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Similar but… The Trend of Xenophobia in Hungary and Poland

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In 2015, immigration became a major source of concern (and perhaps fear) both for Hungary and Poland and for the EU at large. It then declined continuously until 2022, before starting to rise again in 2023. Concerning the fear of migration in relation to one's own country, both the Hungarian and Polish trends deviated from the general pattern: while, in Hungary, the fear of immigration remained slightly more salient until 2018, in Poland, the fear of immigration was constantly (and, until 2022, significantly) below the EU average. However, like in Hungary and other EU countries, it increased again in 2023. In this paper, we compare these 2 countries in terms of xenophobia using Ipsos data which have not yet been examined by others in this regard. We looked first at attitudes and then at behaviour (i.e. activism immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and then 1 year later). We also examined the differences between the socio-demographic variables in both groups.

Keywords: refugee hypocrisy, xenophobia, attitudes, Hungary, Poland

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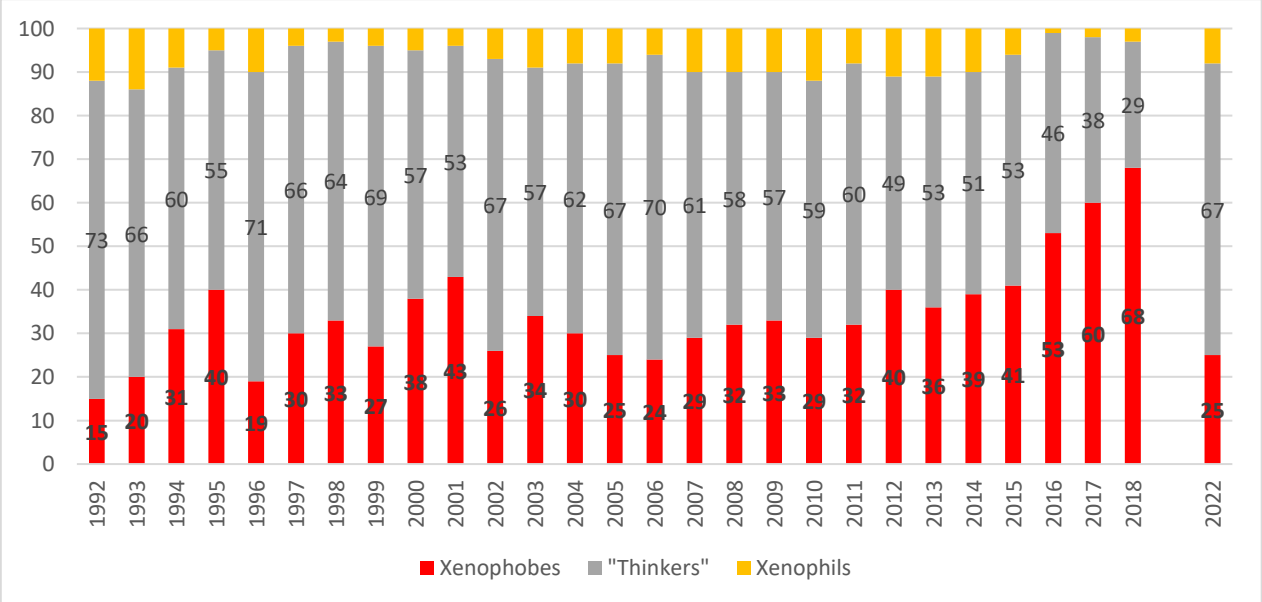
Introduction

In this paper, we analyse and compare xenophobia in 2 countries – Hungary and Poland. Our empirical research is based on data[1] acquired from Ipsos.[2,3] Use of the term 'xenophobia' to refer to prejudice against legally and socially different groups of mobile people (refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers) is likely to conflate different attitudes (see, for example, Abdelaaty and Steele 2022). However, we would argue that respondents are hardly aware of the difference between the latter terms since, in both countries, government propaganda has deliberately blurred the distinction between 'refugees' and 'migrants' (and has hardly ever used the term 'asylum-seeker'), mainly using the term 'migrant' with its more negative connotations (for Hungary, see Gerő, Pokornyi, Sik and Surányi 2023 and, for Poland, see Hargrave, Homel and Dražanová 2023). Furthermore, the Ipsos questionnaire also used only the term 'refugee', as it was prepared to coincide with the World Refugee Day.

In Hungary, the level of xenophobia remained relatively stable between 1992 and 2010 (Figure 1). Until 2015, the majority of the population belonged to the category of 'thinkers' (grey segment – those who would give asylum to those whom they perceive deserve it[4]). The proportion of xenophobes (red segment – those who would reject anyone who asked for asylum) increased slowly between 2010 and 2015 and then rose sharply. However, according to a recent analysis (Pepinsky, Reiff and Szabo 2024), as a result of the moral panic button (MPB[5]), which has involved using a benign framing for refugees from Ukraine ('proper' refugees) versus those from non-European countries ('improper' refugees), Hungarian public opinion towards refugees became 'bifurcated', as the word 'refugee' took on different meanings (white, Christian, European, deserving) to its earlier counterparts (non-white, Muslim, non-European, undeserving). This shift has also been confirmed by other sources – the claim that the majority of Hungarian society think that Ukrainian refugees should be accepted, at least for a limited period of time or until the war is over (Tóth and Bernát 2022).

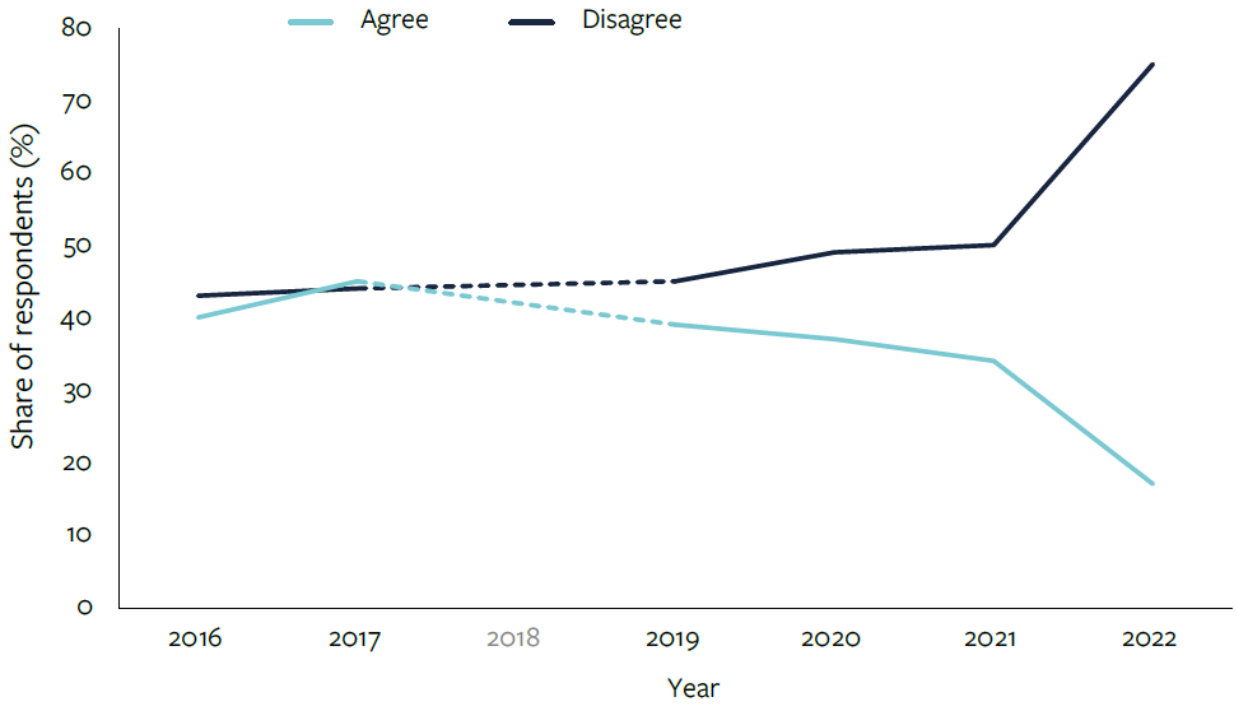
Figure 1. The level of xenophobia in Hungary, 1992–2022, %*



Source: Pepinsky *et al.* (2024); Sik (2016).

* 'Xenophils': would give asylum to everybody, 'xenophobes': would reject all asylum seekers, 'thinkers': would give asylum for certain people depending on their case.

Figure 2. Polish opinion on closing borders to refugees, 2016–2022, %

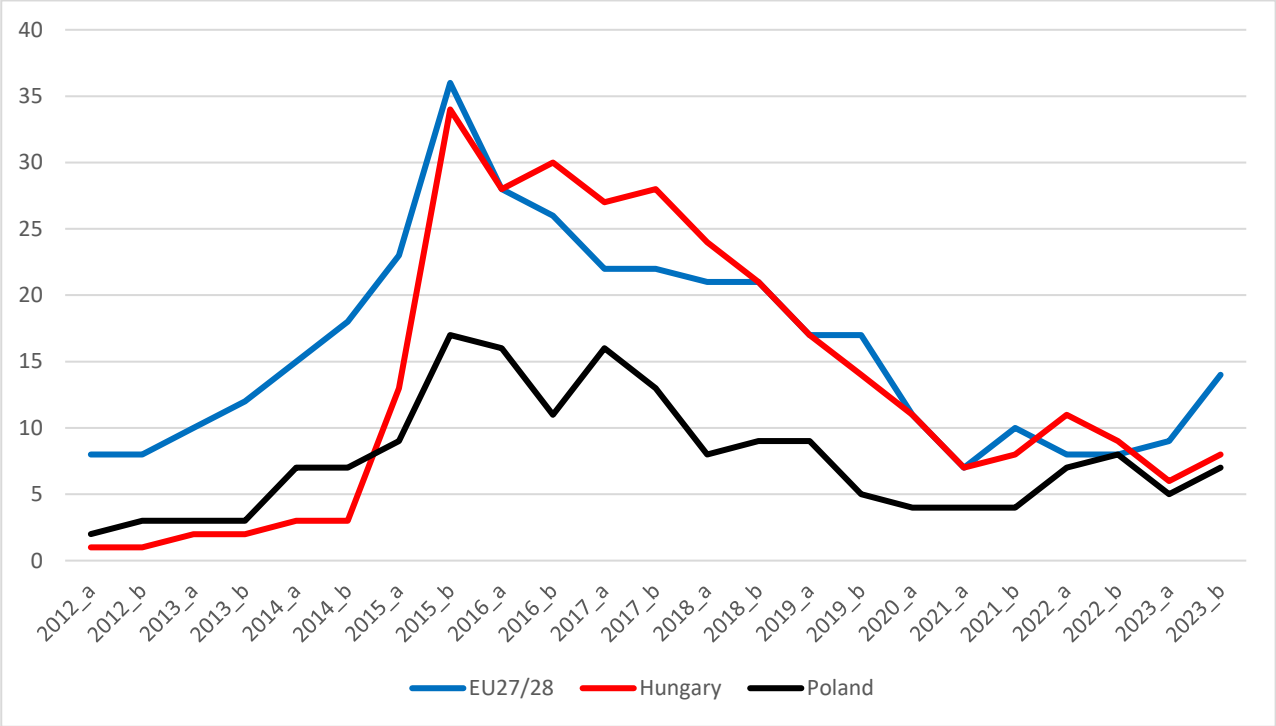


Source: Hargrave *et al.* (2023: 21).

The trend is clear from Figure 2: agreement with closing the borders originally increased and then started decreasing, followed by a sharp decrease in 2022.

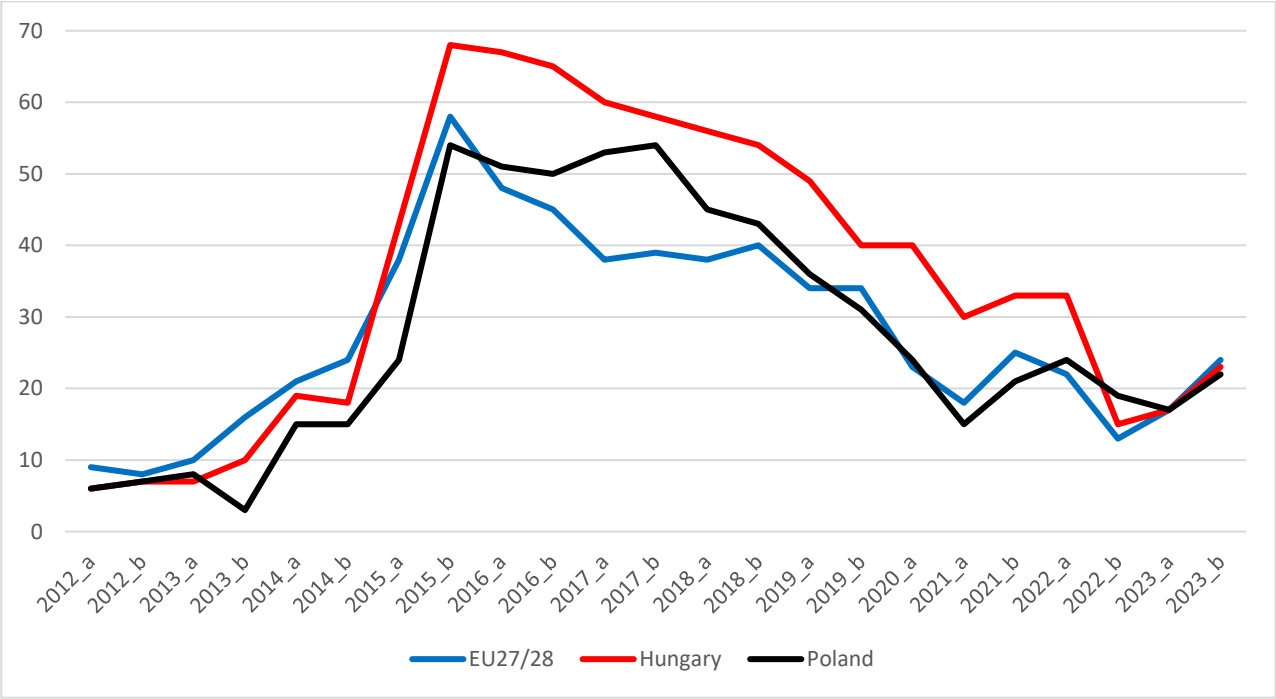
We assumed that the sharp drop in the level of xenophobia which we observed in Hungary and Poland in 2022 was not the exception but the rule among EU countries. The Eurobarometer survey confirmed our assumption (Figures 3 and 4). In 2015, immigration became a major source of concern (and perhaps fear) both for the countries under analysis and for the EU countries at large and then declined continuously until 2022; it started to rise again in 2023. Regarding the fear of migration as applicable to their own countries (see Figure 3), both the Hungarian and Polish trends deviated from the general pattern: while in Hungary, the fear of immigration remained slightly more salient until 2018, in Poland the fear of immigration was constantly (and, until 2022, significantly) below the EU average but, like Hungary and other EU countries, it increased again in 2023.

Figure 3. The level of fear from migration for the country in Hungary, in Poland and in the EU, 2012–2023*



* The proportion of those who consider immigration as one of the two biggest challenges for the country in the Spring (a) and in the Fall (b). Own editing based on https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052.

Figure 4. The level of fear from migration for the EU in Hungary, in Poland and in the EU, 2012–2023*



* The proportion of those who consider immigration as one of the two biggest challenges for the EU in the Spring (a) and in the Fall (b). Own editing based on https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052.

As regards the level of fear of immigration for the EU (Figure 4), the trend is similar (but at a much higher level) than the country-specific tendency. While, in Hungary, the threat of immigration for the EU countries as a whole remained a major issue for almost the entire period (2015–2022), in Poland the trend was similar to that for all EU countries, except for a short period between 2015 and 2019.

Various comparative European data on xenophobia have shown that countries on the eastern and southern periphery have significantly higher levels of xenophobia than the core EU countries (and Scandinavia). Moreover, several ESS-based analyses have proved that the level of xenophobia in Hungary has always been higher than in other European countries and that, after 2015, it increased faster than elsewhere in Europe (Czymara 2021; Messing and Ságvári 2019, 2021). The heat map of the DEREX index (Demand for Right-Wing Extremism, see Map 1 in Annex 1) shows that the average level of prejudice and welfare chauvinism was much higher in Hungary than in Poland both before and during the refugee crisis; the trend of the ESS (migration) Rejection Index (Figure 1 in Annex 1) shows that the level of xenophobia has always been higher in Hungary than in Poland. The Ipsos dataset shows that, if we extend the trend to 2022, support for refugees and the concept of asylum in general has increased (Hargrave *et al.* 2023).

In this paper, we use Ipsos data to analyse the level of xenophobia in Hungary and Poland between 2020 and 2023. These surveys were part of an international study conducted in 28 countries. Approximately 500 individuals aged 16–64 in 2020 and 16–74 between 2021 and 2023, participated in the studies in Hungary and Poland each year via the Ipsos Online Panel. The fieldwork was conducted between 22 May and 5 June 2020, 21 May and 4 June 2021, 22 April and 6 May 2022 and 21 April and 5 May 2023. The samples in Hungary and Poland can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. The precision of Ipsos online polls was calculated using a credibility interval, with a poll of 500 accurate to +/- 4.5 percentage points. Our research questions were as follows: What are the similarities and differences between the countries with regards to the trend in the level of xenophobia before, during and after the Russian attack? Were these trends similar across the entire population or were there social groups whose levels of xenophobia changed either more or less than average? Since we do not have the data themselves,[6] our aim is limited to presenting a descriptive analysis that compares the trend and the social basis of the level of xenophobia both before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

We assume that, while the two countries share many similarities in terms of history and culture,[7] their migration policies and current political contexts are very different. In another article in this special section, we first identify the MPB (Gerő and Sik 2020) as a basic tool deployed to transform Hungary into an informational autocracy (Sik and Krekó 2025, in this section), which did not exist in Poland, which was more like a democracy with autocratic tendencies at the time of the Ipsos polls. Secondly, while migrants have been used by the MPB as scapegoats in Hungary since 2015, no fully fledged anti-migrant propaganda has ever been constructed in Poland. There were only 2 periods when this topic was part of the agenda: first, after the 2015 refugee crisis in the parliamentary election campaign, which was the first time it had formed the subject of a national debate (Szczepanik 2018) and then, secondly, during the 2023 parliamentary election campaign, which served as a hotbed for disinformation about refugees (Neuberger 2023).

Hungary and Poland: Selection of the two cases

In terms of political context, both Hungary and Poland underwent political shifts to the right in the 2010s. The conservative turn in politics contributed to stronger anti-migration and EU skepticism in the

2 countries, both of which have experienced a rise in nationalist movements that emphasise the protection of national identity and cultural values (Sik and Melegh 2017).

Turning to their stance on immigration, as both countries share 'a history which is filled with stories of "us" and "them" and recurring conflicts which threatened the countries' autonomy' (Davies 1981; cf. Goździak and Márton 2018: 127), it is not surprising that they both opposed the EU's refugee solidarity policy during the first refugee crisis in 2015. Both countries have implemented policies to control immigration and have expressed concern about the potential impact of large-scale migration on their societies. There were also many overlaps in their migration narratives, such as the contrasting of 'good' and 'bad' refugees, the securitisation aspect (migrants as threats) and the aforementioned 'othering' (in Poland, see Goździak and Márton 2018; Hargrave *et al.* 2023; about the migration narratives in Hungary, see Surányi and Bognár 2025, in this section).

The 2015 refugee crisis had a significant impact on the 2 countries, shaping public opinion and political discourse. The fear of losing one's national identity, together with security concerns, played a role in the negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees, resulting in the phenomenon of 'Islamophobia without Muslims' (Górak-Sosnowska 2016), which resonates with the phenomenon 'Antisemitism without Jews' (also about Poland, Cała 2006). However, while Hungary adopted a more restrictive and anti-immigrant stance early on, exemplified by the construction of border fences and strict immigration policies, Poland did not implement such extreme measures at that time.

In their analysis of the impact of the 2022 refugee crisis, Moise, Dennison and Kriesi (2023) argue that Poland and Hungary share significant similarities, partly due to their historical experience of Russian occupation and their shared border with Ukraine, which makes them a first point of entry to Europe. The post-Soviet legacy also leads to 'a suspicion concerning anything "foreign" and describing "Brussels" as the new equivalent of "Moscow"' (Sik and Melegh 2017: 77). However, Poland has received hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian (and other) refugees since 2014, when the conflict between Russia and Ukraine started (Hargrave *et al.* 2023) – i.e. the refugee flow from Ukraine has been much more continuous there than in Hungary. Moreover, in 2022, Poland received among the most Ukrainians (after Russia and Germany) who wanted to stay in the country and asked for protection.

Recently, there has been a significant difference in the approach of the governments to Russia and Ukraine: while, in Poland, the government has shown clear disapproval of Russia, the Hungarian government is 'hesitating' (Madlovics and Magyar 2023). Furthermore, before the war erupted, Ukraine's new Minority Law worsened the situation of (all) minorities in the country, exacerbating the already existing conflict between Ukraine and Hungary (Zsiborás 2023).

Regarding the impact of the political context on the level of xenophobia in 2022, we assumed that, in Poland, the level of xenophobia would decrease significantly because the aggressor (Russia) is an arch-enemy (although there are conflicts with allies – the EU) and the refugees are 'real' and historically close (though sometimes 'bad') neighbours. In Hungary, we assumed a milder decline in xenophobia because the government propaganda downplays enmity with Russia (while artificially exaggerating conflicts with allies – the EU).

We also assumed that, due to the strong inertia of values (Dennison and Geddes 2019; Kustov, Laaker and Reller 2021), the artificially increased level of xenophobia in Hungary would decrease less sharply than in Poland and rise again sooner, due to the weaker civil society and the waning of media and personal interest (Lorenz-Spreen, Bjarke, Hövel and Lehmann 2019). We further assumed that the trends in the level of xenophobia would be similar for the whole population, i.e. that there would be no relevant deviations between social groups, because calamities (such as an unexpected war) have more or less the same effect on the whole of society.

Taking into account the three aspects mentioned above, we assumed similar but not identical reactions in the 2 countries.

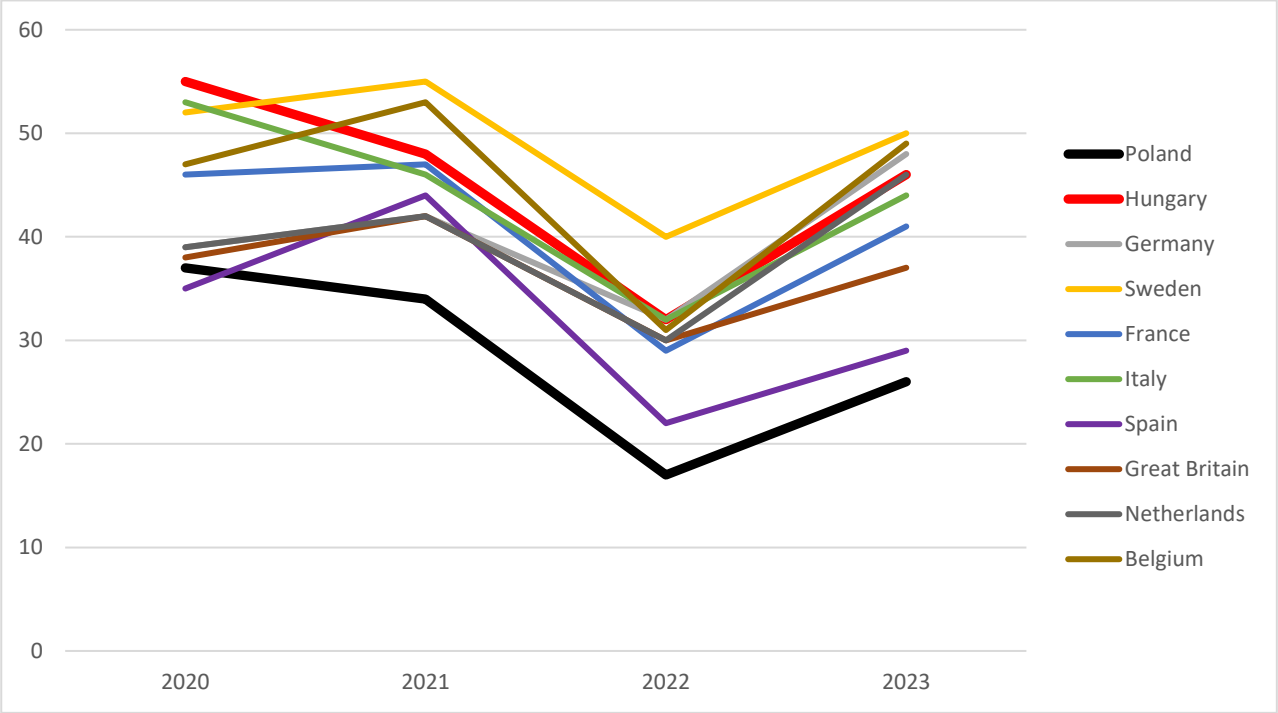
Trends in xenophobia in Poland and Hungary, 2020–2023

Both the unexpected decline in the level of xenophobia in 2022 in Hungary (Figure 1) and across Europe (Figures 2 and 3) – and, in the latter cases, its slow increase in 2023 – are lucidly visible in the new Ipsos global survey (Ipsos 2023). Regarding the trend in levels of xenophobia, Ipsos (2023: 2) concluded that:

> *While attitudes towards refugees became more positive in 2022 in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine, they have since dampened slightly in a number of countries. Nevertheless, overall public support for the principle of giving people refuge remains high at 74 per cent and is still more positive than in 2021 when the pandemic led to increased concern about borders.*

Poland and Hungary fit perfectly into the general trend with the selected 10 EU countries (Figure 5). The proportion of respondents who would close the borders to refugees decreased significantly in all countries in 2022 – when the Ukrainian refugee crisis began – but this tolerant turn had evaporated by 2023.

Figure 5. The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the item when thinking about their country: 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time' (%)



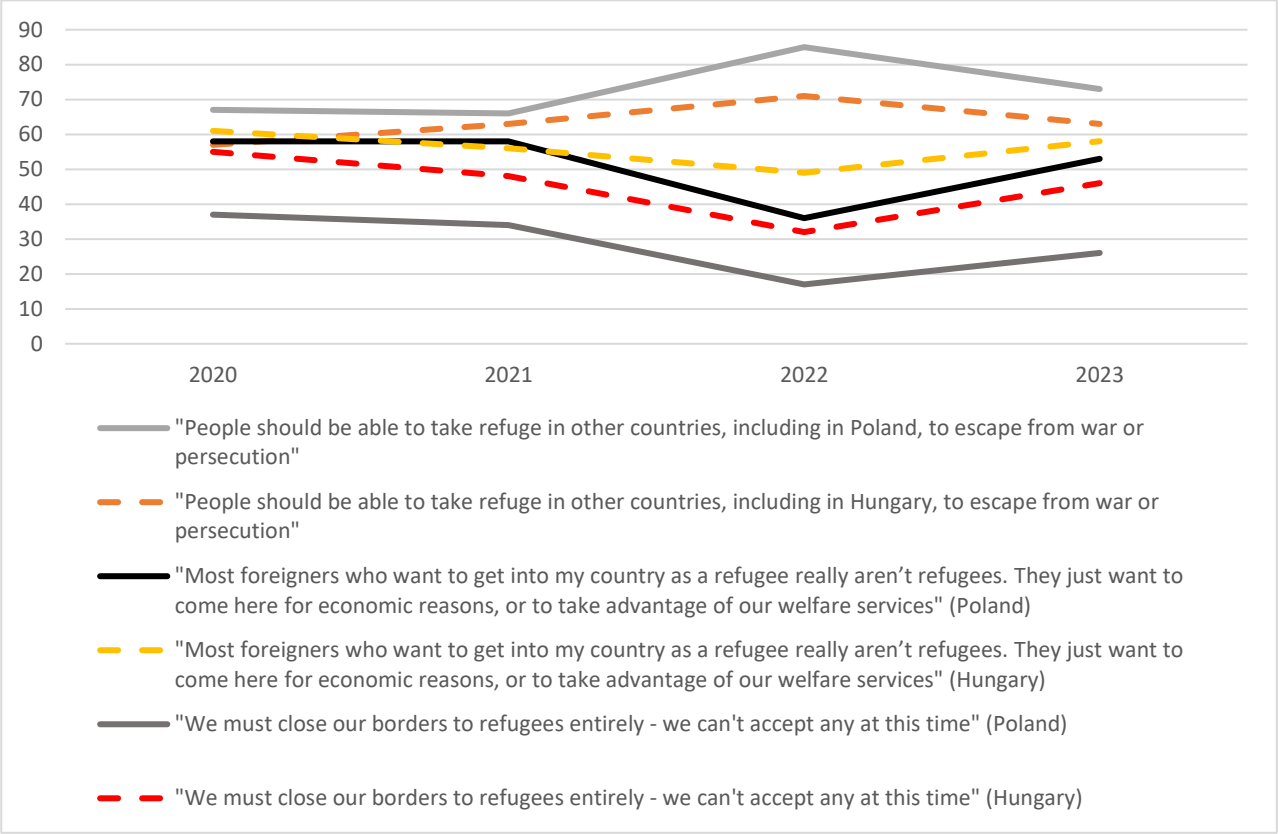
Source: Own drawing based on Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Belgium, Hungary, Poland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, 2020–2023, base 500–501; France, Germany, Great-Britain, Italy, base 500–1000, adults aged 16–75.

The trend in xenophobia was similar across Europe. Hungary and Poland were no exceptions but, in the latter country, it has always been well below average.

Figure 6 shows the development of 3 closely related aspects of attitudes towards refugees[8] in Hungary and Poland. The trends are similar in both countries: agreement with the 2 negative statements (Refugees are 'fake' and There is a need to close the border) decreased in 2022 and agreement with the positive statement (People should be able to take refuge) increased in both countries at that time, while the opposite was the case in 2023. It is important to note, however, that, in Poland, the statement 'refugees are fake' was strongly accepted again in 2023, while the statement 'We must close our borders' was still much less accepted.

The Ukrainian refugee crisis changed all aspects of xenophobia but only temporarily: the population became less suspicious of refugees and would let slightly more refugees into their own countries and many more into other countries; however, these changes were only temporary. The findings are in line with those of Moise *et al.* (2023) who conducted surveys in 5 EU countries (including Hungary and Poland) in 2 waves in 2022 (March and July), examining attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees. We found that the support for accepting refugees slightly declined between the 2 periods.

Figure 6. The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the items in Hungary and Poland, %, 2020–2023



Source: Own drawing based on Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2020–2023, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75.

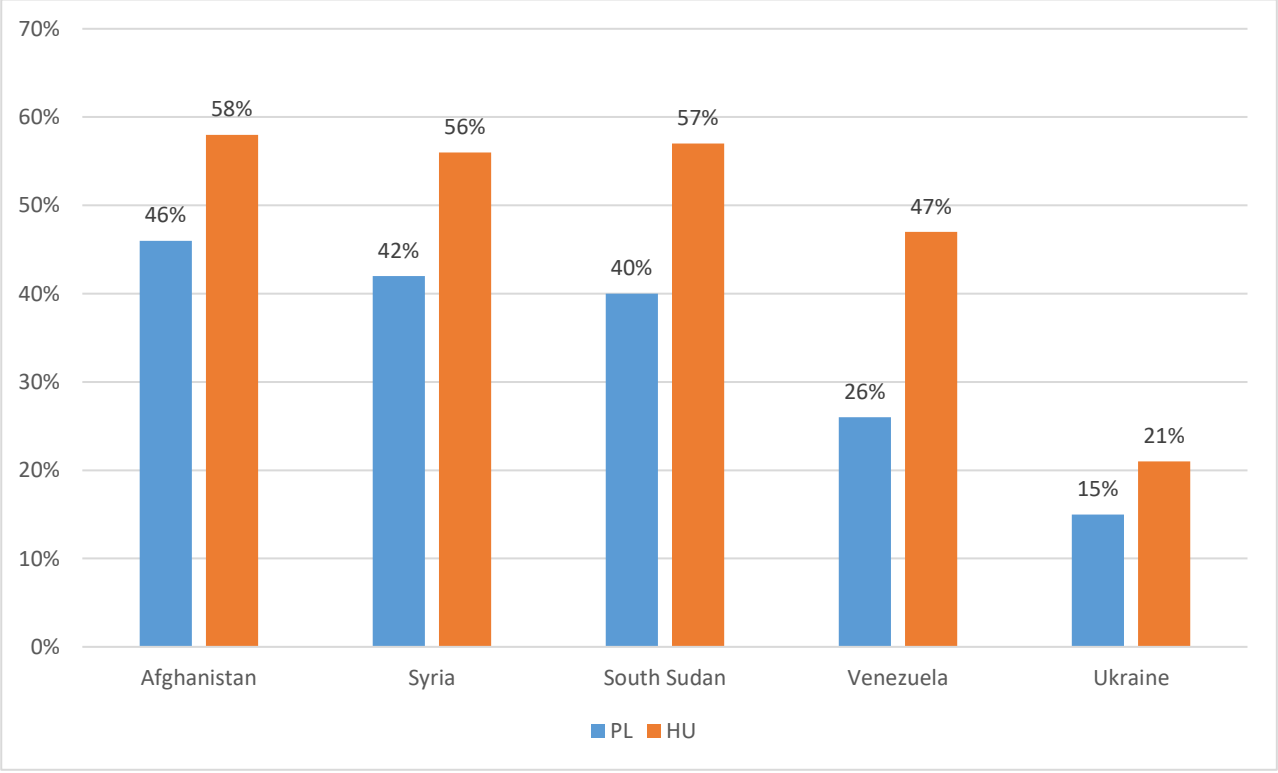
Regarding the differences between the 2 countries, the impact of the MPB is visible in Hungary, hence the more extreme figures. Both the themes 'We need to close our borders' and 'Refugees aren't really refugees' were the main narratives of the Hungarian government from 2015 onwards at varying degrees of intensity. It is also true that the 'fake refugee' narrative was popular in Poland in 2015, then again in

2018 during the elections and in 2021 in relation to the events at the Poland–Belarus border (see more in Hargrave *et al.* 2023). However, the decline in the proportion of those agreeing was much sharper than in Hungary, where the narrative was pushed more strongly and for longer. In the Polish case, we can grasp the impact of the perceptions of Russia as the aggressor and pro-Ukrainian attitudes, which are prevalent in the Polish migration discourse and stem from their historical experiences (Hargrave *et al.* 2023). Nevertheless, of course, this is a complex story: tens of thousands of ethnic Poles were killed by ethnic Ukrainians, which is still remembered (Hargrave *et al*. 2023).

Figure 7 illustrates the differences in attitudes in both Hungary and Poland regarding the country of origin of refugees in 2022. Refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and South Sudan were the least welcome in both countries and Hungarians were less tolerant than Poles about all of them. The difference in attitudes between refugees fleeing other countries and Ukraine is striking. This is most probably due to the cultural distance and perceptions of the root of the conflict (Moise *et al.* 2023). This finding – the non-acceptance of other refugees – contradicts those of Moise *et al.* (2023) concerning the so-called 'spill-over' effect: the latter found that positive attitudes towards Ukrainians were projected onto other refugee groups as well, at least for a certain period.

'Refugee hypocrisy' (Traub 2022), which refers to a certain double standard when it comes to refugees, characterises both countries but is somewhat stronger in Hungary. In Poland, the narrative of 'us' and 'them' was transposed, with Russia becoming 'them' and Ukrainians part of 'us' for a time: Ukrainians are 'freedom fighters' (like Poland has been in its history) against the 'aggressor' – Russia (Hargrave *et al.* 2023). This way, in Poland it is easier than it was in 2015 to accept refugees as 'ours'.

Figure 7. The proportion of those who totally or somewhat oppose the statement: 'To what extent would you support or oppose allowing more refugees into Hungary/Poland from ...?' (%)



Source: Own drawing based on data from Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2022, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75.

The social basis of xenophobia and solidarity in 2020–2023

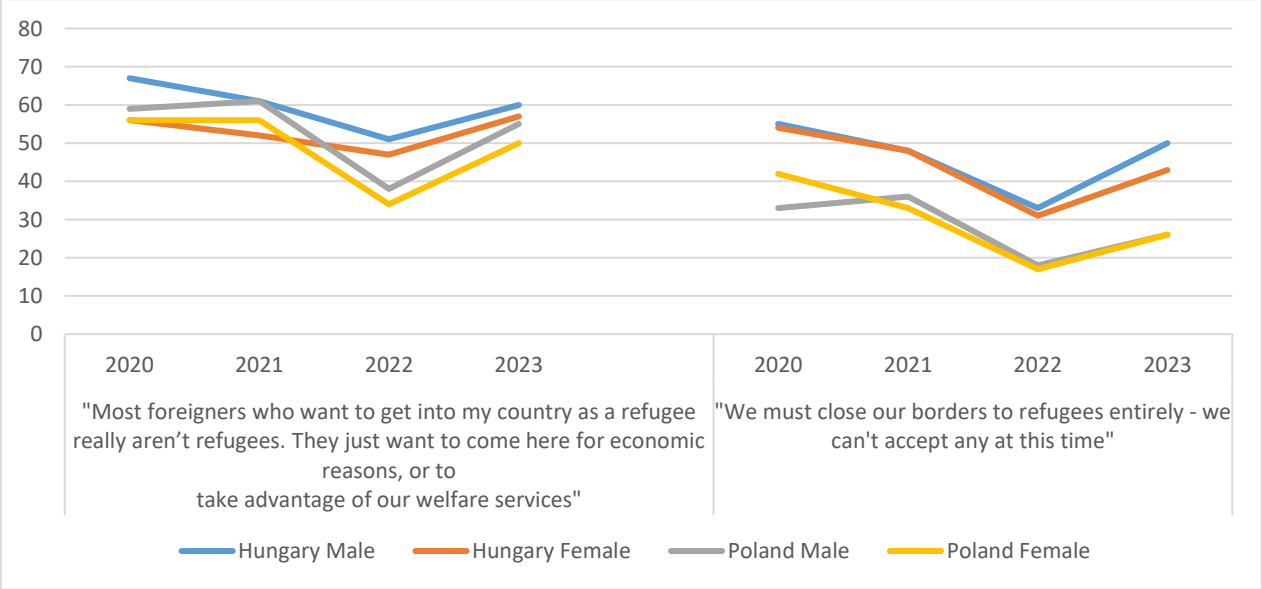
In this section, we describe the similarities and differences in the tendency towards xenophobia among various social groups between 2020 and 2023 in Hungary and Poland. The questions are: Do social groups react differently to the crisis (the war and the coming of refugees)? Do these reactions differ in the 2 countries? First, we focus on attitudes as a proxy for xenophobia and then briefly on the different forms of solidarity actions as a proxy for behaviour.

Attitudes

As described in this sub-section, we looked at 2 aspects of xenophobia. One statement was 'We must close our borders' and the other one claimed that 'Refugees are fakes'. While the former is designed to help identify respondents' *hostility*, the latter is more about *suspicion*. We use these terms when differentiating between levels of agreement with these statements.

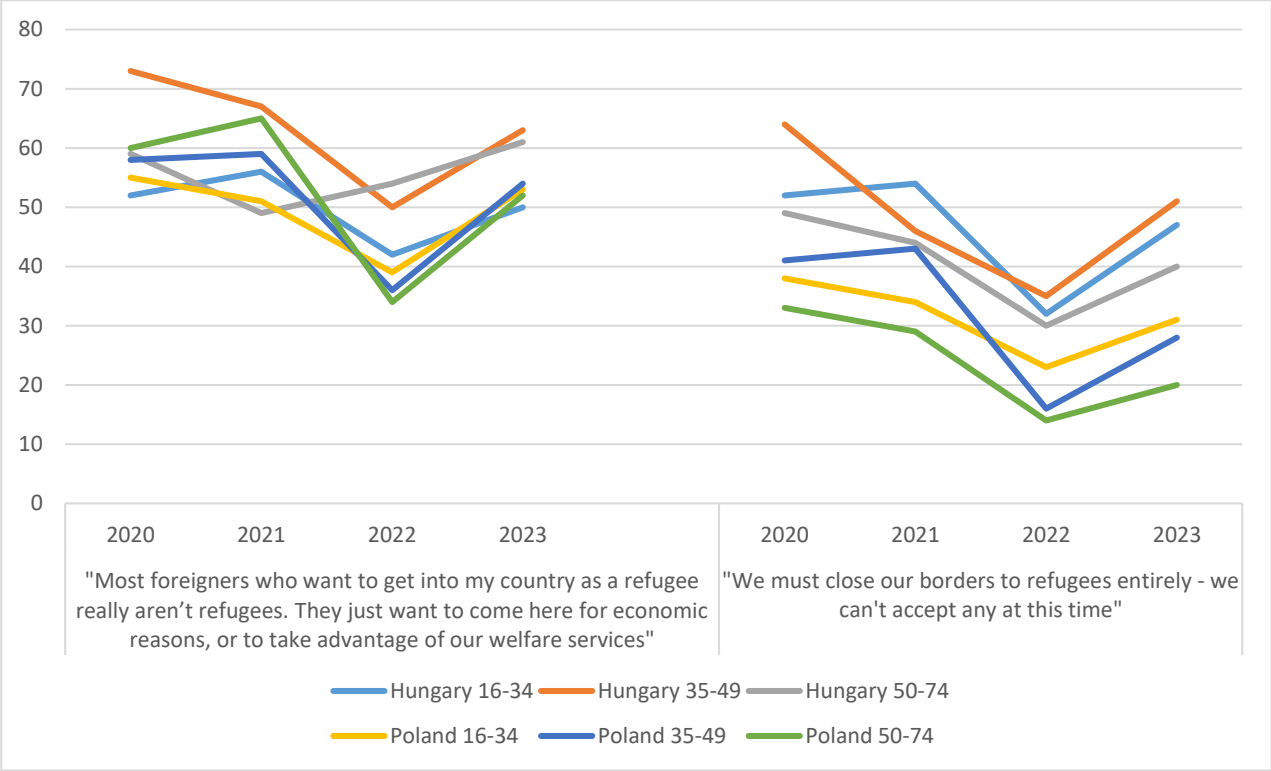
Figure 8 shows that, while males in Hungary were more suspicious than their female counterparts in 2020, the gap had almost disappeared by 2023. In relation to enmity, the gap opened up again in 2023, with males being more hostile. Previous research in Hungary on attitudes towards refugees found no significant difference between men and women (Sik and Szeitl 2016). In Poland, there was only a bigger difference in 2020 in terms of hostility but this had disappeared by 2021 – in this case, female respondents were 'stricter'.

Figure 8. The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the items when thinking about their country: 'Most foreigners who want to get into my country as a refugee really aren't refugees. They just want to come here for economic reasons, or to take advantage of our welfare services' and 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time', in Hungary and Poland, by gender, %, 2020–2023



Source: Own drawing based on data from Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2020–2023, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75; sub-sample sizes for Hungary (male–female in 2020–2023 respectively: 241–159; 234–266; 241–159; 227–274) for Poland (male–female in 2020–2023 respectively: 245–255; 245–255; 246–255; 248–254).

Figure 9. The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the items when thinking about their country: 'Most foreigners who want to get into my country as a refugee really aren't refugees. They just want to come here for economic reasons, or to take advantage of our welfare services' and 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time', in Hungary and Poland, by age group, %, 2020–2023



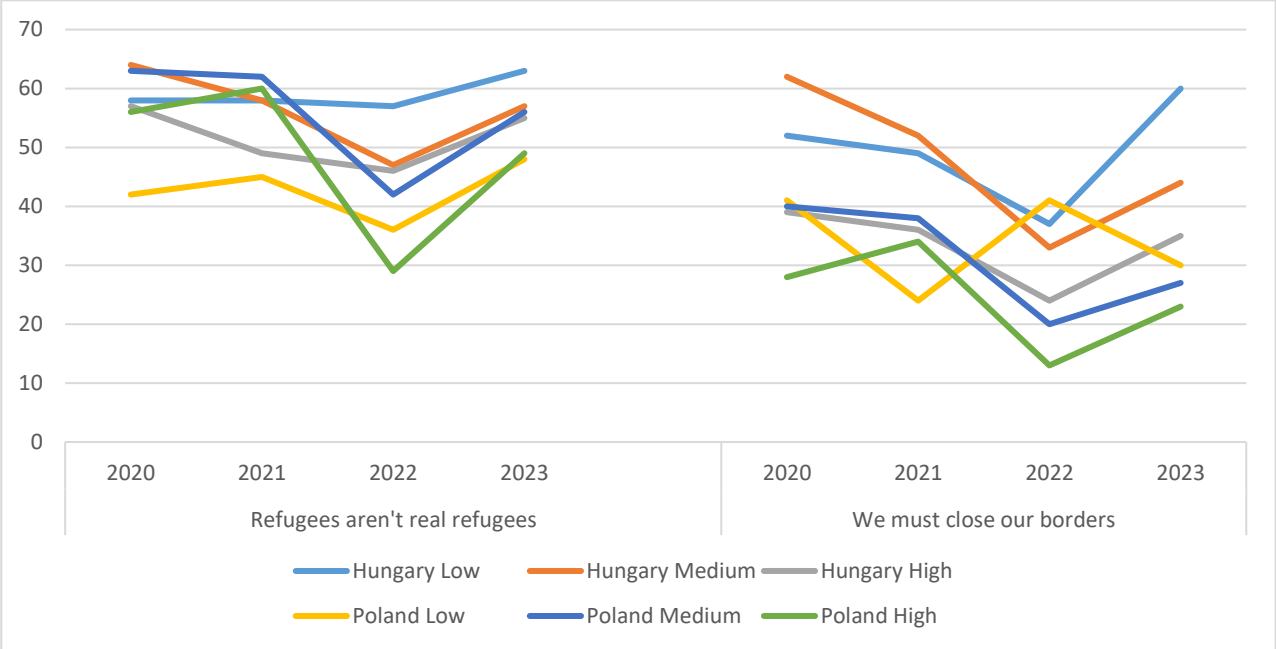
Source: Own drawing based on data from Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2020–2023, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75; sub-sample sizes for Hungary (16–34; 35–49, 50–74 in 2020–2023 respectively: 156–141–204; 156–160–185; 127–157–216; 145–164–192) for Poland (16–34; 35–49, 50–74 in 2020–2023 respectively: 174–156–170; 174–131–196; 153–148–200; 154–148–200).

Figure 9 shows that xenophobia differs more by age in Hungary than in Poland. In Hungary, the middle-aged cohort has (almost always) been the most xenophobic one and the youngest cohort the least suspicious (though still above 50 per cent), while the oldest age cohort has been the least hostile. These findings partly coincide with the results of previous research that finds that the middle-aged cohort has typically been the most xenophobic (Simonovits and Bernát 2016). The trend has not changed, which means that the crisis has not affected the feelings of the age cohorts. In Poland, however, there is no cohort which clearly stands out because the strength of feeling about these issues changes with time in both cohorts, which is not consistent with previous findings (CBOS 2022). While in 2020 and 2021, suspicion increased with age, by 2022 this relationship had almost reversed and hostility first varied across the age cohorts, before changing to a decrease in 2022. It seems that, in Poland, the 2022 refugee crisis changed the trends for the age cohorts: the oldest cohort became the least xenophobic and the youngest the most.

As it is widely accepted in the literature, we also assumed that higher levels of education (and as a close corollary, higher social status and income) are associated with greater support for refugees (Simonovits and Bernát 2016; Steele and Abdeelaty 2019). In Hungary, the level of xenophobia changed over time

within the different groups: while, in 2020 and 2021, the middle-educated were the most xenophobic, in 2022–2023, xenophobia decreased as we move from the lowest-educated to the highest-educated groups (Figure 10). In Poland, those with a mid-level education were the most suspicious throughout the years, while hostility decreased from the lowest to the highest educated – with the exception of the year 2021. We can conclude that the trends in the socio-demographic indicators are not clear-cut.

Figure 10. The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the items when thinking about their country: 'Refugees aren't real refugees' and 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time', in Hungary and Poland, by education, %, 2020–2023



Source: Own drawing based on data from Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2020–2023, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75; sub-sample sizes for Hungary (low-medium-high in 2020–2023 respectively: 124–281–96; 123–281–96; 97–227–176; 98–229–174) for Poland (low-medium-high in 2020–2023 respectively: 85–305–109; 85–306–109; low number–269–224; low number–273–211).

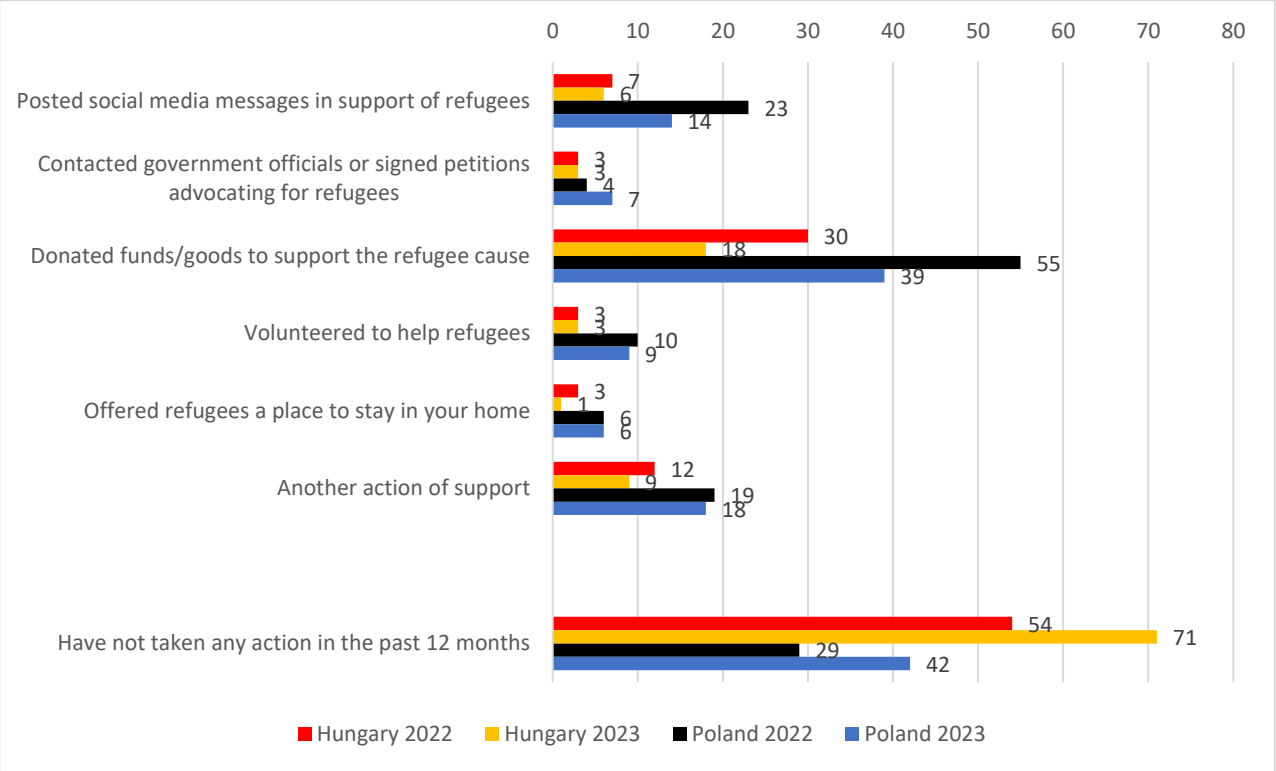
Behaviour

As Figure 11 illustrates, the proportion of those who – admittedly – did not help refugees at all in 2022 was almost twice as high in Hungary (more than half of the adult population) than in Poland (less than a third of the adult population). The level of – admitted – solidarity decreased in both countries in 2023 but the difference remained. The decreasing trend in solidarity is in line with other findings (MEDAM 2022; Nowosielska 2022; Theus 2022 for Poland, cited cited in Hargrave *et al.* 2023, and Zakariás, Feischmidt, Gerő, Morauszki, Zentai and Zsigmond 2023 for Hungary). Focusing on the different forms of assistance provided to refugees in both countries, donations were the most common form and this did not change over time. Regarding the differences between the 2 countries, as the attitudes towards refugees were more positive in Poland, the greater level of solidarity action is not surprising.

The most popular activities were the same in both countries: 'donating funds and goods' was the most popular, 'another supporting action' was second in much smaller proportions and the third, with

a more or less similar share, was 'posting on social media'. 'Volunteering to help refugees' was only popular in Poland.

Figure 11. Percentage of those who participated in various solidarity actions and of those who did not, 2022 and 2023 in Hungary and Poland (%)



Source: Own drawing based on data from Ipsos World Refugee Day Global Advisor Online Survey, Hungary, Poland, 2022–2023, base 500–500, adults aged 16–75.

Concerning the social basis of solidarity actions in the 2 countries, we found that:

- Regarding gender: in both countries, women were slightly more likely to act in both years (2022 and 2023). In Hungary, 49 and 31 per cent of women were involved in at least one form of solidarity action, versus 42 and 27 per cent of men. In Poland, the figures were 72 and 61 per cent for women versus 71 and 55 per cent for men. In both countries, the larger share for females is mainly associated with donation activity although, in Poland, volunteering is also relevant.
- Regarding the age cohorts: while in Hungary the middle-aged cohort acted the least in both years (42 and then 22 per cent), in Poland younger persons were the least active (64 and 55 per cent) (compared to 75 per cent for both in 2022 and 61 per cent for the middle-aged and 59 per cent for the oldest group in 2023). One would expect younger individuals to be more active on social media but this trend was reversed in 2022: in Poland, the middle-aged cohort was the most active in this field and in Hungary, the elderly were. Older people were more likely to donate and younger people were more likely to offer the use of their apartments.
- People with a lower level of education in both countries showed much less solidarity – in Hungary, 40 per cent in 2022 and then 20 per cent in 2023 compared to the 44 and 38 per cent of those with a mid-level education and especially the 59 and 44 per cent of those with a higher-level education;

in Poland, the figures were 59 and 42 per cent compared to 65/55 per cent and 55/64 per cent, respectively).

It is clear that solidarity with refugees is a complex phenomenon and needs to be broken down into different activities in order to identify which segments of society are the more active in different areas. In this respect, the year 2022 witnessed the overturning of some general trends.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the level and trend of xenophobia in Hungary and Poland based on Ipsos data (2020, 2001, 2002, 2023). We chose these 2 countries because of their cultural, political and historical similarities as well as differences – namely, their approach to the refugee crises in 2015 and 2022. Our starting point was that (1) the level of xenophobia in Hungary has always been higher than in other European countries – including Poland; (2) the level of xenophobia in Hungary has been reinforced by the government's full-scale anti-immigrant and anti-refugee propaganda (Reményi, Glied and Pap 2023), by pressing the moral panic button several times over the last 10 years, which was not the case in Poland.

Our descriptive analysis showed that:

1. the Ukrainian refugee crisis decreased the level of xenophobia in both countries (and in Europe), but only temporarily;
2. in contrast to Hungary, where the level of xenophobia returned to its previous level in 2023, in Poland the level of xenophobia increased by 2023 but still remained below its average level;
3. in Poland, while the level of suspicion of refugees became high again in 2023, the level of hostility remained lower than before;
4. 'refugee hypocrisy' is strong in both countries: respondents differentiated between the country of origin when they were asked who should be accepted into the country in 2022 – while refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and South Sudan were much less accepted, Ukrainians were much more accepted; and
5. the level of solidarity was much higher in both countries in 2022 than in 2023 although, in Poland, people were more active than in Hungary, especially in terms of those claiming that they had helped by volunteering, donating or in any other way.

All in all, we believe that our assumptions at the descriptive level were correct: while the 2 countries have many similarities, there are differences as well. First of all, the level of xenophobia is higher in Hungary than in Poland because of the continuous anti-refugee and anti-migrant government propaganda campaign and second, the inertia of xenophobia is also likely to remain higher in Hungary due to a mix of political, historical and cultural effects

The limitations of the study are the following. All surveys that address attitudes towards refugees may over-represent positive answers since the focus is on the group in question and respondents may express different sentiments but not dare to share them honestly.

Notes

1. Technical notes on the Ipsos survey results used in this paper:
   2020: This survey is an international sample of 17,997 adults: those aged 18–64 in the US, South Africa, Turkey and Canada and aged 16–64 in all other countries were interviewed. The fieldwork was conducted from 22 May–5 June 2020. Approximately 1,000+ individuals participated on a country-by-country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey, each with a sample of approximately 500+. The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.1 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 4.5 percentage points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population.
   https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-06/2020-world-refugee-day-ipsos.pdf.

   2021: These are the results of a 28-market survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform. Ipsos interviewed a total of 19,510 adults aged 18–74 in the US, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa,and Turkey and aged 16–74 in 23 other markets between Friday 21 May and Friday 4 June 2021. The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals each in Australia, Belgium, Canada, mainland China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain and the US and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey. The samples in the examined countries can be taken as representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. The data are weighted so that each country's sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data.
   https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-06/Ipsos%20World%20Refugee%20Day%202021%20report_1.pdf.

   2022: The original survey was a 28-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform. Ipsos interviewed a total of 20,505 adults aged 18–74 in the US, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey and 16–74 in 23 other countries between 22 April and 6 May 2022. The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals in each of Australia, Brazil, Canada, mainland China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain and the US and 500 individuals in each of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. The samples in the examined countries can be taken as representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. The data are weighted so that each country's sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data.
   https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2022-06/Ipsos%20World%20Refugee%20Day%202022%20Global%20Survey%20Graphic%20Report%20-%20Pt%201_0.pdf.

2023: The fieldwork was done between 21 April and 5 May 2023. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 21,816 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18–74 in Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, Turkey and the US, 20–74 in Thailand, 21–74 in Indonesia and Singapore and 16–74 in all other countries. The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals each in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain and the US and 500 individuals each in Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand and Turkey. Samples in Hungary and Poland can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. The survey results for these countries should be seen as reflecting the views of the more 'connected' segment of their population. The data are weighted so that the composition of each country's sample best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-06/ipsos-global-advisor-world-refugee-day-2023-full-report.pdf.

2. We would like to thank Ipsos for the data we received via electronic correspondence.
3. Ipsos was responsible for the design of the survey, the fieldwork and the production of the survey data only. The analysis, interpretation and reporting within this paper are the sole responsibility of the authors.
4. 'We call "thinkers" those respondents who selected the item: "It depends…", i.e. they express a need for more information before making their decision and are inclined to evaluate the pros and the cons' (Sik 2016: 41).
5. The moral panic button (MPB) has been the core propaganda machine of the Hungarian government since 2015 (Sik 2016). This is a technology combining media manipulation and push-polls to create fear from foreign enemies (first of all migrants who are used by a world-wide leftist/liberal elite) who seek to destroy the sovereignty of Hungary. The pressing of this button by government authorities aims to convince the population that only the ruling Fidesz government can defend them from these dangers.
6. We received only the excel tables but not the original datafiles.
7. According to the World Value Survey (WVS), both Hungary and Poland belong to the Catholic Europe group; however, in the 1990s and, in recent years, only at its fringe and far from each other, with Hungary having more secular and survival values and Poland more traditional and self-expressive values (Figure 1 and 2 in Annex 2).
8. The wording of the three questions was as follows: 'People should be able to take refuge in other countries, including in [COUNTRY], to escape from war or persecution'; 'Most foreigners who want to get into my country as a refugee really aren't refugees. They just want to come here for economic reasons or to take advantage of our welfare services'; and 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time'. The figures cover those who agree or fully agree with the items.

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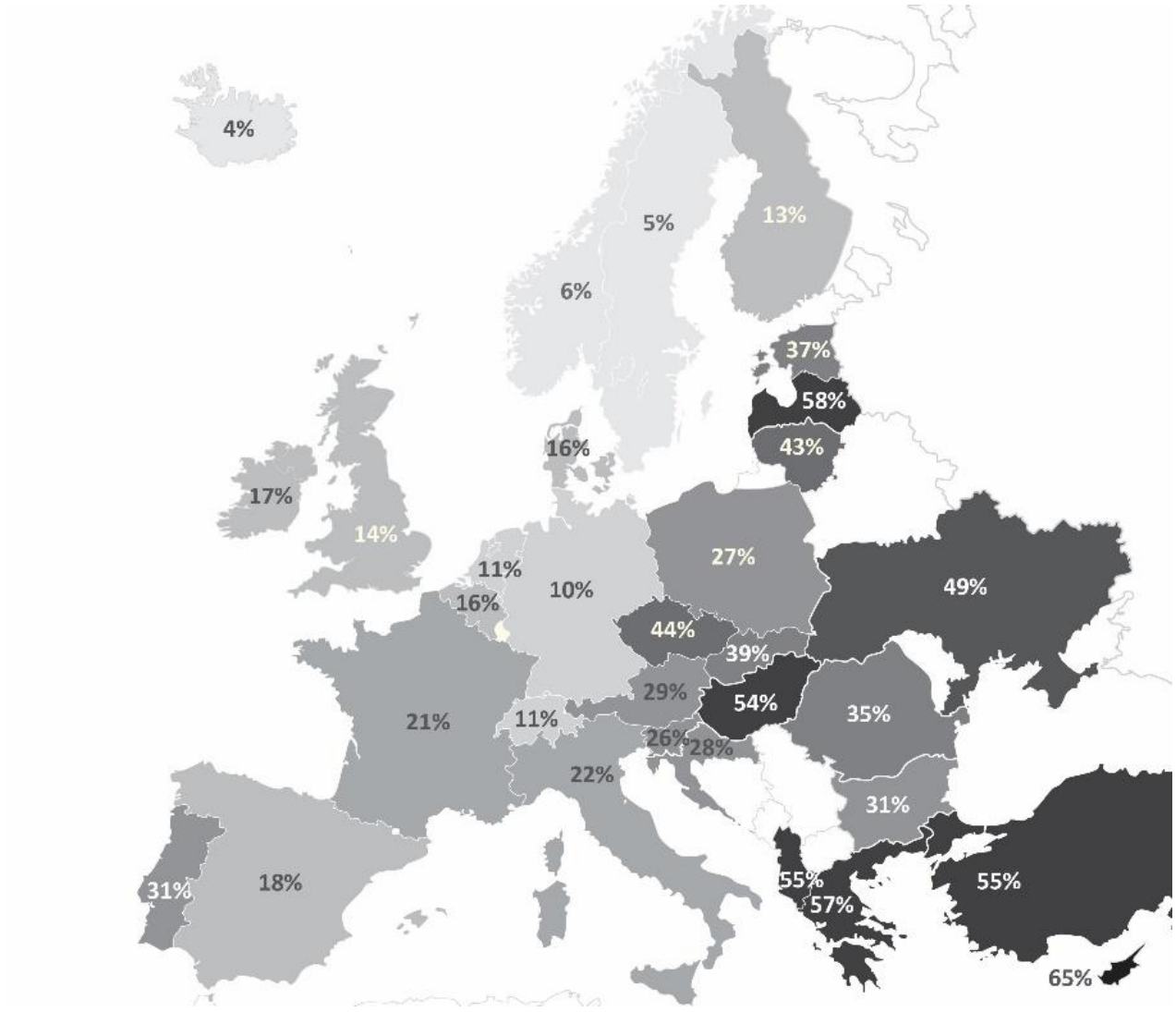
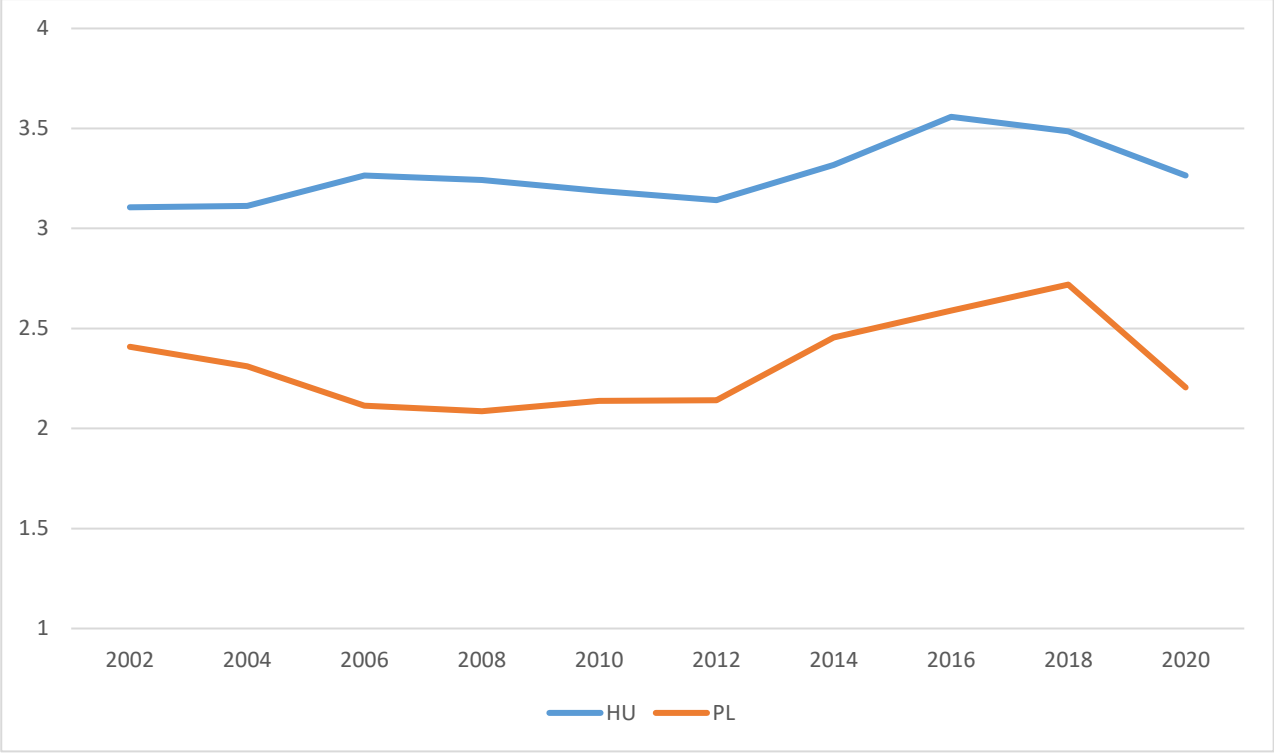
Annex 1

Map 1. The heat map of prejudice and welfare chauvinism



Source: In the mid-2010s (ESS 8).
http://derexindex.eu/images/download/map_derex_cat1_prejudices_and_welfare_chauvinism_20180130.jpg.

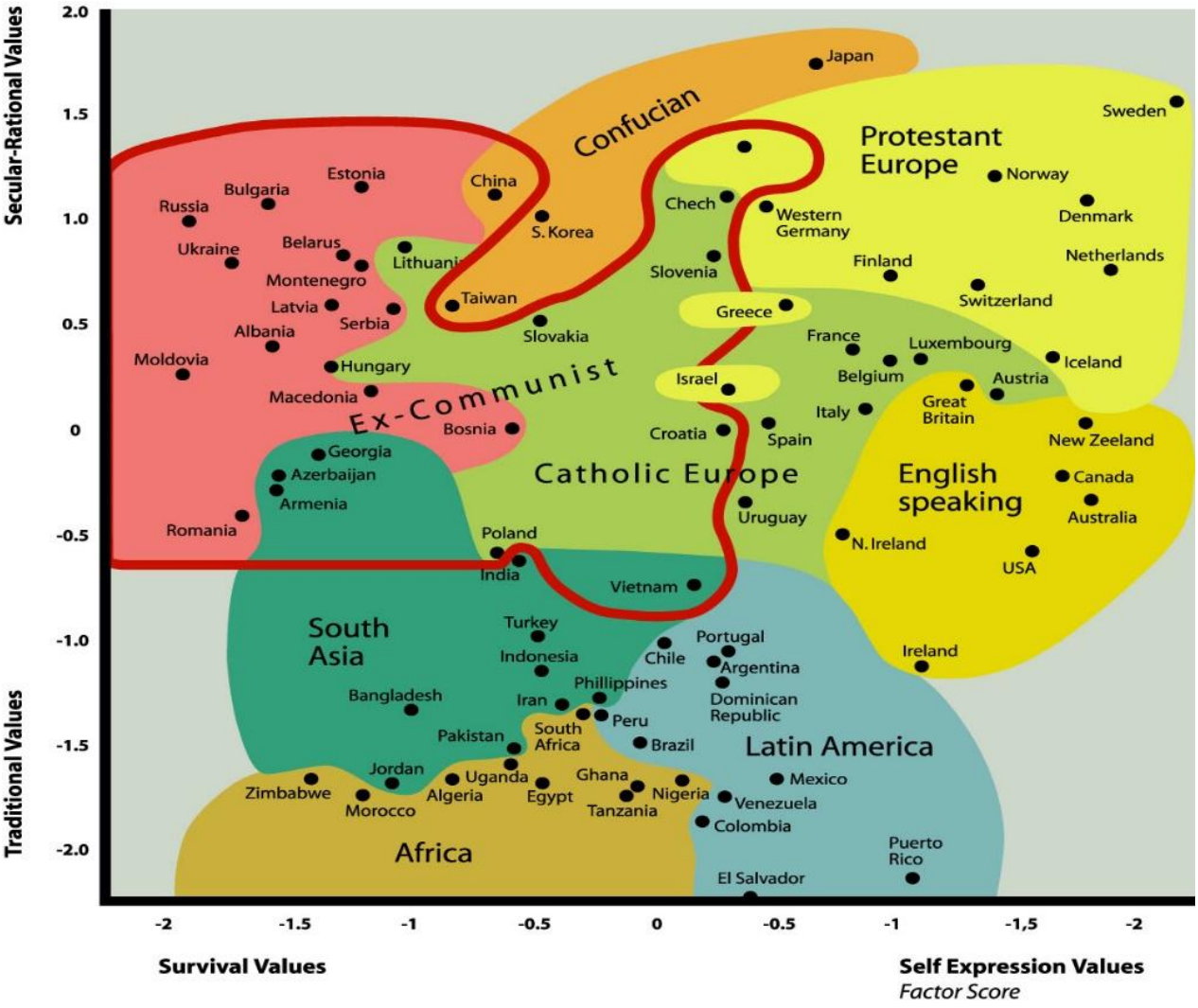
Figure 1. Indicator of rejection in Hungary and Poland (average, 2002–2020, %)



Source: Authors' own elaboration. Mean values of responses to the question: 'To what extent do you think [country] should allow people from the poorer countries outside Europe to come and live here?' Scale: 1 (allow many) to 4 (allow none).

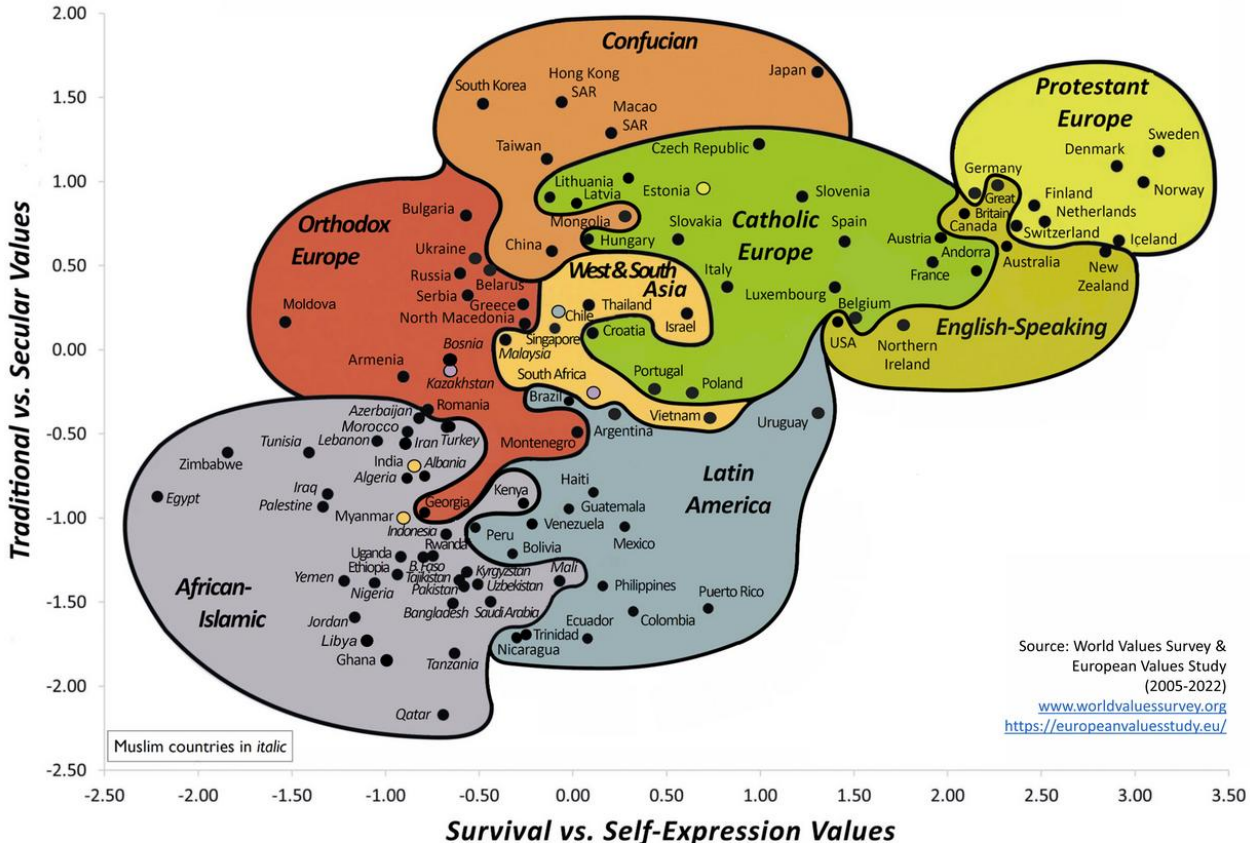
Annex 2

Figure 1. Two WVS maps on the characteristics of value system in Hungary and Poland



Source: World Value Survey 2023, 1996, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Cultural_map_WVS4_1996.jpg.

Figure 2. The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



Source: World Value Survey 2023, 2017–2022, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Map2023NEW.png.

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