

# Attitudes towards refugees and identity

## Pre-Analysis Plan

Cristina Cattaneo

Daniela Grieco

Nicola Lacetera

Mario Macis

*November 2022*

**Data collection location:** Italy

**Data collection date:** November 2022

### 1. Introduction

This document outlines our pre-analysis plan for an online experiment that collects donation decisions in favor of refugees of different nationalities. 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 of a specific nationality 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. This positive response came not only from citizens but also from policymakers that ensured the implementation of the Directive 2001/55/EC in order to guarantee immediate and temporary protection to Ukrainians fleeing the war.

The national interests of member states in the realm of EU asylum and border policies are extremely diverse, and these differences have limited the process of reforming the legislative framework. The current system assigns legal obligation and responsibility to process asylum seekers to the first country of arrival. While Northern EU states are against any reform of the current Dublin regime, the peripheral Member States, which are mainly located in the South, advocate for a burden-sharing allocation mechanism of refugees. The perception that the care of refugees is a burden that is not equally shared by the different member states, may generate hostility in the population of the overwhelmed receiving countries, which eventually translates in a negative attitude towards refugees.

A more decisive EU role in enforcing asylum and border policies that make the burden more equally distributed among member states, can improve the attitudes towards refugees of citizens in EU countries, particularly those that feel treated unequally. On the other hand, a more substantial role of the EU in asylum policies can be interpreted as the EU being more open and welcoming towards refugees. This message can worsen the attitudes, particularly among those who think that there are too many refugees.

## 2. Research strategy and design

The objective of the project is three-fold. First, we aim to test if the way the asylum seekers are managed and relocated between the different European countries, affects the attitude towards refugees. To meet this objective, we will analyze if priming a reform of the EU refugee legislative framework, which sets more equal allocation rules among member states, improves or worsens the attitudes. To provide an incentivized measure for the attitude towards refugees, we ask respondents to use the bonus they receive on top of the survey payment and make a real donation in favor of the Refugees.

Second, we aim to test if the way respondents react to the prime depends on the nationality of the refugees. We vary the cultural/ racial distances of the refugees compared to natives. The literature exploring the reasons behind the attitudes towards migrants shows that, among other factors, 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. In particular, we explore Italian natives' attitude towards refugees, some sharing a common European identity and some not sharing it, being from outside Europe. To this aim, 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 terms of (European) identity. The other group comprises refugees from the African continent, who are likely to be perceived as distant from Europeans in terms of culture and religion.

The project collects not only the total amount of the donation but also the choice of the form of the transfer, whether in-kind or cash. This design allows us to meet the third objective, and test if identity concerns affect the (dis)trust that recipients will wisely use the transfer received in the form of 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).

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, we will test how the nationality of the refugees contained in the 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 differ in the nationality of the victims of violence that seek refugee protection. They also differ in whether they prime the attempt to reform the EU legislative framework in the domain of refugees. As a benchmark for the preferences towards cash versus in-kind donations, we also design a (control) treatment that considers Italian victims of violence and elicit donations in favor of them.

The Red Cross has programs that work to integrate refugees. It also offers assistance to 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 after randomly receiving one of five treatments decide about the amount to donate and the share of donation they want to allocate for in-kind versus cash transfers to specific groups of people, victim of violence. In the control condition (T0), we recall that Italian citizens can be victims of violence and deprivation

and ask to donate in favor of them. The first treatment (T1) recalls that many Ukrainians are victims of violence and asks respondents to donate in favor of Ukraine refugees hosted outside Ukraine. The second treatment (T2) is identical to treatment T1 but also primes a possible reform of the EU legislative framework that employs burden-sharing rules rather than the first-country-of-entry' rule. The third treatment (T3) recalls that many Africans are victims of violence and asks respondents to donate in favor of African refugees hosted in Italy. The fourth treatment (T4) is identical to treatment T3 but also primes the reform of the EU legislative framework.

## 2.2. Background questions

On top of the donation choices, the survey collects socio-demographic information such as gender, age, family status, education level, employment and work conditions, sector of work and political orientation. We also collect information on the expected average donation of other respondents, European perceived identity, trust in the EU and whether a stronger role of the EU in asylum policies is indeed associated with the idea that the EU will welcome a higher number of refugees.

The survey also includes an open-ended question that ask participants to explain the reasons for their donation choices. We also present respondents with an open question where they can motivate their choice between in-kind and cash transfers. In both cases, we plan to perform text analysis to further investigate the underlying factors driving differences in the outcomes of interest. The analysis will include the computation of most frequently used words and phrases (e.g. bigrams), topic modeling, and semantic similarity among full text between and within conditions.

## 3. Empirical strategy

This study will estimate the following equations:

$$D_i^t = \alpha + \beta_1 T_1 + \beta_2 T_2 + \beta_3 T_3 + \beta_4 T_4 + \boldsymbol{\varphi} \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $D_i^t$  is the donation that respondent  $i$  makes 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 ( $t=0$ ).  $X_i$  is a set of individual characteristics of the respondent,

and

$$S_i^t = \gamma + \delta_1 T_1 + \delta_2 T_2 + \delta_3 T_3 + \delta_4 T_4 + \boldsymbol{\theta} \mathbf{X}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where  $S_i^t$  is the share of  $D_i^t$  that respondent  $i$  decides to give in the form of cash transfer in treatment  $t$ . The study will address the following questions.

1. Does priming a reform of the EU refugee legislative framework affect the attitudes?

*Donation in Treatment 2 is higher(lower) than donation in Treatment 1:  $\beta_2 \neq \beta_1$  and donation in Treatment 4 is higher(lower) than donation in Treatment 3:  $\beta_4 \neq \beta_3$*

2. Does cultural/racial distance influence the attitude towards refugees? Does a greater perceived distance worsen the attitudes towards refugees?

*In the absence of the priming of the reform of the EU refugee legislative framework, donation in Treatment 1 is higher than Donation in Treatment 3:  $\beta_1 > \beta_3$*

3. Is the effect of priming a reform of the EU refugee legislative framework on attitudes moderated by the nationality of the Refugees?

*This implies testing if  $\beta_2 \neq \beta_4$ .*

4. Does a stronger common identity increase the trust in the recipient?

*H4a: The share of cash transfer in the control condition is higher than the share of cash transfer in all Treatments:  $\delta_1 < 0$ ;  $\delta_2 < 0$ ;  $\delta_3 < 0$ ;  $\delta_4 < 0$ .*

*H4b: The share of cash transfer in Treatment 1 is higher than the share of cash transfer in Treatment 3:  $\delta_1 > \delta_3$ . The share of cash transfer in Treatment 2 is higher than the share of cash transfer in Treatment 4:  $\delta_2 > \delta_4$ . To test this hypothesis, we can merge Treatment 1 with Treatment 2 (Treatment 1\_2) and Treatment 3 with Treatment 4 (Treatment 3\_4), and test whether the share of cash transfer in Treatment 1\_2 is higher than the share of cash transfer in Treatment 3\_4.*

### **3.2 Heterogeneity**

In exploratory analysis we will study heterogeneity in donation behavior. Our interest is to detect any differential effect depending on the political orientation of the respondents, degree of European identity of the respondents, and skill level 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 African refugees 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, without priming the reform of the EU refugee legislative framework, the average donation in favor of African refugees is equal to 20% of the endowment, in the presence of Refugees who share the same EU identity 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 1'000 subjects for control and treatments are comfortably adequate to detect meaningful, reasonable-sized effects.

### **References**

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