer]. *Yes, it was just because of that, the referendum, and they knew there was Brexit. A lot of companies didn't know how to approach it, whether there would be any work permits. Nobody knew anything, that was about it. That's when I felt such discrimination* (female, 38, Bristol).

It is worth mentioning that the interviewee is a highly qualified professional and has never previously had trouble finding employment or experienced a lack of response to CVs sent out.

To most of our interviewees this socio-psychological aspect was the most important factor in their perception of Brexit, especially the experience of British xenophobia and the anti-immigrant slogans appearing during the campaign. This feeling led to disillusionment with the United Kingdom as a country and affected migrants' comfort when trying to function in British society.

Economic impact

The interviewees most often did not see any direct economic impact of Brexit on their lives (except the lady in the above quote, who had problems with finding a new job as a consequence of uncertain rules on employing foreigners). The weakening of the British pound after the referendum results were announced was temporal and the value of the UK currency in 2022 in relation to the Polish *zloty* was more or less equivalent to the rates

from May 2016 (National Bank of Poland, n.d.). Our interviewees did not record any fears about their life savings, especially because some of them were not saving their earnings but had already used them to buy a property in the UK or in Poland.

Migrants, instead, observed the indirect economic effects of Brexit, the pandemic and, later, the war in Ukraine – which they attributed to these factors. They felt, therefore, a deterioration in the economic situation of the UK itself. Supply problems caused by a shortage of lorry drivers and panic buying were particularly acute. In September 2021, there were long queues at most petrol stations in the country:

> *Yesterday I saw queues at all petrol stations. Just like during communism in Poland. The British government does not want to admit it but that is Brexit. A lot of people who drove trucks have decided to return to Poland* (female, 42, Northampton).

Similar images were emerging in the UK in February 2022, following the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Not only was there a shortage of fuel but empty shelves in shops were a frequent image appearing both in the media and in observation. Interviewees also noted a deterioration in the quality of some products and a significant increase in prices. However, although inflation affected all of Europe, migrants who retained daily contact with their home country were aware that Poland had not experienced similar shortages of supplies.

Migrants have also felt the effects of Brexit such as the return of high mobile roaming costs and customs fees when sending parcels to and from Poland. For some time, major posting companies such as DHL or DPD temporarily stopped accepting shipments due to confusion over new procedures. Migrants sometimes used private announcements by people offering to take parcels in a car going to Poland or back:

> *Before, I was often sending a parcel to Poland. Something for my nephews or for my parents. After Brexit there was a problem with that. A lot of companies suspended sending (...). Then there were a lot of announcements on Facebook from people driving cars, saying they would take a parcel to Poland for £30. Now I've stopped sending at all, because I don't know myself what can and what can't be sent. It's easier to just buy on websites and order with delivery to a Polish address* (female, 41, Liverpool).

Legal impact

Brexit has necessitated certain steps to legalise residence in the UK and obtain status, whether settled or pre-settled. Although the process of applying for status itself was described as uncomplicated by all interviewees, the change in the legal situation had a number of legal and psychological consequences. First of all, applying for a status was already a certain directional decision – especially in the context of the previous strategy of 'intentional unpredictability'. With pre-settled status, one could not spend more than 6 months outside the UK in any 12-month period, as this meant having to renew their pre-settled status – this was before the end of the transition period (31 December 2020). After 1 January 2021, such individuals who wished to return to the UK would have to apply for a visa which, in turn, incurs high fees. It was already a serious limitation of free movement, even if only in migrants' consciousness.

Applying for British citizenship involves significant costs (around £1,500) and the need to pass exams. Some migrants have chosen to take this step in a bid to achieve greater feelings of safety and also because, in the case of Poles, it is possible to have dual citizenship – acquiring British citizenship does not make it necessary to relinquish one's Polish passport and therefore the European one.

Of the 29 people surveyed, only 3 declared a desire to apply for British citizenship. The others claimed that they would be content with settled status. Interviewees mentioned that, just after the referendum result, there

was uncertainty about their legal status – but now the settled status gives them enough security. For those with UK-born children, having a UK passport is most common, which adds to the sense of security of the whole family. The value of the Polish (European) passport has risen sharply as it continues to provide free movement in all EU and Schengen countries.

Political impact

The UK's exit from the European Union has also changed the political perspective on migration. When Poland joined the European Union in 2004 and, later, the Schengen Area in 2007, Poles enjoyed free movement within the EU. They could legally reside, study and work in all Community countries. Some migrants took advantage of this opportunity provided by the coexistence of both Poland and the UK in the EU structures and, in the course of their emigration, completed shorter or longer periods of residence in yet other countries (e.g. one interviewee had spent 1.5 years in Amsterdam). This freedom – and the always open possibility to move elsewhere – has been severely undermined by Brexit.

Another political aspect of Brexit was the issue of re-evaluating migrants' opinions on the condition of the political class in both countries. Some interviewees spoke of their weariness and disillusionment with Polish politics as an argument for their migration. Issues such as the attitude of Polish politicians towards women's rights, abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, as well as migrants and refugees, were mentioned. Polish society was portrayed as parochial, traditional, limited, conservative and closed to modernity. Migrants were frustrated that they lived among a majority who had extremely different views from their own. British society, on the contrary, appeared open, cosmopolitan, tolerant and modern. Meanwhile, Brexit – and especially the referendum campaign – was a major disappointment, undermining just such an image of British society:

> *Well, when I was leaving Poland, it seemed to me that one of the reasons I was doing that was that people make electoral decisions so completely contrary to my value system that it was hard for me to understand their intentions. I live now in a town where the Conservative Party scores the highest, in a town where, if there was another Brexit referendum, my neighbours would vote for Brexit once again. The feeling that I live among people who think completely differently from me still accompanies me, even though I have travelled all over Europe* (female, 35, Hampshire).

Why are they coming back?

As our research shows, Brexit has been an important contributor to rethinking life strategies and the coincidental timing of the currently observed wave of returns from the UK is a fact. However, Brexit alone cannot, in our view, be taken as the main cause of return migration. Poles are also returning from Ireland, which remains in the EU although, for full data, we have to wait until 2026 when the next Irish population census will be released.

Poles also stopped coming to the UK. The reversal of migration trends and the exhaustion of the wave of new arrivals had already happened before the referendum. The new National Insurance Numbers (NINo) issued for EU-8 nationals had already started to decline in 2015. Among all nationalities, the decrease in the quantity of new numbers issued was the greatest among Poles – for example, from September 2017 to September 2018, 46,000 new numbers were issued to Poles, 26 per cent less than in the same period in 2016 to 2017. In 2019, 43,000 new numbers were issued, 10 per cent less than in 2018 (Department for Work and Pensions 2023).

Among important reasons why fewer Poles started to come to the UK were the already mentioned economic factors: the narrowing of the wage gap, the levelling off of unemployment, the flexibilisation of the labour

market in Poland and the entry of multinational corporations into the Polish market, which gave migrants the opportunity to use their experience and language skills acquired in the UK. Demographic factors have also added to this – above all, in the fewer young people entering the labour market. It can therefore be said that, just like the post-2004 departures, the post-2016 returns were a combination of a number of overlapping circumstances.

The change in the conditions of Poles in the UK – triggered primarily by Brexit, the pandemic and then the war in Ukraine – and rampant inflation, seem to have largely ended the 'intentional unpredictability' phase and mobilised migrants to rethink their life strategies. This coincided, in many cases, with other factors – the attainment (wholly or partially) of assumed migration goals, the ageing and illness of parents left behind in Poland and the starting of families, etc. An important push factor was the increase in property rental prices – which accelerated in the UK (particularly in London) following the end of the Covid-19 pandemic: from November 2021 to November 2022, rental prices increased by 4 per cent on average (Office for National Statistics, n.d.). It seems that some migrants who have already spent several or more years in emigration have come to the conclusion that they do not want to live in rented accommodation all their lives and that it is worth making a more long-term decision about where to live. One migrant, whose father recently died and left a house in a village in south Poland, said:

> *Now, after 15 years, I have started to think about going back. I see what the situation is and I also see that Poland has changed a bit, that you can earn better now. And I also always wanted to live in the Polish countryside* (female, 41, Belfast).

Migration trends also have an element of fashion. Just as, after 2004, it was fashionable among young people to go abroad, especially to the United Kingdom and Ireland, now there is a noticeable trend among Polish emigrants to return. The 'herd effect' has also been visible among interviewees, who noticed that many of their friends, hairdressers, handymen or family decided to leave the UK after 2016 (or during the pandemic). These return-migration examples which the migrants observed in their vicinity also contributed to their own reflections on their life strategy. This is reinforced by the fact that, in many cases, Poles never fully integrated in the British society, having most of their social ties still in Poland and living a transnational life (Fanning, Kloc-Nowak and Lesińska 2020; McGhee, Moreh and Vlachantoni 2017; Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2007). Anne White and Louise Ryan have written that 'such decisions [whether to return or stay] are influenced by the nature of the very ties and networks which link Poles in Poland to Poles abroad' (2008: 1468). Since the networks were never really transferred to the UK, it was just a matter of time before the decision to return was made.

Conclusions

While Brexit (and later the pandemic) were triggers for reflections over up-to-date life strategies and impulses to take action, they were not themselves important factors in making the decision to return. They had a mobilising effect which led to such reflections but were not the reasons for decisions. The wave of returns was caused primarily by the coincidence of factors similar to the one described by Okólski and Salt in 2014: 'Right people, right place and right circumstances'. Young people who left Poland reached a stage of their lives when some decisions were to be made. All or some of the migration goals were accomplished. Meanwhile circumstances have changed significantly since 2004: the wage gap has narrowed, unemployment has almost levelled off and a new, much less numerous, generation has entered the labour market in Poland, making it more capacious and flexible. For the same reasons, the influx of new Polish immigrants to the UK ended.

Brexit – and later the pandemic – was, however, an important moment for reflection. The decision which had been maturing could have been postponed for years. During this time, migrants still followed the proven strategy of 'intentional unpredictability', allowing themselves to spend more and more time without determining whether they would settle for good in the UK or start preparations to return. Brexit motivated them to take action – however, applying for a settled or pre-settled status, even if described as an easy procedure, was already a step towards certain decisions.

Of all the impacts which Brexit had on migrants, the socio-psychological impact appears to be the most commonly experienced. Many interviewees expressed the feeling of being unwanted by the majority of the UK's population; this appeared in relation to the referendum campaign. These 'soft' factors, which the migrants described as a 'changed atmosphere' or 'reluctance', affected their wellbeing in the country. Narkowicz' and Piekut's (2022, *podcast*) research on migrant essential workers proved that decisions to return 'solidified during the pandemic but had been brewing since Brexit'. Also in their survey, the socio-psychological impact of both Brexit and the pandemic appeared to be crucial – 28 per cent of the participants reported being discriminated against in the workplace.

Brexit itself was not the main reason why some Polish migrants decided to return after 2016. Nevertheless, the referendum and the referendum campaign mobilised migrants to reflect on their future in the changed circumstances. This mobilisation was then repeated via subsequent events, including the pandemic, supply problems caused by the shortage of lorry drivers and the introduction of Brexit-related changes such as the necessity to possess a valid passport when crossing the UK–EU border. In many cases, this reflection led to the conclusion, which we often heard, that it does not make sense anymore.

Note

1. This is the author's own calculation based on ONS data – the highest number of migrants from each country was taken into account for the period 2004–2021 (Office for National Statistics, n.d.).

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Appendix

Table A1. List of interviewees

	Gender	Age	Place of residence in the UK	Year interviewed
1	M	33	London	2020 (2022)
2	M	54	Surrey / London area	2021
3	M	47	Edinburgh	2020
4	M	34	London	2021
5	M	38	London	2020
6	M	41	Oxfordshire	2021
7	M	32	County Durham	2020
8	M	48	Leeds	2021
9	M	34	Bristol	2021
10	M	52	London	2021
11	F	35	London	2020
12	F	37	Derbyshire	2021
13	F	42	County Durham	2021
14	F	38	Belfast	2021
15	F	26	Buckinghamshire/London	2021
16	F	40	London	2021
17	F	39	Manchester	2021
18	F	41	Liverpool	2021
19	F	38	Bristol	2021
20	F	39	West Yorkshire	2021
21	F	35	Hampshire	2021
22	F	41	Belfast	2021
23	F	51	London	2021
24	F	47	County Durham	2020
25	F	34	Nottinghamshire	2021
26	F	37	Oxfordshire	2021
27	F	42	Northampton	2021
28	F	38	Manchester	2021
29	F	36	London	2021

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Why It Did Not Work: Structural Problems Behind Unsuccessful Return Migration in Latvia

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This paper is based on research analysing cases of unsuccessful East–West return migration. Specifically, it examines returnees' expectations, needs and challenges that shape the decision for re-migration or double return migration. Qualitative data were collected from 2020 to 2022 through 16 in-depth biographical interviews. The analysis applies narrative thematic and discursive approaches, focusing on specific word choices and discursive forms. Although subjective and personal factors largely influence the narrators' mobility, the article highlights the structural factors underlying their unsuccessful return-migration experiences. The research question is: What structural problems have determined returnees' decisions for double return migration? The results depict return migration as an emotionally driven decision motivated by a sense of belonging, a duty to Latvia, a desire to contribute and institutional encouragement to return. Differences in communication culture, work environment and power relations emerge as key structural challenges contributing to double return migration or leaving the homeland. In analysing the factors prompting narrators to reconsider their return and to leave Latvia for a second time, the study concludes that, during their migration, the interviewees have adopted new values that render them outsiders and make them unwilling to adapt.

Keywords: double return migration, unsuccessful return, reintegration, Latvia

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Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvia, like other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, experienced significant migration outflows. The Latvian diaspora is estimated to exceed half a million people (Hazans 2020) – which is considerable compared to Latvia's population of less than 2 million. Return migration is seen by some as a potential solution to a diminishing population and declining labour force, in the hope that the migration from Eastern European countries will be temporary (Hazans and Philips 2011). However, others expressed their suspicions that the nature of East–West migration might not be as temporary as predicted (Krings, Bobek, Moriarty, Salamońska and Wickham 2013). Such doubts also arise when many citizens are prepared to migrate again – two-thirds of recent returnees consider leaving (Hazans 2016a), and within 3–4 years after return, about a third of returnees leave Latvia (Hazans 2020).

Over the past decade, a significant body of research has been dedicated to understanding the motivations behind return migration. Despite diverse forms of return mobility, return migration in Latvia is more associated with the end of the migration cycle and permanent return (Lulle, Krisjane and Bauls 2019). This overlaps with the migrants' willingness to return: Latvians often define their mobility as temporal and explain it by achieving specific objectives, such as improving their knowledge, opportunities and quality of life. The important motives for returning are the lack of family and friends in the host country, longing for Latvia and the desire for children to live and study in Latvia (Zača, Hazans and Bela 2018). Some are attracted by decreasing wage differences and improved job opportunities in Latvia (Apsite-Berina, Manea and Berzins 2020).

Although migrants wish to return home, scholarly evidence suggests that returnees experience reintegration challenges. Moreover, even if motivated by concerns related to quality of life, which draw attention away from the affective and emotional aspects, returns are very much related to imaginaries (Grosa 2022; Saar and Saar 2020). Returnees often check whether they have made the right decision and compare their opportunities in their home country with those abroad. They weigh their attachments to places and individuals in both countries and maintain transnational ties (White 2022). Hence, with the challenges they may face, the return to the home country is unstable – a situation which may push returnees to give up and re-migrate. The component of double return in cases whereby returnees are committed to resettling permanently in their home country has been understudied.

This research takes a deeper look at the case of Latvia, studying unsuccessful return cases and focusing on the structural reintegration problems that negatively affect returnees' decision to settle in Latvia. Due to the initial hope of the respondents to stay permanently in the home country and their disappointment at not being able to reintegrate, followed by a change of mind and return to the host country, this return attempt is here called an 'unsuccessful' return migration. I also use White's (2013) conceptualisation of 'double return' migration: when analysing migrants who return to their homeland hoping to settle but then change their minds and return to settle abroad, the researcher coined the term 'double return' migration, emphasising returnees' sense of 'returning home' to the foreign country (2013: 77). The term 're-migration' is used, emphasising the repeated leaving of the home country, which may or may not be a return to the previous host country.

This study focuses on unsuccessful returns to Latvia and delves into the self-reported experiences of returnees. It adopts a qualitative approach to understanding cases where return migrants to Latvia changed their minds and decided to return to the host country. It used interviews to gain in-depth insights into the complexities of return migration problems in Latvia. With a theoretical overview and analysis of the empirical data, I answer the research question: What structural problems have determined returnees' double return migration decision?

The studies of unsuccessful returns are particularly significant because, even if migrants feel very closely tied to Latvia until their return after an unsuccessful attempt, about half of the narrators lose faith in return and

are strongly determined to integrate into the host country. The paper contributes to the literature on returnee integration problems and double return migration, a topic that has been understudied and warrants further attention.

Theoretical background

A widely used approach in sociology is to analyse return migrations through classical migration theories. The neo-classical and the new economics of labour migration theories view migrants as individuals who, via migration, maximise their earnings; however, return migration is considered a failure or a pre-planned strategy (Cassarino 2004). Structuralists criticise economic theories by pointing out that they downplay the role of state and structural factors, like inequalities in resources and immigration policies.

Analysing push and pull factors, Gmelch (1980) implies that social-patriotic and familial-personal factors influence the decision to return more significantly than economic-occupational ones. Although classical theories elucidate legitimate aspects of mobility, the perspectives seem too one-sided to analyse contemporary migrations' great complexity adequately (Castles and Miller 1998: 23) as they do not provide a meaningful understanding of the freedoms of human action and a realistic understanding of migration according to modern capabilities. Thus, de Haas (2021: 18) suggests mobility dimensions such as the instrumental (migration as a means to achieve an aim, like higher income or better education) and the intrinsic (the value of the migration experience in and of itself, such as the joy of exploring new places or the social prestige linked to proving oneself).

Another distinction is made between those migrants who intended their migration to be temporary and those who intended it to be permanent; however, most migrants do not have a definite plan and keep open the possibility that they will go home one day (Gmelch 1980: 138). Brettell (2003[1997]) calls hope and nostalgia elements of the cultural ideology of return migration in Portuguese society: an intention to return is fundamental to the entire process. Lulle (2017) refers to the Latvian migrant's need to belong and the idea of return as the most powerful driving force. The continuous internal dialogue of belonging shows the complexity, polyvocality and discursivity of the migrant's state of mind.

Return preparedness is a crucial element of a successful, sustainable return and acknowledges that, despite a substantial degree of preparedness, returnees often go through a complex process of re-adaptation in their home country. This process can be multi-phased, long-lasting and impacted on by diverse individual, social and structural factors (Cassarino 2008). Psychological preparedness is increasingly emphasised, stressing the complex sociocultural, emotional, ideological and political ramifications of the nexus between return migration and psychosocial well-being (Saar and Nase 2021; Vathi and King 2017).

Researchers reveal that the relationship between migration and integration depends on motivation, migrant education, culture, livelihood (de Haas and Fokkema 2011), satisfaction with living standards, working conditions and life in general (Koroļeva 2021). The migration intentions can change due to contextual factors such as discrimination, social exclusion and limited access to the labour market (de Haas, Fokkema and Fihri 2015). Migrants who feel marginalised, lack a sense of belonging and have differences in values, beliefs and practices are thus more willing to leave the country (Gherghina, Plopeanu and Necula 2020). Lietaert and Kuschminder (2021) propose the concept of multi-dimensionality, which underscores the holistic nature of reintegration and involves an intersection of economic, social, emotional, physical, psychosocial and political domains.

Studies in migrant psychology show that re-entry into the original culture can be even more challenging than emigration: returnees suffer from cross-cultural re-entry shock; their experience and skills gained abroad may not be evaluated (Adler 1981). Returnees must readapt to the home-country environment to learn new

ways of behaviour and thinking (Furnham 2019). As critical factors influencing overall well-being and adaptation, acculturation studies mention financial problems, academic stress and identity conflicts (Pacheco 2020). In analysing Turkish returnees' readjustment, Kunuroglu (2021) found that sociocultural adaptation to the local context is lower for returnees with a higher sense of belonging to the host country or broader European context.

Migration can strengthen or weaken cultural links and contribute to new cultural awareness and identity development (Sussman 2007). How the migrants view themselves and where they draw the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' does not converge with the receiving society's views because, in contrast to most people's lives in their places of origin and destination, immigrants' lives straddle two or more national societies (Shams 2020). If the Latvian population's attitudes towards otherness and cultural diversity are often unclear and negative (Kaprāns, Mieriņa and Saulītis 2020), returnees' cultural belonging and identity often are more fluid, open and confident and their attitudes more inclusive (White and Grabowska 2019). They feel the loss of those people, experiences and cultural environment to which they are already accustomed abroad.

It is highlighted that returnees need to re-establish a sense of control; the adjustment means an adaptation to work, an interaction with homeland citizens and an adaptation to the environment and culture (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992: 744). The success of adaptation is closely linked to professional integration and assessment (Zača *et al.* 2018); additionally, a sense of professional identity plays a crucial role as an influential mediating variable, bridging the relationship between post-return conditions in the home country and the work atmosphere (Andrianto, Jianhong, Hommey, Damayanti and Wahyuni 2018).

Among the factors still mentioned which hinder integration are the legacies of the communist period, such as specific labour-market and cultural characteristics, mistrust in institutions and scepticism towards government reintegration programmes (King, Lulle and Buzinska 2016), continuing wage gaps between CEE and Western Europe, gender inequality and employers' reluctance to hire returnees (White 2022). Integration in Latvia is even more complicated for low-paid returnees (Zača *et al.* 2018).

These unsuccessful returns, together with subsequent double returns stemming from the challenges of fitting in and meeting essential needs in the home country, have received little attention. Most researchers think that, in contemporary migration, return should be viewed as an unsustainable and unsettled process and part of intra-European mobility (White 2022); returnees can be involved in different forms of mobility while engaging in reintegration processes (Anghel, Oltean and Silian 2022). However, White (2011, 2013, 2014) discusses both double return and the motivations and strategies of migrants who return to Poland – hoping to settle but then changing their minds and returning to settle abroad. She points to returnees' social insecurity and dissatisfaction with their home country's government and state politics (White 2013, 2014); returnees have problems accessing suitable jobs, feel disillusioned and miss their homes abroad. Failed return helps to reduce transnationalism and opens up opportunities for migrants to simplify split lives, rethink priorities and concentrate on integration abroad. In their study on Ghanaian returnees from Canada, Kyeremeh, Kutor, Annan-Aggrey, Yusuf and Arku (2023) highlight, as the main reasons for double return, the integration challenges for children, business failures, economic hardships and poor infrastructure and services in the home country.

Data collection and analysis

This article uses 16 biographical interviews with returnees conducted between 2020 and 2022. Only those returnees who had returned to settle in Latvia permanently but had changed their decision due to structural problems and made a double return (had returned abroad or were ready to leave shortly) were invited to participate in the interviews. Subjects were sought by following media reports and contacting them personally,

asking for recommendations and contacts for acquaintances and addressing social network users by posting invitations to participate in interviews on various Facebook groups.

Altogether, 8 men and 8 women, all Latvians, were interviewed. In 6 cases, participants returned to Latvia as entire households. For 3 participants, the time spent abroad before return was nearly 5 years; the largest duration abroad was 20 years, while the average was 10. The participants represented various social backgrounds and ranged in age from 23 to 51 years. Of the interviewees, 11 held higher education qualifications. Almost all returnees, even those living elsewhere, sought work or were employed in Latvia's capital – Riga – or its surrounding areas. One family, however, chose to settle in another city – in the countryside.

The research was conducted ethically, adhering to the requirements of the Personal Data Protection Regulation and the Code of Ethics of Latvian sociologists. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights, including the option to withdraw from the interview at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. To protect confidentiality, all individuals and locations mentioned in the paper have been anonymised, with pseudonyms assigned to participants. The interviews were conducted in Latvian, and the quoted passages in the article are translated.

The research design and method of analysis are narrative, illustrating the selectivity of experience and enhancing awareness of social and contextual aspects through the continuous interaction of human thought with personal, social and material environments (Butler-Kisber 2018). The individual return experience is explored through the subject's self-assigned meanings. In the thematic analysis, the content is the primary focus, with minimal attention paid to how the narrative is told, the conversation's micro context, the role of the interviewer, transcription and considerations of a real or imaginary audience (Riessman 2008). I use thematic analysis to explore topics that reveal the narrators' wishes, needs and difficulties through single-voice narration.

The dialogical or discursive analysis is applied to dialogically produced or performed themes that reveal the relationship between returnees and the external context, conflicts and power relations. Discursive structures are particularly effective for detecting complex social relationships (Vitanova 2013); the approach helps to assess institutional and power discourses and to connect events with broader contexts (Souto-Manning 2014). When analysing discursive themes, I paid close attention to speech form, discursive structures and narration strategies. The macro context, which reveals the social context and power relationship within the narrative, is essential.

In the tradition of thematic analysts, I interpret the data by considering the purpose of the study, the narratives of experience as a source of data, insights from other return-migration studies and the previously discussed theories.

Findings

The narratives in this study show that feelings of patriotism and national belonging play a crucial role in return migration. At the same time, more is needed for the returnees' long-term stay. There are sociocultural adaption problems and cultural shock: returnees initially feel a honeymoon-like euphoria; however, this phase is followed by a sharp emotional drop, disappointment, confusion and an unwillingness to align. Already in the culture-shock phase, the participants changed their decision to settle and left the country: in 9 cases during the first year, 4 more participants left Latvia in the second year and only 3 participants remained longer. Adeline lived in Latvia for 5 years:

In the beginning, there is that period when you have those rose-coloured glasses. It seems that I am already happy from the fact that I am already there, such a little speck of dust, but I am in my country, and this is what I wanted! (…) The reality of life quickly opens your eyes. (...) You realise that you can no longer provide the normal, everyday life that you had in [country]*; you cannot transfer it to Latvia because the economic situation in Latvia is completely different. (…) When I arrived, I felt* [with energy] *I could open a company there! I knew I could; I could do it! My wings were not broken. But there* [in Latvia], *somehow, they broke quickly.*

Before returning, participants feel well-informed, familiar with the situation and ready to fit in quickly and easily. However, return is unexpectedly challenging; there are problems with social acculturation and reintegration, divergent approaches and thinking, indifference, resistance, a lack of contacts and a lack of understanding of the local system. The participants feel that they are perceived as a threat and that getting the desired position will be much more complicated than expected.

If participants previously had the impression that they would be welcomed, the reality of return requires significant adjustment. Contrary to the initial assumption that returnees would be welcome in Latvia and easily find employment, they often face intense competition for roles that match their skills or else they must create such opportunities themselves. They come to realise that many of their expectations are based on wishful thinking and that they are required to find ways to adapt and fit in.

Aspects of belonging and cultural identity

The study shows that an emotional desire to return home is accompanied by a wish to enjoy Latvia's nature and culture and a willingness to send children to a Latvian school. Participants revealed that children's needs, quality of life and educational opportunities are significant return drivers. Parents feel responsible for their children's Latvian language skills and cultural experience.

Mary is a mother of three. The family has returned so that the eldest can start school in Latvia:

Right now, everything is focused on our children. I also chose [school in Latvia] *because it greatly focuses on Latvian traditions, folk songs and lifestyle. We are here so the children can practice the Latvian language and live in that culture.*

Are you also doing something abroad to maintain children's Latvian identity?

I do it tirelessly [a listing of measures]. *I also chose* [country] *because there was a Latvian* [diaspora] *school. That's important to me. (…) We celebrate national holidays even more actively than* [people] *in Latvia.*

Most participants never intended to leave Latvia permanently: apart from accumulating financial capital, in many cases, it is also about acquiring knowledge, skills and expertise. For some, the desire to return has been long-standing, driven by a sense of duty and guilt for not returning sooner. Before returning, narrators were confident in their abilities and hopeful of finding work. When the opportunity to return emerges, there is joy about the decision to return home, as John illustrates:

It took us about 5 years to decide; in 2018, we sold our house (…). We thought: we have been in [country] *for 17 years; let's go and see. The feeling is fantastic; it's the feeling of home. It wasn't hard at all; it was a gradual decision. (…) I could contribute and benefit in terms of structural changes, training and patient treatment. I had the feeling that I knew everything here. (…) I used to come here* [to Latvia] *in the summer*

> *and went to the hospitals to visit patients with my colleagues (…) I was absolutely sure that I would get a place in academic medicine; (…) that with my knowledge, position and recognition and having led* [diaspora organisation] *for several years, there would be support.*

Migrants observe differences in the social environment and communication cultures; misunderstandings and confrontations arise from different attitudes and perceptions. They aim to be heard, to be active decision-makers and believe recommendations from the diaspora are often blocked as 'outsider' criticisms. Emmy says that she was encouraged to return by her willingness to actively engage in policy-making and her curiousness in evaluating herself and seeing her place in Latvia: 'I had already moved so much *(laughs)* and, in each place, I re-created myself; those reasons for returning were more personal to me – I wanted to understand who I am in Latvia (…); what are my value and place?'

The independence that comes from a good education and international expertise is also an obstacle for the narrators: they are less willing to accept the existing rules and conformism and to meet society's expectations. Their criticism and language can be straightforward and sharp, simultaneously realising that their opportunities in Latvia decrease with every public confrontation. Narrators admit that, if there is a desire to try to return again after some time, 'self-censorship, (...) avoiding stepping on a rake' is necessary. Several participants, such as Emmy, assumed that the returnees' independence causes mistrust and scares others because 'your professional survival depends not on how you behave in Latvia; you can always return to your career abroad. Therefore, even if you were quieter, you wouldn't be accepted because you are not controllable'.

Returnees often find that socioeconomic changes are less significant than imagined, as John says: 'I was sure, I had great hope, that a miracle had happened in Latvian politics. (…) I thought this was the time for reform, but I was wrong'. While successful sociocultural and professional integration in the host country motivated their return, it distanced them from locals in their home country. The sense of marginalisation causes doubt about returnees' belonging, values, beliefs and practices, as they experience discrimination related to unfair local practices and unequal access to resources. Returnees identify with a broader perspective and highlight issues of xenophobia, homophobia, ageism and other prejudices in Latvia.

Inclusion in schools

Integrating children into the education system poses significant challenges for returnees (Grosa 2022). Thirty per cent of respondents with minors mention obstacles such as the difficulty in finding schools or kindergartens and their dissatisfaction with school environments or attitudes (Hazans 2016a). In this study, inclusion problems in schools are indicated by all families with children. Problems arise due to the heavy workload, the reluctance to accept children with different educational backgrounds, unreadiness to teach Latvian as a foreign language and a rigid evaluation system. Relocation stress can also affect children's health. Respondents emphasise these challenges as being very significant and, along with others, they lead returnees to reconsider double return, as Adeline says:

> *It was tough for our 9-year-old child to integrate into the education system: he has difficulties switching to the Latvian language; if, before, in* [country]*, it took half an hour for him to prepare his work at home, the preparation for the next school day* [in Latvia] *goes on almost until midnight. Studies and the after-school music and sports programmes created an abnormal load for him. He had everything in one big avalanche – new environment, classmates, language barrier, a lot to learn, going to school and coming back independently. It caused him health problems and he had to attend sand therapy. The first year, he lived only with the idea that he would go back.*

The critical point comes when a child born in Latvia is not given a place in a kindergarten. Adeline feels tired and sad as the family income is insufficient for a private kindergarten:

> *It was a significant need at the time because I really couldn't afford to sit at home. (…) But to be honest, maybe that was just one of the reasons I mentioned but I also really wanted to double return – maybe because I already have* [list of relatives] *here* [in the host country] *and friends I keep in touch with regularly.*

Lack of interest in returnees' reintegration

Returnees view state support as largely formal and have generally not utilised it; however, they express a need for genuine interest and practical assistance. The lack of attention to their reintegration and foreign-acquired expertise has left them feeling undervalued and unappreciated as agents of change and valuable employees.

Participants see successful reintegration as a result of personal qualities, self-investment and luck. They critique media portrayals of return migration success stories, which are often created in the initial euphoria of return and tend to provide one-sided perspectives. For instance, Amelia's return was widely praised in the media, yet she faced financial struggles and lacked support. Her frustration stems from the media's focus on her achievements abroad and the fact of her return while ignoring her reintegration challenges. Participants emphasise the importance of a balanced portrayal of return migration that openly discusses both the successes and challenges which returnees face to provide more realistic insights.

Participants emphasise that the experiences of acquaintances' unsuccessful returns have a more significant impact on the diaspora than 'positive propaganda' stories; the diaspora is eager to hear what returnees genuinely think about their experience. Some returnees even avoid discussing their unsuccessful returns with the diaspora, fearing that their stories might discourage others from considering returning.

Working environment and willingness to contribute

The weakest and most dangerous point for participants is integration into the working environment. Finding a job and providing basic needs turns out to be unexpectedly difficult. The hierarchical work and communication culture, the situation that part of the salary is offered 'in an envelope' to avoid taxation and the high tax burden for small businesses are all mentioned. Narratives refer to the high-income inequality, social insecurity and insecurity of Latvia's work environment, as Oliver reveals:

> *If you have an above-average income level or have sources of income abroad, you have a very high standard of living in Riga. Wealthy people in Latvia have a really good life. However, as long as your income is low, you have a terrible life – very unsafe. I think that, for many people, the feeling of insecurity in Latvia is balanced by the feeling of the familiar environment – you orient yourself in that environment and you have some fictitious feeling of security. Contacts are very important in Latvia – one's connections. These factors both work for good in Latvia and show its systemic error.*

The participants realise that the fact that they have low social capital in Latvia is a significant disadvantage. Amelia thinks that those who have always lived in Latvia can rely on acquaintances for various matters while, to get a job, 'you need contacts very much'; as Amelia now states, qualifications seem less important.

> *The social cafe was a tool; it gave me visibility. As I had a PhD in science and ran a circular economy model company, what I said carried weight. People trusted my words (…). You need contacts there to be*

included or invited; you need to know people. I'm leaving now with a heavy heart: people got to know me because of the café. However, my recognition will be gone if I don't make myself known, living abroad for a few more years.

The narrators believe that the professional knowledge they acquire abroad is not valued in Latvia. Charlotte describes returning to her previous job as a 'resurrection from the dead'. After 4 years abroad, with a Master's degree and good work experience, she is offered the same position. She observes her employer's absolute ignorance about knowledge acquired abroad and feels 'fear from non-mobile colleagues: won't they lose their jobs if other migrants could also return?'

For highly skilled participants, migration means accumulating knowledge, professional experience and the ability to increase their competitiveness. They are confident about the value of their human and social capital accumulated abroad and hopeful about the opportunities to contribute to Latvia's growth; they believe that they will be able to 'make some contribution, some benefit in structural changes'. Professionals' willingness to be involved, listened to and considered are important topics. Participants claim that their suggestions or ideas are rejected, saying that returnees do not have the necessary positions to decide, are not in charge or do not understand the situation in Latvia. They feel a powerful stamp of outsiders, which allows their opinions to not be heard and recommendations to not be considered. Some, who have been well-paid professionals abroad, are advised to 'start by digging ditches' or first to prove themselves. It shows an underestimation of returnees' knowledge and international experience, as John states:

Sometimes Latvian politicians do not realise that the place has not been given to anyone in the Western academic environment. (...) If they think you will return and start everything from the bottom, I can say: 'Good luck!' No one will come back. (...) If you are a professor there, should you be appointed an assistant professor here? Well, (...) I don't understand it.

Emmy admits to 'hiding' behind bureaucratic arguments regarding transferring experience and recognising professional qualifications in governmental institutions. She stresses that the problem is not only that her professional experience acquired abroad is not appreciated but, even more importantly, that such cases make other professionals in the diaspora cautious about the possibility of a return:

[Professionals] *do not want to return just to come back but want to contribute. They feel that they have gained professional experience and stability and want to be equal at this negotiation table. Lately, I have seen very few such cases in which it could be said: Oh, yes, it works there! They have significant and substantively good positions and ranks.*

The participants support a horizontal management style, where the most important thing is the goal, a good idea, a contribution or a solution. At the same time, as John says, vertically hierarchical thinking is dominant in Latvia: 'We [society in Latvia] have a huge respect not for ideas but for positions'. It dissonates the desire of participants to help and advise not by climbing the career ladder in Latvia and being in a high position but by maintaining collegial relationships at all levels; Charlotte believes this is a fundamentally significant difference in perception and thinking. She reveals that, through living abroad, she developed the ability to appreciate differences and experiences as value, compared to the importance of 'being as high as possible in the structure of society', as is 'most often the case in Latvia'.

Almost unanimously, interviewees acknowledged that there are far more opportunities in the private sector; there is funding for returnees to start a business. At the same time, the participants dare not risk starting a business

because they believe that taxes and bureaucratic requirements in Latvia are too high. However, reprofiling and the private sector are almost the only solutions in cases where skills are too specific.

Conflicts with a 'system' and power relations

Participants mark locally conditioned social structures or, as they used to call them, the 'system', as lacking objective assessment, competition and meritocracy. They observe a prevailing desire in Latvia for people who follow the political will or their employer without question but prefer a less hierarchical and more open communication form. The 'system' demands adaptation, obedience and passivity, which the participants find unacceptable.

John says that the closed 'system' means a misuse of power, resistance to change, innovation, and reform and a reluctance to relinquish control. He publicly challenges and criticises the 'system', questioning its transparency and pushing people to realise that post-Soviet arrangements still exist. John believes that he disrupts the 'system' balance, encouraging people to see its flaws and strive for meaningful transformation.

> *(…) there must be a meritocracy. That is what I have fought for. (…) I have no fear of competing and I am not afraid of losing if this person is better. (…) The fact that someone has been abroad doesn't mean he is better at once. It doesn't mean that. But it must be that there is an objective comparison.*

Emmy is concerned that Latvia's reluctance to adopt foreign experiences and its determination to stick to previous practices 'can slow Latvian society's ability to talk about different things openly, generate new ideas, include different points of view and move forward faster'. Emmy emphasises that for 'a person who does not want to blend in somehow' but who will be an active opinion-maker, 'fitting in is a challenge'. Integration requires 'compromises with yourself and the culture of conversation you have learned outside'. She believes that Latvia still needs to learn that the exchange of opinions does not mean that opponents are the enemy and that discussion, objections and criticism are the formats in which co-designed solutions are reached.

Returnees feel obligated to highlight the system's failures; however, criticism brings conflict and pervasive resistance. Despite initial optimism, narrators are not surprised by their failure; they see that people in Latvia are often unheard and unappreciated. While acknowledging the system's flaws, returnees such as Oliver feel unable to change it. Ultimately, they chose to double return instead of adapting: 'I didn't have a place there because I didn't want to fit in'.

Admitting defeat

Little by little, the participants began to reassess the situation in Latvia and to think about whether return migration was a meaningful decision for them. On the one hand, their narratives express determination and show how the returnees try to fit in; on the other, as in Oliver's case, they show pain, disappointment and frustration:

> *I have the feeling of an open wound. (…) I feel terrible. On the one hand, it is terrible; on the other hand, I am very liberated and happy. (…) I don't feel like I've given up now and would say no, never again. I wouldn't. (…) I see that there is a need for development in a particular political party. Development takes time; the personnel there also need to gain experience and develop to become a resource that can be used to realise our political ideals. (…) It is the curse of democracy for all of us that, if we, as citizens, aren't actively involved, we must expect that someone else will be. It is our responsibility to participate. That's*

the problem with it. I said I'm liberated; that's the feeling I have but, on the other hand, I also feel that it's not right.

The acceptance of failure and the decision to leave also come with a sense of release – the migrant can stop worrying and stop trying to prove something. Despite the loss, my interviewees are happy that they tried. 'Many criticised me: "Why do you teach us from [country] [while] sitting there with your big salary? Come here and do it!" (…) I've tried, and it doesn't work (…) I've done everything I could. (…) I have lost, absolutely' (John). Some say that, even if the return were unsuccessful, the sense of longing, guilt and duty has disappeared, and it is possible to let go of a close attachment to Latvia and integrate into the host country.

Narrative strategies and language forms

The narrative dimensions of unsuccessful return migrations reveal three discursive dimensions (Fairclough 2006[1992]):

2. In the framework of return migration, the perception of returnees, in general, coincides with the diasporas and return-migration policy guidelines which suggest that it is necessary to cooperate, that it is important to return and to invest in Latvia. Otherwise, migration could be regarded as a loss of human capital and resources invested in education.
3. When the narrator returns with the idea that 'I will help because I am asked and I have opportunities', it turns out that it is neither necessary nor possible.
4. The textual level shows individual problems and the inability to obtain a position appropriate to the narrator's knowledge and experience.

The interrelationship between the returnees and the sociocultural context is illustrated through the use of both single- and double-voiced discourse strategies (Vitanova 2013). The single-voiced narrative is primarily used to disclose the desires and needs of narrators. These themes are embedded into the common return-migration concept. The double-voiced discourse strategy in narrative themes is used to counter-state, compare and reveal institutional contexts and power relations and to point out the institutional problems which they see.

John's narrative sheds light on power relations. Driven by a sense of civic duty to get involved, to help and to encourage a faster transition from post-socialist structures and mindsets to democratic relations, he encounters conflict with the authorities. He compares his efforts to obtain a position in Latvia to a battle: 'to fight for a better Latvia', 'You fight with all your heart', and so on. He believes that those who are committed to protecting the status quo – 'representatives of the old [post-Soviet] system' – still hold positions of power. 'The giant surprise', he says, 'is that – I will tentatively call it a clique – when it feels threatened, it is very united. But they are not Latvia; they are just a few specific individuals.'

A legitimation strategy such as argumentation, storytelling and quoting (van Dijk 1993: 264) is also used. For example, Emmy points to the diaspora and returnees as a necessary opposition and uses an argumentation strategy. Referring to migration research and quoting experts, she says that, when critical European-minded professionals emigrate from their home country, the risks of corruption increase: 'When the woodpeckers fly away, a disease multiplies faster in the tree. (…) no one can effectively uncover its [social structures] internal ailments and help to get rid of them'. The argumentation shows self-awareness and the need to be like woodpeckers – to speak loudly and openly about the home country's flaws. The argumentation strategy helps to legitimise the sharp confrontations – the narrators not only 'have not learned to obey in the Soviet-style' but also 'do not think it would be right'.

To be convincing, narrators often use comparisons, particularly when referring to practices in other countries ('If we look at Western Europe or America (…)'; 'It would not be imaginable in Western countries that (…)'). Primarily, the comparison is used to point out that the fear of systemic change is not justified – similar issues and changes are already taking place in neighbouring countries and problems in Latvia are not unique. '(…) we [in Latvia] are not so different. Therefore, I would not like to stigmatise Latvian society as very conservative; we can also see it in Germany' (Oliver). A storytelling tactic is also used to provide samples of unsuccessful attempts by others to do something for Latvia.

The specific nature of the study justifies the use of the legitimising strategies: the interviewees are in a situation where they are supposed to explain their double return, discover the conflict and talk about what they would like to keep quiet about. Several narrators also use a positive self and a negative others presentation (van Dijk 1993: 264). They emphasise idealistic intentions and indicate their willingness to work for Latvia or a good idea without pay. This does not mean that the narrators are not interested in income; they have calculated their recourse and are ready to get involved in specific projects to which they can make a significant contribution. 'I thought it was obvious. You see that there are not enough resources and that that resource is you. You want to do it, it seems important to you and you do it' (Oliver). The narrators believe that the return of migrants as agents of change should be primarily supported and encouraged.

The systemic structures, the clique and sometimes public opinion that resist change are represented as negative 'others'. The 'system' calls into question the idea of selfless volunteering for Latvia's growth and does not give such an opportunity. 'They' is often used when discussing the government, the people in charge and the 'system' – e.g. 'They are opportunists that fit their mind to the circumstances. Mediocrity continues to hire mediocrity'.

My participants do not identify as part of the united group 'we, returnees' and are unaware of their affiliation with the diaspora until they return. Luca mentions that he was shocked by the fact that, when going back 'to his own home', he was called a 'stupid migrant'. He reveals his frustration and pain in his awareness that, back in his home, he is seen as an outsider. On the other hand, the use of 'we' has a common meaning when the participants are talking about Latvians living outside of Latvia, as Luca says:

> *(…) we would all return! If only we could live like here in* [country]. *Because in everyone's heart, as I talk to people here, everyone, well, everyone is drawn to Latvia. And there are those who say that they will never* [return to Latvia] *but that's because they know that Latvia will never be like here; that's why they say so.*

However, the pronoun 'we' is always used when talking about Latvia – it is about 'our country', 'our institutions' or 'our history' but also the form 'we, Latvia' – as in: 'We, Latvia, grow'; 'We, Latvia, will never be like [Western European country]'. The narrators need to confirm that they are not outsiders. Even if they live in another country, they remain connected, care for and cultivate the Latvian cultural environment.

The narratives highlight the need to be needed. Unable to find a job and provide for themselves, many narrators, Like Amelia, conclude with disappointment: 'Latvia does not need me; I thought "Someone will need my education". Nobody needs it. It was a mistake; I realised it too late. Nobody in Latvia needs my skills'. Finding a suitable job to provide basic needs takes much work for the narrators, who point to the dilemma they face. On the one hand, they feel called to return; it is said that Latvia needs people to return, that Latvia needs both labour and the knowledge and skills which people acquire. On the other hand – not seeing anyone interested in returnees' reintegration and not being able to provide for themselves – they feel that the return migration policy is formal: 'No policy helps. At no point. How much I also read [about it] on social networks,

it's crazy! Nobody needs you in Latvia! Nobody. "You're needed", that's what they preach, but those plans don't work' (Benjamin).

Conclusions

The paper delves into the process of returnees' reintegration, examining why migrants who return with the expectation of successful reintegration ultimately choose to leave Latvia again. What structural problems hinder their intention to settle permanently?

The narratives reveal cases of instrumental mobility where the narrators are ready to return after achieving specific goals abroad. A strong desire to return, driven by a need to belong and contribute, underscores the migrants' deep connection to their homeland. The reasons for returning to Latvia align with the broader literature: social-patriotic and familial-personal factors are seen as significant pull factors. Like previous studies (see Barcevičius 2016; Fredheim and Varpina 2024; Saar and Saar 2020; Zača *et al*. 2018), powerful motivations for return migration include a longing to live in Latvia, a sense of belonging and a desire to send children to a Latvian school and immerse them in Latvian culture. Notably, the quality of life in the home country for returnees is often comparable to, or even better than, that abroad – an important factor for families with children. A less-frequently mentioned yet powerful motivation in this study is a sense of duty towards Latvia.

This finding contrasts with those of Apsite-Berina *et al.* (2020), who observe that re-adaptation among returnees is generally easy. Narratives reveal that returnees still feel the influence of communist and post-transformation legacies in Latvia, a significant factor pushing them away. Echoing White (2022), I find that returnees believe that change in their home country is frustratingly slow. Reintegrating migrants are deterred by workplace dynamics: hierarchical management styles are criticised, as returnees prefer a more egalitarian approach; there is frustration over jobs reserved for friends rather than allocated on merit, which fosters risks of corruption; and the widespread use of envelope salaries to evade taxes, simultaneously reducing employees' social security.

Although Latvia's return migration policy documents address potential returnees by encouraging their return and aim to assist actual returnees in reintegration (Kļave and Šūpule 2019; Prusakova, Bērziņš, and Apsīte-Beriņa 2021), participants feel that they were successfully targeted as *potential* returnees but received no support as *actual* returnees. They highlight that the return-migration discourse of policymakers and public institutions seems fragmented and overly formal. For them, return is a highly personal decision, motivated by cultural and emotional ties. As in Lithuania (Barcevičius 2016), participants believe that returnees in Latvia succeed in reintegrating only through personal qualities, self-investment and luck.

The narratives align with studies (Birka 2020; Fredheim and Varpina 2024; Prusakova *et al.* 2021) that underscore the importance of collaboration and the need to view Latvia as a dynamic, opportunity-rich environment. Participants also emphasised the need to actively engage in skills and knowledge transfer, thus contributing to the home country's development. Within the general framework, returnees' perceptions (both theoretically and before returning) reflect the prevailing ideology that feedback and cooperation with Latvia are needed and that returning is preferable (Kaprāns *et al*. 2020); otherwise, emigration would be seen as a loss of human capital and resources invested in their education (Suciu and Florea 2017; Zača *et al.* 2018).

Returning with broader experience and education, most interviewees are confident that Latvian employers will value their knowledge, seeing them as agents of change. They are prepared to apply the skills they have acquired abroad; in that sense, their return can be seen as a 'return of innovation'. Consistent with Cassarino (2004), my study has shown that local power relations, traditions and values strongly impact on returnees' capacity to leverage their migration experiences in Latvia.

In line with previous studies (see Hazans 2016a; Prusakova *et al.* 2021; Začа *et al.* 2018), the narratives show that major reintegration difficulties are related to securing a suitable job or position. Contrary to the expected synergies, participants encounter institutional indifference towards their knowledge, experience and ideas. They fail to obtain desired positions, struggle to realise their potential and cannot capitalise on the skills and expertise gained abroad. Financial challenges and identity conflicts negatively affect the returnees' well-being and adaptation.

Like King *et al.* (2016), my study found that recruitment practices in Latvia continue to rely heavily on personal connections rather than open advertisements. This creates significant barriers to knowledge transfer which, particularly for highly skilled returnees, is a primary goal of their return. As noted by Bela, Mieriņa and Pinto (2022) and supported by the study's analysis, from the perspective of double return migrants, major barriers to collaboration lie in institutional culture: a lack of strategic thinking, a systemic approach to collaboration and an inclusive attitude. Effective cooperation requires not only interest and initiative at the governmental level but also the recognition of international experience when hiring for positions within Latvia's public administration.

The narratives reveal perceptions of a closed and opaque 'system' characterised by a rigidly vertical structure, resistance to reform and competition among those in power, together with limited interest in innovations that could disrupt entrenched systems. Returnees believe that decision-makers frequently view them as a potential external threat. A lack of contacts, a reluctance to submit to the existing 'system' from lower positions and a willingness to critique the 'system' escalate the conflict.

The study does not confirm Hazans' (2016b) view that return is an option primarily considered by those underutilising their education or qualifications. Instead, cases of double return often involve returnees with significant initial integration into the host country, which may reduce their willingness to re-adapt and motivate their decision to leave again. Re-assimilation is not their preferred strategy – most narrators re-emigrate during the cultural shock phase, emphasising that re-migration is a conscious decision reflecting their unwillingness to adapt. They return to Latvia with new mindsets, expectations and demands, believing that the country needs greater openness to diversity, tolerance, inclusivity, international perspectives and fair competition, along with more transparent institutional processes, stability and respectful communication.

Existential challenges in Latvia are described as complex and even disheartening as they 'break the wings'. Adeline's statement captures this sentiment: 'We should have fought instead of running away, but a person is tired, weak and goes where they can find a little rest'. The narratives highlight internal dialogues among migrants and, similar to Kaprāns' study (2015), demonstrate the dilemma they face: on the one hand, migrants feel closely connected to Latvia; on the other, they feel that the country, especially the government, is indifferent to their return.

Statements like 'No one needs me there' underscore the reasons why most narrators no longer expect to return any time soon. As White (2013, 2014) also observes, some returnees in this study claim that they have 'let go thoughts of Latvia' and focus on deeper integration in the host country.

At the same time, the narrators stress that they do not want their experiences to deter others from considering a return. They view their own return attempt positively and believe that everyone should try returning. Their attempt at return migration has given them a voice in discussions about return migration issues while freeing them from the feelings of guilt and obligations toward Latvia, as well as from seeing their stay abroad as merely temporary. In most cases, this does not mean that they have severed ties with Latvia; rather, these connections have transformed into new goals and ways of engaging with their homeland.

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The European Union's Response to the Refugee Movements from Ukraine: The End of the Solidarity Crisis?

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This article explores whether triggering the 'Temporary Protection' Directive (TPD) to deal with the refugee movements from Ukraine has heralded the end of the solidarity crisis in the European Union's asylum policy. It makes two major contributions to the literature: first, it shows how the mode of responsibility allocation in the Common European Asylum System by a costs-by-cause principle violates the EU's solidarity principle, creating a continuous solidarity crisis that was exacerbated after the refugee influx of 2015/2016. Second, it demonstrates how, by invoking the TPD, the EU exhibits continuity in both eroding asylum cooperation and putting increasing emphasis on border controls focusing primarily on the externalisation and deflection of unwanted migration. The EU evades the dysfunctionalities in its asylum system by employing the temporary protection scheme, continuing a policy approach of more national discretion in terms of refugee protection while, at the same time, Member States' policy preferences vis-à-vis non-Ukrainian protection-seekers have not changed. Taking into account the disproportionate distribution of responsibilities it has created among the Member States, the TPD decision has not ended the solidarity crisis in Europe's asylum policy.

Keywords: European Union, asylum, solidarity, crisis, Ukraine, temporary protection

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Introduction

The number of people seeking refuge has been steadily increasing worldwide for a decade, more than doubling during this period (UNHCR 2023). It is fair to say that the planet is facing an exacerbating forced displacement crisis that is, for the most part, shouldered by middle- and low-income countries. In contrast, there still seems to be a commonly held presumption that the EU faced an extraordinary refugee crisis in 2015/2016. In actual fact, in those years Europe only accounted for about 5 per cent of the global number of displaced people (UNHCR 2018). Considering the political impact which their movements had, it is important to realise that the then EU-28 only received 12 per cent of all Syrian refugees (Eurostat 2019). Against this backdrop, it seems beside the point to frame the political crisis of 2015/2016 as a 'European refugee crisis'.[1] In addition, this terminology invokes the notion that the crisis might somehow be the fault of people seeking protection and not, as shown in this paper, the failure of Europe's asylum governance.

This failure was widely exhibited when some EU Member States went so far as to openly revolt against the common asylum policy, following a 2015 Council decision aimed at exercising solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility by relocating asylum-seekers from Italy and Greece (Council Decision 2015/1601). This conflict was never resolved, not even after the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) had confirmed the lawfulness of the relocation scheme in 2017 and found Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic guilty of continued breach of Union law (CJEU 2020a). This contentious episode was a salient example of an apparent solidarity deficit in Europe's asylum policy. Ever since this symptomatic asylum policy failure to find a joint solution based on solidarity, it seems like the EU has retreated to finding solutions mainly in the area of border controls, focusing on an overarching objective of preventing unauthorised migration in order to keep asylum applications to a minimum.

Solidarity is invoked even more prominently than usual in times of crisis, be it in 2015/2016 or in the Ukraine crisis following the unprovoked Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. While the former has revealed deep rifts in EU asylum cooperation that are evidently closely connected to the question of solidarity, the latter has launched a departure from the usual *modus operandi*. Following the refugee influx from Ukraine and in an unprecedented move, the Council has activated the 'Temporary Protection' Directive (TPD) (Council Directive 2001/55/EC). Devised in 2001 as a measure to manage refugee flows from the war-torn Balkans, it was never triggered until 4 March 2022. Expecting up to 4 million refugees from Ukraine after Russia's attack, the Commission quickly proposed to invoke the TPD. The Member States swiftly agreed and implemented the measure only 9 days after the invasion. Consequently, questions arise as to why the TPD was activated in 2022 and not in 2015. This article will address the following questions: Why is there variation in the assessment which the EU has made regarding the influxes in 2015 and in 2022? Wherein lie the differences in the respective policy solutions that have been applied? Does the response to the refugee movements from Ukraine mean the end of the solidarity deficit in the European Union's asylum policy?

In what follows, the case will be made for an understanding of Europe's asylum policy as being characterised by an underlying, continuous solidarity crisis that has been in existence since its very beginnings (Saracino 2018). The root of the problem lies in its centrepiece, which allocates the responsibilities for asylum claims between the Member States – the Dublin system.[2] Its logic of responsibility allocation violates the Union's constitutive solidarity principle, making the emergence of a crisis like that of 2015/2016 the bloc's own responsibility. Accordingly, this contribution will first clarify the role, shape, scope and content of the solidarity principle in the EU in general, as well as its specification in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). To this end, an analytical framework based on a conceptual history approach and extensive content, legal and document analysis will be presented to provide an accurate understanding of solidarity in the EU and its specification in its asylum policy. The paper will continue to explicate why the CEAS is characterised by a constant

solidarity crisis, of which the political crises are just prominently observable symptoms. The subsequent discussion of the rationale behind the activation of the TPD reveals that bypassing the European asylum system has not led to a mitigation of its inherent solidarity deficit. The analysis will demonstrate that, due to observable continuities in its overall policy approach *vis-à-vis* non-Ukrainian protection-seekers and the failure of the TPD decision to create a fair sharing of responsibilities between the Member States, the European Union's response to the refugee movements from Ukraine has not heralded the end to the solidarity crisis.

The solidarity principle in the EU and its asylum policy

Policy outputs in the European Union are cast into law to ensure the adherence to and consistency of the common political will. Compliance with Union law is a prerequisite if the European Union is to function as a community based on the rule of law (Zuleeg 2010). European Union politics and law, therefore, are inextricably linked, which is why a sustained violation of Union law by its members can amount to a *de facto* withdrawal from the scope of the Union's functioning since it implies abandoning the rule of law and the commonly agreed policy objectives. When acknowledging that the common political will of its members is being cast into law so that it can be effectively implemented, it is only consequential that a prominent EU objective like solidarity must be anchored in Union law too. Since a legal definition of solidarity is nowhere to be found in the *acquis communautaire*, it can be assumed that there is an underlying understanding of solidarity in the EU that is embedded in the specific historical context of the concept (Müller 2010).

A theoretical framework to address this desideratum has been provided by Saracino (2019). The methodological approach in this work is based on Reinhart Koselleck's contribution to conceptual history – typically labelled under the German equivalent *Begriffsgeschichte* – that is further developed and adapted to the epistemic interest of building a research framework for solidarity in the European Union. Saracino (2019) demonstrates that the concept of solidarity comprises a descriptive as well as a normative dimension. The former establishes that solidarity has a strong propensity to be applied to non-universal, particular groups wherein actors commit themselves voluntarily to a bond and create interdependences. The European Union can be considered as one such group. Solidarity, moreover, is instrumental to objectives which the reference group seeks to achieve and whose legitimacy it accepts. These objectives are often connected to the common good, a key source of state legitimacy and arguably the most important duty of state action (Anzenbacher 2011). The EU Member States have voluntarily bound themselves together to ensure that their interests pertaining to the common good are being pursued – interests such as economic prosperity, peace-keeping or migration management (Wolfrum 2006). They confer the respective competences to the supranational level and the EU, therefore, becomes a reference sphere for solidarity. The involved parties act in enlightened self-interest – i.e., the notion that they will be able to achieve their objectives more successfully in cooperation with others (Hollerbach, Kerber and Schwan 1995). In European primary law, the collective Union objectives are codified in Art. 3 TEU and, in connection with the framework of basic principles and values in Art. 2 TEU, amount to the idea of a European common good (Hatje and Müller-Graff 2014). A readiness to act in solidarity in the EU must necessarily exist as a prerequisite, otherwise an effective and robust pursuance of the European common good is impossible. The Member States become liable for the consequences of their actions within the EU, whose obligations they must accept at their voluntary accession (Sangiovanni 2012). A duty to solidarity is created by the joint acknowledgement of the common good that to pursue is the primary goal of the EU (Bieber and Kotzur 2016). It becomes the Member States' responsibility to contribute to the shape and production of solidarity in the integration process in order to safeguard their own interests.

The solidarity principle suggests that the reference groups' participants commit themselves to a mutual dependency, thus creating a specific connectedness due to the voluntary agreement to pursue the common

objectives mandatorily. The normative dimension of EU solidarity establishes mutual obligations that stem from the specific bond between the actors; this includes the expectation of reciprocity to achieve the collectively agreed objectives. These obligations take form through concrete actions of support and assistance. Hence, solidarity is not merely appellative. Actors try to safeguard the attainment of their common objectives by vouching for each other and creating mutual obligations. The creation and substantiation of obligations as well as the mutual bond of reference groups take place in the political sphere.

There are procedural duties that regulate how to act, assist and desist, aimed at ensuring the reliability of common good pursuance by all EU Member States and institutions by means of a solidarity principle cast into law. The CJEU (1969) confirmed the existence of a solidarity principle as early as 1969. In 1973, the Court ascertained the vital role and significance of the solidarity principle for the integration project by codifying that the Member States must subscribe to a duty to solidarity when entering the Community (CJEU 1973: para. 24 et seq.). In that seminal ruling, the judges made 2 fundamental determinations: on the one hand, the nation states' readiness to act in mutual solidarity is the necessary condition to be bound together under the rule of law. They should be aware of this obligation before entering the Community. On the other hand, by violating the solidarity principle, the whole legal order is shaken to its core, which amounts to endangering the whole integration project. Violating the solidarity principle means to actively locate oneself outside of the Union's legal order, hence outside of the Union's purview. This judgment provides an authoritative legal answer to the question as to *why* a solidarity principle exists in the European Union.

Since the readiness to act in solidarity can vary, casting obligations into law is all the more important. Political will for solidarity is needed to create and accept the Union law, whereas the law provides the standardisation of solidarity obligations to ensure adherence to the common objectives. It becomes clear that solidarity is the basis of the European edifice, without which it cannot stand. The solidarity principle, hence, is a *sine qua non* of the European Union, which permeates its whole scope. This finding is further corroborated by key documents which accompanied European integration as well as CJEU case law (Saracino 2019). In current EU primary law, Article 3 TEU formulates the general objectives of the Union, of which one is very distinctly the facilitation of solidarity between the Member States: 'It shall promote (…) solidarity among Member States' (para. 3). This passage anchors the solidarity principle as a fundamental principle of Union law (Ohler 2018; Petrus and Rosenau 2018). Furthermore, the article substantiates solidarity objectives in other policy areas (Saracino 2017). Recently, the CJEU has confirmed both the interpretation of the solidarity principle as a fundamental principle of Union law and that all Member States and Union organs must adhere to the solidarity principle in policy-making and legislation, as well as in the implementation and application of all Union provisions (CJEU 2019, 2021).

In Art. 4(3) TEU we find the duty to maintain sincere cooperation that is aimed at adherence to the common objectives (Bieber 2013). It permeates all policy areas of the Union, is aimed at the relationship among the Member States as well as between the Union and the Member States and, in conjunction with Art. 13(2) TEU, among the institutions (Blanke 2013). It comprises the duty to uphold coherent, unrestricted and uniform application and implementation as well the primacy of Union law, obliges the Member States to actively promote all Union activity and prohibits the addressees from undermining or even disabling the effectiveness of Union provisions (Klamert 2019). The principle of sincere cooperation is the necessary procedural specification of the independent solidarity principle. The two principles are not equivalent, as unmistakably evidenced by the clear distinction which Art. 24(3) TEU makes. The CJEU has substantiated the loyalty principle in multiple rulings that confirm the notion of a distinct separation of both principles (CJEU 1969, 1983, 2005).

These findings confirm the existence of an independent solidarity principle in the European Union and explain *why* solidarity must exist, both necessarily and from the outset. It has found a procedural expression

in the principle of sincere cooperation that determines *how* solidarity in EU law is shaped. In a nutshell, it can be ascertained that the European Union cannot exist without its specific solidarity principle. I have shown why the solidarity principle is a necessary condition for the functioning of the EU and how this reality manifests itself in Union law. Every violation of the commonly adopted law that prevents the achievement of the common objectives must be regarded as a violation of the solidarity principle. Sustained refusal to adhere to Union law deprives the integration project of its effectiveness and *raison d'être*, since the EU, by design, can only function on the basis of the rule of law.

The specific significance of the solidarity principle for EU asylum policy is established in Art. 67 TFEU which highlights that it must be 'based on solidarity between Member States'. This observation is undergirded by the addition of a specific solidarity clause for the areas of asylum, border controls and immigration in Art. 80 TFEU:

> *The policies of the Union set out in this Chapter* [asylum, border controls, immigration] *and their implementation shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States. Whenever necessary, the Union acts adopted pursuant to this Chapter shall contain appropriate measures to give effect to this principle.*

This solidarity clause is extraordinarily positioned within the Union Treaties. The signatories acknowledge and address the notion of an outstanding necessity for solidarity in the area of asylum. As will be demonstrated later, this awareness is the result of a fundamental lack of fair sharing of responsibility that is brought about by the specific responsibility allocation mechanism in the CEAS. Art. 80 TFEU explicitly reiterates the validity of the solidarity principle and connects it with the fair sharing of responsibility between the Member States. For the CEAS to adhere to the solidarity principle, compensatory policy measures – which include assistance and support provisions – must be put in place. Only financial assistance is explicitly stated although information exchange, technical assistance and training measures also fall under the scope of Art. 80 TFEU (Rossi 2016).

To summarise, the EU is a specific reference group to which the concept of solidarity and its particular, non-universal nature can be applied and where the group members act in enlightened self-interest. Solidarity is instrumental to achieve the common objectives which the EU has agreed upon and which are required both as a prerequisite and a vehicle with which to maintain its *raison d'être*. Furthermore, solidarity creates a mutual connectedness and demands a reciprocal commitment, evidenced by the Member States committing to a community or union of law with regards to the objectives that they agreed upon voluntarily in the political sphere. The rule of law provides the involved actors with legal reassurance that agreed policy measures aimed at attaining the common objectives will be adhered to. The solidarity principle, on the one hand, aims at ensuring that all involved actors fulfil their duties; on the other hand, through the principle of sincere cooperation, it brings to bear how the procedures for achieving the common objectives must be shaped. Finally, solidarity manifests itself through the members of the reference group vouching for each other in terms of the common objectives. In the EU, this mutual responsibility is expressed by concrete measures of support and assistance that can vary between the policy fields.

All in all, there is a fundamental solidarity principle in the EU that can be specified in form and content. It is inherent to the system of the EU and a necessary condition for achieving its objectives. In EU asylum policy, solidarity is expressed not only through the correct implementation of measures but also in supporting each other to develop national asylum systems that work for the good of the whole Union (Boswell, Vanheule and van Selm 2011). All asylum policy measures and their formulation, implementation and realisation must be compatible with the solidarity principle specified by Art. 80 TFEU, meaning the common objectives cannot

be achieved without the fair sharing of responsibility between the Member States. However, as will be demonstrated in the next section, an adherence to the solidarity principle in the field of asylum is foiled by the logic of responsibility allocation in the CEAS.

How the Dublin system evokes a continuous solidarity crisis

The Dublin Regulation No. 604/2013 allocates the responsibilities for asylum claims in the Common European Asylum System. The 'Dublin system' refers to this responsibility allocation mechanism in conjunction with the Eurodac database, which records the fingerprints and personal data of asylum-seekers (Regulation 603/2013).

As such, 'Dublin' was not devised as a burden-sharing instrument (European Commission 2007). The criteria for determining responsibility for asylum claims in the EU were developed in the Schengen Convention (1990: Art. 28–38)[3] and then carried over into the Dublin Convention (1990)[4] that bears no reference to a fair sharing of responsibilities or to solidarity. From the outset, these measures implemented an overall objective of preventing unauthorised immigration into the EU's asylum governance, which became its unmistakable hallmark (Lavenex 1999). Long before the Dublin Convention was fully implemented in 1997, it became apparent that the omission of a fair responsibility sharing element was highly problematic. The German government, in particular, tried to add provisions to the Dublin Convention to correct this flaw in as early as 1991 (Hailbronner 2000). After this endeavour failed, Germany and other main destination countries for asylum-seekers tried to disincentivise unauthorised entry even more – a policy objective that was copied by almost all other Member States (Noll 2000).

Instead of requiring participants to share responsibilities fairly with each other, the Dublin system's allocation mechanism is governed by a costs-by-cause principle. A Member State which is not able to prevent a claimant's entry into the EU must, in turn, admit the asylum-seeker to the procedure. The rationale behind this allocation mode is to punish Member States that do not comply with the objective to prevent unauthorised entry by placing the responsibility – and thus the cost or 'burden' for the claim – on to them: 'The main criteria for allocating responsibility (…), reflect this general approach by placing the burden of responsibility on the Member State which, by (…) being negligent in border control or admitting him without a visa, played the greatest part in the applicant's entry into or residence on the territories of the Member States' (European Commission 2001: 3). Furthermore:

> *A second group of criteria is designed to deal with the consequences of a Member State* failing to meet its obligations in the fight against illegal immigration [emphasis added]. (…) *a Member State which does not take effective action against the illegal presence of third-country nationals on its territory has an equivalent responsibility* vis-à-vis *its partners to that of a* Member State which fails to control its borders properly [emphasis added]. *The proposal extends this approach to several situations* (*Ibidem*).

In these explanations, added to the legislative proposal that eventually replaced the Dublin Convention, the Commission underlines in a very explicit way why the logic behind responsibility allocation in the asylum system should be labelled 'costs-by-cause principle' and not, as it is almost always denoted, 'principle of first entry' or 'responsibility principle'. Strictly speaking, these are not misnomers but they are incomplete and obfuscate the true impetus behind the Dublin system. It is evident that the system of responsibility allocation in the CEAS necessarily penalises Member States at the southern and eastern periphery since they bear the brunt of migratory movements into the EU. What is more, Italy and Greece, for example, simply cannot control their borders in the Mediterranean in the same way that Member States without external borders or with just

land borders are able to. The costs-by-cause principle is indifferent towards geographical location as well as regarding the economic strength, legal framework or historical genesis of the national asylum system. Hence, the Dublin system disproportionally allocates responsibility between the Member States (Saracino 2019).

The intention to sanction Member States for not preventing unauthorised immigration is not in line with the aim to achieve a CEAS that works for the benefit of the Union as whole – which, as has been shown, can be interpreted as a breach of the solidarity principle. To accuse a Member State of being solely responsible for immigration is illogical. Motives for migration are highly individual and complex and have little to do with how well borders are controlled (Baumann, Lorenz and Rosenow 2011). No less perfidious is an understanding of having to process a claim to asylum – a human right – as punishment. The rationale behind this mode of responsibility allocation stems from the clearly identifiable tenet of the European asylum system to prevent unauthorised immigration. Even if disagreeing with this view, one would inevitably have to assume that responsibility is deliberately allocated through geography (Kücük 2016). Both instances would constitute a violation of the solidarity principle, especially after the introduction of Art. 80 TFEU by the Lisbon Treaty.

Serious doubts about the effectiveness of the Dublin system existed early on. When evaluating it in 2000, the Commission admitted that the Convention had not met its objectives, hence justifying its continuation would be questionable (European Commission 2000). In multiple reform attempts, the Commission has reiterated that the Dublin system's inability to meet its objectives is closely connected to the deficiencies in the CEAS (European Commission 2015a, 2016). Despite these admissions of failure, the costs-by-cause principle has not been seriously put into question, not even in the latest reform proposal package (European Commission 2020a). Hence, the fundamental problem is not being addressed: the Dublin system has proved to be completely dysfunctional in terms of its objectives (Fröhlich 2016; Hruschka and Maiani 2022: Art. 1). It incentivises the secondary movements of asylum-seekers and Member States' deliberate or involuntary non-adherence to their obligations (Chetail 2016).[5] Both instances would constitute a violation of the solidarity principle. Not even its most basic objective – to register all asylum-seekers at the external borders – is being met, which underlines its dysfunctionality (Costello and Mouzourakis 2017).

Adding a case-law perspective to corroborate the argument, the CJEU (2011) has ruled that Member States, in specific instances, are not obligated to process an asylum claim even if mandated by the Dublin system. These instances arise in situations where Member States are confronted with a disproportionate burden that violates Art. 80 TFEU (*Ibidem*: para. 87). The judgment confirms not only the Dublin regulations' inability to ensure a fair sharing of responsibility; it also underlines that the provision creates situations in which Member States are unable to fulfil their legal obligations and that the authoritative jurisdiction views such a violation as lawful. Given that the CJEU decided on a case from 2009 where no significant increase in asylum numbers existed, this ruling is substantial evidence of the assertion that the Dublin system's allocation mechanism violates the solidarity principle, irrespective of the number of people seeking asylum in the EU.

In light of these violations of what Art. 80 TFEU entails, some scholars argue that a case against the Dublin system could be brought before the CJEU (Bast 2016; Moreno-Lax 2017). On the other hand, more sceptical views highlight doubts about the justiciability of Art. 80 TFEU (Thym 2022). This uncertainty highlights the need to establish enforceability for solidarity and responsibility sharing in the EU legal order (Milazzo 2023). Although many Member States disproportionally suffer from the failures of the Dublin system and although its ineffectiveness is widely accepted, thus far no legal challenge has been brought forward. However, without discarding the costs-by-cause principle, the pathologies it creates will remain in the form of a lack of responsibility sharing, the failing achievement of common objectives and Union law violations that breach the solidarity principle. Hence, the costs-by-cause principle evokes a permanent solidarity crisis in the European asylum system that has existed since its origins in the Schengen and Dublin Conventions, thus constituting a 'birth defect' of the CEAS.

The 2015/2016 asylum governance crisis as a(nother) symptom of the solidarity crisis

The identified continuous solidarity crisis in Europe's asylum policy occasionally shows symptoms in the form of certain special events. One of those symptoms was the 'Franco-Italian affair' in 2011 (Saracino 2014). Four years later, a sustained and veritable political crisis arose as a result of the increased migratory movements to Europe. On 13 May 2015, faced with continuing migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, an exacerbating situation on the Balkan route and an ever-increasing number of asylum applications, the European Commission (2015a) presented an extensive plan to tackle the challenge with both short-term and long-term measures. The plan included a proposal for a temporary emergency relocation mechanism on the basis of Art. 78(3) TEU 'for persons in clear need of international protection to ensure a fair and balanced participation of all Member States to this common effort' (European Commission 2015b). In so doing, the Commission opted against proposing to use the TPD which the EP had suggested as an alternative (European Parliament 2015).

On 9 September 2015, the Commission proposed to relocate 120,000 people in need of protection from Italy, Greece and Hungary (European Commission 2015c). On 22 September, the Council adopted the proposal determining mandatory Member State contingents, excluding Hungary as a beneficiary of the scheme (Council Decision 2015/1601). Apparently, the Hungarian government had insisted on being exempt due to its general opposition to the measure and disagreement with the notion of being a Member State with an external border (CJEU 2017a: para. 14). Hungary, alongside Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic, voted against the proposal (Council of the EU 2015). Accounting for the offsetting from the EU–Turkey Statement's relocation contingent and a separate voluntary relocation contingent of 40,000, the number of persons to relocate ended up being 98,000 (Council Decision 2016/1754).

The Commission proposal, as well as the Council decision, bore direct references to bringing to bear Art. 80 TFEU. However, none of the countries opposing the Council decision mentioned Art. 80 TFEU in their statements or agreed to the intended goal of creating fairer responsibility sharing (Council of the EU 2015). In any case, the unofficial Council norm of seeking unanimity could not be met, highlighting the controversies in the decision-making process (Trauner 2016). The political prudence of making an exception to the informal unanimity rule in this highly contested decision should be put into question, especially considering that the European Council (2015) had demanded an agreement by consensus. The decision to put forward a mandatory relocation mechanism was legal beyond any doubt but questions about its legitimacy remain.

Hungary and Slovakia decided to bring legal actions against the Council decision before the CJEU, claiming procedural errors as well as a lack of proportionality and of a legal basis (Case C-643/15; Case-647/15).[6] After the Polish elections brought the PiS into government, the country joined in on the actions (CJEU 2017a: para 30). In its 2017 decision, the Court rejected the actions on all accounts, confirming that asylum policy measures must adhere to Art. 80 TFEU and interpreting the Council decision as a necessary expression of it (CJEU 2017b).

When Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic continued to refuse to implement the provision, the Commission (2017) started infringement proceedings in December of 2017. In its judgment, the Court found that the defending Member States had violated Union law by not complying with the relocation mechanism (CJEU 2020a). The judges again confirmed that all asylum measures must adhere to Art. 80 TFEU and that all Member States must abide by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility (CJEU 2020b).

In the aftermath of the failed mandatory relocation experiment, the mutual ground for common asylum policy had been considerably eroded, especially in terms of the fair sharing of responsibility. Even after the 2020 CJEU judgment, the transgressing Member States did not experience any negative repercussions – in fact, quite the opposite. More Member States pivoted towards their positions. The Commission did not seek any punitive action but, rather, incorporated the underlying political stances in their policy-making approach,

detectable in its asylum governance package published later in the year (European Commission 2020a). These policy proposals turned out to be somewhat inadequate with regards to the necessary substantial reforms, particularly those pertaining to responsibility allocation (Maiani 2020; Thym 2020). The costs-by-cause principle remains alive and well regardless of the ostensible farewell to the Dublin regulation (European Commission 2020b). Signs of path-dependency are clearly identifiable.

The Council decision's objective to bring to bear the principle of solidarity during the 2015/2016 crisis by invoking Art. 80 TFEU in order to mitigate the pathologies within the CEAS has failed. The fact that Member States continue to defy their duty to implement common policy measures, even after the CJEU has deemed this course of action to be unlawful, constitutes a new dimension of the solidarity crisis in Europe's asylum system. By placing themselves outside of the EU legal order, the respective Member States are openly revolting against the common asylum policy, arguably creating a rule of law crisis of its own kind. This episode represents a salient symptom of the underlying and continuous solidarity crisis in the CEAS brought about and perpetuated by the logic of responsibility allocation based on the costs-by-cause principle. A *sine qua non* of the European Union is being violated, which puts into question the way forward, not only in asylum policy but also for the whole integration project.

The activation of the 'Temporary Protection' Directive in light of the 2022 refugee movements from Ukraine

After Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the European Union and its partners gave a united and strong diplomatic response. On the basis of an estimated number of over 3 million refugees seeking protection in Europe, the Commission declared a 'mass influx' and proposed the activation of the 'Temporary Protection' Directive (European Commission 2022a) – an unprecedented move since the Directive had never been used and had lain dormant for more than two decades. Originally, the TPD was devised 'on the basis of solidarity' (Council Directive 2001/55/EC: Art. 16):

> *[T]o establish minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin and to promote a balance of effort between Member States in receiving and bearing the consequences of receiving such persons* (*Ibidem*: Art. 1).

Generally, the TPD's protection scheme envisages fewer rights for beneficiaries than international asylum law would provide (Peers 2015). It was designed as an instrument aimed at deterrence, with a stringent focus on returns (van Selm 2022). The Directive must be activated by the Council upon proposal from the Commission by qualified majority vote (Council Directive 2001/55/EC: Art. 5). The provision does not clarify what constitutes a 'mass influx' – it only delineates it as Union-wide, substantial in numbers and coming from one single country or region only (*Ibidem*: Art. 2). One of its key objectives is ensuring that national asylum systems will not malfunction when faced with a mass influx. The insufficiency of a Member State's ability to absorb an influx, though, is not a sufficient indicator for activation. Neither is an increased influx to a single Member State unless the reason for that increase is its proximity to the main region of displacement (Skordas 2022).

The objectives of the Commission's proposal of 2 March 2022 were fourfold. First, harmonised rights that displaced persons seeking refuge in the EU from the war should enjoy across the Union to be offered an adequate level of protection. Second, asylum provisions should be bypassed to prevent national asylum systems from becoming overwhelmed. Third, the expected influx should be managed in a controlled and

effective manner, respecting fundamental rights and international obligations. Finally – and maybe the most astonishingly – was the objective to promote balanced efforts between Member States by free choice of host country for the beneficiaries of temporary protection and the right to free movement in the EU (European Commission 2022b). In the proposal, solidarity was only mentioned in connection with a 'solidarity platform' from which to exchange information that was to be implemented and coordinated by the Commission.

The Council convened only two days after the proposal was published to adopt its decision unanimously (Council of the EU 2022). Notably, the Council decision differs from the Commission proposal in that it gives Member States more discretion to exclude non-Ukrainian nationals (*Ibidem*: Art 2 and 3; European Commission 2022b: Art. 2). Ultimately, the decision covers Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and their family members. In terms of other third-country nationals and stateless persons, it covers those who enjoyed international or equivalent protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 as well as their family members. Stateless persons and other third-country nationals with no such protection and only proven legal residence in Ukraine must return to their country or region of origin when they can do so in safe and durable conditions. In cases where those conditions are not met, the Member States must extend temporary protection to this group (Council of the EU 2022: Art. 2). The general objectives remained the same between proposal and decision. The standards offered to Ukrainian refugees by the TPD are considered the minimum that the Member States have the discretion to extend. The scheme has recently been extended to its third and final year within the scope of the existing decision (Council of the EU 2023a). The Member States must issue residence permits, allow beneficiaries to take up employment, provide suitable accommodation, social welfare, medical care and education for minors and guarantee free movement for selecting the Member State in which the displaced person would like to take residence under the TPD.

The decision to depart from the 'forum shopping' precept of the CEAS is hard not to overstate. What is often missed in the debate on the ostensible paradigm shift, however, is that the Commission had reflected a free-choice model for the responsibility allocation mechanism in the CEAS very early on. When evaluating the Dublin Convention three years after its implementation, the Commission seriously considered a free-choice model as an alternative to the dysfunctional costs-by-cause principle (European Commission 2000). This consideration was picked up again in the Commission's proposal for the Dublin II regulation (European Commission 2001). However, the documents mention that, for the free-choice model to be effective, national asylum systems would have to be harmonised to a higher degree to prevent diverging standards becoming the key criterion for asylum-seekers' decisions on where to apply.

The free-choice model in the TPD decision constitutes a notable shift towards the long-standing finding within migration research that determining the state responsible for the asylum procedure can only work when the applicants' preferences are incorporated into the decision (Guild, Costello, Garlick and Moreno-Lax 2015; Wagner, Baumgartner, Dimitriadi, O'Donnell, Kraler, Perumadan, Schlotzhauer, Simic and Yabasun 2016). Positive experiences with guaranteeing free choice and free movement to beneficiaries of the TPD might be viewed as a best-practice example for future implementation: it could serve as a feasible alternative to the hitherto existing paradigms of responsibility-sharing by physical distribution, the restriction of movement rights or the use of coercion (Vitiello 2022). Steve Peers (2022) has commented that the Council decision shows the better side of the EU after its asylum law took a turn to a 'moral abyss'.

Why was the TPD activated now?

One of the key questions in the discussion about the activation of the TPD revolves around why it has been activated now and not during previous crises. A first insight to a plausible answer might be that there was simply no political will to utilise the TPD before. In 2011, during movements from North Africa to Italy in the

wake of the Arab Spring, the Italian government considered to put triggering the TPD on the European agenda but prescinded from a formal request due to apparent dismissive reactions from other Member States (Beirens, Maas, Petronella and van der Velden 2016). During the asylum governance crisis in 2015, the TPD arguably could have been triggered but its activation was never seriously considered (Ineli Ciger 2016). Due to the continued disregard even in face of apparent crises and mass influxes, the TPD has been called a 'waste of paper' (Gluns and Wessels 2017: 83).

A thorough review of the TPD in 2016, which included interviews with Member States' representatives, revealed that the main objections to applying the measure were concerns about national sovereignty, the consideration that the protection period was too long, the fear of creating a pull effect, not wanting to reward Member States for not equipping their asylum systems adequately for the CEAS to work properly and the overall endowment of rights for beneficiaries that was perceived as a higher standard than some Member States were granting or ready to grant (Beirens *et al.* 2016).

Other aspects explaining why the TPD was triggered now rather than over previous crises include geographical proximity, time pressure, expected quantity, Ukrainian visa freedom and the uniqueness of the event causing the mass influx. During the Syrian civil war, the neighbouring countries bore the brunt of responsibility for Syrian refugees. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, most refugees were expected to seek protection in neighbouring EU countries. Besides the geographical circumstances, timeframe is another valid argument for triggering the TPD now instead of in 2015, since the displacement was sudden and expected to overwhelm the receiving EU Member States in a very short period of time. In terms of quantity, the estimated numbers of displaced persons seeking refuge in the EU from Ukraine were much higher than the actual numbers in 2015/2016. The decision to activate the TPD, moreover, is a political statement as part of the comprehensive set of countermeasures against the Russian aggression (European Council 2022). Initial findings suggest that the decision was based on a sense of common identity, with the emphasis on the need to show unity (Bosse 2022). Neither of the two aspects were part of the decision-making in 2015. In this exceptional circumstance of hot war returning to European soil, it is very much an extraordinary reaction to this historical watershed moment. On a more administrative note, the existing visa freedom for Ukrainian nationals made it much easier to implement the TPD (Ineli Ciger 2022). Without the temporary protection scheme, Ukrainians would still have had free choice of the Member State in which to seek protection, although the differing standards within the national asylum systems might have had a stronger influence on their selection of destination country. Nonetheless, the rationale behind utilising the TPD seems to differ distinctly from the original objectives of the provision, aiming now at welcoming refugees and equipping them with a wide array of rights, as opposed to focusing on lower fundamental rights standards and returns.

Pragmatism is another aspect that should be considered when trying to explain the unprecedented activation of the TPD. First, relations between the EU and Ukraine in 2022 were much closer than between the EU and most asylum-seekers' countries of origin in 2015/2016, making the use seem even more appropriate and justified. Second, faced with a dysfunctional CEAS and having unsuccessfully attempted the temporary relocation route in 2015, what alternatives would there have been for the EU to tackle this challenge in a unified and practicable manner? The TPD might have been the only viable option left that offered the possibility of a common EU response to the expected mass influx and which would facilitate a fair sharing of responsibility between the Member States.

Moreover, it is instructive to view the decision to opt for the temporary protection scheme in 2022 in the broader context of ongoing developments in EU asylum and border control policies. The TPD presents an instrument to the EU and its Member States with which to circumvent the CEAS – and its logic of responsibility allocation in particular – when dealing with protection-seekers. A successful implementation could provide evidence for a policy stance held by Member States opposing the current asylum regime. A framework of

border control policies – with a primary focus on preventing unwanted entry on the one hand and temporary protection for those who manage to reach EU territory on the other – could be viewed as sufficient. It would feed into the narrative and policy approach that seeks to equip the Member States with more sovereignty and leeway to manage migration on their own. A *common* European asylum policy could become further sidelined.

The end of the solidarity crisis?

Against the backdrop of the unprecedented response to dealing with refugee movements from Ukraine, the question arises as to whether this could constitute a paradigm shift for Europe's asylum policy – one that might end the solidarity crisis. A cogent answer should, firstly, acknowledge that there are discriminatory practices applied at EU borders *vis-à-vis* the different groups of displaced people. Cooperation continues with the Libyan 'coastguards' to pull back migrants departing from Africa on their way to Europe (Amnesty International 2021). Illegal pushbacks on the eastern and southern external borders, under the passive involvement of Frontex, are common practice (Euractiv 2022a; Fallon 2022). The inflow of persons seeking asylum primarily from the Middle East, trying to enter the EU through its eastern Member States, has been framed as a 'hybrid attack' since the protection-seekers were used as political pawns by Belarus' authoritarian leader (Euronews 2021; Kochenov and Grabowska-Moroz 2021). The fact that a negligible number of non-white, Muslim persons seeking refuge in Europe is being labelled as an 'attack' reveals the underlying view that this group of immigrants is unwelcome in the EU as opposed to Ukrainian refugees. Europe's response to the people persevering under the most precarious of circumstances at the borders between Belarus, Poland and the Baltic countries has been ruthless, unrelenting and arguably illegal. In the wake of these developments, Poland and Lithuania have built border fences with Belarus (Deutsche Welle 2022a, 2022b). Latvia has suspended the right to seek asylum and legalised pushbacks in addition to building a border fence of its own (Jolkina 2022). Similarities with what has been exercised in the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are evident. Above all, there is ample evidence that non-white people fleeing the war in Ukraine are being treated in a clearly discriminatory manner (Betts 2022; Howden 2022; Pop 2022). Overall, what these practices have in common is that they are directed at non-white, non-Christian refugees who are simply not welcome in the EU. This discriminatory and nativist approach is historically well documented, especially in the European Union's visa policy (Bueno-Lacy and von Houtum 2022). Irrespective of the human right to apply for asylum, a right that is prominently emphasised in the *acquis communautaire*, the EU continues to deter and criminalise unwanted entry; thus there are calls for a more protection-driven approach with non-discrimination standards as the default (Carrera, Ineli Ciger, Vosyliute and Brumat 2022).

In sharp contrast to the refugee movements in 2015/2016, purported threats to public order and internal security – as put forward in the CJEU cases against the mandatory temporary relocation mechanism – do not seem to play a role in terms of the people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Similarly waived seem to be Member States' concerns regarding national sovereignty or the ability to integrate the protection-seekers. Suddenly, secondary movements no longer seem to be a problem when they pertain to Ukrainian refugees. The rhetoric of invasion which we have witnessed in previous refugee influxes is also astoundingly absent. Above all, there does not seem to be a single Member State government objecting outright to the application of the TPD. All in all, none of the former demurs against the TPD seem to be prevalent in this crisis. At the same time, nothing seems to have changed in the treatment of all other larger groups of people seeking protection in the EU. Europe's double standard in treating refugees is, thus, hard to deny. The change of scope with which the temporary protection scheme has been equipped – between Commission proposal and Council decision – giving more discretion to Member States to exclude non-Ukrainians, speaks volumes in this regard.

As a matter of fact, there seems to be no indication that the general preferences of those opposing the current European asylum regime have changed. Poland, for example, shows continuity in its refusal to adequately apply asylum standards and has now built a border fence with Belarus to fend off unwanted asylum-seekers whilst maintaining a positive stance towards the treatment of Ukrainian refugees. To contextualise, the country has long been welcoming Ukrainians who fill a significant workforce need in Poland's economy (Strzelecki, Growiec and Wyszynski 2022). There are well-developed transport routes and migrant networks between the two countries. In 2017, approximately 900,000 Ukrainians were living in Poland (Jaroszewicz 2018). Prior to the Russian full-scale invasion, around 1.35 million Ukrainians were estimated to reside in the country (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Furthermore, as a country facing profound demographic change, Poland will need millions of immigrants in the coming decades (Duszczyk and Matuszczyk 2018). Other countries facing labour shortages, like Germany, might have similar interests when it comes to welcoming Ukrainian refugees (Euractiv 2022b).

When investigating a potential end to the solidarity crisis through the analytical lens of the fair sharing of responsibility among the Member States, a closer look at the numbers is helpful. As of September 2022, some 3.9 million people fleeing the Russian invasion benefited from temporary protection in the EU. Of the EU-27, Poland (1.37 million) and Germany (813,000) accounted for about 2.4 million permits granted – or roughly 61.5 per cent (Eurostat 2022). In absolute terms, it demonstrates how only two Member States are bearing the brunt of refugee protection in the case of Ukraine. Regarding admission per thousand inhabitants, Estonia, Czechia (both 41.1), Poland (36.1), Lithuania (23.2), Latvia (20.2) and Slovakia (17.2) had higher rates than Germany (12.1). However, other Member States like Spain (3.0), Italy (2.7), the Netherlands (4.4) or France (1.5) showed much lower rates (OECD 2022: 99). These numbers demonstrate an unequal distribution of responsibilities in the EU in terms of providing protection for refugees from Ukraine after the TPD decision was implemented. The fact that those Member States with the highest *per capita* admission rate are concentrated on or close to the border with Ukraine offers one obvious explanation as to why people fleeing the war have chosen those countries, in addition to existing migrant networks and the proximities in culture and language. This is a pattern observed all over the world and, more specifically, during the Syrian civil war in 2015/2016, when by far the greatest number of people seeking protection were either IDPs or were harboured in neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2018). However, from an EU solidarity perspective, this unequal distribution of the beneficiaries of temporary protection between the Member States does raise serious doubts as to whether the implementation of the TPD has provided the fair sharing of responsibility demanded by Art. 80 TFEU. It seems that a similar pattern can be observed that torments the CEAS: a few countries bear the brunt whilst most other Member States take on little to no responsibility. The implementation of the TPD highlights that the fair sharing of responsibility does not happen on its own, be it in the asylum regime or the temporary protection regime. Giving free choice to protection-seekers under the TPD might even counteract the objective of fairly sharing responsibilities between the Member States, since people on the move tend to settle in areas with pre-existing networks, ideally in geographical proximity, where strong cultural ties and sufficient infrastructure as well as resources to accommodate their needs already exist, as evidenced by the numbers in Poland and Germany.

Assessing the TPD application through the lens of the EU's solidarity principle, at the time of writing only a preliminary and tentative assessment can be carried out. In procedural terms, it is safe to say that the process of activating the TPD has been in accordance with the solidarity principle since it has found a unanimous vote, going beyond the necessary QMV. This demonstrates a stark contrast with the mandatory relocation decision in 2015, for example. In terms of implementation, it does not seem that a fair distribution of responsibilities has been achieved. On the other hand, the provisions of the TPD decision have, by and large, been adhered to, unlike in the cases of the Dublin Regulation or the mandatory relocation mechanism of 2015. Furthermore,

there does not seem to be much division among the EU and its Member States about the nature and real-life ramifications of the chosen TPD regime. No Member State seems to be undercutting the aims of the TPD decision to the extent to which either EU institutions or other Member States would disapprove. Temporary protection seems to work fine for all parties involved – at least in its first phase. Member States bearing the brunt are not yet vehemently demanding more assistance from their EU partners. That might be because the physical distribution of beneficiaries is out of the equation anyway. The key question could turn out to be how Member States deal with the long-term challenges of the protection scheme, like the financial burden or dwindling support from the population. Perhaps the most important issue will be the EU's approach to offering protection to Ukrainian refugees after the TPD expires in March 2025 if the war in Ukraine is still raging.

Considering the above findings, a solidarity crisis in Europe's asylum policy can still be diagnosed. Little has changed in terms of practices at the external borders *vis-à-vis* non-beneficiaries of the TPD Council decision – and even then, discriminatory practices are well-documented. The CEAS' birth defect – its costs-by-cause principle to allocate responsibility for asylum claims – is still in place and it is not envisaged for it to be substituted by the now-agreed reform package (Council of the EU 2023b). This fundamental tarnish still breeds the pathologies observable in the dysfunctionality of Europe's asylum and border control policies. In the case of refugees from the war in Ukraine, not even circumventing the CEAS by implementing a temporary protection regime was sufficient to create a fair sharing of responsibilities between the Member States and mitigate the collective action problem. Even if it might be too soon to diagnose a breach of the solidarity principle by the TPD decision, some of the same pathologies that haunt the CEAS can be observed. The European Union's response to the refugee movements from Ukraine has not ended the solidarity crisis.

Conclusion

Understood as encompassing the whole scope of the EU, it turns out that solidarity is a necessary condition for the European Union to maintain its *raison d'être*. In this paper I have demonstrated that, in the area of asylum (and border controls), there is a specific expression of solidarity, characterised by the fair sharing of responsibility between the Member States. All asylum policy measures must adhere to this solidarity principle. However, the bedrock of the CEAS, the Dublin system, violates the solidarity principle on account of its logic of responsibility allocation: a costs-by-cause principle that was implemented in the very beginning of integrated asylum cooperation in Europe. The dysfunctional Dublin system evokes Union law violations and challenges to effective collective action that are in clear breach of the EU's solidarity principle, thus creating a permanent solidarity crisis. This 'birth defect' in the CEAS has been passed on over and over, showing not only pathologies like the 2015/2016 asylum governance crisis but also deeply entrenched path-dependency in this policy area. The adherence to the logic of responsibility allocation in the recent CEAS reform package serves as further confirmation of this article's findings. When taking into account the practices at the Union's external borders that range from the politically imprudent to the outright illegal, the ramifications of this defining flaw in the CEAS show signs of a rule of law crisis.

Examining the developments in European asylum policy since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine we can conclude that, at the time of writing, there is no end to the solidarity crisis in sight. All constitutive elements that have led to the diagnosis are still intact. In fact, some of those factors have been exacerbated since then. Illegal pushbacks have become common practice – and evidence for discriminatory border (and visa) practices has become even more prevalent. The EU and its Member States have found a way to circumvent the birth defect in the Dublin system and prevent the pathologies it creates by activating the 'Temporary Protection' Directive. However, it should be noted that this almost exclusively refers to the treatment of displaced Ukrainians. Generally, unwanted migrants – whether they might have a legitimate protection claim or not – are still

being deflected, pushed back or even left to die at Europe's external borders, sometimes even at the very borders which Ukrainian refugees are crossing, revealing a double standard in treating displaced people detrimental to European laws, values and political credibility.

The unprecedented application of the TPD rather reinforces the notion that the existing asylum governance is increasingly being eroded. The extraordinary nature and cause of the influx, the aspects of (perceived) cultural as well as geographical vicinity, the quite close political ties between the EU and Ukraine, combined with a lack of other viable options, make the application of the TPD seem like an exception to the overall trend. At the same time, there is no identifiable change of policy or preferences in the area of asylum, neither at Union level nor among the Member States – nor towards the treatment of refugees outside of the beneficiaries of the TPD Council decision. This could mean that a successful outcome of the temporary protection scheme further weakens the asylum regime in the EU. When the prevention of entry becomes the sole focus, more effective, domestic temporary protection measures instead of international asylum provisions could become a more appealing way to deal with protection-seekers. Especially when the TPD is being viewed as a last-resort instrument in cases where the EU is faced with mass inflows and refugee protection is being further deprioritised. It is plausible that granting asylum procedures could become the exception to the treatment of refugees in the EU and it would be in line with a growing number of Member States' preferences *vis-à-vis* asylum cooperation.

A key corollary of this contribution's main findings is that, without a revocation of the birth defect of the CEAS – i.e. the costs-by cause principle in allocating responsibility for asylum claims – the pathologies will not stop appearing. This is further corroborated by the fact that even the free choice model in the temporary protection scheme for Ukrainian refugees, at the time of writing, has not been able to create a fair sharing of responsibilities between the Member States. Only an overhaul of the system of responsibility allocation to one that is in line with the solidarity principle could potentially end the solidarity crisis. Every reform that does not factor in this precondition is doomed to fail in attempting to eradicate the core problems of Europe's asylum governance. The question remains whether this is a common objective of the EU Member States at all. The latest CEAS reform has demonstrated that it is not. The task of shaping a better-functioning European asylum system that honours the solidarity principle will, thus, remain a pressing policy issue in the EU.

Notes

1. A crisis is a period of disturbance that requires a response to reinstate a notion of order (Freeden 2017; Koselleck 2006). A commonly accepted interpretation by Rosenthal *et al*. (1989) asserting that crises must constitute a threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system adds explanatory power to this contribution.
2. Even though the 'Dublin' regulation will be replaced by the reform agreed on 20 December 2023, the validity of this study remains unaffected since the core logic of responsibility allocation in the Common European Asylum System via a costs-by-cause principle will continue to be in effect.
3. Convention Implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985 between the Governments of the States of the Benelux Economic Union, the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on the Gradual Abolition of Checks at Their Common Borders [Schengen Convention].
4. Convention Determining the State Responsible for Examining Applications for Asylum Lodged in One of the Member States of the European Communities [Dublin Convention].
5. Philipp de Bruycker and Evangelia Tsourdi (2016) suggest objective criteria to assess whether a Member State is either *incapable* or *unwilling* to fulfil its duties.
6. Action Brought on 2 December 2015 – Slovak Republic v Council of the European Union (Case C-643/15). Action Brought on 3 December 2015 – Hungary v Council of the European Union (Case C-647/15).

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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