

WORKSHOP REPORT

UNDERSTANDING ANTI- IMMIGRATION DYNAMICS: INSIGHTS FROM EUROPE AND THE MENA REGION

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GAR-Report No.12

ISBN: 978-625-94720-2-7

December 2024

This project was carried out with the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Turkey Office.

The views expressed in this study are entirely those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the Migration Research Association (GAR) or the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Turkey Office.

How to cite this report: Daniş, D., Karaçay, A. B. & Özdemir Dal, B. (2024). "Understanding Anti-Immigration Dynamics: Insights From Europe and The Mena Region". GAR Report No: 12. GAR publications: Istanbul



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Association for Migration Research (GAR), in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Turkey Office, organized a workshop titled *"Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: From Rhetoric to International Mechanisms of Advocacy"* on September 19-20, 2024, in Istanbul. The workshop brought together academics, policymakers, and civil society representatives to address the global rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, with a particular focus on the European and MENA countries. Participants explored how misinformation, political rhetoric, and structural inequalities drive anti-immigrant narratives, highlighting country-specific dynamics in France, the Netherlands, Greece, Bulgaria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey. They highlighted the structural and societal factors that perpetuate anti-immigrant attitudes, ranging from misinformation in public discourse to institutional failures in protecting migrant rights. Thus, this workshop report outlines the main findings of the workshop and offers recommendations for policy reforms, stronger civil society involvement, and international advocacy.

Discussions at the workshop emphasized how misinformation, political rhetoric, structural inequalities, and economic anxieties fuel anti-immigrant narratives. These narratives, often perpetuated by political actors and amplified by the media, stoke public fears, reinforce stereotypes, and justify exclusionary policies. Participants analyzed country-specific contexts, exploring the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in EU countries such as France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Bulgaria, alongside non-EU nations like Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey.

One of the central themes of the workshop was the dual role of *emotional* and *structural* dynamics in shaping societal attitudes toward migrants. Emotional factors such as fear and anxiety, often magnified during economic crises, create a fertile ground for hostility. This is particularly evident in contexts where migrants are framed as competitors for scarce resources, including housing, employment, and social services. Political actors exploit these emotions to mobilize public support, often scapegoating migrants for systemic issues. These dynamics are further entrenched by structural inequalities that limit migrants' access to rights, opportunities, and protections.

Institutional responses to migration were also a significant focus of the discussions. While EU countries generally have formal anti-discrimination laws, inconsistencies in their application often lead to selective treatment of migrant groups. For instance, Ukrainian refugees in the EU have received significantly more favorable treatment compared to Syrians, reflecting geopolitical considerations and racial biases. In contrast, non-EU countries like Egypt and Lebanon rely heavily on the efforts of civil society organizations to address gaps left by weak state capacities. These organizations provide essential support but face significant challenges, including limited resources, restrictive policies, and societal hostility.

The *media's influence* emerged as another critical topic, with its role as both a driver of anti-immigrant rhetoric and a potential tool for fostering inclusivity. In many contexts, traditional and digital media have sensationalized migration issues, reinforcing negative stereotypes and fueling xenophobic sentiments. However, responsible journalism and targeted counter-narratives can offer a way to reshape public perceptions. Collaborative efforts involving media outlets, civil society, and migrant communities are essential to challenging misinformation and highlighting the positive contributions of migrants.

Civil society organizations and *academia* were highlighted as pivotal actors in combating anti-immigrant sentiment. NGOs play an indispensable role in advocating for migrant rights and fostering social cohesion, even as they navigate resource limitations and political constraints. Academia, though often constrained by systemic barriers, can provide evidence-based counter-narratives and inform more inclusive policies. Greater collaboration between these sectors is essential for addressing the root causes of *xenophobia* and *misinformation*.

The workshop underscored the profound implications of anti-immigrant sentiment for human rights, social peace, and global cooperation. The participants called for *coordinated efforts to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance media accountability, and foster grassroots initiatives* that promote mutual understanding between migrants and host communities. By addressing the structural and emotional drivers of xenophobia and leveraging the potential of civil society, academia, and media, it is possible to create more inclusive and equitable societies.

This report synthesizes the key insights from the workshop and offers a roadmap for tackling the challenges posed by rising anti-immigrant sentiment. It emphasizes the *interconnectedness of global migration issues* and the urgent need for *collaborative and rights-based approaches*. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must work together to combat misinformation, implement robust legal protections and foster a *culture of empathy and solidarity*. Through *sustained effort and a commitment to inclusivity*, meaningful change can be achieved in the face of this growing global challenge.

INTRODUCTION

Anti-immigrant sentiment, often stoked by political actors and the media, is becoming a critical issue in both Western and non-Western countries, posing a significant challenge to human rights, social cohesion, and global cooperation. In Turkey, as in many other regions, immigrants are frequently portrayed as economic burdens, cultural outsiders, or even security threats. These perceptions lead to growing public hostility and the criminalization of pro-immigrant organizations. In this context, the workshop titled *"Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: From Rhetoric to International Mechanisms of Advocacy,"* held on September 19-20, 2024, in Istanbul, focused on the ways in which anti-immigrant narratives are shaped by misinformation, political rhetoric, and structural inequalities across various regions. Through sessions examining country-specific cases—including France, the Netherlands, Greece, Bulgaria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey—participants explored the intersections of migration, media, and politics. The event also highlighted the emotional dynamics fueling xenophobia, such as fear and anxiety, as well as the varied institutional and societal responses to these challenges.

This policy report synthesizes the workshop's findings and offers actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. By incorporating country-specific analyses from both European and non-European contexts—such as France, Greece, and Bulgaria, alongside Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey—the report moves beyond isolated national frameworks to uncover the interconnected dynamics of migration, the emotional drivers of xenophobia, including fear

and anxiety, and the diverse institutional and societal responses to these challenges, with a particular emphasis on the European and MENA regions. This approach highlights how European and MENA countries, often situated at the crossroads of migration flows, grapple with shared challenges like systemic discrimination, securitization, and the instrumentalization of migrants in political rhetoric, while also reflecting on regional variations in institutional responses and civil society involvement. The report's comparative methodology thus contributes novel insights by emphasizing the region as a critical zone for understanding and addressing anti-immigrant sentiment in a globally interconnected era.

1. Key Issues Discussed

This section explores the central issues discussed during the workshop. By analysing political rhetoric, emotional drivers, media narratives, and the role of civil society and academia, the discussions highlighted the interconnected factors fuelling anti-immigrant sentiment and the challenges in addressing these dynamics. Then it follows with the institutional responses to anti-immigrant sentiments that highlights how different cases in the European and MENA regions reflect varying approaches to migration governance, shaped by distinct political, economic, and social dynamics. While institutional responses in the European and MENA regions vary based on political, economic, and social contexts, they converge in their overarching tendency to adopt restrictive and exclusionary approaches toward migrants.

1.1. The Rise of Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

Throughout the workshop, participants from different countries highlighted the rise of an anti-immigrant climate in their respective contexts, noting the critical role misinformation plays in perpetuating these sentiments. In the *Netherlands*, political and media narratives have increasingly blamed immigrants for housing shortages and unemployment, masking the structural issues rooted in neoliberal policies and market-driven housing strategies. Similarly, in *France*, second-generation immigrants from North Africa experience heightened discrimination, often fueled by stereotypes about their supposed failure to integrate, despite evidence pointing to systemic barriers rather than individual shortcomings. In *Greece*, the anti-immigrant sentiment has historical underpinnings linked to national identity and religion. This sentiment is compounded by policies deliberately designed to make life difficult for immigrants, such as restricted access to legal status and essential services. In *Bulgaria*, the "refugee crisis" has been exaggerated by the media, portraying migrants as threats to public safety and social stability, even though actual migrant numbers remain relatively low. Discrimination is further institutionalized through inadequate housing options and limited access to healthcare and education, exacerbating the hardships faced by refugees. In *Turkey*, anti-immigrant sentiment has grown due to economic difficulties, politicized rhetoric, and pervasive misinformation, with Syrians being the primary target. This trend, intensified by both traditional and digital media, has exacerbated polarization and hostility, complicating efforts to promote

inclusive migration policies. Across these examples, misinformation emerges as a shared catalyst, reinforcing stereotypes and framing immigrants as threats to national cohesion and economic stability. Addressing these narratives requires not only counteracting misinformation but also tackling the structural inequalities that underpin these prejudices, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable discourse on migration.

1.2. Key Dynamics in Shaping Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

1.2.1. Political Actors

Political actors play a crucial role in shaping the narrative around immigration, often framing it as a central societal issue to mobilize support and consolidate power. In countries such as the *Netherlands* and *Greece*, political figures frequently leverage conspiracy theories, like the "Great Replacement Theory," to stoke fears about cultural and demographic changes. These narratives are strategically tied to economic anxieties, with far-right parties positioning immigrants as scapegoats for complex issues such as housing shortages, unemployment, and rising crime rates. By simplifying these problems and assigning blame to immigrants, politicians capitalize on public discontent to bolster their agendas.

The impact of these narratives extends beyond rhetoric, influencing policy decisions and legislative frameworks. Politicians often create or amplify crises to justify restrictive measures, framing these policies as necessary for national security or social stability. In the *Netherlands*, for instance, the introduction of crisis laws allows the government to bypass parliamentary oversight, enabling the swift implementation of anti-immigration measures. These laws not only

undermine democratic processes but also normalize exclusionary practices, further marginalizing immigrant communities.

This exploitation of public fears and the institutionalization of restrictive policies illustrate the deep entanglement of political strategy and anti-immigrant sentiment. The role of political actors in perpetuating these narratives highlights the need for robust accountability mechanisms and counter-strategies that challenge the simplistic and divisive framing of immigration issues. Without such measures, the political manipulation of immigration risks entrenching societal divisions and undermining efforts toward inclusivity and cohesion.

In *Turkey*, the governing party has distinguished itself with a hospitable and pragmatic approach to immigration, welcoming Syrian refugees with open-border policies and liberalizing visas with many countries to boost its economy and tourism. This stands in stark contrast to the restrictive and securitized immigration policies in much of Europe and the Middle East. However, since 2019, political actors—both the government and the opposition—have shifted this positive or neutral narrative. Influenced by political and economic crises, they have adopted more anti-refugee and hostile discourse, along with more restrictive policies toward migrants.

1.2.2. Emotional Dynamics

The participants of the workshop particularly emphasized the significant role that emotional dynamics play in shaping the anti-immigrant climate. Fear and anxiety are frequently exploited by political actors and amplified by media narratives to fuel anti-immigrant sentiments. Far-right rhetoric taps into public

concerns about crime, unemployment, and cultural erosion, transforming these emotions into powerful political tools. In the Netherlands, for instance, the narrative has shifted from predominantly Islamophobic themes to economic fears, such as housing shortages, portraying immigrants as scapegoats for systemic issues. These fears, often detached from actual realities, are magnified through sensationalized media coverage, creating a heightened sense of insecurity and urgency among the public.

Another critical emotional factor emphasized during the workshop is the perception of a group relative deprivation, where local populations feel they are unfairly disadvantaged compared to migrants. During economic crises, these sentiments become particularly acute, as resources like housing, employment, and social services are perceived as scarce and contested. The belief that migrants are receiving preferential treatment over locals exacerbates feelings of resentment and exclusion, further polarizing societies. This emotionally charged climate, shaped by misinformation and amplified by far-right rhetoric, creates significant barriers to fostering social cohesion and addressing the structural causes of these tensions.

1.2.3. Media

The media plays a significant role in shaping public discourse on immigration, often acting as a powerful amplifier of anti-immigrant rhetoric. In countries like *France* and the *Netherlands*, both private and digital media outlets frequently sensationalize immigrant-related issues, framing them in ways that spread fear and perpetuate misinformation. This approach not only deepens societal divisions but also creates fertile ground

for xenophobic narratives to flourish. Media coverage often highlights isolated incidents involving migrants, exaggerating their significance to portray entire communities as threats to national security or cultural identity. By doing so, it reinforces stereotypes and biases that fuel anti-immigrant sentiments.

In addition to traditional media, digital platforms like TikTok, Telegram, and Reddit have become key hubs for the propagation of anti-refugee propaganda. These platforms enable the rapid dissemination of inflammatory content, including hate speech, doctored images, and conspiracy theories. The virality of such content magnifies its impact, contributing to a climate of hostility and, in some cases, inciting real-world violence against immigrant communities. By amplifying stereotypes and framing migrants as threats to security, culture, or the economy, media outlets contribute to a climate of hostility and division. Governments have also leveraged media narratives to justify restrictive immigration policies, using fear-based messaging to garner public support for measures such as tighter border controls and reduced asylum protections.

The interplay between media narratives and political agendas underscores the media's dual role as both a driver of public opinion and a tool of statecraft. Addressing this dynamic requires a concerted effort to promote responsible journalism and counteract the spread of misinformation, ensuring that media platforms contribute to informed and balanced discussions rather than exacerbating prejudice and division.

Efforts to challenge these narratives, however, show some promise when they leverage credible sources like NGOs and international

organizations. These entities have developed tools and campaigns to correct misinformation and provide balanced perspectives on migration. Yet, the success of such counter-narratives depends heavily on engaging broader segments of the public. Without widespread dissemination and accessibility, these efforts risk being confined to limited audiences, unable to shift the dominant rhetoric. The participants highlighted the urgent need for a more coordinated approach, combining factual clarity with emotionally resonant messaging, to effectively counteract the pervasive influence of anti-immigrant narratives in the media.

1.2.4. NGO's

NGOs play a pivotal role in combating anti-immigrant sentiments, although their visibility and effectiveness differ significantly across countries. In France, for example, anti-racist organizations have been subjected to criminalization and stigmatization, accused of threatening social cohesion and being overly activist in their advocacy efforts. This has led to a decline in their influence, as public trust wanes and far-right narratives dominate the discourse. In Lebanon, by contrast, NGOs step in to fill the void left by government inaction, especially in providing critical aid and advocating for the rights of migrant workers who are often subject to exploitation under systems like the Kafala sponsorship program. These organizations serve as a lifeline in a highly fragmented and crisis-prone society, yet their efforts are constrained by the broader political and economic instability of the region.

However, the challenges faced by NGOs are daunting and often undermine their ability to function effectively. Limited funding is a

persistent issue, exacerbated by the shrinking space for civil society and growing public suspicion toward these organizations. In some countries, NGOs that attempt to support irregular migrants or refugees without proper documentation encounter legal and bureaucratic obstacles that make their work even more difficult. Additionally, restrictive legal environments and dependence on international funding often force NGOs to align with donor priorities rather than addressing local needs comprehensively. These challenges collectively hinder the ability of NGOs to sustain long-term impact, highlighting the need for stronger institutional support and more robust advocacy frameworks.

1.2.5. Academia

Academia plays a nuanced and often contentious role in the discourse on immigration. In France, academics are deeply engaged in debates, frequently highlighting systemic discrimination and offering counter-narratives to anti-immigrant sentiments. However, this active involvement has made French academia a target for criticism, with accusations of activism and politically charged labels such as "islamo-gauchism" being levied against scholars. This reflects the polarized nature of immigration discussions in the country, where academic contributions are often viewed through a partisan lens.

In contrast, Dutch academia has largely remained silent on migration issues, avoiding the public spotlight. This reticence limits its influence on shaping public opinion or policy, leaving a gap in the broader discourse on immigration. Across both contexts, while academic research has the potential to challenge stereotypes and inform more inclusive

policies, the lack of robust collaboration with civil society organizations weakens its real-world impact. Bridging this divide could enhance academia's role in addressing anti-immigrant narratives and fostering a more balanced understanding of migration dynamics.

In countries like Bulgaria and Greece, academia plays a relatively limited role in the public discourse on immigration. In Bulgaria, academic institutions rarely collaborate with civil society organizations, and their detachment from grassroots movements undermines their potential to influence migration policies or public opinion. Similarly, in Greece, while there have been isolated contributions to debates on migration, academic efforts often lack consistency and alignment with broader advocacy initiatives, reducing their impact.

In Egypt, academia has faced significant restrictions, particularly after the 2013 crackdown on civil society. Research on migration issues is sparse, and scholars often avoid politically sensitive topics, limiting their ability to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of anti-immigrant sentiments. In Lebanon, the academic sector occasionally engages with migration-related issues, but its impact is constrained by the country's political instability and weak institutional support. Across these contexts, academia's potential to address misinformation and shape inclusive migration narratives remains largely untapped due to structural and political barriers.

2. Institutional Responses to Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

Across Europe and the MENA region, anti-immigrant sentiments are embedded in both public discourse and national policies, often shaped by political instability, economic crises, and societal tensions. In countries like the *Netherlands* and *Greece*, institutional frameworks ostensibly aim to protect migrant rights, but gaps between policy and practice persist, leaving migrants vulnerable to systemic discrimination. Institutional responses frequently prioritize restriction and control over inclusive, rights-based approaches. In *Egypt*, the government's alignment with EU migration containment policies, driven by reliance on financial aid, exacerbates systemic challenges for migrants. Stricter policies restrict civil society's ability to operate effectively, yet these organizations strive to provide healthcare, legal support, and alternative education opportunities in the face of significant barriers.

In *Lebanon*, the Kafala sponsorship system perpetuates exploitation, granting employers extensive control over migrant workers' lives. Broader political and economic crises, alongside discriminatory measures enforced by municipalities, further restrict migrant rights. Civil society campaigns against Kafala and provides essential support, but these efforts are undermined by strong lobbying efforts, societal hostility, and limited resources.

The institutional responses in the Netherlands and Greece reveal contrasting approaches but share similar challenges, particularly in the roles of civil society and academia. As already mentioned, while academia in the Netherlands

has largely remained silent, weakening efforts to counter anti-immigrant rhetoric, Greek academics and civil society face active governmental pushback.

In Egypt and Lebanon, restrictive governance and entrenched systems of exploitation stifle civil society's effectiveness, despite their critical role in addressing migrants' needs. Despite the critical work of civil society organizations in providing support and advocating for migrant rights, their efforts are constrained by systemic barriers, including restrictive legal environments, political volatility, and societal prejudices.

This highlights an urgent need for coordinated reforms, governmental accountability, and the integration of civil society into policy-making to ensure more equitable and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees.

3. Anti-immigrant Practices and Discourses in the EU Countries and Non-EU Countries

Through a comparative analysis of countries such as France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Bulgaria in the EU, alongside Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey in the non-EU context, the discussion explores the shared challenges and unique approaches to managing migration, addressing xenophobia, and responding to the complexities of anti-immigrant sentiment.

3.1. Among the EU Countries: France, the Netherlands, Greece & Bulgaria

Among the EU countries, in **France**, anti-immigrant practices and discourses are shaped

by a paradoxical combination of formal anti-discrimination laws and pervasive media narratives that blame immigrants for integration failures. While legal mechanisms such as the Défenseur des Droits exist to address discrimination, their effectiveness is limited by insufficient public awareness and engagement. At the same time, media outlets often sensationalize immigration issues, perpetuating stereotypes and fostering a climate of suspicion toward immigrant communities. This duality reflects a broader societal struggle, where institutional frameworks for equality are undermined by persistent stigmatization and the polarization of public opinion.

In the **Netherlands**, anti-immigrant practices and discourses are increasingly shaped by far-right rhetoric, which frames immigration as a central societal issue. Policies have become more restrictive, with tougher asylum laws and measures that limit family reunification. Housing shortages, a long-standing structural issue, are frequently blamed on immigrants, further fueling public resentment. Public services often prioritize local citizens, reinforcing perceptions of relative deprivation among native populations and exacerbating tensions between immigrant and host communities. This narrative has become deeply embedded in political and media discourse, amplifying societal divisions.

In **Greece**, anti-immigrant practices are deeply institutionalized and closely tied to notions of national identity, often rooted in the country's historical and cultural narratives. Policies are deliberately designed to make life difficult for refugees, aiming to discourage long-term settlement and promote voluntary departures. Refugees face significant barriers to accessing legal status, education, and essential services,

while the conditions in camps remain dire. This structural discrimination reflects a broader strategy to deter migration, reinforcing exclusionary attitudes and perpetuating a hostile environment for refugees and migrants.

In **Bulgaria**, anti-immigrant discourses are heavily influenced by media narratives that exaggerate the "refugee crisis", fueling Islamophobia and perpetuating stereotypes about migrants as threats to public safety and social stability. Basic services for migrants, such as housing, healthcare, and education, are often inadequate, leaving many in precarious conditions. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees have received preferential treatment, including better housing and support, which has sparked resentment among local populations. This disparity highlights the selective nature of Bulgaria's migration policies, further deepening societal divisions and tensions.

3.2. Non-EU Countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey

For the non-EU countries, in **Egypt**, the absence of comprehensive legal frameworks leaves migrants and refugees without adequate protection or support. Refugees, particularly those from Sudan, face widespread racial discrimination and systemic exclusion from essential services such as education and formal employment. While community-led initiatives attempt to fill these gaps, their efforts are constrained by restrictive government policies and limited resources. This environment fosters a climate of vulnerability and marginalization for migrants, exacerbating their already precarious living conditions.

In **Lebanon**, the government's "policy of no policy" approach to migration creates

widespread insecurity among migrant populations. Syrian refugees, in particular, live in a state of limbo, with limited legal protections and significant barriers to mobility and basic services. Meanwhile, domestic workers, many of whom are migrants, endure systemic abuse under the exploitative Kafala sponsorship system, which grants employers excessive control over their lives. This lack of coherent policies not only perpetuates the marginalization of migrants but also exacerbates tensions between communities in an already fragile social and political landscape.

In **Turkey**, migration policies have undergone a significant shift over the years. Initially, the country adopted an open-border policy and a welcoming narrative during the early stages of the Syrian refugee crisis, positioning itself as a safe haven and emphasizing cultural and religious solidarity. However, this positive stance has eroded since 2019, as political and economic crises have fueled public resentment and heightened anti-refugee sentiments. While Turkey hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally, rising hate speech and misinformation, amplified by local and digital media, have intensified divisions. Additionally, the European Union's externalization policy has played a critical role in the institutionalization and securitization of migration issues, with refugees often being instrumentalized in political and economic negotiations between Turkey and the EU. Migrants are increasingly portrayed as economic and demographic threats, and policies have become more restrictive, reflecting a growing alignment with nationalist and populist rhetoric.

Across the examined countries, the approaches to migration issues reveal significant regional

disparities. EU countries, such as France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Bulgaria, often employ formal legal mechanisms to address immigration. However, these frameworks frequently fall short in ensuring consistent application or equity across different immigrant groups, leading to selective treatment and reinforcing systemic biases. In contrast, non-EU countries like Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey rely more heavily on NGOs and informal networks to fill the gaps left by weaker state capacities. While these organizations provide critical support, their efforts are often constrained by limited resources and restrictive political environments. This dichotomy underscores the broader challenges in managing migration, where institutional capacity and political will remain pivotal in determining outcomes for immigrant populations.

4. Anti-Immigrant Sentiments and Their Impact: Specific Cases

The impact of anti-immigrant sentiments and policies varies greatly across different migrant groups, influenced by a combination of cultural, racial, and political factors. Some groups experience heightened discrimination and exclusion due to systemic biases or historical tensions. In the following section, we will examine the specific cases of Sudanese migrants in Egypt, who face severe racial discrimination; Ukrainian refugees in the European Union, who often receive preferential treatment compared to other migrant groups; domestic workers in Lebanon, who endure systemic exploitation under the Kafala system; and Syrians in Turkey, who have increasingly

become the focal point of rising anti-immigrant rhetoric and restrictive policies. This section explores the distinct challenges encountered by these groups, analyzing how local contexts shape their experiences and how broader political and societal dynamics influence their treatment and integration.

4.1. Sudanese in Egypt: Shifting Policies and anti-immigrant Sentiments

Egypt's geographical position as a crossroads between Africa, the Middle East, and Europe makes it a key transit and destination country for migrants and refugees, particularly from neighboring Sudan, Libya, and Syria. However, Egypt struggles to manage migration effectively due to inadequate legal frameworks, rising anti-immigrant sentiments, and a policy environment that has become increasingly hostile since the 2013 coup. Under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's administration, the welcoming approach of the revolutionary period gave way to stricter measures, leaving migrants without legal protections and at constant risk of deportation or imprisonment.

The absence of comprehensive migration laws has left migrants in precarious situations, with many falling into undocumented status after only 45 days of entering the country. Sudanese migrants, in particular, face systemic racism and exclusion from essential services, such as education. Public schools, despite being officially open to children from certain nationalities, often reject Sudanese students, forcing migrant communities to establish informal schools. These community schools, while providing basic education, operate without formal recognition and are frequently targeted for closure, further marginalizing migrant children.

Economic pressures have also shaped Egypt's approach to migration. Reliant on financial aid from the European Union, the government has tightened its borders and assumed a gatekeeping role to curtail irregular migration into Europe. Simultaneously, public opinion has shifted from initial sympathy to increasing hostility, driven by economic anxieties and political rhetoric scapegoating migrants. These sentiments have led to widespread discrimination and social exclusion, particularly for Sudanese migrants, who are among the most vulnerable.

Civil society organizations, once a cornerstone of advocacy during the revolutionary period, have been severely curtailed by government crackdowns. Operating under constant threat of closure, these groups provide essential support to migrant communities but struggle against systemic hostility and a lack of government cooperation. Moreover, the frequent manipulation of migration statistics by authorities undermines transparency and accountability, further complicating efforts to address migration issues effectively.

In conclusion, Egypt's migration policies exemplify a broader trend of securitization and exclusion, driven by economic and political pressures. The rising anti-immigrant sentiment, coupled with systemic discrimination and a lack of legal protections, leaves migrants—particularly Sudanese—in an increasingly vulnerable position. Without meaningful policy reform and a shift in public discourse, the situation for migrants in Egypt is likely to deteriorate further, deepening social divisions and undermining any prospects for integration and coexistence.

4.2. Ukrainians vs Syrians in the EU: A Case of Preferential Treatment

The European Union's response to Ukrainian refugees has been markedly different from its approach to Syrians, highlighting significant disparities in treatment and integration efforts. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU swiftly activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to provide immediate legal status, housing, and access to education and employment for Ukrainian refugees. This rapid and comprehensive response stands in stark contrast to the experiences of Syrian refugees, who have faced prolonged asylum processes, restrictive policies, and harsher living conditions.

One of the most notable differences is the public and political discourse surrounding these groups. Ukrainian refugees have largely been framed in the media and political narratives as victims of an unjust war and as culturally similar to Europeans. This framing has facilitated public empathy and political support, making their integration into EU societies more seamless. In contrast, Syrian refugees have often been portrayed as cultural outsiders and potential security threats, leading to a climate of suspicion and exclusion. This dichotomy reflects the influence of racial, cultural, and historical factors on the reception of refugees.

Housing and living conditions further underscore this preferential treatment. Ukrainian refugees were initially housed in hotels and well-equipped facilities, especially in countries like Bulgaria. In contrast, Syrians and other non-European migrants were placed in overcrowded camps with inadequate resources. Over time, some Ukrainian refugees were transferred to facilities typically used for other migrants, which brought attention to the poor conditions Syrians have endured for years. However, the disparity in initial reception remains stark.

Access to education and employment also reveals significant gaps. Ukrainian children have been swiftly integrated into public school systems across the EU, with tailored language programs and support services. Meanwhile, many Syrian refugee children face barriers to accessing formal education, ranging from language obstacles to systemic discrimination. Similarly, Ukrainian adults have benefited from streamlined processes for entering the labor market, while Syrians often encounter bureaucratic hurdles and societal prejudice that limit their economic opportunities.

These disparities highlight the EU's selective approach to migration, where geopolitical considerations and cultural proximity influence the reception of refugees. While the preferential treatment of Ukrainians has been celebrated for its humanity and efficiency, it also exposes the unequal and, at times, discriminatory practices faced by non-European refugees like Syrians. Addressing this double standard is essential for fostering a more equitable and inclusive migration framework within the EU.

4.3. Domestic Workers in Lebanon: Systemic Exploitation under the Kafala System

Domestic workers in Lebanon, the majority of whom are migrants from countries such as Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, face systemic exploitation under the Kafala sponsorship system. This system ties a worker's legal status to their employer, granting employers disproportionate control over their lives. Employers often confiscate passports, restrict mobility, and impose exploitative working conditions, creating an environment ripe for abuse. Workers have limited recourse, as their residency status is directly linked to their employer, leaving them vulnerable to retaliation or deportation if they voice complaints.

The lack of legal protections exacerbates the precariousness of domestic workers' lives. Lebanese labor laws do not extend to domestic workers, effectively excluding them from minimum wage guarantees, regulated working hours, and other basic rights afforded to workers in other sectors. This legal gap enables a culture of impunity, where abusive practices such as unpaid wages, overwork, and even physical or psychological violence go unchecked. Efforts to reform the Kafala system, such as the introduction of a unified employment contract in 2020, have faced significant resistance from recruitment agencies and employers, limiting their implementation and impact.

The economic crisis in Lebanon has further intensified the exploitation of domestic workers. Many employers, struggling with financial hardships, have abandoned workers without payment or proper legal procedures, leaving them stranded without support. Workers who remain employed often endure worsening conditions, as employers impose heavier workloads while reducing wages or paying them in depreciated local currency. These economic pressures have compounded the systemic vulnerabilities already inherent in the Kafala system.

Civil society organizations and international advocacy groups have attempted to address the exploitation of domestic workers in Lebanon, offering legal aid, shelter, and other forms of support. However, their efforts are constrained by a lack of government cooperation and limited resources. Religious institutions and NGOs play a crucial role in providing services to these workers, but they cannot address the structural issues that perpetuate their exploitation. The absence of a robust legal framework and the failure to abolish the Kafala system remain significant barriers to meaningful reform.

The situation of domestic workers in Lebanon reflects a broader pattern of systemic inequality and exclusion, deeply rooted in structural and legal frameworks. Abolishing the Kafala system and extending labor protections are essential to ending this cycle of exploitation and abuse.

4.4. Syrians Refugees in Turkey: The Surge of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Turkey's approach to migrants and refugees has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade. Once lauded for its open-door policy during the early years of the Syrian civil war, Turkey is now grappling with rising anti-immigrant sentiments. This shift has been fueled by economic challenges, political exploitation of migration issues, and widespread misinformation, resulting in a polarized society and growing exclusion of migrant communities. Migrants, particularly Syrians, who were once welcomed with solidarity and humanitarian narratives, have increasingly become targets of public hostility and political scapegoating.

Between 2011 and 2016, public discourse around Syrian refugees in Turkey emphasized humanitarianism and cultural solidarity. However, as the visibility and impact of migration grew, the topic became highly politicized. Far-right parties, most notably the Zafer Party, capitalized on this shift, using anti-immigrant rhetoric as a central part of their platforms. These parties have amplified fears of migrants as economic, cultural, and security threats, reflecting a broader societal shift in attitudes. This political exploitation of migration has redefined migrants in the public imagination—not as individuals in need of protection, but as perceived burdens on the state.

This growing hostility has been particularly pronounced during moments of crisis, such as the February 2023 earthquakes and recent election campaigns. In these periods, hate speech against migrants surged, often fueled by political actors seeking to deflect blame or galvanize nationalist sentiments. Media outlets and social media platforms have played a crucial role in spreading anti-immigrant narratives, using sensationalized and misleading content to manipulate public opinion. Many social media accounts exploit hate speech for profit, turning polarized sentiments into clickbait, further deepening societal divisions.

The media has reinforced anti-immigrant attitudes by portraying migrants as a monolithic group, erasing their diverse identities and contributions. Migrants are often alternately framed as victims, criminals, or economic and demographic threats, with less frequent narratives presenting them as role models. This oversimplified representation fosters harmful stereotypes and amplifies their perception as outsiders disrupting societal norms. While data on migrants is often accurate, its manipulation to support anti-immigrant arguments has further hindered efforts to create constructive dialogue.

Public opinion, even among traditionally supportive groups such as religious and conservative communities, has shifted negatively toward Syrian migrants. This decline is driven by misinformation

that fosters a sense of group relative deprivation, where host communities feel migrants unfairly benefit from state resources. Narratives framing migrants as economic competitors or undeserving recipients of aid have heightened resentment, especially in times of economic hardship.

Despite the challenges, NGOs have played an important role in addressing migration-related issues since the onset of the refugee crisis. However, their work is constrained by government restrictions, limited resources, and growing public hostility. Many NGOs are unable to assist irregular migrants or those in transit, leaving significant gaps in support. Efforts to counter anti-immigrant sentiments through interventions like simulation games and text-based campaigns have shown promise, but video-based campaigns have occasionally backfired, reinforcing negative attitudes instead of alleviating them.

Misinformation remains one of the most significant drivers of anti-immigrant sentiments in Turkey. The source of information greatly affects its credibility; international organizations and non-state actors are often trusted more than state-sourced narratives, which face skepticism from the public. This lack of trust in government messaging complicates efforts to combat misinformation and promote inclusive attitudes, creating additional barriers to addressing anti-immigrant rhetoric effectively.

Syrians have increasingly become symbolic of broader anti-immigrant sentiments in Turkey, serving as stand-ins for all migrants in public discourse. This generalization erases the distinct experiences of various migrant groups, homogenizing them under the negative stereotypes associated with Syrian refugees. Consequently, migrants of all nationalities are often viewed through this narrow and prejudiced lens, exacerbating societal hostility and undermining efforts toward integration.

The implications of these rising anti-immigrant sentiments are profound. Hate speech and violence against migrants are becoming normalized, creating an environment of fear and insecurity. Scapegoating migrants shifts attention away from structural economic and political issues, delaying meaningful solutions to the challenges Turkey faces. Combating these sentiments requires a multifaceted approach, including countering misinformation, fostering trust in credible sources, and promoting media narratives that highlight the diversity and contributions of migrant communities. Without significant policy and social changes, the growing hostility risks eroding social cohesion and deepening divisions, leaving Turkey ill-equipped to address its complex migration challenges.

5. Recommendations

Addressing the challenges posed by rising anti-immigrant sentiment requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes legal reforms, strengthens civil society involvement, and fosters community solidarity. The following recommendations, drawn from the workshop discussions, aim to provide actionable pathways for creating more inclusive, equitable, and cohesive societies.

Policy Reforms

Anti-immigrant hatred and discrimination pose significant threats not only to migrants but also to social peace and cohesion, underscoring the urgent need for government action. Governments must commit to establishing stronger legal frameworks to effectively address these issues. Existing anti-discrimination laws should be revised to ensure they are comprehensive, enforceable, and capable of addressing the complexities of modern societies. Proactive measures, such as adopting testing methodologies to detect discriminatory practices—like those utilized in France—can enhance accountability and transparency. Additionally, implementing robust sanctions for proven cases of discrimination is essential to deter such actions and foster a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Strengthening Civil Society and Academic Involvement

As all the participants emphasized, civil society organizations and academics must play a more active role in addressing anti-immigrant sentiment. This involves fostering stronger collaborations between academics, NGOs, and

international organizations to develop research-based interventions that effectively counter misinformation. Additionally, supporting independent media outlets is crucial to challenge biased narratives and promote balanced perspectives. In many countries, where the media landscape often propagates misinformation, the role of civil society in countering anti-refugee rhetoric is particularly vital for fostering informed and inclusive public discourse.

Community Engagement and Solidarity

As all the participants highlighted, fostering grassroots initiatives that promote dialogue between migrant and local populations is essential for building understanding and solidarity. Programs centered on cultural exchange—such as those involving art, food, or shared storytelling—can play a significant role in fostering empathy and breaking down the "othering" of migrants. In Lebanon, initiatives that integrate migrant workers into local businesses and community activities offer valuable examples that can inspire similar programs in other countries, demonstrating how engagement at the community level can contribute to social cohesion and mutual respect.

Media Responsibility and Accountability

Media holds a critical role in shaping public attitudes toward migration and can significantly influence public discourse. Responsible reporting involves moving away from sensationalism and stereotypes to present migrants' experiences and contributions

accurately. Collaborative efforts between media outlets, civil society, and migrant communities can create narratives that counter anti-immigrant rhetoric and highlight positive stories. Training programs for journalists help improve the quality and sensitivity of migration-related coverage. Social media platforms, with their widespread reach, play an important role in addressing hate speech and misinformation by implementing more robust monitoring and response mechanisms. Public broadcasters, as trusted sources of information, contribute by producing balanced content that fosters informed discussions on migration. These combined efforts are essential for reducing anti-immigrant sentiment and promoting inclusivity in public dialogue.

CONCLUSION

This report summarizes the key findings of the workshop, *“Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: From Rhetoric to International Advocacy Mechanisms,”* held in Istanbul on September 19–20, 2024, organized by the Association for Migration Research (GAR). The workshop brought together academics, researchers, and civil society representatives to address the global rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, with a particular focus on the European and MENA regions. Participants examined how misinformation, political rhetoric, and structural inequalities fuel anti-immigrant narratives, highlighting country-specific dynamics in France, the Netherlands, Greece, Bulgaria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Key findings of the report include:

- Anti-immigrant sentiment is a critical issue in both Western and non-Western contexts, posing significant challenges to human

rights, social cohesion, and global cooperation.

- Misinformation, political rhetoric, and structural inequalities play pivotal roles in driving anti-immigrant narratives.
- Political actors often frame migration as a central societal issue to mobilize support and consolidate power.
- Emotional dynamics such as fear and anxiety are frequently leveraged by political actors and amplified through media narratives to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment.
- Group relative deprivation, fueled by perceptions of migrants gaining unfair access to scarce resources like social services, drives anti-immigrant sentiments.
- Media plays a critical role as a powerful amplifier of anti-immigrant rhetoric, significantly shaping public discourse.
- Civil society organizations play a vital role in combating anti-immigrant sentiment, but their visibility and effectiveness vary significantly across countries.
- The impact of anti-immigrant sentiment and policies differs greatly across migrant groups, influenced by a combination of cultural, racial, and political factors.

Across these contexts, the workshop underscored the need for coordinated reforms that prioritize inclusive, rights-based approaches to migration governance. The rise of anti-immigrant sentiment presents a serious challenge to human rights and social cohesion. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must work together to combat misinformation, implement robust legal protections, and foster community solidarity. The recommendations in this policy note provide a pathway to addressing these challenges, but sustained effort and collaboration will be essential to effect meaningful change.

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: From Rhetoric to International Mechanisms of Advocacy

19-20 September 2024, Istanbul

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Turkey Office

19 September Thursday

09:30 Registration / Tea & Coffee

09:45 Welcome Speech

- **Ayşem Biriz Karaçay**, Dr., Istanbul Ticaret University & GAR
- **Deniz Sert**, Prof.Dr., Özyeğin University & GAR
- **Tina Blohm**, Resident Representative, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Turkey Office

10:00-12:30 **First Session**

- **France: Mélodie Beaujeu**, Consultant and co-founder of the French NGO Désinfox-Migration
 - **Netherlands: Orçun Ulusoy**, Researcher, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- Discussant: **Didem Danış**, Associate Professor, Galatasaray University
Moderator: **Souad Osserian**, Assistant Professor, Boğaziçi University

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-17:00 **Second Session**

- **Egypt: Gerda Heck**, Assistant Professor, The American University in Cairo
 - **Lebanon: Karina Goulordava**, PhD Candidate, Koç University
- Lebanon: Maria Gabriella Travato**, Associate Professor, Norwegian University of Life Sciences
Discussant: **Rabia Karakaya Polat**, Professor Dr., Işık University
Moderator: **Kristen Biehl**, Assistant Professor, Sabancı University

15:30-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:00 **Continuation of the Second Session**

17:00 End of the day

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: From Rhetoric to International Mechanisms of Advocacy

19-20 September 2024, Istanbul

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Turkey Office

20 September Friday

09:30-12:30 First Session

- **Greece: Angeliki Dimitriadi**, Dr., ELIAMEP (The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy)
- **Bulgaria: Vesy Deyanova**
Discussant: **Deniz Y kseker**, Prof. Dr., Izmir University of Economics
Moderator: **Damla Aksel**, Associate Professor, Bah e ehir University

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:30 Second Session

- **Turkey: L l fer K r kmez Kaya**, Dr., Ege University
Dilek İ ten, Media and Migration Association
G lay U ur G ksel, Associate Professor, Istanbul Bilgi University
Sedef Turper, Associate Professor, Ko  University
Discussant: **Didem Danı **, Associate Professor, Galatasaray University
Moderator: **Ay em Biriz Kara ay**, Assistant Professor, Istanbul Commerce University

15:30-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:30 Third Session: Forum on Future Dialogue, Cooperation and Policy Proposals

- **GAR: Didem Danı  / Omar Kadkoy / Buket  zdemir Dal / Kristen Biehl**
Moderator: **Didem Danı **

17:30 Closing session / End of the workshop