

EUROPEAN  
REFUGE/ES

# REFUGE/ES

وَوِيْتَة

CRITICAL DIALOGUE ON  
THE 'CRISIS' BY  
REFUGEES AND NON-REFUGEES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND  
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS  
JUNE 2017

SHARING  
PERSPECTIVES  
FOUNDATION



Co-funded by the European Union

# COMPARING VALUES BETWEEN REFUGEES AND NON-REFUGEES:

Whose values  
are under threat?

## ABSTRACT

Over the past few years the European Union has seen an influx of refugees in connection to the crises in the Middle East, and the conflict in Syria in particular. As a consequence of this influx a public debate about the compatibility of European values and the values of these refugees emerged. The perceived difference between the values of refugees from the Middle East and those of Europeans is seen as threat to those European values. This research project aims to understand whether this perceived difference in values exists, and how these values relate to immigration policy preferences among Europeans. The data for this research was gathered as part of the programme "European Refuge/es" organised by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation. The participants of the programme designed the survey and gathered over 3700 unique responses from all over Europe. The analysis of the data shows that there is indeed a difference in values between refugees and Europeans, with refugees being more conservative than Europeans. It, however, also shows that Europeans who hold anti-immigration views are far closer in values to refugees, than people who hold pro-immigration views. This might not come as a surprise, as more conservative political parties are usually also the parties that hold anti-immigration viewpoints, however, it does undercut the presented narrative of value difference being the reason for their anti-immigration views. These results therefore imply that policy makers should not use the perceived value differences between refugees and the host-nation as an argument to exclude people from the asylum process.

## INTRODUCTION

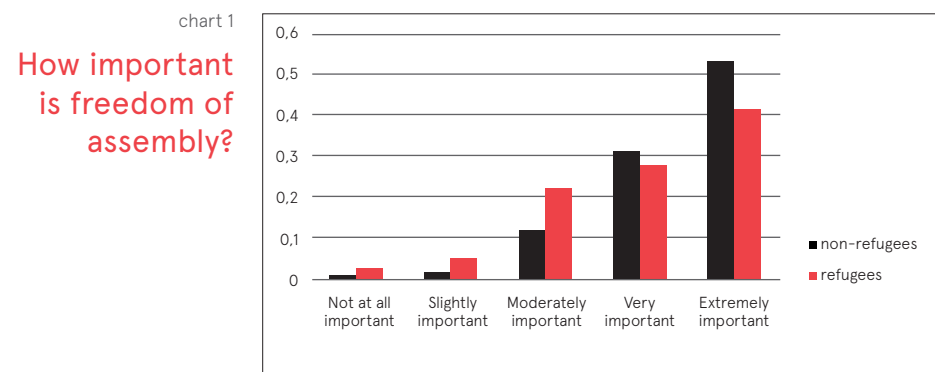
This research project was developed by the research team of the Sharing Perspectives Foundation and the participants of European Refugee-es programme in the spring of 2017. European Refuge/es was a virtual exchange programme that offered participants weekly online discussions based on a weekly theme that was introduced by scholars and practitioners through video lectures. The participants of the programme consisted of university students and people with a forced migration background. The participants of the programme came from 26 different universities across Europe. The development of the survey, its distribution, and reflection on the data for their discussions and final assignment was an integral part of the programme, designed to provide the participants with useful original data and a learning opportunity into conducting quantitative survey research.

The survey was designed around the main theme of the programme, the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, and aimed at gaining a better understanding of the opposing values of refugees and Europeans, as well as the relation of these values to anti-immigration attitudes. This focus seems appropriate in contemporary Europe, where the difference in values between refugees and Europeans is often cited by a number of politicians as a reason to limit the number of refugees a country should accept<sup>1</sup>. Refugees were defined as those people who either have, or where in the process of obtaining, refugee or asylum seeker status. The values on which respondents were questioned ranged from the importance given to freedom speech, to their stance on the welfare state. In total over 3700 unique responses were gathered. Since the programme focussed on Europe only those respondents currently residing in Europe were included in the analysis for this study. As a result, 242 refugees, and 1844 non-refugee respondents currently residing in Europe, were included in the survey.

1) During the Dutch national elections held on the 15th of March 2017 Geert Wilders ran on a platform designed around the 'defence' of Western values by limiting migration from Islamic countries. On the 3th of February 2016 Sauli Niinistö, President of Finland, used his address to parliament to claim that "Migration is a serious problem, Europe, Finland, the western way of thinking and our values have all been challenged by it". Theresa May, the current prime-minister of Great-Britain proposed a 'British value' test for visitors to the country in 2015.

## MAIN FINDINGS

We measured the values of refugees and Europeans using a series of questions concerning civil rights and social issues. Respondents of the survey were asked, for instance, how important they thought freedom of religion was, or whether they agreed that same-sex couples should have the right to adopt children. In general we found that refugees do indeed have different views from non-refugees, with refugees having a more conservative worldview than Europeans. Significant differences were found in how the two groups rated the importance of freedom of speech, gender equality, freedom of sexual orientation and freedom of assembly, with refugees consistently ranking these as less important (for instance, 54% of non-refugees found the freedom of assembly extremely important, as opposed to 42% of refugees, see chart 1). No significant differences were found for the importance of freedom of religion or press freedom.



Further questions asked how strongly the respondents agreed with a series of statements. A similar pattern to the preceding one was found, most notably in relation to the statement "work is a duty to society", with which refugees agreed more strongly than non-refugees (27% of refugees answered "strongly agree", as opposed to 17.7% of non-refugees). This suggests that the differences in values are not merely guided by policy preferences that would be more personally beneficial, as could be suggested by differences in importance of freedom of religion. Instead, the refugees generally have more conservative political viewpoints, which are traditionally associated with right-wing political parties in Europe. This finding is of great interest, since the conservative parties are generally more opposed to migration. For this reason, we also looked at the relationship between the values of non-refugees with anti-immigration policy preferences, non-refugees with pro-migration policy preferences, and refugees.

We defined non-refugees as being anti-immigration if they answered the question “What should your country’s immigration policy be?” with either “strict limits” or “prohibit people from coming”. The group that answered either “as long as jobs are available” or “let anyone come” was defined as pro-migration. Significant differences between the three groups were found for all questions, and, as suspected, non-refugees who oppose immigration were more conservative than their pro-immigration counterparts. In many cases, they were, in fact, closer in values to refugees than to pro-immigration non-refugees. This was true, for instance, in relation to the importance of gender equality (which was rated as extremely important by 56% of refugees, 55% of anti-immigration non-refugees, and 72% of pro-immigration non-refugees), and the importance of press freedom (which was rated as extremely important by 54% of refugees, 54% of anti-immigration non-refugees, and 63% of pro-immigration non-refugees, see chart 2). This pattern repeated itself across all questions asked. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that people who oppose immigration are actually closer in values to refugees than people who are in favour of immigration. Furthermore, although there are differences in values between refugees and Europeans, these same differences already exist within the European population.

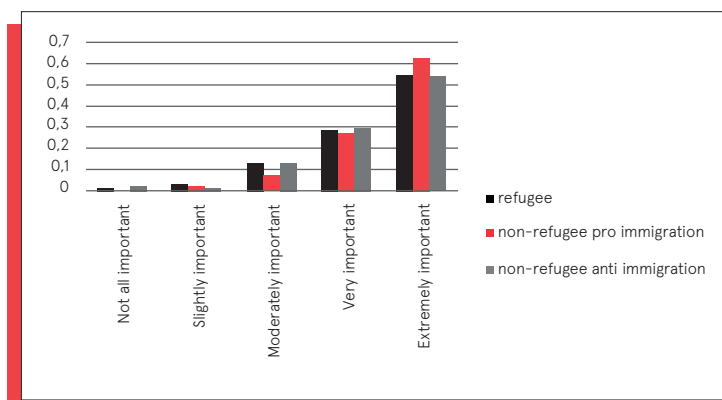


chart 2

## How important is press freedom?

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey research developed and implemented by the SHARING PERSPECTIVES FOUNDATION and the participants of the European Refuge/es programme of the foundation across the European Union reaching out to over 3600 respondents, we would like to offer the following policy recommendations:

- Value differences between refugees and Europeans exist, but mirror those already present in European societies.
- Policy makers should refrain from presenting the value differences as a threat to European nations. Especially because the Europeans who are most aligned with such policy makers, are also the ones whose values are closest to those of refugees and immigrants.
- The admittance of refugees or migrants should not be made dependent upon their perceived values and the difference between those values and the values of the host-nation, since such value differences are present already within the host-nation.

## DISCLAIMER

This study has been carried out as part of the virtual exchange programme “EUROPEAN REFUGE/ES” that was designed and implemented by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation in collaboration with several universities across the EU following a call for proposals by the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission. The information and views set out in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the EACEA.

Contact point for further information:

Bart van der Velden, Research Officer

[bart@sharingperspectivesfoundation.com](mailto:bart@sharingperspectivesfoundation.com)

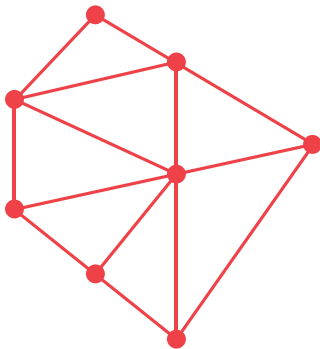
For more information about the Sharing Perspectives Foundation and its virtual exchange programmes, please visit [www.sharingperspectivesfoundation.com](http://www.sharingperspectivesfoundation.com)

## THE FOUNDATION

The Sharing Perspectives Foundation is a non-profit non-governmental organisation dedicated to providing students and academics from across the globe with an opportunity to collaboratively study contemporary Europe. Our virtual exchange programmes stimulate students and academics to cooperate effectively through new media technology and social networks. We provide online classrooms to directly bridge theory and practice by making the classroom itself a venue for cross-cultural exchange.

## VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

Virtual exchange is defined as technology-enabled, sustained, people-to-people, cross-cultural education programmes. The Sharing Perspectives Foundation has developed a format for virtual exchange programmes on topics that have an international and cross-cultural impact. These programmes are designed for higher education institutions to work collaboratively across cultural and/or national boundaries, in order to offer their students one online curriculum to jointly study issues with peers from all over the world. Our methodology is based on three pillars: provide students with international and interdisciplinary academic content on the topic; enable students to collaboratively reflect on this content from a personal perspective in an online classroom; facilitate collaborative research on the societal impact of the studied topic.



SHARING  
PERSPECTIVES  
FOUNDATION