

# Welfare Nationalism and Rising Prejudice against Migrants in Central and Eastern Europe

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## Introduction

Even though Central and Eastern European (CEE)<sup>1</sup> countries have not traditionally been the prime destinations for immigrants and refugees, the significance of migration has been increasing in the political debates as well as in academic research. In the past, the focus has been on the demographic challenge posed by the mass outflow of CEE citizens after accession to the European Union (EU). Since the arrival of a massive number of asylum seekers in 2015, the debate shifted toward the containment of refugee flows and non-European immigrants. At the EU level, CEE governments in general, and the Hungarian government in particular, opposed the mandatory scheme for the relocation of asylum applications and pushed for anti-immigrant policies. This scheme involved mandatory quotas for accepting refugees with the goal of a more equal geographical distribution; however, it was abandoned in 2018 after the strong opposition by CEE countries. Currently, the member states are allowed to receive refugees on a voluntary basis in designated areas within their territories and to screen migrants for their eligibility in applying for asylum prior to reaching the EU (Sarnyai 2018). These changes at the EU level are taken as a signal of CEE countries becoming policymakers and shapers after 2015, as the domestic responses to

the refugee crisis and more broadly to international migration were influential in shaping the migration regimes and views across European countries (Geddes and Scholten 2016).

There are three main arguments in this chapter with regards to the relationship between public attitude toward refugees and migrants and policy outcomes. First, we claim that the recent explosion of anti-immigrant sentiments in the CEE region can only be partially explained by the rise in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. While the salience of immigration peaked during the massive refugee flows to Europe, it considerably declined, with the exception of Hungary, immediately afterward. We also show that while a majority of the people in the CEE region believe that foreigners working and living in their nation do not improve the economy, there is less concern about foreigners undermining the cultural life. Over the years there has been a higher proportion of people who deem immigration as harmful for the economy; however, there is no uniform trend with regards to the opinions about the effect of immigration on the country in general, even after the refugee influx. Hence, we propose that the economic fears are relatively stable and are vastly crucial in shaping the public attitudes against migrants and refugees across CEE countries.

Secondly, we argue that welfare nationalism in the region is particularly high and resilient, which can explain a large part of the anti-immigrant sentiments among citizens. We assert that the already existing prejudices against migrants are further elevated by the political discourse in the CEE region through the instrumental usage by politicians and feed into welfare nationalism. Similar to many other European countries, also in all CEE nations, immigration is overwhelmingly portrayed as a security problem by the politicians and as a potential threat to the homogeneity of the nation. Nonetheless, the symbolic threats in the region are often packed tightly together with economic losses, especially in terms of reductions in welfare benefits for the local citizens. Especially, with the imminent and visible flow of a huge number of refugees and asylum seekers, politicians are able to enmesh the deeply rooted economic fears and cultural sensitivities, leading to strong public opinions about who should receive welfare benefits in general and under what conditions the immigrants should be given the same rights and services. We show that all countries, but particularly Hungary and Czechia, saw large increases in welfare nationalism after the refugee crisis, which is not the general trend in Europe. A very significant part of the public affirmed that immigrants should never obtain social benefits and services even if they contribute to the labor market and pay taxes or become citizens.

Finally, we suggest that welfare nationalism and the perceptions about the immigrants' deservingness of social rights are not primarily determined by the individuals' socioeconomic position. Although income, education,

and labor market status can be undeniably significant in explaining welfare attitudes, sociotropic concerns about the overall health of the system, and a sense of shared identity, might dominate self-interest motives. On the one hand, people who might have either nothing to lose or something to gain from immigrants' inclusion into the welfare system could have very restrictive attitudes. On the other hand, people who might typically be exposed to greater economic competition might be more supportive. As discussed previously, economic anxieties with respect to immigration have always been more prevalent in the CEE region and remain so in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. However, our findings indicate that perceived economic threats are not necessarily driven by individuals' socioeconomic positions, and a significantly higher percentage of the citizens in the CEE countries deem ethnic identity or belonging to a nation as the main basis for welfare entitlements and social assistance. Hence, as outsiders, the immigrants are denied social benefits after they work and are perceived to generate a burden for public resources. In all CEE countries, the percentage of people who view immigrants as not deserving of the same rights, even when they obtain citizenship, is notably higher than in the rest of the EU member countries, which clearly implies that ethnic or other common identities together with more economic anxieties are fundamental to understand the anti-immigrant sentiment in the regions.

In the next section, we summarize a number of theories about the determinants of migration attitudes, how these are shaping welfare nationalism and leading to exclusionary preferences. The third section discusses public opinion and salience of migration in the CEE region between 2002 and 2018. In the fourth section, we look into the development of welfare nationalism in these countries and possible determinants. The final section offers a few concluding remarks on the further impact of selective solidarity for migration policies in the CEE region.

## **Migration and Welfare Nationalism**

In the literature, economic and cultural anxieties are discussed as the two most important sources of anti-immigration prejudices. The most widely discussed effects of migration on the recipient country's economy occur through labor market adjustments. When a large number of foreigners enter, labor supply expands and, depending on the skill composition of the newcomers, the relative returns in the labor market change. For example, the low-skilled immigrants would hurt low-skilled natives primarily due to reduced wages, which in turn increases the possibility that the latter group would oppose migration-friendly policies (Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Despite their intuition, labor market competition theories usually fall short of

explaining the public opinion on migration. There is little evidence indicating whether skills, unemployment rate, or GDP per capita is significant in capturing the variance of attitudes toward immigrants and refugees either at the country level or across countries. It has been shown that immigration does not decrease wages or generate unemployment (Card 2005). Yet, the beliefs about economic competition and perceptions about immigrants lowering wages mean job opportunities and welfare benefits can have major effects on the formation of attitudes (Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit 2015). Hence, the more recent work focuses on the perceptions rather than objective threats in the labor market, and it has been confirmed that perceptions about competition rather than actual competition is explanatory for public opinion on migration across nations (Hainmueller et al. 2015; Schneider 2008).

Cultural anxieties that are related to migration include a fear of the unknown and an aversion to becoming exposed to new beliefs and customs. If the members of a particular ethnic or cultural group perceive differences in values, norms, and beliefs with the immigrants, they are more likely to have prejudices and favor anti-immigration policies (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). These symbolic threats would be more pronounced if the sensed social distance from the immigrant groups was higher. The existence of outsiders could serve to raise the cohesion within the group and hence could be used as a tool by politicians and people controlling the social and cultural practices. The realistic and symbolic threats might not be related to self-interest, and arrival of immigrants could be viewed as detrimental to the overall institutional setup or the way of life of all citizens in a nation. In other words, sociotropic concerns might be as important as self-interest in shaping people's opinions about migration and their policy preferences. Nonetheless, there is scarce empirical testing of sociotropic considerations both economically and culturally. The difficulty of operationalization and lack of cross-country data make it hard to distinguish the impact of perceived collective threats on immigration attitudes. However, in the existing studies it has been found that there are substantial differences between societies, and while in some nations the sociotropic economic issues are found to be more prevalent, in other nations the cultural conflicts are key to the determination of the public views on refugees and migrants (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

Beliefs about economic losses that are usually associated with an influx of migrants also include reduction of welfare benefits, and even though these could be subjective, they are still realistic threats concerning material interests of the citizens of the nation. Additionally, ideas about welfare benefits can be closely linked to group identity and belonging. All welfare states are based on a complex web of relations among the recipients and providers who perceive themselves as belonging to a particular state. National

identity, social rights, and obligations intersect and form strict divisions in terms of deservingness. Immigration adds further complications to welfare state relations as there is no straightforward answer to the question of what the responsibilities of the states should be in delivering welfare benefits to non-citizens (Bommes and Geddes 2000). Welfare nationalism is offered as a bridge between citizens' opinions about who should be receiving social transfers, public assistance, and immigration preferences. Even though the term "welfare nationalism" has different meanings for different researchers, it can broadly be understood as the restriction of welfare state access to the native citizen population and denial of entitlements to new members that do not share common ancestry within that state (Heizmann, Jedinger, and Perry 2018). People who have restrictive preferences for welfare state entitlements are more likely to resist open migration policies and demand exclusion of migrants having access to social rights. Contrarily, people who are more generous toward others with regards to social benefits and services are expected to also be more welcoming to refugees and immigrants.

Although the literature on welfare nationalism is growing, it is a difficult subject to examine fully at a cross-country level. For example, considering the basis of national identity, the perceived distance between the immigrants from national identity criteria and the deservingness of immigrants on nonidentity criteria, such as need or work ethic, have to be defined (Kootstra 2016; Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012). While any one of these dimensions is difficult to conceptualize, the overall lack of solidarity with the migrants appears to be the most crucial aspect of welfare nationalism. When the individuals believe that immigrants are free riders and do not contribute their fair share, it is highly unlikely that there will be support for their access to social benefits. However, it should be noted that assessment of the non-natives' deservingness is not binary, and across countries, on average, people support conditional inclusion (Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012). Once immigrants begin working and paying taxes they are regarded as being worthy of entitlement and can be granted similar welfare advances as the natives. (Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012). On the other hand, there are welfare nationalists who would like to exclude the migrants from social benefits and services all together, and we observe that the share of welfare nationalists is exceptionally high in the CEE region.

Borrowing from the realistic and symbolic threat theories, welfare nationalism at the individual level can also be explained by the perceived competition between natives and immigrants. The social benefits are scarce, and the distributional conflicts are zero-sum games in which one group wins at the expense of the others (Kootstra 2016; Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012). A direct implication of these models is a higher welfare nationalism among individuals who have more to lose if the immigrants are given the same access to welfare provisions. For example, the unskilled employees,

the unemployed, and the people who are dependent on transfer payments would be more opposed to the inclusion of migrants. In contrast, the socio-economically advantaged groups who might not fear competition and do not typically receive welfare benefits can be more open to inclusion and granting social rights to immigrants. In the limited number of studies, it has been found that strict forms of welfare nationalism are associated with low education, income, occupational status, and perceived economic insecurity (Mewes and Mau 2013; Larsen, Frederiksen, and Nielsen 2018). Besides the individual level factors, welfare nationalism can be related to the sociotropic concerns people hold about the well-being of the society they live in rather than their own self-interest. The group identity, which can be based on class, ethnicity, industry, or nation as a whole, could have a larger impact on opinions about immigration (Ford 2011; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013). While some of the characteristics that form the group identity will overlap with the personal characteristics, there can also be mismatches between them. A highly educated and well-employed individual could have higher degrees of welfare nationalism and restrictive attitudes toward immigration, despite the potential gains from cheaper and complementary labor, if the collective concerns are overwhelming.

There is considerable divergence between the extent of welfare nationalism across Europe as well as within countries. In the empirical studies, it has been shown that the majority of Europeans ask for conditional inclusion either based on work and tax payments or on becoming citizens (Mewes and Mau 2013). There is also a significant portion of respondents, around 16 percent, who favor unconditional access, and another 9 percent who demand to be completely exclusive and prefer denying immigrants the same rights to social benefits and services. The inclusionist and exclusionist views are highly concentrated in Scandinavian regions where support for unconditional access is, on average, more widespread, and support for unconditional restriction is most common in the CEE region and the Baltics (Kulin, Eger, and Hjerm 2016). Yet socioeconomic positions are argued to be insignificant to account for favoring skilled migrants over unskilled ones across countries (Valentino et al. 2019). While this finding is interpreted as verification for lack of welfare nationalism, it only suggests that individual factors are not crucial. Besides, the low-skilled migrants usually are perceived to have higher dependency on welfare benefits and social assistance, which might be the reason for disfavoring them as a group. Research has also shown that during the latest refugee flows, asylum seekers have been treated with more generosity, and welfare nationalism went down on average in Europe but not in CEE countries (Heizmann et al. 2018).

We focus on the role of welfare state attitudes and argue that they represent both economic and social fears people hold about immigrants, which do not always correspond to the individual's labor market and social status.

As will be shown later, the CEE region continues to be the exception with no clear decline in welfare nationalism and even substantial increases in Hungary and Czechia after the refugee crisis. Hence, examining welfare state attitudes can potentially inform us about the sociotropic concerns of the natives with regards to protection of the ethnic identity and how these translate into migration preferences. To this end, we investigate the developments in welfare nationalism and reasons for observing high and resilient levels of welfare nationalism in some CEE countries. Additionally, a number of individual characteristics such as education, labor market status, and income are considered to understand whether welfare nationalism is self-interest driven. Before moving to the analysis of welfare nationalism, the following section looks into the public opinion on migration and its political salience over time in the CEE region.

## **Public Opinion on Migration and Its Salience in the CEE**

The majority of the studies in migration literature pay attention to public opinion and how this influences policy. Even though there would not be a perfect correspondence between the individual-level preferences and policy outcomes, it is hardly conceivable that the elected politicians would disregard public opinion. Moreover, politicians might find it beneficial to instrumentally use the anxieties people have over migration to steer the policy platform in a specific direction. Hence, studying public opinion is very relevant in the context of migration, and there are many studies looking at the perceived economic, social, and cultural threats influencing people's views on the issue. A number of empirical regularities have been established in the literature despite huge cross-country differences. For example, not the actual but rather the perceived economic competition and overall macroeconomic conditions are found to be significant. Although prejudice and ethnocentrism are generally associated with restrictive immigration attitudes, there are crucial differences with regards to the immigrant groups. Also, at the individual level, education is argued to be consistently and positively related to more positive attitudes toward immigration, and not merely due to the lower labor market competition (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

The literature on individual preferences with regards to migration almost exclusively concentrates on the determinants and does not necessarily explore the changes in opinions over time. Besides, the overwhelming majority of the studies does not focus on the CEE region but looks at all EU member states, which overlook the significant variation across regions. In the few studies that consider evolution of migration attitudes, it has been established that antimigrant sentiments go up with the size of non-EU populations. However, the changes in GDP per capita are found to be not ex-

planatory for attitudes suggesting the secondary role of economic variables (Semyonov, Rajjman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). The later works investigating the changes over time also support these results, as the share of foreign-born populations repeatedly emerge as an important predictor. However, higher unemployment and proportion of social benefit expenditures in GDP are also documented as factors that are increasing antimigrant preferences (Hutton 2016). We first try to examine the impact of a sudden rise in the number of asylum seekers and refugees over the last five years on public opinion about migration and the political salience of the issue. One of the immediate effects of migration is raising the possibility of interaction, hence making the issue more salient for the general public. Also, if the flow is rapid, as it was in the case of refugee arrivals in 2015, the visibility of immigrant groups would go up, fueling the numerous types of anxieties evident in mainstream society.

Historically, CEE countries are not key destinations for migration, and, as can be seen from table 5.1, the total number of immigrants in the region is extremely low compared to some Western European countries. Migrants from both the EU and countries outside it remain limited, which raises doubts about the possibility of economic competition. In Czechia and Slovenia, the stock of foreign-born populations is around 4.9 percent and 5.9 percent respectively, but in the rest of the countries, it is well below 1 percent and has not increased over time. A similar picture arises when the number of asylum seekers is taken into account, since, with the exception of Hungary, there was no abrupt rise in applications. Hungary, on the other hand, had 177,135 asylum applications in 2015 alone, which is larger than the total number of asylum seekers in the rest of the CEE countries. Nonetheless, this number dropped to 671 in 2018, primarily due to the harsh policies implemented by the government. It should also be noted that more than 60 percent of the applications were from Syrian and Afghan refugees. In other parts of the region, the asylum applications were at 12,815 in Poland and 1,515 in Czechia even during the peak of refugee flows. As can be understood from these figures, Hungary appears to be the only country that received a sizable number of refugees, and we argue that political salience of immigration in Hungary increased due to both the negative media coverage and the relatively large number of asylum seekers in the aftermath of 2015 events.

In order to understand how the refugee flows have altered the public opinion about immigration, we examine people's views about foreigners' impact on economic and sociocultural conditions. We argue that economic concerns in the region are more persistent than social and cultural threats today and that the increase in the recent arrival of refugees has raised the economic fears even further. To measure each, we use two questions from the European Social Survey that have been continually asked since 2002.



**Table 5.1.** Population and Stock of Immigrants in CEE–2018.

	Population	EU-28	Non-EU
Czechia	10,649,800	219,400	296,100
Hungary	9,778,371	78,000	83,400
Poland	37,879,862	30,100	208,600
Slovakia	5,457,526	19,500	102,300
Slovenia	2,078,768	55,900	15,400

Source: Eurostat.

The same wording of the questions and the repeated nature enable us to understand the evolution of economic and social fears related to migration at the national level. Although both questions are very broad and vague, they provide a measure of the average opinion in all EU member states. Table 5.2 presents the share of people who reported that immigration is bad for the country's economy in the first column for each country and the share of people who asserted that immigrants make the country a worse place to live in the second column.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen from the data, with the exception of Poland, immigrants were increasingly recognized as harmful for the economy over the years. The largest rise was observed in Hungary where more than 21 percent of the respondents claimed that having immigrants would be bad for the economy. Also, in Czechia, the share of people who are concerned about the nation's economy has nearly doubled since 2002. Contrarily, in Western European countries, the views about immigrants harming the economy only slightly increased from 5.8 percent to 6.5 percent, on average. Also, unlike the CEE nations, there is no persistent increase as economies that received the largest number of refugees such as Germany and Greece experienced declines in the negative opinions.

When we look at the portion of surveyors affirming that immigration makes a country a worse place to live, the bias influences movement in the region. Besides Poland, in all CEE countries in 2016, more people agreed with the statement, and the ratios are comparative with 12 percent in Czechia and 14 percent in Hungary. Once again, Hungary stands out for having the least pro-migration attitudes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that economic fears are still much higher than social fears, and this is true for all cases excluding the 2016 results in Czechia. In all of the CEE countries, respondents have always been more worried about the perceived economic costs of migration at the national level than perceived social costs. This is in stark contrast to the anxieties respondents declared in the old EU member states, which display much lower ratios for immigrants being viewed as bad for the economy, and the rise over the years is much less substantial.

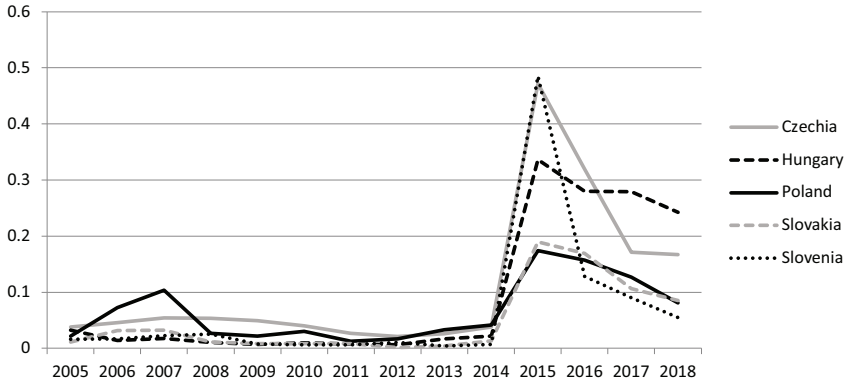
**Table 5.2.** Social versus Economic Fears in the CEE.

	Czechia		Hungary		Poland		Slovenia	
	Bad for Economy	Bad for Country	Bad for Economy	Bad for Country	Bad for Economy	Bad for Country	Bad for Economy	Bad for Country
2002	5.9	4.2	8.8	9.5	6.1	2.4	7.5	4.5
2004	9.1	7.8	11.6	7.6	8	3.7	7.5	3.6
2006			17.1	12.8	4.3	1.6	8.9	5.4
2008	7	5.2	12.9	10.6	2.7	0.9	7	5.3
2010	7.3	5.4	10.4	7.1	3.7	1.2	6.4	4.6
2012	9.6	7.8	10.6	7.4	4.9	2.1	8.6	5.1
2014	10.6	7.6	12.1	7.6	5.9	1.9	11.8	6.4
2016	10.3	12	21.5	14	5.3	1.2	12.3	7.9

Source: Author's calculations based on the European Social Survey (ESS).<sup>3</sup>

However, with respect to two cultural fears, the differences between the two regions are not equally high. For example, in Italy and Austria, there have been comparable increases in the share of people asserting that immigrants make the country a worse place to live. This ratio is 15.6 percent in Italy and 10.5 percent in Austria, but the average share of respondents remained at 6 percent in 2016 for Western Europe. Hence, economic concerns in the CEE region remain particularly relevant and need further investigation, especially for grasping the reasons why these fears instead of worries about culture and social life have become more widespread after the refugee crisis in 2015.

In addition to public opinion on migration, salience has the potential to affect policy and shape the migration regime in a country. Salience of an issue can be effective on policymaking as politicians cannot fully ignore the matters that are viewed as highly important by the voters. For example, several studies demonstrate that media coverage of politics indicates the salience of an issue and raises political accountability through informing voters (Snyder and Stromberg 2010). A positive association between the salience and effect of public opinion on policy has been found in the literature over a range of different issues. Yet with regards to migration, it has been suggested that there is loose correspondence between public opinion and policy (Lax and Phillips 2012). Even the restrictive migration systems are not meeting the demands of the public, and there is a large deviation between the rules governing the migratory flows and what citizens prefer. A number of potential reasons, such as low salience, lack of mobilization among anti-immigrant individuals, and relative autonomy of governing



**Figure 5.1.** Salience of Immigration in CEE. © Anil Duman.

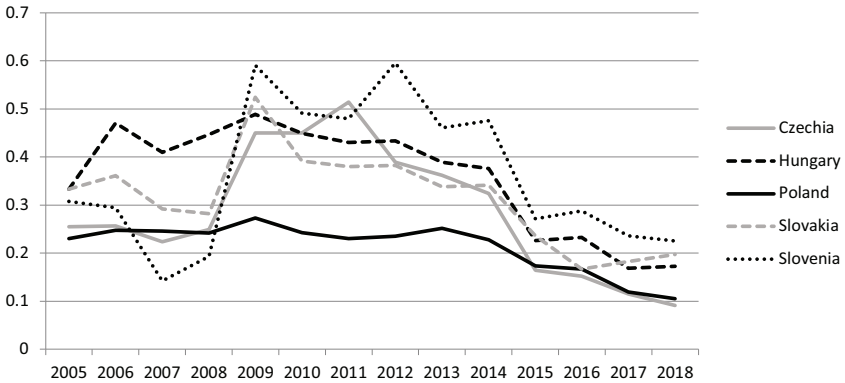
elites, have been offered to explain the divergence between the immigration attitudes and policy results (Hatton 2017). In recent studies, it has been proposed that the rise in the salience of migration and higher share of negative sentiments obliged governments to change the policies in various European countries (Ford, Jennings, and Somerville 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, migration has always been an important component of the political debates in the region, but these are mostly focused on the within-EU labor flows and integration of CEE nationals in the Western European countries. However, the onset of the civil war that began in 2011 in Syria and the following displacement of people transformed the contours of public debate in the region, and migration became one of the most politicized topics. This development can also be seen from the sudden rise in people's opinion about the significance of immigration as an issue, which is taken to be the core measure of salience in this chapter. We use a question in the Eurobarometer survey that has been repeated over the years in which the surveyors are asked to pick the two most important issues facing their country at the moment. Immigration is among the fourteen political issues<sup>4</sup> that are listed, and, as can be seen from figure 5.1, it was hardly selected by the respondents as the most important issue. Only after 2015 did the citizens of CEE countries begin to express their concerns about migration, yet in 2015 nearly 50 percent of the surveyors cited it as the most significant matter in Czechia and Slovenia. In Poland and Slovenia, the salience was below 20 percent even during the refugee crisis period. Hungary, however, ranked in the middle with almost 34 percent of the respondents stating migration as the most important issue in 2015. Nevertheless, Hungary deviates from the other countries in the region as the salience continued to be high, and it was recorded to be around 25 percent

in 2018. The only other country where migration was seen as a significant matter is Czechia, with slightly more than 16 percent of its respondents indicating the issue. After 2015, immigration lost its weight in the eyes of citizens in Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia and became much less of a concern.

One of the factors that affects the salience of an issue is the press coverage. It is no surprise that the media's portrayal of immigration-related controversies and events increases people's awareness. The refugees and migrants' arrival to Europe was framed as a crisis by the press, and the newcomers were primarily characterized as outsiders. Hate speech and hostility toward refugees and migrants was systematically presented in the media and was much more widespread in the CEE countries, especially Hungary. Another distinguishing feature of the Hungarian media was the heavy emphasis on economic reasons for migration along with narratives of security (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Additionally, Prime Minister Orbán launched a "National Consultation campaign on immigration and terrorism"<sup>5</sup> in early 2015, explaining that migrants needed to be stopped as they were all illegally crossing the borders and seeking to exploit welfare systems and employment opportunities. The press coverage together with the political discourse adopted by the governing party, Fidesz, and main opposition party, Jobbik, has elevated the salience of immigration since 2015 and supported it to remain the most important concern in Hungary even after the refugee crisis subsided. Contrarily, in Poland migration was not picked by the mainstream media, although there were various verbal attacks and negative portrayals in the right-wing press. For example, one of the most prominent newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, published with several other outlets an informative campaign on refugees in Poland with the goal of lowering fears through knowledge (Narkowicz 2018). Yet, it should be also noted that various state officials, church representatives, and civil society organizations continue to emphasize the Otherness of the refugees and tend to criminalize these groups in Poland.

Economic developments influenced the relative salience of migration, particularly the global financial crisis that put economic concerns at the top. Indeed, nearly 50 percent of the respondents picked economic issues as the most important in the CEE region during the 2009 and 2010 era with the exception of Poland. And in all of the countries, the salience of the economy declined gradually afterward, falling to less than 10 percent in Czechia yet remaining relatively high, around 23 percent, only in Slovenia by 2018. However, it should be noted as well that the economy continues to be seen as a problem regularly in these countries, and even though there has been a decline in recent years, it remains to be the top-ranking issue after the refugee flows in Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Only in Czechia and Hungary can immigration be seen as a bigger concern than the economy over the recent years. In contrast, among the Western European countries, economy is



**Figure 5.2.** Salience of Economy in CEE. © Anil Duman.

ranked above immigration with the exception of Greece. The latest refugee influx to this country caused migration to be viewed as the greatest problem. These examples suggest that in the CEE region, the arrival of asylum seekers turns out to be an important factor behind the growing political salience of immigration. In the next section, we try to establish the links between the resilient economic fears and negative attitudes toward refugees and migrants through welfare nationalism, and we propose that welfare nationalism based partially on economic fears and partially on sociocultural identities is explanatory for the rising anti-immigrant sentiments.

## Resilience of Welfare Nationalism and Anti-Immigration Sentiments in the CEE

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the migration attitudes in the region shifted dramatically, and people became much more concerned about foreigners living in their countries. We suggest that the rise of the antimigration sentiments in the CEE region can be attributed to the growing welfare nationalism. Table 5.3 presents the share of respondents opposed to granting the same rights to immigrants with citizens between 2008 and 2016.<sup>6</sup> There are five options that surveyors can choose from: immediately upon arrival; after a year, whether or not they have worked; after working and paying taxes for at least a year; once they have become a citizen; and the last option, they should never get the same rights. While people who ask for immigrants having the same rights upon arrival can be denoted as inclusionary, people who are in favor of never giving the same rights are accepted as welfare nationalists. As can be seen in table 5.3, there is an increase in welfare nation-

**Table 5.3.** Welfare Nationalism in the CEE Region.

2008	Immediately on arrival	After a year, whether or not have worked	After worked and paid taxes at least a year	Once they have become a citizen	They should never get the same rights
Czechia	2.5	5.3	35.4	41.3	15.4
Hungary	1.5	3	29.4	52.1	14.1
Poland	5.6	7.2	39.4	45.5	2.3
Slovenia	4.1	4.9	32.7	51.4	6.8
2016	Immediately on arrival	After a year, whether or not have worked	After worked and paid taxes at least a year	Once they have become a citizen	They should never get the same rights
Czechia	5.2	3.7	31.9	34.1	25.1
Hungary	2	3.2	37	28.7	29.1
Poland	4.1	5.2	40.9	41.8	7.9
Slovenia	4.3	7.9	34.3	46	7.6

Source: Author's calculations based on the ESS.

alism in all CEE countries. Given that the survey data was collected before and after the refugee crisis in Europe, part of the surge can be ascribed to the events that took place in 2015. However, with the exception of Hungary, none of these countries had a significant migrant flow, and yet welfare nationalism went up significantly, which is not the case for the rest of the EU member states. On average, welfare nationalism rose from 8.4 percent to 9.1 percent in Europe between 2008 and 2016. Contrarily, Hungary and Czechia, which already had much higher levels of welfare nationalism—14.1 percent and 15.4 percent in 2008—also experienced the biggest changes and represent the highest degrees within Europe, 29.1 percent and 25.1 percent. Poland and Slovenia had lower support for welfare nationalism, and despite the increase, they are still below the EU average.

It should also be noted that the share of respondents willing to grant rights immediately after the migrants arrive in the CEE region is well below the European means in all nations including Poland and Slovenia. For example, in 2008, the share of people who agreed that immigrants should be given the same benefits once they enter the country ranges from 19.5 percent in Sweden to 10.1 percent in Portugal. After the refugee inflow in 2015, these ratios did not go down at all and remained at approximately 18.2 percent in Sweden and rose to 18.8 percent in Portugal. Thus, welfare nationalism cannot be said to have increased everywhere in Europe, and even in countries that received a high number of refugees and asylum seekers public opinion became more inclusionary. In contrast, the views about immigrants obtain-

**Table 5.4.** Welfare Nationalism in the CEE Region across Education.

	Lowest Education	Highest Education
Czechia	30.6	17.2
Hungary	32.4	27.2
Poland	12.1	5.4
Slovenia	9.6	4.1

Source: Author's calculations based on ESS-2016.

ing the same social rights deteriorated over time: migrants are accepted to be welfare-deserving only after they contribute to the economy by working and paying taxes.

Self-interest could be the driving force behind welfare state attitudes, and as discussed previously in this chapter, individuals with lower socioeconomic positions are expected to be less favorable of sharing scarce welfare benefits with immigrants. Hence, low education, low income, and unemployment would raise welfare nationalism, as these groups will be the recipients of social assistance. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 show the distribution of welfare nationalism across education and income categories. There is a clear inverse relation between education and welfare nationalism in Czechia, Poland, and Slovenia, where respondents having lower degrees of education are significantly more in favor of excluding migrants from social rights and welfare benefits. Yet in Czechia, 17.2 percent of the highest-educated people tend to be welfare nationalists. In Hungary, education only slightly influences respondents since even the highly educated are opposed to granting the same social benefits and services. The welfare systems in the CEE countries display commonalities in terms of the nature of the groups receiving transfers, and there is no evidence that the Hungarian welfare state is more favorable to the skilled people.

Comparable results are obtained for the relationship between income and welfare nationalism in the CEE region. As can be seen from Table 5.5, in Czechia, Poland, and Slovenia, surveyors from the bottom decile have greater inclination for exclusion, whereas their top decile counterparts are more favorable toward immigrants. However, it should be noted that like the case of education in Czechia, still 18.3 percent of the individuals with high incomes are welfare nationalists, and this ratio is well above Western European countries. Once again, Hungary exemplifies an interesting case where the relatively wealthier group, tenth decile, has more welfare nationalistic tendencies than the relatively poorer group, first decile, with 29.2 percent and 26.2 percent respectively. We also looked into the association between labor market status, employed, unemployed, and retired; we

**Table 5.5.** Welfare Nationalism in the CEE Region across Income.

	1st decile	10th decile
Czechia	33.5	18.3
Hungary	26.2	29.2
Poland	14.6	4.8
Slovenia	14.1	0

Source: Author's calculations based on ESS-2016.

found no links, with the exception being a retiree in Czechia and Hungary. However, the number of respondents in each category is too low to reach any meaningful conclusions. Overall, our preliminary empirical investigation points out that the self-interest motives are not accountable for the high levels of welfare nationalism in all CEE countries, particularly in Hungary. In the remaining section we consider the role of ethnic identity and how it is instrumentalized by political parties for understanding the rise in welfare nationalism and more generally anti-immigrant prejudices in the region.

Welfare nationalism, described as a unique combination of egalitarianism and social exclusion, has been growing across most European countries, and it has been shown that “welfare for our own kind” gained prominence in the political discussions among right-wing parties (Eger and Valdez 2014). In Western societies, the emphasis on deservingness and need for social protection for only the legitimate part of the nation has been generally explained by the large influx of immigrants throughout the 1990s, increasing diversity. Nonetheless, the CEE region has not experienced any major migrant inflows, and most of the immigrants traditionally have come from neighboring countries. In some cases, in this instance Hungary, often ethnic Hungarians were returning to their nation, so the ethnic composition did not change much (Juhasz 2003). Yet table 5.5 reveals that some CEE countries have much higher degrees of welfare nationalism and have experienced increases over time. The success of right-wing parties in exploiting and shaping welfare attitudes proves to be one of the main factors as to why exclusion of migrants is more widely preferred in the region. The frames of us versus them and arguing that only the true citizens should receive public help are highly common in the political debates, as is blaming the imagined outsiders (Lugosi 2018). Immigrants, especially outside of Europe, become easy targets, and the perceived social distance between them and natives has been manipulated by right-wing parties to consolidate power domestically. These rhetorical tools have been frequently employed by leaders like Orban, who claims to be the defender of European borders and European values that are betrayed by the EU and politicians in Brussels.



Cultural conflicts have been at the core of party politics in many of these countries since the transition, and these conflicts have provided space for political polarization along ethnic and religious lines (Enyedi 2016; Pytlas 2015). From the very beginning of democratization, a significant divide has existed between the cosmopolitan liberals and nationalists in Hungary, and although the cultural battles are less pronounced in the rest of the CEE countries, they maintain a key position in the right-wing party rhetoric. For example, similar discursive tools are utilized for non-European immigrants in comparison to the ethnic and religious minorities, such as Roma and Jews being identified as foreign elements and criminals. By not being members of the imagined communities, these groups are claimed to have no legitimacy for enjoying the same rights and benefits as the natives. Given the significance of ethnic homogeneity in the national discourses, debates on minority rights, and the radical right's ability to capitalize on the movement against non-European immigrants, cultural anxieties are undoubtedly explanatory for the public opinion on migration (Korkut 2014; Bustikova 2018). However, it should be noted that in all CEE countries, right-wing parties bundle the cultural fears together with economic losses, particularly migrants draining welfare benefits. Not only is this group portrayed as culturally distant and dangerous for the ethnically defined communities but migrants are criticized and held accountable for taking away social assistance and economic opportunities from the truly deserving members of the nation. This kind of propaganda obviously has the capability not only to affect the opinions of right-wing voters but also to steer the views of the general public in the direction of welfare nationalism.

## **Conclusion**

CEE nations occupy an interesting position with regards to immigration attitudes and policies in contemporary Europe given both a low share of a foreign-born population and a very common share of negative attitudes. This chapter highlights welfare nationalism as an explanation for the high and persistent antimigrant sentiments. Welfare nationalism provides a link between the cultural and economic fears citizens hold about outsiders, yet these fears do not always overlap with the individuals' socioeconomic status. First, we show that migration attitudes in the region became more negative since the beginning of 2000s, and although this has been the case for both economic and cultural dimensions, perceived economic losses were larger. Additionally, the salience of the issue peaked in 2015 but fell significantly afterward, with the exception of Hungary, while the salience of economic concerns was mostly maintained and surpassed the worries about immigration. The right-wing political parties and the associated media outlets were

instrumental in stimulating the existing anxieties in these societies and successfully combined the perceived economic threats with sociocultural ones. Hence, immigrants became the center of political attention, and the political discourse managed to affect public opinion negatively by playing into the economic fears.

Our findings also reveal that welfare nationalism in the CEE region increased significantly and remained high, particularly in Hungary and Czechia. Economic anxieties with respect to immigration have always been more prevalent in the region and they remain so in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. Nevertheless, a major share of the citizens in CEE countries regards ethnic or other social identities as the main basis for welfare entitlements and social assistance, rather than economic bases, and refute the same rights and services for the immigrants. While welfare nationalism is not unique to the region, the degree of exclusion in these countries is particularly high and even rose higher with the inflow of refugees and political campaigns. Notions of deservingness have been repeatedly used by the right-wing political parties to emphasize the social divides between insiders and outsiders. Due to the historical peculiarities of the region, such as the magnitude of cultural conflicts, disputes over the existing minority groups and lack of experience with integration made it easier to politicize immigration and consolidate support for exclusionary policies.

We show that a big part of the welfare nationalism in the CEE region cannot be fully captured by the individual-level factors, such as education, income, and labor market status. Although socioeconomic position is relevant and, as expected, poorer and less-educated individuals are more opposed to immigrants' social rights, still a large number of relatively better off individuals share the same opinion. This suggests that ethnic or other social identities are taken to be the main basis for welfare entitlements and social assistance in the CEE countries. The immigrants who are perceived to be outsiders are easily viewed as undeserving of receiving social benefits even after they participate in the labor market and become citizens. "Welfare for our own kind" plays an important role in the political discourse of these nations, and right-wing parties are able to defend and foster restrictive policies on the grounds of deservingness and need for social protection. The public supports exclusionary rhetoric, given the persistent and highly salient economic concerns and abrupt exposure to the refugee flows.

Welfare nationalism and its role in raising prejudices against migrants has become the center of many political studies and policy analyses in recent years. The vast cross-country differences in terms of citizens' willingness to share welfare benefits with the immigrants versus favoring restrictions could hint at the future direction of policymaking. The CEE region and several countries, especially Hungary and Czechia, display significantly higher welfare nationalistic attitudes, which already have a negative impact

on the debates about migration policies across Europe. This might imply that sustainability of welfare systems that are based on solidarity and inclusion can be shaken even in societies where there is no visible change in the ethnic composition. Given that perceptions about “us versus them” and seeing migrants as outsiders are sufficient to fuel welfare nationalism in regions like the CEE where the foreign-born population is not sizable, social policy could still be based on identity. At the moment, both the significance of immigration as an issue and how this issue is discussed are very much determined by the right-wing political parties. The mainstream parties could be forced to accept even more restrictive agendas in the future if welfare nationalism and associated discourse in the CEE region are not strategically challenged.

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## Notes

1. We include Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Slovenia in the sample of Central and Eastern European countries throughout the analyses in the chapter.
2. The exact wording of the questions is as follows: “Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?” “Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?” The respondents have a scale from zero to ten, zero being bad/worse and ten being good/better.
3. The ESS is a face-to-face conducted survey that started in 2002, and it has been held every two years in a number of European countries with a list of standard questions and special modules in each wave.
4. The fourteen issues are crime, the economic situation, energy-related issues, rising prices/inflation, taxation, unemployment, terrorism, defense/foreign affairs, housing, immigration, the healthcare system, the education system, pensions, and environmental protection; “other” and “do not know” are additional choices.
5. The questionnaire was criticized by many researchers and policymakers for ignoring any professional and ethical standards. It was argued to not be suitable for any in-merit consultation, and it was found to fuel already high xenoph-

bia and intolerance toward immigrants (see European Commission documents among others for the details of the questionnaire).

6. The question in the ESS reads as follows: “Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here? Please choose the option on this card that comes closest to your view.”

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