



I-CLAIM

Improving the Living
and Labour Conditions
of Irregularised Migrant
Households in Europe

Public understanding and attitudes to irregular migration in Finland

Country report

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Executive Summary

This country report presents evidence from the I-CLAIM public perceptions survey carried out in Finland in February 2025 with a nationally-representative sample of 1,025 adult respondents. It examines what people in Finland understand about *irregularity* and how they evaluate irregularised migrants, with particular attention to work.

The results reveal tightened attitudes towards immigration in general. Most respondents stated that immigration is a threat for Finland and has a negative impact on the economy, but still it was considered enriching Finnish culture. In general, it seems that the influence of gender in shaping attitudes towards immigration has diminished, and age group as well as political affiliation are more appropriate predictors instead.

The findings point out a substantial lack of knowledge about irregular migration. Respondents significantly overestimated the share of irregular migrants in Finland. Women, older adults and right-leaning voters were especially inclined to overestimations. Further, the pathways to irregularity were unclear for the public. Most respondents judged pending asylum claims the main reason for irregularity but did not recognise more hidden pathways such as being born in Finland to parents who do not have legal residence status. These findings signal that attitudes towards irregular migration might be more shaped by media and political discourse than factual knowledge.

Economically important sectors such as cleaning, delivery, construction and care were recognised as sectors in which irregularised migrants work. Respondents reported feeling some level of unease when encountering irregularised migrants, especially in intimate home settings. Preferences for migrant workers were found to be pragmatic, but racialized and gendered. Respondents favoured aspects such as language fluency, longer stay in Finland, recommended candidates and family ties in Finland, but preferred Ukrainian candidates over Iraqi and Somali ones as well as women over men. Similarly, respondents considered aspects of social belonging, language skills and social relations, as the most significant signs of integration.

Perceptions of irregular migration and irregularised migrants in Finland are fragmented, ambivalent and not particularly well informed. Attitudes are a mix of pragmatic views and evident suspicion demonstrated in racialized and gendered outlooks. These findings highlight the need to address both inaccurate beliefs and the wider narrative frameworks that shape how irregularity is discussed in the public sphere.

1. Introduction

Irregular migration is a situation where foreign nationals residing in a given country do not, for various reasons, hold legal residence. Public knowledge and attitudes toward this situation, as well as toward migrants in this situation (irregularised migrants) is limited in Finland, especially within the context of work. Given this, the team from the Horizon Europe-funded project “Improving the living and labour conditions of irregularised migrant households in Europe” (I-CLAIM) conducted an online survey on public perceptions of irregular migration in February 2025 in all the countries covered by the project to improve knowledge on the matter. Finland was one of those countries. The survey was designed to capture not only general attitudes toward irregular migration, but also more specific views related to work, employment, and social integration. These are areas that play a central role in both the lived experiences of irregularised migrants and in public debates.

This is to our knowledge, the first report on public perceptions towards *irregular* migration in Finland. Attitudes towards immigration are part of the European Social Survey (ESS) and Finland has been discussed as one case in analyses using ESS data (e.g. Rockwool Foundation 2025; Vogt Isaksen 2019, see also Koikkalainen et al. 2021). However, the ESS survey questions relate to migration in general without a specific focus on irregular migration. According to the ESS survey data from 2023, native respondents in Finland were among the most positive towards immigration when asked about the impact of immigration to the country’s economy and to whether immigrants make country better place to live. Also, positive attitudes towards accepting new migrations has also increased in Finland between 2004 and 2023 (Rockwool Foundation 2025). It is interesting to see how the public perceptions in the I-Claim survey compares with the findings from ESS.

This report is closely linked to earlier work on the narrative construction of migrant irregularity in Finland across media, politics, and civil society (Merikoski 2025). Our previous analysis revealed that the public narratives related to (irregular) migration in Finland revolve around the border crisis and the figure of the asylum seeker, while public narratives seldom discuss irregularised migrants as workers unless the focus is on the labour exploitation of vulnerable migrants. Moreover, our previous study of public narratives showed the contestations and inconsistencies in the ways in which irregular migration is discussed across media, politics, and civil society. Terms such as refugee, asylum seeker, migrant and immigrant are often used interchangeably while people crossing borders are often described as a faceless mass.

Against this background, the survey is informed by the concept of *irregularity assemblage* (Sigona & van Liempt 2025), which understands irregularity not as a fixed legal status but as a dynamic and relational condition produced at the intersection of various regulatory frameworks (Gonzales et al., 2019) and the outcome of administrative processes (Näre et al. 2024). The survey explores how far these complexities are recognised by the Finnish public, and how public understandings of irregularity shape attitudes toward irregularised migrants, particularly in the context of work.

Drawing on a harmonised survey design and analysis template used across the I-CLAIM countries, and a presentation template set by the UK report (Lessard-Phillips and Sigona, 2025), this Finland report first describes the survey and its respondents before addressing the following questions:

- 1) What does the public know about irregular migration and irregular migrants?
- 2) What are public attitudes toward irregular migration and irregular migrants within the context of work?

2. About the Survey

2.1. Development and methodology

The I-CLAIM survey examined how adults in Finland understand irregularity and perceive it, as well as irregularised migrants. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered by YouGov to members of its Finnish panel that included 'traditional' as well as experimental¹ instruments to gauge public opinion on the matter. In addition to collecting attitudinal data, the survey also collected background information about the respondents. Detailed information is available in the technical report (Abraham, 2025).

The survey was developed collaboratively within the I-CLAIM consortium through a series of design workshops and iterative review. Prior to the fieldwork stage, the survey was also tested and piloted with some respondents. The final dataset included responses to the main survey as well as demographic variables from the YouGov panel data.

2.2. Target population, sample and fieldwork

The Finnish adult population was the target population for the survey, and the aim was to collect a minimum of 1,000 responses. Respondents were drawn from the panel of YouGov's registered users and selected using "targeted quota sampling" (Abraham, 2025). To make the sample representative of the Finnish adult population, sampling selection strategy and weighing used the following characteristics: age; gender and education level; vote at the 2023 Parliamentary Election and region; and level of political interest.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th and 18th February 2025. The final number of respondents who participated in the survey was 1,025.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Stata and include an array of relevant descriptive (univariate and bivariate) and inferential (regressions) statistical procedures. All analyses used the provided sampling weights and none of the information presented in the report are based on small cell counts (<5). This included percentage frequency distribution and cross-tabulations for categorical variables, as well as tests to determine the presence of a relationship between variables and differences in proportions. In the case of continuous variables, means and standard deviations were used, and appropriate tests were used to investigate differences in means.

Results from the experimental questions were analysed using the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) approach to estimate selection probabilities across attribute categories, and Marginal Means (MMs) to capture attribute preference across main groups and overall likelihood of attribute selection (Hainmueller et al., 2014; Leeper et al., 2020). Except where substantively relevant, respondents with missing data were excluded, leading to variation in effective sample sizes across analyses.

¹ Experimental survey instruments, an increasingly popular tool to gauge public views in Migration research, involve experimentally manipulating elements of a survey/survey question to avoid issues such as response bias, among other (Sobolewska and Lessard-Phillips, 2024).

2.4. Survey respondents' main characteristics

In this section, we provide an overview of the key characteristics of the respondents. The corresponding detailed tables are presented in the appendix (Tables A.2–A.4), with Table A.2 summarising the main demographic features of the sample.

The average age of respondents was just under 50 years, with 68% aged 40 or above. Women made up 50.9% of the sample and men 49.1%, and just over 3% identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group. A majority of respondents (63.3%) were married or partnered, and most lived in suburban or rural areas (62%). Geographically, respondents were distributed across the country, with a slightly higher concentration in Helsinki and Southern Finland than in other regions.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics (Table A.3), 20.8% of the Finnish respondents reported having low levels of education (*kansakoulu*, *peruskoulu*, or preferred not to say), 54% having medium levels of education (up to *ylioppilastutkinto*, *ammattikoulu*, or *opistotason tutkinto*), and 25.2% having high levels of education (first degree or higher, *ammattikorkeakoulutus*, *alempi yliopisto- tai*, *ylempi yliopistotutkinto tai*, *lisensiaatin- tai tohtoritutkinto*). Just over 50% of respondents were in work (either full-time or part-time), and 49.5% reported a low household income (up to 40 500€ per year), 40.9% a medium household income (40 500€–94 499€), and 9.6% a high level of household income (94 500€ and above). Among those who voted, most respondents reported having voted for the National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen Kokoomus*) (17.4%), followed by the Finns Party (16.8%) (*Perussuomalaiset*), Social Democratic Party (*Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue*) (16.6%) and Centre Party (*Suomen Keskusta*) (9.5%).

Given the focus of the survey, we also examined respondents' own links to, and experiences of, migration (Table A.4). These were captured through several indicators: being born outside Finland (2.2% of respondents); having at least one parent born abroad (4.3%); having lived abroad themselves (11.7%); and having friends who are immigrants (40.9%).

In the report, we use some of these characteristics to devise groups for comparison, along the following lines: gender (male/female), age group (18–39; 40–64; 65+), and political views through the party voted for at the last Parliamentary Election (National Coalition Party, Finns Party, Social Democratic Party, Centre Party, Other parties, No vote). It is important to note that the populist Finns Party has in the past 15 years developed from a moderate centrist party to a radical anti-immigration party especially after 2017 when the party split in two and the moderate politicians left the party, leaving it to the Right-wing faction alone (Kovala et al. 2022).

2.4.1. Views toward immigration

The survey began by asking respondents to identify the principal areas of (policy) concern for Finland as well as for themselves, enabling an assessment of the extent to which immigration emerged as an issue of relevance. This finding is in line with Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) review of studies on attitudes towards immigration according to which attitudes on migration are driven mostly about a “symbolic concern” over the nation as a whole rather than self-interest or impact on one's own economic situation (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, p. 227). In terms of the perceived relevance of immigration as a concern, 59% of respondents indicated that immigration constituted a major issue for Finland, while 33.7% regarded it as an issue of personal relevance.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the perceived costs and benefits of migration in two areas, following items asked in the European Social Survey (Heath et al., 2016): (1) contribution regarding taxes and services (Figure 1), and (2) the impact of immigrants on Finland's cultural life (Figure 2). While responses were

recorded on a 0–10 scale, ranging from a more negative (0) to a more positive (10) outlook, here the answers were grouped into three categories: Negative outlook (scores of 0–4); Neutral outlook (score 5); and Positive outlook (scores 6–10). Differences across the main respondent groups were also examined.

Figure 1 shows that more than 55% of respondents believed immigrants take out more than they contribute in taxes and services, while 25.8% perceived immigrants as contributing more than they receive. These numbers point towards more negative attitudes towards migration than indicated in the ESS data from 2023 (Rockwool Foundation 2025). This might relate to the current political and economic climate. Orpo's right-wing coalition government including anti-immigration Finns Party formed the government in 2023 and introduced significant austerity measures and several restrictions to migration legislation (Merikoski et al. 2024). Research has shown that during times of economic austerity migration is more likely to be perceived as a competition for social services and resources (Glorius 2018; Meuleman et al. 2020; Vogt Isaksen 2019).

Views toward the issue are generally consistent between men and women, whereas there are more differences across age groups (with the younger age group holding a more positive outlook) and political affiliation (with those affiliating with the Finns Party and National Coalition having a more negative outlook).

These findings are in line with previous research has shown that public attitudes towards migration have become more polarised in Finland alongside many Western European countries since 2002: older and less educated respondents tend to display the most critical views towards immigration, while younger and highly educated respondents' attitudes towards migration are more favourable (Glorius 2018).

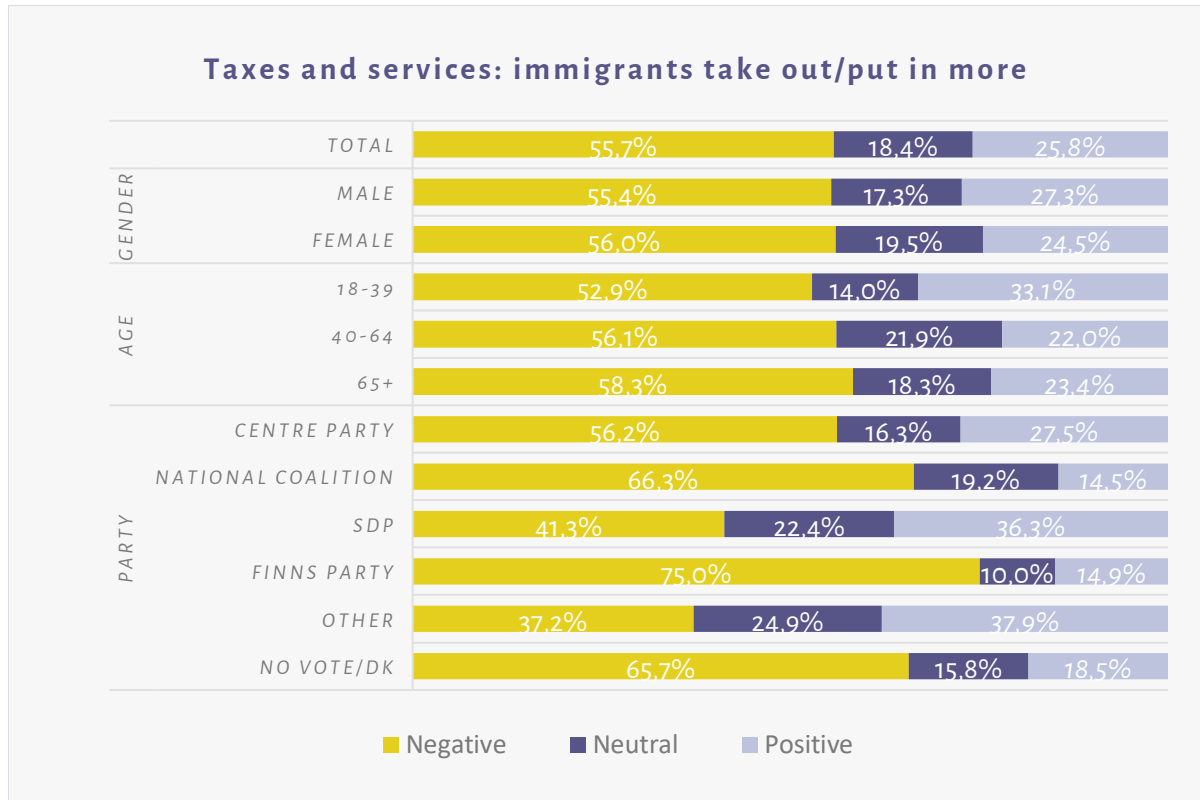


Figure 1 Perceived costs and benefits of migration among I-CLAIM survey respondents: immigrant take out/put in more (taxes and services). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=946.

The link between the current economic climate and negative views on migration in social welfare terms is reflected in the finding that, while just over 55% of respondents expressed a negative view of immigrants' contribution to taxes and services, a clear majority (61.2%) held a positive view regarding immigrants' impact on Finland's cultural life. Only 27.1% of respondents had a more negative outlook. Women, younger and more than 65-year-old respondents appeared to have a more positive outlook. Again, respondents who voted for Finns Party exhibited a more negative outlook with over 57.1 % having a negative view contrasted with the main opposition party SDP voters having the most positive views of 79.7 %.

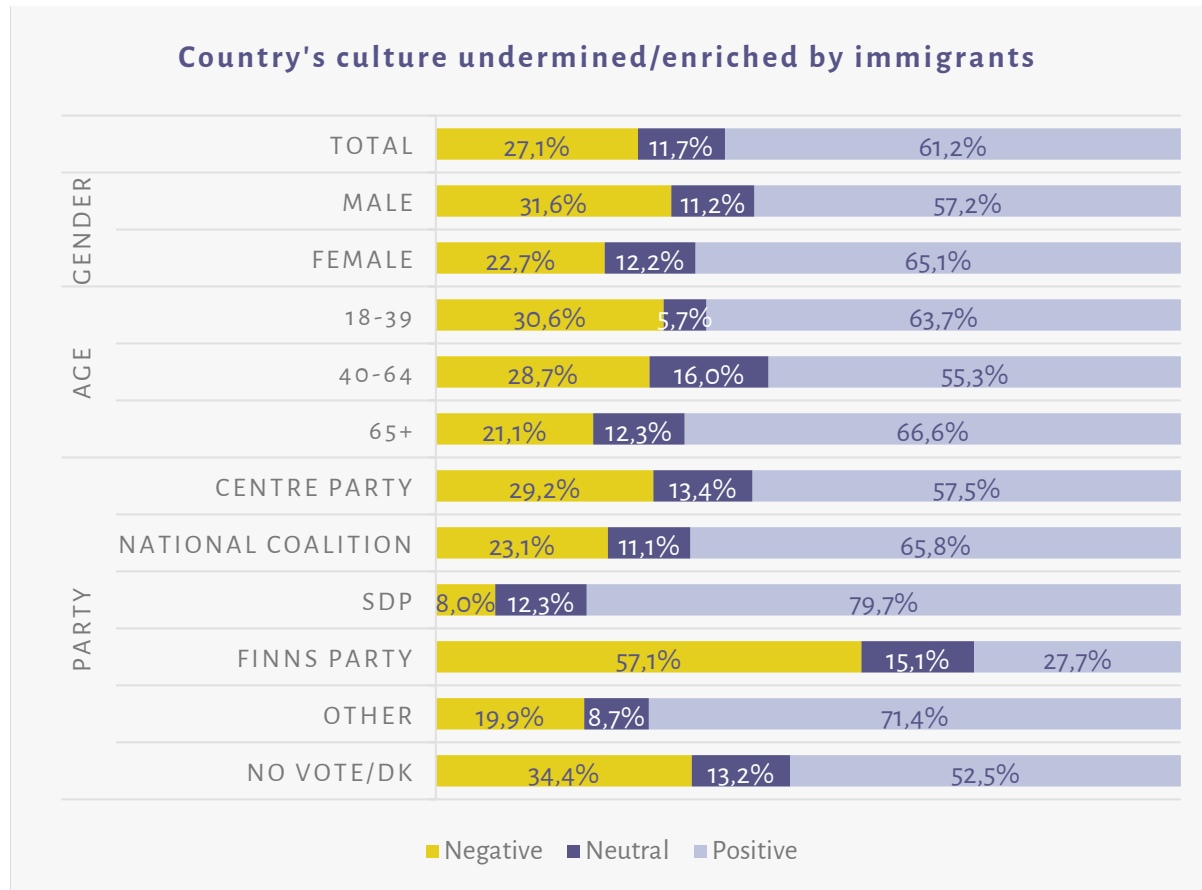


Figure 2 Perceived costs and benefits of migration among I-CLAIM survey respondents: Cultural life undermined/enriched by immigrants. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=974.

Taken together, these findings provide a broad picture of the survey respondents, their demographic profile, and their general views on immigration. The next section considers how these respondents perceive irregular migration and irregularised migrants specifically.

3. Main Results

Having outlined the main characteristics of the respondent sample and their general views on immigration, the next section turns to the core questions guiding this report:

- 1) What does the public know about irregular migration and irregularised migrants?
- 2) What are public attitudes toward irregular migration and irregularised migrants within the context of work?

Each of these questions is addressed in a dedicated subsection, first presenting results for the full sample and subsequently examining differences across key respondent groups (gender, age, and party voted for).

3.1. Knowledge of irregular migration and irregularised migrants

This section examines respondents' knowledge of irregular migration and irregularised migrants. It first considers perceptions of the scale of irregular migration, the extent to which it is viewed as a concern, and the scenarios respondents associate with becoming irregular. The section then turns to work-related aspects, including the sectors in which irregularised migrants are perceived to be employed and levels of perceived and social distance toward irregularised migrants in work-related settings.

3.1.1. *Scale and level of concern*

One of the key knowledge gaps relates to the estimated scale of irregular migration in Finland. Accordingly, the survey asked respondents to provide their estimate of the proportion of irregularised migrants within the foreign-born population. Like in all countries, there is a great uncertainty regarding the estimates of irregularised migrants. A common range of irregularised migrants in Finland is between 700 and 5,000, which equates to between 0.2% and 1.5% of the foreign-born population (MirreM, 2025). In order to gauge more closely which end of this range gives us the most accurate estimate, we checked the most recent statistics on irregularised migrants from three different sources. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland has statistics on the number of beneficiaries of social assistance for undocumented migrants. According to these figures there were less than 2,000 individuals (1,899) receiving such assistance in 2024 (Kela 2025). We then asked for Police statistics collected by the National Bureau of Investigation. These statistics include data on what is categorised as 'illegal stay' in Finland by the Police and the figures include asylum seekers encountered within the country who have registered themselves with the authorities when applying for asylum, but who did not have a right of residence in Finland at the time of their asylum application. They also include figures on encountered cases rather than individuals, so the same person can be entered several times to the statistics. By misleadingly including figures on asylum seekers and possibly several cases of the same person, the police statistics reach a number of 4,064 of which 1,857 were cases of breaching the Asylum Act and 2,207 were asylum seekers in 2024 (National Bureau of Investigation 2025). Thirdly, Eurostat statistics on third country nationals found to be illegally present in Finland in 2024 was 875 (Eurostat 2025). Given these numbers, the share of irregularised migrants in Finland is probably toward the lower end of that range at around 0.2-0.4 % of the foreign population of little over 520,000 (Statistics Finland 2025).

Considering that the maximum number of the estimated range used as a comparison in the survey might itself be an overestimation of the number of irregularised migrants in Finland, and taking sample size considerations into account, we evaluated whether respondents' estimates about the share of irregularised migrants in the Finland were 'on/around/ up to 10% above the estimated range' (0-12%) and 'More than 10%

above the estimated range' (over 12%). Results are shown in Figure 3. Results shown in the figure indicate that more than three quarters of respondents overestimated the share of irregularised migrants by over 10%, whereas 24.1% assessed the share of irregularised migrants in Finland around or slightly over the estimated range. There was variation in the response patterns between men and women (with women seemingly overestimating the share of irregularised migrants more than men), between age groups (with larger shares of older adults (40+) overestimating the share of irregularised migrants), and across political affiliation (with the Finns Party and National Coalition voters having larger shares of overestimation).

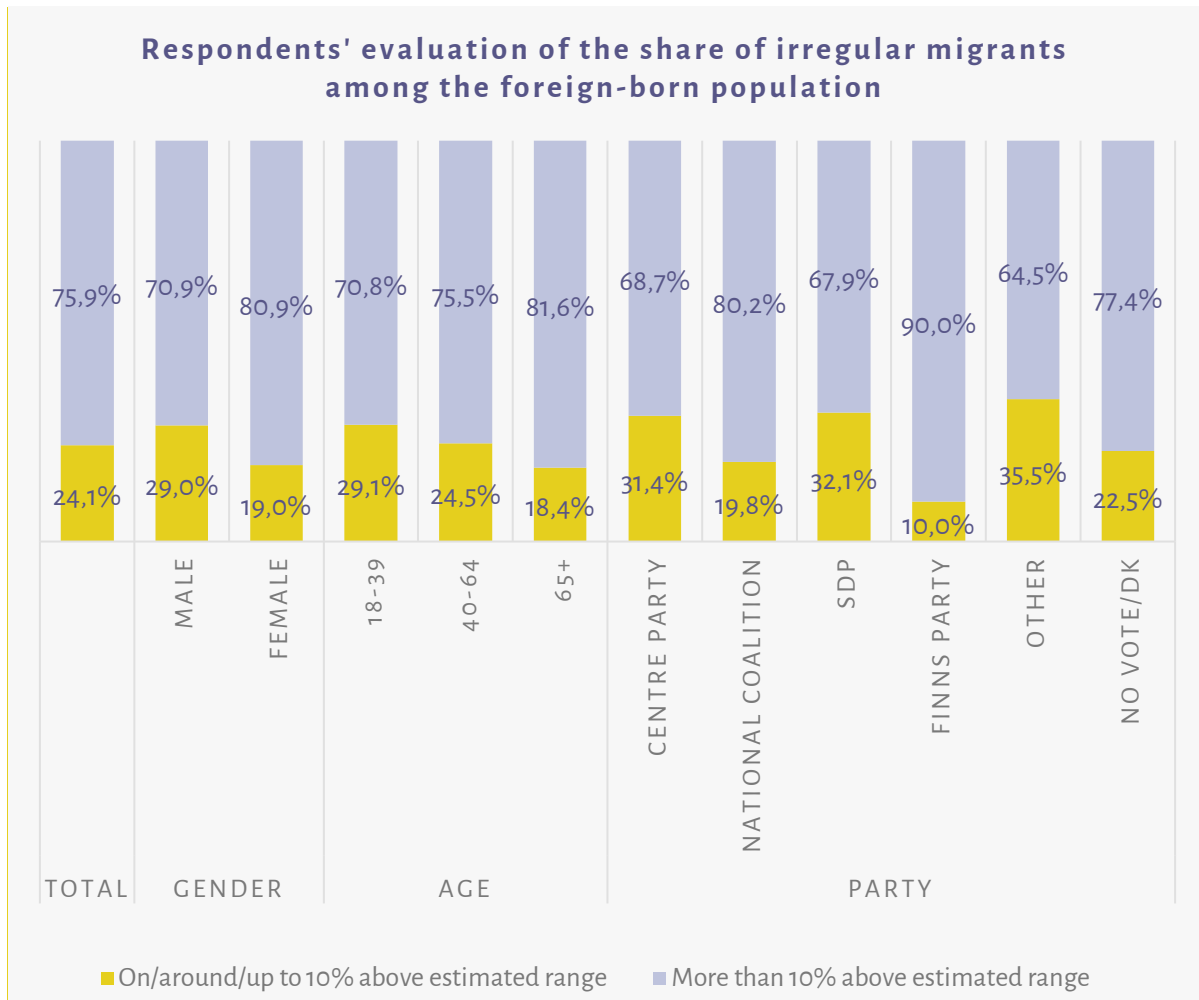


Figure 3 Perception of the scale of irregular migration in Finland against estimates. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=863.

Respondents evaluated the extent to which irregular migration represents a concern for Finland on a 0–10 scale, with higher scores indicating a larger level of concern. According to Figure 4, 59% of respondents assigned a score above 5, indicating that they regarded irregular migration as a significant concern. Concern was more pronounced among female respondents and was highest among Finns Party voters.

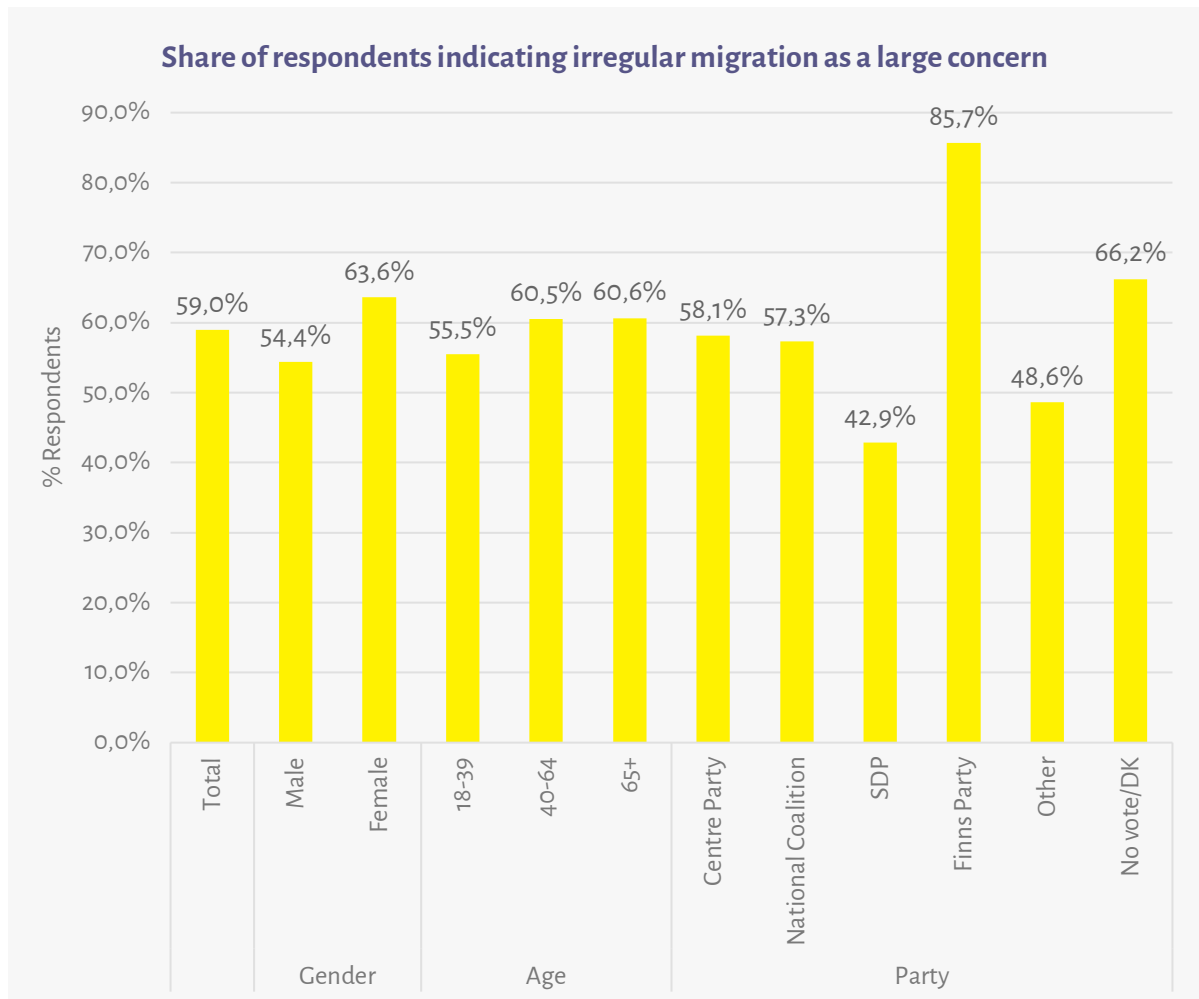


Figure 4 Irregular Migration as concern for Finland. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=970.

3.1.2. *Becoming 'irregular': testing scenarios*

An additional area of interest concerned public understanding of how individuals may become irregularised migrants. To explore this, respondents were presented with a range of scenarios that could potentially lead to irregularity and were asked how often they believed each scenario would result in irregular status. Looking at public perceptions of these scenarios is particularly relevant in light of I-CLAIM's work on narratives of irregularity in Finland (Merikoski 2025), which shows that, despite the multiple pathways into irregularity, political and media narratives overwhelmingly concentrate on unauthorised border crossings and frequently portray asylum seekers in a criminalising and negative manner. This is not surprising given that asylum seekers are included in the same police statistics with cases of breaching the Alien's Act.

The scenarios were informed by earlier work on the legal and policy infrastructures of irregularity (Merikoski et al. 2024) and the political and media narratives on irregularity in Finland (Merikoski 2025), both of which highlighted a misalignment between the actual processes through which migrants may become irregular and how these processes are depicted in public discourse. The scenarios presented to respondents were: (1) documentation; (3) someone born in Finnish to parents with legal residence; (4) Being a worker from the UK in the EU.

Table 1 presents respondents' evaluations of the different scenarios and their perceived likelihood of leading to irregularity. For each scenario, the table reports the share of respondents who considered it likely to result in irregular status (identifying this scenario as leading to irregularity 'most of the time' or 'all of the time'), those who considered it unlikely (identifying as 'never' or 'sometimes'), and those who were uncertain whether the scenario would lead to irregularity (not knowing whether it would).

Table 1 Scenarios of irregularity

		Likelihood of scenario leading to irregularity		Uncertainty regarding scenario (N=1,0525)
		Never/ Sometimes	Most/all of the time	
Scenarios	Waiting to hear about their asylum claim (N=953)	28,60 %	71,40 %	8,10 %
	Crossing a border without proper documentation (N=905)	65,00 %	35,00 %	12,70 %
	Being hired through a recruitment company (N=820)	67,60 %	32,40 %	20,10 %
	Being born in Finland to parents who do not have legal residence status (N=806)	76,50 %	23,50 %	20,70 %
	Having an expired student visa (N=831)	75,70 %	24,30 %	20,10 %
	Being a worker from the UK in the EU (N=518)	78,00 %	22,00 %	49,70 %

The scenarios most often perceived as leading to irregularity were waiting on an asylum decision and crossing a border without documentation, aligning with dominant political and media framings. This contrasts with the legal framework: asylum seekers awaiting a decision retain the right to reside and work in Finland (Merikoski et al. 2024), and the UN Refugee Convention stipulates that irregular border entry should not adversely affect the assessment of an asylum application. These findings are in line with I-Claim survey findings from the UK (Lessard-Phillips & Sigona 2025) and the Netherlands (Lessard-Phillips et al. 2025) where asylum seeking was also mentioned as the most likely scenario leading to irregularity.

Looking at the results from the 'asylum claim' scenario more closely in terms of differences among respondents (Figure 5), we see a general consensus across respondent groups. The only contrast is between the youngest and oldest age groups, with the 65 and over group having close to 77% of respondents selecting the scenario as leading to irregularity 'most/all the time' compared to 65.4% in the youngest age group. Respondents were less undecided about this scenario than others, with less than 8% not answering the question.

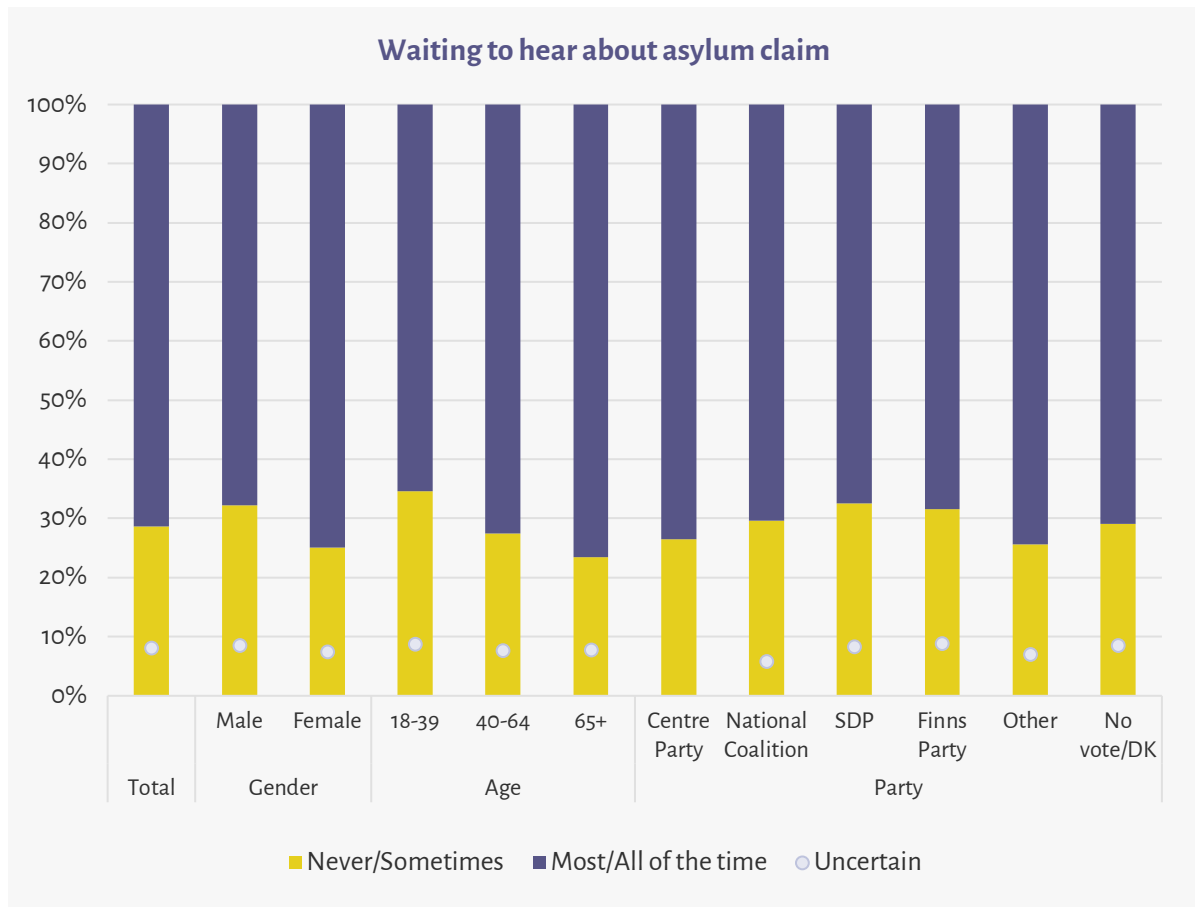


Figure 5 Evaluation of the scenarios leading to irregularity: waiting to hear about an asylum claim. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025).

When it comes to irregular border crossings (Figure 6), there is a clear distinction along political affiliations, with over 52% of Finns Party voters expressing firm convictions on irregular border crossings leading to irregular status and only few undecided, while among the voters of other parties around 30% of respondents, with SDP voters the lowest at 25.5%, see this as a pathway to irregularity.

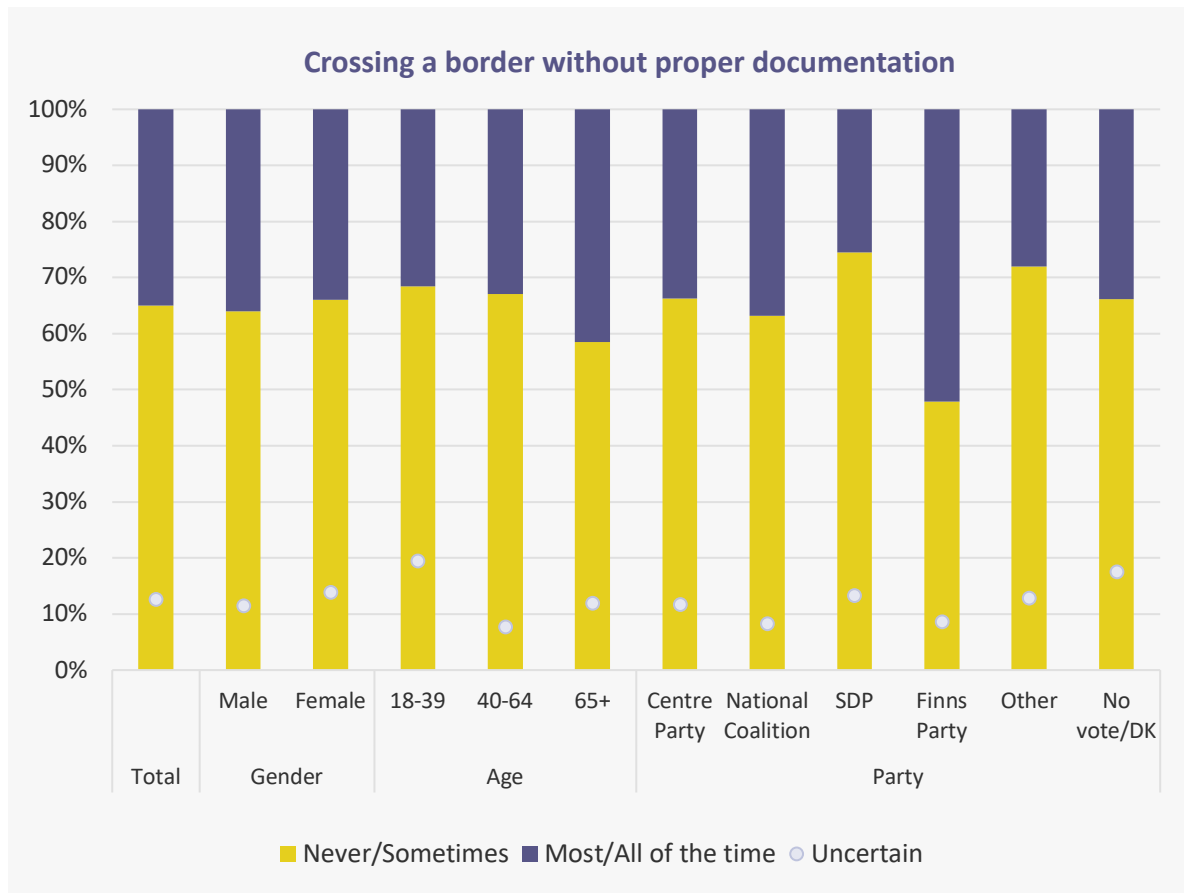


Figure 6 Evaluation of the scenarios leading to irregularity: crossing a border without documentation. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025).

Respondents were least likely to associate irregular status with being the child of irregularised migrants or being a worker from the EU. This contrasts with expert insights gathered for I-CLAIM, which identify both as potential routes into irregularity in Finland (Merikoski et al. 2024). Humphris and Sigona (2019: 13) refer to children of irregular migrant parents as “invisible by design.”

As shown in Figure 7, the invisibility of children of undocumented migrants is high among all groups. However, there is a significant gap between Finns Party and the Centre Party voters on the one hand, with around 70% of respondents in each group seeing this scenario as unlikely, and SDP voters, on the other, with just under 87% of respondents seeing the scenario as unlikely. Slightly over 68% of the over 65-year-olds saw this scenario as unlikely, judging it as more presumable than other age groups.

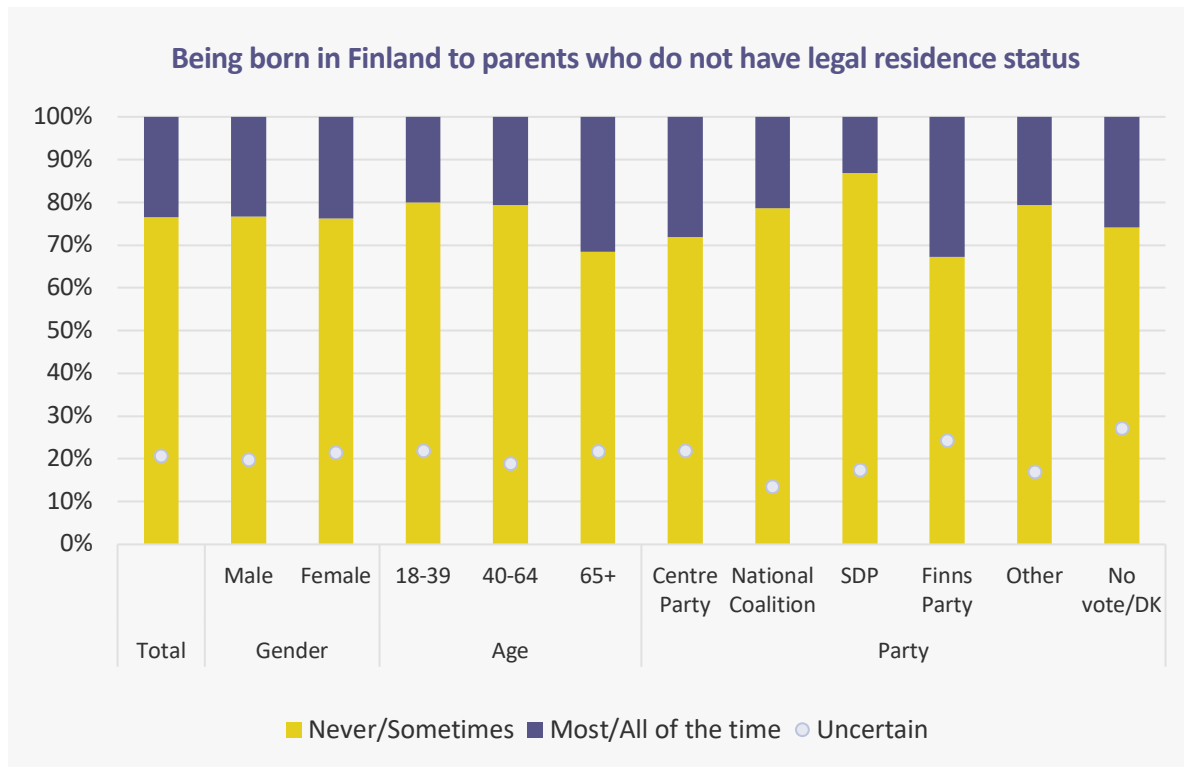


Figure 7 Evaluation of the scenarios leading to irregularity: children born to parents without legal residence. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025).

Finally, regarding the scenario concerning UK migrant workers in the EU (Figure 8), there is a general consensus among respondents that UK migrant workers are unlikely to find themselves irregular through this scenario. The least convinced by this scenario the younger respondents, especially compared to their 65+ peers.

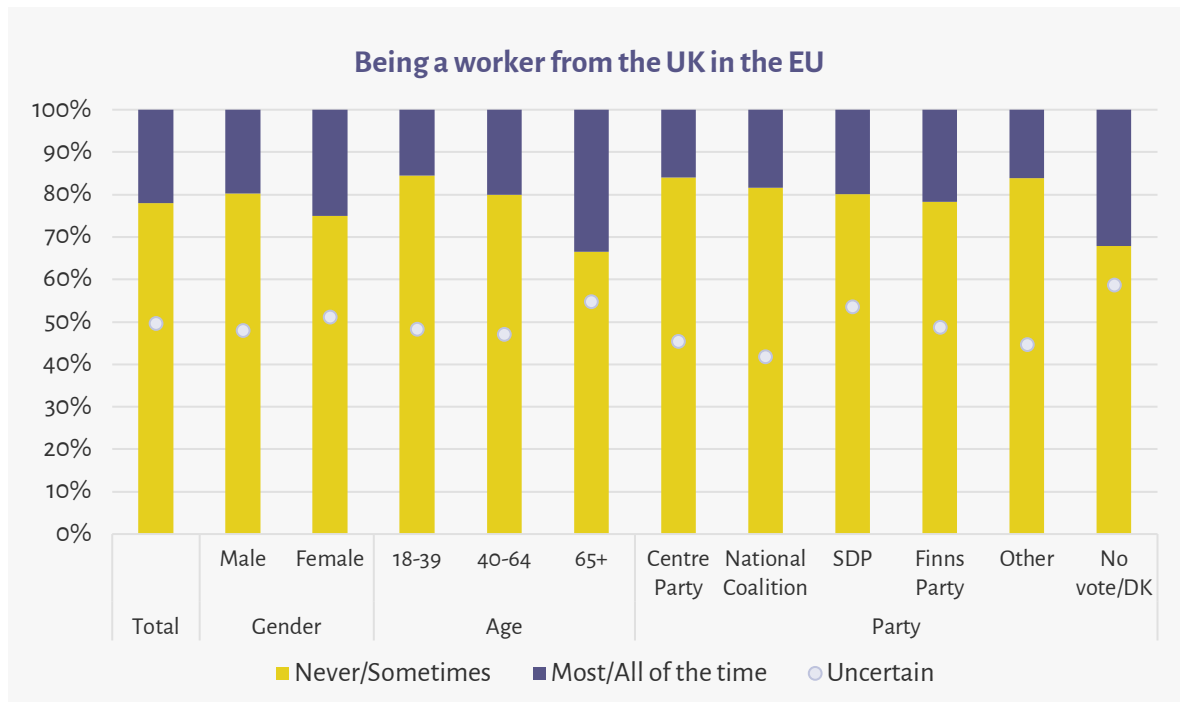


Figure 8 Evaluation of the scenarios leading to irregularity: UK workers in the EU. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025).

3.2. Irregular migration and work: sectors and overall feelings

In line with I-CLAIM's focus on working conditions, the survey also explored public knowledge of irregular migration within the context of work. Respondents were asked to identify the sectors in which they believed irregularised migrants are most commonly employed, as well as to reflect on their feelings about encountering irregularised migrants in different work-related settings.

Although more than 60% of respondents linked the right to work with having legal residence, they nonetheless attributed irregularised migrants' participation to a range of labour sectors. For male irregularised migrants, respondents most frequently mentioned food delivery, construction, cleaning, and catering and hospitality; for female irregularised migrants, the most commonly identified sectors were cleaning, catering and hospitality, child and elderly care, and healthcare. These patterns were broadly consistent across respondent groups.

Table 2 Main sectors in which irregularised migrants are deemed to work

	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Male	Food delivery	Construction	Cleaning	Catering and hospitality
Female	Cleaning	Catering and hospitality	Child and elderly care	Healthcare

Respondents were also given the opportunity to write in sectors not included in the predefined list. Although only a small number made use of this option, the free-text responses indicated that additional sectors were

considered relevant. These included restaurants, specifically pizzerias, and personal care services, as well as sex work, especially for female irregularised migrants.

We also asked respondents to indicate their level of ease with encountering irregularised migrants in different work settings, essentially capturing perceived social distance. Respondents were asked whether they would mind having an irregular migrant working in their home, in their workplace, or in a shop, using a scale from 0 (would not mind at all) to 10 (would mind a great deal). The mean levels of social distance for the full sample, as well as for key respondent groups, are presented in Figure 9, with higher scores reflecting greater social distance/higher levels of unease.

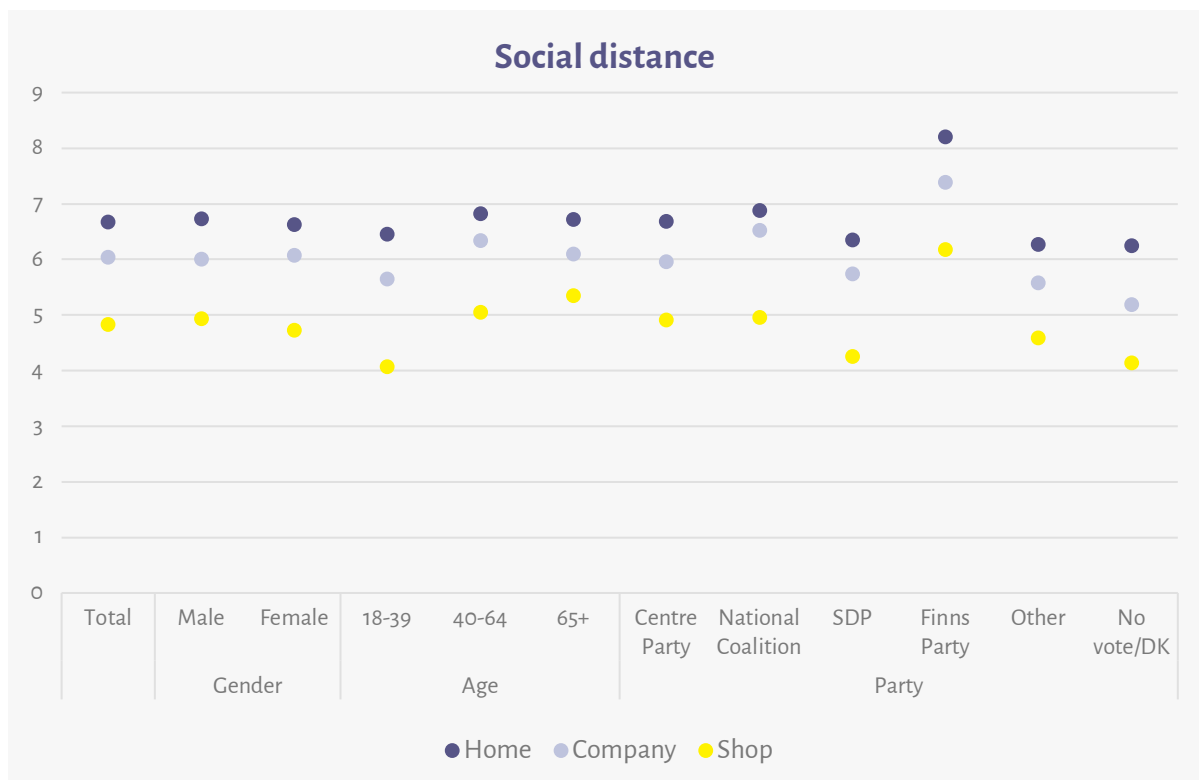


Figure 9 Social distance indicators. Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline Ns=912/891/946.

Results indicate that respondents have higher levels of social distance toward irregularised migrants working in their home, a space within their private lives, and lower levels of social distance for encountering irregularised migrants in their professional lives and in a shop setting. Encountering (whether knowingly or not) an irregular migrant in a shop had the lowest mean level of social distance across all groups, but we can also see variation in the perceived levels of social distance across groups. While levels of social distance are lower for irregularised migrants encountered in the workplace, in some instances (middle-aged respondents, National Coalition voters) the levels are not much different than for irregularised migrants encountered in a home setting. Lower mean levels of social distance are also found for younger adults, as well as respondents who voted for Social Democratic Party and other parties or didn't vote at the 2023 Parliamentary Election. The highest level of social distance in all categories was found among the voters of the Finns Party.

Findings indicate that respondents were most uneasy about irregularised migrants working in their home and less uneasy when encountering them in workplace or shop settings. Shops generated the lowest mean levels of social distance across all groups. There were, however, some variations in perceived social distance across respondent groups, the most salient being the higher means for Finns Party voters. Younger adults expressed lower levels of social distance in company or work settings.

These findings on work sectors and respondents' ease with the presence of irregularised migrants provide important context for interpreting attitudes toward irregularised migrants in employment, which the next section examines in greater detail.

3.3. Attitudes

Having outlined respondents' knowledge of irregular migration and their feelings of social distance toward irregularised migrants across different settings, we now turn to attitudes toward irregular migration within the context of work. Here, we also consider how these attitudes intersect with racialisation and gender. This focus is central to I-CLAIM, where public perceptions form part of the broader narrative construction and production of irregularity. The survey examined these attitudes using several approaches discussed earlier, including experimental methods designed to elicit preferences on sensitive topics in a minimally intrusive way.

In this section, we present findings from two of the survey's experiments: one examining hiring preferences for irregularised migrants and another assessing perceptions of irregularised migrants' level of integration in Finnish society.

3.3.1. *Hiring choice*

The hiring experiment presented respondents with hypothetical applicants for a care-work position, an appropriate choice given that care work was identified by respondents as one of the main sectors in which female irregularised migrants are employed. Each respondent evaluated two pairs of applicants, one male and one female, who were unable to provide proof of residence in Finland. Respondents were asked to assess the likelihood of hiring each candidate and to choose one of the candidates to hire. The profiles included candidates' characteristics that were randomly varied across profiles and included country of origin and associated name, length of residence in Finland, recommendation status, and the location of their family. Figure 10 provides an example of the question shown to respondents.

Imagine that you are looking to hire someone to care for a relative. You have 2 candidates to consider, who are the only ones who came forward.

Please read the profiles of the following two candidates before answering the questions below.

Profile 1	Profile 2
<i>Mariia</i> was born in <i>Ukraine</i> . She has been in Finland <i>for under a year</i> . She is unable to provide proof of residence. When discussing the job, <i>Mariia</i> mentions that she is working to provide for her family in <i>Ukraine</i> .	<i>Samira</i> was born in <i>Iraq</i> . She has been in Finland <i>for 5 years</i> . She is unable to provide proof of residence <i>but comes recommended by a friend</i> . When discussing the job, <i>Samira</i> mentions that she is working to provide for her family in <i>Finland</i> .

On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely, if at all, would you be to hire *Mariia*?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not likely at all Very likely
 Don't know

On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely, if at all, would you be to hire *Samira*?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not likely at all Very likely
 Don't know

If you had to choose, who would you hire between *Mariia* and *Samira*?

Mariia

Samira

Figure 10 Hiring choice experiment questions (varying attributes in italics and blue for reference—see Appendix Table A.5 for details)

We present the results from the hiring choice question, which identify the attributes that increased or reduced the likelihood of a hypothetical candidate being selected, and investigate preferences for attributes across groups of respondents.

Attribute effects on choice for hiring are shown in Figure 11 using Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs), presented for all candidates and separately for male and female candidates. Data points positioned to the right of the vertical dotted line indicate a higher likelihood of hiring a candidate with the given attribute relative to the designated reference category, while points to the left indicate a lower likelihood. Points that cross the dotted line do not represent statistically significant effects. Yellow markers represent the results for all candidates, dark purple markers for female candidates only, and light purple markers for male candidates only.

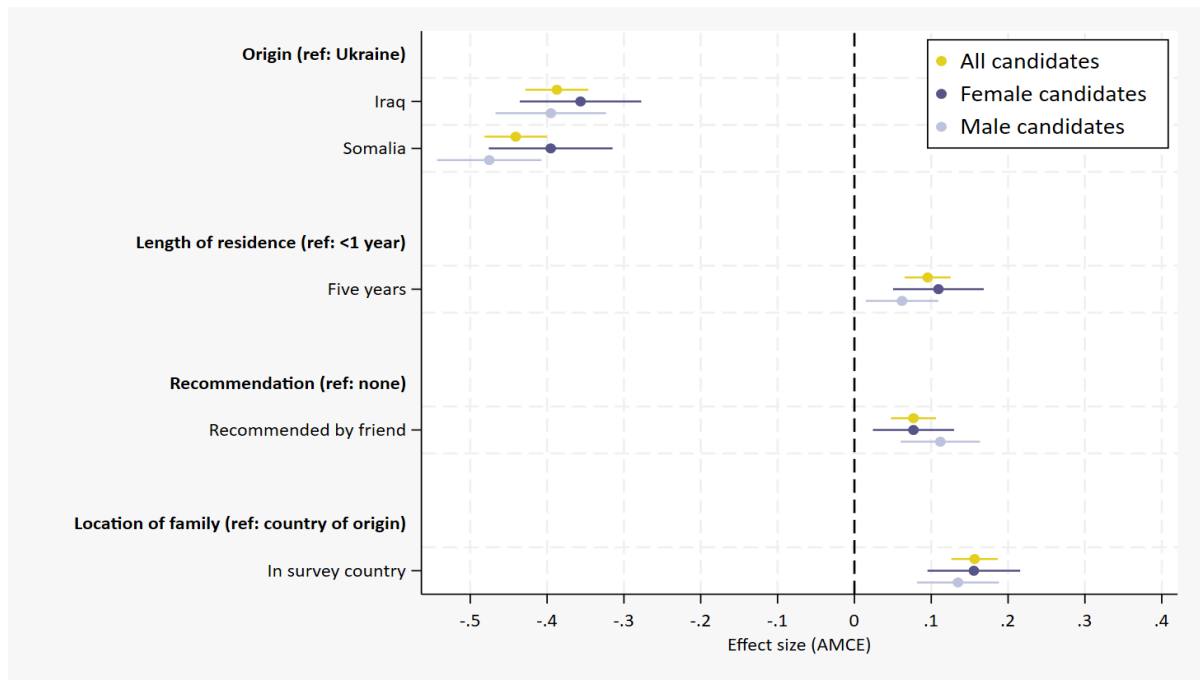


Figure 11 Results from hiring choice experiment (Average Marginal Effects). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=1,025.

The figure shows that when hiring, respondents were less likely to select candidates from Iraq and Somalia than from Ukraine. This was consistent for both male and female applicants. Negative effects on hiring were slightly larger for male applicants (but not significantly so). Respondents were more likely to hire candidates with a longer stay of residence and who came recommended by a friend. Finally, candidates who were providing for their family based in Finland were more positively evaluated for hiring, slightly more positively for female candidates.

Respondents' preference for individual attributes across groups, shown through Marginal Means, can be found in shown in Figures 12-14. Again, a data point to the right of the dotted line indicates a positive preference, whereas one to the left indicates a negative preference, and anything crossing the dotted line indicates non-significance.

Figure 12 shows preferences between men and women, which are relatively similar. The preferences for the country of origin are roughly similar, with men expressing slightly stronger preferences for the candidate from Ukraine and Somalia. Women were slightly more positive or negative in their preference for length of residence, recommendation status and location of family compared to men.

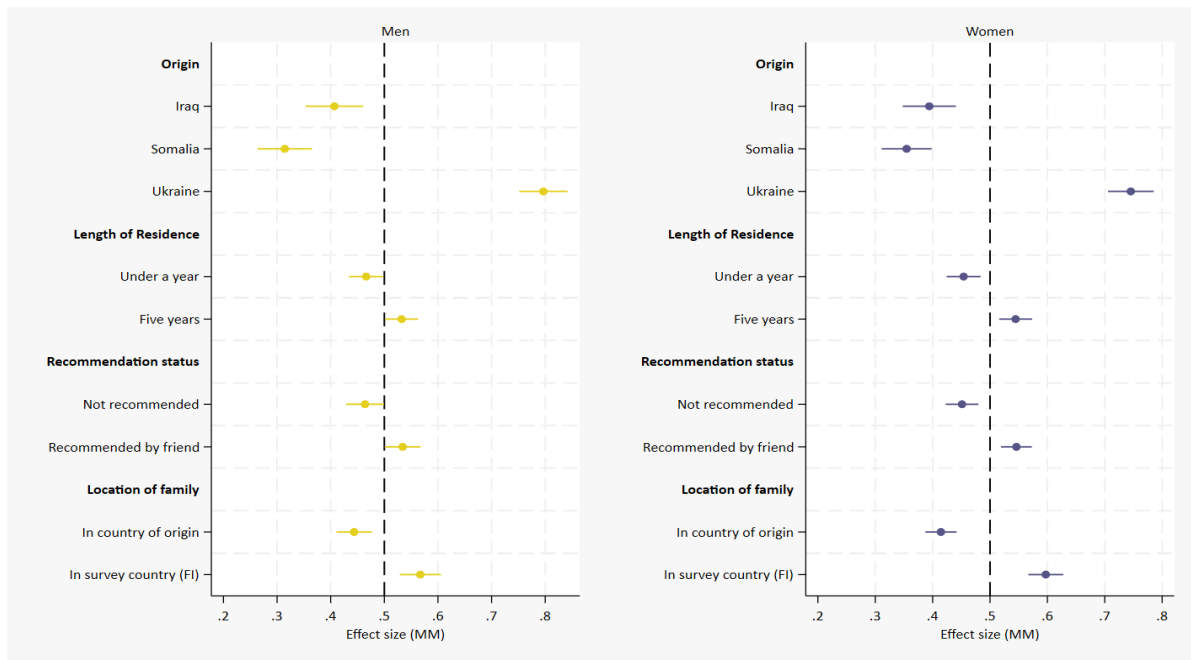


Figure 12 Attribute preference by gender of respondents, hiring choice experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=1,025.

Looking at preferences across age groups (Figure 13), most differences in the preferences operated at the level of the origin of respondents. This is especially the case for candidates from Somalia and Ukraine, where a gap appears to exist in the preference for these attributes (more positive for Ukraine, more negative for the candidate from Somalia). The differences are considerably wider in the group of 40-year-old or older compared to younger respondents. The other attributed were more salient for younger respondents than older ones.

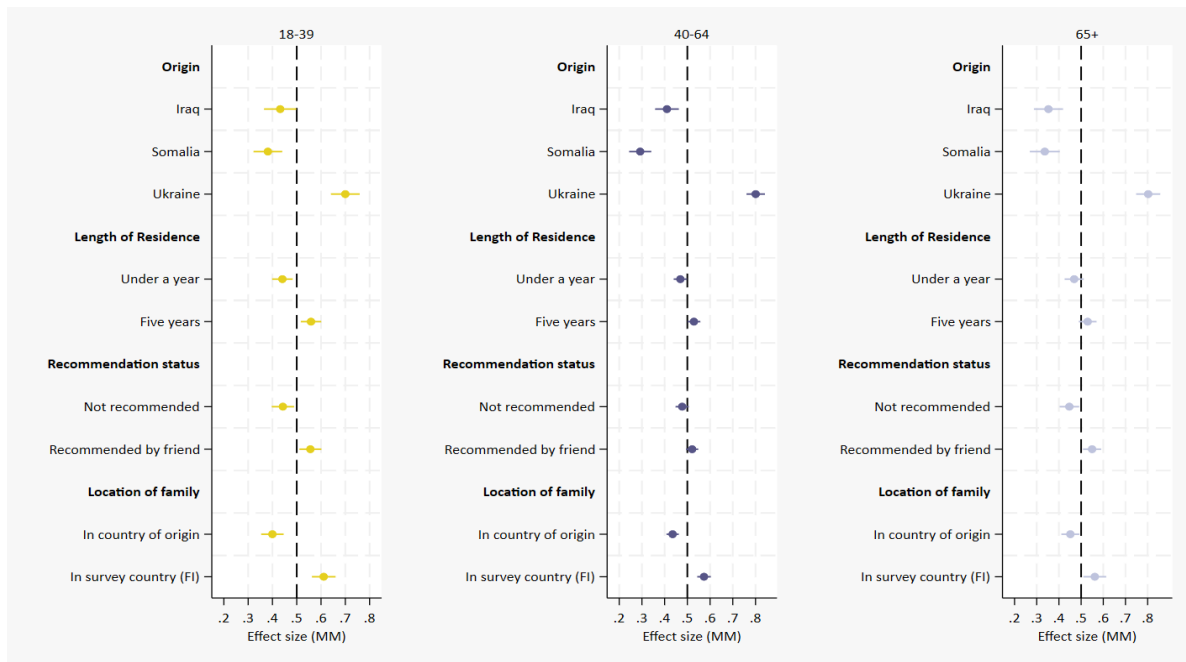


Figure 13 Attribute preference by age group of respondents, hiring choice experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=1,025.

In terms of party affiliation of the respondents (Figure 14), more polarised views were expressed by the National Coalition and Finns Party voters with regard to the origin of the candidates, with the National Coalition and Finns Party voters expressing a stronger preference for the Ukrainian candidate, Centre Party, National Coalition and Finns Party voters expressing a stronger negative preference for the Iraqi candidate, and the National Coalition, Finns Party and SDP voters expressing a stronger negative preference for the Somalian candidate. Finns Party, SDP and Centre Party voters were not swayed by length of residence, and Finns Party as well as SDP voters' opinions were unaffected by the recommendation status in their hiring choice (data points crossing the dotted line). Finns Party along with National coalition voters were more influenced by the location of the family.

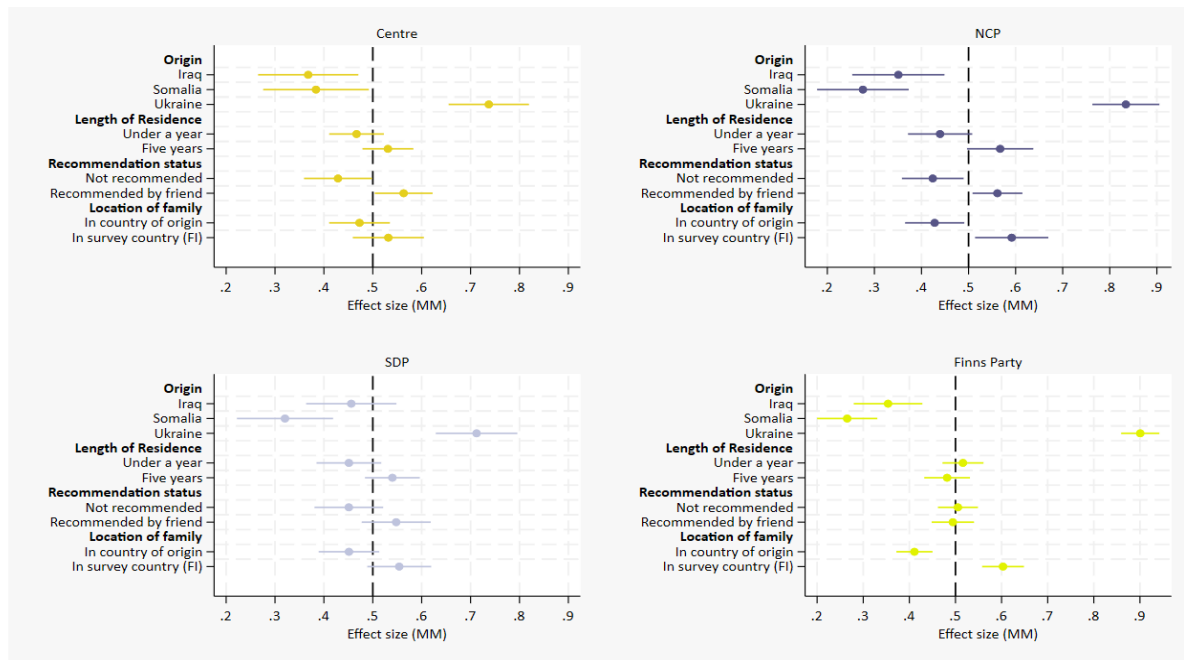


Figure 14 Attribute preference by party affiliation of respondents, hiring choice experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=1,025.

Results from this experiment resonate with the current hierarchies of deserviness in political narratives and legislation when it comes to Ukrainian temporary protection beneficiaries compared to other migrant and refugee groups (Merikoski et al. 2024; Näre et al. 2024). Even though the Somali community has the longest history of the three groups in Finland dating back to the Somalian civil war of 1990s and length of residence in Finland is perceived as a favourable attribute, Somalis are still less likely to be hired compared to Iraqis and Ukrainians. This confirms the persistence of negative attitudes of Finnish population towards Somalis (Jaakkola 2009) and the survey results speaking of wide-spread discrimination against people with African descent in Finland (FRA 2023). While the previous studies have revealed clear gender differences in Finnish respondents' attitudes towards Somalis and other migrant groups with women holding more positive attitudes (Jaakkola 2009), the I-Claim survey would suggest that such gender differences have diminished.

3.3.2. Perceptions of integration and settlement

In another experiment, we examined respondents' attitudes by focusing on perceptions of long-term settlement, or integration, among irregularised migrants engaged in employment. This is particularly relevant given that public debates often emphasise newly arrived migrants, even though some irregularised migrants have lived in Finland for extended periods, and salient given the effect of length of residence in the hiring choice experiment. Moreover, assessing perceptions of male irregularised migrants, who are frequently portrayed in negative terms within public discourse, was considered especially pertinent.

As part of this, respondents were asked to evaluate the level of integration of two profiles of male irregularised migrants, one from Turkey and one from Nigeria on a scale from 0 (not well integrated at all) to 10 (very well integrated). Each profile contained a set number of characteristics deemed to influence evaluations of the level of integration that were randomly varied for each profile (see Appendix for a detailed

The effect of the attributes on the evaluation of integration is presented first for both profiles (Figure 16) and then for respondents by country of origin (Figure 17). The interpretation of results is similar as for the last experiment, but in relation to providing a more positive evaluation of integration.

The results show that social integration measures matter for evaluations of integration, which is consistent with prior research (e.g., Sobolewska, Galandini and Lessard-Phillips, 2017). Finnish language fluency and the location of friends and family had the strongest effects on evaluations of integration: profiles received lower scores when the individual was not fluent in Finnish and when their social ties were located in their country of origin. This pattern held across both origin profiles, with two exceptions: for the profile from Turkey, lack of Finnish language skills and being single resulted in slightly more negative evaluations of integration. In terms of reasons for migration, even if the effects were not significant, seeking protection was viewed more favourably for the Turkish profile, whereas education as a reason for migration generated more positive assessments for the Nigerian profile.

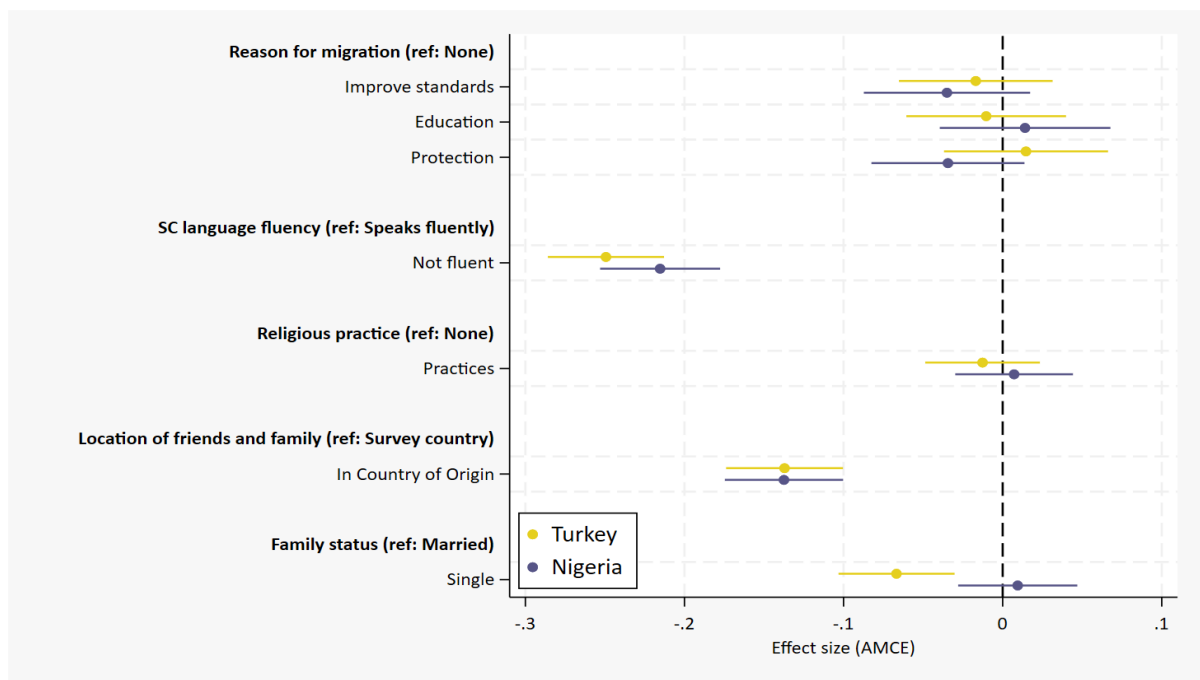


Figure 17 Results from perceptions of integration experiment, by origin of profile (Average Marginal Effects). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=982.

In terms of differences in attribute preference between men and women (Figure 18), we can see that women expressed much more positive preferences than men, and very few negative preferences, probably indicating an overall more positive evaluation of integration overall.

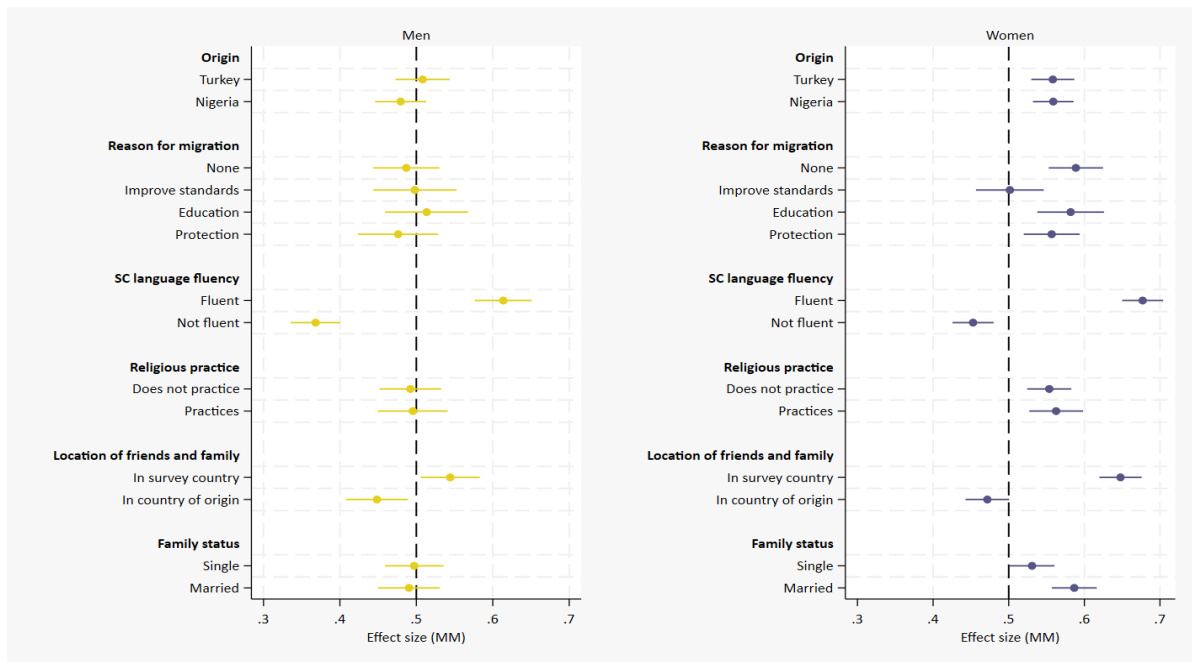


Figure 18 Attribute preference by gender of respondents, perceptions of integration experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=982.

In terms of age groups (Figure 19), there is overall similarity in attribute preferences. All age groups showed a positive preference for profiles showing language fluency as well as family in Finland, while the strongest negative preferences were for the opposites in these categories. Respondents in the youngest age groups were more positive about the profile from Turkey and migration for educational purposes. They less swayed by the location of friends or family in the country of origin profiles than older respondents.

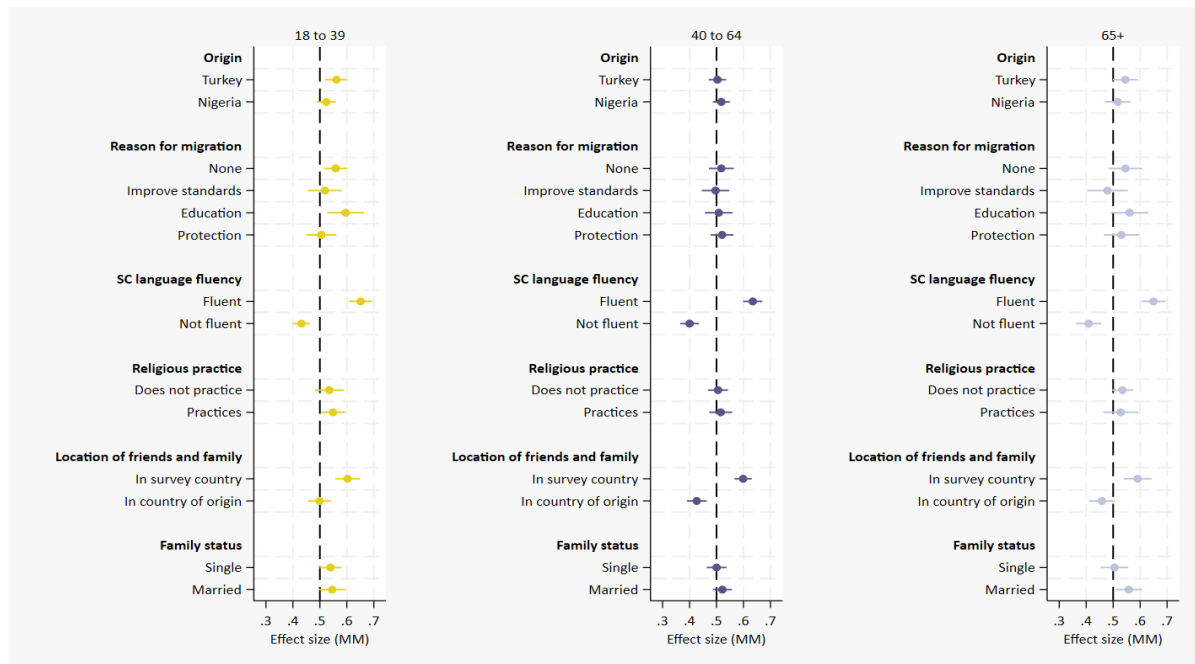


Figure 19 Attribute preference by age group of respondents, perceptions of integration experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=982.

In terms of preferences by party voted for (Figure 20), we see that the Finns Party voters were much more negative in their evaluations, with all attributes linked to negative preferences, whereas voters for other parties expressed some more neutral and positive preferences, with SDP voters not expressing any significantly negative preferences. Language fluency was linked to positive preferences for all but the Finns Party voters, as were Finland-based based family and friends. Being married was a positive attribute for SDP voters. This reflects the picture shown above but does show that, overall, respondents favoured many of the attributes more negatively, but that the extent of negative evaluation varies depending on party affiliation.

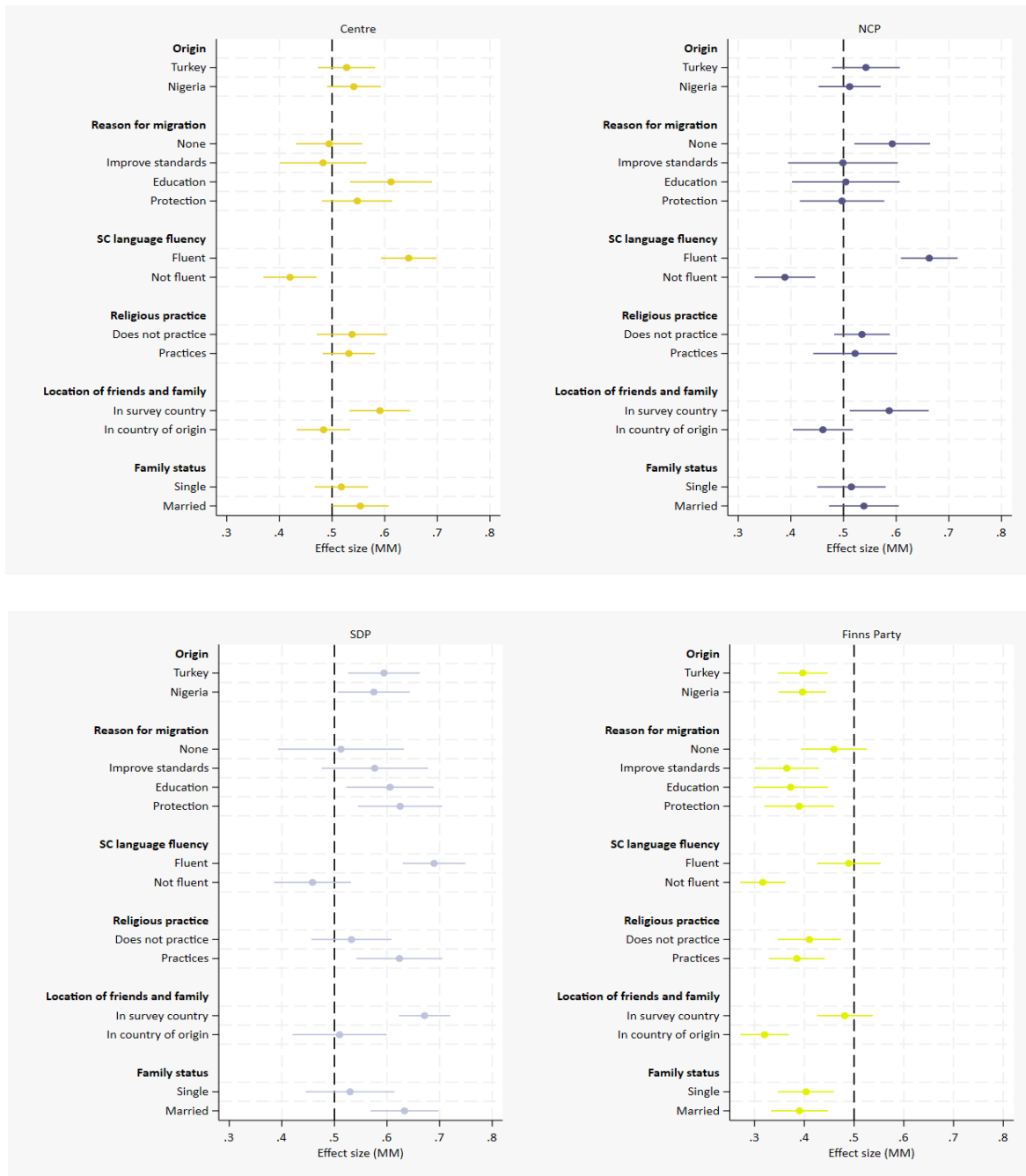


Figure 20 Attribute preference by party affiliation of respondents, perceptions of integration experiment (Marginal Means). Source: I-CLAIM survey (2025). Baseline N=982.

4. Conclusion

The survey explored Finnish public's knowledge and attitudes about irregular migration, a subject that has not been researched before. It therefore provided valuable information about how irregular migration is perceived particularly in the context of work and employment. We found that the public lacks knowledge about irregular migration and its scope.

In general attitudes towards immigration had tightened. We found that a clear majority of the respondents indicated that immigration and irregular immigration in general is a large concern for Finland, while only one third considered immigration a concern for themselves. This reflects previous findings of Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) about immigration as a symbolic concern rather than a personal worry.

Older and less educated respondents demonstrated more negative views, which is in line with previous research (Glorius, 2018). Most respondents stated that immigration is a threat for Finland and has a negative impact on the economy, but still a vast majority thought that immigration is enriching for Finnish culture. This contradiction confirms that the current economic and political climate affects citizens' views about migration.

Respondents' views about whether immigrants take out or put in more taxes and services were more negative compared to the ESS survey 2023. This might reflect the current political discourse and situation; the current Orpo government has implemented several restrictions to migration legislation (Merikoski et al. 2024) and introduced economic austerity measures.

The results show that respondents' knowledge about the scale of irregular migration was scarce. Our estimates place the share of irregular immigrants at around 0.2 to 0.4 % of the foreign population, but other estimates use a wider range. Even with this wider range, most respondents substantially overestimated the share of irregularised migrants in the immigrant population. Women, older adults and right-leaning voters were especially inclined to overestimations.

Irregularity was by and large associated with waiting to hear about an asylum claim, while the question whether irregularity could result from crossing a border without proper documentation was politically polarizing. Being born in Finland to parents who do not have a legal residence status wasn't considered a probable pathway to irregularity, even though experts interviewed in the I-Claim project state that it is one route to irregularity in Finland. The finding highlights how children born to parents without a legal residence status are "invisible by design" (Humphris and Sigona 2019: 13). These findings resonate with our previous research on public and political narratives around irregular migration that revealed inconsistencies in the ways in which irregular migration is discussed across media, politics, and civil society and the mixing of terms when it comes to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (Merikoski 2025).

The survey revealed conflicting attitudes to irregularised migrants as workers similar to our previous findings on public and political narratives (Merikoski 2025). While economically significant fields such as cleaning, food delivery, construction, hospitality and care were recognized as the most likely work sectors for irregular workers, the respondents had racialized and gendered preferences for the people working in these vital positions. All groups favoured hiring Ukrainian candidates over Iraqi or Somali ones, as well as women over men. Other characteristics considered favourable were longer residency in Finland, having recommendations and having friends and family in Finland. These results resonate with the hierarchies of

deservingness in political narratives and legislation when it comes to Ukrainian temporary protection beneficiaries compared to other migrant and refugee groups (Merikoski et al. 2024; Näre et al. 2024).

Aspects related to social integration, such as language fluency and having friends and family in Finland, were considered strongest signs of integration across the age and political groups (Sobolewska, Galandini and Lessard-Phillips, 2017), even though Finns Party voters were unconvinced by all presented aspects. Respondents were the most open for meeting irregularised migrants in shop settings, but that it would feel less comfortable in more intimate settings, such as private homes. Young respondents and SDP voters reported the level of ease for meeting irregularised migrants, while for Finns Party voters the distance was high in all surroundings.

In previous research (Jaakkola 2009) gendered differences in attitudes towards immigration were found, but they appear to have diminished. Instead, the most defining attributes seem to be age group and political affiliation. Younger adults and SDP voters tended to have more positive attitudes. Older adults and voters of other major parties, Finns Party in particular, were more critical in their views.

Finally, our findings reveal several gaps and contradictions when it comes to Finnish public's knowledge about migration and irregular migration in Finland. There is thus an urgent need for more reliable knowledge and research on migration and irregularised migrants.

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Appendices

Table A.1 Overview of the content of the I-CLAIM survey

Section	Description of question
A. Overall concerns	Description of question
	Top issues facing the country today
B. Attitudes and experience toward immigration	Top issues facing you personally
	Close friends as immigrants (split allocation)
	Whether immigrants take more in or out of society
	Whether cultural like undermined or enriched by immigrants
C. Perception of irregular migration/migrants	Views on immigrants and work
	Percentage of irregularised migrants in country
	Whether irregular migration is a concern in country
	Work sector for female irregularised migrants
	Work sector for male irregularised migrants
D. Attitudes toward irregular migration and work/employment	List experiment on policy deservingness for female cleaner
	Conjoint experiment – female care workers
	Likelihood of hiring applicant 1
	Likelihood of hiring applicant 2
	Choice of applicant
	Conjoint experiment – male care workers
	Likelihood of hiring applicant 1
	Likelihood of hiring applicant 2
	Choice of applicant
	Factorial experiment – Perceptions of integration for male irregular migrant 1
	Factorial experiment – Perceptions of integration for male irregular migrant 2
	Social distance indicator – 3 scenarios
E. Further demographics	Immigrant generation
	Religiosity
	Member of ethnic minority group
	Has lived outside of country for over 1 year

Table A.2: Main Demographics

Characteristic	Categories	%
Age (N=1,025)	Adult (18-39)	32,0%
	Middle Age (40-64)	39,7%
	Older adults (65+)	28,3%
Gender (N=1,025)	Male	49,1%
	Female	50,9%
Ethnic Minority (N=986)	No	96,8%
	Yes	3,2%
Marital Status (N=1,025)	Married, partnership, living as married, in a relationship	63,3%
	Divorced, widowed, separated	12,7%
	Not in a relationship	24,0%
Location (N=1,025)	Urban	38,0%
	Suburban, rural	62,0%
Region (N=1,025)	Helsinki	30,7%
	Southern Finland	19,9%
	Western Finland	25,6%
	Eastern Finland	23,8%

Table A.3: Respondents' Socio-demographics in Finland

Characteristic	Categories	%
Education level (N=1,025)	Low	20.8%
	Medium	37.6%
	High	25.2%
Work status (active/inactive) (N=1,025)	Work status (active/inactive) (N=1,025)	50.8%
	Working (full time/ part time)	49.2%
	Not Working (student, pensioner, family carer, unemployed,	
Household income (N=905)	Low	49.5%
	Medium	40.9%
	High	9.6%
Party voted for 2023 (N=922)	Keskusta	9.5%
	Kokoomus	17.4%
	SDP	16.6%
	Vasemmistoliitto	5.9%
	Vihreä liitto	5.9%
	KD	3.3%
	RKP	1.6%
	Perussuomalaiset	16.8%
	Other	6.4%
	DNV/DK	16.6%

Table A.4: Respondents' Links to migration

Characteristic	Categories	%
Country of birth (N=983)	Outside of Finland	2.2%
	Finland	97.8%
Immigrant parentage (N=1,020)	None	95.7%
	One parent	1.9%
	Two parents	2.4%
Experience of migration (N=1,020)	No	88.3%
	Yes	11.7%
Has immigrant Friends (N=1,007)	None	59.2%
	Yes, several	9.4%
	Yes, a few	31.5%

Table A.5 Attributes for hiring experiment randomly selected for each profile.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: FEMALE NAME/MALE NAME Two of three chosen for the female and male candidates.	Ukraine: Mariia / Andriy Iraq: Samira / Ali Somalia: Fatima / Mustafa
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE One of two.	under a year 5 years
RECOMMENDATION STATUS One of two.	<no recommendation> but comes recommended by a friend
LOCATION OF FAMILY One of two.	but comes recommended by a friend

Table A.6 Attributes for integration experiments randomly selected for each profile.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN/NAME One for each profile	Turkey: Aras Nigeria: Ekele
REASON FOR MIGRATION One of four.	<no reason stated> to improve his living standards to get an education to seek protection
SURVEY COUNTRY LANGUAGE FLUENCY One of two.	speaks does not speak
RELIGIOSITY One of two.	He regularly practices his religion. <none stated>
LOCATION OF FRIENDS One of two.	From COUNTRY OF ORIGIN From SURVEY COUNTRY
FAMILY STATUS One of two.	He is single He has a family
LOCATION OF FAMILY If has family One of two.	In COUNTRY OF ORIGIN In SURVEY COUNTRY

I-CLAIM Consortium



Utrecht
University



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice
Department of Philosophy
and Cultural Heritage



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of Irregularised Migrant
Households in Europe