
ADVOCATES FOR ACCEPTANCE

To what extent community sponsorship could generate support for refugee reception in the Netherlands

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Master Thesis Human Geography –
Conflicts, Territories & Identities

Nijmegen School of Management

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential of community sponsorship to generate support for refugee reception in the Netherlands. Community sponsorship, a relatively new concept in the Netherlands, refers to the partnership between governments, who facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private actors, who provide additional support to receive and settle refugees into their community.

The hypothesis that was formulated is that frequent interactions between refugees and the receiving society foster better relationships between the two groups and, subsequently, increase the support for refugee reception. Additionally, there might be an indirect effect of these positive sentiments on the social circle of the person who participates in intergroup contact. Furthermore, literature-based evidence suggests that a person's satisfaction with the national government and their knowledge of immigration-related matters might also affect their support for refugee reception.

Three research methods have been combined into a mixed-methods design: (1) a literature review that explores previous research on community sponsorship and the support for refugee reception, (2) a descriptive and statistical analysis of cross-country data on attitudes towards immigrants, collected through the Special Eurobarometer 519 survey, and (3) a qualitative study of first-hand interviews with seventeen participants of the Dutch community sponsorship program of Samen Hier.

The outcomes of this study suggest that frequent interactions with immigrants and refugees could indeed foster better intergroup relationships and, subsequently, increase the support for immigration and refugee reception. Evidence was found that contact with refugees can increase a sponsor's sense of compatibility with different cultures, decrease their perception of 'us' versus 'them' and generate more empathy and understanding for refugees. Some evidence also suggests an indirect effect on the social circle of sponsor-participants, but the strength of this effect remains unknown. Furthermore, a relationship was found between satisfaction with the national government and support for immigration and refugee reception. No significant evidence was found for the effect of knowledge of immigration-related matters. Additionally, the study found that, compared to other EU countries, the Dutch are more likely to be satisfied with their government, feel comfortable with immigrants in various social roles and consider themselves well-informed about immigration-related matters.

The main limitation of the quantitative research is the small sample size of 28 cases. For the qualitative part, a selection bias in the participants of Samen Hier was somewhat problematic. All participants were already very supportive of refugee reception before their participation in Samen Hier. Therefore, the positive impact of the program on its participants' support for refugee reception seems to have been smaller than it would have been on less supportive participants.

Thus, some evidence was found for a potential direct and indirect effect of community sponsorship programs on public support for refugee reception, through fostering better relationships between refugees and the receiving society. Furthermore, the Dutch context seems quite favourable for refugee reception. Therefore, an expansion of the current sponsorship programs or the establishment of other programs that foster contact between refugees and the receiving society could prove quite beneficial. The size of the effect could be increased if these programs involve participants that are not already very supportive of refugee reception before their participation. Therefore, a low participation threshold is recommended.

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1. Introduction

In 2021, a total of 38,860 asylum seekers and family reunification refugees entered the Netherlands after they were driven from their homes in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Turkey, Somalia and Yemen (CBS, 2022). In the previous year, another 14,045 refugees were granted a Dutch residence permit (CBS, 2022). After many had left behind their family, friends, home and belongings, they started a long, and often traumatic, flight to find refuge in the Netherlands. When they have passed the lengthy asylum procedure and received their refugee status, a second journey starts. This time, to find their way within the Netherlands, instead of into it. While language barriers, a mismatch of refugee competencies and available jobs, mental health, discrimination and limited access to the labour market might be obstacles in their way (Odé & Dagevos, 2017), status holders try to find their place in the Netherlands. For successful integration, it is essential to find a balance between the expectations of the receiving society, and the newcomer's frame of reference. While government institutions have set up various programs to assist status holders with their education and labour market participation, and to teach them about Dutch culture and customs, the largest part of integration takes place outside of these courses, in the arena of daily life (Soudagar, 2019). Through all sorts of interactions between newcomers and the receiving society, a process of mutual accommodation and acceptance starts after settlement (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). Newcomers could use assistance that is customised to their specific personal needs. While the government may struggle to provide such individual support, ordinary citizens could step in to help.

Through community sponsorship programs, Dutch citizens could contribute to the integration process of refugees. Community sponsorship is a type of refugee settlement where community members of the hosting society are directly involved in the process of welcoming newcomers, by providing mentorship, assistance, and some level of financial or in-kind support (Fratzke, 2017). In the international context, similar programs have shown positive effects on refugee integration (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). Furthermore, community sponsorship holds the potential to help build more positive relationships between refugees and members of the receiving society. By taking part in sponsorship programs, sponsors may then develop a more positive attitude toward refugees and refugee reception (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). By spreading these sentiments to other members of their society, sponsors can take the role of advocates for acceptance, and help to raise public support for refugee reception (Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2017).

In this thesis, I have explored the potential of community sponsorship to generate support for refugee reception in the Netherlands. I combined a literature review with a quantitative analysis of Eurobarometer data and a qualitative analysis of interviews with sponsor-participants of Samen Hier, the first established community sponsorship program in the Netherlands. The outcomes suggest that frequent interactions with immigrants or refugees can indeed foster better intergroup relationships and, subsequently, increase the support for immigration and refugee reception. Therefore, some evidence was found for the potential effect of community sponsorship programs on public support for refugee reception. Additionally, a relationship was found between satisfaction with the national government and support for immigration and refugee reception.

1.1 Societal relevance

In the Dublin Regulation of 2013, EU member states determined that all displaced people entering the EU could only apply for asylum in the first country of entry (Schmid-Drüner, 2021). This member state then becomes responsible for investigating the person's asylum claim. The Dublin Regulation is meant to assign responsibility for asylum claims and make sure refugees can access international protection quickly. Of course, some member states, especially those on the EU's external borders, experience more pressure than others in this system. To relieve these member states, refugee resettlement ought

to distribute refugees more evenly over the EU. Thus, through resettlement programs, refugees can be hosted elsewhere if the first asylum country struggles to fulfill their specific needs (Schmid-Drüner, 2021). However, many EU member states have not lived up to their resettlement targets. During the first six months of 2021 for example, only about 16,300 of a total amount of 26.6 million refugees have been resettled to third countries (UNHCR, 2021). One of the reasons for this gap is an increasing politicization of immigration (Solf & Rehberg, 2021).

The number of refugees entering Europe increased sharply in 2015 and 2016, because of escalating conflicts in countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. New, dangerous routes across the Mediterranean Sea increased the number of casualties during the crossings (Spindler, 2015). Dramatic representations of the crisis appeared in European media reports and increased pressure on EU member states to make them rethink existing national strategies for the reception of asylum seekers (Wagner, 2015). Tumultuous public and political debates arose across Europe, labelling this year as the start of Europe's 'refugee crisis' (Spindler, 2015). While the actual number of asylum requests dropped again after 2016, most people still overestimate the actual number of migrants and refugees entering their country (Adviesraad Migratie, 2022); about 68% of Europeans tend to overestimate the proportion of third-country nationals in their country's population (European Commission, 2022). Negative sentiments on immigration and integration can also be stirred up by populist parties (Siebers, 2010). Thus, both the portrayal of immigrants in the communication of political parties and the mass media seems to play a role in the perception of immigration (Postmes et al., 2017).

While Dutch citizens have started to prioritize immigration-related matters more over the years (Lubbers, 2022), the level of public support for immigration policies in the Netherlands has been quite stable between 2008 and 2018 (Adviesraad Migratie, 2022). Thus, there also seem to be other factors that affect support for immigration, next to political and media communication.

In the future, it is quite likely that the Netherlands will encounter new peaks in the number of immigrants and refugees entering the country. Foreign conflicts, like the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, could increase the number of refugees. Another factor could be climate change. According to a report by the World Bank, it could displace more than 216 million people by the year 2050 (Clement et al., 2021). Thus, to build capacity, raising public support for refugee reception and finding additional pathways to refugee migration and integration could prove useful in the future.

A potential way to do so could be through the community sponsorship of refugees (Fratzke, 2017). By directly involving citizens in the integration process, it can create a sense of ownership in the receiving community. This could address concerns and give participants the feeling that they have some control over immigration. Additionally, sponsorship could help to build more stable relationships between refugees and the receiving society, leading to more cohesive communities (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). Furthermore, it can support or complement national resettlement programs to distribute refugees more evenly over the EU and create new, safer migration pathways.

1.2 Scientific relevance

Two factors underline the scientific relevance of this study: a focus on good practices and the novelty of community sponsorship in the context of the Netherlands.

Because of the refugee crisis frame, a lot of attention in public and political debates has gone to the issues and dangers of refugee admission (Spindler, 2015). Scientific research has followed this path, focussing a lot on the way our society has responded to the arrival of refugees in a negative way. According to Siebers (2010) for example, resistance against immigrants has increased due to hostile discourse in both Dutch politics and the media. This has led to an increased feeling of 'us', the receiving

society, against 'them', immigrants. A lot of research has been conducted on this process called 'othering' (Van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2001). While it is good to examine the processes that could stimulate negative sentiments towards refugees, it might be even more important to look at the positive influences. Relatively little research has been conducted on alternative practices, of which community sponsorship could be an example.

While evidence for a positive influence on the acceptance of refugees has been found in the more-established Canadian context of sponsorship (UNHCR, 2020), less research has been conducted on the relatively new programs in European countries. A report on a community sponsorship program in the United Kingdom has shown that daily interactions between sponsors and refugees have built kin-like relationships between both groups and that this positive view was extended across the local community of the sponsor groups (Phillimore & Reyes, 2019). In the Netherlands, the first community sponsorship program was launched in 2019 (Smith et al., 2020). Because the program is less-established than its Canadian and, to a lesser extent, British sister, very little research has been conducted on the potential impact of sponsorship in the Netherlands. However, the literature shows that the Dutch context is quite different from, for example, the Canadian one; where Canadian citizens have been involved in the integration process for over forty years (Hyndman et al., 2021), the Netherlands has never had national immigration or integration programs that include citizen responsibility (Bakker et al., 2020). This lack of experience in the Dutch context could create a quite different playing field for community sponsorship and generate different results for similar programs. Therefore, this research attempts to fill part of the knowledge gap on how community sponsorship may affect public opinions on refugee reception in the Netherlands.

1.3 Research objectives

Thus, the involvement of citizens in refugee integration has positively affected public support for refugee reception in Canada (Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2017). Since community sponsorship is a relatively new concept in the Netherlands, its potential effect on the support for refugee reception is yet unexplored. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the potential of community sponsorship programs in the Netherlands to foster better relations between refugees and the receiving society and subsequently, to raise support for refugee reception. This leads to the following research question:

- *To what extent could community sponsorship programs generate support for refugee reception in the Netherlands?*

This research objective required some background information on community sponsorship programs and the Dutch context for refugee reception. Additionally, an exploration was needed of the factors that could influence support for refugee reception.

Therefore the following sub-questions have been explored:

- *What is community sponsorship?*
- *What characteristics distinguish the Dutch context for community sponsorship, as compared to other countries?*
- *Does the frequency of interactions with refugees relate to a person's support for refugee reception? If so, what does this relationship look like?*
- *What other factors might influence a person's support for refugee reception?*
- *Does participation in a community sponsorship program relate to a person's support for refugee reception in the Netherlands? If so, what does this relationship look like?*

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, an overview is provided of the existing literature. The first paragraph contains definitions of some important concepts. The second paragraph explores the concept of community sponsorship, including some existing programs in various countries. The third paragraph explains how interactions with refugees might influence a person's support for refugee reception. In the fourth section other factors that could affect this support are identified. The fifth paragraph explores the context of the Netherlands as a country of destination for refugees. In the sixth paragraph, the theoretical knowledge is combined into a conceptual model.

2.1 Refugees, asylum seekers, status holders and newcomers

The terms 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', 'status holder' and 'newcomer' are often interchanged in public debates, but they refer to different groups of people. A definition of these terms is therefore essential.

A universal definition of the concept of 'refugee' was made during the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in Geneva. According to its first Article, a refugee is defined as someone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14)

An asylum seeker, on the other hand, is a person who has moved across national borders, and who claims to be a refugee to receive international protection, but whose position has not yet been legally assessed by a national government or by the UNHCR (Briskman, 2015). When an asylum seeker is legally recognised as a refugee, they receive a Dutch residence permit. This person then has an official refugee status and can also be called a 'status holder' (COA, n.d.). Therefore, not every asylum seeker is a refugee, but all legally recognised refugees, or status holders, have once been asylum seekers.

Justice & Peace, the organisation that coordinates the Dutch community sponsorship program of Samen Hier, the program that this thesis explores, often uses the term 'newcomer' in their documentation. In the public debate, the term 'newcomer' is often used to describe all immigrants in the Netherlands. However, when Justice & Peace uses the term, the organization implies only persons with a refugee background; individuals who have received legal recognition for their position as a refugee and who have now entered the process of integrating into Dutch society. Thus, the concepts of 'newcomer', as used by Justice & Peace, and 'status holder' refer to the same group of people. This is also the definition that is referred to when the term 'newcomer' is used in this study.

2.2 Community sponsorship

The terms 'community sponsorship' and 'private refugee sponsorship' are essentially descriptions for the same programs, where the latter term is mostly used in the Canadian context (UNHCR, 2020). These programs involve a 'public-private partnership between governments who facilitate legal admission for refugees and private/community actors who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle refugees into the community' (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019, p. 8). Some key elements of these programs are the planned arrival of refugees, a safe and legal way to get international protection that is often a complement to existing resettlement programs, co-ownership of civil society, individuals, and the government authorities for refugee reception and integration support, and that the end-responsibility for integration remains with the government

(UNHCR, 2020). Additionally, sponsored refugees can sometimes be selected by the sponsor groups that support them (Fratzke, 2017).

Because of this broad definition, community sponsorship programs can take many forms. In some programs, government authorities will provide financial support, whereas in other programs this responsibility is given to private actors. Furthermore, the programs can relate to national resettlement programs in different ways. While some sponsorship programs are meant to support these national programs, others are fully additional to them. Fratzke (2017) divides existing sponsorship models into three broader categories:

- Sponsorships programs where private actors provide support to a refugee during and after the asylum process. Governments often encounter problems with housing and individual guidance for newcomers. Here, private actors can jump in to assist.
- Initiatives that are in support of government resettlement efforts. In this case, refugees arrive through regular national resettlement pathways and are supported by private sponsors after their arrival. These private actors are then responsible for the refugee's settlement and integration, including their financial support. This category is sometimes a complement to existing resettlement quotas, but it can also be part of it.
- Sponsorship models that are fully additional to government resettlement channels. A group of private actors selects a refugee they want to resettle and then seeks approval from the national government. The sponsor group then takes full responsibility for the refugee's integration, including their financial support.

The benefits of community sponsorship programs can thus be better refugee integration, and an increased capacity for refugee resettlement by creating additional legal channels for migration (Fratzke, 2017).

Community sponsorship programs in the international context

Community sponsorship programs have been implemented in various countries. Canada has the most experience with this type of refugee sponsorship; its first programs were set up in 1979, as a complement to its national resettlement structure (UNHCR, 2020). The main program is the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR), where sponsors become responsible for the financial and social support of refugees for up to one year (Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2017).

Forty years after its establishment, sponsor-participants of the PSR program have supported about 325,000 refugees in Canada, and the program keeps expanding (Hyndman et al., 2021). In the year 2018, community sponsorship supported 18,000 refugees, while the national resettlement program accounted for only 7,500 refugees. The 2020 target was to increase these numbers to 20,000 refugees in sponsorship programs, and 10,000 refugees in national programs, but it was not met due to COVID-19 restrictions, (UNHCR, 2018). Between 2015 and 2018, two million Canadians sponsored refugees and seven million Canadians know someone who has taken the role of sponsor (UNHCR, 2020). The majority of Canadian sponsors can be divided into two groups: (semi-)retired, faith-based volunteers and former refugees who have sponsored family members. For the second category of sponsors, it is essential to be able to name a specific refugee they wish to sponsor (Hyndman et al., 2021). This is a unique feature of the Canadian sponsorship program as compared to other international programs (UNHCR, 2020).

In January 2023, the United States also announced the launch of a sponsorship program. The goal of the so-called Welcome Corps program is to increase public support for refugee reception and to increase the number of resettled refugees in the United States. The program's goal is to mobilize 10,000 Americans to support at least 5,000 refugees (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

In Europe, the first programs were set up after 2013, to reunite family members in Germany, Ireland and France (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). Between 2013 and 2018, the German program, for example, admitted about 23,500 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2020). After 2016, Christian organisations created humanitarian corridors in Italy, France and Belgium to provide safe passage for refugees (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). This came as a reaction to the large number of deaths during the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR, 2020). In these programs, refugees are selected by faith organisations and resettled in a third country, where they receive an entry visa and where they can start an asylum procedure. After arrival, the organisation provides financial and social assistance to the refugee. By 2020, these programs had hosted about 3,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2020). In 2016, sponsorship programs were also set up to assist in government-led resettlement. The UK, Ireland and Germany took in refugees that were identified by the UNHCR (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019).

Community sponsorship programs in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, community sponsorship is still a relatively new concept. The first pilot program on community sponsorship, '*Samen Hier*', was launched in 2019 by the organisation Justice & Peace and completed in the spring of 2021 (Smith et al., 2020). This program matched a newcomer to a group of five sponsors, who formed a Welcome group. Each of the groups was coached by a community builder, whose role was to advise and support the group members when they noticed cultural differences. These community builders often also speak French, Arabic, Farsi, Tigrinya or Turkish, next to Dutch. For the pilot, a total of 42 sponsor groups were created in the Dutch cities of Almere, The Hague, Haarlem and Rotterdam, with each group hosting one refugee (Smith et al., 2020). The 42 refugees that participated in this program were mostly Syrians (52%) and Eritreans (29%). If all family members are included, 73 adult refugees and 64 children were involved in Samen Hier (Smith et al., 2020). In June 2020, a mid-term report was released on the first findings. After taking part in Samen Hier, 92% of sponsors and 82% of refugees mentioned that interactions within the group had been positive and informal, and 77% of sponsors and 82% of refugees indicated that after taking part in the program they had gotten a better understanding of each other's cultures (Smith et al., 2020). After finishing the pilot program, Justice & Peace formed and supported seven more groups in The Hague in a similar way. These are the groups that have been evaluated as part of this study.

Furthermore, a Dutch NGO for refugees called VluchtelingenWerk Nederland also started experimenting with community sponsorship in January 2022 and will continue the project until December 2023. The goal is to investigate whether community sponsorship can be valuable in the case of resettlement. Resettled refugees will receive long-term, personal support from Dutch inhabitants. For this program, VluchtelingenWerk works together with various organisations, including Justice & Peace (VluchtelingenWerk, n.d.).

2.3 Interactions with refugees, the quality of intergroup relationships and support for refugee reception

Contact theory

As mentioned before, increased contact with refugees, as in community sponsorship programs, could foster better intergroup relationships between refugees and the receiving society (Fratzke, 2017). This hypothesis is based on contact theory. According to Allport (1954), more intergroup contact could lead to better intergroup relations, and thus reduce prejudice and conflict, provided that four optimal conditions are taken into account: (1) individuals of opposing groups should work together in a non-competitive way; (2) the relations between the two parties should be equal and non-hierarchical; (3) the groups ought to work on common goals; and (4) they should receive institutional support, for example in the form of law, custom or the local environment. This diminishes the amount of prejudice ingroup individuals hold for members of the outgroup (Allport, 1954).

In later adaptations to this theory, these conditions are regarded as facilitating, rather than essential; they could help to increase the effect of intergroup contact rather than bring it about (Pettigrew et al., 2007). Originally, the effect was thought to occur because intergroup interactions generated new knowledge about the outgroup, which helps to reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954). Subsequently, however, researchers found evidence that affective mediators have a larger effect than these cognitive ones; intergroup contact enables a group to empathize with the other group and see its perspective. Also, it reduces the perception of intergroup threat and anxiety (Pettigrew et al., 2007). Furthermore, the same effect was found for indirect contact. Having an ingroup friend who has outgroup contacts can also help to reduce prejudice. Thus, the effects of intergroup interaction on prejudice could spread beyond the direct contact of two individuals from opposing groups (Pettigrew et al., 2007).

However, contact theory is not undisputed in the scientific debate. According to Bertrand and Duflo (2017), intergroup interactions could also make minority groups perceive the majority group as more just-minded than it really is. This could then decrease political activism, while public attitudes and policy remain unchanged. Additionally, the authors state that the causal relation could also be working the other way; people with fewer prejudices get involved in intergroup interactions more frequently (Pettigrew et al., 2007; Bertrand & Duflo, 2017). Furthermore, critics have come up with a contrasting theory. According to the negative contact hypothesis by Paolini, Harwood & Rubin (2010), negative intergroup interactions may actually increase prejudice about the outgroup. However, they mitigate their position by adding that positive interactions are far more likely to occur than negative ones.

Support for refugee reception

A study by Postmes et al. (2017) at the University of Groningen (RUG) builds on contact theory to explore how intergroup contact between refugees and the receiving society might lead to more support for refugee reception. Their study has identified the mechanisms that could increase public support for immigration policies. They mention the same factors as Pettigrew et al. (2007); a reduction of the perceived intergroup threat and anxiety, and an increased ability to empathize with and take the perspective of the outgroup, but elaborate on these mechanisms further. The study has found that there is more support for immigration when people have the perception that:

- The two groups and their norms, values and cultures are compatible;
- The two groups can live together without any competition between them, for example in the labour or housing market;
- The group of newcomers poses no threat to the culture and security of the receiving society.

Besides that, (re)humanisation of immigrants can also lead to more support. This can be done by:

- Nuancing the perception of 'us' versus 'them';
- Embracing the positive outcomes of cultural diversity;
- Creating more understanding and empathy for the other group.

According to Postmes et al. (2017), these six mechanisms through which the quality of intergroup relationships is improved can be influenced by the positive portrayal of newcomers in media and government communication and by fostering interactions between immigrants and the receiving society.

Thus, it is expected that individuals who interact with refugees more frequently have a more positive relationship with refugees, and subsequently, that they are more likely to support refugee reception. However, this is only on condition that the contact is experienced as positive. Additionally, there might be an indirect effect as well when these positive sentiments spread beyond the direct interactions between two individuals.

2.4 Other influences on the support for refugee reception

Another influential impact on the support for refugee reception could be a person's sense of control over immigration. Adviesraad Migratie (2022) found that most European citizens feel a need to have control over the number of immigrants entering their country. Additionally, they found that this sense of control is influenced by perceptions rather than factual knowledge; it does not seem to be caused by the actual numbers of refugees entering the country, but rather by the perception of these numbers; a sharp increase can cause civilians to overestimate the number of refugees and lose their sense of control over immigration. Thus, the formulated hypothesis is that people who overestimate the number of refugees in their country are less likely to support refugee reception.

This sense of control also seems to be influenced by a person's faith in their government. According to Postmes et al. (2017), general trust in the national government might increase support for certain immigration policies and their implementations. They expect that people who have more faith in the democratic procedures in place are more likely to feel heard and less likely to rise against immigration. Thus, it is expected that individuals who are more satisfied with their national government are more likely to support refugee reception.

2.5 The Dutch context for community sponsorship

In Canada, research has shown that the PSR program has helped to foster more positive attitudes toward refugee reception among its citizens (Fratzke, 2017). A study in 2022 among 2,000 Canadians found that the majority, about 76%, found that their country should accept more immigrants from places experiencing major conflicts (Environics Institute, 2022). While this is promising, the implementation of community sponsorship in other countries might not necessarily show the same outcomes. The Dutch context is quite different in several important ways.

First, the Dutch seem less supportive of refugee reception. In 2022, about 60% of the Dutch population thought that sheltering people who flee war or persecution in the Netherlands is a moral obligation (Lubbers, 2022). Additionally, when asked about the number of refugees that should be admitted, 6% of the respondents does not want to admit any refugees, 30% wish to admit only a few, 52% want to admit some refugees and only 12% thinks that many refugees should be admitted (Lubbers, 2022).

Second, the Canadian program has been running for over forty years and it has involved many sponsor groups that have hosted a total amount of 325,000 refugees (Hyndman et al., 2021). In the Netherlands, the first pilot program on community sponsorship was finished only recently and it involved only 42 sponsor groups (Smith et al., 2020). This means that Canada is far more experienced in the implementation of community sponsorship programs.

Likewise, the Netherlands has very little experience with any other type of citizen involvement in refugee integration. Matters of integration have been the field of affairs of the national government until this responsibility was placed upon the newcomers themselves in 2013 (Bakker et al., 2020). Refugees then had to organise their own integration and pay for it out of their pocket. After its implementation, this law has received heavy criticism due to its negative effects on integration outcomes. As of 2022, the responsibility for successful refugee integration was placed upon the local governments (Bakker et al., 2020). All of these legal frameworks included very little space for citizen involvement. Therefore, the implementation of community sponsorship is a major change in the historical and societal context of the Netherlands.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The literature has shown that direct interactions between two groups could foster better intergroup relations (Allport, 1954). Consequently, the interactions and the improved relationships they foster

could then increase the support for refugee reception through the beforementioned mechanisms that Postmes et al. (2017) identify. Thus, the hypothesis is that participation in a community sponsorship program can increase a sponsor-participant’s support for refugee reception by fostering better relationships with refugees.

Furthermore, the literature distinguishes two other factors that might affect the support for refugee reception. According to Postmes et al. (2017), general trust in the national government could positively impact the support for immigration policy. Likewise, an overestimation of the number of refugees could decrease the sense of control over immigration and thus, decrease support for refugee reception (Adviesraad Migratie, 2022). Therefore, it is expected that individuals who are more satisfied with their national government and who have a more accurate perception of the number of refugees in their country are more likely to support refugee reception.

These theoretical relationships are represented in the conceptual model in Figure 1.

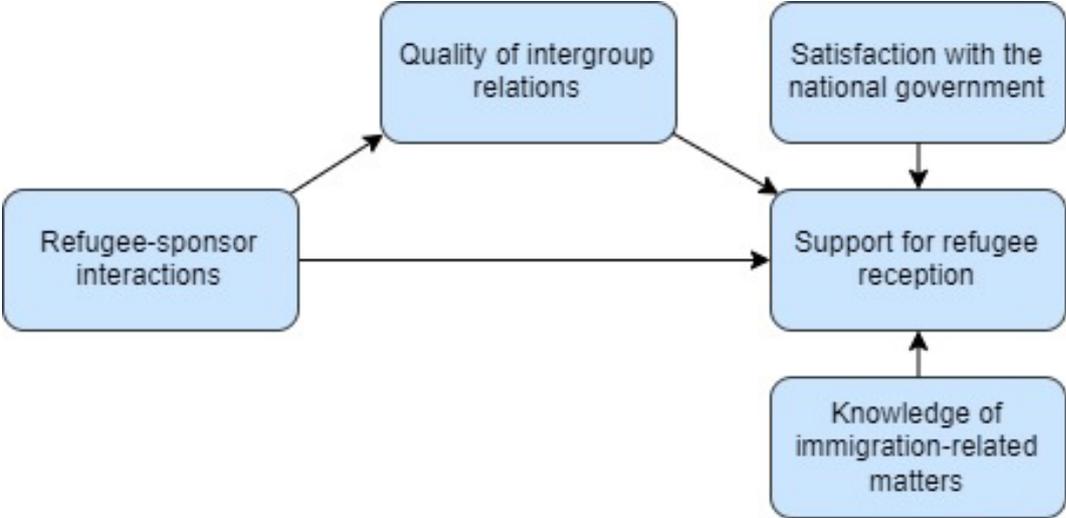


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the relationship between refugee-sponsor interactions and the support for refugee reception

3. Methodology

3.1 Research methods

This study uses a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

First, a literature review has been carried out to explore the existing knowledge on community sponsorship. By studying published works, this research has drawn from earlier experiences with community sponsorship programs in both Canada and other European countries. Additional literature was collected on the mechanisms that influence public support for refugee reception and the role community sponsorship could play in this. Furthermore, the mid-term report of the pilot program *Samen Hier* was used to gain knowledge on the first outcomes of community sponsorship in the Dutch context. These insights are later used to test the level of compatibility with the outcomes of the analyses, thus measuring their construct validity.

Second, a quantitative study has attempted to find statistical data on the factors that influence support for refugee reception. This data tests the hypothesis that positive interactions with immigrants may lead to a more positive perception of immigration. A beneficial aspect of statistical analysis is that it can be used to compare and analyse data from many respondents. A large, representative sample size can lead to generalizable results with high external validity. Furthermore, the research can easily be replicated by other researchers, for example, to find out whether the same outcomes can be found in a different geographical area or period of time. This ensures the reliability of the outcomes. However, quantitative data fails to capture subjective information, such as individual experiences.

In the third part of this research, a qualitative study is used to partly overcome these shortcomings and increase the internal validity. Interviews add personal experiences to the data set that may explain why we find certain relations between variables. It gives respondents space to include detailed answers and explanations that cannot be captured in a closed-ended survey. However, because of limited time and means, only a small group of respondents can be questioned on their experiences. This small sample size means that the outcomes are less externally valid. Therefore, they cannot be generalized to a larger population. Additionally, qualitative research is more prone to the researcher's subjectivity, which can make the interview biased. It also makes an interview much more difficult to replicate and thus less reliable. Fortunately, the external validity and reliability of the results are increased by the quantitative part of the research.

A hybrid research design will thus complement the existing knowledge in the literature with the generalizable outcomes of the quantitative research and the more in-depth, explanatory findings of a qualitative method, and mitigate the shortcomings of both research methods. This triangulation increases the validity and reliability of the research outcomes.

3.2 Data collection

Special Eurobarometer 519 data

For the quantitative study, no first-hand data was collected, but instead, Eurobarometer data was used. The Eurobarometer is a tool that the European Commission uses to keep track of public opinion in the EU Member States. These surveys, which have been conducted every year since 1973, are used to support policies and evaluate their outcomes. In 2021, the Kantar network carried out one of these surveys, resulting in the Special Eurobarometer 519 Report, which contains information on the general perceptions and knowledge of immigration in the European Union, individual experiences with immigrants, levels of integration, and opinions on the influence of the media and government on matters of immigration and integration (European Commission, 2022). During the fieldwork period between November 2nd and December 3rd, 2021, about 26,510 individuals from 27 EU Member States

were interviewed in their own language (see Appendix I for a list of country codes and the corresponding member states). The survey has separately collected data on East and West Germany, thus, the sample size (N) is 28. Random people were selected to form a good representation of the entire population. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these interviews took place (partially) online (European Commission, 2022).

The Eurobarometer surveys generate an enormous amount of data, because of their extensive scope and number of respondents. A selection of this data was made, to include all the relevant variables for this study. These involve Eurobarometer questions QB2 up to QB7, and D80a. Both the data for the European total and the 27 specific member states were used in the analysis. Each variable is measured as the share of respondents in a country that has answered the corresponding question within a certain response category, thus, generating values between 0 (0% of the respondents) and 1 (100% of the respondents). In the Eurobarometer survey, the following definition of immigrants is used: 'people born outside the European Union, who have moved away from their country of birth and are at the moment staying legally in an EU country' (European Commission, 2022, p. 5).

Evaluation interviews of Samen Hier

For the qualitative part of the research, data has been collected through interviews. Because Samen Hier was the only established community sponsorship program in the Netherlands, the research relied on access to this program's participants. Therefore, arrangements were made with Justice & Peace, the Dutch organisation that runs this program. To make sure there was no bias in the cooperation, it was agreed upon beforehand that any negative outcomes may also be published in the research. Additionally, a non-disclosure agreement was signed by both parties, to guarantee the privacy of the participants and to prevent other uses for the collected data. The interview questions for this research were then integrated into Justice & Peace's standard Monitoring & Evaluation Plan; they became part of the mid-term and final evaluations. Then, Justice & Peace gave permission to approach the sponsor-participants for interviews and shared the necessary contact details.

In October 2022, all participants of Samen Hier received a message from their community builder informing them about an upcoming evaluation round in the following November. They also received a research statement (see Appendix II), informing them about the purpose and methods of the research. At the start of November individual appointments were made for the interviews. For this, real-life interviews were the preferred option, but if people were unable to travel or if they had little time, the interviews were conducted online or over the phone. Lastly, if people were unable or unwilling to participate in an interview, they received a digital survey with the same set of questions.

At the time of the research, Samen Hier had a total of 38 sponsor group participants involved in their Welcome groups. However, one person ended their participation very early on in the program, so this person was excluded from the sample. Of the remaining 37 participants, 6 persons started participating in November 2021, 5 persons in March 2022, 3 persons in April 2022, and 23 individuals in May 2022. Therefore, at the time of the interviews in November 2022, all participants had been part of Samen Hier for six to twelve months. For the groups that started in March, April and May 2022, the interview or survey was part of their mid-term evaluation. For the group that started in November 2021, it was their final evaluation. A total of seventeen interviews were conducted in the period between November 14th and December 7th, 2022, of which three were conducted in real-life and fourteen through Google Meet, Zoom or over the telephone. The participants who did not respond to the invitation e-mail, a reminder e-mail and a subsequent phone call received the digital survey. However, no response came to this. Thus, the response rate remained at 17 out of 37, or 46%.

Interview questionnaire

The semi-structured interviews consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. While closed-ended questions make it easier to compare data between respondents, open-ended questions allow for more detail and a less restricted range of answers. Therefore, a mixture of closed- and open-ended questions combines the benefits of both types. The questionnaire that was used in the interviews can be found in Appendix III.

The questionnaire can be divided into three sections. The first part contains questions to test the respondents' knowledge of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. A large part of the population tends to overestimate the number of asylum applicants (Adviesraad Migratie, 2022). Therefore, respondents were asked for their estimate of the number of asylum applications in the Netherlands (Q.1). Additionally, they were asked about their former experiences with asylum seekers and refugees, and the three countries they think most applicants come from (Q.2).

The second and third parts of the questionnaire are based on the before-mentioned study by Postmes et al. (2017), which identifies different factors that can influence public support for immigration policy, namely: the compatibility between groups (Q.7), perceived intergroup competition (Q.8) and a perceived threat to the own group's culture (Q.9) or security (Q.10). Furthermore, support can increase when there is less perception of 'us' versus 'them' (Q.11), when people embrace the positive outcomes of cultural diversity (Q.12) and when there is more focus on empathy and tolerance for others (Q.13) (Postmes et al., 2017).

The third section of the questionnaire contains questions that investigate how participation in the community sponsorship program has influenced these factors. For this, statements were used to which respondents could express how much they agree or disagree by using a seven-point Likert Scale. In the end, two questions were added to see whether participation in Samen Hier has influenced the respondent's knowledge of asylum policy (Q.14), and their overall support for migration policies (Q.15).

After the closed-ended questions, respondents had the opportunity to describe their experiences with Samen Hier in four concluding open-ended questions (Q.16 – Q.19). Lastly, Postmes et al. (2017) point to the knowledge gap on the effect of overall trust in the national government on public support for refugee policies. Therefore, the second part of the questionnaire focuses on overall trust in the Dutch government and the support for its asylum policies in specific (Q.3 – Q.6). Again, statements were made to which respondents could (dis)agree by using a seven-point Likert Scale.

3.3 Data analysis

After and during the data collection, the outcomes have been analysed. This consisted of three parts: a quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis, and a combination and comparison of the two.

Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative analysis consisted of four parts: (1) a descriptive analysis; (2) a simple regression and mediation analysis; (3) a multiple regression analysis; and (4) a model assumption check. These analyses will be further discussed in the following section.

First, a descriptive section was written on the outcome and predictor variables, using the outcomes for the various Eurobarometer questions. It starts with a description of the shares of respondents in Europe and the Netherlands in each response category, except for the category 'don't know', which was removed from the dataset beforehand. The descriptive analysis also explored the mean, interval and standard deviation for each variable. Furthermore, the shares of respondents in the individual EU states have been ranked for the most relevant response categories. The position of the Netherlands

was determined by its rank and the number of standard deviations its share of respondents was above or below the mean. The data has also been visualised in bar charts.

Second, a simple regression analysis has been performed to find whether the frequency of interactions with immigrants significantly relates to the perception of immigration. Subsequently, a mediation analysis was used according to one of the methods described by Field (2013), to determine whether the frequency of interactions with immigrants has an indirect effect on the perception of immigration through the quality of intergroup relations. The unstandardised regression coefficients for the relationships between the three variables and their significance have been compared. The indirect effect was determined as the result of the effect of the predictor on the mediator, and the effect of the mediator on the outcome variable. The size of this effect was then compared to the size of the direct effect of the predictor on the outcome variable. Then, a Sobel test was used to assess the significance of the indirect effect. The indirect effect was considered significant if $p > .05$.

Third, a multiple regression analysis has been performed to find whether certain variables could predict the perception of immigration. The analysis included four predictor variables, which were all measured as the share of respondents that; (1) feel comfortable with immigrants in all social categories, (2) are satisfied with the national government, (3) correctly estimate the proportion of immigrants in the country, and (4) feel well-informed about matters of immigration. This analysis consisted of the establishment of two different models: one to predict the share of respondents that sees immigration as an opportunity, and one to predict the share that sees it as a problem.

As argued by Field (2013), backward elimination was used, rather than stepwise or forward selection, because it is less likely to remove predictors involved in suppressor effects. These effects occur when predictors have a significant effect, but only when other variables are held constant. Therefore, the stepwise and forward methods are more likely to miss a predictor. The outcome of the backward elimination has found the model that fits the data best.

The unstandardised coefficients (B) are used to determine the models' constants and the individual contributions of each predictor. To check their accuracy, the 95% confidence interval of the coefficients was used. The standardised coefficients (β) are not taken into account, since all variables are measured on the same scale.

After the best-fitting models had been determined, they were tested for their significance and goodness-of-fit. The R^2 was used to find how much variability in the outcome variable is accounted for by the predictors. If their significance was larger than .05, the models were considered significant. Subsequently, the adjusted R^2 was used rather than R^2 , because it corrects the R^2 outcomes for the number of predictors in the models. The F-ratio was used as a measure of the improvement of the predicting capacity of the models compared to their level of inaccuracy. The minimal value for F was considered 1. However, a greater value indicates a better model.

In the fourth and last section of the analysis, the final models were checked for several assumptions for multiple regression that are mentioned by Field (2013):

1. Outliers: the data has been checked for outliers that could disproportionately influence the model parameters. All cases with a Cook's distance > 1 or a standardised residual below -3 or above 3 have been deleted.
2. Linearity and additivity: the analysis has checked whether a linear model is the best fit for the data, and in the case of multiple predictors, whether the individual effects could be added together in the total model. To do so, a graph was plotted of the standardised residuals and

standardised predicted values. In case the values were evenly scattered around a horizontal line, the assumption of linearity is met.

3. Normality: the analysis has checked whether the cases' residuals are normally distributed to make sure the estimates of the model are accurate. This was done by creating a P-P plot. If all points fell somewhat onto the line, this was evidence of a normal distribution. Additionally, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test found whether the distribution of the sample was significantly different from a normal distribution. If it found $p > .05$, normality could be assumed.
4. Homoscedasticity: to check the model for homogeneity of variance, a graph of standardised residuals and standardised predicted values was used again. If no kind of funnelling was detected in the data, homoscedasticity could be assumed.
5. Independence of errors: a Durbin-Watson test was performed to check whether the errors of each variable were related to each other. A value between 1 and 3 suggests no strong autocorrelation, whereas a value closer to 2 would be preferable. If this was the case, independence of errors was assumed.
6. Multicollinearity: lastly, the predictors have been checked for a high linear relationship with each other. For this, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to find any correlations above 0.9. Additionally, the VIF values for each predictor were calculated. Values larger than 10 point to multicollinearity, as well as an average VIF above 1.

Qualitative data analysis

The goal of the qualitative analysis was to provide a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that might affect community sponsorship participants' support for refugee reception. Because the number of respondents was below one hundred, the results were used for a descriptive analysis rather than an analytical one. With the permission of the respondents, the interviews have been recorded and processed into transcripts. The frequency of each answer to the Likert Scale statements was explored and, if necessary, visualised in bar charts. Subsequently, important information was highlighted in the interview transcripts and compared to the outcomes of other interviews to find any commonalities, which were then categorised. Additional to this descriptive comparison, respondents' quotes have been used to support the outcomes. In this study, the respondents have been anonymized, as agreed upon in both the disclosure agreement with Justice & Peace and in the personal communication with the seventeen participants. Therefore, names are not included in participants' quotes, but instead, they are referred to as 'Participant 1 to 17', accompanied by the date of the corresponding interview.

To test the participants' knowledge of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, the respondents' answers in the first section of the interview have been compared to the data of the Dutch Agency for Statistics (CBS, 2022) on the actual number of asylum requests and the frequency of requests per country of origin.

Combined data analysis

After the quantitative and qualitative analyses had been completed, their outcomes were combined to provide a better understanding of the nature of the relationships between the significant predictors and the perception of immigration. Lastly, conclusions were drawn from the combined analysis.

3.4 Limitations of the methodology

As with every study, this research has its limitations that will be explored in the following paragraph.

Quantitative research

The Eurobarometer data has various limitations. One, while the survey questions came very close to this research's objectives, they were not entirely similar. While this study focuses on refugees in

specific, the Eurobarometer surveys include questions on immigrants in general. While both refugees and other types of immigrants are born outside of the country and are now staying in the country of destination, the motives for their movement are quite different. While other immigrants move voluntarily, refugees have little choice. Therefore, the receiving society might look differently upon accepting and welcoming refugees, as compared to other types of immigrants.

A similar limitation is the use of Eurobarometer questions to approach the various outcome and predictor variables. For example, the Eurobarometer did not involve any data on community sponsorship participants. The frequency of interactions with immigrants was chosen as a substitute since the assumption is made that community sponsorship will also involve frequent contact. However, this leaves out the quality of the contact; a conversation with a refugee of a few minutes might have less impact than doing an activity together for a few hours. Likewise, the question does not measure whether the contact is experienced as positive. Furthermore, the quality of intergroup relationships was approached by an individual's comfort with immigrants in various social categories. Being comfortable with immigrants might be an indicator of good relationships, but of course, it is not entirely the same thing. Lastly, the knowledge of immigration-related matters, including refugee reception, was approached by the self-assessed knowledge of immigration and whether respondents could give a correct estimation of the proportion of immigrants in their country. Of course, self-assessed knowledge does not always indicate actual knowledge, and accurate knowledge of the number of immigrants does not necessarily mean knowledge of immigration policy as well. Therefore, a combination of the two predictors was used to marginalize the shortcomings of the individual measures. Thus, the indicators used might not completely grasp the corresponding variables, which could decrease the validity of their outcomes. However, with the data available these were the best possible options for this study.

A third issue was the lack of individual data. The data on each variable was only available as the share of respondents in a country that chose a certain response category. Therefore, while there were 26,510 individuals involved in the Eurobarometer survey, the sample size consisted of only 28 EU countries (including East and West Germany separately). However, to build a significant regression model from multiple predictors, a larger sample size would be much more conclusive. Additionally, using percentages as a measurement scale means that both the predictor and outcome variables are bounded [0%, 100%), rather than continuous. Therefore, the fitted regression model could predict values that are not possible in the real world; percentages of the population below 0% or above 100%.

Qualitative research

A main obstacle in the qualitative study is constituted by the high probability of a selection bias. As Bertrand and Duflo (2017) stated, there is a chance that it is the less prejudiced people who take part in intergroup interactions in the first place. This might also be the case for community sponsorship programs. There is a possibility that the participants that get involved in sponsor groups are less prejudiced towards refugees, to begin with. Of course, this might make sense, since they voluntarily invest their money and time in refugee integration. However, while this selection bias could influence the outcome of this study, it was difficult to overcome, since the effect of community sponsorship can only be measured in participants of the programs.

An additional shortcoming is the existence of only one community sponsorship program in the Netherlands, which might be problematic for three reasons¹. First, it made the research fully reliant on the willingness of Justice & Peace to cooperate for its access to the relevant data. Fortunately, the

¹ At the time of the data collection. Later, another sponsorship program was initiated by VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (VluchtelingenWerk, n.d.).

organisation turned out to be very cooperative, thus, this did not form an obstacle to the research. Second, research on only one program limits the generalisability of the study to other sponsorship programs. Third, it limits the number of potential respondents to only 37 individuals; the number of sponsor-participants in Samen Hier. Therefore, the sample size was too small for any analytic research because of the low validity and reliability of its outcomes. This issue was overcome by turning the interviews into a descriptive study instead.

Furthermore, while the novelty of Samen Hier as the first community sponsorship program in the Netherlands provides a great opportunity to generate new knowledge, it also creates some obstacles for the research. Some respondents had only taken part in the program for six months. Therefore, the results of the change in their attitudes could have been different if they were interviewed after one year or so. However, because of the limited amount of time available to perform this research, it was not possible to do the interviews at another moment.

Interview questionnaire

Some bias also exists in the preparation of the interview questionnaire. An attempt was made to ensure a high internal validity, but of course, there are some shortcomings.

First, a balance had to be found between providing an accurate measurement of each variable and preventing the interview from becoming too lengthy, so that respondents did not lose their focus, or worse still, became unwilling to participate. Because the interviews were part of a larger evaluation, this was quite difficult. The limited number of questions also limited the possibility of monitoring the reliability of the questionnaire itself by adding similar questions to test the consistency of respondents' answers.

Second, since the program had already started before the research was prepared, it was no longer possible to perform a baseline measure of the individuals' opinions on refugee reception. To overcome this issue, questions were included on how respondents themselves thought taking part in the program has influenced their attitude toward refugees. This made the research reliable on peoples' own perception of how the program has influenced their thinking, which made it more difficult to objectively measure a possible change in perspective. However, even if a baseline measure had been possible, it would have been difficult to exclude other variables that might have impacted the perception of refugee reception during the period sponsors participated in the program of Samen Hier. For example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequential arrival of Ukrainian, Belarussian and Russian refugees in the Netherlands could also have influenced the participants' perceptions.

Furthermore, some limitations exist in the measurement of the variables. While asking respondents about the number of asylum seekers and their countries of origin provided an easy way to measure their knowledge, the results paint only a very limited picture. While many respondents seemed very much involved with the reception of refugees, they had little knowledge of statistics. Furthermore, the number of applicants was asked for all first asylum requests in the year 2021, because the numbers for 2022 were not complete yet. This specific period made it even more difficult to provide a correct estimation of the total number because the number can vary quite a lot across years. Therefore, the content validity for this section was not very high.

Lastly, some questions turned out to be flawed. For example, during the interviews statement 4, *'I am glad that the Netherlands is temporarily hosting refugees'*, turned out to be ambiguous for many respondents. Some people interpreted the temporary aspect as optional, others as a condition. This made some people agree with the statement whereas others disagreed with it, even though they used similar reasonings. Likewise, the statement *'cultural diversity is positive for the Netherlands'* failed to measure the change Samen Hier has made in participants' opinions on this.

4. Quantitative Data Analysis

In this chapter, the Eurobarometer data were used to analyse the relationship between the frequency of interactions with immigrants and the support for immigration. A mediation analysis explores whether this effect takes place indirectly through the quality of respondents' relationships with immigrants. Additionally, a multiple regression analysis was performed to predict the support for immigration. This analysis included two potential control variables: satisfaction with the national government and knowledge of immigration-related matters.

4.1 Support for immigration

The outcome variable, the support for refugee reception, was approached by the outcomes of the Eurobarometer survey question QB2: 'Generally speaking, do you think immigration from outside the EU is more of a problem or more of an opportunity for your country today?'. The response options were 'more of an opportunity', 'more of a problem', 'equally a problem and an opportunity' and 'neither a problem nor an opportunity'. This question was answered by 13,052 European and 479 Dutch respondents². The results are shown in Figure 2. The majority of the European respondents think of immigration as a problem or both a problem and an opportunity. The results for the Dutch respondents seem quite similar to the European average (European Commission, 2022).

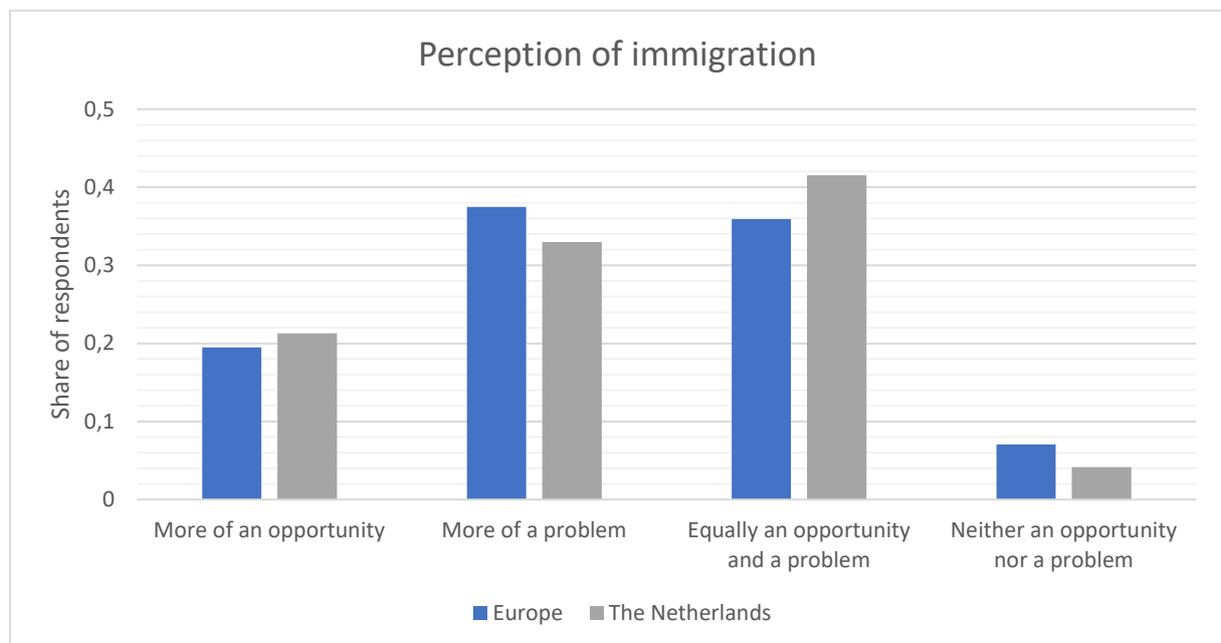


Figure 2: The perception of immigration in Europe and the Netherlands

Figure 3 shows a cross-country comparison of the perceptions of immigration in 27 EU countries. The average share of respondents that sees immigration as an opportunity is 19.5%, with an interval of [3.5%, 41.2%] and a standard deviation of 9.3%. The countries where most respondents perceive immigration as an opportunity are Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden. The bottom countries in this ranking are Lithuania, Latvia and Greece. The Netherlands ranks 13th out of 28 and 0.2 standard deviations above average, thus, positioning it just above the middle and close to the mean.

² Excluding those in the response category 'don't know' (this is also the case in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.5).

The average share of respondents that perceives immigration as a problem is 37.5%, with an interval of [19.4%, 60.9%] and a standard deviation of 13.2%. The countries where the largest share thinks of immigration as a problem are Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania, whereas the share is the smallest in Spain, Ireland and Luxembourg (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 15th out of 28 and 0.3 standard deviations below average. Therefore, the Netherlands ranks somewhat in the middle and close to the mean. Thus, the perception of immigration in the Netherlands is quite average in comparison to the other EU countries.

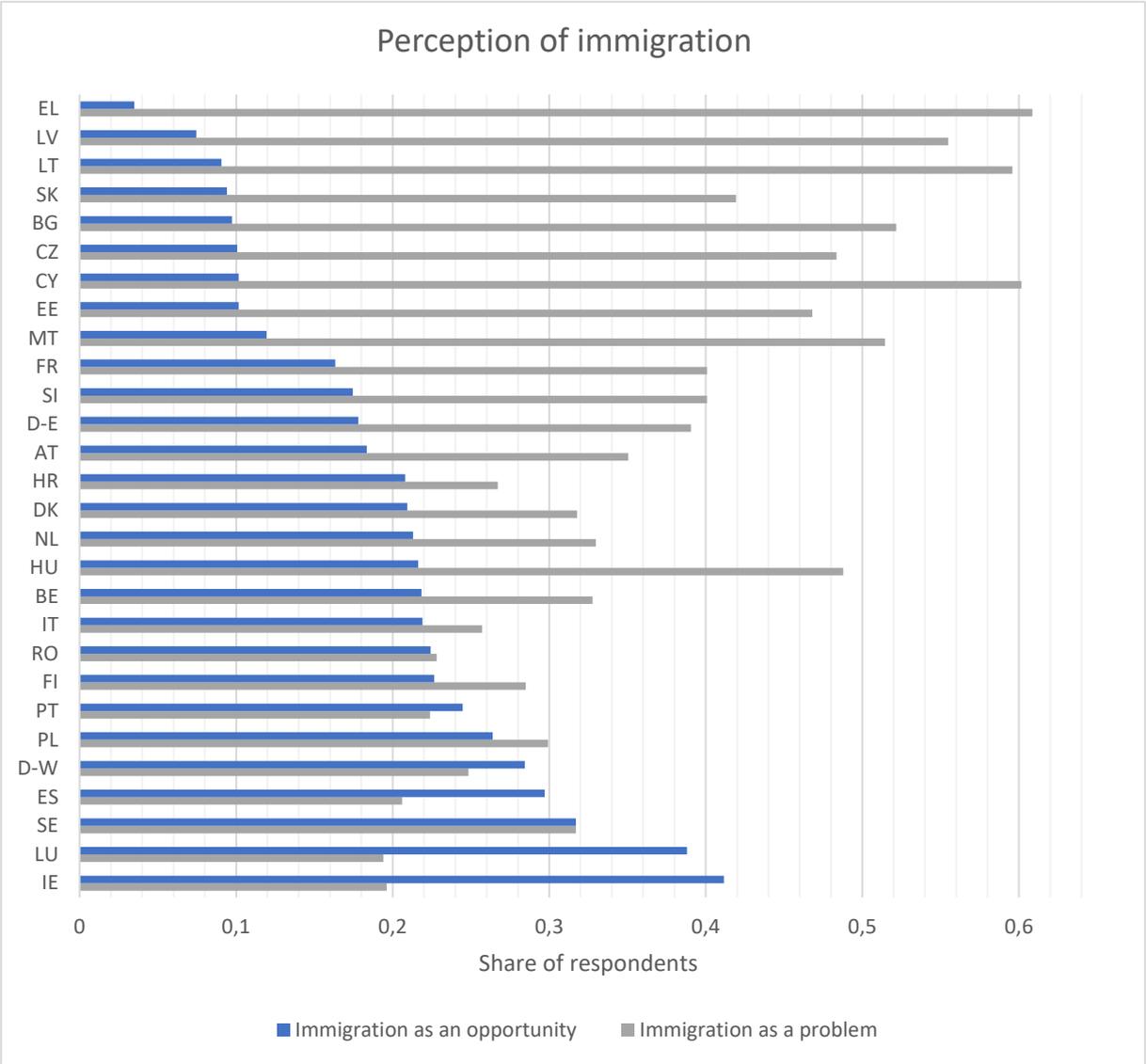


Figure 3: The perception of immigration per EU country

4.2 Frequency of interactions with immigrants

According to Fratzke (2017) and Postmes et al. (2017), frequent interactions with refugees through a community sponsorship program could make an individual more supportive of refugee reception. To measure the predictor variable of the frequency of interactions with immigrants, the outcomes of another Eurobarometer question QB6 were used: ‘On average, how often do you interact socially with immigrants? Interaction can mean anything from having a few minutes conversation to doing an activity together.’ The response options were ‘daily’, ‘at least once a week’, ‘at least once a month’, ‘at least once a year’ and ‘less often or never’. It was answered by 25,981 European and 1,002 Dutch

respondents. The results are shown in Figure 4. The largest share of the European respondents interacts with immigrants less frequently than once a year or never. Compared to the European average, the Dutch respondents are slightly less likely to have daily interactions with immigrants, more likely to interact with immigrants weekly, monthly or yearly, and less likely to interact with immigrants less often than yearly or never (European Commission, 2022). However, no pattern can be distinguished in these differences.

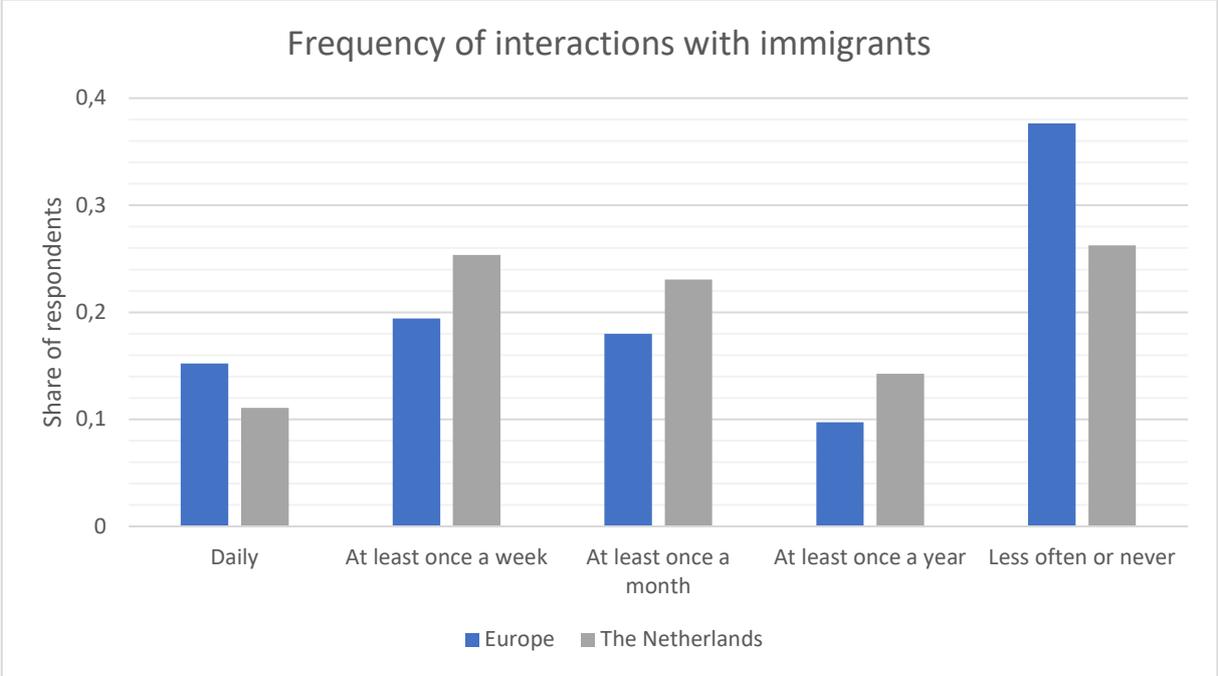


Figure 4: The frequency of interactions with immigrants in Europe and the Netherlands

Figure 5 shows a cross-country comparison of the respondents with frequent (daily) and infrequent interactions (less than once a year or never) with immigrants. The average share of respondents that has daily interactions with immigrants is 15.2% with an interval of [1.1%, 34.5%] and a standard deviation of 9.7%. The countries where most respondents have daily interactions with immigrants are Spain, Ireland and Sweden, compared to the countries with the smallest share of respondents; Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria. The Netherlands ranks 17th out of 28 and 0.4 standard deviations below average. Thus, somewhat below the middle, yet not far from the mean.

The average share of respondents that interacts with immigrants less than once a year or never is 37.7% with an interval of [9.7%, 80.2%] and a standard deviation of 19.8%. The countries where the most people interact with immigrants less than once a year or never are also Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania, compared to the bottom countries; Spain, Ireland and Sweden (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 18th out of 28 and 0.6 standard deviations below the average. Again, somewhat below the middle, yet not far from the mean. Therefore, the frequency of interactions of Dutch respondents does not differ much from the European average.

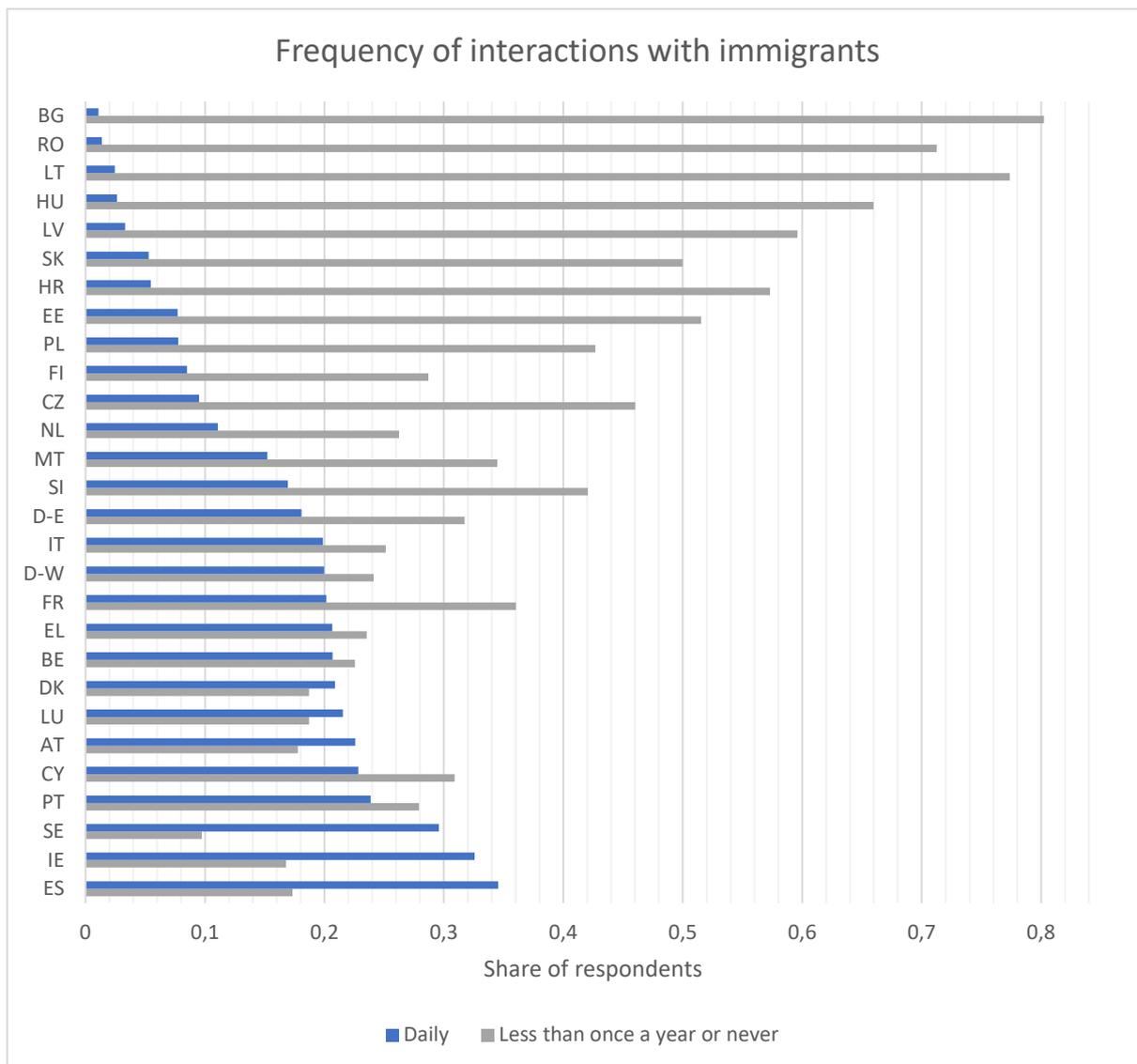


Figure 5: The frequency of interactions with immigrants per EU country

Based on the theory of Fratzke (2017) and Postmes et al. (2017), the hypothesis was made that individuals who have frequent interactions with immigrants are more likely to see immigration as an opportunity, and less likely to see it as a problem. Simple linear regression found that both the regression model for immigration as an opportunity (adjusted $R^2 = 0.247$, Std. Error = 0.081, $F(1, 26) = 9.873$, $p < .004$) and for immigration as a problem (adjusted $R^2 = 0.136$, Std. Error = 0.123, $F(1, 26) = 5.235$, $p < .031$) are statistically significant.

The coefficient in the model to predict immigration as an opportunity has a value of 0.504 ($p = .004$) with an interval of [0.174, 0.833]. The intercept of the formula is 0.118. The coefficient to predict immigration as a problem is 0.557 ($p = .031$) with an interval of [-1.057, -0.057]. The intercept of this model is 0.460. Therefore, the share of respondents in a country who have daily interactions with immigrants can significantly predict the share of respondents that see immigration as either an opportunity or a problem.

The fitted regression models are:

$$\text{Immigration as an opportunity} = 0.118 + 0.504 * (\text{frequency of interactions with immigrants})$$

$$\text{Immigration as a problem} = 0.460 - 0.557 * (\text{frequent interactions with immigrants})$$

4.3 Quality of intergroup relations

However, based on the literature, one could expect that the effect of the frequency of interactions with immigrants on the perception of immigration, partly works as an indirect effect through the quality of intergroup relationships (see the conceptual model in Figure 1). The mediating variable, the quality of intergroup relations, was approached by the Eurobarometer questions QB7.1 to QB7.6: 'Would you personally feel comfortable or uncomfortable having an immigrant as your (resp.: manager, work colleague, neighbour, doctor, family member (including partner) or friend)?' The outcomes for these questions have been combined into the categories 'feels comfortable with all the social categories', 'feels uncomfortable with only one or two social categories' and 'feels uncomfortable with three or more social categories'. These questions were answered by 24,089 European and 967 Dutch respondents. The results are shown in Figure 6.

The majority of the European and Dutch respondents feel comfortable with immigrants in all social categories. However, the Dutch seem more likely to feel comfortable than the European average, and less likely to be uncomfortable with one or more social categories (European Commission, 2022).

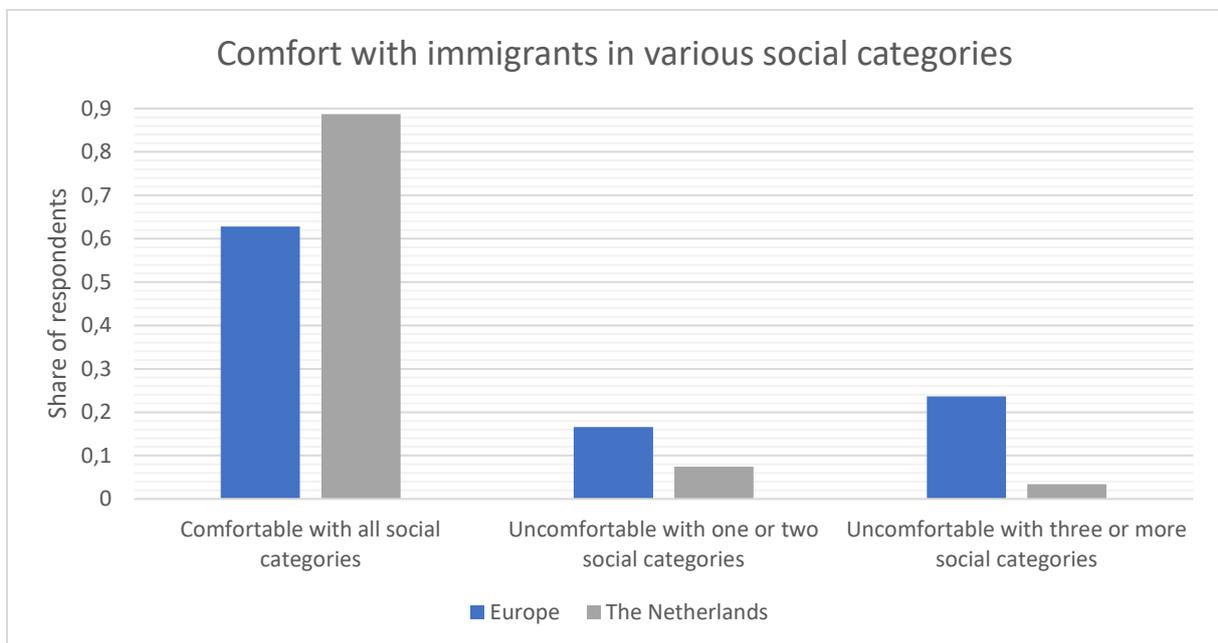


Figure 6: The comfort with immigrants in various social categories in Europe and the Netherlands

In Figure 7, a cross-country comparison is displayed for the share of respondents that feel comfortable with immigrants in all six social categories and the share that feels uncomfortable with three or more categories. The average share of respondents that feels comfortable with all social categories is 62.8% with an interval of [26.8%, 93.5%] and a standard deviation of 18.4%. The top countries with the largest share of respondents that is comfortable with immigrants in all six social categories are Portugal, Ireland and Spain. The countries with the least respondents comfortable with immigrants are Latvia, Romania and Hungary (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 4th out of 28 and its share of respondents is 1.4 standard deviations above average. Thus, the Netherlands ranks quite close to the top and high above the mean.

As can be seen in Figure 7, the share of respondents that feel uncomfortable with three or more social categories does not seem to follow the ranking of the shares that feel comfortable with all categories. The average share of respondents that feels uncomfortable with immigrants in three or more social categories is 23.7% with an interval of [2.1%, 63.4%] and a standard deviation of 15.9%. The largest

share of respondents that feels uncomfortable with immigrants in three or more categories can be found in Estonia, Ireland and Cyprus. The smallest share is seen in Croatia, West Germany and Czech Republic (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 21st out of 28 and its share of respondents is 0.8 standard deviations below average. Thus, the country is ranked in the bottom half and somewhat below the mean. Therefore, quite a large share of the Dutch respondents feels comfortable with immigrants in all social categories, as compared to the other European countries.

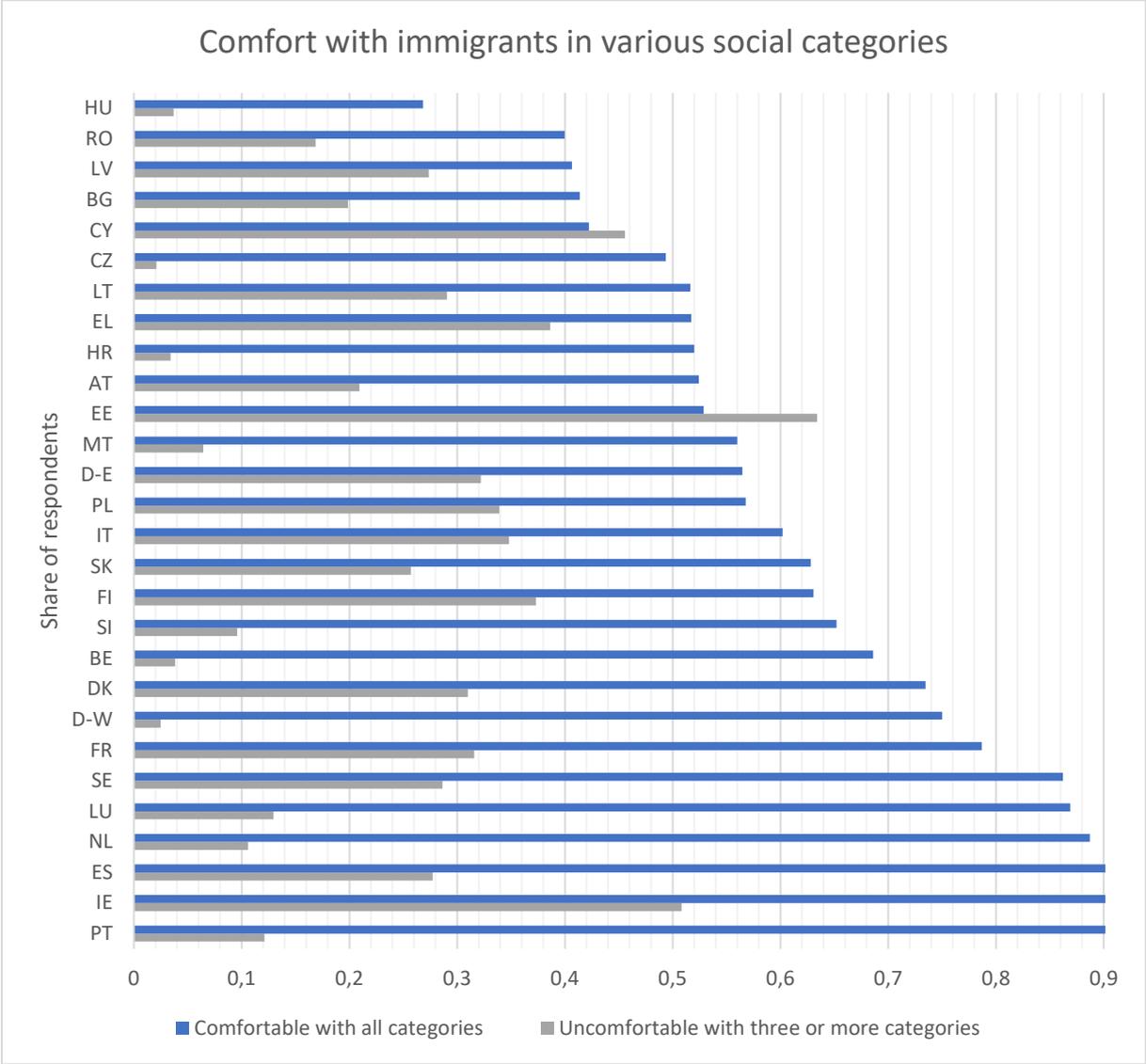


Figure 7: The comfort with immigrants in various social categories per EU country

To test the indirect effect of the frequency of interactions with immigrants on the perception of immigration through the quality of intergroup relations, a mediation analysis was performed for both the share of respondents that sees immigration as an opportunity and the share that sees it as a problem.

The analysis found that the effect of the frequency of interactions on the perception of immigration is fully mediated via the comfort with immigrants in all social categories. After adding the share of respondents that is comfortable with immigrants in all social categories to the previous regression models, the direct effect of daily interactions with immigrants on the perception of immigration has been considerably reduced and is no longer significant. The size of the indirect effect on the share that

sees immigration as an opportunity was $(1.349 \times 0.291 =) 0.393$, and that on the share that sees immigration as a problem $(1.349 \times -0.522 =) -0.704$. The significance of both indirect effects was tested through a Sobel test, which found them both to be significant ($p = .017$ and $p = .005$). The relationships are visualized in Figures 8 and 9.

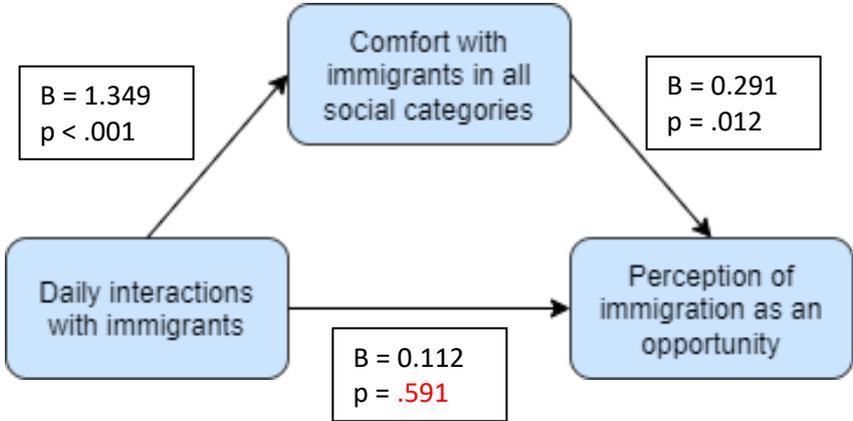


Figure 8: The indirect effect of daily interactions with immigrants on the perception of immigration as an opportunity, through the comfort with immigrants in various social categories

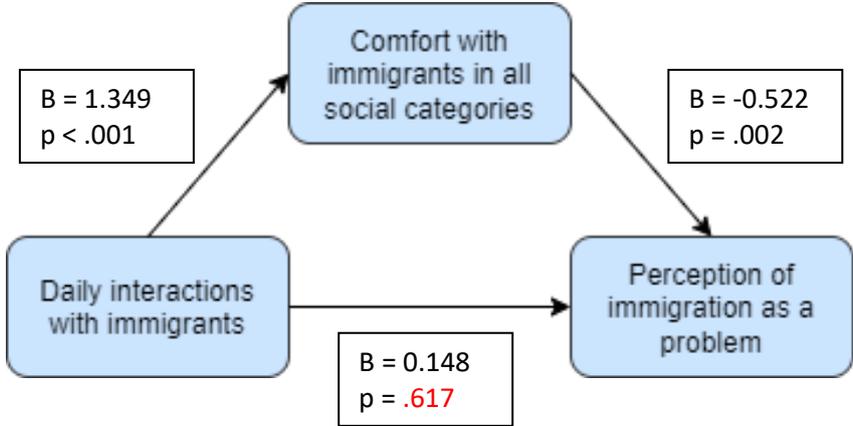


Figure 9: The indirect effect of daily interactions with immigrants on the perception of immigration as a problem, through the comfort with immigrants in various social categories

4.4 Satisfaction with the national government

As mentioned before, Postmes et al. (2017) state that trust in the national government can also play a significant role in the support for immigration policy. Therefore, the first control variable was based on the Eurobarometer question D80a: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)?’. Respondents could thus answer on a four-point scale. This question was answered by 26,049 European respondents, including 1,004 Dutch people. The results are shown in Figure 10.

The largest share of the European and Dutch respondents is at least somewhat satisfied with the democratic system in their country (European Commission, 2022). The share of Dutch respondents that is satisfied is somewhat higher than the European average.

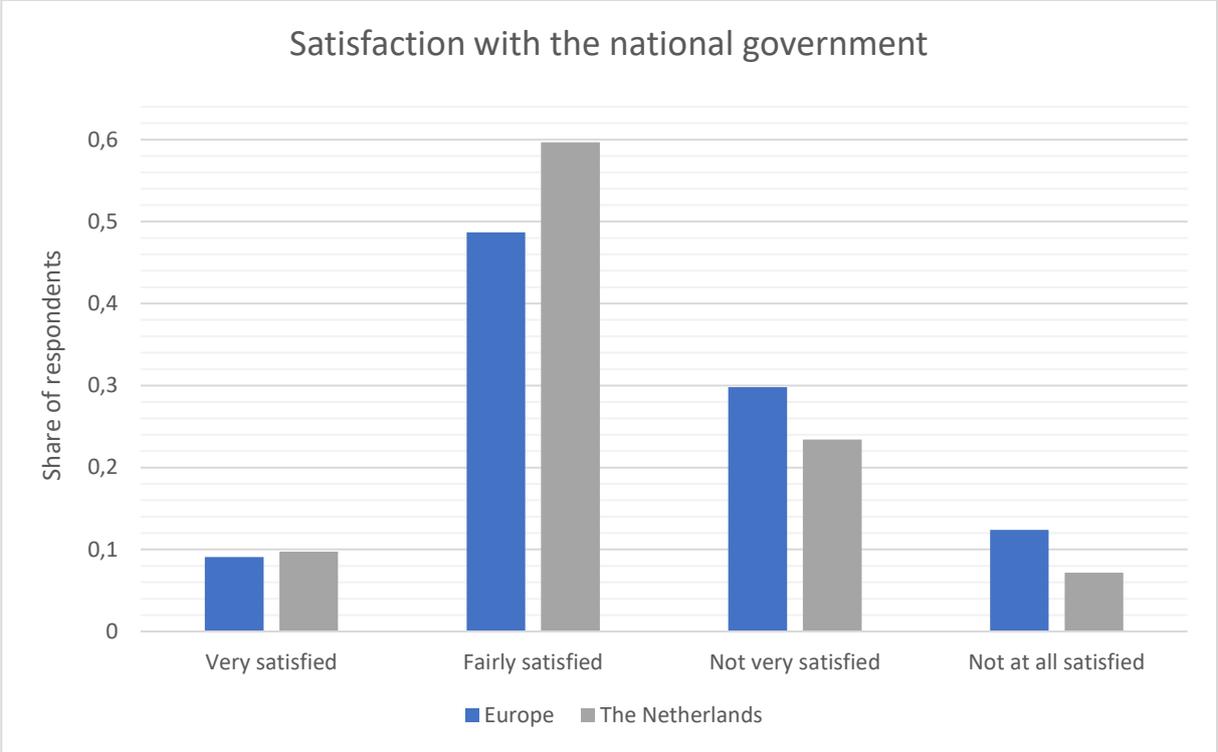


Figure 10: The satisfaction with the national government in Europe and the Netherlands

Figure 11 shows a comparison of the 27 EU countries. The average share of respondents that is satisfied with their democratic system is 57.8% with an interval of [31.5%, 89.2%] and a standard deviation of 17.8%. Those with the highest share of respondents that are satisfied with the democratic system are Luxembourg, Denmark and Ireland. The countries with the smallest share of satisfied respondents are Bulgaria, Greece and Slovenia (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 7th out of 28 and its share of respondents is 0.7 standard deviations above average. Thus, the Netherlands ranks in the upper half and scores somewhat above the mean. Therefore, the Dutch are quite satisfied with their democratic system as compared to the other EU countries.

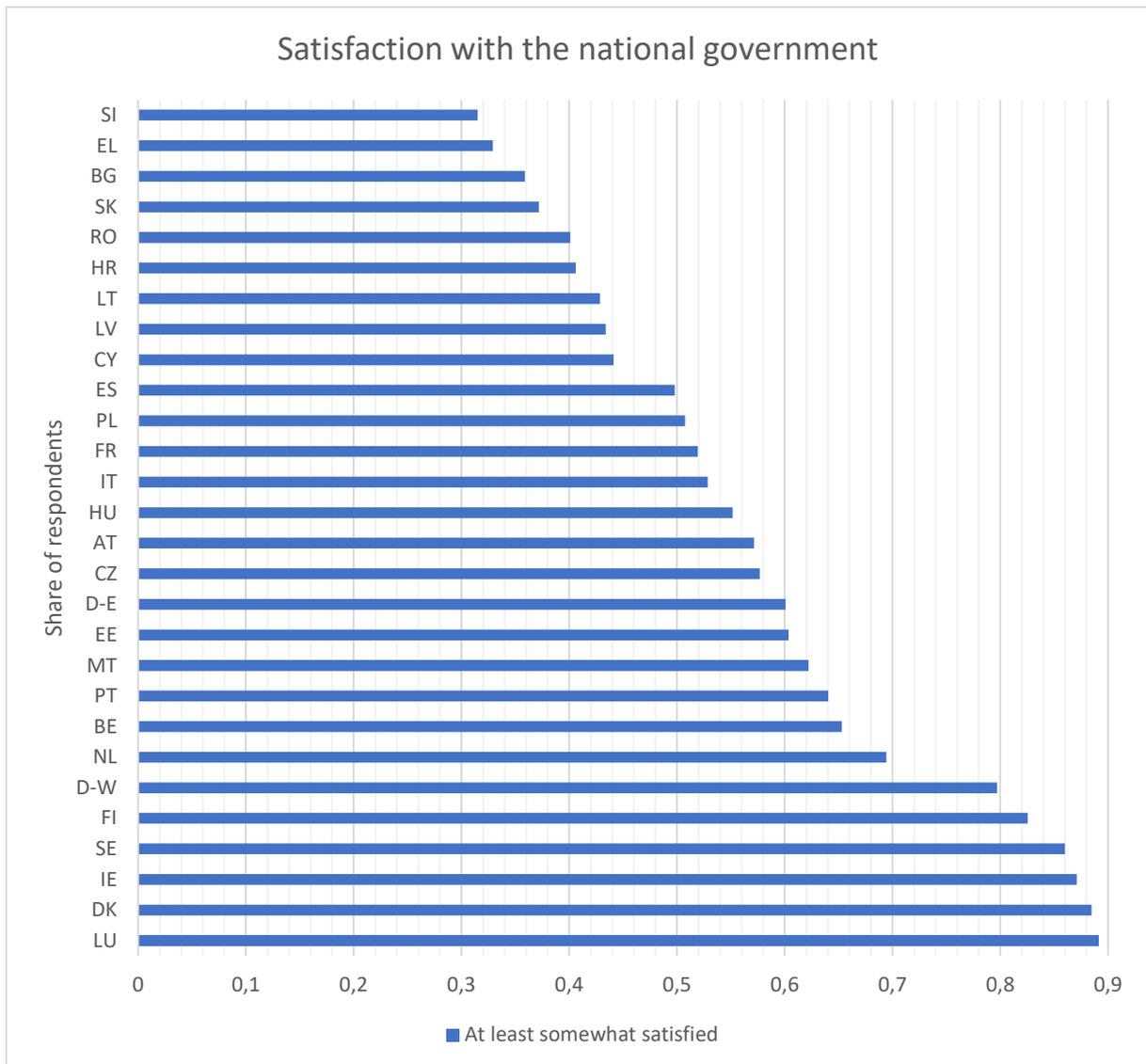


Figure 11: The satisfaction with the national government per EU country

4.5 Knowledge of immigration-related matters

According to Adviesraad Migratie (2022), disproportional attention to immigration in the mass media and politics can lead people to overestimate the number of immigrants in their country. This might also affect the perception people have of immigration. Therefore, a second control variable was added to test whether knowledge of immigration related-matters also affects the perception of immigration. The hypothesis is that the extent to which a person is informed about immigration might have some effect on their support for refugee reception. However, the Eurobarometer data did not explicitly measure this variable. Therefore, it was approached by two Eurobarometer questions; one on the perception of the proportion of immigrants in the country, and the other on the extent to which respondents believe themselves to be informed about immigration and integration-related matters.

Estimation of the proportion of immigrants

The first variable to approach the knowledge on immigration was drawn from the Eurobarometer question QB3: 'To your knowledge, what is the proportion of immigrants in the total population in (OUR COUNTRY)?'. The answer categories were 'from 0% to less than 3%', 'from 3% to less than 6%', 'from 6% to less than 9%', 'from 9% to less than 12%', 'from 12% to less than 15%', 'from 15% to less than 20%', 'from 20% to less than 25%', 'from 25% to less than 35%', 'from 35% to less than 50%' and '50% or higher'. This question was asked to 23,316 European and 986 Dutch respondents. By using the data

of Eurostat (2022), the respondents' answers were compared to the actual proportion of immigrants in the total population of each country, to assess whether the respondents answered within the right category, overestimated the proportion or underestimated it. The outcomes are shown in Figure 12.

A small majority of the European and Dutch respondents overestimate the proportion of immigrants in their country. Of the Dutch respondents, a slightly larger share underestimates the number (European Commission, 2022) (Eurostat, 2022). However, the difference seems quite small.

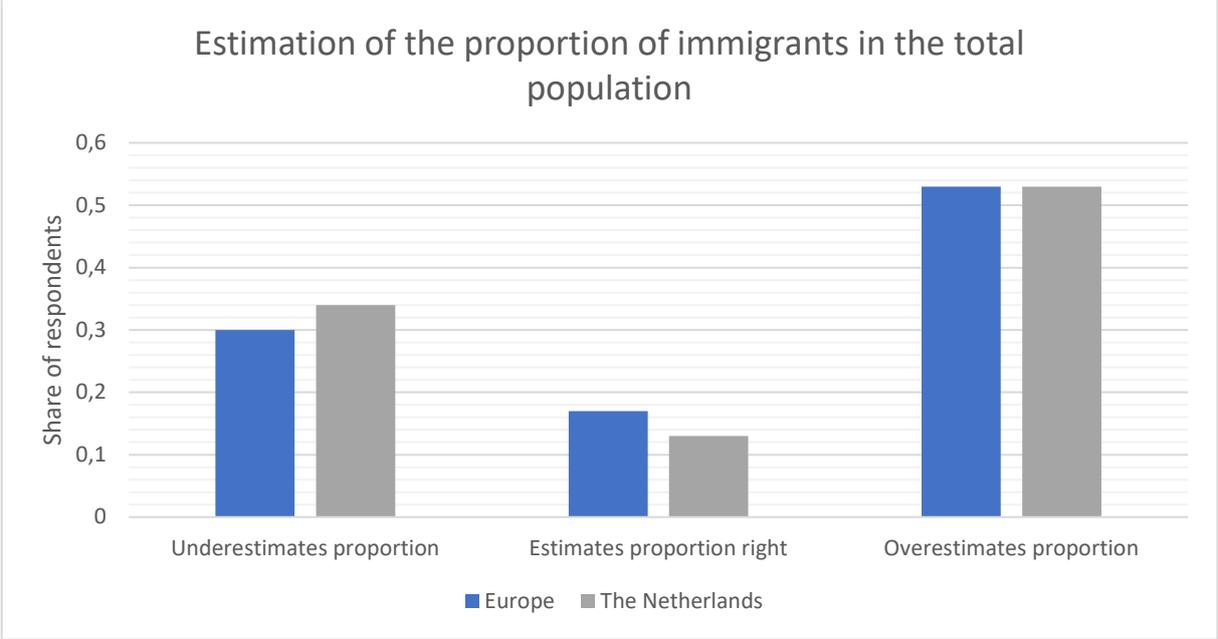


Figure 12: The estimation of the proportion of immigrants in the total population in Europe and the Netherlands

Figure 13 shows a cross-country comparison of the 27 EU countries³. The average share of respondents that overestimates the proportion of immigrants in their country is 47.0% with an interval of [12.0%, 89.0%] and a standard deviation of 18.9%. The countries where the largest share of the respondents overestimates the proportion of immigrants are Poland, Portugal and Italy. The least respondents overestimate the number in Luxembourg, Latvia and Estonia. The Netherlands ranks 14th out of 27 and is 0.3 standard deviations above average. Therefore, it is close to the middle and close to the average.

The average share of respondents that underestimates the number of immigrants is 21.2% with an interval of [0.0%, 73.0%] and a standard deviation of 23.4%. The countries where the largest share of respondents underestimates the amount are again Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg. The countries where the share of people that underestimates the proportion is the smallest, are Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania (European Commission, 2022) (Eurostat, 2022). However, since the proportion of immigrants in all of these countries falls into the smallest category, from 0% to less than 3%, it was not possible to underestimate the number. The Netherlands ranks 10th out of 27 in place for the share of underestimations and is 0.4 standard deviations above average. Therefore, the Netherlands ranks somewhat above the middle, yet not far from the mean. This is probably the case, because five countries have 0.0% of underestimates due to their low proportion of immigrants, and because the standard deviation is quite large. Thus, the Netherlands is not remarkable in the number of overestimations or underestimations of immigrants, as compared to the other EU countries.

³ No Eurostat data was available on the share of immigrants in East and West Germany. Therefore, Germany as a whole is taken into account here.

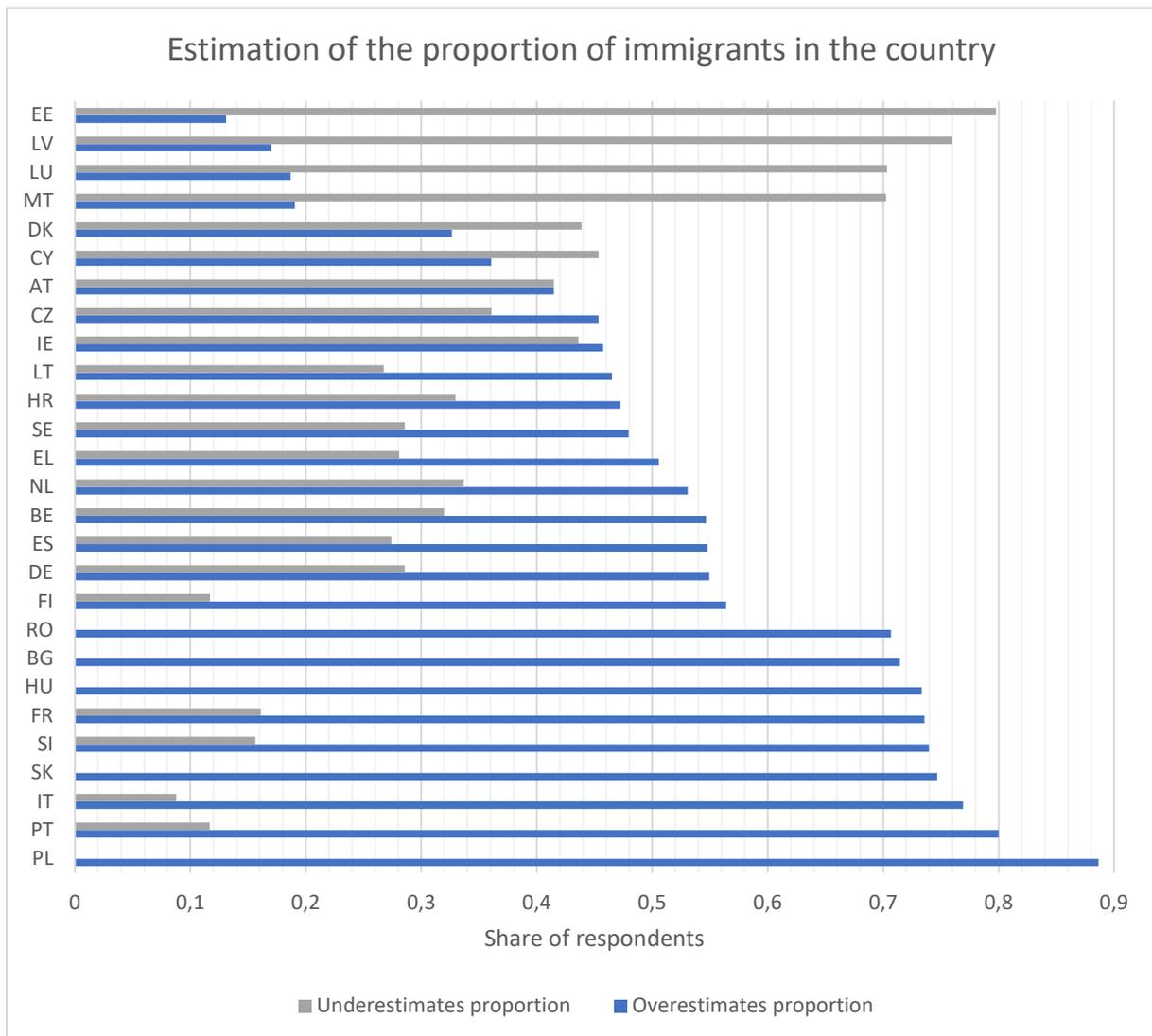


Figure 13: The estimation of the proportion of immigrants in the total population per EU country

Self-assessed knowledge of immigration-related matters

The knowledge of immigration was also approached by the Eurobarometer question QB4: ‘Overall, to what extent do you think that you are well informed or not about immigration and integration-related matters?’. Respondents could answer the question in four categories; ‘very well informed’, ‘fairly well informed’, ‘not very well informed’ and ‘not at all informed’. The question was answered by 26,410 Europeans, of which 1,006 Dutch respondents. The results are shown in Figure 14.

A majority of Europeans find themselves not well-informed about immigration-related matters. In the Netherlands, a slight majority do feel well-informed (European Commission, 2022). Thus, the Dutch seem more likely to feel informed about immigration than the average European.

Figure 15 shows a comparison of the EU countries. The average share of respondents that considers themselves well-informed is 36.0% with an interval of [16.2%, 68.8%] and a standard deviation of 13.4%. The countries where the largest percentage considers themselves well-informed are Sweden, Denmark and West Germany. The countries where respondents felt the least informed are Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria (European Commission, 2022). The Netherlands ranks 4th out of 28 and its share of respondents is 1.4 standard deviations above the average. Therefore, it ranks near the top and scores above the mean. Thus, the Dutch feel better informed about immigration than other Europeans.

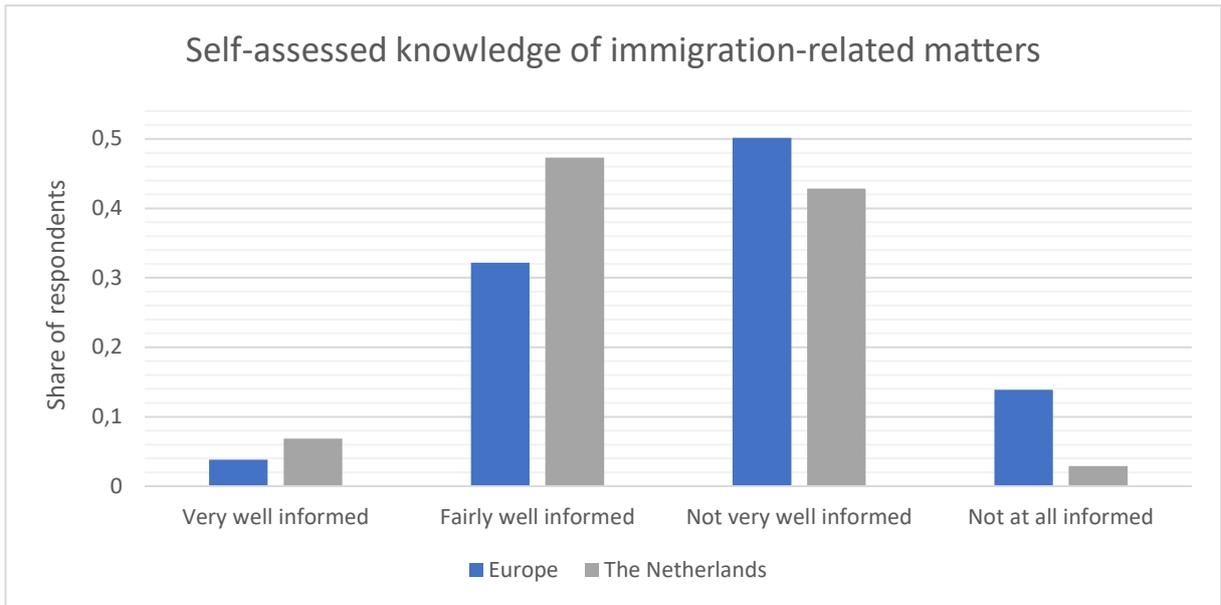


Figure 14: The self-assessed knowledge of immigration-related matters in Europe and the Netherlands

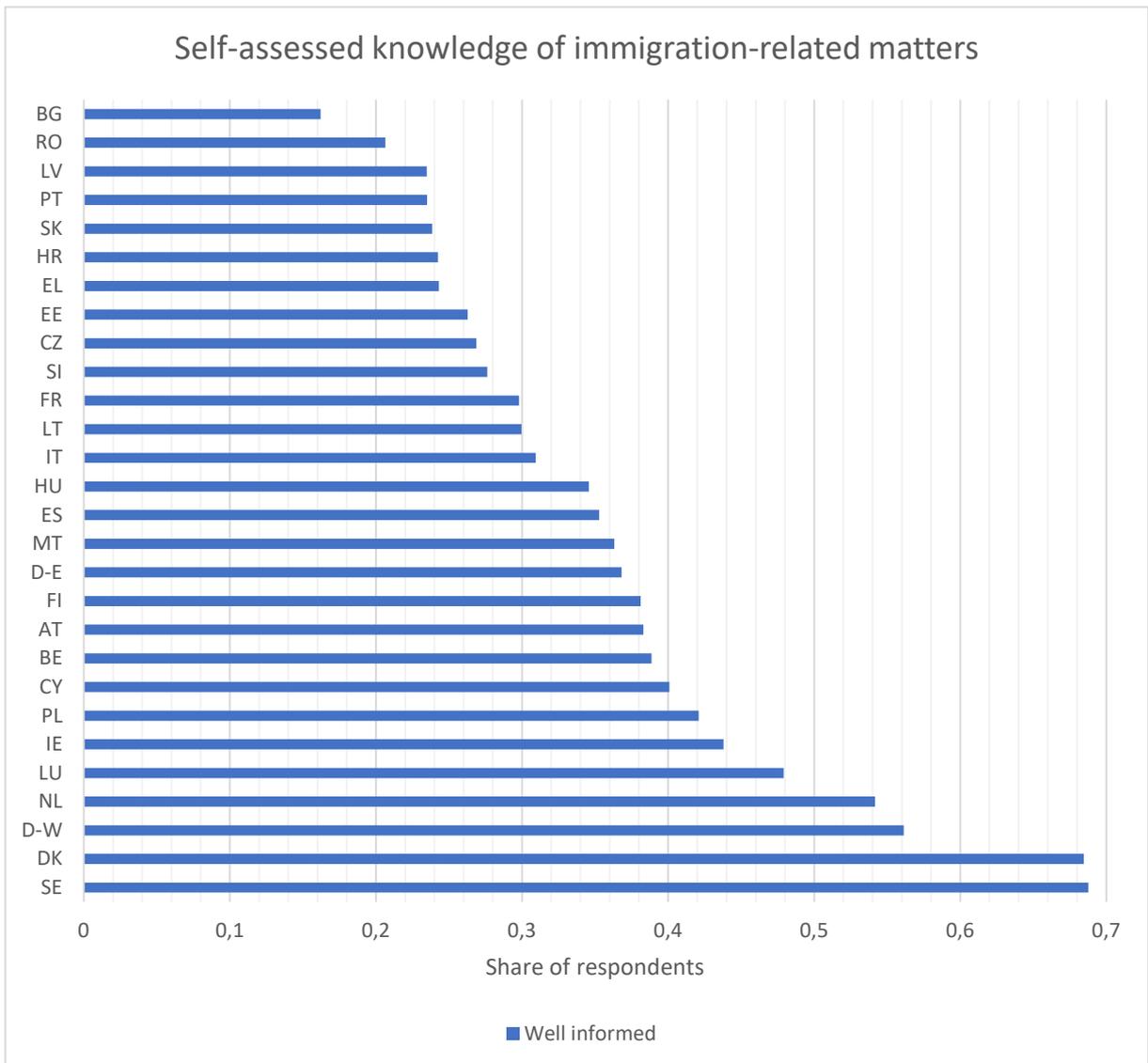


Figure 15: The self-assessed knowledge of immigration-related matters per EU country

4.6 Multiple regression analysis

Multiple linear regression was performed to test whether the perception of immigration can be significantly predicted from the comfort with immigrants in various social categories, the satisfaction with the national government, the self-assessed knowledge of immigration and the correct estimation of the proportion of immigrants. The frequency of interactions with immigrants was left out of the analysis, because of its indirect effect through the comfort with immigrants in various social categories. The analysis was performed twice: first, to predict the share of respondents that sees immigration solely as an opportunity, and second, to predict the share that sees immigration solely as a problem.

Regression model 1: immigration as an opportunity

The first regression found that the share of respondents that perceives immigration solely as an opportunity can be significantly predicted by the share of respondents that is satisfied with their national government and the share of respondents that is comfortable with immigrants in all social categories (adjusted $R^2 = 0.507$, Std. Error = 0.067, $F(2, 23) = 13.875$, $p < .001$). No significant effect was found for the predictors of the self-assessed knowledge of immigration and the estimation of the proportion of immigrants.

The first predictor, satisfaction with the national government, has a significant ($p = .019$) effect size of $B = 0.231$ (95% CI [0.042, 0.421]). The second predictor, the comfort with immigrants in various social categories, also has a significant effect ($p = .033$) of $B = 0.197$ (95% CI [0.017, 0.377]). The intercept value is -0.063. Since the lower and upper limits of both confidence intervals are positive values, a positive relationship between the predictors and the outcome variable is probable.

Thus, the fitted regression model is:

$$\text{Immigration as an opportunity} = -0.063 + 0.231 * (\text{satisfaction with national government}) + 0.197 * (\text{comfort with immigrants in various social categories})$$

Since comfort with immigrants seems to predict the perception of immigration as an opportunity, the outcomes of the regression analysis can be combined with the mediation analysis in paragraph 4.3. Figure 16 describes the final model for the prediction of the share of respondents that perceives immigration as an opportunity.

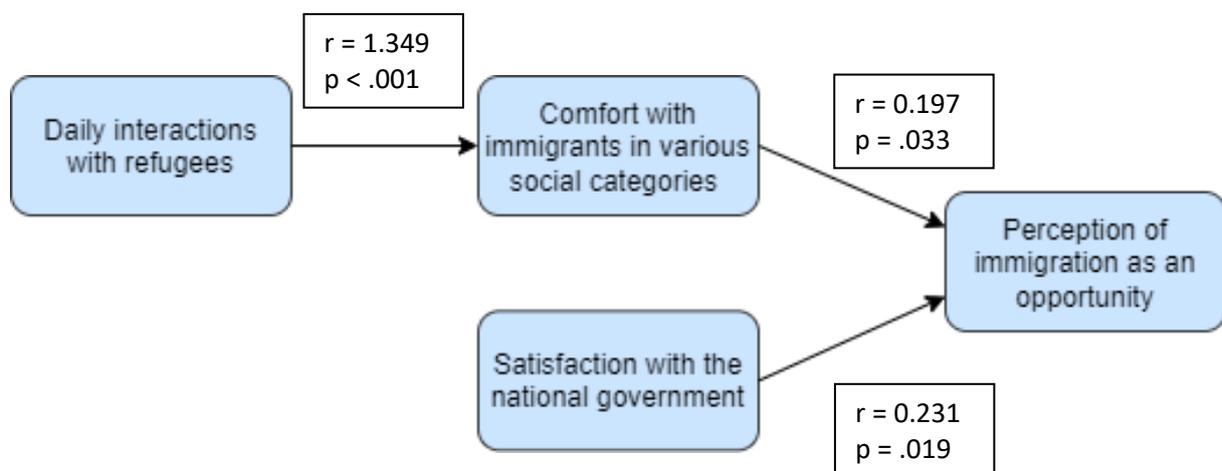


Figure 16: The relationship between the perception of immigration as an opportunity and various predictors

Assumptions in model 1

1. Outliers:

No outliers were identified (Std. Residual Min = -1.209 and Max = 1.735, Cook's Distance Min = 0.000 and Max = 0.312).

2. Linearity and additivity:

The scatterplot for the standardised residuals and standardised predicted values shows an even distribution around a horizontal line, thus, suggesting linearity.

3. Normality:

The Predicted Probability (P-P) plot shows that the errors in the data are somewhat normally distributed. Some residuals are not located on the line exactly. However, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has found no significant deviation from a normal distribution ($p = .200$).

4. Homoscedasticity:

The scatterplot of standardised residuals and standardised predicted values shows that the residuals have a constant variance, thus, homoscedasticity is assumed.

5. Independence of errors:

A Durbin-Watson test found a value of 2.326, indicating no high level of autocorrelation.

6. Multicollinearity:

A collinearity analysis found no evidence for multicollinearity between the predictors when they are all entered into the model (comfort with immigrants, VIF = 1.638; satisfaction with the government, VIF = 2.851; self-assessed information about immigration, VIF = 2.493; estimation of the proportion of immigrants, VIF = 1.087). However, the average VIF of 2.017 was quite high, thus, there might have been some multicollinearity between the predictors. Additionally, while the self-assessed level of knowledge of immigration had been significant in simple linear regression, this was no longer the case in the multiple regression model. This could also be a sign of multicollinearity.

A correlation matrix was created to further explore this (see Figure 17). The correlation matrix shows that the estimation of the proportion of immigrants is not significantly related to any of the other variables. Furthermore, the perception of immigration as a problem does not significantly relate to the self-assessed knowledge of immigration. The other variables are all significantly correlated ($p < .05$). The share of respondents in a country that sees immigration as an opportunity is highly negatively correlated to the share of its respondents that sees immigration as a problem. This is as could be expected since both variables are indicators of opposing sentiments in the population.

The matrix also shows that two predictors are highly correlated (Pearson Correlation Coefficient > 0.7); satisfaction with the national government and the self-assessed level of information. This could partly explain why the predictor variable self-assessed knowledge of immigration is only significant in single linear regression, while this is not the case in the multiple regression analysis. Multicollinearity is less high in the final regression model since the satisfaction with the national government correlates only moderately with the comfort with immigrants in various social categories and the model's VIF value is 1.524. Therefore, the assumption of multicollinearity was met in the final model.

		Pearson Correlation Coefficient				
Perception of immigration as an opportunity		1,00				
Perception of immigration as a problem		-0,87	1,00			
Comfort with immigrants in various social categories		0,66	-0,65	1,00		
Satisfaction with the national government		0,68	-0,53	0,59	1,00	
Self-assessed knowledge of immigration		0,55	x	0,50	0,79	1,00
Estimation of the proportion of immigrants		x	x	x	x	x
	Perception of immigration as an opportunity	Perception of immigration as a problem	Comfort with immigrants in various social categories	Satisfaction with the national government	Self-assessed knowledge of immigration	Estimation of the proportion of immigrants

Figure 17: Pearson's correlation matrix of the outcome and predictor variables ($p < .05$)

Regression model 2: immigration as a problem

The second regression found that the share of respondents that perceives immigration solely as a problem can be significantly predicted by the share of respondents that is comfortable with immigrants in all social categories (adjusted $R^2 = 0.390$, Std. Error = 0.105, $F(1, 24) = 16.990$, $p < .001$). No significant effect was found for the predictors of satisfaction with the national government, the self-assessed knowledge of immigration and the estimation of the proportion of immigrants.

The effect size of the comfort with immigrants $B = -0.458$ (95% CI [-0.688, -0.229]) is significant ($p < .001$). Since the lower and upper limits of the confidence interval are both below zero, a negative relation between the predictor and outcome variable is probable. The intercept of the model is 0.666.

Thus, the fitted regression model is:

$$\text{Immigration as a problem} = 0.666 - 0.458 * (\text{comfort with immigrants in various social categories}).$$

Since comfort with immigrants seems to predict the perception of immigration as a problem as well, the outcomes of the regression analysis can again be combined with the mediation analysis in paragraph 4.3. Figure 18 describes the final model for the prediction of the share of respondents that perceives immigration as a problem.

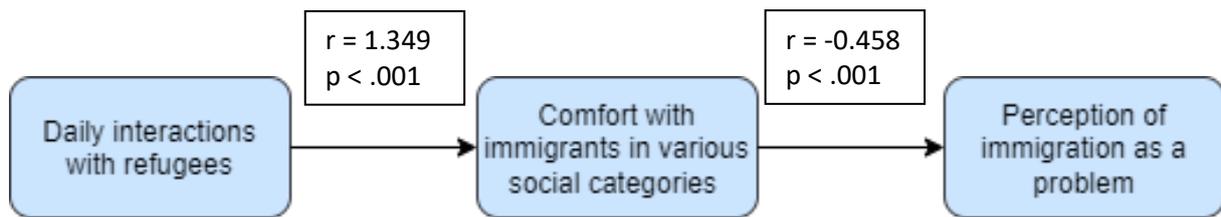


Figure 18: The relationship between the perception of immigration as a problem and various predictors

Assumptions in model 2

1. Outliers:

No outliers were identified (Std. Residual Min = -2.422 and Max = 1.713, Cook's Distance Min = 0.000 and Max = 0.342).

2. Linearity and additivity:

The scatterplot for the standardised residuals and standardised predicted values shows an even distribution around a horizontal line, thus, suggesting linearity.

3. Normality:

The Predicted Probability (P-P) plot shows that the errors in the data are somewhat normally distributed. Some residuals are not located on the line exactly. However, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has found no significant deviation from a normal distribution ($p = 0.200$).

4. Homoscedasticity:

The scatterplot of standardised residuals and standardised predicted values shows that the residuals have a constant variance, thus, homoscedasticity is assumed.

5. Independence of errors:

A Durbin-Watson test found a value of 2.151, indicating no high level of autocorrelation.

6. Multicollinearity:

There is some evidence for multicollinearity between the predictors (see assumptions model 1). However, since only one predictor is added to the regression model, this is not the case in the final model for the perception of immigration as a problem.

5. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative study took place in the form of interviews based on the before-mentioned questionnaire (see Appendix III). Of the 37 participants in Samen Hier, 17 were willing to participate. The outcomes have been divided into four sections: (1) the respondents' knowledge of refugee reception in the Netherlands; (2) their trust in the Dutch government and its immigration policy; (3) the direct effects Samen Hier has had on its participants; and (4) the indirect effects of Samen Hier.

5.1 Knowledge of refugee reception

First, respondents were asked about their previous experience with intercultural contact, and in specific, with refugees. Eleven out of seventeen mentioned at least some experience with international and intercultural contact before taking part in the community sponsorship program of Samen Hier; nine participants mentioned intercultural contact through work or volunteering for refugee organisations and four of them had a migrant background themselves. For example, one respondent was a volunteer at the Dutch NGO for refugees VluchtelingenWerk Nederland. Two others teach a language course to the children of asylum seekers, adult refugees, family reunification migrants and expatriates. One respondent volunteered in a Canadian program that matches refugees to hosts. Someone worked for an NGO in the Middle East that coordinates projects in support of Syrian refugees. Another was a language buddy for a Syrian boy and yet another worked in refugee camps in Greece.

In only a few cases, respondents mentioned that they did not have a lot of interactions with refugees or asylum seekers before taking part in the program. One respondent said: 'That was one of the reasons we thought: let's do that. Then you do indeed come into contact with people you wouldn't otherwise come into contact with' (Participant 12, November 28, 2022).

Thus, the largest part of the respondents already had some former experience in volunteering or working with immigrants or refugees. Two participants also mentioned this observation from their own experience with Samen Hier. One of them noted: 'I'm making a hypothesis here, but I think a lot of people who volunteer in Samen Hier already have a lot of intercultural experience and backgrounds' (Participant 14, November 30, 2022).

Factual knowledge

To objectively measure participants' knowledge of refugee reception in the Netherlands, two questions have been posed: one on the number of first asylum requests in the Netherlands in 2021, and one on the top three countries these refugees came from.

Each respondent's estimate of the number of first requests can be seen in Table 1. Out of the total of seventeen respondents, fourteen mentioned that they found the question difficult. Some made a random guess, while others had so little idea that they were unable to make an estimation. Of the ten participants who did provide an answer, nine overestimated the actual number of 24,740 first asylum requests in 2021 (CBS, 2022) and five people gave a number that was more than twice as large.

While many participants struggled with the number of asylum requests, most had quite a good idea of the countries where most asylum seekers came from. In Table 2, the numbers per country are shown for the 22 countries where most asylum requests in the Netherlands in 2021 came from. In the last column, the number of times each country was mentioned by a respondent is shown. Syria is rightly the most often mentioned country of origin, followed by Afghanistan. Less participants mentioned Türkiye, the country that is in third place. Additionally, four participants mentioned that they were surprised about the high number of asylum requests from Turkey after they were informed of the actual numbers. Three participants also mentioned Ukraine, while the country ranked only 22nd in 2021. Thus, in general, the respondents have quite a good image of the countries where most asylum

seekers come from, although many underestimated the asylum requests coming from Turkey.

Table 1: Estimation of the number of first asylum requests in 2021, per participant

Participant	Estimation
1	26,000
2	40,000
3	40,000
4	-
5	30,000
6	-
7	50,000
8	100,000
9	-
10	-
11	100,000
12	-
13	-
14	-
15	200,000
16	15,000
17	80,000

Table 2: First asylum requests in 2021 per country of origin and participants' expectations of the top three countries of origin

Country of origin	Actual number of requests	Number of respondents mentioning country as a top sender country
1. Syria	8,380	14
2. Afghanistan	3,005	7
3. Turkey	2,460	4
4. Yemen	1,190	4
5. Algeria	1,105	1
6. Morocco	905	2
7. Somalia	905	1
8. Eritrea	770	5
9. Iraq	745	6
10. Pakistan	445	0
11. Nigeria	420	0
12. Iran	265	1
13. Tunisia	265	0
14. Russia	205	0
15. Ethiopia	165	3
16. China	155	0
17. Egypt	145	0
18. Gambia	140	0
19. Sudan	135	1
20. India	120	0
21. Belarus	85	0
22. Ukraine	70	3
Total	24,740	

The effect of Samen Hier on participants' knowledge of immigration-related matters

Lastly, respondents were asked whether they believe Samen Hier has had an impact on their knowledge of asylum and integration procedures, policies and laws. For most, this was not the case. Four participants explained that this was not a topic they encountered or that was discussed with the sponsored newcomer. One respondent mentions that since the newcomer already received a status, most of the procedures were in the past and they did not have to deal with that together anymore. For one person, not talking about these procedures was a deliberate choice to prevent any unequal relationship between them and the newcomer: 'I could ask him about that, but I think: why? It's not something he wants to explain. And I think in any of our conversations you don't want to enforce: you were an asylum seeker. Their status has been guaranteed' (Participant 14, November 30, 2022).

Only four participants did receive some new knowledge of life in an asylum centre, the civic integration exam, the search for education and work, and the obligations newcomers still have after they receive their residence permit: 'Once you're a status holder, you're not there yet. That was interesting' (Participant 9, November 24, 2022).

5.2 Trust in the national government

According to Postmes et al. (2017), general trust in the national government could also be an influential factor in the support for immigration policies. Thus, the second part of the interview was meant to evaluate the respondents' trust in the national government, their support for refugee reception and their opinion on the current treatment of refugees in the Netherlands. Four statements were made to which respondents could answer with completely agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree, or completely disagree, according to a seven-point Likert Scale.

General trust in the national government

As shown in Figure 19, a small majority of the participants trust the Dutch government. However, most of them did not give a specific explanation for their position. Only four respondents mention positive aspects; they believe that the government has the best interests of the population at heart and that a good social safety net is in place. One of them explains: 'I trust in our social contract with the government and that it works, but I also know that there really are systemic flaws in how it works. But in principle, I trust that we have a benevolent government' (Participant 15, November 30, 2022).

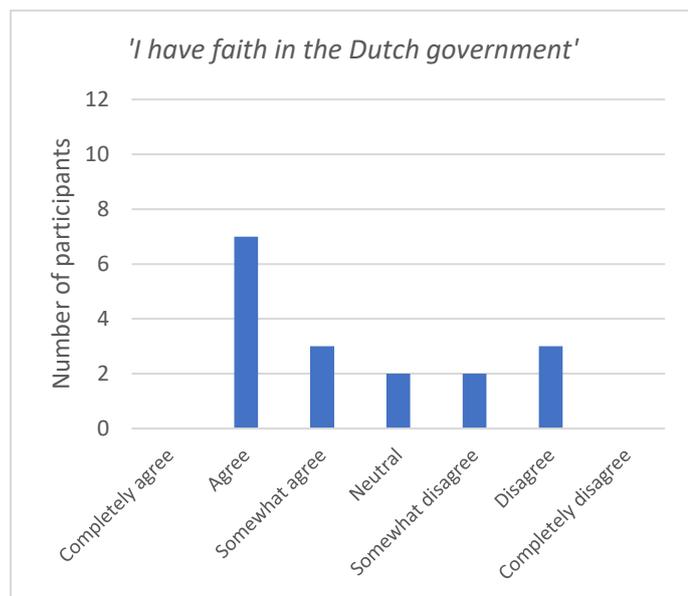


Figure 19: Participants' faith in the Dutch government

Both the respondents who have faith in the government and those who do not mention many negative characteristics. Four respondents explained that the recent childcare benefits scandal in the Netherlands has negatively impacted their trust in the government⁴. Partly because of this, six respondents explain that they have little faith in the current government administration led by the liberalist political party VVD:

I have faith to the extent that I basically assume that they [the government] have everyone's best interests at heart, but then when I think about cases like the childcare benefits affair, how many scandals there have already been with the VVD and that they've been the largest party for ten years. I don't have much confidence in them. I'm not a supporter of the current cabinet either and I think it [the political system] is moving to the right pretty badly. (Participant 13, November 30, 2022)

Two respondents believe the government to be thoughtless and non-transparent, one person feels like the government does not live up to its promises, and two others think that current policies lack consideration for the environment and social issues:

There are just a lot of incentives for them to not act in the interest of the people that I want them to act for (...) For me as an educated, obviously privileged white person, sure, fine. But also, I have to deal with climate change and other issues they are just not addressing. And I

⁴ The childcare benefits scandal refers to the Dutch political scandal in 2021 when thousands of families were falsely accused of fraud in their application for childcare benefits, often based on racial profiling.

tend to vote not for myself but for the people I think I should be voting for. And I don't see anything going well in that direction. (Participant 17, December 7, 2022)

One respondent points to an issue with the democratic system in general; each citizen can have a say in every social issue, with or without obtaining sufficient knowledge of the matter: 'We can all have an opinion, but just as well that I'm not a doctor and I don't want to have an opinion on that too much, it's the same with politics; you just have to learn more about that' (Participant 4, November 17, 2022).

Lastly, someone mentions the staffing shortages in different sectors and one person mentions the way asylum seekers are treated as reasons to have little trust in the government in general.

Support for refugee reception

The participants were also asked whether they support the permanent reception of refugees on the one hand and temporal hosting on the other hand. All seventeen respondents agreed that refugees should be able to stay in the Netherlands permanently. Contrarily, the responses to the second statement were quite diverse (see Figure 20).

However, those who agreed to temporal hosting do so because they see temporal hosting as an important option, while those who disagreed do so because they think temporality should not be a condition. Thus, almost all participants agreed that temporary shelter should be an option, but not a condition for the reception of refugees; refugees should be able to return if they can and want to, but if not, they are also welcome to stay permanently. The main reason, that was mentioned by five respondents, is the length of their stay in the Netherlands; if a person has stayed here for a few years and built a life in the Netherlands, respondents agree that a person should not necessarily have to return when the security situation in their country of origin improves: 'They don't necessarily have to go back. If people first stay here for ten years, waiting and building a life, and then they would have to go back, I disagree' (Participant 15, November 30, 2022).

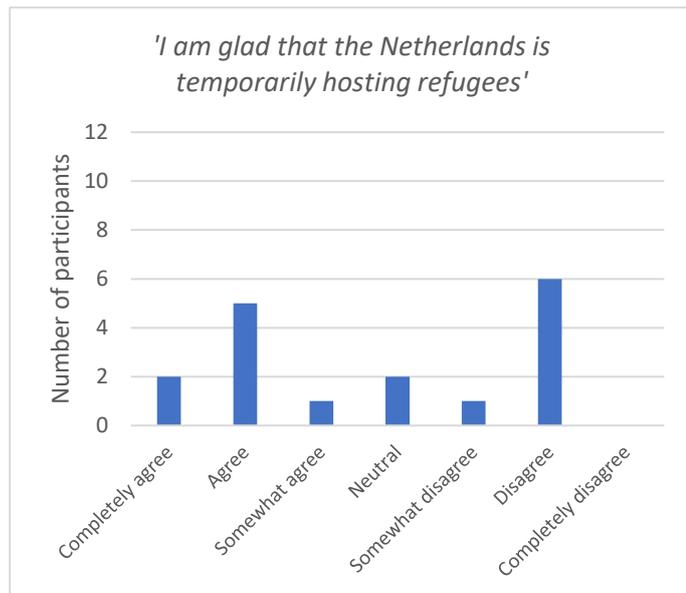


Figure 20: Participants' support for temporarily hosting refugees in the Netherlands

Two respondents added conditions to a permanent stay but did not specify these: 'I agree if they add something good, if they add something to society' (Participant 4, November 17, 2022). Another participant turned this around; instead of taking a contribution to society as a condition for a permanent stay, they saw the ability to stay permanently as a prerequisite for contributing to society:

What are they going to do temporarily? They need to build a life and only then will a society get all the benefits of their being here. Because if you are keeping people in limbo it just ruins their mental health and they can't build anything. How are they going to contribute if they don't know what for? (Participant 17, December 7, 2022)

One respondent explained that refugees should return as soon as they can but added that in many situations that is already the case. Another agreed that the security level in the country of origin is decisive, but that after a few years it is up to the refugees themselves whether they wish to return:

‘Safety in the home situation is decisive, I think. And even then, if someone has been here for a long time and is settled with their family, I think you have to leave it up to the people themselves whether they want to stay or go back.’ (Participant 12, November 28, 2022)

Opinion on the current treatment of refugees in the Netherlands

Fourteen of the seventeen respondents were unsatisfied with the treatment of refugees in the Netherlands, while the others remained neutral. Therefore, most participants were unhappy with the treatment of refugees in the Netherlands.

Ten people referred to the problems in Ter Apel and the poor distribution of asylum seekers to other asylum centres⁵. Six of them expressed their dissatisfaction with the organization of the Dutch asylum system and the way the national government and municipalities are dealing with the situation. One of them explained: ‘With the corona measures, so much could be arranged on short notice, but then this can’t be solved because municipalities suddenly cannot cooperate. Then something is really wrong’ (Participant 7, November 22, 2022).

Five other respondents pointed to the inhumane living conditions and treatment of asylum seekers. Two respondents expressed their disappointment that a situation like this can exist in the Netherlands. One of them stated that: ‘They [the Dutch government] act very tough about human rights and degrading situations in other countries, but we are pretty good at creating those ourselves too. It’s an arrogant attitude; it’s not justified’ (Participant 9, November 24, 2022). Another explained:

I had an initial shock because obviously in Greece you see the little kids being bitten by rats and they have scabies all over and they live in tents. The same people I’ve known five years ago still sit in the same fucking container. So when it happened the first time in the Netherlands that people were actually living in tents and there was a discussion whether they should have mattresses and stuff I was like, of course, why did I think it was different? And that moment of disillusion had to happen. And now it just makes sense to me. (Participant 17, December 7, 2022)

Next to the problems in Ter Apel, six respondents mentioned the poor attitude many Dutch inhabitants adopt toward refugees. They mentioned protest, ignorance, discrimination, and hostility toward refugees and asylum seekers. One person explained: ‘The Netherlands as a society is terrible right now. (...) The way people protest against refugees coming when those people are just fleeing war zones. It’s really incredible that people say they don’t want to work; they are not even allowed to work’, and later on this person added the inability of the government to tackle these issues: ‘Political parties don’t correct them; the government doesn’t do anything about it either’ (Participant 5, November 21, 2022).

Another thought that the government not only fails to tackle the problematic attitude of Dutch society but also takes part in this discrimination itself:

There really is a big difference between Ukrainian people being allowed to work and people from other countries. Then you could say: those are the Dutch people themselves who make the distinction in that, maybe not necessarily the government, but that is not the case because Ukraine is not part of the EU and people were allowed to work here anyway, while other

⁵ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Dutch asylum centres closed down. In the summer of 2022, this led to problems in application centre Ter Apel, because the reception centre did not hold enough place to shelter all asylum applicants that would normally stay there only temporarily
<https://nos.nl/collectie/13898/artikel/2441954-artsen-zonder-grenzen-naar-ter-apel-waar-opnieuw-700-mensen-buiten-sliepen>

people were not. That already indicates racism and discrimination. (Participant 2, November 15, 2022)

Another person pointed to the role of the media: 'The problem is also the media coverage about it. It's demonizing something that you don't know anything about' (Participant 17, December 7, 2022).

A third issue that was mentioned by four respondents was the inhumane and lengthy procedure asylum seekers have to go through before they get their final answer. All of them considered it inhumane that refugees have to go through a lengthy bureaucratic process before they are allowed to participate in society: 'Those people just want to get to work, but they can't because they don't have the right papers or they don't speak the language yet. (...) This [working] would make it much easier for them to find a place in Dutch society and to build a life' (Participant 1, November 14, 2022).

One respondent added that this prolonged process gives false hope to asylum seekers who have no right to a residence permit. They are allowed to stay for too long and build a life in the Netherlands:

Of course, not every asylum seeker is a refugee. What I saw then is that a lot of people are actually given false hope so that they could, for example, continue the asylum proceedings until the end of time while they actually had no basis at all on which they could get a residence permit. And that people had just been walking around in the Netherlands for twenty years and spoke the language and had built a whole life without actually being entitled to a residence permit. (...) I thought that was really bad. Just focus on the people who really do have an unsafe home and put your energy into that, so that they are taken care of. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

Two respondents opted for a stronger distinction between categories of immigrants because this way, more effort could be put into the integration of refugees: 'Of course [economic immigration] is more of their own choice. They only come to have a better life and I think that is different from fleeing a war' (Participant 4, November 17, 2022).

One respondent, who had gone through the integration process themselves, was critical of the trajectory. This person thought that the integration exam fails to capture the essence of integration and that instead of learning facts, interaction with Dutch inhabitants would be more valuable:

I went through the integration process myself. It doesn't add any extra value. (...) If that [Samen Hier] is one of the trajectories you have to do to integrate, for example, you have to spend ten hours or twenty hours with a Dutch family getting to know them as part of the road to citizenship in the Netherlands, that would really be a lot better than to sit behind a screen and answer a few questions. (Participant 8, November 22, 2022)

Two respondents, who had both remained neutral about the statement, were a bit more optimistic in their explanation and pointed out that besides the issues, there are also a lot of things that are going well. One of them mentioned: 'The intention they have is good, but it doesn't always go well of course. But when I see what is being done for [the refugee sponsored through Samen Hier], and for his wife now as well, you can be very satisfied with that' (Participant 4, November 17, 2022).

5.3 Direct effects of Samen Hier

The third section of the interview explored the effect participation in Samen Hier had had on its participants' perception of refugees and refugee reception. First, the general effect was taken into account, and then, any impact of Samen Hier was further explored through the six mechanisms identified by Postmes et al. (2017). Lastly, respondents' answers to the open-ended questions on the outcomes of their participation have been reviewed.

The effect of Samen Hier on participants' attitudes towards refugees and refugee reception

Respondents were asked in an open question how Samen Hier might have affected their attitude toward newcomers. For nine participants, the program had changed nothing in their attitude. For two of them, participation did reconfirm the attitude and ideas they already had: 'I don't think it changed my perception, but it was a nice reconfirmation that, of course, people who are on the move or who are new to a country are fully capable individuals. That you shouldn't frame them as someone who's needy' (Participant 17, December 7, 2022).

For four others, taking part in a community sponsorship program provided them with a more personal experience with refugee reception. While they were already quite aware of the facts, experiencing the journey a newcomer goes through up-close still positively affected their empathy for their situation. Two of them mentioned:

I think it just makes a really big difference when you get to know people personally. It's taken from the abstract to the personal, and that makes for a lot more empathy. And that only has to be one family. I always thought I was understanding, but it always becomes different when you just hear personal stories. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

He sat next to me that first night during the introduction. A very nice boy. He was sitting on the couch, the same age as my son, telling his story of how he spent a year and a half walking here. And you know that and you read that, but at that moment tears ran down my cheeks. When a boy like that is sitting in your living room and telling you that, suddenly it does hit much harder. (Participant 4, November 17, 2022)

Three participants explained how Samen Hier made them more aware of the obstacles a refugee encounters during the process of integration:

The challenges are really big, and for that matter, also within the culture. Men have to be successful. It's not culturally accepted to freeload for too long or to go out with a girl if you don't have a job yet. (...) And meaning, that's like oxygen. If you lack that, then you can be a fortune seeker, or whatever they call it, but that doesn't necessarily make you happy in the Netherlands. (Participant 9, November 24, 2022)

Furthermore, for two participants Samen Hier changed the way they perceive the role of society in the reception of refugees in the Netherlands. Both felt like Dutch citizens should be more involved with refugees and that it could have a large impact: 'I actually think we as a society should take better responsibility in welcoming newcomers. (...) It takes little effort, but it is very valuable' (Participant 3, November 16, 2022). The other explained:

You become much more aware of the obstacles and also the opportunities for those kinds of families. And the opportunities for other Dutch people to do more with that. I think there is now a realization that if there was more introduction between newcomers and the Dutch, it would have a big impact. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

Additionally, respondents were asked whether Samen Hier had made them more positive about allowing asylum seekers into the Netherlands. For fourteen participants, Samen Hier did not change this because they were already very much in favour of taking in asylum seekers before their participation. For none of the respondents, Samen Hier had made their attitude more negative.

Only three participants saw some kind of positive change because of Samen Hier. One participant stressed that for them, the distinction between refugees who flee from insecurity and other asylum seekers is very important: 'For refugees yes, but as I mentioned before, only for the group that really

comes from unsafe areas so that they can be helped much better instead of having very vague policies and not actually being able to do anything right for anybody' (Participant 1, November 14, 2022). Another person had become more positive about the opportunities for better reception of refugees:

I asked around who would like to be in a group with me and the echo that I got back from that was always very positive. (...) So in that sense, maybe yeah. I think I moved amongst people who are quite open. (...) We reconsidered that [forming a Welcome group] at one point as well and everybody was very positive about it. Maybe they could do a different group in a different city. It resonated very well. (Participant 17, December 7, 2022)

Mechanism 1: Increasing the feeling that the two groups are compatible

The majority of the participants agreed to the statement *'The culture of the newcomer(s) I have met through Samen Hier fits well into Dutch society'*, or remained neutral (see Figure 21). Those who chose 'neutral' do not think they have a good image of the newcomer's culture after participating in Samen Hier. They did not talk about this much or think that culture is too difficult to grasp. Others mentioned that, while they partly agreed, they believed that some aspects did not match the Dutch culture.

Three respondents mentioned the relationship between men and women as very different; in the families of the newcomers, the men seemed to provide for the family financially and the women took care of the household and the children:

The wife of that couple would also like to work, but they have three children and she is of course the one who would have to be at home most of the time to raise the children, and of course, she is also less skilled in the language (...) The husband is much more articulate and he is the one who will start to look for a job. I don't know how he would react if she would also like to work. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

Additionally, two respondents problematized the veil these women wore; they worried about practical issues and the different rules for dress between men and women: *'The girls are completely veiled. (...) I notice that I myself sometimes think: can those poor girls ride bikes like that? You know, things like that. These are things that I still have questions about sometimes'* (Participant 3, November 16, 2022).

Four participants found it difficult to take a position on this statement because they believed that fitting into a new society has more to do with personal characteristics rather than culture; if a person is open to new ideas, they will integrate more easily. One participant explained:

It's also very personal. They are a young couple and they come from a country with quite a traditional male-female division, but they themselves have the personalities to adapt. (...) They are quite open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. In that sense, I think as a family

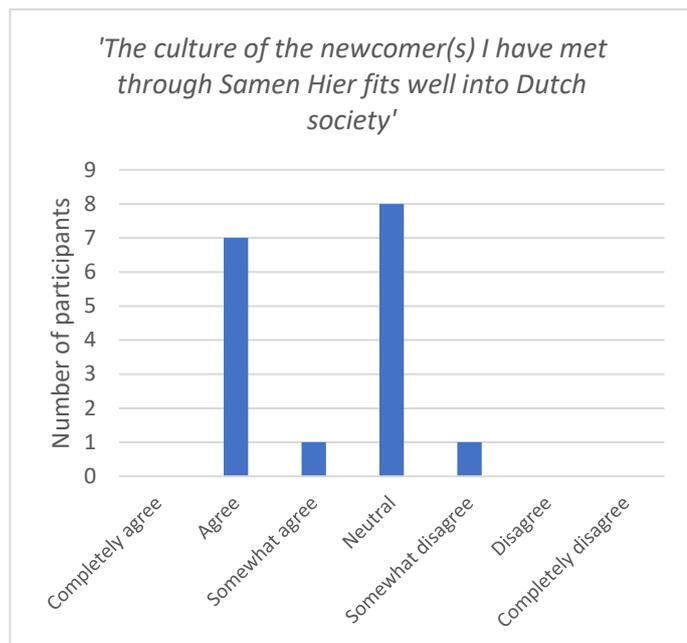


Figure 21: Participants' opinion on the compatibility of the sponsored newcomer's culture with Dutch society

they do fit in very well here, but in terms of culture, it's really a lot more traditional what I see. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

Rather than examining the culture of the newcomers, four participants focused on the nature of Dutch society instead. They did not think there is one, homogeneous Dutch culture, but rather a fluid, multicultural society that could fit any culture: 'Society is a big term, it's made up of different groups. There are a lot of Dutch Moroccans and Dutch Turkish people. The family is more of a traditional Middle Eastern, Northern African origin, but that fits here' (Participant 14, November 30, 2022). Likewise, another participant mentions:

Who am I to judge the culture? Culture is such a fluid thing and I don't claim to know the culture of the Netherlands; it's not monolithic. And I also for sure don't know his culture because he also lived in different countries. I would say, why not? I haven't seen how it doesn't fit because it's just as fluid and multifaceted as anyone's culture. (Participant 17, December 7, 2022)

Mechanism 2: Decreasing the feeling of competition between the two groups

Four participants agreed to the statement '*Because of my experience with Samen Hier I have become more positive about newcomers' housing and labour market integration*'. The others remained neutral because Samen Hier had not changed much about their attitude towards the housing and labour market integration of newcomers. Seven people mentioned that their attitude toward housing and labour market integration was already very positive before taking part in the program and that their opinion had stayed that way.

Four people thought Samen Hier did have some impact because it had increased their understanding of how the integration process works. Three participants mentioned more insights into the obstacles and one of them mentioned a better view of the possibilities too:

[I gained] more understanding and I also see more opportunities. What a shame that these young people are now sitting at home while they would really like to get a job but are unable to do so. I think the ambition and drive are there, but it is still too difficult to actually do something with it for the newcomers. (Participant 1, November 14, 2022)

Three of them also mentioned that participating in Samen Hier had given them a more personal image of integration. While they were already aware of the facts, they now saw what this search for a house and a job is experienced like up close.

Mechanism 3: Decreasing the feeling of a cultural and security threat to Dutch society

The perception of a threat to culture and security that Postmes et al. (2017) identify, was split into two statements: '*Because of my experience with Samen Hier I am more open to the influence of other cultures on the Netherlands*' & '*Because of my experience with Samen Hier I feel more reassured about potential security risks that are caused by the reception of asylum seekers*'. To both statements, all but one participant remained neutral, because Samen Hier did not change their feeling of a threat to Dutch culture or security by the acceptance of newcomers. Nine respondents mentioned that they were already very open to the influence of other cultures before taking part in Samen Hier and that they never felt threatened by the reception of asylum seekers in the first place.

For some, this had to do with their former experiences with intercultural contact through their work or personal life: 'I have also lived in Abu Dhabi and I have several colleagues with different backgrounds from Eastern countries. So no, this has not changed anything for me' (Participant 7, November 22, 2022). Additionally, four participants mentioned that their own background was not (only) Dutch, thus for them, Samen Hier had not changed their opinion.

To both statements, some participants reacted a bit indignantly. They felt like the statements were built on certain assumptions about asylum seekers, first, because they found the insinuation that asylum seekers could form a potential security risk offensive, and second because participants felt that ‘other cultures’ are already an inherent part of the Netherlands:

I think that's a tricky question, to be honest. Dutch culture, I don't know exactly what is meant by that in this context. (...) Also because Dutch society, if you read or interpret it as a kind of society and culture where newcomers don't belong, then I don't think that's true. (Participant 16, December 6, 2022)

Only one participant slightly disagreed with the statements. After being closely involved with a status holder who struggled a lot with their mental health in the Netherlands, this person mentioned that their participation did not reassure them, but that: ‘Maybe it even decreased that. Because I did find it intense to see. Especially during COVID-19, it all becomes more poignant. How alone someone is also has risks in it, to leave people to their own devices like that’ (Participant 9, November 24, 2022). Another participant agreed that Samen Hier had made them more open to other cultures because it increased their empathy for others.

Mechanism 4: Nuancing the perception of ‘us’ versus ‘them’

The reactions to the statement ‘*Our Welcome group and the sponsored newcomer(s) had more in common than I expected beforehand*’ were a bit more wide-ranging (see Figure 22).

Of those who found more commonalities than expected with the newcomer they were matched to, three mentioned similar interests, two mentioned a similar stage in life and family composition, and one person felt like they and the newcomer had a personality that was much alike. One person explained: ‘Sometimes you also get surprised. They have two girls who are veiled, but they were playing soccer in the square all together. I didn't quite expect that, so that's nice’ (Participant 5, November 21, 2022).

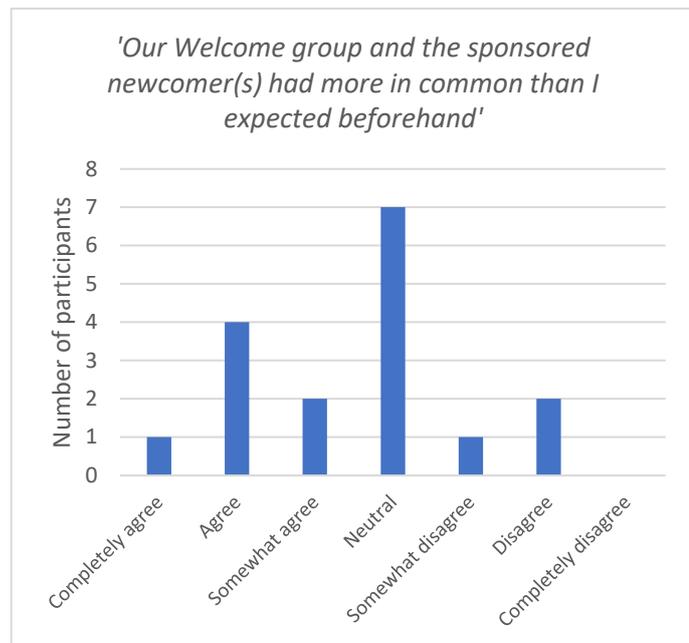


Figure 22: Participants' experience of their commonalities with the sponsored newcomer(s)

Another participant mentioned a shared atheistic viewpoint: ‘In that respect [religion] he doesn't think much differently than we do. (...) [He's] not really [religious], or at least not practising. He says: I accept people for who they are’ (Participant 10, November 24, 2022). One person explained their position by mentioning that they had very few expectations, to begin with, so they were pleasantly surprised when there were some commonalities. For one person the match was so good, that they thought they could have been friends without Samen Hier as well: ‘We were prepped for anything and anyone and he's sort of our age, similar stage of life, we have some similar interests. We could have just met him out and about, and he would be part of our friend circle’ (Participant 17, December 7, 2022).

Those who disagreed experienced the opposite: for them, there were fewer commonalities than expected beforehand. One person remained neutral because very little interaction had taken place between them and the newcomer, and thus they could not form an opinion on this.

Mechanism 5: Encouraging the positive valuation of cultural diversity

To the statement *'Cultural diversity is positive for the Netherlands'*, all respondents agreed (see Figure 23).

According to six respondents, the motivation behind their answer was that they believed cultural diversity to be inevitable. One person mentioned globalisation as the main reason for this. Another person thought that since it is inevitable, we might as well turn it into something positive. One of them explained:

I think this is just normal in 2022. You can't just live in a closed-off society anymore; that's just not possible. If you want to grow then you also have to see what other people are like and what other cultures and traditions are like. It's simply the only path I think. (Participant 8, November 22, 2022)

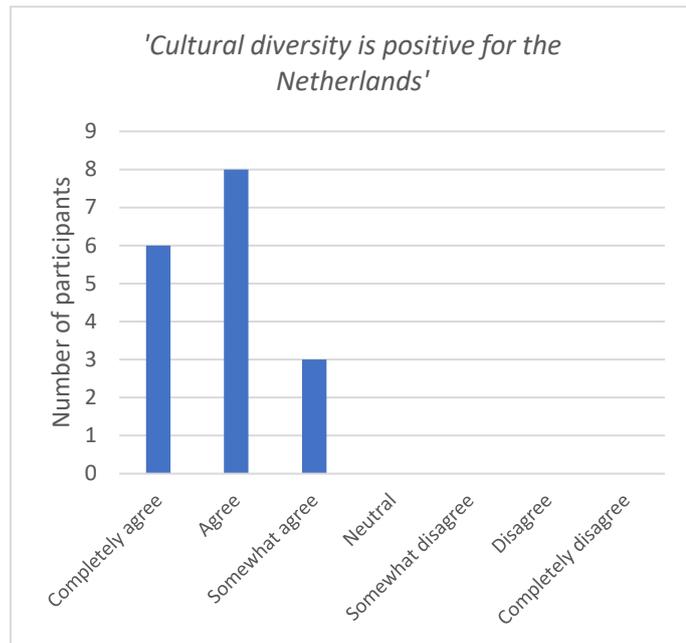


Figure 23: Participants' valuation of cultural diversity in the Netherlands

Three persons named the benefits of cultural diversity for a society; according to one of them, it can make a society more resilient. The two others thought that diversity stimulates innovation: *'Keeping a breath of fresh air in it [society] against those inveterate thoughts. Nothing wrong with that'* (Participant 11, November 28, 2022).

The three respondents who were a bit more hesitant, yet still somewhat agreed with the statement, all mentioned friction in society as the main reason: *'Diversity, in general, is good for change, innovation. (...) But it can also cause friction because there are more differences. So the more homogeneous a society, the easier'* (Participant 7, November 22, 2022). These participants made a distinction between their own opinion on cultural diversity, and the reality they encountered in society; not everybody agrees with diversity:

If I look at it on a kind of meta-level, of course, there are a lot of people who disagree with that [cultural diversity as a positive aspect], which means it's not necessarily good for Dutch society if there is diversity. So I personally do agree, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is the truth. (Participant 13, November 30, 2022)

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that the right support structures to manage diversity are not always in place. Therefore, it can also be problematic: *'If you have racial profiling and you don't have support systems to receive people who are from a different background, level of education or opportunities, and you have these dominant narratives in a society, then there will be more friction'* (Participant 14, November 30, 2022).

Mechanism 6: Creating more understanding and empathy for the other group

Four respondents agreed with the statement *'Because of my experience with Samen Hier I have gained more understanding of the motives for refugees to flee to the Netherlands'*, while the rest remained neutral. For most, Samen Hier had not changed anything about their understanding of the motives for

refugees to flee to the Netherlands. Sometimes, this was because they were already very understanding of this, and for others, it was because it was not a topic that was brought up in their conversations with the sponsored newcomers. Sometimes, this was a subject participants did not wish to initiate, because it could be rather painful for a refugee to talk about their flight story. For one person, it was not necessarily a topic they wished to discuss, because this person did not think it was important for their interactions:

We did talk about where we grew up, where we might have lived after that, but their move to the Netherlands, that was never fully articulated as to what exactly the motivation was behind that. And for me, if they want to share that, I'm happy to listen. It's not something I don't want to hear, but for my part, there is no need. If they have legitimate reasons, what those reasons are exactly, I don't find that very important for our contact. (Participant 16, December 6, 2022)

Three participants mentioned that they did talk about the motives for the refugee to flee their country and in some cases that did increase the participant's understanding: 'He was also in a refugee camp and he did talk about that sometimes. That did give more insight into why people would come here' (Participant 11, November 28, 2022). One respondent mentioned that through volunteering, they already knew a lot about these motives, but that adding one more personal story to their data had still had some effect on their understanding.

One person interpreted the statement more as to why refugees would choose the Netherlands in specific as a country of destination, rather than why they would leave their country of origin in the first place. This person was rather sceptical about the Netherlands as a good host country: 'I honestly understand less and less why they [refugees] would want to come here. But then again, a right-wing wind is blowing all over Europe' (Participant 5, November 21, 2022).

Open-ended questions on the outcomes of participation in Samen Hier

After the statements, respondents could describe their experience in some open-ended questions. They were asked about the positive and negative outcomes of their participation in Samen Hier. All respondents mentioned positive outcomes, whereas only nine respondents mentioned negative outcomes as well, of which eight describe these as 'minor issues'.

Eleven respondents considered the expansion of their social circle the most positive outcome. Three people mentioned that it was nice to break out of their social bubble for once and have contact with people they would have been less likely to meet outside of Samen Hier: 'I think you're kind of forced to make a bit more effort to go off the beaten path, and as a result, you meet nice people and experience nice things. I laugh a lot with that couple, so it's really a lot of fun' (Participant 5, November 21, 2022). Additionally, six participants also explicitly mentioned that they experienced their contact with the newcomer(s) as positive, for example, because they felt at ease together and were comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings:

I think it's very nice to notice that the people we are paired with, to the extent that I can judge for them, that they feel comfortable enough to invite other people and to say for themselves: we are unavailable then, this doesn't work for us or we don't like that. I feel like there does seem to be a certain kind of comfort both with the group and with the people we're paired with and I like that. (Participant 16, December 6, 2022)

Contrarily, two respondents mentioned that they felt a bit insecure in their social interactions with the newcomer. One of them explained: 'Sometimes it just takes a little finding out how it works. Do I understand you now in the way you mean to say this? But that's of course not something terribly bad that happened' (Participant 16, December 6, 2022).

For three participants, a positive outcome of taking part in Samen Hier was learning new perspectives. For one person, for example, Samen Hier had made them more aware of the privileges of living in the Netherlands. Another mentioned that: 'It does expand your worldview; it offers new perspectives and that is just very valuable. It gives you an insight into another world and it also expands your social circle' (Participant 1, November 14, 2022). On the other hand, one respondent mentioned that these new perspectives were not always positive. They struggled with the gender role distribution of the man and the woman in the family they had been matched to: 'He is super sweet to his wife, so not at all in that sense, but the relationships within the family, I find that interesting to see and I can't quite fathom that either' (Participant 12, November 28, 2022).

Another three participants mostly enjoyed being able to assist a refugee with practical matters, for example, learning the Dutch language:

He asked if I could help a little bit with some Dutch language stuff because he had an assessment at UAF, the foundation that financially supports refugees, and then I thought: now I can finally contribute something. (...) He had a request for help, he expressed it and I came to help him. (Participant 13, November 30, 2022)

Furthermore, two participants mentioned that because of Samen Hier, they got to take part in entertaining activities: 'It adds on a lot of levels. I get to see people I really like, including him, and I get to go outside. I look forward to those moments you know, so it did add to my own routine as well' (Participant 17, December 7, 2022). Two others mentioned that they liked taking on the role of coordinator and contact person in a Welcome group:

People asked me to be the contact person while I can actually be pretty shy and I also found it quite scary to suddenly fulfill that role and to start reminding or informing people, but I picked up on that anyway and continued to do that, also towards the newcomer. (Participant 10, November 24, 2022)

In addition, for two participants involvement with Justice & Peace was a benefit as well. One participant liked supporting the message the organisation means to carry out, and for another person, the best part was learning more about how organisations like Justice & Peace function. However, when asked about negative outcomes, five participants also mentioned some organisational inconveniences; the reality of Samen Hier did not match their initial expectations of the program. One of them had hoped to be able to help the newcomer a lot with practical matters, but this turned out not to be the case. For another, the match with the newcomer was not a good fit. They wonder: 'What do I actually have in common with them? Do I even have anything to offer? Maybe on that level, I was a little doubtful about the contact after all' (Participant 2, November 15, 2022).

Lastly, one person mentioned a larger negative outcome. This person was doubtful of the impact the program had had on the newcomer and feared that it might also have negatively affected that person:

[I] also [feel] a bit of uncertain as to whether this has really done him any good because you're also confronting someone with: look how nice we all have it here? That's not something that I think has been so nice for him. I'm certainly not convinced of that. I just don't know, what this is like for him. (Participant 9, November 24, 2022)

5.4 Indirect effects of Samen Hier

The last open-ended question investigated the indirect effect participation in Samen Hier may have had. Nine respondents did not think their participation had affected anyone outside of the Welcome group and the newcomer(s) they had sponsored. One of them explained: 'Not really, until others have

met [the newcomer] because it's hard for them to form a picture and everybody is busy, so it doesn't lead to much yet' (Participant 1, November 14, 2022).

The other eight respondents mentioned some kind of impact by informing others of the initiative. They all received very positive reactions from others on the concept of a community sponsorship program. In five cases, participants thought that spreading the idea might encourage others to participate in similar programs: 'Every time we tell people about it they find it very nice and interesting. (...) I don't know if it has a huge influence, but that can be a positive signal that makes people think a little bit about what they could do themselves' (Participant 5, November 21, 2022).

However, others mentioned that, while they received these positive reactions, they did not think the people they had talked to seriously considered taking part in a similar program:

I did tell a few people what I was doing. They all exclaim that they're going to do something too, that they're going to pick up on something like that, but it doesn't really happen much. I have forwarded things sometimes, but then you don't get much response from others. (Participant 11, November 28, 2022)

6. Conclusions and Discussion

In this chapter, the outcomes of the literature review, the quantitative and qualitative analysis have been juxtaposed, to find any commonalities and deviations, and to provide a more in-depth explanation of the statistical findings.

6.1 Conclusions

Community sponsorship is a type of refugee settlement that takes the form of a partnership between, on the one hand, a government that facilitates the refugee's legal admission, and on the other hand, private actors who provide refugees with financial, social and/or emotional assistance during their settlement into the community (ICMC Europe & Caritas Europa, 2019). The goal of this study was to find out whether these programs hold the potential to influence their participants' perceptions of refugee reception, and subsequently, to raise public support for it. The expectations, rooted in the contact hypothesis of Allport (1954), were that frequent interactions between refugees and sponsor-participants, an essential part of community sponsorship programs, could foster better intergroup relationships. According to Postmes et al. (2017), this effect can be split into six mechanisms; a sense of compatibility between groups, the absence of intergroup competition, the absence of a perception of a cultural or security threat to the receiving society, a nuanced perception of 'us' versus 'them', a positive perception of the outcomes of cultural diversity, and understanding and empathy for the other group. Subsequently, these mechanisms could increase support for immigration policies, such as refugee reception.

Interactions with refugees, the quality of intergroup relationships and support for refugee reception

Mediation analysis found that having daily interactions with immigrants positively relates to an individual's comfort with immigrants, which in turn positively relates to perceiving immigration as an opportunity (indirect effect: $r = 0.393$, $p = .017$). An even stronger negative relationship was found for the perception of immigration as a problem (indirect effect: $r = -0.704$, $p = .005$).

In the interviews with sponsor-participants of Samen Hier, evidence was found for a similar relationship between having frequent interactions with refugees and the support for refugee reception, although the impact seemed far less significant⁶. This is primarily caused by these participants' initial attitude towards refugees; even before taking part in Samen Hier, all participants were very supportive of the reception of refugees in the Netherlands. Most had quite some experience with intercultural contact, often even specifically with refugees, which meant that their participation in community sponsorship was not the first time they came into contact with newcomers. However, a few participants mentioned that they experienced some positive change in their attitude toward refugees. For them, Samen Hier provided them with a more personal experience with refugee reception, gave more insight into the obstacles refugees face, and made them rethink the role of society in this.

Like the mediation analysis, the qualitative analysis found some evidence that this relationship occurs through the quality of intergroup relationships. Participation in Samen Hier has created positive relationships between most sponsor-participants and the refugees they were matched to. When asked about the most positive outcome of their participation, eleven out of seventeen people explicitly mention the expansion of their social circle, while six of them add that they have built a comfortable

⁶ While the statistical effect focuses on respondents who interact with immigrants daily, none of the participants of Samen Hier had daily interactions with refugees. However, for almost all of them Samen Hier did increase their frequency of interactions with refugees.

relationship with the refugee. When asked about negative outcomes, only one of the seventeen respondents is not so sure about the outcomes of the contact.

This worked through at least three of the mechanisms Postmes et al. (2017) identify. First, most respondents felt that the culture of the newcomer they were matched to fit well into the Netherlands; thus, it could contribute to a sense of compatibility between these different cultures. Second, participation in Samen Hier seems to have had some positive influence on the perception of similarities between the two groups, decreasing the perception of 'us' versus 'them'. Third, for many respondents, frequent interactions with a refugee have created more empathy and understanding.

For the remaining three mechanisms, no evidence was found that either supports or discredits their functioning. Participation in Samen Hier does not seem to have influenced its participants' perception of labour and housing-market competition with refugees, perception of a cultural and security threat caused by the entry of asylum seekers, and valuation of cultural diversity. However, the respondents explained that they did not perceive any competition or threat in the first place and that they already considered cultural diversity as something positive before they participated in Samen Hier.

Factors that influence the support for refugee reception

The literature mentions two other factors that could influence the support for refugee reception. First, Postmes et al. (2017) suspect that trust in the democratic system of the national government might increase the support for refugee reception. Second, Adviesraad Migratie (2022) states that most people tend to overestimate the actual number of immigrants and refugees that enter a country. The initial hypothesis was that this could also affect the support for refugee reception.

In the qualitative study, respondents were also asked about their opinion on the Dutch government in general and its immigration policy. While most respondents are dissatisfied with the organisation of refugee reception in the Netherlands, they still have faith in the Dutch government. Since all participants also have a positive perception of refugee reception, this is in accordance with the literature. Furthermore, most respondents overestimated the number of asylum requests, even though some participants believed that their knowledge of refugee reception had increased because of their participation. However, this did not seem to influence their support for refugee reception. Thus, some qualitative evidence was found for an effect of the satisfaction with the national government, while no evidence was found for an effect of the knowledge of immigration-related matters.

In the quantitative study, multiple regression analysis found that the share of respondents in a country that sees immigration as an opportunity can be significantly predicted by both the share of respondents that is satisfied with the national government ($B = 0.231$, $p = .019$) and the share that is comfortable with immigrants in all social categories ($B = 0.197$, $p = .033$). The share of respondents that sees immigration as a problem can only be predicted by the share that is comfortable with immigrants in all social categories ($B = -0.458$, $p < .001$). No significant relationship was found between the knowledge of immigration-related matters and the perception of immigration.

The indirect impact of community sponsorship

Pettigrew et al. (2007) found that, next to the positive impact of direct intergroup interactions on intergroup relations, indirect contact could also help reduce prejudice. Individuals with ingroup friends that interact with other groups could also be impacted by these interactions and become less prejudiced. Thus, in theory, the refugee-sponsor interactions in community sponsorship could impact the social circle of sponsor-participants as well.

When asked whether their participation in Samen Hier has affected anyone outside of their Welcome group, half of the participants mentioned some kind of impact. Most shared their experiences with others and received positive reactions. In some cases, they believe that these conversations could potentially activate others to become more involved with refugee integration as well, although there are no known cases where this has been put into practice.

Community sponsorship in the Dutch context

Bakker et al. (2022) describe how the Netherlands has very little experience with citizen involvement in refugee reception and integration. This is especially the case in comparison to Canada, where private refugee sponsorship is an integrated part of the refugee reception (Hyndman et al., 2021). To gain more insight into the potential impact of community sponsorship in the Netherlands, some research was also conducted on the context of the Netherlands as a country of destination for refugees.

The outcomes for the Dutch respondents were quite average in many respects; the share of respondents who perceive immigration as an opportunity and as a problem, who have daily interactions with immigrants and who underestimate or overestimate the proportion of immigrants in the total population of the country.

However, the Dutch respondents deviate from the European average in some respects. First, the Dutch are more likely to feel comfortable with having an immigrant as their manager, work colleague, neighbour, doctor, family member (including partner) or friend. Second, the Dutch are above-average satisfied with the democratic system in their country and third, they are more likely to feel well-informed about immigration and integration-related matters than their European counterparts.

6.2 Critical reflection

Thus, this study has found some evidence that supports the hypothesis that community sponsorship could be a potential instrument to increase individual and public support for refugee reception in the Netherlands. The frequent interactions with refugees that form an integral part of the sponsorship programs could create better relationships between refugees and the receiving society. Subsequently, this could help generate more public support for refugee reception. Additionally, while the strength of the effect remains unknown, this study has found some evidence for an indirect effect of participation in community sponsorship on the support for refugee reception in the participants' social circle. The possibility of an indirect effect could further enlarge the potential impact of sponsorship programs on public support for refugee reception.

If the outcomes of this study are taken into account, the above-average comfort of the Dutch with immigrants and their high level of satisfaction with the national government could be positive characteristics for the support for refugee reception in the Netherlands. Therefore, the Dutch context seems favourable for the implementation of community sponsorship, or at the least, no evidence was found for an unfavourable climate. While the current scale of community sponsorship in the Netherlands might limit its positive effects, these could become more noticeable if programs are further expanded. Since, unfortunately, the world will likely see a future increase in the number of refugees, community sponsorship programs could become more important; not only to increase the absolute capacity for refugee reception and foster better integration but also to raise public support in the receiving society.

This potential impact would be the largest with sponsor-participants who are not already very supportive of refugee reception before the start of the sponsorship program because in that case, more space is left for a positive change. Of course, this is difficult to accomplish since these individuals are less likely to participate in community sponsorship for motivational reasons. However, while this

study focuses on community sponsorship programs in specific, its outcomes imply that other kinds of initiatives that foster positive contact between refugees and members of the receiving society could have similar effects. Therefore, other programs with these objectives and a lower participation threshold might perhaps prove to be quite beneficial.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

Of course, these outcomes should not be seen as conclusive proof of the effect community sponsorship can have, but rather as supportive evidence. Hopefully, it could inspire further research on this relatively new phenomenon in the Netherlands. Therefore, this section will list some recommendations for future research.

The largest shortcoming of this research is the selection bias of sponsor-participants. However, as mentioned before, it is difficult to overcome, since the effect of community sponsorship can only be examined through its participants. In an ideal situation, this bias could be overcome by setting up an experiment where individuals with less positive perceptions of refugee reception participate in a community sponsorship program. To accomplish this, an additional incentive should motivate these individuals to participate, since their willingness to assist refugees is not sufficient. However, the more negative attitude of the sponsor-participants could simultaneously influence the outcomes of the program, especially for the refugee they are matched to.

Another option to improve the validity of the study could be the addition of a baseline measure, in combination with a longer period for sponsor participation. A baseline measure ensures that the change of perception over time can be more accurately measured. Simultaneously, the prolonged period could make sure that respondents have had more experience with community sponsorship, and thus can be more certain of the outcomes of their participation. Ideally, intermediate tests could be used to examine the effects of the duration of the program on participants' perceptions. Perhaps, future research will also be able to study the impact of community sponsorship in the Netherlands in a more established and experienced context, to exclude the effect of any organisational shortcomings. Additionally, any growth in the program, or the establishment of other sponsorship programs in the Netherlands, could help to increase the sample size.

Furthermore, a more extensive quantitative study of the variables that might impact the perception of refugee reception in the Netherlands could be useful to support the research on the effects of community sponsorship. For example, by focusing on refugee reception rather than immigration, or by including more predictor variables, such as the quality of the interactions with refugees. Additionally, the use of individual data in a large enough sample of Dutch respondents could provide a better image of the context of the Netherlands in specific.

In the scenario that further research finds that community sponsorship does make a significant impact on its participants' perception of refugee reception, other studies could elaborate on the indirect effect, for example, by involving the perception of refugee reception of members of the participants' social circle in the dataset. This way, the larger potential for community sponsorship on the public support for refugee reception in the Netherlands could be examined.

With an eye on the potential outbreak of new conflicts and climate change in the future, the search for alternative pathways to safe refugee migration could become much more urgent. Additionally, better integration could create a more coherent society, where its members feel more empathy and understanding for others. Therefore, further research on programs like community sponsorship could be of great value.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Coverage countries of Special Eurobarometer 519

Country code	Country	Country code	Country
AT	Austria	HU	Hungary
BE	Belgium	IE	Ireland
BG	Bulgaria	IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus	LT	Lithuania
CZ	Czech Republic	LU	Luxembourg
D-W	West Germany	LV	Latvia
D-E	East Germany	MT	Montenegro
DK	Denmark	NL	The Netherlands
EE	Estonia	PL	Poland
EL	Greece	PT	Portugal
ES	Spain	RO	Romania
FI	Finland	SE	Sweden
FR	France	SI	Slovenia
HR	Croatia	SK	Slovakia

Onderzoeksverklaring

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Persoonlijke achtergrond

Na afronding van de bacheloropleiding Geografie, Planologie en Milieu, ben ik mij gaan specialiseren in de Engelstalige master Human Geography: Conflicts, Territories and Identities aan de Radboud Universiteit van Nijmegen. Op deze opleiding houden studenten zich bezig met onderwerpen als internationaal conflict, migratie, mensenrechten, integratie en discriminatie. Tijdens de master ben ik mij met name gaan richten op de thema's migratie, asiel en integratie in Nederland. Ik heb in het verleden bijvoorbeeld onderzoek gedaan voor De Jonge Akademie naar de ondersteuning van gevluchte wetenschappers uit Oekraïne, Belarus en Rusland door Nederlandse kennisinstellingen. Daarnaast heb ik mij ingezet voor Shelter City Nijmegen (een lokale afdeling van het landelijke mensenrechtenprogramma van Justice & Peace) als buddy en programmacoördinator.

Doel van het onderzoek

Gezien de vraagstukken die de toelating van vluchtelingen in Nederland via de reguliere route oproept, ben ik erg geïnteresseerd in alternatieve wegen voor toelating en integratie. Community sponsorship programma's (zoals Samen Hier) zouden een mogelijkheid kunnen bieden om draagvlak, betrokkenheid van de Nederlandse bevolking en capaciteit voor opvang te vergroten. Deze theorie is geworteld in de contacttheorie; het idee dat regelmatig contact tussen twee groepen voor meer onderlinge empathie en begrip kan zorgen. Er is echter nog geen wetenschappelijk onderzoek verricht naar dit effect in de context van community sponsorship in Nederland, omdat het concept relatief nieuw is hier.

In eerste instantie wil ik mij hierbij focussen op de ervaringen van de sponsoren die betrokken zijn bij Samen Hier. Ik richt mij daarom op het beantwoorden van de volgende vraag: *"In welke mate kan community sponsorship de houding van sponsoren veranderen ten opzichte van vluchtelingen in Nederland?"* Hiermee hoop ik een kleine bijdrage te leveren aan de bestaande kennis over dit concept, die gebruikt zou kunnen worden om vervolgonderzoek over de impact van community sponsorship te ondersteunen.

Onderzoeksmethode

Aangezien Samen Hier het enige community sponsorship programma in Nederland is, ligt een samenwerking met Justice & Peace voor de hand. Zodat sponsoren niet twee sets van vragen hoeven te beantwoorden, wordt het onderzoek geïntegreerd in de algemene evaluatie van Samen Hier. Dit betekent dat ik de hele evaluatie zal afnemen, waarna een deel van de informatie verwerkt wordt in mijn onderzoek. Dit zal plaatsvinden in de vorm van interviews met individuele sponsoren, naar verwachting in november 2022. Naderhand zal de informatie verwerkt worden in een masterscriptie. De uitkomsten worden ook gedeeld met Justice & Peace, zodat zij meer informatie verkrijgen over de impact van Samen Hier.

Privacyverklaring

De data die verzameld wordt, zal enkel voor onderzoekdoeleinden gebruikt worden. Interviews worden anoniem verwerkt, waardoor er geen persoonsgegevens openbaar gemaakt zullen worden. De verzamelde data zal na afronding van het onderzoek verwijderd worden. Dit alles is vastgelegd in een vertrouwelijkheidsovereenkomst met Justice & Peace.

Appendix III: Interview questionnaire

Deel 1: Kennis Nederlands asielbeleid:

1. Hoeveel eerste asielverzoeken denk je dat er in 2021 in Nederland ingediend werden?
2. Uit welke drie landen denk je dat de meeste verzoeken afkomstig zijn?

Deel 2: Algemene tevredenheid met Nederlandse overheid en asielbeleid

(stellingen a.d.h.v. een 7-punts Likertschaal, *volledig mee eens – mee eens – enigszins mee eens – neutraal – enigszins oneens – oneens – volledig oneens*):

3. Ik heb vertrouwen in de Nederlandse overheid.
4. Ik ben blij dat Nederland vluchtelingen tijdelijk opvangt.
5. Ik vind het goed dat vluchtelingen permanent in Nederland mogen blijven.
6. Ik ben tevreden over de manier waarop Nederland vluchtelingen behandelt.

Deel 3: Invloed van Samen Hier op de houding t.o.v. nieuwkomers

(stellingen a.d.h.v. een 7-punts Likertschaal, *volledig mee eens – mee eens – enigszins mee eens – neutraal – enigszins oneens – oneens – volledig oneens*):

7. De cultuur van de nieuwkomer(s) die ik ontmoet heb via Samen Hier past goed binnen de Nederlandse samenleving.
8. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier sta ik positiever tegenover de toetreding van nieuwkomers tot de Nederlandse woning- en arbeidsmarkt.
9. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier sta ik meer open voor de invloed van andere culturen op de Nederlandse samenleving.
10. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier ben ik meer gerustgesteld over eventuele veiligheidsrisico's door de toelating van asielzoekers.
11. Onze welkomgroep en de gesponsorde nieuwkomer(s) hadden meer met elkaar gemeen dan ik vooraf verwacht had.
12. Culturele diversiteit is positief voor de Nederlandse samenleving.
13. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier heb ik meer begrip gekregen voor de drijfveren die nieuwkomers ertoe bewegen naar Nederland te vluchten.
14. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier heb ik meer kennis gekregen over asiel- en integratieprocedures, -beleid en -wetgeving.
15. Door mijn ervaring met Samen Hier sta ik positiever tegenover de toelating van meer asielzoekers in Nederland.

Na iedere stelling de mogelijkheid voor toelichting.

Open vragen:

16. Wat was voor jou de meest positieve uitkomst van je deelname aan Samen Hier?
17. Wat was voor jou de meest negatieve uitkomst van je deelname aan Samen Hier?
18. Is je houding tegenover nieuwkomers veranderd door deelname aan Samen Hier? Zo ja, hoe?
19. Heb je het gevoel dat je deelname aan Samen Hier ook invloed heeft gehad om de mensen om je heen (los van je sponsorgroep en de nieuwkomer)? Zo ja, kun je dit uitleggen of een voorbeeld geven?