



Attitudes towards immigrants and Syrian refugees during the ‘refugee crisis’: The case of Greece

**Stefania Kalogeraki
Department of Sociology
University of Crete, Greece**

***1st International Conference, “Migrations: Interdisciplinary Challenges”, UCRC, University
Campus Gallou, Rethymno, Crete, 17 &18 October 2019***

'Refugee crisis' and responses in Greece



- Between 2015 and 2016 the massive refugee influx challenged European countries in terms of tackling one of the largest movements of displaced people through European borders since the World War II (UNHCR 2016).
- Within the European Union, Greece became one of the major entry points by the sea as high numbers of irregular crossers, in their majority considered to be refugees from Syria, entered its territory *en route* to Northern and Central European countries (European Commission 2016).
- By the end of 2015 the total number of irregular migrant arrivals reached the record figure of 857.000 with the bulk of them being directed towards the Northern Aegean islands (European Commission 2016). In 2016 the closure of the Balkanic route and the EU-Turkey Deal resulted in the decrease of refugee flows; however thousands of refugees were left stranded in Greece waiting to be either relocated or integrated in the country.
- **Responses to the 'refugee crisis'**
 - I. Natives' responses included warm welcoming gestures and numerous volunteers helped refugees to cover their basic and urgent needs (Papataxiarchis 2016; Kalogeraki 2018).
 - II. Increasing trends in anti-refugee sentiments have been reported in national and cross-national research (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons 2016; Public Issue, 2016a; Public Issue, 2016b).

Presentation's rationale



➤ **Limitations in research**

- I. Opinion polls do not systematically explore the factors that underlie anti-refugee attitudes; hence they provide us with only a very limited understanding.
- II. Quantitative migrant research rarely differentiates attitudes towards different groups which are believed to have distinct migrating motives such as 'economic immigrants' who are perceived to have voluntarily emigrated and 'refugees' who are perceived to have been forced to do so.
- III. Nevertheless, public attitudes towards migration vary depending on the perception of individuals' motives for movement (Verkuyten, Mepham & Kros 2018); generally people are more favorably disposed towards those perceived as 'refugees' than those perceived as 'immigrants' (Mayda 2006; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006).

➤ **Rationale:**

Inspired from the ethnic competition theoretical framework, including realistic group and social identity theory (Scheepers, Gijsberts & Coenders 2002; Coenders et al. 2004), the analysis explores attitudes towards migrant groups who are perceived to have distinct migrating motives including Syrian refugees and immigrants in Greece.

By distinguishing between these two groups we investigate similarities and differences in specific individual-level determinants related to negative attitudes.

Ethnic competition theory



- **Realistic group conflict theory:** the intergroup socio-economic competition between natives and migrants over the same limited resources drives realistic and economic threat perceptions to natives' interests, which, in turn, motivate negative stances towards migrants

Social identity theory: emphasizes symbolic threats (socio-cultural competition) which are primarily related to natives' perceiving group differences in morals, values, beliefs and religion, driving anti-immigrant attitudes

- **Individual-level competition**

Socio-economic competition: natives of lower socio-economic positions are more vulnerable to intergroup competition, therefore more susceptible to anti-migrant attitudes (O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006).

Socio-cultural competition: natives emphasizing the unity and coherence of the native population as a group or as a "nation" clearly differentiating itself from migrants are more susceptible to anti-migrant attitudes (Pichler 2010).

Contextual-level competition

Attitudes towards migrants are shaped by contextual components associated with the: a) size of the ethnic minority group residing in the host country (sizable migrant groups intensify both the socio-cultural and socio-economic competition), b) national economic conditions (declining economic conditions intensify the intergroup socio-economic competition (Semyonov, Raijman & Gorodzeisky 2008)).

- **Ethnic competition theory:** the stronger the intergroup socio-economic and socio-cultural competition -either at the individual or the contextual level- the stronger threat perceptions, which in turn, reinforce the processes of social identification and contra-identification leading to negative stances towards migrants (Coenders 2001; Scheepers, Gijssels, and Coenders 2002)

Research hypotheses



- **Ethnic competition theory:** Greece is a country that satisfies both contextual competitive conditions. But as Coenders (2001, 123-124) underlines:
In addition to the effect of the contemporary national context, it can be argued that recent changes in the national circumstances might have an additional influence on chauvinism and ethnic exclusionism. For instance, a rapid increase in ethnic immigration or a sharp deterioration in economic prosperity may have a larger impact on perceived ethnic threat as compared to stable contextual circumstances.

- *H1. Greeks' opposition to Syrian refugees is expected to be higher than to immigrants*

- Opposition towards Syrian refugees and immigrants will be more strongly supported among natives:
 - I. Realistic group conflict theory
 - H2a. with low income levels*
 - H2b. performing manual labor or performing low skilled labor*
 - H2c. unemployed*

 - II. Social identity theory
 - H2d. with stronger preference for national unity*
 - H2e. with stronger preference for cultural homogeneity*

Data, measurements and methods

- **Data:** online survey conducted at the end of 2016 Greek dataset which excludes individuals who stated that both their parents and themselves were born abroad

- **Measurements:**

Dependent variables:

- i. **Opposition to Syrian refugees** includes two recoded responses, i.e. acceptance of (admit the same or higher numbers) and opposition to (admit lower or none) Syrian refugees entering Greece
- ii. **Opposition to immigrants** includes two recoded responses, i.e. acceptance of (allow all or allow people to come as long as there are jobs) and opposition to (put strict limits or prohibit people from these countries coming here) non-EU immigrants entering the country

Independent variables:

- i. **Demographic:** gender, age, educational attainment, geographical location and administrative region
- ii. **Ethnic competition theory**
 - a) **Socio-economic competition** : a) income, b) occupational class, and c) employment status

- b. **Socio-cultural competition:** a) additive score of national unity (attachment to people with the same religion, ethnic group and country of birth), b) preference of cultural homogeneity (attitudes towards multiculturalism)

Statistics:

- i. Descriptive
- ii. Logistic regression (independent variables entered in 3 blocks)
- iii. Statistically significant levels are reported for p values less than or equal to .05

Figure 1. Responses (%) of Greeks' attitudes towards Syrian refugees and immigrants entering the country

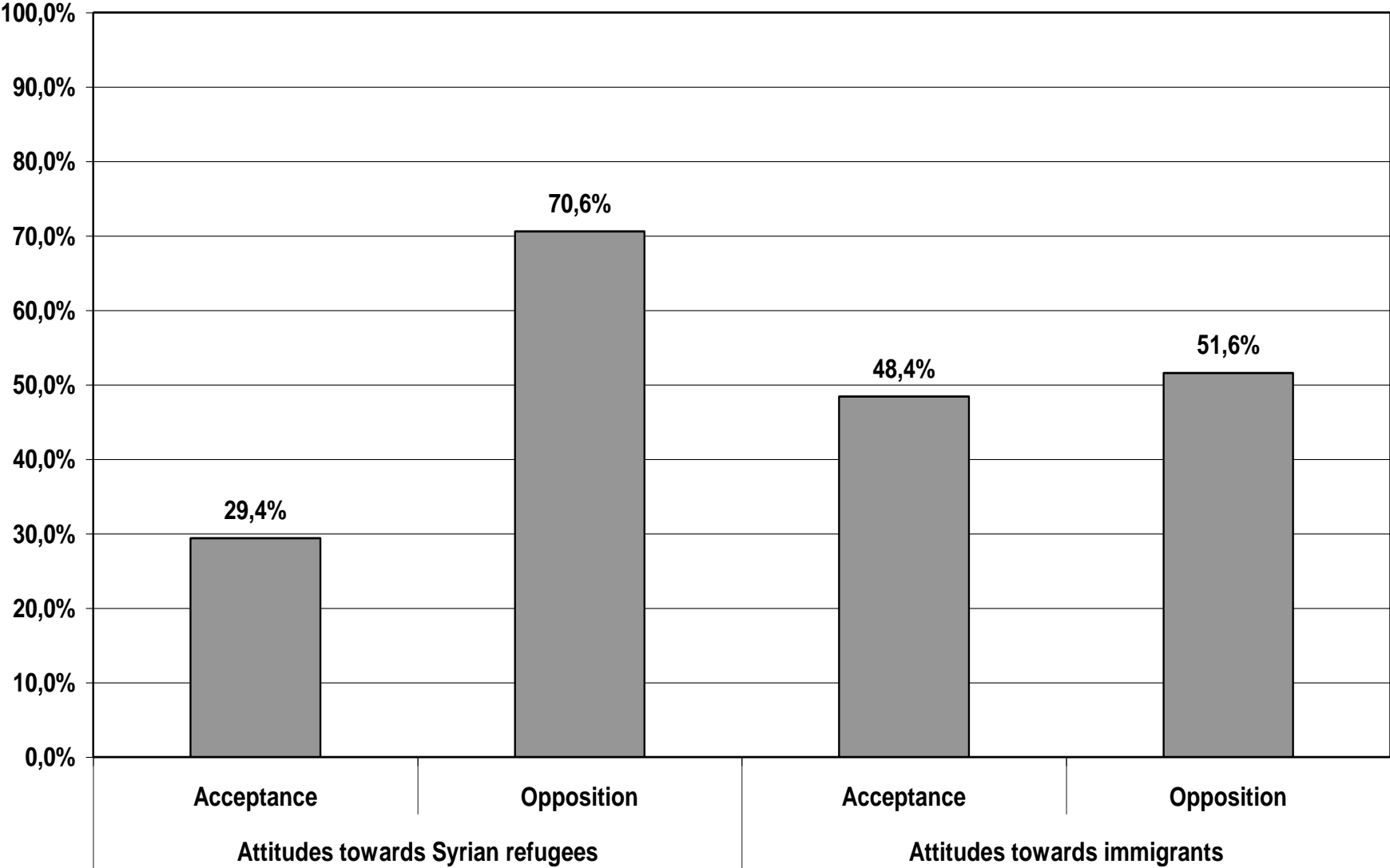


Table 1a. Descriptive analysis of respondents opposing immigrants and Syrian refugees in Greece (percentage, frequency in parenthesis)		
	Opposition to immigrants	Opposition to Syrian refugees
Gender		
Male	50.2% (467)	71.3% (666)
Female	53.1% (493)	69.9% (647)
Age groups		
18-24	39.5% (51)	51.5% (68)
25-34	56.6% (163)	71.6% (209)
35-44	53.6% (186)	72.0% (257)
45-54	50.3% (199)	75.3% (287)
55-64	52.3% (266)	68.8% (347)
65+	49.5% (94)	75.4% (144)
Educational attainment		
Higher education	44.4% (164)	66.9% (243)
Intermediate education	51.3% (349)	68.3% (454)
Lower education	55.2% (448)	74.2% (616)
Geographical location		
Urban	49.8% (626)	68.5% (854)
Semi-urban	56.3% (220)	70.3% (281)
Rural	54.0% (114)	83.6% (178)
Administrative region		
Attica	50.2% (319)	66.2% (420)
Central Macedonia-Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	56.8% (248)	76.5% (329)
Epirus and Western Macedonia	44.6% (50)	71.0% (76)
Thessaly and Central Greece	48.9% (111)	78.0% (181)
Peloponnesse, Western Greece and Ionian islands	45.2% (113)	66.5% (171)
Aegean islands	75.0% (69)	91.4% (85)
Crete	47.6% (50)	48.1% (50)

Table 1b. Descriptive analysis of respondents opposing immigrants and Syrian refugees in Greece (percentage, frequency in parenthesis)

	Opposition to immigrants	Opposition to Syrian refugees
Income		
Low income	52.5% (302)	74.9% (439)
Intermediate income	49.8% (353)	71.1% (494)
High income	48.3% (198)	62.3% (255)
Occupational class		
Professional or higher technical work	40.1% (97)	71.1% (172)
Manager or senior administrator	56.8% (117)	66.2% (133)
Clerical	57.0% (335)	72.5% (430)
Sales or services	42.5% (85)	64.7% (123)
Foreman or supervisor of other workers	41.8% (23)	77.8% (42)
Skilled manual work	40.8% (42)	59.4% (60)
Semi-skilled or unskilled manual work	56.6% (94)	69.9% (116)
Employment status		
Full-time employee	51.2% (262)	72.6% (373)
Part-time	44.7% (85)	65.6% (122)
Unemployed	57.6% (291)	68.5% (348)
Retired/sick	47.1% (219)	70.2% (322)
In education/military service	45.1% (32)	58.4% (45)
Housekeep	61.2% (71)	89.5% (102)
Multiculturalism		
Disagree or strongly disagree	68.1% (388)	88.3% (505)
Neither disagree nor agree	58.0% (392)	76.7% (532)
Agree or strongly agree	29.3% (180)	46.6% (277)

Table 2. Binary logistic regression for predicting attitudes towards immigrants (n=1498)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR
Gender (Ref.female)									
Male	-.163	.113	.850	-.090	.123	.914	-.143	.133	.867
Age-groups(Ref. 18-24 years old)									
25-34	1.120***	.294	3.065	1.082***	.311	2.950	.521	.328	1.683
35-44	1.017***	.287	2.765	1.049***	.314	2.854	.522	.332	1.686
45-54	.818**	.283	2.266	.917**	.311	2.502	.411	.328	1.508
55-64	1.115***	.280	3.051	1.218***	.319	3.379	.711*	.336	2.035
Over 65	.931**	.307	2.537	1.093**	.363	2.982	.662	.383	1.938
Educational attainment (Ref.High)									
Intermediate	.344*	.152	1.410	.131	.167	1.140	-.080	.180	.923
Lower	.350*	.150	1.419	.152	.169	1.164	-.216	.183	.806
Geographical location (Ref.Urban)									
Semi-urban	.325*	.156	1.384	.298	.159	1.348	.338*	.169	1.402
Rural	.253	.186	1.288	.305	.194	1.357	.283	.207	1.327
Administrative regions (Ref. Attica)_									
Central Macedonia- Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	.456**	.150	1.578	.420**	.156	1.521	.305	.169	1.357
Epirus and Western Greece	-.145	.248	.865	-.195	.255	.823	-.174	.270	.841
Thessaly and Central Greece	-.087	.192	.916	-.126	.198	.881	-.273	.210	.761
Peloponnesse- Western Greece and Ionian Islands	-.578**	.188	.561	-.528**	.197	.590	-.539*	.211	.583
Aegean islands	.898**	.330	2.454	.964**	.340	2.623	.849*	.355	2.337
Crete	-.406	.243	.667	-.374	.252	.688	-.197	.271	.821

Table 2 (continued). Binary logistic regression for predicting attitudes towards immigrants

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR
Income (Ref. High income)									
Low income (less than)				.156	.176	1.169	.034	.188	1.035
Intermediate income				.153	.153	1.166	.115	.165	1.122
Occupational class (Ref. Professional/higher technical work)									
Manager or Senior Administrator				.743***	.214	2.101	.974***	.232	2.648
Clerical				.724***	.188	2.064	.826***	.201	2.284
Sales or Services				.097	.233	1.102	.284	.250	1.329
Foreman or Supervisor of Other Workers				.308	.336	1.361	.359	.359	1.431
Skilled Manual Work				.169	.274	1.184	.105	.291	1.111
Semi-Skilled or Unskilled Manual Work				.610*	.249	1.840	.604*	.264	1.830
Employment status (Ref. Full-time)									
Part-time				-.146	.204	.864	-.018	.218	.982
Unemployed				.090	.157	1.095	.087	.166	1.091
Retired/sick				-.090	.180	.914	-.321	.194	.725
In education/military service				.397	.367	1.487	.186	.384	1.204
Housekeep				.431	.299	1.539	.054	.317	1.055
National unity indicator							.242**	.079	1.274
Multiculturalism (Ref. Agree)									
Disagree							1.848***	.160	6.344
Neither agree nor disagree							1.243***	.145	3.467
Constant	-1.241***	.302	.289	-1.788***	.377	.167	-2.828***	.471	.059
Nagelkerke R2	.066			.098			.239		

Table 3. Binary logistic regression analysis for predicting attitudes towards Syrian refugees (n=1487)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR
Gender (Ref.female)									
Male	-.092	.126	.912	.032	.136	1.033	-.009	.148	.991
Age-groups(Ref. 18-24 years old)									
25-34	1.099***	.298	3.002	.882**	.320	2.416	.310	.346	1.363
35-44	.887**	.286	2.429	.803*	.322	2.232	.289	.352	1.335
45-54	.910***	.284	2.485	.837**	.322	2.310	.300	.350	1.350
55-64	.809**	.278	2.245	.735*	.330	2.087	.261	.358	1.298
Over 65	1.101***	.317	3.008	.754*	.388	2.125	.442	.423	1.555
Educational attainment (Ref.High)									
Intermediate	.081	.164	1.085	.093	.180	1.097	-.084	.197	.919
Lower	.495**	.164	1.640	.526**	.185	1.693	.180	.204	1.197
Area of living (Ref.Urban)									
Semi-urban	-.039	.170	.962	-.044	.173	.957	-.151	.187	.859
Rural	.868***	.241	2.381	.892***	.251	2.439	.977***	.268	2.656
Administrative regions (Ref. Attica)_									
Central Macedonia- Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	.650***	.169	1.916	.633***	.175	1.884	.617***	.193	1.853
Epirus and Western Greece	.461	.287	1.586	.525	.293	1.690	.759**	.320	2.137
Thessaly and Central Greece	.961***	.234	2.613	.935***	.240	2.548	.928***	.259	2.529
Peloponese Western Greece and Ionian Islands	-.243	.194	.784	-.340	.203	.712	-.306	.219	.736
Aegean islands	1.641***	.476	5.163	1.632***	.483	5.113	1.586**	.508	4.884
Crete	-.675**	.247	.509	-.715**	.260	.489	-.541+	.287	.582

Table 3 (continued). Binary logistic regression analysis for predicting attitudes towards Syrian refugees

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR	B	S.E	OR
Income (Ref. High income)									
Low income (less than)				.602**	.193	1.826	.498*	.208	1.645
Intermediate income				.242	.166	1.274	.218	.181	1.244
Occupational class (Ref. Professional/higher technical work)									
Manager or Senior Administrator				-.280	.237	.756	-.138	.260	.871
Clerical				-.108	.204	.898	-.198	.222	.820
Sales or Services				-.511*	.251	.600	-.468	.276	.626
Foreman or Supervisor of Other Workers				.309	.389	1.362	.421	.431	1.524
Skilled Manual Work				-.710*	.291	.492	-.898**	.321	.408
Semi-Skilled or Unskilled Manual Work				-.364	.279	.695	-.504	.304	.604
Employment status (Ref. Full-time)									
Part-time				-.373	.219	.689	-.241	.241	.786
Unemployed				-.450**	.174	.638	-.554**	.187	.575
Retired/sick				.117	.204	1.124	-.136	.221	.873
In education/military service				.169	.405	1.184	-.067	.445	.935
Housekeep				1.407**	.481	4.082	1.025*	.500	2.788
National unity indicator							.269**	.087	1.308
Multiculturalism (Ref. Agree)									
Disagree							2.015***	.185	7.504
Neither agree nor disagree							1.554***	.158	4.729
Constant	-.548+	.303	.578	-.470	.386	.625	-1.573**	.507	.207
Nagelkerke R2	.108			.149			.304		

Discussion



- Greeks' opposition to Syrian refugees is stronger than to immigrants who are perceived to be entering the country in order to improve their working and living conditions.
- Public opinion towards migrants is more positive when migration is perceived to be forced rather than voluntary (Verkuyten, Mepham & Kros 2018), however Greeks' attitude towards Syrian refugees is not shaped by the fact that these newcomers have fled armed conflict in Syria

I. **Potential contextual level explanations**

In times of unexpected and acute changes in the intergroup socio-economic and socio-cultural competition (Coenders 2001), natives' perceptions of threats heighten leading to unfavorable attitudes specifically targeting groups involved in such changes (Scheepers, Gijsberts & Coenders 2002; Coenders et al. 2004).

➤ **Individual determinants shaping anti-refugee and anti-immigrant attitudes**

- I. Opposition to Syrian refugees primarily stems from perceptions of symbolic threats towards natives' unity and cultural homogeneity whereas socio-economic threats are less important. Due to the perceived cultural and religious distinctiveness between Greeks and Syrians, socio-cultural threats might play a more decisive role than socio-economic threats in shaping opposition to Syrian refugees.
- II. Opposition to immigrants is mainly associated with socio-cultural competition whereas the findings for socio-economic competition are in the expected direction, whilst non-significant.

➤ **Limitations**

Opposition indicators are based on single items; however attitudes towards migrants involve complex concepts that should be measured with composite indexes (Roots, Masso & Ainsaar 2016)

Future research and policy implications



- Understanding public attitudes towards newcomers, and particularly refugees, as well as designing adequate policies, is of critical importance in enabling effective integration into new host countries, specifically in times of high inflow of people seeking protection.
- Future research should: a) conduct cross-national studies to explore attitudes towards migrant groups which are perceived to have distinct migrating motives, b) apply refined measurements of opposition, c) shed light on the mechanisms that cultural threat perceptions are shaped towards specific migrant groups.
- Policy initiatives including cultural diversity programs may curtail the main source of anti-migrant attitudes, which as demonstrated in the present study, are symbolic and cultural threat perceptions.
- While the design and implementation of these policies are rather challenging tasks for politicians and other social actors, in the long run, they can make significant inroads in countering the perceptions of migrants as threats to the presumed cultural homogeneity and Greek ethnic identity.

References



- UNHCR, 2016. Global trends : Forced displacement in 2015. Geneva, Switzerland, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. (<http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>)
- European Commission. 2016. "Greece: Response to the Refugee Crisis". ECHO Factsheet. (http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/greece_en.pdf)
- Wike, Richard, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons. 2016. "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs" (<http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/>)
- Public Issue. 2016a. "Political Barometer 151, December 2015 – Special Issue: Attitudes Towards Refugees". Accessed 30 April. <http://www.publicissue.gr/en/2962/pol-bar-151-dec-2015-ref/>
- .2016b. "Political Barometer 154, March 2016 – Special Issue: Attitudes Towards Refugees". (<http://www.publicissue.gr/en/2978/pol-bar-154-mar-2016-ref/>)
- Kalogeraki, Stefania. 2018. "Volunteering for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Greece". In *Solidarity in Europe. Citizens' Responses in Times of Crisis*, edited by C. Lahusen and M. Grasso, 169-194. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham
- Coenders, Marcel. 2001. "Nationalistic Attitudes and Ethnic Exclusionism in a Comparative Perspective: An Empirical Study of Attitudes towards the Country and Ethnic Immigrants in 22 Countries." PhD diss., ICS, Nijmegen University.
- Scheepers, Peer, Mérove Gijsberts and Marcel Coenders .2002. "Ethnic Exclusionism in European Countries. Public Opposition to Civil Rights for Legal Migrants as a Response to Perceived Ethnic Threat." *European Sociological Review* 18(1): 17–34.
- O'Rourke, Kevin H., and Richard Sinnott. 2006. "The Determinants of Individual Attitudes towards Immigration". *European Journal of Political Economy* 22(4): 838-861. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2005.10.005>
- Coenders, Marcel, Mérove, Gijsberts and Peer Scheepers. 2004. "Resistance to the Presence of Immigrants and Refugees in 22 Countries". In *Nationalism and Exclusion of Migrants: Cross-national Comparisons*, edited by M. Gijsberts, L. Hagendoorn and P. Scheepers, 97-120. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Coenders, Marcel, Mérove Gijsberts, Louk Hagendoorn and Peer Scheepers. 2004. "Introduction". In *Nationalism and Exclusion of Migrants: Cross-National Comparisons*, edited by M. Gijsberts, L. Hagendoorn, and P. Scheepers, 1–25. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Papataxiarchis, E. (2016). Being "there": At the front Line of the "European refugee crisis" – Part 1. *Anthropology Today*, 32 (2), 5-9,
- Pichler, F. 2010. "Foundations of Anti-immigrant Sentiment: The Variable Nature of Perceived Group Threat Across Changing European Societies, 2002-2006." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 51(6):1-25. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715210379456>
- Roots, Ave, Anu Masso, and Mare Ainsaar .2016. "Measuring Attitudes towards Immigrants: Validity of Index Variables across Countries". Paper prepared for the 3rd International ESS Conference, Lausanne, 13-15 July.
- Verkuyten, M, Mepham, K. and Kros, M. (2018). "Public Attitudes towards Support for Migrants: The Importance of Perceived Voluntary and Involuntary Migration." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (5): 901–918. doi: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1367021.
- Mayda, Anna Maria. 2006. "Who is Against Immigration? A Cross-country Investigation of Individual Attitudes towards Immigrants." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 88 (3): 510–530.
- Semyonov, Moshe, Rebeca Raijman, and Anastasia Gorodzeisky. 2008. "Foreigners' Impact on European Societies: Public Views and Perceptions in a Cross-national Comparative Perspective." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49 (1): 5–29.



Thank you for your attention!

Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the project “European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis: Conditions, forms, role models and policy responses” (TransSOL). This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649435. The TransSOL consortium is coordinated by the University of Siegen (Christian Lahusen), and is formed, additionally, by the Glasgow Caledonian University (Simone Baglioni), European Alternatives e.V. Berlin (Daphne Büllesbach), the Sciences Po Paris (Manlio Cinalli), the University of Florence (Carlo Fusaro), the University of Geneva (Marco Giugni), the University of Sheffield (Maria Grasso), the University of Crete (Maria Kousis), the University of Siegen (Christian Lahusen), European Alternatives Ltd. LBG UK (Lorenzo Marsili), the University of Warsaw (Maria Theiss), and the University of Copenhagen (Hans-Jörg Trenz).”



This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649435.

www.transsol.eu
