

# Attitudes towards refugees and identity

## Pre-Analysis Plan

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### 1. Introduction

This document outlines our pre-analysis plan for an online experiment that collects donation decisions in favor of Ukraine and Syrian refugees. Respondents receive a monetary bonus (on top of their payment for taking part in a survey) and chose (a) to donate part of the bonus in favor of refugees and (b) whether the transfer should be done in cash or in-kind.

This pre-analysis plan presents the data sources, the structure of the experiment, and the empirical strategy. We will collect data through a survey company. At the time of writing this plan, we designed the survey questionnaires and the treatments. We intend to submit this Pre-Analysis Plan to the AEA RCT Registry.

#### 1.1. The context

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. More than two million people left Ukraine in the first two weeks of the war, with the European Union estimating that there may eventually be seven million refugees. Many of these refugees sought asylum in countries at the border, like Poland and other central- and eastern-European countries, while some moved to other European countries like Italy. The humanitarian response has been heartening, notwithstanding some countries' past resistance to providing similar support to asylum-seekers from other regions of the world. As Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said recently about people from Ukraine: "These are not the refugees we are used to. [...] These people are Europeans. [...] These people are intelligent, they are educated people. [...] This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists."<sup>1</sup>

The literature exploring the reasons behind the attitudes towards migrants shows that, along with economic motives, identity concerns play a significant role in affecting how much natives welcome migrants and refugees. People perceive society through the lens of a group they belong to, and this self-categorization generates the distinction between ingroups and outgroups. Ingroup favoritism and outgroup prejudice are common traits in behavior.

This project explores Italian natives' attitude towards refugees, some sharing a common European identity and some not sharing it, being from outside Europe. In particular, we collect donations in favor of two distinct groups of refugees hosted in Italy. One group comprises Ukrainian refugees, who should be perceived close in

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<sup>1</sup> Renata Brito, "Europe Welcomes Ukrainian Refugees -- Others Less So," AP News, 28 February 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-refugees-diversity-230b0cc790820b9bf8883f918fc8e313>

terms of (European) identity. The other group comprises Syrian refugees, who are likely to be perceived as distant from Europeans in terms of culture and religion. Given that the conflict in the Syria Arab Republic stretched into its tenth year, and refugees from Syria account for the largest share of refugees under UNHCR's mandate, the media coverage of this war has been ample, and the salience of the phenomenon high. This is why we target Syrians as the alternative group who can receive the donation.

The project collects the total amount of the donation and the choice of the form of the transfer, whether in-kind or cash. From an economic point of view, cash transfers are superior to in-kind ones because the freedom of choice maximizes recipients' utility. Conversely, givers prefer in-kind transfers because they care about the recipients' consumption of specific goods and do not appreciate the consumption of other goods ("consumption externalities" as in Browning, 1981). They may also think the recipients cannot understand what is good or bad for them. This is explained as the "paternalistic" view (Currie and Gahvari, 2008; Cunha, 2014). According to MacKay (2019), "the provision of in-kind benefits rather than cash is paternalistic since it rests on the judgment that citizens cannot be trusted to use cash transfers wisely to promote their own interests" (p. 423).

## **2. Research strategy and design**

The objective of the project is three-fold. First, we aim to test if priming the refugee status of populations with different cultural and racial distances from Italians (Ukrainians versus Syrians), affects the attitudes towards the specific primed group. We measure attitudes through real donations in favor of the different groups of refugees.

The second objective is to test if the arrival of a new group of refugees who share the European identity and are culturally closer to Italians changes how previous groups, who are culturally more distant (i.e. Syrians), are perceived and identified. This is because social groups are context-dependent and the identification of ingroup and outgroup is malleable. Fouka et al. (2021) find that the inflows of Black migrants in the US during the first Great Migration (1915-1930) affected the way natives classified other white migrants, coming from Eastern and South Europe, into ingroup and outgroups. The inflows of Black migrants increased the salience of skin color as opposed to language or religion and favored the assimilation of previously excluded European immigrants. Ex-ante, it is not clear whether a complementary or a substitute attitude prevails. According to a complementarity hypothesis, by priming the general refugees' crises that may involve people from Europe, Syrians can be perceived as closer, because they share the same refugee condition of Ukrainians. According to the substitution hypothesis, by priming the general refugees' crises, and automatically shifting the attention to the most salient Ukraine refugees, respondents may reduce donations to refugees like Syrians, whose situation is perceived as less urgent. This substitution hypothesis can be interpreted through the lens of moral licensing. Respondents may think they are doing a lot in favor of Ukrainians and reduce support in favor of another (more distant) group. To test these concurring hypotheses we prime that many people in the world seek asylum to flee conflicts and measure the donation in favor of Syrians, who are culturally and racially distant from Italians. Given the current situation, we believe that the most salient nationality of people seeking asylum is the Ukrainian one.

Third, we aim to test if identity concerns and different attitudes towards the groups of refugees affect the (dis)trust that recipients will wisely use the transfer received in the form of cash. Individual identification with a group can foster the propensity to trust others in the same group (Gueth et al., 2008). The preference for cash transfers should be higher when trust towards recipients is higher, and trust should be higher when people share the same identity. Therefore will test how our different treatments affect the composition of the donation, between in-kind and cash transfers.

The current project collects experimental data on a nationally representative population of Italian respondents recruited by an international survey company. We plan to enroll 5'000 respondents and randomly assign them into one of five treatments. The treatments prime that some people are the victim of violence and seek refugee protection, and some also prime the group's nationality. To provide an incentivized measure for the attitude towards the specific group of refugees, we ask respondents to use the bonus they receive on top of the survey

payment and make a real donation, in cash or in-kind or both, in favor of the specific group of Refugees. As a benchmark for the preferences towards cash versus in-kind donations, we also design a (control) treatment that considers Italian women victims of violence and elicit donations in favor of these women. To keep the gender trait constant across treatments, the treatments involving refugees refer only to women.

The Red Cross has programs that work to integrate Ukraine and Syrian refugees (among the others). It also offers assistance to Italian women who have been victims of domestic violence and it provides aids to these (and other) categories of people either in the form of in-kind transfers, or cash assistance. Therefore, we selected the Red Cross as the organization for the donation.

## 2.1. Treatments

Respondents choose the amount to donate after randomly receiving one of five treatments. We vary the nationality of the victims of violence primed in the treatments, and the beneficiaries of the donation. In the control condition (T0), we recall that Italian women can be victim if violence and ask to donate in favor of them. After all treatments, respondents decide about the amount to donate and the share of donation they want to allocate for in-kind versus cash transfers. The first treatment (T1) recalls the Ukraine situation and asks respondents to donate in favor of Ukraine female refugees hosted outside Ukraine. The second treatment (T2) recalls the Syrian situation and asks respondents to donate in favor of Syrian female refugees hosted outside Syria. The third treatment (T3) recalls some general information about refugees of all nationalities and asks respondents to donate in favor of Ukrainian women refugees hosted outside Ukraine. The fourth treatment (T4) recalls some general information about refugees of all nationalities and asks respondents to donate in favor of Syrian women refugees hosted outside Syria. T3 and T4 aim to credit either the complementarity or the substitution hypotheses, as described in objective two above.

## 2.2. Background questions

On top of the donation choices, the survey collects information on the respondent's gender, age, family status, education level, employment and work conditions, sector of work, political orientation, European versus Italian perceived identity and general attitude towards the degree of (paternalistic) intervention of the Government in the individual life. Given the novelty of this research question, we also present respondents with an open question where they can motivate their choice between in-kind and cash transfers.

## 3. Empirical strategy

We estimate the following equations:

$$D_i^t = \alpha + \beta_1 T_{i,1} + \beta_2 T_{i,2} + \beta_3 T_{i,3} + \boldsymbol{\varphi} \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

$$S_i^t = \gamma + \delta_1 T_{i,1} + \delta_2 T_{i,2} + \delta_3 T_{i,3} + \boldsymbol{\theta} \mathbf{X}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where  $D_i^t$  is the donation that respondent  $i$  makes in treatment  $t$  and  $S_i^t$  is the share of  $D_i^t$  that respondent  $i$  decides to give in the form of cash transfer in treatment  $t$ .  $T$  are dummy variables, that take the value of 1 if treatment is equal to  $t$ , and 0 otherwise, with  $t=1, 2, 3, 4$ , as described above. The excluded category is the control condition ( $t=0$ ).  $\mathbf{X}_i$  is a set of individual characteristics of the respondent.

### 3.1. Testable hypotheses

H1: A shared (European) identity determines a more favorable attitude towards Ukraine refugees compared to refugees who do not share this identity.

Donation in Treatment 1 is higher than donation in Treatment 2:  $\beta_1 > \beta_2$

H2: The stronger the common identity, the higher trust in the recipient.

H2a: The share of cash transfer in the control condition is higher than the share of cash transfer in Treatments 1 and 2:  $\delta_1 < 0$ ;  $\delta_2 < 0$

H2b: The share of cash transfer in Treatment 1 is higher than the share of cash transfer in Treatment 2:  $\delta_1 > \delta_2$

H3a: Complementarity hypothesis: The salience of the refugees status, that can involve persons with a shared (European) identity, improves the attitude towards all refugees.

Donation in Treatment 3 is higher than donation in Treatment 2:  $\beta_3 > \beta_2$

H3b: Substitution hypothesis: the salience of a shared (European) identity worsens the attitude towards other refugees, who do not share the same (European) identity.

Donation in Treatment 4 is lower than donation in Treatment 2:  $\beta_3 < \beta_2$

### 3.2 Heterogeneity

Using the background data collected in the survey, we will also study heterogeneity in donation behavior. Our interest is to detect any differential effect depending on the degree of European identity of the respondents.

### 4. Sample size requirements

The novelty of this study makes it difficult to perform exact power calculations. We can, however, determine the sample size needed to detect a non-trivial effect size with statistical precision.

We expect that the average donation in favor of Syrian migrants reflects the donation in favor of migrants of an unspecified nationality. We can therefore take as a reference the data of a previous study, where the average amount donated by respondents to migrants was equal to 20% of the endowment. If the average donation in favor of Syrian migrants is equal to 20% of the endowment, in the presence of migrants who share the same EU identity or Italian women in a disadvantaged condition, with a sample size of 313 we will be able to detect an increase in donation up to 30% of the endowment (corresponding to an increase of 50%) with 95% confidence level and 80% power.

Because we would consider our interventions as being successful only if they generate non-trivial increases in donation rates, our proposed sample sizes of 1,250 subjects for control and treatments T1 and T2 and a sample sizes of 625 subjects for treatments T3 and T4 are comfortably adequate to detect meaningful, reasonable-sized effects.

### References

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