



# Refugee Exposure and Attitudes Toward Refugees in a Developing Country Context

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# **Refugee Exposure and Attitudes Toward Refugees in a Developing Country Context**

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## **Abstract**

Despite high concentrations of refugees in these areas, there is a scarcity of causal evidence on how refugee exposure affects local attitudes in developing countries. Using a quasi-experimental setting and administrative data on the spatial distribution of refugees in the country hosting the world's largest refugee population, I examine the causal impact of refugee exposure on local attitudes and migration policy preferences. To identify this effect, I use the instrumental variables approach. Empirical findings show that refugee exposure significantly impacts perceptions of economic burden, insecurity, social distance, and migration governance. Negative attitudes predominantly arise from relative deprivation of the hosting population, leading to biased perceptions of cultural alienation. Moreover, competition in the labor market and access to public services emerge as primary factors shaping negative attitudes. Religiosity minimally affects attitudes but plays a role in shaping beliefs. Additionally, in line with the integration paradox hypothesis, increased interaction with refugees triggers cultural conflicts, portraying refugees as an ostensible threat to the majority's culture.

**Keywords:** Syrian refugees; theory of exposure; contact hypothesis; social cohesion; Türkiye.

**JEL codes:** D01; J15; O15; F22.

## 1. Introduction

Refugee and asylum seeker numbers are forecasted to reach 30.5 million by mid-2020, out of a total of 80 million forcibly displaced people. (UNHCR, 2019). In this context, understanding the drivers of public attitudes towards refugees is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it enables us to establish evidence-based policies to systematically increase social cohesion and decrease social tension in the recipient countries. Secondly, understanding the channels that shape negative or positive attitudes toward refugees can help policymakers design better policies to improve refugee integration levels. Furthermore, analyzing the impact of refugee exposure on attitudes towards them would inform better ways to design residential allocation policies in host countries, as this kind of analysis is informative in understanding how refugee exposure and its intensity are related to the social cohesion in host communities.

Available evidence in the literature on public attitudes centers on developed countries, which host only 14% of the total refugee population in the world. Surprisingly, there is scarce evidence on this issue in low and middle-income countries, although an overwhelming refugee population lives in the Global South. Developed countries also have relatively more substantive labor markets and greater infrastructural capacity to absorb this small population of refugees. This is critical for the economic integration of refugees and, therefore, attitudes towards them. Concomitantly, refugees hosted by developed countries are, on average, more educated than those in developing countries due to selective migration policies or the liquidity trap for many low-educated, low-income refugees who can, therefore, only seek refuge in countries neighboring the conflict areas (see, for example, Lergetporer et al. (2021) for the education levels of Syrian refugees in Germany and Kayaoglu (2022) for the average education level of Syrian refugees in Türkiye).

This paper uses the instrumental variables approach to analyze the impact of refugee exposure on relevant local attitudes and mechanisms. Specifically, micro-level representative survey data on the hosting population and administrative data on the population distribution of Syrian refugees in different Turkish provinces are used as primary data sources. Additionally, the predicted migration flow weighted by the distance between each Syrian governorate and the Turkish province center is used as an instrument for the Syrian population shares in each province. After analyzing the refugee

exposure's impact on various anti-refugee sentiments, I checked the relevant mechanisms that mediate this impact using subsets of data for different theoretically driven channels, explained in Section 3.

This study contributes to the literature on attitudes toward refugees in four main ways. First, it presents the first causal evidence from a developing country currently hosting the world's largest refugee population where the findings are relevant across other developing country contexts. Second, the study provides evidence of the essential mechanisms that drive the impact on public attitudes. In turn, understanding those mechanisms may help identify relevant policy areas to improve social cohesion in refugee-hosting developing countries, while findings on mechanisms contribute, *inter alia*, to the literature on migration management.

Third, as presented in the literature review section below, while the available causal evidence of the effects of refugee exposure on the attitudes of local populations draws on cases where refugees are transient with limited meaningful contact with the local population, the protracted nature of Syrian refugees in Türkiye enables us to test the impact of long-term exposure. Thus, the interaction variation among the hosting population allows for testing the effect of interaction levels and exposure on hospitality or hostility toward refugees. Relatedly, the non-transient nature of refugees caused inevitable interactions with locals in a political environment where refugees were presented and perceived as 'guests' in the early years of refugee inflows. In addition, Syrian refugees in Türkiye are not granted refugee status but only temporary protection status<sup>1</sup>.

Fourth, the paper's attitude measurement is not downward biased; as the survey was conducted in 2016, it records the higher hospitality level from the early years of the Syrian crisis. This means the study provides a long-term analysis of attitude formation instead of a contemporaneous one, as Syrian refugee inflows in Türkiye started in April 2011.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on the multifaceted impact of refugee exposure on attitudes toward refugees. Section 3 explains the theoretically suggested mechanisms for this impact. Details about the context are provided in Section 4. The data and

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<sup>1</sup> I still use the term 'refugee' when I talk about Syrians with temporary protection status, referring to the international definition of their conditions. Details about the context are provided in Section 4.

empirical strategies are explained in Section 5, while empirical results are presented in Sections 6 and 7. Finally, Section 8 concludes.

## **2. The Role of Refugee Exposure on Anti-Refugee Sentiments and Policy Preferences**

Understanding people's attitudes and policy preferences is essential, not only to unpack the effect of refugee exposure on voting preferences in host societies (Dinas et al., 2019; Gessler et al., 2019), but also to capture the role they play in changing the existing refugee protection policies and normative debates. Public views act as "an important feasibility constraint on public policymaking on asylum and refugee protection" (Ruhs, 2022, p. 5), which is crucial in achieving long-term policy sustainability and feasibility. Therefore, understanding how the public negotiates competing objectives, such as socio-tropic concerns against humanitarian views, is vital to sustainable policymaking in migration management.

Immigrants and refugees, as out-groups in many societies, can easily be the target of exclusionary attitudes (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Bansak et al., 2016). Such exclusionary attitudes harm immigrants' integration (Aksoy et al., 2023). They can even lead to violence against out-groups and, thus, harm social cohesion, as recently seen in some European countries (Dancygier, 2010; Graeber & Schikora, 2021). That is why, for many years, researchers from different social science disciplines have pointed out ways to decrease prejudices and negative attitudes toward out-groups and ways to increase out-group inclusion in society.

However, there is limited evidence about the role of refugee exposure in anti-refugee sentiments. Similarly, studies focusing on economic migrants have not reached a prevailing consensus. In some contexts, there is a positive correlation between the share of immigrants in a region and the discriminatory attitudes of the hosting population (Kaufmann & Harris, 2015; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010), whereas in others, it is negative (Zorlu, 2017). Although relatively small, there is also a related strand of the literature that focuses on the impact of refugee or asylum seeker exposure on increasing voter support for the radical right after the so-called 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe. While Dinas et al. (2019) and Hangartner et al. (2019) found an increase in the popularity of far-right parties in Greece, the cases of France and Austria showed support for the contact hypothesis (Vertier et al., 2020; Steinmayr, 2020). For Hungary, Gessler et al. (2021) found no overall impact of refugee exposure on

right-wing party vote shares. Thus, the impact of refugee exposure on the political attitudes of the hosting population is ambiguous in many developed countries.

Among the few papers focusing on how refugee exposure affects them, Hangartner et al. (2019) show that refugee exposure negatively affects the views of natives on migrants and refugees on Greek islands. However, it must be noted that the Greek context is enormously different from the Turkish or other developing countries' cases, as most refugees in those countries are in a protracted situation. Importantly, it is not only transient exposure or proximity but also higher contact levels that might shape attitudes toward refugees in such settings. This difference is crucial because, as the growing literature on the social threat (Stenner, 2005; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009), politicized places (Hopkins, 2010), and community discord hypotheses (Williamson, 2015) shows, out-group hostility might become prevalent in the long term as it leads the hosting population to reveal latent anti-immigrant sentiments. Moreover, the longer migrants live in a region, the more threatened the natives feel as they start competing with the migrants for scarce resources, which may trigger negative attitudes.

Meanwhile, the conjoint experiment results of Alrababa'h et al. (2021) provide the only evidence about the role of refugee exposure on native attitudes in a developing country context. They find that cultural and humanitarian concerns outweigh the egocentric and sociotropic concerns in understanding attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Jordan. However, the Jordanian case is also distinct from the Turkish in many ways. Notably, the host community and Syrian refugees share different languages, unlike in Jordan. This affects both the sociocultural proximity between refugees and the host society and Syrian refugee labor opportunities in Türkiye.

Jordan also had a stricter employment policy towards Syrian refugees. In contrast, Syrian refugees in Türkiye could work in the informal sector right after their migration and apply for formal work permits after 2016. Furthermore, Türkiye hosts almost 4 million registered Syrian refugees who are mainly scattered around urban areas, while only half a million are hosted in Jordan and live predominantly in refugee camps. Thus, interaction with the host community is comparatively limited in the Jordanian context.

Overall, drawing on previous literature on the impacts of migration on host community attitudes, this paper's empirical analysis will test if refugee exposure affects six primary attitude components: economic, insecurity, migration policy, behavioral, exclusionary, and anti-refugee.<sup>2</sup> Section 5.1 explains how these outcome components are constructed from the survey. Before moving to the empirical results, it is essential to discuss how different individual- and household-level characteristics might mediate our impact estimations. The following section will present the theoretical explanations for the potential mechanisms proxied and tested in the empirical analysis.

### 3. Theoretical Explanations for the Potential Mechanisms

Although it is crucial to understand how migrants and refugees impact native attitudes, identifying these impacts' mechanisms is even more vital if we want to design evidence-based policies to improve social cohesion in refugee-hosting societies. Four broad theoretical mechanisms are suggested in the literature. The first mechanism is related to individual- and household-level economic conditions (i.e., *egocentric economic concerns*). This mechanism implies we can expect natives negatively affected by refugees due to relative deprivation and labor market competition to have higher negative attitudes toward refugees. However, we see mixed evidence on this issue in developed countries. The only finding from another developing country setting, Alrababa'h et al. (2021), finds no support for these egocentric economic concerns in Jordan.

Secondly, and at a macro level, it is crucial to understand how individuals perceive refugees' impact on their country's economy, welfare systems, and public service provision. These *sociotropic economic concerns* also shape attitudes toward migrants. Although available empirical findings provide strong evidence for this mechanism in developed country contexts, it has been a weak factor in Jordan.

Thirdly, in addition to economic concerns, *cultural and religious factors* play important roles at the individual and country levels, as they may determine whether migrants are regarded as threats to the majority's or in-group's norms and identities. We see the importance of this mechanism as a form of "anti-Muslim" bias in developed countries. Cultural and religious differences or similarities, and perceptions thereof, also play a role in developing countries. However, these untapped exclusionary

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<sup>2</sup> The anti-refugee component forms a summary index of the preceding five components.



or discriminatory attitudes toward migrants become visible once there is a strong perception of refugees as a burden, especially if natives perceive themselves as secondary citizens when accessing public services or aid provisions. This can be observed even in cases where, objectively and subjectively, refugees are vulnerable, and negative attitudes were suppressed and kept latent if they existed.

**Humanitarian concerns** are suggested as another crucial mechanism in the literature on attitudes toward refugees. In this respect, it is essential to understand whether or not natives regard refugees as ‘vulnerable’ and needing help. Finally, I test if **contact intensity** is an important mechanism. In Allport’s theory of contact, the reduction of prejudice and growth of empathy depend on natives and migrants sharing equal status and the absence of competition between in- and out-groups over limited resources. However, we still observe out-group hostility, even in long-term cohabitation and out-group interaction. Or, more importantly, we might see the revelation of latent anti-immigrant sentiments, which could be initially hidden but revealed once the population of out-groups increases and the majority population starts to feel their cultural identity is threatened (Stenner, 2005; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). This aligns with the social threat hypothesis (Liska, 1992).

Moreover, as Hopkins (2010) argues in the politicized places hypothesis, in addition to large immigrant populations, a sudden out-group influx increases the feeling of being threatened if national and local conditions suit it. We also see populist politicians exploit natives’ sentiments by linking migrants with unrelated threats, thus creating exclusion in such societies (Adida et al., 2018). Relatedly, exposure to or regular contact with out-groups might trigger latent negative attitudes if the securitization of migrants is at a high level.

As explained in the data section, I will use several survey questions to proxy these five broad mechanisms suggested in the literature above and test if they matter for this study. Before doing so, I deem it helpful to provide some information about the contextual background.

#### **4. Syrian Refugee Flows to Türkiye**

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War in April 2011, Türkiye has become the main port of entry for millions of Syrians escaping the brutal conflict. As of December 2023, there were slightly more than 3.2 million registered Syrians in Türkiye, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in the world

since 2015. In the initial years of the conflict, Syrian refugees were mainly hosted in temporary refugee camps in border provinces. However, the protracted conflict in Syria meant the infrastructural capacity was no longer sufficient to absorb the continuously increasing refugee inflows, particularly after 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Given the low capacity of temporary accommodation centers, Syrian refugees<sup>4</sup> were allowed to relocate within the country by registering with the DGMM (the Directorate General of Migration Management in Türkiye) in certain provinces. Thus, we see a sharp increase in the urban refugee population after 2014. As of November 2022, the total Syrian refugee population in camps was only 47,727, making up 1.3% of Türkiye's entire Syrian refugee population. This urbanization of the refugee population coincided with Türkiye's economic slowdown, which was particularly felt by the urban population.

Although Syrians have been allowed to obtain a work permit to engage in the formal sector since 2016, the application procedure and other constraints, such as lower education and language barriers, resulted in insufficient demand for legal work permits. Thus, citizens with low education levels who worked in the informal sector started competing with refugees (Kayaoglu & Erdogan, 2019; Kayaoglu, 2020). Moreover, urban Syrian refugees are unevenly distributed across and within provinces; they are more concentrated in districts with lower housing costs. Thus, competition for public service provision and public goods intensified in low-income neighborhoods.

This rivalry over labor market opportunities, public goods and services, President Erdogan's announcements about government spending on Syrians, the possibility for Syrians to get Turkish citizenship, terrorist attacks by ISIS in Türkiye, increases in housing costs, and perceptions of rising crime rates, among other things, resulted in increased social tensions between natives and Syrians. Given these negative perceptions towards Syrians, the Turkish government announced its plan to resettle Syrian refugees in a 'safe zone' in the north of Syria in 2016<sup>5</sup> and started to increasingly use repatriation rhetoric ahead of the 2019 local elections (Şahin-Mencütek & Kayaoglu, *forthcoming*). However, Kayaoglu et al. (2022) found that only a tiny proportion of Syrians planned to return as they

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<sup>3</sup> In 2013, the population of Syrian refugees sharply increased from 224,655 to over 1.5 million. In 2014, it increased to 2.5 million which kept increasing afterwards until 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Syrians in Türkiye are not provided refugee status, but instead, they have temporary legal protection.

<sup>5</sup> See a news article (in Turkish) on Erdogan's announcement: <https://anlatilaninotesi.com.tr/20160201/recep-tayyip-erdogan-pkk-pyd-1020582966.html>

were either waiting for a Syrian regime change or improved living conditions to enable them to restart. However, according to various public surveys, a significant majority of natives want Syrian refugees to return to Syria (see, for example, Erdogan, 2020).

## 5. Data and Methodology

### 5.1. Micro-level Data and Outcome Variables

The survey data used in the empirical analysis was collected by the KONDA Research and Consultancy Barometer (“Perceptions on Syrian Asylum-Seekers”), a well-known survey company in Türkiye. The field survey was conducted February 6-7, 2016. The sample was selected through stratification of the data on the population and neighborhood/village educational attainment levels based on the Address-Based Population Registration System (ADNKS) in Türkiye and the 2011 General Election results. First, administrative units were grouped as rural/urban/metropolitan, and then the sample was created based on the 12 regions. Within the survey scope, 2649 respondents were interviewed face-to-face in 136 neighborhoods and villages in 98 districts – including central districts – of 27 provinces. Thus, the survey was conducted in provinces with high, low, or almost no Syrian refugee populations.

The survey had questions on perceptions toward Syrians (and asylum seekers), hostility, support for restricting border policy, and respondents’ various socioeconomic characteristics. As explained below, these individual characteristics were used to construct variables to test the mechanisms behind our main results. The survey data was merged with the spatial distribution of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, obtained from the DGMM (the Presidency of Migration Management).

Six outcome components were constructed using multiple survey questions: (1) economic, (2) insecurity, (3) migration policy, (4) behavioral, (5) exclusionary, and (6) anti-refugee. For each category (except 2 and 4), a polychoric principal component (PC) analysis was performed to reduce the measurement error, and the 1st PCs (normalized with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1) were used as dependent variables so coefficients could be directly compared. The **economic component** included information about three variables: (1) whether the respondent believed refugees harm the Turkish economy, (2) whether refugees should be provided with a work permit, and (3) whether job opportunities became scarcer because of Syrian refugees.

The *insecurity component* concerned respondents' views on cities becoming less safe after the arrival of Syrian refugees. The *migration policy component* was constructed using respondents' views about (1) whether refugees should be provided with a residence permit and (2) whether more refugees should be allowed to enter the country. The *behavioral component* summarized whether the respondent helped Syrian refugees. The *exclusionary component* was constructed using (1) the preferred distance measures of respondents towards refugees and (2) whether they preferred refugees to live only in camps in Türkiye. Finally, the *anti-refugee component* considered all the above dimensions together, forming an overall measure of negative attitudes towards asylum seekers. As with all other component scores, a higher value implied a more negative attitude. Summary statistics of these measures are provided in the Appendix.

## 5.2. Macro-level Data and the Identification Strategy

The key independent variable is the share of Syrian refugees among the total population in each province<sup>6</sup>. I used the refugee share instead of the refugee population in a province because the former is more relevant for measuring the refugee exposure of natives; it also internalizes the size of a province, which can be related to the total absorption capacity in a hosting area. The OLS regression of the refugee share in each province on the outcome variables described in the data section might result in biased estimates due to selection bias. In other words, refugees' decisions to internally migrate (at least in the long-term) to different provinces could be related to the pre-existing hostility/hospitality levels of natives in those places. Therefore, to find the impact of refugee exposure on attitudes and perceptions, I used an instrumental variable (IV) method and compared individuals with similar characteristics according to their age, gender, and education but who were exposed to refugee populations at different intensities. The standard errors are clustered at the province level in all analyses.

The second stage equation in the IV regressions is as follows:

$$y_{i,p} = \alpha + \delta * exposure_{i,p} + X'_{i,p}\beta + \epsilon_{i,p} \quad (1)$$

The outcome variables are the six constructed attitude/perception indices of each respondent  $i$  in province  $p$ , as explained in Section 5.1. Following Kayaoglu (2022), the instrument used in the

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<sup>6</sup> This information was calculated using administrative data on registered Syrians under temporary protection (SuTP) in Türkiye at the end of 2015. Therefore, it does not include the unregistered Syrians. Hence, I assume the distribution of unregistered Syrians is similar to that of registered SuTPs.

empirical analysis was a predicted population flow into each sampled Turkish province, weighted by the distance between each Syrian governorate and the Turkish province center. Furthermore, exclusion restrictions were checked with placebo tests on gender, age, and education, which showed that provinces hosting larger refugee shares were not statistically different from those hosting smaller refugee shares in terms of gender, age, and refugee education distributions. Finally, the instrument is statistically relevant as first-stage F-statistics are above 90 in all specifications in the following section (see the main results section in the Appendix).

### 5.3. Variables to Test the Potential Mechanisms

In addition to presenting the impact of refugee exposure on the perceptions and attitudes toward refugees and migration policy, I also tested the theoretical mechanisms suggested in the earlier studies. The first mechanism is related to egotropic economic factors, namely, *economic competition and relative deprivation*, which were proxied by four dummy variables: (1) if the respondent was unemployed; (2) if the per capita household income was in the lowest quartile of the sample distribution; (3) if the respondent could not make ends meet in the last month before the survey; and (4) if the respondent expected financial difficulties in their lives in the coming months.

The second mechanism is *cultural and religious concerns*, which reflected the respondents' perceptions about the cultural (dis)similarity of Syrian refugees to the Turkish population and their religiosity level. The *religiosity* level of respondents was coded into three categories: non-believers, believers, and religious, using the respondents' views about their religiosity levels. The sample size for non-believers was small (N = 70), so I focused on the other categories in our analysis.

Thirdly, we tested if humanitarian concerns were important factors causing different impacts of refugee exposure on our outcome variables. To measure humanitarian concerns, I used the subjective categorization of Syrian refugees, which was also highly correlated with respondents' political views and the political narratives they followed in Türkiye. Four indicator variables were used to construct this third mechanism. The first binary variable equaled 1 if the respondent agreed with either of the following statements: "Syrians are opportunists who come to our country for economic gain by using the war as an excuse" or "They are a burden to us."

The second dummy variable indicated whether respondents agreed that “Syrian refugees are our religious brothers/sisters.” The third binary variable equaled 1 if the respondents agreed with the statement: “Syrian refugees are our guests.” The last category equaled 1 if the respondents agreed with the statement: “Syrian refugees are people fleeing persecution.”

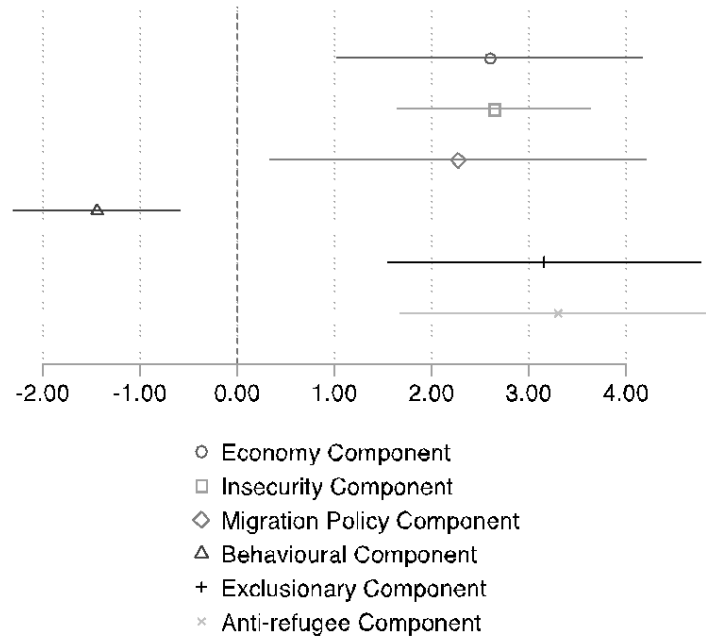
The fourth mechanism is the *contact intensity* of the host population with the refugees. To explain the contact intensity, I first used a variable showing the frequency of native contact with Syrian refugees. I coded it as a 7-point Likert scale from ‘never’ to ‘every day.’ In addition to this contact intensity information, I also created dummy variables if the respondent came across Syrians either in (1) a neighborhood/street, (2) a bazaar, (3) a workplace, (4) a school, (5) a mosque, or (6) public transportation. The summation of these dummy variables informs us if the contact between the respondent and Syrian refugees occurs in a few or many locations.

The final mechanism is the *sociotropic concerns* of respondents, and it equaled 1 if s/he expected a financial crisis in Türkiye in the coming months and 0 otherwise. Summary statistics of these variables are also provided in the Appendix.

## 6. Main Results

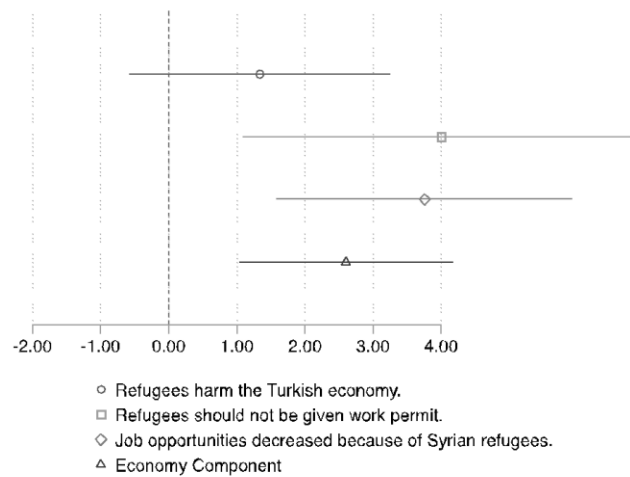
As explained in the data section, each component used as a dependent variable is normalized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Moreover, the higher the score, the greater the hostility toward refugees in all the dependent variables. As you can see in *Figure 1*, overall negative attitudes toward Syrian refugees exist in all outcome categories. In other words, exposure to refugees significantly increases anti-refugee sentiments in Türkiye across all dimensions. The only exception is how the behavioral component is affected. I found that higher exposure to refugees did not keep the host society from helping them, even if their hostility increased in other dimensions simultaneously. Also, interestingly, exclusionary and anti-refugee components increased more than all other outcome components, which rose by 2.81 SD ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 2.76 SD ( $p < 0.001$ ), respectively, as shown in Table A2 in the Appendix.

**Figure 1. Impact of Refugee Exposure on Attitudes and Host Society Perceptions**



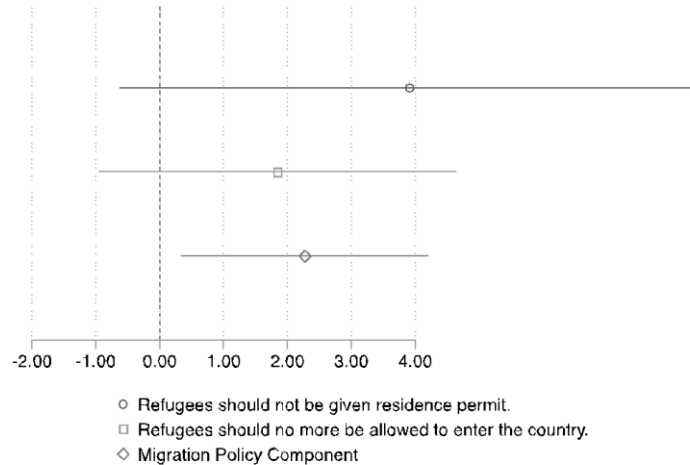
Looking closer at the details in each component, we see how exposure to the refugee population shapes them. For example, **Figure 2** shows that sociotropic economic concerns are essential for anti-refugee sentiments. Exogenous exposure to refugees increases interest in banning refugees from working legally by 4 SD ( $p = 0.007$ ) and beliefs that refugees decrease job opportunities by 3.75 SD ( $p = 0.001$ ).

**Figure 2. Impact of Refugee Exposure on the Economic Component**



Regarding the migration policy component, **Figure 3** shows that, although natives in provinces with higher refugee populations have stronger beliefs that asylum seekers should not be given residence permits or accepted at all, these findings are not statistically significant. For the summary measure of migration policy, though, we find that it increases by 1.55 SD ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Figure 3. Impact of Refugee Exposure on the Migration Policy Component**

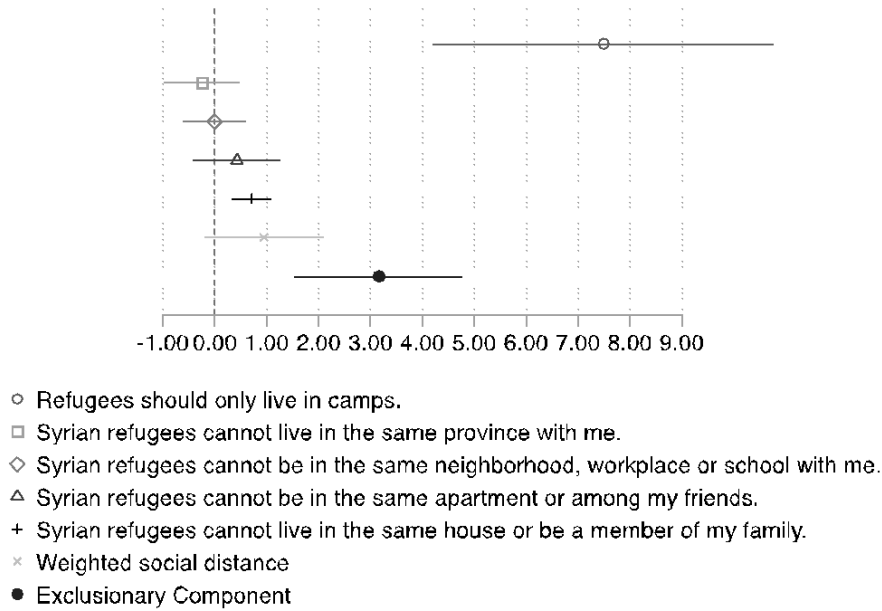


**Figure 4** presents the estimates of all the variables used to construct the exclusionary component. It shows that the largest impact of refugee exposure is on the view that refugees should only be allowed to live in camps (7.49 SD with  $p < 0.001$ ). This is important in relation to the long-term effects of refugees on social cohesion, as camps had already begun to close; currently, less than 1.5% of the total refugee population in Türkiye lives in camps. This finding is also important because it shows that natives, on average, do not want to live with Syrian refugees in urban centers. Moreover, we also see an exogenous increase in refugee exposure increases the desire of natives to not have refugees in their close circle (in the same apartment or among their friends).

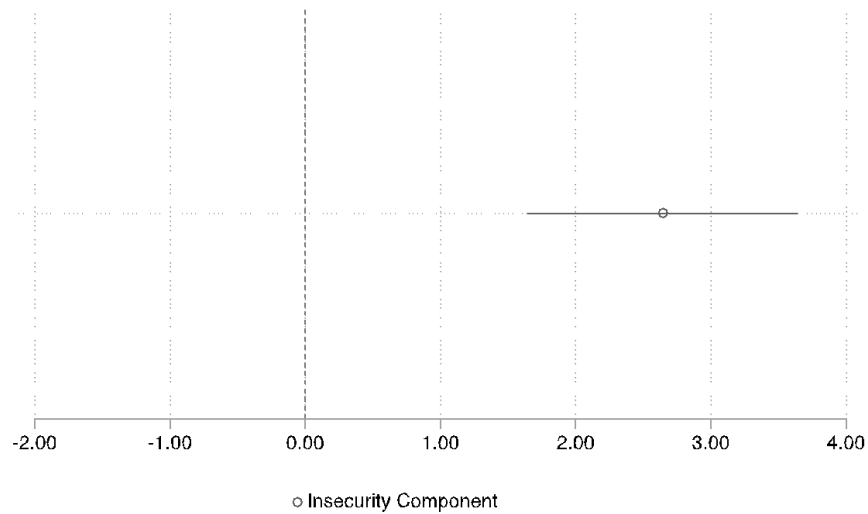
Furthermore, as **Figure 5** shows, the perception of higher crime rates (cities being less secure because of Syrian refugees) is significantly higher (2.61 SD with  $p < 0.001$ ) for natives who are more exposed to refugees. Importantly, the insecurity component is found to be more important (in terms of economic significance) than the economic.



**Figure 4. Impact of Refugee Exposure on the Exclusionary Component**



**Figure 5. Impact of Refugee Exposure on the Insecurity Component**



## 7. Empirical Findings about the Mechanisms

The previous section shows that refugee exposure has a statistically significant and sizeable impact in all dimensions except the behavioral. Yet, it is critical to understand the sources of these impacts so that effective and tailored policies can be designed to achieve social cohesion in refugee-hosting provinces. Empirical findings on the mechanisms are provided in **Table 1**. As all the dependent

variables are normalized, the coefficients can be compared to understand which mechanism's role is dominant. At the same time, a crucial observation from the findings is that negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees are common across society, although at different intensities. This is worrisome, as it implies social cohesion is difficult to achieve in the short term.

When we look at the role of economic competition and relative deprivation, we see that students who have worries about their future job prospects and unemployed individuals have higher anti-refugee sentiments than individuals in other labor market categories. This implies that aggregate demand-induced job creation was not enough to cause negative attitudes towards refugees. Thus, it is crucial for the government to follow policies that will create jobs in refugee-hosting regions. As the literature already provides evidence about native job replacements in the informal sector resulting from refugee inflows, job creation or residential policies distributing refugees in provinces with lower labor market saturation are vital. In addition, vocational training for natives would ensure that job or sectoral transition would be smoother. Relatedly, retired individuals do not have any significant anti-refugee sentiment.

Furthermore, when we look at the distribution of per capita household income and its role in attitudes toward refugees, we find that high-income families have higher anti-refugee sentiments across all categories. However, when it comes to poverty, we see that families who have difficulty making ends meet have greater economic, insecurity, and policy concerns. We also checked if egocentric economic concerns are relevant to natives' attitudes and found statistically significant impacts for all attitude categories.

Moreover, natives who believe that Syrian refugees are culturally similar to Turkish people have fairly lower economic, insecurity, and migration policy concerns linked to refugees. However, for the exclusionary component, the impact of refugee exposure on anti-refugee sentiments is even higher for this group. We also checked if empathy or humanitarian concerns matter for attitudes toward refugees. It is found that even natives who defined Syrian refugees as 'people fleeing persecution' had more negative attitudes after greater exposure. For those who defined refugees as 'religious brothers/sisters,' allying with the ruling party's rhetoric, there are no economic-, insecurity-, or policy-related concerns associated with refugee exposure. However, at high levels of exposure, they also want to see refugees only living in camps.

I also wanted to check whether Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis was valid in Türkiye. **Table 1** shows it is not relevant in our context because natives who reported having high levels of personal contact generally had higher anti-refugee sentiments. However, the contact level decreased the exclusionary component slightly, although it was still positive and statistically significant.

Finally, religiosity is an essential characteristic of natives with more welcoming attitudes. However, even for people defining themselves as religious, greater exposure to refugees led them to support the exclusionary component.

Overall, the empirical findings on the potential mechanisms show that the significantly negative attitude towards refugees is a trend for people with different demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural characteristics. Moreover, comparing all the behavioral and attitudinal components, empirical findings show that, on average, a greater effect is found on the exclusionary component.

**Table 1. Impact of Refugee Exposure on Host Community Negative Attitudes**

		Economy component	Safety component	Migration policy component	Behavioural Component	Exclusionary Component
Labor Market Status	Employed	2.768** (1.179)	3.845*** (.978)	2.004** (.975)	-2.734*** (.767)	3.128** (1.451)
	Unemployed	1.336 (2.071)	4.206*** (1.077)	3.994 (3.769)	-.467 (1.451)	6.355** (3.090)
	Student	3.155*** (.944)	4.070*** (.820)	1.330 (1.095)	-2.561*** (.903)	3.893*** (1.126)
	Housewife	2.131*** (.875)	1.339** (.586)	1.196* (.712)	-2.171** (.864)	2.409*** (.494)
	Retired	.641 (2.335)	.999 (2.610)	.751 (1.162)	-2.292 (1.677)	.809 (1.226)
Household per capita income	In the lowest quartile	1.626 (1.285)	1.824** (.907)	.836 (1.149)	-.988* (.518)	1.175 (1.065)
	Above the lowest quartile	2.216*** (.624)	2.905*** (.399)	1.737** (.684)	-1.289*** (.378)	3.302*** (.899)
Financial Difficulty	Last month	2.560** (1.158)	2.328*** (.763)	2.200** (.961)	-1.169** (.478)	1.961** (.903)
	Expected in the future	2.268*** (.844)	2.687*** (.500)	2.431*** (.759)	-1.052* (.559)	3.384*** (.698)
Cultural (Dis)similarity Perceptions	Cultural Similarity	1.322** (.597)	2.530*** (.541)	.593 (.808)	-1.235*** (.470)	3.064*** (.918)
	Cultural Dissimilarity	2.655*** (.765)	2.814*** (.331)	1.969** (.856)	-1.380*** (.316)	2.683*** (.596)
Subjective Categorization of Syrian Refugees	Burden	3.075*** (.897)	2.621*** (.890)	2.487** (1.184)	-1.384*** (.309)	3.092*** (1.087)
	Religious brothers/sisters	.961 (1.830)	1.547 (2.209)	1.783 (1.104)	-.413 (.844)	3.936*** (1.258)
	Guests	3.658*** (.789)	2.625*** (.585)	2.328* (1.414)	-.590 (.717)	5.301*** (1.750)
	Refugees	2.537*** (.923)	3.350*** (.521)	1.683* (.923)	-1.224** (.606)	2.637*** (.731)
Contact	Below mean	.698 (1.157)	1.736** (.846)	1.283 (1.200)	-1.281*** (.370)	3.088** (1.426)
	Above mean	3.354*** (.535)	3.363*** (.731)	1.598** (.786)	-.835 (.527)	2.731*** (.399)
Sociotropic concerns	Expecting a financial crisis in Turkey	2.551*** (.709)	2.350*** (.475)	2.771*** (.694)	-1.211** (.548)	3.235*** (.786)
Religiosity	Believer	3.826*** (1.128)	5.315*** (1.078)	1.263 (1.031)	-.953 (.789)	1.586 (1.321)
	Religious	2.004*** (.769)	2.543*** (.538)	1.656** (.710)	-1.155*** (.387)	3.017*** (.766)

Size of impact	< 2 SD	[2 SD; 3 SD]	[3 SD; 4 SD]	>4 SD
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## 8. Conclusion

Using an instrumental variables strategy, this paper provides evidence for the impact of exposure to refugees on attitudes toward them in a developing country setting. Empirical findings show that, expectedly, relative deprivation and economic competition increase economic concerns. Strong support is also found both for egotropic and sociotropic concerns. Thus, social protection policies for the asymmetrically affected host community population are needed to decrease social tensions.

The perceptions of cultural alienation also increase anti-refugee sentiments across all dimensions. The exclusionary component is highly significant, and the host community noted a strong preference for refugees to live only in camps. As an overwhelming majority of refugees live in urban areas in Türkiye, this finding shows that effective residential and integration policies are yet to be designed and implemented. It is also interesting to observe that the government's rhetoric of presenting refugees as "guests" did not have the intended effect and did not overcome the adverse effects of exposure to refugees. Although anti-refugee sentiments are observed in all dimensions, humanitarian concerns still matter for anti-refugee sentiments in Türkiye; the host society continues helping refugees, directly and indirectly, even after their exposure to refugees increases.

That said, personal exposure increases negative attitudes, which is in line with the qualitative and anecdotal evidence showing the majority of Turkish people are unsettled by the differing lifestyles of Syrian refugees. This is also helpful to interpret the finding that even natives who define Syrian refugees as being culturally similar or as their religious brothers/sisters want to see them living only in camps. Further research is needed to understand the reasoning, particularly regarding whether these effects change depending on the level of residential segregation.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Obs
Age	41.02	14.67	17	88	2647
Education categories					
Below high school	.508	.500	0	1	2642
High school	.327	.469	0	1	2642
Above high school	.165	.372	0	1	2642
Female	.471	.499	0	1	2643
Refugees harm the Turkish economy	4.416	1.658	1	6	2627
No work permits for refugees	3.805	1.794	1	6	2617
Lower job opportunities due to Syrian refugees	4.444	1.720	1	6	2610
Syrian refugees cause insecurity in cities	4.462	1.631	1	6	2616
Refugees should only live in camps	3.810	1.846	1	6	2616
Syrian refugees cannot live in the same province as you	.276	.447	0	1	2619
Syrian refugees cannot live in the same neighborhood, be in the same workplace or school as you	.429	.495	0	1	2612
Syrian refugees cannot live in the same apartment with you or be your friend	.593	.491	0	1	2602
Syrian refugees cannot live in the same house or be a member of your family	.863	.344	0	1	2591
Weighted social distance	1.594	.848	0	2.5	2586
Did not help Syrian refugees directly or indirectly	.525	.499	0	1	2629
Refugees should not get residence permit	4.064	1.786	1	6	2608
No more refugees should be allowed to enter the country	4.063	1.814	1	6	2613
Economic component	0	1	-2.472	1.506	2584
Insecurity component	0	1	-2.122	.943	2616
Migration policy component	0	1	-2.134	1.440	2584
Behavioral component	0	1	-1.051	.950	2629
Exclusionary component	0	1	-2.138	1.447	2561
Anti-refugee component	0	1	-2.634	1.681	2496

## Main Estimates

**Table A2.** 2SLS regression estimates on (1) economic component, (2) insecurity component, (3) migration policy component, (4) behavioral component, (5) exclusionary component, and (6) anti-refugee component.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Refugee exposure	2.150*** (.754)	2.608*** (.458)	1.550** (.716)	-1.184*** (.398)	2.815*** (.789)	2.762*** (.740)
Female	.008 (.055)	.147 (.055)	.012 (.061)	.042*** (.014)	.048 (.056)	.045 (.059)
Age	.002 (.002)	.000 (.002)	.012 (.061)	-.001 (.001)	.001 (.002)	.002 (.003)
High school	.056 (.049)	.077 (.049)	.029 (.041)	-.023 (.027)	-.024 (.040)	.034 (.040)
Above high school	-.089 (.066)	-.013 (.081)	-.145** (.073)	-.043 (.030)	-.120 (.077)	-.135* (.074)
Intercept	-.160 (.146)	-.184 (.154)	-.116 (.157)	.579*** (.045)	-.139 (.153)	-.167 (.159)
Obs	2569	2601	2569	2614	2546	2481
Kleibergen-Paaprk Wald F statistic	139.728	137.119	140.636	132.991	142.363	145.43
Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic	9867.027	9910.501	9853.497	9843.373	9857.355	9681.762

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses are robust and clustered at the province level (27 clusters).

Below the high school education level is the reference category for the education level categories listed in the table.

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table A3.** 2SLS regression estimates for the Economy Component Details. Impact of Refugee Exposure on (1) Refugees harm the Turkish economy, (2) Refugees should not be given work permits, (3) Job opportunities decreased because of Syrian refugees.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Refugee exposure	.797 (1.108)	3.523** (1.790)	3.676*** (.996)
Female		-.097 (.061)	.045 (.090)
Age	.004* (.003)	.002 (.004)	.001 (.004)
High school	.101 (.076)	.137 (.074)	-.062 (.109)
Above high school	.076 (.117)	-.119 (-.119)	-.331** (.147)
Intercept	4.098*** (.225)	3.617*** (.253)	4.363*** (.235)
Obs	2612	2602	2595
Kleibergen-Paaprk Wald F statistic	134.825	133.718	137.268
Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic	9890.466	9824.387	9886.483

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses are robust and clustered at the province level (27 clusters).

Below the high school education level is the reference category for the education level categories listed in the table.

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table A4.** 2SLS regression estimates for the Policy Component Details. Impact of Refugee Exposure on (1) Refugees should not be given residence permits, and (2) Refugees should no longer be allowed to enter the country.

	(1)	(2)
Refugee exposure	2.369 (2.055)	1.640 (1.302)
Female	-.035 (.088)	.113 (.111)
Age	.004 (.003)	.003 (.004)
High school	.236*** (.083)	-.114* (.071)
Above high school	-.029 (.130)	-.397** (.142)
Intercept	3.789*** (.236)	3.942*** (.283)
Obs	2593	2598
Kleibergen-Paaprk Wald F statistic	138.175	135.509
Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic	9872.639	9856.748

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses are robust and clustered at the province level (27 clusters). Below the high school education level is the reference category for the education level categories listed in the table.

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table A5.** 2SLS regression estimates for the Exclusionary Component Details. Impact of Refugee Exposure on (1) Refugees should only live in camps, (2) Syrian refugees cannot live in the same province as me, (3) Syrian refugees cannot live in the same neighborhood, be in the same workplace or school as me, (4) Syrian refugees cannot live in the same apartment with me or be among my friends, (5) Syrian refugees cannot live in the same house or be a member of my family, (6) Weighted social distance.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Refugee exposure	6.993*** (1.893)	-.111 (.281)	-.159 (.248)	.367 (.315)	.656*** (.155)	.806* (.446)
Female	-.039 (.108)	.017 (.022)	.020 (.022)	.039 (.025)	.034*** (.011)	.076* (.040)
Age	.003 (.004)	.001 (.001)	.002 (.001)	.000 (.001)	-.000 (.001)	.001 (.002)
High school	-.125 (.084)	-.038 (.020)	-.014 (.026)	-.026 (.024)	.048*** (.014)	.011 (.039)
Above high school	-.238** (.116)	-.024 (.034)	-.033 (.043)	-.058 (.042)	-.014 (.023)	-.077 (.074)
Intercept	3.593*** (.233)	.248*** (.060)	.368*** (.077)	.568*** (.076)	.820*** (.037)	1.500*** (.134)
Obs	2601	2604	2597	2587	2576	2571
Kleibergen-Paaprk Wald F statistic	141.427	131.397	131.237	131.283	131.577	131.709

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses are robust and clustered at the province level (27 clusters).

Below the high school education level is the reference category for the education level categories listed in the table.

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01