



ACRONYM

**An analysis of the evolution
of public opinion on migration
in France, Germany and
the Visegrad countries
(2014–2024)**

The Evolution of Public Opinion on Migration: A Comparative Analysis of France, Germany, and the Visegrad Four in the Past Ten Years

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1. Introduction

Following the rapid increase in the flow of refugees and migrants since 2015, culminating in what was called the “migration crisis”, the European Union (EU) has faced several challenges that went beyond the logistical or humanitarian aspects. The high influx of asylum seekers and migrants crossing EU borders challenged European unity, exposing deep fractures in the continent’s political landscape. While the “crisis” was portrayed as being “European”, the reactions to it were distinctly national. Nowhere was this divergence more palpable than in the contrast between the “core” Western powers, specifically France and Germany, and the Visegrad Group (V4) countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This divergence in sentiment between Western European powers and the V4 is not merely a matter of policy preference but is rooted in deeper historical trajectories and migratory traditions. While initially the countries most affected and with a long tradition of immigration showed solidarity towards asylum seekers, while the V4 rejected not only accepting migrants but any policy attempt taken at the EU level (Kazharski and Tabosa, 2018).

This report seeks to trace the evolution of public opinion on migration through a qualitative analysis of the Eurobarometer surveys conducted over this ten-year period, associated with secondary studies. The report explores the evolving perceptions of *migration* across six key nations, France, Germany, and the V4, mapping the salience of migration among the public, how the perceived value of migration, and the desire for unified EU policy have fluctuated alongside major events.

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2. Methodological Framework: Analyzing the Eurobarometer Surveys

This analysis is grounded in a qualitative review of quantitative polling data, collected across the European Union between 2014 and 2024, utilizing the only standardized, high-volume survey that provides data for all the selected countries throughout the years: the Eurobarometer Survey. In total, I trace the evolution by looking at data from ten Autumn/Winter Standard Eurobarometer Surveys, whose data is collected usually spanning October and November, after the summer months and when the influx of migrants arriving at Europe is higher. The decision to rely on this source is led by the fact that it ensures cross-national comparability and minimizes the biases associated with differing national sampling methodologies. For national contextualization, I rely on secondary sources. The methodology emphasizes tracing trends, identifying directional shifts, and comparing the trajectory of public opinion between Western Europe and the V4 bloc.

The Eurobarometer is employed for its consistent, recurring questions on public attitudes toward the European Union, including specific metrics on migration policy and the perception of third-country nationals. Its large sample sizes and regular publication cycles offer a high-resolution, longitudinal track of European shifts in sentiment. For inclusion in the analysis, all data fell within the 2014-2024 time frame, and ensured comprehensive coverage of the pre-crisis period, the 2015 peak, and the subsequent post-crisis consolidation phase. Furthermore, selected survey questions contained at least one metric addressing “migration”, “immigration”, “migrants”, “asylum seekers” “temporary protection”. In total, the questions selected for the analysis covered salience of the issue in the national context, acceptance of immigrants from outside the EU, contribution of migrants to the host society, and governance on asylum and migration.

3. “Crisis”, “Humanitarian Duty” and the Shift towards Securitization of Migration

The analysis of public opinion must be contextualized by the specific events that served as potential catalysts for the shifts in sentiment towards migrants and asylum-seekers. The first major event is the 2015 migration “crisis”. In the West public opinion was profoundly influenced by the widely publicized tragedy of the death of Alan Kurdi in September 2015, which triggered a temporary but significant humanitarian wave (Sohlber et al., 2018). Studies that included also France and Germany registered a temporary spike in public empathy and a willingness to accept refugees, overriding immediate security or economic concerns (Talò, 2017). In France, data from the European Social Survey reveals that during the early 2000s, the prevailing sentiment



was either negative or uncertain regarding immigration's impact on French life. In 2016 a notable shift occurred, marking the first time positive perspectives outweighed negative ones (see Holloway et al., 2022). In the East, prior to 2015, migration was not an issue that was politicized. Most decisions taken on migration was done by the executive with very little public debate being generated (Scholten, 2016; Kazharski and Tabosa, 2018). The images of a massive influx of migrants European borders was highly publicized and, as by 2016 certain countries like Hungary became major transition countries; political elites in the V4 started using securitizing discourses as a tool for electoral profit (Bocskor, 2018; Surányi and Bognár, 2025).

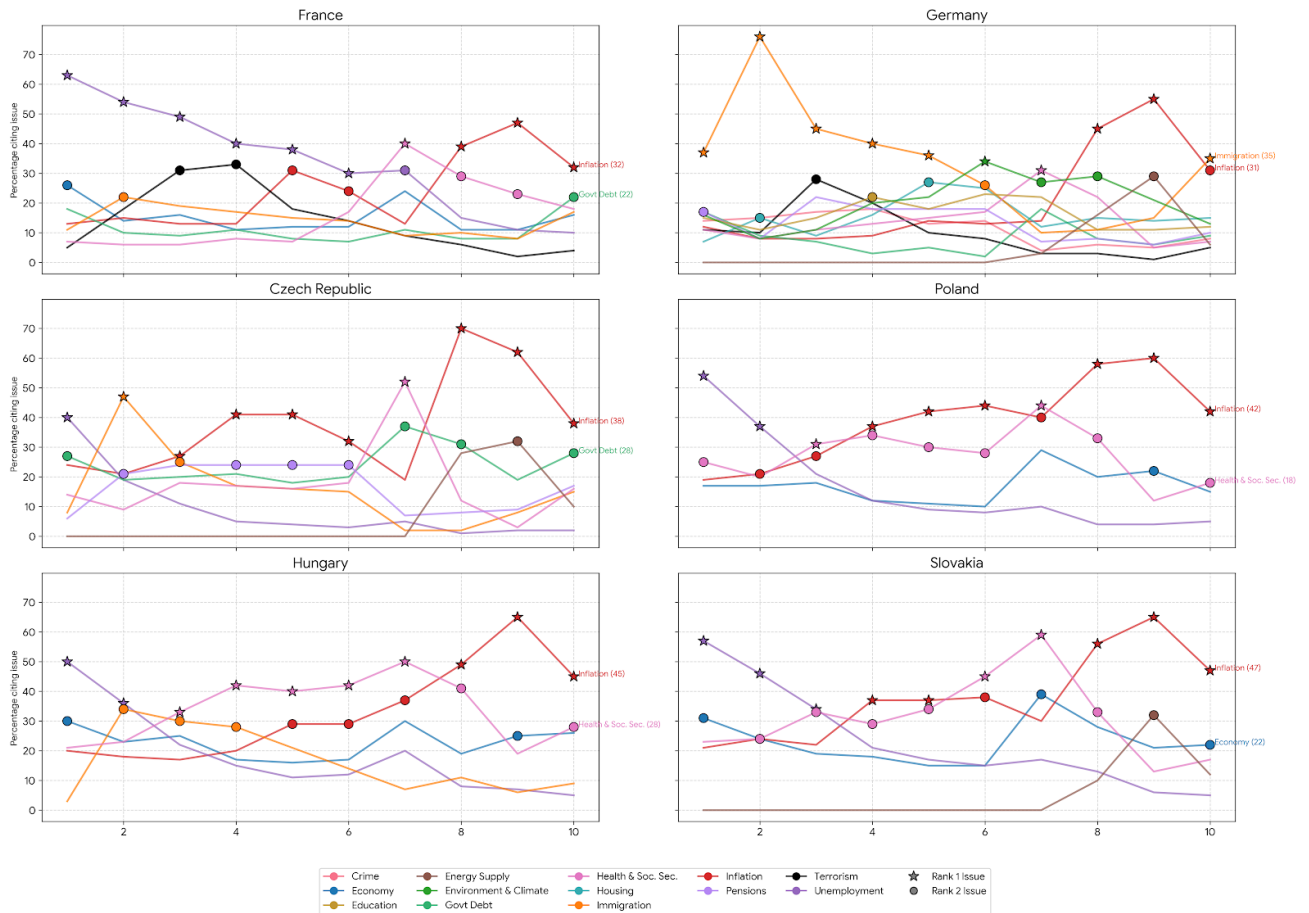
By mid-2016 the debate on migration became highly securitized across Europe. The immediate aftermath of the peak crisis saw public opinion in the West evolving from humanitarian needs to security and integration concerns, marking a definitive security turn. The Cologne New Year's Eve sexual assaults, in December 2015, might be seen as an important moment. The incident, widely attributed to foreign nationals, correlated with an increase in concern about immigration issues in all analyzed countries, including a hardening of attitudes in the V4 bloc (Tabosa, 2020) where skepticism was already dominant and were the news of the assault were widely medialized. But how salient was the topic of migration in the studied countries? How did public sentiment evolve regarding people coming from non-EU countries? And how were migrant contributions to host societies perceived by the public in the selected member states? These are important questions asked in the Eurobarometer surveys.

3.1. The Fewer Migrants, the More Salient Migration Issue?

To assess the evolution of public opinion, it is necessary to examine the "salience" of migration relative to other socioeconomic concerns. Data from the Eurobarometer surveys presented below shows that immigration reached a historic peak as a "major issue" in Germany in 2016, where a staggering 76% of respondents ranked it as a top concern, maintaining its status as a primary issue for much of the decade and returning to the #1 spot in the most recent period, as immigration became a central issue during recent elections. Similarly, the Czech Republic and Hungary saw immigration jump into their top two priorities during the middle of the decade, with the Czech Republic seeing it hit 47% at its peak. Interestingly, these countries were not directly affected by the migration crisis, Hungary only serving as a transit country for migrants aiming to reach Western Europe. In contrast, while immigration was a significant talking point in France, it was frequently outranked by economic stability and terrorism.



Top 2 Most Important Issues (10-Year Span) - Eurobarometer



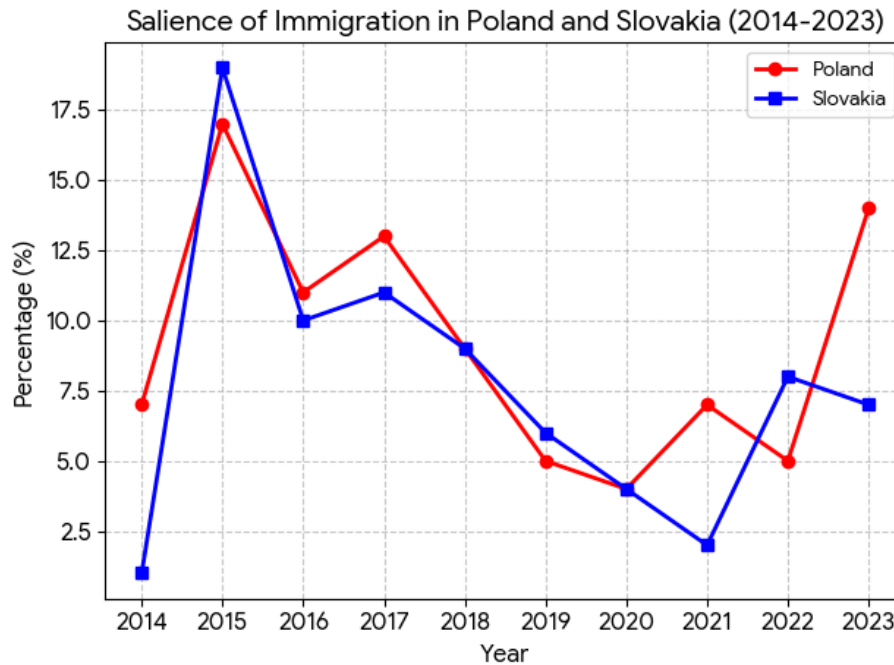
(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 82-102)

The visualization is designed for clear comparative analysis, using trend lines to track the longitudinal trajectory of any issue that attained a top-two ranking within a country over the last decade. To distinguish priority levels at a glance, rank indicators are utilized: a star denotes the primary concern (#1) for a given period, while a circle (·) identifies the second-place issue. To facilitate easy cross-country comparisons, the chart employs consistent coloring, ensuring that a specific issue—such as Immigration or Inflation—retains the same color across all six panels. Finally, annotations on the right side of each plot provide immediate clarity on the most current priorities, labeling the issues and their specific percentages for the most recent data period.

In Poland and Slovakia, as indicated in the figure below, immigration rarely broke into the top two, and this is reflected in the previous figure as well, as those populations remained more consistently focused on domestic issues like healthcare, pensions, and the soaring cost of living. However, there was a significant increase on the salience of migration even in these two countries. In 2014, immigration was a negligible concern, polling at just 1% in Slovakia and 7% in Poland. However, by 2015, the issue reached its historical peak, soaring to 19% in Slovakia and 17% in Poland as it dominated the political landscape. Following this surge, salience began to erode steadily. After the Covid-19 pandemic, by 2021, it had dropped to its lowest levels of the decade at 2% in Slovakia and 5% in Poland. The trend has reversed in the most recent periods, with concern climbing back to 7% in Slovakia and a significant 14% in Poland by 2023, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Interestingly, not



comparable to the levels in 2015, when these countries were not affected by the wave of asylum-seekers to a similar extent as they were in 2022, suggesting that there is no correlation between the actual number of migrants and asylum-seekers in a country and the perceived salience of the issue.



(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 82-102)

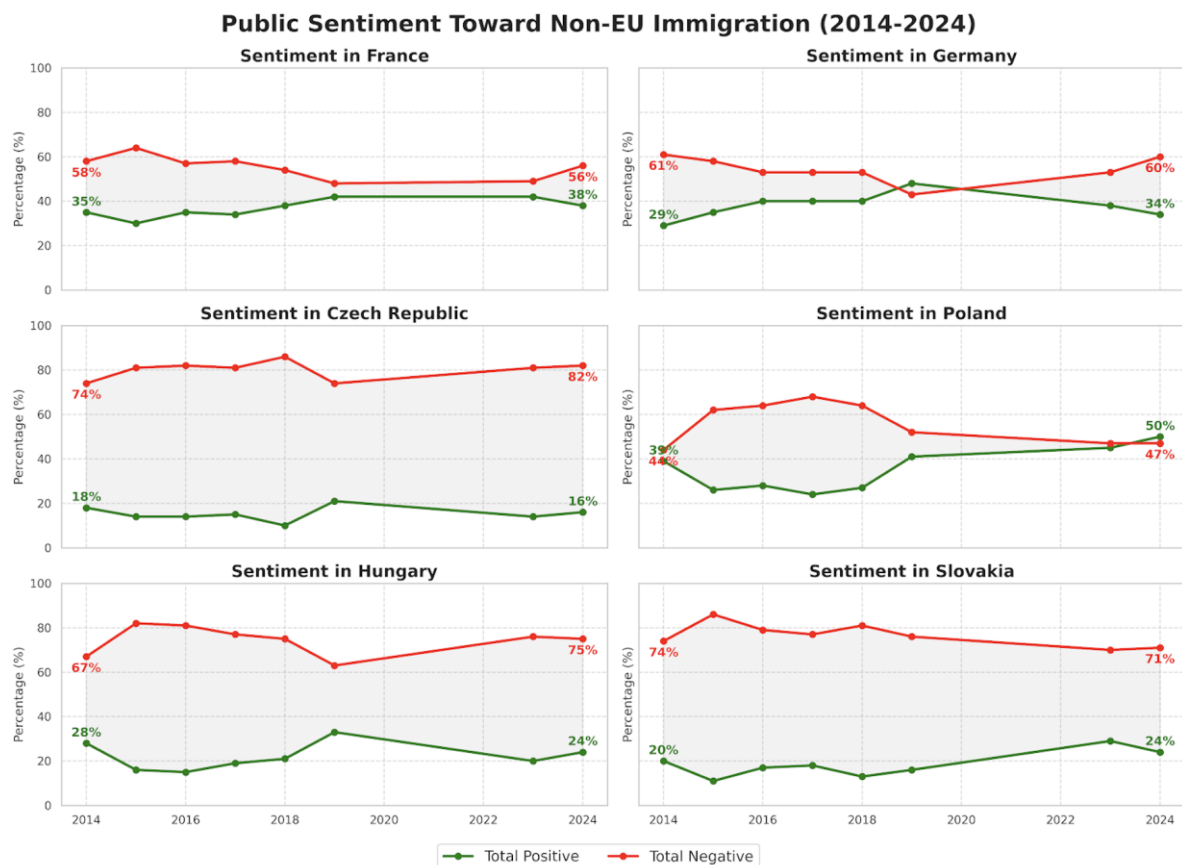
3.2. Public Sentiment Towards Non-EU Immigration

The figure below shows public sentiment in response to the inquiry: *“Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: Immigration of people from outside the EU”*. The data shows a pronounced geographic divergence in attitudes, particularly within Central Europe. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, a robust and persistent negative sentiment prevails, with opposition frequently exceeding the 70–80% threshold, while positive appraisals remain marginal, rarely surpassing 20%. Once again, it is important to highlight that these countries were never major destination countries for asylum seekers until 2022 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In contrast, the socio-political landscapes of Germany and France, countries historically more affected by migration, are characterized by a significantly narrower margin between favorable and unfavorable views. Germany, specifically, experienced a notable convergence of sentiment between 2016 and 2018, though recent data



indicates a resurgence in negative perceptions. Poland presents a unique trajectory. It follows a substantial shift toward negative sentiment since 2015 and attitudes have remained largely critical. However, the country maintains a comparatively higher degree of positive sentiment than its Visegrad counterparts. Most recently, the 2023-2024 period reflects a widespread hardening of anti-immigrant sentiment across the surveyed nations, a trend likely exacerbated by the complexities of the contemporary geopolitical and economic climate, rise of extreme right-wing parties, securitization of migration, and the increase in numbers of asylum-seekers following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine even in the V4 countries, as they became major destination countries to Ukrainian asylum seekers.



(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 82-102)

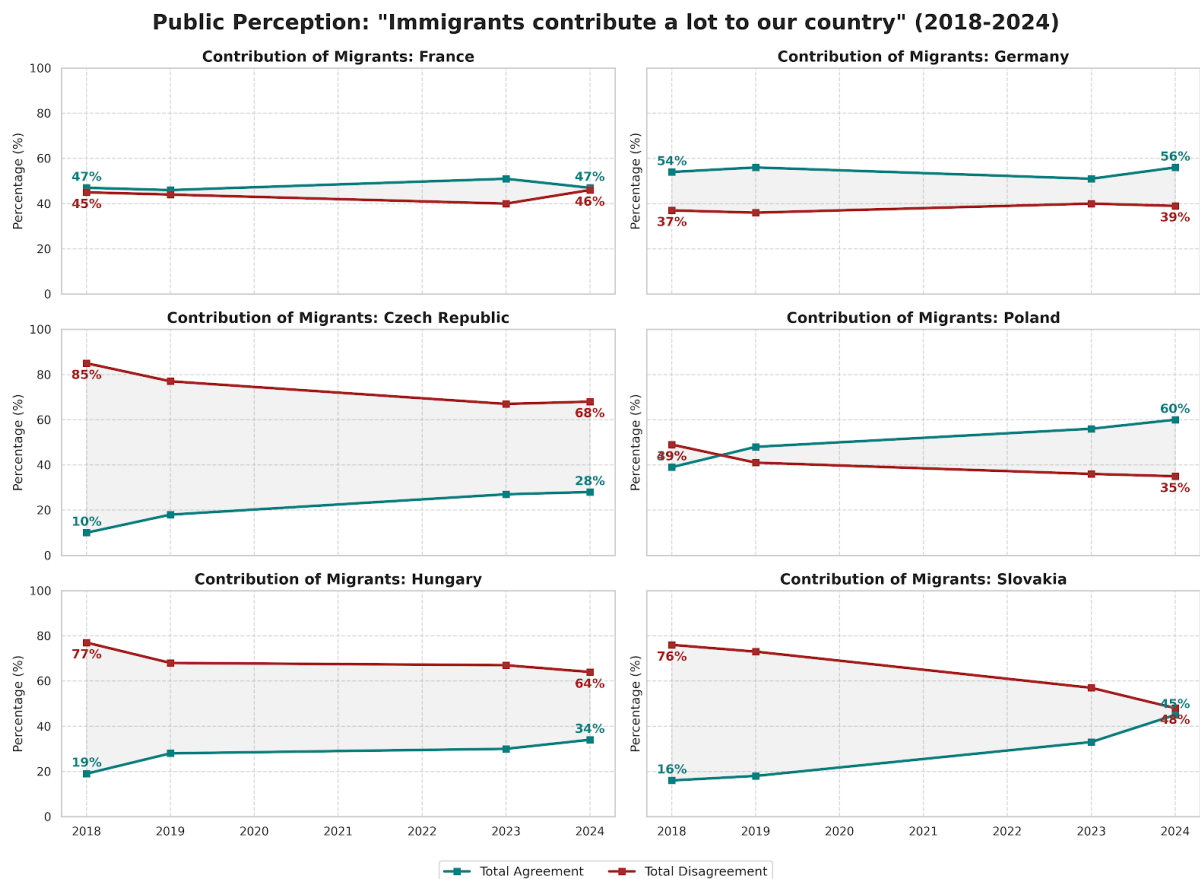
This graph illustrates longitudinal data from Eurobarometer surveys 86 through 102, specifically analyzing public response to the question: "Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: Immigration of people from outside the EU." The red line represents total negative sentiment (the combined percentage of "fairly negative" and "very negative" responses), while the green line tracks total positive sentiment ("fairly positive" and "very positive"). The shaded area between these lines highlights the "sentiment gap," visually representing the degree of net negative or positive feeling within each country. It is important to note the data gap as this specific question was not included in the standard surveys during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Between the COVID-19 pandemic and the agreement on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, in 2022, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine led to a new, although very



different, wave of asylum-seekers to EU countries. The reaction to this crisis was different in terms of response, where within a few days the Temporary Protection Directive (2001) was quickly enacted, and in relation to the destination countries for most Ukrainians. This time the countries most affected by this wave of asylum seekers were the Central and Eastern European countries. Additionally, public opinion towards Ukrainian asylum-seekers was more positive and led to an initial more welcoming attitude (Aghi, 2022; De Coninck, 2023). Very often, Ukrainian asylum seekers are not even perceived as “migrants”, but as belonging to a different category of people on the move², and the data suggest they have improved the way people in the CEE perceive the contribution of migrants to some of the studied host societies, such as Slovakia.

The graph below is based on data from the Eurobarometer surveys, specifically following the introduction of the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: *Immigrants contribute a lot to [OUR COUNTRY]*” in 2018, prior to this year, the survey did not include this question.



(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 90-102)

² These are findings from focus groups interviews conducted within the scope of the ACRONYM project in selected countries: Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia in October 2025.



The graph utilizes a teal line to track "Total Agreement," aggregating responses from those who "totally" or "tend to" agree that immigrants contribute significantly to their country. Conversely, the brown line monitors "Total Disagreement," combining those who "totally" or "tend to" disagree with that sentiment. The shaded area between these two markers serves to visually quantify the perception gap, illustrating the degree of social consensus or division regarding the statement: "Immigrants contribute a lot to [OUR COUNTRY]"

The data reveals a clear divide between Western and Central European countries regarding the perceived value of migration. In Western European nations such as Germany and France, public opinion reflects a relatively high degree of consensus, with agreement that immigrants contribute a lot to the society levelling frequently consolidating at or above the 50% threshold. Despite minor temporal fluctuations, these figures remain significantly elevated compared to some CEE countries.

The Central European landscape is characterized by deep-seated skepticism. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia exhibit the highest levels of disagreement with the statement, with "Total Disagreement" metrics consistently exceeding 70%. Poland occupies a different, intermediate, position within this regional framework, maintaining disagreement levels below the 50% mark, thereby suggesting a more nuanced or shifting public perception of migrant contributions relative to its immediate neighbors. This is an interesting finding compared to the previous figure that shows that Poland has a high negative feeling towards non-EU immigrants. Here, once more, we can hypothesize based on data from the focus groups interviews conducted within the scope of the ACRONYM project that shows that Polish citizens tend to see Ukrainians similarly as EU citizens and, therefore, the question would have to be adapted in further Eurobarometer surveys to have a more nuanced view on the positive/negative perception of Ukrainians, specifically. Additionally, Ukrainian labor migrants have been present in Poland for decades and are seen to contribute to Polish economy (Strzelecki et al. 2025). These findings might, in the long-term, suggest that while general public sentiment toward non-EU immigration might remain characterized by skepticism, the large-scale presence and participation of the Ukrainian population might be perceived as fostering a growing pragmatic recognition of the contributions migrants provide to the host societies in the V4, making this an interesting trend to observe in the upcoming years.

3.3. Support for EU Governance on Asylum and Migration

In 2015, in Germany the favorable sentiment towards asylum seekers was quickly tested by the "Open Door" policy, epitomized by Chancellor Angela Merkel's declarative phrase, "Wir schaffen das" ("We can do this"). This statement, while intended to send a message of humanitarianism, immediately triggered intense polarization, delineating a divergence between those supporting humanitarian duty and those expressing deep concern over the state's capacity for integration and border control. By the fall of 2015 support for the far-right party AfD increased from 3.5% of voting intentions in August to 8% by December (Lemay, 2021). This event



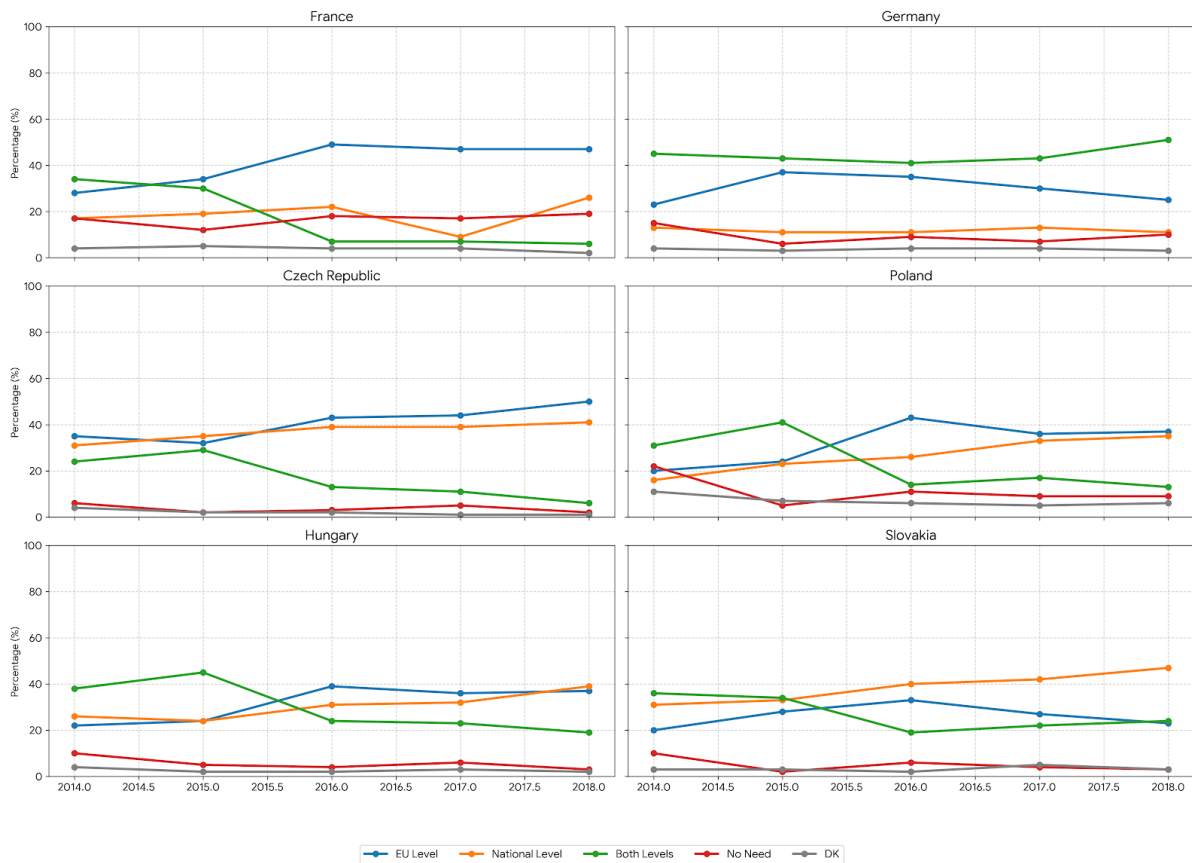
marked the beginning of a sustained period of divergence in German political discourse, a pattern less pronounced but still visible also in France, when by 2017 Jean-Marie Le Pen (National Front) reached the second round of the presidential elections capitalizing on the anti-immigration discourse. In the V4, often EU asylum and migration policies are framed as being imposed on the V4 countries, or “dictated from Brussels” (Visnovitz and Jenne, 2021; Tabosa, 2020). This kind of discourse served as fruitful ground for electoral campaigns in all V4 who benefited from the securitization of migration (Kende and Krekó, 2020; Holányi, 2025). Polling data throughout this period directly informed political strategies, as parties that successfully framed migration as an existential threat (Kazharski and Tabosa, 2018; Tabosa, 2020) whether to cultural identity (V4) or national coherence (Germany/France), saw electoral gains. This trend culminated in the 2019 European Parliament elections, where high support for populist, migration-critical parties demonstrated the consolidation of skeptical public sentiment, locking in the divergent East-West attitudes established during the crisis years.

This consolidation of skeptical sentiment across the continent highlighted a fundamental tension in the architecture of EU migration governance. The perceived failure of collective action in 2015 did not only fuel local populism, but it altered the relationship between member states and Brussels by turning migration into a pivotal test for sovereignty versus integration. While the V4 countries increasingly viewed centralized EU mandates as a breach on national sovereignty, as previously pointed out, Western states began to advocate for collective action. This friction between perceived “dictation” and requested “solidarity” served as the critical backdrop for understanding expectations upon the Union in the East/West divide. This issue of migration governance was traced in the Eurobarometer surveys throughout the years.

From 2014 to 2018, the Eurobarometer survey posed the question *“In your opinion, should additional measures be taken to fight illegal immigration of people from outside the EU?”*. The data shows that the French and German electorates consistently advocated for policy interventions at either the European Union level or through a synchronized dual-level approach, signalling a prevailing perception of irregular migration as a transnational phenomenon necessitating supranational coordination. Conversely, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there was a more pronounced emphasis on national-level enforcement during the initial phase of the crisis; while support for integrated EU-national efforts remained present, the distinct spikes in preference for domestic sovereignty highlight a regional skepticism toward the efficacy of centralized European border management, mainly the mandatory quota scheme, and a prioritized reliance on national institutional frameworks, which in the case of the V4 were inexistent.



Support for Measures Against Illegal Immigration (2014-2018): Implementation Levels



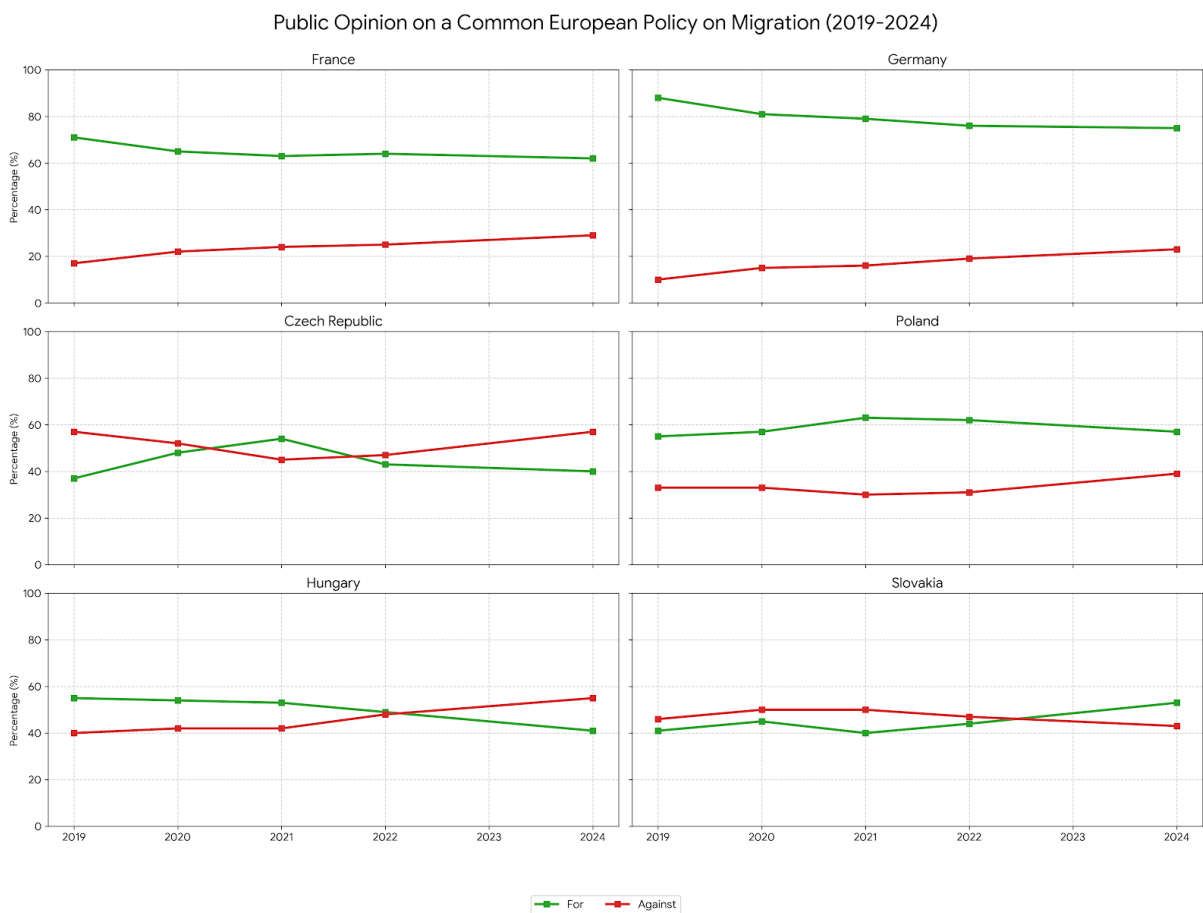
(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 82-90)

As it is shown below, after 2018, the question posed was “What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement whether you are for it or against it. A common European policy on migration”. Between 2019 and 2024, Germany and France, maintained a stable consensus in favor of a unified framework, with support frequently surpassing the 70% threshold. This trend reflects a durable commitment to supranational cooperation and the conceptualization of migration as a matter of collective solidarity and burden-sharing. Within the CEE, Poland stands out for its sustained and growing endorsement, with support rising to 57% by 2024. Similarly, Slovakia has recently shifted into the pro-policy camp, crossing the majority threshold for the first time in 2024 with 53% agreement. This can be potentially explained by how these countries are now affected by the wave of Ukrainian asylum-seekers, and how dependent they were on EU-triggered measures (and funds) since February 2022.

In contrast, the Czech Republic and Hungary experienced a definitive shift in 2022, marking a retreat from earlier peaks of support. In the Czech Republic, a brief spike in favorability during the 2021/22 period (54%) was sharply reversed, with opposition climbing back to 57% by 2024. Hungary underwent a similar transition: having



maintained majority support through 2021, favorability dropped below the 50% mark in 2022 and has since plummeted to 41%, with a clear 55% majority now standing in opposition. This divergence suggests that while half of the surveyed CEE nations now view a common EU policy as a necessary mechanism for regional stability, the Czech and Hungarian publics have increasingly prioritized national sovereignty over EU measures in the wake of the post-2022 geopolitical landscape. In Hungary, Fidesz oppose even the flexible solidarity mechanism proposed in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, whose final text was approved in December 2024. They adopt this position to appease voters who favor nationalist, anti-immigration agendas. In the Czech Republic, there is a long-tradition of framing EU common asylum and migration policies as a threat to national sovereignty (Tabosa, 2020).



(Based on data from the Eurobarometer Surveys 92-102)

The formal adoption of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in mid-2024 represents the most significant attempt to Europeanize migration policy since the 2015 crisis. The Pact seeks to replace the previous ad-hoc responses with a permanent legislative framework centered on “mandatory solidarity”. The regulatory framework, particularly



the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management (RAMM), codifies the desire to curb irregular migration through foreign policy. This policy trajectory focuses on externalization by establishing partnerships with third countries and by making EU development aid and assistance conditional on the third country's success in preventing migration flows. It also focuses on introducing mandatory pre-entry screening, fast track asylum procedures, and speeding up deportations (source). Interestingly, the V4 who were, since 2015, the loudest voices in support of securitized over humanitarian measures, are also the strongest voices against the Pact. Holányi (2025) studies this puzzling "contradiction between demanding harsher rules and opposing the Pact introducing such new rules". The author identified a sharp contrast in how Central European states handled the EU Migration Pact, noting that while Hungary and Poland focused on total obstruction and questioning EU legitimacy, the Czech Republic and Slovakia remained more constructive. A key finding is that domestic political pressure, rather than actual policy disagreement, dictated the final voting behavior for several countries. In the Czech Republic and under the new pro-EU leadership in Poland, the fear of losing domestic electoral support forced leaders to adopt a "hardline" rejection of some of the Pact's components, such as the relocation mechanism in the case of Poland. Still, they actually supported the majority of the reforms. Conversely, because migration was not a high-stakes campaign issue in Slovakia, Fico's government opted for a moderate path of abstention rather than joining Hungary's total defiance, as they saw no political gain in a full-scale rejection of a compromise they found partially beneficial.

4. Conclusion

The analysis shows a persistent geographic divide regarding the perceived socio-economic utility of migration, with Western European states like Germany and France maintaining a relatively stable consensus on the positive contributions of migrants and a high preference for supranational policy frameworks. Negative sentiments toward non-EU immigration dominated the V4 contrasting narrower gaps in France and Germany, while perceived migrant contributions lagged sharply in Central Europe, with disagreement above 70% in three V4 states, with the exception of Poland's nuanced stance, potentially softened by the contribution of Ukrainians to Polish economy. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in 2022, potentially served as a context for a pragmatic shift in Poland and Slovakia in terms of the perceived contribution of migrants to their societies. In these countries, perceived migrant contribution levels saw increases.

When comparing public support for EU governance on matters of asylum and migration, we can see differences between the data on the Eurobarometer surveys and how the V4 acted in relation to the EU migration Pact. The data from the surveys show that in Poland and Slovakia there is a majority support for a common EU



migration policy. Conversely, the Czech Republic and Hungary represent primary sites of resistance, with both nations recording a definitive retreat from common policy support starting in 2022. Regardless of the public support for a common European policy on migration, both Poland and Slovakia have showed opposition to the Pact, alongside with Hungary and the Czech Republic. This situation shows that even if there is a convergence regarding prioritizing securitization and externalization over an approach focused on humanitarian protection among Western and CEE countries, this does not necessarily mean convergence in *support* for EU governance on matters of asylum and migration. The V4 position leaves the structural challenge of internal solidarity largely unresolved.

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Note: The figures were generated using the Gemini AI tool, based on Eurobarometer datasets compiled and processed by the author.

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