PERCEPTIONS

Migration to the EU.
A Review of Narratives
and Approaches.

PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH:
Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices

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The PERCEPTIONS Project

The Horizon 2020 project PERCEPTIONS examines imaginations and (mis)perceptions about the EU held outside Europe and the way they influence migration decisions. It further aims to understand how such perceptions are distributed via varous channels, how the flow of information could be distorted and whether inaccurate information could lead to a threat to the security of migrants (e.g. through dangerous border crossings) or even national security (e.g. radicalisation).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES: The main objectives of the three year project are (1) to identify narratives, images and perceptions of Europe abroad, (2) to investigate how different narratives could lead to unrealistic expectations, problems and security threats for host societies as well as migrants and in what way; and (3) to create toolkits using creative and innovative measures to react or even counteract them, considering social, societal and structural aspects.

CONSORTIUM: The project involves 25 partners in 15 countries. These countries include three non-European countries of migrants' transit (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia), and four Mediterranean countries of arrival (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain), as well as two countries of transit to Europe (Bulgaria and Kosovo), representing three routes into Europe (Western, Central, and Eastern Mediterranean). The research is further focused on countries of destination including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, and the UK.

The project runs from September 2019 to August 2022.

Consortium members

SYNYO GmbH (SYNYO), Austria

Sheffield Hallam University (CENTRIC), UK

Alma Mater Studiorum Universita di Bologna (UNIBO), Italy

University of Granada (UGR), Spain

University Rey Juan Carlos (URJC), Spain

University of Northumbria at Newcastle (UNN), UK

Swansea University (SU), UK

University of Rome La Sapienza (SAPIENZA), Italy

Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), Netherlands

University of Antwerp (UANTWERPEN), Belgium

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Austria

Kentro Meleton Asfaleias - Center for Security Studies (KEMEA), Greece

Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), Bulgaria

SINUS Markt- und Sozialforschung GmbH (SINUS), Germany

Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Developpement (CREAD), Algeria

Egyptian Center for Innovation and Technology Development (ECITD), Egypt

ADITESS Advanced Integrated Technology Solutions & Services LTD (ADITESS), Cyprus

Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), France

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), Kosovo

Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies (FUNDEA), Spain

Koinonia Caritas Cyprus (CARITAS), Cyprus

Fondazione Bruno Kessler (FBK), Italy

Hellenic Police (HP), Greece

Ministry of Public Security - Israel National Police (MOPS-INP), Israel

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Aim of this brochure

The aim of this brochure is to present current knowledge on migration narratives about the European Union (EU) and current approaches to migration since 2015 across the 15 countries in which PERCEPTIONS research is conducted. It maps the landscape of narratives on migration and Europe as a basis to understand migration flows and decisions as well as migration-related policies, perceived threats, and best practices to address migration challenges on local, national and international levels.

The information in this brochure summarises the results of Work Package 2 (PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH: Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices). The material is based on the review of 221 academic sources about narratives, 149 policies as well as 177 perceived and actual challenges and threats and 149 good practices collected by the 25 partners in the PERCEPTIONS consortium.[1]

The brochure is divided into three parts

Part one sets the scene by outlining the current knowledge about narratives in the academic literature. This part focuses in particular on examining migrants' perceptions of the EU as a suitable migration destination and host societies' perceptions of migration. It further examines how such information and narratives are distributed via disparate channels such as social, digital and mainstream media. Part one also offers a critical evaluation of current research on migration drawing attention to a lack of knowledge about specific migrant groups and migration phases.

Part two examines current migration policies focusing on the different approaches to policymaking in countering and preventing threats linked with migration behaviour. In this context, we also offer a critical evaluation about the disparate types of threats to migrants and host societies reported in relevant documents. Part two further summarises current approaches to migration and explores current and best practices and migration policies.

Part three integrates insights from the previous sections by formulating five recommendations addressed to policy makers, front-line practitioners, and researchers. These recommendations advocate for rethinking the terminology of migration, better capturing the full diversity of migration experiences, the strategic involvement of all stakeholder groups, creating and linking infrastructures and for systematically addressing the gaps in current knowledge about migration to Europe which are highlighted throughout this brochure.

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[1] The reports, on which the brochure is based, are available on
https://project.perceptions.eu/about/deliverables/ (public deliverables only).

Introduction

Migration is one of the key challenges within the European Union in the last years. Migration is driven by a number of push and pull factors – and narratives play an important part in shaping these factors and in influencing decisions about destinations, routes and expectations of migrants once they arrived. For instance, feedback from migrants back to their country of origin can influence the image or perception of Europe and thus affect migration both in a positive and negative way.[2]

Migrants may choose different EU countries as destination for several reasons, including geographical closeness, family connections, expected educational or employment opportunities and the degree to which it is perceived to have fair asylum policies. This is why a thorough understanding of the complex nature and impact of migration narratives is vital.

Social media and new communication networks have increased the scope and the intensity of distribution of migration narratives, while so-called filter bubbles and echo chambers can lead to one-sided perceptions that go uncorrected. Claims can take on a life of their own and might raise unrealistic expectations or negative views in both migrants and host societies. At the same time, new communication channels might also provide a means to correct misperceptions and to promote more realistic narratives on both sides.

This brochure summarises the current knowledge about migrants' views and perceptions about the EU and how such narratives about the EU are shared (e.g. via social media or interpersonal connections). It further provides a review of existing policies, best practices and the type of threats migration can be linked with migration, not only for host societies but also migrants themselves.

Information in this brochure is intended for civil society organisations, policymakers, practitioners, academics, journalists, migrants and the general public alike, who are interested in an overview of current research, debates and approaches in the area of migration to the EU. It aims to provide a foundation to ongoing discussions about how to manage the intricate issues of migration, with a special focus on the role of narratives as subjective but powerful influences and a cross-national picture on existing approaches.

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[2] Timmerman, C., De Clerck, H. M-L., Hemmerechts, K., & Willems, R. (2014). Imagining Europe from the Outside: The Role of Perceptions of Human Rights in Europe in Migration Aspirations in Turkey, Morocco, Senegal and Ukraine. *In* Chaban, N. & Holland, M. (eds.) *Communicating Europe in Times of Crisis: External Perceptions of the European Union.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Part 1:
Migration Narratives about the EU

What are migration narratives and why are they important?

Narratives are "stories that individuals and institutions tell themselves and others about the world they live in and their place within it".[3] As such they act as "sense-making tools"[4] that help individuals and collectives to frame and understand their experiences.

Migration narratives are 'stories' that aim to make sense of the migration experience. They are told by a wide variety of groups:

The **migrants** themselves and formal or informal migrant groups (e.g. interest groups of (former) migrants in a destination country) are the key informants about perceptions of migration experiences and the EU and their impact on migration dynamics

Host communities, i.e. the citizens and communities in the countries, migrants enter and integrate into that perceive migration from their own point of view

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[3] Cantat, C. (2015). Narratives and counter-narratives of Europe. Constructing and contesting Europeanity. *Cahiers 'Mémoire et Politique'*, 3, 3-30.
[4] Macías-Gómez-Estern, B. (2015). Narrative as a Sense-making Tool in the Construction of Migrants' Identities. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 173(13), 168-175.

Local, national, EU and global policy makers which shape the legal and political frameworks around migration

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other groups with a key role in promoting migrants' rights and in assisting their settlement and integration are often an intermediary and/or key actor in managing migration perceptions within the host society and among the migrants

Law-enforcement authorities and other first-line practitioners (health, social welfare, courts, housing and employment agencies, etc.) have first-hand experience about the challenges, threats and safety and security issues throughout the migration process; their views add another very specific but vital perspective of migration narratives

Media – both traditional and online/social media platforms – are probably the biggest provider of information for and about migrants and thus a huge factor in influencing thoughts, ideas and perceptions of migration

Academics in the field of migration studies systematically study, report and reflect on migration narratives and thus provide vital knowledge about their production, meaning, distribution and impacts

The above list makes clear how complex and varied perceptions of migration are. In a detailed analysis of organisations and groups involved in migration to the EU, PERCEPTIONS has identified 1.134 unique stakeholders across the six categories.[5]

The content of migration narratives

Migration narratives told by migrants are often conceptualised on an **individual level**, relating largely to migrants' (mis)perceptions of the EU, their experiences of the journey and of living in the EU. Other groups such as host societies, policy makers, law-enforcement agencies, etc. are mostly presented on a **collective level**, relating perspectives based on professional responsibilities or group interests. A third perspective is on the **macro level** and focuses on apparent push-pull factors that drive migration decisions.

On the following page we illustrate the three different types of migration narratives.

Migrant perceptions of the EU

Migrants' perceptions of the EU are highly diverse, as shown in the summary in table 1. They contain very specific positive and negative elements, including about individual countries, countering the idea that all migrants perceive the EU as 'el dorado'. At the same time, migrants also actively curate their narratives, while intended recipients may choose not to believe them.

Table 1. Content of core migration narratives by migrants themselves

✅ **Positive perceptions:**
Migrants perceive the EU to be a positive place to migrate due to the following reasons:

- Having access to a fair asylum system
- The large presence of co-ethnics thus aiding integration
- Better economic prospects
- Good educational opportunities
- The possibility to secure freedom and safety
- The lack of discrimination for LGBTQ+ refugees
- The low presence of corruption and crime
- The possibility to obtain immigration documentation due to family reunification procedures

❌ **Negative perceptions:**
Migrants perceive the EU not to be a place to migrate due to the following reasons:

- Economic crisis
- Poor climate and quality of life in general
- Difficulty of assimilation and integration
- Increased border security meaning it is difficult to arrive and arrival involves risking one's life via a dangerous border crossing

✅ **Differentiated positive views of EU countries (examples):**

- **Germany** is perceived to be a good country to migrate to due to economic opportunities and its welcoming manner towards refugees. Migrants perceive greater possibilities to integrate due to the large presence of migrants and the possibility to gain documentation under family reunification legislation.

- The **UK** is perceived to be a good destination due to its multicultural policy and the possibility for migrants to get good jobs and social status.

- **Italy** is perceived to be a good destination country due to weak immigration controls enabling migrants to work without documents.

- The **Netherlands** and **Germany** are perceived to be places of tolerance particularly for LGBTQ+ refugees.

- **Sweden** is perceived to have good immigration and asylum legislation and is welcoming to refugees.

Views about transit countries:

- Some countries such as Italy and Greece are perceived by migrants to be stepping-stones and not final destinations.

- Migrants can spend several years in these transit countries whilst raising the money to move forward onto other EU countries where they perceive they will have more opportunities.

- Sometimes transit countries become destination countries by default, since migrants remain in these countries due to various reasons including the initiation of settlement and integration processes, a lack of funds to move forward, increased border control and a fear of undertaking further dangerous journeys.

Telling and hearing narratives

- Sometimes migrants exaggerate the positive aspects of living in the EU for reasons such as feeling ashamed or not wanting to worry their family and friends with their current hardships.

- Family, friends and other migrants in the country of origin and other host countries sometimes do not believe migrants' negative representations of the reality of living in the EU often without immigration status and in harsh financial conditions

Perceptions in host societies

Host societies hold very mixed perceptions of migrants and migration. On the one side stand expressions of solidarity and recognition of human rights, on the other migrants are often represented as threats and categorised in a xenophobic frame (see table 2).

Table 2. Common contents of host society narratives

Positive perceptions:

- Upholding human rights obligations enshrined in International Law

- Supportive of accepting refugees into the country

- Expressing solidarity with the refugees and migrants

- Young people and wealthier nations are more receptive to skilled migrants from wealthier EU countries than migrants from poorer and non-EU countries and are more welcoming of women and minors than adult male migrants

❌ Negative perceptions:

- Fear that migration leads to an increased threat of terrorism related crimes

- Migrants are seen to pose economic, political and cultural threats to the host population due to problems of assimilation and integration

- Migrants are sometimes viewed in a xenophobic, racist, stereotypical way due to media discourses representing migrants in a negative superficial manner using loaded terms such as 'flood' and 'wave', even when immigration remains low

Migration narratives on the macro-level: push and pull factors

Several factors may initiate and influence the decision to migrate and choices along the way. These can either be aspects that impel or stimulate emigration (**push factors**) or aspects attracting migrants to another country (**pull factors**). Table 3 lists the six main types of push and pull factors identified. Five of the six themes appeared as both push and pull factors (see figure 1).

Table 3. Main types of push-pull factors

Social improvement:
migration to increase social status and/or help join own social group in other country

Familial:
migration to protect own family/children or for family reunification

Economic:
migration to escape poverty; to improve access to education/economic position for oneself or family members

Environmental
migration to escape environmental threats and deterioration

Political/security-related:
migration due to political persecution and war as well as escaping religious, sexually based, and ethnic-based threats

Cultural:
migrants prefer certain regions and are drawn to certain destinations due to a welcoming/ familiar culture in the host country

Environmental considerations were the only one not reported as attracting migrations to certain countries. Still, even amongst the remaining five factors, considerable differences were found how often they were mentioned as either push or pull factor. The biggest push factor was political/security related, while the biggest pull factor was economic.
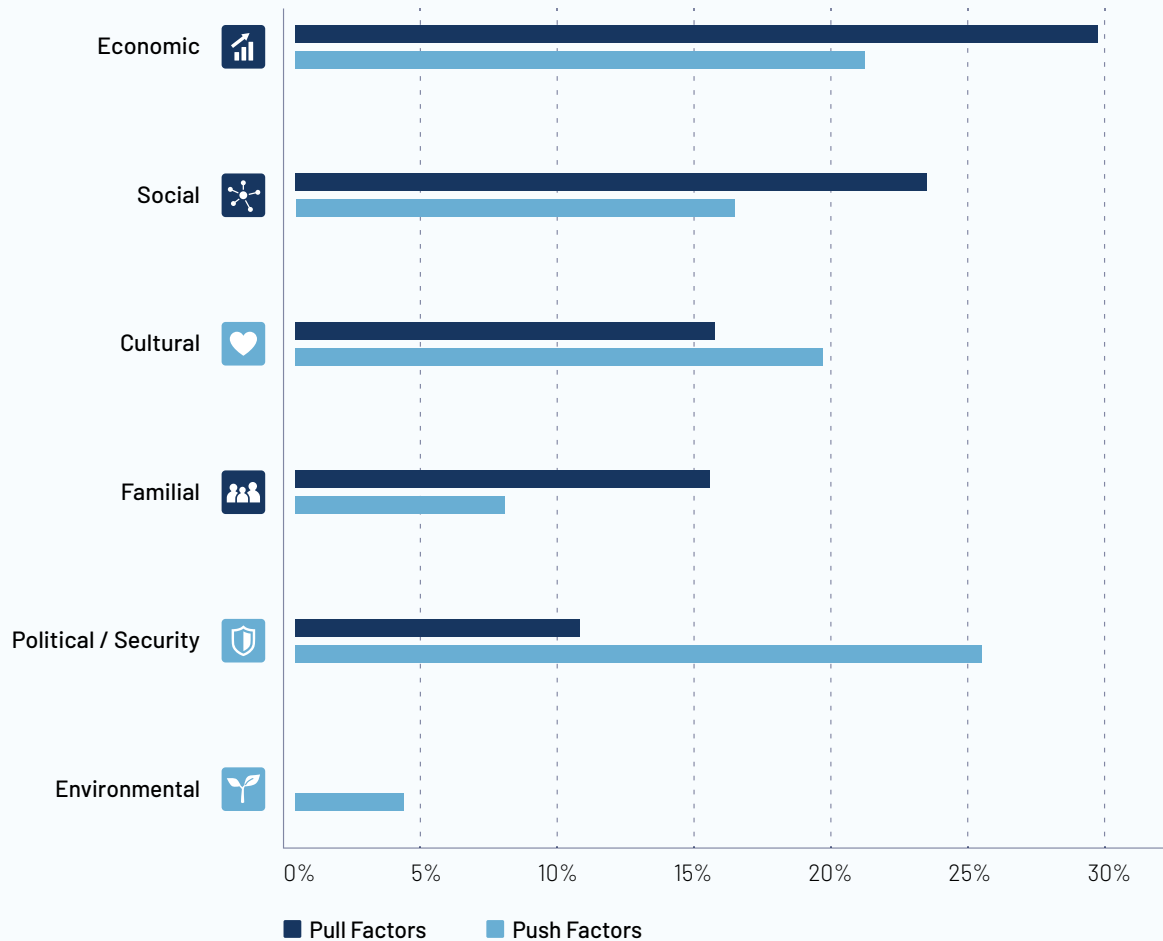
Figure 1. Comparing the prevalence of push versus pull factors

Narratives by migrants indicate that decisions about destinations, routes and modalities tend to be strategic. For instance, countries may be chosen because they provide future prospects for family members or because of laws that offer more protection from religious-based violence or of LGBTQ+ rights. Knowledge about pull factors often seems to be formed through stories told by other migrants or by first-hand experiences, when people return for visits in their home communities. However, while pull (and push) factors have an influence on decisions where to go, the actual route and destination are not always up to the migrants. Often migrants are limited by external circumstances (political, legal, etc.), meaning that expectations clash with the experienced realities.

Channels used to share and transmit narratives

A wide range of platforms are used for the transmission of narratives combining **traditional media, digital and social media** and **personal communication**. Media formats reported in the literature were wide-ranging – textual, visual, audio channels and mixtures thereof – confirming that migration as a topic finds broad distribution across the media landscape.

In reporting findings, we focus on two areas: (1) the use of social media by migrants and (2) the core narratives transported by traditional media in host societies.

Digital and social media use by migrants

Migrants use a wide variety of social media channels. The primary **digital and social media** platforms are Facebook and messenger apps such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube and Viber and to a lesser extent dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr. At the same time, **personal contacts** remain important for gaining information about migration (e.g. to locate people to organise transfers).

Digital technologies affect all aspects of a migrant's experience both pre-entry and post-arrival: they help to maintain strong ties with family and friends in the country of origin and other countries, develop and maintain transnational networks, organise contacts and resources to aid the journey, etc. Social media also enable migrants to give personal testimonies about the conditions of life in the host country, thus affecting how 'destination' countries are perceived. Figure 2 summarises the main ways social media are used in the migrant journey.
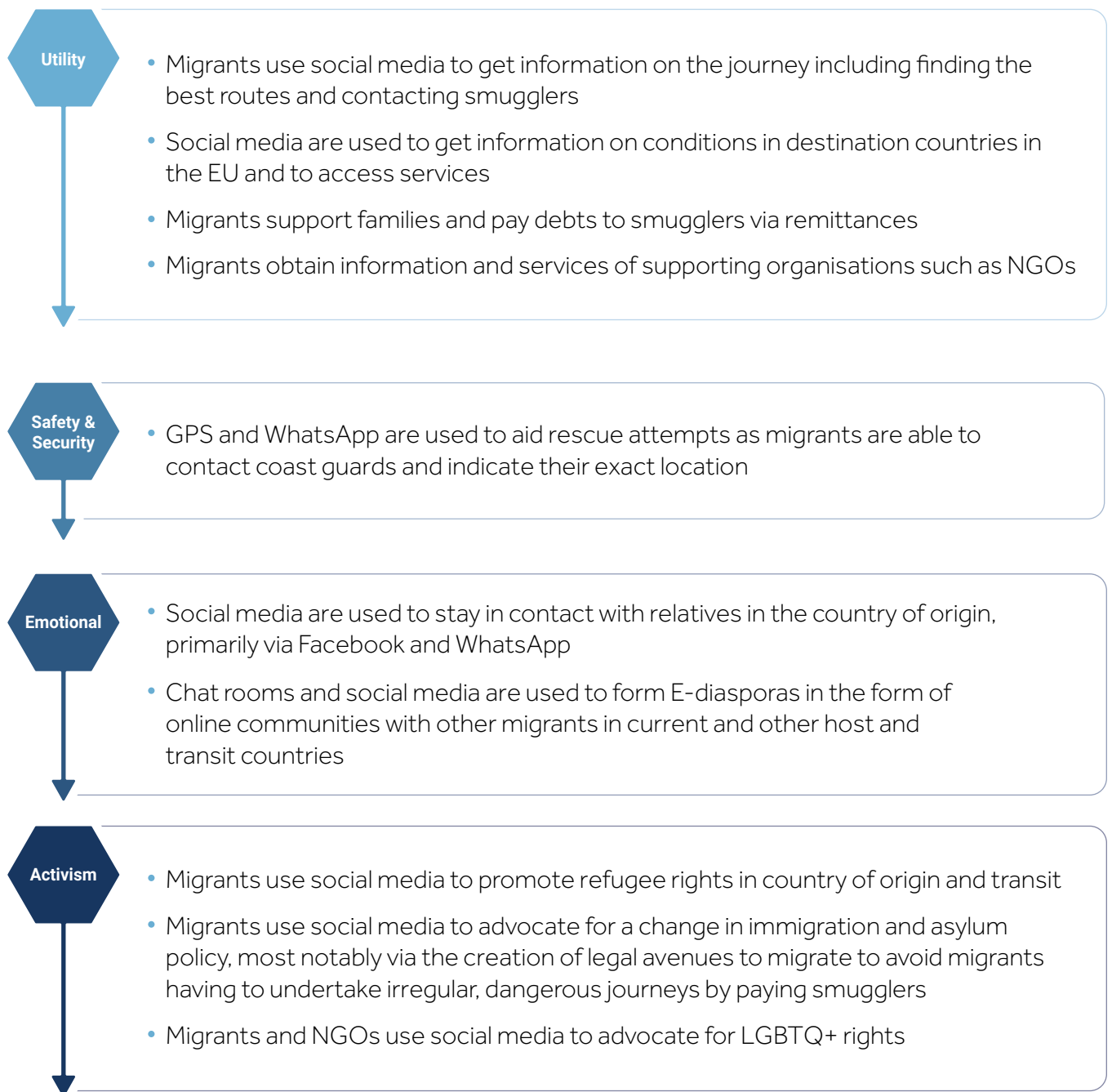
Utility

- Migrants use social media to get information on the journey including finding the best routes and contacting smugglers
- Social media are used to get information on conditions in destination countries in the EU and to access services
- Migrants support families and pay debts to smugglers via remittances
- Migrants obtain information and services of supporting organisations such as NGOs

Safety & Security

- GPS and WhatsApp are used to aid rescue attempts as migrants are able to contact coast guards and indicate their exact location

Emotional

- Social media are used to stay in contact with relatives in the country of origin, primarily via Facebook and WhatsApp
- Chat rooms and social media are used to form E-diasporas in the form of online communities with other migrants in current and other host and transit countries

Activism

- Migrants use social media to promote refugee rights in country of origin and transit
- Migrants use social media to advocate for a change in immigration and asylum policy, most notably via the creation of legal avenues to migrate to avoid migrants having to undertake irregular, dangerous journeys by paying smugglers
- Migrants and NGOs use social media to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights

Figure 2. Main uses for digital and social media by migrants

Social media platforms do not always aid migrant integration and general well-being. In fact, **social media can also be a burden** for migrants with a negative impact on migrants' lives by creating stress (e.g., migrants are frequently asked to provide remittances and be in contact with relatives in their country of origin). Social media are also frequent sources of misinformation.

Furthermore, not all migrants have equal access to social media. Factors such as digital literacy and limitations of digital connectivity are important, as is 'the digital divide' caused by inequalities of access and use, which are related to gender, socio-economic status, level of education and other contextual elements. Further issues are trust and the dangers and risks of using social media. This is particularly evident for certain groups such as LGBTQ+ refugees who risk persecution if their sexual identities are revealed via social media. As a consequence, they do sometimes choose to remain disconnected to compatriots in their countries of origin for fear of receiving homophobic verbal and physical abuse.

Traditional media in host societies

Migration narratives in the traditional media of host societies are often politically motivated. They often become part of dissemination campaigns against irregular migration via information campaigns including TV ads, educational radio programs, newspaper campaigns and cinema spots.[6]

Four main narratives framing the discourse around migrants and migration can be identified, which we refer to as crisis, xenophobia, solidarity and victimisation narratives.

Crisis narrative:

The media often frame migration as a crisis that needs emergency legislation and intervention. In the current 'migration crisis', the terms, 'migrant' ,'refugee' and the less commonly used term 'asylum seeker' are sometimes used to mean one and the same thing. This view of 'migration crisis' is contested within academia and reflects the politicised nature of defining migration issues in the EU; especially since the majority of refugees do not make it to the EU but remain in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia, Jordan and Pakistan.

Xenophobic narrative:

A xenophobic representation of migrants has been exacerbated with the Covid-19 pandemic as fear mongering in popular media highlight the 'foreignness' of immigrants and their descendants, leading in some instances to an increase in discrimination including Islamophobia and a negative reaction to all migrants.

Solidarity narrative:

The framing of a solidarity narrative in the media depicts host societies as feeling close to the refugees' plight and offering solidarity. Migration is framed in a humanitarian discourse with narratives focusing on host societies' emotional reactions to vulnerable migrants. These focus on identifying with the struggle that migrants undertake in risking their lives to arrive safely in the EU.

Victim narrative:

The framing of migrants as victims tends to 'de-humanise' migrants, showing migrants as lacking agency. At the same time, victimisation seems linked to building solidarity-based narratives.

- 5% Victimisation
- 21% Solidarity
- 29% Xenophobic
- 45% Crisis
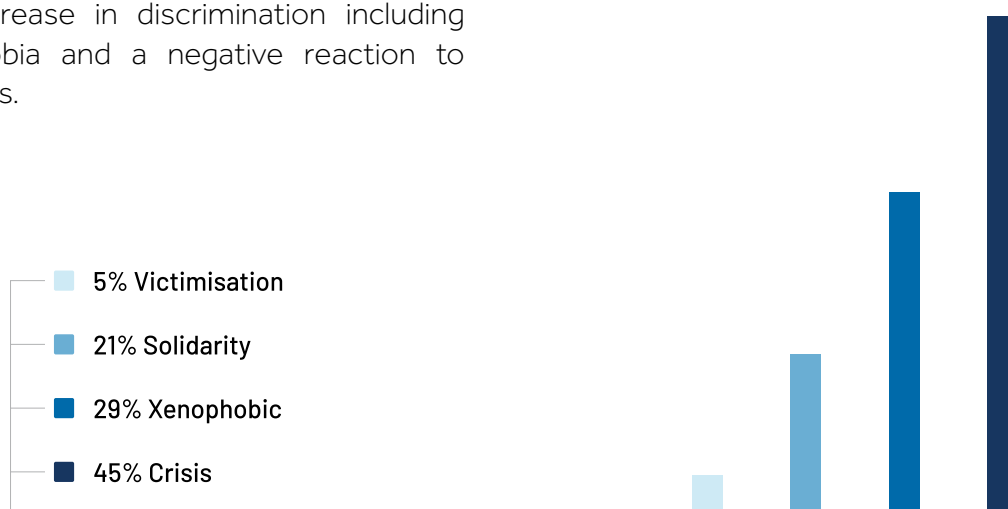
Narratives in Mainstream Media
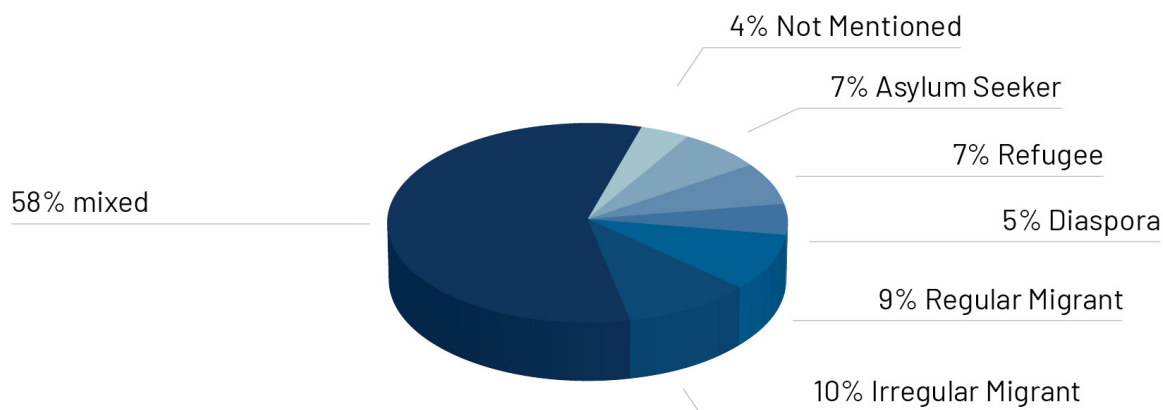*Figure 3. Frequencies of narratives reported for mainstream media*

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[6] Fiedler, A. (2019). The gap between here and there: Communication and information processes in the migration context of Syrian and Iraqi refugees on their way to Germany. *The International Communication Gazette,* 81(4), 327-345.

Critical evaluation of current research into migration narratives

Terminologies: Who are existing studies talking about?

References in the current academic literature produce a number of disparate terms for migrants, with labels ranging from asylum seekers to irregular and regular migrants, refugees and diaspora (see figure 4). Most studies addressed a combination of these groups accounting for the 58% in the 'mixed' category, while 4% did not describe the type of migrant addressed. This may be partly due to the complexity of classifying migrants into 'exact' categories but also suggests a dearth of studies focused on specific migration groups.

Noteworthy in the literature is also the lack of studies addressing specific **migrant demographics**. Only 6% of studies focused specifically on migration experiences by men and 3% document on those of children or women, respectively. Even fewer studies (1%) addressed experiences of migrants from LGBTQ+ groups. This suggests that knowledge about perceptions and migration experiences of vulnerable groups remain underrepresented.
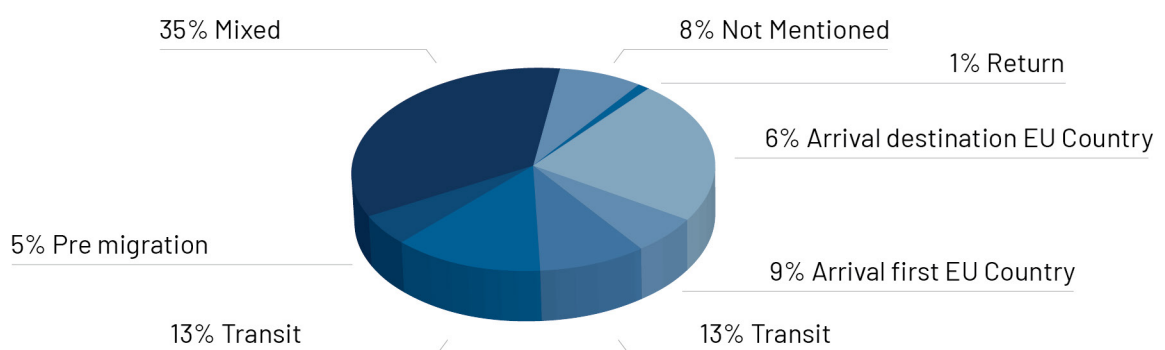

4% Not Mentioned

7% Asylum Seeker

7% Refugee

5% Diaspora

9% Regular Migrant

10% Irregular Migrant

58% mixed

Migrant Type
Figure 4. Terms used for migrants in the reviewed academic literature

Which migration phases are considered?

The majority of literature (35%) reported migration experiences across multiple migration phases, suggesting a process perspective in which migration is a trajectory with multiple steps and stages (figure 5). A smaller number of documents (23%) addressed issues specific to migrant integration, i.e., the process of settling into a new country. This group of studies was highly diverse – ranging from migrant integration experiences directly after arrival to experiences after many years within the host society. In contrast, the vital phases before migration (pre-migration) and after return to the country of origin have received very little attention. Hence, migration narratives and their impact on migration decisions in origin countries remain understudied.

35% Mixed

8% Not Mentioned

1% Return

6% Arrival destination EU Country

5% Pre migration

9% Arrival first EU Country

13% Transit

13% Transit

Migrant Phase
Figure 5. Migrant phases addressed in the reviewed literature

Part 2:

# Current approaches, policies and best practices

Migration Policies

The 'securitization of migration' – understood as increasingly framing migration policies in the realm of security – has shaped the common understanding of what or who represents a (potential) threat. Narratives of threats and security risks have justified measures, policies and laws that were once considered to be extreme, unjustified and inhumane. The analysis of selected policies has shown that threats, seen from states' perspectives, are not only understood as **public or individual security threats**. Several institutions referred to **economic threats** resulting from, for instance, a "disproportionate" number of asylum seekers arriving in countries of transit and destination, or migrants engaging in informal economic activities. Other threats, for example **symbolic threats** to a country's sovereignty by undermining its borders or abusing its policies, have also been highlighted.

Policy measures operating at the intersection of managing migration and security were collected in **12 countries** which, together, cover all three categories along the migration journey.

Countries of origin, of transit and of destination

- Algeria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Egypt
- Germany
- Greece
- Italy
- Kosovo
- Spain
- Tunisia
- United Kingdom
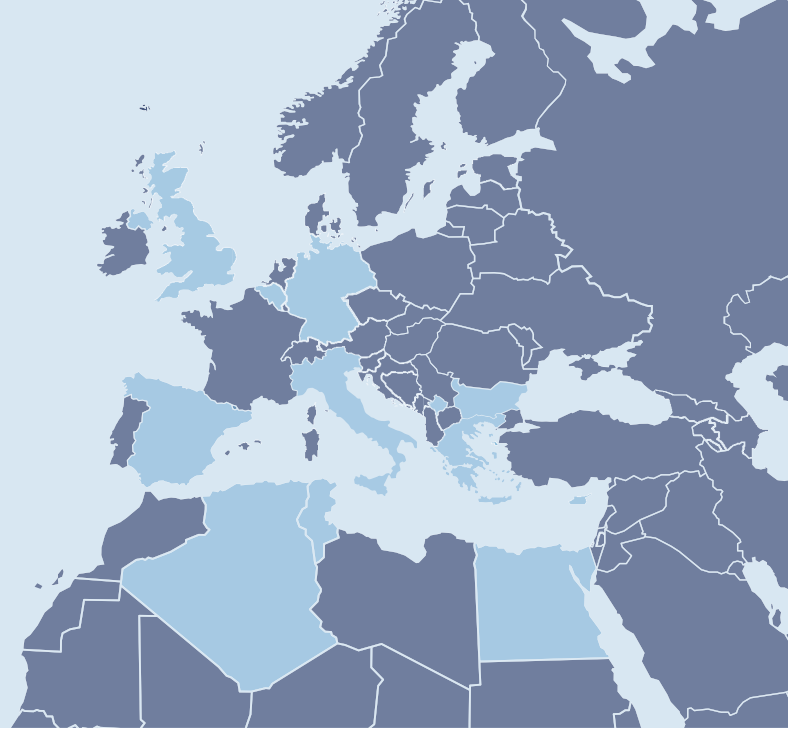
Perceived threats related to migration

The in-depth examination of documents revealed 13 threat types. In figure 6 these threats are organised according to the group they affect most: on the top are threats that affect migrants' security, at the bottom threats that mainly affect host country security/stability and in between threats that affect both groups.

Perceived threats to migrants
- Death
- Detention and deportation
- Discrimination
- Violence and abuse

Perceived threats to both migrants and host societies
- Violent radicalisation and terrorism
- Domestic violent extremism
- Minor, serious and organised crime
- Human smuggling and trafficking
- Corruption
- Health problems/ disease
- Environmental

Perceived threats to host societies
- Economic
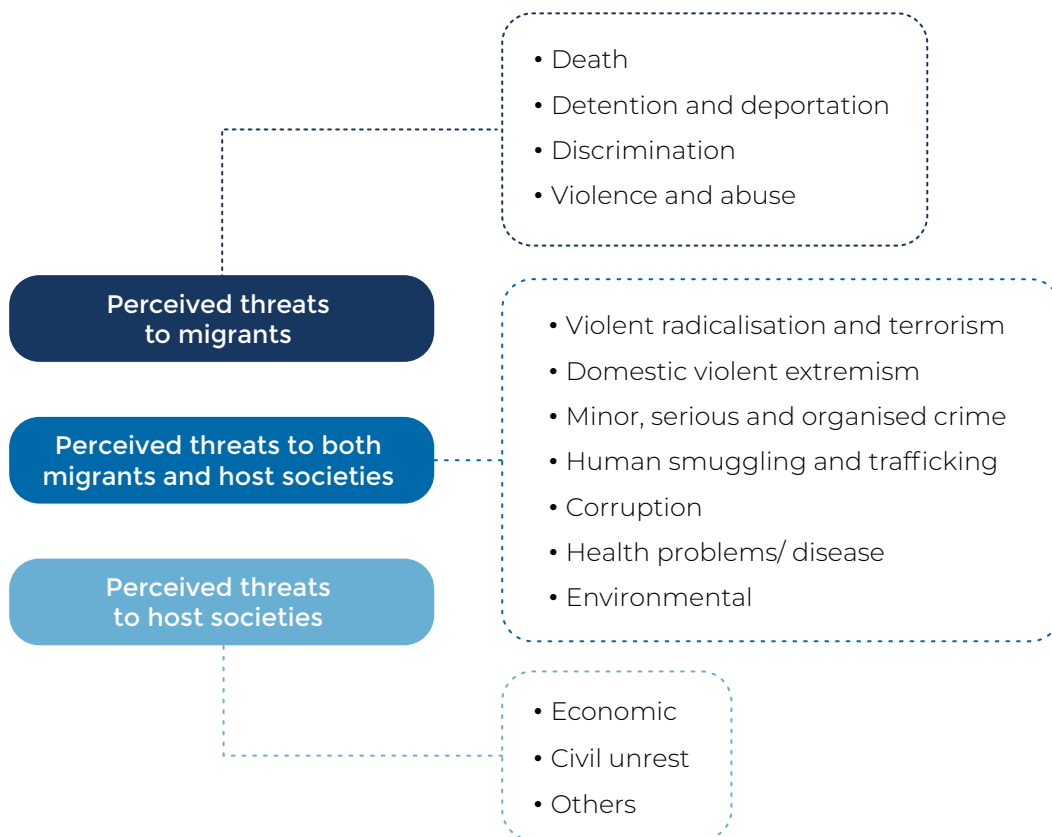- Civil unrest
- Others

Figure 6. Types of threats identified

Perceived threats to migrants

Death is primarily related to hazardous migration journeys but also to traveling illegally across dangerous geographies such as the Mediterranean and to attempts to leave facilities or cross land borders illegally. **Detention and deportation** address narratives of imprisonment, exploitation, and abuse. **Discrimination,** according to the reports, often occurs once migrants entered destination countries where migrants experience it in the form of racism, xenophobia and prejudices. **Violence and abuse** include actions such as sexual violence and rape, exploitation and severe psychological distress.

Perceived threats to both migrants and host societies

The threat of **violent radicalisation and extremism** is included among the threats that affect host countries despite the fact that we have to consider that those who have suffered a process of radicalisation and recruitment are also victims of their recruiters. In reports, domestic violent extremism is sometimes difficult to differentiate from violent radicalisation and terrorism. In this case, **domestic violent extremism** does not imply the link of the individual with violent actions of terrorist organisations but it can harm both migrants and host countries, as citizens can become extremists over the issue of migration and the importance of right-wing parties increase. This could mean xenophobic or exclusionary measures that negatively influence social cohesion. Migrants are moreover widely perceived by host states and citizens as related to **minor, serious and organised crime**. The reason for that relationship takes different forms: they are part (and sometimes victims) of the increasingly profitable 'business' of human trafficking networks which are related to drug trafficking, prostitution, etc.

Among the group of threats that affect migrants, host societies as well as countries of origin and transit is also **human smuggling and trafficking**.

An important number of reports relates to the smuggling and trafficking of people, as an increasing number of people contact crime organisations to find a way to pass through Europe. **Corruption** also affects both groups, as it can happen when state officials allow criminals to operate freely and turn a blind eye to their business of smuggling and trafficking people. **Health problems and diseases** are clearly a threat to both migrants and host countries. Among host country populations it is often believed that migrants can bring new diseases to Europe as they can suffer from different diseases due to different immune pasts or due to the conditions of journeys they take to arrive to Europe. **Climate change and environmental deterioration** is a push factor causing people to migrate to other countries, but also a problem for host countries as, for example, refugee camps have proven to create an environmental problem, such as large amounts of waste, both at sea and on land.

Migration in large numbers is one of the oldest soft threats perceived by host countries described in the academic literature, and its potential **economic** consequences for destination countries have long been perceived as an important threat to the extent that migrants are thought responsible for a decrease in the number of jobs for host citizens, a decrease in welfare state benefits or as a burden for public budgets. Migration is also sometimes perceived as a reason for **civil unrest**. It is seen as a threat for the political stability as far as 'unhappy' or 'disappointed' migrants can use riots or manifestations to show their fury against the system.

The category **others** includes a number of additional threats encountered in the documents analysed. Among them, we include 'new threats' and new or specific manifestations of old threats. These new threats or problems linked to migration are:

- Abuse of the asylum system

- Cultural threats and national identity

- Overcrowding in refugee camps

- Diplomatic problems

- Unaccompanied minors and women. Women, together with children, are described as a vulnerable target for human smuggling and trafficking and sexual violence.

Who is threatened?

The reported threats are linked to different referent objects. **Referent objects** are understood as persons, groups or ideals that are being threatened and need to be protected. Referent objects in this case are classified in migrants, host countries or both at the same time. Threats that are expected to affect directly the security of host societies are the most frequently mentioned issues across reports (see table 4). Particularly salient is the issue of violent radicalisation and terrorism. Among the threats perceived as most frequently affecting both migrants and host countries are human smuggling and trafficking; among those that affect mainly migrants are detention and deportation. The analysis also identifies threats that are related to security-policy areas (violent radicalisation and terrorism, minor, serious and organised crime, human smuggling and trafficking and border security). In this case, border security stands out among the security-related areas of policies analysed.

An important observation is that the threat of violent radicalisation and terrorism seems prominent in most of the reports of host countries. This means an imaginary that links this threat with those who come from the outside. Notably, host countries appeared more worried about the consequences that might come with the arrival of migrants than the threats migrants may suffer in their journeys to arrive in Europe.

Table 4. Threats and referent objects threatened
Country/region–specific differences in threat perceptions

Referent object	Threats	Frequencies	%	% Total
Migrants	Death	7	4.7 %	28.2 %
	Detention and Deportation	17	11.4 %	
	Discrimination	12	8.1 %	
	Violence and Abuse	6	4 %	
	Modern Slavery	0	0 %	
Migrants and host countries	Violent Radicalisation and Terrorism	29	19.5 %	43 %
	Minor, Serious and Organised Crime	23	15.5 %	
	Economic	7	4.7%	
	Civil Unrest	2	1.3 %	
	Disease	3	2 %	
Host countries	Human Smuggling and Trafficking	27	18.1 %	28.8 %
	Corruption	1	0.7 %	
	Domestic Violent Extremism	3	8.7 %	
	Environmental	2	1.3 %	
Total		149	100 %	100 %

A further classification of the documents was made according to country from which the information stems. Based on Forin and Healy (2018)[7], countries in the sample were classified into three categories: origin, transit and destination. Countries of origin and transit share a focus on threats that affect migrants and host countries: human smuggling and trafficking (25% in each group); countries of origin also mentioned the issue of domestic violent extremism in host countries (25%) that affect migrants and locals. Destination countries, which are the biggest group in the database are focused on host country threats, pay special attention to issues related to violent radicalisation and terrorism (21.3%).

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[7] Forin, R. & Healy, C. (2018). *Trafficking Along Migration Routes to Europe: Bridging the Gap between Migration, Asylum and Anti-Trafficking.* Vienna: ICMPD.

Policies addressing security threats linked with migration

The migration-security nexus and the relevance of new technologies and social media in addressing security threats linked with perceptions of destination areas (either of Europe or of a particular country) and contributing to a certain extent to decisions to migrate can be clustered into migration policies, security policies and social media and ICT policies:

Migration policies are policies addressing various migration areas such as asylum, integration, return, irregular migration, border management, and threat of trafficking in human beings.

Security policies are not specific to migrant populations but have increasingly addressed security threats linked with migration movements or those that tend to affect disproportionately individuals with migration backgrounds. These include policies addressing criminality among migrants and policies, violent extremism and radicalisation.

Technology and social media policies are explored to investigate the extent to which policies take into account the role of emerging technologies and social media in informing decisions to migrate and mitigate security threats linked to the use of technologies. The policies explored are clustered under ICT policies, referring to the recent creation of joint databases and registers, and information policies, referring to information campaigns.

The policy measures introduced to counter migration threats reflect an approach that not only aims at **addressing particular challenges** but also the **behaviour**, and sometimes the **environment,** that gives rise to these challenges. Policies addressing radicalisation online or the spread of disinformation on social media platforms signal states' **varying levels of intervention**. From a regulatory perspective, what many of these policies had in common is a **command and control approach**, which manifests through the increasing involvement of law-enforcement authorities at different stages of migration phases, the emphasis put on the collection and sharing of information on migrants across institutions and states, and the stricter methods used to enforce compliance, both in relation to neighbouring states as well as individuals. Governments have actively used **incentives and disincentives** to motivate migrants to integrate, comply and make decisions on their return or asylum applications. Similar approaches have also been used by EU governments in relation to countries of transit and origin, particularly regarding policies on return and border management, both of which require collaboration between these countries in order to address, for instance, irregular migration.

In the area of asylum, and as a response to what was seen by states as 'abusive' practices by some asylum seekers, including the lodging of several claims by the same applicants, and the incentives claimed during the waiting process, several countries introduced measures aimed at lowering the costs of processing asylum claims. By speeding up the processing of claims through early screenings, reducing the incentives associated with the waiting time and restricting working rights to applicants seen as more likely to receive asylum, governments aimed to **counter the economic and symbolic threats** to the asylum system by introducing stricter measures, **limiting incentives**, and by extension, changing asylum seekers' behaviours.

In North African countries, a 'crimmigration approach' was found, i.e. a policy approach whereby irregular migrants, including asylum seekers, are criminalised. This approach also extends to legal and illegal attempts to push migrants outside of the territories. This framing of migration refers to the symbolic threat that is illegal crossings of a country's borders. Through punishment and 'push-backs' states aim to discourage transiting migrants, asylum seekers and nationals alike from undertaking irregular journeys to, across and from their territories.

Current and Best Practices

Definition of 'best practice'

The definition and semantic range of a 'good practice' or 'best practice' varies depending on the actors competence for its implementation, the objectives of the actors or for which challenge the practice is implemented or suggested, the target groups of such practice and the broader context. The PERCEPTIONS project identified good practices to be implemented mainly by governmental bodies, policymakers, legislators, civil society organisations and Law-Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) as well as migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. In this context, '**good practices**' have been defined as those practices, measures, tools and strategies for (counter-)acting threats caused by narratives or perceptions and 'misperceptions' of migrants about Europe, keeping in mind that 'misperceptions' is always a matter of perspective – depending also on the findings of each of the PERCEPTIONS' partners and formed along the process of collection, categorisation and analysis of the respective data.

The general definition of best practices is open-ended and customised based on different approaches, including those related to best practices for addressing challenges regarding the safety and integrity of migrants and refugees and those related to threats to the security of the host country. In the project's regime, inspiration for filtering out and defining a measure, tool, practice, strategy as a 'best practice' has been drawn among others, from the criteria used for identifying best practices that address challenges for the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The project also refers to the UNHCR Good Practices for Urban Refugees platform definition of a good practice as 'a process or methodology that is ethical, fair, and replicable, has been shown to work well, succeeds in achieving its objective(s), and therefore can be recommended as a model', which 'need not be viewed as prescriptive, but can be adapted to meet new challenges, becoming better as improvements are discovered.'[8]

Type of 'best practices'

The majority of the proposed practices, measures and strategies have been clustered around the years 2017 (25%), 2018 (20%) and 2019 (25%). According to figure 7, almost two out of ten organisations proposed **information days** and **training to stakeholders** (LEAs, border authorities, the general public, etc.) as counterstrategy. This is followed by the proposition for the organisation/planning of information days and training for migrants for awareness raising around multiple issues and the **design of new integration procedures** with a percentage of 16% each.

25% represent strategies/tools and measures that have been proposed through funded projects (EU, regional and national), while four out of ten organisations also included the **incorporation and adoption of new technologies** such as e-learning platforms, mobile applications, websites and art-based campaigns. These were suggested as an innovative approach for migrant integration in the local society[9] as well as for addressing potential threats against migrant and/or refugees, either during their journeys or inside the destination country.[10] Finally, combined practices falling under the majority of 34% 'other' included several sub-strategies such as (social) media awareness campaigns against migrant smuggling, human trafficking and radicalisation; toolkits and other informational/training material against misinformation around migrants and refugees; review reports; campaigns and other publications around public perceptions towards migrants not only on an international and EU level but also on a national level (e.g. Greece, Cyprus, Germany, etc.); reports and interventions supporting migrant integration and reintegration as well as story sharing platforms and art-driven projects (cinema, photography, theatre) aiming to raise awareness to migrants against irregular migration and for the realistic depiction of Europe to their nationals.

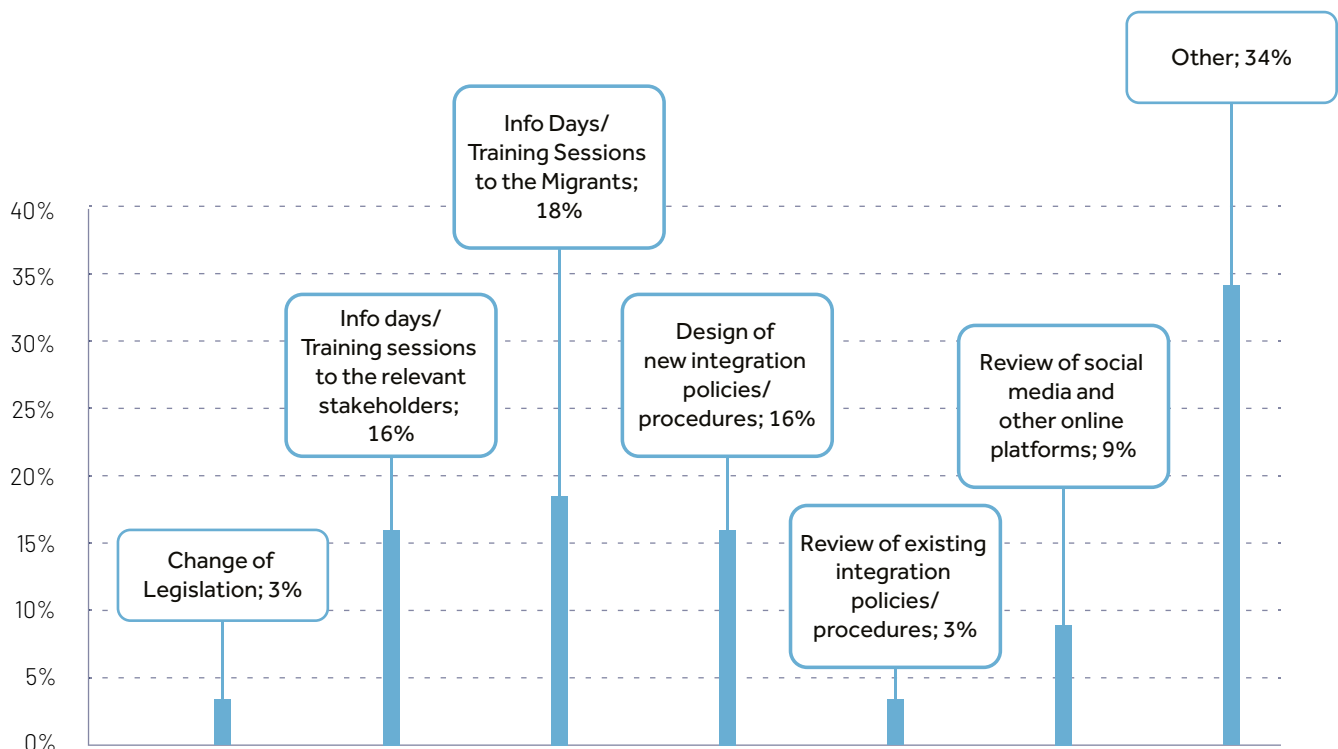*Figure 7. Types of proposed practice, measure, tool and strategy*

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[9] McAuliffe, M. (2016). *The appification of migration*. Retrieved from: https://www.policyforum.net/the-appification-of-migration/
[10] Szczepanikova, A., & Van Criekinge, T. (2018). *The future of migration in the European Union: Future scenarios and tools to stimulate forward-looking discussions*, European Union: EU Policy Lab.

This initial collection and analysis of existing practices, measures, tools, models and strategies for tackling perceived migration threats is aligned with the threat analysis in the Migration Policies section resulting in the following classification of six main categories of best practices:

1. Migrant integration in the host country (education, labour, housing, health, cultural integration)

2. Tackling radicalisation, hate speech, extremist behaviours and/or terrorism

3. Review of media representations of migrants and other misinformation

4. Awareness raising on the migrant journey and the risks associated with irregular migration routes (human trafficking, migrant smuggling, deaths, etc.) along with policies to tackle them

5. Addressing negative public perceptions, racism and xenophobia towards migrants in the host country

6. Protection against the violation of migrants' human rights and against other threats related to them in the host country

These best practice categories can be directly or indirectly associated with the identified threats (figure 8) and indirectly contribute to the targets and indicators of migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).[11]
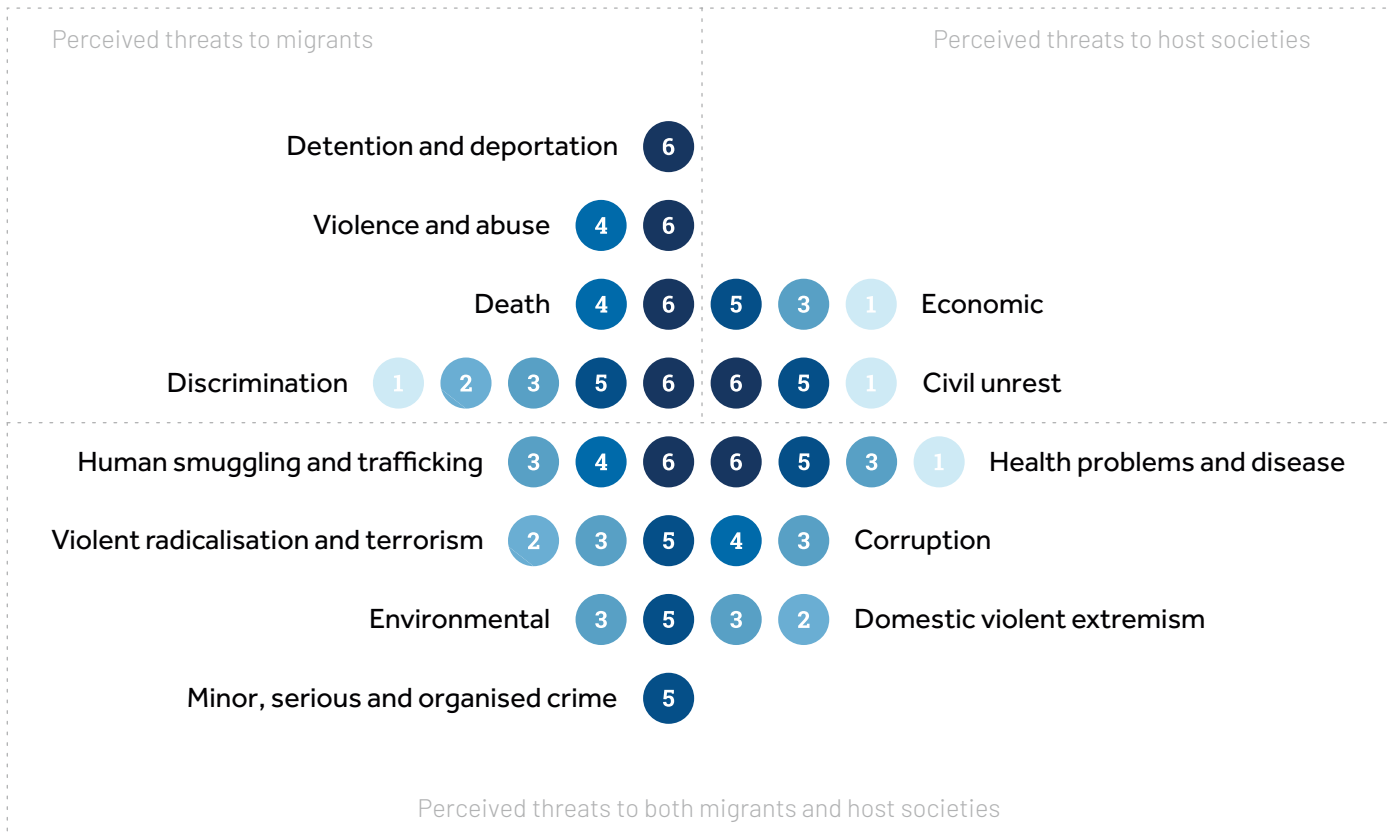

Figure 8. Association amongst reported good practices and identified threats

[11] cp. Migration Data Portal: https://migrationdataportal.org/

A final category of best practices includes good practices and tools stemming primarily from migrant stories and address combined versions of the previously mentioned issues and threats (e.g., the depiction of Europe in countries of origin, issues of reintegration of migrants in their original countries, threats before, during and after the migrant journey, etc.). It was decided to use this final category, as the practices proposed did not fit neatly into one of the prementioned categories.

Figure 9 summarises the main points derived for each type of best practice.

GCP, TOOLS AND MEASURES

- Art exhibition and workshop
- Recreational and cultural activities
- Video/media clips, films, TV reports
- Social media, Youtube videos for sharing experiences among migrants and refugees
- Photo galleries, art exhibtions, festivals, toolkits, cinema screenings, theatrical plays

- Community of practices
- Collaboration schemes between migrant and refugee community organisations and mainstream service providers
- Peer-to-peer meetings, Urban Innovative Actions, Capacity building lab, neighbourhood activities

- Recommendations lists
- Collection of strategies and synthesis reports
- Studies for public attitudes towards migration and recommendations
- Baseline study and annual monitoring reports
- Factsheets with FAG

- Digital portfolios
- Mobile applications and digital tools in the specific services relevant to migration process
- ICT, online interactive platforms with collective information in different languages

- Compliance of EU states, institutions and authorities with international human rights standards
- Reform of existing migration policies and legislation and policy recommendations (+COVID 19)
- Social and legal assistance (before and after)
- Code of practices on disinformation
- Crime prevention policies and other counter narrative initiatives

- Workshops, conferences, forums, joint platforms and training sessions
- Press announcements, social media posts for all relevant stakeholders
- Educational days, (online) awareness raising campaigns
- Dedicated training manuals, handbooks and toolkits

Figure 9. Summary of best practices across the six main categories

The collection of the aforementioned good practices can be utilised as an initial library of knowledge, as far as it concerns the best ways to prevent or counteract migration issues or threats derived from false narratives. Considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this library can be a useful asset by outlining preliminary countermeasures to tackle false narratives and to inform migrants about the considerable risks of travelling to Europe. Moreover, the collection of good practices can be used as lessons learnt in terms of preparedness, planning and implementation of similar measures to resolve or prevent a humanitarian crisis in the host country. Bearing in mind the COVID-19 situation in different countries, it is of utmost importance to gather, study and analyse the relation between such unpredictable situations and (mis)perceptions among asylum seekers, refugees and migrants towards Europe. Even more important is to study best practices to counter such threats in the migration and security context. Finally, good practices tackling threats linked with such narratives change dynamically and even new and more efficient ones may arise. Thus, they should be continuously investigated and monitored, to prevent and counter, where possible, potential new ways of distributing false narratives.

Who is proposing migration practices?

Of the organisations proposing measures, tools, practices or strategies, more than half of the organisations were civil society organisations/ NGOs (51% of the total sample), followed by governmental/policymaking bodies (34.8%). In addition, organisations on a national level were represented most frequently (53.7% of the total sample) followed by those on an international (21.5%) and European (18.8%) level (see table 5).

Finally, it is worth indicating that countries already implement such strategies on a national level, with the main target groups of the people who could benefit from each best practices seems to be unified under the umbrella of the terms 'migrant' and 'refugee'. In addition to this, a large proportion of good practices (46.6% of the total sample) also target other stakeholders, such as public bodies, the general public and society as a whole.

Table 5. Type and level of organisation proposing migration practices

Level of Organisation (implementation level)	Type of Organisation (proposal level)						
	Academic Think Tank	*Civil Society NGOs*	*Governmental Policymaking Body*	*Private Sector*	*Security LEA Border Agency*	*Other*	*Frequencies*
European	2	12	13	1	0	0	28
International	1	18	13	0	0	0	32
National	5	39	25	3	2	6	80
Regional	1	7	1	0	0	0	9
Frequencies	9	76	52	4	2	6	149

Monitoring of implemented practices

As far as evaluating monitoring measures are taken into consideration, 88% of the entries have reported that there were no clear monitoring measures, or that they are unknown/unpublished even if they do exist. Only 22 out of 149 entries reported the existence of a certain evaluation scheme for the proposed measure, reporting different impact indicators such as the number of people who benefit from the measure, the migrant integration impact level, the number of sessions and campaigns organised for certain initiatives or the outcomes of questionnaires, feedback and official reports. The number of entries indicating the effectiveness level each practice presented is even lower, with only 16 entries to have included the relevant impact scale.

Part 3:
Recommendations

Rethinking the 'vocabulary' of migration

When it comes to migrants' perceptions about Europe, dominant concerns often seem to revolve around the idea that migrants hold 'false' or 'inaccurate' perceptions, which need to be 'corrected' to stop them from coming to Europe in large numbers and with 'unrealistic' expectations that may lead to frustration. In the PERCEPTIONS project, however, we argue that there is no such thing as one 'right' perception of Europe or of what to expect after migration. The multitude of perspectives identified in our work supports this claim. Rather, the idea of 'false' perceptions reflects the concerns of those in positions of power who can define what is considered an 'accurate' perception of Europe. We therefore advocate to avoid the binary categorization of perceptions as either 'true' or 'false', or 'accurate' or 'inaccurate', without critically reflecting on who is defining them as such.

We also found that a growing acceptance of a securitization approach to migration leads to an increased focus on 'migration as a threat'. Indeed, authorities in many countries of transit and destination seem to pay a lot of attention to perceived 'threats' that migration is assumed to pose to host societies, and particularly to the threat of radicalisation and violent extremism. Here it is important to highlight that these securitization narratives and perceptions of 'migration as a threat' in themselves constitute a threat to both the individuals who migrate and the societies they cross/intend to reach, e.g. by closing legal migration routes and imposing strict border and immigration policies that foster the creation of illegal routes. In the PERCEPTIONS project, we take a critical approach to this framing of 'migration as a threat'. Instead, it is necessary to understand the impact this increasing securitization of migration perceptions has on migrants, migration decisions and host societies in Europe. In this regard, it is important to pay attention to the (limited) impact of migrants' agency in migration decisions in order to better understand to what extent perceptions of Europe influence actual migratory behaviour.

Capturing the full diversity of migration experiences

Other lessons learned concern the significant gaps in the current literature on migration and narratives. Firstly, there is a lack of knowledge about the effect of narratives on migration throughout the migration journey and for disparate migrant groups. Specific migrant demographics, especially vulnerable groups such as minors, people with disabilities or from LGBTQ+ communities, are severely under-researched. There are also few studies that explored the perceptions that first-line practitioners including LEAs, border guards and policymakers have about migration and migrants and the challenges they face. This means that our current knowledge about migration experiences lacks the voices of many migrant groups, especially the ones most vulnerable; and it lacks the voice of people that stand at the forefront of implementing national and EU migration policies.

A similar observation can be made with respect to threats. In general, reported threats represent the view of destination countries as most of the documents come from academic institutions/think tanks (25%) that talk about the situation in destination countries (80%) by organisations based at the national level (43%). This means that the conclusions we have reached are, in part, broadly the vision of destination countries. This conclusion points to the need to assess the perspectives and narratives of countries that migrants transit through as well as of their countries of origin. Together, these observations indicate the present view of migration to Europe is rather narrow and misses important points of view. More efforts need to be made to capture the full diversity and complexity of migration experiences and perspectives across all groups involved.

Strategic involvement of all stakeholder groups

Our research has revealed the large amount and diversity of relevant stakeholders for migration into Europe. An involvement roadmap should be followed to ensure intense and effective participation of all envisaged stakeholder groups, with due account of countries' structures of government and institutions and organisations at the central, regional and local levels. A clear engagement strategy will seek to achieve the stakeholders' sustained support and uptake of project results. The following levels of engagement, or combinations thereof, should be aimed at:

- inform (one-way communication)
- consult (gain information and feedback)
- involve (work directly throughout the process)
- collaborate (partner for the development of mutually agreed solutions)
- empower (delegate decision-making on a particular issue)
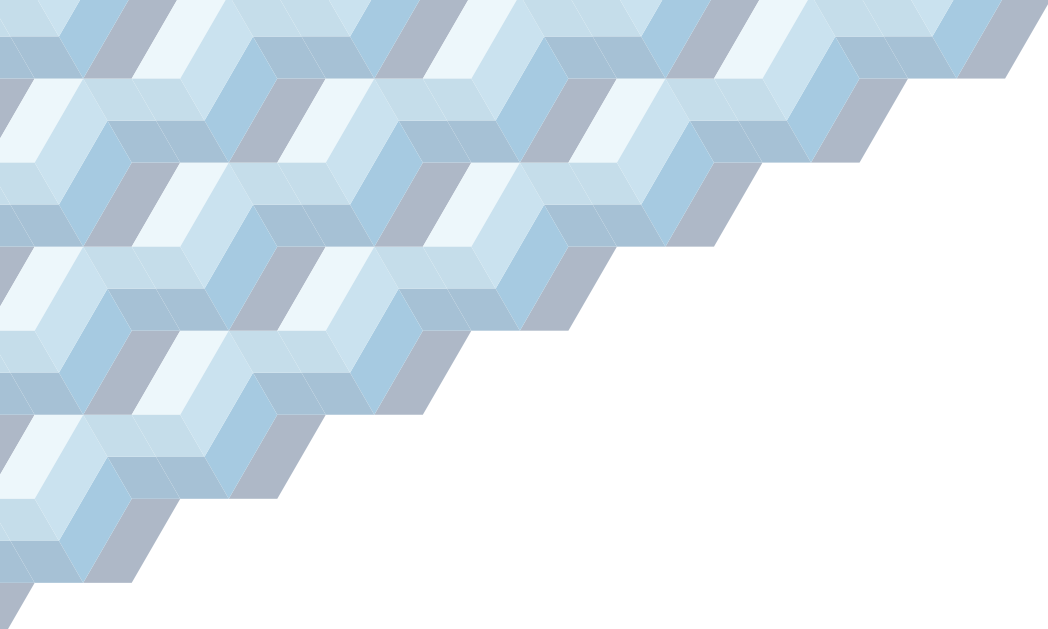
Depending on level of interest and influence, different strategies may be devised such as 'inform' for stakeholders of lower interest and influence, 'involve/consult' for entities of lower interest but higher influence and 'consult' for entities of higher interest but lower influence.[12] Thus, a balanced prioritizing approach should be taken to different stakeholders, depending on the engagement purpose and task.

Involvement and engagement should rely on principles such as:

Diversity and non-discrimination:

reaching the widest possible circle of stakeholders, without considerations of race, nationality, religion or belief, etc., but also carefully scrutinising the participation of any entity publicly known to be discriminating against migrants, minorities or any other population.

Gender mainstreaming:

proper involvement of women and women's (rights) entities and taking into account the gender dimension within all initial and sustained contacts with stakeholders.

Non-politicisation

involving and engaging stakeholders, especially policy makers, without discrimination based on their political affiliations, except in case of discriminatory attitudes.

[12] cp. Dinges, M., & Wang, a., & Köngeter, A. (2017). *Policy Brief on Stakeholder Engagement in Public-Public-Partnerships.* Positionspapier der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeinmedizin und Familienmedizin (ERA-LEARN 2020). DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14443.44327
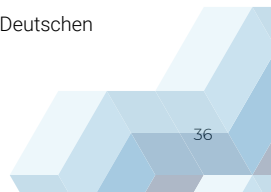
Creating and linking infrastructure

The creation of joint databases between different institutions and ministries has been a key measure for utilising technology to counter threats in relation to migrants' criminal backgrounds. Furthermore, measures involving a unified database were implemented in countries like Germany or Belgium and have had a significantly positive impact in bridging the gap and identifying potentially dangerous individuals. Moreover, states have also increasingly invested in improving their border management through technology. Many states have emphasised the importance of relying on computerised procedures to track entries and exits to the territory, the reliance on social media to provide information to prospective and current migrants, and the use of digital tools for language and integration courses pre-departure.

Addressing gaps in knowledge

In addition to the gaps already outlined above, our work highlights further areas for research. Most of the current research on migration narratives is of a qualitative nature. Future efforts should be directed to expanding quantitative approaches, for instance, to examine causal effects of how social media influences migrant decision-making. Social and traditional mass media are an important (mis)information source for migrants and host societies alike. There will therefore be a continued need to understand the effects of social media and mass media in framing migration narratives. Social media research should further focus on how 'trust' is instilled (e.g., whether migrants trust the information that friends, family, co-ethnics or close friends post as opposed to unknown sources or official government NGO websites or which migration narratives travel particularly well). Additionally, literature that looks at the impact of countermeasures on changing perceptions and expectations of migrants is clearly underrepresented in the literature reviewed. More research should be focused on analysing the current countermeasures and devising new more successful ones.
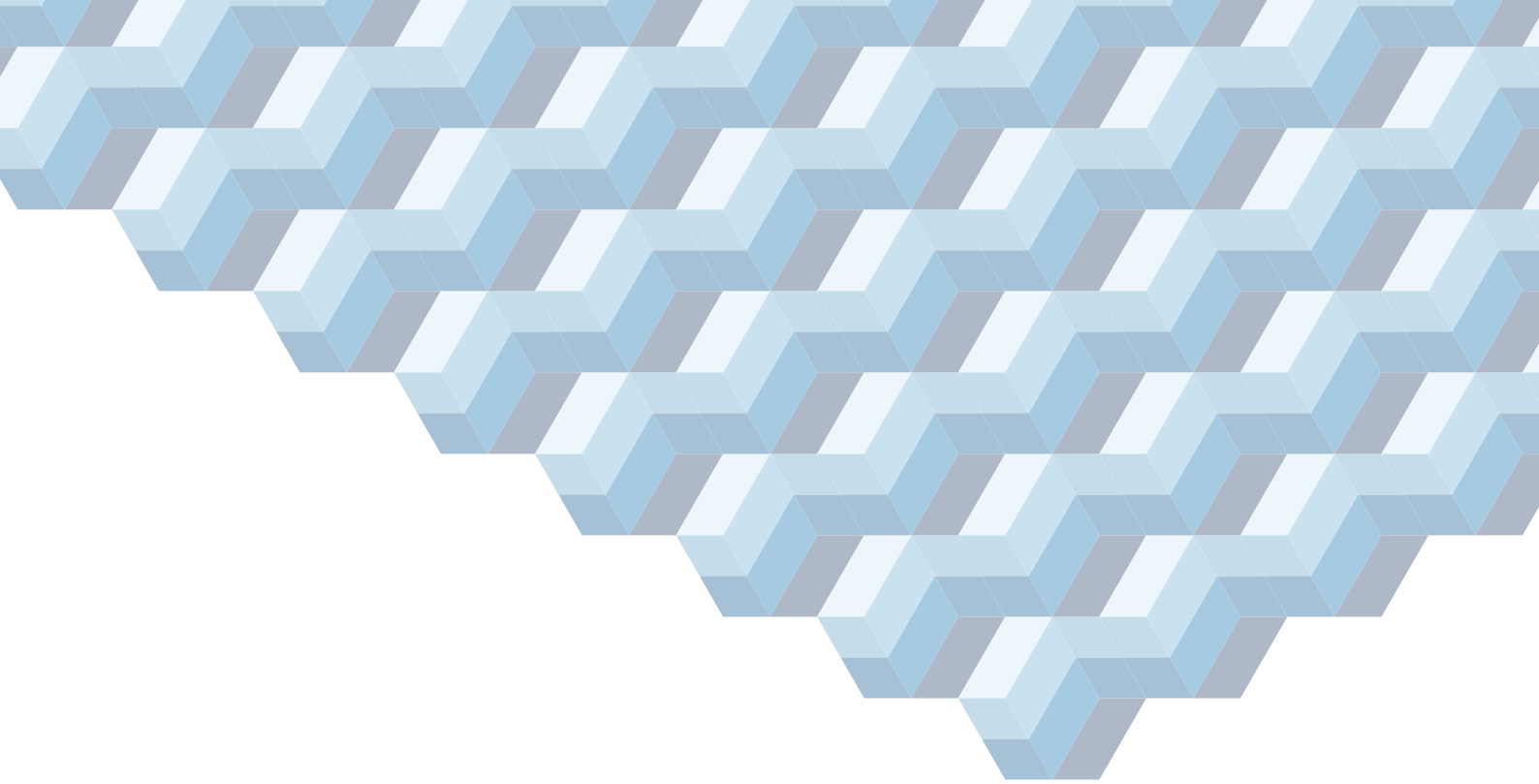
Next steps in PERCEPTIONS

This brochure reported findings from the first phase of PERCEPTIONS. In the next stages of the project, empirical work will investigate narratives from migrants, first-line practitioners and policy-makers as well as their spread in social media. In this work, rather than aiming to identify 'misperceptions' with the purpose of 'correcting' them, we try to gain insight into how and why these different actors consider particular perceptions or narratives as either 'accurate' or 'inaccurate', or 'true' or 'false'. This will lead to a more nuanced understanding of perceptions and narratives about Europe, as well as of the criteria by which their accuracy is evaluated by different stakeholder groups. The next phase will further investigate what countermeasures of perceiving 'migration as a threat' could look like according to the different actors involved.

Useful websites

European Commission Directorate-General for Home Affairs: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs

EU Immigration Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/immigration

European Migration Network: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration network/index_en.htm

European Website on Integration: http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi

European Asylum Support Office: http://easo.europa.eu

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: http://unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home

IOM: https://www.iom.int/

AIDA Asylum Information Database: https://www.asylumineurope.org/about-aida

Notes on Methods

The work presented in this brochure was conducted in the context of Work Package 2 (Research: literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices). Several methods were deployed to come to the findings of this initial phase of the research with data collection undertaken collectively by the 25 consortium partners.

The review of migration narratives is based on a systematic examination of academic literature on 'migration narratives' published from 2014. In total, partners collected a total of 856 entries, which after screening for relevance and duplications led to 221 sources including journals, books, conference papers and public reports. A mixed strategy of data extraction and an interpretive qualitative thematic synthesis was used to collate and synthesise the information in these sources. Best practices were collected from consortium partners who were asked to search for relevant practices in their countries. The process of collecting current good/ best practices resulted (after screening) in a final dataset of 149 entries. The same strategy was used to identify reports of migration-related threats. This led to a final matrix of documents composed of 138 reports that provides information about 177 threats and issues linked to migration movements across borders. Stakeholder information from partners collected stakeholders within and beyond their countries of origin and divided them into key stakeholder groups using a pre-defined template. The consortium adhered strictly to applicable personal data protection rules and no personal data was collected at this stage. As of December 2019, the stakeholder collection contained 1.134 unique entries from a number of countries in the EU and beyond.

Link to Deliverables

The information in this brochure is a summary of six PERCEPTIONS deliverables of Work Package 2 (PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH: Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices). Public deliverables of WP2 are available online: https://project.perceptions.eu/about/deliverables/

Acknowledgements

PERCEPTIONS

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