

# EMN-World Bank discussion series

## Footprints: Public Perceptions of Migration

### Selected Takeaways

- 1. Why has anti-migrant voting been on the rise?** Voting for anti-immigrant parties showed an increase across Europe, as the radical right benefited from the 2015-16 migration crisis due to 'issue salience' – i.e. the importance that individuals attach to certain issues. Migration had reached high salience at that time, but it has fallen considerably since then.
- 2. What about public attitudes?** Underlying public attitudes towards migrants have actually been quite stable, in fact, they have become gradually more positive in most countries across Europe. Behavior therefore seems to be driven by priorities not preferences, which is good news because it means that the task at hand is not to try to attempt the near impossible, i.e. change individual preferences, but instead to engage people on their priorities. Voters are looking to have balanced conversations on immigration. In fact, when educated elites avoid difficult conversations on migration, or appear to constantly speak in one voice, it reinforces the suspicion around the conspiracy of the liberals.
- 3. So how do we engage differently going forward? What not to do.** Economists and the media may need to take heed. Making the case for immigration based on aging populations seems to reinforce a scary specter of population replacement. Providing estimates of migrant contributions to the destination economies only ends up reinforcing the notion of us versus them. Showcasing migrants as entrepreneurial stars in Silicon Valley or Nobel prize winners seems like a fairy tale to ordinary people. Myth-busting with facts makes the myth stick more and an appeal to facts seems to get tainted by the implication that people who question immigration must be simply incapable of understanding facts.
- 4. Attempting to change hearts not just minds.** Of the ten common deeply rooted values (à la Schwartz) a few seem to matter a lot in the context of migration: universalism, tradition, security and conformity. A careful look at migration campaigns revealed that in pro-migration campaigns, values were not referred to that much, instead they tended to use statistics and facts. Conversely, anti-immigration campaigns draw very heavily on values - tradition, security, and conformity, are all brought to bear.

**5. Policies and institutions really do matter.** The Canadian story shows that the trade-off between patriotism and immigration can be broken, in fact they can go together which means the narrative around the “new us” seems to work. In fact, a whole of government approach has been working towards it since the 1970s with an eye on at least three aspects: first, national immigration policies have emphasized economic migration signaling that the newcomers are productive; second, the leadership has carved an inclusive vocabulary and indeed even has robust migrant political representation; and third and perhaps most key is the steady commitment to ‘institutional inclusion’ where meso level local institutions are designed to deliver services to help new Canadians access the labour market as well as integrate into Canadian society.

## **Resources**

Bloemraad, Irene (2012): Understanding 'Canadian Exceptionalism' in Immigration and Pluralism Policy. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/tcm-canadian-exceptionalism>.

Dennison, James (2019): What policy communication works for migration? Using values to depolarize. [https://epicamif.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/202007EMM4\\_OPAM\\_3rd\\_chapter\\_Using\\_values\\_to\\_depolarise.pdf](https://epicamif.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/202007EMM4_OPAM_3rd_chapter_Using_values_to_depolarise.pdf)

Dennison, James and Geddes, Andres (2018): A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.12620>

Katwala, Sunder (2019): How to talk about immigration: Better storytelling in a polarised time. [https://apolitical.co/en/solution\\_article/how-to-talk-about-immigration-the-stories-we-need-in-polarised-times](https://apolitical.co/en/solution_article/how-to-talk-about-immigration-the-stories-we-need-in-polarised-times)

Rutter, Jill and Carter Rosie (2018): National Conversation on Migration. Final Report. <http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-report.National-Conversation.17.9.18.pdf>

Schwartz, Shalom H. “Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries.” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 25 (January 1, 1992): 1–65.