Publication of *The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe. Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations*, a book edited by Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola and Meuleman

*Working on a research project launched by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (Belspo), a team of researchers from ULB, ULiège and KU Leuven have studied people’s attitudes, discourses and mobilisation towards refugees in six European countries, from 2017 to 2019. The results of their research are released in a book entitled The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe. Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations, published by Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola and Meuleman.*

*The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe. Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations*, published by Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola and Meuleman, presents the results of an international collective research project that examines the attitudes, discourses and mobilisation of the population from 2017 to 2019. It covers six European countries (Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Greece and Hungary). The book is the product of a project entitled *Public opinion, mobilizations and policies concerning asylum seekers and refugees in anti-immigrant times (Europe and Belgium)*, funded by Belspo as part of its BRAIN-be research programme.

The book covers three topics. First, it examines public opinion towards asylum seekers and refugees, from a transnational European perspective. Then, it attempts to explain the polarisation of public opinion by focusing on mobilisations - both in favour of migrants and against them - and by looking into practices of hospitality and hostility in local communities. Lastly, the book’s third objective is to gain insight into how asylum seekers and refugees perceive the reception they are given. The latter topic focuses specifically on the situation in Belgium.

**Mixed public opinion within Europe**

Starting in 2015, public opinion on immigration and asylum has become increasingly polarised, with a dichotomy between two positions: ‘for’ or ‘against’. An analysis conducted over a longer period, however, shows that public opinion is relatively stable. Furthermore, opinions between different European countries also vary. Countries whose citizens wish to see lower immigration rates are located in the southern and eastern regions of Europe: the former because they are directly confronted with arrivals of new asylum seekers and migrants; the latter because they have, historically, not been confronted with international immigration. While individual factors (lowest levels of education, lowest incomes and highest unemployment rates) contribute to negative opinions towards refugees and migrants, an analysis of public opinion also suggests that the discourse of political parties - especially far-right parties where they exist - contributes to building a frame for thought that promotes hostility towards refugees and migrants.

**Hospitality, empathy**

Collective demonstrations of hostility in Europe have been outnumbered by initiatives centred on hospitality and solidarity. Starting in the summer of 2015, the mobilisation of ordinary citizens has reached significant numbers and is a relatively new phenomenon compared to initiatives launched by traditional defenders of migrant rights. This humanitarian mobilisation can be explained by moral and emotional factors, with the concept of
hospitality being at the heart of initiatives launched by non-institutional players from the civil society. The term ‘hospitality’ was used because the activities carried out involve satisfying the immediate needs of asylum seekers, and because empathy plays a significant part in the initiatives. Ordinary citizens do not initially set out to defend political demands for more migrant rights, yet as they come into contact with asylum seekers, the organisation of the movement and the reactions of political players, citizens taking part in hospitality activities become more politically involved. Their actions constitute a form of subversive humanitarianism, in that they stand in opposition to the public authorities’ organised inaction.

The 2015 refugee crisis has led to the emergence of new civil society organisations. Welcome Refugees is a transnational organisation that was created in many European countries and whose main goal is humanitarian support. However, other mobilisations were launched by existing organisations, as was the case in Sweden and Italy. In Germany and Belgium, support for asylum seekers was offered by organisations that were not previously active in the field of immigration.

From humanitarian aid to polarisation

The reasons why people mobilise - which are either very political, or very humanitarian - may also converge. While many volunteers in the newly created organisations mobilise for mainly humanitarian reasons (providing housing, handing out meals, giving clothes, etc.), the lack of an effective and organised response from EU institutions and Member States results in volunteers becoming more politically active. In Belgium, early spontaneous actions became more political, and were eventually referred to as ‘political solidarity’. In Hungary, meanwhile, in response to the growing politicisation of civil society organisations against the government’s action, the government imposed sanctions on non-governmental organisations providing aid to asylum seekers.

These observations are developed in seven chapters, in the book The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe. Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations, edited by Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola and Meuleman.


Several authors are also publishing an analysis on The Conversation France – creative commons:


Scientific contacts:
Andrea Rea, Université libre de Bruxelles, andrea.rea@ulb.ac.be
Alessandro Mazzola, Université de Liège and Université libre de Bruxelles, alessandro.mazzola@ulb.ac.be
Marco Martiniello, Université de Liège, m.martiniello@uliege.be
Bart Meuleman, KU Leuven, bart.meuleman@kuleuven.be

A. Rea, M. Martiniello, A. Mazzola, B. Meuleman (eds.)
256 pages – 23 euros (print)

Available in open access at [https://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=1005529](https://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=1005529)