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# Beyond fear & hate

**Mobilising people power to  
create a new narrative on  
migration and diversity**

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Our research crosses disciplinary boundaries. It draws on a range of knowledge, experience, skills, connections and methods in order to better understand issues and contexts. We work across countries, regions and sectors developing integrated approaches and practical, effective and sustainable solutions at the local and global levels. We employ a range of innovative and participatory research methods with the objective of handing power from the researcher to research participants, who are often community members or community-based organisations.

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Like many, the company has become increasingly concerned by the growing divisions within our communities, in and around Europe. In response to this growing concern, the company launched a new campaign in Europe, alongside a number of charity partners, called One Sweet World, aiming to bring people together and celebrate our communities at a time of increasing division. Ben & Jerry's has funded this independent research in order to gain a greater understanding of the issue of social exclusion, and attitudes to diversity and migration across Europe.

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## Executive Summary

Across Europe political and media debates on migration and diversity have become increasingly negative. There is growing evidence that narratives of fear and hate have moved from fringe positions to occupy the mainstream, changing the terms of the debate in many countries.

These narratives are important. They set the boundaries of what are considered publicly acceptable opinions and behaviours, and who does – and does not – have a voice. Some views may dominate, others may go unheard.

And they have consequences.

Negative political and media debates on migration and diversity undermine the integration of those who are newly arrived and they do far more than that. They also threaten relationships within and between long-established communities, undermining a common sense of identity and solidarity and raising questions about the values on which societies are based.

In this context it is important to ask who is driving dominant narratives on migration and diversity and for what purpose? Is this just about certain sections of the mainstream media or does political leadership make a difference to how people think – and talk – about issues of migration and diversity? Is there space for the development of alternative voices? If migration is a ‘touchstone’ issue that taps into people’s deepest fears and anxieties, is it possible to capture and amplify some of the powerful counter-narratives developing at a local level to move the debate about migration and diversity beyond fear and hate?

### What this report does – and doesn’t – do

Recognising the complex array of factors that shape attitudes to migration and diversity challenges us to think more carefully about the ways in which narratives of fear and hate have come to dominate contemporary political and media debates.

It would be impossible to summarise all the evidence on how attitudes are formed, and their relationship with political and media narratives in a single report. Instead we reflect on the overall context of migration in Europe, what we know about people’s attitudes and how these are shaped by drawing on evidence from four European countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.

The report examines the factors that shape attitudes to migration and diversity in these contexts, focusing in particular on the development of alternative narratives by a growing number of civil society and grass roots organisations, based on values of diversity, solidarity and human compassion.

### Unpacking attitudes to migration and diversity

Across Europe there has been a hardening of attitudes towards migrants, refugees and social groups perceived to be in some way to be different and threatening, most notably Muslims.

Surveys of public attitudes toward migration show a widespread sense of concern. In 2015, a YouGov poll in the UK and a Demoskop survey in Sweden found that a majority of people in both countries believe there has been too much immigration. In the Eurobarometer public opinion survey of May 2016, immigration was considered

**“ Who is driving dominant narratives on migration and diversity and for what purpose? ”**

the most important issue for Germans (56%), Dutch (46%), Swedish (44%) and British (38%) respondents.

But when we dig beneath the surface things are rather more complicated than they first appear.

Whilst it may appear that attitudes are firmly against migration and diversity, in reality there is a polarisation of views with an almost equal split between those (a quarter of the population) who see migration as a threat and those who believe that it brings economic, social and cultural benefits. Everyone else is on a spectrum in between. An 'anxious middle' who are sceptical about their government's handling of immigration and worried about the effects of immigration on society and the economy but are not overly hostile toward migrants themselves, especially those who are perceived as having skills and able to make a contribution to the economy.

And there are significant differences in the attitudes held by different groups in society.

Young people feel more positively about migration than older people. And many people know relatively little about those coming to their countries. People generally overestimate how many refugees and migrants are living in their countries and underestimate their economic contribution. This suggests that migration is a 'touchstone' issue that taps into people's deepest fears and anxieties. When people feel insecure their first reaction is often to look for someone to blame. Ironically this has increasingly been directed towards the most vulnerable in our societies, those who have already lost everything and have no voice.

**“ An almost equal split between those (a quarter of the population) who see migration as a threat and those who believe that it brings economic, social and cultural benefits. ”**

**“ Rather than reassure their populations, many European politicians from across the spectrum have increasingly emphasised or reinforced anti-immigrant views to secure political support. ”**

### **The politics of fear and hate**

There is growing evidence that fears and anxieties about migration and diversity reflect, and feed off, a range of issues that have little or nothing to do with migration itself. From unemployment and precarious job roles to poor housing and threats from numerous and often ill-defined 'enemies', European citizens are living through times of strongly perceived threats and insecurity.

Rather than reassure their populations, many European politicians from across the spectrum have increasingly emphasised or reinforced anti-immigrant views to secure political support. They have done this in two main ways:

- **By linking migration with economic concerns and positioning migrants and citizens as being in competition with one another. This is often linked with a sense of being 'left behind' by the country's political and economic elites.**
- **By talking about migration – and migrants – in terms of cultural difference and the threat posed by diversity. This has been associated with calls for certain groups – most notably Muslims – to be observed, controlled and, at times, removed from society as seen in the debate on the 'Burkini' and images of Muslim women being forced to undress on French beaches.**

But it's not the same everywhere.

Dominant political and media narratives in several countries – most notably the UK and the Netherlands – have been shaped by populist leaders who have presented themselves as the voice of those who feel

ignored and unrepresented by mainstream political parties. As a result narratives of fear and exclusion have started to move from the margins into dominant mainstream political discourse.

In Germany and Sweden by contrast political leaders have challenged the voices of populists and scaremongers and created political counter-narratives which typically seek to rejuvenate a sense of national identity and duty that is related to past experiences of migration. In Germany in particular there continues to be public support for 'willkommenskultur' (a welcoming culture) despite growing political opposition.

This doesn't mean that the situation in Germany and Sweden is perfect. Far from it. But it does mean that cross-party political leadership is important in shaping the overall context within which attitudes to migration and diversity are formed and in creating spaces for positive counter-narratives to develop.

### **The rise of people power**

For growing numbers of people, particularly young people for whom diversity is part of the world in which they grew up, narratives of fear and hate threaten not only the security of migrants, refugees, Muslims and other minorities but the vision of the society in which they want to live.

The evidence presented in our report suggests, across Europe, people are starting to find ways to turn diversity into an opportunity rather than an excuse for division. They are coming together to create a different narrative on migration and diversity, one that challenges injustice and brings together different groups to work together, building positive

**“ Across Europe, people are starting to find ways to turn diversity into an opportunity rather than an excuse for division. ”**

relationships within and across communities, and a shared sense of a common humanity.

There are literally hundreds of examples of civil society, voluntary and community-led organisations in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK working in new and innovative ways to harness people power, and making use of new technologies and digital platforms to engage new audiences and create positive counter-narratives around issues of migration and diversity. In Germany the second most popular Google search on 'migration' in 2015 was 'How to volunteer to help migrants'. Established NGOs have reported an average increase of 70% of interest in volunteering for refugees over a period of three years.

Many of these initiatives are driven by young people who are less likely to read print media or engage with mainstream political narratives, and are instead using new online digital technologies to share information and build networks of solidarity and resistance. These movements are based on solidarity, humanitarian assistance, human rights and good old fashioned empathy and human kindness.

And in some cases they are starting to move the debate away from migration, focusing instead on the ways in which austerity, social exclusion and government policies are impacting on people's lives and the communities in which they live.



### What next?

The narratives of fear and hate which have increasingly dominated political and a selection of mainstream media responses to migration and diversity create division, undermine solidarity and set communities against one another. But across Europe people are coming together to challenge these narratives and develop new ways of thinking about – and responding to – migration and diversity. The emphasis is very much on what people from different backgrounds have in common rather than the differences between them.

There have always been strong civil society organisations and social movements in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. The absence of a positive political response to migration across Europe has propelled them into action, galvanising support from a wider and more diverse group of people who continue to view migration as both an asset and a humanitarian responsibility.

**“ The emphasis is very much on what people from different backgrounds have in common rather than the differences between them. ”**

These initiatives may not be prominently placed in mainstream media and political debate but they are there, quietly – and sometimes noisily – challenging the dominant narratives that can feel all-powerful and resistant to change. They offer hope that it is possible to mobilise people power and create a new narrative on migration and diversity that moves beyond fear and hate.

**“ They offer hope that it is possible to mobilise people power and create a new narrative on migration and diversity that moves beyond fear and hate. ”**

## Introduction

The world can feel like a very scary and unstable place. From unemployment and precarious job roles to poor housing and threats from numerous and often ill-defined 'enemies', European citizens are living through times of strongly perceived threats and insecurity. And 24 hour news channels and new digital technologies mean that we are aware of what is happening elsewhere in the world more quickly than ever before.

The refugee crisis that dominated media headlines through 2015 serves as a powerful and enduring symbol of this uncertainty. Migration is one of the most important issues facing the world today, not just because of the humanitarian needs of those on the move but because it can make us feel deeply insecure. It often serves as a 'touchstone' issue that taps into our deepest fears and anxieties<sup>1</sup>. When people feel insecure their first reaction is often to look for someone to blame and history gives us many examples to draw from. Ironically this has increasingly been directed towards the most vulnerable in our societies, those who have already lost everything and have no voice.

So this is not just about 'them', the refugees and migrants making the journey, it is also about 'us' and the kind of society we are. The kind of society we want to be.

Ideas about the kind of society we want to live in come up time and again in the powerful – and often conflicting – narratives around migration and diversity that have developed across Europe. A narrative is a set of stories or ideas that are developed to make sense of what is happening in the world and to justify our response. They are important because they set the boundaries of what is considered publicly acceptable debate and opinion, and who can have their voice heard.

Do we pull up the drawbridge and build walls to keep people out, turning against our fellow citizens who do not

share the same language or religion and are also viewed as a threat?

Or do we find new ways to live alongside one another, focusing on what we have in common rather than what divides us and building stronger communities that are resilient to political, economic and social change?

For growing numbers of people the powerful narratives of fear and hate that have come to dominate political and media debates on migration and diversity over recent years do more than threaten the peaceful existence of migrants, refugees, Muslims and other minorities who find themselves stigmatized or even verbally and physically attacked. They also threaten the vision of an open European society which values diversity and solidarity.

But history has taught us that people power is a force to be reckoned with.

Across Europe people are coming together to create a different narrative on migration and diversity, one that challenges injustice and brings together different groups to work together, building positive relationships within and across communities and a shared sense of our common humanity. In the absence of political leadership championing the positives of our diverse communities, this counter-narrative has been developed from the ground up, built by tens of thousands of individuals and organisations – both formal and informal – that have developed across Europe. We may not hear much about it in mainstream media and political debate but it is there, quietly – and sometimes noisily – challenging the narrative of fear and hate that can feel all-powerful and resistant to change.

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<sup>1</sup> A 'touchstone' issue is an issue which has come to symbolise or signify a broader range of concerns or anxieties in society.

## “ Across Europe people are coming together to create a different narrative on migration and diversity, one that challenges injustice and brings together different groups to work together, building positive relationships within and across communities and a shared sense of our common humanity ”

### What this report does

Although the refugee crisis has focused attention on migration and diversity, these issues are nothing new. Migration has been a feature of European societies for as long as these societies have existed. And whilst narratives of fear and hate have come to be expressed more explicitly over recent years, we have also seen an unprecedented wave of support for refugees and migrants.

In this context our report pulls together existing evidence on the key issues shaping current debates on migration and diversity in four European countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.

We begin by considering the extent to which migration is a touchstone issue. If we ask people what they think about migration it appears that attitudes in many countries have hardened over recent years. But scrape beneath the surface and there is strong evidence that debates about migration and diversity are about more than just the movement of people. For many, the presence of migrants, refugees and increasingly Muslims embodies a range of concerns about deeper, more structural economic and social problems in their countries. This clearly has implications for efforts to mobilise positive public and political narratives to meet the challenges of migration and diversity.

In this context it is important to ask who is driving the dominant narrative and for what purpose. Is this just about some sections of the mainstream media or does political leadership make a difference to how we think – and talk – about issues of migration and diversity? Is there space for alternative voices, the powerful counter-narratives developing at the local level which generate change and have a real impact on people's lives?

The report provides examples of civil society and other forms of grass roots organising which have developed to counter negative media and political narratives on migration and diversity. Young people are driving many of the projects and initiatives that bring people together to create change. And what they do, often reaches out beyond the issue of migration and diversity to issues of equality more generally.

These examples serve as a powerful reminder that it doesn't have to be like this. Supporting communities, and young people in particular, to come together in solidarity to counter narratives of fear and hate has the potential to go far beyond improving the lives of refugees and migrants. It can strengthen the fabric of society.

### Where we got our information from

Most of the sources of information in this report can be accessed via the hyperlinks provided. For those of you who would like to read more about the issues we discuss – or just want to make sure we aren't making stuff up – you can find some of the key sources at the end of the report. Just to make sure we understood the issues properly we also spoke to some of the people who work on these issues in the UK, Sweden and Germany. They told us what we'd found made sense to them. We hope it does to you too.

## 1. Migration as a Touchstone Issue

**“ But scrape beneath the surface and there is strong evidence that debates about migration and diversity embody a range of concerns about deeper, more structural economic and social problems. ”**

We begin by considering the issue of migration to Europe and the extent to which migration can be seen as touchstone issue, by which we mean an issue which has come to symbolise or signify a broader range of concerns or anxieties in society.

This is a tough question to address in a single report.

The consequences of migration are complex and multi-faceted reaching deep into the economic, political, social and cultural heart of our societies. These consequences have been studied at length by academics from all disciplines. There are libraries full of books and papers on the subject.

It's impossible for us to summarise all of this evidence here. We would be foolish to even try. What we can do is reflect on the overall context of migration to Europe, what we know about people's attitudes and how these are shaped by political and media narratives.

The answers might seem straightforward.

Every day we hear negative stories on our television screens, in our newspapers and our social media feeds about the impacts of migration on our economies, health services and housing, and about the threats to our security and identity with which refugees and migrants are associated.

But scrape beneath the surface and there is strong evidence that debates about migration and diversity embody a range of concerns about deeper, more

structural economic and social problems. This has implications for efforts to mobilise positive public and political narratives to meet the challenges of migration and diversity. If migration and diversity are not the only issues that concern people or undermine their quality of life then it seems unlikely that reducing migration and diversity will be the solution.

### 1.1 Migration is nothing new

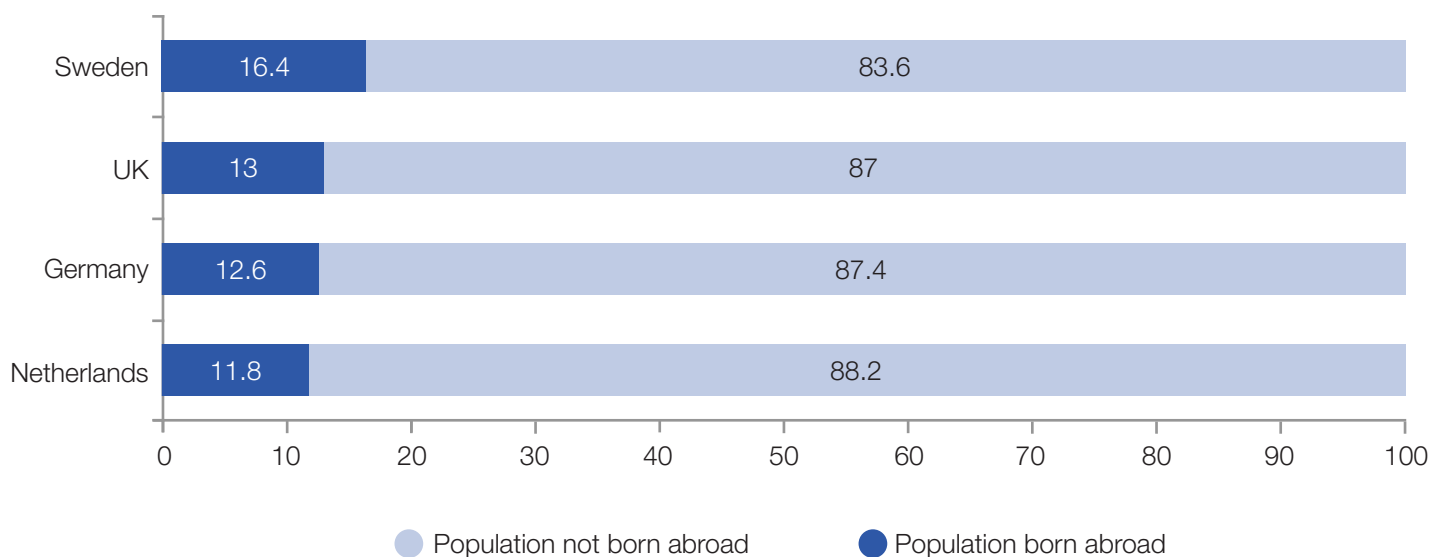
Sudden increases in the number of people from different countries and different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds can pose a real challenge, particularly when this takes place at a time of wider societal change<sup>2</sup>.

But it's worth remembering that we have been here before.

Across much of Europe migration is nothing new. For centuries people have chosen to live in other countries for work, study, love or in order to be with their families. Others have been forced to move because of conflict and war. The Europe we see today is comprised of people from a wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, race and religions. In Sweden 16.4% of the population was born abroad. For the UK, Germany and the Netherlands the figures are 13%, 12.6% and 11.8% respectively.

The background of refugees and migrants living in Europe has been strongly influenced by our relationships with other places in the world. This is particularly the

<sup>2</sup> Sagar, S., Somerville, W., Ford, R. and Sobolewska, M. (2012) *The Impacts of Migration on Social Cohesion and Integration*, Migration Advisory Committee; The Economist (2016) *Britain's Immigration Paradox*

**Figure 1. Population born abroad, January 2015 (%)**

case for the Netherlands and UK both of which drew on these relationships to meet gaps in the labour market. The growth in migration during the 20th century was due to an increased demand for workers, initially as Europe rebuilt itself following the devastating impact of two wars and then to meet the demands of growing economies. Germany established a 'guest worker' system which brought in millions of low-skilled workers from Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey. In Sweden the number of Finnish workers more than doubled over the course of the 1960s once a common labour market was established between the Nordic countries.

The protection of refugees fleeing war and conflict has been a significant part of this migration but also an important aspect of European identity. Established in the aftermath of the Second World War and the death of millions of Jews and others during the Holocaust, the 1951 Refugee Convention formed a cornerstone of the European peace project, sending a signal around the world that refugees who could not be protected in their own countries must be protected by others. Since that time hundreds of thousands of refugees have been granted asylum in Europe. This includes between 3.7 and 4 million people who have been forced from their homes since 1991, a third of a million of whom are still displaced.

And migration within the borders of the European Union has also been increasingly important. The free movement of people across national borders was an objective of the European Community in the Treaty of Paris in 1951 and an important step towards the creation of a single market. Over recent years, free movement has enabled large populations of Eastern and Southern Europeans to move to the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. Today, approximately 4.5% of the population of the Netherlands, Germany and the UK is a national of another EU Member State. In Sweden the figure is 3%. This free movement goes both ways. Many German nationals have moved to Britain and over one million Brits live in another European country.

**“ In Sweden 16.4% of the population was born abroad. For the UK, Germany and the Netherlands the figures are 13%, 12.6% and 11.8% respectively. ”**

## 1.2 Diversity is an important part of European identity

Europe has a long and rich history of migration and is home to people from a wide range of racial, ethnic, religious, gender and sexual backgrounds. Around 7% of the European Union's population was born outside the EU. The importance of bringing together people from diverse backgrounds is reflected in the EU motto 'United in diversity' which serves as a poignant reminder of the contribution that this diversity has made to the political, economic and social development of Europe over the last half century.

And diversity is not only important at the European level. It has also been an increasingly important aspect of national identity for European countries.

The opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games in London has been described as a triumph of British multiculturalism, showcasing the ways in which Commonwealth migration in particular has contributed to contemporary British identity. Swedish national identity is frequently expressed in terms of core values associated with human rights, development and peace. Public figures have typically been proud of their country's historical openness and generosity towards asylum seekers<sup>3</sup>, noting that 'the true situation and tradition here is of internationalism and tolerance.' Germany acknowledges that it is now a 'country of immigration' after decades of treating migrants as temporary members of society.

But it is fair to say that right now Europe lacks a positive vision of what diversity means. Refugees and migrants have been described as 'cockroaches' in the British media. In Germany there have been more than 1,000 attacks on refugee shelters over the last year alone. We are in danger of forgetting the lessons of the 20th Century when millions died or were persecuted in Europe based on national, ethnic or other differences.

## 1.3 We need to unpack attitudes to migration

Across Europe there has been a hardening of attitudes towards migrants, refugees and social groups perceived to be in some way to be different and threatening, most notably Muslims.

Surveys of public attitudes toward migration show a widespread sense of concern. In 2015, a YouGov poll in the UK and a Demoskop survey in Sweden found that a majority of people in both countries believe there has been too much immigration. In the Eurobarometer public opinion survey of May 2016 immigration was considered the most important issue for Germans (56%), Dutch (46%), Swedish (44%) and British (38%) respondents. This situation is very different than it was just five years ago: in May 2011 immigration was considered the most important issue by only 8% of Germans, 9% of the Dutch and 8% of Swedes. In the UK the figure was higher at 24%.

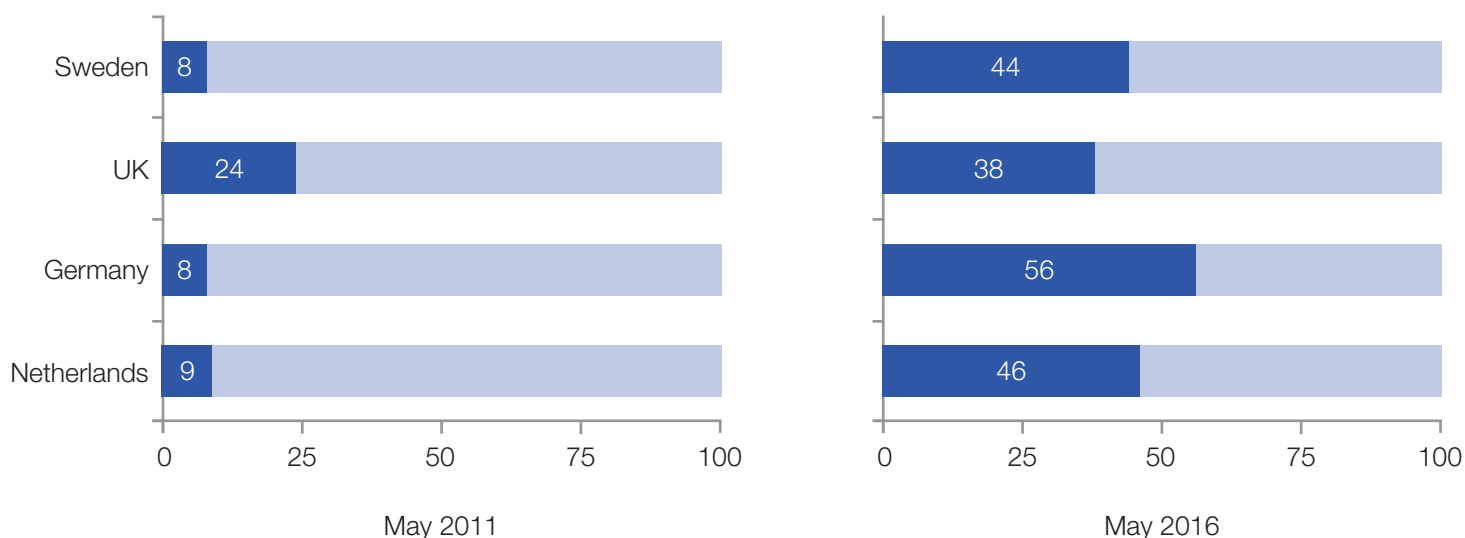
But when we dig beneath the surface things are rather more complicated than they first appear.

For a start there is a polarisation of views between those who feel negatively about migration and those who are much more positive. Despite the dominance of negative stories about migration and diversity, these proportions are actually remarkably similar. In general terms, around a quarter of people in Europe welcome the arrival of refugees and migrants and another quarter are opposed, with the remainder sitting in the 'anxious middle'<sup>4</sup>. Those in the 'anxious middle' are sceptical about their government's handling of immigration and worried about the effects of immigration on society and the economy. But they are not overly hostile toward migrants themselves, especially those who are perceived as having skills and able to make a contribution to the economy.

It's also clear that even when people express 'concern' about migration in general they don't necessarily feel

<sup>3</sup> German Federal Agency for Civic Education (2016) Immigration in Sweden: Future Challenges, Germany: BPB, <http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/58641/future-challenges>

<sup>4</sup> Katwala, S. and Somerville, W. (2016) *Engaging the Anxious Middle on Immigration Reform: Evidence from the UK Debate*, Washington: Transatlantic Council on Migration

**Figure 2. Proportion of people that see migration as most important issue, May 2011 & May 2016 (%)**

the same way about all groups of migrants and especially refugees. Swedish public opinion surveys have recorded increasingly critical views of migration over the last four years but have also found that more Swedes are willing to accept refugees. A majority continues to consider that immigration enriches their country. And whilst half (55%) of those living in The Netherlands think there are too many refugees, a greater proportion (63%) think that their country has a moral obligation to provide protection<sup>5</sup>.

Different groups of people also hold different attitudes towards migration. Perhaps most importantly, age is an important predictor of attitudes. Those who are negative towards migration tend to be older, those who are supportive generally younger.

In the UK, a generation gap opened up in the 2000s. By 2013 the pre-war generation was nearly twice as likely as those born after 1980 to consider migration an important issue facing Britain. Younger Britons aged

18-24 are also the most likely to believe the country has benefited from multiculturalism (64%), while older Britons are more likely to disagree.

In Sweden, people over 50 years old hold the most negative attitudes towards migration<sup>6</sup>. In the Netherlands meanwhile a 2015 opinion poll of 1,165 young people aged 12-24 years) found that 83% believed the Netherlands should accept refugees from conflict areas like Syria. Similar studies among adults found only 56% thought refugees should be accepted. Although both adults (69%) and young people (61%) believe that accepting refugees will have an influence on Dutch society, 44% of young people expects this influence to be neutral and 59% of adults expects it to be negative. Young people have generally been more open to the idea that other cultures enhance rather than undermine Dutch culture, a point to which we will return.

Finally, it is important to note that not all migrants are viewed in the same way. The skills that migrants have

**“ Younger Britons aged 18-24 are also the most likely to believe the country has benefited from multiculturalism (64%) ”**

<sup>5</sup> Ridder, J., Den, Mensink, W., Dekker, P., and Schrijver, E. (2016) *Burgerperspectieven 2016 - 2*. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

make a difference to how they are perceived generally but so too does their race and religion.

In the UK, the public generally want greater controls on migration but are less keen on reducing the numbers of people arriving with high levels of education and skills, paying to study in universities or to invest in Britain. They are also more likely to view people from Germany, India, or Australia as having made a positive contribution to the UK than people from Romania or Nigeria, for example. In the Netherlands migrants from Muslim backgrounds are now more likely to be perceived as an 'other' that cannot be integrated<sup>7</sup>. A survey in Germany in 2006 found that 4% of respondents would be disappointed if a family member married an Italian, compared with 24% if they married someone from a Turkish background.

**“ Attitudes towards migration and diversity usually reflect, and build on, an overall set of beliefs and values which can at times be influenced by levels of knowledge, the policy and political context and personal experience, but generally remain constant and consistent ”**

#### **1.4 So is this about immigration – or something else?**

The complex and often contradictory nature of attitudes towards migration suggests that there is something rather more complicated going on here than just the movement of people. This is because migration also raises issues about who we are and what we believe in.

Attitudes towards migration and diversity usually reflect, and build on, an overall set of beliefs and values which can at times be influenced by levels of knowledge, the policy and political context and personal experience, but generally remain constant and consistent<sup>8</sup>.

Unpacking the factors that inform attitudes is a difficult task because they often reflect a general 'world view' which is based on a whole range of inter-related assumptions and factors in addition to those which are immediate or obvious.

When it comes to migration and diversity these assumptions – and the fears with which they are associated - have often proven to be false.

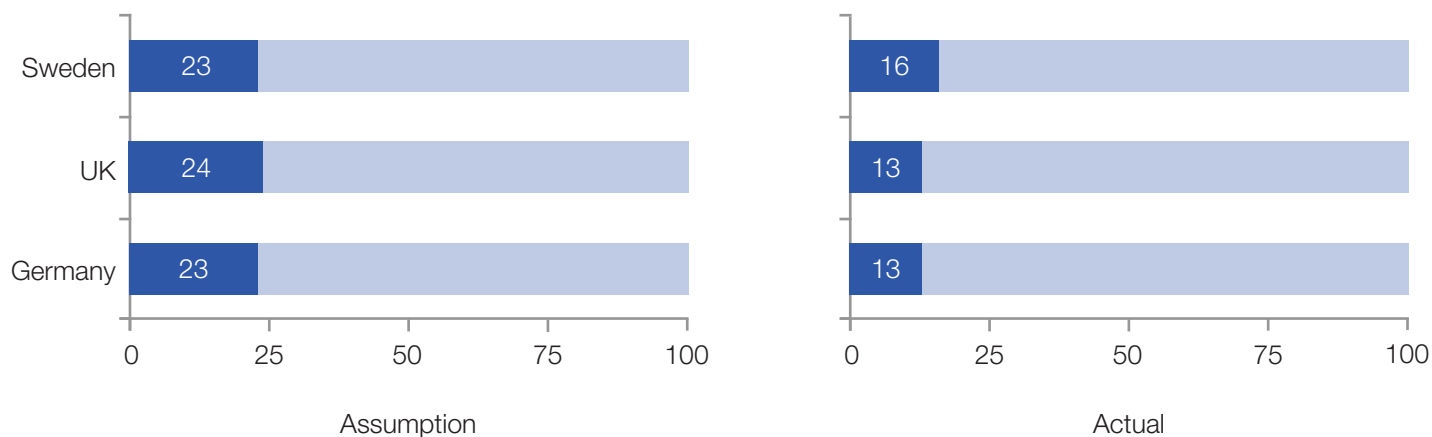
Surveys from the UK, Germany and Sweden show that people vastly over-estimate the number of migrants in their country. People living in the UK think that 24% of the population are migrants, nearly twice the real figure of 13%. In both Germany and Sweden people believe that migrants make up nearly a quarter (23%) of the population when the actual figures are 13% and 16% respectively. Assumptions that EU migrants are 'benefit tourists' are challenged by evidence that they pay more in tax and are less likely to use social services than those who are born in the UK. Similarly, whilst there is growing public anxiety about the size of the Muslim population and perceived 'Islamisation' of Europe in reality most people are Christian or atheist: figures show that in 2012 only 4% of the population of the Netherlands was Muslim whilst in Germany the figure was 5.8% in 2010. Just 4.8% of the British population declared themselves to be practicing Muslims in the 2011 census, 47% of whom were born and raised in the UK.

The roots of these fears are complex. Understanding where they come from - and what they mean - lies at the heart of creating a society based on tolerance and understanding rather than prejudice and fear.

<sup>7</sup> Wekker, G. (2016) *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, London: Duke University Press

<sup>8</sup> Crawley, H. (2009) *Understanding and Changing Public Attitudes: A Review of Existing Evidence from Public Information and Communication Campaigns*, London: The Diana, Prince of Wales Memorial Fund



**Figure 3. N° of Migrants in Population, August 2014 (%)**

There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that fears and anxieties about migration reflect, and feed off, a range of issues that have little or nothing to do with migration and migrants. From unemployment and precarious job roles to poor housing and threats from numerous and often ill-defined ‘enemies’, European citizens are living through times of strongly perceived threats and insecurity. And fear is a powerful political currency. Rather than reassure their populations, across the political spectrum we have seen politicians increasingly emphasising or reinforcing anti-immigrant views by linking immigration with economic concerns or a sense of being ‘left behind’ by the country’s political and economic elites<sup>9</sup>. Narratives of fear and exclusion have started to move from the margins into dominant

mainstream political discourse. Against this background, the representation of migration and diversity by politicians and the media is often biased or negative<sup>10</sup>.

There are two main ways in which the framing of migration taps into wider public concerns and anxieties.

**First, there is a tendency to position migrants and citizens as being in competition with one another particularly in relation to work and welfare.** This can lead to calls for access to welfare and the labour market to be denied to migrants and reserved for citizens. In the UK numerous studies have shown how migrants and refugees have been presented as a burden on the welfare state, a source of competition for jobs or as being associated with

**“ There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that fears and anxieties about migration reflect, and feed off, a range of issues that have little or nothing to do with migration and migrants. From unemployment and precarious job roles to poor housing and threats from numerous and often ill-defined ‘enemies’ ”**

<sup>9</sup> Crawley, H. (2009) *Understanding and Changing Public Attitudes: A Review of Existing Evidence from Public Information and Communication Campaigns*, London: The Diana, Prince of Wales Memorial Fund; Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University; McMahon, S. (2015) *Immigration and Citizenship in an Enlarged European Union: The Political Dynamics of Intra-EU Mobility*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>10</sup> Berry, M., Garcia-Blanco, I. and Moore, K. (2015) *Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries Report prepared for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees*, Cardiff.

increased rates of crime, particularly during the recent period of economic crisis and recession.<sup>11</sup> In 2013 the UK government warned about the ‘considerable strain’ being placed on schools, healthcare and the welfare state by migrants from the EU. This narrative is reflected in, and reinforced by, media coverage of migration issues especially during elections.<sup>12</sup>

In the Netherlands public and political debates have focused on high taxation and substandard elderly and health care, both of which have been blamed on migration rather than the dismantling of the welfare state as a result of the global economic crisis and government policies<sup>13</sup>.

In Sweden, an increasing number of anti-immigrant blogs and social media profiles have presented refugees as damaging the country’s much-lauded welfare system because they are often poorer and experience higher levels of unemployment than Swedes. In reality the shrinking welfare state is part of a broader shift in Swedish society which has seen the fastest-growing income gap between rich and poor in the OECD countries.<sup>14</sup>

**Second, there is a growing tendency to talk about migration – and migrants – in terms of cultural difference and the threat posed by diversity.** This can easily be associated with calls for certain groups – most notably Muslims - to be observed, controlled and, at times, removed from society. This summer’s debate on the ‘Burkini’ and images of Muslim women being forced to

undress on French beaches provides the most powerful recent example.

In the UK, the idea that some sections of society have been ‘left behind’ by political elites that have ‘lost control’ of their country has often been associated with a fear of migrants, and Muslims in particular, who are viewed as having segregated lives, governed by their own (sharia) laws and norms. This is despite evidence that Muslims are actually less segregated than other groups in society<sup>15</sup>.

In the Netherlands, anxiety about the threat posed by a tiny minority of radical Islamists has impacted on much wider groups in society with people from Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds expressing concern about the way in which they are regarded by others<sup>16</sup>.

In Sweden, the far-right has gained prominence by advocating greater limits on migration and by explicitly criticising the cultural values and identity of Muslim communities.

The consequences of these ways of framing migration and diversity are very real. Virtually every government is making it harder for refugees and migrants to enter and integrate with consequences that go deep into our increasingly diverse communities. Meanwhile growing distrust of public authorities and the political establishment deepens a worrying lack of hope that things will get better in the future.

<sup>11</sup> Benson, R. (2013) *Shaping Immigration News. A French-American Comparison* (New York: Cambridge University Press); Crawley, H. (2009) *Understanding and Changing Public Attitudes: A Review of Existing Evidence from Public Information and Communication Campaigns*, London: The Diana, Prince of Wales Memorial Fund; Lawlor, A. (2015) ‘Local and national accounts of immigration framing in a cross-national perspective’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (6), 1-24; McMahon, S. (2015) *Immigration and Citizenship in an Enlarged European Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>12</sup> Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University

<sup>13</sup> Hillhorst, S. and Hermes, J. (2016) ‘We have given up so much: passion and denial in the Dutch Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) controversy’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (3), 218–233

<sup>14</sup> Traub, J. (2016) ‘The death of the most generous nation on Earth’, *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/10/the-death-of-the-most-generous-nation-on-earth-sweden-syria-refugee-europe/>

<sup>15</sup> Finney, N. and Simpson, L. (2009) ‘Sleepwalking to segregation?’ *Challenging Myths about Race and Migration*, London: Policy Press

<sup>16</sup> Uitermark, J. and Gielen, A.-J. (2010) ‘Islam in the spotlight: the mediatisation of politics in an Amsterdam neighbourhood’, *Urban Studies* 47 (6), 1325–1342

Challenging these narratives and breaking the 'common sense' connection that is increasingly made between the problems facing European societies and the issues of migration and diversity is vitally important. In order to do that we need to understand the role of narratives, where they come from, who is driving them and the potential spaces in which alternative views might be able to develop.

**“ Virtually every government is making it harder for refugees and migrants to enter and integrate with consequences that go deep into our increasingly diverse communities. Meanwhile growing distrust of public authorities and the political establishment deepens a worrying lack of hope that things will get better in the future. ”**

## 2. The role and purpose of narratives

**“ It won’t come as a surprise to learn that the relationship between narratives and attitude formation is complex: because people’s attitudes to migration reflect their overall ‘world view’ some narratives will resonate more than others ”**

Over the last decade there have been big changes in the way people talk about migration. It’s not just that people talk about migration a lot but that the dominant political and media narratives have become increasingly negative<sup>17</sup>. As we noted in the introduction, a narrative is a set of stories or ideas that are developed to make sense of what is happening in the world and to justify a particular political, policy or personal response. Narratives are important because they set the boundaries of what is considered publicly acceptable debate and opinion, and whose voices are - and are not - heard. In the European context these narratives tend to present migration as a threat rather than an opportunity.

It is important to acknowledge that, regardless of where you look, there is no single narrative on migration and diversity. Rather there are a series of, sometimes competing, narratives constructed at different levels:

- **By politicians and political leaders operating locally, nationally and internationally;**
- **By different sections of the media including broadcast media, traditional print (newspapers), social media and citizen journalism;**
- **By civil society organisations, NGOs and grassroots activists; and**
- **By friends and family, work colleagues and neighbours, in other words the people we spend most of our time with.**

It won’t come as a surprise to learn that the relationship between narratives and attitude formation is complex: because people’s attitudes to migration reflect their overall ‘world view’ some narratives will resonate more than others. Over time some narratives can move from fringe positions to occupy the mainstream, changing the terms of the debate.<sup>18</sup> And whilst certain views may dominate, others may be dismissed and go largely unheard.<sup>19</sup>

In this context it is important to ask who is driving the dominant narratives and for what purpose. Is this just about certain sections of the mainstream media or does political leadership make a difference to how people think – and talk – about issues of migration and diversity? Are there any alternative voices which offer up a counter-narrative and, if so, where are these voices coming from?

<sup>17</sup> Woods, J., and Arthur, C. D. (2014) ‘The threat of terrorism and the changing public discourse on immigration after September 11’, *Sociological Spectrum* 34(5), 421-441; Nagarajan, C (2013) ‘How politicians and the media made us hate immigrants’, *Open Democracy*

<sup>18</sup> Bail, C.A. (2012) ‘The fringe effect: civil society organizations and the evolution of media discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks’, *American Sociological Review* 77(6), 855-879

<sup>19</sup> McMahon, S. (2015) *Immigration and Citizenship in an Enlarged European Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

## 2.1 Positive political leadership on migration is important - but lacking

Political leaders at the national and local levels play an important role in shaping the tone of public debate on issues of migration and diversity. Politicians and decision makers publicly debate migration and diversity as policy issues to be interpreted and addressed in particular ways. But, political parties also seek to give a voice to concerns of their voters and mobilise public opinion in the hope that, ultimately, this will benefit them in elections. In this way political leaders define what they consider to be the boundaries of acceptable public debate, potentially giving credibility to fears and stereotypes or providing reassurance and defusing tensions. It can often be the former.

There are two main ways in which politics has shaped recent narratives on migration and diversity.

### **The first is through mainstream political parties which have tended to dominate election results and national parliaments.**

Over the last two decades European governments have overseen a period of increased migration. Most have responded to rising public anxiety by increasing immigration controls. But migration is not easily controlled or stopped. The economic and demographic drivers of migration are strong, as are the political forces generating the conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East from which refugees have fled. When policies fail to live up to what was promised, political leaders have typically been unable or unwilling to give convincing accounts of the drivers of migration and the potential benefits that it brings. For those who are already feeling insecure and politically marginalised this response can simply reinforce the perception that political elites are not interested in the needs and concerns of the people that they supposedly represent

**The second – and clearly related – way in which political leadership shapes narratives on migration and diversity is through populist leaders who declare that they are the voice of those who feel ignored and unrepresented by mainstream political parties.** Whilst the far right appears to be isolated and in retreat in several of the countries we looked at, there has been a mainstreaming of far right rhetoric. This can be seen most clearly in the UK and the Netherlands where mainstream political narratives have adopted a particularly negative and hostile tone. The UK Government for example has refused to be part of the relocation scheme for those arriving in the countries of Southern Europe, even as a gesture of solidarity. This reflects a marked shift from the policies of multiculturalism which could be seen in both during the 1990s.

In the Netherlands, right-wing populists such as Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders have presented migration as an ‘invasion of aliens’ and a threat to Dutch society and culture.<sup>20</sup> Since the early 2000s both have promoted and capitalised on a more assimilationist approach to migration and minorities, accompanied by the view that criticism of migration is neither racist nor xenophobic.<sup>21</sup> The murders of both Fortuyn and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, both of whom had spoken negatively about migration and Islam, were used to legitimate the view that critical voices were being unfairly silenced and that Islam was a problem.<sup>22</sup>

In the UK, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has dominated headlines over recent years. A significant reason for the far right’s disastrous results in the 2015 General Election was that UKIP stole the media limelight - and most of the British National Party’s (BNP) voters – mainly through controversial anti-migrant views expressed by its then leader Nigel Farage.

<sup>20</sup> Uitermark, J. (2012) *Dynamics of Power in Dutch Integration Politics: From Accommodation to Confrontation*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press)

<sup>21</sup> Uitermark, J., Rossi, U., and Van Houtum, H. (2005) ‘Reinventing multiculturalism: urban citizenship and the negotiation of ethnic diversity in Amsterdam’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(3), 622-640

<sup>22</sup> Uitermark, J. and Gielen, A.-J. (2010) ‘Islam in the spotlight: the mediatisation of politics in an Amsterdam neighbourhood’, *Urban Studies* 47 (6), 1325–1342

## “ Some elements of the EU Referendum campaign went further, legitimating racist and xenophobic views which were heard and amplified by the British media. ”

Although UKIP won just one parliamentary seat, the party received over four million votes and it gained 14% of the national vote. This success has served to embolden UKIP who have been implicitly accused by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racism of “failing to condemn” racial abuse and creating prejudices during the recent EU Referendum campaign. Their anti-migrant ‘Breaking Point’ poster was reported to the police for inciting racial hatred.

But the representation of migration as being ‘out of control’ and as a threat to British jobs and culture has featured in the narratives of all the main political parties. In 2007, Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown made a public pledge to provide ‘British jobs for British workers’ ahead of EU citizens. In 2011, the Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron said that multiculturalism had failed and had resulted in dangerously segregated communities around the country. Muslim identity and culture in particular has been presented as a threat, not only in the media but through the Government’s own PREVENT anti-radicalisation strategy.

Narratives representing migrants - and particularly Muslims - as a problem contributed to the creation of an anti-migrant environment long before the EU referendum rolled around earlier this year. Some elements of the EU Referendum campaign went further, legitimating racist and xenophobic views which were heard and amplified by the British media. These then spread far beyond the debate on migration and Europe opening up a Pandora’s

box of deeply-held views about wider issues of race, ethnicity and British identity.

### 2.2 So what about the media?

The media, and specifically the print media, plays an important but complex role in contemporary European society<sup>23</sup>. On the one hand it provides an important source of information for the public, representing events, issues and people in particular ways, influencing people’s awareness of what is important and perceptions of who belongs in our communities<sup>24</sup>. At the same time the media is an industry that seeks to maximise its income through audience figures and advertising revenue. To achieve these twin objectives the media often relies upon scandalous, dramatic or controversial topics, often using ‘storytelling’ to bring issues and events to life through a focus on the experiences and points of view of individuals. News media editors and writers make choices about what stories to select and what to emphasise: they possess the power to let people speak or to silence them, to give groups a voice or to leave them voiceless.<sup>25</sup>

Storytelling and the search for personal stories can provide an important opportunity for migrants and marginalised communities to engage with, and challenge, dominant political narratives. In the UK for example, the *Daily Mail* has repeatedly published articles supporting Afghan interpreters for the British army refused asylum in the UK. Personal stories of

<sup>23</sup> Despite their decreasing sales, newspapers remain important avenues for stories to reach multiple readers not least because they carry headlines which are seen by large numbers of people regardless of purchase and readership habits. Newspapers are also an important source of information for review and discussion in broadcast media, often setting the focus and tone for associated stories and content.

<sup>24</sup> Bleich, E., Stonebraker, H., Nisar, H. and Rana, A. (2015) ‘Media portrayals of minorities: Muslims in British newspaper headlines, 2001–2012’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2014.1002200

<sup>25</sup> Thornbjørnsrud, K. and Figenschou, T.U. (2014) ‘Do marginalised sources matter? A comparative analysis of irregular migrant voice in Western media’, *Journalism Studies* (published online), 1-19

**“ In the UK in particular, it has been argued that rhetoric and behaviour that was once the preserve of the out-and-out extremists has now become increasingly mainstreamed. ”**

people who have been detained also gained widespread coverage during the same period.<sup>26</sup> In Sweden, the media has given a voice to people representing positive experiences of integration, such as a 24-year old Syrian who stated that he had fallen in love with the Swedish language and the people and considers Sweden as one of his homes, and another young Syrian who said he felt he had been ‘born again’.

But the search for scandal, drama and personality also means that the media has increasingly provided a platform to people expressing radical, specifically right-wing and anti-immigrant, views.

In the UK in particular, it has been argued that rhetoric and behaviour that was once the preserve of the out-and-out extremists has now become increasingly mainstreamed. Certain newspapers in particular have published articles on the refugee crisis that have been heavily criticised. Notable examples include an article by Katie Hopkins in *The Sun* newspaper describing refugees and migrants as ‘cockroaches’ and a ‘plague of feral humans’ which was criticised by the UN as pro-genocide propaganda and led her to be questioned about inciting racial hatred. Another example was a cartoon in the *Daily Mail* that portrayed migrants as rats swarming across Europe’s borders, and led to a huge backlash on social media demonstrating that this was an image not just reminiscent of, but very close to, the Nazi

anti-Semitic propaganda of the 1930s.

In the Netherlands the right wing populist Geert Wilders has been widely criticised at controlling the news and of supplying controversial statements and generalisations. The search for scandal was epitomised in the Netherlands when the well-respected newspaper *Trouw* published an article about the dangers of a supposed ‘sharia triangle’ of radical Muslims in The Hague which later proved to have been completely invented by its author. Although the journalist lost his job, the story stirred up unrest and resulted in international press attention to the neighbourhood, as well as much-publicised visits from government representatives - and Geert Wilders himself<sup>27</sup>.

This particular story illustrates an important point but one that is often ignored. Negative media narratives on issues of migration and diversity have real impacts for those living in our societies, both migrants and non-migrants alike. They also impact on the relationship between different social groups by reinforcing stereotypes and inter-group prejudices.

In the UK the representation of migrants as villains damages migrants’ sense of belonging.<sup>28</sup> In the Netherlands, press reporting has been found to create anxiety among migrant and minority groups who feel they are being held responsible for the actions of radical,

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<sup>26</sup> Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University

<sup>27</sup> Van der Laan, C. (2015) ‘Terug in de Schilderswijk’. *Trouw* 14 May

<sup>28</sup> Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University

**“ Some parts of the narrative stick over time, others change. Some are positive, most are not. ”**

violent and often criminal individuals.<sup>29</sup> Marginalised communities also express concern about what they perceive to be double standards: whilst they are not given space to express their views or opinions in the mainstream media, individuals such as Geert Wilders are repeatedly given a platform to express radical, socially divisive views.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear from everything we've said so far that there is a close relationship between the media and political leaders who often use one another to meet their own objectives and agendas. This conclusion is supported by the existing research.<sup>31</sup> The media serves not only as the 'mouthpiece' for political debate but also as a filter which shapes and influences the tone and content of much of what is said by others. Whilst the exact nature of this relationship varies across the different countries we looked at, it is rare for either of these mainstream narratives to engage with or accurately represent, the complex realities of migrant flows and experiences or the wide-ranging and often positive response of individuals and communities to these issues. Whilst of course there are notable exceptions, they often successfully select

and emphasise particular aspects of the issues that make sense to their intended audience, calling on a series of cultural cues and stereotypes. Some parts of the narrative stick over time, others change. Some are positive, most are not.

### **2.3 Hostile narratives are not inevitable**

It is clear that those on the political right have been effective at both generating - and mobilising around - negative migration and diversity narratives which enable them to secure political support.

This has not been a difficult task.

Migration is, as we've already suggested, a touchstone issue that taps into our deepest fears and anxieties. And when people feel insecure all too often their first reaction is to lash out, ironically at the most vulnerable in our society, those who have already lost everything and have no voice. Efforts to counter these deep fears and anxieties through providing factual information on the positive benefits of migration have been largely ineffective<sup>32</sup>.

But there are examples of mainstream political leadership which challenges the voices of populists and scaremongers.

**“ Efforts to counter these deep fears and anxieties through providing factual information on the positive benefits of migration have been largely ineffective. But there are examples of mainstream political leadership which challenges the voices of populists and scaremongers. ”**

<sup>29</sup> Siebers, H. and Dennissen, M.H. (2015) 'Is It cultural racism? Discursive exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands', *Current Sociology* 63 (3), 470–489

<sup>30</sup> Uitermark, J. (2012) *Dynamics of Power in Dutch Integration Politics*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press

<sup>31</sup> Bail, C.A. (2012) 'The fringe effect: civil society organizations and the evolution of media discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks', *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 855-879; Benson, R. (2013) *Shaping Immigration News. A French-American Comparison*, New York: Cambridge University Press; Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University; McMahon, S. (2015) *Immigration and Citizenship in an Enlarged European Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>32</sup> British Future (2014) *How to Talk About Immigration*, London



These political counter-narratives typically seek to rejuvenate a sense of national identity and duty that is related to past experiences of migration. They also explicitly, and consistently, acknowledge the positive benefits of migration and diversity for the economy and for a national identity narrative located within a global framework and a belief in shared international responsibility.

Taking Sweden as an example, it is clear that negative migration narratives have impacted on the day-to-day experiences of refugees and migrants. During 2015 and 2016, there has been increasing concern about the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees. Tensions flared when three mosques were set on fire in the span of a month together with a nursery which announced it would accommodate asylum seekers and an asylum centre. A number of newspapers and the right-wing anti-immigrant party the Sweden Democrats has called for more open discussion of the problems associated with migration. These calls were not new. The Sweden Democrats have been making political headway for several years coming third in elections in September 2014 with 12.9% of the vote.

But there is some evidence that this narrative hasn't yet broken through to dominate mainstream political debate. In contrast with the situation in the UK, politicians, academics, journalists and other public figures continue to assert the importance of Swedish openness and generosity towards refugees, not just as a humanitarian obligation but as part of a wider sense of what it means to be Swedish.<sup>33</sup> The former Prime Minister Frederick Reinfeldt called for Swedes 'to open their arms' to refugees, stating that the country had 'more space than you can imagine'. Aron Etzler, secretary general for the Left Party, reminded people that refugees had 'helped us build the Sweden we wanted'. These comments aimed to reinforce the shared identity of Sweden which

recognizes its international obligations and provides protection for those in need.

As in the UK and the Netherlands, there has been public anxiety about increased migration to Germany since at least the 1980s. Over recent years these anxieties, most frequently associated with concerns about security, have translated into street protests by anti-Islamic organisations such as Pegida. These protests have often grabbed the media headlines. In 2010, the Chancellor Angela Merkel had declared that multiculturalism had failed prompting concerns of a political shift to the right. Yet in 2015, she used a humanitarian narrative to justify her decision to allow refugees entering Europe to make a claim for protection in Germany rather than being returned to the first EU country in which they had arrived. At the same time she called for Germans to provide a "Willkommenskultur" (welcoming culture).

This approach seems to have been effective in limiting the rise of a negative migration narrative.

Despite rising political opposition to Merkel's decision, public opinion in Germany is predominantly in favour of accepting refugees, with two-thirds of the population in favour of providing refuge to people fleeing conflict, war, and oppressive governments and 81% saying they would not oppose the opening of refugee homes in their area.<sup>34</sup> This position has been supported by much of the German media: a study of 19,000 media stories on the topic of refugees in Germany from 2015 found that 82% of reports were positive in tone. This shift has been secured through a political narrative that emphasises the economic benefits of migration in the context of a shrinking and ageing population whilst proclaiming the moral imperative of supporting those in need. **It shows how a clear message on the value of welcoming refugees and strong leadership in the face of public concerns can be successful.**

<sup>33</sup> German Federal Agency for Civic Education (2016) *Immigration in Sweden: Future Challenges*, Germany: BPB <http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/58641/future-challenges>

<sup>34</sup> Gerhards, J., Hans, S. and Schupp, J. 'German public opinion on admitting refugees', The Barometer of Public Opinion on Refugees in Germany. *DIW Economic Bulletin* 21.2016 [https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw\\_01.c.534664.de/diw\\_econ\\_bull\\_2016-21-1.pdf](https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.534664.de/diw_econ_bull_2016-21-1.pdf)

## “ Positive political leadership on migration and diversity can limit rather than fuel the growth of far-right political movements ”

But it has not always been this way.

The shift in public opinion in Germany is the result of decades of work to eliminate racism, change the political discourse and create a more tolerant nation. The government, civil society, and political parties worked to push the pendulum towards peaceful dialogue. This change did not happen quickly but required steady and consistent challenge to the representation of migration – and migrants – as a problem. Whilst far-right extremism and violence have not been eliminated, their influence over mainstream public debate and the population in general has been drastically diminished.

These examples are illustrative of the ways in which positive political leadership on migration and diversity can limit rather than fuel the growth of far-right political movements. As such they provide important lessons from which other countries in Europe can learn.

### 2.4 The importance of creating alternative narratives

Although political leaders and the media play an important role in the construction of narratives on migration and diversity, there is growing evidence that across Europe people are coming together to create alternative narratives on migration and diversity. These narratives often challenge the injustices with which dominant discourses have come to be associated.

There is, for example, very little space for the voices of migrants and refugees in media reporting on migration issues. A recent study found that only 15% of migration-related articles published in the British print media in the run-up to the 2015 general election included a migrant voice or perspective. Where migrants had a voice they were usually presented as victims in need of some support and assistance<sup>35</sup>. Research on how journalists themselves perceive migrants to be represented in European news discourse has similarly found inaccurate group labelling, negative or victimised representation and limited reference to the wider European context within which migration is situated.<sup>36</sup> In each of the countries we looked at there were examples of migrant-led organisations established to provide opportunities for migrants and refugees to engage directly with the media. In the UK for example, Migrant Voice was set up to develop the skills, capacity and confidence of members of migrant communities, including asylum seekers and refugees, to develop their own strategies to strengthen their voice and representation in the media and to inform and influence political narratives and, ultimately, migration policies.

Others bring together different groups to work together, building positive relationships within and across communities with a view to creating a shared sense of our common humanity.

We noted earlier that age is an important predictor of attitudes: those who are more open to migration and diversity tend to be younger. The evidence is still not clear on why this is the case. It may relate to levels of education or to the fact that young people are more likely to have grown up socialising with friends and peers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds than older members of society. ‘Contact theory’ strongly

<sup>35</sup> Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, S.J., Wal, J.T, Lipinsk, A., Fabiszak, M. and Krzyzanowski, M.(2012) ‘The representation of third country nationals in European news discourse: journalistic perceptions and practices’, *Journalism Practice* 7(3), Special Issue: Themed Section on Migrants and the Media in the 21st Century: Obstacles and opportunities for the media to reflect diversity and promote integration, 248-265

<sup>37</sup> Allport, G.W (2954) *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge MA. For an excellent accessible summary see Everett, J.C. (2013) ‘Intergroup contact theory: past, present and future’, *The Inquisitive Mind* 2 (17)

suggests that meaningful relationships between those from different backgrounds will reduce inter-group prejudice<sup>37</sup>.

But it could also be due to the fact that young people are less likely to engage with, or be influenced by, dominant media and political narratives. They consume media in a very different way to older generations and are able to be selective and seek out content very effectively. Many young people do not read print media alone and nor do they have a lot of time for political leaders and elites who appear not to understand or represent their interests and concerns<sup>38</sup>. In the Netherlands as elsewhere in Europe, overall readership of newspapers is decreasing but this decline is even more pronounced among young people: in 2010, around half (52%) of people aged 20-35 years old read print media, but by 2015 this figure had fallen to just 30%. At the same time, new digital technologies and social media have become a hugely influential source of information for young people. In Sweden 55% of the population uses social media, but for the 16-25 age group this rises dramatically to 95%. In the UK more than two thirds (69%) of those aged over 55 are active users of social network sites, but this rises to 100% of 18-24 year olds. Young people are not 'disengaged' from social and political issues, but do not express their views or mobilise through traditional groups and platforms, using social media and networks rather than political parties or print media.

Digital activism through sharing information, communicating messages, joining groups and signing petitions online provides new forms of civic engagement.<sup>39</sup> For example, the Where Are We Going campaign in Sweden was launched online to protest against the government's rules on asylum. The campaign video quickly received more than 700,000 views on Facebook. The Open The Gates of Europe campaign in 26 Swedish districts also highlights the need for legal ways into Europe by integrating digital communication - encouraging people to share images on #ÖppnaEuropasPortar (#OpenEuropesPorts) to demonstrate their support - with the production of a piece of jewellery which symbolises an open Europe and every person's right to be safe.

Alternative forms of communication are therefore increasingly important, particularly for young people. Digital technologies and online forms of engagement can help to mobilise public support for migration and diversity and the creation of alternative, more positive narratives. In the UK the use of hashtags on Twitter but also Facebook and in the titles of campaigns has become an increasingly popular way of expressing solidarity with refugees and migrants. Examples include #MoreInCommon, #StandAsOne, #chooselove, #withrefugees #westandwithyou and #readyandwilling. The #refugeeswelcome hashtag is used internationally to express support for people seeking international protection.

**“ Alternative forms of communication are therefore increasingly important, particularly for young people. Digital technologies and online forms of engagement can help to mobilise public support for migration and diversity and the creation of alternative, more positive narratives ”**

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, O'Toole, T 'Explaining young people's non-participation: towards a fuller understanding of the political', *European Consortium for Political Research* and Henn, M. and Foard, N (2012) 'Young people, political participation and trust in Britain', *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1), 47-67

<sup>39</sup> Warren, A-M., Sulaiman, A. and Jafar, N.I. (2014) 'Facebook: the enabler of online civic engagement for activists', *Computers in Human Behaviour* 32, 284-9

What's more, local experiences of co-existence and relationships among social groups often don't align with national narratives on migration and diversity.

A recent report from Amnesty International in the UK highlights the fact that the proportion of UK residents who view migration as a national problem has, for many years, been 50 percentage points above the proportion who are concerned about migration at the local level.<sup>40</sup> The same report also found "unexpected examples of refugee welcome and support actions taken without publicity by local groups or residents far removed from the usual terrain of migrant and refugee advocacy", showing that beyond mainstream politics and media channels, there was a wealth of activity seeking to build positive relationships for migrants and refugees in the country.

In the final section of this report we turn our attention to the things that people are doing in communities across the case study countries. We may not hear much about these initiatives prominently in mainstream media and political debates but they are there, quietly – and sometimes noisily – challenging the narratives of fear and hate that can feel all-powerful and resistant to change.

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<sup>40</sup> MigrationWork CIC (2016) *Welcoming refugees / protecting rights: A scoping study for Amnesty International UK* (Interim report, available on request)

<sup>41</sup> Crawley, H., McMahon, S. and Jones, K. (2016) *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry University; Katwala, S. and Somerville, W. (2016) *Engaging the Anxious Middle on Immigration Reform: Evidence from the UK Debate*, Washington: Transatlantic Council on Migration; MigrationWork CIC (Feb 2016) *Welcoming Refugees /Protecting Rights*, unpublished report for Amnesty International, available on request.

### 3. How we can change things

**“ Negative political and media debates on migration and diversity which have risen to the surface over recent years undermine the integration of those who are newly arrived. But they do far more than that. They also threaten relationships within and between long-established communities, undermining a common sense of identity and solidarity ”**

It is clear that things need to change in order to prevent deepening tensions in society.

Negative political and media debates on migration and diversity which have risen to the surface over recent years undermine the integration of those who are newly arrived. But they do far more than that. They also threaten relationships within and between long-established communities, undermining a common sense of identity and solidarity. And they undermine our sense of what it means to be human, to be able to show compassion and kindness towards another human being regardless of the difficulties we may face in our own lives.

**In order to strengthen society, we need to find a way to turn our diversity into an opportunity rather than an excuse for division.** We need a story of hope about an open European society which respects diversity, values uniqueness and protects the values of liberty, tolerance and solidarity that lie at the heart of the common European project.

It can feel as though there is no space for a positive narrative on migration and diversity. Existing research suggests otherwise.<sup>41</sup> There is plenty of evidence that grass roots initiatives, rather than top-down campaigns, provide opportunities for people to organise and participate in civil society, building bridges across social groups, strengthening bonds of belonging and

providing a platform to have a voice to strengthen our democracies. Civil society organizations serve as an essential conduit and mediator between individuals and their governments, and a vehicle through which citizens can hold their leaders to account and find a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. They can also serve as an important service delivery mechanism providing assistance to the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the response to the refugee crisis.

The diversity of experiences, voices and audiences for these issues demands a new approach that can create awareness, bring people to work together and introduce new voices into the debate. In order to move beyond fear and hate people power needs to mobilise at different levels. Let's take a look at each of these in turn.

#### 3.1 Creating opportunities for civil society engagement

In order to positively engage on migration and diversity, people need to have a shared understanding of the issues and to find some common ground. A recent report identifies three different approaches for bringing people together to develop a common understanding of migration issues<sup>42</sup>. The success of these approaches is likely to vary depending on the context in which they take place.

<sup>42</sup> MigrationWork CIC (Feb 2016) *Welcoming Refugees /Protecting Rights*, unpublished report for Amnesty International, available on request.

The first approach emphasises the **principle of solidarity** with migrants and refugees. This approach has been particularly evident in Germany where the idea of *Willkommenskultur* or ‘Welcoming culture’ has been used to refer to a culture that recognizes the contribution migrants make to society. This idea, which has developed over a number of years, paved the way for the largely positive response of German people to the refugee crisis. *Flüchtlinge Willkommen (Refugees Welcome)* extends this idea to the digital world, creating an online platform that brings flat shares and refugees together.

The second approach centres on the need to provide **humanitarian assistance**. As noted by Didier Fassin, humanitarian needs have increasingly become the most widely used justification for governments and people working together.<sup>43</sup> This is illustrated by the comments of Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders who sent humanitarian assistance to refugees in Greece stating that “we must all pull together to help the refugees stranded there. The need to provide humanitarian assistance has brought together many groups in the UK which have organised themselves in order to provide support to refugees and migrants, for example those living in the ‘Jungle’ near Calais. In the Netherlands the NGO ‘*Stichting Vluchteling*’ (Refugee Foundation) organises the *Night of the Refugee*, an annual 40 km sponsored walk in the middle of the night which raises money for specific projects to help refugees. In 2016, over 2,800 people participated in the event, raising over a million euros.

The third approach for building common ground is based on a **human rights framework** and focuses on securing access to rights for refugees and migrants. In Sweden *The Association of Social Democratic Students* (‘S-Students’) has 15,000 members who organise

seminars and debates and produce parliamentary proposals to stimulate debate and progressive politics. The group also runs an Immigration Policy Network which explicitly states that it is “working for a rights-based migration policy – a policy that looks at right to protection from war and persecution as a right and not a matter of ‘generosity’ or economic viability”.

Finally, civil society engagement can also be driven not by a desire to ‘do something’ but simply through a **positive emotional connection with an issue**.

As we have seen, young people are less likely to engage with mainstream political narratives in part because they don’t trust political elites but also because they are less interested in traditional (non-digital) forms of communication. On the flip side there is evidence that young people are more likely to engage when an issue resonates with their own personal beliefs and experiences.<sup>44</sup>

This may explain, in part at least, why civil society organisations offer greatest scope for developing positive and inclusive narratives which build on the energy, vision and beliefs of young people who remain of the view that the world can, and should be, a better place.<sup>45</sup> In the Netherlands for example, Humanity in Action and *Nederland wordt beter* (The Netherlands Gets Better) co-organised a Day of Empathy in 2016<sup>46</sup> which promoted empathy as a core value of Dutch society and suggested that empathy could be promoted for the benefit of society and in countering polarized and racist views. The emphasis on empathy and the shared values of people from different backgrounds stands in stark contrast to the often angry and disillusioned approach offered by far-right groups.

<sup>43</sup> Fassin, D. (2011) *Humanitarian Reason*, University of California Press

<sup>44</sup> Sloam, J. (2012) ‘New voice, less equal: the civic and political engagement of young people in the United States and Europe’, *Comparative Political Studies* 47, 633-688

<sup>45</sup> Vromen, A., Xenos, M.A. and Loader, B. (2015) ‘Young people, social media and connective action: from organisational maintenance to everyday political talk’, *Journal of Youth Studies* 18(1), 80-100

<sup>46</sup> See <http://humanityinaction.nl/day-empathy/>

**“ The emphasis on empathy and the shared values of people from different backgrounds stands in stark contrast to the often angry and disillusioned approach offered by far-right groups. ”**

### **3.2 Driving people powered change and grassroots mobilisation**

As well as developing a shared understanding of migrant and refugee issues, grassroots mobilisation requires opportunities to bring citizens from different backgrounds together with migrants and refugees. Various models exist to facilitate this process including volunteering, community organising and social movements. What they have in common is the idea of bringing together individuals and organisations around particular issues and places. Organisations, networks and community spaces can create bonds with others in their group, as well as bridging out to others. This contact within and across social groups creates ‘social capital’ which can be mobilised to drive change. This, in turn, can lead to an engagement with broader democratic participatory process.

**“ Organisations, networks and community spaces can create bonds with others in their group, as well as bridging out to others. ”**

Across the case study countries we found numerous examples of projects based on the idea of people powered change which can create counter-narratives at the local, and sometimes national, levels. These projects have been established by tens of thousands of

individuals and organisations - some formal, others less so - in response to what they see around them.

A number of the projects aim to create spaces for dialogue between individuals and groups often through cooking and eating together. In Germany, for example, *Über den Tellerrand* (Cook Outside the Box) promotes an open and tolerant society by bringing together refugees and local citizens to prepare dishes together. The group uses the hashtag #makingtheworldabetterplate to extend the impact of this work beyond the individuals involved. *United Invitations* in Sweden is also taking a similar approach. In the UK *Share My Table* uses food from around the world as a starting point for conversations about belonging among new and established Scots.

Connections between people developed through volunteering, social movements and community organisations have also been used to meet gaps in reception and integration services across Europe. Often, these projects and the organisations that run them were not established to support refugees and migrants but have extended their work into this area.

In Germany the second most popular Google search on ‘migration’ in 2015 was ‘How to volunteer to help migrants’. Established NGOs have reported an average increase of 70% of interest in volunteering for refugees over a period of three years. This has been described by some as ‘new national movement for volunteering’<sup>47</sup>. For example, the *Start with a Friend* initiative brings together citizens and –refugees in seven major cities across Germany, making partnerships of people who explore the city together, talk or learn German and help in dealing with the authorities.

In the Netherlands, *Humanitas* offers over 700 projects run by 22,000 volunteers, focussing on social services and community building as well as migrant integration, informal language training and building social contacts

<sup>47</sup> Karakayali, S. and Kleist, O.J. (2015) *EFA-Studie: Strukturen und Motive der ehrenamtlichen Flüchtlingsarbeit in Deutschland, 1. Forschungsbericht: Ergebnisse einer explorativen Umfrage vom November/Dezember 2014*. Berlin: Berliner Institute für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

## “ They move the debate about what is going on in communities away from migration focusing instead on the climate of austerity which has resulted in the closure of local facilities and rising rents. ”

for newcomers. A group of students in Amsterdam created the initiative *Amsterdam verwelkomt* which made 21,000 welcome packages for refugees in the city, including personal welcome messages and gifts to make them feel welcome.

In the UK *Citizens UK* has employed a community organising model based on the principle that when people work together they have the power to change their neighbourhoods, cities, and ultimately the country for the better. This form of community engagement underpins the work of the organisation including *Refugees Welcome* which has drawn on the idea that the country's response to refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria is an important part of our national identity and who we are. According to the group's website, offering sanctuary to those in need is a “proud British tradition”. We found similar approaches in Sweden and the Netherlands. This approach contrasts strongly with efforts to approaches that focus on providing ‘the facts’ on migration. These are often less effective in capturing hearts and minds.<sup>48</sup> Nearly 1.5 million people have joined Citizens UK's campaign and over 90 Refugees Welcome campaign groups have been established around the UK to put pressure on the government to resettle Syrian refugees.

In Sweden, the grassroots organization *Megafonen* (Megaphone) has also become an important platform for raising awareness of these issues.<sup>49</sup> Launched in 2008 at the initial height of the financial crisis as a hub for young people in Stockholm's suburbs to provide them with a

voice and enable their engagement in local social issues brought about by the crisis. These include preserving a local football field, protesting against large investment projects that would increase gentrification, and fighting against the privatization of communal housing in deprived areas with high numbers of migrants. Projects such as this are important because **they move the debate about what is going on in communities away from migration focusing instead on the climate of austerity which has resulted in the closure of local facilities and rising rents.**

### 3.3 Shared spaces, new voices

Narratives that present migrants, refugees and other social groups, particularly Muslims, as a problem can be found across much of Europe. As we have seen, these often build on the association of migration and diversity with a wide range of, sometimes unrelated, issues which feed off cultural cues and stereotypes.

Public messaging is a strategy employed by some organisations to counter negative narratives. The objective is usually to secure positive media coverage of issues related to migration and diversity aimed at specific audiences, most notably the ‘anxious middle’.<sup>50</sup> As noted by others, this is now a crowded field with a wide range of organisations making use of public messaging to leverage support for their views.<sup>51</sup>

But sustained change is difficult to achieve through media messaging alone.

<sup>48</sup> British Future (2014) *How to Talk About Immigration*, London

<sup>49</sup> Udham and Kaun (2013) ‘The Euro crisis in online media: civic resilience and social innovation in Sweden’, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2013/07/15/the-euro-crisis-in-online-media-civic-resilience-and-social-innovation-in-sweden/>

<sup>50</sup> Katwala, S. and Somerville, W. (2016) *Engaging the Anxious Middle on Immigration Reform: Evidence from the UK Debate*, Washington: Transatlantic Council on Migration; Nelson, D et al (2014) *Migration and the Media*, London, Migrant Voice

<sup>51</sup> MigrationWork CIC (Feb 2016) *Welcoming Refugees /Protecting Rights*, unpublished report for Amnesty International, available on request.



Positive stories can be short-lived in both their impact and duration. And as we've suggested already, attitudes towards migration and diversity are based on a complex array of factors which extend far beyond the media.

To counter negative narratives some organisations have instead sought to create opportunities for people to connect with others at a personal level, explicitly building on ideas of a common or shared identity. They have often done so by using diverse communications channels and media in order to reach new audiences. And they have created opportunities for different voices and perspectives to be heard. The scale of local campaigning and action shows that it is possible to mobilise people power in support of migration and diversity, even in times of crisis.

In the UK, a spike in race hate crimes in the wake of the EU Referendum has renewed efforts to build resilience within and across communities. Inspired by the maiden speech of Labour MP Jo Cox who was murdered by a right wing extremist shortly before the referendum vote, #MoreInCommon has been established by Hope Not Hate as a way of bringing people together to create the bonds that can help people to work through differences and divisions in a positive and constructive way. The campaign provides an opportunity for people in towns and cities across the UK to get to know one another through a series of free community fun days involving sport, community stalls, face painting, drumming workshops and other activities.

In the UK, Sweden and Germany recent campaigns have put migrants and refugees themselves centre-stage.

In the UK, the *I Am An Immigrant* campaign produced posters with striking images of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds together with information about their economic and social contribution. These posters were displayed on the London underground in order to "challenge the negative rhetoric against immigrants, celebrate them and provide them with a platform to share their story". Others were invited to upload their own images and stories to the online campaign.

In Germany the *#auchichbindeutschland (I am Germany too)* campaign also used images and personal stories of life in Germany to demonstrate the contribution of migrants and refugees. These images and stories have been shown in cinemas across the country.

In Sweden the *Change for Tensta* project established and run by Interpeace has provided opportunities for young people from migrant backgrounds to narrate their own experiences of living in Tensta, a suburb of Stockholm in which there has been social unrest and protests. The area is home to a large migrant population and proudly boasts the multicultural and welcoming nature of the neighbourhood but is perceived by many Swedes as one of the most dangerous areas in Sweden, and often portrayed negatively in the media. The findings of the project have been captured in a report entitled *Voices from Tensta* as well as in a video documentary called *Dreams from Tensta* which was made by the young people and provides an opportunity for them to share their voices and experiences.

**“ To counter negative narratives some organisations have instead sought to create opportunities for people to connect with others at a personal level, explicitly building on ideas of a common or shared identity. ”**

## 4. What next?

**“ Narratives of fear and hate which have increasingly dominated political and media responses to migration and diversity create division, undermine solidarity and set communities against one another. The evidence in this report suggests that across Europe people are coming together to find new ways of responding to these narratives. ”**

2015 was a tough year for Europe. With the debate surrounding the EU referendum highlighting tensions and a sluggish recovery from the recent economic crisis in many parts of Europe, 2016 has not been much easier.

Many things may be uncertain but one thing is clear. Migration and diversity will remain key issues in 2017 and beyond.

Conflict, climate change and the unequal distribution of resources which drive migration are set to continue generating new flows of people from diverse backgrounds which will not stop outside Europe. Migration matters not only because of what it means for the ways in which we live and work but because it acts as a ‘touchstone’ issue and a powerful symbol of change.

Many of the issues about which people have deep seated fears and anxieties are rooted in much bigger changes taking place in the world. Globalisation has brought benefits for many but for others it has come to be associated with economic insecurity, concerns about terrorism and a sense of not knowing who we are or what we believe in.

These are big issues. They can make us feel small and powerless.

But it is our response to migration – as much as migration itself – that will have the greatest impact on the kind of societies that we become.

Narratives of fear and hate which have increasingly dominated political and media responses to migration

and diversity create division, undermine solidarity and set communities against one another. The evidence in this report suggests that across Europe people are coming together to find new ways of responding to these narratives.

We found literally hundreds of example of civil society, voluntary and community-led organisations working in new and innovative ways to harness people power and make use of new technologies and digital platforms to engage new audiences and create positive counter-narratives around issues of migration and diversity. These counter-narratives have been developed from the ground up. Like the dominant political narrative, these individuals and organisations didn’t come from nowhere. There have always been strong civil society organisations and social movements in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. But the general absence of prominent mainstream positive political and media responses to the refugee crisis has propelled them into action, galvanising support from a wider and more diverse group of people who continue to view migration as both an asset and a humanitarian responsibility.

And whilst these counter-narratives are rarely prominent in mainstream media or political debates you can be sure that they exist and that they are slowly but surely starting to make a difference to the lives of those who are involved.

The lesson from these initiatives is that it is possible to create a new narrative on migration and diversity. And that people power can move the needle forward.

The challenge is to go out and do exactly that!

**“ And whilst these counter-narratives are rarely prominent in mainstream media or political debates, you can be sure that they exist and that they are slowly but surely starting to make a difference to the lives of those who are involved. ”**