



PERCEPTIONS



**An Overview of Stakeholders
Narratives on Perceptions
and (Mis)information
regarding Migration to Europe
and Migration Policies**

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PERCEPTIONS

The PERCEPTIONS Project

The Horizon 2020 PERCEPTIONS Project¹ aims to identify the ways in which perceptions and narratives of the EU come into play in shaping migrants' decision-making process and experiences, the sources and channels through which these narratives are disseminated, and the potential consequences that can result from (mis)perceptions and (mis)information regarding migration, the EU, or even policy effectiveness. By doing so, it sheds light on contrasting views on migration and migration policy, the challenges involved in migration management and the proposals and recommendations offered by stakeholders in regards to the main challenges faced in relation to international migration.

Project Objectives:

- 1) Identify through the analysis of secondary sources the main contemporary narratives concerning perceptions of Europe abroad, migration to the EU and migration-related challenges in Europe
- 2) Investigate through empirical research conducted with migrants and professionals in the field of migration the main narratives about Europe abroad as well as potential (mis)perceptions of Europe, their influence in migration decision-making processes, as well as the dominant narratives on the most pressing migration-related challenges and recommendations offered by stakeholders
- 3) Create toolkits for disseminating knowledge in regards to narratives on migration to the EU, migration-related challenges, migration policy and best practices in migration

Consortium:

The project consortium is made up of 26 partners in 15 countries, including ten EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, and The Netherlands), two other European countries (Kosovo and the United Kingdom), and three countries outside of Europe (Algeria, Egypt and Israel).

The Project runs from September 2019 to February 2023.

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Aims and Structure of this Brochure

The purpose of this brochure is to disseminate research findings beyond standard academic circles. It aims to be a useful reference for professionals in the field of migration and, more broadly, anyone interested in migration as a societal phenomenon. Most importantly, it intends to provide feedback to research participants. Indeed, without their knowledge and generous contributions to the project, the research findings would have been unattainable.

The brochure provides first an introduction, followed by a summarised list of key findings, and a brief section on research methodology. The main body of the brochure includes a more detailed description of the findings organised into five thematic parts: 1) perceptions, information and motivations for migrating, 2) migrants' experiences: from origin to uncertain integration

paths, 3) debates and challenges in transit and destination countries, 4) professionals' views on their work and best practices, and lastly, 5) stakeholders' recommendations for the future. A section on concluding remarks offers an overall discussion of the results, followed by a note on terminology and a list of project deliverables that the findings reported here are based on, some of which may be accessed through the project's website for further reference.

Introduction

This report presents the main findings of research conducted with migrants and professionals in the area of migration regarding perceptions of Europe, channels and sources of (mis)information, narratives on migration-related challenges and recommendations for future policies and best practices. It provides an up-to-date overview of contested narratives on migration as expressed by various stakeholders, including asylum seekers and other migrants, as well as potential migrants in Europe and North Africa, and front-line practitioners working in the areas of support and advocacy, policy making, law enforcement and migration studies.

While there are points of general agreement among stakeholders, differing narratives concerning misinformation and migration-related challenges –and thus recommendations– have also emerged. Different perceptions of threats associated to migration can be linked to differing perceptions of causes of the phenomenon, differing views on

what may be legitimate means of action to deal with it, and differing views on responsibility bearing.

Research participants included migrants, support and advocacy professionals, policy makers, law enforcement agents and CSO and intergovernmental agency representatives. While this document presents different trends among the narratives expressed by each of these stakeholder groups, it is important to note there is no internal homogeneity among any of these groups. Furthermore, although some stakeholders who participated in the research belonged to more than one stakeholder group, their participation was linked to either their experiences as migrants, or as professionals in migration-related areas. Lastly, the following paragraphs describe the views and perspectives, as well as policy recommendations as described by participant stakeholders. Thus, no assessment of these practices is included here.

Key Summary Findings

The research findings, described in more detail throughout other sections of the brochure, are summarised here, together with a selection of quotes from research participants:

Perceptions of Europe

Before arriving to Europe, perceptions of Europe shared through migrants' accounts were mainly positive, at times describing utopian imaginaries, referring to the continent as 'heavenly' or 'a paradise land'. In contrast, sometimes they emphasised how they knew life in Europe wasn't going to be easy, or bluntly stated they knew 'Europe was no paradise'. Still others claimed they didn't think much of Europe before migrating as they were focused on where they were leaving from, rather than where they were going to. In relation to this, in many cases, Europe was not the first desired destination, but rather became a destination after finding difficulties in third countries.

"I was thinking freedom in Western countries because I didn't have that. I was seeking money in Western countries because I was working really hard in my country." (Migrant, United Kingdom)

"Some people would be looking for safety, some others would be looking for economic opportunities or both. A lot of times it is both." (Support practitioner, Cyprus)

"I really never had the dream of the west, still I don't have that. I just need safety." (Migrant, Bulgaria)

"Most refugees don't come with the aim of getting to Europe, but they have to get away from the direct conflict that they have on their doorstep." (support practitioner, Germany)

Information and (mis)information

Migrants reported to mainly rely on informal sources such as family members, friends, and acquaintances, and sometimes smugglers, to inform themselves about the migration process, however, several highlighted how they faced situations where they had no time to actively search for information. Face-to-face, instant messaging and migrant mutual support social media groups were the main forms of communication.

Practitioners believe this reliance on informal sources can have potential consequences for migrants' safety in transit and destination. They also generally believe migrants' perceptions of Europe to be predominantly accurate, although they highlight that unrealistic expectations and misinformation about conditions for migrants in Europe do exist.

Professionals widely viewed information campaigns designed to inform migrants about the obstacles involved in the migration process as ineffective and associated with migration deterrence objectives. When coupled with counselling, in-person meetings and other interventions, they were considered more effective and to potentially serve other purposes beyond deterrence.

Motivations for migrating

Migrants explained their motivations for migrating in terms of **safety, freedom and economic opportunity**. Their accounts included numerous examples of multiple motivations coexisting in the migration decision-making process.

Surveyed professionals considered external factors (like war, violence, or conditions in countries of origin) to be the main driving force behind migration. They did also highlight, although to a lesser degree, the role of comparison between Europe and countries of origin in migrants' decision making. This suggests that perceptions may play a secondary role in decisions to migrate to Europe.

"Work, peace and education for my children."
(Migrant, Morocco)

"It is only an information... and then afterwards you have to make the choice, because when I had to come here, I knew.... France24 showed a lot of corpses in the water... I knew everything... but, it depends on... There are situations that you are put into... life is like that...."
(Migrant, Italy)

"But there were some people who could help us to do this journey. It was their job. They got money to move us from the border from one country to other country. They were my advisors. No one else."
(Asylum seeker, United Kingdom)

"I think it is about what they expect, that is why social media is affecting a lot of people to take the decision of leaving their countries. And this is where life becomes difficult, especially when you are unemployed and you live with your parents, and someone tells you let us leave. So, in one hand the social media, and in the other hand the difficult reality they live in. This is what pushes people to go abroad." (Support practitioner, Morocco)

"Freedom, democracy, future." (Migrant, Bulgaria)

"I came to Europe because I want to include a future for my children...because here in Europe.. there are rights for children that don't expire. Everything is present here. They help you! This is thus one of the reasons that gave me the courage to move to Europe." (Migrant, Belgium)

"I've also come across quite a few cases, they travel because they find themselves in very difficult situations where their basic needs aren't covered and they come here seeking that support." (Support practitioner, Spain)

Migrants' main experiences in transit and destination countries

Migrants reported many obstacles they faced once they left their countries of origin. These obstacles included high levels of requirements for becoming or remaining documented, difficulties in achieving decent living standards, and high levels of vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Some claimed to be shocked by the conditions they faced once in Europe, claiming it bore little resemblance to the image of Europe as a bastion of human rights.

"We had some cases of people who said this is not what I expected and I would like to go back to my country. Definitely not the majority. Some people only." (Support practitioner, Cyprus)

"If we are without a document, so, we are forced to be working without a contract, to be working illegally. So, you see that it is the system that force you to do that... If you are sick even to access hospital... they ask you for your documents... this isn't the Europe we saw

in the Gambia.... a place where people are enslaved, a semi-enslaved place. A place of suffering for certain people" (Migrant, Italy)

"Well, it depresses you, it frustrates you, because you say that you are more qualified than many people to do that kind of work and they don't give it to you... a lot of sleepless nights." (Migrant, Spain)

"I can't say anything positive. Because when you have access to Europe you can see if it's positive or not. But if I see that the door from where I enter... I have not even arrived somewhere and I am already out! ... I am beaten, they are hitting me, they are hurting me... And around me, there are dead people at every attempt to cross! At every attempt, in 2014 on February 6 at 6:00 a.m... This date I will never forget because, there, I lost almost 10 personal friends who died on the spot... They shot white bullets into the water, threw tear gas into the water." (Migrant, Morocco)

Debates and challenges in transit and destination countries

Professionals in the field of migration have highlighted inadequacies in securitisation policies, which can result in criminalisation practices, and in law enforcement actors efforts being directed to manage migration-related phenomena of a humanitarian nature.

Professionals have widely criticised the treatment of migration as a temporary, rather than long-term, phenomenon.

Public resources in transit and destination countries have widely been described as being insufficient in migration-related areas, including border enforcement and migration services. The lack of funds has been framed to be the result of a lack of political will, as well as a result of the lack of existing available resources in a given country.

"For thirty years we have been dealing with this subject like an emergency, when it is not an emergency. Because we know very well the reasons for

humanitarian crises and we cannot always hide behind the emergency to do nothing and not to structure a composite network that creates jobs, that creates many professional figures. In other words, there is so much to do, and there is so much wealth, because we cannot say that we do not have wealth, which we are constantly wasting." (Law enforcement agent, Italy)

"Most people - refugees, of course, run away from just that [terrorism]... I have never seen a proven link between terrorism and refugees... Now, you ask me about migrants. Rather, the connection would stem from the risks associated with marginalisation, and hence entry into a marginalised group." (Support practitioner, Bulgaria)

"Delinquency, in my eyes... has little to do with hopes and desires, but simply occurred in the way people deal with the circumstances of life. And that applies to migrants just as much as to others" (Law enforcement agent, Germany)

Professionals' views on their work and on best practices

Surveyed professionals working in migration-related fields showed high levels of dissatisfaction with both their countries' and the European Union's migration policies. They also highly valued the protection of human rights when evaluating migration policies and placed importance on face-to-face work in combatting misinformation amongst migrants.

These professionals also reported that they were only moderately satisfied with their salary and the social recognition of their work. While they did generally consider their work to be effective, they identified several barriers in their field. These included lack of adequate infrastructure and human resources, as well as legal constraints. Professionals also reported significant levels of stress and psychological burden caused by the work they perform.

"Human rights are the most important thing. The human being is the most important thing and both the police and other bodies have to guarantee it." (Law enforcement agent, Spain)

"[We need] increase[d] professional resources capacity... accommodation capacities...in addition to which the quality of services in the psycho-social aspect should increase." (Support practitioner, Kosovo)

"The solution first, is belonging, in my opinion to the governments, to the political agreements that can allow people to move as it is for Europeans, as it is for all the most powerful countries in the world... Is an illusion to think that migration can be stopped." (Support practitioner, Italy)

Stakeholders' recommendations for the future

Stakeholders widely recommend policies and initiatives that increase the recognition of migrants' rights, including the easing of restrictions on freedom of movement, the facilitation of circular migration and an increase in migrants' access to economic and social rights in transit and destination countries.

"It's important for people to have the opportunity to work." (Support practitioner, Germany)

"There is a problem of recognition of [academic] titles. That is at European level. On this we should work a lot, also to guarantee regular channels of arrival." (Support practitioner, Italy)

"If we want to change the mentality of migrants so as not to risk their lives, we have to show them that everywhere we can build a life but by giving them a helping hand. And if there is no helping hand, they will all try to go elsewhere." (Migrant, Morocco)

Research Methodology

The findings presented here were obtained through empirical research carried out with migrants and professionals in the field of migration resulting in a total of 1543 survey responses, 278 interviews and 19 focus discussion groups (FDGs).

The fieldwork was carried out between October 2020 and April 2022 throughout sixteen different countries: ten European Union members (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, and The Netherlands), two non-EU European countries (Kosovo and the United Kingdom) and four North-African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia).

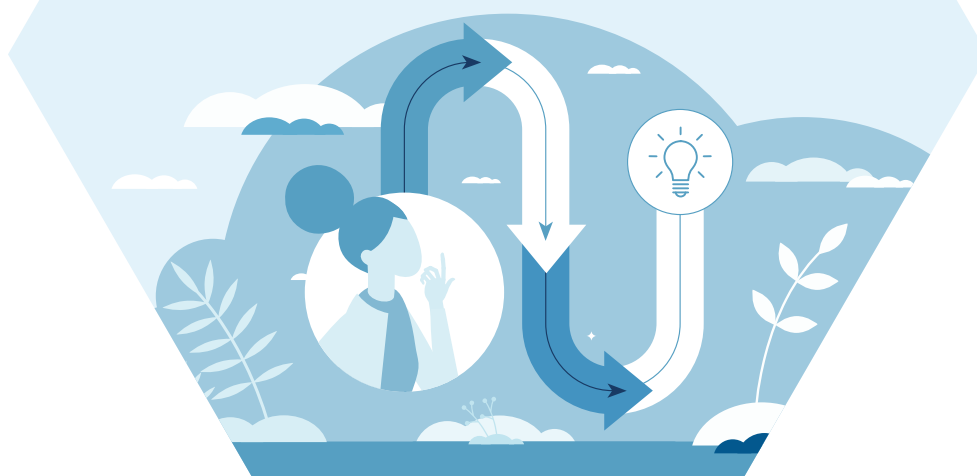
Research was divided into three research tasks:

- An online survey (with some offline respondents) on perceptions, drivers, challenges and best practices related to migration, aimed at first-line practitioners (two iterations, led by the University of Granada).
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with support and advocacy practitioners, law enforcement agents, asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants, on the main drivers of migration, sources and channels of information involved in migration decision-making, possible mismatches between expectations and experiences in countries of destination, and consequences of mismatches (led by the University Rey Juan Carlos).
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews and FDGs with policymakers, support and advocacy practitioners, intergovernmental agency representatives, experts, and law enforcement agents, on the role of perceptions in migration decision-making, relevant threats and issues that have emerged (such as unaccompanied and separated children), and relevant measures to improve or respond to these threats (good and promising practices, and in-depth analysis of information campaigns, their objectives and effectiveness) (two iterations led by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development).

Total number of participants in research tasks

Survey with first-line practitioners	Interviews with migrants and practitioners	Interviews and FGDs with policymakers and CSO representatives
<p><i>1st Iteration</i></p> <p>379 support practitioners 317 law enforcement agents 95 others</p> <p>Total: 788 responses</p>	<p>58 support practitioners 13 law enforcement agents 61 asylum seekers/refugees 39 other migrants</p> <p>Total: 171 interviews</p>	<p><i>1st Iteration</i></p> <p>79 CSO representatives 45 policymakers 33 experts 18 intergovernmental agencies representatives 13 law enforcement agents</p> <p>Total: 90 interviews 17 FGDs (98 participants)</p>
<p><i>2nd Iteration</i></p> <p>591 support practitioners 107 law enforcement agents 57 other</p> <p>Total: 755 responses</p>		<p><i>2nd Iteration</i></p> <p>10 policymakers 8 experts 6 intergovernmental organisation members 4 CSO representatives</p> <p>Total: 17 interviews 2 FGDs (11 participants)</p>

Part 1: Perceptions, information and motivations for migrating



1.1 Why people migrate to Europe

Political and security factors as well as economic factors emerged as the most predominant drivers of migration, with stakeholders' highlighting the comparative aspect between conditions at home versus abroad as playing an important role. Practitioners named specific countries, such as Germany, Sweden and the UK as being perceived by some migrant groups as most desirable destination countries. In turn, migrants more often claimed the main reason for choosing a particular country in Europe was having friends and/or relatives who had already settled there, while also considering the advice of previous migrants who

informed them about the conditions in different European countries.

According to research participants, while overall conditions in origin can grant a contextual background of insecurity, there often are specific triggers that lead to a person's decision to migrate. These triggers can be particularly harmful and traumatic, such as the loss of a loved-one, being exploited, becoming destitute, or becoming dependant on an abusive family member. This last trigger was shared by several migrant women who participated in the research. In some cases,

the threat of poverty for young migrants is framed within the duty to provide for an older family member or someone who is ill and cannot provide for themselves. Identified triggers also included being coerced to join an armed militia or the state army of a dictatorial regime, bombings, the loss of a loved one due to armed conflict, or the detention of a close peer with similar political views. When deciding to leave, some migrants may be helped by a family member in the country of origin or who is already settled in the destination country. In contrast, several migrant women claimed they decided to migrate precisely because of abuse they faced from their family members. In other cases, triggers may not result from a traumatic experience but from an opportunity or a possibility that arises, such as friends already planning a trip.

Migrants have explained their motivations for migrating in terms of safety, freedom and economic opportunity². In line with research conducted formerly, findings revealed how political insecurity and harsh economic conditions often coexist³. When describing the reasons for migrating, numerous references were made to social and political rights-based motivations, including gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, freedom of expression, children's education, and access to vitally needed healthcare in contexts of rare or severe illnesses.

It is important to note that the migratory journeys described were often nonlinear, that plans may change along the way, and that while the terms countries of 'origin', 'transit', and 'destination', can lead to the perceptions of a clean-cut between these countries, in reality this is not the case. Migrants' accounts tell of situations in which they first decided to migrate to Morocco, for example, and once there, found unexpected obstacles in the country and decided to 'move on' to Europe. Migrants' accounts also show indicators of the opposite being proven true: situations in which migrants may arrive to a country considering their stay there as temporary or transitory and decide to remain because opportunities in the country arise, or because their perception of their final destination, and what it may entail to get there, changes. At times they remained in a country

previously considered as transit as a result of loss of resources, or stricter border controls being put in place.

Lastly, research results suggest that perceptions of Europe play a secondary role in migrants' decision-making process, as stakeholders' accounts place higher degrees of emphasis on push factors rather than pull factors. For example, first-line practitioners surveyed overwhelmingly considered external factors beyond the migrants' control (e.g. violence, different political situations, different levels of opportunity, etc.) and general negative conditions in the country of origin (e.g. war, a weak economy, etc.) to be the main drivers of migration⁸.

1.2 Most commonly used sources and channels of information

When deciding whether or not to migrate, migrants claimed to rely mostly on informal sources, such as family, friends, and acquaintances, as they were considered to provide unbiased first-hand knowledge. In contrast, formal sources were often seen as biased and unreliable. When asked to evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of different sources after having arrived to Europe, migrants rated informal sources as the most accurate and trustworthy.

The most commonly used channels for communication are face-to-face, telephone calls, instant messaging and social media. Open social media groups of migrant support networks were referenced as important tools to get practical and legal information before and upon arrival to Europe. The most frequent means of communication for this end were Whatsapp, Telegram, and Facebook.

Furthermore, they used internet to access government webpages, as well as news sources that inform about regularisation processes and the conditions of migrants at important border crossing points, such as Calais. However, migrants tended to be wary to trust these sources and often contrasted the information with that received from

² Bermejo et al, 2021

³ See Achilli et al (2016), Crawley and Skleparis (2018), and D'Angelo (2020)

family, friends, or acquaintances.

Other sources influencing migrants' perceptions of Europe included textbooks, western films, TV series, and news broadcasting channels.

1.3 Misinformation and information campaigns

Practitioners viewed migrants' overdependence on informal sources as having potential negative consequences due to the lack of fact checking involved. The use of unreliable sources was reported to lead to idealised visions of Europe or the belief that it is easier to migrate to the continent than it actually is. Practitioners stated how this can lead to migrants taking dangerous irregular migration routes unaware of the high levels of risk involved, or, arriving to Europe and developing high levels of disillusionment and a sense of failure, living in high poverty levels and being vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. It is important to note that although references to an idealised vision of Europe did emerge in migrants' accounts, they were more recurrent among practitioners' statements, suggesting practitioners may believe these idealised visions are more widely held than they actually are. Nevertheless, migrants have also shared accounts of Europe not being what they expected, or, more specifically, 'what they were told'.

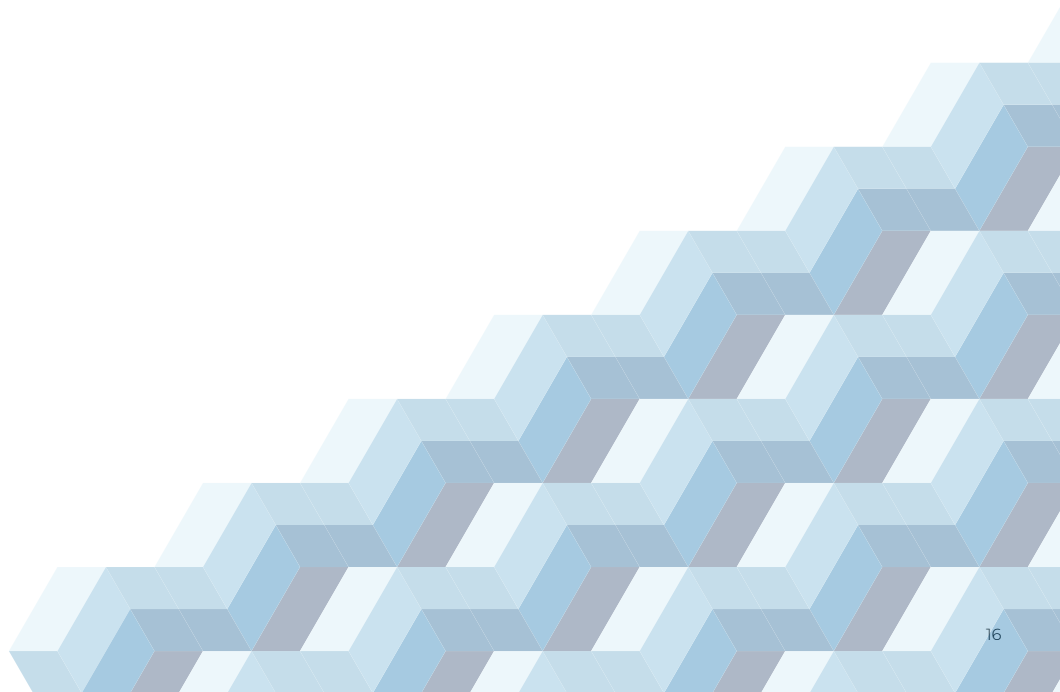
Stakeholders also referred to smugglers as important sources of information when choosing a destination country. The higher the levels of insecurity in the country of origin, the higher migrants' dependence on smugglers to be able to leave the country. While there were migrants who claimed to be grateful to the smuggler(s) that helped them arrive to Europe, other accounts showed evidence of systematic deception schemes with devastating consequences, particularly among those migrating to Cyprus.

Sources of misinformation included human smugglers but also Western media productions that portray unrealistic or biased imageries of

Europe, as well as other migrants who may not have shared the most difficult aspects of their life in the continent. In relation to this, migrants explained how sometimes they do not share information about the harsh conditions they live in as to not worry their loved ones back home and to avoid being seen as a failure, since their loved ones may have placed high expectations in the outcome of their migratory journey. Thus, migrants, as well as the rest of the population, are more likely to share success stories than failures, especially so in public social media accounts.

For those migrants who took on irregular journeys, several claimed to have been aware of the high levels of risks involved and spoke of 'a need to believe', or to 'try their luck', the reference to 'luck' having emerged among migrants as a reoccurring concept revealing an awareness of slim chances. While this is so, some migrants may not be aware of the danger that irregular border crossings entail. In response to this, several information campaigns have been developed in origin and transit countries with the declared objective to inform migrants about such risks and prevent the tragic outcomes these journeys often entail. Most migrants claimed to be unaware of the existence of such campaigns, and several believed they could be helpful. However, they emphasised the need for information campaigns to include migrants in their design and implementation and to inform about alternative legal migration channels or alternatives found in countries of origin. Practitioners, on the other hand, were widely critical of information campaigns, which were frequently understood as migration deterrence campaigns, with some policy-makers standing out in believing information campaigns served an important humanitarian purpose. In line with migrants' recommendations, practitioners spoke of the importance for information campaigns to increase their effectiveness by including migrants as messengers and informing about alternatives in the country of origin and, if existing, alternative legal migration channels. They also believed information campaigns were more beneficial when implemented together with other initiatives, such as counselling and in-person advisors, rather than as stand-alone practices.

As described above, practitioners associated misinformation with threats to migrants, not to national security, or instances of terrorism and violent radicalisation. In this regard, most survey "respondents disagreed with the imputed belief that migrants who come to Europe based on inaccurate information are more likely to commit crimes or become radicalised.



Part 2: **Migrants' experiences: From countries of origin to uncertain integration paths**



2.1 Irregular migratory routes to Europe

Migrants facing dire conditions in their countries of origin often relied on a human smuggler when migrating through irregular migration routes. Stakeholders referred to migrants' dependence on human smugglers mostly in terms of a threat to migrants' safety, and highlighted the risks for migrants when using irregular migration channels, including becoming victims of human trafficking, exploitation, torture, and even loss of life. The rise of organised crime around irregular border crossings was also discussed in relation to corruption of state officials, particularly, but not limited to, border enforcement related positions.

While distinct, human smuggling and human trafficking are often confounded and a same policy may be directed at both, given the relation between the two. Stakeholders widely agree that migrants' dependence on human smuggling and the rise of human trafficking entail significant threats most directly concerning migrants' safety. Differing views arise, however, in terms of policies that are implemented with the stated objective of combating them, since they often entail increased restrictive measures and surveillance leading to what has been described as a vicious cycle, resulting in unintended consequences or even

being counterproductive. Stakeholders referred to how increased restrictions and surveillance push migrants into more dangerous routes, rendering human smuggling both more complex and profitable, requiring undetected transnational coordination that often can only be fulfilled by organised criminal networks. Thus, stakeholders described a situation where policies aimed at combating human trafficking can actually result in an increase in migrants' vulnerability to, and increased instances of, human trafficking.

2.2 Uncertain integration paths

Several asylum seekers expressed shock at the difficult conditions in which they had to live once in Europe, highlighting how it contrasted with the idea of Europe as a place where human rights and human dignity were respected. Stakeholders denounced the conditions in refugee camps, reception centres, inadequate amounts of social aid, and the restrictions on asylum seekers' freedom of movement and access to the labour market. Furthermore, practitioners shared multiple accounts of victims of human trafficking being denied asylum as well as asylum seekers who came from violent conflict zones that European countries' failed to recognise.

Stakeholders denounced excessive requirements linked to status that resulted in large numbers of migrants becoming undocumented, as well as unrealistic requirements linked to the recognition of academic titles and professional skills acquired elsewhere. This lack of recognition pushes migrants into specific sectors of the economy that entail long hours under harsh conditions in exchange for low wages.

Practitioners highlighted the acute vulnerability of unaccompanied minors, reporting that large

numbers of them were living on the streets and not receiving the care entitled to them by law. Even in cases when receiving the care that fulfils destination countries legal requirements, they often become undocumented and are left unattended when they turn eighteen, leaving many of them vulnerable to homelessness, exploitation and abuse. Undocumented migrants were also referred to as a particularly vulnerable group in risk of exploitation and abuse, including falling victims of human trafficking and other crimes that most often go unreported due to fear of being detained and deported.

Documented migrants outside of the asylum system also shared accounts about feeling disillusioned by the difficulties they confronted, such as not being able to access decent living wages, adequate housing, education or healthcare.

Overall, stakeholders' accounts reveal high levels of dissatisfaction with migratory policies. Stakeholders specifically expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of alternative legal migration channels available for those who undertake irregular migration routes and described the existing amount of regular migration channels as insufficient and inadequate. Criticisms of current migration policies also included what was described as the misuse of international cooperation and development funds for security purposes, at times resulting in migrants' increased vulnerability. Dissatisfaction was also shared with the amount of available public funding for migration-related areas, and the high levels of vulnerability experienced by migrants in transit and destination countries.

Part 3: Debates and challenges in transit and destination countries



3.1 Public security and securitisation discourse

Stakeholders consistently called for a need to reframe the public and political discourse revolving around migration, most notably referring to: 1) the tendency to treat migration as a 'temporary' and 'emergency' or 'crisis' and 2) the association between migration and security threats, such as terrorism and violent radicalisation. In a way, these two tendencies can be seen as intertwined, as they both portray migration as a pathology that entails potential threats, rather than an innocuous phenomenon that has existed for centuries. The temporal approach was criticised as it impedes long-term policy legislation and on-the-ground

strategies for effective migration management. Furthermore, the 'emergency approach' often justifies continuing to implement practices presented as 'exceptional' for decades. Lastly, securitisation discourse has been deemed to lead to narratives that justify criminalisation practices of migrants that directly threaten migrants' security.

Law enforcement agents explained how the link between security and migration is limited to undetected entry of criminals, human trafficking networks who take advantage of migrants' vulnerability in transit and destination, and

populations who, due to high levels of poverty, engage in what was termed 'survival crime'. Several law enforcement agents claimed to be overwhelmed by the high numbers of irregular border crossings, claiming to be ill-equipped in numbers, training and infrastructure to respond effectively. Particularly since many of the irregular border crossings were led by asylum seekers, this resulted in them focussing efforts on events that required humanitarian responses, and the fulfilment of duties that regularly are beyond their purview, such as receiving asylum seekers and managing the first steps of their asylum claim. In the words of one border guard, this prevented them from 'focussing on the criminals'.

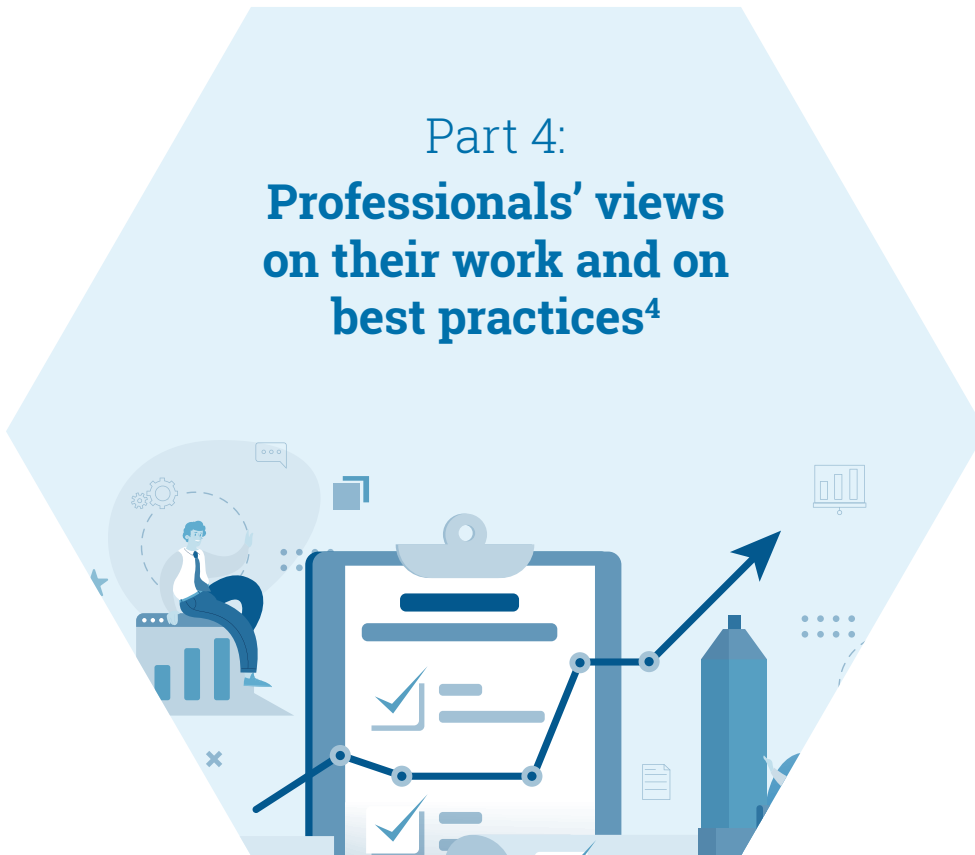
3.2 Public resources and social cohesion

In terms of public resources practitioners widely considered there was a lack of sufficient public funding in migration-related areas, whether related to law enforcement or in support services destined to a country's immigrant population. In relation to this, two contrasting frameworks in understanding the reasons for this emerged. On the one hand, there were professionals who viewed the number of incoming migrants into their countries as requiring an amount of funding that exceeded the amount of available public resources. On the other hand, the lack of resources destined to migration management and migration-related services was described by other professionals as being a consequence of a lack of political will. In other words, the problem may be framed as insufficient country resources, or, as sufficient resources that are chosen not to be destined to migration-related services and infrastructure.

What is described as 'disproportionate numbers of migrants' can be seen to compete with the autochthonous population for limited resources, or to weaken public institutions for which funding is already scarce. In the regional context of the European Union professionals from countries located at the borders also referred to what they saw as an inadequate level of burden sharing among member countries, where those located at or nearest to the border were forced to take on most of the costs of migration-related expenses. These considerations can lead to negative, or hostile feelings regarding membership of the European Union, and/or against migrant populations.

Professionals also highlighted how discourses that represent migrants' access to resources as 'unjust' or threatening the well-functioning of public institutions, can play into the general populations' sentiment of fear and lead to xenophobic attitudes that undermine migrants' economic and social rights. In relation to this, stakeholders showed wariness over what they described as increasing instances of racism and xenophobic attitudes, at times intertwined with the rise of the extreme right. Migrants specifically shared accounts of being discriminated against based on skin colour and nationality of origin, having been subjected to verbal abuse and discrimination in the labour market and/or housing market. Furthermore, their accounts include first-hand examples of multiple instances of Islamophobia having taken place in several of the countries under research.

Part 4: Professionals' views on their work and on best practices⁴



4.1 Practitioners' satisfaction with their work: successes and challenges

Research from the survey revealed that first-line practitioners working in the field of migration were satisfied with some areas of their work and dissatisfied with others.

For example, practitioners tended to view their work positively in terms of overall organisational effectiveness. They were also moderately satisfied with their salary, the social recognition of their work, and existing ICT tools available to them (rating them as effective, user-friendly, and understandable).

However, practitioners were highly dissatisfied with migration policies at both the regional level,

in terms of policies employed by the European Union, and the national and local levels. This dissatisfaction was shared across different countries and practitioner groups. Practitioners across the board also identified a range of barriers to the effectiveness of their work, including legal constraints, insufficient human resources, and lack of necessary facilities or infrastructure. On a psychological level, practitioners reported that stress was an additional barrier to their daily work.

⁴ This section is based on findings obtained through the first and second iteration of the survey.

4.2 Professionals' views on best practices

Professionals' views on best practices revealed high levels of agreement across different stakeholder groups, as well as between professionals working within and outside the European Union. When rating best practices, professionals 'assessed protection of human rights as the most important criteria for evaluating the success of practices in migration-related work' and 'transferability as the least important'. Furthermore, some survey participants highlighted 'beneficiaries' involvement, satisfaction, and gain from a practice as additional criteria through which to evaluate a practice's success'.

When asked to consider activities to combat misinformation amongst migrants, practitioners assessed various types of face-to-face engagement (with migrant individuals or communities, and with other professionals) as the most promising practices. In contrast, online activities and arts- and culture-based activities were considered the least promising practices'.

These findings shed light on the specific aspects of their work that practitioners consider to be effective. They may also offer insights into the factors behind practitioners' high levels of dissatisfaction with migration policies, as detailed in the section above.

Part 5: **Stakeholders' recommendations for the future**



Stakeholders' recommendations reflect an overall call for an increase in the recognition of migrants' rights. This includes the promotion of their freedom of movement and choice of settlement within a given country, their access to economic and social rights in transit and destination countries, and their ability to cross international borders without putting their safety in jeopardy.

The following list of recommendations provides a summary of the most predominant recommendations provided by stakeholders who participated in the research, without implying that all stakeholders agree with all the policies and recommendations listed here nor providing an evaluation of the given recommendations. Notably, while stakeholders provided recommendations on how to make information campaigns more

effective if implemented, they did not highlight an increase in the number of information campaigns as a potential initiative.

5.1 International cooperation, development and migration policy

- Introduce less restrictive policies on freedom of movement.
- Facilitate circular migration through more flexible visa schemes.
- Direct international cooperation and development funds to the promotion of human rights in line with the Sustainable Development Goals in countries of origin.

5.2 International and national asylum policy

- Guarantee access to seek asylum by creating safe passageways and enabling the right to seek asylum in countries of origin and transit.
- End restrictive policies on the freedom of movement of asylum seekers, both in terms of secondary movements between different countries of the European Union and movements and settlement within a given country.
- Increase financial support for asylum seekers in need and remove limitations on labour sectors and labour activities in relation to asylum seekers' ability to work.
- Provide for greater protection for victims of human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery.

5.3 National and local integration policies and initiatives

- Grant amnesties for undocumented migrants.
- Implement regularisation schemes.
- Reduce the costs associated with visa petitions, work, stay and residency permits as well as applications for citizenship.
- Lower the costs and level of difficulty involved in the recognition of migrants' academic and non-academic titles and qualifications.
- Increase financial resources for providing services for migrants.
- Promote the active participation of migrants in the design and implementation of intercultural initiatives.

Concluding Remarks

The research findings described here have shown that motivations for migrating are diverse. However, a broad concept of 'safety', foregrounding freedom and decent living standards, has emerged as a key underlying motivation for migrating to another country.

Perceptions of Europe also play a role in driving migration, be it secondary to other migration drivers. For example, migrants perceive they will be able to achieve higher degrees of safety in the continent, which often presents itself as 'a bastion of human rights'. Migrants interviewed in the research have, at times, used metaphors presenting an idealised vision of Europe. However, they have also highlighted that migration decisions may be motivated by comparison between living conditions in different countries, and in many instances Europe was not the first desired destination.

The accounts of migrants who participated in the research also speak, at times, of disappointment, or high levels of shock, at the harsh conditions they are confronted with when in the continent. In particular, several asylum seekers have shared their disbelief at the unsanitary and overcrowded conditions at reception centres and refugee camps, and at the treatment received by border agents or other law enforcement agents.

Stakeholders shared differing views concerning the extent to which migrants may be misinformed. However, their views reflected high levels of agreement that misinformation among migrants was associated with threats to migrants' safety and not to threats of national security or terrorism and violent radicalisation. Migrants' accounts of misinformation have been varied. Some were aware of the risks when deciding to take on irregular migration journeys but felt they 'needed to try their luck', while still others claimed they did not realise what the journey would entail.

Information campaigns with the stated objective of increasing migrants' awareness of risks were widely seen as ineffective and as campaigns

formulated to deter migration altogether. Some policy makers stood out, viewing information campaigns as serving an important humanitarian purpose. When asked about recommendations to increase the effectiveness of information campaigns, professionals and migrants highlighted the benefits of including migrants in the design and implementation process and of integrating content about alternatives to irregular border crossings, such as legal migration channels or meaningful opportunities in country of origin. Some stakeholders viewed the inclusion of information on alternatives with scepticism, given what they described as an insufficient number of legal migration alternatives. Notably, information campaigns directed at increasing migrants' awareness did not emerge among the main recommendations offered by stakeholders. This may be because stakeholders' accounts widely refer to numerous obstacles faced by migrants that do not appear to be related to misinformation.

Securitisation policies that aim to address migration through a security approach were criticised by professionals who highlighted how they can result in the criminalisation of entire migrant communities and in a failure to guarantee human rights.

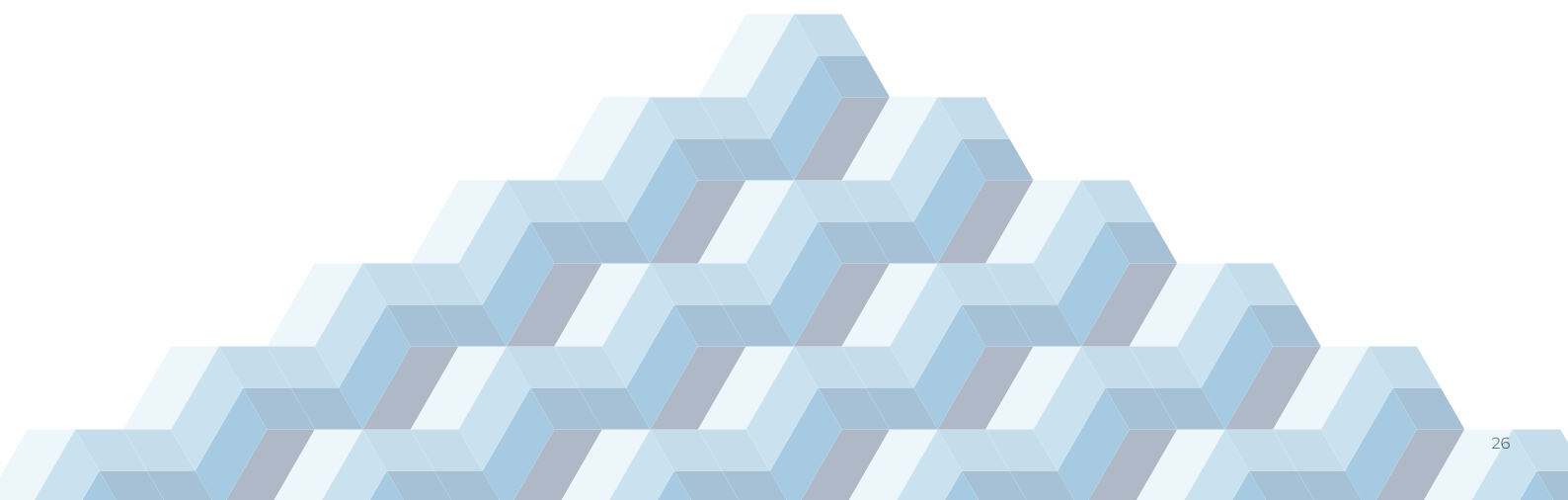
Stakeholders' accounts point not only to the dubious ethical implications of securitisation policies, but also to a lack of effectiveness. Law enforcement agents have explained they are overburdened with irregular border crossings and ill-equipped to tackle these. They viewed increased funding for training or increased human resources as possible solutions, in addition to a reorientation of migration policies. Such a reorientation was thought to potentially allow them to steer away from management of humanitarian crises and be able to focus specifically on criminal networks, rather than on migration management in the wider sense. Furthermore, increased border surveillance and migration deterrence policies were linked to increasing the profitability of migrant smuggling, often creating a niche for transnational criminal networks involved in various forms of criminality,

including human trafficking, to take over, benefiting from migrants' increasing vulnerability. In this sense, stakeholders paint a picture in which policies directed at combating human smuggling and human trafficking may very well be strengthening the very networks they are set out to combat.

In transit and destination countries, migrants face multiple obstacles that prevent them from achieving decent living standards and are forced into situations of high levels of vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, with significant consequences to their physical and psychological wellbeing. Notably, stakeholders' accounts speak of structural obstacles stemming from migration and integration policies. Such obstacles make it very difficult for migrants to become or remain documented, due to high levels of requirements for residency permits and access to work, and complex and expensive bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, migrants struggle to use their skills and knowledge, as official recognition of qualifications obtained in other countries may be difficult to obtain. This often confines migrants to labour sectors associated with low pay and harsh conditions.

Research participants working in migration-related fields widely report that they are under-funded, with insufficient material and human resources, lack of adequate infrastructure, low salaries, and significant levels of stress associated with their professions. These conditions are exacerbated by high degrees of dissatisfaction with overall migration policies, both at the national and international level. Taken together, these factors can add up to feelings of being overburdened and lead to professional burn-out.

Given stakeholders' dissatisfaction with the current situation, it may be unsurprising that they provided a series of recommendations that would entail a broad reformulation of migration policies. Indeed, their recommendations would affect the way migration is understood and portrayed, and involve deep structural changes that significantly steer away from the norm of contemporary migration policies.



Note on terminology

International migrants are understood here as non-nationals in the case of countries outside the EU, and as third-country nationals in the case of EU members, including migrants that have and have not applied for asylum. When describing the differences that arise specifically from having entered the asylum system, the term asylum seeker is employed. Thus, the inclusivist approach, rather than the residualist approach was selected in line with the definition provided by the International Organization for Migration⁵. This approach facilitates a clear identification of the common forces to which migrants are exposed to (whether they be asylum seekers or not), often highlighted in research concerning 'mixed migratory movements'⁶. However, the term mixed migration at times implies inherent differences between asylum seekers and other migrants concerning their motivations for migrating and whether their migration can be deemed to be forced or voluntary. This research steers away from such assumptions in recognition of the results of studies that highlight the multicausal nature of international migratory movements and that question the empirical as well as ethical validity of taking for granted such distinctions⁷.

This terminology does not imply an oversimplification of the variety of human experiences in relation to international migration, nor does it mean to question the rights entitled to refugees or fail to recognise the differing factors that come into play once a person has filed an asylum claim, when a State has granted a person refugee status or any other form of international protection. Rather, while recognising international judicial instruments and their implications, it steers away from limiting the study of international

The term '**practitioners**' comprises the following subcategories of professionals:

- **Support and advocacy practitioners:** front-line practitioners (FLPs) working as social workers, cultural mediators, teachers, psychologists, medical professionals, program coordinators or directors, whether it be in public institutions at the local or state level, civil society organisations (CSOs), or privately managed organisations.
- **Policymakers:** authority representatives at the local, national and international level.
- **Intergovernmental agency representatives:** practitioners working in international agencies such as those established by the United Nations.
- **Law enforcement agents (LEAs):** include local, national and international professionals working in law enforcement.
- **Experts:** professionals working in academic institutions and think tanks.

The term '**migrants**' is used as an umbrella term comprised of:

- **Asylum seekers:** individuals who had applied for asylum and whose asylum claim was either under revision or had been granted refugee status.

⁵ As stated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the term migrant is "an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM 2019,). International Organization for Migration. (2019). International Migration Law: Glossary on Migration. Geneva: Switzerland. For an overview on the inclusivist approach versus the residualist approach, see Carling, J. (2017). Refugee advocacy and the meaning of 'migrants'. PRIO Policy Brief II. For further discussion on this choice within this research project, see Carrasco Granger, S. (2021). Reflections on the methodological implications for empirical studies with a critical approach to the migrant-refugee binary. Newsletter of the American Political Science Associations' Organized Section on Migration and Citizenship. Vol 9, No. 1

⁶ The phenomenon of asylum-seekers and other migrants travelling the same routes is often referred to as mixed migration flows, on which there is an extensive body of literature. For annual reports on this topic and other resources, see <https://mixedmigration.org/4mi/>

⁷ For more information on empirical and ethical critiques of regarding the residualist approach see Crawley, H. & Skleparis, D. (2018). Refugees, migrants, neither, both: Categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1), 48- 64. Hamlin, R. (2021). *Crossings: How we label and react to people on the move*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

mobility and its terminology to those found in contemporary legal instruments. By doing so it recognises the possibility that those who do not fulfil the definition of refugee as found in the Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol⁸, may very well be entitled to international protection even when not contemplated in contemporary international judicial instruments.

In relation to the terms '**origin, transit and destination countries**', these are not employed as mutually exclusive nor stagnant categories of specific countries. Instead, they reflect stakeholders' perspectives on what they consider to be countries of origin, transit and destination. In the case of migrant research, participants' 'country of origin' refers to the country in which, when asked, they described as where their migration began. 'Country of transit' refers to a country they arrived at with no intention of remaining and where they stayed for shorter or longer periods of time, whilst 'desired country of destination' is the country they wished to arrive at with the intention of remaining there. It is important to note that migratory journeys are highly complex and non-linear processes where social aspects and changing circumstances come into play and can result in a person changing their positions as to what they consider a desired destination to be. When referring to research findings that did employ these terms as closed categories of specific countries, these countries are named specifically.

- **Other migrants:** individuals who had not applied for asylum and did not intend to do so at the time of the interview. When sharing quotes of migrants who had not applied for international protection, the term 'migrant', rather than 'other migrant' is used for the sake of simplicity.

The terms '**origin**', '**transit**' and '**destination**' countries:

- reflect stakeholders' perspectives on what they consider to be countries of origin, transit and destination, and thus, do not include a particular list of countries associated with each of these terms.

⁸ The term refugee, on the other hand, is defined under international law by the Geneva Convention 1951 and its 1967 Protocol and refers to any person "who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Ibid.). The term refugee thus applies to every person who fulfils the criteria set in the refugee definition, independently of whether a state has recognised criteria fulfilment granting refugee status.

PERCEPTIONS H2020 Deliverables

Findings described in this report are based on the results of each of the following research tasks, as described throughout the corresponding deliverables:

Ben Brahim, N., & Hendow, M. (2021). *D3.4 Summary report on research with policymakers and CSOs (2)*. PERCEPTIONS H2020 Project No. 833870.

Ben Brahim, N., & Hendow, M. (2022). *D3.6 Summary report on research with policymakers and CSOs (2)*. PERCEPTIONS H2020 Project No. 833870.

Bermejo, R., Sánchez-Duarte, J. M., Bazaga, I., Carrasco, S., Estaba R.T., Castellanos, D., Ciordia, A. (2021). Deliverable D3.3. Stakeholder interviews summary report. PERCEPTIONS H2020 Project No. 833870.

Bermejo, R., Carrasco Granger, S., (2021). Deliverable 3.5. *Multi-perspective Research Report*. PERCEPTIONS H2020 Project No. 833870.

Bermejo, R., Carrasco Granger, S., García Carmona, M., Whitworth, B., Moya Fernández, P., García Quero, F., Yomn Sbaa, M., Zappalà, S., Puzzo, G., and Jinkang, A. (2022) Deliverable 3.7. *Update to the Multiperspective Report*. PERCEPTIONS H2020 Project No. 833870.

García-Carmona, M., García-Quero, F., Guardiola, J., Moya Fernández, P., Ollero Perán, J., Edwards, J., and Whitworth, B. (2021) Migration to the EU: a survey of first-line practitioners' perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. PERCEPTIONS H2020 project No 833870. <https://www.perceptions.eu/migration-to-the-eu-a-survey-of-first-line-practitioners-perceptions-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

García-Carmona, M., Whitworth, B., Moya Fernández, P., García-Quero, F., Edwards, J., Rodríguez-García, A.M., and Espejo Montes, R.M^a. (2022). Best practices and ICT tools in migration-related work: a survey of first-line practitioners. PERCEPTIONS H2020 project No 833870.

For more information, see <https://www.perceptions.eu/>