

Evidence-based approaches to understanding public perceptions on migration

UN ESCAP

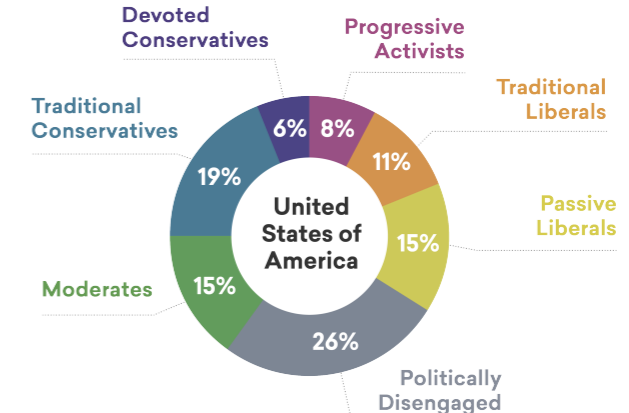
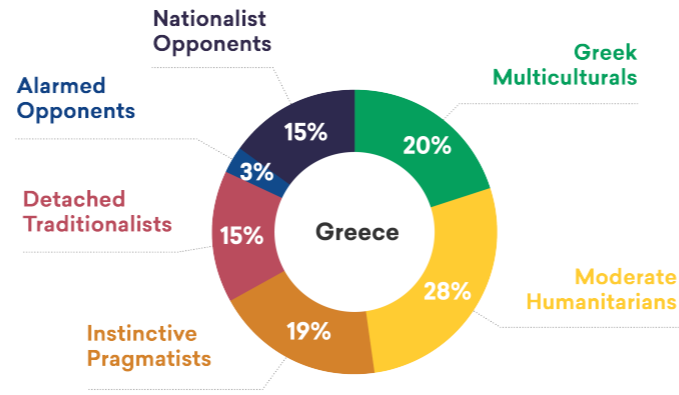
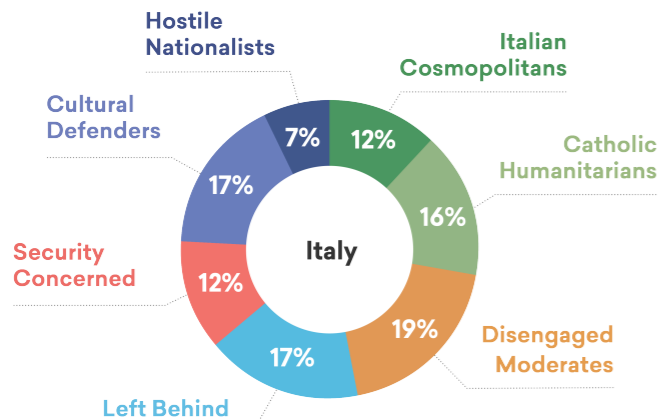
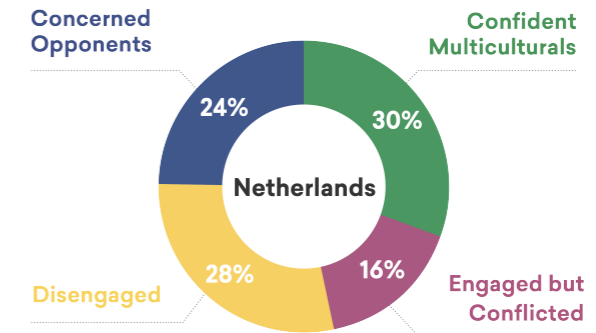
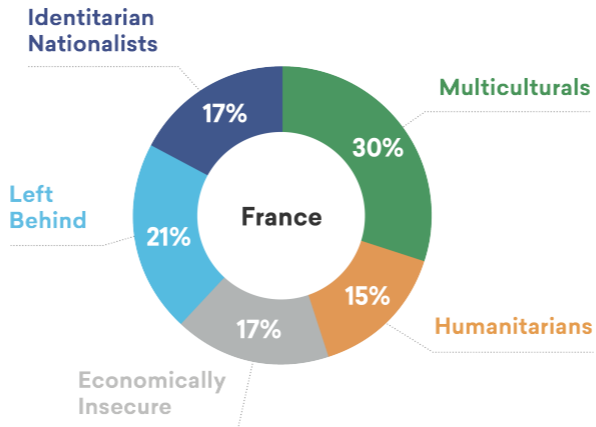
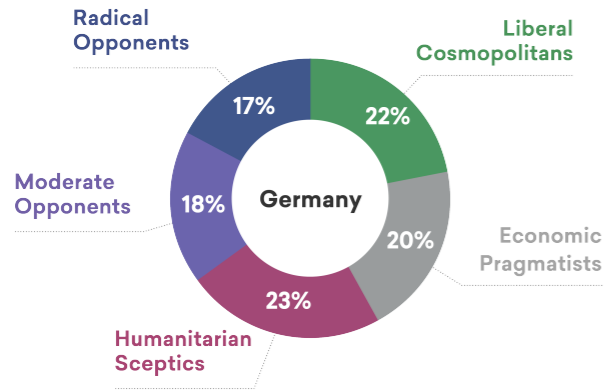
Regional Review of the Global Compact on Migration – UNECE Region
November 13 2020

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Key point #1

Improving public debate requires insights into our audiences –
not just migrants and migration experiences

Better public engagement starts with understanding national audiences (not just migration issues)



Key point #2

Most people hold *mixed* views of migrants and migration – recognising both positives and negatives.

Those with mixed views about migration are often concerned about the management of migration



- **Public health concerns** since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - **Loss of control of borders**, especially with unauthorised arrivals
 - **Threats to traditional culture and values** from rapid change - “It feels like [my country] is disappearing”. They worry that migrants do not integrate, weaken their sense of community, traditions and national identity.
 - **Terrorism and crime** – many associate refugees with increased physical threats.
 - **Economic uncertainty** – at a time of economic uncertainty, people worry that migrants of all kinds may take jobs, undercut wages and put pressure on scarce resources (eg hospitals, schools, transport and welfare).
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Key point #3

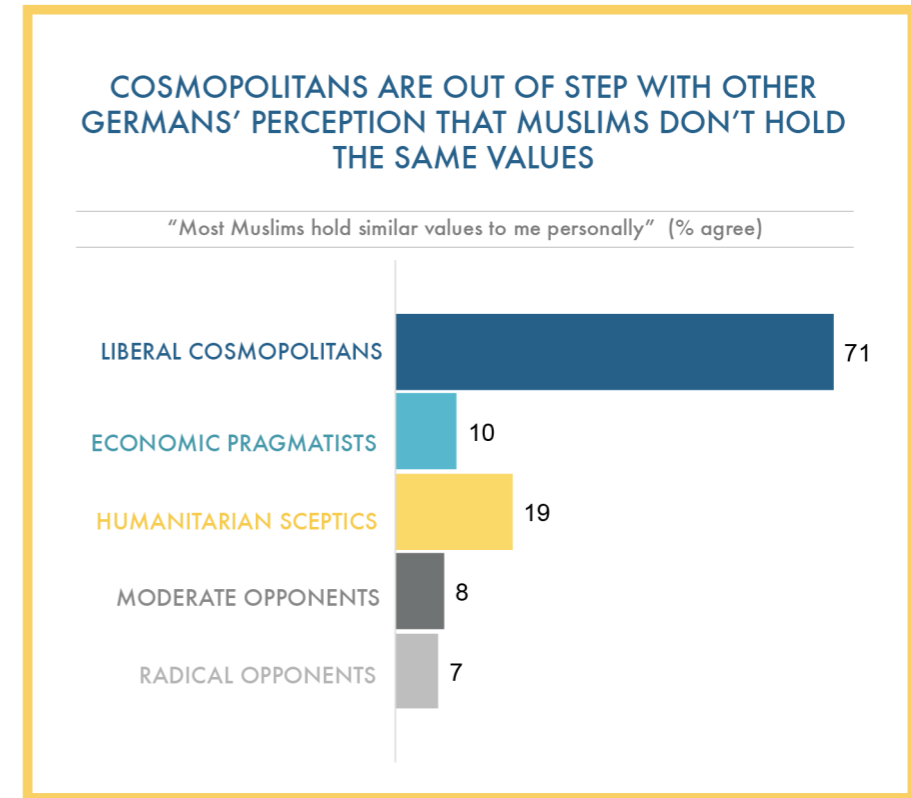
Social psychology is providing valuable new insights into the underlying drivers of perceptions of migrants, which can improve efforts to counter disinformation and hatred.

A key insight is that the root of misperceptions of migrants is people seeing them as 'other' to themselves.

There are limits to the effectiveness of fact-based communications if people have entrenched views of migrants as 'other'.

The core challenge is overcoming the ‘othering’ of migrants

- A key insight from social psychology is that humans default to seeing others in terms of groups, and perceiving in-groups and out-groups (‘us’ versus ‘them’)
- Communications that reinforce the ‘otherness’ of migrants can be counter-productive, even if they communicate pro-migrant messages



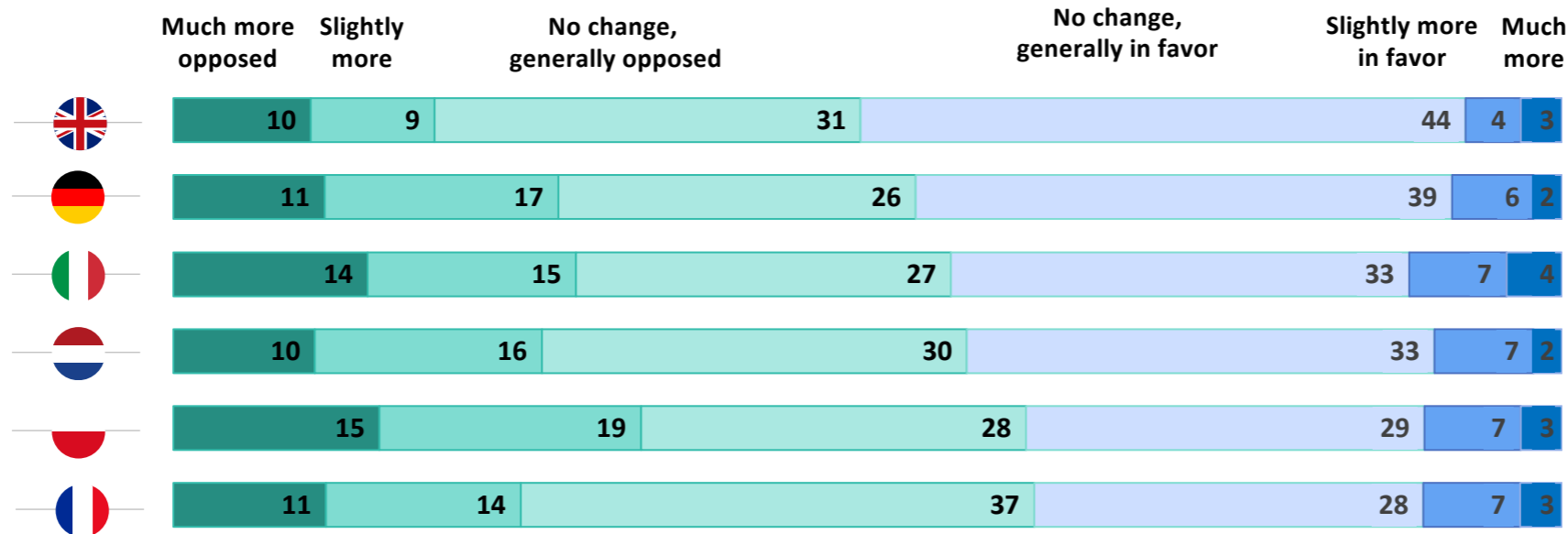
Source: "Attitudes Towards National Identity, Immigration, and Refugees in Germany." Research Report Published by More in Common, 2017.

Key point #4

Research provides valuable and timely insights into public attitudes, which can prevent resources being wasted on ineffective communications efforts.

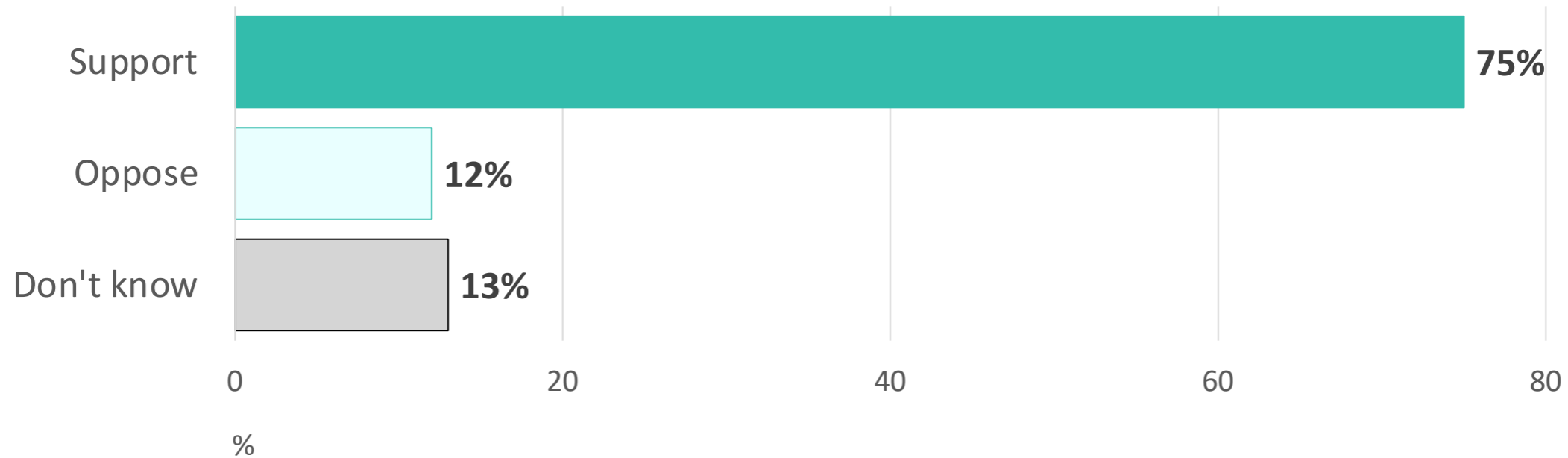
Public perceptions often move in ways different to what migration experts might expect.

For example, because of COVID-19, migration is currently seen through a public health lens



- Question: Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, how have your views changed about accepting migrants into [YOUR COUNTRY], if at all?

This public health lens can also lead to more strongly *pro-migrant* views on some issues



Would you support or oppose proposals to allow doctors and nurses trained in foreign countries to temporarily practice medicine in America to help care for COVID-19 patients? (US average)

Key point #5

Communications on migrants and migration issues touches on deeply-felt issues of national identity, culture, values and human rights.

To improve communications efforts and public debates, we need to be willing to challenge our assumptions, test different approaches, be evidence-based in evaluating impact, build professional networks and create centres of expertise.

The social media era has made public debate more vulnerable to disinformation, distortion and xenophobia – underscoring the critical importance of these efforts.
