



REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

Summary of Work Package 9

REPORT

Authors: Christine E. Meltzer
Nora Theorin
Christian Schemer
Jesper Strömbäck

Published: December 2019



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Summary of Work Package 9

Authors: Christine E. Meltzer¹, Nora Theorin², Christian Schemer¹, Jesper Strömbäck²

¹ University of Mainz, Germany

² University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Published: November 2019

Paper prepared as part of the REMINDER project

www.reminder-project.eu

Correspondence address:

Christine E. Meltzer, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Department of Communication,
Jakob-Welder-Weg 12, 55099 Mainz, Germany Mail: meltzer@uni-mainz.de



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020
research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727072

Abstract

This document summarises the key findings from Work Package 9 (WP9) of the REMINDER project. Work Package 9 explored public opinion toward free movement in seven European countries. It also examined how exposure to specific types of content and narratives about migration (identified in WP8) affects individuals' attitudes toward and perceptions of intra-EU mobility. A three-wave panel survey and a survey experiment were administered in seven core case study countries: the UK, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Hungary, Romania and Poland.

The research was organized in four main steps: (1) a comprehensive review of the existing literature on media effects on EU free movement and migration (see Eberl et al. 2018); (2) a three-wave panel study on public opinion toward free movement over time; (3) linkage analysis combining tailored media data from WP8 with data from the panel study; (4) a survey experiment testing for causal effects of media content on mobility attitudes. For extensive details about the different analyses, as well as detailed discussions of findings and limitations, please refer to the different outputs of the Work Package.

This work package had the following main objectives:

- Assess the importance of migrants' EU or non-EU origins in conditioning the impact of discourses about the socio-economic impacts of mobility.
- Understand how receptiveness to different discourses depends on individuals' socio-economic profile, political preferences and ideology.
- Assess the extent to which narrative/story-telling elements rather than statistical/data-driven elements influence perceptions about EU migrants' impact on welfare (in close collaboration with WP8).
- Understand to what extent discourses of EU mobility welfare affect public perceptions of welfare impact and attitudes towards EU mobility generally, through a multi-wave cross-country survey experiment.

The analyses in Work Package 9 show that attitudes toward free movement are strongly associated with support for the EU. Further, those attitudes are highly stable over time. We do find media effects on attitudes toward free movement, they are however rather small.



Furthermore, the results suggest that there are cross-national variations in media effects. Yet, there is indication that the salience of migration-related news and whether this news is positive or negative affects free movement attitudes. This summary discussion is general, and aimed at a non-academic audience.

The insights reviewed in this final report can be grouped into the following areas:

1. Public opinion toward free movement is more positive in sending than in receiving countries: Overall, we find that, in the EU, attitudes toward free movement tend to be positive. The most positive attitudes toward free movement are found in Romania, followed by Poland, and Hungary. In Germany, Sweden, and Spain respondents are more neutral toward free movement, but still positive. The UK is the only country where people have negative attitudes toward free movement. Positive attitudes toward free movement are associated with support for the EU.

2. Attitudes toward free movement are affected by perceived threats from intra- and extra-EU immigration: When looking at the relation between immigration attitudes and free movement attitudes, we found a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western European countries. In Poland, Hungary, and Romania it was specifically perceived threats from European immigrants that were associated with negative free movement attitudes. In Germany and Sweden, on the other hand, it was specifically perceived threats from Non-European immigrants (from Africa and the Middle East) triggering such negative attitudes. In the UK and Spain, it was threat perceptions about both immigrant groups that negatively affected free movement attitudes.

3. Attitudes toward free movement are highly stable. Yet, they are affected by media: To look at attitudes toward free movement over time, we conducted a three-wave panel analysis (wave 1: December 2017, wave 2: June 2018, wave 3: October 2018). Analysis shows that free movement attitudes are highly stable over time. This suggests that attitudes toward free movement are rather strong, and hence not easily affected by contextual factors (e.g., media reporting). When linking media content (from WP8) with our panel study, we find that media messages affect attitudes toward and perceptions of free movement. First, those who received negative migration-related news developed more negative attitudes toward free



movement over time. This is specifically the case in Hungary. Further, visibility of migration related news lead to more positive attitudes in the UK.

4. The (journalistic) style of media messages affects attitudes toward free movement: To test causal effects of specific types of media content on attitudes toward free movement, we conducted a survey experiment in the seven core-case countries between 5 and 24 September 2019. Respondents were randomized into different experimental groups, each of which was given a different fictional news article to read. The articles varied in a variety of respects, including: frame (positive versus negative economic and labour market implications of free movement); journalistic style (exemplar, i.e. focused a person whose experiences exemplify the free movement issue, versus base-rate information, i.e. official information from a researcher about general implications of the issue); and type of intra-EU migration (immigration versus emigration). The findings show that the articles focusing on negative implications of free movement on the economy and labour market led to more negative attitudes toward free movement than the articles focusing on positive implications. Looking at the findings from the different countries, this media effect was identified in Spain and Sweden. Furthermore, the results indicate that the effects of news coverage focusing on intra-EU *immigration* might be stronger in countries with higher unemployment rates.



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1. Public opinion toward free movement is more positive in sending than in receiving countries

This analysis is based on the first wave of the panel survey, conducted between 6 December 2017 and 5 January 2018 in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. In each country, a sample of the population (18 and older) was assessed via online access panels. All respondents were approached through these online panels. Respondents were classified by socio-demographic characteristics into quotas set on age, gender, and region to ensure a representative sample. In total, 22,862 respondents completed the interview (length in minutes: $M = 16.44$, $SD = 10.78$). To ensure the quality of data, respondents with short response times and an unusual amount of “don’t know” answers as well as “straight liners” were excluded from the sample. The final sample comprises 21,882 respondents (51.8% female; M age = 47.8 years). Weighting of the data is based on age, gender, and region.

Attitudes toward freedom of movement were measured with five items, tapping into different aspects of free movement (or aspects that frequently appear in public debate about the matter). More specifically, the items tap into perceived impact on national security, culture, labour market, welfare system, and economy.

1. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **restricted to help fight crime.**
2. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **free to increase mutual understanding.**
3. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **restricted to protect native workers.**
4. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **restricted to avoid exploitation of the public services (e.g. education and health services).**
5. The movement of individuals between EU countries should **be free to promote economic growth.**

Respondents answered on a five-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Items 1, 3, and 4 were reverse coded and then all items were summed up into one composite index ($M = 3.28$, $\alpha = .84$). This index serves as the central dependent variable for all WP 9



analyses (with a small deviation for the experimental analysis, where only four items were used).

Overall, attitudes toward free movement are positive in the EU. The UK is the only country with negative attitudes toward free movement. The most positive attitudes toward free movement are found in Romania, followed by Poland and Hungary. In Germany and Spain respondents are more neutral toward free movement, but still positive. Attitudes are close to neutral in Sweden, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

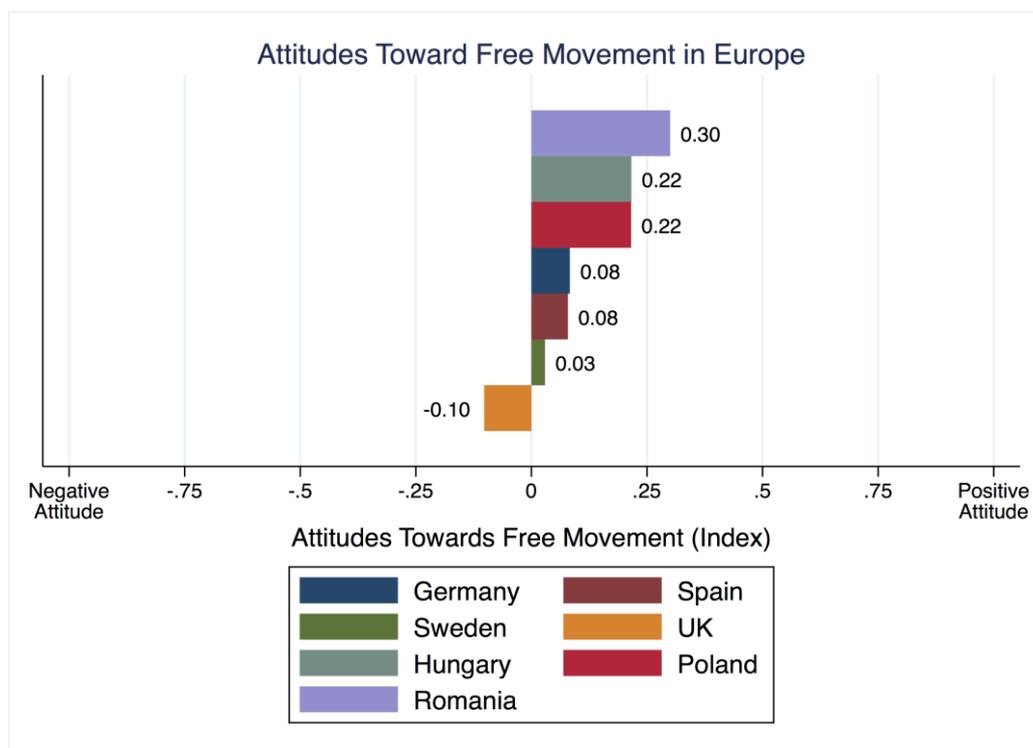


Figure 1. Attitudes toward free Movement in Europe. Composite index from -1-1; 1 indicating favourable attitudes toward free movement, 0 = neutral.

Looking at predictors of free movement attitudes, we found that support for the EU was strongly associated with positive attitudes toward free movement. Thus, it is possible that highlighting the benefits of free movement might lead to more positive attitudes toward the EU as a whole. Further, higher levels of education also turned out to be associated with positive attitudes. A narrow conception of citizenship (i.e. the notion that to be a true citizen

of the countries under investigation, one has to be born in the country, to speak the country's language and follow the country's customs and traditions) was negatively associated with free movement attitudes. For extensive details, please refer to Meltzer et al. 2018.



2. Attitudes toward free movement are affected by threat perceptions from intra- and extra-EU immigration

We looked at attitudes toward free movement in relation to four different immigrant groups: immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. Thus, two of the groups were from within the EU, two from outside of the EU. For each group, respondents indicated perceived impact of immigration. Perceived impact was assessed with six items concerning *economic* impacts (e.g. ...take jobs away in [country] vs. create new jobs in [country]), *cultural* impacts (e.g. ...undermine the cultural life in [country] vs. enrich the cultural life in [country]) and *security* impacts (e.g. ... make [country]'s safety problems worse vs. make [country]'s safety problems better).

Looking at the overall perceived impact of immigration, we can observe that immigration is perceived as a threat more than a benefit. However, the impact perceptions differ between the immigration groups. Generally, both groups from outside Europe trigger larger threat perceptions than the groups from within Europe. Western European immigrants are the only group that is perceived to have positive economic and cultural impact on society. Hence, they are seen as beneficial to the job market and culture of the host country compared to all the other immigrant groups under investigation. This, however, does not apply to perceived safety perceptions. For extensive details, please refer to Meltzer et al. 2018.



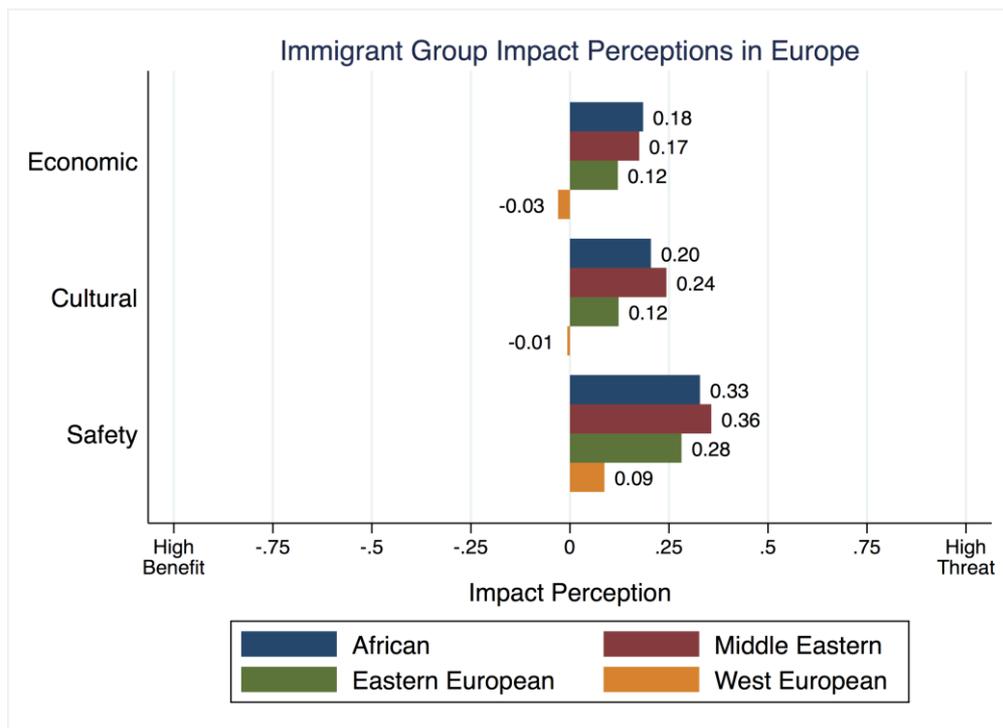


Figure 2. Perceived threats from immigrant groups from within and outside of Europe.

To analyse how those immigrant groups affect free movement attitudes, we conducted structural equation models. We grouped the two immigrant groups from inside of Europe and the two from outside of Europe. The items were coded, so that a higher number means high perceived threat from those groups. Further, we divided the sample so that Germany and Sweden (as the two main receiving countries in our sample) were grouped in one model, and the Eastern European countries Poland, Hungary, and Romania were in a second group. The UK and Spain were treated individually: the UK because it has shown to be the country where we found the most negative attitudes toward free movement; Spain because it is both a receiving country from extra-EU migrants and a sending country with respect to inner Europe. Education, age, and gender were controlled for in all models.

Results show fundamental differences for Eastern and Western European countries. In Poland, Hungary, and Romania, it was perceived negative impacts from European immigrants in particular that were associated with negative free movement attitudes (although one has to keep in mind that these are the countries where we found the most positive overall attitudes toward free movement). On the other hand, in Germany and Sweden it was perceived negative impact from Non-European immigrants (from Africa and the Middle East) that triggering such negative attitudes.

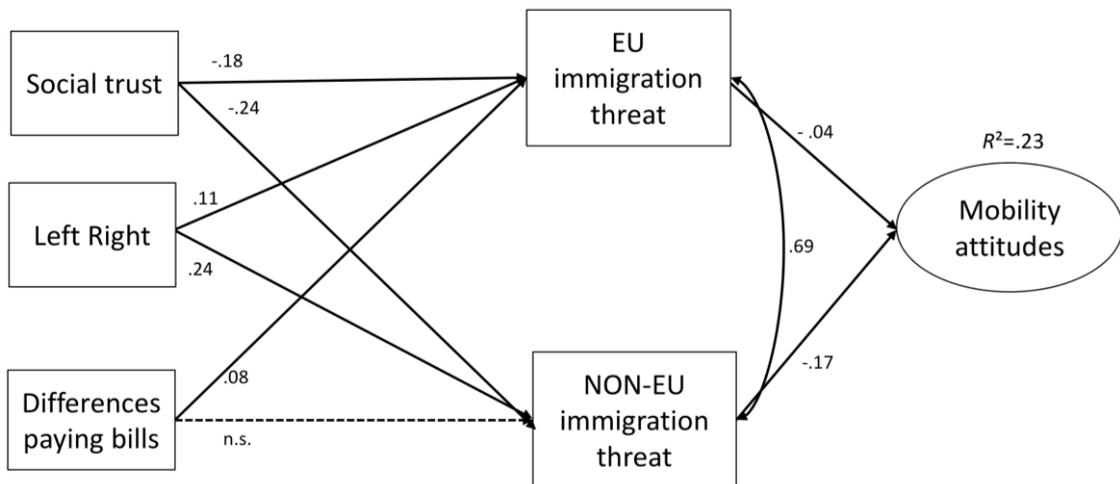


Figure 3: Perceived threat from immigration groups in relation to free movement attitudes in Germany and Sweden, $N = 5010$, $\chi^2=255.8$, $df=72$, $CMIN/DF = 3.05$, $p<.001$ $RMSEA=.011$ (90% C.I.: .009, .012), $GFI=.998$.

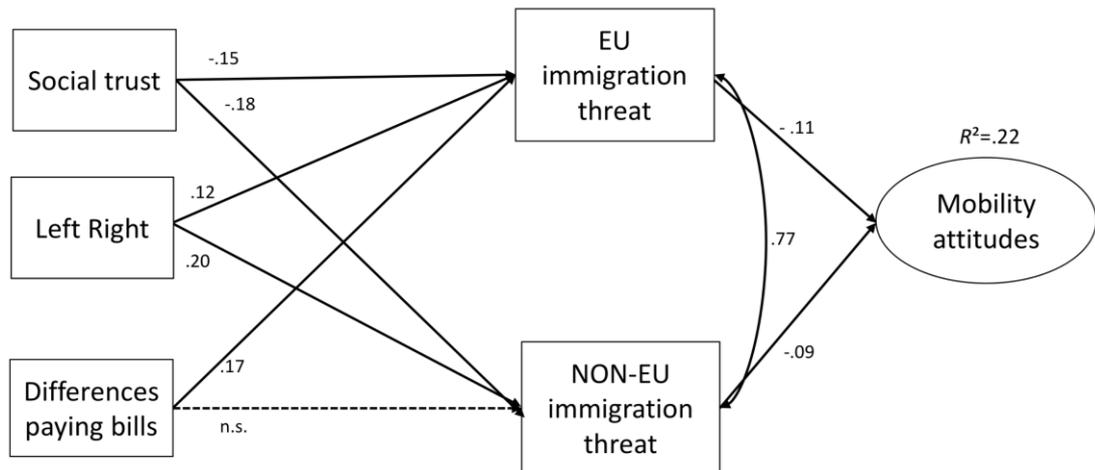


Figure 4: Perceived threat from immigration groups in relation to free movement attitudes in Poland, Hungary and Romania, $N = 7406$, $\chi^2=255.8$, $df=72$, $CMIN/DF = 3.05$, $p<.001$ $RMSEA=.011$ (90% C.I.: .009, .012), $GFI=.998$.

The analyses from the UK and Spain show the same pattern: attitudes toward free movement are negatively affected by perceived threats from both EU- and non-EU immigrants. However, in the UK the perceived threat from EU immigration was the larger factor.

3. Attitudes toward free movement are highly stable. Yet, they are affected by media

The panel survey allows examination of free movement attitudes over time. Further, we combined tailored media data collected by WP8 with public opinion data, to examine media effects on free movement attitudes. In a first analysis, we linked content data to the general population in five countries (Spain, UK, Germany, Sweden, Poland) using two panel waves. This analysis focuses on the period between December/January 2017 (wave 1) and June/July 2018 (wave 2). The media sample contains different types of online news outlets selected based on circulation figures, genre, and national and regional distribution. The analysis focuses on two central predictors of immigration-related media content: frame salience (i.e. the presence of immigration-related topics and actors in the news) and frame sentiment (i.e., the valence of the news). We further included a number of control variables such as age, gender, education, ideology, political interest, and media use.

A requirement for a positive finding as regards media effects is that respondents' policy preferences on free movement actually shifted over the course of the campaign. More than half of the respondents changed their policy preferences at least slightly, with 28% becoming more negative towards free movement and 26% becoming more positive towards it. However, 28% of all respondents did not change their policy preference. Thus, an important finding is that attitudes toward free movement are rather stable and, therefore, there is not much room for media to exert effects. Against our expectations, we found a positive effect with respect to frame salience: that is, consumption of immigration-related news leads to more positive free movement attitudes over time. We further found an effect with respect to frame sentiment. Being exposed to media coverage that emphasizes a specific frame in migration-related media coverage indeed affects policy preferences in relation to this particular frame (see table 1 below). A closer look at the individual country regressions shows that the effect of frame salience tends not to be very robust. While salience leads significantly to more positive attitudes toward free movement in Germany, the effect in the United Kingdom is only marginally significant. In the other countries, the effect of salience is insignificant. Frame sentiment, however, affects free movement attitudes in Germany, Sweden, and Poland. Overall, policy preferences toward free movement were characterized



by stability rather than change during the period of analysis. For extensive details, please refer to Eberl et al. 2018.

Table 1: Linear Regression for Media Effects on Policy Preferences towards Free Movement with Country Fixed Effects

| Dependent variable: Policy Preferences (Wave 2) | Model 1 Frame salience β | Model 2 Frame sentiment β | Model 3 All β |
|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| Policy Preferences (Wave 1) | 0.437*** | 0.436*** | 0.436*** |
| Frame Salience | 0.067*** | | 0.030* |
| Frame Sentiment | | 0.115*** | 0.089*** |
| Online media use | 0.015 | 0.014 | 0.015 |
| Social media use | 0.008 | 0.009 | 0.009 |
| Television media use | -0.013 | -0.013 | -0.013 |
| Print media use | -0.034*** | -0.034*** | -0.034*** |
| Trust in media coverage | 0.024** | 0.024** | 0.024** |
| Political interest | 0.013 | 0.013 | 0.013 |
| Ideology (L/R) | -0.098*** | -0.100*** | -0.099*** |
| Support of EU | 0.159*** | 0.161*** | 0.160*** |
| Age | 0.046*** | 0.045*** | 0.045*** |
| Gender | -0.026** | -0.027** | -0.026** |
| Education | 0.049*** | 0.050*** | 0.049*** |
| Country fixed effects included | YES | YES | YES |
| <i>n</i> of observations | 15,366 | 15,366 | 15,366 |
| <i>N</i> of clusters | 7,794 | 7,794 | 7,794 |
| R ² | 0.360 | 0.361 | 0.361 |
| aic | 42507.3 | 42504.4 | 42492.4 |

Note. Standardized beta coefficients are shown. Model includes non-nested dummy variables for countries. Standard errors clustered by respondents.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

In a second analysis, we looked at education as a moderator of media effects. This analysis was conducted in all seven countries of the sample, using again two panel waves (December 2017/January 2018 (wave 1) and October 2018 (wave 3)). We looked again at salience (i.e. relative visibility of migration coverage) and migration-related sentiment in the media, and linked these to public opinion. The findings from the overall model including all countries shows that higher educational degrees, being male, self-positioning on the left, and support for the EU are related to developing more positive free movement attitudes over time. In



Hungary, we find that moderately-educated respondents are especially affected by the valence of the news they read about immigration. For people with moderate educational levels, exposure to positively-valenced migration news leads to more positive free movement attitudes over time. At the same time, people with moderate educational levels who received negative news about migration became more negative over time. This however does not occur for the low- and highly-educated respondents. However, such a regulating effect of education occurred only in Hungary.



4. The (journalistic) style of media messages affects attitudes toward free movement

In order to test causal effects of specific types of media content on attitudes toward free movement we conducted an online survey experiment in the seven core case countries. The experiment was conducted between 5 and 24 September 2019. In each country, quota definitions were based on gender and age. 8, 457 respondents participated (approximately 1,200/ country).

In the experiment, we tested the effects of news frame, journalistic style and the type of intra-EU migration that is being covered. Specifically, respondents in the experiment were randomized into different experimental groups, with each group reading a fictional news article. The articles varied with respect to frame (positive versus negative economic and labour market implications of free movement), journalistic style (exemplar, i.e a person whose experiences exemplify the free movement issue, versus base-rate information, i.e. official information from a researcher about general implications of the issue), and type of intra-EU migration (immigration versus emigration). The articles were structured in the same way (heading, introduction, quotes etc.), and designed to look like screenshots of real online-news articles (see the example below). Respondents in the control group read an equally long news article about an unrelated topic.



Figure 5: Example of the stimulus

To explore if the different articles led to different attitudes, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward free movement after reading the article they were assigned to. Specifically, respondents indicated to what extent they agreed with four statements about free movement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Since the articles were about labour market and economic implications of free movement, these four statements also tapped into perceived impact of free movement on the labour market (statement 1, 2 and 4 below) and economy (statement 3 below).

1. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **restricted to protect workers born in [country]**.
2. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **free to deal with labour shortages**.
3. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **free to promote economic growth**.
4. The movement of individuals between EU countries should be **restricted to avoid undercutting of wages**.

Statement 1 and 4 were reversed so that a higher value on all statements indicated more positive attitudes toward free movement. Based on the items, an index was then constructed and rescaled to range from 1-5 ($M = 3.43$, $\alpha = .82$).

All analyses are based on the 7,026 respondents who did not give an incorrect answer on three quality check questions about the news article they were assigned to.¹ The findings show that the articles focusing on negative implications of free movement on the economy and labour market led to more negative attitudes toward free movement than the articles focusing on positive implications (see Table 2). However, this media effect was not robust across countries: Looking at the findings from the different countries, the effect was identified in Spain and in Sweden, but not in the other countries.

¹ 1) If the article deals with immigration or emigration, 2) if the article deals with mainly positive or negative consequences of migration, and 3) if the person who figured in the article was a man or a woman.

Table 2. Framing effects on attitudes toward free movement (ANOVA)

| | Negative article | Positive article | Control article |
|----|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| M | 3.40 | 3.46 | 3.37 |
| SD | 0.92 | 0.91 | 0.86 |
| N | 3,433 | 3,257 | 336 |

Note: Pairwise comparisons (Tukey) negative vs. positive = .053* (.022); negative vs. control = n.s.; positive vs. control = n.s.

Another key finding from the experiment is that the effects of news coverage focusing on intra-EU *immigration* might be stronger in countries with higher unemployment rates, since there were only significant effects of the articles focusing on immigration in Spain and Sweden: the two countries with the highest unemployment rate.² Specifically, we found that respondents in Spain who received one of the positive articles about immigration showed more positive attitudes than respondents in the control group (M , positive condition = 3,59. M , control condition = 3,186). In Sweden, in turn, respondents reading negative articles showed significantly more negative attitudes than respondents in those reading positive ones (M , negative condition = 3,111. M , positive condition = 3,282).

Finally, it should be noted that we did not find any difference in attitudes toward free movement depending on whether respondents read an article focusing on an exemplar or on base-rate information.

²Unemployment rates 2018: Germany – 3,4 %, Hungary – 3,7 %, Poland – 3,9 %, Romania – 4,2 percent , Spain – 15,3 %, Sweden – 6,3 % The UK – 3,9 %. (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>).

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REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 12 consortium partners in 8 countries across Europe



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme under grant agreement no 727072

