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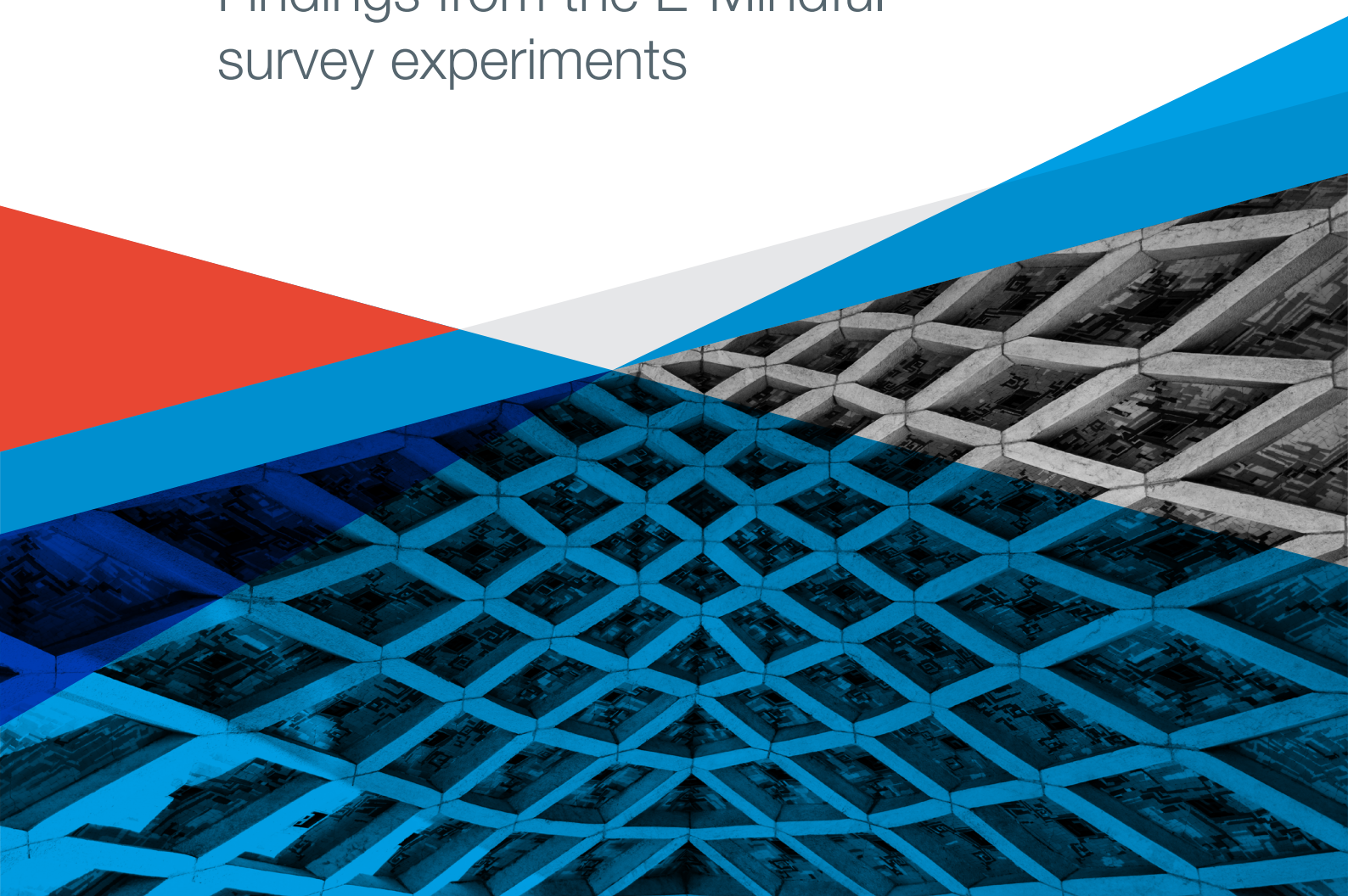
International  
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## E-MINDFUL PROJECT

Policy Brief

# Attitudes towards immigration in EU and Western Balkan countries

Findings from the E-Mindful  
survey experiments



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# 1. Introduction

The E-Mindful project contributed to investigating the key factors that shape public perceptions about migration and migrants, and aimed to provide guidance on how to build effective communication strategies. To achieve this objective, the project adopted a comprehensive process through which infotainment campaigns have been developed, tested and assessed on audiences in six countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

In each of the six participating countries, National Multidisciplinary Creative Groups (NMCGs) have developed communication campaigns aimed at raising awareness on the contributions of migrants to society. The campaigns intended to address primarily youth as the target population. The creative freedom offered to each group resulted in highly distinctive approaches.

Within the project, the team at the Migration Policy Centre (MPC) of the European University Institute (EUI) assessed the evidence from the E-Mindful project by carrying out nationally representative surveys in all six participating countries that included questions on attitudes to migration and other indicators that measured psychological, socio-economic, and political variance. The EUI conducted Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) to test the possible effects of the infotainment campaigns on the survey's respondents. These RCTs were embedded as survey experiments in each country.

The E-Mindful Impact Assessment Report<sup>1</sup> contains all the surveys' results with detailed analyses of its findings. This policy brief overviews the key findings concerning factors that potentially affect attitudes toward migration in each of the six countries surveyed, and whether there are any commonalities or differences between the sampled countries. It includes considerations about the measured impact of the infotainment campaigns on the target audiences and sub-group effects, showing if and how the campaigns' effects varied by the respondents' age, sex, educational level, economic status, and other individual characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> *E-Mindful Impact Assessment Report. What works and what does not when promoting a balanced narrative about migration? Experimental evidence from the E-Mindful project*, by L. Dražanová and J. Dennison, 2023 — International Labour Organization and Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, [https://e-mindful.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Impact-assessment-report\\_web.pdf](https://e-mindful.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Impact-assessment-report_web.pdf)

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## 2. Headlines

- Understanding population and country-specific factors is vital to designing an effective campaign.
- Communication strategies appealing to common interests, values and emotions, and using engaging, individualized and empathetic stories are generally effective.
- Values-based messaging is commonly recommended but rarely applied. Use more/other values besides ‘universalism’ and ‘benevolence’.
- Emphasizing diversity to counteract the identitarian contraposition of “us versus them”, conveying normative views of multi-ethnic society as natural, and appealing to negative emotions is ineffective.
- Four out of six E-Mindful information campaigns did not produce a significant difference in attitudes to migration between those who saw them and those who did not.
- In the other two cases, positive effects were short-lived and no longer present one month after the campaign. The outcome is consistent with evidence from academic research. This finding represents an important element to consider when evaluating the efficacy of campaigns funded with taxpayers’ money.
- Anti-migrant sentiment is a multifaceted issue influenced by numerous factors; even when effective, communication interventions alone have limited impact.

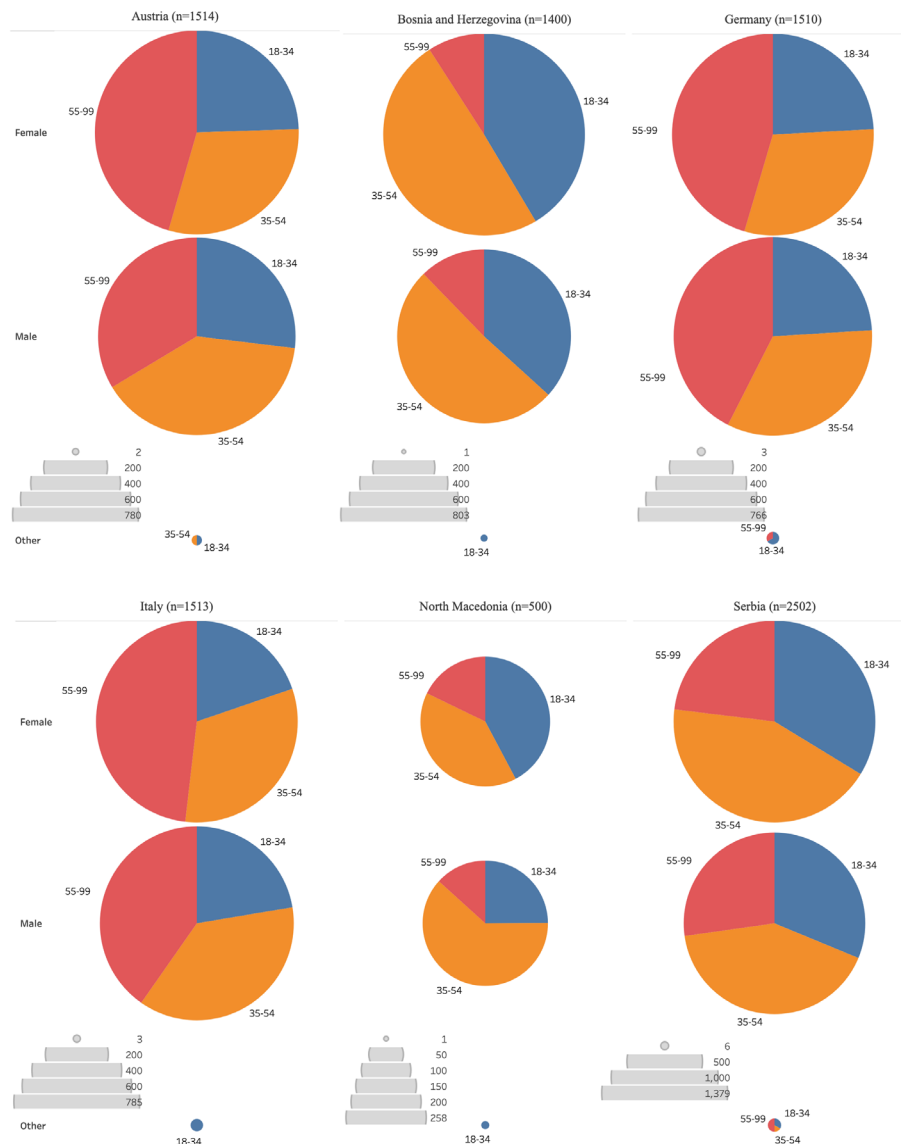
### 3. Surveys

Two rounds of surveys were carried out between August 14th and October 25th 2023. The questionnaire was uniform across countries and rounds, translated into national languages and aimed to be representative in terms of major sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, education and region of residence.

Participants, minimum 18 years old, were recruited by a survey company. Detailed information about participation rules was provided in advance, and participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. Data collection adhered to strict European data protection laws and regulations. Survey results were evaluated anonymously.

The surveys looked at five types of attitudes to immigration. It measured respondents' opinions about the effects of immigration on the country overall; the country's economy, the country's culture, the country's demographic future, on people's lives.

Fig. 1 Survey sample by sex and age in the six participating countries.



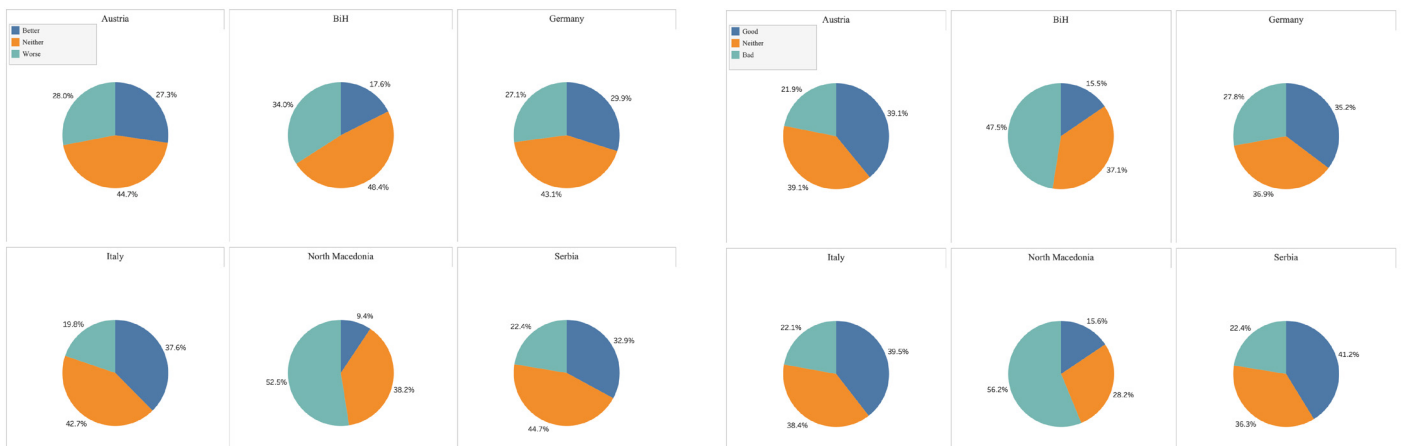
## 4. Results

One added value of the E-Mindful surveys is that they looked at factors affecting attitudes toward migration both in countries that are regularly surveyed on the topic as well as in countries often understudied. All experienced migration from various parts of the world, although with wide variations in terms of scales, composition, and time. Most of the surveyed countries are transit and destination countries simultaneously. Each country, to varying extents, also generates outward migration and mobility of their own citizens, resulting in the establishment of significant communities abroad.

This section highlights some of the findings and shows a few descriptive statistics, focusing only on respondents' attitudes about the effects of immigration on the country overall and the country's economy.

Fig. 2 Total sampled population: Would you say that [your country] is made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

Fig. 3 Total sampled population: would you say that it is generally bad or good for [your country]'s economy that immigrants come to live here?

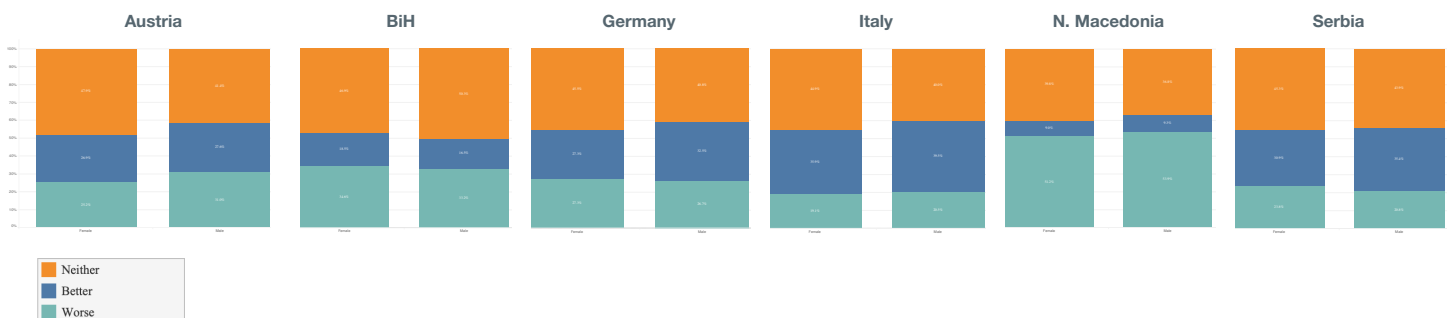


Looking at the sociodemographic factors that influence attitudes toward migration across the participating countries, the most notable results include:

### Sex

Overall, the descriptive statistics show some differences between sexes in their attitudes toward migration in both the EU countries and the Balkan countries. Male respondents in Germany, Italy and Serbia are more inclined to have more positive views regarding migration's effect on the country and its economy compared to females.

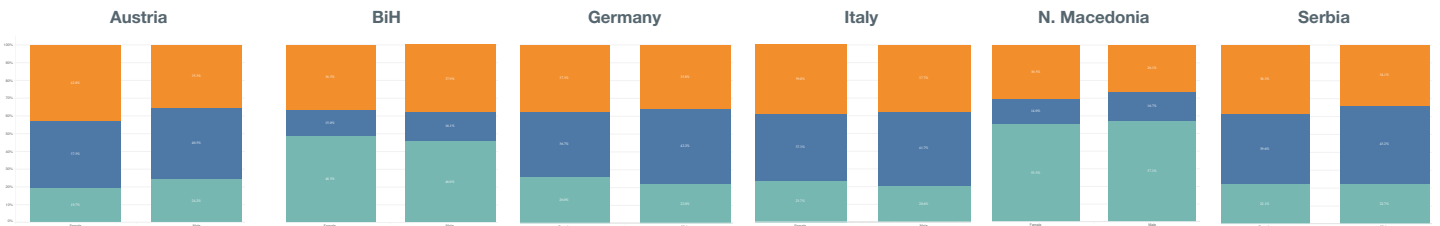
Fig. 4 Disaggregation by sex: would you say that [your country] is made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?



However, the more refined analyses of the Impact Assessment Report did not find the respondents' sex to be a significant factor in determining attitudes toward migration in either the EU countries or the Balkan countries. The only notable exception being Germany where female respondents are significantly more negative regarding migration's effect on the country and its economy compared to males.

The finding that sex is not a significant factor in affecting attitudes toward migration, and that men and women are similarly likely in their negative or positive views, is fully consistent with previous research.

Fig. 5 Disaggregation by sex: would you say that it is generally bad or good for [your country]'s economy that immigrants come to live here?



## Age

Generally speaking, younger respondents in most countries are more likely to hold pro-migration views. The descriptive statistics confirm that this is the case as far as the three EU countries are concerned, where younger respondents are more inclined to select a positive answer than the other age groups about the effects of immigration on the country overall. However, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the highest share of respondents opting for a more positive attitude is among the older cohort of the sampled population.

The picture becomes more articulated concerning the effects of immigration on the country's economy, where positive attitudes are both more frequent and more evenly distributed across all age groups.

Fig. 6 Disaggregation by age: would you say that [your country] is made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

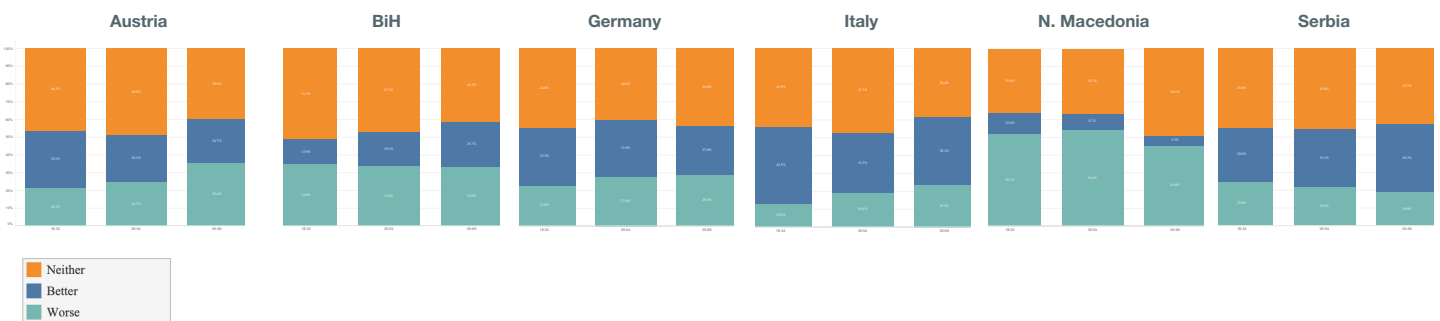
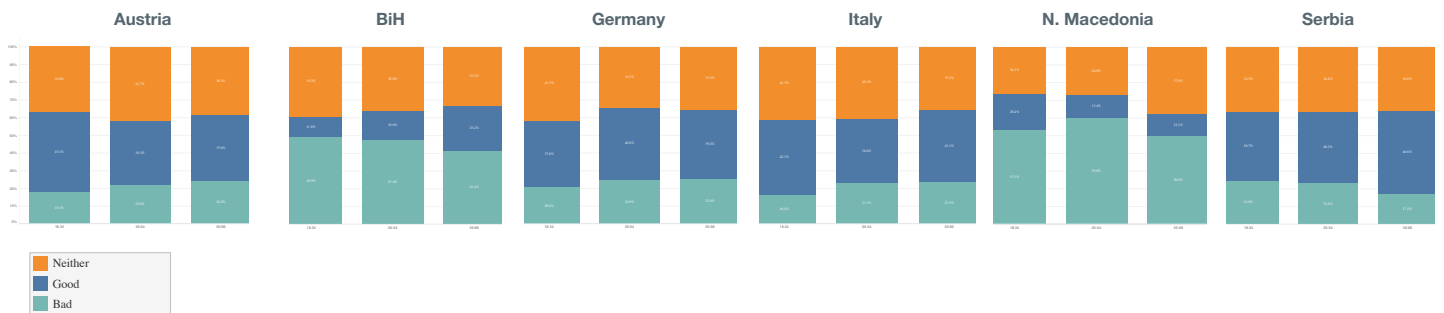


Fig. 7 Disaggregation by age: would you say that it is generally bad or good for [your country]'s economy that immigrants come to live here?



The more refined analyses of the Impact Assessment Report found that in none of the six countries age has a significant effect, meaning that none of the age groups were relatively more or less pro-migration compared to the others.

### Education

Generally speaking, in most countries people with higher levels of education hold more positive views towards immigration. The descriptive statistics confirm that this is the case across all surveyed countries. Respondents with a high education tend to select more frequently a positive answer than respondents with medium and low education – with the exception of Serbia.

The more refined analyses of the Impact Assessment Report found that higher educational levels were indeed predictive of more pro-migrant attitudes in the EU countries, while in the Western Balkan countries this effect was not observed.

Fig. 8 Disaggregation by education: would you say that [your country] is made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

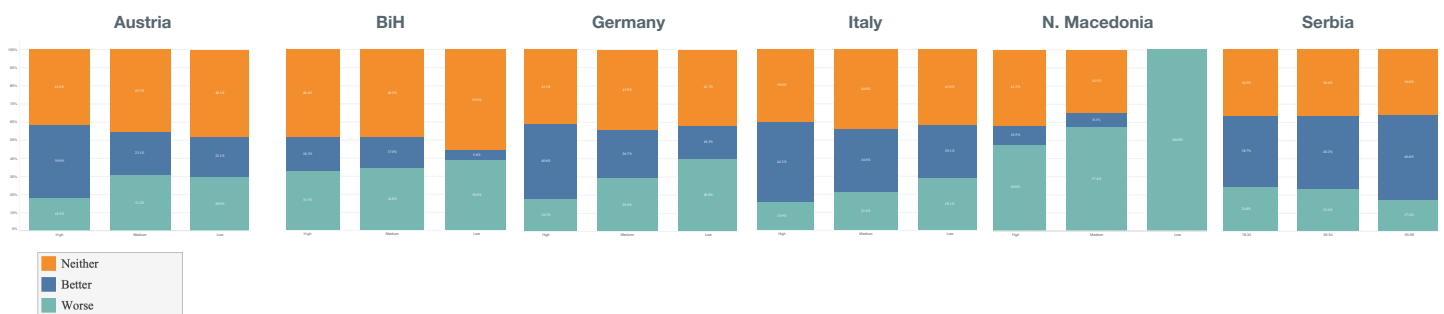
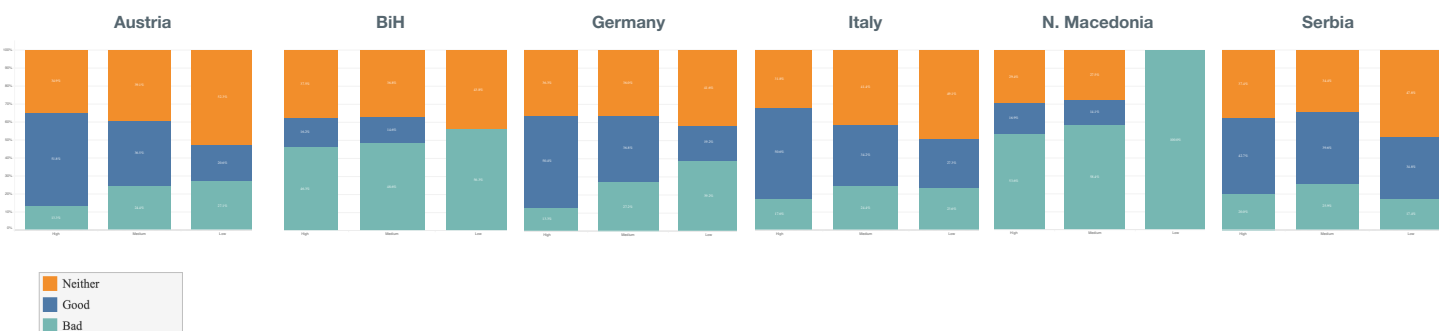


Fig. 9 Disaggregation by education: would you say that it is generally bad or good for [your country]'s economy that immigrants come to live here?





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### **Economic status, employment, rural/urban settlement, and other individual characteristics**

Individual variations in attitudes toward migration are frequently linked to personal economic circumstances. The literature finds that people facing economic vulnerability are more often holding less tolerant attitudes toward outgroups and minorities than the better-offs, because they perceive a direct economic threat from these groups. The analysis of the surveys shows that, in none of the covered countries, the actual income plays a significant role in predicting attitudes to migration. However, when considering subjective economic status – “how you feel about your household’s income” – perceived income difficulties affect attitudes towards immigration. Subjective income difficulties negatively affected attitudes toward immigration in Austria, Germany, North Macedonia and Serbia, while they had no effect in Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is fully consistent with academic research that showed that a pessimistic personal economic outlook correlates with increased negativity toward migrants.

Similarly, the literature finds that individuals who are not employed are more often inclined to hold negative views towards immigration, fearing competition on the labour market. Nonetheless, the survey results do not find any significant difference between the employed and unemployed in their attitudes towards immigration across the considered countries.

Another element recurrently investigated in the literature regards possible differences in attitudes toward immigration based on the context in which the respondents reside. Overall, residents in urban settings display more often positive views than those who reside in rural areas. The E-Mindful surveys found that living in larger cities significantly contributes to positive migration attitudes in Austria, Germany and Serbia.

Finally, the surveys showed that a strong emotional attachment to the country by the respondents correlated with negative attitudes in the three EU countries, whereas more positive attitudes were observed in the Western Balkan countries.

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## 5. Impact of the E-Mindful infotainment campaigns

Each country's creative team of the E-Mindful project designed and produced their own infotainment campaign. The overarching goal of these campaigns was to foster a shared sense of belonging between natives and migrants, promoting a more cohesive and welcoming community. However, it is important to underline that, despite a common overarching message, the use of different interventions and the diversity of formats encouraged creativity, but reduced the overall comparability across countries.

The Impact Assessment Report evaluated the relative effects of the campaigns, if any, on the respondents' views concerning the impact of migration on the country overall, on the economy, culture, demography and people's life, by applying a rigorous design to the surveys. Half of randomly selected respondents participating in the surveys watched the campaign, whereas the other half did not. This way, it became possible to estimate the causal effect of the campaigns, comparing the results of those watching the campaigns with the ones of the control group. Since it is important to understand if the effects of the campaigns endured over time, a second round of the survey was carried out one month after the first one to register whether the measured effects, if any, had lasted or not.

All creative teams designed their information campaigns with the goal of addressing primarily youth as the target population. The report thus looked at possible differences in terms of younger respondents who were shown the campaigns expressing more positive attitudes toward migration. The original intent of the creative teams was not confirmed by the results. In most countries, the infotainment campaigns did not have a particularly strong impact on the young compared to the old. If age-specific effects have been detected, the campaigns resonated particularly strongly with the oldest group of respondents.

The effects of the campaigns varied strongly between the participating countries and demographic subgroups.

Austria's campaign achieved a consistent positive impact on attitudes toward migration immediately after viewing, particularly regarding immigration's effects on the country, economy, culture, and demography. However, these positive effects did not endure after one month. Subgroup analysis revealed interesting variations in impact, with positive effects on older respondents and those facing income difficulties. Similarly to Austria, Serbia's campaign initially achieved large positive effects on attitudes toward migration. Subgroup analysis showed that the campaign had significant positive effects regarding attitudes toward migration among males, those living comfortably on their present income, older people (55 years old and above), those who are not employed full or part-time, and those with only elementary school education. However, these effects diminished after one month, highlighting the temporary nature of the campaign's impact.

Both the German and Italian campaigns had very limited, almost negligible impacts, with only a temporary effect. The infotainment campaigns did not yield any significant impacts on attitudes to immigration in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. In all four countries, the campaigns even had negative effects on some subgroups.

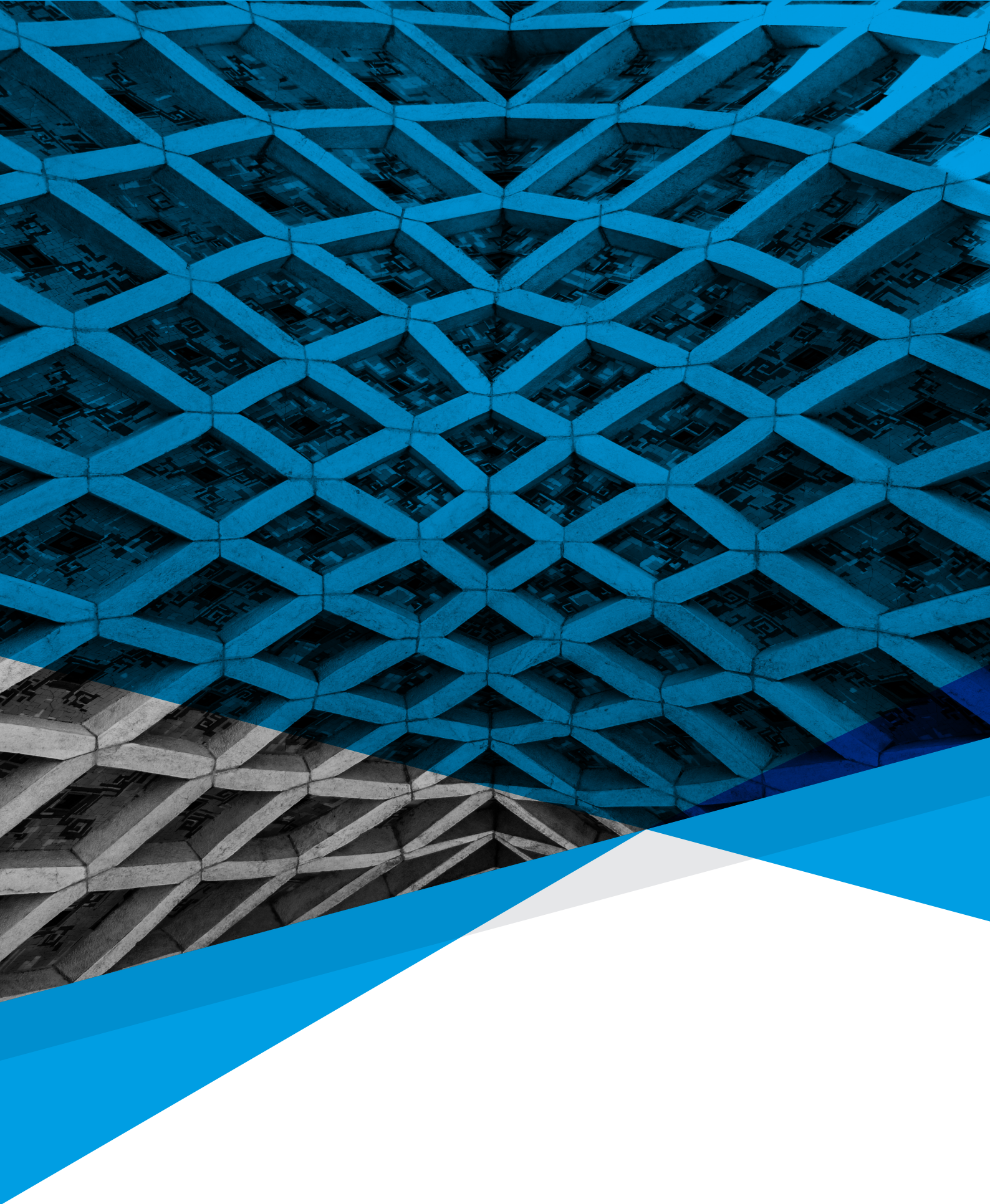
## 6. Conclusion

Through the E-Mindful project, spanning six European countries, the impact assessment exercise offered key insights for evaluating communication strategies on immigration. Despite variations among the surveyed countries in terms of type and scale of migration dynamics, the analysis observed a series of patterns.

Differences based on sex played a limited role, with Germany being a notable exception where female respondents expressed significantly more negative attitudes. Education's impact was nuanced, with university-educated individuals generally holding more pro-migration stances in Austria, Germany, and Italy, but no such effect was observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Contrary to expectations, age and economic conditions did not significantly influence attitudes toward migration in the studied countries. However, subjective income difficulties emerged as a significant predictor, aligning with earlier research indicating their strong association with negative attitudes toward migrants. Finally, while frequent contact with migrants leads to more positive attitudes to migration, living in areas with a significant proportion of migrants significantly worsens attitudes toward migration. One of the important differences between the EU and Western Balkan countries is that, while in the former strong emotional attachment to the country leads to negative attitudes toward migration, in the Western Balkans it affects migration attitudes positively.

These nuanced findings challenge the assumptions rooted in Western-centric existing research, about the universality of factors influencing attitudes toward immigration and the possibility to apply the same interpretive lenses in other regions of the world. Examining specific campaign outcomes, the critical scrutiny indicated that applying proven effective strategies can still be unsuccessful when other elements of the communication campaign are obstructive. For example, unclear messages, triggering negative emotions, and the use of an ill-selected messenger can hinder impact. In addition, the research unveiled how any positive effect of the campaigns was systematically temporal and short-lived. The findings highlight the need for rooting communication campaigns concerning immigration into already confirmed strategies that have proved to be working by numerous social studies, even at the cost of limiting the creativity of the teams designing the campaigns. The findings also highlighted that additional research is needed into the intricacies of prolonging the positive effects of communication campaigns.

In conclusion, the experiment studies offer actionable insights for policymakers and communicators, advocating for clear, relatable messaging and the consistent application of effective strategies to shape public attitudes toward migration. A good understanding of the country-specific context is essential, emphasizing the need for more targeted approaches. In the design, appealing to conformity and common interests, and employing clear migrant descriptions emerged as highly effective. The E-Mindful survey experiments confirm that this methodology is critical to contribute valuable knowledge and inform future endeavours in strategic communication on migration.



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