

ReSOMA

RESEARCH SOCIAL
PLATFORM ON MIGRATION
AND ASYLUM

NATIONAL
STAKEHOLDER
REPORT

September **2019**

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**Public opinion on migrants: the effect of
information and disinformation about EU policies**

INTEGRATION



National Stakeholder Reports aim to inquire the **stakeholders' response to the evolving EU policy agenda** and **assess the unmet needs** in EU Member states. They also offer a key opportunity to bring the recently ReSOMA briefs and outputs on each topic to the attention of the relevant actors at national level. As such, the reports play a key role in linking the current EU policy agenda with the debate and recent developments on migration, asylum and integration within Member states.

In the second year of ReSOMA, the consultations underpinning the reports were conducted via the ReSOMA online platform in order to mobilise the community of experts (the "Expert Database") through thread discussions.

Download this document and learn more about the Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum at: www.resoma.eu

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National Stakeholder Report

Who is reshaping public opinion on EU migration policies?

By Peter Scholten & Zeynep Kaşlı

Since 2015, the EU institutions are increasingly trying to respond and communicate to public opinion about developments and facts on EU migration policies. **Information about policy developments spread through Europe's fragmented media landscape**, alongside highly mediated stories of migrant arrivals and living conditions in and outside Europe, incidents of crime and acts of terrorism and **the use of fake news and disinformation for political purposes**.

As ReSOMA [ask the expert brief](#) mapping the recent research on media and public opinion relationship shows, the public opinion on EU migration policy are linked to **changing narratives and frames in policy and discourse** circulating in different media sources and at different scales (local versus national media). Social experiments also point at several **individual factors in shaping what we observe as "public opinion,"** such as one's empathy level, already existing partisanship or geographical proximity to newcomers.

In ReSOMA [expert interview](#), Dr. Leila Hadj Abdou and Dr. Lenka Dražanová highlight that:

- it is necessary to consider the negative effects of the increased **salience of the issue** on public opinion on migrants and migration policies.
- what appears as fake news nowadays is more related to how the available information is framed and presented.
- **issue framing** must be a key consideration of NGOs and policy actors who would like their claims and policy proposals to be welcomed and accepted by those with opposing values and opinions.

Therefore, key issues and controversies highlighted in the ReSOMA [discussion brief](#) include:

- links between attitudes towards migrants and attitude towards the EU
- trends towards polarisation, political fragmentation and mistrust
- changing discourses of mainstream political parties
- the importance of framing, messengers and storytelling
- role of the media in different politicised national contexts
- effects of direct experiences of EU migration policies
- new uses of social media, especially for fake news and disinformation.

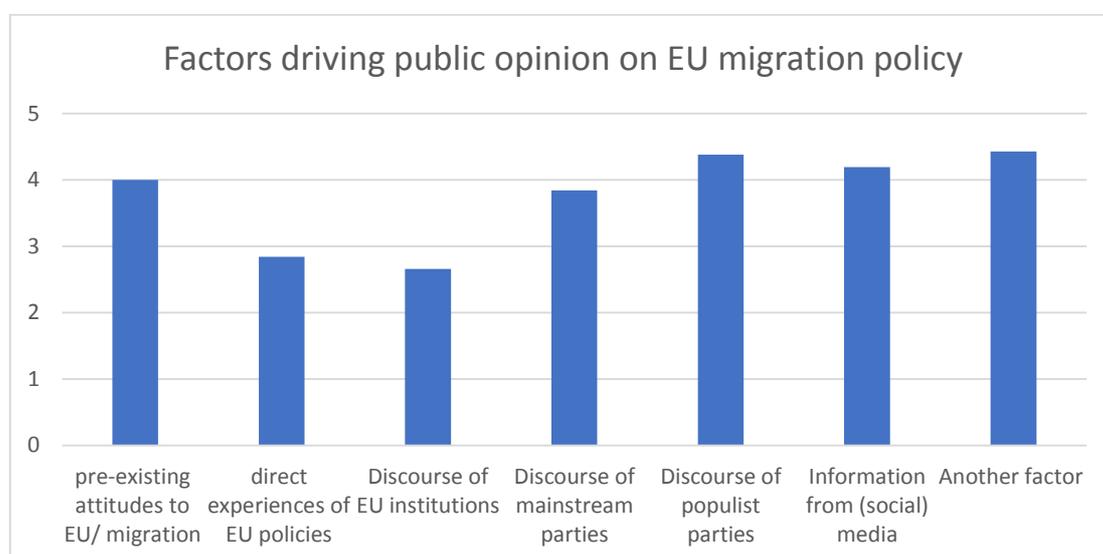
This report summarizes the online discussions via the ReSOMA web portal and survey conducted via the SurveyMonkey platform. The questions for both the online discussion and

the survey have been developed based on the needs and specifications of the ReSOMA stakeholder partners and were launched over the course of late June and early July. During that time, experts, who are already registered to the ReSOMA Expert Database, received invitation e-mail to take part in both the online discussions and the surveys. Further promotion was carried out from the ReSOMA twitter account. As a privacy measure, survey responses cannot be matched with Expert Database Profiles whereas the comments posted on the platform match with the name and the institution of each commentator. Summary reports include only the names of the organizations as the comments reflect the views of affiliated institutions.

During the online discussions, the respondents were asked to provide input on the following topics: the **drivers for changes** in public opinion on EU migration policy and suggested **policy actions** in shaping public opinion on migration. Although it is hard to make strong inferences due to low response rates, the survey results (N=32) and two inputs mainly from ECRE highlight following points:

- Among all factors, the discourse of EU institutions seems to be the least important in driving public opinion on EU's migration policies.
- Further research is needed on the potential involvement and impact of new actors, such as private sector, in shaping public debate and public opinion on migration.

According to the survey respondents, there are multiple factors driving public opinion on the EU's migration policies. The discourses of populist parties are followed by information from (social)media and people's pre-existing attitudes to the EU and to migration issues are found to be equally important factors. However, 7 out of 32 respondents also noted as another factor "images conveyed by mainstream media" "bad media coverage of incidents like Cologne attack" next to "integration policies" and "people's fears in host societies." Hence it is not wrong to claim that people consider the media effect even more prominent than the discourse of populist parties. According to the respondents, the discourse of EU institutions seems least important. The chart below presents the weighted average of used for each factor on a 5-point scale (N=32).



Policy actions in response to public opinion and changes in public debate

Consultations sought answers to the following questions: Which proactive measures and actors are effective for informing public opinion on a large scale? And which are effective for limiting the damage of fake news? How can authorities be more responsive to changes in public debate?

In their comment, ECRE representative stresses the necessity to stop fuelling misguided perceptions of public attitudes towards migration and, in line with Dennison and Dražanová's findings, recalls that there is no radical negative change in public attitudes towards migrants and refugees and instead an increase in salience of the migration issue. Hence it is not that European politicians lack the willingness to respond. In the words of ECRE representative, "their [European politicians] response is simply the wrong one and so is the analysis generating it. Human rights organisations can communicate this through direct advocacy and press work targeting policy makers."

In terms of how the authorities can be more responsive ECRE calls the politicians to defend the fundamental rights of people in need of protection that are eroded by the damage of fake news, instead of supporting their erosion. While inclusion of the voices of people of refugee or migrant background is vital, ECRE warns against the probability that their inclusion would provide a platform to respond and often confirm the negative clichés of pro-migrant civil society.

Yet, as again recalled by ECRE, recently there are examples of productive engagements from "unfamiliar places" which are potentially becoming influential to change the terms of debate on migration, such as private sector with the need for open societies and with CSR strategies and from those actors looking from the perspective of security and diplomacy and raising their concerns with the consequences of short-sighted and counter constructive European policies.

The effects of involvement of such actors in shaping public opinion on EU migration policy is a question open to further scrutiny.



ReSOMA - Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum

is a project funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme that aims at creating a platform for regular collaboration and exchange between Europe's well-developed networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policymaking. Being a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), ReSOMA is meant to communicate directly with policy makers by providing ready-to-use evidence on policy, policy perceptions and policy options on migration, asylum and integration gathered among researchers, stakeholders and practitioners.

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