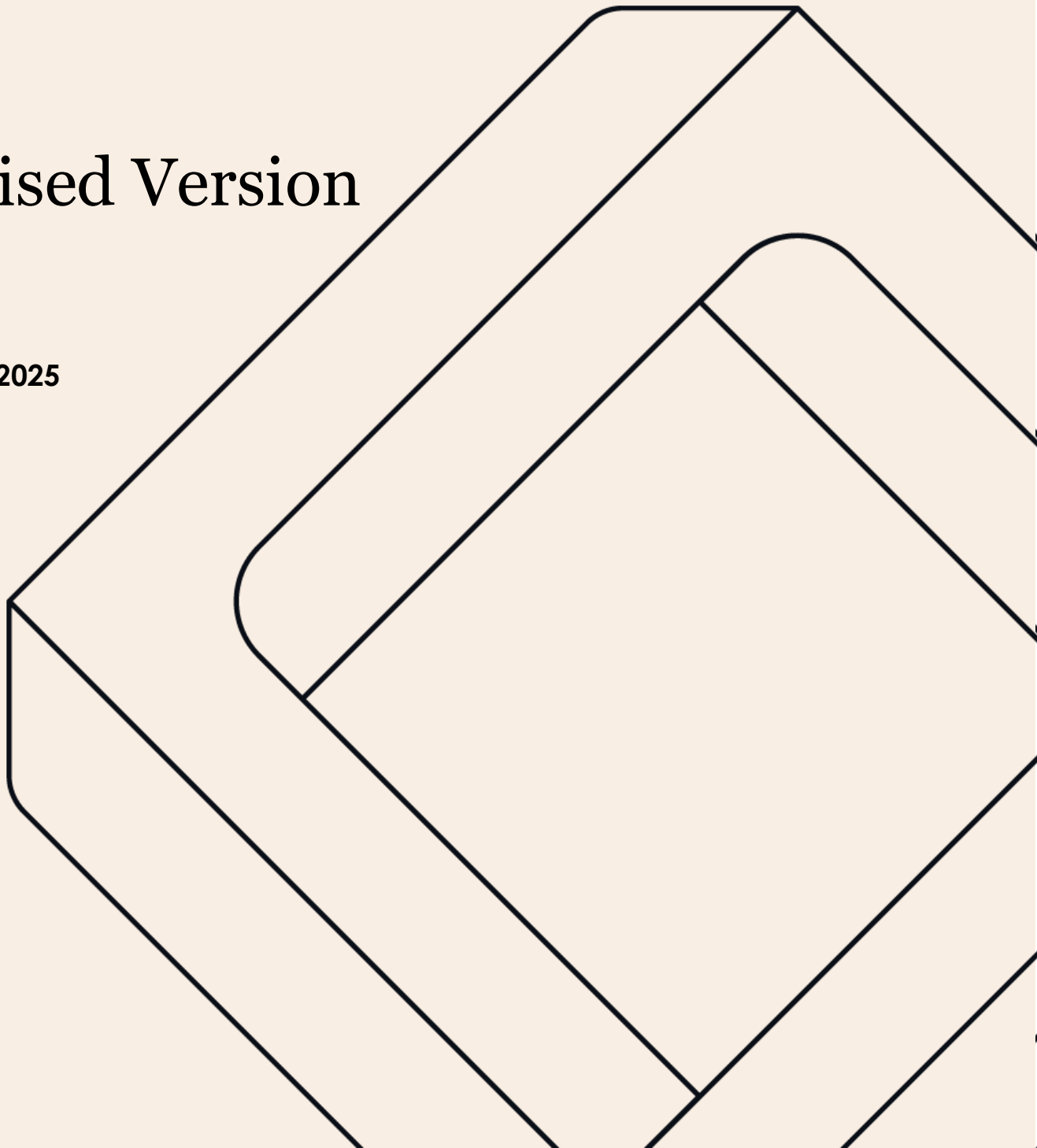


Working Migrants in the EU – Mixed-Method Analysis

Revised Version

26 May 2025



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives of the study

Immigration consistently ranks as one of the most pressing concerns for the EU. In the Autumn 2024 Eurobarometer Standard survey¹ immigration was considered the second most important issue facing European countries (20%, +4pp), following rising prices and inflation (33%, -5pp).² This concern also applies to the EU as a whole: when asked what actions the EU could take that would have the highest positive impact on their life in the short term, respondents ranked 'managing migration' in second place (27%, +1pp), just after 'ensuring peace and stability' (44%, -2pp).

In response to these concerns, the EU adopted a major overhaul of its migration policy framework with the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was approved by the European Parliament and the Council in April-May 2024. This policy comes at a time when many member states are facing growing gaps in their labour markets and are increasingly turning to migration to help fill those shortages. While employment of migrant workers remains a national competence, the Pact reflects a broader effort to better coordinate migration flows and support legal pathways for labour mobility.

Understanding how EU citizens perceive this aspect of migration is crucial for policymakers aiming to manage legal labour migration from within and outside the EU. The Special Eurobarometer survey on the Integration of Immigrants in the EU, conducted in November–December 2021, revealed that EU citizens were more likely to view immigration from outside the EU as a problem rather than an opportunity (31% vs 22%). It also detailed the factors perceived as contributing to the successful integration of immigrants, such as 'being able to speak the country's language' (85%), 'contributing to the welfare system by paying taxes' (78%) or 'being committed to the way of life' (78%). However, few studies so far have explored in depth narratives and perceptions of Europeans with regard to working migrants.

Therefore, it is essential to explore how EU citizens specifically perceive labour migration and whether they see it as a solution to the challenges facing the EU, such as declining fertility rates, workforce shortages in certain sectors and pension funding. In this context, the Martens Centre commissioned Verian to conduct this research study with the objective of delving deeper into the attitudes, concerns, and expectations of citizens regarding labour migration across several member states.

Our questionnaire delves into these perceptions, examining general views on migration, distinctions between irregular and regular migration, and the economic contributions of migrants. It also examines concerns around labour market

¹ Find the survey at the following link: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3215>.

² Evolution figures refer to the previous Eurobarometer Standard Spring ST101 conducted six months earlier.

competition, openness to admitting more migrants, and the distribution of responsibilities between EU and national authorities. Finally, the questionnaire tests several policy proposals that could shape future migration policies, with the aim of fostering a more integrated and mutually beneficial approach for both EU citizens and migrants.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Interactive group methodology

As an alternative to traditional methodologies, this research project employs an innovative approach: mixed-methods research via a Digital Focus Group Platform using Remesh technology. Remesh is a digital platform designed to conduct mixed-method research through real-time, text-based conversations with multiple participants. Participants respond to both closed-ended questions, which provide measurable data, and open-ended questions, which generate qualitative input that can be analysed in real time to identify key themes and the distribution of views across the group.

This methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches, enabling the collection of insights from a larger and more diverse group of citizens than in the case of traditional focus groups.

The Digital Focus Group Platform operates as an online platform where participants engage in real-time discussions through a moderated chat format. This format provides for a higher number of participants and offers the advantage of anonymous participation, reducing the influence of social desirability bias which can easily come into play on this topic. The platform combines custom polling with both closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions allow us to segment respondents based on their attitudes, while the open-ended questions then enable us to explore the personal narratives.

Additionally, after submitting their own answers, respondents have the opportunity to rank the responses of others. This creates an automated ranking system that supports both moderation and analysis, helping to identify areas of consensus and disagreement within each respondent category by country. Where available, we have included the percentage of agreement alongside each quoted answer to indicate how representative a particular response is of its group, thus highlighting verbatim comments that reflect broader group opinions.

It is important to note that the findings are not statistically generalisable to the broader population due to the limited sample size (around 30 participants per country). The aim of the research was to collect rich qualitative insights regarding the citizens' perceptions and narratives. The smaller sample size allows this qualitative approach, and the findings must be considered as illustrations of the actual perceptions and narratives of the broader population, but are not statistically generalisable. To make certain that the views from a variety of citizens were collected, quotas were applied to ensure diversity across key demographic or attitudinal variables, which strengthens the sample as qualitative and exploratory in nature, rather than representative.

That said, the results provide meaningful insights into participants' perceptions, experiences and attitudes. They help identify recurring themes, narratives, contextual nuances, and points of divergence across countries and socio-demographic groups.

1.2.2 Research design

The first step was to establish the sample size based on the agreed-upon option and the sample’s characteristics, in coordination with our partner, Remesh. This study covers France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Romania, Sweden and Poland.

Table 1 Fieldwork dates

| Country | Number of participants who finished the conversation | Date of the groups |
|---------|--|--------------------|
| France | 37 (including 11 in flex mode ³) | 21 January 2025 |
| Italy | 34 | 27 January 2025 |
| Romania | 34 | 28 January 2025 |
| Poland | 36 | 29 January 2025 |
| Spain | 34 | 29 January 2025 |
| Sweden | 36 | 30 January 2025 |
| Germany | 32 | 30 January 2025 |

The study was carried out through a series of digital focus groups on the Remesh platform in January 2025, at a time when the topic of migration was high on the political agenda—marked, on the one hand, by the return of Donald Trump as president of the US and, on the other hand, by intensified debates on immigration across Europe. This was notably the case in Germany, where in January migration dominated the political discourse and the mainstream parties faced growing pressure amid discussions of potential alliances with the AfD (Alternative for Germany party).

To ensure diversity of opinion, the recruitment process for each group discussion was carefully designed to bring together a well-balanced mix of participants. Particular attention was paid to capturing a range of opinions on migration, from more open to more sceptical views. The groups also balanced gender, age, educational background and living area—including both urban and rural settings—to provide a comprehensive understanding of how different segments of the population perceive labour migration.

Each session lasted approximately one hour and included a mix of closed and open-ended questions. Two moderators were present for every discussion: a project leader

³ Flex mode refers to a feature in Remesh that allows participants to join the conversation after the live session has concluded. These respondents engage with the same set of questions as live participants and are also able to view and vote on the responses of others, ensuring consistency in both experience and data collection

to ensure all technical and procedural conditions were met at the start and to provide support if any platform issues arose, and a native-speaking moderator for each country to guide the conversation effectively.

1.2.3 Advantages and limitations

The methodology employed in this study offers a distinctive combination of qualitative depth and quantitative structure. It facilitates real-time, text-based discussions with larger participant groups (30 per country), while preserving many interactive benefits of traditional focus groups.

Advantages

- Compared with traditional focus groups, which typically involve smaller numbers of participants, this format enables broader engagement, as each respondent is expected to answer every question. This allows for the collection of more diverse viewpoints, both within and across countries.
- The quotas ensure a broad range of opinions regarding attitudes towards migration, ensuring balanced representation across key demographic and attitudinal segments.
- The anonymous nature of participation encourages more candid and honest responses, helping to mitigate the risk of social desirability bias, particularly relevant for topics such as migration, which can be considered contentious in the social context.
- The platform's voting system allows participants to evaluate the responses of others, offering additional insight into areas of consensus and divergence within and between groups.

This methodology provides a unique opportunity to gather both qualitative verbatim responses and quantitative scale data. The qualitative insights enable a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and narratives, while cross-analysis with quantitative variables enhances the robustness and interpretability of the findings.

Limitations

- Participation requires internet access and a minimum level of digital literacy, which may result in the under-representation of certain demographic groups.
- With 30 participants per country, the findings are intended to illustrate trends and opinions but should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the general population.

While digital groups offer a degree of flexibility and interaction, they do not match the level of prompting, adaptability, and interpersonal engagement possible in face-to-face qualitative interviews and focus groups.

In summary, this approach represents a robust and innovative alternative to traditional qualitative methods, particularly when timely insights, cross-national coverage and participant anonymity are essential to the research objectives.

1.3 Technical report

1.3.1 Recruitment of participants

To ensure the quality and depth of discussions, we recruited around 30 participants in each of the countries covered by the study. Particular care was taken to compose groups that reflect a broad range of views and backgrounds. Recognising that attitudes towards migration are shaped by a variety of factors, we aimed to include participants with differing perspectives on the topic—from more open views to more cautious or critical positions.

Beyond opinions, diversity in socio-demographic characteristics was also a priority. We sought to balance the groups in terms of educational and professional background, including both participants with lower levels of formal education and those with higher qualifications but also differing occupations. Age diversity was equally important, allowing us to capture generational differences in perception and experience. In addition, participants were recruited from both urban areas and the countryside, ensuring that the discussions included views from across the territorial spectrum.

The recruitment process was carefully managed to achieve this balance, helping to create conditions for open and varied exchanges during the fieldwork. A detailed breakdown of the composition of each group, including the distribution of key socio-demographic variables, is provided in Appendix 1 of this report.

1.3.2 Fieldwork report

Participant engagement was consistently high across all countries. Respondents were generally active throughout the session, with high completion rates for both open and closed questions. In France, despite a slightly lower live completion rate, additional respondents contributed via flex mode, bringing the group to full capacity. Sweden and Poland demonstrated particularly strong engagement, with participants providing detailed responses and actively voting on the contributions of other participants. There was also sustained interaction throughout the session, with minimal drop-off, in Romania, Spain and Italy. Although there were slightly fewer participants in Germany than expected at the end of the session, those present remained active and contributed to a balanced and productive discussion.

The sessions ran smoothly across countries, with no major technical issues reported. The topline results were made available within days of completion, allowing for timely synthesis and integration into the broader analysis.

2 Research findings

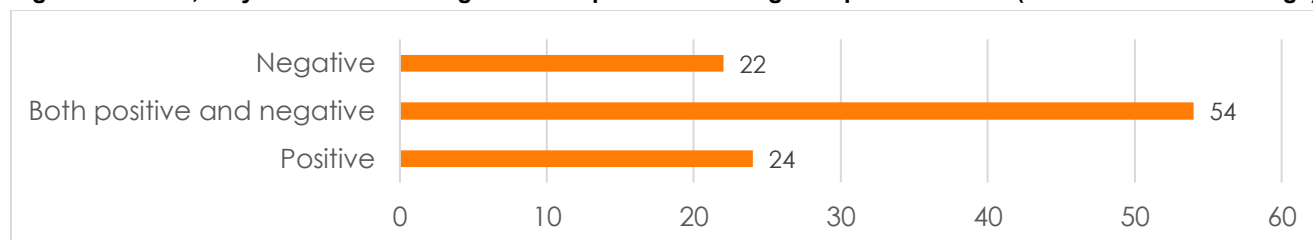
2.1 General views on migration

2.1.1 Socio-demographic profile, political values and perception of migration

To introduce the topic, a closed question was posed to respondents about their overall attitude towards migration. In line with the quotas applied, each country's group included a balanced mix of participants with positive, neutral and negative views on migration as a phenomenon. As such, these groups allow for a plurality of opinions to be expressed on each topic; however, due to the deliberate balancing of views, they are not intended to be representative of the general population.

On average, as displayed in the chart below, 24% of respondents had a positive view of migration, 22% had a negative view, and 54% had both positive and negative views.

Figure 1 Overall, do you believe that migration is a positive or a negative phenomenon? (% – all countries average)



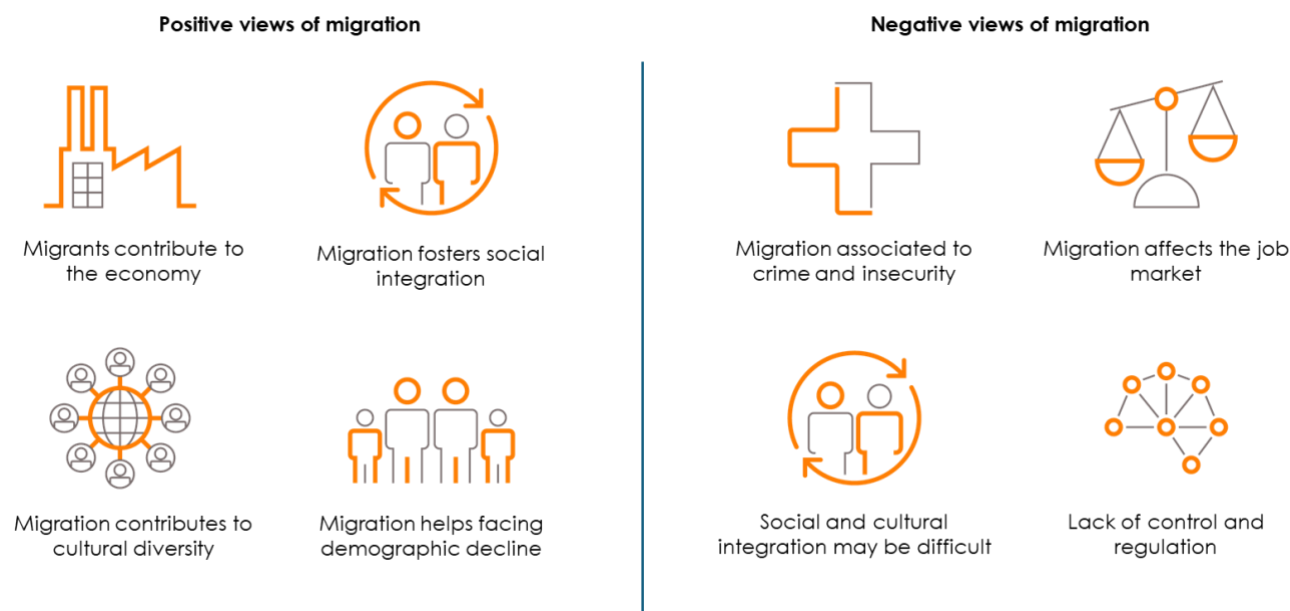
Regarding the **socio-demographic profile** of respondents, women were more likely to declare they have both positive and negative views (58% compared to 50% for men), while men were more likely to declare they have negative views (27% compared to 23% for women). Respondents aged more than 45 years old were more likely to declare they have negative views of migration (30% compared to 13% for the 18–45 group), while the younger respondents aged 18–45 were more likely to declare positive views (28% compared to 21% for the group aged 46 and over). Finally, respondents with a higher education level (at least university level) were more likely to say they have positive views (28% compared to 21% for respondents with a lower education level), while respondents with a lower level of education (lower than university level) were more likely to say they have a negative view of migration (28% compared to 14% for the more educated). Overall, **age and education level** are the socio-demographic variables for which we observe the strongest variations regarding attitudes towards migration.

Regarding **political values**, respondents with supranational values⁴ (32%) were more likely to declare they have a positive view of migration compared to those with national values (10%). Similarly, respondents with progressive values⁵ (43%) were also more likely to declare they have a positive view compared to those with traditional values (20%). Conversely, respondents with national (50% compared to 15% for supranational) and traditional values (23% compared to 10% for progressive) were more likely to declare they have negative views of migration. Finally, respondents on the right side of the political spectrum⁶ were more likely to declare they have a negative view of migration (34% compared to 15% for centrists and 18% for leftists).

2.1.2 Explanations from respondents

Participants were then invited to explain the reasons behind their positive or negative attitudes towards migration.

Figure 2 Reasons behind positive and negative views of migration



Among those who viewed migration **positively**, a common justification was the perceived economic benefits of migration. This perception was very salient across the discussions in all countries. In this context, respondents often pointed out that migrants **fill labour market gaps, take on jobs that locals do not want to do and contribute to economic activity**. This theme indicates the perceived effects of migration on the economies of host countries.

⁴ The supranational–national values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about EU membership and protection from globalisation.

⁵ The progressive–traditional values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about the protection of traditional values and same-sex marriage.

⁶ The left–right values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about wealth redistribution and state intervention in the economy.

'Pentru ca acopera unele goluri de pe piata muncii, cum ar fii serviciile de curierat, consider ca migrantii aduc un plus economiei.' (Because it covers some gaps in the labour market, such as courier services, I believe migrants bring an economic benefit.) 89% agree [Romania]

Cultural diversity was another theme evoked, as some respondents mentioned that migration contributes to the cultural variety of the host country, providing different perspectives and promoting multiculturalism.

'Öka mångfalden i samhället.' (Increase diversity in society.) 100% agree [Sweden]

Respondents also emphasised that migration fosters **social integration** and mutual understanding between different cultures, thereby contributing to a more inclusive society. This theme underscores the social cohesion and harmony that can result from the successful integration of migrants.

'Creo que una sociedad multicultural es positiva porque existen diferentes aspectos de vista y una gran variedad social.' (I believe a multicultural society is positive because there are different viewpoints and great social variety.) 78% agree [Spain]

Finally, some respondents noted that migration mitigates the effects of **declining birth rates** and ageing populations, thereby sustaining a younger workforce. This observation underscores the perceived demographic benefits of migration in preserving a balanced and dynamic population structure.

'Per la carenza di natalità italiana, certi lavori gli italiani non li vogliono fare più . . . e un dato di fatto.' (Due to the low birth rate in Italy, certain jobs Italians no longer want to do . . . it's a fact.) 100% agree [Italy]

Among those who regard migration as **both a positive and negative phenomenon**, the economic contribution of migrants remains a prevalent theme. However, this perception is frequently balanced with concerns regarding integration and the necessity for controlled immigration.

'Ce serait positif pour avoir de la main-d'œuvre, par exemple dans l'agriculture, et négatif si les personnes ne veulent pas travailler.' (It would be positive in terms of providing labour, for example in agriculture, and negative if people do not want to work.) 69% agree [France]

Another prominent theme was the **cultural diversity** associated with migration; this is often seen as enriching a country's social fabric through the introduction of new ideas, traditions and perspectives. At the same time, however, cultural differences can also give rise to tensions and pose challenges for integration.

‘Por que trae cosas positivas como la aportacion de fuerza de trabajo al pais para tambien puede traer cosas negativas como las costumbres-relegiones que vienen de las personas de fuera ajenas a nuestro pais que pueden entrar en conflicto.’ (Because it brings positive things, such as the contribution of labour to the country, but it can also bring negative things, such as the customs and religions of people from outside our country that can be conflictual.) 65% agree [Spain]

Social integration also emerged as a key theme. The successful integration of migrants is viewed positively as it can foster a more cohesive and inclusive society. On the other hand, difficulties in assimilation and the emergence of parallel communities are perceived as negative outcomes.

‘De flesta invandrare bidrar positivt, men det finns mycket problem med assimileringen.’ (Most immigrants contribute positively, but there are many problems with assimilation.) 70% agree [Sweden]

Finally, some respondents expressed concerns about the potential for **increased crime** and security issues associated with migration. Others mentioned the need for controlled and regulated migration to mitigate these risks.

‘Pozytywna bo: wymieszanie innych kultur, nowi pracownicy. Negatywna bo – zagrożenie przestępczością.’ (Positive because of cultural mixing and new workers. Negative due to the threat of criminality.) 50% agree [Poland]

The concerns regarding crime and security, expressed by many who saw migration as a negative phenomenon, included fears of violence, theft and general insecurity.

‘Niemand hat etwas gegen Migranten, die sich integrieren und unsere Werte akzeptieren. Andererseits werden jeden Tag in Europa Menschen angegriffen, abgeschlachtet und vergewaltigt von Leuten, deren Herkunft der Staat nicht einmal kennt.’ (No one has anything against migrants who integrate and accept our values. On the other hand, every day in Europe people are attacked, slaughtered, and raped by people whose origin is not even known to the state.) 100% agree [Germany]

These respondents also view migration as affecting the job market, with concerns that migrants may compete with local workers for jobs and impact unemployment rates. Related comments evoked concerns about the demands on social services and possible increases in public spending on immigrants.

‘Abbiamo scarsità di reside per i resident e manca per altri.’ (We have a scarcity of jobs for residents and there is a shortage for others.) 71% agree [Italy]

Some respondents also mentioned the difficulties of **integrating migrants into the local culture**, which they see as a source of social tensions and conflict. Concerns were also raised about migrants imposing their own laws and customs.

'Certains migrants veulent imposer leurs lois ou leur religion par la force ou le terrorisme. Ce n'est pas le cas de tous.' (Some migrants want to impose their laws or religion by force or terrorism. That is not true for everyone.) 80% agree [France]

Finally, the **lack of control and regulation over migration** is seen as a significant issue. Respondents mentioned the need for better management of migration flows, documentation and employment contracts.

'Porque no está controlada, no hay control de llegada, de papeles, de contratos, de sueldos..... de nada.' (Because it is not controlled, there is no control of arrivals, papers, contracts, salaries . . . nothing.) 75% agree [Spain]

2.2 Unprompted perceptions

2.2.1 Origins of migrants

The first open-ended question explored the origins of migrants, offering valuable insights into the specific groups that respondents associate with migration. This question was essential to contextualising respondents' views, as it revealed whether they were thinking of migrants from neighbouring countries, regions beyond Europe or particular cultural or ethnic backgrounds when expressing their opinions.

Many respondents across countries say migrants working in their country typically come from poorer regions or countries with an ongoing conflict. Commonly mentioned origins included **African countries (especially North and Sub-Saharan Africa)**, notably in France, Spain and Italy.

'De pays africains.' (From African countries.) [France]

In Spain, it was noteworthy that respondents specifically mentioned South America, highlighting regional ties and historical connections.

'Normalmente viene de Marruecos, países africanos varios o países latinoamericanos. . . . Pero si hay que escoger un país predominante diría Marruecos.' (They usually come from Morocco, various African countries, or Latin American countries. . . . But if I had to choose a predominant country, I would say Morocco.) [Spain]

Although Eastern Europe was mentioned across several countries, the mention of Ukrainians was specific to Poland, underlining that country's position as one of the main destinations for Ukrainian refugees displaced by the war.

'Osoby te najczęściej pochodzą ze wschodu, z białorusi lub ukrainy.' (These people usually come from the East, from Belarus or Ukraine.) [Poland]

2.2.2 Jobs held by migrant workers

Another open-ended question asked respondents what types of jobs they believe migrants do.

Exploring these perceptions offers valuable insights into how migrants are perceived within the labour market and how their contribution is viewed by society. It helps to identify which sectors are the most frequently associated with migrant labour and whether these roles are perceived as essential, undesirable or undervalued. Moreover, it sheds light on whether migrants are believed to have recognised skills and qualifications or are thought to remain concentrated in low-status positions regardless of their background.

A common trend across countries is the perception that migrants are often employed in **precarious or low-paid positions**, particularly in **manual labour** categories, such as agriculture, construction and other physically demanding sectors.

‘Najczęściej prace fizyczne np magazynier murarz tynkarz.’ (Most often physical work, e.g. warehouse worker, bricklayer, plasterer.) [Poland]

Although most respondents associated migrants with manual and physically demanding work, such as agriculture and construction, some—particularly in countries such as Spain—also referred to jobs in the service industry, mentioning waiters, caregivers and other service-related positions.

‘[C]amareros cuidadores de ancianos.’ (Waiters, caregivers for the elderly.) [Spain]

Some respondents also mentioned, to a lesser extent, **high-skilled professions**, such as doctors or engineers, though these were often mentioned alongside low-skilled occupations.

‘Większość pracuje fizycznie, ale także w handlu i usługach... jest też masa informatyków, programistów, ale są też i lekarze.’ (Most work in physical jobs, but also in trade and services. . . . [T]here are also lots of IT specialists, programmers, and also doctors.) [Poland]

Finally, as a common pattern across all countries, respondents mentioned that migrants fill jobs that locals do not want.

‘[N]ella maggior parte dei casi, lavori che nessun giovane italiano ha voglia di fare.’ (In most cases, jobs that no young Italian wants to do.) [Italy]

2.2.3 Reasons for coming

The last unprompted question concerned the reasons migrants come to the host country.

The most common response given was that migrants come to the country of migration in search of a **better quality of life** and to **escape poverty and conflict**. Respondents often highlighted the difficult economic conditions migrants face in their country of origin, and the relative advantages in terms of wages and living standards offered by the host country.

‘Soit elles ne trouvent pas de travail dans leur pays, soit elles ont de la famille en France, soit elles sont persécutées dans leur pays ou encore elles y voient une opportunité car la France est réputée très accueillante (avec une sécurité sociale que beaucoup nous envient).’ (Either they can’t find work in their country, or they have family in France, or they are persecuted in their country,

or they see an opportunity because France is reputed to be very welcoming (with social security that many envy us [for]).) 74% agree [France]

A second recurring theme across countries related to **job opportunities**, with respondents considering that migrants have better job opportunities in their country of migration than in their country of origin.

‘Por que en sus paises de origen la situacion economica-social es mucho peor que la de España.’ (Because in their countries of origin the economic-social situation is much worse than in Spain.) 74% agree [Spain]

Some responses, particularly in France, Sweden and Germany, indicated a perception that migrants are attracted by the availability of public assistance, healthcare **and social housing**.

‘Många kommer hit pga vårt välfärdssystem och anhöriginvandring.’ (Many come here because of our welfare system and family reunification.) 69% agree [Sweden]

2.3 Perception of legal and irregular migration

2.3.1 Understanding of legal and irregular migration

We then asked about the distinction between **legal** and **irregular migration** to understand how respondents perceive the differences between the two statuses. As expected, the **legal aspect** is the first element that comes to mind for most respondents.

What is more interesting, however, is the additional detail provided in their responses—many respondents mentioned working conditions, highlighting that irregular migrants are often exploited because of their lack of legal protection.

‘Ceux qui sont “legals” touchent un salaire comme les français les autres sont sous payés.’ (Those who are ‘legal’ receive a salary like the French; the others are underpaid.) [France]

In addition, several responses underlined integration as a key difference between legal and irregular migrants. Respondents often associate legal status with a willingness and ability to integrate into society, seeing legal migrants as contributing positively to the host country through their work and social participation. On the other hand, irregular migrants are perceived as less integrated, sometimes portrayed in a negative light, with references to criminality and social detachment.

‘Die, die legal hier arbeiten, wollen auch bleiben und Deutschland weiter helfen. Die illegal hier arbeiten, tun dem Land nichts Gutes und sind zu 70% kriminell und nicht sozial.’ (Those who work legally here also want to stay and help Germany further. Those who work illegally here do nothing good for the country and are 70% criminal and not social.) [Germany]

2.3.2 Perception of irregular migration

Many respondents who believe that irregular migration is **more of a problem** feel that irregular migrants **take jobs away from local workers**, leading to increased competition for employment.

‘Eher ein Problem, da sie anderen die Arbeit wegnehmen und nur für Probleme sorgen und aufgrund dessen das sie illegal hier sind und kein Visum oder ähnliches haben. Sie nehmen auch Legalen die Arbeit, Wohnungen, etc. weg.’ (Rather a problem because they take jobs from others and only cause problems because they are here illegally and do not have a visa or similar. They also take jobs, housing, etc. from legal residents.) 79% agree [Germany]

They also pointed out that irregular migrants are often **underpaid and exploited**, which leads to undeclared work and a financial loss for the state.

‘Cela veut dire qu’ils ne sont pas déclarés donc leur salaire non plus. Donc c’est du travail au noir. Ils sont souvent sous payés et exploités. Donc c’est un

problème social mais aussi financier car un manque à gagner pour l'Etat.' (They are not declared and neither is their salary. So it's undeclared work. They are often underpaid and exploited. So, it's a social problem, but also financial, because it's a loss for the state.) 71% agree [France]

Some respondents also made a connection between irregular migrants and **security concerns**.

'Ein Problem, denn allein die offizielle Kriminalstatistik bestätigt das.' (A problem, because the official crime statistics confirm this.) 79% agree [Germany]

Among the respondents who believe that irregular migration is more of an opportunity, there is a perception that irregular migrants do **jobs that are vacant and not attractive to local workers** and thereby contribute to the country's economic activity.

'Realizar trabajos que las personas nacidas y con residencia no hacen y cubren esas vacantes.' (They do jobs that people born and residing here do not do and fill those vacancies.) 83% agree [Spain]

Another point raised is that by working, irregular migrants convey their **willingness to integrate** into the country.

'[J]a, för att de arbetar som innebär att de vill integreras i landet jämfört med många andra som varken arbetar eller studerar och gör bara kaos med landet.' (Yes, because they work, which means they want to integrate into the country compared with many others who neither work nor study and only cause chaos in the country.) 60% agree [Sweden]

A minority of respondents view illegal migration as an **opportunity**, primarily on the grounds that irregular migrants significantly **contribute to the economy** by performing jobs that local residents are often unwilling to undertake.

'Hace los trabajos menos agradables, los que los Españoles no quieren hacer.' (They do the less pleasant jobs that Spaniards do not want to do.) 83% agree [Spain]

'Eher eine Chance, denn sie wollen arbeiten. Ein Teil darf nicht offiziell, weil es noch keine Erlaubnis gibt, ein anderer Teil macht es mit "krimineller" Absicht. Das muss man differenzieren. Aber generell ist doch Arbeitswilligkeit nichts Schlechtes.' (Rather an opportunity because they want to work. Some are not allowed to work officially because they do not yet have a permit, but some do it with a 'criminal' intent. It is necessary to differentiate between the two cases. But generally, willingness to work is not a bad thing.) 75% agree [Germany]

2.3.3 Support for a regularisation policy

Participants were then asked what their government should decide regarding migrants working irregularly. The results reveal varying perspectives across different countries, highlighting the complexity of public opinion on this issue.

Table 2 What do you think our government should decide regarding migrants working irregularly?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Require all irregular migrants working irregularly to leave the country. | 53% | 31% | 21% | 51% | 56% | 34% | 59% | 44% |
| Regularise all migrants working irregularly. | 20% | 39% | 41% | 40% | 11% | 34% | 19% | 29% |
| Regularise migrant workers only in sectors or industries where there is a shortage of labour. | 27% | 25% | 38% | 3% | 25% | 25% | 19% | 23% |
| Not regularise migrant workers but allow them to stay. | 0% | 6% | 0% | 6% | 8% | 6% | 3% | 4% |

The groups in Germany, Sweden, France, and Italy expressed a marked preference for requiring irregular migrants **to leave the country**, with support for this option exceeding half of respondents in most cases.

By contrast, in Spain, Poland and to some extent in Romania, participants were more inclined to support **full regularisation**, with Spain standing out as the most open to regularisation, whether fully or targeted at sectors facing labour shortages.

In Poland and Italy, a clear generational difference emerged, with 86% of participants aged 18–30 in Poland and 67% in Italy selecting full regularisation.

Moderate support for selective regularisation based on addressing labour market needs was found in several countries, most notably in Spain (38%), suggesting a pragmatic recognition of economic imperatives.

On the other hand, support for tolerating the presence of irregular migrant workers without granting them regular status was marginal across all countries indicating a general preference for more decisive policy choices.

Overall, the findings point to a divide between countries favouring stricter enforcement and those leaning towards integration-oriented solutions, likely shaped by differing economic contexts and public attitudes towards migration.

2.4 Perception of EU and non-EU migrants

At this point in the discussion, we clarified to participants that the discussion would now focus specifically on *legal migration* to ensure that respondents kept this context in mind when answering the next set of questions.

2.4.1 Perceptions of EU migrants

Table 3 Generally speaking, do you think migrants coming from another EU country and working in OUR COUNTRY is more of a problem or of an opportunity for OUR COUNTRY today?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| More of a problem | 32% | 25% | 18% | 18% | 31% | 18% | 9% | 22% |
| More of an opportunity | 68% | 75% | 82% | 82% | 69% | 82% | 91% | 78% |

The discussions revealed that most groups see legal migrant workers from another EU country as more of an opportunity than a problem. This view was particularly strong in Germany, Romania, Spain and Italy, while the French and Swedish groups expressed more mixed opinions but still leaned towards seeing opportunities.

Those who believe that EU migrants are **more of a problem** feel that migrants take jobs away from local workers, leading to increased competition for employment in the market.

In France, compared with the other countries, a clear generational difference emerged, with 75% of respondents aged 18–30 considering EU migrants to be more of a problem.

‘Pur essendo in regola, portano lo stesso via lavoro agli italiani, perché vanno a prezzi inferiori.’ (Even if they are regular, they still take jobs away from Italians because they go at lower prices.) 83% agree [Italy]

EU migrants are also seen as **a financial burden** on the state's resources.

‘[I]l n'y a pas assez d'argent en France pour eux.’ (There is not enough money in France for them.) 80% agree [France]

Another theme evoked was the perceived **cultural differences** which can lead to social problems.

‘‘[D]e kan inte språket. [E]n annan kultur, blandar man många olika kulturer brukar det bli problem.’’ (They do not know the language. Another culture, mixing many different cultures usually causes problems.) 73% agree [Sweden]

Finally, **security concerns** were also mentioned for EU migrants as they are perceived as dangerous to society.

'Jest wiele emigrantów którzy są niebezpieczni dla naszego społeczeństwa.'
(There are many migrants who are dangerous to our society.) 89% agree [Poland]

Those who believe that EU migrants represent more of **an opportunity** see such migrants as filling job vacancies in sectors where there is a shortage of workers.

'Por que suelen cubrir puestos de trabajo que un español no cubre o acepta.'
(Because they usually cover jobs that a Spaniard does not cover or accept.) 71% agree [Spain]

Respondents also believe that EU migrant workers are often well educated and bring valuable skills to the country.

'Jag tycker att det är en tillgång eftersom kompetensen eller intresset kanske inte finns hos den svenska befolkningen. De bidrar till samhället genom att betala skatt.' (I think they are an asset because the competence or interest may not exist among the Swedish population. They contribute to society by paying taxes.) 96% agree [Sweden]

Finally, these respondents also consider that EU migrants not only have a similar way of life and adhere to the laws of the host country but also **maintain the social system**.

'Una oportunidad para engrosar los trabajadores que necesitamos para mantener las cajas de las pensiones y las cotizaciones de la S.Social.' (An opportunity to increase the workers we need to maintain the pension funds and social security contributions.) 79% agree [Spain]

2.4.2 Perceptions of non-EU migrants

We then asked a similar question, but for non-EU migrants.

Table 4 Generally speaking, do you think migrants coming from outside the EU and working in OUR COUNTRY is more of a problem or of an opportunity for our country today?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| More of a problem | 45% | 42% | 34% | 27% | 46% | 35% | 30% | 37% |
| More of an opportunity | 55% | 58% | 66% | 73% | 54% | 65% | 70% | 63% |

During the discussions, most groups tended to view non-EU legal migrant workers as more of an opportunity than a problem, though opinions were more balanced than those on EU migrants.

For those who see them as **more of a problem**, the results of the verbatims show that many such respondents feel that migrants **take jobs away** from native workers.

'Ponieważ zabierają pracę w naszym polskim obywatelom.' (Because they take jobs from our Polish citizens.) 73% agree [Poland]

The comments collected verbatim also revealed that many respondents feel that there are significant issues in terms of **cultural differences leading to integration challenges**. Migrants from outside the EU are often perceived to have significantly different customs, values and ways of life, which can lead to difficulties in integration and social cohesion.

'Zu starke kulturelle Unterschiede zu uns. Sie integrieren sich nicht.' (The cultural differences are too strong. They do not integrate.) 90% agree [Germany]

Another common theme concerns the **economic burden** on the state and the perceived exploitation of social benefits.

'Pracują za niższe pieniądze niż Polacy. Dostają dużo socjali. Przez co nam jest ciężiej o pracę.' (They work for lower wages than Poles. They receive a lot of social benefits. This makes it harder for us to find work.) 73% agree [Poland]

Finally, **language barriers** were sometimes mentioned as an obstacle that could hinder the ability of migrants from outside the EU to integrate and contribute effectively to the workforce.

'Viele sind leider nicht bereit, die Sprachbarrieren zu überwinden und bilden lieber Parallelgesellschaften.' (Many are unfortunately not willing to overcome language barriers and prefer to form parallel societies.) 90% agree [Germany]

For those who see working migrants from outside the EU as **more of an opportunity**, such migrants are most often perceived in terms of the **valuable economic contribution** they make by filling jobs locals are unwilling to fill, similar to working migrants from the EU. Many respondents appreciate the willingness of migrants to take on jobs that are essential but often overlooked by locals.

'Por que suelen cubrir puestos de trabajo que un español normalmente no cubre o acepta.' (Because they usually fill jobs that a Spaniard normally does not cover or accept.) 82% agree [Spain]

'[D]e bidrar till arbetskraften i sverige och hjälp landet utveckla ekonomisk.' (They contribute to the workforce in Sweden and help the country develop economically.) 95% agree [Sweden]

Some respondents also mentioned the cultural enrichment that these migrants contribute, which is seen as beneficial for society.

'Emulation intellectuelle, partage de connaissance, de culture. On sort toujours grandi du partage surtout fait dans le respect des lois du pays où l'on va.'
(Intellectual emulation, sharing of knowledge, culture. We always grow from sharing, especially when this is carried out in accordance with the laws of the country to which we go.) 76% agree [France]

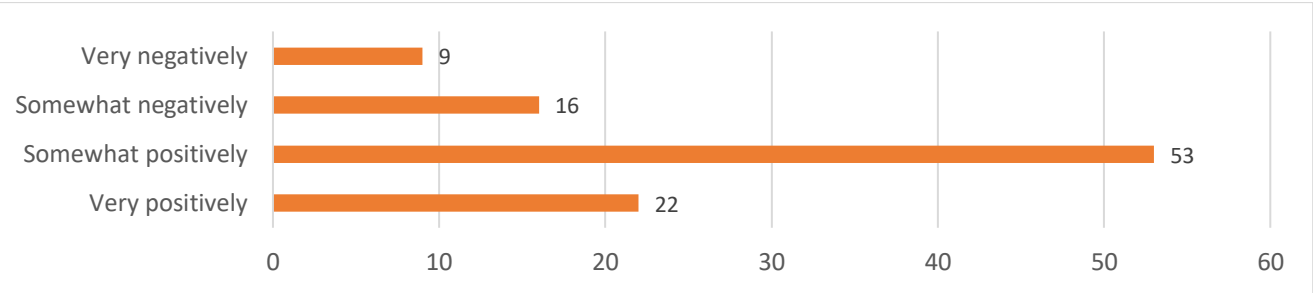
2.5 Economic contribution of working migrants

2.5.1 Perceptions of the economic contribution of working migrants

While we have recruited respondents with balanced views towards migration in general, respondents have, on average, **a positive view of the economic contribution of working migrants**.

First, in line with the quotas applied, each country's group included a balanced mix of participants with positive, neutral and negative views on migration. On average, 24% of respondents had a positive view of migration, 22% had a negative view, and 54% had both positive and negative views. Then, when asked about the contribution of working migrants to the national economy, on average 75% of the respondents perceive it somewhat or very positively.

Figure 3 Overall, do you think migrant workers contribute positively or negatively to the NATIONAL economy? (% – all countries average)



In all countries, at least 69% of respondents perceive the contribution of working migrants to the national economy in a positive light.

Table 5 Overall, do you think migrant workers contribute positively or negatively to the NATIONAL economy?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Total 'Negative views' | 37% | 35% | 18% | 24% | 31% | 12% | 30% | 25% |
| Total 'Positive views' | 63% | 75% | 82% | 76% | 69% | 88% | 70% | 75% |

Regarding the **socio-demographic** profile of respondents, there were no variations across age groups. Regarding gender, men were slightly more likely to declare that working migrants contribute positively to the national economy (77% compared to 73% for women). And respondents with a higher education level (at least university level) were more likely to say they have positive views (79% compared to 71% for respondents with a lower education level).

Regarding **political values**, respondents with supranational values⁷ (86%) were more likely to declare that working migrants contribute positively to the national economy, compared to those with national values (51%). Similarly, respondents with progressive values⁸ (91%) were also more likely to declare they have a positive view compared to those with traditional values (71%). Finally, respondents on the left side of the political spectrum⁹ were more likely to declare they have a favourable view of working migrants' contribution (80% compared to 72% for centrists and 71% for respondents from the right).

Respondents were then asked to explain why they think migrant workers contribute positively or negatively to the national economy.

Figure 4 Perceived positive and negative contributions to the economy

Why working migrants contribute positively to the economy



Labour market support



Contribution to the country's economy and budget



Migration contributes to cultural diversity



Migration fosters social integration

Why working migrants contribute negatively to the economy



Job competition



Wage competition



Strain on public services



Cultural and social tensions

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers contribute **positively** to the national economy, participants mainly evoked four themes:

- **labour market support;**
- **contribution to the economy;**
- **social integration; and**
- **cultural diversity.**

First, respondents said that migrant workers often fill jobs that locals may not want, thus helping to sustain economic growth and stability. They are seen as hardworking and willing to perform jobs that are in high demand, in sectors with shortages. Secondly,

⁷ The supranational–national values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about EU membership and protection from globalisation.

⁸ The progressive–traditional values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about the protection of traditional values and same-sex marriage.

⁹ The left–right values scale was computed based on respondents' answers to questions about wealth redistribution and state intervention in the economy.

respondents expressed the view that by working legally and paying taxes migrant workers contribute to the state budget, thereby supporting public services and social welfare systems. Thirdly, many responses highlighted that migrant workers who respect local laws, obtain visas and find employment are well integrated into society. This integration fosters social cohesion and mutual respect. Finally, there is a perception that the presence of migrant workers enriches cultural diversity, bringing new perspectives, skills and knowledge. This cultural mix can lead to innovation and a more dynamic society.

The following comments quoted verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'Ils respectent nos lois, ont un visa et ont trouvé un travail. C'est des personnes intégrés donc désireux de vivre en France avec nos règles. Cela crée une mixité culturelle et apporte que de la plus value.' (They respect our laws, have a visa and have found a job. They are integrated people who want to live in France with our rules. This creates cultural diversity and brings only added value.) [France]

'Por que aportar una fuerza de trabajo que un español no quiere aportar en ese puesto de trabajo lo que genera plusvalías al estado en cuanto a la recaudación de impuestos y beneficios económicos en general para el país.' (Because they work in jobs that Spaniards shun, thereby generating tax revenues for the state and economic benefits in general for the country.) [Spain]

'Pentru ca ocupa locuri de munca unde exista deficit si unde romanii nu vor sa mai lucreze, deci ajuta economia tarii.' (Because they occupy jobs where there is a deficit and where Romanians no longer want to work, so they help the country's economy.) [Romania]

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers contribute **negatively** to the national economy, participants mainly evoked four themes:

- **job competition;**
- **wage competition;**
- **strain on public services; and**
- **cultural and social tensions.**

Many respondents believe that migrant workers take jobs away from local workers, leading to increased unemployment and job competition for native citizens. Then, there is a concern that migrant workers accept lower wages, which can drive down overall wage levels and negatively impact working conditions for local workers. Moreover, some respondents feel that migrant workers put a strain on public services such as healthcare, education and social welfare systems, leading to increased costs for the state. Finally, the presence of migrant workers is sometimes seen as causing cultural and social tensions, with concerns about integration and the impact on local communities. This theme reflects worries about social cohesion and the challenges of integrating migrant workers into the local culture.

The following comments quoted verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘Zabierają Polakom pracę.’ (They take jobs from Poles.) [Poland]

‘Porque aceptan sueldos bajos que no debiera aceptar nadie. Que los españoles no aceptan.’ (Because they accept low wages that no one should accept. Spaniards do not accept them.) [Spain]

‘Migrantarbetare är ett plåster på såren. Hjälper inte arbetslösheten för oss Svenskar långsiktigt.’ (Migrant workers are a band-aid on the wound. They do not help unemployment for us Swedes in the long term.) [Sweden]

2.5.2 Perceived sectors benefiting

While respondents in all countries have an average positive view of the economic contribution of working migrants, there are **some differences regarding the sectors perceived as benefiting** from them.

On average, the most frequently mentioned sectors are those that require **lower levels of skills and qualifications** in general (in terms of educational attainment): construction and manufacturing (81%), accommodation, food services and retail (59%), domestic services (50%), and agriculture, forestry and fishing (50%). Construction and manufacturing were the most frequently mentioned sectors in all countries, except for Spain, where agriculture, forestry and fishing ranked first.

In some countries, migrant workers are also associated with higher-skilled sectors. Respondents, in particular in Sweden (63%), Germany (48%), and France (35%), associate working migrants with healthcare and education, while in Sweden, 31% of respondents associate them with professional, scientific and technical activities.

Table 6 According to you, what are the industries or sectors in OUR COUNTRY that benefit the most from migrant workers? You can select as many options as you like.

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Construction and Manufacturing | 77% | 89% | 78% | 88% | 71% | 84% | 79% | 81% |
| Accommodation, Food Services, and Retail | 48% | 43% | 75% | 42% | 63% | 69% | 70% | 59% |
| Domestic Services | 55% | 40% | 69% | 79% | 49% | 16% | 45% | 50% |
| Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing | 35% | 29% | 87% | 79% | 26% | 50% | 42% | 50% |
| Transportation and Storage | 45% | 57% | 25% | 24% | 43% | 47% | 33% | 39% |
| Healthcare and Education | 35% | 29% | 9% | 6% | 63% | 6% | 48% | 28% |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities | 13% | 23% | 9% | 6% | 31% | 6% | 12% | 14% |
| Finance, Real Estate, and Public Administration | 6% | 6% | 3% | 0% | 14% | 3% | 9% | 6% |

2.6 Labour market competition

2.6.1 Migrants filling jobs or taking them away?

When asked whether they believe that migrant workers mostly **take jobs away** from local workers, or rather mostly **fill jobs** that local workers are unwilling to take, a large majority of respondents believe that migrant workers mostly fill jobs that local workers do not want to do (79% on average, ranging from 69% in Poland to 88% in Germany). When asked in which sector they think migrant workers mostly fill jobs, the respondents listed sectors such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, hospitality and manufacturing.

On the other hand, 21% of respondents on average (from 12% in Germany to 31% in Poland) expressed the belief that migrant workers take jobs away from local workers. In other words, the perception that migrant workers compete for jobs with local workers is shared by about one in five respondents. When asked in which sector they think migrant workers mostly take jobs away, they listed similar sectors as above: construction, agriculture, healthcare, hospitality and manufacturing.

As noted earlier in this report, respondents primarily believe that migrants work in lower-skilled sectors, such as construction and manufacturing, accommodation, food services and retail, domestic services, and agriculture, forestry and fishing. Therefore, we have analysed whether respondents' education level might explain the perception that migrant workers take jobs away from local workers. We could indeed expect that local workers with lower levels of education would be more likely to perceive migrant workers as competitors, because they think that these migrants mostly work in similar sectors, requiring fewer qualifications and skills. However, the analysis reveals that the abovementioned percentages do not differ significantly according to level of education.

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers mostly fill jobs that local workers are unwilling to do (79% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned three reasons:

- **unattractive job conditions;**
- **labour shortages; and**
- **economic necessity for migrants.**

First, many respondents believe that migrant workers fill jobs that are considered unattractive because of poor working conditions, low wages and the physically demanding nature of the work. Then, there is a perception that specific sectors have labour shortages and migrant workers are willing to fill these gaps. This is particularly perceptible in industries that require manual labour or have high turnover rates. Finally, according to some respondents, the explanation is also linked to the individual economic situation of migrants, since they feel that migrant workers accept these jobs out of economic necessity, even if they are poorly paid.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘Cela date de très longtemps, on fait venir des étrangers pour faire le travail dit “ingrate” car les français ne veulent pas le faire.’ (This has been going on for a long time, we bring in foreigners to do the so-called ‘menial’ work because the French don’t want to do it.) [France]

‘Por que tienen mas facilidad para adquirir ese puesto de trabajo por que un español no lo quiere. Además otros puestos con un mayor nivel de salario implican mas preparacion academica o laboral y la mayoría de emigrantes que vienen no la tienen.’ (Because they find it easier to get that job because a Spaniard doesn’t want it. Also, other positions with higher salaries require more academic or work preparation skills, and most immigrants who come don’t have them.) [Spain]

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers mostly take jobs away from local workers (21% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned the willingness of migrant workers to accept lower wages. Many respondents believe that migrant workers accept lower wages, which makes them more attractive to employers. This leads to job displacement for local workers who cannot compete with the lower wage expectations. Some respondents also mentioned the issue of illegal employment, as they believe that some employers prefer to recruit illegal migrant workers instead of working with locals. Finally, respondents also mentioned that lower wages are limited to some specific sectors where lower skills are required.

The following comments quoted verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘[I]ls les prennent car [ils] acceptent d’être moins bien payés, secteur agricole par exemple.’ (They take them because they accept being paid less, for example in the agricultural sector.) [France]

‘Często pracują za niższą stawkę niż Polacy.’ (They often work for lower wages than Poles.) [Poland]

2.6.2 Perceived job competition at the individual level

When asked whether they believe that migrant workers are **their competitors** on the job market in their sector, most respondents do not consider that migrant workers are competitors (65% on average, ranging from 47% in Italy to 84% in Germany). On the other hand, 35% see migrant workers as their competitors on the job market in their sector (ranging from 15% in Germany to 53% in Italy—the only country with a majority).

As analysed earlier, respondents primarily believe that migrant workers work in lower-skilled sectors, such as construction and manufacturing, accommodation, food services and retail, domestic services, and agriculture, forestry and fishing. Therefore, we have analysed whether respondents’ education level might explain the

perception that migrant workers are their competitors. The analysis reveals that **the perception does differ according to the level of education**, since 42% of respondents with a lower level of education (up to secondary level) see migrant workers as competitors, compared with only 25% of respondents with a higher level of education (university level at least). This confirms that local workers with lower levels of education are more likely to perceive migrant workers as individual competitors, because they think that these migrants mostly work in similar sectors requiring fewer academic qualifications.

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers are not their competitors on the job market (65% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned four reasons:

- **high qualification requirements;**
- **language barriers;**
- **sector-specific knowledge; and**
- **lack of integration.**

First, many respondents believe that their sector requires high qualifications, specialised skills or specific certifications that migrant workers typically do not possess. Secondly, some respondents feel that the language proficiency required in their sector is a significant barrier for migrant workers. Then, there is also a perception that certain sectors require in-depth knowledge of local regulations, cultural nuances or industry-specific practices that migrant workers may lack. Finally, some respondents believe that migrant workers are not well integrated into the local economy or society, making it less likely for them to compete for jobs in specific sectors.

The following comments quoted verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'Pracuję jako specjalista do spraw administracyjno-prawnych więc sądzę że imigrant nie sprawdziłby się na tym stanowisku.' (I work as an administrative and legal specialist, so I think an immigrant would not do well in this position.) [Poland]

'Jag arbetar med kundservice över telefon och det är höga krav på svenska språket. Dessutom är det inte ett populärt arbete och finns alltid platser för nytt folk eftersom personalomsättningen är hög.' (I work in customer service over the phone and there are high requirements for the Swedish language. Moreover, it is not a popular job and there are always places for new people because staff turnover is high.) [Sweden]

'Lucrez la birou, munca de birou, imigrantii ce vin la noi nu ocupa posturi de o asa natura.' (I work in an office, office work, the immigrants who come to us do not occupy such positions.) [Romania]

When asked to explain why they believe that migrant workers are their competitors on the job market (35% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned four reasons:

- **lower wage acceptance;**
- **higher motivation and work ethics;**
- **willingness to work in undesirable conditions; and**
- **skills.**

First, many respondents believe that migrant workers accept lower wages, making them more attractive to employers. Secondly, some respondents feel that migrant workers are often more motivated and hardworking, which makes them strong competitors on the job market. They are perceived as willing to work longer hours and take on more demanding tasks. There is also a perception that migrant workers are willing to work in conditions that local workers find undesirable, such as physically demanding or low-prestige jobs. This willingness makes them more competitive in sectors with labour shortages. Finally, a few responses highlighted that migrant workers often have the necessary skills and qualifications, making them capable competitors in various occupations.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘Pentru ca sunt in general foarte harnici si dornici de munca.’ (Because they are generally very hardworking and eager to work.) [Romania]

‘Weil die alle Arbeiten annehmen, denke ich.’ (Because they accept all jobs, I think.) [Germany]

‘Perchè accettano salari più bassi avendo quasi sempre le stesse capacità lavorative.’ (Because they accept lower wages while almost always having the same work skills.) [Italy]

2.7 Demographic challenge

2.7.1 Openness to welcoming migrants to address the ageing population issue

When asked whether they would welcome an increased number of migrant workers from outside the EU, given the ageing population issue in their country, **a majority of respondents** (59% on average) declared they are 'probably' or 'definitely' **open to such a proposal**. The strongest levels of support were observed in Spain, Romania and Germany, while the weakest levels were observed in France and Sweden.

Table 7 Given the ageing population in OUR COUNTRY, would you be open to welcome an increased number of migrant workers from outside the EU?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Total 'No' | 53% | 42% | 24% | 44% | 50% | 35% | 35% | 41% |
| Total 'Yes' | 47% | 58% | 76% | 56% | 50% | 65% | 65% | 59% |

It is notable that before explicitly prompting the challenge of ageing population, in the answers to previous questions in the survey, the respondents did not spontaneously associate the topic of working migrants with this issue. The respondents spontaneously mentioned that migration for work purposes could be a solution for labour shortages in specific sectors, that it could contribute to the national economy, and bring new skills and diversity, but not that this could be a solution for the demographic challenge.

Regarding the **socio-demographic** profile of respondents, it is notable that the age group that least supports welcoming migrants to address the ageing population issue are respondents aged between 46 and 65 years old (45% compared to more than 60% support for all other age groups). There is also a strong variation depending on the education level, as respondents with a higher education level are much more likely to declare they support this policy (69% compared to 52% for respondents with a lower education level).

Regarding **political values**, respondents with supranational values (71%) were much more likely to support the proposal, compared to those with national values (28%). Similarly, respondents with progressive values (75%) were also more likely to support the policy compared to those with traditional values (51%). Finally, respondents on the left side and centre of the political spectrum were more likely to agree with welcoming migrants (62% compared to 54% for respondents from the right).

We then tested whether the framing effect would increase support for welcoming migrant workers; this was done by mentioning the possible increase of the legal retirement age. When faced with the trade-off between welcoming migrant workers and working longer before retirement to support the country's social benefit system in the face of the ageing population challenge, we could expect respondents to be

more open to welcoming working migrants. However, no significant change was noted when the legal retirement age was mentioned.

When asked to explain why they would be open to welcoming an increased number of migrant workers from outside of the EU (59% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned two reasons:

- **support for public services, and**
- **addressing demographic challenge.**

First, there is a perception that migrant workers can help support public services such as healthcare, education and social welfare systems. By paying taxes and contributing to the state budget, they help maintain these essential services. Secondly, many responses highlighted the need to address demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and declining birth rates. Migrant workers are seen as a solution to fill the gaps in the labour market and ensure the sustainability of social security systems. In addition, respondents mentioned other reasons not directly linked to the demographic challenge, such as the economic contribution of working migrants, the fact that they are filling unattractive jobs, or the cultural diversity and enrichment they bring.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'Cineva trebuie sa acopere deficitul de tineri din Romania.' (Someone has to cover the deficit of young people in Romania.) [Romania]

'Ponieważ zastąpią oni braki na rynku pracy i zapewnią wymianę pokoleń a także środki na emerytury dla Polaków.' (Because they will fill labour market gaps and ensure generational replacement as well as funds for pensions for Poles.) [Poland]

'[S]i nous voulons que notre système de retraite perdure, il faut des gens qui travaillent et qui cotisent, d'où qu'ils viennent.' (If we want our pension system to last, we need people who work and contribute, wherever they come from.) [France]

When asked to explain why they are not open to welcoming an increased number of migrant workers from outside of the EU (41% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned two reasons:

- **resource concerns, and**
- **preference for the local workforce.**

First, many respondents believe their country is already facing economic challenges, such as high unemployment and insufficient resources. There is a belief that the country does not have the capacity to accommodate more migrant workers, as they are perceived as being at risk of becoming an additional burden for the country's social benefit system. Secondly, some respondents feel that the focus should be on

improving employment conditions and opportunities for the local workforce, instead of welcoming more working migrants. In addition, respondents mentioned other ideas unrelated to the demographic challenges or the social benefits system, such as concerns about the cultural and social integration of migrants, or concerns around security and safety issues.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'Deutschlands Wirtschaft befindet sich im Niedergang und zigtausende Stellen wurden bereits abgebaut, dies wird sich auch 2025 fortsetzen. Wozu also sollen wir noch mehr niedrig bezahlte Arbeitnehmer einstellen, wenn immer mehr Einheimische ihre Jobs verlieren. Das macht keinen Sinn und zerstört das Sozialgebilde.' (Germany's economy is in decline and tens of thousands of jobs have already been cut, this will continue in 2025. So why should we hire more low-paid workers when more and more locals are losing their jobs? It makes no sense and destroys the social structure.) [Germany]

'Porque lo que hay que favorecer es la natalidad en España, subvenciones, mejorar las condiciones laborales y favorecer la conciliación familiar de los españoles para que las parejas se animen a tener más niños.' (Because what needs to be encouraged is the birth rate in Spain, subsidies, improving working conditions, and promoting family reconciliation for Spaniards so that couples are encouraged to have more children.) [Spain]

2.7.2 Alternative policies

Welcoming more working migrants might not be the only policy option to address the ageing population issue. **Two alternative policies** were tested with the study's participants. The first option involved increasing the legal retirement age, making national workers work longer before retirement. The second option involved an activation policy to get inactive people in the country back into work.

Overall, 53% of respondents agree that increasing the legal retirement age is a good alternative policy. However, at the national level, Sweden, France and Germany were the only countries where most respondents agreed that people would have to work longer before retiring. In the other countries, Spain, Italy, Poland and Romania, a majority of respondents did not agree with the option of working longer.

Regarding the second policy option, in all countries except Germany a large majority supported the option of getting inactive people back into work (76% on average).

2.8 Labour shortages

2.8.1 Migration as a solution for shortages

When asked whether they supported or opposed the idea of granting work permits to migrants who have qualifications in a sector that is facing labour shortages in their country at a particular time, an overwhelming majority of respondents tend to support this policy. 85% of respondents on average support **granting work permits** in that context, and this support reaches at least 80% in each country.

Such strong support is in line with the observation that respondents spontaneously mentioned that migration for work purposes could be a solution for labour shortages in specific sectors, even before the specific issue was introduced in the study.

When asked to explain why they would support granting work permits to migrants who have the qualifications in sectors facing shortages in their country, respondents mentioned the following reasons:

- **addressing labour shortages and benefiting the economy;**
- **utilisation of skills;**
- **regulated migration; and**
- **social and humanitarian considerations.**

First, many respondents believed that granting work permits to qualified migrants will help fill labour shortages, thereby boosting the economy and ensuring the survival of businesses. Secondly, there was strong sentiment that migrants with the right qualifications should be allowed to work, as their skills are needed and they can contribute positively to the workforce. Then, some respondents highlighted the importance of regulating the influx of migrants to ensure that only those with the necessary qualifications and in sectors with shortages are granted permits. Finally, a few responses touched on the humanitarian aspect, suggesting that granting work permits can help migrants integrate better into society and improve their quality of life.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'Por que alguien tiene que hacer ese trabajo para evitar que la economia del pais se hunda mas de lo que ya esta hundida.' (Because someone has to do that job to prevent the country's economy from sinking more than it already has.) [Spain]

'[P]er aiutare economia e regolarizzare anche loro, purchè abbiamo tutto in regola.' (To help the economy and also regularise them, provided everything is in order.) [Italy]

'Pentru ca trebuie ocupat acel deficit indiferent cine il ocupa.' (Because that deficit must be filled regardless of who fills it.) [Romania]

2.8.2 Temporary workers

In Poland and Romania,¹⁰ an additional question asked whether respondents were in favour of migrant workers coming to work in their country on a temporary basis to meet the needs of their country's labour market. The results show strong support for such a policy allowing migrant workers to come and work in the country on a temporary basis to deal with specific labour shortages.

Table 8 To meet the needs of our labour market, are you in favour of temporary migrant workers coming to work in OUR COUNTRY?

| | PL | RO | All |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| I'm in favour of temporary migrant workers coming to work in OUR COUNTRY | 70% | 76% | 73% |
| I'm opposed to temporary migrant workers coming to work in OUR COUNTRY | 31% | 12% | 22% |
| None | 0% | 12% | 6% |

¹⁰ This question was asked only in Poland and Romania as the issue of temporary migrant workers was judged more salient in those countries. In France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Sweden, the alternative question concerned the skills of working migrants (selecting migrants or organising reskilling programmes) as that issue was judged more salient in those countries.

2.9 Qualifications and skills

2.9.1 Some concerns regarding the skills

Regarding the skills of working migrants, 74% of respondents on average declared that they are confident that working migrants have the necessary skills to work in their country, with scores ranging from 91% in Spain to 41% in Sweden.

However, there are still **some concerns regarding the level of skills**, as one in four respondents are not confident in this regard. Respondents in Sweden are the most sceptical, and indeed, Sweden is the only country where a majority of respondents expressed concerns regarding the qualifications and skills of working migrants. This could be explained by another finding of the study previously reported: Sweden is the country where working migrants are primarily associated with higher-skilled sectors, such as healthcare and education, and professional, scientific and technical activities.

Table 9 If OUR COUNTRY welcomes new migrant workers with qualifications or diplomas acquired in their home country, are you confident they will have the necessary skills to work in OUR COUNTRY?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Very confident | 17% | 17% | 26% | 15% | 8% | 24% | 19% | 18% |
| Fairly confident | 63% | 64% | 65% | 62% | 33% | 42% | 61% | 56% |
| Not very confident | 13% | 17% | 3% | 24% | 53% | 27% | 19% | 22% |
| Not confident at all | 7% | 3% | 6% | 0% | 6% | 6% | 0% | 4% |

When respondents were asked what they thought their country should do to make sure that migrant workers have the best qualifications and skills when coming to work in their country, they mentioned various ideas:

- **verification of skills;**
- **collaboration with the authorities in the home country;**
- **practical assessment and internships;**
- **language proficiency; and**
- **providing training.**

First, many respondents emphasised the importance of verifying the qualifications and skills of migrant workers before they arrive. According to respondents, one way to ensure an efficient verification process would be to collaborate with the authorities in the migrant's home country to ensure that the qualifications are recognised and valid. Another solution proposed involved practical assessments and internships to evaluate the skills of migrant workers.

Secondly, language proficiency was a recurring concern raised by participants. Several respondents highlighted the importance of language proficiency for migrant workers and suggested that migrant workers should be required to learn the language of the host country to ensure better communication and integration.

Finally, another common theme was the need to provide training and skill development opportunities for migrant workers who already live and work in the country.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘Ar trebui facuta o evaluare a calificarii lor si o recalificare daca e cazul.’ (An evaluation of their qualifications should be carried out, with a requalification if necessary.) [Romania]

‘Mit den offiziellen Behörden des Herkunftslandes zusammenarbeiten, Qualifikationen erweitern wenn nötig, Anerkennung fördern.’ (Collaborate with the official authorities of the country of origin, expand qualifications if necessary, promote recognition.) [Germany]

2.9.2 Reskilling or selecting?

As noted above, regarding the skills of working migrants, 74% of respondents on average declared that they are confident that working migrants have the necessary skills to work in their country. However, there are still some concerns regarding the skills, as one in four respondents is not confident when it comes to the skills of migrants. As pointed out in the previous section, respondents mentioned ideas involving the verification of skills before admitting migrants, or training and reskilling migrants who already live and work in the country.

When faced with an **explicit trade-off between reskilling and selecting migrants**,¹¹ respondents appear split. The question asked was ‘To meet the needs of our labour market, which of the following approaches do you most favour?’. On average, 43% of the respondents would prefer to attract and select new skilled migrant workers, while 41% would prefer to invest in reskilling programmes for migrants who already live in the country. Sweden is the only country where a clear majority of respondents prefer investing more in reskilling programmes for low-skilled non-EU migrants who already live in the country, particularly women.

¹¹ This question was only asked in France, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Germany. The issue of the skills of working migrants (selecting migrants or organising reskilling programmes) was judged more salient in those countries. In Poland and Romania, the alternative question concerned temporary migrant workers, as that issue was judged more salient in those countries.

Table 10 To meet the needs of our labour market, which of the following approaches do you most favour for OUR COUNTRY?

| | FR | ES | IT | SE | DE | All |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Investing more in reskilling programmes for low-skilled non-EU migrants who already live in OUR COUNTRY, particularly women. | 33% | 29% | 35% | 69% | 41% | 41% |
| Attracting and selecting new skilled migrant workers to fill labour gaps. | 47% | 56% | 41% | 25% | 44% | 43% |
| None of the above | 20% | 15% | 24% | 6% | 16% | 16% |

2.10 Policies

2.10.1 EU or national level?

When asked whether decisions regarding migration for work purposes should be made at the national or the European level, **respondents are split on their preferred locus of decision-making**. On average, 57% of respondents would prefer decision-making at the national level, while 43% think decisions should be made at the European level together with other member states. The country findings show that France and Italy are the only two countries where a majority of respondents would prefer decisions to be made at the European level.

Table 11 According to you, at which level should decisions be made regarding migration for work purposes in OUR COUNTRY?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | Mean |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| The decisions should be made at the European level together with other member states | 57% | 25% | 47% | 62% | 32% | 33% | 42% | 43% |
| The decisions should only be taken at national level | 43% | 75% | 53% | 38% | 68% | 67% | 58% | 57% |

When asked why they believe that the EU should take decisions regarding migration for work purposes (43% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned four reasons:

- **the benefit of uniform and standardised policies;**
- **efficiency and coordination;**
- **collective responsibility; and**
- **security and control.**

First, many respondents emphasised the need for uniform policies and standards across the EU to manage migration effectively. In the same vein, several respondents pointed out that EU-level decisions would lead to better coordination and efficiency in managing migration. Another common theme was the idea of collective responsibility among EU member states. Respondents suggested that migration is a common issue that affects all countries in the EU, and therefore, decisions should be made collectively to distribute the burden and benefits fairly. Finally, some respondents emphasised the importance of security and control in managing migration. They believe that EU-level decisions would help ensure tighter controls over migration flows and enhance security across the region.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

‘Weil die Rahmenbedingungen grundsätzlich für alle gleich sein sollten und damit einiges erleichtern könnten. Mit EU-rechtlich beschlossenen Dingen ist einfacher zu verfahren, als mit einem Flickenteppich, der von Land zu Land unterschiedlich gehandhabt wird.’ (Because the framework conditions should

basically be the same for everyone and could make some things easier. It is easier to proceed with EU-legally decided things than with a patchwork that is handled differently from country to country.) [Germany]

'Pour améliorer justement les flux migratoires il faudrait des lois européennes communes sur le sujet avec des possibilités de règles dans chaque pays.' (To improve migration flows, there should be common European laws on the subject with the possibility of rules in each country.) [France]

'Por afectarnos a todo el continente europeo. Es para bien general.' (Because it affects the entire European continent. It is for the general good.) [Spain]

When asked why they believe decisions regarding migration for work purposes should be taken at the national level (57% of respondents), the respondents in this category mostly mentioned five reasons:

- **local knowledge;**
- **sovereignty;**
- **the economic and social impacts;**
- **security and control; and finally,**
- **cultural and social integration.**

First, many respondents believe that each country has unique needs and circumstances that are best understood by its own government. Another common theme evoked was the importance of national sovereignty and the right of each country to make its own decisions. Respondents feel that the country itself should determine migration policies without external interference. Then, several respondents believe that decisions regarding migration should be made at the national level to ensure that the policies align with the country's economic needs and social context. Other respondents also expressed concerns about the ability to manage and control migration securely and effectively if decisions are made at a higher level. Finally, some respondents believe that national governments are more apt to create policies that facilitate the integration of migrants into their specific cultural and social contexts.

The following comments collected verbatim from respondents illustrate these views:

'[P]onieważ tylko nasz kraj wie, jakie mamy problem.' (Because only our country knows what problems we have.) [Poland]

'Nu consider ca este treaba UE cum ne gestionam migratia, noi stim mai bine ce nevoi are economia noastra cand vine vorba de migrant.' (I do not consider it the EU's business how we manage migration, we know better what our economy needs when it comes to migrants.) [Romania]

'[C]haque pays doit prendre ces propres decisions mais pas les autres.' (Each country must make its own decisions, not others.) [France]

2.10.2 Restrictive or open policy?

Respondents are split when asked whether they would prefer governments to restrict or encourage migration for work purposes. On average, 56% of respondents would prefer their government to encourage migration for work purposes. Support for this view is the strongest in Germany (73%), Romania (65%) and Spain (64%). On the other hand, 44% of respondents would prefer governments to restrict migration for work purposes. This view is the most prevalent in France (60%), Italy (56%) and Sweden (54%).

Table 12 In general, would you prefer governments to restrict or to encourage migration for work purposes?

| | FR | PL | ES | IT | SE | RO | DE | All |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Restrict migration for work purposes | 60% | 42% | 36% | 56% | 54% | 35% | 27% | 44% |
| Encourage migration for work purposes | 40% | 58% | 64% | 44% | 46% | 65% | 73% | 56% |

3 Conclusions

3.1 Key takeaways

- Positive views on migration often highlight the **economic benefits, such as filling labour market gaps and contributing to economic activity, but also, in some countries, the cultural diversity.**
- Negative views usually highlight **concerns about integration** and the potential for **increased crime** and **security issues.**
- Respondents commonly associate migrants with **poorer regions** or countries with **ongoing conflict.**
- Migrants are often perceived to be employed in **low-paid, manual labour positions** in agriculture, construction, and the service industry.
- The perceived **primary reasons for migrants** coming to the respondents' countries include **seeking a better quality of life, escaping poverty and conflict, and pursuing job opportunities.**
- **Legal migrants** are generally seen as **more integrated** and contributing positively to society, while irregular migrants are often perceived as **being exploited** and sometimes associated with **criminality.**
- **Irregular migration** is largely viewed as a problem due to job **competition, exploitation, and security concerns.** However, a few respondents see it as an opportunity, noting that irregular migrants fill vacant jobs and contribute to the economy.
- **Opinions on regularising irregular migrants** vary across countries. In Germany, Sweden, France and Italy, there is a preference for requiring irregular migrants **to leave the country.** In contrast, Spain, Poland and Romania show stronger support for **full regularisation.**
- **EU migrants** are generally seen more positively, with many respondents recognising their contribution to **filling job vacancies** and **bringing valuable skills.** However, there are concerns about **job competition, financial burden and cultural differences.**
- Non-EU migrants are viewed more cautiously, with evenly divided opinions. While they are appreciated for filling essential jobs and **contributing to the economy,** there are significant concerns about **cultural differences, integration challenges and economic burden.**

- Migration is mostly perceived spontaneously as **migration from outside the EU** and mostly associated with migration for **low-skilled jobs**.
- **Irregular migration** is perceived as **highly negative**, but a considerable share of the respondents still support the regularisation of irregular migrants.
- **EU migration** is perceived **more positively than migration from outside the EU**, but the difference is not that high.
- Respondents have, on average, **a positive view of the economic contribution** of working migrants. The **main benefits** they mention are **labour market support, contribution to the economy, social inclusion and integration in the community, and cultural diversity**.
- **Migrants** are mostly perceived to **benefit sectors that require lower levels of skills** and qualifications. Still, in some countries, migrant workers are also associated with higher-skilled sectors.
- However, there are also **negative perceptions of working migrants' contribution** to the economy. They mainly refer to **job competition, wage competition, strain on public services, and cultural and social tensions**.
- A large majority of respondents believe that **migrant workers mostly fill jobs that local workers do not want to do**.
- **Competition in the labour market** and **wage competition** are key concerns, especially for **respondents with lower education levels**.
- **Demographic challenges** are not spontaneously mentioned **as a contribution of migrants** to the national economy. However, when prompted with this challenge associated with falling national birth rates and related issues, they tend to support welcoming migrants to solve this.
- There is a strong and spontaneous **agreement that migration for work purposes** could be **a solution for labour shortages** in specific sectors.
- Most respondents seem **confident regarding the skills and qualifications** of migrant workers. Still, there were some concerns, in particular in countries where migrants are more associated with sectors requiring higher education levels.
- Respondents are split on **the locus of decision-making** (national vs European).

4 Data appendix

Appendix 1 Socio-demographic profile of participants

The socio-demographic tables below show the number of participants who started the discussions. As outlined in the post-fieldwork report, it should be noted that in some countries, there were instances of participant dropouts, which may account for slight discrepancies between the initial recruitment targets and the final group composition.

| Country covered | France | Germany | Italy | Romania | Sweden | Poland | Spain |
|--|--------|---------|-------|---------|--------|--------|-------|
| Number of participants | 37 | 36 | 36 | 36 | 36 | 36 | 36 |
| Gender | | | | | | | |
| Man | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 16 | 18 |
| Woman | 19 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 20 | 18 |
| Age category | | | | | | | |
| 18–30 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| 21–45 | 10 | 12 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| 45–65 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 9 |
| +65 | 12 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Educational level | | | | | | | |
| Below primary school – No degree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Primary school | 2 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Secondary school – High school | 20 | 17 | 26 | 17 | 19 | 18 | 16 |
| University degree | 7 | 7 | 6 | 13 | 14 | 3 | 15 |
| Master's | 7 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 13 | 4 |
| PhD | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Current occupation | | | | | | | |
| Manager/Director | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 1 |
| Employee | 12 | 18 | 8 | 16 | 7 | 8 | 13 |
| Manual worker | 2 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 13 | 6 | 0 |
| Self-employed | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Unemployed | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Student | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| Retired | 14 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 11 | 10 |
| Not in paid work | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Would you say you live in a . . . ? | | | | | | | |
| Rural area or village | 12 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 3 |
| Small or middle-sized town | 15 | 15 | 18 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 14 |
| Large town | 10 | 11 | 10 | 20 | 18 | 18 | 19 |
| Views on migration | | | | | | | |
| Very positive | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Fairly positive | 9 | 9 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 12 | 10 |
| Neutral | 10 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 3 | 14 | 15 |
| Fairly negative | 8 | 12 | 9 | 7 | 19 | 7 | 8 |
| Very negative | 8 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |

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