



# MIGRATION, A KEY CHALLENGE FOR THE EU

## HOW TO COMBINE CITIZEN'S CONCERNS, SOLIDARITY DUTY AND MIGRANTS NEEDS?

A RECORD OF THE ROUNDTABLE ORGANISED BY THE  
CENTRE KANTAR SUR LE FUTUR DE L'EUROPE, 7/11/2018

To celebrate its second anniversary, Kantar and the Centre Kantar sur le Futur de l'Europe organised a seminar dedicated to the topic of public opinion around migration. The seminar discussed the reality of migrants and the challenge of reconciling contradictory positions and views on migration with the fact that Europe has a moral obligation to respect human rights and also needs migration to sustain many economic sectors.

Four voices were heard, all concluding on the need to propose positive narratives and even experiences so that people can connect with migrants and focus on what we share rather than on what divides us.

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We'd be happy to talk further about the research discussed in this paper. Please contact :

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# Public opinion & immigration

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Since the 2015 migrant crisis in Europe, there has been a shift in EU public opinion, unemployment and economic issues giving way to immigration and terrorism as the two main issues to be addressed by the EU. Today, immigration is by far the most worrying issue for European citizens (see graph below). More than two-thirds (69%) of Europeans believe that immigration is a problem, at least to some extent. However, the proportion of people for whom immigration is a problem is not evenly distributed among European countries, as the map below shows. In some countries fewer than 30% respondents agree with this statement, while in other countries more than half do so.

The disparities between countries further increase when people are asked whether they would feel uncomfortable with an immigrant as a friend, colleague, manager, doctor, neighbour or family member. On this question there is a clear East-West divide. Citizens in Eastern European countries are more concerned about immigration, and speak more openly about their negative attitudes towards migrants.

While immigration is perceived as problematic, it is also greatly overestimated. As shown on the chart above, Europeans generally think there are twice as many immigrants in their countries as there actually are. On average, EU citizens think that immigrants represent over 16% of the population while in fact they represent just 7.2%.

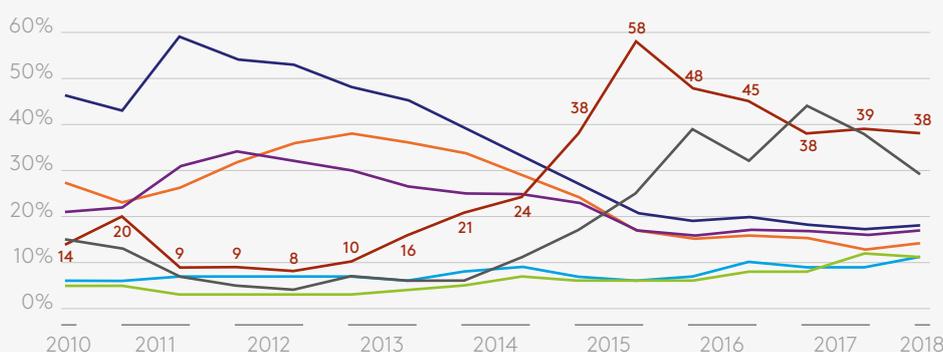
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The disconnection between the real numbers of migrant inflows and public perceptions is also apparent when we compare the evolution of immigration with the extent to which people perceive it as a problem. The proportion of immigrants in the overall EU population has remained relatively stable. Despite the number of new arrivals in 2015, the overall number of immigrants in EU countries has not significantly changed over time. Media coverage of arrivals in the Mediterranean gave the impression of a skyrocketing proportion of immigrants in the total EU population. Yet the dramatic fall in arrivals since the peak in 2015 has not lessened public concerns regarding immigration. In some countries where the proportion of migrants in the population is very low, immigration is very significantly over-estimated – in Slovakia, people imagine that there are 13.8 times more immigrants than there actually are. In Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, they put this figure at more than eight times higher than the reality.

There is also a strong relationship between the feeling that immigration is under control (or not) and people's attitude towards it.

IMMIGRATION IS SEEN AS A KEY CHALLENGE FACING THE EU

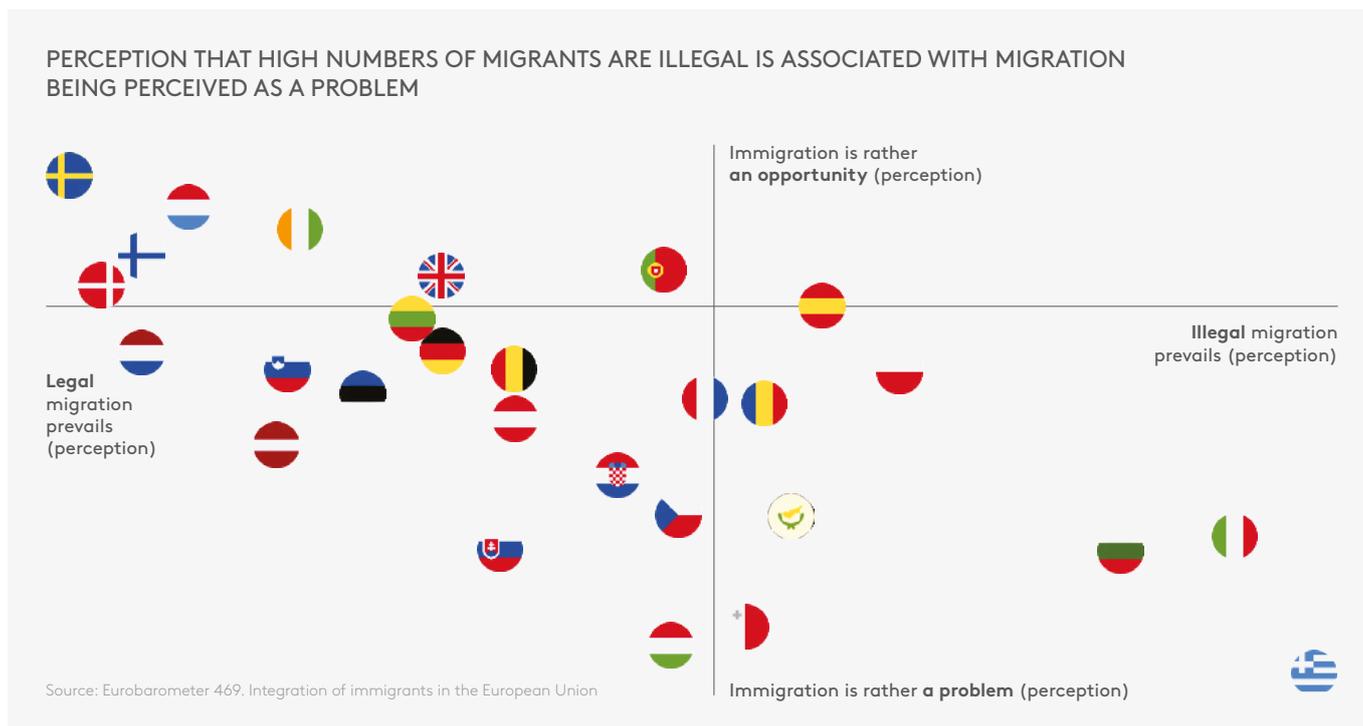


Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys – autumn 2010 – spring 2018

What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?

**IMMIGRATION**

- TERRORISM
- ECONOMIC SITUATION
- THE STATE OF THE MEMBER STATES
- 'PUBLIC FINANCES'
- UNEMPLOYMENT
- CLIMATE CHANGE
- EU'S INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD



Data from the Eurobarometer survey reveal a strong correlation between the belief that immigrants are present illegally and the perception of migration as a problem rather than an opportunity.

The research also revealed the need for more debate and information among those who regarded immigration as more of a problem. There were only five countries in which the majority of respondents said that they felt well-informed about this issue (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg). These appear to be the countries where immigration is not regarded as much of a problem.

People who have negative perceptions of immigration also see it as :

- 1) posing a threat to the welfare system;
- 2) influencing the level of crime;
- 3) increasing competition in the local labour market.

Conversely, those who see the impact of immigration as beneficial believe that immigrants help fill the gaps in the job market by taking jobs for which it is hard to find local workers.

There are some interesting differences between the countries where large numbers of respondents see the impact of immigration as negative:

- Germany appears in the list only once – Germans are concerned about the effects of immigration on the welfare system;
- Denmark also appears only once, in relation to concerns over criminality;
- Italy, however, features frequently in the list of countries where citizens are worried about the impacts of immigration.

These results suggest that integration policies need a contextualised and country-specific approach, working with the general public to bring people closer.

There is also some good news in the data. Despite wide national disparities in perceptions of immigration, there is an overwhelming feeling that this issue must be tackled at the European level. Even in the countries expressing some reluctance about giving more power to the EU, there is a conviction that immigration cannot be addressed only at the national level. The majority of European citizens are in favour of a common immigration European policy.

Further good news for policymakers in the Eurobarometer survey data: the more people interact with immigrants, the more they tend to think that immigration has a beneficial impact on society. The intensity of interactions with immigrants significantly impacts perceptions.

Finally, we can draw two lessons from the Eurobarometer survey on the integration of migrants. In the large majority of countries, respondents identify the crucial points for improving integration as:

- 1) fluency in the host country language;
- 2) contributing to the welfare system; and
- 3) being committed to the host country's way of life, with an acceptance of its values and laws.

The uncertainty felt by respondents in some countries regarding their own identities, and the difficulty of building a common 'European identity', are both related to the issue of immigration. Thus, it is essential to assess whether immigrants have a similar understanding of how to make appropriate contact with European culture.



# Germany learning to listen migrant needs

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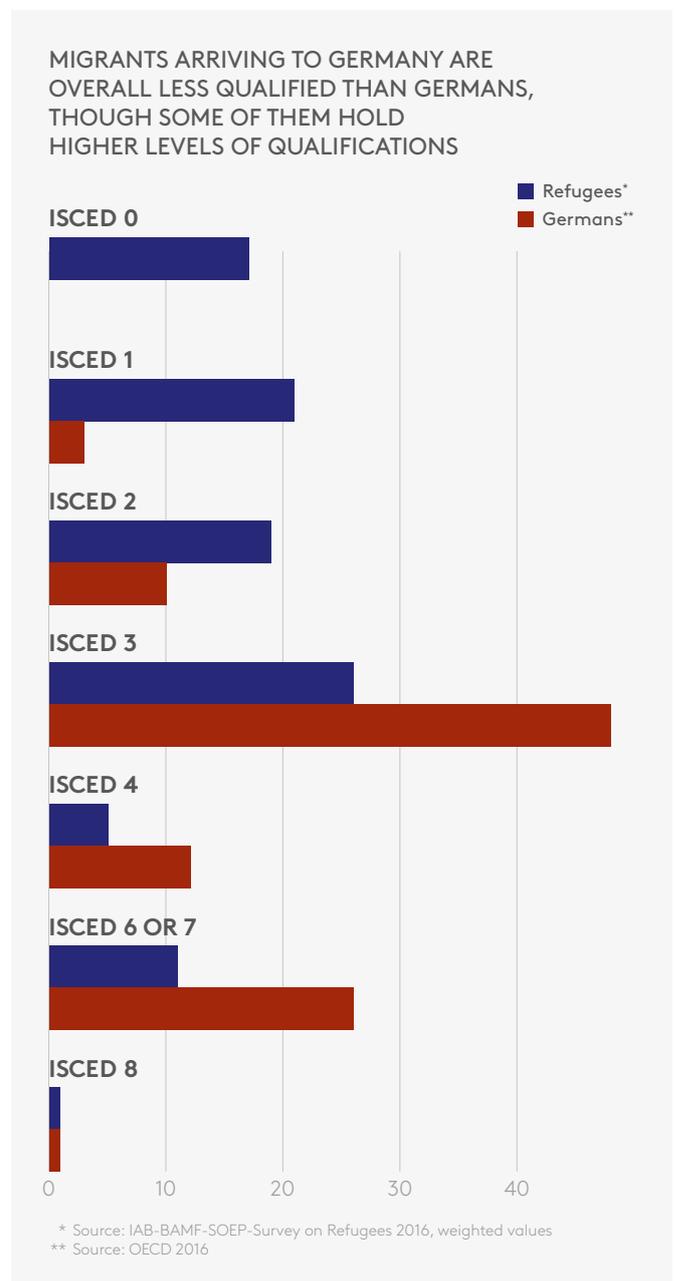
In 2016, seeking a comprehensive understanding of immigrants' living conditions and aspirations, the German government asked a group of research institutions to undertake a survey on related issues. Kantar Public is collecting the data for this research.

The results of that survey are full of lessons inviting us to reject our prejudices about immigrants. For example, there is a persistent stereotype ascribing high levels of illiteracy to migrants. And more generally, there is a tendency to think of immigrants as a homogeneous group – which they are clearly not. The pool of asylum seekers that entered Germany between 2015 and 2016 shows very considerably heterogeneity. Of course, there are migrants with low levels of education, but others are highly educated.

In comparison with the German population, there are some educational differences. Indeed, Germans are more likely to be highly qualified than the pool of 2015-16 asylum seekers. Some 9% of asylum seekers have low literacy levels, or are functionally illiterate. Those who are illiterate represent only 4% of newly arrived asylum seekers. While some asylum seekers do indeed have low levels of education and low literacy levels there are also non-negligible numbers of highly qualified individuals. The situation of women is very different – while more women than men are in the group of poorly qualified persons, women are also more represented in the group of highly qualified asylum seekers.

However, while many migrants have skills when they arrive, getting recognition of their qualifications is a challenge. Asylum seekers are unlikely to see the qualifications they acquired in their home countries accepted in the German job market unless they apply for recognition of those certificates. Even a PhD is not recognised on the labour market, and formal recognition is likely to be necessary. The survey shows that the higher the qualification level of asylum seekers, the more likely they are both to apply for recognition and to succeed in the process. The recognition of degrees is one of the needs perceived by asylum seekers. It is a way to measure the skills and competences with which they can contribute to the labour market.

Interestingly, asylum seekers all expressed a strong desire to receive further formal education: some for the labour market in their home countries one day, others for the German labour market. This shows that their main concern is related to education, and education is the foundation of integration.





Education also refers to learning the German language. At the time of their arrival, most asylum seekers speak no German at all. Yet the longer they stay, the greater their improvement. After three years spent in Germany, self-reported levels of spoken German are good or very good. However, men are more likely than women to report this improvement. The language is better mastered by men over the same period of time than by women, due to labour market integration and social exposure to German speakers.

Returning to the question of stereotypes, there is a belief that we Germans, and asylum seekers have different values. That, however, is not necessarily true. Just as values differ widely within the German population, asylum seekers' values vary as well. Although asylum seekers are more likely to think that it would be a problem if a woman earns more than a man in a relationship, only a third of them share that view.

The data show that in some respects, asylum seekers are less conservative than the German population. Women's economic independence, i.e. their capacity to get a job, is actually more widely accepted among asylum seekers than by the German population. GRAPH If we dig deeper into these kinds of impressions, we see trends suggesting that we share the same values and perceptions. There are no major differences in the values revealed by Germans and asylum seekers. Asylum seekers, who have fled oppressive regimes, generally value civil rights and free elections.

Asylum seekers also show gratitude and look forward to life in a democratic society. It is false to assume that many migrants would want to abide by the rules imposed by religious authorities. In fact, only a small minority of people show this level of trust in religious authorities.

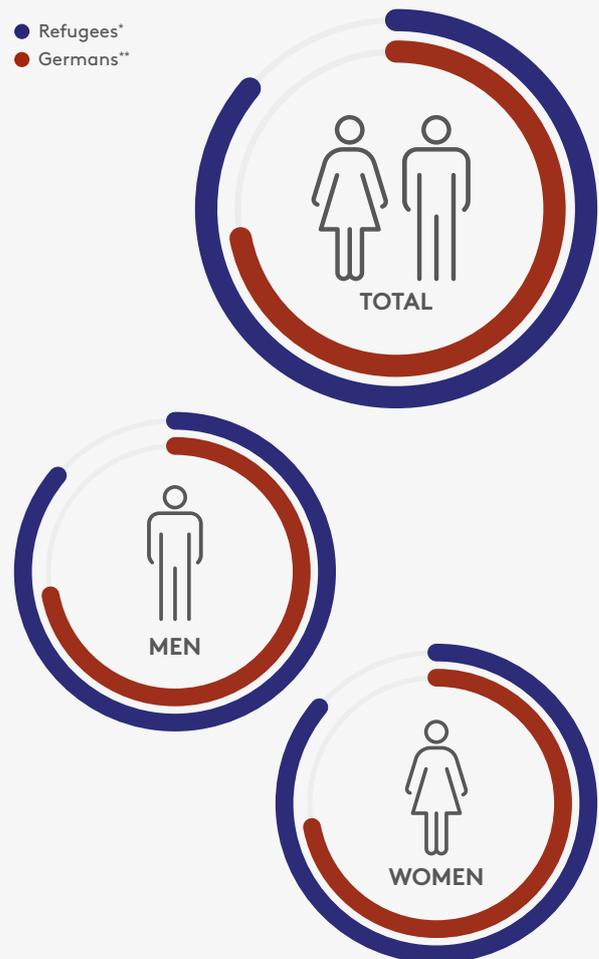
Having escaped from conflict-affected regions, a vast majority of asylum seekers in Germany aspire to establish themselves, to contribute to the host country's economy and to become self-sufficient.

**STRONG ADHERENCE TO THE BELIEF THAT ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN IS RELATED TO HAVING HER OWN JOB**

Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person

Shares of those who agreed (5-7 on a likert scale)

- Refugees\*
- Germans\*\*



\* Source: IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Survey on Refugees 2016, weighted values  
 \*\* Source: World Value Survey wave 6 (2010-2014)



# Attitudes toward immigration :

## looking beyond support and opposition

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More in Common



Social representations of immigration often matter more than we tend to think. A survey of public opinion and immigration in European Union countries suggests that citizens' concerns over immigration are one element in a wider divide facing the EU. It is not just a matter of policy-making, but of politics. We cannot tackle the challenge of adverse public opinion of immigration simply through a solution-based approach; it is an issue of some complexity. Nonetheless, our research shows that there exist a wide range of possible solutions.

We are observing a shrinking space of commonality: it appears that the opportunities to share and support broader narratives are diminishing. Current national discourses are emphasising what divides us rather than what we have in common. The question has shifted from what we are ready to share to with whom we are ready to share: settling questions of solidarity and social justice in the dangerous field of identity and culture. As these become widely debated issues, they polarize the conversation into a cleavage of extremes. This slippery narrative tends to increase withdrawal into closed circles and closed positions.

At present the traditional left-right division is increasingly fading away. In some countries a new political landscape has emerged, notably in Italy, Austria, and France. In northern European countries the main political parties, both left and right, are divided around this open v. closed axis.

So, the question is no longer whether we are able to compromise with what we have but instead whether we are able to compromise with who we are.

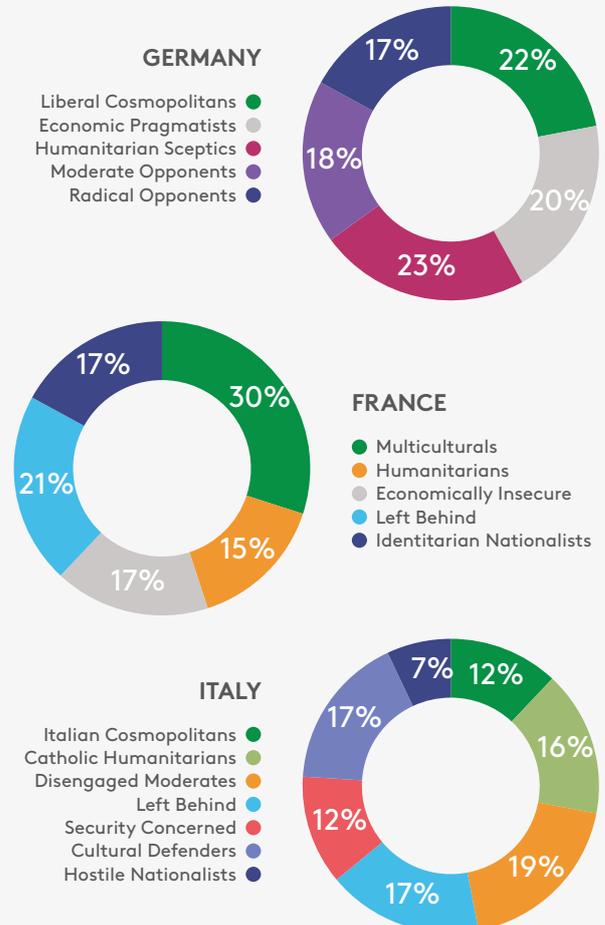
***The question is [...] whether we are able to compromise with what we are"***

This major shift in the frame of reference can be explained by massive and rapid social changes. Its drivers include income inequalities, the disruptive impacts of automation, and the globalization of labour markets, cultural items and references, increasing the salience of migration in current public debates.

### IT'S NOT LEFT VS RIGHT, IT'S OPEN VERSUS CLOSED

Growing polarization on a spectrum between cosmopolitans with open values, and nationalists with closed values.

Typically around 25-35% are in the 'open' group, 15-20% are in the 'closed' group, and 40-55% are in the 'conflicted middle' groups.





Nonetheless, there is hope. Our research in France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy has shown some consistent patterns: a quarter of interviewees belong to what we've called the 'open groups' (some version of a cosmopolitan or outward-looking group), 15 to 20% to the 'closed groups'. These extremes frame the new spectrum: in between, 40-55% fall into what we've called the 'conflicted middle'. Despite national variations, all the countries we investigated share this common pattern. These groups are less ideological, more disengaged and experiencing value conflicts. Within these middle groups, there are generally two or three distinctive segments. Each of them has very specific characteristics, socio-demographics, preoccupations and perceptions. They express mixed views: they do not identify with either of the extreme narratives. Their attitudes toward migration are driven by different concerns: some are more anxious about economic issues, others more concerned about cultural ones, and some may be entirely disengaged. They have in common a vulnerability to the "us" against "them" narrative, expressed for decades by the extreme right, and now gaining more and more influence in public opinion. By focusing their anger against the "system", against the "other", against foreigners, populists have persuaded public opinion that social policies in favour of migrants are detrimental to local populations. Torn between anxieties and open values, these people from the conflicted middle groups still express feelings of solidarity.

Although they represent a great opportunity, we often tend to listen to and debate with the extremes rather than the silent middle. We still have a hard time addressing them. As cosmopolitans, we are often disconnected from these conflicted middle groups, but engaging them in the national conversation is key if we are to assemble a majority around open values and to construct an enlarged national and European narrative.

The fact that they experience conflict shows how ambivalent their position is, and that there is a way to shift the narrative again. The key question therefore is: how can we connect with this conflicted middle? Approaches based on facts and evidence do not work. Faced with inconvenient evidence, people only become further entrenched in their positions. If we want to enlarge our impact and to bring new a public to the discussion, it seems necessary to relate to their world views and values, without having to validate them. They need to be engaged on their own terms, within their own codes and frames of reference. We must be ready to walk in their shoes, without necessarily endorsing their views but being capable of seeing the world through their eyes.

The feeling of belonging is key: people feel and think in terms of in-groups and out-groups. Speaking to this feeling of belonging may be a way to connect with conflicted middle groups. We need to frame messages that will resonate with their situation and anxieties, always in a positive way.

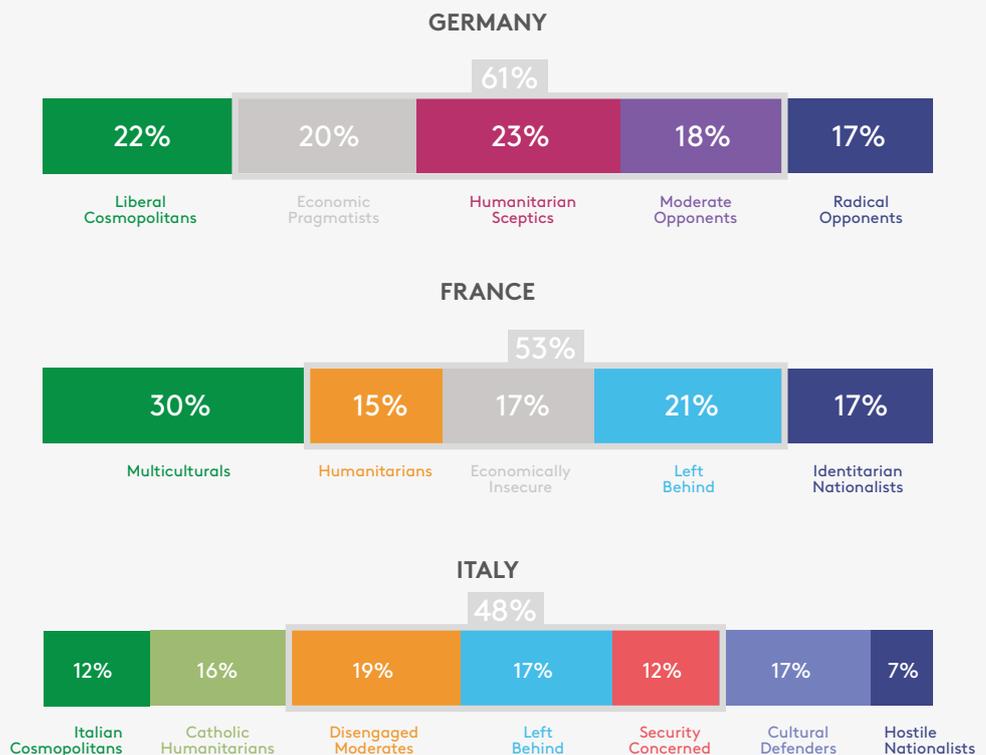
### THE MIDDLE GROUPS

There are generally two or three distinctive middle groups, making up around half the population.

They are different in each country, but they are consistently less ideological, less deeply engaged in issues and often hold conflicting views.

Their attitudes toward immigration are driven by different concerns

Some are more concerned about economic issues, others cultural issues, and some disengaged.





# What Europe is doing for Migrants?

## Public perceptions of migration and counteracting the current polarisation

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It is very hard to speak to the heart of every citizen, or to fully understand how to connect with them, given the differences in perceptions and philosophies. No matter how much information we put out there, citizens still highlight their individual points and positions.

There is no doubt that facts alone are not enough. People are not just interested in facts. Instead, what they want is empathy: the feeling that we understand what it's like to walk in their shoes. They want to feel that their lives are understood by the policy-makers that represent them.

Referendums are one way to give the people a voice. However, some have suggested that referendums could be the suicide of Europe. Maybe, maybe not. It is certainly one way for politicians to listen to the people. However, in some referendums, the questions are formulated in ways that deliberately stir up fears.

Now – to turn to what Europe is doing about immigration. There is no doubt that much has been done already. However, we do not know where we are heading. Most of the recent efforts have gone in the direction of appeasement. These were compromises made in a difficult political context. We lack a coherent overall strategy. In 2018 immigration is still, and will surely continue to be, high on the agenda and at the forefront of people's minds. This is connected with record levels of displacement, human suffering, climate change and complex political situations. At the heart of all this is the question of migration management and how to place human rights at the heart of all our policy choices. How to reconcile the interests of the host states, home states and immigrants.

Unfortunately, there are no clear answers at the moment. The strategy is still up for debate. The aim is a forward-looking and comprehensive European immigration policy based on solidarity, one intended to establish a balanced approach to deal with both regular and irregular migration.

It requires a lot of political courage to move ahead with both. Currently, we are witnessing a predominance of initiatives to fight irregular migration, but there is not enough progress towards opening channels for legal migration.

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we should all remember that immigrants are not statistics. They are human beings, and human beings have human rights and human rights are universal.

The more importance politicians give to immigration, the more people vote according to their proposals. Today many politicians play on fear, resulting in a divide. Many narratives play into the fear of immigrants. The rise of populism across Europe is another issue of significant importance for the EU as it introduces a divide between 'open and closed' perspectives.

Over the past 10 years Europe has successfully:

- 1) reformed the common European asylum system;
- 2) strengthened its borders;
- 3) strengthened the flow of information on entry;
- 4) focused on internal readmission;
- 5) achieved cooperation with third countries like Turkey and in Africa.

Still, this is not enough. Despite the existing channels of legal immigration, such as family reunion, student opportunities, and so forth, we need to create more possibilities for people to come to the EU legally.



In this context, the integration of immigrants is crucial. This goes well beyond granting citizenship. Having a country's passport is not enough. You need to feel at home, you need to feel that you belong there. And that comes later, with time, with the feeling that you are being heard and respected, that you can find a job, and so on.

The EU is working closely with Member States and the UN towards the adoption of two compacts in December 2018: the global compact on refugees which will cover many of the problems we are facing today, and the global compact on migration, where discussions are more intense, complex and subject to obstacles due to fears of loss of sovereignty, accompanied by a fear that a 'human right to migration', analogous to the right of asylum, may emerge.

## **CENTRE KANTAR SUR LE FUTUR DE L'EUROPE**

Established within Kantar Public, a global consulting and research business, the 'Centre Kantar sur le Futur de L'Europe' brings together a pan-European team of researchers with expertise in political and opinion polling, social and economic trends and migration.

The Centre aims to contribute to the quality of public debate through Kantar's analysis and knowledge of public opinion and political change in Europe and its member countries.

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